

politics. Rather, it is a way to maximise autonomy and pleasure for as many people as possible, as soon as possible. TAZs have existed, and will exist in the future. Furthermore, TAZ is not the end of the line, but simply the only manifestation of radical conviviality visible today.

Bey looks back on the book as surprisingly anti-pessimistic. He suggests that the ‘hippy/punk anarchism’ underpinning TAZ is one of an array of third alternatives (to capitalism and communism) which seem to have failed or disappeared after 1989. However, he argues that TAZ as peak experience or existential condition remains important to revitalise the social. He now sees the TAZ as the last way of creating an outside, at least in the core countries.

Bey particularly criticises the Internet, and his earlier writings on this, suggesting that it has now become a commercial/surveillance network, and emphasising the need to resist mediation. He also suggests that TAZs can be periodic (e.g. camps and holidays) or permanent (e.g. communes and enclaves). There are even ‘degrees’ of TAZness in phenomena such as hobby groups. At this point, he predicts a new movement against capitalism and the simulated or spurious world of spectacle. This movement will be spontaneous and experiential, Green, possibly technophobe, spiritual or shamanistic, ‘social’, and probably based in the Fourth World. It will vary between places, and will use guerilla tactics to liberate space and time, avoiding big confrontations.

## **TAZ and the Internet**

The association of TAZ with the Internet and cyberculture has been one of the major lines of promotion of Bey’s work. For example, André Lemos termed Minitel, the French proto-Internet system, a TAZ because it is self-organising and rhizomatic. However, Bey was always hesitant about virtual applications of the TAZ idea. He argued that the counter-net, or network of dissident information,

# **Hakim Bey**

## **Articles on Hakim Bey from Ceasefire Magazine**

Andy Robinson

October 28, 2017 - November 13, 2019

cial overproduction' or 'pirate economics'. This involves extracting part of the surplus left over from consumerism and capitalism. Bey suggests that the question of land is a recurring problem for anarchy. The central question is how to separate space from control, so as to create liberated spaces.

The TAZ as a strategy is prefigured in Bey/Wilson's historical examples. These were more-or-less permanent communities of resistance established in remote or secluded geographical regions. Historical examples of TAZs include most of the cases discussed by Bey – Maroon and 'tri-racial isolate' communities, revolutionary moments like the 1919 Munich Soviet and the 1871 Paris Commune, short-lived occupations like D'Annunzio's Fiume, pirate utopias, Fourierist experiments, the Assassins of Alamut and so on.

However, modern technology makes such autonomous zones unlikely. We are now, for the first time, in a world without unmapped zones. Bey posits the TAZ as an alternative which already exists. It provides a possibility for action even when it seems hopeless. At least, one should seek to cultivate insight, love, freedom and justice within oneself and one's few close friends, to the greatest degree possible in one's context.

## **TAZ twelve years on**

In a 2003 introduction to the book *TAZ* (which is a collection of several 80s pieces), Bey looks back on *TAZ* with nostalgia, describing it as a very '80s' book, from a more erotic and romantic time. However, he also suggests that the TAZ seems the 'last and only means of creating an Outside' or space of resistance to the system. He denies that he invented the TAZ. Instead, he insists he merely gave a name to ways of maximising some conception of freedom that come naturally to those who resist.

In another later piece, Bey disavows the claim that TAZ abandons past and future to an eternal present, or replaces concrete

of substance neglected by the system. The TAZ is thus a ‘tactic of disappearance’. It is thus rather different from the confrontation typical of revolutionary politics. However, disappearance cannot simply entail ‘never coming back’. It must be possible to conceive of everyday life in a liberated zone. A TAZ provides the peak experience of insurrection without the risk of martyrdom.

There is not a specific way to create a TAZ. Rather, TAZs have been and are being created in different ways. From a strategic standpoint, Bey is not expecting an imminent explosion of anarchist culture. However, he sees TAZs as a step in this direction, prefiguring an anarchist culture in microcosm. The world might change because of a TAZ, or it might not. The focus should not be on such effects. Rather, Bey suggests that we should ‘keep on the move, and live intensely’. TAZs are connected by open information networks. They are based on indiscriminate syncretism, not exclusion.

Some TAZs are persistent, interconnected, underground nodes. A well-formed TAZ is clandestine, invisible, not represented in the media or the Spectacle, and undefinable in the system’s terms. It is therefore able to avoid being recuperated or repressed by a system which cannot see it. However, Bey does not wish for TAZs to be temporary moments of excess which quickly burn-out. Rather, they are most effective as islands in the net.

We don’t know where the process of intensity will lead – for instance, whether it will be high-tech or anarcho-primitivist. However, we can trace the direction to move in – ‘successful raids on consensus reality’, increases in abundance and intensity. Bey argues that a TAZ is more than simply a bolt-hole within the system, sustained by parasitism on it. If TAZs expand past a certain point, they become an entire alternative world, similar to that portrayed in the anarchist utopia *bolo’bolo*. TAZ is also a learning process, a growth from tameness to ferality or wildness.

Aesthetics is important in realising an effective TAZ. Economically, a TAZ might be based on what Bey calls the ‘surplus of so-

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speaking, a TAZ is a deliberately short-lived (or else precarious) spatial zone in which peak experiences and altered consciousness are realised, in a context of 'autonomy' or the absence of hierarchy. A TAZ is necessarily immediate and present, rather than an ideal which fuels sacrifice for the future.

The idea of TAZ is an attempt to exploit cracks in the power of the Spectacle. It is based on the limits of broad-brush representational practices. The possibility of TAZ is grounded in the gap between the map and the territory. A map, or other representation, is never a perfect representation of the territory. It always simplifies and leaves things out. This means that there are spaces where chaos can re-emerge. People can practice autonomy, without being represented.

Bey draws on the cyberpunk idea of 'islands in the net'. He suggests that a collapse of centralised control will lead to a proliferation of experimental communities and zones. The map is closed, but the TAZ is open, expanding along molecular lines invisible on the map. A TAZ is open because it is not 'ordered'. Even if it is planned, it is the spontaneous 'happening' which defines it. TAZ is festive, and fighting 'for the right to party' is not a parody when enjoyment is usually mediated. It is a kind of endlessly replicating, temporary revolution.

One finds spaces where TAZ's can be formed by looking for spaces and times neglected or unnoticed by the state. Bey portrays TAZs as occupying gaps in time as well as space, like medieval festivals. The conditions for TAZs are like 'strange attractors' in chaos theory, arising outside observable causality and seeming almost arbitrary. A TAZ is a place where revolution has actually happened, even if only for a short time, for a few people.

The experience of a TAZ is similar to a potlatch or a festival. It involves an experience of excess, intensity and abundance. A TAZ is a zone of peak experience and sensory intensity. Bey, following Baudrillard, argues that the system values simulation, not substance. This means that TAZs can invisibly occupy the zones

# Hakim Bey: The Temporary Autonomous Zone

*Counterculture guru Hakim Bey is best-known for his concept of TAZ – the Temporary Autonomous Zone. Previous columns have reconstructed Bey’s immanent ontology and his critiques of capitalism and the state. In this sixth of sixteen parts, Bey’s seminal idea – the TAZ – is finally examined. I also explore other types of autonomous zones found in Bey’s work, and his later theories of small-scale group formation.*

## The Temporary Autonomous Zone

Bey’s best-known concept is the *Temporary Autonomous Zone*, usually abbreviated TAZ. This concept originates in his works of the 1980s, and especially the 1991 compilation of the same name. When the pieces appearing in the book were first written, the figure of Bey was not yet associated with Wilson. Many pieces appeared as typewritten, sigil-covered leaflets on coloured paper, before being reprinted in a bewildering array of zines. Many were first collated as a book in 1985, and posted on the Internet – a process Bey claims he had ‘nothing to do with’.

Bey deliberately avoids defining the concept of TAZ, which he sees as self-explanatory when experienced in action. However, it is not a meaningless concept, but one with imaginal resonances. If someone has experienced a TAZ, they will be able to tell a TAZ from a non-TAZ. Once the phrase is lodged in someone’s mind, Bey predicts they will begin to see TAZs everywhere. Roughly

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## **Discussion**

Bey's analysis of capitalism, the state, and the Spectacle is thought-provoking and insightful. It is written with an eye to strategic responses to particular configurations of power. Counter to certain critics, I wouldn't interpret Bey as reducing the system to an imaginary construct, or a 'discourse' in a narrow sense. Rather, he is suggesting that the imaginal underpinning of the system provides the matrix for its real functioning.

The imaginal aspect of the system disrupts responses on a purely material level. It is necessary to fight at the imaginal as well as the material level to be effective. This is similar to Gramsci's view that civil society insulates the state and capital from revolution. It by no means implies that the system's violence, or its human consequences, aren't 'real', or that the system will disappear simply from not believing in it.

However, I feel Bey often places too great an emphasis on recuperation relative to repression, as a threat to social movements. He seems, therefore, to overemphasise imaginal strategies over material control of spaces, resources and so on. Especially in the post-9/11 era, repression is a very real threat. It responds in a targeted way to the danger posed to it by autonomous zones.

The idea that the state can function as an 'adversary' against which to sharpen one's claws seems naive in a control society, in which state-produced fear and anxiety have such a debilitating effect on dissent. In addition to its imaginal operation, capital and the state also rely on spatial dominance. It seems impossible to prevent this dominance without some kind of counter-power. I would analyse legalisation, and other border-conflicts with the state, as more than just recuperation – they are also means to push back the state, to create space for autonomy.

Liberal integration posits a false separation of cultures, which in fact are only tolerated or encouraged if they tacitly recognise the centrality of the consensus. Particularities and cultures are spokes in a wheel around a central hub, the dominant system. Genuine cultural autonomy and horizontal connections across cultures are forbidden.

The consensus thus sucks in energy in a death-like process. Since particularism is a source of resistance, the system offers a false form of it, devoid of insurrectionary desire. At the same time, it encourages hatred and conflict among groups, and responds to social problems with securitisation. The system provides false, packaged particularities articulated by the commodity system, whereas Bey proposes autonomous groups articulated through reciprocity and a gift economy.

Instead of multiculturalism, Bey calls for 'radical tolerance'. This is a situation of creative chaos and multiple relations among relatively equal powers, without a centre. The system's pluralism focuses on the specific object of desire – such as a particular food or dance – whereas the real issue is 'to be yourself' or to 'be free'. The possibility of autonomous desire is more important than the object of desire. The system can offer the object (conditional on conformity), but not autonomy – and this renders partial victories and reforms problematic.

Today's 'pan-capitalism' in theory permits any image, but in practice proves unable to generate anything but sameness. Images of relations other than exchange are implicitly prohibited. For example, a documentary about an indigenous group cannot convey the meaning of gift economy, although it might create 'cognitive dissonances' through things which remain unseen.

## An Introduction

Hakim Bey is a quasi-fictional anarchist theorist best known for his concept of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ). He has also formulated a type of post-left anarchist theory known as immediatism. Bey is widely regarded as a pseudonym for the writer and comparative religion specialist Peter Lamborn Wilson. The works of Bey and Wilson can be found and read for free at a number of websites. Stemming from anarchism, New Age spirituality and the 60s counterculture, Bey's work provides one of the most astute recent theories of alienation and capitalism to be found anywhere today. However his work is also extremely controversial, for reasons that will be discussed in detail in the last parts of the series.

### Who is Hakim Bey?

On one level, the relationship between Bey and Wilson is clear: they are the same person. But on another level, it is unclear. Bey may simply be a pseudonym, or an alter ego. For example, Simon Sellars argues that Hakim Bey is not just a pseudonym, but a fictional character. He cites as evidence the fictionalised biography of Bey provided in *TAZ*. Similarly, Greer suggests that Bey was originally a deliberate fiction. The identity of Wilson, Bey, and the Association for Ontological Anarchy was a closely guarded secret. When Bey appeared in a video about TAZ, he is presented in a blurred form, using psychedelic colours and patterns. In this series, I shall assume for sake of simplicity that Bey and Wilson are the same person, although there are noticeable differences in style.

The invented name 'Hakim Bey' has two probable sources. Hakim was a Fatimid caliph admired by Wilson for his heterodoxy. Bey is a common title given in the Moorish Science movement to which Wilson is loosely affiliated. Given Wilson's hostility to the Internet, connotations of 'hacking' are probably unintentional. Bey's work is described by Simon Sellars as 'a potent brew of mysticism, historical narratives, autonomous Marxist politics and French critical theory'. He explicitly sees himself as continuing the struggle waged by Situationism and Italian *autonomia*. However, he rejects the class-struggle orientation central to these traditions. Instead, he theorises revolution in terms of the achievement of altered states of consciousness, in struggle against the dominant 'Spectacular', 'consensus' or 'media trance' worldview.

In Knight's biography, Wilson is portrayed as a former hippy and drug-user who converted to Sufi Islam during a period of exile in Iran. He started out as a so-called 'white Negro' jazz fan and marijuana smoker. He was later involved with the Moorish Orthodox Church, a mainly-white splinter from the black-led Moorish Science Temple. He was also involved with the LSD-fuelled religious activities of Timothy Leary. When Leary's activities were criminalised, and with a climate of repression and the Vietnam draft hanging over his head, Wilson fled the country. He claims that he intended permanent exile. He journeyed in Bengal, Assam, Balochistan, northwest Pakistan, and Afghanistan. He eventually settled in Iran, referred to the Iranian Sufis by an Indian Sufi master. After studying with a number of masters, he became affiliated with the Maryamiyya. This was a Sufi order founded by western scholars connected to the Iranian monarchy. Wilson was editor of the sect's journal *Sophia Perennis* during the 1970s. The price for this affiliation was turning a blind eye to the abuses of the last years of the Shah's rule. (Bey later associated himself with Ali Shariati, a rebel against the Shah). At this time, Wilson also saw Islam as providing a penetrating critique of modernity. Knight suggests that photos from this period show a 'happy' Wilson, contrasting with

personality in which passion is dammed and diverted against itself. Bey seeks the destruction of the archetypal image of the cop or the cop-in-the-head (not necessarily of individual cops). Destroying this inner repressive force releases tides of passionate energy – not the negative disorder feared by authoritarians.

## American Global Hegemony

Bey also occasionally discusses global geopolitics. In 'The Information War', Bey distinguishes three kinds of conflict. Indigenous war is a 'ritual brawl', voluntary and non-hierarchical. Statist or classical war is compulsory and hierarchical. Hyperreal or 'pure' war – the kind discussed by Baudrillard – is based on images and psychological effects. Wilson portrays the founding of America as a successful conspiracy by a white male elite against Church and King.

The elite's power is founded on enterprise, including slavery and swindling, and a political system designed to perpetuate their rule. The US has defined itself as the hegemon over an illusory 'free market', acting as both CEO and 'security cop' at a global level. Overt discrimination has largely been replaced by psychological racism, or hostility to other cultures. Imaginative participation in other cultures is a way to resist psychological racism.

America has tried to avoid the problem of diversity through its melting-pot approach. But in practice, American consensus culture was English colonial culture with amnesia and frontier bluster. Multiculturalism emerged as a response to the failure of assimilation. It is designed to save the American system of social control, by allowing a small degree of cultural self-identity and tokenistic inclusion.

Minority cultures are still valued only in relation to a 'universal' culture of the dominant group. They are also 'appropriated' in the sense of being commodified, and reduced to images or 'Spectacle'.



domesticated. The underlying pictorial meaning of letters is taken to rebut the structuralist idea that writing is arbitrary.

## “Cop Culture”

The police-state logics of the contemporary state also have an imaginal element. In a 1980s piece, Bey calls for a boycott of ‘cop culture’. He argues that police TV shows encourage identification with power – which he terms a ‘police-state-of-consciousness’. Viewers are encouraged to identify as powerless victims. This victim identity plays into the grievances of identity groups. It encourages us to see the police as the mediator between criminal and victim, and between each other. This stops us identifying as chaotic heroes. The power of the police is built on the viewer’s helplessness and lack of autonomous substance.

In police dramas, if we aren’t powerless victims, we are criminals. These shows also encourage people to act as amateur cops and ‘help’ the police. While real vigilantes are threatening to the police-state, media vigilantes support it. People are turned into extensions of the state’s surveillance machinery through shows like *Crimewatch*. This process turns people into a nation of toadies sucking up to an elite of bullies. It prepares us for a messianic moment of police-state control which is at once total control and leeches of content – ‘meaningless violent spasms’ as the ‘last principle of governance’.

The signifiers involved in this phenomenon are contradictory. People ambiguously identify as victims or amateur cops, but also identify as criminals and want ‘crime’. The signifier of ‘crime’ has come to stand for unmediated desire. Hence, police shows enact a kind of inner conflict between superego and id, across an abandoned landscape of alienation.

The success of police shows is a result of popular acceptance of the Manichean worldview of the police. It plays to an inner

the ‘tired’ man of today. Bey himself tells us that he converted to orthodox Sufism in 1971. This cost him ‘seven lean years’, but also taught him a lot. He is no longer a practising Muslim, but admires Sufism for its emphasis on immediacy.

In 1979, he was forced to flee Iran due to the rise of Khomeini, and ended up back in America. Most of his better-known writings appeared after this date. The Broadsheets of Ontological Anarchism, appeared in various zines and as decorated fliers on coloured paper in the 1980s. (Zines are homemade, anarchic counterculture magazines). These were written by Bey/Wilson, but attributed to the possibly fictitious Association for Ontological Anarchy. They were compiled, with other pieces, into the book TAZ in 1991. Bey/Wilson has written around a dozen other books and a greater number of short pieces which have developed and modified his theory. None of these works are as well-known as TAZ, but many offer important contributions to understanding alienation, liberation, capitalism and autonomy.

## The Imaginal World

The central innovation of Bey/Wilson’s approach to anarchism and transformative politics is his focus on the domain of images and spirituality. Bey/Wilson suggests that a *Mundus Imaginalis* (world or images or imagination) exists. In this world, there are ‘imaginal personae’ or archetypes. This idea of an imaginal world comes from the work of comparative religion scholar Henry Corbin. ‘Imaginal’ means that something exists in the world of images and archetypes – it does not mean ‘imaginary’. For Bey (and Corbin), we can have relations with this realm. In his discussion of archetypes, he suggests there are three realms – the level of oneness of being, the imaginal level, and the material level. Myths are not authored, but fished from the imaginal realm. As in Jungian theory, Bey maintains that archetypes

express structural universals of the human condition. For this reason, 'lost' religious and indigenous traditions can often be reconstructed by interpreting them through archetypes. Such texts are not fictional, so much as polemics for imaginal initiation, which manifest a process of such initiation. Imaginal links are actual – both material and spiritual – and not simply symbols or metaphors. Bey's own writing (and the Bey persona) are in this style, a type of mythopoesis or deliberate invention of a mythical system, which channels imaginative energies through images. In one piece, Bey/Wilson advances the slogan 'all power to the imagination', which he argues it still emerging as a paradigm despite setbacks since the 1960s.

Stylistically, Bey's writings tend to be poetic and elusive, though easily comprehensible to someone who has experienced the kind of intense altered consciousness they summon. Even his longer works are composed of fragments. They are suggestive and inspirational, but not particularly difficult to read. This style is based on an ontological orientation to the imaginal realm. Discussing mystical poetry in *Scandal*, Bey/Wilson argues that insight starts with a moment of pure intuition of the unity of being. This happens at the level of the heart or spirit. It quickly begins to form into archetypal images, which the poet then arranges into organised form. This process both crystallises and memorises the intuition, integrating it into the self, and transmits it to others. The poet seeks to draw the listener towards the altered state of consciousness the poet wishes to invoke. He admits seeking to be entertaining as well as instructive. He also writes that he has little interest in dialogue, and none in disciples – seeking instead 'co-conspirators'. His style is as important as his content in conveying his ideas. He offers readers a playful, poetic style of politics in which nothing is fixed in place and everything is open to re-use. Indeed, he seems to offer his work to readers in this way – as a collection of items from which readers can borrow or steal at will. His writing style sometimes imitates William S. Burroughs' cut-up technique. Hence, something

The type of image used in modern society reflects this tendency towards meaninglessness. Writing and computer coding are based on images. However, they are reified, solidified forms of images. Computer coding is based on a very simple, binary image-system. It never escapes images, but they are buried more deeply. In *Abecedarium*, Wilson argues that writing is a form of alienation, which brings with it the state. It enables communication and therefore action at a distance. This tends to destroy earlier, direct forms of community.

However, various so-called 'pre-writing' systems, such as wampum, manage to avoid alienation. They should be renamed (and not called writing or pre-writing) to avoid implications of evolution-as-progress. Such systems belong to complex, wealthy societies which refuse the emergence of capitalism and the state.

Symbolism through images arises in non-state societies. However, writing based on abstract letters is inherently statist. States seem to require writing, along with irrigation and metallurgy, to exist. Writing is a kind of magic, or 'action-at-a-distance', which entraps people for the state. Wilson argues that Native American wampum is neither money nor writing. Instead, it operates to ward off these technologies. Colonisers turned it into money by mass-producing and counterfeiting it, cornering the market.

In *Abecedarium*, Wilson recounts the evolution of the letters of the English alphabet from hieroglyphs with pictorial resemblance to the things they represent. He portrays this process as a kind of entrapment and alienation of imaginal meaning. Letters capture the spirit of the image so it can be manipulated or worshipped. Words maintain a magical (imaginal) connection to things, but this is hidden by letters.

Nevertheless, the power of images persists beneath letters. Most images are turned back-to-front or upside-down, to conceal their image-power. A, for example, is a bull or ox – but the image of its head is turned upside-down. Originally a proud bull, it is now

the Spectacle. Capital adapted, and so will disintegrate instead of imploding.

In one essay, Bey suggests that the Evil Eye exists, in the sense of having apparent effects. It's a complex way in which humans affect each other. Westerners are especially vulnerable to the Eye, because the western social ethic is rooted in envy, and because defences are not used. Capitalism and Russian-style communism are both rooted in envy, and require it as a survival trait.

The gaze thus becomes a gaze of hate, rather than love. It is expressed around us as the panopticon (surveillance, performance management and so on). It manifests as an experience of deprivation and misery, often focused on lack of some commodity. This experience is fuelled by the ways we are represented, as lacking commodities or rights. Against envy, Bey proposes not morality ('another abstraction') but over-abundant power.

As in his other occult pieces, the claim that the Evil Eye 'exists' is not so much an ontological claim as a metaphor for a particular affect or social force – in this case, envy and lack. This in turn is a variant of the recurring theme of alienation, which is counterposed to life-force.

## Critique of Representation

Bey theorises representation as a hardened form of imagery. Capitalism, or the 'cruel instrumentality of Reason', has a flattening effect. It reduces consciousness to a 2-dimensional map. This map is viewed mechanically. Meaning is excluded, as it would disrupt mechanical order. This leads to a contemporary 'plague of meaninglessness' and a collapse of ethics. Marxism is similarly limited because it reproduces meaninglessness. The theory of meaning implied here is expressive or affective. Instrumental rationality destroys meaning because it is difficult to invest emotionally in it.

goes missing when I summarise his ideas in prosaic form – unlike some theorists, there is no substitute for reading the original.

As readers will have noticed, my own preferred writing style is direct and literal. I sometimes criticise academic writers for unnecessarily complex, poetic presentation which interferes with communication. In Bey's case, however, his style complements the substance of his work. In *Scandal*, writing as Wilson, he suggests that representational language is too easy, and says too little of importance. It activates one area of consciousness to the exclusion of others – intellect rather than intuition. Only poetry and story can speak to consciousness as a whole. Art is the language of rebirth or transformation. It is associated with open-mindedness. On the other hand, prose writing is associated with closed systems of thought. Once an idea or image acquires representational or prose forms, it tends to fixate on categories. It creates polemics, dualisms and definitions. It stops expanding perceptions. Dogmatic systems are composed of ideas, not images. If Bey/Wilson is right, then the difficulty with some poststructuralists is not their use of poetic style as such. It's the fact that the style is image-light, and seeks to frustrate readers rather than open their minds.

Despite his preference for a poetic style, Bey/Wilson has also written a number of more empirical works in a more direct style, usually under the name Wilson. These are usually histories of particular past examples of autonomous zones. These works are closer to academic style than most of Bey's works, but still rely heavily on imaginative reconstruction. They often deal with areas of history where evidence is limited. Bey's work deviates from usual norms of historical scholarship by using imagination and interpretation to fill in the gaps. Bey's renderings of past autonomous zones are perhaps best read as affective interpretations. They attempt to reconstruct the zone's lifeworld from similar autonomous affects today. Similarly, his translations of historical texts are often approximate, and include anachronistic contemporary elements.

Bey's analysis of the social world follows from his emphasis on the imaginal realm. Each group or individual lives under certain signs by which they are known, which connect the Imaginary and Real realms. Bey sees modern power as rooted in ancient forms of magic and spirituality. Money, television, writing and so on are forms of magic because they involve action at a distance. The Spectacle, or the capitalist system, is a kind of trance-state produced by forms of mediated magic or representation. Bey often explores the ancient or esoteric meanings underpinning current institutions. For instance, in his book *Abecedarium*, Bey explains the symbolism behind each letter of the alphabet. He also provides explorations around these imputed meanings. On a similar note, Bey does not wish to dispense with origins. He views origins as mythological or imaginal, rather than real. He encourages his readers to stack up or combine different origins or conceptual elements from different sources.

Bey's strategic focus on struggle on the imaginal level has led to accusations of 'lifestyle anarchism'. Usually, such accusations are anathemas thrown by opponents. However, there are exceptions. For instance, Leonard Williams sees Bey's work as exemplary of a shift in anarchism from a focus on the state to a political culture of alternative living and aesthetic practice. This practice claims to be a triumph of life over dogma. He suggests that Bey's theory avoids political and educational purpose. Instead it draws on artistic *expressivism*, emphasising themes of art, imagination, immediacy and experience. Bey's approach to all belief-systems, including anarchism, is to seek to channel their vital energy – their 'life-forces, daring, intransigence, anger, heedlessness' – while discarding their spooks, or fixed categories. This leads to an approach in which he loots or appropriates from different theories and traditions, without endorsing their foundational assumptions. Bey terms this 'cultural bricolage', or as 'thieving', or 'hunting and gathering', in an informational world. He takes, for instance, passion from revolution-

Computers are a kind of prosthesis of consciousness. They make the religious mind-body split even more acute, by reifying consciousness in technology. Virtual life encourages a false transcendence, in which people believe consciousness will become immortal as pure information.

