

Five O' Clock World

*Up every mornin' just to keep a job
I gotta fight my way through the hustling mob
Sounds of the city poundin' in my brain
While another day goes down the drain*

*But it's a five o'clock world when the whistle blows
No one owns a piece of my time
And there's a five o'clock me inside my clothes
Thinkin' that the world looks fine, yeah*

*Tradin' my time for the pay I get
Livin' on money that I ain't made yet
I've been goin' tryin' to make my way
While I live for the end of the day*

*Cuz it's a five o'clock world when the whistle blows
No one owns a piece of my time, and
There's a longhaired girl who waits, I know
To ease my troubled mind, yeah*

*Oh my lady, yeah
Oh my lady, yeah*

*In the shelter of her arms everything's OK
When she talks then the world goes slippin' away
And I know the reason I can still go on
When every other reason is gone,*

*In my five o'clock world she waits for me
Nothing else matters at all
Cuz every time my baby smiles at me
I know that's it's all worthwhile,*

*Yeah oh my lady,
Yeah oh my lady, yeah...*

1.

Utopian thought replaces time with space, temporal processes with static images. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels dismiss utopian plans and visions as “fantastic pictures,” attempts to realize intellectually what could only be lived historically, to turn time into terrain. Although elsewhere Marx may have complained about industrial capitalism’s “annihilation of space by time” the utopian picture represents a fantasy recovery of space by means of the image.

The emphasis on “pictures” is of a piece with what many commentators have described as Marx’s suspicion of the graven image. Painting an overly detailed picture of a future state prior to establishing the conditions for its realization was to engage in a futile piece of fortune telling, to project a desirable conclusion to history without considering its vagaries as a process. As an image Utopia looms at the end of an implicit historical narrative, skipping over the process of social and political struggle and arriving prematurely at a redeemed and finished world.

The image had a history that long predated Marx’s targets in the projections of Fourier, Proudhon, Owens, and other 19th century theorists. In its more popular manifestations it consists of a millennial fantasy of abundance and equality. In the medieval land of Cockaigne, a landscape itself replaces necessity with readily fulfilled desires: rivers flow with wine, fish jump into the hands of waiting fisherman, and geese fly pre-roasted into the mouths of peasants. The medieval fantasy gives way to later versions like the Big Rock Candy Mountain with its topography of crystal fountains, cigarette, leaves and lemonade springs. Marx and Engels acknowledge a subversive potential in the utopian image insofar as it performs a dialectical reversal of the privileges of various masters whether bourgeois or aristocratic. In the fantasy luxuries become a common extravagance presaging a world of shared abundance and closing the gap between necessity and desire.

Their harsher criticism is reserved for serious utopian plans that replace temporal struggle with spatial planning and messy contingency with organization. Utopia becomes a model, situated either in a possible future or somewhere off to the side of history; its “pictures” are outlines, diagrams and blueprints depicting areas that clarify and separate activities. The utopia of planners is typically defined by separation of uses especially between home and workplace. This might take the form of the Garden City, the Ville Radieuse, or Brasilia, cities of the mind, inspired by a faith in pure reason. Divorced from the actual work of actual politics, they offer a way out of rather than *through* social conflict.

In some instances, utopian visions were designed less to obviate than to reinforce class differences. In his aptly titled *Bourgeois Utopias* Robert Fishman notes that during the industrial revolution, suburbs became a refuge for the rich located a distance away from the grimy workplaces of the inner city. Engels describes the spatial relationship between suburb and workplace in Manchester in *The Condition of the working Class in England* noting the various partitions defined by class, owners travelling from the leafy refuge of their homes to the tumult of the city on a daily basis while their workers live in the shadow of the same warehouses and factories where they spend their days. The suburban utopia then depends on a frame, a border cutting it off from a harder reality like Thomas Moore’s island city surrounded by yet shored up against a threatening sea.

2.

Five O' Clock World was written by Allen Reynolds, a country music songwriter and producer, and recorded by The Vogues in 1965. A love song, a complaint and a celebration of a place. it expresses, like many country songs, the frustrations, indignities and resentments of the white working class. In contrast to the 9 to 5 workday it posits another world, in the process setting up a series of contrasts between work and play, public and private, necessity and desire. The 5 O' Clock World becomes a relief from the workplace even as it depends on work for its existence.

