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REVIEWS

Alissa Starodub and Andrew Robinson (eds), *Riots and Militant Occupations: Smashing a System, building a World – A Critical Introduction*

London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018; 284pp; ISBN 9781786603708

This edited collection is a courageous and vital contribution to literatures on anarchism, autonomous social movement studies and participatory research. The book is comprised of two framing chapters co-written by the editors, and eleven chapters with multidisciplinary and international reach, split into three sections: 'theoretical reflections,' 'expressions' and 'critical case studies'. Although the book deals with riots and militant occupations, there are none of the protracted debates over the legitimacy of political violence one might expect. The framing chapters take a Deleuzian post-representational bent, drawing attention to affect, subjectivity/identity, space, and self-transformation, arguing that riots constitute 'a different basis for social relationality' to the dominant system and create 'prefigurations [...] of another type of social connection' (p3). This sets the tone for the book, which shows that riots and militant occupations are not, as often assumed, destructive, nihilistic, and apolitical events, but bring something new into the world.

The first section, 'theoretical reflections', begins with two chapters by the editors. Starodub's methodological chapter extolls the importance of formulating a participatory perspective from inside a riot, against mechanistic explanations from a supposed transcendental viewpoint. This is followed by Robinson's chapter, which explores the creation of new affects such as joy, empowerment and disalienation, giving momentary glimpses into an 'other world' of life without authority (p33). Love's third chapter theorises riots as potentially consciousness-raising and decolonising insurrectionary theatre. Souadis's chapter explores the spatiality of square occupations, drawing on experiences and interviews in Syntagma and Tahrir. It highlights the tactical and symbolic importance of occupying spaces, and the violent policing strategies that result when the status quo is threatened.

The short second section offers artistic expressions of experiences of riots. The introduction emphasises the relevance of these artistic contributions, which speak to the book's emphasis on affective expression. The poems and pictures are mostly

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anonymously or pseudonymously authored, which left me curious as to the origins and particular riots or occupations they might refer to.

The section on 'critical case studies' is the longest and contains chapters on 'riots' in the Calais Jungle; collective learning and memory on the streets of Barcelona; the Cortège de Tête form of marching, as utilized in Nantes; the pressure on public workers to condemn the 2013 Stockholm Riot; the political economy of the 2012 Occupy Nigeria protests; grassroots alternative media in the Syrian revolution; and Chinese counter-insurgent (COIN) repression.

The book is replete with examples of the creative and utopian aspects of riots. These include experimenting with new forms of emotion or affect (Robinson); constructing new spatialities and temporalities against the status quo (Soudias); creating new experiences of temporality (Mauvaise Troupe); working towards social recomposition through collective knowledge of struggle (Gelderloos); bringing people together to defy fragmentation and separation (Gelderloos; Soudias); practical learning such identifying and containing repressive technology and improvising tools from the landscape (Gelderloos).

Aside from the emphasis on expressive, affective and utopian aspects, the thread that ties the book together, there are three main themes which recur: the first is the need to critique the dominant construction of riots; the second concerns motivations; and the third is about state response. Mainstream academic, media and colloquial accounts are shown to rest on a racist discursive construction, which delegitimates the demands and organizing capacities of migrants (Calais Migrant Solidarity). Riots are often fetishized and portrayed as the fault of outside agitators. Likewise, rather than identifying any single, mechanistic cause, authors highlight the diversity and complexity of motivations: each person in a riot will have their own reason to be there. Lastly, there is always a choice for state and police whether to use 'soft' or 'hard' COIN measures. Softer measures operate through recuperation and co-optation or divide and rule tactics, but we are begged to remember that the cops who co-opt also don riot gear.

The editors and some contributors take an active stance in exploring the role of social science and social theory in articulating the social field. While dominant social theory operates in the interests of power, radical theory should attempt to rupture the status quo and offer alternatives. This can involve revealing hidden narratives, stories, affects and emotions, creating a situationist reversal of perspective. Social science is used alongside art as a form of expression, for formulating collective memory and for consciousness-raising, and as rejection of neutrality and of perspectives that emphasise mechanistic causes. Dominant academic approaches might view this tact as unscientific, too subjective, or biased. However,

the proposed reversal of perspective reveals that much 'debate' on riots is framed in terms that assume the need to suppress them and discredit participants: 'The good protester/bad rioter dichotomy should be understood as a counterinsurgency strategy rather than a viable analytical perspective' (p259)

I learnt a lot from this book about movements around the world. I also enjoyed reading it. It is fresh and exciting and accessible. It is not just for academics. I tend to keep any book I am reviewing on my coffee table in order to read a chapter each morning. For the first time, and on more than one occasion, some of my non-academic guests showed an interest: they were drawn in by the attention-grabbing and controversial title and started flicking through the book, reading sections and asking questions. This speaks highly for how accessible and entertaining the book is, and how unusual to see its subject matter spoken of in this way. It would work particularly well for students on social movement modules.

