

The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism by Hakim Bey

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Part 3

MEANWHILE, HOWEVER, WE TURN to the history of classical anarchism in the light of the TAZ concept. Before the “closure of the map,” a good deal of anti- authoritarian energy went into “escapist” communes such as Modern Times, the various Phalansteries, and so on. Interestingly, some of them were not intended to last “forever,” but only as long as the project proved fulfilling. By Socialist/Utopian standards these experiments were “failures,” and therefore we know little about them.

When escape beyond the frontier proved impossible, the era of revolutionary urban Communes began in Europe. The Communes of Paris, Lyons and Marseilles did not survive long enough to take on any characteristics of permanence, and one wonders if they were meant to. From our point of view the chief matter of fascination is the spirit of the Communes. During and after these years anarchists took up the practice of revolutionary nomadism, drifting from uprising to uprising, looking to keep alive in themselves the intensity of spirit they experienced in the moment of insurrection. In fact, certain anarchists of the Stirnerite/Nietzschean strain came to look on this activity as an end in itself, a way of always occupying an autonomous zone, the interzone which opens up in the midst or wake of war and revolution (cf. Pynchon's “zone” in Gravity's Rainbow). They declared that if any socialist revolution succeeded, they'd be the first to turn against it. Short of universal

anarchy they had no intention of ever stopping. In Russia in 1917 they greeted the free Soviets with joy: this was their goal. But as soon as the Bolsheviks betrayed the Revolution, the individualist anarchists were the first to go back on the warpath. After Kronstadt, of course, all anarchists condemned the “Soviet Union” (a contradiction in terms) and moved on in search of new insurrections.

Makhno's Ukraine and anarchist Spain were meant to have duration, and despite the exigencies of continual war both succeeded to a certain extent: not that they lasted a “long time,” but they were successfully organized and could have persisted if not for outside aggression. Therefore, from among the experiments of the inter-War period I'll concentrate instead on the madcap Republic of Fiume, which is much less well known, and was not meant to endure. Gabriele D'Annunzio, Decadent poet, artist, musician, aesthete, womanizer, pioneer daredevil aeronautist, black magician, genius and cad, emerged from World War I as a hero with a small army at his beck and command: the “Arditi.” At a loss for adventure, he decided to capture the city of Fiume from Yugoslavia and give it to Italy. After a necromantic ceremony with his mistress in a cemetery in Venice he set out to conquer Fiume, and succeeded without any trouble to speak of. But Italy turned down his generous offer; the Prime Minister called him a fool.

In a huff, D'Annunzio decided to declare independence and see how long he could get away with it. He and one of his anarchist friends wrote the Constitution, which declared music to be the central principle of the State. The Navy (made up of deserters and Milanese anarchist maritime unionists) named themselves the *Uscochi*, after the long-vanished pirates who once lived on local offshore islands and preyed on Venetian and Ottoman shipping. The modern *Uscochi* succeeded in some wild coups: several rich Italian merchant vessels suddenly gave the Republic a future: money in the coffers! Artists, bohemians, adventurers, anarchists (D'Annunzio corresponded with Malatesta), fugitives and Stateless refugees, homosexuals, military dandies (the uniform was black with pirate skull-&-crossbones—later stolen by the SS), and crank reformers of every stripe (including Buddhists, Theosophists and Vedantists) began to show up at Fiume in droves. The party never stopped. Every morning D'Annunzio read poetry and manifestos from his balcony; every evening a concert, then fireworks. This made up the entire activity of the government. Eighteen months later, when the wine and money had run out and the Italian fleet finally showed up and lobbed a few shells at the Municipal Palace, no one had the energy to resist.

D'Annunzio, like many Italian anarchists, later veered toward fascism—in fact, Mussolini (the ex-Syndicalist) himself seduced the poet along that route. By the time D'Annunzio realized his error it was too late: he was too old and sick. But Il Duce had him killed anyway—pushed off a balcony—and turned him into a “martyr.” As for Fiume, though it lacked the seriousness of the free Ukraine or Barcelona, it can probably teach us more about certain aspects of our quest. It was in some ways the last of the pirate utopias (or the only modern example)—in other ways, perhaps, it was very nearly the first modern TAZ.

