

Feminist Utopia

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Feminist UTOPIA (Feminist GOOD PLACE and NO PLACE) and some DYSTOPIA Utopia ... ? The word 'utopia' is a mix of the Greek words 'eutopia' (good place) and 'outopia' (no place). The word 'utopia' does evoke the idea of a perfect place, but it is also a non-existing place, as what we imagined to be perfect, seldom is actually flawless in reality...



While it is more difficult to find women's utopian ideas documented, it is quite easy to find the utopias formulated by (and too often for) men. The concept of utopia was introduced in the title of Thomas More's 16th century novel 'Utopia'. The novel was allegedly inspired by More's discussions with a clerk from Antwerp ! (More was also an early advocate of women's rights) ! Since More published his novel many Men have followed in his footsteps creating utopias or dystopias (=very bad places !). Some of the most known include George Orwell's '1984', William Burrough's 'A Naked Lunch', Anthony Burgess's 'A Clockwork Orange' and Aldous Huxley's 'A Brave New World'.

Only a few male utopian thinkers have been inspiring also for different feminist movements. Charles Fourier (19th century) is a wellknown historical male utopian socialist focusing on utopian love and sexual liberation, and advocating for 'women's progress towards liberty'. Numerous 19th century feminists, notably the Belgian and French Suffragettes, were inspired by some of Fourier's ideas. Unfortunately, most male utopias cannot be considered particularly tempting to women, as men's utopias and dystopias seldom give much thought about how women's lives need to be rethought ! In men's utopias women are rarely allowed to break the boundaries of wifedom, motherhood and sexual servitude...

Feminist Utopia

The idea of a utopia has also inspired many feminist activists, artists, writers and scholars ! What would a truly feminist world look like ? Would it be a world... ..without men or with men as our equals ? ...with peace ? ...with nothing but love ? ...defined by the mother-child relationship or would machines make babies for us ? ...with women as amazons, carers, cyborgs, nomads or other ? ...where sisterhood

reigned ? ... defined by women's sexual needs ? ...where order or chaos was the rule ? ...dominated by urban centres or would it be "back to nature" ? ...where women worked or would it be beyond work ? ...with a socialist or capitalist system ? ...with goddesses or without religion ? ...which we would enjoy or would it bore us ?

This Scum Grrrls dossier gives you a selection of famous feminist visions of best places, worst places and no places ! In order not to only treat 'thinkers', some utopian (often limited in range and space) practices and actions are also included – women putting ideas and desires into practice ! And of course some inspiring women novelists...

But please, don't let our selection stop you ! This is only a beginning – there is room for many more inspiring, sensuous, sexy, environmentally concerned, radical, queer and revolutionary UTOPIAS...



• A city of women !

Christine de Pizan (14th century) : Christine was born 1364 in Venezia. Her book, "Città delle donne", is a vision of a city without men. Her analysis of the contemporary society was that men treated women in such a way that women could never be happy in a gender-mixed society. Women should therefore withdraw into a place of their own.

• Equal rights = a utopia ?

Mary Wollstonecraft (18th century) : Strange as it may seem, Wollstonecraft, who only argued for women's equal rights with men and for women's right to education, tends to be counted amongst the feminist utopians ! Equal rights remain a utopia ? It is a strange world we live in...

- **Encourager la non-mixité pour construire une société de non-violence**

Jeanne-Désirée Veret et Flora Tristan (19th century) : Une des premières utopies féministes trouve son origine dans les doctrines de St-Simon et de son disciple Enfantin, qui proclament d'égalité de l'homme et de la femme, complémentarités d'un couple idéal, dans une société socialiste idéale. Des femmes s'inscrivent dans le courant prolétaire saint-simonien, notamment Jeanne- Désirée Véret qui publie en 1832 le journal La Femme Libre, ou la journaliste Flora Tristan. L'utopie développée par ces féministes du 19ème siècle, exalte la féminité, enjoint les femmes à se regrouper en un seul corps, encourage la nonmixité et appelle de ses vœux le projet d'une société maternelle où triompheraient les valeurs « féminines » de la nonviolence et de l'harmonie.