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Mark Antliff, *Sculptors Against the State: Anarchism and the Anglo-European Avant-Garde*

University Park: Penn State University Press, 2021; 284pp; ISBN 9780271089454

In the opening lines of *Sculptors Against the State*, Mark Antliff states his aim as being to establish how 'sculpture was treated as integral to a radical movement whose participants saw the arts as a catalyst for a new set of social relations and psychological dispositions deemed antithetical to those propagated by the state'. What follows is a gripping and exhaustive account of the history surrounding four exemplary avant garde artists (or group, in the case of the final chapter) whose work not only encapsulates the anarchist ideas of the moment but also played a critical and revolutionary role in their proliferation.

Moving deftly from discussions of anarchism and its connection to sexual liberation, antimilitarism, insurrection and anti-imperialism (to name a small few), Antliff's great strength is revealed as his keen ability to so lucidly flesh out the historical backdrops and tumultuous political moments which these artists inhabited and expose how their work engaged with interrelated critical dialogue, debate and wider ideas. The opening chapter is a rich and engaging case and point, which spotlights the work of Jacob Epstein, providing an expansive summary of his personal connection to anarchist politics and focusing on his iconic and highly controversial tour de force, *The Tomb of Oscar Wilde* (1909-1912). This

work – which becomes Antliff's centerpiece – was 'inspired in part by Wilde's anarchist-inflected indictment of the penal system, *De Profundis'* and a work emblematic of how 'Epstein repeatedly turned to Wilde's poetry throughout the generative process' (pp19-21). From here the author expertly guides us through Epstein's assimilatory symbolism and the critical ideological influences which form the swirling vortex of ideas, figures and source material that played a part in the conception of the piece.

That literature and philosophy reflected the anarchist ideas of the time and were in many ways critical to the progression of sexual rights and relinquishing the shackles of 'a state eager to police sexuality', is another compelling substrate of discussion to this chapter (and others) which Antliff eagerly uproots. He points out that, 'by folding such issues as colonialism and homosexuality into their critique of the state', artists and philosophers 'partially anticipated contemporary anarchists' conceptual approach to domination' (p11).

The illumination of sculpture's close relation to the work of the great writers, poets and philosophers of the time (such as Oscar Wilde, Ezra Pound and Henri Bergson) is clearly of great significance to Antliff, and the book emphasises the necessity for studies which bridge the far too often divided study of art and literature as individual, isolated subjects. The second chapter follows a familiar thread, this time focusing on the work of seminal Italian Futurist Umberto Boccioni, who 'had described Futurism as "synonymous with individualism, with anarchy"' (p57), whilst the third turns attention to the French Primitivist Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, whose 'ongoing interest in anarchism led him to endorse aestheticised violence as a form of resistance to the punitive force of the state' (p100).

The final chapter brings the artist-poet relationship once again into the foreground, examining the fascinating relationship between Gaudier-Brzeska and Ezra Pound and their crucial involvement with the Vorticist movement (and its anarchist underpinnings). Antliff outlines how Gaudier-Brzeska 'played a seminal role in Pound's conversion to the anarchist cause' in late 1913 (p138), in the months running up to the epochal release of *Blast* in June 1914. Soon enough, Pound was developing his own 'anarchist-inflected vocabulary designed to foreground heterogeneity and celebrate individualism ... [even expressing] that "if I were more interested in form than in anything else I should be a sculptor and not a writer"' (pp155-156).

Antliff's dizzying breadth of material and energy is impressively infectious, and perhaps the only shortfall of the study specifically relates to the sheer amount of historical context and framing, which often leaves the discussion of sculpture itself feeling like background noise. This is particularly true of the early parts of

the Gaudier-Brzeska chapter and there is also a lack of engagement with Epstein's remarkable artistic output beyond Wilde's tomb in the first. That being said, the study would certainly not be so effective if not for its expansive scope and engagement with swathes of material which illuminate the ideological environment shaping the artists' output. All in all, this is an exuberant illustrated volume which will enliven the shelves of many a scholar of sculpture and anarchism.

Declan Lloyd, Lancaster University

Fernando O'Neill Cuesta, *Direct Action in Montevideo: Uruguayan Anarchism, 1927–1937*, translated by Luigi Celentano

Edinburgh and Oakland: AK Press, 2020; 340pp; ISBN 9781849353649

Less than ten years after the end of the Uruguayan civic-military dictatorship, former metalworker, and self-taught anarchist historian Fernando O'Neill Cuesta (1924-2005) wrote *Anarquistas de Acción en Montevideo, 1927–1937*. The original text, with a foreword by Osvaldo Bayer, was published in 1993 by Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (FAU) publishing house Recortes. However, the print run of 300 copies quickly sold out. After a difficult search, the Argentinean independent publishing house Cúlmine Ediciones located a copy of the book and in 2017 reprinted it in Buenos Aires. Translated into English by Luigi Celentano, this version was released by AK Press in 2020 under the title *Direct Action in Montevideo: Uruguayan Anarchism, 1927–1937*.

