

PATHS TOWARD UTOPIA: Graphic Explorations of
Everyday Anarchism

by **Cindy Milstein & Erik Ruin** | Introduction by Josh MacPhee

PATHS TOWARD UTOPIA

Writing speaking differently is part of the struggle for the world we want to create and are creating, a world that moves against and beyond capital alone. These picture-narrative-prose books the existing world built in what they say and how they say it. A fabulous book, an honor to comment on it.
—John McKinley, author of *Crack Capitalism*

There is a haunting, fragile strength to the postapocalyptic images and texts that populate this book. They hover half in our world-punctuated by its heavy recent systems of failure—while they hold ancestral longings from our future, as if good ordinary images of the future do, for a world assembly as close at hand as the pages of the book that holds them.
—Brett Aaron Bloom, artist/activist, Temporary Services

PATHS TOWARD UTOPIA

This remarkable book is inspiring and emboldening, allowing us to see the contours of another world that is not only possible but already in formation.
—Rosaura Dunbar-Dino, author of *Dollar Wages: A History of the War Years, 1860–1875*

A beautiful and meaningful book, Cindy Milstein and Erik Rubin offer us visions of a way out of the world we see, and ways to think about how we might get out.
—Paul Butler, editor of *Trade Theory's Working: A Graphic Adaptation*

Paths toward Utopia avoids sweeping everything into a grand narrative; instead, multiple threads of radical possibility emerge from the daily actions that make up our ongoing practical responses to a world gone mad. Revolution is rejection, war, but it has to invite us all to move toward a better life too. In these drawings and words, an urgent agenda becomes visible, not as a future program to which all must adapt, but as a recognition that we are already everywhere, taking on all steps toward a radically transformed future.
—Chloe Carlson, author of *Abolition: How Place Programmers, Outlaw Revolution, and Vacant-Lot Gardeners Are Inventing the Future Today!*

The path—right and broken, unmapable, an adventure as important as utopia—sometimes doesn't. This book is a radical part of that adventure. It tries to imagine not only what that unknown Utopia might look like but also the beautiful path that will get us there. And the path starts right here, at our feet, on our laps, in our hearts, and at the end of our arms.
—Scott Whalley, *Chumbowamba*

These picture-stories are poignantly familiar, like the never-judged of a half-remembered tomorrow, carried on the breeze past our broken alleys and empty neighborhoods. Milstein and Rubin urge us to take tools in hand, to prepare the hard dirt of vacant lots and battered homes, transforming it into soils into which that living, generous future can send out its roots. This book is itself a seed, an invitation to that bright world, needed in our most authentic selves, to which we have never been but to which we long to return.
—Nicola Lanza-Munoz, artist/activist

GRAPHIC EXPLORATIONS OF EVERYDAY ANARCHISM

CINDY MILSTEIN & ERIK RUBIN
FOREWORD BY JOSH MACPHEE

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Crucially, Josh MacPhee has been one of our strongest advocates and most insightful critics—both invaluable gifts. He has also gifted us his words and design.

Last but not least, heaps and heaps of debt, of a thoroughly noncapitalist kind, to all the aspirations, flights of fancy, and working existences of the recent do-it-ourselves commons and movements from below—peopled by dreamers, agitators, occupiers, troublemakers and gender-troublers, critical thinkers, pirates, anarchists and autonomists, queers, rabble-rousers and rebels, and so many other misfits who haven't given up on themselves and each other, and are willing to be visionary vagabonds on this journey together.

Cindy My greatest acknowledgment for this book is to Erik, as longtime dear friend and inspiration, a fellow heretic and, I trust, ongoing coconspirator. Josh MacPhee has stood by my side throughout, as another longtime dear friend and inspiration. If Erik and Josh both make me feel loved and at home in this inhospitable world, so too, always, does Joshua Stephens, and he yet again came to my mutual aid, training his keen mind and editorial eye on my prologue. Love also to utopias found during the development of these picture-essays—most poignantly, my Station 40 chosen family in San Francisco and my occupy neighborhood in Philly.

Erik My deepest gratitude, of course, goes out to Cindy for going down this long road together with me, for struggling together to make the best that we could make, and for her patience and support. Thanks as well to my dear friend and constant inspiration Josh MacPhee along with the rest of my comrades in the Justseeds Artists' Cooperative. Nidal El-Khairy deserves kudos for his crucial assistance with Arabic-language slogans and signage in "Waking to Revolution." I'd also like to acknowledge Emmy Bright, Joshua Marcus, and Meredith Younger for feedback and advice at various stages.

I hope the book you are reading is a turning point, a dawn in graphic politics. A writer and an artist have met in the space between their disciplines, and created something new. It is not a graphic novel in the traditional sense. Each chapter is more a poetic essay than a story driven by characters and narrative. It is not a series of illustrated essays either, for far too often the images drive the page, dismissing such a simple description of this work. What we have here is simultaneously a theoretical and graphic engagement with some of the most important ideas circulating in, and struggles facing, the world today.

At their best, Ruin's bold yet complex graphics lift Milstein's words, and together they successfully recast everyday political engagement as vital resistance and prefigurative transformation. His graphic renditions of Milstein's actual text always remind us that we write our own stories. The words emerge from mouths, shout from banners; they exist as graffiti on walls and words on homemade signage. Otherwise-dense theoretical frameworks become our words, thoughts, and conversations. In this integrated textual-image world Milstein and Ruin conjure, we glimpse a place where there is no longer a separation between thought and action, subject and object. We live our words. They are the walls we run into and the roads we walk along.

This is further captured by the compactness of word and image. These are not long essays we need to slog through. They are short and pithy, and read practically as action poems. Yet a cascade of ideas also flows within each one. It is the same with the imagery. A quick scan gives us the basic gist, but the overlays and reworkings invite us to dig deeper, to see exchanges and glances not held within the text alone.