This ideology forgets that we can't eat information. Capital seeks to transcend the body into pure spirit or information. In fact, the gnostic capital which escapes embodiment also relies on a huge exploited periphery of old-fashioned industry and agriculture, mostly in the global South. This process shows the falsity of commodities. The idea that images are wealth is a delusion caused by the Spectacle and believed by its supporters.

Bey argues that the 'gnostic dualists are wrong' – body and spirit cannot exist without each other. The rule of spirit has alienated us from the language of the body, which we scarcely even speak today. Modernity believes in rationality, unified consciousness, teleological history and so on. Public discourse pretends to be secular, and separate from religion. But in fact, religious phenomena keep resurfacing, for example in moral panics, conspiracy theories and so on. Such social phenomena channel similar energies to religion. Bey views the current system as in fact deeply religious, based on a gnostic separation of mind and body, and a particular answer to the religious problem of intensity.

Bey argues that the media's extension across the social field also creates problems for power. The media has paradoxically approached a limit of 'image-enclosure' (by analogy with the Enclosures of land). This leads to a 'crisis of the stasis of the image, and of the complete disappearance of communicativeness'.

In other words, because all images are captured by the media, images lose the ability to communicate. Everything the media says refers to itself, and lacks an external connection to an outside. This idea is derived from Baudrillard, and points to transformative strategies focused on horizontal communication and intimate media. Soviet communism failed because it failed to embrace

abstract ideas concrete, rather than emerging naturally or organically.

As technology expands in modernity, a corresponding machinic consciousness emerges. The rigid psychological repression of the unconscious in Victorian thought is based on a mind-machine model which reflects the production line. It leads to puritanism and imperialism. We are now undergoing a further paradigm shift focused on cybernetics, quantum physics, and dematerialisation. Today, the law seeks to suppress this shift (for instance, through the 'War on Drugs').

However, the system is also using the newly-recovered esoteric powers unleashed by this shift. For Bey, civilisation is a 'trance-like state' which produces a 'bad consciousness', somewhat like a bad drug trip. Hermetic powers have also been appropriated by science, the State, capitalism, and the media. For example, adverts use erotically charged symbolic imagery, intelligence services use cryptography, and money has a spiritual origin.

The power of such institutions can only be understood in terms of their recuperation or turning-aside of hermetic processes originally designed for liberation or immediacy. Such recuperation occurs by using the powers to control users, thus leaving them alienated rather than enchanted. Bey considers many forms of transformation to be alchemical. The system uses a lot of 'evil alchemy', a category which includes nuclear weapons, commodification, and acts such as 9/11. Both drug addiction and the war on drugs are 'shamanism gone bad'.

Bey theorises capitalist ideology as a variety of the gnostic ideology of disembodiment. Information theory is now producing fantasies of disembodiment worthy of Puritans or gnostics. The 'information economy' is a new mask for body-hatred. It involves revulsion against the heaviness of material production, and the ongoing replacement of organic space with machinic space to organise consciousness.

ary socialism, grace and ease from monarchism, self-overcoming or higher awareness from mysticism.

A non-standard type of self or subject is at the heart of this process. In order to perform acts of bricolage, there must be some kind of selecting self. But this is not necessarily an ego associated with a spook. The self is the Stirnerian Unique One, irreducible to categories. In Bey's work, the Unique One is associated with the higher Self of mystical and spiritual traditions. Yet Bey also suggests that the Unique One paradoxically requires the Other, as a witness or key to holism. In his approach, the ideal is that the process of bricolage is driven by desire. Bey's work is deliberately inspirational. He seeks to cause hearers or readers to reach for happiness, to purge barriers to freedom, and to open themselves to difference.

## Bey and Postanarchism

There are some who treat Bey as the first postanarchist. This is largely due to his article 'Post-Anarchism Anarchy', which arguably pioneered the term. (The title is probably a play on 'post-left anarchy', and suggests the rejection of *anarchism* as an ideology – although Bey elsewhere identifies with the term 'ontological anarchism'). Bey shares with postanarchism a simultaneous valuing of and distance from historical and leftist forms of anarchism. He also shares with the tradition an interest in poststructuralism (he clearly uses ideas drawn from Deleuze and Baudrillard).

This said, I would suggest there are important differences between a post-left anarchist position such as Bey's and the forms of postanarchism developed by academics. Postanarchists such as Saul Newman and Simon Critchley generally maintain that there is no overarching social system. They embrace a strong constructivist ontology in which there is 'no outside' of dominant cate-

gories. As a result, they orient politically to a practice of small transgressions rather than systemic ruptures. They are influenced by Laclau, Foucault and Derrida, and see power as partial and diffuse. They value reformist, non-separatist strategies. These strategies operate on the inside of a system considered to have no outside. Revolution and exodus are dismissed with a hundred labels (moralist, purist, abstract, dualistic, irrelevant to the people...) The point of post-anarchist practice is not to overthrow the system, but to subvert the self, or the authority of the text. There is thus a negative, fatalistic quality to the poetics of post-anarchism.

Bey's work, in contrast, is unapologetically opposed to a dominant system conceived largely as an external force which an actor can seek to resist or escape. Its orientation is insurrectional even when its tactics are not. A perspectival or everyday 'outside' is always available in the form of altered consciousness. Derridean and postcolonial approaches also arguably value a kind of shamanic altered consciousness. They arguably seek to attain it through the failure and dismantling of the self. They seek awareness of interdependence and holism, the self/ego as a mere appearance, and the ethical call of the whole of existence. Both Bey's and the Derridean approach are broadly pantheist, but with different affective and political consequences. Bey, like Stirner, Deleuze and Nietzsche, derives a politics of affirmation, desire, power, creativity, and ecstasy. The continuity of true Self and divinity leads to antinomianism and affirmation of life whatever form it takes. This leads to affects of euphoria, intensity and rebellion. On the other hand, Derrida and postanarchism tend to produce affects of humility and lack. They situate divinity mainly in the Other rather than the Self.

Bey's work influenced autonomous social movements, particularly in Europe and America, in the 1990s. The idea of TAZ has inspired groups such as ravers, computer hackers, squatters and countercultural activists. Events like Reclaim the Streets and Carnivals against Capital, as well as the rise of social centres and small-scale, informal political groups, are partly inspired by the idea of

sphere from human rights to economics. It seems to believe it can give up its powers and functions and yet still survive as an 'elected occupying army'. What remains are empty ceremony and the exercise of terror against the poor and different – for instance, the 'war on crime'. However, Bey speculates that the state could be used as a kind of social 'custom and right' against capital.

Bey's reaction to 9/11 in 'Crisis of Meaning' is based on the idea that meaning is already in crisis. This is not changed by '5000 murders'. Yet others thought something had changed. For instance, articles after 9/11 were arguing that advertising now seemed shameful. Wasn't it already shameful, since death and tragedy happen every day?

Bey argues against the view that any trauma or tragedy is so great that art or poetry are no longer possible. They have already survived the Holocaust, Hiroshima, and the Gulag, in spite of predictions to the contrary. Bey predicts – probably rightly – that 9/11 would quickly be sublimated into the collective unconscious, after an orgy of fear, hate, and destruction of freedoms.

In a later interview, Bey suggests that globalism has emerged stronger than ever, because it now has the enemy it had been looking for since the Soviet collapse. America is able to sustain globalism and hegemony together. People were hypnotised by the media for two or three weeks after 9/11. This produced a 'neurotic, obsessive, trance-like consciousness'. I would suggest that this kind of hypnosis is commonly repeated when tragedies or atrocities occur. It has become an important mechanism of stabilisation.

## Spectacle as Trance

Bey sees economic systems as producing, or being co-produced with, corresponding worldviews. Indigenous and agricultural systems have an organic consciousness. Civilisation emerges from ideologies, which rigidly order the world as if from outside. It makes

ture. It is the effect of a deep psychological capitulation to this world as the only alternative available. Echoing Baudrillard, Bey argues that the relationship of alienation, the ‘mirror of production’, has been replaced by a ‘vertigo of terror’.

This new phenomenon realises tendencies inherent in capitalism. Indeed, money has always been nothing but absence or debt. Most people are now in debt to de-realised finance capital, and excluded from the heaven reserved for the very few. Capital takes off into a timeless future, leaving the rest of us stuck, reliving the past. The stock market soars, but leaves zones of depletion everywhere. Such zones of depletion are both regions and groups of people. Such zones of depletion are not rescued by the system but punished.

Bey sees money as a religious phenomenon, striving to remove itself from the world of bodies to the world of spirit. Coins were initially seen as ‘liminal’ objects, existing at the intersection of the material and spiritual worlds. Whereas nomads move between spaces, money moves from time to time, obliterating space. It is based on what Bey calls the ‘sexuality of the dead’ – a type of inorganic reproduction through constant splitting.

It thus captures chaos of sorts, but a type of chaos stripped of life. It cannot deal with true complexity, reducing it to sameness. Today, the attempt to posit capitalism as the only existing world turns money into the one God. Capital increasingly needs no authority except money. It has placed itself beyond the human – beyond conservatism as much as beyond leftism.

Today (or at least in the 1990s), capital has gained primacy over the state. All states, even the US, are simply turned into mercenaries of capital. One might expect a showdown between capitalism and the State for absolute power. However, the State seems to have realised it was beaten. With money breaking free of the state, the state loses its power to claim to be providing ‘something for nothing’ – protection.

The post-Fordist state provides ‘nothing for nothing’ and its power is shattered. It has given up its protective role in every

the TAZ. According to Bey/Wilson’s unofficial biographer, Michael Muhammad Knight, TAZ inspired the early ‘Trips to the Zone’ which evolved into the Burning Man festival. There is reportedly at least one intentional community based on Bey’s theories. There is also an event video based on the TAZ idea. The video, like Bey’s work, uses humour, image manipulation and appeals to altered consciousness. It seeks to ‘deconstruct, synthesise and reconstruct’.

*Note to readers:*

*Hakim Bey/Peter Lamborn Wilson is a controversial figure due to his apparent support for child sexual abuse. While there is some disagreement over what exactly he believes, it is clear that at the very least, he has provided apologia for child sexual abuse. I believe he takes this position seriously, and is not just engaged in playful provocation as some supporters claim. In my view, his position is inconsistent with his wider positions on sexual consent and abuse, and on children’s liberation. I believe Wilson/Bey is wrong on this question. However, most of the theorists covered in this column take at least one position which is oppressive or problematic (Aristotle supported slavery, Bakunin was anti-Semitic, Aquinas was homophobic, Althusser killed his wife...). If I required purity on all issues of oppression from all the theorists I write on, and effectively ‘no-platformed’ any theorist who might be complicit in one or more oppressions, I would have to exclude the overwhelming majority of historical thinkers. I have therefore generally refrained from omitting thinkers from the series based on single oppressive position, if I feel their theory is otherwise useful. I also believe that the inner structure of a theorist’s thought – the “problematic” or “theoretical machine” which drives the generation of ideas – is separable from the historical personage who formulates the thought. I believe the rest of Bey’s theory can be used, without entailing endorsement of sexual abuse. Bey’s position, and the problems with it, will be examined in detail in part 15, where I also explain in more detail my disagreements with some of Bey’s critics and defenders, and my rejection of a ‘no-platform’ position towards his work.*

## “Chaos never died”: Hakim Bey’s Ontology

*“Chaos never died”. This is one of the best-known slogans from Hakim Bey’s seminal work, TAZ. In the second of a sixteen-part series, Andrew Robinson reconstructs the ontology of Bey’s “ontological anarchism”. He examines what it means to take chaos as ontologically primary, and how a sense of meaning or order can emerge from chaos.*

### Chaos Never Died

Bey’s ontology is based on the primacy of *chaos*. The concept of chaos should not be seen as a synonym for disorder, or an attention-grabbing rephrasing of anarchism. Chaos is not simply the absence of laws or the state. It is an ontological condition characterised by constant flux and flow, the absence of normative or other criteria of order, and a state of being akin to intoxication. Chaos, Bey tells us, is ‘continuous creation’. He also repeatedly states that ‘Chaos never died’. Chaos has survived the supposed foundation of order. It is a basic ontological reality we should embrace and celebrate.

There are thus no essential or natural laws to provide us with meaning. Nature, says Bey, has no laws, only habits. Meaning creation is, then, a matter of personal construction based on desire. The only order possible is the order one produces and imagines through ‘existential freedom’. All other orders are illusions. Life and the body are permeable, ad hoc, impure, and full of holes. Yet nevertheless, existential autonomy and self-actualisation must be accomplished in this field. In any case, Bey prefers a world of ‘in-

However, Bey/Wilson believes it also has existential or spiritual significance. Cyber-gnosis realises the Enlightenment dream of a unified rational world-consciousness. It has expanded into a fragile membrane around the earth, a bubble filled with hot gases. It has become self-enclosed and self-referential. In another paper, Bey argues that money referring only to more money in an endless chain is the most abstract idea humanity has ever had.

In the poem *Creepy Sensation*, Bey speculates that we are being watched by future people who might redeem our lost sensations, envying our sensations which they lack, and our closeness to species extinct in the future. Similarly, in ‘Islam and the Internet’, Bey argues that the spirit/body split and the hierarchical organisation of religion reaches a culmination in cyberspace – the principle of mind separated from body.

The Internet was designed to resist physical destruction, such as nuclear war, by rapidly transcendentalising matter, transferring it between sites. It does not offer immanence, but a false transcendence based on the gnostic mind-body split. It is a kind of heaven. The conflict over the future of the Internet thus seems to be a ‘war in heaven’. (In *Riverpeople*, Wilson reverses this and suggests that money has virtualised itself into Hell). There is barely even a ruling-class, firstly because CEOs are replaceable functionaries, and secondly because only a few hundred people ‘control’ half the money. Actually, Bey believes that nobody is in control any more. The ruling class has lost control of virtual capital.

Capitalism today pretends to be the only possible world. For Bey, this entails a kind of closure of reality. This closure has created a sense of numbness and powerlessness. It also leads to ennui and anomie, as ways of covering-up an anger with no clear target. It is impossibly pessimistic to actually *feel* what is happening today, a ‘tragedy without catharsis’. The current world is marked by a new kind of psychological malaise.

Bey suggests that this malaise stems from a ‘cognitive collapse’. This collapse is focused on the single world of capitalist monocul-



life entirely. In tourism, even the real world is experienced as an image. Tourists are seduced by the utopian trace of difference, but bear the virus of sameness into living spaces. Bey likens this process to the indigenous idea of soul loss.

## Capital Today

In *Millennium*, Bey suggests that, in the recent past – up to the 1990s – it was still possible to see the Spectacle or the Planetary Work Machine as the enemy. It was then possible to resist through exodus. This was the analysis underpinning *TAZ* – creating nuclei of alternative forces and using resistance to defend them. Today, in contrast, capitalism does not need to concede space to such ‘third forces’. It has shed its ideological armouring and initiated a full onslaught. It now treats all opponents directly as enemies. This means we are left with a global neoliberalism and a superpower which doesn’t even obey its own rules.

Bey opposes the postmodern position that all binaries and categories have now dissolved. He argues that one category – the system – survives. Survival in this context depends on persistence – on determination to remain in history after its declared end. Bey suggests that capitalism is triumphalist because of the end of the Cold War. But he argues that it is only the winner by default – because viable alternatives have collapsed first. Today, money is turning into a phantom-like, imaginary entity outside the world. The energy of life remains outside the system.

In *Escape from the Nineteenth Century*, Bey/Wilson argues that the increasing abstraction of capital renders it increasingly unreal and ineffective. Over 90% of money has escaped into a kind of ‘CyberGnostic heaven or numisphere’. This sphere has no relationship to production or government. Bey is here alluding to the expansion of finance capital, which has grown out of proportion to productive capital. This is similar to the Marxist idea of fictitious capital.

determinacy, of rich ambiguity, of complex impurities’ to purist utopias. Chaos is therefore *desirable* as well as ontologically basic, or necessary. Bey sometimes portrays his theory in terms of a decision to say yes to life itself. In another work, Bey describes himself as a ‘bad prophet’ who bets on unlikely anomalies and chaos.

Chaos is something prior to thought and social construction. Bey conceives Chaos as a creative potential underlying all reality. It means that living things can generate their own spontaneous orders. It also undercuts the legitimacy of all hegemonic and hierarchical systems. Bey suggests that something comes into thought which consciousness attempts to structure. The structure appears to be the foundational level, but it isn’t. This analysis rules out representation, but not thought as such. Indeed, thought and images are both important. Letters or hieroglyphs are both thoughts and images. Bey celebrates a type of in-betweenness which deals with both thought and images.

Chaos is primary over order. In fact, order is an illusion. We are always in chaos, but sometimes we fall for the lie that order exists. This lie leads to alienation. The world is real, but consciousness is also real since it has real effects. In one passage, Bey suggests that the self cannot produce things, nor be produced. Everything simply is what it is, spontaneously. In ‘The Information War’, Bey argues that information is chaos, knowledge is spontaneous ordering from chaos, and freedom is surfing the wave of that spontaneity. He counterposes this view to the gnostic dualism of those who use information (or spirit) to deny the body. Instead he seeks a ‘great complex confusion’ of body and spirit.

Access to chaos comes through altered consciousness, but chaos is also always present in everyday life, beneath the surface. Chaos, or imagination, is the basis of a field which is outside the ordinary. However, it is also the field from which the ordinary is composed. It can enter into ordinary life. Interpretation, for example, occurs in this field. It is similar to the field of becoming in Deleuzian theory, of time or the virtual for Deleuze and Bergson, and the un-

conscious in Jung. The numinous is 'banal'; it can be found everywhere. Bey refers to himself as a radical monist, in distinction from the gnostic or Manichean dualisms of the right-wing. Although he does not say so directly, he seems to treat oppressive systems as distorted forms of the field of chaos, turned aside by 'dark magic' or negative forms of trance. The zone of altered consciousness is also the zone of hybridity, the zone where the boundaries provided by interpretive categories break down.

Psychological liberation consists in actualising, or bringing into being, spaces where freedom actually exists. This is not something unimaginably other. Bey suggests that many of us have attended parties which have become a brief 'republic of gratified desires'. The qualitative force of even such a brief moment is sometimes greater than the power of the state. It provides meaning, and attracts desire and intensity. Similar claims are made elsewhere in post-left anarchy. For instance, Feral Faun suggests that we all knew this kind of intensity in childhood.

## **Chaos as the Basis for Meaning and Order**

In the field of chaos, things are held together by desire or attraction. Action is possible at this underlying, chaotic or quantum level. Magic is 'action at a distance'. Chaos also produces a kind of order, through Eros (love) or the self-ordering activity of a Stirnerian ego. Bey adopts Fourier's view, which he also attributes to Sufi poets, that love or attraction is the driving force of the universe. The Big Bang is 'beautiful and loves beauty', although dirt is also the mirror of beauty. For instance, flowers grow from dirt.

The possibility of 'action at a distance' is the main belief of the Hermetic approach with which Bey identifies. This approach was supposedly banished from science in its mechanistic phase, but keeps coming back – in gravity as 'attraction', in quantum physics,

similarly rejected in neo-classical economics, and that sociological knowledge has been displaced by policy discourse and individualised explanations. The dominant system is today defined by its denial or warding-off of certain directions of development of knowledge, leaving knowledge as a kind of Lysenkoite shell.

Money may have originally appeared as a type of religious, symbolic power. Coins might have been temple souvenirs deemed to have mana or numinous value, which could be exchanged for real wealth. Alternatively, it might have first appeared as debt. Either way, Bey suggests that its basic gesture is to separate wealth from its symbol and recombine them later, making the symbol tradeable. The rise of money is also part of the rise of cumulative mediation. Whereas commodity currencies (such as cattle or barley) still had personal uses, money is entirely impersonal – a floating signifier.

However, writing and money are not enough to explain the rise of alienation. Money existed for 4000 years before the state emerged. The material world tends to restore equality. It resists accumulation. In any case, the State provides 'protection', which is not a material resource. Bey believes that symbolic power is central here. The State can only gain an advantage over diffuse social institutions when it can present its power in symbolic terms.

Capital operates at the level of magic, or interpretation, the same level where Bey locates resistance. The capitalist type of imagination is negative, reducing everything to debt and sucking it into a black hole. Debt mutates into peonage (slavery) as jubilee (debt write-off) never comes. Abstractions are handed down from one generation to the next. Nothing is experienced directly; everything is mediated by money. Capital seeks a monopoly on interpretation. It constructs a space of supposed dialogue which in fact precludes any response, resonance or resistance.

This is similar to the idea of forced communication within dominant terms. Whereas in totalitarian systems, the regime censors by fiat, in capitalist systems the market censors through market failure. Today, capital seeks to detach images from experienced

and meaning. But capitalism intervenes to mediate between people. It interrupts reciprocity and introduces scarcity and separation. Capitalism is vampiric. It relies on consuming others' creativity. It liberates itself by enslaving desire. Much of what the system offers has no real use – it is 'snake oil' – but it works because it has a placebo effect.

Capitalism stems from the invention of scarcity as an existential condition. It is driven by a totalitarian logic of eternal growth. It claims eternity, and therefore ahistoricity. Capitalism cannot "really" escape production. But the ideology of globalised capitalism creates the appearance of escaping production. It appears to be pure, disembodied and ecstatic. The triumph of capital is connected to the triumph of the screen. The system represents itself as a state of oneness, and as invulnerable. But its weakness is shown in the feeling that it is 'not reflected in lived experience' – in experiences of alienation, emptiness and boredom.

Contemporary capitalism takes this process to new extremes. Today, the system is evolving towards rule by technocrats over a mass of homogenised but atomised consumers, linked only by 'CommTech' and mutual surveillance. The current situation is like the story, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* – in which a junior wizard uses magic in which he is untrained, causing disaster. Today this is happening with technology. The current phase of capitalism involves a kind of historical blockage. The world has basically remained in – or looped back to – the nineteenth century. Authors as early as Fourier, in 1799, were already discussing today's problems. However, the system conceals such history. Capitalism is building an '8-lane bypass over the Past'. Like the state, it operates at the level of images.

The current situation is not so much postmodernist as anti-modernist. Modern insights have been denied and jettisoned. For example, the Freudian discovery of the unconscious has been rejected. It is denied and spread-out across various forms of downmarket media. One might add that Marxian insights are

strange attractors, the power of media, and so on (and rather differently, in Fourier's work).

Hermeticists believed that the 'moral power' of an image could be conveyed across distance, by some kind of energy beam, especially if boosted by other sensory inputs. Bey believes that artists continue to do this, even when they deny it. Advertising, for example, conveys a particular affective or 'moral' frame. Hermeticism thus has a dual aspect. In its positive form, it is liberatory and politically radical. However, it also provides the basis for advertising, PR and so on.

The only viable government is that of attraction or love among chaotic forces. Only desire creates values. Values arise from the turbulent, chaotic process of forming relations. Such values are based on abundance, not scarcity, and are the opposite of the dominant morality. Bey describes 'peak experiences' as value-formative on an individual level. They transform everyday life and allow values to be changed or 'revalued'. Creative powers arise from desire and imagination, and allow people to create values. Catastrophe has negative connotations today, but it originally meant a sudden change, and such a change is sometimes desirable.

Bey talks a lot about magic, spirituality, Hermeticism, esotericism, and so on. This is not 'mystification' in the usual sense, nor a literal belief in the kinds of magic seen in fiction. Rather, it involves reflections on the symbolic and imaginary nature of many taken-for-granted practices and objects. Something is 'magical' or 'spiritual' in a positive sense if it leads to an altered state of consciousness.

Things can also be 'magical' or 'spiritual' in enacting invisible forms of long-range communication or control. 'Magic' or 'spirit' in this sense is something immanent, something most of us have experienced already – as an intense emotional experience, romantic or sexual attraction, a psychedelic trip, a meditative state, a powerful dream, an empowering protest or direct action, a random moment where everything feels right. It does not involve reference

to a transcendent field outside experience, although it is certainly taken to be outside ordinary, 'consensus' experience.

Bey writes as if the entities experienced in altered consciousness, or the archetypes found in dreams and stories, are real. But this is part of the process of mythically initiating the reader. The ultimate ontological status of these entities (whether they are merely imagined, or have some real existence) is not particularly important. (In a sense, if everything is chaos, oneness, or becoming, then nothing of a categorisable type is real in any case). What matters is the role of these figures, and belief in them, in producing altered consciousness and intensity.

## Chaos, Religion, and Science

Bey's idea of chaos has a number of resonances. It is similar to the idea of chaos in chaos theory, but qualitative, rather than mathematical. It has similarities with a particular style of reading quantum-level realities. It is also similar to Deleuze's claim that becoming or difference-production is ontologically basic, and Spinoza's univocity of being.

Bey periodically refers to Taoism, Buddhism, Sufism, Kabbalah, quantum physics, and other bodies of thought as similar to his own, although his relationship to them is often syncretic. To the extent that one understands the Tao as an undifferentiated force of becoming, it is similar to Bey's chaos. To the extent that one understands God as immanently coextensive with being, then God is another name for chaos.

In 'Quantum Mechanics and Chaos Theory', Bey argues that scientific worldviews both influence and are influenced by wider social discourses. Ptolemaic theory echoed monarchy and religion, Newtonian/Cartesian theories echoed capitalism and nationalism. Quantum theory and relativity similarly co-constitute a current social reality. However, theory continues to lag behind quantum

## Hakim Bey: Capitalism, the State, and the Spectacle

*In the previous essay, I examined Hakim Bey's theories of alienation and the state. Completing the examination of Bey's analysis of the dominant system, this fifth of sixteen columns examines Bey's theory of capitalism. It shows how Bey situates capitalism as a trance-like manipulation of desire, and as a process of alienation from the body culminating in a flight to the ether. It also examines Bey's critique of 'cop culture' and his comments on American global hegemony, and provides an analysis of Bey's view of the dominant system.*

## Capital and Capitalism

Bey also analyses capital as a machine for the production of scarcity and the destruction of intensity. Capitalism seeks, not to satisfy desire, but to exacerbate longing through utopian traces. This idea – which Bey attributes to Benjamin – plays on the idea that commodities are advertised in terms of future promises. The commodity will provide enjoyment or validity or reality, or validate one's experiences. Capital needs the promise of such future benefits to sell products. Yet it also needs to avoid actually delivering on these promises. If it delivered, then there would be no need to buy further products.