The story of the editing and translation of the book shared a common objective with the author of the work: to rescue from oblivion and ignorance the experience of the direct-action anarchists in Montevideo between 1927 and 1937. In the first case, by recovering the book that told the story and making it available to a wider public; in the second, by salvaging the memory of the protagonists of this story, which could easily inspire not one but several film scripts (as in fact happened with the documentary *Ácratas*, 2000).

The book is compelling for these and other reasons. Rather than focusing on the more famous direct-action anarchists of Buenos Aires, like Simón Radowitzky, Kurt Wilckens or Severino Di Giovanni, its pages are full of anonymous men whose names appear in the union reprisal against the Estrella del Norte bakery (1927), the robbery of Cambio Messina currency exchange (1928), the escape from Punta Carretas Penitentiary (1931), the attack against Police Captain Pardeiro (1932) and the deportation of some of them to Argentina (1937). However, the

impression left by the stories of gunshots and bombs, of bank robberies and expropriated money, of jail and prison escapes, of heroes and villains, is that they are connected and cannot be fully understood without taking into account the River Plate region as a space of fluid exchanges.

Fernando O'Neill Cuesta knew many of these men. Between 1946 and 1952, he was sent to the Miguelete Jail and the Punta Carretas Penitentiary for some violent acts that occurred in his hometown. As he recalls, this 'almost happy time' (p55) of his life allowed him to share in the fraternity generated by imprisonment with militants Pere (Pedro) Boadas i Rivas, Vicente Moretti, Domingo Aquino, José González Mintrossi, Virginio Denis, Rodolfo Musso and Gabino Ortells. He was able to listen to their successes and failures; broaden his 'poor and limited' ideological universe (p46); get to know anarchism; and to become one of them. After his release, that decisive experience led him to join the group that founded FAU.

These conversations, more casual testimonies than rigorous interviews as O'Neill Cuesta laments, were the foundations for further research in the early 1990s based on press chronicles and court files. Is it necessary to use anarchist newspapers to write a history of anarchism? For him it was not. In straightforward and engaging prose, the author reconstructs biographies and episodes, accompanied by his opinions both critical and laudatory. He is not – nor does he want to be – either an academic historian or a militant one.

In a sense, O'Neill Cuesta's story is one of men who lived in another time and with another intensity, but guided by the same belief: violence from above justifies violence from below. Thus, between the decades of 1970s and 1980s, after his time in the FAU, he joined the urban guerrilla group Tupamaros National Liberation Front and became involved in exile with the Spanish anarchist movement and the Portuguese revolutionary movement. Like many of his former comrades, he also went underground and escaped repression in Uruguay, Chile and Argentina.

Rescuing this history opens the possibility of contributing to the ongoing debate on anarchist violence. That is, to begin to understand how direct-action anarchists in the River Plate region but also in other latitudes, processed that belief. Why did they act as they did? What were the most innermost reasons that led them to believe that 'it was worth giving it all for this cause' (p4), even their own lives? The same reasons that O'Neill knew first-hand, due to his personal and political background.

For the journalist and historian Osvaldo Bayer, the most prominent River Plate direct-action anarchist Di Giovanni 'is the meaning of the word. He executes the word; the action. Society condemns him because it is in charge of setting the

limits of the word; it is the one that interprets at what point the word can have this or that meaning',[1] just as the state aspires to monopolize legitimate violence disputed by revolutionaries. In this breathtaking book, executing the word and writing the action become two sides of the same coin.

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NOTE

1 Osvaldo Bayer, *Severino Di Giovanni: El idealista de la violencia* [5 ed.], Buenos Aires: Booket, 2013, p.13.

Steve J. Shone, *Women of Liberty*

Leiden: Brill, 2019; 360pp; ISBN: 978-90-04-39045-4

Shone's project in this book is clear from the very start, laudable and obviously stimulating: '[T]o show the many overlaps between ... anarchist, libertarian, feminist, free love, and Anti-Federalist writers, while at the same time restricting the subject matter to women in order to emphasize the lack of attention given to many of these thinkers and their ideas in the past' (p1). It is also, unfortunately, partly poorly executed. This doesn't owe to his choice of ten women, whose lives, activism and thought are equally thought-provoking and indeed, for most of them, greatly unrecognised, with sufficient scope and contrast to open comparative perspectives – from Mercy Otis Warren to the anarchist Rose Pesotta, via Louise Michel, Mollie Steimer etc. The focus is largely on the US, with Michel and Japanese anarchist Itō Noe as notable exceptions; however, while selection is unavoidable in this type of work, the book would have really benefitted from a discussion of the choice of this corpus, its cohesion, and overwhelming whiteness (the latter being especially problematic given the role of abolitionism as a spur for a range of radical mobilisations throughout the nineteenth century).