The two-page chapter "Food for Thought" acts as a central pillar of the book. It solidly frames the different aspects of our survival under capitalism as both our doing and undoing. In Ruin's illustrations these acts and aspirations flood out of our mouths, turning our faces into both megaphones and broken fountains. Some of these (speech) acts buoy and nourish us. They are the water we drink, wash, and frolic in. But others we lose control over; they threaten to submerge us. This is the duality of our lives illustrating the ways in which our survival techniques sustain us, yet paradoxically satiate the things we oppose. It is all water, and the struggle is how to drink without drowning.

The chapter "Solidarity Is a Pizza" brings out the subtleties of this dialectic—the ways that it works on us that we might not recognize. We are introduced to powerful and emotional examples of international solidarity, how simple gestures like an Egyptian worker ordering a pizza for occupiers in Madison, Wisconsin, become overwhelming symbols of the fragility of the borders that keep us apart. At the same time, in the final double-page spread, the crumbled border converts the basic equation that solidarity equals liberation into something more illusive. The wall has come down, but other boundaries remain. The two people sitting at the table across the once-existing border seem no closer, nor happier than before. There are miles and decades of barriers, many invisible, between them that still need to be broken down. Here, graphic and textual representation work with and against each other, creating a richer fabric than either would do alone.

Paths toward Utopia continuously brings us back to the concept of the commons. The need for commons, what we share among us with no claim to private ownership, is an idea so simple and powerful, yet simultaneously so elusive in the face of capitalism's ability to shape our perceptions of reality. The commons are often left hanging in the theoretical ether, seemingly just out of reach. By grounding them in our quotidian existence, our experience with public libraries ("Borrowing from the Library"), parks ("Picking Up the Park"), and gift giving ("The Gift")—activities that all readers will recognize—the commons become living things. We draw from and give to them; they nourish our actual

lived lives, not merely the way we think about those lives. At the same time, while I revel in the commonsenseness of these examples, part of me can't help but want to see the other sides too: the complications, poison gifts, and libraries that enclose rather than liberate knowledge. I'm not sure we can effectively build and protect our commons if we don't acknowledge their weaknesses and failings.

Overall there is a strong duality throughout the book—commons versus capitalism, surplus versus scarcity. This goes a long way toward allowing us to envision our lives as individual engines of utopian power. Our actions matter, and small steps can build toward bigger and greater leaps. But there are limits to this idea, to what we can do in our daily lives. Foregrounding our self-determination is dependent on just that: it comes from the self. As individuals, our resistance appears as little but a circular mirror vision of the existing society we oppose. Are we but reactionary pawns responding, bending, and acting in response to capital, and not the other way around?

Thankfully, the poetic skeletons of liberation we glimpse in many of the short pieces here are given muscles and flesh by the longer and more detailed chapters that close the book. Focused on the social struggles in Argentina (“Deciding for Ourselves”) and Egypt (“Waking to Revolution”), they show how self-determination can be about more than self. The grounding of the concepts of commons and autonomy, self-determination and self-organization, in these real-world examples of social struggle give justification to the utopian impulse present throughout the book. We may not always see the underground currents of a different world. The economies we build to the side of capitalism may appear so small as to be insignificant. But the stories in this book give us glimpses of how to tend these precious sparks, lightly blow on them, and build them into a joyous bonfire.

Let this be an opening salvo, a call to artists and writers to attempt to break the bounds of the individual labors and collide, to spark the invention birthed by building together. Milstein and Ruir's collaboration was not seamless; the tension in their interactions can be seen in the work. This is where truly interesting things begin to happen, for isn't a call to utopia actually a call to drop our tools and pick up others, to become something else, something new?

I remember reading Martin Buber's *Paths in Utopia* long ago, before I'd ever heard of one of the book's guiding lights, Gustav Landauer. It was before I'd visited the rebuilt-kitsch landscape of Munich, where Landauer had helped to make a revolution from below with his fellow anarchists nearly a century before only to be murdered in the process, and where he now lies buried in that city's forever-bloodied soil. It was also before I'd lived in Europe for over two years, where I'd daily felt the ghosts not only of Landauer and other revolutionaries but so many "ordinary" people too—Jews, Roma, queers. They haunted my every footstep, whether I meandered past the sleek global architecture in Berlin being erected, literally, over Hitler's final bunker or walked along Treblinka's isolated dirt road crudely paved with pieces of broken Jewish tombstones, ransacked from cemeteries for this space of the final solution.

Landauer and his friend Buber's faith in "living and life-giving collaboration, an essential autonomous consociation of human beings, shaping and re-shaping itself from within," as Buber puts it haunts *Paths in Utopia*, written in 1944, and to some degree, the work you now hold in your hands.¹ It's hard to imagine that anyone could still hang on to a concept of utopia in the mid-1940s, given that much of the world had become a graveyard. And it's just as difficult to understand how this pair of radical Jews and critical thinkers could find promise in the kibbutzim experiment, albeit its socialistic impulse—one of the paths in Buber's book—in the land that wasn't yet Israel but soon would become another kind of graveyard.

At the time, few saw much potential for the "renewal of society," to again cite Buber.² As another radical Jew and critical theorist, Theodor W. Adorno, famously observed in 1949, "Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today."³ Nearly all was lost. Perhaps the best that could be hoped for was meticulously penning messages in a bottle, such as Adorno's, for future generations to find long after the wreckage of the twentieth century had sunk to the bottom of our collective experiences and memories.

