

Letters

Our readers respond

Various Authors

2007

Send letters to Fifth Estate, P.O. Box 201016, Ferndale MI 48220

Not Male Fantasy

I appreciate the thoughtfulness of Cookie Orlando's "Unlocking the Girl Lock: Gender Trouble at Burning Man." (FE, Winter 2007). However, what's missing is the girl's point of view.

The article tells us that she didn't feel like going to a lecture at the Burning Man festival in Nevada that her boyfriend wanted to attend, so he left her in the "Girl Lock," a service much like left luggage at the airport.

Though she put up some initial protests, when the boyfriend went back to check on her, she was obviously enjoying herself, as she was being ministered to by her male "captors" in what amounted to gentle sexual teasing, and in front of a crowd, no less.

In Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, there's a scene in which the main character places a bowler hat on his mistress's head as a form of foreplay-it is simultaneous exploitation and seduction. Perhaps the girlfriend was enjoying the absurdity of the campy Girl Lock-and isn't a lot of Burning Man about camp?-in a manner similar to Kundera's scene.

Or, maybe she was just enjoying a short period of freedom from the bindings of capitalism: during her captivity, she was not being summoned by her BlackBerry, nor did she have to worry about feeding her fish.

But I don't know for sure, because Orlando didn't ask her why she found this particular experience pleasurable. If he did, and she didn't want to talk about it, this should have been mentioned.

What Orlando fails to grasp in his piece is that female pleasure-or anyone's, for that matter-can be a pretty complicated bag of tricks. It does not always have a direct correlation to mutual respect and enlightened understanding. If I had to draw a conclusion, I'd say that the girl in the Girl Lock was not acting out a male fantasy of possession and ownership-she was acting out her own fantasy of exhibitionism, of performing in front of a crowd.

Orlando suggests as an alternative, "a camp or a booth that challenged and intervened on the issue of gender." Idealistic, yes, but I doubt many women would sign up for it.

Carol Wierzbicki
Brooklyn NY

Parasongs Wanted

For the fifth edition of my infamous songbook, *Listen to the Mockingbird*, I am now seeking contributions from others besides my egomaniacal self. I want "Parasongs" (see definition below) on any subject.

Parasongs tend to be parodic and/or humorous, but need not be and do not have to follow the original lyrics at all.

Parasong: a song using new and original lyrics set to an older (generally a popular) melody.

Martin Luther set many of his religious hymns to the popular songs of that period. His reasoning: "Why should the devil have the best of tunes?"

In our time, the Wobblies repaid the compliment by resetting many old hymns to new radical labor anthems!

Please send lyrics to:

Tuli Kupferberg

160 6th Ave.

New York, NY 10013

Walker Lane Duped?

I was deeply disappointed, although not quite shocked, to see Walker Lane's defense of voting in the Winter 2007 *Fifth Estate*. I had hoped that his execrable piece, in the Fall 2004 issue stating he was going to vote for Kerry was a fluke, but alas, it seems to have been a portent of a new direction for the magazine. However, I believe there is still much of value in FE, or else I wouldn't bother responding to this recent article.

Lane's apologia employs the typical left/liberal (il)logic of seeing the U.S. elections, either presidential or congressional, as a referendum on the right-wing, rather than what they really are: an opportunity for millions of alienated voters to ratify the choices already made for them by our mass media and ruling class.

Somehow, we are supposed to believe that the ever so small ideological differences between the two major parties are enough to justify actively supporting one ruling-class scumbag over another. As Walker Lane puts it, "Though it may be humiliating [how about stupid and self-defeating?] to pick one's rulers, it is worse to be ruled by a pack of rightwing psychos..."

Lane is so focused on single issues (homophobia, war, racism, etc.), he forgets what is, or should be, so patently obvious to any one calling himself an anarchist, or even an "anti-authoritarian," namely, that all of these issues arise within a context of political, economic, and social oppression that must be confronted as a whole, not in pieces.

For example, for an anarchist to vote for John Kerry, he or she must ignore the fact that Kerry actively supported the war in Iraq, even promising to send 40,000 more troops if elected! They must also ignore Kerry's hand in writing the Patriot Act, and his status as a member of one of the wealthiest families in this country.

A vote for someone as vile as Kerry was not just a vote against the neocons; it was also a vote for everything that Kerry publicly supported during the election. Do you really believe that Kerry or any of his Democratic cronies gave a damn whether any of the votes cast for them were protest votes? Of course not.

A vote for Kerry or any other politician is a vote for that politician, no more and no less. Someone said, "You get the kind of government you deserve," and anyone who votes deserves, and is morally complicit in, the actions of the people they elect.