This is an extensively documented study, which includes plenty of primary citations from its protagonists. However, Shone tends to engage too deeply in the scholarship, sometimes losing sight of his topic: for instance, Warren's ideas on republicanism and freedom are repeatedly sidelined in intricate accounts of the literature on the topic, which unfortunately foreground the writing of the Great White Men which the book's introduction sets out to decenter. There

are quite distracting expository flaws throughout: for instance, readers are given information on Itō Noe's marital status before being told that she was executed for her political activism. Similarly, while – rightly – bemoaning the predominance of a shallow focus on Tennie C. Claflin's looks, wealth and love life, the chapter dedicated to her proceeds to replicate it before delving into her political views. The discussion of Claflin's candidacy for the US House of Representatives in 1871 comes completely out of the blue, without any prior exploration of her earlier politicisation. The discussion of voting rights activist Elizabeth Cady Stanton's stance on slavery, abolition and race feels rushed. At other times, it is the bigger picture that is lost, most strikingly in the chapter on Louise Michel, which devotes several pages to her sexual preferences through the lens of other witnesses or writers – so much for Michel's agency, but also so much for the study's own cohesion, as the important themes announced in the introduction are not really dealt with: there is little analytical continuity between the chapters, except for an emphasis on freedom which is of course an important central theme, but deserves far a more consistent and contextualised analysis. This is especially marked in the initial chapters, after which recurring themes and interesting analyses come through more clearly, including bodily autonomy in reference to marriage, sex, dress, abortion; education, money, work, financial independence; and, of course, civil and political rights and the fight for economic justice. It is in fact in the book's strong conclusion that these more synthetic analyses are offered, through an inventory of the 'lost liberties' uniting these women and those they aspired to speak for.

Roughly half of the chapters focus on anarchist women and will be of special interest. There, a range of ideological and activist mobilisations are foregrounded, spanning the period of classical anarchism, the hopes, disappointments and deportations connected with the Russian revolution and Bolshevism, and then the Second World War. The book is at its strongest in those chapters on anarchism, with a great deal more nuance in analyses, a rigorous examination of these women's ideological and intellectual formation, the practical modalities of their activism (from journalism to union militancy) and their personal and political networks. From Lithuania to the US, Russia and Spain, the figure of Emma Goldman appears in several chapters – a nice touch which succeeds in acknowledging her towering influence while bypassing what might have been a slightly predictable chapter, making visible instead less prominent but nonetheless major figures, such as Lois Waisbrooker and Margaret Sanger, who both shared Goldman's interest in reproductive politics. While the overall project is interesting, it feels like a missed opportunity, and makes one wonder whether a book focusing solely on anarchist

women might have been a more congenial theme for Shone – not least because there remains ample scope for this type of study.

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Murray Bookchin, *The Modern Crisis*

Edinburgh and Oakland: AK Press, 2022; 196pp; ISBN 9781849354462

Y. Tarinski (ed.), *Enlightenment and Ecology: The Legacy of Murray Bookchin*

Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2021; 219pp; ISBN 9781551647098

Despite the urgency of the ecological crisis and its interlocking dynamics – rising global temperatures, petrochemical pollution, deforestation, toxic e-waste dumps, acidifying oceans, widespread desertification, soil degradation and ecosystem collapse – corporate greenwashing campaigns mislead consumers with sustainability claims; Big Oil emphasises personal responsibility for carbon footprints; state governments in the Global North rubber stamp new fossil fuel projects while classifying those opposing ecocide as extremists; and extractive industries go on cannibalising the web of life.

Murray Bookchin was among the first to grasp the irresolvable conflict between a finite environment and capitalism's demand for limitless economic growth. Bookchin, who fused libertarian socialist and ecological thought into social ecology and communalism, saw ecological processes as constituted by and through complex interrelations with human social forms. Ultimately, it is only through examining social hierarchies and institutionalised domination within society that, in turn, define the relationship between society and nature, that the irrationality of ecological destruction is confronted and its possible resolutions illuminated. Seeing a clear connection between hierarchical forms of social organisation and destructive human interactions with nature, to Bookchin, the ways in which particular societies treated their natural surroundings in the past reflected their specific social arrangements - how social interrelationships were structured and through what forms of social organisations and institutions. As Bookchin argues in *The Modern Crisis*, social ecology recognises that 'the future of life on this planet pivots on the future of society' (p55).

As I read *the Modern Crisis* alongside *Enlightenment and Enlightenment and*

Ecology: The Life and Legacy of Murray Bookchin, several thoughts in particular stick out. First, Bookchin's comprehensive ecological critique of capitalism, hierarchy and the state demonstrate the continuing relevance of social ecology as a tool for making sense of the worsening ecological situation and its relation to the socio-economic sphere. Second, Bookchin unites theory and praxis by coupling a critique of this ecologically-destructive society with practical-political solutions that ground present possibilities for the transition to democratic, ecologically-friendly communities in human potentialities for freedom and communal participation latent within society itself. Considered altogether, this paradoxical, crisis-ridden world contains both the omens of global dystopia and the flowering of a multiplicity of social-ecological communities beneath the atrophying dominant social institutions.