Still, like a trash picker in a vast landfill, Buber set about the task of scavenging useful fragments in the here and now, from the given social reality, so as to "sketch the picture of an idea in process of development": utopia. For him, utopia was "the unfolding of the possibilities, latent in [hu]mankind's communal life, of a 'right' order." Buber's utopia at once sought "to stimulate" a "critical relationship to the present" in order to illustrate "perfection" as an ideal, but crucially, also had to serve "as something towards which an active path leads from the present." As he further explained, "We must be quite unromantic, and, living wholly in the present, out of the recalcitrant material of our day in history, fashion a true community."⁴

And now, in a different world altogether, although one exhibiting barbaric elements of neofascism in the United States and elsewhere, Erik Ruess and I heft aside more rubble so as to uncover paths of our own, but paths you can walk on too—or maybe already do. The switch to the preposition *toward* in our book's title is less a matter of splitting grammatical hairs—or avoiding outright plagiarism in our nod to Buber's book—than it is a substantive shift in how those of us fighting for individual and social freedoms see such transformation—revolution—happening. We harbor a far less messianic faith than Buber. Our preposition indicates that for us, like so many of our contemporaries, the road seems longer and fraught with more perils, offering faint probability of reaching a particular destination. Indeed, even as Erik and I seek directionality in behaviors and practices along with forms of self-organization close at hand, we're overly self-conscious about making any claims to an exit strategy from the resilient logic of domination. Or perhaps we're just a much more tempered bunch, healthily so, given that capitalism, to

name one obvious foe, has only continued to extend its reach and recuperative powers over the decades. As Guy Debord contended in 1967, “The entire expanse of society is its portrait,” and one could easily argue that this is truer now than ever before.⁵ Utopian desires all too quickly become just another tempting commodity.

But if Buber, amid the dystopia of the 1940s, could proclaim that utopia, in Karl Marx’s words, entailed people “consciously participating in the historical revolutionary process of society that was taking place before our eyes,” then it behooves us to find cracks that we can further pry open in what seems like the smooth surface of social control.⁶

Halfway through creating our *Paths toward Utopia*, in fact, a yawning gap in history opened up: occupy everywhere.⁷ Months before that other fissures appeared, from the creation of a do-it-yourself city within a dictatorial one in Egypt to the directly democratic occupation of the Wisconsin State Capitol, and so many more. Each and every instance has shared several features, not least among them the element of surprise—with the participants perhaps being the most surprised of all. *The Coming Insurrection’s* counsel that a few like-minded radicals should “find each other,” picked up as tinder for the “occupy everything” student movement in the United States a couple years ago, suddenly took on a substantively different meaning this past year.⁸ People of dissimilar minds, and most far from radical, not only found each other by the hundreds and thousands in plazas, encampments, and assemblies worldwide in new face-to-face relationships; they also discovered and flexed their communal power-from-below, in all its startling beauty and messiness.

Erik and I kicked off our picture-essay making at a time when nothing seemed possible, well before the Arab Spring, by first testing our own creative relationship through pieces (“Paths toward Utopia” and “Food for Thought”) for two issues of the graphic journal *World War 3 Illustrated*. We’ve finished this book amid the nervous anticipation of even more audacious uprisings globally this spring.⁹ Throughout our collaboration of artistically “sketch[ing] the picture of an idea in process of development,” we’ve balanced on the tightrope between the tension that marks any inching toward utopia, and that especially today, is stretched taut by the push-pull of utter despair and utter hopefulness. Almost by surprise to us, our book found its defining motif—the commons—inside this tension, precisely because it unfolded at this unanticipated yet wholly remarkable crossroads.

John Holloway states in his recent book *Crack Capitalism* that “the commons can be seen as the embryonic form of a new society: ‘If the cell form of capitalism is the commodity, the cellular form of a society beyond capital is the common.’ ... If capital is a movement of enclosing, the commons are a disjointed common-ing, a moving in the opposite direction, a refusing of enclosure.” He describes “an enclosure, an appropriation, [as] a separating of something from common enjoyment or use.”¹⁰ This can happen by privatizing land or anything else for that matter, including information, politics, caring, or the ecosystem.

A commons is a simple idea really, and something that humans have done throughout our existence even before we had languages, even before we made up the word *commons* in multiple languages. It is the exact opposite of enclosure: something held by people in common, to be used, shared, and enjoyed. It can be a physical space, like a field for grazing or planting, or a library or park; knowledge, like the ideas within our libraries or free and open-source software; those things that sustain all of life, like the air and water; and what make us most human, such as empathy, imagination, and love. What all commons share is, precisely, a deep sense of sharing, in which our usage does not diminish the commons but rather increases its “worth” for everyone, and its worth is determined not by money or its exchange value but instead by how intrinsically useful it is to everyone. Like love, it only increases through our freely

given shared use and enjoyment. We thus have a coequal interest in sustaining our commons. Much more than that, Buber maintains, “the real living together of [hu]man with [hu]man can only thrive where people have the real things of their common life in common.”¹¹

But besides commons as what we hold in common to use, enjoy, and share, there is the implicit and essential corollary: a commons is inherently something that we must self-manage and self-govern. If we share a field to graze our individual sheep on, each and every one of us knows that if one of us overgrazes their animals, the field won't sustain any of our sheep, so we'll need to figure out informal or formal ways to voluntarily manage our usage, enjoyment, and sharing such that the commons is sustainable and yet still commonly ours. Alongside collective management, though, a commons needs to be collectively governed. Again, implicit in the notion of something held in common is that we also all commonly have the ability to determine its use, enjoyment, and sharing along with the parameters around such activities.

Enclosure, then, goes well beyond denying us material sustenance; it also involves closing off possibilities and, critically, our power-together. In this way, the commons differs not only from privatization of all kinds but equally from anything dubbed public, including space, resources, or even the public good. There's always someone or something above “the public” that has the final say. Such ultimate power-over ensures that some humans—and in this era, fewer and fewer of them—will perpetually dominate not only the majority of humanity and even what it means to be human. They also will dominate the nonhuman world and what it means to supposedly be ecological. The commons instead intimately involves our collective power as caretakers to envision, decide, and implement a world in common, knitted together by a politics of dignity and solidarity. Holloway frames this notion as “the assertion, against a world that treats us as objects and denies our capacity to determine our own lives, that we are subjects capable and worthy of deciding for ourselves.”¹²

This book's designer and author of the foreword, Josh MacPhee, was my guide, as it were, across the bridge of despondency toward the embankment of a commons looming, tantalizingly, so much closer than I could have ever dreamed. I happened to be in New York City this past September a couple days early for our twice-yearly meetings of the Institute for Anarchist Studies, of which Josh and I are both collective members, and Josh said, “You have to come see Occupy Wall Street!” He and his longtime partner, Dara Greenwald, were grappling with her near-imminent death from cancer, yet when Josh and I rendezvoused with her at a Brooklyn subway stop to travel to Zuccotti Park, I'd almost never seen either of them looking so alive. (Variations of the phrase “I haven't felt this alive in years” would soon come to be echoed repeatedly to me during our own self-generated “beloved community” at the Occupy Philly encampment.¹³ And Josh would later tell me, after the Wall Street and Philly occupations had both lost their physical spaces, and he and so many others had lost Dara, that Dara was drawn to Occupy Wall Street because it embodied a caring community—prefiguring a caring commons.)