I believe that if we compare Fiume with the Paris uprising of 1968 (also the Italian urban insurrections of the early seventies), as well as with the American countercultural

communes and their anarcho-New Left influences, we should notice certain similarities, such as:—the importance of aesthetic theory (cf. the Situationists)—also, what might be called “pirate economics,” living high off the surplus of social overproduction—even the popularity of colorful military uniforms—and the concept of music as revolutionary social change—and finally their shared air of impermanence, of being ready to move on, shape-shift, re-locate to other universities, mountaintops, ghettos, factories, safe houses, abandoned farms—or even other planes of reality. No one was trying to impose yet another Revolutionary Dictatorship, either at Fiume, Paris, or Millbrook. Either the world would change, or it wouldn't. Meanwhile keep on the move and live intensely.

The Munich Soviet (or “Council Republic”) of 1919 exhibited certain features of the TAZ, even though—like most revolutions—its stated goals were not exactly “temporary.” Gustav Landauer's participation as Minister of Culture along with Silvio Gesell as Minister of Economics and other anti- authoritarian and extreme libertarian socialists such as the poet/playwrights Erich M^ahsam and Ernst Toller, and Ret Marut (the novelist B. Traven), gave the Soviet a distinct anarchist flavor. Landauer, who had spent years of isolation working on his grand synthesis of Nietzsche, Proudhon, Kropotkin, Stirner, Meister Eckhardt, the radical mystics, and the Romantic volk-philosophers, knew from the start that the Soviet was doomed; he hoped only that it would last long enough to be understood. Kurt Eisner, the martyred founder of the Soviet, believed quite literally that poets and poetry should form the basis of the revolution. Plans were launched to devote a large piece of Bavaria to an experiment in anarcho-socialist economy and community. Landauer drew up proposals for a Free School system and a People's Theater. Support for the Soviet was more or less confined to the poorest working-class and bohemian neighborhoods of Munich, and to groups like the Wandervogel (the neo-Romantic youth movement), Jewish radicals (like Buber), the Expressionists, and other marginals. Thus historians dismiss it as the “Coffeehouse Republic” and belittle its significance in comparison with Marxist and Spartacist participation in Germany's post-War revolution(s). Outmaneuvered by the Communists and eventually murdered by soldiers under the influence of the occult/fascist Thule Society, Landauer deserves to be remembered as a saint. Yet even anarchists nowadays tend to misunderstand and condemn him for “selling out” to a “socialist government.” If the Soviet had lasted even a year, we would weep at the mention of its beauty—but before even the first flowers of that Spring had wilted, the geist and the spirit of poetry were crushed, and we have forgotten. Imagine what it must have been to breathe the air of a city in which the Minister of Culture has just predicted that schoolchildren will soon be memorizing the works of Walt Whitman. Ah for a time machine...

The Will to Power as Disappearance

FOUCAULT, BAUDRILLARD, ET AL. have discussed various modes of “disappearance” at great length. Here I wish to suggest that the TAZ is in some sense a tactic of disappearance. When the Theorists speak of the disappearance of the Social they mean in part the impossibility of the “Social Revolution,” and in part the impossibility of “the State”—the abyss of power, the end of the discourse of power. The anarchist question in this case

should then be: Why bother to confront a “power” which has lost all meaning and become sheer Simulation? Such confrontations will only result in dangerous and ugly spasms of violence by the emptyheaded shit-for-brains who've inherited the keys to all the armories and prisons. (Perhaps this is a crude american misunderstanding of sublime and subtle Franco-Germanic Theory. If so, fine; whoever said understanding was needed to make use of an idea?)

As I read it, disappearance seems to be a very logical radical option for our time, not at all a disaster or death for the radical project. Unlike the morbid deathfreak nihilistic interpretation of Theory, mine intends to mine it for useful strategies in the always-ongoing “revolution of everyday life”: the struggle that cannot cease even with the last failure of political or social revolution because nothing except the end of the world can bring an end to everyday life, nor to our aspirations for the good things, for the Marvelous. And as Nietzsche said, if the world could come to an end, logically it would have done so; it has not, so it does not. And so, as one of the sufis said, no matter how many draughts of forbidden wine we drink, we will carry this raging thirst into eternity.

Zerzan and Black have independently noted certain “elements of Refusal” (Zerzan's term) which perhaps can be seen as somehow symptomatic of a radical culture of disappearance, partly unconscious but partly conscious, which influences far more people than any leftist or anarchist idea. These gestures are made against institutions, and in that sense are “negative”—but each negative gesture also suggests a “positive” tactic to replace rather than merely refuse the despised institution.