The issue for anarchists should not be merely, "How do we combat the right-wing?," but how do we combat a social, economic, and political system that offers us merely the illusion of participation in the decisions that affect our lives, whether it be through our "power" as consumers or our "power" as voters?

True, one vote more or less doesn't mean much in the larger scheme of things, but it means a great deal in terms of each individual's willingness to be duped again and again by left/liberal propaganda that offers such a distorted picture of the control complex we are all enmeshed in, and, like Jim Jones in Guyana, convinces us to drink the poisoned punch, or to cast just one more vote.

Derek Davis

Chicago

Walker Lane responds: As I said in my article, "One voting [anarchist] comrade told me that he just did it, and couldn't understand why I made a public fuss about it." I made a "fuss" in these pages to elicit opinions about the traditional anarchist avoidance of the polls. Unfortunately, Derek's letter, in my opinion, doesn't advance the discussion much.

I could have written a letter similar to his about voting for Kerry. In fact, I did (see my article among several in the Spring 2004 edition, "Selecting A Master or Ousting a Tyrant"). I argued much the same as Derek.

What changed my mind? Again, what I say in the current article. Those of us with privilege based on nation, race, gender, and class, and aren't too directly effected by the assaults of the Bush regime against the poor, gays, women, Iraqis, Afghans, etc., maybe owe those who are, whatever we can do.

Would it have made no difference to, say the war in Iraq, if the Republicans would have won the elections handily rather than being repudiated? Did my vote and that of other anarchists help stay the hand of the rulers by being a miniscule part of what put the other half of the ruling racket in positions of Congressional power? The dominant sentiment in the country among the citizenry has altered significantly, but we'll see what, if anything concrete, the Democrats intend to do. But whatever they do, we have to continue encouraging subversion of the war mentality at home, and resistance in the armed forces.

I asked how voting alters an anarchist as a person, or if many of us participate, what is the effect on our movement; I doubt if any of us who voted were "duped." My last line speaks about "overthrowing capitalism and the state," but my question was, is a defensive gesture like voting harmful? This was not addressed by our comrade from Chicago.

Immigration Unsustainable

Onto's pro-immigration article (FE Winter 2007, "Solidarity, immigration, and border regimes") is well-meaning, but misguided; it completely misses the larger issue.

His central idea is that we can attack the corrupt American nation-state by undermining its borders. This notion is dubious at best, but even if it were true it ignores the big picture people-flooding into an already overcrowded landscape.

Our current population of 300 million is expected to double in this century, and could reach as high as one billion. This will result in massive environmental and political problems. Any immigration discussion must address this.

Environmentally speaking, the total impact on the land is the product of the population level and per capita consumption. Our current levels of consumption—equivalent to about 25 acres of land per person, according to the World Wildlife Fund—exceed our available land area by a factor of four (7.5 billion acres used, versus the two billion we have). More people only make this worse.

Turning the picture around, our two billion acres can only support 80 million people at current consumption levels. And, if we were to preserve a large portion of our land as wilderness, this country could support only 50 million people, or less—roughly an 80 percent reduction from today! Instead, we are staring at a 200 to 300 percent increase! Obviously consumption must also be reduced, but we need to tackle both issues simultaneously.

Politically, our current 300 million is utterly ungovernable. There is no hope for responsive, democratic government with such a vast and diverse population—as experience has clearly shown. Evidence suggests that 10 million or so is the upper limit of a rationally-governable, human-scale population. We are far from this ideal, and speeding in the wrong direction. So, unless we have good reason to believe that a flood of immigrants will cause the spontaneous disintegration of this country, there is not much of an argument for an open-border policy.

Any way we look at it, our population must be dramatically reduced if we have any hope of a sane lifestyle in this country. Few seem to understand this, and Onto's piece does nothing to help the matter.

David Skrbina

Dearborn, Mich.

Onto responds: The commonplace green anti-immigrant argument David Skrbina provides, arises and falls with such regularity that I would think it follows the patterns of the tides. But alas, we must deal with it again.

This is how I see the classic "immigrants are overpopulating our natural environment and hence, must be controlled" thesis: You're in a SUV driving down a wide road going 70 mph with the music and air conditioning on. You're going from the suburbs to a mall, and all of a sudden, an immigrant family runs across the road.

You jam on the brakes, almost killing them. What runs through your head? Damn these immigrants are taking over my road and must be stopped' before we can't even drive our SUVs to the mall anymore!! Do you see my point?

Ecological sustainability in the USA is not about population at all; it's about consumption. Consumption is our culture, and cannot be stopped by reducing the amount of people. Immigrant consumption levels are famously low compared to Anglo-American ones. Furthermore, even if we had your "balanced" population, there is no guarantee that consumption levels wouldn't skyrocket to even higher proportions to make up for the loss. This is American consumer capitalism we are talking about, not happy play land.

