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Constituent Imagination
ed. Stevphen Shukaitis & David Graeber w/ Erika Biddle (AK Press 2008)
336 pages. Paper, $21.95

This is an eclectic book. While the central question lies in the neighborhood of how to reconcile activism with academia, there are plenty of plot points off the mean. DIY Punk Rock, anti-racism, crocheting, tree-sits, and anti-globalization tourism are among writings on real subsumption, praxis, ethnography, and the multitude.

Consistent Imagination is organized into four stanzas that comprise the editor's view of the relationship between radical theory and the "movement of movements" of social change, each with an editorial introduction. The first is titled Moments of Possibility//Genealogy of Resistance and attempts to address the central question of this book: how does one negotiate between the desire for and practice of a total rupture of the existing order while working to understand the existing order?

In the parlance of the book "Where are the fault lines between academia, activism, and the orgasms of history?"

Of the five articles within this section, the article by *Colectivo Situaciones* ("Something more on Research Militancy") is the most important both to the first section and to the book's central thesis.

> In an era when communication is the indisputable maxim, in which everything is justifiable by its communicable usefulness, research militancy refers to experimentation: not to thoughts, but to the power to think; not to the circumstances, but to the possibility of experience; not to this or that concept, but to experiences in which such notions acquire power (potencia); not to identities but to a different becoming; in one word: intensity does not lie so much in that which is produced (that which is communicable) as in the process of production itself (that which is lost in communication). (81)

Colectivo Situaciones is an Argentine group originating in the radical student milieu of the mid-1990s that, since then, has produced books on unemployed workers' movements, the question of power and tactics of struggle, and conversations about how to think about revolution today. In their own words "[We] intend to offer an internal reading of struggles, a phenomenology (a genealogy), not an 'objective' description. It is only in this way that thought assumes a creative, affirmative function, and stops being a mere reproduction of the present. And only in this fidelity with the immanence of thought is it a real, dynamic contribution, which is totally contrary to a project or scheme that pigeonholes and overwhelms practice"(Perspectives on Anarchist Theory, fall, 2003) .

Immanence is a concept that has gained a kind of trendy traction among anarchists inspired by the political writings of

drift." North Americans' lack of a social movement of their own translates as a hunger for the social movements of other peoples and places.

disagree, the bad news of this book is the outlook for the "movement of movements." The gains that are struggled for in these narratives are small, if not minuscule. The vision of the constituent movements is myopic to the point of severity.

The most paradigmatic movements — to the extent that they are even treated in this text — are the series of struggles in Argentina in the first part of this decade. They are little known, and were immediately claimed by liberals and defeated by globalization. This series of events, popularized by the Naomi Klein documentary "The Take," do indeed hearken back to a time where workers' power, conscious human subjects, and hope-above-all were elements of our political experience. We should not even feel nostalgia for the incongruity of this incomplete view of this moment. We should feel a cultural disconnect.

As is often the case when ideas from one part of the world are shared (often by exuberant fans of those ideas) with another culture, something is lost in translation. In the case of *Colectivo Situaciones*, who are impressive in their articulation about practice and thought and have very little exposure in North American radical circles, their ideas about affective experiments, research militancy, and the "sad militant" are exciting but odd. Can even the North American radical academic get much out of becoming "militant" when expressing vague anti-war beliefs is enough to get them on a right-wing radical watch list? Are the ideas of *Colectivo Situaciones* being properly understood when they are evoked as in the article "Drifting Through the Knowledge Machine?" The article cites *Colectivo Situaciones* as an inspiration in its description of a Labor Day protest where certain University employees where not given the day off work (because they weren't properly defined as workers). Their protest involved creating an "ad hoc intervention group" vis à vis a group of employees (a.k.a. knowledge workers) protesting their exclusion by doing "militant research." This entailed having students and passersby fill out questionnaires and walking around campus in a "stationary-

Deleuze, along with the Negri-ists of the Autonomous Marxist tendency. The idea is rather simple: rather than seeing history as a series of progressive changes leading to an idealized future (as in dialectics), immanence sees no transcendent future. Life is to be lived now, not after the revolution, and not in the service of the historical active agent.

Here we see the great potential of post-structuralist and autonomist ideas for current anarchist thought. Immanence provides a conceptual framework as powerful (if not as historically rich) as dialectics, for understanding our participation in this historical moment, and frames the conversation on an appropriate scale. We are no longer for Great Men and the inevitability of History. As Deleuze puts it in his reading of Nietzsche (quoted in Will Weikart, "All Gods, All Masters: Immanence and Anarchy/Ontology" info.interactivist.net), "Choose those things which you would have continuing forever, and embrace them with your life. As a principle, this approach avoids the direct negativity of opposition; and as such it allows for a very positive affirmation of the world."

