The utopian example of the Shakers

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COMMUNITY, TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN

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Introduction; Origins of Shakerism; Shaker life; Shaker industries; Shaker inventiveness; The Shaker environment; The Shaker contribution to communitarianism; Utopia or dystopia? The decline of Shakerism; References; Appendix of Millenial Laws relating to environmental design.

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine a practically self-sufficient rural commune of some sixty or seventy men and women. The communards share everything in common and live as one 'family' in a large communal building. They practise an enlightened, productive, organic agriculture and horticulture, and manufacture a variety of craft products at a relaxed pace in their own workshops. Originally designed and made for the communards' own use, these craft products are of such renowned quality that they now find a ready and extensive market. The communards also market bottled fruits and preserves, medicinal herbs and garden seeds.

Imagine some five or six of these 'families' clustered together into a village of perhaps three hundred people. The village is a model of cleanliness, order and calm. Its barns, workshops and communal 'family houses' are designed and built by the village communards in a simple, functional but elegant style. The villagers share a common philosophy, believing that they should strive to make the earth more nearly perfect, spreading their philosophy not by exhortation but by example. They are pacifists and take no part in politics or affairs of the state.

Imagine a federation of some twenty of these villages, dotted over a large territory, and comprising sixty thousand men, women and children. Each village is autonomous in its practical affairs, just as is every 'family' within a village, but all sixty thousand communards share a community of interest that ensures a sharing and caring between 'families' in time of need.

This was the achievement of the Shakers.
As well as their enlightened agriculture and superior craftsmanship, the Shaker people were technologically progressive, making numerous inventions and technical improvements that suited and promoted their chosen way of life. However, that way of life was a singular and uncompromising one. They saw themselves as the resurrected and they isolated themselves from 'the world', which they regarded as a lower order of existence; they were already half way to Paradise. They practised the strictest celibacy; men and women were regarded and treated as each others' equals, but lived very separate lives. They submitted to their own laws which prescribed the minutest details of their lives, and to an omnipotent, self-perpetuating ruling 'ministry'.

The Shaker movement reached a peak around the middle of the nineteenth century, in the United States of America, its villages scattered from Maine to Kentucky. From obscure origins, it rose to its maximum of some 6000 members, and then declined; but still survives as a handful of old ladies, nearly two hundred years after its first community was established. It remains the largest, most successful and, to many, the most fascinating of the experiments in communitarian socialism that blossomed in the nineteenth century.

Shakerism retains a fascination for us today, I think, for what we can learn of its attitudes to technology and the environment. Many aspects of its communities reflect the rhetoric of modern alternative technology or 'biotechnic' communities. Also, and in particular, the Shakers designed and created a range of uniquely identifiable artifacts that embodied and sustained their highly principled life-style.

It is this latter aspect that I would like especially to try to draw out from the Shaker experiment. Today, the alternative technology movement recognizes that technology is a 'language of social action', that the neutrality of technology is a 'myth',
and that the 'ideology of industrialization' dominates socio-technical development (Dickson, 1974). Dickson's analysis of technology as a social institution leads to the view that technology both creates and constrains the possibilities of social action. Technology therefore cannot be regarded as politically neutral; it is a manifestation of social value systems. So alternative communities and alternative technologies have to be formed together, with, it seems to me, design as the vital mediating process.

In this paper I shall try to explore, through the historical utopian example of the Shakers, how technology and community interact in an idealised relationship, and how that interaction is both reflected in and influenced by the design process. The Shakers offer a particularly good example in that they founded a relatively large number of ideal, communitarian societies and developed complementary attitudes to technology and design.
ORIGINS OF SHAKERISM

The religious sect of the Shakers originated in England but was transplanted to, and blossomed in, America. To all intents and purposes it can be regarded as an American movement - the great majority of converts being Americans.

Shakerism began as an off-shoot of the Quakers, influenced by millenial views of the French Camisards who came to England in the eighteenth century to escape religious persecution. Bodily trembling during worship earned them the name 'Shaking Quakers', hence 'Shakers'. The leading Shaker was Ann Lee, a Manchester blacksmith's daughter born in 1736. She was (reluctantly) married to another blacksmith, and her four children died in infancy after difficult deliveries. Her distressing experiences seem to have been at least partly accountable for her later renunciation of 'cohabitation of the sexes'. The Shaker desire for cleanliness, neatness and order has also been attributed to Ann Lee's reaction to her origins in a Toad Lane slum.

In the early 1770s the Shakers were being persecuted for their strange views - denunciation of 'worldliness', criticism of the established church for 'condoning' marriage, condemnation of lust, prophesying the end of the world - and strange practices - fams, trances, speaking in tongues, singing and shouting, and shaking. In 1773 Ann was imprisoned for 'disturbing the Sabbath'. In prison she had a vision of Christ and 'a full and clear view of the mystery of iniquity, of the root and foundation of human depravity, and of the very act of transgression committed by the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden.' On her release she called herself 'Ann the Word', believing that Christ spoke with and through her, and she became 'Mother Ann', the leader of the Shakers.
Ann believed that she was Christ, a female version. On this dualism of Christ rested the Shakers' belief in equality of the sexes. Their general belief in the reincarnation of Christ gave them their full name: The Millenial Church of the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing.

In response to more visions, and the continuing persecution, Ann decided to lead her followers to America. She and eight others (six men and two women) sailed in 1774, from Liverpool to New York.

Two years later they had established themselves as a small pioneering community at Niskeyuna, New York. Ann had visions of many people joining them, and the group began to prepare for this. In 1779 their first converts came from the Baptist 'revival', a reawakening of religious fervour.

The Shakers believed that they were the resurrected, 'risen with Christ'. Since 'in resurrection, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven' (Matthew, 22,30) they renounced the 'marriage of the flesh', in order to be 'married to Christ'. Like the early Christian church they began to practise communism.

Ann Lee died in 1784 and was at first succeeded by one of her English disciples James Whittaker. He died only three years later and was succeeded by Joseph Meacham, who appointed Lucy Wright as co-leader 'in the female line' and thus established the practice of there always being a balance of the sexes in the Shaker government. These two, but especially Meacham, then went on to establish the principle features and laws of Shaker communism. They soon decided that the Shakers should separate themselves as completely as possible from 'the world'. The practices of the world, such as marriage and private property, were not regarded as sinful, but merely symptoms of a lower order of existence which the Shakers, in resurrection, had transcended.
Around the turn of the century, the United Society membership began to swell, largely as a result of gaining converts from the religious revivals of that time. In Kentucky, for instance, tens of thousands were flocking to religious 'camp meetings', where 'At first they were taken with an inward throbbing of the heart; then with weeping and trembling; from that to crying out in apparent agony of soul; falling down and swooning away, until every appearance of animal life was suspended, and the person appeared to be in a trance' (McNemar, 1807, quoted by Nordhoff, 1875). (How very like our own dear modern festivals!) In this revivalist atmosphere the Shakers' radical beliefs, so sincerely held, were attractive to many.
The spread of Shakerism at its peak

1. Watervliet, New York, Founded 1787
2. Mount Lebanon, NY., founded 1787
3. Hancock, Massachusetts, founded 1790
4. Harvard, Mass., founded 1791
5. Enfield, Connecticut, founded 1792
6. Tyringham, Mass., founded 1792
7. Alfred, Maine, founded 1793
8. Canterbury, New Hampshire, founded 1793
9. Enfield, N.H., founded 1793
10. Sabbathday Lake, Me., founded 1793
11. Shirley, Mass., founded 1793
12. South Union, Kentucky, founded 1811
13. Union Village, Ohio, founded 1812
14. Watervliet, O., founded 1813
15. Pleasant Hill, Ky., founded 1814
16. Whitewater, O., founded 1824
17. Groveland, NY., founded 1826
18. North Union, O., founded 1826
Between 1790 and 1810, some one dozen Shaker communities were founded, in seven States. These all adopted the basic Shaker style of government, organization and life-style. Each society was ruled by a 'ministry' of usually two Elders and two Elderesses. This ministry appointed an Elder and Elderess to each 'family' within the society, the 'deacons' and 'deaconesses' who ran the day-to-day business of a family, and the 'trustees' who handled its dealings with the world. The ministry also appointed its own successors.