Bookchin's *The Modern Crisis* (first published in 1986 but republished in 2022 with a foreword by Andy Price), moves between several interconnected themes, including - the question of humanity's place in nature; the normative basis for an ecological ethics of freedom; the rejection of deep ecology; the dialectics of society and nature; and present political possibilities inherent in the gap between what is and what could be. Bookchin's ecological dialectic (dialectical naturalism) emerges against the backdrop of a two-pronged critique of anthropocentric dualism and reductionist biocentric approaches that assign equal innate value to humans and all other life-forms. Bookchin regards deep ecology's anti-humanist position as politically naive, in contrast to dialectical naturalism's synthesis of the natural and social (humanity-in-nature) that maintains some difference between human and nonhuman actors for the politics of social ecology (p51). Romantic attachments to idealised nature, or nostalgia for pre-civilisational times, actually confine nonhuman nature to a 'circumscribed domain in which human invention, foresight, and creativity have no place and offer no possibilities' (p38). To Bookchin, it is necessary to preserve some distinction between human societies and animal-plant communities because the fundamental transformations required in the face of planetary catastrophe can only be carried out by human agents. Viewing abstract humanity in antagonism to nature not only undermines human potential to act as self-conscious, creative stewards in co-operative symbiosis with the web of life, but also supports neo-Malthusian worries about overpopulation that overlap with the main ingredients of eco-fascism. Without a holistic awareness of the systemic conditions of domination, ecological concerns are easily exploited for reactionary purposes. Additionally, technology is not 'unnatural' or inherently harmful but dependent on the imperatives that undergird its use. In a world of material abundance amidst globalised insecurity, embracing the democratic potential of technology is essential to the transition to an ecological, democratic

and post-scarcity society, such as the automation of labour necessary to open up time for communal participation. There is a midway, then, between pretensions to dominion and mastery over nature, and seeing humanity as a wholly negative, parasitic influence on Earth.

Social ecology, as an appeal above all for 'social reconstruction along ecological lines' (p54), presupposes the active politics of libertarian municipalism (pp55-57). Building an ecological politics on ethical appeals or ephemeral rebellions, according to Bookchin, is pointless because they do nothing to dent an institutionalised system of control and social hierarchy that, by being structurally amoral, is immune to moral reasoning. Crucially, only through societal self-transformation can the promise of a creative, self-conscious, and free nature be fulfilled. Developing out of immanent present potentialities in social life, Bookchin emphasises the need for an 'abiding institutional basis for a grassroots dual power' that can, on the one hand, concretise an ecological ethics of complementary and freedom, and on the other, endure as a counter-veiling social infrastructure beneath and beyond the co-opting effects of state power and the pressures of capitalist market forces. That is why, for Bookchin, no ethics or vision of an ecological and democratic society 'can be meaningful unless it is embodied in a living politics' (p56). To this end, the institutional configuration of libertarian municipalism (an interlinking of interdependent neighbourhoods into a confederation of municipal networks) reconstitutes active and plural public spheres for the cultivation of new forms of political subjectivity and the self-management of common affairs by being rooted in face-to-face, direct-democratic assemblies. Bookchin describes a municipalist approach to economics as a *moral* economy based on a participatory system of production and distribution of commodities to meet human needs, in contrast to the capitalist market economy's commodification of natural and built environments. Care, responsibility, and obligation appear as alternative values to interest, cost, and profitability in a moral, municipal economy driven by norms democratically decided in citizens assemblies and confederations of assemblies (p71).

'The influence of Murray Bookchin is immeasurable', writes Alexandros Schismenos in his contribution to *Enlightenment and Ecology*, 'since it is constantly expanding; it does not inspire any form of Bookchinianism, but rather a theoretical and practical legacy that continues to live on in humanity's social struggles' (p144). The first half of the collection, 'Bookchin's Theoretical Legacy', explores Bookchin's contribution to political theory and philosophy, touching on: the project of libertarian municipalism; the dialectical emergence of direct democracy; the importance of the city to social ecology; and the social-ecological ethic of using diversified technologies to harmonise humanity's relationship with nature.

As Brian Morris observes, what Bookchin understands by the modern crisis is manifold: 'social, economic, political and ecological all at once' (p29). Bookchin advocated a form of 'communal individuality' or 'social freedom' influenced by the revolutionary anarchist tradition of Kropotkin and Bakunin, which in turn emphasised the need to integrate an ecological worldview with a libertarian socialist political philosophy - a combination of the project of human liberation with an ecological project (p33). Like Kropotkin, Bookchin stressed the decentralisation of political and urban life and a social economy that transcends the urban/rural divide. Despite the misconceptions about Bookchin's views on municipal elections, Yavor Tarinski insists that Bookchin is explicit in his commitment to real democracy (p14).