Occupy Wall Street was a scant four days old, but Josh and Dara had already grasped its quirky import. Josh toured me around the outdoor occupation, from the concrete-bench-turned-library of a dozen or so mediocre books to the cigarette working group's table where several folks were busily rolling smokes, from a lone person silk screening T-shirts of his own design to the small group of MacBook users encircled into a tiny media area, to the two historical accidents that would so characterize this movement: the people's mic, because amplification was illegal, for increasingly large general assemblies, and an increasingly expansive mosaic of hand-painted cardboard signs, because there were so many discarded pizza boxes from the mountain of pie donations. Both the verbal sentence fragments and mass of eclectic written messages were near incomprehensible; misspeaks and misspellings abounded. When I

asked person after person why they'd made their sign, using the instantly assembled materials in the on-the-ground art area, or why they had come to Zuccotti, they offered vague responses. They usually simply repeated their sign's slogan back at me, as if those words or images—which I could obviously just read or see—said it all. "Why the American flag?" I inquired of one hippie dude, who'd also drawn a smiley face, heart, and peace symbol on his creation. "The American flag," he answered, then added, with a look of wonder as to why I couldn't understand, "The American flag," followed after a pause by "The American flag."

But like Josh and Dara, I recognized the power of this moment—like them, not fully, but enough. I was transfixed. Like Josh, I too became obsessed with the cardboard signage. For one, no one seemed to move any of the pizza-box placards once they were placed so reverently on the cold, hard pavement. And thus second, this crazy quilt (and it was overwhelmingly crazy—crazy incoherent, but also crazy homophobic, crazy racist, and so on) of signs kept spiraling outward, while huge crowds of strangers mingled on its edges to engage in animated though often-incoherent conversations.¹⁴ When at one point I tiptoed between the pieces of cardboard to take photos, alarmed voices backed up by gesticulating arms warned me to step out of what clearly was seen by most not as a corporate-owned and police-protected private plaza, or a public one, but a sacred space, a commons. This commons, in turn, was making visible its participants' deepest intuition that something in the world was terribly, terribly wrong and that somehow, here, they'd be able to figure out together how to make the world, a new world, terribly, terribly right. That was about as much as anyone could articulate, but it was enough.

In a generational moment when, up until Occupy Wall Street, *community* frequently meant the disembodied aloneness of social networking via Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, texts, and cell phones, or a thoroughgoing estrangement from the world, this occupy commons was all about the power of embodying one's "status update" among so many others, and having those others "find each other"—be able to directly look each other in the eye, listen, respond, dialogue. Time and time again, those at Zuccotti, usually completely new to politics or apolitical, kept saying, "You don't understand how incredible it is to be here with everyone else." As the working groups started to click, as Occupy Wall Street hammered out its "Declaration of the Occupation of New York City" using an intriguing mix of directly democratic debate along with paper drafts posted near the people's library for hundreds to scribble comments on, thereby aiding in redrafting followed by more debate and amendment before its affirmation, as this occupation in the symbolic heart of global capital sent shock waves around the world and aspirational lifeblood to other cities to do their own takeovers and tent cities, it increasingly hit me just how deeply capitalism had damaged the majority (or that way too uncritically defined 99 percent) and created a shared sense of suffering (the truth, on the other hand, that's encapsulated in the 99 percent slogan)—enough that face-to-face communities felt, and alas are, novel.¹⁵ Or enough that, well "enough is enough," ya basta!

Particularly in this space called the United States, where "our" very origin story elevates the entrepreneurial individual, where the "American dream" is about pulling oneself up by one's own bootstraps, where every home foreclosure or imprisonment is seen as a personal failure, the near-overnight shift in sensibility from private, nuclear relations to common, collective ones was astonishingly utopian in itself. What I didn't understand at first was how powerful it actually was for many, many people to simply find each other—in person. Self-organization and self-governance was almost an accidental by-product of the desire to stay put with this spontaneous beloved community, so qualitatively different than anything most of those people in Zuccotti, and soon other cities and small towns, had ever experienced and literally lived within before. If everyone wanted to stick together in this newfound "family" (another word that would be repeated ad nauseam initially, but given substance as

our contingently assembled family began to learn how to get along in all our startling beauty and messiness, through thick and thin, consensually), by necessity we had to provide ourselves with everything we needed, or everything for everyone, because anyone could enter the space of occupy.¹⁶ We had to set about becoming, unexpectedly and without a map, do-it-ourselves cities within cities, with us occupiers as part do-it-ourselves city self-managers and part do-it-ourselves camp counselors.

In this increasingly difficult process of constructing a new world completely in the belly of the beast—in civic spaces that we never thought we'd be able to hang on to for so long—it wasn't merely that we created a friendship or chosen kinship commons. We became new selves as we stumbled awkwardly about the implicitly anticapitalist business of trying to forge a new society. Within the daily space of occupy, the speed at which people re-created or rather undid themselves to shed decades of socialization by structures like patriarchy and racism was dizzying, and that continues still, even without our encampments. Within this book, this dialectic of self-societal transformation is hinted at, for example, in our picture-essay "Waking to Revolution." It's not fast enough for many, of course. But each time I've personally been just on the verge of giving up, metaphorically, on humanity or myself, an occupier or two—or several, or even my whole general assembly—surprises me with the giant steps they've made in their ethics, politics, and behaviors, thereby also reshaping this occupy micro-society of ours, and I in turn surprise myself at how I've changed.