Your language of immigrants "flooding in" is disgusting. Immigrants aren't natural disasters; they are people responding to the ravages of capitalism. Reducing people to just number games without any reference to how military, corporate and political forces influence their decision is myopic, a warning light for recognizing scapegoating in its early stages.

For instance, what are the biggest fossil fuel energy wasters in the country? The Military, Agribusiness, and Suburbia. Until we eliminate those structures, we are doomed to ecological collapse. Your passions are right, but your target is wrong. As I argued, the border is not a neutral object, but an ongoing, veiled attack that we must resist, whether we are citizens or not. I hope you will join in solidarity.

Anarchist CSAs

David Meesters in his "Letter from Appalachia" (FE Winter 2007) misinterpreted my "call for anarchist CSAs" (Community Supported Agriculture) in the previous issue. I'd like to clarify this, because I very much agree with his position in general.

He seems to think I advocate CSAs run exclusively by and for anarchists. Even if desirable, this would be almost impossible, since no one micro-region in America contains a large enough population of anarchists to run a successful CSA, except in big cities, where you can't have farms.

CSAs must be local, otherwise they simply cannot exist. Most of them are, in fact, owned by the farmer(s) who run them; that's the case with all the CSAs around here. Members are basically just customers who pay before receiving their veggies. Some CSAs offer credit in return for hours of farm labor, but they are still operating within (or on the inner margin of) the capitalist/entrepreneurial system.

I have, however, heard of CSAs that are cooperative in exactly the same way as the typical food coop is, or used to be—that is, the "customers" are the owners. As with food coops, one or more managers may be paid by the collective; the manager's position might even be shared by a number of members. This kind of organization is not specifically anarchist, but it is quite compatible with anarchism.

An anarchist CSA, in my view, would simply be a cooperative CSA organized by anarchists, but open to anyone who agreed to the "rules." In this way, anarchism would have something to offer a micro-region besides the usual protests and "symbolic discourse," just as Meesters desires.

Peter Lamborn Wilson
Brooklyn, New York

Dave Meesters responds: Thank you for clearing that up. It seems like we are in agreement after all. Your proposal for cooperative CSAs involves just the kind of creative engagement I'm advocating.

You Can't Keep a Good Library Down

One year ago, something magical happened. A zine library called Aboveground rose above the Katrina flood waters and was set up at a permanent facility in New Orleans' Iron Rail Bookstore.

Before the flood, I was in the process of cataloging a large amount of material for the library. However, along with tens of thousands of others, I had to flee the city, and didn't think the library had survived.

A few weeks later, while walking in Fairview, Texas, and thinking about returning to see what damage had occurred, I wasn't making any plans to do the library again. The library for me died when the levees broke. Due to the scale of the disaster, you think, where do you start?

I was doing something before the flood that I was proud of, so, I decided to do it again. I lugged 50 to 60 heavy boxes of zines from New Orleans to Mississippi to be stored too many times to remember. Through pure determination I single handedly accomplished what I dreamed of doing for years.

When people ask me what are some of my hobbies? I always reply with, "I do a library." My life feels complete and has meaning.

Aboveground Zine Library is a collection of about 10 thousand items that are available to view and read. There is a strong collection of music zines, personal zines and many political publications including a lot of older New Orleans anarchist publications. During Mardi Gras weekend last year, the Tennessee Fifth Estate editorial collective came by to say thanks for such a magical place. Having those that are responsible for one of the most inspiring periodicals in the U.S. at the zine library was an honor.

Aboveground Zine Library is open everyday from 1-7 pm. If you are in New Orleans, helping to rebuild the city, or visiting, come on in and take a peek. We're located at the Iron Rail Bookstore at 511 Marigny Street (at Decatur). Call 504-944-0366 or email abovegroundlibrary@yahoo.com for info or directions.

If you want to donate zines send them to Aboveground Zine Library, 107 East Lakeshore Drive, Carriere, MS 39426.

Robb Roemershauser
New Orleans

Free to GIs

I am a U.S. army soldier at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina and I found a reference to your publication on Wikipedia. When searching your website I found a comment stating: "Free for Prisoners & Soldiers." If this service is indeed free of charge for soldiers, please send me your latest issue.

I would gladly pay for a subscription for one year, but mail travels slowly and I will be deploying to Iraq soon, but it will find its way to me. It hadn't dawned on me the amount of time your publication has been running, and your quick response is a message to me all by itself: that you actually believe what you write and want others to hear it.

I can guarantee you if I emailed Rolling Stone magazine, they would not have even read my message, much less offered free issues.

Pvt. Daniel C.
Ft. Bragg, N.C.

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