

# The Anarchist Utopian Imagination

Second Reality: What the future could look like.

Margaret Killjoy

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“There’s a kind of desire that, whenever it arises, is censored scientifically, morally, politically. The ruling reality tries to stamp it out. This desire is the dream of a second reality.”

– P.M., *bolo’bolo*

In the introduction to his anarchist utopian book, *bolo’bolo*, author P.M. describes why we need visions of positive futures. Second realities, as he calls them, are necessary, else we find that “the only choice [is] that between the Machine’s own dream and the refusal of any activity.”

We need ideas—not blueprints, not codified maps—of what to yearn for, so that in our work here and now we have a direction in which to walk.

And for that, we have utopian fiction.

What is utopian fiction anyway? Utopia is a strange genre, to be sure. It’s a serious challenge to write compelling fiction that balances the exposition of a society with plot, character, tension, and all of the things that draw readers to narrative writing in the first place. For some, the idea of “utopia” conjures up images of societies that are both impossible and, likely, authoritarian and prescriptive. But that doesn’t need to be the case at all: As anarchists, we can and have dreamt of societies, of second realities, that challenge dogmatic approaches to the design of society.

Perhaps the most talented authors to turn their attention to the description of anarchist (or anarchist-ish) societies are Ursula le Guin with *The Dispossessed* in 1974 and Aldous Huxley with *Island* in 1962. Le Guin’s planet Anarres is a resource-poor, organizational anarchist society that the author, in the good anarchist tradition of questioning everything, shows to be quite imperfect.

Huxley, for his part, has drawn on Kropotkin and other anarchist thinkers to describe Pala, a utopian psychedelic community that is oddly both a monarchy and a federation of self-governing units.

Other books have come from within the ranks of anti-capitalist activists, like P.M.’s 1983 *bolo’bolo*, Starhawk’s 1993 *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, and Graham Purchase’s 1994 *My Journey with Aristotle to the Anarchist Utopia*.

P.M.’s society is perhaps the one I’m most drawn to, but his book is also closer to being a manual than a novel. It describes a fairly clearly post-left vision of cooperative, autonomous groups that cover a very heterogeneous and fascinating world. It also, of interest to the contemporary reader, lays out a five-year plan that can have us living in an anarchist world by as soon as 1988.

Starhawk describes a post-collapse West Coast and a free, diverse society that practices permaculture, free love, and magic. Purchase’s work is set in a far-future world that has been carved into bioregions but it is united by work syndicates. Its prose is clumsy but its politics are fascinating and much of the science it describes is becoming more in vogue only now.

All three of these books describe fascinating places in which I’d be quite happy to live.

There are other titles out there, to be sure, but most of these books are two decades old, at least. Globally, nation states are entering a new round of crises and anarchism is on the rise—so where are the new anarchist utopian novels?

Besides being hard to write, the utopia has gone out of style—to both the modern mainstream reader and the modern anarchist—because we haven't had much in the way of hope.

The future is looking bleak, and it's much easier, and perhaps more cathartic or relevant, to write about fighting against dystopian tyrannies than it is to write about the creation or continuation of an anarchist society.

Insurrectionist and nihilist tendencies in anarchism have done us a lot of good over the past few years, and one of the critiques they have brought to the forefront is that we cannot be prescriptive in our actions or our theory. But having dreams, having utopias, doesn't have to turn us into partisans, where we fight with words and knives about whether to live in *bolo'bolo* or *The Fifth Sacred Thing*.

As a surrealist friend once told me, utopias don't have to be followed dogmatically. They can simply be the exercise by which we free our imaginations, by which we escape, if even only for a moment, the confines of global capitalism, and see the possibility of something different—even if we don't know quite what that thing will be.

It is for that reason that Combustion Books, an anarchist-run publisher of genre fiction, has announced an interest in publishing new anarchist utopian novellas: *The Anarchist Imagination*. Submission guidelines can be found on [combustionbooks.org](http://combustionbooks.org).

# fifth Estate

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