Hence, capitalism constantly reproduces scarcity to stimulate demand. This renders art threatening to capitalism. Art, or creativity, is based on the gesture of reciprocity, or presence. Everyone is an artist, in the sense of co-creation through lived experience, play,

chy is objectionable for cruelty and capriciousness. But it is closer to anarchy than modern regime-types. Monarchs at least are human in their flaws. Today's rulers barely even exist aside from the Ideas, or spooks, they serve. Such people are functionaries, not archetypes. Bey suggests that anarchism is actually a mutation of monarchy, in which each person becomes sovereign in a creative sphere.

mechanics, as scientists struggle to explain phenomena which clearly "work" scientifically. Quantum theory seems to validate Eastern and New Age worldviews, which might provide an organising myth or poetics for quantum science.

Bey summarises a series of different possible readings, some of which recover some form of realism, others of which do not. He insists that the universe must be a single reality, and suggests that the underlying chaotic nature of reality produces effects such as quantum uncertainty. This possibility could shatter 'consensus reality' and its claims to truth.

This could have various social effects. For example, an economy mirroring quantum theory would have to abolish work, because work is similar to classical physics in structure. The result might either be a Zerowork utopia, or a form of enslavement worse than work (probably cybernetic, and following Deleuze and Guattari's idea of machinic enslavement).

Taoism and Buddhism are recurring points of reference. According to Wilson/Bey in *Escape from the Nineteenth Century*, Taoism is a Clastrian machine for warding off hierarchy, which offers direct experience in a manner similar to shamanism. Historically, it undermined Chinese Imperial mediation. In another piece, Bey calls for a 'new theory of Taoist dialectics'. In Taoism, Wilson argues in *Shower of Stars*, chaos is not a figure of evil, but full of potential. It is the source of creation. The only difference between ontological anarchism and Taoism is on the question of action versus quietism.

Bey also embraces the Zen Buddhist idea of Beginner's Mind. In another piece, Bey compares the Buddhist concept of satori with the Situationist Revolution of Everyday Life, and the Surrealist and Dadaist concept of the eruption of the marvellous. All involve perceiving the ordinary in extraordinary ways. While Situationism neglects the spiritual aspect, Buddhism neglects the political.

Bey also likens his position to Sufism. In the Sufi tradition, a 'single vision' of holistic divine reality is contrasted with the 'double vision' of alienated consciousness. Wilson relates this to the one-

eyed monsters associated with the Soma-function and with magic mushrooms, taking it to be a form of altered consciousness.

Bey's readings are sometimes rather selective. Many of the traditions he discusses counterpose spiritual awakening to bodily pleasure. They also emphasise the channelling, constraint, or balancing of desire, not simply its release. However, Bey nonetheless traces interesting parallels among traditions of disalienation.

The idea of chaos is also similar to the primordial force which is slain by the founder of civilisation in a number of statist epics (such as the Epic of Gilgamesh). Bey further likens his view of chaos to hunter-gatherer worldviews, arguing that we need to recover shamanism against priesthood, bards against lords and so on. His approach is modelled on a language which does not yet distinguish ritual from art, religion from harmonious social life, work from play, art-objects from useful objects, and so on. In one passage, Bey depicts a war between two sets of forces. Chaos, Mother Gaia and the Titans are on the side of aimless wandering, hunter-gatherers and freedom. Zeus and the Olympians are on the side of order.

If humans are different from animals, it is because of consciousness or self-consciousness, not awareness. Animals are also aware, in a spiritual sense. However, only humans have technology – which can either be a means or can dominate us. Symbolic systems are related to consciousness. Humans are thus split between an 'animal' level of intimacy and unified consciousness, and a distinctly human level of alienated consciousness.

Religion stems from this tragic separation of mind and body. This, in turn, leads to a huge range of practices of 'knowing', ranging from psychedelic drugs to computers. But since early civilisations, religion has sought to escape the body, becoming increasingly gnostic and body-hating. Bey seeks to re-valorise the 'animal' level of immediate awareness.

Bey's position on altered consciousness puts him in disagreement with many anarchists. He rejects the 'two-dimensional scientism' of classical anarchism. The idea of being, consciousness, or

Corresponding to its creation of zones of depletion, capital actually retreats on a spatial level. A philosophy of risk-management and protection is accompanied by a process of withdrawal into fortress-like spaces such as gated communities and malls. This corresponds to the disappearance of certain zones into virtual reality, and the consignment of others as zones of depletion. Most people are left behind in the resultant 'social triage', even if they remain media-entranced. There is also a clever control strategy in which the system threatens something very extreme, and when it falls short, people are relieved and find it tolerable. The surveillance state creates a danger of 'information totality' in which the map finally covers the whole territory. Such a regime would amount to unchallenged terror and the triumph of order and death. Our hopes in such a system are computer glitches and venal human controllers.

In an earlier paper, Bey argued that the right-wing need an enemy. In the absence of communism, they worry about the UN, or Arabs, or drugs. This is partly because they cannot theorise the current regime of rule by virtual capital. Elsewhere, he argues that both right and left are caught up in identifying symptoms and enemies. These enemies actually stem from the political subconscious, which is affected by neoliberalism and the resulting dissatisfaction. Some symptoms are noticed from the right, others from the left, but both are searching for a scapegoat for the general malaise. This leads to a society which is waging war on itself. In *Sacred Drift*, Wilson notes that the west has rediscovered 'its ancient Other'. He cites Marx's dictum that history repeats first as tragedy, then as farce. Today's Islamophobia is a farcical re-enactment of medieval conflicts.

One of the more unusual aspects of Bey's theory of the state is his relative preference for monarchical and single-leader states over mass culture and modern regimes. The only regimes which exist at an archetypal level – in dreams, for example – are anarchy and monarchy. Both are rooted in sovereignty and will. Monar-

## The Contemporary State

Today, the state is undergoing a process of decline marked by its current death-spasms of apocalyptic violence. Hence there are periodic 'spasms of control-by-terror' directed at perceived enemies, such as hackers. 'Robocop', or the automation of war, is the last interface between power and its others. Bey portrays the state as simultaneously liquefying and petrifying – its outer rigidity marking its emptiness. Bey likens these spasms of repression to medieval public executions, intended to terrorise and paralyse rebels. This is simulated justice, or terror, as opposed to systematic repression. This pattern of repression makes publicity a bad tactic and clandestinity a good one.

Another aspect of the contemporary state is its use of 'depletion' as social control. The old liberal approach sought to assimilate marginal groups. Today's approach instead relies on repression and isolation in zones of depletion. In this context, immigration is really a problem for global capitalism. Undergoing decay, capitalism practices social triage. It lets go of areas (and classes, races, etc) which fall below a certain level of participation in the Spectacle. This leads to no-go-zones where control is mostly simulated. Officially these zones remain state-controlled. They are not allowed political autonomy, and spasms of spectacular terror are sometimes unleashed against them. The Spectacle still tries to destroy any threat to its monopoly on spectacular authority. In theory, everyone is represented. In practice, however, most people are sacrificed. They cannot enter the deathly world of virtual reality or Cyber-Gnosis. There is thus a process of polarisation between included and excluded. Bey thinks this process will speed up, and even parts of America will be affected. Triage will occur even within the zones assigned to supposedly 'safe' subjects with rights. However, this creates possibilities through the occupation of zones of depletion, or NoGoZones.

bliss contained in mystical conceptions is not for Bey a Stirnerian spook – an abstract figure to which people subordinate themselves. It is a term for a type of intense awareness or 'valuative consciousness' resulting from immanence, which is to say, the rejection of spooks. Techniques for higher consciousness can be appropriated by anarchists.

Bey sees science as a 'way of thinking' without special ontological status. He therefore opposes the common assumption that only one type of consciousness, the scientific, has validity. One kind of consciousness – universalising, Enlightenment, linear, rational, mechanical – has dominated for too long. For Bey, experiences in altered states of consciousness have as much reality as any other kind of experience. Also, if something has effects, then it might as well be real.

Bey describes his approach as a 'rationalism of the marvellous' – neither science nor religion. This rationalism accepts that some things cannot be explained. However, in *Scandal*, he also suggests that there is 'something mad' about any metaphysical experience of the oneness of being, which is chaotic and primordial. Altered consciousness is both rational (as something there are good reasons to believe in) and extra-rational (as an experience). In *Sacred Drift*, Bey argues that spiritual realisation is 'good for quite a lot', worth tasting and striving for. But it is not the end point of human development. Rather, it is a means to something deeper.

Joseph Christian Greer has explored the origins of Bey's thought in the zine movement, and the new religious movements of Chaos Magick and Discordianism. He argues that Bey's ontology is largely derived from these movements. He also contends that Bey's thought is formed in debate with alternative (especially nihilistic) positions in particular zines. TAZ, he notes, is a compilation of already-published articles, which had appeared in zines such as *Kaos* and *Mondo 2000*.

The zine scene of the 1980s was rhizomatic and transgressive, often covering taboo topics. Chaos Magick and other esoteric zines

overlapped constantly with those focusing on punk music, alternative sexuality, cyberculture, and radical politics. Many of Bey's pieces appeared in the Chaos Magick zine *Kaos*, which operated a policy of printing everything submitted to it.

Chaos Magick is a playful religious tradition which nevertheless focuses on a central belief: that magical forces can be used to manipulate reality. It maintains, like Bey, that one can achieve 'gnosis' through ritual and psychedelic practices. Gnosis gives access to the forces structuring reality. Such access is normally blocked by the mass media, or other 'psychic propaganda'.

The controversies between Bey and other contributors were focused on Bey's insistence that the death-drive, or 'thanatos', belongs exclusively to the Spectacle. Bey reads chaos as a creative force, and the role of the Chaos magician as encompassing others' desires. This brought him into conflict with nihilistic and individualistic contributors.

In 'The Ontological Status of Conspiracy Theory', Bey argues that conspiracy theory is right-wing only because it emphasises individual rather than group action as the source of social problems. Similarly, vanguardists believe the state is a conspiracy, and conspire to seize it. Alternatively, one can maintain that elites are 'simply carried by the flow of history'. The state does not have power, so much as it usurps individuals' power.

However, social forces do not simply determine individuals. Rather, there is also a feedback mechanism in which people modify the forces which produce them. He calls for an existentialist valuing of acting *as if* actions can be effective, to avoid a poverty of becoming. We have to act as if we act freely, whether we really do or not. Bey also suggests that history is chaotic, and abrupt denials of all conspiracy theories reveal an irrational faith in the superficial social world.

the world obstructs the circulation of images and undermines the expression of difference. Instead, the same discourse is endlessly recycled or reproduced.

However, the state has also changed in the neoliberal period. With the rise of the Spectacle, the function of law has changed. In Nietzsche's day, law still appeared as the oppressor's arsenal of tools, which is useful in providing something to struggle against. Today it is less an edged weapon than a 'viral ooze', operating through the Spectacle and 'cop culture' which become indistinguishable from real power. The law should still be used as 'an edge to sharpen our lives'. However, law has mutated from a tool of oppressors to the self-image of the spectacle. Law simulates power, while offering and denying the utopia of justice. Anything which provides unmediated experience is a threat to the Spectacle and at risk of being banned.

In some pieces, Bey argues that the law is a useful stimulus for the subversive effects of dissent. Paradoxically, a liberal regime can disempower dissent by making it safe. In 'Against Legalisation', Bey argues that dissident media is impossible without censorship. American-style free speech absorbs or co-opts dissent as images, thus rendering it ineffectual. Today, reform is impossible, because partial victories are always absorbed as commodity relations. For example, Bey suggests that legalisation would absorb drugs as a 'new means of control'. It could be used, for instance, to control drug research more effectively, as the underground would disappear. The 10% of the world economy which is 'grey' or quasi-criminal is a new frontier for capital to recuperate. This article shows clearly Bey's emphasis on recuperation as a greater danger than repression.



diffuse power as theorised by Clastres. The state had to defeat this social machine to take power. Why was it defeated? What 'went wrong'? Wilson suggests in *E(c)logues* that excess production may have given the temple political power, and metal-smithing may have strengthened warriors. A new ideology of human sacrifice was created to replace the old religions. The state was based on an elite, which captured the social surplus. This elite then focused on war instead of food production. War already existed as an aspect of indigenous diffuse power. However, it changed with the rise of the state. The new, 'classical' (rather than indigenous) form of war was a means to capture wealth and slaves. Corresponding to this process, land was privatised. Originally, myths and institutions existed which warded off the state – for instance, shamanism. Something went wrong somewhere, and the founding myths are now those of alienation. The State is founded on symbolisation as mediation and alienation. It thus has a magical basis, in writing as 'action at a distance'. It also rests on the monopolisation of violence. Violence originally belonged to everyone. It was monopolised by the state. The state might even have started off as a scapegoat, carrying off blood-guilt.

The state is also based on homogenisation. Planned statist cities are designed as gridworks, whereas grottos associated with mysticism are shapeless and meandering. Medieval cities are similar to grottos. In statist systems, a single worldview and value-system is locked in place. This is true of Christianity, and also of capitalism since the collapse of Stalinism. This single worldview reshapes language. Linguistic categories are a secondary structure used to interpret incoming chaotic flows. Modernity is unusual in insisting on only a single structure. Bey suggests that any map (or language) will fit any territory (or experience), given enough violence. Capitalism seeks to fit the whole world into a single conceptual language. This contrasts with the hermeticist and indigenous views of multiplicity, in which many worldviews contain part of the truth of a world based on difference. The hegemony of a single image of

## Chaos and Technology

For Bey, techniques and technologies are associated with 'action at a distance'. Technology is a kind of magic. This position renders Bey both sceptical of modern technology, and hostile to the wide-ranging anti-technology positions of some eco-anarchists. For Wilson, writing in *Ec(o)logues*, only a type of technology which 'enhances freedom and pleasure for all humans more-or-less equally' can provide a basis for the flourishing of creativity and individuality.

Neolithic technology fits this definition. However, some modern technologies – such as bicycles and balloons – are basically of the Neolithic type, even though they were invented much later. Similarly, renewable energy, handlooms and the like are the right kinds of technology.

In a piece titled 'Domestication', Wilson argues for Fourier's idea of 'horticulture' as a system which combines aspects of agriculture and gathering. A transition to horticulture seems more viable than the anarcho-primitivist idea of a transition to hunting and gathering. Furthermore, Bey suggests that domestication was initially not control, but an effect of love (caring for a young animal). However, in another paper, Bey argues that agriculture is the only truly new technology, and amounts to 'cutting the earth'. It instantly seems a bad deal to non-agricultural peoples, and leads to authoritarianism.

In 'Back to 1911', Bey suggests that refusing technologies past a certain point can allow the recovery of imagination and 'human life'. For example, amateur communal music is preferable to recorded music, and letters to telephones. Like many of Bey's experimental proposals, this is a way of creating altered everyday experiences.

Bey has an ambiguous relationship to eco-anarchism. He opposes the rejection of technology of authors such as Zerzan. But he also calls for a psychological return of 'paleolithic' or 'primitive'

techniques such as shamanism. He frames this as a return in a psychoanalytic sense – a return of the repressed. The paleolithic continues to exist at an unconscious level. Bey also supports Luddite tactics against technologies used for oppression today, whatever their future potential.

But chaos implies a right to appropriate the high-tech as well as the paleolithic. Bey does not seek to reduce the level of technology, but instead to recover lost psychological or spiritual techniques. He also suggests there is a kind of future which is at once paleolithic and sci-fi, and also immediately present to those who can feel it. This future involves new technologies of the Imagination, and a new science beyond quantum science and chaos theory.

In 'Primitives and Extropians', Bey responds to the appeal of his theory both to deep ecological and anarcho-primitivist approaches, and to Internet-focused and science-fiction movements, which have radically different attitudes to technology. He accuses anarcho-primitivists of a puritan impulse which uses the 'primitive' as a metaphysical principle (an essence, trunk, or spook).

On the other side, pro-technology 'Extropians' lack a critique of modern technology. They are also too purist, whereas the field of desire is 'messy'. Zerzan criticised Bey on the back of this article for failing to understand the oppressive effects of technology. In *Seduction of the Cyber Zombies*, Bey suggests that there is some point at which technology flips from serving to dominating humans, and we need to keep it serving humans.

Bey calls on people to think about technology and society without absolute categories. Instead, a 'bricolage' or ad-hoc approach should be used. 'Appropriate' technology should be selected based on maximum pleasure and low cost. Bey suggests that the basic principle after the system is destroyed would be freedom from coercion of individuals or groups by others. The 'revolutionary desire' of freely acting people would then arrive at the appropriate level of technology.

imaginary basis. This contrasts with indigenous symbolism such as shamanism, origin narratives ('myths'), symbolic exchange, and *wampum*. These all involve a close connection between imagery, social use, and emotional or existential significance. Bey seeks alternatives to capitalism, of a certain type. He seeks to recover more intense, less mediated types of imagery and symbolism.

Bey rejects the view that either capital or the state is a determinant, final instance of alienation. Oppressive, alienating institutions are not reducible to a single matrix. There are a number of different sources of alienation. Money (or Capital) and the State are distinct institutions, although they are sometimes allied. Authoritarian religion is a third, distinct force. The emergence of the state seems to have been a revolution when seen from the *longue durée* of historical time. But it is more gradual in human terms. The rise of the state is the rise of separation and hierarchy. The early State had to coexist with social forms – such as rights and customs – which resisted it. An absolute State or 'free' market was inconceivable, as it violated reciprocity. Only in modern times are there absolutist States or 'free' money. Although distinct from capital, the state always remains mired in production. In contrast, money can escape production as pure symbolisation.

The emergence of the state requires the emergence of statist images. The state has to 'invent' surplus and scarcity to disrupt indigenous bands, which are based on abundance. The rise of the state must have been a result of human actions (not for instance population growth or climate change), since the state is a social relation. Bey suggests the rise of the state must have involved a revolt by one or another group differentiated by role. Maybe chiefs, shamans, or warriors revolted, or of men revolted against women. The resultant structure is still with us. In some ways, we are still within the Roman Empire. The Roman form of the state, law, and property are still fundamental to modern power.

As we shall see later, Bey sees indigenous social forms as a type of social 'machine' which includes a gift economy, shamanism, and

The media play a central role in Bey's theory of capitalist power. In 'Media Creed for the Fin de Siècle', Wilson argues that the term 'media' should refer mainly to those media which claim objectivity. Subjective media tend to resist mediation. Books, for instance, have become an intimate or subjective medium because anyone can write one. The mass media constructs an image of false subjectivity by blurring the boundary between objective and subjective. It sells an illusion that each of us has expressed her/himself by buying a lifestyle or appearing within representation. The system still had 'glitches' in the 1960s because the media failed to convince. War appeared as Hell, not glorious; the counterculture appeared exciting, not evil. This led to cognitive dissonance, or a gap between experience and representation. When the system is able to produce experiences in line with its discourses, it eliminates virtually all cognitive dissonance. The 1960s movement saw and exploited the glitch, but fell into the trap of seeking to seize the media, and thus becoming images and commodities themselves. In any case, these tactics are no longer viable. However, in 'Utopian Blues', Bey argues that the 'con' of alienated civilisation is wearing thin to the point of transparency. Capitalism is threatened by a 'mass arousal from the media-trance of inattention'.

## The State and the Rise of Alienation

Bey discusses the state as a central aspect of alienation. In Bey's historical theory, the rise of the dominant system is an effect of increasing alienation and mediation. In other words, lived, immediate, intense symbolism and imagery are gradually replaced by increasingly abstract, emotionally empty symbols. These symbols are in turn captured and monopolised by dominant institutions, which are effectively accumulations of such symbols. Law, writing, money, and computer coding are all examples of extremely abstract symbolism with only an attenuated relation to their original,

In terms of levels of technology, Bey suggests that it ultimately comes down to desire. Do people who want computers or spaceships really want them enough to make the components themselves? If so, they will happen, if not, they are impossible, since people will reject alienated work.

While primitivists are sure that such a situation would preclude all technology, Bey is less certain. Both sides will be reconciled to it because it is based on pleasure and surplus, not scarcity, and the process of creation and conviviality would be more immediate and human-scale.

In TAZ, Bey opposes the idea of a return *to* the Paleolithic or any other period. Instead, he writes of a return *of* the Paleolithic through shamanic practices and zero-work, a return analogous to the Freudian return of the repressed. This position is implicitly directed against anarcho-primitivism. Similarly, he rejects the primitivist position of trying to reverse the rise of agriculture.

Later, however, in *Riverpeople*, Bey/Wilson has come round to the view that people were 'meant to live' like indigenous hunter-gatherers or gardeners. This is the high stage of human development – not today's 'Civilisation'. Hunter-gatherers may know hunger, but not scarcity. He calls for a return to gathering, hunting, or swidden (slash-and-burn) cultivation, and the renunciation of literacy.

In *Shower of Stars*, Bey argues that hunter-gatherers have a way of thought based on the generosity of the material bodily principle, similar to peasant carnivals. He also argues that wilderness can be recovered. Even if it has disappeared today, it can be restored or summoned back. We need to forget (but not forgive) the system, and become radically other to it, remembering our 'prophetic selves' and bodies.

In *Ec(o)logues*, Wilson includes a 'Neo-Pastoralist Manifesto' which suggests inculcating superstitious fear of nature as a way to ensure it wins the 'war on nature' against humans. It is important

that any return to nature take the form of 'coherent actions for re-enchantment', not passive tourism.

Bey sometimes goes as far as to see power as mainly an image. In 'The Information War', he argues that the state is now a 'disembodied patterning of information' rather than a force in its own right. There is no 'power' today, but instead a complete and false totality which contains all discourse through commodification and mediation. Individuals always remain outside of this, but as something pathetic and meaningless. One cannot appear in the media with one's true subjectivity, but only disappear in representation. The system's power does not stem from a solid structure – a possibility precluded by Bey's insistence on the primacy of chaos. In *Immedistism*, Bey repeats his view that any order, except that arising from existential freedom, is illusory. However, illusions can kill. Only desire creates values. Civilisation is based on the denial of desire. In other words, it is a kind of upside-down value which values its own denial. Knowledge has also been alienated today. It is replaced by a simulation – the same 'data', but in a dead form. It is alienating because it fails to interact with the body, or with imagination. The illusions created by finance capital have become consensus reality, but remain illusions. Bey seeks to recover the call of a submerged reality accessible only rarely – the reality of intensity.

The persistence of this system offers a kind of de-intensified, meaningless experience. We're at the end of history, *götterdämmerung*, and yet it's also 'goddam dull'. In one poem in *Black Fez Manifesto*, he suggests that we hide in 'squatted character armor' which is not our own, like hermit crabs. In another poem (this time in *Ec(o)logues*), Wilson discusses his native New Jersey. Modern agriculture is associated with death. It is opposed by 'secret ludic economies' connected with meadows, woods and wild spaces. Today, the system tries to *force* people into mediation. Today, unmediated pleasures are nearly always illegal. Even simple enjoyments like outdoor barbecues often violate bylaws. Pleasure becomes too stressful and people retreat into the world of television.

reproduction are today a bigger force in oppressing people than things like police repression and unjust laws. The structure of social life, which really makes everyone miserable, goes unnoticed.

Conviviality is possible within small affinity-groups – in Bey’s terms, bees or tongs. However, capitalism subtly disrupts such groups. Affinity-groups come up against barriers such as the ‘busy’ lives of members, the need to earn money, or difficulties which seem like bad luck. Today capitalism has fragmented people to an extraordinary degree. Most people are caught in ‘involution’ (shrinkage, or production through their own inverse) with the media. Small groups are also isolated from each other. Neoliberal capitalism is based on isolating people to an increasing extent. Forms of ‘combination’, or life in common, have been destroyed or turned into simulations. Poverty, terror, mediation and alienation all contribute to this process of isolation. Hence, while Bey rejects collectivism, he also opposes standard types of individualism. The ego, as much as the group, can be a Stirnerian ‘spook’, or false essence. People can be subordinated and captured through their own appearance – for example, through self-branding.

Recuperation through representation is identified by Bey as the main problem facing dissent. The system captures and redirects everything simply by representing it, and changing its context. It can even pre-empt opposition through simulation. In earlier works such as *TAZ*, Bey argues that opposition is open to recuperation, as it gets converted into post-revolutionary normality. Each generation’s dream becomes the next generation’s parlour decor. People construct artificial outer images of themselves, known as personae. They succumb to a kind of generalised common sense or ‘consensus-perception’ which filters out much of what exists. The global crisis does not in fact result from scarcity, but from the ideology of scarcity. The world doesn’t run out of resources. Rather, it runs out of imagination, or creative energy. Today there is too little, too thinly spread.

## Hakim Bey: Chaos, altered consciousness, and peak experiences

Ontological anarchist Hakim Bey argues that chaos is ontologically primary. Meaning can only be produced subjectively, through self-valorisation. In this third essay of the series, I explore the role of peak experience and altered consciousness in ontological anarchism. I examine how immediacy can provide a basis for resistance to alienation, explore Bey’s ethical theories, and look at whether social life is still possible if outer order is rejected.

The orientation to chaos leads to a political theory of altered consciousness. In order to be felt as really meaningful and existing, something needs to interact with the body and with imagination. It needs to exist in the ‘imaginal’ realm – the realm of images, unconscious archetypes, and imagination. Bey seeks an intensification of everyday life – a situation in which marvellous, ecstatic, intense, passionate forces enter into life. The passions are not pale shadows of higher realities, as in Platonism, but are themselves supernatural realities. Everyday life can be raised or sublimated to ‘a degree of intensity approaching full presence, full embodiment – and yet still indistinct... an erotic dream of a utopian landscape’. A *TAZ* is a case of life ‘spending itself in living’, rather than simply surviving. It can entail risking the abyss. This position involves a particular kind of affective politics. Bey clearly sees boredom or lack of meaning as the major problem in contemporary life.

Bey also proposes a particular path to creating meaning. Chaos means that anything one does must be 'founded on nothing'. No solid groundings are possible. Yet still, we need projects, because we are not ourselves 'nothing'. The project which remains is an uprising against everything that posits an essential nature of things. Anarchism is faced with a philosophical problem deriving from the contradiction between meaninglessness and ethics. It seeks a 'right way to live' in an 'absurd universe'. In 'The Palimpsest', Bey distinguishes between theory – which drifts nomadically – and ideology, which is rigid, and creates cities and moral laws.