The song starts with a yodel over a quasi-military chant --the abrupt "hut" of the drill sergeant, or the sound of a chain gang setting the rhythm of the workforce.. The verse kicks in with a complaint against the deadening boredom of factory and mill.

*Up every mornin' just to keep a job
I gotta fight my way through the hustling mob
Sounds of the city poundin' in my brain
While another day goes down the drain*

A chorus of "yeah, yeah, yeah" echoes the Beatles but adds a hint of sarcasm to their exuberance. Then a release as the verse opens up for a breath of air:

*But it's a five o'clock world when the whistle blows
No one owns a piece of my time
And there's a five o'clock me inside my clothes
Thinkin' that the world looks fine, yeah*

Fundamentally the 5 O'clock World is all interior, an unspecified domestic space that is the antithesis of the more vividly rendered workplace and by extension the city. Although its precise location is vague it clearly suggests a suburban nest. Cordoned off from the more public excruciations of labor 5 O'clock is a moment that becomes a world poised on the borderline between mechanical time and qualitative duration, a utopia of the stopped clock.

3.

Like utopia, suburbia is a matter of images. In the standard narrative, after World War II suburbs trickled down to the white lower middle and working classes. The new suburb provided an escape from the factory and the town to a drastically scaled down version of the more elaborate landscapes and homes of their employers. This was the 5 o'clock World that arrives "when the whistle blows", a moment that blooms into a world,

In that world the principle of separation remained in effect. Though there was a variety of blue collar communities, the various Levittowns across the country provided something of a standardized image. Among other things, Levittown was a

convenient symbol. of conformity. The fact was borne out by racially exclusive contracts which set off the ideal domestic space not only from the factory but from less desirable members of the working class itself. Suburban houses like the “little boxes” Malvina Reynolds satirized in her famous song. were essentially the work of assembly lines, extending factory logic to domestic life even as the homes provided a refuge from the workplace. Uniformity and unity of design created a corresponding uniformity of vision. The picture window, a common feature of the new suburban space, meant to create a view ended up framing a scene identical to the scene from which it was viewed. The living room became a camera facing another camera. an invitation to observe and to be observed, both a lens and a stage. It was ultimately a hall of mirrors further encouraged by the uniform families that appeared on TV which, as another mirror reflected the suburban family back to itself in wholesome images of leafy streets and friendly neighbors and kitchens where TV dinners were a version of ready cooked birds on the wing.

In another, later narrative the idealized vision, subject to the condescension of critics and commentators suggests a darker image, a deeper domestic space hiding sinister doings behind innocent façades: adultery in the bedroom, bodies buried in the basement or backyard and a slew of other skeletons in the closet. Popular culture from horror films to soap operas focused on an inevitable flaw at the heart of the suburban ideal. This trend represented a reaction to the earlier idealization of the domestic sphere, and the exaggerated claims of realtors, builders and other proponents of the suburban dream, a suspicion of something hidden behind the closed curtain of the picture window or outside of its frame, in corners and crannies, in spaces off to the side away from the semi-public stage of the living room.

This obscure offstage space gave birth to fantasies more or less connected to the actual actions of the inhabitants, a dark parody of the images of tinkers and hobbyists contentedly working away on home improvement projects. It's impossible to calculate the precise ratio of reality to fantasy in the suburban imaginary which tends to either idealize or demonize, oscillating between the poles of sitcom and melodrama. This very oscillation suggests an ambivalence about the suburban vision.

4.

Dawn comes soon enough for the working class.

--John Doe and Exene Cervenka

The 5 O'Clock World balances the spatial separation with a recurring set of activities and scenarios, a cycle which replaces Utopia's steady state. It is not a realm of permanent satisfaction but a place sustained by the promise of recurrence, a compromise with the powers that are simply absent from other versions. And it has a shadow in the form of the 9 to 5 workday.

In the suburban utopia, time, like space becomes segregated. In hard won battles for a number of reforms , most significantly the eight hour workday unions fought to provide workers with a temporal respite from the labor. The eight hour , nine to five day becomes the counterpart of and precondition for the 5 O'clock world. 9 to 5 establishes quantifiable limits in contrast to the 5 O'clock world which points solely to a beginning, a moment of release stretching beyond itself replacing the limited quantifiable time of the factory with an open field of possibilities. If the workday represents necessity, five o'clock initiates the beginning of an alternative reality composed of and permeated by the relief and pleasure of an extended moment. Yet the 5 O' Clock World is a paradoxical time translated into space in a wishful bid for permanence. At the same time, the workday haunts the dream of domestic life. The song itself alternates between workplace and domestic space, the first and second verse and chorus moving between a list of complaints and a celebration of leisure.