- **Woman-power utopia and/or suffocating madness dystopia**

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) : 'Herland' is an early account of an all-woman society to which three men venture. The men end up staying in Herland and living with the women for some time till they are expelled from the woman-defined society where sharing is a rule and violence is rare. Perkins Gilman's short story 'The Yellow Wallpaper' is a dystopian account of upper middle-class wifedom in the late 19th century. Perkins Gilman tells us the story of a rather frail and sick wife who slowly goes mad, because of the overwhelming care of her husband. The wife ends up joining her imagined woman friend living trapped behind the ornaments in the yellow wallpaper in her bedroom.

- **Un presse quotidien autonome et féministe – un beau projet utopiste...**



Marguerite Durand (1864-1936), “La Fronde” :

De 1897 à 1905 paraît le seul quotidien de femmes qui ait jamais existé dans un pays francophone (et peut-être dans le monde ?), La Fronde créé par Marguerite Durand. Un beau projet féministe utopiste où l'ensemble de la réalisation du journal, de la rédaction à l'impression était réalisé par des femmes.

- **Feminist pacifism apt to rule the world –acting boldly against militarism and degradation of nature**

Elin Wägner (1882-1949) : Wägner was a Swedish feminist, author and radical pacifist who believed it was fruitless to try and change the system from within. Her utopia could be created in this world, but not in this system. She writes in her book Väckarklocka (Alarm Clock) in 1941 : It is not within the existing system that [the women's movement] has its duty, as it was first believed, its task is to find a point outside, from which it can, not shake the world (because it is already shook up), but instead reinstate its balance again. Wägner sets out to revolutionise the world. Together with a group of women calling themselves the Women's Organisation for World Order, she draw up a declaration of rights and duties where women's perspective is considered in all areas ; war, economy, foreign policy etc. The declaration starts with the statement "Men are equal to women..." : the perspective cannot be misunderstood.

- **La revolution féministe des années 70 – des idéologies et pratiques radicalement féministes**



Les mouvements féministes des années 70 se cherchent de nouvelles fictions et langages de femmes, de nouveaux mythes et écrivent de nombreuses visions utopistes, sociétés féminines idylliques, se déroulant en des temps ou des lieux éloignés, sociétésmatriarcales. Ce sont les « Guérillères » de Monique Wittig (1969) ou les « Belles histoires de la Ghena Goudou » publiées par les Femmes S'entêtent (1975).

- **Towards a post-male society !**

Valerie Solanas (1936-1988) : In her Manifesto SCUM (Society for Cuttingup Men) written in 1967, Solanas declares the male as a biological accident from which the world should be cured (with the exception of the men who are part of the Men's Auxiliary to SCUM). The SCUM are the "dominant, secure, self-confident, nasty, violent, selfish, independent, proud, thrill-seeking, freewheeling, arrogant females, who consider themselves fit to rule the universe, who have free-wheeled to the limits of this 'society' and are ready to wheel on to something far beyond what it has to offer". The SCUM Manifesto demands the extermination of men, and develops an idea of a post-male and SCUM-femaledefined society !

• **Les femmes libérées de la reproduction !**

Dans The Dialectics of Sex (1970), Shulamith Firestone imagine une société dans laquelle tout le monde vivrait en petites communautés, où la famille et la division sexuelle des tâches seraient abolies, et la reproduction serait enlevée aux femmes pour devenir un processus entièrement artificialisé.

• **Smaller worlds of women - Herlands and women's communities**

Quite a few 'Herlands' or women's communities have been set up around the globe, including different feminist, non-hierarchical, and communal organisation, ecologically sustainable methods of farming, and a solidarity-based economy, etc. While these ideas and the practices that follow might not amount to full fledged 'utopian communities', they are daring projects created by women who try to make reality of ideas and ideals...

