

Ron Sakolsky's *Swift Winds*

Andy Sunfrog (Andy "Sunfrog" Smith)

2009

A review of:

Swift Winds, Ron Sakolsky, artwork by Anais LaRue, Eberhardt Press, 2009, 128 pp., \$8

The prolific anarchist Ron Sakolsky—formerly of Fool's Paradise, Illinois and now a resident of Inner Island, British Columbia—has published another book.

Billed as a "backpocket compendium," the volume borrows its shape and size from the legendary City Lights pocket poetry series and professes the insurrectionary properties of poetic desire in such a fashion as to make it a worthy descendant of such legendary and incendiary texts as Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* and Diane DiPrima's *Revolutionary Letters*.

Gorgeous artwork by Anais LaRue and precise production by Portland's anti-authoritarian collective Eberhardt Press give *Swift Winds* an aesthetic glory and old-school feel.

In true anarcho-surrealist fashion, the collection calls for nothing shy of "an end to all forms of domination" and "the realization of poetry in everyday life." These "impossible demands" find their place in poem, rant, and review-genres in which Sakolsky is eminently confident and creative. The blend of styles interspersed with LaRue's images conjures the mood of a mixtape stitched lovingly to our souls by the writer-as-DJ and DJ-as-writer.

To some, surrealist writing can seem overly abstract or academic, but Sakolsky's anarcho-surrealism detours away from either stigma without diluting or dumbing-down the delicious or defiant. The most theoretical work in this compact volume comes from Sakolsky-as-critic in the reviews of Alan Antliff's book *Anarchy and Art* (which first appeared in this publication) and of Harry Smith's recorded, *Anthology of American Folk Music*.

With Antliff's flawed manuscript, Sakolsky takes the material to task on many levels and does a service to both art and anarchy by doing so. But since the social conditions of the times in which we live are themselves so inherently, as the surrealists call it, miserabilist, even necessary negativity can deflate the insurgent muse.

That is, as problematic as the Antliff book is, one can question whether dismantling its structure and arguments (like the "embarrassments to the anarchist milieu" column in one of our peer publications) is the best use of anarcho-surrealist energy. Thankfully, the Antliff piece is toward the end of the book, and Sakolsky spares us any more scathing critiques of other anarchists.

When he turns the wise inspection of his ears and eyes to the work of Harry Smith's legendary compilation, Sakolsky shines an appreciative light, suggesting that the project comprises "a mid-twentieth century ghost dance along the fault lines of the American psyche" and "exemplifies a surrealist strategy for releasing the Marvelous from the fetters of the massification of American culture in the Fifties."

Essentially, Sakolsky places the tunes as presented by Smith in a new cross-pollinated universe of understanding we might call the mytho-anarchic, where Smith's esoteric sensibilities inform the DIY-precedent to file-sharing.

Sakolsky calls the collection an "occult or hermetic document" and "the most famous bootleg of all time," culled from "thrift store 78s." Smith "never bothered to ask permission" to re-release the tracks and felt no "qualms about violating proprietarian copyright laws that benefited the record companies (rather than the artists), since it was

those same companies that had destroyed the original masters and failed to keep the records in print, which made them so rare in the first place.”

Like other “niche” genres of verse, intentionally “anarchist” poetry is next to impossible to pull off well. Some agitator MCs sacrifice style on the altar of message while others petrify the politics to serve the rhetorical power. Dripping with wordplay, the opening poem and “title track” of *Swift Winds* subverts the stale and superficial with stanzas to stop the stagnation of radical transformation.

The beautiful and brief “Bakunin Ascending” brings the joyful noise of historical revision wrapped in a blanket of sonic speculation based on Sakolsky learning that the legendary Russian aristocrat-turned-anarchist had a huge fondness for Beethoven’s universally inspiring and intoxicating Ninth Symphony.

While the poems and reviews provide the creative and critical parameters for the thirteen lucky pieces in this book, it’s the ranting and raving prose of Sakolsky as “utopian warrior” that kicks this mix into the radical stratosphere. The timely screed about shit (reprinted in its entirety in this issue of FE) is a viciously visionary “Scatology of the Oppressed.”

The insightful tract “Why Misery Loves Company” attempts to decolonize our minds enough to show how many responses to miserablism are mere coping strategies of self-medicating manipulations within the shadow of the megamachine instead of marvelous strategies for breaking its shackles.

“The Real Threat to Our Safety” and “Surrealist Ferry Demands” share their spirit of regionally appropriate poetic pranks as universally relevant critique of developers and tourists that might further domesticate the spaces that Sakolsky and his comrades occupy out west.

All told, in a prolific legacy of anarchist writing, editing, and publishing that began in the early 1990s with the watershed wonder *Gone to Croatan: Origins of American Dropout Culture*, *Swift Winds* is perhaps Sakolsky’s most creative and unique contribution to our common literature of dream and revolt.

fifth Estate

Andy Sunfrog (Andy "Sunfrog" Smith)
Ron Sakolsky's *Swift Winds*
2009

<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/381-summer-fall-2009/ron-sakolskys-swift-winds>
Fifth Estate #381, Summer-Fall 2009

[fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fiftheestate.org)