

Last Exit to Utopia

Takver Shevek

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“In view of the solutions that are asked of us, routine completely re-upholstered in velvet is dangerous. Routine hatches more distress and death than an imaginary utopia.”

—Andre Breton

Green Anarchy #17 (Summer 2004) featured a rather amorphous seven-page article by one A Morefus as to why utopianism and anarchy are fundamentally incompatible. The author criticizes the totalizing impulses of utopian thought with a totalizing critique that glibly and thinly covers a few thousand years, from Plato’s *Republic* and the Shakers to the Bauhaus, the Third Reich, anarcho-primitivism, and post-human cybertopias.

While the motivations for writing the piece are completely understandable—namely, worries about how utopian thinking promotes the achievement of “perfect societies” through the implementation of viciously authoritarian paradigms of control—the author overlooks the most vital and valuable aspects of utopian projects in a rush to promote that most idealistic of intellectual exercises, nihilism, as a “healthy influence” for anarchic communities.

Green Anarchy’s narrow read on the utopic future fails to recognize that the closed, static, inhuman machinery of the blueprint is only what appears in the most simple, literal and fundamentalist of readings. This knee-jerk anti-utopianism renders all utopians into political engineers in the tradition of V. I. Lenin and Paul Wolfowitz, ignoring that utopia is fiction and even the most totalitarian, coercive, and conformist utopian texts can be critically read in order to spark the sheet lightning of previously unimaginable and radical libertarian possibilities. Really, no anarchist would make the mistake to read a science-fiction novel as a carefully-calculated recipe for life after the Revolution. We are inspired by imaginal works; we would never completely mimic the worlds described in Fourier’s *Theory of the Four Movements*, Pannekoek’s *Workers’ Councils*, Ursula LeGuin’s *The Dispossessed*, Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia*, Starhawk’s *Fifth Sacred Thing*, Katsuhiro Omoto’s *Akira*, or P M’s *bolo ‘bolo*.

Aside from providing trenchant social commentary on contemporary life, what’s most important about utopianism are not its strict ideological templates, but rather its poetic verve and audacity: “Utopias have often been plans of societies functioning mechanically, dead structures conceived by economists, politicians and moralists,” anarchist Marie-Louise Berneri wrote, “but they have also been the living dreams of poets.” Tom Moylan, in *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (1986), spells it out this way: “Utopias help sustain us after long meetings and political defeats. They help to provoke our imaginations as we work out new strategies to meet our needs and desires. They challenge us to play with alternatives and thereby break out of the ideological chains that have restrained our socialized imaginations.” Utopian works are a form of critical play that can be used as a sharp tool for stirring up radical change.

To that end, especially invigorating about utopian thought and creation is the absolute refusal to resignedly accept extant political conditions as inevitable, incontrovertible, and natural. Above all else, utopians reject miserabilist edicts about what is and is not realistic; utopians distrust practicality and pragmatism; utopians ignore the unfreedoms of efficiency, instrumental reason, and usefulness; utopians refuse the fruits from the poisonous

tree of a puritanical Protestant work ethic and instead dance with the serpents of heresy and desire. To approach utopian projects solely as literal, one-way, single-path prescriptions for social organization is to miss the point. Utopias are not political science; utopias are political science-fiction.

As dark as the contemporary civilized dystopia is, we should continually and unapologetically challenge more people in our communities and our milieu to explore and embrace the utopian urge rather than to squelch it as was so summarily done in the pages of *Green Anarchy*. Utopia and anarchy are not incompatible—in fact, despite some arguments to the contrary, each borrows from the other in the name of harmony, ecstasy, and liberty.

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