Ideology re-orders the world from outside, whereas theory refuses to let go of desire and thus creates organic movements. Theory is like a palimpsest, in which different texts are written over one another. The idea of theory as a palimpsest comes from Derrida. However, Bey is looking for 'bursts of light', moments of intensity, rather than Derridean ironies. He is seeking values, or the creative capacity to create values out of desires. Bey's style of theory aims to be a ludic (play-based) approach. It is not moral relativism in the usual sense. A viewpoint is given value by a kind of subjective teleology – the individual's search for purposes, goals, and objects of desire. The epistemology (way of learning and knowing) associated with this theory will involve juxtaposing distinct elements, rather than developing them consistently.

Awareness of chaos is intensified by altered states of consciousness and intense experiences, including those arising from psychedelic drugs, shamanism, meditation, and aestheticised living. Such practices are ways of sucking everything present into the Other World, the spiritual or chaotic world. They are attempts to reconnect with 'original intimacy', prior to cognition. Without such 'higher states of consciousness', anarchism dries up in resentment and misery. Hence the need for an anarchism both mystical and practical. Bey lists a wide range of possible sources of such intense, unmediated perception, including inspiration, danger, architecture, drink and sexuality. One passage refers

stance, the dead were the first to get privatised space and to invest in futures.

## Alienation

Much of Bey's theory focused on the question of alienation – though he prefers the less 'lofty' term 'loneliness' – and he theorises the system in such terms. Capitalism involves both sameness and separation. In *Riverpeople*, he portrays capitalism as a form of monoculture. Property is a type of 'spectral alienation', as opposed to the 'mutualism of usufruct' (a Proudhonian term for temporary ownership based on use). The problem with modern society is 'civilisation', not culture or technology. In other words, Bey identifies the main social problem as a certain kind of social system, based on alienation. Civilisation reproduces itself through alienation, negation, and unfulfilment. It offers the appearance of fulfilment from which one always awakes unhappy. The Totality renders people isolated and powerless. It offers only illusory forms of self-expression. Alienation is a 'demonic democracy', everything equal but valueless. It is a 'bad mood in which every day is the same'. In his 'Esoteric Interpretation of the IWW Preamble', Bey argues that alienation is psychological as well as economic. He argues for a political orientation to all of those affected by alienation, not only industrial workers.

Alienation functions partly through the disruption of horizontal social relations. In the essay 'Immediatism versus Capitalism', Bey argues that capitalism only supports or enables, or even allows, particular kinds of groups. It promotes groups based on production (such as work colleagues), consumption (such as self-help groups) or reproduction (such as nuclear families). Capitalism is organised to prevent conviviality in Bey's sense – or coming together for purposes of play, life, or mutual enhancement. Bey argues that pressures on people's time and energy from work, consumption and

If something went wrong in modern history – and Wilson/Bey is sure it did – then it must have happened in the imaginal realm. He thinks that humanity's main historical mistake was to lose the experience of the imaginal realm. Modern humans have lost the experience of intimacy with the cosmos. Most of us can no longer attain altered consciousness. In *Shower of Stars*, he adds that every society produces an excess, which it needs to squander. There are different ways to do this. Wealth can be squandered in rituals of consumption, such as potlatch. It can be consumed by a large 'idle' population, such as monks. It can be consumed in carnivals. Or it can be managed through the artificial production of scarcity. Capitalism opts for the last of these options. This is not a good way to deal with excess. Seen from an altered state of consciousness, he adds in *Riverpeople*, authoritarianism and conventional morality come to seem like a disease.

Bey also endorses most of the standard objections to capitalism. The system is objectionable for a whole range of familiar reasons. Wealth is too concentrated. Financial capitalism separates money from production. The media enclose meaning in a limited sphere. Capitalism leads to securitisation, repression, and ecological destruction. The benefits of civilisation are only ever available to an elite of about 10%. The system, or Empire, brings with it murder, famine, war and greed, all of which are effects of the triumph of death over life.

Bey claims to be 'personally at war' with each of these facts because 'they violate my desires and deny me my pleasures'. In other words, Bey is an anti-capitalist, but his grounds for anti-capitalism are largely Stirnerian. He objects to capitalism because it blocks self-actualisation and the personal production of meaning. He embraces the Marxist critique of alienation, but not Marxist collectivism. Capitalism is emptiness – what Bey in a poem terms a 'lukewarm necromantic vacuum of dephlogisticated corpse breath'. It is figured archetypally as death, rather than life or joy. For in-

to Iranian poetry set to music and chanted or sung, producing an affect known as *hal* – somewhere between hyperawareness and an aesthetic mood. Another passage refers to the techniques of heretics and mystics, seeking inner liberation. Some such techniques get trapped in religion, whereas others become revolutionary. Bey uses the term 'magic' or 'sorcery' for practices which cultivate altered awareness and disrupt the false selves that result from ordinary perception. A sorcerer recognises the reality of consciousness. This leads to a state of intoxication. Sorcery is a set of means to sustain this state of being, and expand it to other people.

Such practices produce a particular relationship to the universe. True mysticism creates what Bey calls a 'self at peace', a 'self with power'. Awareness of the 'immanent oneness of being' is at the root of various anarchistic heresies such as the Ranters and Assassins. Another passage (from the *Black Fez Manifesto*) refers to the 'potential of an idleness money can't buy, the thrill of zilch, the zen of ZeroWork'. This idleness, 'natural to childhood, must be strenuously defended'. Bey effectively calls for us to avoid being broken-in by capitalism, to remain in or return to a childhood orientation to play and immediacy. A shaman of bard uses a combination of words, music and archetypes to create altered consciousness. Everyone is an artist, but not necessarily all of the same type. Some might specialise in the 'grand integrative powers of creativity' or telling the 'central stories' of the group. Such integration by bards is posited as an alternative to integration by laws.

Many fields of life are already inflected with altered consciousness. Hermetic powers have been appropriated by dominant institutions. The means to prevent such capture is to insist that each adept control the powers, rather than be manipulated through them. Bey periodically refers to Bakhtin's 'material bodily principle', or the valuing of the body in carnival, as typical of intensity. He counterposes the celebration of the body to gnostic body-hatred, which he believes is prevalent in the Spectacle. In

a poem, Wilson suggests that animals already practice zerowork economics.

Bey suggests that language does not have to be representational. The structure of language may turn out to be chaotic, or complex and dynamic. Grammar might be a strange attractor, rather than a structuring law. Language is a bridge (of translation or metaphor) and not a structure of resemblance. Language should be ‘angelic’ – similar to the figure of the angel as messenger or intermediary. It should carry magic between self and other. Instead it is infected with a virus of sameness and alienation. This virus is the source of the master-signifier in language.

In many ways, Bey’s work can be understood as a theory of alienation. Alienation (whether social, psychological or ecological) separates us from awareness of, and life in, ontological chaos. For instance, belief in order leads to normativities of good and evil, body-shame, and so on. The family is criticised for encouraging miserliness with love. Christianity, even in its liberationist variants, is condemned. The point is to seize back presence from the absence created by abstraction. Life belongs neither to past nor future, but to the present. Idealised pasts and futures are rejected as barriers to presence. Time can become authentic and chaotic by being released from planned grids.

Bey criticises negative ontology, in which he apparently includes much of poststructuralism, for flattening reality onto a single, level plain. This process makes altered consciousness and escape from capitalism difficult. Everything becomes equally meaningless. Negative consciousness is a predictable effect of the present system. But for Bey it is a kind of ‘spook-sickness’ caused by alienation. It serves the status quo, because it keeps people afraid, and reliant on leaders for salvation. This makes attacks on leaders seem stupid. It creates a binary between pointless action and sensible passivity. This argument is similar to my own work on theories of constitutive lack.

temic structure. In a related discussion, Sellars suggests that Bey’s view of the system is basically Debord’s.

Bey’s theory of capitalism draws heavily on the Situationist idea of the Spectacle. This approach sees capitalism as a type of life mediated by images. Bey similarly sees the system as a regime in which images dominate life. If someone is within ‘consensus thought’, they accept the dominant beliefs of the current system. For example, they only recognise the existence of things that are represented, not those that are present. Representing something (within the Spectacle) makes it ‘semiotically richer but existentially impoverished’. This process gives something a more symbolic meaning, but a less emotional or lived meaning. A represented thing becomes a potential commodity. This, in turn, destroys the existential meaning of objects, especially those which produce altered consciousness. Take an example such as dance music. As part of a rave, it is hard to represent. At the same time, it generates intense energy, such as ecstatic experiences and collective bonding. Now suppose the same music is recorded, sold, and classified. It gains symbolic meaning. It becomes easier to name, categorise and compare with other things. But it loses some of its emotional meaning. It is no longer part of the context of intense practice.

The Spectacle is also a system of scarcity. Like many eco-anarchists, Bey contrasts the system of scarcity with an ethos of abundance in indigenous societies. Modern cultures, and agricultural indigenous cultures, often symbolise scarcity as a loss or fall. A familiar example is the story of the fall from Eden. For Wilson (in *Ploughing the Clouds*), this type of story symbolises the loss of original anarchy and autonomy. In the passage to modern life, intimacy with nature is replaced by separation from it. Abundance is replaced by scarcity. Gift economies are replaced by commodity economies. ‘Polymorphous co-sensuality’ in sexual relations is lost to kinship and marriage structures.



## Hakim Bey: Alienation and The State

*Hakim Bey's TAZ is a well-known manifesto of anti-capitalism, providing a model for alternative living. Yet Bey's work has been criticised for neglecting the critique of capitalism. In the fourth and fifth parts of the series, I aim to show that Bey has an astute, unusual analysis of the structure of the dominant system. This fourth part explores the view of the dominant system as a 'Spectacle', the theory of alienation, and the history and contemporary forms of the state.*

Bey's work is thoroughly anti-capitalist. Critics sometimes miss this fact because of Bey's unusual terminology. He rarely talks about 'capitalism'. Nevertheless, his theory is clearly directed at a more-or-less unitary adversary, identifiable as capitalism or modern society. Bey seeks to challenge the whole system, rather than be distracted by any particular issue. He does not see power as localised, diffuse, or irrelevant. In this column and elsewhere, I've generally paraphrased Bey using the words 'system' and 'Spectacle'. In fact, Bey tends not to talk about the system in such general terms. He assumes it in the background of his theory. When he names it at all, he uses terms like 'consensus reality', 'scarcity', and 'images'. Sometimes, Bey uses the Hegelian term 'Totality' to refer to what he considers the false consensus expressed on behalf of society. He also sometimes uses the term Spectacle, derived from Situationism. Other times, Bey refers to the Planetary Work Machine (from P.M.'s Bolo'Bolo), or to Empire (from Hardt and Negri). While these terms don't necessarily connote a dominant system for some readers, they are used in a way which clearly refers to a sys-

Chaos is misappropriated when used as a scientific basis for death, as nihilism, or for scams. Chaos is everywhere, and so is unsaleable. At one point, Bey argues that both New Age spirituality and religious fundamentalisms derive their power from the spiritual emptiness of modern life. However, they divert the rejection of emptiness into new abstractions – commodification in the New Age, morality in fundamentalism. Escaping spiritual emptiness instead requires escaping abstractions.

Bey specifically rejects the view of chaos as lack, entropy, or nihilism. Instead, he argues that chaos is Tao, or continual creation. It is a field of potential energy rather than exhaustion, of everything rather than nothing. Bey speaks of moments when he's overcome the feeling of powerlessness and futility. He writes that these are the only times he breaks through into a state of consciousness which feels like health. In other words, action is necessary to disalienate, even if it has no outer effect. Existence is a meaningless abyss. Yet this is not cause for pessimism. Rather, it leads to an open world in which we can create or bestow meaning through action, play, and will.

Bey seeks to make an offer of disalienation, which, once felt, breaks the functioning of capitalism. Even a few moments of joy may be worth considerable sacrifice. Awareness of the holism of being, or 'metanoia', can go beyond categorised thinking into smooth, nomadic, or chaotic thinking and perception. Bey denies that he is pointing to a secret which he is refusing to share. Rather, the material bodily principle is secret because it is forgotten. The body is degraded both by the world of images and by bodily narcissism.

Immediacy, or presence, is a central concept for Bey. Immediacy is valued as a counterpoint to representation and simulation – which are definitive of the dominant system. Immediacy can also be expressed in or through representation, by means of chaotic processes which disrupt order. The spirituality of pleasure, as Bey terms it, exists only in a presence which disappears if it is repre-

sented. In Bey's reading of religious imperatives, such imperatives are not outer impositions but a kind of inner choice – to live fully, or to risk dying without having lived. The point seems to be to experience chaos as play, rather than trauma. 'The universe', Bey states at one point, 'wants to play'. One loses one's humanity or divinity if one refuses to play. People sometimes refuse to play due to alienated motives ranging from dull anguish to greed to contemplation. The 'magic' practices of Bey's politics are ways of experiencing chaos in a suitably joyful way. In *Scandal*, Wilson argues that one can handle pain, suffering and negative emotions by ritualising them, turning them into reversible symbols. Cultures also symbolise and channel the potentially destructive power of Eros. Bey insists that this approach does not deny that there are ugly, frightening things in the world. However, many of these can be overcome. They can only be overcome if people build an aesthetic from overcoming rather than fear. If one reads history through 'both hemispheres' – meaning both affectively and logically – then one realises the world constantly undergoes death and rebirth.

If life is chaos, then Bey's response is what he sometimes terms 'aimless wandering' or nomadism, and compares to the Situationist drive and Sufi 'journeying'. Nomadism, along with the Uprising, provides a model for everyday life. In *Sacred Drift*, Wilson invokes the figure of the 'rootless cosmopolitan', a Stalinist slander against Jews, as a general modern strategy. People wander or drift today because nothing fixes them in place or commands fixed loyalties. This process of movement is also a kind of psychological nomadism which moves among different bodies of theory. There is an ambiguity in that, since being is oneness, journeys start and end in the same place.

For Bey, life is to be lived through peak experiences, and conviviality. The peak experience becomes the goal of aimless wandering, much like a shrine is the goal of a pilgrimage. Bey's concept of peak experience is modified from Maslow's. Against the false unity of a flattened, commodified world, Bey argues for disloyalty to the

instance, collective squatting). They don't necessarily value such practices. However, ontological anarchy values such a way of life as preferable to mass consumerism.

At times, the imperative to support chaos and promote freedom lead to ambivalent positions. For instance, Bey is ambivalent about abortion, supporting women's freedom but desiring that the entropic force of family planning be negated by chaos. This position does not imply optimism about human nature. Bey opposes the view that humans are 'basically good'. Instead, he argues against others holding power 'precisely because we don't trust the bastards'. In another passage in *Sacred Drift*, he argues that brilliance is not itself desirable. He observes that people can be brilliant for good things like love or humanity, but also for bad things like hatred and self-aggrandisement. In the latter case, there is a need for self-defence against brilliance. The best of human potentiality seems to come out in altered consciousness, whereas capitalism stimulates the worst.

cumb to 'joyless commodification' or 'vulgar materialism'. Such an ethic is distinct from normativity, and continuous with shamanism. For instance, Bey remarks that paganism invents virtues, but not laws.

'Wrong' in Bey's code of ethics means counterproductive and self-immiserating. Causing misery to others is wrong because it is self-defeating (misery breeds misery). Those who immiserate others are in Bey's experience psychologically poor, and themselves miserable. Bey associates de Sade with fascism – the satisfaction of desires of an elite through the creation of enemies and victims. Against these positions, Bey turns to Fourier's view that desire is impossible unless all desires are possible. This seems to be partly a response to Bookchin's critique. It is a similar critique of simple egoism to that found, for instance, in Ancient Greek thought, which similarly argued for ethical positions without assuming a standpoint higher than the self.

Other passages also emphasise the relational aspect of chaos and becoming. For instance, Bey argues that speech is dialogical or 'diadic' in structure. It relies on a pairing of speaker and hearer, and this pairing can be reversed. In *Sacred Drift*, Wilson argues for reciprocity, sharing, mutual benefit, and harmony, instead of either quarrelling or submitting. In 'Utopian Blues', he claims that utopia is a unity, not a uniformity. It is based on something like Fourier's idea of harmonisation – a combination of widely different people and desires, through each pursuing their own attractions. Utopian desire 'never comes to an end, even – or especially – in utopia'.

The primary conflict of the current world is the conflict between the authority of the tyrant and the authority of the realised self. In *Ec(o)logues*, Wilson claims that social life is to be based on conviviality and creativity, rather than mediation. A key step towards a different way of being is to summon the will to experience other living beings as relatives or relations. The valuation of a different kind of world is crucial here. Many people are forced to live by means of conviviality or social networks due to poverty (for

dominant culture and nomadic movement among different alternatives.

In a poem in the *Black Fez Manifesto*, Bey cites Ibn Khaldun's view that nomads who awake at night to see the stars are like animals reassured the universe is still there. But he adds that city-dwellers who awake similarly while on a trip are sucked into 'panic' and 'freefall'. The point here seems to be that the experience of chaos is negative only because of the habits and alienation of modern subjects. Embracing chaos is not a loss in itself, but seems as such from a certain point of view, because of a lack of familiarity with chaos. Modernity or the Enlightenment tries to blot out the stars with light pollution, to destroy the vitality of night. Night here symbolises a type of energy associated with smooth space and altered consciousness. In a related piece, Bey calls for a 'Bureau of Endarkenment' to encourage superstitions about technologies such as cars and electricity.

## Ethics and society

Like other post-left and politics-of-desire writers, Bey rejects normativity and top-down morality. Instead, he argues for a type of immanent ethics based on one's own desire and ethos. In a fragment on crime, Bey defines justice as action in line with spontaneous nature. He argues that it cannot be obtained by any law or dogma. The moment someone discovers and acts in line with a mode of being different from alienated reality, the state or 'law' tries to crush it. This means that we are all criminals. Instead of claiming martyrdom as victims of persecution, we should admit that our very nature is criminal.

Ontological freedom stems from ontological chaos. We are already sovereigns in our own skins, by virtue of the absence of order. Freedom is not, therefore, something we have to achieve through revolution or struggle. Freedom is realised in the expe-

rience of intensity, or emotion experienced to the point of being overwhelmed. Bey supports Fourier's idea that unrepressed passions provide the only basis for social harmony. However, people also seek other sovereigns (i.e. other autonomous subjects) for relations. Reciprocity, or pleasure with others, is the non-predatory expansion of intensity. It is a kind of eros of the social. In one passage, Bey argues that 'each of us owns half the map', so finding intensity is often a cooperative activity. He suggests that the self/other or individual/group contradictions are false dichotomies created by the Spectacle. Self and other are complementary. The Ego and Society are absolutes which do not exist. Rather, people are drawn into complex relations in a field of chaos. Bey refers to Stirner's union of self-owning ones, Nietzsche's circle of free spirits, and Fourier's passional series as inspirations for such relations. They involve processes of redoubling oneself as others also do so. The 'gratuitous creativity' of such a group would replace the specialised field of art.

In a sense, Bey is constructing a virtue ethics very different from the usual type, in which virtuous life consists in the pursuit of peak experiences and a type of living compatible with ontological chaos. Some readers see Bey's politics as emphasising sincerity as a virtue. In such a worldview, enjoyment is almost a moral imperative. One has an obligation to experience joy, and not postpone it to the future or afterlife, so as to do justice to oneself. In *Sacred Drift*, Wilson argues that this is a prerequisite for doing justice to others. By combining various Sufi theories of disalienation, Bey suggests that we arrive at a position which valorises all kinds of sexualities, both as permitted bodily enjoyment and spiritual practice.

Bey, following Bob Black, favours the abolition of work. The subset of work-like tasks which remain necessary are to become a kind of play for those attracted to them. Bey thinks that relations among autonomous beings might find ways of working themselves out. He sometimes suggests that we are all 'monarchs' or 'sovereigns'. Today we survive as pretenders, but we can still seize a little real-

ity for ourselves. Monarchy is closer to anarchy than other forms of government, because it recognises individual sovereignty. Bey here plays on the Situationist idea of 'masters without servants', which is an egalitarian attempt to address hierarchical aspects of Nietzsche.

However, this does not mean that people should optimise their own enjoyment in predatory ways. The point is to realise intensity in altered consciousness, not to appropriate alienated experiences in a maximising way. In 'The Anti-Caliph', Wilson distances his position from 'libertinism', in the sense of doing what one likes regardless of others' values or lives. The difference between an antinomian (Wilson/Bey's position) and a libertine is that the former acts from a personal ethic. This ethic is considered higher than outer laws and social norms, and thus provides a basis for defying them. Such an ethic is more demanding than normativity or law, since it involves the expansion of the self to include others, rather than self- or other-denial.

*'A freedom or pleasure that rests on someone else's slavery or misery cannot finally satisfy the self because it is a limitation or narrowing of the self, an admission of impotence, an offence against generosity and justice.'*

Bey does not want to realise desires at the expense of others' misery – not for moral reasons, but because it is self-defeating. Misery breeds misery, and desires to cause misery stem from psychological impoverishment. He is sympathetic to Fourier's argument that desire is impossible unless all desires are possible. Everyone aspires to certain 'good things' which are available only among free spirits. This is particularly true in cases of love. The spiritual meaning of sexuality, for instance, precludes uncaring, violent and dominating types of sex. Bey thus advocates the destruction of all social relations which treat some as subordinate to or owned by others – including marriage and the family. One's sexual code should be 'both highly ethical and highly humane', valuing both pleasure and conviviality. It should include a spiritual dimension, and not suc-

often inaccurate, but inaccurate translations are sometimes productive and useful. Romantic perceptions distort reality. But they distort it so as to free perception from 'consensus reality', or ideology. The 'exotic' may not be the 'true', but it is still a relief from simulation and banality. Romantics do not 'prettify' or 'sentimentalise' the environment. They poeticise and spiritualise it. Factories are not excluded as un-picturesque, but as sacrilegious. This is a type of gaze which does not dominate. Instead, it performs a sublimation or transformation.

In the case of Native American revivalism, Bey praises the revival of indigenous traditions. He recognises that some ceremonies 'belong' to particular families and has no wish to 'appropriate' them. (Secrecy is also part of his own model of resistance). But he refuses to pretend not to be enthusiastic for 'traditions that once shaped the very landscape I now inhabit'. By destroying the Esopus 'Indians', settlers also suffered a loss of the near presence of non-authoritarian, non-capitalist culture. This absence lies at the heart of the disenchantment of the area.

Bey also endorses 'anti-translation', in which 'don't tread on me' becomes 'don't translate me'. Translation as representation should be avoided. Instead, one should seek a 'direct making-present'. Such a process requires abandoning one's 'self' or ego so as to go inside the other culture to the maximum extent possible. Avoiding appropriation requires tact and sometimes silence. But it does not require a refusal to communicate.

Wilson does not claim to have produced an adequate anti-translation, though he has practiced Islam in various forms. Instead, he seeks to revalorise the 'romantic' image of Islam. He claims that this image survives the problem of translation because it already exists in both Islamic and western culture. I would add that the problem of translation tends to disappear when the original text already points towards the untranslatable or unknowable.

needs to be expanded. The zines and BBS's of the 1990s are said to insufficiently provide goods and services for everyday life. In a new preface from 2003, Bey argues that the discussion of the Internet is the least contemporarily relevant part of TAZ. He criticises a counterculture which now mistakes 'a few thousand "hits"' for political action, and which neglects physical presence.

In 'Islam and the Internet', Bey argues that the major limit of virtual politics is that the Internet can be controlled from outside. It is diffuse in its internal power-structure, but this is undermined by its connections with the wider context. Therefore, resistance also has to happen outside the Internet. An entirely virtual resistance is only a spectacle of resistance. The body must also be present in effective resistance.

However, communications technologies can organise revolutions. Bey uses the example of the 1979 Iranian revolution, which relied heavily on cassette tapes. He nevertheless argues that technology cannot overcome the cultural or religious forces of power. We need to stop reifying technology, and realise that only imagination creates values.

There is an ambiguity in the Internet, because it is designed in a structure similar to indigenous warfare (i.e. diffuse power) to avoid destruction. It is 'designed to be out of control'. However, this does not render it safe or free. Those who control the means of communication have power over those who communicate. The Internet is not really in heaven, because it can be controlled from outside. As a result, it is a false transcendence of the culture-nature dichotomy.

Since the Internet can be controlled from outside, resistance also has to occur outside. Also, the controllers of the Internet will be reluctant to allow it to spread to the global majority, because of the fear of terrorism. Technology is in many ways a religious problem. The binary of good and evil prevents a technology like the Internet from bringing salvation. Indeed, communication technologies tend to become forms of mediation and separation.

In a later work, 'Seduction of the Cyber Zombies', Bey argues that 'other nets' need to be set up alongside 'the' Net, otherwise it will simply become another alienating medium. These 'other nets' would include other patterns of communicativeness and conviviality. Indeed, the Internet today is so alienated as to be interesting mainly as a 'romantic ruin' – a site where old sites, coding languages and webpages are available to bricoleurs.

In 'Media-Space! – Opening Speech', Bey argues that the Internet raised social hopes because it was out of control. It is still technically out of control, but now socially under control. This is because the tiny free spaces are now dwarfed by massive multinationals. The struggle today over Internet censorship is largely between capital and the state. The Internet suits capital because it is similarly chaotic and decentred. Technologies mirror the society and economy that generate them. The Internet should be used as a tool, not imagined to be a magical answer to political problems. The Internet is molecular, but molecularity can be used against us.

In 'A Network of Castles', Bey compares the Internet to Alamut. He suggests that the network aspect of horizontal politics is now easier. But the problem is in creating castles from which to network. It is no longer possible to create defensible positions, given modern military and surveillance technology. Instead, Bey suggests that unused sites may be occupied in periods of confusion and collapse, and will then be unassimilable but also irrelevant. There will be little reason for capital or the state to waste effort destroying them. (In other pieces, Bey speculates about survivalist hide-outs, underwater or underground facilities, or outer space, though he concludes that none of them seem feasible).

In an interview, Bey argues that the military made a mistake in inventing the Internet. The Internet is a machine of indigenous war (in Clastres' sense of diffusion of power), not classical war. The Internet is decentralised, and therefore reproduces the structure of indigenous war. However, the military and corporations are seeking to control the Internet. The Internet can reproduce mind-body

their social significance. He uses the experience of cultural difference to disrupt dominant categories.

Similarly, Bey may be accused of 'romanticising' indigenous people. His work is romantic in the sense of being emotionally expressive, favouring the emotional impact of an experience over its outer empirical aspects. But the idea that altered consciousness, relationality, and disalienation are central to explaining how indigenous cosmology differs from western thought is common in indigenous scholarship, as well as in contemporary anthropology. Similarly, Bey's remarks on the Islamic world stem from a long spell of living in Iran/Persia and studying comparative religion.

