

Richard Gilman-Opalsky, *Precarious Communism: Manifest Mutations, Manifesto Detoured*

Autonomedia / Minor Compositions, 2014; 144pp; ISBN-13: 978-1570272929

In *Precarious Communism* Gilman-Opalsky explains that the purpose of any manifesto, including his own, is to make manifest certain facts. Accordingly, he highlights the difference between Marx and 'Marxism' without engaging dead ideologies. He is a 'precarious' proponent of new theories void of historical baggage or loaded terms. This makes the book an excellent supplement to many social science and humanities courses.

Gilman-Opalsky situates Marx and 'Marxism' in the concept of precarious communism (autonomy) in an attempt to disentangle the terms 'communism' and 'Marxism' from past ideological purity and state practice. It is a way forward that allows for no single pure ideological possibility of social organisation, but rather many diverse possibilities for achieving a non-capitalist society that could be described generally as communal. *Precarious Communism* also demonstrates the 'precarious' position of the non-ideological communist seeking a way forward. It is within this context that Gilman-Opalsky attempts to situate the *Communist Manifesto* for today's audience, realities, and experiences, using the methodological technique developed by the French Situationists (an artistic-political organisation) under Guy Debord called *détournement* (meaning re-routing or hijacking) (Situationist International, 1958, <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline///si/definitions.html>).

One of the author's major contributions is to update Marxist ideas, rather than ideology, showing their relevance both theoretically and as more accurate descriptions of conditions under late capitalism or neoliberalism. In fact, such critical analyses are more important and relevant than ever before given the expansion of capitalist co-optation and invasion into even more spheres of life than in Marx's times. Gilman-Opalsky points out that globalisation is still based on the old city power centres around the world. In this sense, globalisation is a thinly veiled exercise aiming to further modern forms of neo-colonialism. More so, this is a 'privatized' globalisation, as he points out, where national governments have voluntarily privatised almost all of their functions leaving them as hollow 'straw men' for the elite to rail against, an ironic sight indeed since governments, having been co-opted long ago, are no more than political expressions of capital. He points out this contradiction where so-called liberals (basically the bourgeoisie) accuse the capitalist state of being Marxist.

Furthermore, Gilman-Opalsky observes that this transformation includes an insidious 'colonization' of our minds, in what is termed 'informationalism'. In essence, social media and the digital age have obliterated the hard-won eight-hour workday. Now, *via* email, for example, we are 'on the clock' during every waking moment regardless of our body's physical location. This is a form of disembodiment, a new capitalist transformation based, as Gilman-Opalsky claims, not on neutral technologies, but ones deliberately designed from inception to colonise both mind and time. This leads to the constant stream of the 'spectacle' discussed by Debord where time has become a continual stream of images where past, present, and future are melded into one in the service of capital accumulation.

In terms of class, Gilman-Opalsky splendidly demonstrates the difference between then and now, as well as the 'achievements' of labour over the centuries. Namely, Marx saw workers massed in brutal capitalist warehouse spaces whereas today workplaces such as those at Google hide their raw capitalist nature through soft, personalised, hipster-artist warehouse spaces. Whereas Marx saw a great divide between the proletariat and bourgeoisie, today everyone identifies as middle class even as quantitative measures of inequality have increased. Whereas discipline was external in the early industrial era, now it is internalised and regulated by decentralised networks of power and control through technology. What we now have is a divide between the less and more precarious among us, terms he considers as more accurate than traditional notions of 'class'.

Gilman-Opalsky defines precarious communists the same way most people would understand communists. The only substantive difference is that the former reject orthodox ideologies, political parties, and state socialism. In fact, he is describing anarchists, as he admits (p. 66, 120). But, anarchists are utopians (good ones versus the 'bad' liberal utopians according to the author). To this end, the book makes clear that the propaganda baggage from past Left and Right sectarian ideologues is a dead end. However, he runs into a problem which he indirectly acknowledges. Namely, communists (and, or anarchists) in general are few and far between today relative to the general 'precariat' (the masses). Add the lack of organisational structure given the utopian or anarchistic nature of precarious communists and you are left wondering if change is understood solely as a random event following insurrections. If so, where is the space for *organised* agency?

However, another of Gilman-Opalsky's contributions is to separate 'communism' from communism. A rejuvenated look at Marxism and communism shows their relevance increased, rather than being relics of a forgotten dystopia. These perspectives are updated to fit an ever-changing capitalist world that the forefathers of these theories could never have envisioned, demonstrating how their critique

still applies. On pages 92-96, a list of key perspectives describes what precarious communism or autonomists are for. In the context of the book it seems that precarious communism or autonomists are anarchist Marxists. When looking at the overall approach, many on the Left will come to the surprising conclusion that they have been 'autonomists' all along without knowing it, including myself. What are precarious communists? As Gilman-Opalsky states, anarchists are communists and Marxists are also anarchist communists ... they may just not realise it as do the precarious communists or autonomists. Gilman-Opalsky concludes with the observation that almost everyone lives precariously under capitalism, including capitalists.

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Randall Amster, *Anarchism Today*

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Randall Amster teaches at Prescott College in Arizona. He has been active in the anarchist movement for many years. In *Anarchism Today*, he presents an overview of contemporary anarchist theory and practice, showing the continuing appeal and coherence of anarchist ideas. His survey of various anarchist currents, from more traditional forms of class struggle anarchism to primitivist and post-modernist approaches, is balanced and comprehensive. For the most part, he lets each perspective speak for itself, but occasionally presents some critiques of these various and sometimes opposing currents.

It is a very ecumenical approach, which has the advantage of emphasising the positive aspects of contemporary anarchism, presenting a clear picture for people unfamiliar with anarchist ideas, helping to dispel common misconceptions and to rebut more facile criticisms of anarchist ideas and movements. The book is an easy read.

Amster is generous with his quotations, with various anarchist perspectives being expressed in the words of their proponents. Occasionally, he presents muted criticisms of some contemporary anarchist currents, but generally tries to emphasise common ground rather than to focusing on sometimes divisive issues. By downplaying the differences between competing schools of anarchist thought, there is a risk that contemporary anarchism may appear to be more unified than it really is, making disputes between various currents difficult to understand, and the actions of one faction unfairly attributable to another. On the other hand,