That first day that Josh took me to Occupy Wall Street, we kicked into anarchist self-organizing mode, perhaps falling back a little too comfortably on what we know how to do best: educate and agitate, with the aim of getting people to think and act for themselves. We decided to gather up some good radical books to add to the then-miniscule library and started tossing around ideas for some posters. Josh honed in on the image of the Wall Street bull's buttocks, and I crafted the trio "commons not capitalism."¹⁷ He used the backside of the bull for other posters, and a couple weeks later, I picked up my phrase for a painted banner to help launch my "home" occupation in Philly, where I'd coincidentally just moved. Like my collaboration with Erik on this book, though, our common musing allowed for more than any individual brainstorm. Indeed, I keep coming back to how we and so many others knew almost without knowing from the get-go that occupy represented a grand contestation, challenge, and invention of a new commons—out of and against a world that has become enclosed in more ways than the heart or a smiley face can bear any longer.

From Cairo to Madison, from Athens to New York, from Barcelona to Oakland, on the shoulders of Chiapas, Seattle, and Buenos Aires, in "Asia's unknown uprisings" along with occupiers, de-occupiers, and unoccupiers urban and rural, and in so many crevices in between, we the billions have joyfully, startlingly, raced to the window on history that's been flung open.¹⁸ We are a product of this historical moment certainly, yet globally, perhaps in a way never before seen in the story of humanity, we're busily making history, doing history. It may not be inevitable, but quite likely this window on history will slam shut again, fiercely and just as suddenly. So it's imperative that we quickly though intentionally beat it as far down as many paths toward utopia as we can before it closes, (re)appropriating as many commons not enclosures as we're able to imagine and annex.

In this uneven process, we may find that our rebellious reconfigurations are actually leading us toward what Michel Foucault calls "heterotopias." He ruminates that "there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience" between utopias ("fundamentally unreal spaces") and heterotopias ("real places ... something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted"): the mirror. "Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual

space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am.” Yet for Foucault, like our perspective here this book, we’re more likely to remain always on a journey, in a queasy “floating piece of space”: the boat. A boat is “closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea”; it is at once “the great instrument of economic [colonial] development” and “simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination. The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.”¹⁹

In my case, trying to move from what can only be an exilic existence under the contemporary social structure into the uncharted territory of a new society all too frequently entails part alienation, part depression, and part mess. I know that I’m breathing the fresh air of utopia, however, when I occasionally feel at home in the world, and the process of this book with Erik has always held that euphoric quality. Not that it was always fun. In fact, fun is probably not the first word that would spring to either of our minds. It’s been work—not merely the work that writing on my own or making art on Erik’s own takes but rather the exponentially more difficult task of meeting within the “no-man’s-land” of language and image. *Paths toward Utopia* really was and is a collaborative project, and yet we found again and again that much as we’re both committed to such an ethos, it’s difficult to navigate. The intersectional commons where our respective artistic sensibilities converged and conversed was precisely where the hard work came in, because that dynamic space points beyond the present, and it’s tough thinking past the hegemony of this particular period. So at times it felt like we had run aground in a heavy fog.

Still, in my mind’s eye, I keep seeing the image of Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodsman, and the Lion in the *Wizard of Oz* film as they emerge from a poppy field to see the glorious Emerald City ahead, rushing toward its beauty. Of course, once there, the glisten quickly tarnishes, yet collectively they push forward to newfound realizations. At the movie’s end, when Dorothy gets back to Kansas, she insists that her quest “wasn’t a dream. It was a place. And you—and you—and you—and you were there,” and then marvels, “There’s no place like home.” In my reading of this film, hers is not a return to sameness, in the same old physical house, though. She and those around her, via their tempestuous travels, have become more than they were before by discovering what the good witch Glinda tells Dorothy toward the finale: she “always had the power” to transform herself and her community, but “she had to learn it for herself.” Moreover, because of this, she is now embedded—literally waking up in her bed, surrounded by her closest companions—in “no place,” the etymological meaning of utopia, which now feels “like home.”²⁰

I feel as if Erik and I, while creating this book, have been wandering along a similar yellow brick road, desirous of unearthing potential no places within the deadening spaces of today. But what we hadn’t counted on was that at the end of our own arduous journey, we also landed somewhere unexpected. Our individual arts—words and images—by engaging in a reciprocal dialogue within the “creative commons” of our picture-essays, together invented a new language that somehow spoke to us, helping each of us to find new “power” within ourselves. I’m not sure how it happened—whether as Foucault’s metaphoric mirror or boat, or both—but our collaboration facilitated an enriching of our own artistic styles over this past year or so, and thus our own selves and how we engage in wider communal efforts. Perhaps that sense, for me, of our process as one of making and remaking heterotopias isn’t as invisible on these pages as I think it is; perhaps it shines through our poetic portraits.

Toward the end of finishing this book, Erik wanted me to write some fragments on occupy for a picture-essay articulating the flights of exuberance that marked its early days. Try as I might, I couldn’t personally step out of the idea that hasn’t yet been evicted—whether occupy maintains or retakes

physical spaces, or finds its power in the political, ethical, or existential space of its expanding diasporic communities sans encampments—to get enough distance to fulfill Erik’s wish.²¹ The idea has not yet run its course, even if many of us occupiers are suffering from wintery bleakness before what I hope is a blossoming of occupy again this spring, and into the summer and beyond. In this accelerated instance of traversing the battered byway toward utopia, it’s too hard to peer ahead at exactly where we’re going and hence it’s difficult to speculate on it in print.