There are many for whom 'romanticising' is automatically a bad thing. This is either for scientific reasons (it is factually incorrect) or identity-political reasons (it stereotypes others). However, Bey makes a powerful case for 'romanticising' places and social phenomena. By romanticising something, one connects it to the imaginal realm. It potentially becomes a site at which altered consciousness is possible. If the resultant image is untrue as a representation (as arguably are all representations), it is nevertheless true at a different level, as an imaginal construct. Bey uses archetypes, and connects them to zones of experience. But it is arguably not the use of archetypes which is the problem. Rather, the confusion of archetypal figures, in the imaginal realm, with real people or spaces creates dangers of stereotyping. In general, Bey does not stereotype, but indicates possibilities.

In *Sacred Drift*, Wilson engages directly with the problem of 'Orientalism'. The kind of history of religion on which Wilson draws stands within the tradition of Oriental studies. This tradition has been exposed, from Edward Saïd onwards, as translation for imperial appropriation. However, Bey argues that translation can also occur through a 'heretical' model of translation. Such translation connects forms of resistance, rather than forms of power.

Bey exhorts readers not to throw out the 'Oriental baby' with the 'Orientalist bathwater'. Translations from outside a culture are

ties in other traditions as preferable to the emptiness of alienation. His ontology owes more to Sufism and Taoism than to modern epistemology. Of course, he is selective. He takes what he values in other traditions, discarding the aspects he considers oppressive, and de-emphasising (though hardly denying) the suffering which is associated with the imposition of modernity on such traditions. But this is how difference enters the world. Something of the sort is clearly needed if Eurocentric modernity is ever to be overcome. Over-sensitivity about partial appropriations and hybridity is a barrier to this process.

Bey's reliance on archetypes is also open to the criticism that it reproduces Barthesian myths or essentialist categories. For instance, gendered archetypes often reproduce gender roles. In Bey's case, the biggest potential problem is the treatment of non-western cultures, which sometimes verges on Orientalism. Bey presents personal experiences of place through fragmentary presentation of details which are often sensory or quasi-spiritual in nature, usually in a beat-poetic style. The Khyber Pass – 'actually controlled by uncontrollable Pathan tribes who allowed the border to function in exchange for tribute' – is characterised by 'hashish, fake Lugers, Japanese radios, opium, flintlock rifles, Chinese tea kettles, daggers, binoculars', 'bowls of cardamom-scented syrupy green tea' and so on. Such passages give an impression of an exotic otherness, in which intensity is constantly possible, and is part of everyday life.

When reading these passages, it is important to remember that the discussion is focused on the imaginal construction of altered consciousness, rather than the empirical description of the outer world. Bey's method of sympathetic reconstruction refuses the distance and humility of poststructuralist anthropology, but arguably gets closer to a real transformation of western perceptions, a process of becoming-other. This does not entail reducing the other to a western gaze, but rather, transforming and 'othering' this gaze through altered consciousness. In contrast to usual western reductions, Bey does not take outer aspects of cultures while ignoring

separation. If people don't think about the body, desire, and pleasure, they are stuck in a mental game without real resistance to oppression. Real resistance is embodied resistance.

Bey predicts the fusion of television and the Internet into a single, final medium which encloses and censors/moderates all discourse. More recently, Bey is reported to want to smash the Internet with a hammer. According to Knight, Wilson can't use a computer, and doesn't understand that the Bey identity is no longer a secret. However, in his more pro-Internet period, Bey/Wilson was reportedly involved in the Ong's Hat hoax.

## Temporary, Permanent, and Periodic Autonomous Zones

Initially, TAZ is temporary for a particular strategic reason. In the book *TAZ*, temporariness is connected to the need for struggle against an adversary to produce intensity. 'Successful' revolutions risk collapsing into habit and boredom. The temporariness of TAZ is thus a way to prevent its encrustation into institutionalised socialism. Even then, Bey recognised that certain causes remain semi-permanent, if only because their adversaries are so awful.

This strategic perspective declines after the collapse of the Soviet Union, with neoliberalism claiming to be the only possible world. As a result, recurring and permanent TAZs become conceivable. In 'Periodic Autonomous Zone', Bey discusses festivals and carnival as varieties of recurring TAZ. They create a liminal (inbetween) zone between culture and nature. This sometimes reflects ecological and economic cycles. For instance, summertime gathering seems like play compared to spring/autumn farming. In this piece, Bey also argues for the re-emergence of camps, as sites for autonomous zones. Such 'neo-camps' will need to be disguised from the state, and provide a month or two of temporary freedom.

This is better than no autonomous zones at all, giving a taste of autonomy.

In the paradoxically titled 'Permanent TAZs', Bey responds to the expansion of TAZs at the time of writing. People are dropping out, disappearing, or at least creating their own networks in urban folk-culture. For instance, much passion and creativity goes into hobby networks. Furthermore, swathes of the world are now empty of substantive power, besides media and a few police. In this context, some TAZs are no longer temporary.

Autonomous groups still terrify the state – as in cases such as MOVE and Waco. Groups which can stay invisible are able to survive and avoid persecution. At this stage, Bey maintains that the system might already be dead, and spasming violently. It becomes possible to wait out the storm in autonomous zones – perhaps 'a nice anarchist monastery somewhere'.

One variant on the TAZ is the Pastoral Autonomous Zone discussed in *E(c)logues*, an anti-tech type of TAZ set up for 'ecstatic communion with Nature'. Wilson suggests that, by experiencing this state before it's too late, we can contribute to bringing immanence into the world. Pastoralism does not necessarily imply peace. Indeed, pastoral cultures sometimes practice indigenous warfare.

In extreme cases, people end up living in stone towers and guarding their flocks with weapons. Remote mountainous regions also have their own cultures, which often involve special forms of intensity. Sometimes, everyone is considered noble. Urban pastoralism is also possible in some cities, such as Benares (Varanasi). In a poem, Wilson suggests that 'Scythians without horses' are like centaurs cut in half, 'half human half nothing', wasting 12,000 years of co-evolution.

In 'Back to 1911: Temporal Autonomous Zones', Wilson argues for the reconstruction of alternative experiences based on past historical periods. This is achieved through restricting oneself to technology that existed or was possible in the period. The period he proposes is 1900-1914, the era of the 'dawn of modernism' which

However, this line of critique rests on the assumption that cultures *should* be enclosed, separate entities. Or at least, 'privileged' people shouldn't mix them. In which case, 'privileged' people are either supposed to retreat into dominant ideology because they can't escape it, or else somehow do without a culture (presumably the better to act as subordinate actors to underprivileged power-brokers). If one rejects both of these options, then one cannot reasonably object to cultural bricolage.

Bey's philosophy encourages hybridity, syncretism, bricolage and nomadism, because Bey sees these tactics as ways of resisting the power of the Spectacle. For example, the types of religion he promotes are deliberately semi-humorous and heretical, and subversive of established religious orders and divisions. This raises problems for those interested in purity, and Bey can easily be accused of appropriation, of misusing Islam or other religions, or of making something light-hearted out of serious identities and attachments. Against such criticisms, one must consider firstly, Bey's ontology (in which chaos is primary), and secondly his identification of altered consciousness as the primary means to resist the Spectacle. Further, he is 'appropriating' (if this is the right word) for a global counterculture against capitalism, not for the American mainstream or the world of commodification. Knight is wrong to see Bey's selection as particularly 'American'. Rather, it is countercultural. Bey selects the parts of traditions which are compatible with a broadly anti-systemic, politics-of-desire orientation. This is part and parcel of his method of 'psychic nomadism', syncretism, or bricolage.

Whether cultural bricolage is disrespectful or harmful is a matter of debate. In Bey's view, participating in other cultures is a counterbalance against the prevalent form of racism, which is mainly psychological. I would emphasise that Bey is using such accounts of difference to rupture dominant categories, to open up zones of intensity, and not at all to trap 'others' in their otherness or posit western superiority. Quite the opposite, in fact – he posits intensi-



## Imaginative Participation and Appropriation

Bey/Wilson's tendency to appropriate from a range of cultures leads to an eclectic approach which takes on and claims labels and practices from outside his own context. He also writes about regions through his own experiences, and he writes about historical topics through contemporary analogies. His creative process is similar to Romanticism, which seeks emotional intensity rather than literal truth, and to Burroughs' cut-up method. This is arguably a cost of working at the level of archetypes, seeking spiritual meanings and connections rather than empirical, spatial accounts.

Bey has been criticised for this position. For instance, Joseph Christian Greer accuses Bey, and Chaos Magick more broadly, of appropriating and decontextualising Taoism by identifying it with chaos. The main issue seems to be the position that classical Taoists never directly claimed that Taoist ontology precludes law or government. Similarly, Knight questions Wilson's reconstruction of Moorish Science for a mainly-white group of followers unconnected to the original Temple. He claims that Bey/Wilson has cherry-picked the parts of Islam which best fit with his 'American-ness' – particularly the American-ness of the Beat generation. With its embrace of idols and anything-goes spirituality, Bey's Islam is more neo-pagan than Islamic, though also rooted in pantheist forms of Sufism. In addition, both Knight and Helms accuse Bey of unacknowledged privilege.

never came. The experience of this period can be reconstructed by using technologies and techniques of the period, such as letter-writing, and avoiding other technologies, such as television.

## Tongs, Bees, and Other Groups

In works written after *TAZ*, Bey has increasingly focused on small-scale, immediate, often clandestine groups, with the terms 'tong' and 'bee' often recurring. In 'The Criminal Bee', Bey argues that *TAZ* and related structures rely on illegality, even when they break no laws. They break the framework of consensus reality. He advocates 'bees', or small-scale, task-focused groups, as the 'only viable immediate means of realizing passionate series in real-time, everyday life'. They are based on evasion and nomadism, rather than confrontation and seizing power.

However, Bey argues strongly against the reading of *TAZ* as an evasion, postponement or substitute for revolution. Instead, he argues that uprising, on a model similar to that of Sorel, emerges from the *TAZ*, which is a 'matrix' for it, and a prefiguration, a 'pre-echo'. In Sorel, revolution is theorised as 'general strike', which is at once a future event and an organising 'myth'. Particular uprisings and strikes serve as instances of the same energy, or as prefigurations, of the general strike. An effective *TAZ* in this sense should be both enjoyable *and* political. Bey argues that most groups are one or the other – either joyless politics or apolitical lifestyle events.

The tong, or secret society (a term for a certain type of revolutionary or criminal group in pre-revolutionary China), is a similar type of group. In 'Black Thorn Manifesto', Bey celebrates 'certain anarcho-Taoist Chinese tongs' and expresses a wish to reproduce their 'mutual aid webworks'. In 'Tong Aesthetics', Bey suggests that the City of Willows was an imaginal space of the Chinese tong.

Bey argues that aesthetics, or style, is also important in the emergence of tongs today. A tong requires a cause and a legend. The

legend is similar to a Sorelian myth – something one wishes to manifest in the world. The cause might be the Insurrection, which is prefigured in the TAZ. The legend is a passionate reading or psychological structure of the cause. For instance, it might revive radical millenarian beliefs.

In *Immediatism*, Bey claims to refocus from disappearance to reappearance, and, hence, organisation. Capitalism now recuperates artistic intensity almost instantly. The tong is again proposed as an organisational form. Bey defines a tong as a secret mutual benefit group for marginal or illegal purposes. Today's tongs may be virtually secret simply by means of avoiding mass-media attention. Avoiding the media is crucial for maintaining the power of an activity. A tong may also be selective in whom it admits, and in how much information it shares. Bey denies that this is elitist, because the group does not restrict itself so as to coalesce power.

Overcoming isolation is itself a central goal of a modern tong. Such groups also operate to mutually enhance members' lives. They would evolve into nuclei of 'self-chosen allies' seeking to seize back more and more space and time for play, eventually expanding into a network and a movement, and finally a new society. However, its networking needs to be slow and corporeal.

Bey later tries to systematise the different groups he discusses. They are different levels of expression of his project of 'immediatism'. In 'The Occult Assault on Institutions', he lists a series of increasingly broad groups which he portrays as levels of immediatist organisation:

1. The gathering – any spontaneous action, such as a revolt, party, rave, or Be-in;
2. The potlatch, or exchange party;
3. The Bee, such as quilting bees – a group of friends meeting to work together on a project, or united by a common passion;

a way that just about anything can come to 'prove' what Wilson is looking for. An example of the former is the speculated relationship between Oscar Wilde and George Wharton Pepper, discussed in *Riverpeople*. An example of the latter is the treatment of mythology in *Ploughing the Clouds*, in which common mythological figures such as gold, snakes, cows, dragons, berries, chalices, and water are taken as signifying psychedelic 'soma'. In neither case is the posited history impossible, and the purpose of presenting it may be to inspire the imagination as to what *might have been*, as much as to suggest what actually was.

In many other cases, the image of what 'might have been' is both more likely and more inspiring. Images of pirate utopias, networks of autonomous castles, libertarian religious heresies, travelling on pilgrimages in pursuit peak experience, and psychedelic traditions stretching back into antiquity are inspiring images at the level of imagination. They are images Wilson inspires the reader to *want* to be true, and provides just about enough evidence that they might have been to stimulate a feeling that other worlds are possible. They are also images of the utopian impulse towards altered consciousness and autonomy, actualised in different conditions, providing a kind of imaginary genealogy for present struggles.

which 'cannot claim authenticity'. In *Shower of Stars*, he suggests that comparing different approaches – for instance, Sufi practices, Taoist spirit-writing, African-American mediums, and Christian angels – provides a set of 'anthropological coordinates' for a wider project. In a poem, Bey raises the intriguing figure of a 'prophet of a future that should have been but won't', in many ways an analogy to past TAZ's themselves.

Bey/Wilson denies that the past is necessarily worse than the present. Modernist Europe considers the past cruel, but only because it conceals its own cruelty technologically. Bey argues against determinism because it labels creativity and revolution as futile. In a way, not much has changed since the 1600s. History is written from the state's point of view. Revolutionary and religious motivations are viewed as dangerous and fanatical. We rarely see history told from the point of view of the rebel. Bey/Wilson has variously claimed that we're still in the Roman Empire (since the state-form has barely changed), and that we're in the nineteenth century (since capitalism has attempted to reverse theoretical advances since this point). However, he is also acutely alert to the different conditions for autonomy in different eras – such as the technological barriers to Alamut-style castle utopias today. His relationship to the past is non-linear, imaginative, and focused on extracting possibilities for autonomy.

The approach taken in Wilson's historical works is not standard historiography. His historical method provides interesting alternative histories which make for compelling reading. They are always historically possible. They don't, for instance, rely on miracles or on the falsity of "proven" conclusions. They simply build up new constellations from the available "evidence". Yet Wilson often speculates on, or even claims to have received by revelation, various conclusions which the available sources do not suggest directly. There is a danger that Wilson projects his own desires, fantasies, or preferences onto his source-material. There is also a danger of overinterpreting symbols based on presumed equivalences, in such

4. The Tong or secret society, or its above-ground equivalent, the club;
5. The TAZ, which can arise from any or all of the previous levels. A TAZ lasts between one night and a couple of years, but while it lasts, it fills the horizon of attention of its participants, becoming a whole society;
6. The uprising or insurrection, in which the TAZ seeks to become the whole world.

Of these, the Tong is the highest that can be predetermined. The others cannot be 'organised' – at most one can maximise conditions for them to happen. In another passage, Bey argues that the social model implied by ontological anarchism is the band or gang. Whereas families result from scarcity, bands express abundance. This echoes anthropological studies of bands.

All of the group-types listed above have a similar purpose and function. In 'Seduction of the Cyber Zombies', Bey argues for a principle of group-formation similar to Fourier's. The purpose of the group is to maximise pleasure or 'luxury' for its members. The cohesion of the group stems from passion, which for Bey is the only viable integrative force.

Immediatist groups are not based on 'group-think' or a common moral code. They are not meant to counter individuality. Instead, they are meant to enhance individuals by providing a 'matrix of friendship', and combating loneliness and alienation. This type of group is both the most natural possible for humans, and the worst abomination for capital.

An immediatist group has rules of play (as a game), but not laws. It seeks to resist capture, which follows from representation. Immediatist organisations have the goals of conviviality (coming together and enhancing each other's pleasures), creation of beauty outside structures of mediation, destruction of the 'ugliness' of capitalism, and the construction of values through peak experiences.

Forming such groups is itself an act of resistance. Capitalism only allows a limited range of groups, based on production, reproduction or consumption. Simply coming together outside of these categories is already a victory – indeed, it has ‘achieved virtually everything Immediatism yearns for’. This defiance of alienation and boredom will generate play and art almost automatically.

Forming such a group is a struggle, because time and work pressures militate against it. One must overcome the feeling of being ‘too busy’ for Immediatist projects – this is the whole point, to defeat the structure of capitalism which prevents conviviality. Another problem Bey identifies is the temptation to sell the art created through such projects. The temptation is strong, because it allows one to avoid work. However, it risks mediation, and hence being seen, and hence repression of the secret group.

As a result of this pluralistic position, Wilson suggests that traditions of interpretation such as Marxism and feminism are too reductive. They miss the imaginal realm, because they over-use dualisms. The imaginal realm is a space where dualisms break down, a third point.

Bey works on the margins between empirical history and what Ptolemy Tompkins calls speculative history – the spiritualised reconstruction of the past as part of general narratives constructed from contemporary viewpoints. The *Ancient Aliens* series is a good example of the speculative approach at its purest. Academic historians such as the British Marxist Historians and the Subaltern Studies Group are good examples of the more sober historical approach, although most of its adherents are more on the conservative side. Writers like Wilson/Bey, Tompkins, R. Gordon Wasson and Timothy Leary tread a fine line between the two approaches, giving free reign to imaginative reconstruction while also focusing on empirical evidence.

Wilson/Bey often lacks adequate evidence to decisively demonstrate his claims, but at the same time, they rarely violate the historical record or require supernatural explanations. They don’t deploy Occam’s Razor and they assume that historical societies are interested in certain existential questions important to the author. This can be seen as abuse of the historical material. However, I would argue that it is better seen as a different type of knowledge, derived from a different regime of truth connected to a different subjectivity from the scholarly gaze of conventional history. This is history written from the standpoint of schizorevolutionary desire.

In *Scandal*, Wilson treats different facts, stories, rumours, historical sources, and pieces of scholarship as ‘like little bits of a crystal prism’, which might be arranged together to reveal light. For instance, discussing the use of marijuana and other drugs in South Asian Islamic mysticism, Bey/Wilson attempts to avoid a sociological and psychological treatment, and instead to adopt the viewpoint of a heterodox mystic. This is an imaginative activity

## Historical Method

As a historian, Bey/Wilson writes in an unfashionably general way, somewhere between classical universalism and a particularism focused on syncretic uses. In *Ploughing the Clouds*, Wilson admits that his comparative approach is similar to nineteenth-century generalism. He portrays such generalism as necessary to escape the boundaries of academic disciplines and to 'analyze the ineffable' so as to recover what is forgotten.

Wilson suggests that myth and folklore deal with origins, but social science and anthropology refuse them. For him, the resultant academic refusal to interpret facts means that facts cannot become knowledge or meaning, and are rendered useless. He argues, however, that origin is not an 'exclusive category'. Instead, it is a kind of narrative element used in interpretation, and multiple incommensurable origins are possible. He thus recovers the kind of comparative, general history which is precluded by the poststructuralist rejection of metanarratives, and by the policing of identity-boundaries.

However, he is not seeking to recover a universalist approach. His history, like poststructuralism, encourages multiple narratives. He argues that fairy tales are the only universal world literature, and their spread is unrelated to authors, literacy, or 'high' traditions. The existence of multiple narratives means that one should recognise and use many different traditions. Even science has a place, provided it can renounce its claim to exclusive truth and seriousness. Mythology is 'fractal', and there are always multiple meanings overlaid in each story.

## Hakim Bey: The Pessimism of Autonomy

Hakim Bey's theoretical creativity did not end with the publication of *TAZ*, and he has continued to produce new contributions for those seeking autonomy in a changing strategic field. In this essay, the seventh in a series of sixteen columns on Bey's work, I examine his contributions from the 1996 book *Millennium* onwards.

### **Millennium: a changed strategic field**

The strategic concerns underpinning *TAZ* recede in Bey's more recent work. In *Millennium*, written in 1996, Bey reverses his earlier critique of revolutionary politics. With communism no longer an issue, he refers to a need for 'revolutionary presence', pitted against the alienation and separation of capitalism. However, he insists that this presence should also value difference. For instance, he celebrates the Zapatistas for wishing to remain Mayans without making everyone Mayans. They assert the right to be different. They also act to expel power, rather than seize it, knowing the state could not destroy their zone, which was already depleted.

During the Cold War, anarchism took a position as a third alternative to capitalism and Stalinism. Today, there is no such possibility, as the second position has collapsed. This changed context thrusts anarchists into the position of being the opposition, the second pole. It forces Bey to rethink his previous criticisms of revolutionary politics. Bey argues that difference is the organic revolutionary response to capitalist sameness, or monoculture. Bey

sees 'tribal' or communal differences becoming increasingly precious as sites of difference from capitalism. Often, such differences are recuperated as spectacle, customs, consumption options and so on. However, 'organic integral difference' becomes revolutionary today. There is thus a choice between a hegemonic particularity – integrated into neoliberalism – and an anti-hegemonic particularity.

Bey now calls for an alliance of particularities. Today, any unassimilable difference is potentially revolutionary. Some remain reactionary, as 'hegemonic particularities' seeking control, whereas others become truly revolutionary 'non-hegemonic particularities'. Both right and left rebel against the system's total control, and they are now hard to tell apart. While encouraging non-hegemonic particularities, Bey also argues for the development of conviviality which communicates across 'false boundaries'. The uniting factor among such particularities is 'presence', or overcoming alienation through intensity.

Bey proposes a federalism similar to Proudhon's, between various particularities. In such a model, autonomy and federation are complementary rather than contradictory. The key principle of such a federation would be to recognise freedom at every level of organisation, even the smallest. This should not, however, be a federation of orthodoxies. Islam, for instance, includes a range of different views of the sacred, irreducible to orthodoxy or fundamentalism. It is the unorthodox and heretical variants which Bey seeks to bring together in a global networked struggle with other particularities. Indeed, Bey suggests that Islam is indispensable to a global anti-capitalist coalition.

For Bey, anarchism is anti-ideological. One shouldn't care if someone else wishes to be a Mayan, Muslim, or rationalist, as long as one can secede and individual autonomy is safe. This creates a possibility for broad coalitions of groups excluded by capital, on the basis of mutual tolerance. Autonomous enclaves of different groups are to be linked through anarcho-federalism (Islam and Eugenics). Anarchism is the only movement capable of being taken

attributes this bias to an identification with aggregate collective responses to capitalism. The Social as an idea opposed to Capital was a strong opposing idea for some time. Yet it is not Bey's preferred alternative. Instead, Bey is interested in what Sellars terms 'mini-societies', set up beyond the reach of law and the state. However, Bey argues regarding Marxism that it was sincerely emancipatory. Stalin largely stamped that out. But at the same time, Stalinism was implicit in earlier authoritarian aspects of Marxism.

## Hakim Bey's Histories

Bey/Wilson's histories are nearly always discussions of historical TAZ's or social movements which create periods of autonomy and intensity. His histories focus on the esoteric, in the sense of non-ordinary or spiritual states of consciousness. In *Pirate Utopias*, Bey suggests that existing histories – such as those of Corbin and Eliade – are useful in categorising religions, but neglect the role of insurrectionary desire. He admits to using imagination more than an academic historian would. He defends this, as a type of alternative history. Imagination is powerful, as for instance in Noble Drew Ali's version of Islam (which involves not only a reconstruction of religious doctrine, but also an origin narrative). Imagination allows reference to the imaginal (or archetypal, or virtual) realm. Place-names like Tibet and Egypt, used apocryphally, can unlock altered consciousness in dreams, books or visions. These names function as metaphors for the spiritual realm or paradise, for the realm of shamanic or ecstatic experience.

Bey/Wilson's histories are nearly always histories of small-scale or short-lived non-state (or quasi-state) communities neglected by mainstream history. Examples include 'tri-racial isolate' communities in America, radical strands within Sufism, pirate communities in North Africa, the African-American Moorish Science Temple, d'Annunzio's short-lived Republic of Fiume, the Grange (an American rural organisation), and Chinese Tongts or secret societies, to mention just a few examples.

Defending the transformative importance of such cases, Wilson suggests that people pay too much attention to supposedly successful revolutions, like Russia, instead of supposedly failed ones. He

seriously, in a post-ideological age. In *Millennium*, Bey also argues for the creation of spaces for artists outside the commodified world of art. These spaces would reaffirm creativity in everyday life.

In the current period, contestation is intensified. Each zone either belongs to capital, or ends up in opposition. Whatever the system tries to destroy takes on an aura of life. Sometimes it differs from capitalism only by a hair's breadth, but still this is enough to make it completely revolutionary, defying the rule of the one system. Bey likens this to the small distance in *satori*. Religion is faced with a choice of capitulation or revolt. Art, too, can survive only in opposition. Nationalism is on a collision course with capitalism because capitalism has reduced nations to 'zones of depletion', and because capital is interested in nations only for instrumental reasons. This issue could go either right or left, depending on whether the nation as particularity is defined as hegemonic. Capital also begins to clash with remnants of social ideology in liberalism, conservatism, the UN, the EU and so on. Politics is reduced to 'cognitive dissonance', as no ideology is really compatible with total capitalist rule.

Hence, the ground for TAZ's has disappeared. Third positions have been eliminated. Everything is now either capitulating, or opposing capitalism. Capital can now turn its attention to what it formerly had to ignore due to the bipolar conflict. It also no longer needs former allies, such as Christianity, or to make deals with social sectors. It formerly needed allies in its fight against socialism or the Soviet bloc. Today, it reverses the deals it made with Northern labour movements and other allies. Everything becomes disposable. Regions of the North can be turned into regions of the South through capital flight. Any particular region, class, profession, sexuality, or attitude might be the next to be disposed of. For privileged people, however, the choice is between capitulation on comfortable terms and reinventing opposition. TAZs retain a strategic role, but the goal is now to extend them into permanent

autonomous zones, which coalesce into the 'millennium' or new world.