Each communistic 'family' looked after its own temporal affairs, but long lists of rules and regulations covered virtually every aspect of a Believer's life. These were embodied in the Millenial Laws, which not only laid down the general principles of the organization of the Society, the duties of the elders, etc., but also such details as:

- Brethren and sisters may not shake hands together.
- All are required to rise in the morning at the signal given for that purpose.
- All should retire to rest in the fear of God, without any playing, or boisterous laughing, and lie straight.
- No one should talk while eating.
- When we kneel, all should kneel on their right knee first.
- When we clasp our hands, our right thumbs and fingers should be above our left, as uniformity is comely.

The Millenial Laws (numbering over 350) are a curious mixture of Shaker principles (such as 'Believers must not run in debt to the world'), practical rules (such as 'It is not allowable to redrill a hole in a rock while it is charged for blasting') and seeming petty nonsense (such as the injunction to 'lie straight' in bed). Many of the Laws appear to be incredibly restrictive and repressive, but they were, of course self-imposed and quite voluntarily accepted by the Shakers. The Laws should perhaps be regarded as communally-adopted guidelines (in fact, they originated in the 'way-marks' of Father Joseph Meacham) for perfect, spiritually-inspired behaviour, rather
than as more conventional laws which attempt to control anti-social behaviour or to impose the dictates of a ruling class.

Even the apparently petty-minded Millenial Laws were infused with a spiritual correctness for the Believers. Kanter (1972) comments: 'Meaning is obtained in the utopian community from the knowledge that all events within the community have a purpose in terms of the beliefs and values of the group. For the Shakers, for example, this integration of values and everyday events meant that even getting out of bed was an act infused with meaning by community dictates.'

If the Millenial Laws had had to be constantly imposed and reinforced by sanctions and punishments, as conventional laws are, then the United Society would have been divided and would have fallen. The principal 'sanction' against transgressors was self-confession to one's family Elder and Elderess: the 'Conclusion' of the Millenial Laws is that 'Whoever shall knowingly or willfully, violate or break any of the orders contained in this book, it shall be accounted as sin unto them, until it is honestly confessed, and put away in the line of order'. However, there was also the 'warring gift', which some Believers might 'receive' and which constituted a communal sanction against someone who had been behaving inappropriately. Those with the 'warring gift' would point out the miscreant, crying 'Woe!' or admonishments in the 'gift' of new tongues, and shaking. This divinely-inspired identity parade was meant to induce the transgressor's confession.

Although sharing a communal family home, and often sleeping in small dormitories only across a landing from one another, the sexes were carefully kept apart. Sexual equality was practised, but women did the 'women's work' of domestic chores, cooking, washing, etc. Each brother had a sister assigned to him 'who takes care of his clothing, mends when it is needed, looks after his washing, tells him when he requires a new garment, reproves him if he is not orderly, and keeps a general sisterly oversight over his habits and temporal needs.' (Nordhoff, 1875.)
As well as the domestic work, which was conducted on a rota of usually one-month assignments to the kitchen, laundry, etc., the sisters undertook various industries such as spinning and weaving, fruit preserving, dairy work, and participated in the herb and seed business.

Everyone, even the Ministry, was required to undertake manual work of some kind. Besides the basic agricultural work which supported each family, there were many crafts and industries carried on to produce goods not only for the Shakers' own use but also for trading with the world. Within each family, the distribution of goods and produce from the common stores was effected with rigorous equality between all members.

Whilst idleness was abhorred, the Shakers were not fanatical workers. There seems to have been a fairly relaxed pace to Shaker life, with work proceeding in 'an easy kind of rhythm' (Dixon, 1867, quoted by Andrews, 1953). According to Nordhoff (1879).

Shakers do not toil severely. They are not in haste to be rich; and they have found that for their support, economically as they live, it is not necessary to make labour painful. Many hands make light work; and where all are interested alike, they hold that labour may be made and is made a pleasure.

Kanter (1972) notes that, 'The communistic principle of "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs" was given substance in Shaker work..... Though every Shaker worked, age, sex, and ability were taken into account in the assignment of work: "each member does what amount of labour he considers right and proper, without any intervention on the part of his fellow labourers."' (Although, doubtless, as in Sir Thomas More's Utopia, 'Everyone has his eye on you, so you are practically forced to get on with your job, and make some proper use of your spare time.')
Each brother had a trade he mainly practised, but not to the exclusion of all other kinds of work. There was, of communal necessity, a constant need for the sharing of duties. A typical month's work is shown in the extract, below, from the diary of Benjamin Gates, of New Lebanon, whose trade was tailoring.

### September 1832

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S 1st</td>
<td>Helped clean out the ditches in the swamp so as to let the water on the meadow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M 3rd-8th</td>
<td>Ploughing and harrowing above the south orchard with the old horses chief part of the time, and the rest of the time drawing dung from Jones's on the flat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M 10th</td>
<td>I help finish sow the wheat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T 11th</td>
<td>Draw dung.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W 12th</td>
<td>Help clean up the tailor's shop, and gather myself in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th 13th</td>
<td>Help cut onion seed; and begin a blue jacket for Hiram Rude.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 14th</td>
<td>am. Go down to the grist mill and mend conductors; pm. Cut onion seed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S 15th</td>
<td>Work on Hiram's jacket.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M 17th</td>
<td>I work on Hiram's jacket.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T 18th</td>
<td>I finish said jacket, and do various choars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W 19th</td>
<td>I begin a blue jacket for Philip B.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th 20th and F 21st</td>
<td>I help shingle the hog pen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S 22nd</td>
<td>I finish Philip's jacket and do various choars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M 24th</td>
<td>Begin a blue jacket for Benjamin Lyon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T 25th</td>
<td>I finish said jacket.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W 26th</td>
<td>I go a butternutting with Rufus Hinkley.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th 27th</td>
<td>Began a jacket for Aaron Bill, thick blue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 28th and S 29th</td>
<td>I work at the north house, preparing hoof and horn for buttons.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Andrews, 1953).

'How a member spends his time,' suggests Kanter (1972), 'is a matter not only of community policy but also of community welfare, for every member depends on the effort of every other. Most communities, therefore, establish their own particular daily routines and assign people to jobs on the basis of community need, to ensure smooth and harmonious operation.... The Shakers instituted a routine prescribed in minute-by-minute detail, with bells ringing to signify the beginning of new activities.' The assignment of tasks, and the general management of the various Shaker industries was conducted by the family deacons and deaconesses responsible for each industry or sector of work.
Andrews (1993) gives a rather different impression of Shaker working life than the 'minute-by-minute detail' suggested by Kanter. His view is that, 'Within (the Shakers') general framework of economic organization, labour itself was relatively free and plastic: combined industry did not degenerate into a rigidly regulated system, nor did the individual's feeling of responsibility toward the group result in regimentation. On the contrary, there was recognition of native ability and individual initiative, of the satisfactions that come from diversity of occupations, and of the virtues of moderate as opposed to excessive toil.'

The general daily life of the Shakers was regular, ordered, peacefully industrious. In violent contrast were their weekly (or sometimes more frequent) religious meetings, which maintained the fervour and activity that had earned the Shakers their name. From the earliest, very anarchic assemblies, these meetings gradually became more ordered but were still notable for the ritualised dancing and marching, or 'labouring', in rows, with the Believers clapping and singing lively hymns. Often individuals would receive a 'gift' to speak in tongues or pass on messages from the spirit world, or receive the 'whirling gift'.

The following description of such a meeting is from a Shaker journal:

Meeting usually begins by singing an anthem or a hymn, then the people prepare to labour. Singers place themselves and after singing sometimes one or two songs, the singing is entirely drowned by the different exercises and the sound is like mighty thunderings. Some are stamping with all their might, and roaring out against the nasty beast and filthy whore, which has made all nations drunk with wine and her fornication. Others turning with great power and warring against the flesh, while at the same time, a number are speaking with new tongues, attended with such majestic sign and motion that it makes the powers of darkness tremble. Yea, and the good believers cry out with thankfulness to God, for the special notice of God to them. The meetings frequently continue with such like exercises for two hours without cessation....