The second section of the book, Circuits of Struggle, sets up a series of metaphors about human energy and activism like ten-penny nails and pounds away at them like a technophilic carpenter building a casket for John Zerzan. As a matter of fact, this section is haunted by Zerzan, with its defensive rhetoric about circuits, "turning cycles of struggles into spirals and opening up new planes of resistance" (111), and the process of composition and decomposition of knowledge.

The strained metaphors reach their nadir with the article "Reinventing Technology: Artificial Intelligence from the Top of a Sycamore Tree" by Harry Halpin. Set as a rant written from the top of a nameless tree-sit, and declaring that "the re-enchantment of everyday life" will come through technology — it turns out to be a new form of the old argument about the neutrality of means. If you are a global justice activist then communications technology is a new kind of alchemy. As a

technologist in the movement you have to "provide solutions that respect the very human and ecological origins of these networks… to tear down artificial divisions between technology, action, and theory" (162). Sounds like the top sheet to a venture capitalist proposal.

The third section, Communities of/in Resistance, contains the dreamy-eyed stories of how current activism, specifically around food politics, social services, homeless organizing, and knitting, pertains to "circulating moments of rupture, through circuits and cycles of struggle, we find the processes through which communities are formed in resistance." (179)

The most engaging of these essays is "The Revolution Will Wear a Sweater: Knitting and Global Justice Activism" by Kirsty Robertson. This article doesn't question the overarching logic of activism but does discuss a practice that is far more interesting than traditional grassroots activism or protesting. Although it doesn't use the jargon of immanence, knitting is presented as an immanent practice, which is a correction many of the theoretical articles could have used.

Finally the last section, Education & Ethics, summarizes the defense of the book's central thesis — that usable knowledge for the social justice movement has something to do with the institution of the university. Each of these authors asserts that knowledge is a superset of the university education production environment, but somehow that environment is still there haunting us in the background, like an employer whose paychecks are too small, or a dream of a goal never accomplished. Sometimes this looks like knowledge is something that can, should, and must be informed by other sources, like the Situationists: "how we live our everyday lives has everything to do with the projects we aspire to create and enact. Theory, analysis, and narration are a central part of our daily actions, and these daily actions are, by definition the materiality of politics" (254); or science fiction,"the figure of the revolting knowledge-worker has not yet truly made

it is hardly the worst choice to be made within capitalism. Additionally, several of the authors within this collection argue, *research militancy* is a project that is defined by the tension of its relationship with academic knowledge. Who better to have this tension than self-defined radicals in the university?

But there is something about the assumption that the classroom is a locus for struggle, for the creation of knowledge, that frames the presenter(s). Is it really possible to reclaim something — anything — from the hierarchical atmosphere of the Euro-American university structure? Is this question answered differently if you are on the cusp of being a professor yourself? A concern of this book is on the relevance of the university and the inter- and intra-struggles therein. An article that deserves special mention as a contrast to the rest of the book is by CrimethInc. called "No Gods, No Masters Degrees." Besides the witty title, this article asks many of the questions that the rest of the authors seem either oblivious to or antagonistic towards. Specialization, tradition, and the conflict between anarchist-as-researcher and anarchist-as-revolutionary are topics given only short shrift in this article but are glaring in their complete absence in the rest of the book. Like most CrimethInc. writing, this serves as a polemic "to life" rather than the kind of sober yet obviously engaged analysis of most of the other articles, but again this contrast is refreshing. When you have traveled through 300 pages of articles that you suspect are central to a term paper or a doctoral thesis, reading a cry for action rather than a description of a near-action is welcome relief.

Constituent Imagination succeeds. It demonstrates that there is a relationship between radical theory and what remains of the movements for social change. Some good news results from this success: there will continue to be interesting thinking done about the political consequences of some of the more abstract notions of post-structuralist, autonomous, and anarchist ideas into the next few decades, by these thinkers if no one else. While many readers, and perhaps the authors themselves, may

few new turns of phrase along these lines, demanding further research to understand the context that they come out of and more than a little patience to understand where the reference ends and the stylistic flourish begins.

This dense "discursive regime" dominates especially the editorial voice, but also the book as a whole. The result is a book of and for specialists in this kind of language. Who are these people? Where did they go to learn this jargon? Having trained themselves in this kind of language, what do they do with it and the marginal kind of power they gain as a result?

