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**IMAGINAL MACHINES: AUTONOMY & SELF-ORGANIZATION IN THE REVOLUTION OF EVERYDAY LIFE**

By Stevphen Shukaitis (Autonomedia 2009)

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in the introduction to their sprawling radical theory roller coaster *A Thousand Plateaus*, make a distinction between a “tracing” and a “map.” A “tracing” is a kind of exact copy—a perfect image that tells you what you need to know about something, that tells you what to do. A “map,” on the other hand, is a lot more interesting—it’s something that doesn’t pretend tell you everything, to have the final answers to your questions, because it’s something you take along with you as you step into the unknown, that you scribble on and modify as you go along. Stevphen Shukaitis, in his *Imaginal Machines: Autonomy and Self-Organization in the Revolutions of Everyday Life*, has written a map (and not a tracing), ready to be used in the collective exploration of anticapitalist resistance in the 21st century.
Shukaitis’ book even starts with a map: one from 1896, of “Bohemia”—not the Eastern European territory, but rather its imaginary counterpart, the land of dropouts, deviants, and marginalized creativity, here labeled with regions like “Vagabondia” and “The Sea of Dreams.” And it’s precisely this “territory” of the imagination that is explored in the pages that follow—if we can no longer simply oppose creativity to power, but instead have to recognize that power feeds on creativity, that 21st century capitalism doesn’t just need us to work and obey, but wants to take possession of our dreams as well, then, as Shukaitis argues, we need to pay close attention to the dynamics of recuperation. The idea here is to play on the double meaning of the word “composition”—to bring into conjunction the idea of aesthetic arrangement (to compose a piece of music) with the idea of class composition, where the collective subjects of political action are never given in advance, but are fluid, always somewhere in the process of construction or dissolution. The imagination is political, and any successful politics is going to have to draw on the resources of the imagination.

The “imaginal machine” therefore names something quite general: those complex arrangements of ideas, desires and creative bodies that animate our material and immaterial lives, sometimes opening up pathways to collective liberation, and sometimes turning against us in the worst way. Because these “machines” are always on the move, carving out spaces of temporary autonomy or collapsing into the nightmare of late capitalism, Shukaitis’ attempt to map out their impact on life and resistance is itself mobile, provisional, swerving from the heights of radical theory to the small details of his own experiences as a collective owner of the DIY label Ever Reviled Records, and more often than not through unexpected detours through science fiction and horror movies. If you’re looking for a guide to the uninitiated to walk you through, in simple, clear terms, the work of the Italian autonomists, the Midnight Notes collective, Deleuze and Guattari, and Hakim Bey, this might not be the book for you. But if you want to explore the same conceptual territory in a madcap dash that also brings in the space zombies of cultural appropriation, meets up with Joe Hill and Sun Ra on Mars in time to return to earth to dress up like billionaires to lead fake protests against the IWW’s Starbucks Workers Union, and then team up with San Precario, the patron saint of precarious workers, to loot a supermarket and lead a May Day parade, before blasting off again with the Association of Autonomous Astronauts, all the while providing a thousand points of entry into the essential conceptual toolbox for creative revolt and resistance in the 21st century, then Imaginal Machines has exactly what you’re looking for.

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