In order for citizens to find opportunities to meet one another and socialise, however, technology and infrastructure must be re-oriented to foster the *communal* dimension of city life (p45). Consequently, Eirik Eiglad contends that reclaiming the commons is a necessary precondition for urban regeneration, including reclaiming direct control over everything that should be deemed a shared responsibility: squares, streets, forests, parks, but also important public services (p46). Despite the fact that city space is beset by inequalities, Papachristodoulou notes how grassroots citizens movements are creating meaningful urban communities in which assembly-based politics can flourish (p52). Morris explains how Bookchin's advocacy of radical agriculture or 'agroecology' implies not only new techniques but a new sensibility toward land and society as a whole, suggesting agricultural practices should be based on the fusion of sound biological and ecological knowledge combined with ethical and aesthetic principles (pp37-38).

Whether Bookchin's influence on Ocalan's democratic confederalism and the Kurdish liberation movement; the assembly of assemblies established by the French Yellow Vests; Ecology Montreal's on-the-ground spread of social ecology; the direct-democratic common assembly processes of collective design being implemented by Urban React in Athens and The Living Commons in Cork; or the Social Ecology Education Demonstration School (SEEDS) in Vermont, the book's second half, 'Bookchin's influence on political practice around the world,' takes readers on a journey through some of the local communities, autonomous-led groups and social movements that are relocating the space through which political power is exercised by giving practical form to communal participation and direct democracy. Tarinski concludes by describing 'the ways in which Bookchin's legacy and the social ecological school of thought he helped establish spreads across the globe and cross-pollinates with local theoretical tendencies and social movements, enriching a plethora of revolutionary practices ... creating the foundations of what

the Zapatistas call: "a world where many worlds fit"' (pp211-212). As Janet Biehl writes, 'Change progresses through contradictions' (p20).

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Thomas Swann, *Anarchist Cybernetics: Control and Communication in Radical Politics*

Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2021; 179pp; ISBN: 9781529208795

Cybernetics is having a moment. *Again*. And for good reason, because cybernetics, in many ways, augured the transformation by which humans became 'seen primarily as information-processing entities who are essentially similar to intelligent machines', as Kathrine Hayles argues.[1] First-order cybernetics emerged in the 1940s as an interdisciplinary technoscience contemporaneous with linguistic structuralism. It soon became known as a theory of communication and control because cybernetics looks at how systems use information to model and manipulate their actions in order to counter entropy. Although not emphasizing entropy directly in *Anarchist Cybernetics*, Thomas Swann nevertheless obliquely refers to systems' abilities to adjust and acclimatize to internal and external pressures and changes. He does so by asking why movements that were set to change the world – Occupy, the 15M movement and the Arab Spring – failed to do so, at least on a macro-political level, though they certainly liberated people's desire for *something other* than what is. Yet Swann is right to raise the problem of why these movements could not be sustained because, besides critical mass, long-term sustainability is surely of concern to any radical political organization or group. The problem, for Swann, seems to lie at the level of *strategic organisation*, which he addresses via the work of second-order cyberneticians Gordon Pask and Stafford Beer.

Second-order cybernetics, initiated by Heinz von Foerster, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, differs from first-order cybernetics in that it includes the observer in the system. The British cyberneticians, Pask and Beer, were active researchers during this period. While Pask did some work on functional hierarchy, Beer started thinking about organizing systems in terms of simple, more complex and exceedingly complex types, where the first two types 'are in principle knowable and predictable and thus susceptible to the methods of modern science and engineering', whereas exceedingly complex systems are not because their emerging properties exceed representationable knowledge.[2]

Nonetheless, Beer developed what he called the Viable System Model (VSM), according to which any organization or system can be divided into five subsystems, each of which has a different functional role to support the system or organization as a whole in its response to complexity. Swann argues that this model can function as a strategic framework for radical politics because, while it provides functionally higher or strategically defined goals, it still allows for prefigurative, creative, and tactical responses to internal and external pressures. This, for me, is the major contribution of *Anarchist Cybernetics* to radical politics. It is also the most sustained and positive engagement from the radical left with cybernetics since Tiqqun's *The Cybernetic Hypothesis* (2020), which was largely critical of cybernetics on the whole.