(Source: quoted by Kanter, 1972)
Shaker dance in the Meetinghouse at New Lebanon, mid-nineteenth century
Several writers have suggested that these frenzied ceremonies provided a psychologically important release for the Shakers from the great restraint they exercised in the rest of their lives. 'Shaker ceremonies served unparalleled expressive functions,' Kanter (1972) points out. 'During the day Shakers tended to work in silence. Even meals were eaten quickly and silently.... But then during the ritual, emotion, feeling, tension, and physical energy literally exploded.'

Kanter likens these Shaker meetings to modern encounter groups. She points out the ceremonies 'promoted communion and group solidarity in a number of ways. For example, while under the influence of the spirit of the ritual, members would approach each other, state how much they loved one another, apologize for being cross or disagreeable, exchange affectionate embraces, and then resolve to let their deep love prevent disagreements and friction in the future.'

On certain occasions there would be elaborate rituals involving the Believers in marching through their lands, wearing make-believe heavenly costumes, enjoying heavenly feasts, getting merry on spiritual wine, and conversing with the spirits of departed believers, Indian chiefs, George Washington or Napoleon. Rexroth (1975) comments that 'Psychodrama is the only word we have for such activity because it is impossible to accept them as genuine hallucinations; and Shaker leaders often admitted to outsiders that they were really make-believe.'
Circular dance "The Gift of Love"
SHAKER INDUSTRIES

The Shakers achieved great success in many of their craft industries - both in terms of the quality of their products and in business terms. It has even been said that they had deliberately to curtail the success of some of their business endeavours so as to keep within their guiding principles. Their 'psychodramas' and religious idealism were matched by sound practical attitudes to business matters. They were renowned for 'sending the Devil to market' to make their transactions. 'One of the chief distinctions between Shakerism and the many short-lived communistic enterprises in the United States,' suggests Andrews (1932), 'lies in the thorough organisation of the Believers on the material side, and it is to their success in agriculture and industry as much as to their spiritual sincerity that the long life of this society must be attributed.' Each Shaker family autonomously conducted its business with the world through its deacons' office.

Shaker industries were based on their own communal requirements, in the main, but were also intended to produce a modest income. Profits were deliberately kept small, although their goods achieved high reputations and sold at relatively high prices. 'They catered...not to the frailities of human nature, but to the genuine needs of society; their goods were meant to serve some real use. The result was that the Shakers early achieved an enviable reputation for reliability and honesty, and the quality of their products was uniformly high' (Andrews, 1932).

Their religious faith and principles carried through into their industries. For instance, they held a progressive view of the roles of science and technology, which can be attributed to their belief in their own superiority, as the resurrected. They regarded their religion as a practical faith, combining 'science,
religion and inspiration'. Wingate (1880, quoted by Andrews, 1932) was told by the New Lebanon Shakers that 'science and religion, "truly so called", are one and the same.' The Shakers' efficient progressiveness came to be admired within neighbouring communities of the world. Before buying new equipment, for example, local farmers would call on the Shakers to see what they were using.

Agriculture and horticulture

The Shakers became quite large landholders, through gifts of converts' properties and also by buying neighbouring farms. (They did not allow themselves to 'invest' their money in any other way.) The agricultural basis to their self-sufficient separatism had a spiritual as well as a practical purpose. 'They consider their labour in the soil as a part of their ritual, looking upon the earth as a stained and degraded sphere, which they have been called to redeem from corruption and restore to God' (Dixon, 1867, quoted by Andrews, 1953).

Only those crops which were found suited to the local soil and climate were cultivated, thus complying with the 'natural order'. A part of the Millenial Laws 'Concerning the Order of the Natural Creation' reads:

Believers may not spend their time cultivating fruits and plants, not adapted to the climate in which they live.
2. Different species of trees, or plants may not be supported or budded upon each other, as apples upon pears, quince, etc., peaches upon cherries, or contrary wise.
3. The different species of animals should also be kept distinct, each in their own order.
4. No fowls, may be set on the eggs of the fowls of different kinds.
Plants also seem to have been treated with a care, even love, that is now weakly echoed in the 'talk to your plants' syndrome. Elder Frederick Evans told Dixon (1867), 'A tree has its wants and wishes, and a man should study them as a teacher watches a child, to see what he can do. If you love a plant, and take heed of what it likes, you will be well repaid by it. I don't know if a tree ever comes to know you; and I think it may; but I am sure it feels when you care for it and tend it; as a child does, as a woman does.'

There were also positive attitudes towards what we would now call conservation and recycling. Hayden (1976), drawing on the account of Wingate (1880) notes that 'rainwater was channeled into laundry tubs, kitchen waste was circulated to the orchards, and waste in earth closets used for compost heaps, all aspects of a sacred, closed system to redeem the land through intense, careful use'.

In line with the careful treatment of land and plants was the Shakers' gentle treatment of their animals. Also, although it seems they forbade themselves actually to watch sexual intercourse between animals, they improved their stock through careful breeding. However they allowed themselves no pets (not even the identification of animals by pet names); the Millennial Laws allowing the keeping of 'no kinds of beasts, birds, fowls or fishes merely for the sake of show or fancy.' Shaker families had varying attitudes to meat-eating. There was never an extensive amount of meat eaten in any family, but some families were deliberately vegetarian, a few even vegan.

The Church Family at New Lebanon kept the following animals in 1858:

- Oxen, 3 yoke.
- Steers, 2 yoke.
- Fatten oxen, 1 yoke.
- Fatten cows, 6 all butchered.
- Cows milch, 20.
- Young cattle, 15.
- Sheep, 80.
- Horses, 3.

(Source: Andrews, 1932.)
In the same year that family also grew, as well as vegetables, hay, barley, oats and corn on the cob, and apples, pears, quinces, cherries, currants, grapes, strawberries, plums, blackberries, whortleberries and tomatoes. Nordhoff (1875) commented that 'The Shakers have always fine and extensive vegetable gardens and orchards.' He also reports Elder Evans's view that every commune should be self-sufficient and based on agriculture, since only simple farming can hold a community together.

Herbs and seeds

We always had extensive poppy beds and early in the morning, before the sun had risen, the white-capped sisters could be seen stooping among the scarlet blossoms to slit those pods from which the petals had fallen. Again after sundown they came out with little knives to scrape off the dried juice. This crude opium was sold at a large price and its production was one of the most lucrative as well as the most picturesque of our industries. (Sister Marcia Bullard, writing in Good Housekeeping, July 1906.)

The Shakers were the first in the USA to market medicinal herbs. As with other industries, this also originated in their own requirements for self-sufficiency. Shakers did not consult the world's doctors, but had their own herbal medicinal treatments, administered by their own nursing sisters in their own hospital wards.

They started selling herbs after about 1820, and it grew into a large industry, even becoming international - shipments were made to London as late as 1905. The herbs were also imported from abroad, as well as being gathered from many States of the USA. Large areas of Shaker land were devoted to herb cultivation - 50 acres at New Lebanon alone. Andrews (1932) reports that in 1852 (around the peak time of Shaker achievements), 42000lbs of roots, herbs and barks were pressed, and 75000lbs of extracts produced.
Garden seeds were also a major Shaker industry. They were said to be the first seedspeople to package seeds in small envelopes (around 1816). They then invented machines for filling these seed-bags, and went on to do their own printing of labels, for which they also invented hand-printing machines.

At first, as well as their own seeds, some seeds were bought in and re-sold. However the Shakers ceased this practice when they thought it might put their reputation for quality, honesty and scrupulous dealing in any doubt. The seeds were often marketed by sending out travelling Shaker salesmen. 'In all parts of the country the Shaker seed wagon and the shrewd, honest, sedate but kindly Shaker Brother, who sold the seeds, were familiar, as the spring-time'

Furniture

Shaker furniture is renowned for its revolutionary functionalism, in contrast to the prevailing styles of the nineteenth century. In both furniture and architecture the Shakers preceded the functionalism of the twentieth century Modern Movement in design. They achieved this by adopting a vernacular, craft approach to the expression of their beliefs, aspirations and shared conscience.