• **Pour des nouvelles identités – à travers la suppression des deux sexes**

Le GRIF, Groupe de Recherche et d'Information Féministe, publie dès 1973 les Cahiers du GRIF, revue de réflexion féministe et projet d'une nouvelle société ayant supprimé les rôles masculin et féminin et où les femmes se seront créé une nouvelle identité. Ce n'est qu'un groupe parmi d'autres groupes de féministes révolutionnaires qui rêvent de changer radicalement la société au lieu de l'améliorer (féminisme réformiste).



• **La résistance contre la récupération par des hommes des projets et utopies féministes**

1975 est l'Année Internationale de la Femme et pour de nombreuses féministes, l'arrêt des utopies. Car cette Année Internationale signifie que le féminisme, repris par les hommes et la société, « récupéré » dira le MLF, n'est plus une lutte révolutionnaire. Une chanson devient célèbre dans les manifs (sur l'air d'il était une bergère) : *“Les hommes savent plus quoi faire Pour nous remettre au pas Voilà qu'ils nous libèrent Il nous manquait plus qu'ça Ils causent de nous dans les forums Ils nous préparent des petites réformes Trois pas en avant, trois pas en arrière, Trois pas sur le côté, trois pas de l'autre côté”*

• **Cooperation and harmony between the sexes...**

The Nordic Research Group "Det nye hverdagsliv" (created in 1979) : Their utopia expressed in "The new everyday life", was a new social organisation of production and reproduction, taking the local resources as a starting point. Instead of a gender-separated place, they wanted to create a "middle-level", between production and reproduction, in the society where men and women could co-operate with the every day chores.

• **Marion Zimmer Bradley...**

La trilogie des Amazones Libres (série Ténébreuse) Auteure prolifique, MZB a commencé à écrire ses romans dans un coin de table de cuisine, en s'occupant des enfants et du ménage. Elle a inventé le monde de Ténébreuse (Darkover), habité par des descendant-e-s des terrienne- s échoué-e-s sur une planète perdue. Un monde féodal, avec des familles puissantes qui dominent les royaumes et où le patriarcat fait loi. Les guerres sont atroces d'autant plus qu'un « don » s'est développé chez certains humains, le « laran », don de télépathes. C'est dans ce monde dangereux aux multiples puissances, que des femmes ont constitué la Guilde des Amazones Libres... On retrouve les visions féministes des années septante sur les communautés de femmes, autodéfense, autonomie, intelligence collective, solidarité et amour entre femmes...

And some dystopia

• **Older white men in power and women enslaved – a familiar dystopia ?**

Suzy McKee Charnas : In her 4-volume post-holocaust feminist dystopia (“Walk to the End of the World”, “Motherlines”, “The Furies” and “The Conqueror’s Child”, 1970-1990s), women are enslaved as “fems”, persons of color have as it seems been eliminated and older white men are in power (Hmm... that last aspects seems so familiar...). The heroine of the books is Alldera, an escaped woman slave who travels between the two hidden women’s

worlds in order to convince the other escapees to enter into the male world, revolt and free all enslaved women. Will she succeed ? Will the women ever be free ?

- **Reproduction – only for rich, white men to decide ?**

Margaret Atwood : In Atwood's dystopia, "A Handmaid's Tale" (1985), reproduction has become a luxury that can only be afforded by the rich and powerful men ! In the Atwoodian world women can be servants, wives or handmaids, and it is only the last ones that, still, have reproductive capacity.

- **A heroine searching for anarchic worlds !**



Marge Piercy : In "Women at the End of Time" (1983) Connie is the heroine, a Mexican-American woman, incarcerated in a mental hospital of this One Flew over the Cuckoos Nest-inspired dystopia. Connie is subjected to mind control treatment, but she still manages to visit future anarchic worlds...