For example, the negative gesture against schooling is “voluntary illiteracy.” Since I do not share the liberal worship of literacy for the sake of social ameliorization, I cannot quite share the gasps of dismay heard everywhere at this phenomenon: I sympathize with children who refuse books along with the garbage in the books. There are however positive alternatives which make use of the same energy of disappearance. Home-schooling and craft-apprenticeship, like truancy, result in an absence from the prison of school. Hacking is another form of “education” with certain features of “invisibility.”

A mass-scale negative gesture against politics consists simply of not voting. “Apathy” (i.e. a healthy boredom with the weary Spectacle) keeps over half the nation from the polls; anarchism never accomplished as much! (Nor did anarchism have anything to do with the failure of the recent Census.) Again, there are positive parallels: “networking” as an alternative to politics is practiced at many levels of society, and non-hierarchic organization has attained popularity even outside the anarchist movement, simply because it works. (ACT UP and Earth First! are two examples. Alcoholics Anonymous, oddly enough, is another.)

Refusal of Work can take the forms of absenteeism, on-job drunkenness, sabotage, and sheer inattention—but it can also give rise to new modes of rebellion: more self-employment, participation in the “black” economy and “lavoro nero,” welfare scams and other criminal options, pot farming, etc.—all more or less “invisible” activities compared to traditional leftist confrontational tactics such as the general strike.

Refusal of the Church? Well, the “negative gesture” here probably consists of...watching television. But the positive alternatives include all sorts of non-authoritarian forms of spirituality, from “unchurched” Christianity to neo-paganism. The “Free Religions” as I like to call them—small, self-created, half-serious/half-fun cults influenced by such currents as Discordianism and anarcho-Taoism—are to be found all over marginal America, and provide a growing “fourth way” outside the mainstream churches, the televangelical bigots, and New Age vapidness and consumerism. It might also be said that the chief refusal of orthodoxy consists of the construction of “private moralities” in the Nietzschean sense: the spirituality of “free spirits.”

The negative refusal of Home is “homelessness,” which most consider a form of victimization, not wishing to be forced into nomadology. But “homelessness” can in a sense be a virtue, an adventure—so it appears, at least, to the huge international movement of the squatters, our modern hobos.

The negative refusal of the Family is clearly divorce, or some other symptom of “breakdown.” The positive alternative springs from the realization that life can be happier without the nuclear family, whereupon a hundred flowers bloom—from single parentage to group marriage to erotic affinity group. The “European Project” fights a major rearguard action in defense of “Family”—oedipal misery lies at the heart of Control. Alternatives exist—but they must remain in hiding, especially since the War against Sex of the 1980's and 1990's.

What is the refusal of Art? The “negative gesture” is not to be found in the silly nihilism of an “Art Strike” or the defacing of some famous painting—it is to be seen in the almost universal glassy-eyed boredom that creeps over most people at the very mention of the word. But what would the “positive gesture” consist of? Is it possible to imagine an aesthetics that does not engage, that removes itself from History and even from the Market? or at least tends to do so? which wants to replace representation with presence? How does presence make itself felt even in (or through) representation?

“Chaos Linguistics” traces a presence which is continually disappearing from all orderings of language and meaning-systems; an elusive presence, evanescent, *latif* (“subtle,” a term in *sufi* alchemy)—the Strange Attractor around which memes accrue, chaotically forming new and spontaneous orders. Here we have an aesthetics of the borderland between chaos and order, the margin, the area of “catastrophe” where the breakdown of the system can equal enlightenment. (Note: for an explanation of “Chaos Linguistics” see Appendix A, then please read this paragraph again.)

The disappearance of the artist IS “the suppression and realization of art,” in Situationist terms. But from where do we vanish? And are we ever seen or heard of again? We go to Croatan—what's our fate? All our art consists of a goodbye note to history—“Gone To Croatan”—but where is it, and what will we do there?

First: We're not talking here about literally vanishing from the world and its future:—no escape backward in time to paleolithic “original leisure society”—no forever utopia, no backmountain hideaway, no island; also, no post-Revolutionary utopia—most likely no

Revolution at all!— also, no VONU, no anarchist Space Stations—nor do we accept a “Baudrillardian disappearance” into the silence of an ironic hyperconformity. I have no quarrel with any Rimbauds who escape Art for whatever Abyssinia they can find. But we can't build an aesthetics, even an aesthetics of disappearance, on the simple act of never coming back. By saying we're not an avant-garde and that there is no avant-garde, we've written our “Gone To Croatan”—the question then becomes, how to envision “everyday life” in Croatan? particularly if we cannot say that Croatan exists in Time (Stone Age or Post-Revolution) or Space, either as utopia or as some forgotten midwestern town or as Abyssinia? Where and when is the world of unmediated creativity? If it can exist, it does exist—but perhaps only as a sort of alternate reality which we so far have not learned to perceive. Where would we look for the seeds—the weeds cracking through our sidewalks—from this other world into our world? the clues, the right directions for searching? a finger pointing at the moon?