Shaker design is distinguished by an elegant simplicity - the best interpretation of 'functionalism'. This simplicity, evident in all Shaker endeavours, they regarded as a gift of God - the 'gift to be simple' - and a constituent of their

'Tis a gift to be simple,
'Tis a gift to be free,
'Tis a gift to come down
Where you want to be,
And when you have come down
In your place just right,
It will be in the Garden
Of Love and Delight.
(Shaker hymn)
resurrected life. 'The Shaker artificer found that the simplest things, if made without error, were not only the most useful, but also the most satisfying to his conscience' (Andrews and Andrews, 1966).

Chairmaking, in particular, became another large Shaker industry. In fact it was one of the earliest Shaker industries, and (once again) they were pioneers in this occupation in America. Over the years, many thousands of Shaker chairs were sold through furniture dealers in the towns and big cities.

Andrews (1932) has described the general nature of the Shaker chair:

The prototype of the Shaker chair was the common slat-back which dated from early Colonial times. The strength and simplicity of this design appealed to the first cabinetmakers of the sect, under whose touch, however, the frequent crudities of those earlier chairs were refined and their utility greatly increased. A lightness was given to the frames without sacrificing strength, and their chrome yellow, red or natural finish gave them a charm which was heightened by the addition of woven seats in listing webbing of many colours. Because of the lightness and simple turnings of all members, even the first chairs made are readily recognizable as a Shaker product.

The chairs, and some other furniture such as beds, were often designed to anthropometric rules, and sometimes specifically to fit a Brother or Sister for whom they were particularly made. Some chairs (called 'tilting' chairs) were fitted with a Shaker invention of a ball-and-socket device in the base of the rear legs. The hemispherical ball, with its flat surface downwards, allowed the occupant to tilt and rock his chair without damaging the floor or fear of slipping.

Although Shaker furniture has its own distinctive style, it was all craft-made, and therefore each piece was individual. Andrews and Andrews (1966) suggest, 'It is hardly possible, for
Rocking chair, New Lebanon, c. 1875
Candlestand, Hancock, c. 1830
example, to find two sewing cabinets, or two trestle tables alike. There was freedom, within the limits of principle, to create new designs.'

It should be said, however, that Shaker furniture was not universally admired. Charles Dickens visited the Shaker Society at New Lebanon in 1842, and commented in his American Notes, 'Ranged against the wall were six or eight stiff, high-backed chairs, and they partook so strongly of the general grimness, that one would much rather have sat on the floor than incurred the smallest obligation to any of them.'

Other products

The Shakers had many other miscellaneous industries producing items both for their own use and for sale. For example, broom and brushmaking was widespread amongst Shaker families (the flat broom was a Shaker invention). There was also tanning, which in turn led to leatherwork industries, such as saddles, harness, etc., and boots and shoes - again often made to fit particular individuals. ('Our shoes are for comfort and made to the feet', boasts a Shaker poem.) Elegant oval boxes, made from thin maple-wood shavings, were another Shaker product.

There were many, many other goods made by Shakers - indeed, almost everything that would be required by self-sufficient, self-isolated communities: from buckles to bricks, candles to clocks, pipes to pails, sieves to spinning wheels, wagons to wire nails.
SHAKER INVENTIVENESS

I have already mentioned a few examples of the originality Shakers brought to their industrial pursuits and domestic products. There is, in fact, a long list of Shaker inventions and improvements. They have been credited with the following:

- the circular saw
- the common clothes pin
- cut nails
- an automatic spring
- a turbine water wheel
- a water wheel governor
- a screw propeller
- a rotary harrow
- a threshing machine
- a pipe machine
- a pea sheller
- a self-acting cheese press
- a butter worker
- a revolving oven
- a palm-leaf bonnet loom
- the Shaker wood stove
- metal pen-nibs
- the flat broom
- an improved windmill
- an improved washing machine
- and machines for turning broom handles, sizing broomcorn brush, filling seed bags and herb packages, printing bags and labels, cutting leather, cutting and bending machine card teeth, twisting whip handles and lashes, silk-reeling, splint-making, basket-making, box-cutting, fertilizing, and planing boards.

Shaker inventiveness ranged from the creation of significant new tools and machines to modest, but ingenious, domestic comforts such as the tilting device for chairs. Andrews (1932) comments that 'Seldom did the visitor fail to notice how farming and industrial operations were accelerated by all manner of skilful
means and devices, how the labour of the household was lightened by labour-saving machinery fashioned in the Shaker shops, and how efficiently sanitary systems had been constructed. One such visitor was Charles Nordhoff (1875), who recounts some of the minor domestic comforts he noticed in the visitors' room at New Lebanon:

As I looked out of a window, I perceived that the sash was fitted with screws, by mean of which the windows could be so secured as not to rattle in stormy weather; while the lower sash of one window was raised three or four inches, and a strip of neatly fitting plank was inserted in the opening - this allowed ventilation between the upper and lower sashes, thus preventing a direct draught, while securing fresh air.

The Shakers were consistently technically progressive, frequently being the first in a region to introduce water-power, for instance. Quoting Brother Isaac Youngs of New Lebanon, Andrews (1953) says that "he writes about "a grindstone going by water," a new stone bridge, the introduction of cast-iron stoves to replace fireplaces, a triphammer works, aqueducts to bring water into the kitchen, "a proper framed wood-house," a cast-iron bark mill, the oiling of floors, alarm clocks, a new spinning jenny, improved types of lathes, drying kilns, and wood mills, even "exertions for improvement in our language and address.""

Neal (1974) says that 'Often the Shaker craftsman took another man's invention and improved on it. For example, the Shaker washing machine that won an award at the Philadelphia Exposition in 1876 was copied and improved with the originator's consent.' She adds that 'Inventiveness as a Shaker characteristic lasted throughout the years.' In The Manifesto for March 1891, the South Union correspondent wrote:

"One of our members C. Holman has invented a rotary machine and another member Sandford Russell has a steam propeller under way and nearly ready for use. A mania has seemed to take hold of some of the Brothers for inventing and being skilful mechanics, and they are successful."
Why should the Shakers have been so enamoured of technical progress? A principal reason is that they saw themselves as superior to the world, and tended to assume that this should be reflected in their technical superiority. Father Joseph Meacham wrote, 'We are not called to be like the world, but to excell them in order, union and peace, and in good works....' The 'good works' should be 'works that are truly virtuous and useful to man, in this life', and, as always, 'superfluity' was to be shunned: 'We have a right to improve the inventions of man, so far as is useful and necessary, but not to vain glory, or anything superfluous.'

There were also some fairly practical reasons for the Shakers' pursuit of inventions and improvements. For instance, they were often engaged in activities that were not common elsewhere, and therefore needed to create and design the tools, etc. for their own particular tasks. Also their general self-reliance and isolation from the world meant that they were dependant on their own ingenuity for many items that others would seek in the market places.

However, these reasons do not seem satisfactorily to account for the Shakers' prolific ingenuity. They themselves believed that their inventions and designs were 'gifts'. White and Taylor (1905), themselves Shaker Sisters, offer a typically spiritual justification for Shaker inventiveness: 'There is no quickener to brain and hand like a heart at peace, a conscience clear and a sense bright with the joy of holy living; and thus the world is richer for many tangible proofs of the Shaker's consecrated ingenuity.' Less spiritually-inclined commentators might point out that the mixing of occupations the Shakers practised could result in the transfer of ideas from one task to another (as may have happened in the case of the circular saw as the transfer of the idea of the spinning-wheel).
Andrews (1953) seems to suggest that Shaker inventiveness was natural 'Yankee ingenuity', which is presumably the birth-right of such 'practical-minded Yankees'. Less chauvinistic commentators this time, might point to the recognition of ability and initiative that was given to individuals within (and despite) the communal order of the Shakers. Their inventiveness has also been accredited to the natural benefits of communism, by Baker (1895); 'The list of their inventions is a standing refutation of the theory that Communism would reduce production to a dead level; it shows rather, that nothing so much stimulates the inventive genius of a group as a system which enables them to reap the benefits of their own talent, and to save their own labour by whatever labour-saving devices they introduce.' Less dogmatic commentators might now add that the Shaker cultivation of the concept of inspired 'gifts' would also have helped to promote an atmosphere in which individual creativity could flourish.

Apart from a small number of exceptions, the Shakers did not patent their inventions, apparently on principle. The inventors also usually remained anonymous, although it is known that Sarah Babbitt of Harvard was the inventor of the circular saw, a double spinning-head and wire nails. At the time of her death, this creative Sister is reputed to have been experimenting with false teeth, and had already produced a wax set.