This tension between positivity and negatively is one I would like to tease out, because the lack of critical engagement with cybernetics in Swann's book is its one potential limitation – just as Tiqqun's wholly negative response is. Rather than an either/or position, I want to suggest that cybernetics be viewed as *pharmacological* in nature, meaning it has simultaneously poisonous and curative properties, just as antibiotics do. Which of the two immanent conditions becomes amplified depends on the care – or lack thereof – that is given to the situation. This relation between relative health and sickness can, for French philosopher Georges Canguilhem, be understood with reference to *normativity*, though he means something other than the lay understanding we have of this concept. In *On the Normal and the Pathological* (1978), Canguilhem argues that we use the terms 'pathology' and 'normativity' too narrowly, thereby misunderstanding, or entirely missing, the pharmacological dynamics between the two. For him, wellbeing – which includes the wellness of organisms as much as organizations – is simply an expression of pathology or normativity, where normativity refers to a system's capacity to deal with change, thereby returning to a metastable state and so countering entropy. From a pharmacological point of view, then, cybernetics has the potential to provoke both pathology and normativity, or illness and health. This means that even Swann's application of the VSM to radical politics has the potential to be noxious or therapeutic. Understanding this tension addresses not only our individual and collective desires in and for radical politics, but also takes care of the pharmacological situation itself – and I believe that this kind of normativity is what Swann is, ultimately, aiming at.

Chantelle Gray, North-West University

NOTES

1 Hayles, N.K. (1999), *How We Became Posthuman*: *Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p7.
2 Pickering, A. (2010), *The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future*, Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010, p23.

Richard Morgan, *The Making of Kropotkin's Anarchist Thought: Disease, Degeneration, Health and the Bio-Political Dimension*

London: Routledge, 2021; 145pp; 9781138365650

Although Petr Kropotkin was a geographer before escaping Russia and made his living writing popular science articles for much of his British exile, other than *Mutual Aid* his scientific work has been largely overlooked in the literature. Richard Morgan reminds us in this intriguing book that for Kropotkin politics and science were inextricably intertwined – indeed, the final book he published was titled *Modern Science and Anarchy*. Kropotkin frequently used the language of disease and degeneration to describe the impact of capitalism and the state on people individually and collectively. Morgan contends that this was not simply a metaphor.

The book's central theme is Kropotkin's 'bio-political' analysis. 'Capitalism afflicted humanity not simply by precluding equality and brotherhood ... but by preventing good health' (p98). Thus, Kropotkin's writings on living and working conditions 'expose the effects of capitalism on the human body[,] ... show the processes of decay that were taking place in the dwellings of the working class, in the factories and other sites of work' (p98) Cities too were unhealthy, not intrinsically but because of the damage inflicted by systems of power and exploitation. Capitalism 'is pushing the health of humanity to [the] breaking point' (p99). Unemployment leads to illness, as does poverty and the unsanitary conditions the poor are forced to endure. But idleness and excess are also unhealthy, and so 'capitalism makes everyone sick', leading to moral decay through "psychological adaptation to a degrading moral environment'. (pp100, 105). And while Kropotkin spent less time on this (although he did discuss the harmful effects of monoculture), these 'toxic surroundings' also poison the environment (p102).

Crime, too, is exacerbated, if not caused, by oppression and poverty. While many anarchists understandably see the deprivation of liberty as their main

feature, Morgan contends that Kropotkin's extensive writings on prisons portrayed them as a biological problem. Using statistics and official reports, Kropotkin showed that they were sites for spreading literal disease among prisoners and to the surrounding communities, as well as imposing psychological damage that led to and reinforced antisocial behaviour. Like many contemporary scientists, Kropotkin believed there were biological causes of crime, aggravated and often caused by prison conditions.

Kropotkin's understanding of the pervasive, inheritable impact of toxic environments was influenced by Lamarck. But Kropotkin saw this not only as a question of genetics, but also of social environment – human nature was not fixed, a society degraded by capitalism and oppression could also be remade through revolution. Lamarckism is no longer fashionable in scientific circles, but there is a great deal of research demonstrating that stress and poverty have long-lasting effects that carry down through the generations.[1] Even a simple matter like height is influenced not only by genetics, but also by the material circumstances of our lives, which is why average height is growing in most of the world even as it declines in supposedly socialist North Korea.

One troubling issue Morgan addresses is Kropotkin's (and other reformers') early dalliance with eugenics. Eugenics claimed to share a concern with social hygiene, and anarchists who participated in early conferences rejected the racist analysis and measures (notably sterilization) that came to dominate. Where eugenicists sought to eradicate social ills by controlling who could reproduce, Kropotkin advocated 'improv[ing] the biological condition of populations by making their social environment healthier' (p128).

Kropotkin saw social ills in scientific and medical terms, but also looked to science for solutions. He believed that science could benefit the entire population, but that the masses must be centrally involved in the scientific process. After the revolution, for example, Kropotkin foresaw the need to systematically gather data on all manner of provisions and resources. But this would not be the domain of experts; ordinary workers would gather the necessary data and then reallocate housing and other resources based on that information.

