

***Constellations : Trajectoires
révolutionnaires du jeune 21e siècle***, by DE
Collectif, Mauvaise troupe, de l'Eclat, Paris, 2014, 704pp.

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A New Point of View regarding Protest

Constellations is a work of the collective *Mauvaise troupe*. It has for objective to present the struggles and the radical practices in France, and more widely in Europe since the beginning of the 2000s. It draws up a panorama of these struggles. Their common point is to happen outside the organizational frames of political parties and labor unions that traditionally embody social movements. These practices also have for common point a particular relationship to radicality. This term is to be understood here as the will to question things at their root.

Through a multitude of local experiments, the actors try to struggle against capitalism but also to create local alternatives such as housing collectives, squats or agricultural communities. It is also a new relationship to locality which takes shape. It is "to inhabit" which is valued. It is defined as the investment of ones

living place at every level, against logics of privatization and commodification of the public space. It is also local links of sociability that are recreated and valued, beyond the economical horizons of social movements.

More than a rational plan, it is a succession of fractioned practices that is going to establish the basis of these revolutionary trajectories. They are not a militant plan in order to take power. On the contrary, the objective would be the creation of zones of autonomy (temporary or not), following the example of Hakim Bey, (quoted in the book). It is chinks of rebellion that are opened against the system. They are not a global fight for power that for example marked the revolutionary left of the 1970s. The common point of these experiments is to refuse to struggle for political power, as well as the demands usual to social movements.

The book is divided in a serie of "constellations" which are collections of texts dedicated to a particular theme: housing, alternative experiences of community, but also parties or the imaginary, which acquire here a place as important as the more "serious" thematics.

We also notice in the book a wide importance given to partying in the lineage of the situationist current. It is the place of an opposition: on one side, the established parties, ritualized, full of social control, and on the other side the wild, free and popular parties. The examples more elaborate of these parties are the revival of diverse forms of traditionnal Carnival, the

*Reclaim the streets*¹ in Great Britain, but also *free parties*. It is those diverse events which are mobilized in this imaginary of the anti-authority party. References to Jean Duvignaud and to the liberating aspect of the party are going to unify the imaginary of the feast.²

In those renewed popular parties, there is a will to refound to a certain extent the traditional community, dissolved by the modernity: the carnival is the best example of this aim.³

The part of the volume dedicated to the imaginary is interesting. It offers references to the sociology of the imaginary, but also to Antonio Gramsci. The various authors emphasize the fact that the capacity of a movement to convince, to fight, to resist, is connected to its capacity to be creative and to give live to an imaginary. For the authors, the myths and figures of rebellion (such as Che Guevara) have a strong capacity of mobilization and emancipation.⁴

These heroic figures are also used by the "established" movie industry in films such as *V for vendetta* and *Mesrine*.⁵ For the authors, the copyright system and intellectual property are a

1) Reclaim the street are parties of reappropriation of the public space, where thousands of party goers invest a place of the urban space, without license to party there. These demonstrations know their highlight at the beginning of 2000s.

2) Collectif et Mauvaise Troupe, 2014. *Constellations: Trajectoires révolutionnaires du jeune 21^e siècle*, Paris, Editions de l'Éclat, p. 146.

3) *Ibid.*, p. 185.

4) *Ibid.*, p. 270.

5) Jacques Mesrine is a famous french outlaw, that escaped several times the french law enforcement services.

privatization of the imaginary, the myths and the figures conveyed in these films belonging not only to those who mobilize them, but to the imaginary of a society.

The parts dedicated to housing focus on experiences of life in community, whether it is in squats, as the *Traverse des 400* in Grenoble, or communal agriculture experiences. The common point of these experiments is the will to recreate a community as well as horizontal social links against the dissolution of the social links caused by modernity.