I trust, however, as does Erik, that you’ll catch glimpses of the breathtaking prefigurative heights of occupy and other people power movements within several of our picture-essays. For example, “Deciding for Ourselves” supplies a narrative of magical realism that flits across time and space, borrowing from some of the highs of low moments, such as the neighborhood assemblies and self-managed factories springing out of Argentina’s financial collapse in 2001, the Common Ground Health Clinic in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and some of the deeply human interconnections and processes that have been facilitated by occupy. Yet much more than these peaks, we encourage you to savor the calmer saunters through daily routines that point toward qualitatively better lives—lives worth living.

Which brings me to this book’s subtitle: *Graphic Explorations of Everyday Anarchism*. Its double entendre within the word everyday—as in “daily” and “routine,” or “ordinary”—aims to grasp, subtly, the double-edge quality of this quieter search for rocky yet promising footholds out of our present-day quagmire.

A good chunk of our picture-essays look at those things that many of us do now, in our daily lives, that model not an anarchist world—that is, one in which everyone must subscribe to one particular political orientation—but rather an anarchistic one—namely, one of our own making and doing, often within spaces that we can increasingly transform into commons. We try to capture this in such pieces as “Picking Up the Park” and “Good Defense,” which draw out the power of self-activity, whether for leisure or necessity. In “The Gift,” we unpack this almost-unthinking social obligation as perhaps affording a route beyond capitalism, in the same way that Francis Fox Piven recently highlighted the power of the lived experimental practices within occupy of a “moral economy” against the deadening “immoral economy” of the current market system.²²

Yet this book is also intended to supply hints of what it routinely would be like to live, every day, in a nonhierarchical society, moving from a world premised on the social organization called neoliberalism and capitalism, say, to one looking a whole lot more like that advocated by anarchism: a freely self-organized society of freely self-determining individuals. What if, in other words, beloved communities from below replaced top-down structures that remove us from lives worth living? What if they were the norm of our social relations and social organization, something that was the common sense of our daily lives in common(s), both unremarkable and ordinary, rather than the exception? We offer glimmers of this movement “from here to there” in “What to Keep,” which repurposes a current object of much protest—the bank—into something we might be able to use, enjoy, and share. You’ll see glances as well in “Borrowing from the Library,” which further widens the already-expansive supposition by bell hooks that “one of the most subversive institutions in the United States is the public library.”²³

The binding of “the community-forms that remain” in the present and “a new spirit” in the future is what we assert in this book, only to be uncovered and discovered in the tension created in the gap of those hierarchies and forms of domination that send us careening off the path of social transformation, only to resiliently and bravely venture forth again. We will find and experience utopia not in some definitive end but rather, as Buber writes, in our “bold but precarious attempts to bring the idea into reality.”²⁴

Paths toward Utopia is thus not a rosy-eyed stroll through potential commons, toward some fixed

and forever-defined freedom. The book tries to retain the bittersweetness of present-day efforts to “model” horizontal institutions and relationships of mutual aid under increasingly vertical, exploitative, and alienated conditions. It tries to walk the line between potholes and promise. Yet if autonomous, do-it-ourselves efforts are to serve as a clarion call for more innovative actions, they must illuminate how we qualitatively, consensually, and ecologically shape our needs as well as desires. They must offer stepping stones toward emancipation—an emancipation that will then continually renew itself. This can only happen through ongoing experimentation, by us all, with diverse forms of self-determination and self-governance, even if riddled with contradictions in this contemporary moment—in every moment. As the title piece to this book steadfastly declares, serendipitously reverberating Buber’s sentiment above, “The precarious passage itself is our road map to a liberatory society.”

NOTES

1. Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia* (1944; repr., Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 14.
2. *Ibid.*, foreword.
3. Theodor W. Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society” (1949), in *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 34.
4. Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, foreword, 8, 15.
5. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (1967; repr., Detroit: Black & Red, 1983), para. 50.
6. Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, 2.
7. Which in turn, through the opening created by occupy but also in the necessary criticisms of it, has exponentially amplified calls for as well as grassroots organizing efforts to unoccupy and de-occupy many places.
8. The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection* (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2009), 97.
9. By way of illustrating just how surprising this moment is—and how excruciating it feels to put any thoughts on it to paper—since I penned this prologue over two months ago, a student strike in Quebec and especially Montreal has grown into a maple spring of grand proportions. And this week, as it celebrated its hundred-day anniversary on May 22 and thirty days of nightly street demonstrations, this already-enormous movement has escalated into a widespread social strike, or maple summer—just to point to one of the many current twists and turns.
10. John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), 29–30.
11. Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, 15.
12. Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*, 39.
13. For a sense of the occupy commons and the life it generated, see my “Occupation in Philly, Day 20 (October 25): Commons Not Capitalism,” *Outside the Circle* blog, <http://cbmilstein.wordpress.com/2011/10/26/occupation-in-philly-day-19-october-24/> (accessed March 9, 2012). Martin Luther King Jr. (“Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom,” *Ebony*, October 1966, 30) popularized the notion of a beloved community with his often-cited observation, “Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.” In his book *Growing a Beloved Community* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2004, xiii), Tom Owen-Towle contends that in the early 1900s, U.S. philosopher Josiah Royce first used the phrase in print, and it was picked up in visions such as that of Clarence Skinner, a Universalist minister

who argued that to create a beloved community on earth, we must embark on “the task of inventing an applying arts which shall win all over to unity, and which shall overcome their original hatefulness by the gracious love, not of mere individuality, but of communities.” For bell hooks (“A Revolution of Values: The Promise of Multi-Cultural Change,” *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 26, no. 1 [1993]: 10), a beloved community also necessitates that “we must stand for justice, have recognition for difference without attaching difference to privilege.”

14. I’m aware that the word *crazy* can feel like, or even be, an insult in relation to mental health/wellness, and how the pharmaceutical-industrial complex’s medical model in particular and society at large in general both stigmatize those it categorizes as mentally ill. Here I’m harkening to the Icarus Project: “We recognize that we all live in a crazy world, and believe that sensitivities, visions, and inspirations are not necessarily symptoms of illness,” and more specifically, that we currently live “in a world gone mad,” in which, in my view, the sane are crazy, and those labeled crazy are frequently the most brilliantly perceptive. See Icarus Project, “Mission Statement,” <http://theicarusproject.net/about-us/icarus-project-mission-statement> (accessed March 7, 2012), and “You Are Not Alone Sticker,” <http://theicarusproject.net/product/youarenotalonesticker> (accessed March 7, 2012).