> How can we open the university to use its resources for the benefit of movements and organizing? How can we use it to create a forum for collective reflection, to re-imagine the world from where we find ourselves? It is through this constituent process of collectively shared and embodied imagination that the boundaries of the classroom, of where knowledge is created and struggles occur, start to break down. (251)

David Graeber is a well-known figure in anarchist circles. He was one of the media spokespeople during the NYC RNC in 2004 and then made headlines (at least in the anarchist press) for his release from his job at Yale. An "out" anarchist who was also a renowned college professor in anthropology made his expulsion dramatic for many anarchists. Graeber recovered his professional standing and is currently teaching in the UK. Shukaitis is a graduate student also in the UK. Clearly these two are not evaluating the university from a distance or from a total rejection of it, but as participants who are trying to reconcile their *a priori* decisions.

The usual argument made by radicals who become professors is that every person in this society must work, and that they are just making a choice; it is one that can be criticized, but

its presence known. Cyper-punk seems to have been overly optimistic" (272); or anti-racist pedagogy, "the default pedagogic and epistemic modes of the academy are, by virtue of being the historically developed and promulgated modes of a Eurocentric and authoritarian institution, antagonistic to the aims of anti-racist education" (295).

Uri Gordon's article in the last section is the strongest of the book in defense of the editors' central thesis. "Practising Anarchist Theory: Towards a Participatory Political Philosophy" eloquently draws together the academic texts that have taken anarchist thought seriously with a proposal for anarchist research. This article has a fascinating contradiction at its center because it both argues from the most clearly academic position (being a series of proposals, lists, and explanations) *and* concludes, at odds with itself, that

> [t]he lack of rational discussion is far from the norm in the movement if we also count the everyday oral communication among anarchists, where the bulk of discussion with the movement takes place. These oral discussions, most often in the form of causal conversations among activists, tend to be of a far higher quality that what McQuinn is seeing in the narrow display box of anarchist print and Web-based media… For this reason it is extremely important for whoever wants to write about anarchism to be attentive to these oral discussions and follow them in a consistent way. (285)

Militant Investigations, Collective Theorization is the subtitle to this collection of autonomous marxist, anarchist, and unspecified radical tracts. The subtitle is the high- handed way that the thesis is communicated to the reader — and begs the question of what exactly is militant about the investigations and what is collective about the theorization in this book.

Their own definition of militant investigation is a short one. It is an "intensification and deepening of the political… Militant Research starts from the understandings, experiences, and relations generated through organizing, as both a method of political action and a form of knowledge" While this definition clearly draws a line in the sand, I am not sure it is where the editors intend for it to be. For many of the people interested in the question (or practice) of how to change the world, the very word political has become suspect. In the same way, organizing is a term of the same genre, expressing a certain view of managing people — with method and goal already determined.

This way of framing the question — of asking the questions many of us consider central — by already having determined the method and the historical trajectory by which the questions will be answered — severely limited the potential of this book. This said, some of the questions are good ones and many of the authors are attempting to answer them to the best of their abilities.

Among the authors there is a common nomenclature and set of political markers and boundaries, but they are not expressed clearly by the editors themselves; instead they must be gleaned by a close reading of each of the texts (and by knowing a bit about the editors). While this book was published by the ostensibly anarchist book publisher AK Press, the editors clearly draw more inspiration from the events in France in the 60s, Italy in the 70s, and Central and South America in the 90s than they do Spain in the 30s. This isn't a problem per se but conveying the point that this volume largely comes out of the Autonomous Marxist tradition, (while the editors refer to themselves as anarchists (16)), and what **exactly** that entails, is a central point to this collection that is never addressed, much less explained. Inquiring anarchists would like to know.

As a result, the language used throughout the volume assumes a political education and a set of motivations that will not apply to all, or even most, readers who are actually interested in the relationship between radical theory and social change. An education in 19th century Hegelian thought or 20th century post-structuralist political thought turns out to be not as relevant as is information about the lyrical polemics of Subcommadante Marcos or knowledge of the context of collective factory recovery movements in Argentina.

> We can map the resonance and connections over physical space and encounters through mediated machinations and communications, through and around the disparate spaces that compose the university, the hospital, the city square, and through all spaces of life. By looking at the different circuits and channels through which information flows, we can see that cartographies of resistance trace the multiple and overlapping spaces and forms of struggle that exist, extending and expanding them. (111)

What is a "cartography of resistance"? If you are familiar with groups like *bureau d'études* and *Multiplicity*, you know that this term refers to a subset of the formal discipline of geography — a radical critique of modernist cartography a la the Mercator projection. Instead of simple tweaks to Mercator to create a world map reflecting the actual size of the continents (like the Gall-Peters projection), these radical cartographers map the micro (like Multiplicity's map of two routes between the same two points in Israel — one for an Israeli, the other for a Palestinian) and the macro (as in the power map bureau d'études created of the US political system).

A cartography of resistance moves from the work of radical cartographers into a practice that is technically capable of evaluating relationships of probably disparate actors onto a stage where their actions can be understood, clearly conveyed to others, and proliferated. Nearly every article in this book has a