Although they were the most wide-ranging in their practical endeavours, and the most widely-renowned for the quality and good design of so many of their products, the Shakers were not, however, alone amongst nineteenth-century communitarians in their inventiveness. The Oneida Perfectionists particularly sought to be inventive, to demonstrate their superiority and uniqueness. Their inventions included a 'traveller's lunch bag', which was a kind of brief-case with built-in compartments for sandwiches, etc, a 'lazy Susan' dining-table, which had a revolving central section to save the necessity of passing dishes around, and the 'final shoe', a 'perfect design. These
may sound a little idiosyncratic, especially in relation to the practical and lasting achievements of Shaker inventiveness, but the Perfectionists did also design some practical devices—such as an animal trap, the sale of which provided a main source of their income. They also established a reputation in silk thread manufacture and in silversmithing (the latter continues at their Wallingford location today).

Nordhoff (1875) commented: 'The Oneida Perfectionists established the reputation of their silk-twist in the market by giving accurate weight and sound material; the woollen stuffs of Amana [The True Inspirationists] command a constant market, because they are well and honestly made.' But 'the Shakers have shown more skill in contriving new trades than any of the other societies.'

All this is very different to the relationship we have with technology in conventional society today. As Dickson (1974) points out, 'Few of us are in the position to devise machines to perform tasks which we have selected or defined ourselves. For the most part, we have to rely on those machines which society makes available to us.' The ubiquity of Shaker inventiveness perhaps suggests that Dickson's desire that 'the hold on innovation' should be wrested from 'the hands of a dominant social class' might indeed be fulfilled in an alternative society.
GET THE BEST MOWER

The Improved
Shakers' Maine Mower!

For
Ease of Draft,
Durability, Perfection,
And
Beauty of Execution,

has never been surpassed, if equaled. New improvements having just been made to this mower, render it more desirable than ever. Wrought and Martin Irons have been substituted for the castings that were liable to give out, which makes the machine very durable. All stopping of parts in the year and which is entirely avoided. All who wish to purchase can make no mistake in adopting this machine.

Recommendations

Having used one of the "Shakers' Maine Mowers" during the past season, I find it superior in every respect to any other I have used. It does the work very well. The mowing is clean and even, and it requires no more labor than is absolutely necessary. It is very durable, having been in use for some years, and the price paid for it was more than repaid by the work done during the last season.

The Shakers' Maine Mower that I used last year was on the farm as well as in the garden, and it was a most efficient tool.

Manufactured by the United Society of Shakers,
West Gloucester, Me.

By whom all orders will be promptly filled.

A. BRIGGS, Travelling Agent.

West Gloucester, Jan. 18__.
THE SHAKER ENVIRONMENT

One of the principal successes of the Shakers, which makes them stand out from so many of the other communitarian experiments, and which perhaps also helps to account for their relatively much greater success, was that they created their own, particular, total environment. From shoes to bonnets, each Believer was dressed in Shaker clothes, made by Shakers to Shaker design. Most of the tools and equipment they used every day were Shaker tools, making Shaker products for Shaker purposes in Shaker workshops. Their buildings were designed and made by themselves; the interiors were furnished and decorated in a unique Shaker style; the exteriors, with the gardens, orchards, roads and fences, created a unique Shaker landscape.

In contrast, members of almost all other communities, and the members of mass society today, have to live in an environment which is not of their choosing, not of their design, not of their making. Yet if the technological environment is a 'language of social action', it seems obvious that alternative societies need alternative technologies. Certainly the Shakers created their own special language of social action by creating their own special environment.

What was this environment like?

Visitors to Shaker villages usually comment on the neatness, cleanliness, order and air of quiet industriousness.

The streets are quiet, for here you have no grog shop, no beer house, no lock up;.... and every building, whatever may be its use, has something of the air of a chapel. The paint is all fresh; the planks are clean bright; the windows are all clean. A sheen is on everything; a happy quiet reigns. (Dixon, 1857.)
The Meetinghouse at Pleasant Hill
One gains the impression that there were no litter, no gates hanging, no fences broken, no paths unmended, no buildings in disrepair. Everyone was peaceful, industrious, and neatly dressed. Everything was as if new, soundly made, and in its proper place. Wingate (1880) thought that the sound construction of the buildings, for instance, 'would bring tears to the eyes of a jerry-builder.'

The buildings - many of them quite large, such as the four or five-storey family houses, the big barns and workshops - were designed and detailed in the Shakers' own crisp vernacular. And they were painted in a colour-coding system laid down in the Millenial Laws - white for the meeting house and light colours for the houses and workshops fronting the road, dark red or brown for the barns and back buildings. (Two Sections of the Millenial Laws relating to environmental design are reproduced in the Appendix.)

Interiors were also specified in the Millenial Laws - what colours for the floors and walls, and for the curtains, carpets and covers, what furniture in a room, etc. Colours and patterns were to be cool and quiet.

Reflecting the preference for plainness and subdued, uniform colours, the furnishing of Shaker rooms naturally harmonised with their white plastered walls, the reddish-yellow floors, oiled and neatly carpeted, the doors, window frames, and delicately turned wall pegs of mellow brown. No distracting elements violated the quiet simplicity of these airy, well-lighted interiors. The colours glowed softly... A spirit of peace, almost of sanctity, pervaded the scene. (Andrews, 1953.)

Nordhoff (1875) described the 'retiring rooms' (usually 4-person) thus:

Each room contains as many simple cot-beds as it has occupants, the necessary washing utensils, a small looking-glass, a stove for the winter, a table for writing, and a considerable number of chairs, which, when not in use, are suspended from pegs along the wall.

The walls were bare of pictures, 'not only because all ornament is wrong, but because frames are places where dust will lodge... neatness, order and absolute cleanliness rule everywhere.'
Men's "retiring room", Watervliet, c. 1880
The design of the Shaker environment even carried through into their dress. They wore their own particular uniform.

The dress of the men is remarkable for a very broad, stiff-brimmed, white or gray felt hat, and a long coat of light blue. The women wear gowns with many plaits in the skirt; and a singular head-dress or cap of light material, which so completely hides the hair, and so encroaches upon the face, that a stranger is at first unable to distinguish the old from the young. Out of doors they wear the deep sun-bonnet known commonly in this country as a Shaker bonnet. They do not profess to adhere to a uniform; but have adapted what they find to be a convenient style of dress, and will not change it until they find something better. (Nordhoff, 1875.)

There was even a Shaker hair style, men's being cut 'straight across the forehead and suffered to grow long behind'. The clothes were generally in subdued colours. In contrast, the 'heavenly' clothes they 'wore' in their 'psychodramas' were bright, colourful and gay with shining buckles and buttons.

In all of these aspects of the total design of their community environment, the Shakers adopted a revolutionary functionalism, a century ahead of a similar concept in the Modern Movement in design. Many of the Shakers' design principles are precise statements of the later slogans of the Modern Movement philosopher-designers. For instance:

Every force evolves a form.
Anything may, with strict propriety, be called perfect which perfectly answers the purpose for which it was designed.
Regularity is beautiful.
Beauty rests on utility.

Shakers put function, utility, regularity above all else; from these came 'beauty'. Nordhoff (1875) asked Elder Evans, if the Shakers were to build anew, would they not 'aim at some architectural effect, some beauty of design?' Evans replied, 'No. The beautiful, as you call it, is absurd and abnormal. It has no business with us.' In building anew, Evans would 'take care to have more light, a more equal distribution of heat, and a more general care for protection and comfort, because these things tend to health and long life. But no beauty.'
In making the objects of their environment, the Shakers strove for the best, the soundest, craftsmanship. On this quality rested the reputation of their products in the world. It was a reflection of their beliefs; such as:

Do your work as though you had a thousand years to live, and as if you were to die tomorrow. (Ann Lee)

All work done...ought to be faithfully and well done, but plain and without superfluity. (Joseph Meacham)

Just as Shaker philosophy promoted the simple, the plain and the orderly, it repudiated 'superfluity'. A Section of the Millenial Laws begins

Fancy articles of any kind, or articles which are superfluously finished, trimmed or ornamented, are not suitable for Believers, and may not be used or purchased.