15. New York City General Assembly, “Declaration of the Occupation of New York City,” #OccupyWallStreet, September 29, 2011, <http://www.nycga.net/resources/declaration/> (accessed March 13, 2012).

16. Which isn’t meant to minimize how hard it was and is for many people to enter and stay in the physical, political, or psychic space of occupy—an ongoing process of how unity in our diversity looks in our experimental moment of attempting to create beloved communities from below.

17. See <http://occuprint.org/Posters/CommonsNotCapitalism> (accessed March 9, 2012).

18. So many good people’s histories could be cited here, but since it uncovers some of the least-seen rebellions, at least among North Americans and Europeans, see George Katsiaficas, *Asia’s Unknown Uprisings, Volume 1: South Korean Social Movements in the 20th Century*, and *Volume 2: People Power in the Philippines, Burma, Tibet, China, Taiwan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Thailand, and Indonesia, 1947–2009* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012).

19. Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” (1967), *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* (October 1984), <http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html> (accessed March 9, 2012).

20. *Wizard of Oz*, 1939, movie script by Noel Langley, Florence Ryerson, and Edgar Allen Woolf, based on book by L. Frank Baum, sfy.ru/?script=wizard_of_ox_1939 (accessed March 14, 2012).

21. See Occupy Wall Street, “You Can’t Evict an Idea Whose Time Has Come,” September 15, 2011, 1:30 a.m. EST, <http://occupywallst.org/article/you-cant-evict-idea-whose-time-has-come/> (accessed March 7, 2012). Thanks to Rabbi Arthur Waskow of the Shalom Center for the notion of a diasporic occupation community—or the search for one—in the aftermath of our evictions. For my tentative thoughts on various present-day moments, such as my recent “May Day Matters” piece, see my *Outside the Circle* blog, <http://cbmilstein.wordpress.com/>.

22. See Francis Fox Piven, “The Movement for a Moral Economy,” *Al Jazeera English*, November 14, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/11/20111117132329620899.html> (accessed March 9, 2012). See also E. P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present* 50 (1971): 76-136, <http://libcom.org/history/moral-economy-english-crowd-eighteenth-century-epthompson>; Murray Bookchin, “Market Economy or Moral Economy?” in *The Modern Crisis* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1987), 77–98.

23. bell hooks, *Rock My Soul: Black People and Self-Esteem* (New York: Atria, 2003), 95.

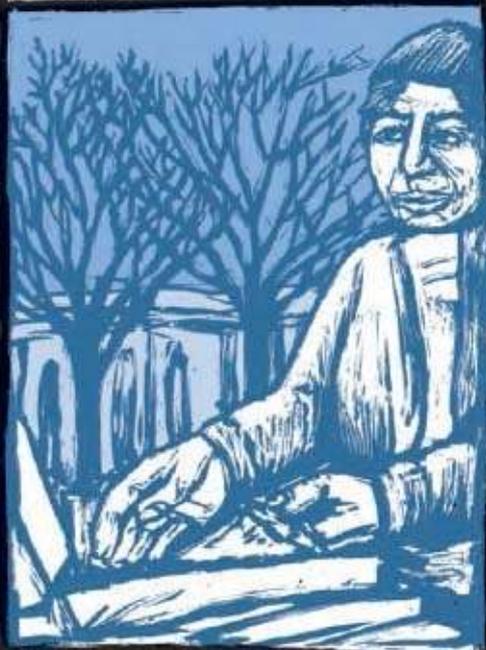
SOLIDARITY IS A PIZZA



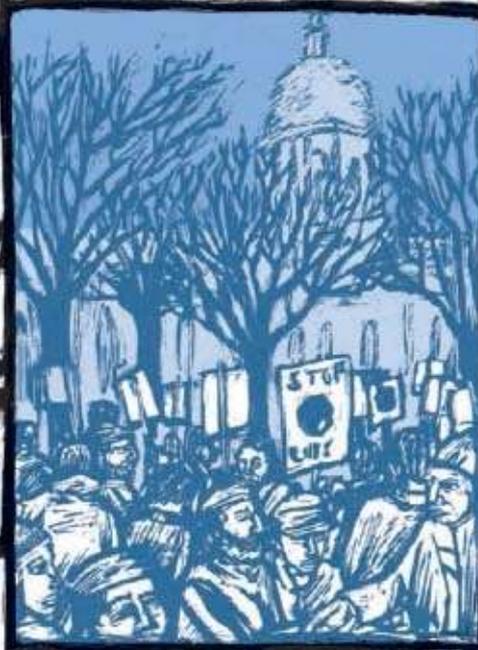
IT'S AN EGYPTIAN WORKER IN
CAIRO ORDERING A PIZZA,



FROM A PIZZERIA IN
WISCONSIN,



TO FEED ANOTHER WORKER
IN MADISON,



PROTESTING ATTACKS
ON COLLECTIVE BARGAINING.