Autonomy as such is now criminalised. Bey discusses the cases of MOVE and the Waco siege, and argues that both groups were attacked by the state because they wanted to be autonomous. The fact that people just want to 'be weird – by themselves', or be a group on their own terms, outrages consensus reality. Sociologically, millions of people from many backgrounds are dissatisfied. But they tend to be invisible, because they don't vote or work in the formal sector. The middle-class is shrinking, which creates dangers of fascism and populism.

Neoliberalism claims there is only one world. Money is free within this one world. However, in practice, it divides the world into included and excluded zones, zones of security and zones of depletion, in which it sucks away all life-energy. Instead of clashing ideologies, there is now capital, on one side, and what it excludes, on the other. By declaring itself the one world – the only alternative – capital has called into being its nemesis. This nemesis is the last-ditch defence of everything that cannot become part of global capitalism. Bey suggests that the opposition that emerges in such a context will be profoundly influenced by the 'Clastrian machine', particularly shamanism. This machine will attack exchange itself, and promote reciprocity and generosity. He also suggests that power vacuums will appear in zones depleted and evacuated by capital, providing radical possibilities. This analysis also implies that transgression and the critique of binaries are no longer effective approaches to resistance. Without bipolar categories – with the system operating as oneness instead of binary – there is nothing to transgress. There is only capitulation or opposition.

In 'Islam and the Internet', Bey argues that there is a need for embodied resistance. We need something like an ideology, and we need to clarify (but not purify) language. Communication needs to be reconstructed as 'communicativeness'. By this, Bey means that communication should be festive, dialogical, pleasurable,

ible. The TAZ plays a special role in affirming for creative people that they exist.



'you risk insanity in order to bring back  
healing word from the Ninth Sky  
nobody wants them because they're not for sale'

The Spectacle has largely contained and recuperated art. Artists have been reduced to providers of images or bytes, such as advertisements. Even images of utopia and transformation fall into this trap. The system can use all artforms to deepen simulation and control. Artists have been trapped in enclaves, akin to Native American reservations. We shouldn't give up the enclaves, because they're the last vestiges of autonomy. Providing entertainment is not evil, but it's not Bey's calling. Rather, art should transform everyday life. The work-consume dichotomy is being undermined and sabotaged in everyday life – not in the media or theory. We may just need to 'exorcise the spooks' and give up the artist-audience relation. Play makes the audience impossible.

In the past, there was a time-lag between the emergence of artistic movements and their recuperation by the Spectacle. Today, this lag barely exists. Most art, including avant-garde and popular art, is instantly commodified. In this context, art which avoids mediation has a function of 'insurrectionist propaganda'. Bey is not calling for Realist or crudely political art. Rather, art propagandises by acting as an invitation to altered consciousness. Artists should encourage readers to perceive an 'outside' to capitalism, and to pursue peak experiences. They should promote a 'desire to desire', and an aesthetic 'taste' and way of life contrary to commodification.

Wilson endorses Shelley's idea of the artist/poet as unacknowledged legislator, or provider of an ethic of living. Propagandistic art should produce powerful emotions which rip aside the veils of everyday life, such as inattention, boredom and self-betraying egotism. In *Millennium*, however, Bey differentiates the US and European situation. In Europe, there are still remnants of the public intellectual, whereas in the US, masses of creative people are invis-

warm, and linked to desire – rather than being abstract and mediated. Bey also calls for a spirituality of and for the body, and a re-enchantment of the world.

Certain types of movements are partially resistant, but also problematic. Fundamentalism spearheads resistance to capitalist capitulation. But by closing the doors of interpretation, it represses the desire for difference and prevents the emergence of a fully-fledged critique of capitalism. Mafias are a kind of shadow government which emerges from the degeneration of the Pastoral Code (Clastres's view of indigenous warfare) in struggle against the state.

In 'The Obelisk', Bey argues that resistance movements since the rise of centralised power are based on the gift economy, which preceded this rise. This is less clear today than in the past. But Bey suggests that today's movements still seek 'empirical freedoms' defined by the economy of the gift – freedoms such as the absence of oppression, conviviality, bodily or spiritual pleasure, peace, plenty, equality, and so on. These same values appear in immemorial 'rights and customs', in the politics of desire, and in movements such as tactical media.

## Green Hermeticism and the Last Possible Outside

From 2004 onwards, Bey has been increasingly interested in ecology as the site of altered consciousness. He has developed the idea of 'Green Hermeticism' as a potential philosophical matrix for ecology. He has also written a series of ecologically inflected works, such as *Riverpeople* and *Ec(o)logues*. Such works combine intense appreciation for local ecological sites with Bey's older themes of mysticism, autonomy, disalienation, altered consciousness, and alternative history.

Other recent works have a more pessimistic tone. In *Escape from the Nineteenth Century*, Bey suggests that the present feels as if his-

tory has stopped, and we are trapped in the ruins of time. In 'Seduction of the Cyber Zombies', Bey suggests that a desperate global war is coming, between global capital and a worldfull of individuals and groups. The best we can hope is that it be a peaceful war, like Sorel's General Strike. But we should prepare for the worst. In another piece, Bey predicts that the situation will become very ugly when capital is finally opposed.

If one finds oneself in a zone of depletion, or No Go Zone, one's prospects for autonomy increase with the withdrawal of power into the virtual. Such zones are unlikely to be able to assert political autonomy. However, there are possibilities for freedom in everyday life. Today, such zones are already vacuums of control, but mostly suffer 'negative chaos'. To become emancipatory sites, they need to be filled with 'positive chaos'. Such possibilities depend on an appropriate model of the economy and the social. Bey suggests this might operate as a kind of borderless bricolage, a 'melange of whatever works'. Technology is likely to be low-tech and ad-hoc, but 'more human than green'. It should be constructed to resist hierarchy through each person's will to power. Failure may be the last refuge from the 'Capitalist heaven' of simulation. One can at least be a beautiful spirit doomed to fail, rather than an ugly one.

In periods of defeat, the most pressing issue is survival as a trace or remnant, to be recovered later. Following the Anabaptists after their defeat, Wilson argues that, if the world cannot be saved (through revolution), at least a 'saving remnant' can withdraw into intentional communities based on pleasure. In a poem, 'Failure as the Last Possible Outside', Bey writes of a future in which entire nations are enclosed as 'literal garbage dumps', but are secretly inhabited by outcasts and bricoleurs. Even in the darkest dystopia, Bey creates hope of an outside, an autonomous zone.

Whatever slips past panoptical surveillance, perhaps because it seems futile, becomes the basis for this zone. In this poem, Bey appeals to the 'paradoxical productivity of all that refuses to be computed, that which "doesn't count"'. Rebels disguise themselves

out mediation by images or words. Music connects to emotion and desire, and therefore the 'utopian imagination'. It is bodiless, yet speaks to and from the body. Claiming music as 'ours' – as something which belongs, performatively, to the audience or to diffuse artists – is a disalienating gesture. The musician should disappear as a 'specialist', and reappear as a 'shamanic function'.

Bey embraces the Situationist idea of the 'suppression and realization of Art' – its suppression as a separate sphere, and realisation in everyday life. Artists yearn to recover the bardic function of telling the group's stories. Unable to do so, they spiral into ever greater alienation. The role of art today is split between the recovery of the bardic function and the pursuit of the suppression and realisation of art.

Art needs to be removed from the commodity economy and placed in a gift economy. In a gift economy, festival is a focal point of social life, a kind of government (or a replacement for the master-signifier). Today, events such as raves, Be-Ins and gatherings recover an aspect of gift-economy. Hence, they are seen as dangerous sites of disorder from a commodified perspective. Bey proposes that each artwork should be a 'seduction machine' designed to awaken 'true desires', anger at repression, or a belief that realisation is possible. Such artworks would have to convey an 'insane generosity' or abundance, an almost painful excess of emotional or lived meaning.

Bey argues that artists do not choose alienation. They seek to add to the 'image-hoard' of their tribe or band. They are forced into alienation because modern society separates work and play. The shamanic trace is more easily visible in non-western societies – for example, in Balinese and Javanese art, dance and theatre. In the west it is buried beneath the apparatuses of organised religion, machines, and Empire. However, it reappears in the west as 'modern' art which is directed against modernity. In *Riverpeople*, Wilson expresses a similar sentiment poetically:

## Art and shamanism

The shamanic trace can also be found in art. Bey sometimes identifies as an artist in his work, and reflects on the nature of art, artists and audiences. He theorises art as a residue of an original practice of personal or group ecstasy, which has been damaged by the artist-audience separation. The original, disalienated form of art is the tribe or band's 'creation of itself in the aesthetic imagination', without any separation between performers and audience. The artist's calling is to restore the original space of ecstasy or to create altered consciousness – not to 'entertain' in a narrow sense, or to accumulate status as an authorial authority. Transformative art ultimately destroys art-as-spectacle and the boundary between artist and audience.

In 'The Utopian Blues', Bey argues that musicians hover in an in-between space of shamanic intoxication. Music probably emerged as a symbol of separation from nature. However, it also preserves symbols of the lost unity of an earlier time. Music often expresses the 'festal' or carnival spirit, which is associated with utopian energy. When music emerges as a distinct category of art, it becomes alienated and specialised. The bohemian artist is simply a modern, commodity-society version of the 'low-down spirituality' of musicians and artisans through history, both tabooed and possessed of a shamanic trace.

Artistic revolutions have been attempted (Romanticism, Wagner, Fourier). They have failed because art remains commodified. Even revolutionary and non-western music is appropriated and reduced to a simulation or counterfeit. However, art retains a utopian trace. Music in particular is utopian because it addresses emotions, with-

as outcasts to slip through the cracks in the Empire. In another poem, 'Herm', he incites us to live like 'Them', the tri-racial isolates, as 'rebels against progress', as if with 'bad genes'.

In one poem, he suggests that, if our pagan deities have gone silent, we should do the same, and withdraw to a monastic or druidic site. He also refers in this era to 'endarkenment', or reversal of Enlightenment. This is another term for altered consciousness, this time associated with low-technology, low-mediation forms of life – such as, in one poem, 'flyfishing while under the Influence'. We cannot become 'innocent' or 'primitive', but we can still 'fall in love with the beauty of the Earth as a sign of divinity'. Recognising the archetype of 'Perfect Nature' in actual nature might be an illusion. But it is a necessary, creative error. It creates possibilities for altered consciousness.

## Discussion of TAZ

In some ways, it is unsurprising that Bey is more pessimistic today than previously. The idea of TAZ seems to stem from a particular conjuncture. Bey's theory stems from the fraying of the world-system in the 1980s and 1990s. As capital withdrew from vast zones and the Fordist control-mechanisms broke down, areas fell out of systemic control. The state collapsed in Somalia and Afghanistan, gangs took control of shanty-towns, secessionist movements seized control of regions. Only a few of these (such as Chiapas) became autonomous zones with emancipatory projects. Nevertheless, the fraying of the system provided hope for autonomists and anarchists worldwide.

Things have changed somewhat in the 2000s. The system continues to fray around the edges, with 'black holes' emerging in its power-structure. But increasingly these emergent autonomous zones are shut down, pre-empted, or militarised. Intensified control is eliminating or shrinking the spaces the system cannot see,

at least within countries like the UK. With GIS, Google Maps, GPS systems, personalised laws and data mining, the gap between map and territory is growing ever narrower. What is more, the system is remodelling the territory to fit the map ever more closely. I would speculate that the state has found ways of seeing TAZs, firstly by defining anything it cannot predict as a threat, and secondly by focusing its gaze more closely on each micro-element of space and life.

Another possible issue with TAZ is the apparent necessity of an adversary, so as to keep it temporary. In early pieces (like *TAZ* and 'The Criminal Bee'), Bey tends towards the position that laws and oppression are necessary, to provide a target for rebellion. He seems to abandon this position in his more recent work. Is a permanent TAZ even thinkable? I think it *would* be possible to have a kind of society in which peak experience is the ultimate value, without requiring a repressive regime as a challenge to overcome. But it couldn't be based on conflictual action-spaces of the kind seen in activism. The closest analogue are certain indigenous groups in which intergroup conflict and intense ritual experiences are common. The utopian work *Bolo'Bolo* provides an image of something akin to a society of permanent TAZs.

The idea of failure as the last possible outside sounds pessimistic compared to Bey's earlier work. However, the emphasis on disappearance is continuous. If capitalism claims to be a unitary world, yet excludes zones which cannot be commodified, then failure and autonomy go together. Knight suggests that Bey speaks as if his generation were the last one with a chance at revolution, as well as at overseas adventures.

The TAZ concept is often used to interpret aspects of 1990s counterculture, particularly raves. In a video, Bey lists as examples of TAZ-like phenomena such events as neo-pagan festivals, rainbow camps, 'open conspiracies' such as *Queer Nation*, raves, collaborative art events, anarchist collectives, intentional communities, secret societies, and even drug dealing. These gatherings attempt

The implication is sometimes present in Bey's work that anarchist and radical traditions are continuations of a hermetic, esoteric, shamanic underground tradition which has repeatedly revived and is rarely fully exterminated. Survivors of persecution often wander afield and spread aspects of forbidden doctrines in invisible ways, so the doctrines continue and reappear down the years. Bey seeks to uncover the roots of religion in shamanism, and he is probably right that organised religion is an alienated form of this indigenous practice. However, Bey tends to read spiritual traditions (the Andean 'condor') as bodily traditions (the Andean 'snake'). This arguably limits his ability to engage with the indigenous traditions on which he draws.

Orthodox religion has to play down the playfulness of spiritual becoming, which is a variety of serious play or serious joke. Orthodoxy creates an ontological hierarchy between One and Many, transcendence and immanence, and privileges transcendence. This contrasts both with gnostic dualism and with radical monism, which favours the Many. People are left waiting for signs of a coming messiah, rather than looking for the divine spark within themselves. Orthodoxy always insisted that law remain the dominant frame. Mystical experience was meant to remain within the law. For this reason, mystics tread a thin line between accepted heterodoxy and heresy. Organised religion prioritises 'God the creator' over 'God the inner reality', or the mystical experience. This experience in turn breaks down organised religion. Since one can see God in everything, the idea of Divine Law (which creates a split between sacred and profane, permitted and prohibited) breaks down.

Rather than rejecting the drive behind religion, Bey argues for religion to be democratised. The religious experience (ecstasy, transcendence, altered consciousness) should be available in an egalitarian fashion, without specialists, priests or gurus. Bey takes his stand where 'religion becomes aesthetic, festal, ludic, and creative— a source of power and freedom'. The mystical experience not only breaks religious and secular law, but also the 'law of the ordinary', the order of things. Transformations require trickery, norm-breaking and symbolic reversals. Mysticism maintains that 'belief' is a delusion. It seeks experience, rather than faith. Mysticism is a process of initiation into disalienated being, with a goal of a 'state of bliss', or realisation. The recognition that one is already part of the unitary spiritual substance does not leave everything unchanged. Rather, it leads to an unlearning or loss of fear, so that one can be led by one's natural senses, like a child. This leads to disalienation. Although mysticism has radical effects, some mystics, such as Augustinians, remain within law through hierarchical dualisms and strict regulation of interpersonal relations.

to realise enjoyment, or 'passional series', in everyday life. Many groups fail to realise the depth of their threat to the spectacle, use the media, and end up recuperated. Political groups have mainly failed to master pleasure, and lifestyle groups to grasp politics.

Benjamin Noys lists TAZ as one of a number of recent approaches emphasising the role of space in liberation. Simon Sellars refers to 'Reclaim the Streets' occupations, raves, and occasions where protesters overrun police, as instances of TAZ. He also surveys a list of academic pieces which refer to TAZ in relation to themes such as popular culture, Critical Mass, areas of Deaf culture defined by sign language, Stonehenge, camping, hip-hop, and various Black, women's, and gay/queer spaces. Williams uses a similar example of the Fare Dodgers' Liberation Front, who held parties on London Underground stations to protest and subvert fare rises. Jeff Shantz sees Bey's work as an inspiration for the formation of anarchist social centres in 1990s America. Sellars suggests that the idea of TAZ became widespread, but without a definite meaning. It had general connotations of anarchy and freedom, but was not always understood in Bey's sense. This led to criticisms, such as Zerzan's depiction of the term as 'hip posturing'. Similarly, Geert Lovink has observed that TAZ is taken out of its political and cultural context in recuperated forms of cyberculture.

Williams suggests that TAZ, and some of Bey's other concepts, tend to be 'empty signifiers': They have so many meanings and uses that they lack a definite meaning. He also draws the conclusion from Bey that fulfilment never comes, that a little enlightenment is better than none. He argues that Bey ultimately arrives at the conclusion that anarchism is unattainable. Instead, he seeks to make the current world a bit more anarchist. However, I'd suggest that there's a core qualitative reference to intensity and disalienation which provides a core of meaning to such concepts.

It is true that Bey is sometimes strategically pessimistic. He is not confident that we can reach emancipation from the strategic

options available today. However, he has a clear transformative perspective in which the ultimate goal is a society integrated by passion, operating as something like a permanent TAZ. Enlightenment is not an absent goal which never comes. Enlightenment means altered consciousness, which is a lived alternative.

Bey does not simply try to make the world a bit better. He has an antagonistic orientation to a dominant system, conceived as a 'totality' or Spectacle. Far from becoming more pessimistic with time, Bey becomes more revolutionary after the collapse of 'communism'. He feels a need for uncompromising opposition to a system which accepts only full capitulation. On this question, I believe Bey is right, and Williams is wrong. The Gramscian strategy of fighting in the 'trenches and fieldworks' of a complex society is increasingly ineffective in a 'joined-up', high-speed, low-tolerance form of capitalism. The system's demand for total capitulation makes it impossible to make the world a bit better – especially from a standpoint inside it. Today, even the most reformist demands seem to require a near-revolution to succeed. Those who give up on revolution, and use their included position to seek small reforms, will have to settle for less and less.

Despite all the changes since 1991, TAZs still exist. The ZAD in France is an archetypal TAZ. There are also shades of the TAZ in Tahrir Square, Gezi Park and Occupy, though they are oriented to visibility rather than invisibility. Social movement-controlled spaces in autonomous communities in Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia, South Africa and so on are arguably a variety of TAZ. Authors such as Graeber argue that autonomous zones continue to exist invisibly in areas such as rural Madagascar. The most effective TAZ's, almost by definition, will be invisible to us, too. Yet the regulation of everyday life, and the extension of surveillance and repression to post-TAZ spaces, are rendering it harder to alternate TAZ with ordinary life. This, in turn, creates a need for something more permanent. Arguably, the possibility of TAZ relies on the semi-permanence of everyday practices of resistance, such as squatting,

Orthodox Church as the latest phase in a centuries-old psychological and spiritual war. This war pits Native Americans, African-Americans, poor whites, and drop-outs against Anglican, Puritan and imperialist hierarchies. Other new religions such as Discordianism and Chaos might also figure on the progressive side of this conflict, although co-opted varieties of the New Age and cybergnosticism do not. Wilson/Bey's side has much existential appeal – for instance, Puritans kidnapped by Native Americans sometimes refused to be 'rescued'. However, the repressive side has largely won out.

Organised religion is formed through the hierarchical degeneration of mystical traditions. This requires misreading the founding, mystical texts and experiences. Initial psychological doctrines such as the rebirth of the self (as disalienated) are given literal meanings, or freedom is reserved for those who are fully realised. For Wilson, transformation occurs as an 'immediate psychological reality', not in the afterlife or the far future. In mystical terms, 'death' stands for dissolution of the alienated ego, and 'paradise' refers to metaphysical realisation. 'Hell' stands for present alienation and misery, not a future punishment. All religions seek salvation, which is basically disalienation. They differ on the way to achieve it. However, organised religions deal in abstractions instead of actual disalienation. Those who have tasted disalienation have little time for abstract religious disputes.

The basis of alienated religion is the claim of authorities to a monopoly on initiation. Without authority, there is taken to be no opening to the spiritual. In *Shower of Stars*, Wilson suggests that dreams and books can also serve as initiators. This allows people to evade divine and human authority, creating a non-hierarchical process of initiation. He discusses a case from Buryat shamanism, in which the shamanic book is lost but the shaman can still get spirit into their words, as evidence for this claim. In another passage, he suggests 'urban shamanism' as a way to democratise religion.

carries this trace. The permeable body of carnivalesque is both the fully realised self and the the desired body. Festival is the inner structure of autonomy. Bey refers to Clastres' discussion of shamanic movements seeking an earthly utopia by downing tools and adopting nomadism. He suggests that many indigenous groups are not archaic remnants, but deliberate drop-outs from statist history. While this is usually read as evidence against the likes of Clastres and Sahlins, Bey suggests it actually shows that people can succeed in overthrowing the supposedly 'higher' social forms of hierarchy and separation. Bey celebrates free religions – 'half-serious, half-fun cults' like his own Moorish Orthodox Church. He opposes authoritarian religions with normative moralities.

Discussing the Mound-Builders of North America, Bey suggests that the mounds are not at all mysterious. Their purpose is to enchant the landscape. They show the viewer something about the art of harmony and guardianship of nature. The shamanic trace is also clear in the Zapatista revolt. Bey suggests that shamanism reappears in religions which reject it. For example, in Islam, it appears in forms such as sufism, the Shi'ite hidden Imam or Mahdi, and the eschatological Shi'ite socialism of Ali Shariati. Popular religions – European witchcraft, Iranian traditions linked to Zoroastrianism – often preserve the shamanic trace. Some come to see themselves as devil-worshippers, as their enemies portray them. If all things are one, and are manifestations of God, then even the devil must be an aspect of God. The devil is necessary because light cannot exist without darkness. Whereas he appears to the alienated as an evil force destroying joy, to the esoteric he appears as a bearer of light and truth, as the multiplicity which is key to oneness.

The shamanic trace is carried in Europe by the 'hermetic left'. In contrast with the right's moral dualisms, the hermetic left celebrates the 'ancient rights and customs' of freedom, justice, equality, and bodily pleasure. Wilson/Bey reportedly sees his own Moorish

countercultural events, festival circuits and so on. If the everyday is too regulated, it becomes harder to carve a TAZ from the everyday.

There are strange echoes between Bey's *Millennium* – the system versus anything that cannot be englobed – and the liberal idea of 'Jihad vs McWorld' (except in the latter case, the dominant system is valued). The main difference is that Bey conceives opposition mainly in terms of autonomous movements expressing powerful affirmative passions. In 'Jihad Revisited', Bey rejects the idea of any similarity between his dream of a neo-Sufi Islamic Zapatismo and the rise of 'Islamism'. Bey has little sympathy for the anti-fun, anti-Sufi orthodoxy of groups like the Taliban and al-Qaeda. He sees it as a 'simulation', a false conflict between the Spectacle and a self-defined energy which is not really anti-systemic. This leads to a fake conflict between 'democracy', meaning coca-colonisation, and 'Islam', taken to mean 'emotional plague' (Reich's term for psychological repression). 'Islamism' cannot negate Empire because it is itself based on negation and resentment. In a later interview, Bey suggests their limit is shown by their lack of a critique of capital, and an economic model he considers fascistic. Such groups are only able to gain popular support in countries like Afghanistan – with a rich tradition of everyday enjoyment – as a lesser evil in a context of absolute destruction.

Bey here attempts to grapple with what I elsewhere discuss as 'reactive networks'. Reactive networks lead to a certain ambiguity, because they clearly create autonomous zones (relative to capital), but these zones do not incarnate the affects Bey seeks. Indeed, the proliferating revolutionary oppositions of anything that cannot be incorporated are expressed just as much in reactive movements (e.g. ISIS, Boko Haram, Mungiki, gangs of various kinds) as in autonomous movements. This complicates the picture of 'system vs autonomous particularities' considerably. Anarchism and other radical positions (Marxism, pacifism, feminism, etc) seem to be back in the position of a 'third', but in a context where the sys-

tem still defines itself as the one world and treats difference as enmity.

Another possible difficulty with TAZ is that it identifies excess with abundance. This is a strategic response to scarcity-based dynamics, but creates difficulties in the current context. Is it possible to be paralysed by excess, as well as by lack? Berardi claims so, and suggests that contemporary capitalism has recuperated 1960s-wave revolt in this way. People are now exposed to attentive stress due to an excess of information and stimulation. Native American therapist Lewis Mehl-Madrona makes similar claims. He suggests that, without forms of meaning to provide purpose, chaos is paralysing and anxiety-inducing.

However, such critiques do not seriously problematise Bey's argument. Bey is not saying that we should do without existential attachments or meanings. He is saying that meanings are rooted in desire, which is accentuated in altered states of consciousness. The tenuous construction of personal meanings may be the last structuring force possible in a world of information overload. In any case, intensity can be experienced as euphoric rather than overwhelming, given certain conditions. Much of Bey's theory seems designed to produce these conditions. Bey also observes that information excess can lead to darkness rather than enlightenment – a 'lite age' in Bey's terms. The problem is that the excess is itself mediated and de-intensified.

later emerges around the idea that sacrifice will restore unified consciousness. This gives us three types of spiritual force: shamanic altered consciousness, the sacrificial shadow version of this consciousness, and the force of alienation.

There is something existentially primordial in the spiritual drive. Religion comes from a desire for accommodation with mysterious forces, including ancestors. This issue arises in all cultures. The binary of nature and culture exists even for indigenous people and shamanic religions. Religion works in the marginal zone between nature and culture. However, the split between nature and culture has become increasingly severe over time. It has also shifted into a vertical rather than horizontal relation. Most religions transmute consciousness of death into a separation of the immortal soul from the body, and thus into body-hatred, and a series of other exclusions – of nature, of indigenous peoples, of women, and so on. The marginal zone is occupied exclusively by priests.

Religion was initially a means to access altered consciousness and chaos. It was later monopolised by rulers. Shamanism is a type of religion which avoids alienation because creative acts are carried out by everyone, for everyone. The exchange of units or quanta of imagination is roughly equal. For instance, in voodoo and Santeria, people claim to be possessed by spirits. They do not represent, but simply present or express the spirit. This is very different from the passive relationship found in theatre between playwright, actor, and audience. Bey cites Ibn Arabi's claim that there are strands between heaven and earth along which meanings descend like angels. This image reflects Bey's own view that magical power can be channelled from the field of chaos or imagination.

