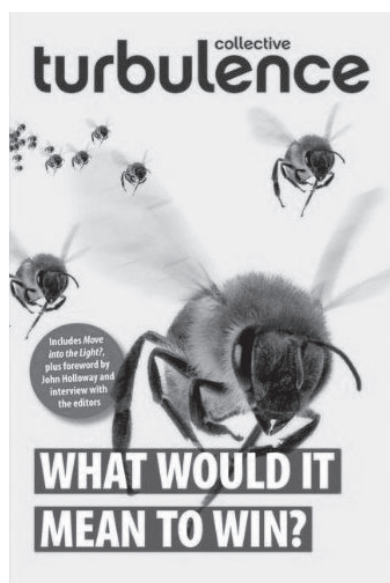


QUEESCH DUERCH D'RICHER



Review Turbulence



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WINNING, WORKING, MOVING

Hope moves faster than the speed of thought' is the title of the Foreword, written by John Holloway, to this edited volume. The Turbulence Collective are a fountain head out of control, a bunch of restless people who constantly rethink and rework their position, slowly, constructively, tentatively, forcefully. It is not a postmodern navel-gazing space but a place where difficult debates are carried out and negotiated. If there is a movement for a more viable future (and against neoliberalism in its worst incarnations), there are bound to be inherent internal differences underlying its vision and political realities.

This particular volume cracks the question of 'what it would mean to win' wide open. How do we understand contemporary capitalism, and what would it mean to break with it? How do we deal with living on a finite planet, and with its manifestations such as climate change? How different is the global movement of movements from all that has passed before; and how can we learn from history? What is the nature of this movement that people refer to? Fourteen articles follow, written by people carrying across their voice from very different contexts. There is nothing smoothed about the ways in which these articles correlate, but that is part of the rough edges that lead into a conversation, that raise questions and that rattle cages.

Each contribution could cer-

tainly be discussed at length, but I choose to review four recurring concerns of the contributor that weave through the volume and that I consider crucial for the anti-globalisation movement. The first of these concerns the question of how to refashion politics and action. The second deals with the issue of how to think about the relationship between work and life, the third asks in how far the concerns of the anti-globalisation movement are not 'just' economic, environmental or political concerns but also, and more fundamentally, social concerns. The fourth issue concerns a set of reflexive and critical questions around the nature of the movement, its impetus, thrust and reach.

As conventional politics has been stalled, rethinking political action and politics itself has been at the heart of the movement. What are the political alternatives people have explored and pursued, adapted to their specific geographical and historical contexts? The excerpts from Stephen Duncombe's 'Politics in an Age of Fantasy' make the case for a new political aesthetics: Self-conscious, progressive politics that embraces fantasy and spectacle, images and symbols, emotions and desire. The limits of our imagination are truly the limits of our world, but utopia is good for keeping on walking. Gustavo Esteva's piece takes as its departure the indigenous people's struggle in Mexico, most

notably his position as an activist working with and alongside various Mexican NGOs. He spins further the thread of taking things into our own hands and no longer waiting for external sources of power that would magically intervene and do the work for us. Similarly, the group Colectivo Situaciones has been working on new emerging forms of politics in Argentina since the late 1990s on what they call militant research/research militancy. In their text named 'politicising sadness' they describe the way in which the insurrection of December 2001 became reinterpreted as an event and the feelings associated with it as time went by. Kay Summer and Harry Halpin draw on the model of complexity theory to assess the way in which capitalism's spiralling out of control and coming up against environmental limits has called up a strong feeling that our world has become schizophrenic, which leads us to sense critical instability. This term is used to describe a complex system that is behaving wildly, seeming chaotic. Critical instability usually signals the first detectable stage of a bifurcation point, that point at which massive systematic changes start. We are lurching towards a new-yet-unknown system or systems. Only one generation in forty or fifty years may have the chance to live through a phase transition in human society, and more importantly, have the chance to actually create the new society. This spectre of collapse is both terrifying and exciting.