Kropotkin believed that capitalism literally made us sick, and that scientific analysis provided the tools to build a healthy, sustainable society. 'Kropotkin's anti-capitalist stance revealed a sinister biological reality: the learned values of bourgeois society – greed, self-interest – could be visited unknowingly on progeny' (p105). Revolution, then, was a sort of public hygiene – to eliminate the causes of illness and decay to protect both individual and social health. Morgan sees Kropotkin's scientific analysis as central to his revolutionary project, while making it clear that

Kropotkin always understood that human action was essential if we were to eliminate the 'pestilential threat to humanity' posed by the state and capitalism (p9). His book enriches our understanding of the role of science in Kropotkin's thought, and reminds us of the insistence on grappling with the material, with the real facts of life, that pervades Kropotkin's writings.

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1 See for example: Arline Geronimus, *Weathering: The Extraordinary Stress of Ordinary Life in an Unjust Society*, New York: Little Brown Spark, 2023.

Antonio Negri, *The End of Sovereignty*, Ed Emery (trans.)

Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022; 220pp; ISBN 9781509544301

The End of Sovereignty is the fifth collection of writings from Antonio Negri. The book places Negri's more recent work within a broader chronological perspective, focusing on the capitalist state's evolution from Keynesianism up to the present transformation of sovereignty into an immanent form of global control. Those familiar with Negri's more well-known work will not find any major surprises in the twelve essays collected in this volume. Its major value is in better historicising the trajectory of Negri's thought on sovereignty and the state and better situating it in relation to other major historical and contemporary thinkers, not least thanks to a spirited direct exchange with fellow Italian biopolitical theorist Roberto Esposito (chapters 4 and 5).

The book opens with a fascinating Marxist critique of the evolution of Keynes' thought as a theorist of the capitalist state, illuminating the state's metamorphosis in response to the working-class movement's emergence in 1917. Negri regards the economic crisis of 1929 as a crucial turning point, triggering a revision in the state's comprehension and management of capitalism. The revolutionary events of 1968 ushered in escalated confrontations, culminating in a 'settling of accounts' between the state and the working class (p37). This turmoil birthed neoliberalism and globalisation, restoring power to capital at the cost of the state ceding certain sovereign features.

As the narrative progresses, the book delves into the implications of this second major transformation. Negri expounds upon some of his signature ideas,

tracing the evolution of constituent power from a static politico-juridical concept to a dynamic, productive biopolitics. He discusses the diminishing role of representative politics, the decoupling of representation from sovereignty, and the imperative to shift socio-political struggles to the arena of global cooperation - 'attacking private property and pursuing social cooperation and the common as the engines of new constituent processes' (p66).

One of the book's most edifying elements is the comparison of Negri's viewpoints with other key philosophical perspectives and thinkers. For instance, in chapter 3, Negri criticises all those advocating for 'the autonomy of the (national) political', denouncing these positions as not only nostalgic but 'dangerous' in failing to account for the inherent violence and domination of sovereignty (p59). Likewise, chapters four, five, and eight position Negri's philosophy in dialogue with Roberto Esposito and Ernesto Laclau. In chapter 4, Esposito commends Negri's affirmative, constitutive approach yet questions his interpretation of today's political and socio-cultural landscape. Esposito calls into question the feasibility of Negri's diverse 'multitude' coalescing into a unified political project, contends Negri's potential oversight of the inevitable 'negative' dynamics within politics, and questions his direct correlation between immaterial labour and freedom. These challenges echo broader criticisms within the wider academic reception, offering readers an opportunity to directly engage with Negri's rebuttals. In a similar vein, Negri critiques Laclau, primarily over his transcendental philosophy manifest in differing interpretations of 'the void' and 'the surplus'. Laclau perceives 'the void' as a political gap, which needs to be filled by populist signifiers to form a unified public, while Negri sees 'the surplus' as an intrinsic source of societal creativity tied to the decentralising power of the 'multitude'.

The book's concluding chapters pivot from theory to praxis, as Negri revisits Lenin's slogans and outlines the potentialities of post-capitalist transformation. His insights into resistance, the notion of living labour, and Lenin's ideologies provide a dynamic exploration of his revolutionary thought. As the book concludes, Negri confronts the challenges of the era of biopolitics, advocating for a radical reshaping of societal structures away from traditional sovereignty towards a more pluralistic, cooperative model.

Given its influence, Negri's work has sparked considerable critique, in particular concerning the practicality of his abstract theories to the every-day lived experience of those resisting state-capitalist violence. Whilst one cannot help but be impressed by the power and creativity of his historical materialist method in these essays – demolishing and rebuilding key concepts of political theory – many anarchists may find the residual traces of Marxist teleology in Negri's thought

problematic. The risk is that some of the implications drawn by Negri in pursuit of what he sees as ultimately liberatory tendencies, might inadvertently consolidate the very mechanisms of control he seeks to dismantle. Regardless, *The End of Sovereignty* is an invaluable exploration of the state and sovereign power by one of the great minds of contemporary left anti-authoritarian thought. Whether or not one fully subscribes to Negri's conclusions, the book remains essential reading for all those committed to pursuing an anti-capitalist *and* anti-state politics in the current globalised conjuncture.

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