There follows a long list of proscribed items, including; silver pencils, silver tooth picks, brass knobs or handles, gay silk handkershiefs, superfluous suspenders of any kind, and 'many other articles too numerous to mention'. The Section ends: 'Believers may not in any case or circumstances, manufacture for sale, any article or articles, which are superfluously wrought, and which would have a tendency to feed the pride and vanity of man, or such as would not be admissible to use among themselves, on account of their superfluity.'

These attitudes towards design are a direct reflection of the Believers' spiritual philosophies. Andrews and Andrews (1966) argue that 'To create a new earth, to establish a society freed from sin and wordliness, they sought perfection in all their endeavours. The keys to the seeking were order, usefulness, simplicity. Shaker simplicity was a 'gift' - 'a divine call to turn away from pride and power and self to a life of the spirit.'
Merton (1966) compares this spiritualism and its manifestation in craftsmanship with the similar philosophy of William Blake (and also points out that Blake and the early Shakers were contemporaries, although having no interaction):

Neither the Shakers nor Blake would be disturbed at the thought that a work-a-day bench, cupboard, or table might also and at the same time be furniture in and for Heaven: did not Blake protest mightily at the blindness of 'single vision' which saw only the outward and material surface of reality, not its inner and spiritual 'form' and the still more spiritual 'force' from which the form proceeds?

....The Shakers believed their furniture was designed by angels - and Blake believed his ideas for poems and engravings came from heavenly spirits.

Andrews (1953) suggests that the nature of Shaker design embodies their beliefs:

Architecture and craftsmanship alike reflected such principles as union (basic uniformity of design), the equality of the sexes (balance, proportion), utilitarianism (adaptation to needs, durability), honesty (mastery of techniques), humility and simplicity (absence of pretence or adornment), purity (a sense of pure form).

....Builders and joiners, therefore, inevitably impressed their character, the Shaker character, upon their work. It has a recognizable look - not 'factory-like', as some described their buildings, not austere or 'grim', as Dickens once called their furniture, but rather like its users, dispassionate, reliable, unworldly.

The successful design process of the Shakers has been suggested as a principal reason for their general success as a communitarian experiment. Through environmental design they were constantly approaching their aspiration to create a heaven on earth. Their vision of this heavenly-earth was that it was clean, bright, crisp, healthy, orderly, spick-and-span; perhaps conceived as the opposite of the hell-on-earth slums Mother Ann had experienced in Manchester.
Other nineteenth-century communitarians tended either to regard environmental design as unimportant, or else to have pre-planned utopian designs which they sought to impose on themselves. In contrast, says Hayden (1976) the Shakers 'probed the perceptual questions which link social behaviour and environmental design.' And 'the Shakers were acutely sensitive to the effects of the physical environment on the life of their communities. They wished buildings to house their activities and display them accurately to members and the world at large....'

There was a consistent emphasis on regular alignment and orthogonal order in the Shaker environment. Buildings were rectangular and placed on similar alignments to one another. (The magnificent Round Barn at Hancock being a striking exception). In dwelling and meeting houses a formal symmetry both reflected and imposed the separation of the sexes. Chimney flues from Shaker wood stoves jack-knifed through right-angled routes across the ceiling to their exit walls. The Believers' own behaviour was similarly constrained by the Millenial Laws: not only were they to 'lie straight' in bed, but also 'it is not orderly to cut up the dooryards into little cross paths, ....all should keep on the [right-angled] walks.'

If all this again begins to sound petty-fogging, we should remember that there was always a grander vision held by the Shakers. Hayden (1976) also reminds us that, in contrast with the prevailing social norms, 'The basic principles of Shaker community planning opposed economic exploitation and the despoliation of nature, advocating careful use of land and economical planning of buildings in order to provide essentials for all.'
MEET I NO-HOUSE AT MOUNT LEBANON.

SHAKER DWELLING—MOUNT LEBANON.

MEETING-HOUSE AT MOUNT LEBANON.
Within the uniformity of the Shaker environment, the individual member was respected and treated as such, and his particular uniform was just that - made for him, not standard issue. Every member was thus aware of his personal identity and of his commitment to the community. 'Social control was thus achieved through careful articulation of personal identity, a synthesis quite at odds with modern bureaucratic control and anonymity,' Hayden suggests. In contrast to one-off communities, the Shakers' ability to recreate their own special environment at different locations is regarded by Hayden as a particular strength; it is 'the critical test for any communal group which claims to have a strategy for social, rather than personal, reform'.

The Shakers' ability to produce a satisfactory environment, wherever they chose, provides the ultimate proof of their full mastery of the design process...... The Shaker process and buildings appear to represent pure discipline. But in the closed system of Shaker life, every physical design made possible a responsive, opposite spiritual action. To appreciate the straight chairs, one must know the whirling dances. To understand the rigid alignment of buildings, one must envision members marching through their orchards or rolling woodlands singing of a procession in their Heavenly City... despite its complexity, the Shakers' closed system was not unique, but replicable. It could be recreated anywhere that new members gathered to form a 'living building' *. (Hayden, 1976.)

* Leap and shout ye living building,  
Christ is in his glory come,  
Cast your eyes on Mother's children,  
See what glory fills the room!  
(Shaker hymn)
THE SHAKER CONTRIBUTION TO COMMUNITARIANISM

There were, of course, many experiments in communism in nineteenth-century America (and in Europe). Their degrees of success were varied; some still survive in compromised form today. The early success of the Shakers' demonstration of the practicality of 'utopian' communities, gave inspiration to many of the other communitarian experiments. Holloway (1966) says of the Shakers that 'They were the first to show that communities could be prosperous, neat, orderly, and of long duration. Their fame spread far. Robert Owen studied first-hand reports of them in Scotland, and was thus encouraged to make his own experiments; they were visited, for advice and observation, by founders of communities throughout the nineteenth-century. They provided a solid and enduring foundation for others to build upon'.

One of these founders of other communes who visited the Shakers for advice and observation was John Humphrey Noyes, founder of the Perfectionists at Oneida, who ascribed very great meaning and relevance to the Shakers.

The example of the Shakers has demonstrated not merely that successful communism is subjectively possible, but that this nation is free enough to let it grow. Who can doubt that this demonstration was known and watched in Germany from the beginning; and that it helped the successive experiments and emigrations of the Rappites, the Zoarites and the Ebenezers?..... Then the Shaker movement with its echoes was sounding also in England, when Robert Owen undertook to convert the world to Communism.... France also had heard of Shakerism, before St Simon or Fourier began to meditate and write Socialism..... It is very doubtful whether Owenism or Fourierism would have ever existed, or if they had, whether they would have ever moved the practical American nation, if the facts of Shakerism had not existed before them and gone along with them. ' (Noyes, 1870).
As did Noyes, Engels also took Shakerism as an example that justified a more general form of communism. Engels (1845, quoted by Mang and Fischer, 1974) argued the practicability of communism was demonstrated by the success of American communal groups. Of the Shakers, he said that they were 'The first people in America, and in fact in the world, who effectively created a society based on the joint ownership of property.... These people are a strange sect, which holds curious religious opinions, do not marry and suffer absolutely no intercourse between the sexes, and so forth. However, this is irrelevant here.'

These 'curious' aspects of Shakerism were dismissed by Engels as 'irrelevant', because he was trying to be selective in his facts, to suit his philosophy. He attempted to dismiss the religious base of almost all the early communitarian societies in America, arguing that the 'most absurd and irrational views on certain subjects' that were held by these religious sects, 'have absolutely nothing to do with communism.' The religious bases of these groups he regarded as a hindrance rather than any help to communism; 'If in spite of this the community proves successful, how much easier still must it be for others which do not have such crazy ideas.'

However, it seems nowadays to be the conventional wisdom that some such 'crazy ideas' may indeed be necessary for the success of communitarian societies. As disillusioned communards split from their modern, permissive communes, they often conclude that religion, or some such discipline, is necessary to overcome the interpersonal difficulties of communal life. This view is at least a century old. Nordhoff (1875) concluded after his tour of 'The Communistic Societies of the United States':
It is asserted by some writers who theorize about communism that a commune cannot exist long without some fanatical religious thought as its cementing force; while others assert with equal positiveness that it is possible to maintain a commune in which the members shall have diverse and diverging beliefs in religious matters. It seems to me that both these theories are wrong; but that it is true that a commune to exist harmoniously, must be composed of persons who are of one mind upon some question which to them shall appear so important as to take the place of a religion, if it is not essentially religious, though it need not be fanatically held.