On the other hand, this "regenerated" community is not meant to be organized into a hierarchy and centered around family, but to rather to have an horizontal structure and to be based on affinities and elected sociability, which would make it a postmodern community.⁶

We find similar perspectives in the part dedicated to the digital world. We shall note that the perspectives of taking the struggle on the digital ground is relatively innovative. The aim for the members of the collective, against the omnipresent surveillance on internet, is to create free and horizontal interfaces belonging to the movement, guaranteeing encoding and anonymity to its members.⁷

We can also see a criticism and a refusal of wage work in the book, as well as the concept of work itself in the book, but also in concrete alternatives there is the use of a very few capital

6) Collectif et Mauvaise Troupe, op. cit., p. 310.

7) Ibid., p. 450.

intensive techniques, but that those alternatives are using a lot of labor: is it a paradox, or on the contrary a unity in diversity?

A Particular Point of View on Politics

First of all, we can notice that the authors refuse the "big" narratives which were the privilege of the political fights of the 20th century. If numerous authors are quoted, however, none is put on a pedestal or advanced as a unique reference. Also, the members of the collective, if they join the autonomous movement, refuse to refer to a specific ideology. So, for them, the "anarcho-autonomous" movement is a construction made by the media and law enforcement agencies.⁸

Also, they do not embrace a philosophy of history, where revolution would be the result of ineluctable progress, which will aim towards a radiant end. On the contrary, the objective of the authors of the collective is to create spaces of freedom outside of the existing system. They can be moments of parties, as the various carnivals and *free parties*, but also places of life such as squats or communal farming.

Finally these chinks can be more massive occupations such as the ZAD of Notre Dame des Landes in French Brittany or the No-Tav mobilization in the Italian Alps⁹, against the high speed

8) *Ibid.*, p. 350.

9) Ces deux exemples sont des luttes contre des grands projets d'aménagement du

railroad line between Lyon and Turin. This conception of the struggle joins Michel Maffesoli's¹⁰ theories concerning the margins, but also the Zones of Temporary autonomy of Hakim Bey. For them, the revolutionary fight does not aim at taking the power by a revolution and insurrection, than to create and to widen these chinks of "authentic" life.

The authors also oppose to the merchant logic, seen as both sterile and mortiferous, but also totalitarian. They consider that our societies are characterized by a diffuse and generalized surveillance organized according the lines of Michel Foucault's "biopower"¹¹, which characterizes the merchant society. On the contrary, the chinks of freedom would recreate social link, solidarity. It would be realized by wantonness, party and sharing food and drinks together, in a resurrection of the traditional community, freed from the Church and from patriarchy.

Besides, certain elements of the political narrative, are in filiation with the anarcho individualist ideology. First of all, contrary to almost all the currents of the modern left, the authors of the text do not look for a revolutionary subject, that is a social group having vocation to lead the revolution (as the working class for Marx or the young people and Afro American for Marcuse), but

territoire (aéroportetligne de train). Ilsdonnent lieu à des mobilisations nationalesvoireinternationalescontreleur construction. Elles setraduisentnotamment par une occupation prolongée des lieuxoù les travauxsontprévus.

10) Michel Maffesoli, 2002.*La transfiguration du politique: La tribalisation du mondepostmoderne*, Paris, La Table ronde.

11) Collectif et Mauvaise Troupe, *op. cit.*, p. 410.

on the contrary, addresses individuals who would become emancipated of the yoke of society. They would then join the struggle on moral bases. Another element which moves the authors closer to the anarcho individualist current, is the refusal of any structured organization, including self-management.

The tome ends on a part dedicated to social organization. It advocates a solution based on various autonomous levels which would fit like Russian dolls, going from the local to the general. The collective would be the smallest step, it would be open to the network, to be then linked in a federation of “communes”. We note that the watermark of the work is a refusal of the hierarchical based centralized bureaucratic organization

To conclude, we can say that this work, from various concrete experiences, but also theoretical contributions of various ideological currents, offers a theory of the social struggles which is going to be rather different from the “great” revolutionary narratives of class struggle. Rather than a great narrative, the authors offer a multitude of small stories, starting from small local experiences to go forward to the global level. This book, whether we agree or not with its theses is a very good description of a certain type of struggles and radicality.