I believe, or would at least like to propose, that the only solution to the “suppression and realization” of Art lies in the emergence of the TAZ. I would strongly reject the criticism that the TAZ itself is “nothing but” a work of art, although it may have some of the trappings. I do suggest that the TAZ is the only possible “time” and “place” for art to happen for the sheer pleasure of creative play, and as an actual contribution to the forces which allow the TAZ to cohere and manifest.

Art in the World of Art has become a commodity; but deeper than that lies the problem of re-presentation itself, and the refusal of all mediation. In the TAZ art as a commodity will simply become impossible; it will instead be a condition of life. Mediation is harder to overcome, but the removal of all barriers between artists and “users” of art will tend toward a condition in which (as A.K. Coomaraswamy described it) “the artist is not a special sort of person, but every person is a special sort of artist.”

In sum: disappearance is not necessarily a “catastrophe”— except in the mathematical sense of “a sudden topological change.” All the positive gestures sketched here seem to involve various degrees of invisibility rather than traditional revolutionary confrontation. The “New Left” never really believed in its own existence till it saw itself on the Evening News. The New Autonomy, by contrast, will either infiltrate the media and subvert “it” from within—or else never be “seen” at all. The TAZ exists not only beyond Control but also beyond definition, beyond gazing and naming as acts of enslaving, beyond the understanding of the State, beyond the State's ability to see.

Ratholes in the Babylon of Information

THE TAZ AS A CONSCIOUS radical tactic will emerge under certain conditions:

1. Psychological liberation. That is, we must realize (make real) the moments and spaces in which freedom is not only possible but actual. We must know in what ways we are genuinely oppressed, and also in what ways we are self-repressed or ensnared in a fantasy in which ideas oppress us. WORK, for example, is a far more actual source of misery for most of us than legislative politics. Alienation is far more

dangerous for us than toothless outdated dying ideologies. Mental addiction to “ideals”—which in fact turn out to be mere projections of our resentment and sensations of victimization—will never further our project. The TAZ is not a harbinger of some pie-in-the-sky Social Utopia to which we must sacrifice our lives that our children's children may breathe a bit of free air. The TAZ must be the scene of our present autonomy, but it can only exist on the condition that we already know ourselves as free beings.

2. The counter-Net must expand. At present it reflects more abstraction than actuality. Zines and BBSs exchange information, which is part of the necessary groundwork of the TAZ, but very little of this information relates to concrete goods and services necessary for the autonomous life. We do not live in CyberSpace; to dream that we do is to fall into CyberGnosis, the false transcendence of the body. The TAZ is a physical place and we are either in it or not. All the senses must be involved. The Web is like a new sense in some ways, but it must be added to the others— the others must not be subtracted from it, as in some horrible parody of the mystic trance. Without the Web, the full realization of the TAZ-complex would be impossible. But the Web is not the end in itself. It's a weapon.
3. The apparatus of Control—the “State”—must (or so we must assume) continue to deliquesce and petrify simultaneously, must progress on its present course in which hysterical rigidity comes more and more to mask a vacuity, an abyss of power. As power “disappears,” our will to power must be disappearance.

We've already dealt with the question of whether the TAZ can be viewed “merely” as a work of art. But you will also demand to know whether it is more than a poor rat-hole in the Babylon of Information, or rather a maze of tunnels, more and more connected, but devoted only to the economic dead-end of piratical parasitism? I'll answer that I'd rather be a rat in the wall than a rat in the cage—but I'll also insist that the TAZ transcends these categories.

A world in which the TAZ succeeded in putting down roots might resemble the world envisioned by “P.M.” in his fantasy novel *bolo'bolo*. Perhaps the TAZ is a “proto-bolo.” But inasmuch as the TAZ exists now, it stands for much more than the mundanity of negativity or countercultural drop-out-ism. We've mentioned the festal aspect of the moment which is unControlled, and which adheres in spontaneous self-ordering, however brief. It is “epiphanic”—a peak experience on the social as well as individual scale.

Liberation is realized struggle—this is the essence of Nietzsche's “self-overcoming.” The present thesis might also take for a sign Nietzsche's wandering. It is the precursor of the drift, in the *Situ* sense of the *derive* and Lyotard's definition of driftwork. We can foresee a whole new geography, a kind of pilgrimage-map in which holy sites are replaced by peak experiences and TAZs: a real science of psychotopography, perhaps to be called “geo-autonomy” or “anarchomancy.”