Nordhoff's perception in these matters is perhaps evidenced by his comment that 'the Germans make better communists than any other people - unless the Chinese should some day turn their attention to communistic attempts.'

The Shakers certainly had a 'fanatical religious thought' as their 'cementing force', and this resulted in there being aspects of Shakerism that now must be acknowledged as being negative contributions to the history of communitarianism. Holloway (1966) refers to the 'heavy sacrifices' Shakers made in terms of their suppression of natural sexual impulses, their restrictions upon personal liberty, and their authoritarian style of government. Yet he adds that their positive contributions to the communal ideal were important:

Almost alone among such societies, they produced skilled craftsmanship and a folk art of their own. Their insistence on absolute equality between men and women was revolutionary. So also was their tolerance of race and colour - for they were the only people of their time to include both Jews and Negroes in their settlements. They fought slavery, war, and the worst aspects of society at that time, not by pleading with a world in which their voices would have been lost, but by offering what they considered to be a model of the good life.
UTOPIA OR DYSTOPIA?

There were many aspects of Shaker life that we would find unattractive today. We no doubt sympathise with the retired Shaker who, after forty years' experience of Shakerism, commented that it was 'like boarding school with no vacations...no ending of the term' (Briggs, 1920).

From a modern perspective, Shaker society is a confusing paradox of utopian and dystopian elements. In their viable, self-sufficient rural communes, practising a mixture of craftwork with a progressive technical ingenuity and ecologically-sound agriculture and horticulture, the Shakers offer a model of an alternative technology life-style. In contrast, their hierarchical, paternalistic government, repressive separation of the sexes and total celibacy, extensive rules and regulations controlling the minutest details of personal activity offer a dystopian vision of everything abhorrent to the modern communard.

As a whole, Shaker society does not conform to modern stereotypes of either utopia or dystopia. The attached Table (pages 47-49) shows that Shaker society included aspects of both, if we use the utopian/dystopian stereotypes derived by Sargent (1972) from current science fiction.

The question facing us is whether the various aspects of the Shakers' model society are indivisible. Could a viable community be created out of the 'utopian' aspects, leaving aside the 'dystopian' ones? If we take Nordhoff's advice (whilst avoiding the gross selectivity and anti-religious bias of Engels) it seems that we need not assume that utopian communities must adopt a fanaticism such as would lead to the negative features we find in Shaker life.

It should not be overlooked, however, that from the Shakers' contemporary perspective the 'dystopian' aspects of their life might well have seemed less significant than they do from a modern perspective. Apart from Dickens, visitors to Shaker communities usually reported favourably. We should also remember that the Shakers offered a genuine alternative to the common people of the time. A visitor to the Shakers at Niskeyuna in 1843,
A.J. Macdonald, made the following comparison of the living standards of Shaker mechanics and agriculturists with those of their counterparts in the world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shaker Mechanics</th>
<th>World's Mechanics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No fear of want</strong> (Sincere Shakers)</td>
<td><strong>General fear of Want</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean and healthy Workshops in the Country</td>
<td>Dirty and unhealthy in a City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular meals of the very best kind of wholesome food</td>
<td>Generally regular but not equal in quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean and good clothing never ragged</td>
<td>Inferior in Cleanliness, and especially in healthiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean beds and Bedrooms - with temperature regulated according to the weather</td>
<td>In sickness wages stopped, cost of medical attendance and nursing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attention in sickness</strong></td>
<td><strong>World's Agriculturists</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shaker Agriculturists</th>
<th>World's Agriculturists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The same advantages as the Mechanics with the addition of:</td>
<td>Inferior Cattle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior Cattle of all kinds</td>
<td>Inferior tools and accommodation for repairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good tools always kept in repair</td>
<td>Inferior teams, unclean fields, and especially gardens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good teams, good seeds, clean fields, and gardens, and generally superior crops</td>
<td>(Source: Andrews, 1953.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From some of the 'dystopian' aspects of their society, it might also be assumed that Shakers were frustrated neurotics, but Holloway (1966) suggests that the evidence of their work gives a contrary impression. In contrast with Shaker craftsmanship, he says, it is in 'the tortured furniture, the gaudy and tawdry trappings, and the grotesque upholstery of the "world" at the same period that we can see the products of frustration and neurosis.' And he adds a tempering note to our perception of Shaker life-style.

At first sight, it seems a spartan and even a stultifying life; but it is worth remembering that the rules and regulations of any society seem more fierce on paper than they do in practice, when they are not always observed absolutely to the letter. It is also worth remembering that membership...was voluntary and could be renounced...at any time. We should assume, therefore, that the Shakers were unhappy because they were subject to restrictions and repressions that might seem to us to be unbearable. The facts of Shaker craftsmanship alone, deny unhappiness. No one who was frustrated, repressed, discontented, or ill-adjusted to life could have produced such simple and eloquent work, which breathes the air of tranquility and fulfilment.
## Modern stereotypes of utopia and dystopia (after Sargent, 1972) compared with Shaker society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>UTOPIAS</th>
<th>DYSTOPIAS</th>
<th>SHAKERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conformity and non-conformity</td>
<td>Non-conformity is stressed (often within a larger conformist framework). Individual differences are recognized and encouraged.</td>
<td>Probably the most obvious characteristic is the emphasis on conformity.</td>
<td>Conformity stressed, but individuality acknowledged and incorporated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions and irrationality</td>
<td>Emotions are generally treated as important but within a larger, strongly rationalistic milieu.</td>
<td>Ambivalent. Some strongly emphasize man's rational side; others, his irrational side. Both controlled or manipulated.</td>
<td>Emotion absent in day-to-day life, but cathartic releases in frequent ritualised ceremonies. Rationality predominates in practical affairs, but within overall religious framework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value system</td>
<td>Only generalization is efficiency.</td>
<td>Only generalization is efficiency.</td>
<td>Technical efficiency within over-riding moral and religious precepts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>Usually stressed; no economic differences. Usually some status differences - high status usually goes to intellectuals.</td>
<td>Usually a rigid caste or class system.</td>
<td>Complete equality except for the status of the few ruling elders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious system</td>
<td>Religion usually gone.</td>
<td>Rare, but usually government controlled or controls government.</td>
<td>Beliefs peculiar to the sect, including themselves as separate from 'the world'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational system</td>
<td>Rarely discussed. Usually very free.</td>
<td>Rigidly controlled.</td>
<td>Moderate amount of schooling, with practical emphasis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family system</td>
<td>Varies widely with tendency toward community responsibility for children.</td>
<td>No generalization possible.</td>
<td>No marriage or other family relationships. Everyone a member of a communal 'family'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspect</td>
<td>UTOPIAS</td>
<td>DYSTOPIAS</td>
<td>SHAKERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual relations</td>
<td>Varies widely with strong tendency to promiscuity.</td>
<td>General promiscuity encouraged, but with a minority emphasizing sexual control.</td>
<td>Celibacy. General separation of the sexes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illness</td>
<td>None.</td>
<td>Generally not discussed.</td>
<td>Reputation for long life. Own medical and nursing practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Voluntary euthanasia often available. Death rarely stressed. Ambivalence.</td>
<td>Voluntary euthanasia often stressed. Rituals only rarely.</td>
<td>Belief in spiritual contact with the dead, but death itself seems to have been unexceptionally treated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime and punishment</td>
<td>Almost non-existent.</td>
<td>There is little crime in dystopias, but what there is is treated harshly.</td>
<td>No reports of crime or punishment as such. Confessions of sins to the elders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science and technology</td>
<td>Surprisingly there is little discussion of science and technology even though there are innumerable new machines easing life.</td>
<td>Rather similar to the utopias. Much change but little discussed.</td>
<td>Technically progressive. 'Science and religion are one and the same'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation and</td>
<td>Although most of the utopias are leisure-based, the writers seem to assume that almost all varieties of entertainment have already been invented.</td>
<td>Little.</td>
<td>Virtually none, except religious meetings and 'psychodramas'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>entertainment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art and aesthetics</td>
<td>Very important. Major part of leisure time.</td>
<td>Little.</td>
<td>Art suppressed; occasional 'inspirational' drawings. Functionalist aesthetics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspect</td>
<td>UTOPIAS</td>
<td>DYSTOPIAS</td>
<td>SHAKERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Political system | Vague. None or run by intellectual elite.                               | Dictatorship in one of many forms.                                       | Federation of communities. Within each community, a self-perpetuating ruling 'ministry' of 'elders'.
THE DECLINE OF SHAKERISM

The graph of membership of the United Society of Believers is approximately symmetrical around its peak at the mid-nineteenth century when almost 6,000 were members, in 58 families, in 18 villages. The Society had its most rapid growth in the first quarter of the nineteenth century - a period of religious revivals, and during which the Shakers offered a most practical alternative to prevailing society. No new families were founded after 1826, and there was a rapid decline in numbers after mid-century, particularly post-Civil War (1861-65).