The second set of concerns regards the proper relationship of work and life. Some of the anti-globalisation movement's strength has come out of older left-wing political constellations whose work was intimately related to labour conditions and regulation. Valery Alzaga and Rodrigo Nunes have both been active in setting labour campaigns demanding justice for employment groups such as janitors or cleaners, and offer a conversation to draw out the practical organisation of their campaigns, the way in which the world of unions and workers has become infinitely more complex with aspects of global corporatism, and how mobilisation requires a lot of research, networking and effective leadership. An interview with Todd Hamilton and Nate Holdren, US-based members of the Industrial Workers of the World reveals that, while it might not be sufficient to focus efforts solely on organising the workplace, many people work for wages and spend a good part of their day at work. Thus prioritising intervention here is somewhat warranted, not least because labour relations have changed. The class compromise on which the higher unionisation rates in the US were once built no longer holds as the ruling class is no longer interested. Their choice of terms of 'organising' versus 'activism' is not coincidental, as they see activism as acting for someone else. Organising, on the other hand, is acting with someone else, and therefore more valuable. Euclides André Mance illustrates how solidarity economy can be the material basis of post-capitalist societies by explaining that people across the world are already practising it: they are working and consuming in order to produce for their own and other people's welfare rather than for profit. Creating satisfactory economic conditions for everyone means assuring individual and collective freedoms, generating work and income, abolishing all forms of exploitation, domination and exclusion, and protecting ecosystems. The initial efforts for this network came out of successful practices of work and income generation, fair trade, ethical consumption, solidarity finance, and the diffusion of sustainable productive technologies. It is now maturing into alternative community-based currencies in many parts of the world, and keeps evolving every day.

As far as the social aspects of change are concerned, a few contributions to the volume are particularly illuminating. Speaking from the Camp for Climate Action, Paul Sumburn's text deals with how the growing movement against the fossil fuel economy has attempted to find a way out of the rhetorical labyrinth of making noise by taking action that stops or reduces carbon dioxide emissions, whilst promoting workable ecological solutions and challenging dominant power structures. He restates that climate change is not an environmental issue, but above all a social issue, and its impact will affect all our social movements. Nick Dyer-Witford invites us to think about the commons and what he calls commonism as one main purpose of the movement. His argument is that the form of a new social order, commonism, can be seen only in a circulation of the common. He ar-

gues that we need to think in terms of the interconnection and reinforcements between the commons. The ecological commons maintains the finite conditions necessary for both social and networked commons. A social commons, with a tendency towards equitable distribution of wealth, preserves the ecological commons, both by eliminating the extremes of environmental destructiveness linked to extremes of wealth and poverty and by reducing dependence on 'trickle down' from unconstrained economic growth. The initial reference for commonism is to the collective lands enclosed by capitalism in a process of primitive accumulation running from the middle ages to the present. Today commons also names the possibility of collective, rather than private ownership in other domains: an ecological commons (water, atmosphere, fisheries and forests); a social commons (public provisions for welfare, health, education and so on); a networked commons (of access to the means of communication). In the social sphere, two movement initiatives have picked up the issue of 'common wealth' in rather innovative ways. One is the movement of 'solidarity economics' focused on cooperative enterprises of various sorts and associated with the success of the Latin American Left. The other is a set of proposals and campaigns around what is variously known as a 'basic' or 'guaranteed' income, which, by assuring a modest level of subsistence, saves human life from utter dependence on a global labour market. Such programmes also address feminist political economists' point about the market's systemic non-reward of reproductive work (care of children and households). Basic income was initially proposed in the global North West, and in that context can be criticised as a supplement to an already-affluent welfare state.

Finally, many of the articles return to the question back on the movement itself, from its beginnings in Seattle. Sandro Mezzadra and Gigi Roggero ponder the way in which the commonalities between the struggle that started in 1999 have perhaps lessened. Moving beyond a cyclical understanding of movement, they do not aim at excluding the crisis from the horizon of possibility of political practice. Rather, the challenge is to situate the crisis in today's spatio-temporal coordinates. Emerging from the opposition to neoliberal capitalism, initially the question and political demands centred on a different globalisation connected to the free circulation of people and knowledge, to social cooperation and struggles. Today we find that neoliberal politics are in a crisis, paradoxically symmetrical to that of the movements. Ben Trott raises the issue of how one creates what the Zapatistas have called 'a world in which many worlds are possible'. What are the directional demands of the movement? According to Trott, these would suggest a direction, but are no hard and fast rules. They provide a point around which a potential movement could consolidate. Michal Osterweil, another founding member of the Turbulence Collective, examines

