Call for papers

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Utopias and collective dystopias in rural worlds: Contestation, experimentation, evasion

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The investment in the rural world by anti-establishment communities is not new. The strategy of withdrawal and distancing from places where power is centralised has already been observed by sociologists, anthropologists and historians at different times and places around the world. People who decide to organise their daily lives and modes of production collectively are motivated by different aspirations. They may defend a desire to distance themselves from the system denounced by an anti-capitalist protest perspective. Following the example of the anarchist *Milieux Libres* of the 19th century (Steiner 2016; Creagh 2009), the *Zones à Défendre* in Europe (Pruvost 2017; Verdier 2018; Subra 2017) or the Zapatista revolutionary communities in Mexico (Reyes & Kaufman 2011; Baschet 2020), these collectives affirm themselves as spaces for insubordination, resistance and militant organisation.

Utopian collectives are also defended by their protagonists as places for experimentation with societal alternatives, whether they concern modes of governance, agricultural techniques, gender relations or the organisation of work. This is what many scientists have focused on among the so-called "neorural" agricultural collectives in France (Léger & Hervieu 1979; Mercier & Simona 1983; Sallustio 2018), certain family farming communities engaged in the struggle for technical sovereignty (Adenle *et al.* 2019) or other "intentional communities" in the USA (Lallement 2019; Petitfils 2011). These collectives are also an opportunity for individuals to increase their capacity for individual action through the learning of new skills and proactively taking control of their lives. This individualised approach is transformed into a quest for personal emancipation (Carlsson & Manning 2010) and a romanticised rural lifestyle whose material benefits, such as less pollution or access to open spaces, are touted (Clavairolle 2013; Lacroix 1981; Mauger & Fossé 1977; Wittersheim 2017; Rouvière 2016).

However, recent scientific contributions on the subject remain isolated and are struggling to put up a united front. However, questioning the contemporary forms of the phenomenon of the installation of anti-capitalist communities in rural areas provides an empirical basis for Utopian Studies in anthropology. The utopian or dystopian imaginaries that animate social actors take on the form of an inestimable heuristic interest in capturing contemporary social criticism and related

social transformations (Maskens & Blanes 2018; Fitting 2009; Appadurai 2013: 286; Wallman 1992; Baccolini & Moylan 2003; Schaer *et al.* 2000; Shukaïtis *et al.* 2007; Moore 1990).

At a time when it seems easier to imagine the end of the world than the collapse of capitalism (Jameson 1994: xii), we wish to bring together in this dossier analyses of the everyday life of these "concrete utopias" (Wright 2017 [2010]) in rural areas. The objective is to grasp their "creative" potential (Cossette-Trudel 2010), as well as the social values and contradictions they promote. In order to do so, we will focus on four areas of reflection.

1) First of all, **the notion of autonomy**. It is understood here **as the emancipatory will to "do it yourself" and to seek independence (financial, subsistence, energy, governmental)**. At a time when DIY, low tech or "collapsological" movements are on the rise, campaigns are being reinvested by actors anxious to reappropriate a certain technological and food sovereignty. They thus wish to participate in a reappropriation of the definition of "progress" (Grimaud *et al.* 2017; Dobré 2002; Pruvost 2013, 2015; Jarrige 2014; Lallement 2019). Through what types of activities does this quest for autonomy manifest itself? What modes of internal organisation (of work, family, rituals, etc.) are deployed by the actors to achieve it? What economic, political or geographical factors hinder or promote these initiatives?

2) Rural worlds also offer a specific framework for the realisation of these autonomous practices, especially with regard to the vast spaces that sometimes surround collectives and the possibility of cultivating the land. **The environmental aspect of these utopian projects** constitutes the second axis of reflection of this dossier. We will be interested in **the representations of nature conveyed by the agricultural practices developed by the actors**. Are they driven by a "structural nostalgia" attached to the idea of rurality (Herzfeld 2007)? Do they claim filiation with the traditional peasantry? What place is given to the conservation of natural heritage and to animal and plant biodiversity? Do the actors refer to permaculture in the implementation of their agricultural project? What place is given to vegetarianism or veganism in their political thinking? The analysis of the symbolic registers that surround the maintenance of the landscape, plants, animal will all allow us to learn more about the philosophical currents that influence these actors.

3) As such, we also seek to understand **the social criticism and ideological work that is developed within these collectives**. What are the political themes most often tackled by the actors? How is their desire for social transformation manifested? To what extent is this in line with historical political thought? Do they mobilise innovative action strategies? What are the recommended ways of socialisation, formation and awareness raising? Many authors have also testified to a shift away from revolutionary optimistic temporalities to a dystopian and presentist perspective (Dubar 2011; Leccardi 2011; Foessel 2012; Diaz 2017; Dupuy 2002; Chateauraynaud 2013). What about the temporalities conveyed in their protest ambitions? How do the individuals who invest in these collectives envisage the past, the present and the future?

4) Finally, we will look at **internal organisation and decision-making methods**. These political investment initiatives in the countryside are sometimes the scene of experimentation with participatory modes of governance (Sallustio 2019). How do actors question power relations and what do they put in place to overcome them? What place is given to gender relations in collective organisation? It will also be important for us to know the relationship that actors have with state structures and representative democracy. Do these collectives continue to maintain relations with

official institutions or organisations? If so, what are their organisational modalities and points of friction?

This issue is part of a multidisciplinary approach. It is open to anthropological, historical, sociological and political science contributions. Ethnographic materials, fragments of interviews and photographic/iconographic works are welcome, as well as reflections on the methodology adopted in the field.

Article proposals, in French or in British English (a title and a 500-word abstract + 5-6 keywords) are to be sent to the journal office (civilisations@ulb.ac.be) by October 30, 2020.

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