The TAZ involves a kind of ferality, a growth from tameness to wild(er)ness, a “return” which is also a step forward. It also demands a “yoga” of chaos, a project of “higher”

orderings (of consciousness or simply of life) which are approached by “surfing the wave-front of chaos,” of complex dynamism. The TAZ is an art of life in continual rising up, wild but gentle—a seducer not a rapist, a smuggler rather than a bloody pirate, a dancer not an eschatologist.

Let us admit that we have attended parties where for one brief night a republic of gratified desires was attained. Shall we not confess that the politics of that night have more reality and force for us than those of, say, the entire U.S. Government? Some of the “parties” we've mentioned lasted for two or three years. Is this something worth imagining, worth fighting for? Let us study invisibility, webworking, psychic nomadism—and who knows what we might attain?

—Spring Equinox, 1990

Appendix A. Chaos Linguistics

NOT YET A SCIENCE but a proposition: That certain problems in linguistics might be solved by viewing language as a complex dynamical system or “Chaos field.” Of all the responses to Saussure's linguistics, two have special interest here: the first, “antilinguistics,” can be traced—in the modern period—from Rimbaud's departure for Abyssinia; to Nietzsche's “I fear that while we still have grammar we have not yet killed God”; to dada; to Korzybski's “the Map is not the Territory”; to Burroughs' cut-ups and “breakthrough in the Gray Room”; to Zerzan's attack on language itself as representation and mediation.

The second, Chomskyan Linguistics, with its belief in “universal grammar” and its tree diagrams, represents (I believe) an attempt to “save” language by discovering “hidden invariables,” much in the same way certain scientists are trying to “save” physics from the “irrationality” of quantum mechanics. Although as an anarchist Chomsky might have been expected to side with the nihilists, in fact his beautiful theory has more in common with platonism or sufism than with anarchism. Traditional metaphysics describes language as pure light shining through the colored glass of the archetypes; Chomsky speaks of “innate” grammars. Words are leaves, branches are sentences, mother tongues are limbs, language families are trunks, and the roots are in “heaven”...or the DNA. I call this “hermetalinguistics”—hermetic and metaphysical. Nihilism (or “HeavyMetalinguistics” in honor of Burroughs) seems to me to have brought language to a dead end and threatened to render it “impossible” (a great feat, but a depressing one)—while Chomsky holds out the promise and hope of a last-minute revelation, which I find equally difficult to accept. I too would like to “save” language, but without recourse to any “Spooks,” or supposed rules about God, dice, and the Universe.

Returning to Saussure, and his posthumously published notes on anagrams in Latin poetry, we find certain hints of a process which somehow escapes the sign/signifier dynamic. Saussure was confronted with the suggestion of some sort of “meta”-linguistics which happens within language rather than being imposed as a categorical imperative from “outside.” As soon as language begins to play, as in the acrostic poems he examined,

it seems to resonate with self- amplifying complexity. Saussure tried to quantify the anagrams but his figures kept running away from him (as if perhaps nonlinear equations were involved). Also, he began to find the anagrams everywhere, even in Latin prose. He began to wonder if he were hallucinating—or if anagrams were a natural unconscious process of parole. He abandoned the project.

I wonder: if enough of this sort of data were crunched through a computer, would we begin to be able to model language in terms of complex dynamical systems? Grammars then would not be “innate,” but would emerge from chaos as spontaneously evolving “higher orders,” in Prigogine's sense of “creative evolution.” Grammars could be thought of as “Strange Attractors,” like the hidden pattern which “caused” the anagrams—patterns which are “real” but have “existence” only in terms of the sub-patterns they manifest. If meaning is elusive, perhaps it is because consciousness itself, and therefore language, is fractal.

I find this theory more satisfyingly anarchistic than either anti-linguistics or Chomskyanism. It suggests that language can overcome representation and mediation, not because it is innate, but because it is chaos. It would suggest that all dadaistic experimentation (Feyerabend described his school of scientific epistemology as “anarchist dada”) in sound poetry, gesture, cut-up, beast languages, etc.—all this was aimed neither at discovering nor destroying meaning, but at creating it. Nihilism points out gloomily that language “arbitrarily” creates meaning. Chaos Linguistics happily agrees, but adds that language can overcome language, that language can create freedom out of semantic tyranny's confusion and decay.

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