Bey suggests that there is an underground, hermetic tradition which preserves the old values in the forms of heresies. Movements such as the Free Spirit movement recover the trace of shamanism. Bey claims that shamanism has subverted colonial power – first turning hostility into romanticism, and then generating dependence on 'native' power. The field of the carnivalesque



## Religion and Shamanism

One of Bey's most unusual contributions is his theory of the origins of religion. According to him, spirituality and religion are different. Bey defines spirituality as the 'imaginal creative esprit of the social', the force of social creativity and imagination. Religion is its spectral or shadow form. In other words, spirituality and religion are forms of the shamanic trace. They differ in their degree of alienation.

Bey sees religion as a certain subset of zones in the field of human becoming. These zones are associated with holism and altered consciousness. Revolutionaries have been too quick to throw out altered consciousness with their rejection of puritanism and religious repression. Every religion calls forth its antithesis repeatedly, generating forms which conflict with power or theorise resistance. Shamanism lies at the root of religion, and all religion contains its trace. Shamanic religion uses spirituality against the emergence of alienation and hierarchy. For instance, Bey defines messianism in terms similar to Benjamin. The messiah is not an individual but a historical collective. It is the same as 'the difference and presence of revolution' – a synonym for immediacy. Religion is also a strong force for social cohesion, for instance in intentional communities.

The roots of religion lie in abstract thought. Humans have a type of consciousness which allows separation and categorisation (symbolic systems, technology, etc). This leads to a split between a separating, alienating approach and a desire to recover intimacy and participatory/unified consciousness. Religion arises from the latter desire. At root, religion is 're-linking' of consciousness. This process is often violent. A further split within shamanic consciousness

## Hakim Bey: Strategies of Resistance

*Hakim Bey's general strategic perspectives, such as the TAZ, are complemented by a range of tactical proposals for political action. In this essay, I will explore the strategic underpinnings for Bey's political proposals, and will examine his focus on resisting recuperation, his emphasis on "empirical freedoms" as means to liberation, and his theory of immediatism.*

### Bey's strategic approach

There is a transformative strategy at work in Bey's theories, which stems logically from his ontology and his view of the dominant system. He favours a range of tactics which produce altered consciousness and peak experiences. In his theory, peak experiences provide a means to transform values. They are also a challenge to the Spectacle, which is unable to provide them.

This strategy is based on Bey's ontology of chaos. His approach is driven by the 'desire for desire, for Eros son of Chaos'. No ideology or normativity is adequate today. An adequate ethics must be situational. Peak experience is part of this. However, peak experience is not a goal in itself. TAZ is not purely hedonistic, but insurrectionary in intent – seeking to infect or become the 'social'. Experiences such as those of a TAZ can serve as the matrix for a Sorelian myth of uprising. (In Sorel, a myth is a mobilising idea which inspires action, regardless of its truth). The point is to provide the hope, the morale, necessary for transformative struggle

and personal enjoyment. 'Whether or not you believe you're going to save the world, you have to act like you believe it or your life will be crap'.

Chaos is ontologically primary. Therefore, every social order is ultimately illusory. It is made real only by coercion. Even so, fighting the system's agents is less important than breaking down the self-alienation which underpins it. There is a danger that fighting the state helps sustain it as an effective illusion.

This leads some of Bey's critics and supporters to interpret him as opposing social struggle. Despite these concerns, there is a recurring orientation to insurrection, or the 'Uprising', in his work. The 'Uprising' is a moment, like Sorel's General Strike, when the TAZ comes to encompass all of social life, and becomes permanent.

Bey insists on altered consciousness against consensus reality. But it is not necessarily a rare occurrence. Esoteric, mystical and magical forces are found in unusual, everyday places. Ice-cream, for instance, is a mystical mixture of ice, fire, ocean and space, holding natural appeal for children. It has its origins in Persian hermeticism and the discovery of rock-salt.

## **Resisting Recuperation – Exodus not Revolution**

Resisting recuperation is a central aspect of Bey's strategy. The Spectacle is a trap for revolt, because rebellion can also be turned into an image or a product. People are failing to create an outside because they are too glued to, or hypnotised by, televisions and computers. Visible militancy can become an image of itself and be recuperated by the media.

If mediation is the main enemy, the system's main means of control, then effective resistance takes the form of disappearance, disengagement, immediacy (instead of mediation) and presence (instead of representation). Refusal to be mediated, or to engage with

myths and customs of indigenous groups resist the re-emergence of hierarchy and bullying. The pursuit of intensity and conviviality are part of this structure. Such myths and customs provide a 'million year triumph of human spirit' over fear, force, separation and hierarchy. Bey suggests that we don't lose the 'rights and customs' of indigenous bands. Remnants of these practices preserve remnants of autonomy and pleasure. These fragments are not lost, but severely reduced in scope, and relegated to hidden corners. For instance, gift economy persists in the loose structures of shadow and informal economies.

Resisting capitalism today requires us to recover a relation with such rights and customs, so as to restore pleasure and autonomy against separation and hierarchy. Bey analogises the situation to a house in ruins – the underlying pillars (indigenous war, gift economy, shamanism) can still be discerned. He believes that shamanism has particular importance in fighting capitalism. Shamanism often manifests itself as a hidden power beneath the power of the oppressed, even when it is extremely muted. It appears as a rising-up of direct experience and immediacy.

one is considered noble. Each self has 'honour', which signifies an autonomous self whose freedom is the object of the entire system. (Bey's account, like Clastres', ignores the question of gender). Inter-clan raiding can also be a means of redistributing any surplus. In another piece, Bey argues that classical war is a betrayal of indigenous war, and the violence built into the religious or sacred project.

A second mechanism is the gift economy. Following Mauss, Bey argues that the gift is a balancing structure. It atones for the violence of the hunt and creates symbolic unity and renewal within the social group. It differs from modern exchange in focusing on reciprocity, instead of accumulation or the profit motive.

The third mechanism, shamanism, will be discussed in more detail below. Here, the importance of the relationship between shamanism and altered consciousness should be emphasised. While shamanism as an immanent spiritual practice is eliminated after the rise of the state, it leaves a 'shamanic trace'. Aesthetics tends to reduce and mediate, but not to eliminate, the shamanic trace. The trace easily revives or re-appears at times of crisis in the dominant system. The crisis of the state is a time of opportunity for the Clastrean machine. The carnivalesque, in the Bakhtinian sense, is shamanic in that it entails altered consciousness. Wilderness and wildness often symbolise the shamanic space in the worldviews of farming and settled peoples. The Robin Hood myth is an example. European nobles also preserved aspects of nomadic shamanism, such as hunting and heraldry.

Shamanism in a broad sense is a non-specialised practice of immanent religion. It does not represent spirits, but makes them present, through means such as psychedelic drug use and spirit possession. Sometimes it is practiced by the whole group. Bey associates shamanism with direct experience of altered consciousness, or of a second, spiritual or timeless world.

Bey suggests that elements of the three indigenous mechanisms persist in popular culture in medieval and modern societies. The

the Spectacle, creates spaces which are outside the system. While Bey also argues periodically for sabotage, reappropriation, and tactical use of the media, refusal seems to be the privileged tactic. His tactics are similar to the tactics of *détournement* used by Situationists. In an interview, Bey suggests that a strategy irrecoverable by the system has to involve altered consciousness. Altered consciousness or peak experience is irrecoverable because it cannot be represented, or reduced to mediated forms.

Strategically, Bey opposes a head-on collision with the state for two reasons. Firstly, he thinks it is futile. Secondly, he thinks the state is 'terminal', or dying of its own accord. The system is violently spasming in its death throes. In this context, there is no point confronting a power-system which has lost all meaning and is just a simulation. The best tactic is to avoid this spectacular violence which cannot reach the substance of social life, instead disappearing.

Insurrection and armed action are tragically counterproductive, because they are recuperated by the Spectacle. Also, radical action or organising should not be a sacrifice, but self-liberation with immediate psychological reward. Struggles against the system risk recuperation. As an alternative, Bey proposes personal and cultural actions. His alternative is to live as if the struggle were already won, to realise alternatives immediately, in the present. He discourages purely destructive acts (without a constructive element), and direct attacks on people. Instead, he defines the task of radicals as finding cracks in the system's power and images, chipping away at the Spectacle and its influence. With enough success, such tactics might cause the system to lose its coherence and assurance, and thus also its power.

Armed attacks are 'tragically counterproductive'. What counts today is personal/cultural action and 'bearing witness'. Attacks like 9/11 are 'automatically recuperable' and always produce the opposite of their intended effect, because they are incorporated in the system's internal image of the enemy. On another occa-

sion, Bey reportedly expressed disapproval of the mass murders, but called 9/11 a 'brilliant piece of artwork' falling into the broad category of 'bad shamanism' which underpins reactionary movements.

Bey feels there is an obligation to feel joy, and not postpone it until the future or the afterlife. Feeling joy is necessary both to do justice to oneself, and to deal fairly/beautifully with others. Bey seeks to tap the energy of insurrection, without risking martyrdom or capture by the image. Insurrection must relate to the media today as it used to relate (in Bey's historical examples) to religion as heresy. It is effectively a heresy against the Spectacle.

Resistance to the Spectacle occurs mainly through images and imaginaries. Simply being conscious of the Spectacle, sameness, and alienation cannot overcome them. Rather, opposition needs 'counter-imagery' and a kind of spirituality or marvel. In *Millennium*, Bey suggests that there is a lack of an inspiring 'myth' or 'metanoia', a focal point for dissident energies, both in above-ground radical movements and in countercultures and underground groups. The present task as he sees it is to build an anti-capitalist resistance movement out of the remaining fragments of radical movements.

In line with this perspective, Bey proposes a range of different tactics, the goal of which is to free desire from a state of capture or bondage to the system. Everyday life is the main field for insurrectionary self-empowerment against the system. Bey suggests that everyone knows what is going on and what to do, provided s/he can break free of 'false consciousness', the Spectacle, interpretation, or scarcity. Bey calls for a type of resistance which melts into the wider resistance of the excluded. It avoids confrontation on unequal terms, but breaks down the system's monopoly on violence. It occupies cracks in the system of control and reproduces techniques of indigenous warfare.

Viewed as a general strategy, this is not a strategy of resistance at the level of theory or art alone. Rather, it seeks dis-alienation

instance, Wilson suggests that Ireland was organised this way until 1848.

In another piece, Wilson suggests that he was earlier influenced by early critiques which saw farming as a 'fall from grace' in relation to hunter-gathering. However, he has reconsidered this view on the basis of botanical history. He now suspects that farming began with seeds growing spontaneously at human campsites. People started to cultivate certain favourite plants – mainly luxuries, not necessities. The earliest were barley (for beer), grapes (for wine) and marijuana. Without the creation of the state, people could have transitioned straight from horticulture to utopia.

Indigenous groups are based on a particular kind of small-group universe. A tribe or village is sometimes a self-contained cosmos. It is not true that this structure prevents individuality. Rather, there can be space for every kind of marginal person within such a complete universe. The exclusionary dynamics of villages and particularisms stem from constant attack or vampirism by the centre, in a situation where the village is not a cosmos. For instance, capital cities often suck money, energy, and creative people from villages.

There is thus a specific aim to ward off concentrated power in indigenous social groups. The three mechanisms operating for this purpose are indigenous warfare, the gift economy (or society), and shamanism. Following Clastres, Bey argues that indigenous warfare is centripetal (it prevents centralised power). It is driven by honour rather than acquisition, and any booty must be shared with the group. This structure prevents warriors from taking power and inventing 'classical' warfare, in which warriors become a powerful class through looting. 'Classical' warfare refers to the kind of warfare found in Ancient Greece and Rome, and in authors such as Sun Tzu and Clausewitz. This is the type of war waged by states.

When states don't exist, there is usually a kind of 'tribal anarchy' where the possibility of diffuse violence has an effect of dispersing power. In tribal anarchy, nobody accumulates power, and every-

# Indigenous anti-hierarchical mechanisms: gift economy, Clastrean struggle, and shamanism

In various works, including *Escape from the Nineteenth Century*, Bey attempts to look back to when non-authoritarian social bands were first shattered by the state, i.e. separation and hierarchy. He suggests that alienation would only emerge when separation reaches a 'catastrophic' tipping point. The indigenous band is/was structured to maximise autonomy and pleasure for all, as is shown by Sahlins' claim that it rests on abundance. Following Clastres, Bey argues that indigenous bands had already imagined the possibility of separation and worked to ward it off. They understand centralised power very well, and actively reject it. Pursuing a goal of preserving autonomy and pleasure, they use 'rights and customs' to ward off concentrated power. In some contexts, they also operate as sites of oppositional power.

The hunter-gatherer world is the closest humans have come to social harmony – not because people are/were naturally good, but because mechanisms exist to successfully ward off hierarchy. Farming societies, such as those of the Neolithic, also involve complex, intense (even 'erotic') relations with nature – not conquest, but intimacy. Such societies still have egalitarian technologies and are far preferable to states, even if they are not 'proper anarchism'. Such societies have survived until recently, even in the North. For

through the strategic use of images, culminating in an alternative consciousness geared towards the Uprising. However, some of the tactics *do* focus on theory or art. Before the world can be changed, we need to destroy the dominant archetypes, the 'cops in the head'. This is the only practical insurrection possible today.

Bey suggests that it may also change the landscape around us. An insurrection against false consciousness will sweep away the power, the technology, of oppression. Attacking power is no longer possible because it is no longer 'there' – is is pure spectacle. The state, as an outer institution, is increasingly irrelevant as a focus, because of the spread of virtual capital. Yet spaces cannot be neutral. Either a zone is part of capital, or it is in opposition.

Bey's position leads to certain general propositions. In 'Post-Anarchism Anarchy', he provides a nine-point manifesto which includes 'Zerowork' or anti-work, opposing the education system and the 'serfdom of children', promotion of sexuality, and addressing the issue of land in the context of de-spatialisation of capitalism. However, Bey also critiques single-issue politics as playing into the commodification of opinions. Specific oppressions cannot be separated out from the general problem of the system.

## Strategies and Contexts

In some ways, this is a consciously anti-strategic strategy. Politically, Bey criticises the idea of revolution as a goal, instead valuing insurgence, uprising, or insurrection as an inner process of rejecting power. There is no overarching programme for revolution. Worthwhile struggles are always for 'empirical freedoms', rather than ideology. 'Strategic autonomy is made up of tactical incremental empirical freedoms not ideology'. He theorises uprisings as an equivalent at the social movement scale of peak experiences at the individual level. The aim is to get outside mediation by creating different ways of being.

In this context, the TAZ is not only a tactic, it is also a 'psycho-spiritual state' or 'existential condition'. The physical TAZ is a way to sample this state of being. It is a way to create a psychological and political 'outside' – from which resistance can happen. Sometimes the insurrection itself is a zone of freedom, regardless of whether it is successful. Its temporary nature can be a virtue. The process of revolt is arguably preferable to the sleepiness of a realised social form.

In a sense, even dropping or reforming repressive rules is unnecessary, since rules and the morality of the herd are there to be overcome. They are something to prove and measure oneself against. Bey's main point here is that one should break the rules, instead of trying to reform them. The imperative to resist does not disappear even in miserable conditions. If rebellion is not possible, then Bey advises what he calls a 'clandestine spiritual jihad', or struggle to disalienate life and culture.

Bey's strategies vary greatly with context. Each situation has a particular strategic structure and needs to be approached situationally to find sources of power. 'Situation' here seems to mean something like a social structure or opportunity structure in relation to which strategies and tactics are formulated to create autonomy or conditions for its emergence. In his early work, Bey conceived of TAZ in Deleuzian molecular terms, as a tactic used as part of a worldview distrustful of strategy. In his later work, faced with the totalising effects of the post-Cold War 'end of history', he suggests that he's now forced into trying to formulate a strategic position, without the authoritarian implications of strategy (Interview, Sakhra).

At various points, Bey also calls for creating alternative economic institutions, and for anarchist involvement in wider social movements. For example, the strategic position of TAZ changes a lot through Bey's writings. In the book *TAZ*, Bey wishes for the 'eruption of the marvellous into the ordinary'. This means spiritualising everyday life. For Bey at this time, spiritualisation is the

avoiding confrontation and looking for cracks may still be viable, although the general trend is towards a combination of spatial autonomy with insurrectionary tactics. This said, there is also a tendency for today's drop-out communities (squatters, ravers, etc) to eschew visibility and to seek to remain below the radar of the media and police. In a different context, Lisa McKenzie suggests that working-class men in St Ann's often stay off the grid and keep a low profile (whereas women strategically engage with services). Many have no official address, no registration with the benefit or medical systems, and hence are largely invisible outside local networks unless they are arrested. David Graeber makes similar claims about the largely stateless people he studied in Madagascar – they simply minimise contact with the state. He suggests that, the more successful such 'anarchic' spaces are, 'the less likely we are to hear about them'. This suggests that something similar to Bey's idea of invisibility might be a common strategy among marginalised groups.

He instead gambles on invisibility and mobility as forms of protection. His argument follows consistently from his view of the nature of the system and the basis and goal of resistance. If the point is to maximise altered consciousness, pleasure, and an 'outside', then it makes sense to avoid representational entanglements and reduce the danger of repression as far as possible. Bey sometimes seems to underestimate the determination of contemporary capitalism to crush every remaining 'outside', however inoffensive or hidden. Today, the very fact of being a 'black hole' is taken as threatening by the system, almost as much as being in open rebellion. It is possible that invisible and mobile 'outsides' survive better than those which attract the system's attention. It is also possible that 'outsides' which defend themselves are more resilient. The invisibility of the former renders both claims hard to test.

The growing repression of marginal zones is reflected in a certain contradiction or shift in his more recent work, in which opposition comes to be increasingly central, but many of the older tactical orientations remain intact. Tactics similar to Bey's, such as raves, squatting, protest camps and even convergence spaces, have taken heavy blows from the increase in repression. In contemporary activist movements, there is arguably a shift towards creating and militantly defending permanent or semi-permanent autonomous zones (such as the ZAD, or autonomous communities in southern Mexico, or cities such as El Alto), and away from temporary gatherings which are repressed with increasing frequency. This reflects the changed context Bey recognises, but also highlights a possible tactical error in fearing visibility and demonisation more than outright repression. It is possible that the most effective movements today are not so much those which avoid confrontation as those which are too costly to repress, which are able to carve out and then defend autonomous zones.

This said, zones created in periods of confusion, when the state is focused on a greater danger, often show considerable resilience. Kurdish autonomy is a possible example. So Bey's position of

most tumultuous and urgent political demand. In *Immediatism*, Bey claims that he staked and ultimately lost on this position. He now seeks to find hidden treasure instead. This later position suggests that the marvellous is contained mainly in secretive small groups. In 'The Occult Assault on Institutions', he argues for a strategy to optimise conditions for TAZ's to emerge.

There are thus major differences in Bey's strategic perspective over time. Overall, however, his varying strategies and tactics pursue a consistent goal of immediacy, intensity, and altered consciousness. In *Escape from the Nineteenth Century*, he argues that capital is based on sameness and separation. The antidotes are therefore difference and presence. In an interview, he counterposes 'real immanence' to the 'false transcendence' offered by the Spectacle.

In 'Post-Anarchism Anarchy', Bey argues that anarchism is caught between a tragic Past and a utopian Future, but it needs to find a present in 'true desires' and things we can do 'before it's too late'. It starts from the question, 'What is your True Desire?' A first step in 'utopia' is always to look in the mirror and demand to know one's true desire. This requires at least temporarily overcoming anxiety, or fear of one's shadow.

In some works, Bey redefines the Islamic concept of jihad in terms of the struggle against alienation. The greater jihad is the struggle against the separated self and the suffocation of the true self. The lesser jihad is the struggle against the Spectacle. In 'Jihad Revisited', Bey suggests that he was hoping for a kind of 'Islamic Zapatismo' when he wrote *Millennium*, possibly derived from neo-Sufism. This jihad he imagined has not come to pass and it is 'probably too late'.

## **Immediatism: Tactical Resistance to Mediation**

Bey sees mediation as a central aspect or cause of alienation. All experience is mediated, but mediation differs in degree. Embodied experiences are the least mediated. Certain sensory experiences – such as taste, touch, and sexual pleasure – are less mediated than others. Live or performance arts are less mediated than recorded arts. Even among recorded arts, there are degrees of mediation depending on how much imaginative participation each work demands. When hearers or readers play an active role in imagination or dreaming, there is less mediation.

Books draw on the reader's imagination, but involve a hierarchical relationship between producer and consumer. Spirit-possession is less mediated than theatre, which is less mediated than film, and television is especially mediated and in need of overcoming. However, the point is not to do away with any means of artistic production. The more imagination is freed or shared, the more useful the medium. In other words, mediation is a continuum, ranging from the barely-mediated to the extremely mediated, with many shades in between.

The idea of mediation is central to Bey's analysis of art. Capitalism propels art towards increasing mediation, and recuperates art increasingly rapidly today. Authentic art is play. Play is one of the least mediated experiences. Bey seems to connect artistic creativity with peak experience. Immediatism is a means of creative, liberatory and playful energy-production, without alienation or mediation. Today's art and advertising promote endless images of death and mutilation.

On the other hand, images of life are sometimes punished. Bey argues that art cannot exist for itself. Art functions as political power, a way of expressing or changing the world. Even if there is such a thing as art without political content, it would still be polit-

## **Tactics and strategies: discussion**

Bey is sometimes accused of failing to address race, class and gender in his work, but this is not entirely true. Bey sometimes talks about issues of racism and sexism. For instance, he dismisses de Sade for wanting freedom only for adult men to eviscerate women and children. In another passage, Bey criticises anarchism on the basis that oppressed racial groups are absent, suggesting that it lacks means to fulfil real needs and desires. In another passage, he argues that mystical symbols are not gendered, but instead stand for energies of life and death.

He also recognises the importance of hybrid groups such as 'tri-racial isolates', and discusses Black and Muslim resistance to colonialism in his historical works. However, he also criticises the tendency of radical groups to denounce and exclude each other as 'crypto-authoritarian', distancing himself from many identity-oriented groups. Instead, he calls on people to 'ride the wave of liberation no matter what outward form it might happen to take'. Bey's tactical flexibility suggests that, while it is always important to resist or at least to disalienate, modifications are possible based on people's different situations. People might not all be able to escape or to seize back their time to the same degree, but it is important to try to do so, to the greatest extent possible.

On a different matter, Bey takes the view that insurrectionary tactics are futile, because they are recuperable (in the image of the enemy), attack at the wrong place (because the enemy is mostly an image), and risk martyrdom, which entails the wrong affects.



manent altered consciousness. Many things can be alchemical – for instance, cooking. Food can also offer intensities, if treated as nourishment rather than consumption. People are encouraged to develop a personal mythscape as a way of summoning vivid, intense images. A full sense of tactical options would also consider the various religious practices Wilson discusses in his historical works, as well as his lists of sources of altered consciousness – which range from chanted Iranian poetry to drink, danger, inspiration and architecture.

ical in its means of production and consumption. Immediatist art expresses its radicalism in its means of production and consumption. It is kept within a small group of friends and ideally leaves no trace at all, except self-transformation.

In the 1990s, Bey theorised disappearance as desirable, to avoid recuperation. Disappearance is a way to save something from dying of mediation. Capitalism has created a kind of closure in which a single image of the world dominates. Other images cannot emerge because of the hegemony of this image. This leads to a dead process of endless reproduction of sameness. Any image which ruptures this hegemony would have to come from outside. And it would have to be asserted as a kind of ‘Image War’.

The ‘outside’ here is presence, or the gift economy, as something which cannot be represented. In *Riverpeople*, Wilson claims that publication sometimes ‘profanes’ (dirties or despiritualises) secret knowledge which is better transmitted in less-mediated forms, such as manuscript or word-of-mouth. These less-mediated forms retain a small chance of enchantment, of becoming ‘Poetic Facts’ with truth in the archetypal world as well as the real world. In contrast, mass-published facts become mere data or information. They lose any relationship to the imaginal world. Bey also claims that ‘secrets still exist’. Secrets are powerful, against the system’s claims to see and represent everything. Secrecy is central to the tong, immediatism, and Bey’s conception of ‘tact’.

In ‘Media Creed for the Fin de Siècle’, Wilson argues that the mass media alienates whatever it captures. One cannot express one’s true subjectivity in the media. Instead, what is expressed is rendered meaningless. Therefore, he calls for a refusal to let the media possess one’s image and extract ‘vampiric power’ from it. Instead, one should invest energies in intimate or subjective media, and either evade or destroy mass media.

Virtual reality failed because human reaction times are faster than vision. VR caused sickness and illnesses by separating embodied and visual experiences. In ‘The Obelisk’, Bey argues that

voluntary self-restraint in relation to the world of representation and images can lead to flows of power to the autonomous imagination. The point is to imagine ourselves, rather than to allow ourselves to be imagined through words or images. Things which are unrepresented and unseen – deliberately or fortuitously – tend to maintain their lived meaning. This in turn creates optimal conditions for the emergence of the ‘marvelous’ in lived experiences (or of altered consciousness).

In Immediatism, Bey proposes to practice art in secret, so as to avoid ‘contamination’ by mediation. All spectators should also be performers. Artistic products should be shared with participants only, and never sold. Techniques involving physical presence are preferred. This practice is framed as a response to alienation and to the ‘death of art’ due to mediation.

Art should be created from inspiration, as a free gift, which may or may not be reciprocated. Today, instead, it is produced for money. Art is meant to provide a kind of ‘healing laugh’, which is serious, but not sober. It is to be a boast, not an excuse. Bey suggests that art which is not produced through alienation is today classified in terms such as ‘insane’ and ‘neo-primitive’. It appeals because of its imaginal presence.

As an example of an immediatist project, Bey proposes a variety of the potlatch, or ritual feast. It should be made without ready-made ingredients. The main point is to give and receive gifts. Another piece, ‘A Lunar Garden of Legal Phantastica’, suggests modern items for creating a Greek pantheon. Priapus could be a garden gnome with a painted-on penis; Mercury a hood ornament from a car, or the Western Union logo.

Similarly, in ‘The Occult Assault on Institutions’, Bey argues that actions to promote TAZ should avoid mediation, directly realising their goal. They should also add up to more than the sum of their parts. Such actions should both ‘damage or destroy some real and/or imaginal time/space of “the enemy”’, and create a strong chance of a peak experience. In terms of enemies, abstractions like ‘the

racism. The same applies to historical phases. We seem to be stuck in the past, forced to re-live it as capital escapes into the ether. In this context, we can at least ransack the past for useful tools. But we may also be able to re-visit and correct decisive moments.