*Tradin' my time for the pay I get
Livin' on money that I ain't made yet
I've been goin' tryin' to make my way
While I live for the end of the day*

Time as commodity, broken into fragments, owned by an employer, bargained over and exchanged for a paycheck gives way to an image of leisure stretching out beyond the workplace. 5 O' Clock divides the day into sold time and free time and time becomes a question of ownership alternating between factory owner and worker. The contrast is stark. Time is subject to trade and life is built on speculation. Shelter comes in the form of a long-haired girl, a Penelope of sorts who provides a reason to survive the daily round of indignities.

*Cuz it's a five o'clock world when the whistle blows
No one owns a piece of my time, and
There's a longhaired girl who waits, I know
To ease my troubled mind, yeah*

In the end, the domestic utopia appears to get the upper hand, usurping the factory's place in the final verse, which extends the celebration of the domestic utopia into the chorus:

*In the shelter of her arms everything's OK
When she talks then the world goes slippin' away
And I know the reason I can still go on
When every other reason is gone,*

*In my five o'clock world she waits for me
Nothing else matters at all
Cuz every time my baby smiles at me
I know that's it's all worthwhile,*

Yet the free moment is bound to wind down eroding at the moment it is announced. It becomes the prelude to sleep and another day destined to “go down the drain,” as surely as the song will repeat in a DJ’s rotation. A good part of the moment’s intensity lies in the fact that it can’t be sustained. Unlike the utopias of planners, it’s persistently threatened by a clock that alternately represents labor and leisure. 5 O’Clock is a utopia both ephemeral and recurrent like Brigadoon. Its cycles are meant to reinforce each other, to maintain a temporal and financial economy. The home stands in a reciprocal relation to the factory, depending on it as both a source of income and as one half of an oscillating daily rhythm. Five o’clock is the half realized model for a fuller, fulfilled time, endlessly promised and endlessly deferred.

5.

The emergence of digital technology into everyday life threatens to replace both the 9 to 5 workday and the 5 O’clock World. The Utopian rhetoric of new technocrats focusses on a continuity of home and work. Working from home, typically on a computer has become a common practice while the workplace has become more homelike incorporating leisure space, childcare, and various conveniences into its structure. The traditional suburb may have gained its identity by virtue of a rhythm but in the new digital dispensation, the workplace is everywhere and nowhere. 5 o’clock becomes just another time of day, ever less sacrosanct as the digital world crosses the barrier between home and work. For the managerial and administrative classes as well as for clerical workers home is a scene of incursions from the workplace. The situation for blue collar suburbs is more dire as the disappearance of traditional jobs results in a mass unemployment destroying the foundation of work that underwrote the domestic utopia. This is a time without rhythm, without punctuation. A time whose movement is glacial. The monotony of opioid addiction creates a floating world, empty of expectations. The suburb becomes less a refuge from work than the reminder of its absence, a mark of redundancy, a space of neglect and pointless monotony. Utopia in its most literal sense: a nowhere.

6.

On May 19, 1995, the following information appeared in The New York Times:

A man stole a 63-ton military tank from a National Guard armory here and used it to rampage through neighborhoods, flattening utility poles, fire hydrants and cars before getting stuck on a road divider. Police officers fatally shot the man as he tried to get the tank moving.

The man’s name was Shawn Nelson an unemployed plumber living in suburban San Diego. Following his death, details of Nelson’s life came to light including a divorce, the threat of losing his home and a variety of medical issues. The most

unusual detail of Nelson's story involved a 19-foot hole in his backyard, a mine Nelson excavated in a futile search for gold. One of his friends referred to the mine as "Shawn's hobby".

Garrett Scott's film, *Cul-de-Sac: A Suburban War Story*, documents the event and its aftermath, in interviews with friends and other people who knew Nelson many of whom endured similar indignities including unemployment, foreclosure and drug addiction. Aside from Nelson's rampage his neighbors describe his mine as a very serious operation, a testament to his ingenuity and his desperation. Estimates of the depth of the mine vary. One man suggests 14 feet, another 25. A woman seemingly addled by drugs describes a moment when she accompanied Nelson into his mine. Anticipating geological strata, she goads him on. "Why don't you keep going. she says "I wanna' see time."

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