The Civil War is often cited as a factor in the decline of the Society. Shakers were pacifists, but doubtless many of the younger ones left to go to the War. In the Kentucky societies it was a drain on resources; the Shakers supported neither side and often sheltered and fed both armies; '... they treated both sides equally as the two armies crisscrossed Kentucky. As many as 10,000 troops at one time camped on the grounds at Pleasant Hill and were fed' (Keig, 1971). The lucrative seed businesses (along trade routes to the South) of many of the northern families were ruined by the War.

The modest prosperity of the Shakers was also undermined by mismanagement of their economic affairs (e.g. in land dealings) by the unworldly Shaker managers. And all who left Shaker society (although they mostly joined with very little) were recompensed, so that the world would have no claim against the Society.

Perhaps most important, post-Civil War there was a different age dawning in America. Religion declined, there was rapid industrialisation, a social emphasised on private enterprise and individualism; whilst the Shakers offered the complete opposite, taking radical, extreme views, counter to the prevailing social norms. They were 'Largely self-sufficient, abjuring the profit motive, dependent on a handicraft economy, ...the product of an age that was passing.' Whilst for the mass of society, 'Not in personal salvation and perfection was utopia to be sought, but in personal advancement are the opportunities
presented by cheap western lands, rich natural resources, the railroads, factories and beckoning machines' (Andrews, 1953).

The Shakers relied on recruitment; their celibacy rule meant that they did not regenerate themselves. Although they offered a free orphanage to the world's children, they put no compulsion on the children to stay once they matured. You either had 'the gift' to join, or you did not. The vast majority of the children found they did not have the gift, and left as soon as they had learnt a trade from their Shaker foster parents. This free orphanage facility, with no return on the Shakers' investment in bringing up the children, was also a drain on the Society's resources.

The Society has very gradually, but inexorably, declined towards extinction. In 1930, there were about 200 Believers; in 1940, 100; in 1950, 50; by 1960, some two-dozen remained. Today, perhaps a half-dozen very elderly sisters survive. Rexroth (1975), however, whilst not citing his evidence, suggests that 'there recently have been attempts to revive the society.'
REFERENCES


Engels, Friedrich, 1845, The German Burgess Roll for 1845.


Sargent, Lyman, 1972, 'Utopia and Dystopia in Contemporary Science Fiction', *The Futurist*, 6, 3, 93-98.


Millenial Laws relating to environmental design (source: Andrews, 1953).

Millenial Laws, or Gospel Statutes and Ordinances adapted to the Day of Christ's Second Appearing. Given and established in the Church for the protection thereof, by Father Joseph Meacham and Mother Lucy Wright. The presiding, Ministry and by Priest, Successor. The Ministry and Elders Recorded at New Lebanon August 7th, 1821.

Revised and re-established by the Ministry and Elders Dec. 1825.
Part II  More Particular Orders for Justification and Protection.

Section X. Orders concerning Furniture and Retiring Rooms

The following is the order in which retiring rooms should be furnished, the number of articles may be more, or less, according to the size of the room, and the number of inmates therein.

2. Bedsteads should be painted green - Comfortables should be of a modest color, not checked, striped or flowered. Blankets or Comfortables for outside spreads, should be blue and white, but not checked or striped; other kinds now in use may be worn out.

3. One rocking chair in a room is sufficient, except where the aged reside. One table, one or two stands, a lamp stand may be attached to the woodwork, if desired. One good looking glass, which ought not to exceed eighteen inches in length, and twelve in width, with a plain frame. A looking glass larger than this, ought never to be purchased by Believers. If necessary a small glass may hang in the closet, and a very small one may be kept in the public cupboard of the room.

4. Window curtains should be white, or of a blue or green shade, or some very modest color, and not red, checked, striped or flowered.

5. The carpets in one room, should be as near alike as can consistently be provided, and these the Deaconesses should provide.

6. The following books may be used, and kept in retiring rooms, viz. Bibles, Testaments, Concordances, such religious books as have been or may be published by Believers, Dictionaries, Grammars, Spelling books, and such other books as the Leading Influence deem profitable for such purposes.
But works on the sciences, (except it be moral science) such as Natural Philosophy, Natural, Civil or Profane History, Biography, Miscellany in general, Allegory etc. are not suitable to be kept in retiring rooms, where souls meet to labor: for the gifts of God.

7. No maps, Charts, and no pictures or paintings, shall ever be hung up in your dwelling rooms, shops, or Office. And no pictures or paintings set in frames, with glass before them shall ever be among you. But modest advertisements may be put up in the Trustees Office when necessary.

8. Newspapers may not be read in your retiring rooms on any condition.

9. Each room should be provided with a tin, earthen, or other safe vessel, to keep friction matches in.

10. If any person, or persons, mar, break or destroy, any article or articles of furniture in the retiring rooms, it is such an one's duty, to acknowledge the same, to the Deacons or Deaconesses, as the case may be, and if possible to repair the injury.
Part III Concerning Temporal Economy

Section IX Concerning Building, Painting, Varnishing
and the Manufacture of Articles for Sale, &c. &c.

Beadings, mouldings and cornices which are merely for fancy may not be made by Believers.

2. Odd or fanciful styles of architecture, may not be used among Believers, without the union of the Ministry.

3. The meeting house should be painted white without, and of a blueish shade within. Houses and shops, should be as near uniform in color, as consistent; but it is advisable to have shops of a little darker shade than dwelling houses.

4. Floors in dwelling houses, if stained at all, should be of a reddish yellow, and shop floors should be of a yellowish red.

5. It is unadvisable for wooden buildings, fronting the street, to be painted red, brown, or black, but they should be of a lightish hue.

6. No buildings may be painted white, save meeting houses.

7. Barns and back buildings, as wood houses, etc. if painted at all, should be of a dark hue, either red, or brown, lead color, or something of the kind, unless they front the road, or command a sightly aspect, and then they should not be of a very light color.

8. It is considered imprudent and is therefore not allowable, to paint or oil such articles as the following, viz. Cart and ox waggon bodies, or any kind of lumber waggon or sleigh boxes, sleds or sleighs, except those kept at the office for journeying; wheelbarrows, and hand cart bodies, or hand sleds for rough use, hoe handles, or fork stales, rake stales, broom or mop handles, for home use, plough beams, milking
stools, and all such articles as are exposed to very ready wear, whether for in doors or out.

9. The following articles may be painted, viz. All kinds of cart and waggon wheels and gearing. All kinds of carriages and sleighs for nice use, wheelbarrows, hand carts, and hand sleds, kept exclusively for nice use. Ox yokes and snow shovels, may be stained or oiled. The frames of cart and waggon bodies, also gates may be put together with paint, but not painted.

10. Varnish, if used in dwelling houses, may be applied only to the moveables therein, as the following, viz. Tables, stands, bureaux, cases of drawers, writing desks, or boxes, drawer faces, chests, chairs, etc. etc. Carriages kept exclusively for riding or nice use may be varnished. No ceilings, casings or mouldings, may be varnished. Oval or nice boxes may be stained reddish or yellow, but not varnished. Bannisters or hand rails in dwelling houses may be varnished.