

Books:

Visions of utopia and decay have always been intimately connected. The image of a remade world necessarily entails the ruination of the old, but the very paradise that the utopian imagination conjures up is also by its nature fragile and destined to desuetude. You could even say that the project of utopia is an unconscious-excuse for the invention of new ruins: a love of destruction and decadence dressed up as optimistic renewal. As Alan Rowlands's curious 'documentary fiction' attests, utopian schemes conceal the seeds of their own obliteration; but the ruins of the perfect world to come also press on the mundane present: the remnants of utopia exert a strange fascination. *3 Communiqués* is a subtle and playful excursion among the archives of certain vanished futures.

Rowlands's first subject is one Stanley Green, who from 1968 till his death in 1993 was a familiar sight on London's Oxford Street, selling his pamphlet 'Eight Passion Proteins with Care' and wielding a sign that warned against the libidinal excess occasioned by eating meat, cheese and nuts. He railed also against too much sitting down. For Rowlands, the peripatetic prophet of protein wisdom is a walking anachronism: a relic of Victorian pamphleteering, for sure, but also a reminder of the extent to which all utopian visions seem obsessed by modifying the human body. Green was only unusual in his favouring sexual continence over free love. His dietary theories were otherwise oddly of a piece with the main current of radical communalism and even with Deleuzian notions of bodily becoming: as Rowlands puts it: 'the body becomes all machine and architecture, skin becomes multi-dimensional, and the city is an organism'.

The second narrative concerns the ruins of a 1960s countercultural commune, and reads

at the same time like a description of all the thwarted avant-gardes of the last century. In a belated reworking of the writings of Charles Fourier, the commune's denizens 'live on a diet of home-grown vegetables and radical theory'; schooled on Wilhelm Reich, they listen to Hendrix, Faust and the Velvet Underground, and film themselves degenerating from unregulated community to ordered bliss. Eventually they find themselves reduced to scheduling even their supposedly spontaneous sexual encounters. 'At every beginning', writes Rowlands, 'confidence in the benefits of the group seems to prevail. At the end we just stare, in melancholy, anger or indifference at its remainders.'

In the final section, Rowlands considers Sealand: the Second World War sea fort off the coast of Suffolk, declared an independent nation (complete with citizenship and passports) in the late 1960s: 'our non-site forms a discursive and ramshackle web of imagery, conjecture, analysis and recollection, which like the platform's occupation over thirty years itself, lacks either focus or direction'. It's not only the reference to the 'non-site' that makes Rowlands sound like Robert Smithson here: the rusted hulk of the fort starts to seem a crystalline accretion of utopian and decadent impulses, an 'islet of resistance' that is also spinning into entropic ruin.

In sum, *3 Communiqués* is dense with connections between the histories of political idealism, aesthetic revolt and plain crankishness. The book itself embodies its infolding themes: its design somewhat resembles that of Georges Bataille's *Documents* (1929-30), and the three parts are concertinaed together so that the whole looks as eccentric as its inspiring and absurd subjects. *Brian Dillon*

3 COMMUNIQUÉS

By Alan Rowlands
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ALAN ROWLANDS

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