the links between feminism and 'the movement of movements', starting from the wide appeal of its central and visible critical and reflective practices captured best by the Zapatista phrase 'caminar preguntando' – 'to walk while questioning'. During her work in Italy, she encountered the idea that the movement was a woman, because it functioned according to logics of difference, dispersion and affect: no central group of singular ideology could control it, and it was propelled by an energy, from subjects and places, that far exceeded those of traditional forms of leftist organisation and practice. Osterweil recounts that she was simultaneously compelled and disturbed by these references to feminism. Excited because

And maybe that is fine.

she thought there was something to it, disturbed because the potential was not matched in reality. She poses the thorny question: what does it mean to see yourself as part of a movement governed by feminist and minoritarian logics when in so many of the most visible spaces, the voices and languages of women continue to be less audible? Does it matter if we have a fabulously astute and sensitive notion of what a good democratic – non-representative – politics would look like if we cannot involve more people in the conversation? If theoretical and reflective practice is so important to us today, even as an ethical and formal element, how do we live with such inconsistencies between our theoretical language and our experiences? In conclusion, Osterweil reflects that recognising irreducible differences, attempting to work with forms of organisation that are more fluid, dynamic and based on affect and pleasure, rather than structure and strategy, are key and important elements of the 'new politics', but they are not sufficient. Nor, I would add, is theorising and calling them part of a new post-representational political logic. The Free Association write about the way in which, by envisaging a different world, and acting in a different world one actually calls forth that world. They describe the way in which the risk of being trapped in the logic of capital and state, whether as radical reformers, summit protesters, workplace activists etc. is ever present. The only way for autonomous social movements to avoid this dance of death is to keep breaking new ground. In this sense, winning, in the realm of problematics, is just the gaining of extended problematics, as our experimental probing opens up ever-wider horizons. Or more prosaically, all that movements can ever get from 'winning' is more movement. And maybe that is fine.

The volume's conclusion, which takes the form of a conversation with members of the collective, takes up the issue that had a ghostly presence for this reader throughout the contributions. In the effort to organise movements with an anti-systemic orientation, i.e. 'movements that understand that it is not just a matter of repealing a few misguided policies, or reforming institutions like the G8, World Bank, etc., but rather overturning or transforming an entire political, economic, cultural and social sys-



tem' (p.143), questions arise in how far that makes capital appear far more coherent and hegemonic than it actually is, in how far it attempts to generalise the ungeneralisable as every struggle needs to be framed and worked with within its very own social, historical, economic and political contexts, as well as in how far it universalises the idea of 'radicalism' a little too much. Turbulence specifically works against the danger of ossification of the movement and its accompanying threats of making it just as rigid, un-reflexive and essentialising than anything it would like to fight against. Ben Trott speaks of Deleuze, who draws on Spinoza, to characterise two different, simultaneous states of being of a body in a brilliant explanation of how mutual constitution in terms of 'the movement' and the 'outside' of the movement are actually working in practice. A body undergoes transformation through changes in the way in which its internal particles move in relation to one another, as well as relatedly changing in its capacity to affect or be affected by other external bodies. He argues that the fact that the borders between 'outside' and 'in' are, in the case of the counter-globalisation movement, so porous does not invalidate this understanding but simply increase its complexity. Far from romanticising the idea of uncertainty, he argues that it is not a paralysing type of uncertainty which partially explains the appeal of collectives such as Turbulence, but the strength of feeling associated with the idea that people want to do, act, resist, organise their lives differently outside of and beyond dogmatic, sectarian identities and ideologies, but know that there are no ready-made solutions, no magic tricks. Trott emphasises the importance of this recognition in the face of the surrounding violent political culture, where one is constantly compelled to fight for the truth or the superiority of one's position rather than to recognise the messy, contingent nature of all political work. So maybe it is not about 'winning' after all, but on keeping on working, every day, and visioning 'winning' while walking with questions.

Turbulence website and work:
<http://www.turbulence.org.uk/>

Review Author: Katy Fox

foxxkat@gmail.com