S O L I D A R I T Y



SOON,

IT'S PIZZA ORDER AFTER PIZZA ORDER

FROM FIFTY U.S. STATES & MANY COUNTRIES

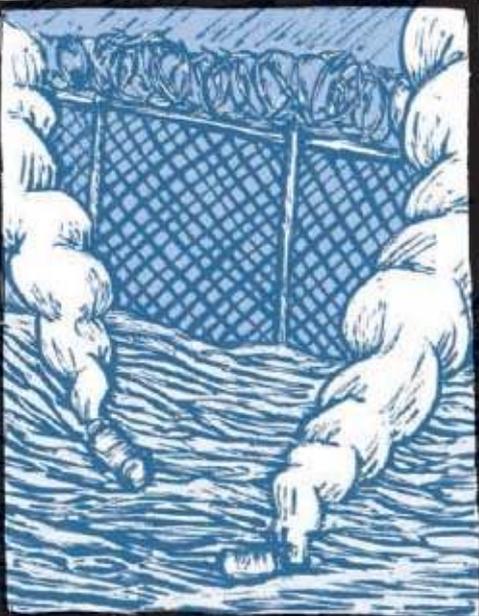
FEEDING MANY MORE WORKERS

IN THE OCCUPIED

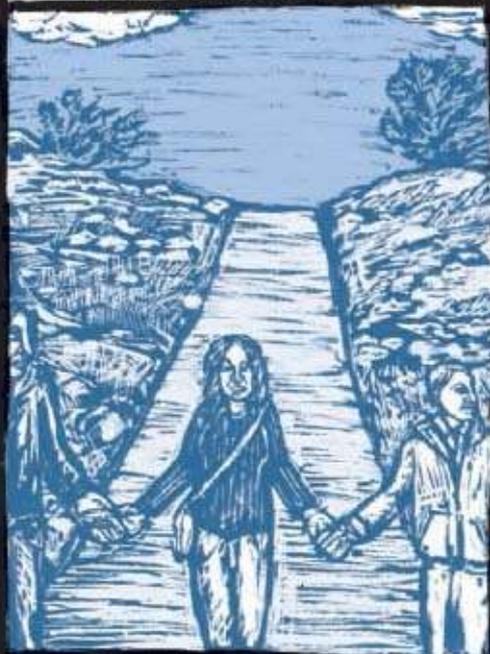
CAPITOL



IT'S AN ISRAELI CITIZEN IN
BIL'IN STANDING UP,

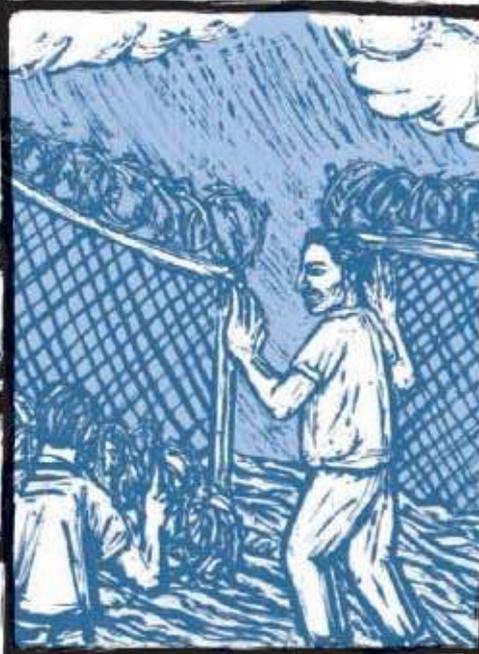


TO SOLDIERS & TEAR-GAS CANISTERS,



ALONGSIDE THE PALESTINIAN
WHO ASKED THEM THERE,

S O L I D A R I T Y



PROTESTING WEEKLY
AGAINST A WALL.



SOON,

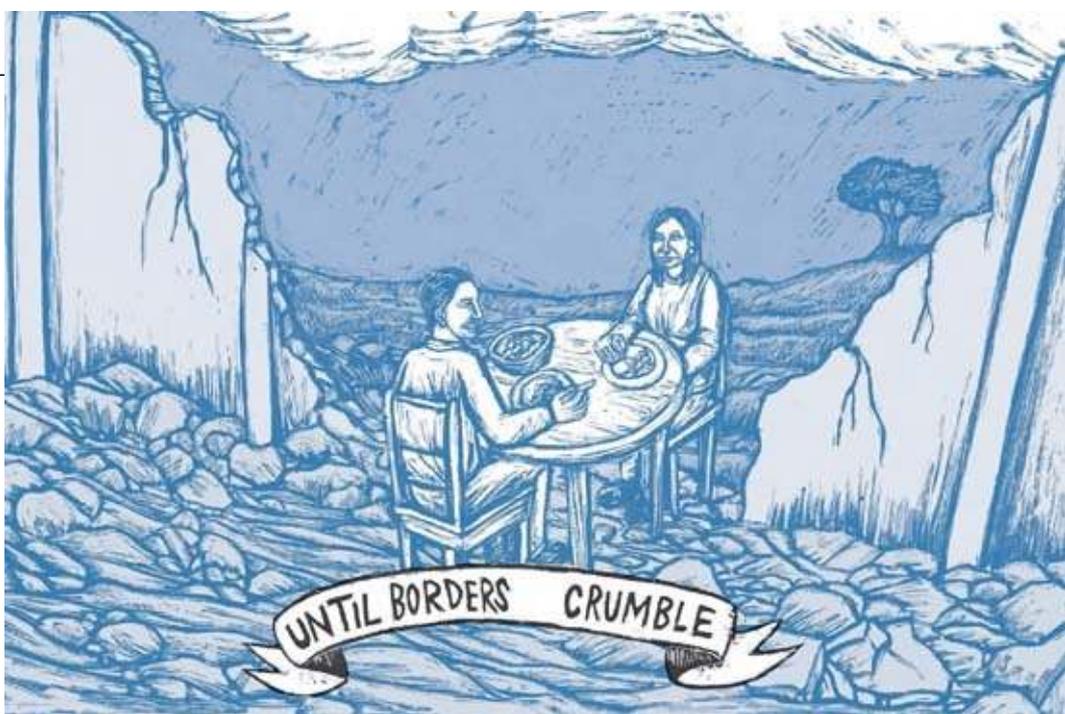
IT'S PERSON AFTER PERSON

FROM MANY VILLAGES & CONTINENTS

COMING TO STAND WITH MORE PALESTINIANS

THIS WALL WILL FALL

IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES



- [The Waiting: The True Story of a Lost Child, a Lifetime of Longing, and a Miracle for a Mother Who Never Gave Up for free](#)
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