Rootless cosmopolitanism can express itself in the use of travel as a means to altered consciousness. In ‘The Caravan of Summer’, Wilson criticises tourism and argues for an alternative mode of travel based on Sufism. Sites of pilgrimage primarily provide ‘baraka’ or ‘mana’ (spiritual power, charisma). Pilgrimage is reciprocal rather than alienating. In contrast, tourists seek and consume difference, and use it up. Wandering dervishes gave baraka in return for hospitality, whereas tourists tend to break reciprocity and hospitality. In addition to Sufi ‘aimless wandering’, Wilson gives the example of the Trobriand Islanders, who travelled to give useless but aesthetically powerful gifts among the islands. Dervish wandering may be ineffective or impossible today, but its ‘conceptual matrix’ is still possible.

Technological reversals can also alter perceptions. In a piece provocatively titled ‘Take Back the Night: Ban Electricity’, Wilson argues that electricity was known in the ancient world, and transmitted to the present through the hermetic tradition. It is a kind of magic which has escaped from its bottle. We need at least moments without electricity so as to revive mystery and meaning. Similarly, recorded music both realises a dream of pure music, and realises the death of music. Music ceases to be performed, and becomes ‘background’, for example in stores. Amateur communal music disappears.

A range of other practices also lead to altered consciousness. For instance, Tantric Hinduism restores the lost ‘Soma-function’ (roughly, altered consciousness) through transcendence of caste, use of banned substances such as wine, kundalini yoga, hemp, and extra-marital sex. Quilts can be psychedelic. They are connected to potlatch and gift economy. Cyberspace is almost psychedelic, producing a visionary inner space. Trepanning may produce per-

a major purpose of the groups Bey proposes, perhaps even the main goal. The system forces us to keep 'making a living', but the real point is to make a life.

In architecture, Bey recognises a nostalgia and desire for cities which have designed themselves on the basis of conviviality, with narrow alleys, covered ways and so on. The architecture of a convivial world would likely be grotesque, in the sense of being cave-like, akin to mystical grottos. Ritualised language can also challenge alienation. Language is a mask – a way of giving something a ritual or symbolic meaning. Such ritualisation is a way of destroying the suffocating paralysis of the alienated system.

Childhood has a special place as a site of resistance to alienation. In the piece *Wild Children*, Bey calls for a type of intensity which involves thinking in images, polymorphous sexuality, and 'delirious and obsessive play'. In another piece, Bey describes childhood as a site of permanent insurrection, suggested by messiness, collections, intense enjoyment, band/gang formations, and running away. After the collapse of civilisation, it is children who restore awareness of the cosmic. Anti-work or Zerowork actions, including attacks on education and the 'serfdom of children', are also very important. Forms of resistance to schooling might include 'voluntary illiteracy', home-schooling and craft-apprenticeship. Presumably, this image of childhood is partially archetypal. Real childhoods may be traumatic, but this can be ascribed to the aforementioned 'serfdom'.

Bey also calls for, and exemplifies, 'Rootless Cosmopolitanism'. This is an outlook which searches the ruins and remains of different cultures for viable fragments, and helps itself to whichever fragments are needed. This may be criticised by others, either as cultural appropriation, or as indulging religious and anti-modern worldviews. Bey justifies it on the basis that Chaos cannot be restricted to categories. In fact, Bey argues that psychological racism – hostility to other cultures – has largely replaced overt discrimination. Participation in other cultures helps combat psychological

state' are of little use. Resistance must target specific functionaries. The aim is to provide a particular 'occult effect', projecting power back at the media.

One way to avoid recuperation by the Spectacle is to ensure that symbolism has depth or 'fractal dimensions' which cannot be reduced to the flat imagery of the Spectacle. In such cases, even when others try to recuperate an image, it will continue to carry an uncertain, anti-systemic subtext. Sabotage, for instance, is too easily recuperated by being classified as crime. It might avoid this if combined with information, beauty, or adventure, provided one does not get caught.

For instance, media employees might be sent powerful imagery or magic art-objects which are said to carry a curse. The curse is that it will cause them to realise their true desires. The aim of such a tactic is to infiltrate the images into their dreams and desires, to make their jobs seem boring and destructive.

## Using Images and Media

When he engages in media and art politics, Bey seeks to liberate imagination from the regime of the image, or the Spectacle. Sight and sound are today hegemonic. We need to valorise smell, touch, taste and the 'third eye' (or spiritual seeing). Bey also calls for the use of silence, secrecy, and veiling of images to combat the Spectacle. He suggests that capitalism is a 'blind panopticon' which is especially vulnerable in the field of 'magic', or the manipulation of images to produce events.

Secrecy and invisibility are useful for this purpose. The art of the unseen, or clandestinity, can be used to avoid absorption in the Spectacle. Art is play. It requires secrecy and silence, and uneven rather than smooth time. Things which are real but unseen have imaginative, erotic, or spiritual power. The very existence of unseen things challenges the regime of images, the Spectacle. By becoming invisible, we can become re-encharmed, and avoid being visible to the system. In a panoptical world, we must seek to explore the last tiny corner of the room which the eye cannot see. Geographically, this seemingly tiny corner might comprise large regions – such as Chiapas. In such zones, the right to be different is posited increasingly forcefully.

Wilson also proposes that, to break the hypnotic trance exercised by media, especially on the unconscious, one sometimes needs to 'just stop'. By taking a pause from media and reassessing it, one can limit the effects of the trance, as when Wilson himself avoided media after 9/11 to resist this effect. He likens this practice to Sufi 'halting', which is a meditative practice used to distance from and reassess fixed assumptions and habits.

tionships, gay marriage, gays in the army – has corroded the transgressive force which gay sexuality once had.

Bey rejects politics based on lack or scarcity, including the restoration of a lost past or progress towards a future revolution. He calls for an art of abundance and excess, rather than mutilation and death. He associates scarcity and lack with sexual repression, and the rejection of intensity. Nihilistic action and art are fine, as long as they are means to liberation through intensity. Images may be dark, so long as they are simply masks behind which is light and pleasure.

Resistance to work is also central to social transformation. Zerowork is realised through seizing back time. The more of one's time one can wrest back from systems of production and reproduction – 'Work/Consume/Die' – the better. Time which is restored to immediate, everyday groups (even something as simple as a quilting bee) is time which increases the chance of pleasure. Withdrawing time from capitalism is risky. But the risk is also part of the pleasure. Time seized back from capitalism and mediation can become time for play.

In 'The Jubilee Saints Project', Bey celebrates the ancient practice of Jubilee. Once every fifty years, all debts were cancelled, slaves freed and fields left fallow. Workers observed feast days and festivals. Jubilees have not existed for 500 years, but would effectively combat today's permanent indebtedness. This position also leads to scepticism about workerist positions. In a critique of Surrealism, Bey argues that the liberation of desire turns into the commodification of desire, unless it escapes the matrix of the work-system.

As we have seen, Bey sees alienation partly in terms of the destruction of horizontal connections. Restoration of such connections is thus a powerful form of resistance. In *Immediatism*, Bey argues that conviviality – coming together face-to-face for reasons other than work, consumption or reproduction – is itself a victory against alienation. Isolation and absorption in media are among the major forces which oppress people today. Conviviality is thus

## Other Forms of Disalienation

In general, Bey's approach is framed in terms of anarchist theory. He claims that anarchism has been successful for 99% of human history, in hunter-gatherer and early farming societies, and also in inspiring resistance throughout the period of capitalism. There is a kind of revolutionary spirit in stateless societies which overturns authority before it can appear. Autonomy and authority seem easily distinguished, but they can become confused either via theoretical abstraction, or on an emotional level. The desire for freedom can be projected onto 'society' or various groups, and then becomes authoritarian.

Society can be constructed without the state. Indeed, it has been for most of human existence. Such a process of construction relies on the creation of myths, customs and institutions that suppress the state – for example, shamanism. However, Bey differentiates his approach from anarchist theory more broadly. Existing anarchism is criticised for failing to follow through on its critique of the myths and 'spooks' of the dominant society. He argues that it becomes a new church by incorporating elements of Cartesian subjectivity and ethical humanism.

In addition to specific liberation struggles, it is necessary to seek a certain transgressive power which undermines recuperation. In *Riverpeople*, Wilson argues that 'queers' have lost their transgressive magic from recuperation, along with the liberationist rhetoric. They need more Debord or Breton to free them from 'bourgeois deviation, betrayal of Dionysian principles'. Wilson here suggests that normalisation as a variant on heteronormative life – legal rela-

Bey also suggests that tactical or 'guerrilla' media can be used to subvert dominant images and create glimmers of the unseen. Intimate media (such as zines) can also remain outside the totality of representation. Tactical media is messy or organic, as opposed to the sterility of strategic media. The tactical problem is to avoid, or stay ahead, of representation and capture. Wilson aims for 'relative invulnerability' to representation through mobility and invisibility. The problem here is that most tactical media continues to represent. The appropriate response is to make uncertainty or messiness a 'principle', to refuse to be 'cleaned up'. Ad hoc tactics tend to coalesce into a strategy of spontaneous ordering. New technologies have a magical aura. For instance, the Internet raised almost messianic expectations. It was a factor for liberation because it was out of control.

Powerful art is art which produces intense emotional reactions – good or bad. Bey wishes to reconnect poetry and art to the body, recreating its ability to produce affects (emotions). Bey suggests that freedom of publication in the arts is a sign that the system has destroyed the ability of art to subvert the dominant reality. At least when poets are jailed, this shows they are taken seriously. Porn is still restricted, says Bey, because it has a definite affective effect, uncovering desires. However, today's porn is mostly based on body-hatred. Bey calls for alternative erotic art which is a 'better vehicle for enhancement of being/consciousness/bliss'.

## Poetic Terrorism and Art Sabotage

In his book *TAZ*, Bey advances the idea of 'poetic terrorism'. This is not terrorism in the sense of armed opposition. Bey uses the term as a provocation. Rather, poetic terrorism consists of playful actions designed to shock people into awareness of ontological chaos or to provoke intensity. Such actions seek an audience reaction of aesthetic shock, at least as strong as terror – for example, intuitive breakthrough, awe, arousal, or disgust. Poetic terrorism possesses some of the affect or 'resonance' of terrorism or cruelty, but directed at abstractions or images, rather than people, and carried out for pleasure rather than power or profit. In other words, poetic terrorism does to a myth or symbol what literal terrorism does to people or spaces.

Bey conceives this as a new, nonviolent way of fighting by bringing life. Artists conspire to spread generosity, life, and disappearance from the alienated world. Such approaches, which target ideas and institutions, are tactically advised, instead of actions against individuals. However, they are expected also to lead to other forms of insurrection. In a later work, Bey/Wilson suggests that the use of poetic terrorism or 'Image Magic' to attack the totality of the Image (i.e. the Spectacle) is necessary, not to destroy the Spectacle but to define a possible outside. Examples include breaking into houses to leave gifts, instead of stealing, or staging all-night dances in bank lobbies. Pyrotechnics or fireworks have a special place, as an ancient weapon invented to shock rather than kill.

The fact that the system continues to wage war on drugs, rather than recuperating them, suggests that some kind of authentic power is at stake in this struggle. Drugs are criminalised because of their 'neo-shamanic' potential in altering consciousness. Bey suggests that the war on drugs is a war between organic and machinic worldviews. The war cannot be won, because the organic realm is more fluid and responsive.

Bey seems to see psychedelic consciousness as more realistic, or in tune with the nature of the world, than mundane, media-inflected consciousness. He recognises that drug use can be dangerous. But he argues that 'life is a risky business'. People should not seek safety at all costs. Safety ultimately ends up as sterility, 'a vegetable plugged into a computer'. The use of drugs to produce altered consciousness, spiritual experiences, and a broader, more holistic view of the world is distinct from, but continuous with, their 'recreational' use for simple pleasure. It is more drastically distinct from the use of drugs to numb pain or to self-medicate for psychological suffering – the usual context of use in modern societies. This is one of the forms of dark magic which sustain the system.

## Drugs and Entheogenesis

Another path to intensity is drug use. Bey terms psychedelic drugs 'entheogenic', meaning that they stimulate the 'divine within'. He argues that such plants were worshipped once agriculture was adopted, because they provide a route back to the lost immediacy of a psychoactive world. Previously, the entire world was psychoactive. All cultures had such a cult, until the rise of Christianity – after which, psychoactive knowledge was maintained underground, by country doctors and wise-women.

Bey suggests that psychoactive drugs were revived after 1945 because the world became more dematerialised. Nuclear war and computers were both aspects of dematerialisation. At the same time, people began to recognise archaeological cave art as art. This process reflects a paradigm-shift out of modernity. The law seeks to suppress this shift, because the law is machinic or 'clockwork', not fluid and organic. It attempts to re-impose machine consciousness on the re-emerging organic or quantum consciousness.

Drugs are a threat to capitalism because they provide the enjoyment capitalism only pretends to provide. They are the 'perfect commodity' in that they provide what adverts only claim that products provide, and thus undermine alienation and mediation. This is why they are criminalised, because they destroy the lack which otherwise sustains consumption. In 'Ayahuasca Reading', Wilson observes how people taking this plant-based drug often encounter plant-beings in their visions, including some which point to cures or other information, or provide what are taken as prophecies. The experience creates a sense that humans, plants and animals are one, or forever woven together.

There are similarities between what Bey proposes and carnivalesque protest tactics. There are also similarities to trolling (in the humorous sense), as well as to the art practices of Dadaism and Situationism. Williams sees these tactics as a kind of con trick, designed to alter consciousness rather than accumulate money. Many such actions are designed to shock but also to point towards altered consciousness – such as Bey's proposals for self-flagellating anarchists in black robes, or curses mailed to malign institutions. In *Sacred Drift*, Wilson promotes the Trickster archetype, and suggests that the Green Man and the Hidden Prophet are varieties of it. This archetype heals and inspires through laughter and clowning. Its actions provoke shock – either laughter or outrage. The trickster intervenes to take someone to the borderland where the marvelous (or imaginal) enters everyday life.

The darker side of these practices is termed 'art sabotage', and consists of seeking to create intensity through destruction and disruption of the culture industry, such as disrupting TV transmissions. This type of sabotage aspires to be a Luddite response to the dominant system. Art sabotage does not seek power. It seeks to release power which is trapped in existing structures. It is a kind of imaginative disruption.

## Sexuality and Sexual Repression

Sexuality can also be a path to altered consciousness. Bey promotes a view of sexuality as intense experience and polymorphous perversity deployed to create intensity. Such sexuality would promote pleasure rather than self-denial. It is based on an explosive reaffirmation of Eros, the life-force, as polymorphic and powerful. Obscenity counters the cold life-destruction of the Evil Eye, which in Bey's work reflects not only envy and hatred but also instrumentalism and control.

Romantic love, based on unsatisfied desire, is an effect of ideals of chastity. It glorifies hopeless longing. In capitalism, the beloved becomes a 'perfect commodity' – desired and paid for, but not enjoyed. Romantic love is tainted with ownership and alienation. Bey counterposes both the Surrealist idea of transgressive excess of obsessive desire, and John Henry Mackay's idea of erotic friendship based on generosity. Bey concludes that both obsessive longing and happiness can create mystical states of consciousness (Obsessive Love).

The view that the repression of sexuality – in the broad sense of 'Eros', life-force or passion, as well as in specific sexual forms – is at the root of alienation can be traced back to Freud and Reich. Its specific manifestations are weaker today – for example, sexual activity and imagery are less restricted than in the 1950s. But the general pattern of excluding intensity from life is arguably stronger today. The regime Baudrillard terms simulation requires the de-intensification of those aspects of life which are permitted,

to an unprecedented degree. Think of the regulation of football, of music festivals, of nightclubs and music, of pubs, of fireworks, and of drugs as a few examples.

We can here cross-read Bey with Norbert Elias and the cumulative exclusion of the body and its flows from public life. Elias traces how, from early modernity onwards, things like nudity, sex, pissing and shitting, disease, old age, human death, animal slaughter, and punishment were hidden or excluded from public spaces. This process goes hand-in-hand with the rise of the modern ego or cogito – the idea that the self is simply a brain, and the body an instrumental means. It is also tied-up with the rise of the bourgeoisie, in opposition to 'vulgar' warlords and feudalists. This process is still very much with us, in the criminalisation of nudity for example. Another author who takes up these themes is Bakhtin, who argues that the interpenetrating aspects of bodily flows are ways of summoning an image of a continuous, abundant universe.



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Andy Robinson

Hakim Bey

Articles on Hakim Bey from Ceasefire Magazine

October 28, 2017 - November 13, 2019

Retrieved on October 28, 2020 from

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Hence, Wilson's approach is not Orientalist in Said's sense; it does not reduce the 'Orient' or 'Islam' to fixed categories. In particular, it does not reproduce the tropes identified by Said, such as irrationalism, despotism, timelessness and incomprehensibility. Wilson does not promote 'one-dimensional' portrayals of cultures. He seeks to appreciate complexity, mutability and difference within a culture. In his view, heretical translation can still be used to appropriate, but it is better seen as a cooperative venture among heretics, artists, rebels and visionaries of all cultures.

Bey openly calls for appropriation of techniques to reach altered consciousness, whether from indigenous cultures, the East, or the occult tradition. However, in other places, he differentiates his own style of hybridity from appropriation, which he associates with commodification and dilution of shamanic or utopian energies. Cultural diversity should be preserved, not because any culture is good in itself, but because of the powerful syncretisms and ways out of consensus reality they provide. The 'rootless cosmopolitan culture' of the future will create *bricolage*, or 'mosaics and mandalas', out of elements of all cultures. Non-appropriated cultures can be shared through gift economy. This is an alternative to appropriation through commodification.

Bey thus argues for sharing or potlatch as the answer to commodification. For instance, people should be welcomed into tribes on a non-commodified basis. It is appropriation, for instance, if people commodify or use cultural practices while rejecting underlying cosmologies, but not if they adopt both. The result would be a 'non-hierarchic, de-centered web of cultures', each unique but not alienated from the others. Exchange is based on reciprocity, and boundaries are fluid. He argues that heresy is an important means of cultural transfer. Religions usually cross cultural boundaries only through syncretism.

Some identity theorists would doubtless still see this as appropriation, because they wish to maintain rigid boundaries between cultures. However, I would argue that Bey's conversion of aspects

of cultures into parts of a decentred network is fundamentally different from the conversion of aspects of other cultures into commodities or statist categories. In effect, Bey fights appropriation by replacing a trunk with a rhizome. Standard appropriation uses commodification or the market as a trunk. Multiculturalism similarly maintains capitalism (or liberal integration) as a trunk. But anti-appropriation approaches often turn their own cultures into trunks ('hegemonic particularities' in Bey's terminology) – with or without attaching them to capitalism. Bey follows Day's proposal to replace the hegemony of hegemony with an affinity for affinity. By adopting a general horizontal structure as the form of contact among cultures, Bey provides a way of avoiding both 'hegemonic particularities' and commodified appropriation. Identity politics treats power differentials as so absolute and structural as to preclude horizontal exchanges in everyday life. In reality, however, everyday sites have considerable autonomy, and TAZ's even more so. Replacing trunks with rhizomes – not with new trunks – is the best way to fight domination.

## **Ploughing the Clouds: Psychedelic experiences in classic literature**

In *Ploughing the Clouds*, Wilson uses a comparative approach to cross-read the Indian story of soma, Irish Celtic stories, and psychedelic experiences. In Indian accounts, soma is a specially prepared drink or potion which gives its user visionary or prophetic powers, poetic frenzy, and divine status or attributes. Someone in such an altered state of consciousness sees the universe as light or consciousness. Wilson tries to make a case that the Indian idea of soma reached Ireland (and all of Europe).

Soma first appeared in the Ṛg veda or Rigveda, a Hindu scripture which is arguably the oldest written text in existence today. While the word may originally have referred to a particular substance, it also refers to what Wilson calls the 'soma-function'. This function is simply the broad idea of an ecstatic transformation of consciousness by a psychotropic substance (possibly fly agaric or psilocybin mushrooms) – a variant on the recurring theme of altered consciousness. Soma has both licit and illicit dimensions. Both are paths to enlightenment, but the illicit path is higher. The illicit path leads to divine status and a right to pleasure and perversion.

The idea that soma was a psychedelic plant is not original to Wilson, having appeared for instance in the work of Robert Gordon Wasson. Wilson is unusual, however, in suggesting that soma as an idea or function spread throughout the Indo-European world. As a 'function', soma is associated with a complex of spiritual egal-

itarianism, entheogenesis and poetic inspiration. Although there may well have been an original Soma, the function is more important for Wilson. Specific plants may perform the role of Soma or 'Soma-substitutes' (with or without psychedelic properties) in different contexts.

According to Wilson, knowledge of 'entheogens' – plants which could induce spiritual experiences – was widespread in medieval Europe. This knowledge has been lost today, due to 'induced amnesia' from sometime in early modernity. Indeed, in the shamanic tradition, such plants are said to disappear in times when they are not respected.

The soma-function was repressed because it had to be repressed to sustain a system based on scarcity and repression. Modern capitalism seeks to cover up alienation. It seeks to deny the loss of gift economies, ecstasy, abundance and so on. It also needs to restrict access to the spiritual realm to specialist clerics. However, the soma-function is never completely lost, and keeps reappearing. It reappeared, for instance, in the 1960s psychedelic movement. Outwardly, this movement lost – but it continues to resist its own recuperation. The recurrence of the soma-function is a variant of the shamanic trace found throughout Bey/Wilson's work.

Soma is a special case of a wider phenomenon of entheogenic/psychedelic plant use. Such plants are also widely used by indigenous peoples. Wilson suggests that, whereas hunter-gatherers tend to use them to create individual relations with spirits, farming societies tend to ritualise and socialise them. He claims that such plants were among the first cultivated plants. They are tied-up with narratives about the rise of agriculture and the loss of an ecstatic original intimacy. The plant symbolised or recreated the supposedly lost intimacy with the wild or the wilderness, a process of *yoga*, relinkage or disalienation.

Modern societies see this disalienated state as a feature of other societies. Indeed, European colonisation seemed to acquire or 'conquer' more and more intoxicants (chocolate, coffee, tobacco,

(such as drug use), rather than maintaining a zone of conformity compatible with social inclusion.

In conclusion, I find Bey's work to be a powerful critical approach in engaging with issues of struggle against mediation and alienation. He sees chaos as ontologically primary, social praxis as a kind of 'magic', and capitalism and the state as effects of 'dark magic'. The dominant system is mainly a matter of alienation, by means of mediation, and it can be combated by immediacy, autonomy, intensity, and altered consciousness. This transformed perspective can be achieved by a variety of means, and extended outwards into zones of autonomy which might ultimately cover the whole world. This is an inspiring and very contemporary view of resistance which resonates well with emerging forms of autonomous social movement. While the strategic conditions for realising autonomy are constantly shifting, it is important to keep pursuing a disalienated world, and the perspective of disalienation as altered consciousness, peak experience, and immediacy is at least as convincing as the more standard Marxian view.

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opium, and so on), as if constantly seeking soma. However, the theme of the receipt of soma from the Other is not simply an effect of colonialism. It is structurally necessary, because of soma's radical otherness. On an imaginal level, soma is both 'wild' – symbolising wilderness, nature, and disorder – and yet also the origin of speech and consciousness.

Wilson also suggests that autonomous groups were often absorbed into invading societies in a subordinate status – for instance, as untouchables. This function was often ambiguously tied-up with their perceived access to entheogens, wilderness, and lost traditions. This is partly because of the absorbed people's local knowledge of the land and its plants, partly because of their reputation as uncanny and close to nature. In Ireland, this place is sometimes taken by the Fomorians, who are portrayed as one-eyed giants but who Wilson suggests may have been African, and in other works by the fairy-like Tuatha Dé Danaan. In this context, knowledge of soma is associated in mythology with pre-Celtic peoples

Following Wasson, Eric Ruck and others, Wilson argues that language about magic mushrooms and other entheogens is often disguised and euphemised. However, it can be recovered because it uses standard symbols. Of course, this requires a style of reading which explicitly looks for concealed meanings which are not directly present in the text. For example, one-eyed, one-legged beings, like the Irish Fomorians, are often mushrooms.

Much of *Ploughing the Clouds* consists of a lengthy exploration of possible symbols of soma, the soma-function or entheogens in Irish mythology and folklore. For example, the Pooka, an Irish spirit-being, is etymologically related to mushrooms. Dragon-slaying repeats the slaying of Vṛtra in the Soma narrative, and symbolises the destruction of restrictions on consciousness. Snakes – common in Irish mythology, although never found in Ireland – are symbols of soma. The imaginal realm is signified variously as fairyland, Tír na nóg, the Land of Promise and so on. The hypothesis of symbolic

themes performing a masking function for Soma leads to a huge list of common symbols – gold, dragons, cups, serpents, lightning, beheadings, cows and milk, and so on – which Wilson interprets as soma stand-ins or indicators. Such a reading is viable, but ignores the wide range of other possible symbolisms involved. Furthermore, the list of symbols is so long, and the symbols are so common, that it's possible to read just about anything as a soma story in this sense.

However, Wilson himself suggests that interpretation is never reductive, since the 'map is not the territory'. Hence, he is not claiming that these stories are *only* about soma – only that the soma-story is an element (possibly latent) within them. In some cases, furthermore, Wilson is not pointing out single symbols, but entire lists of similarities. The 'soma-function' becomes a historical name for something akin to the idea of peak experience or altered consciousness which inspires Bey's ontology and politics. Peak experience is present as a disguised element in mythology, with or without psychedelic overtones.

cut by capitalism, the experience of flow and self-transformation became a source of anxiety rather than euphoria. Many poststructuralist writers who once celebrated post-Fordist contingency – such as Stuart Hall and Arjun Appadurai – later came to recognise that it had generated anxiety, fundamentalisms and insecurity, rather than the open-ended, self-defined identities they sought. Bey differs from these scholars in refusing to identify contingency with neoliberal capitalism or the 'postmodern condition', but there is a similar issue with the effect of chaos. Another thing that Bey does, that poststructuralists generally do not, is to suggest concrete practices to overcome alienation.

Bey's work is similar to other traditions of re-enchantment and magic, such as the Wiccan tradition, as exemplified by Starhawk. He shares with these authors an emphasis on desire and becoming, an immanentist critique of dominant religions, openness to the 'imaginal realm', and a personalised view of spiritual practices. While this tradition is also useful for radical politics, I would argue that Bey's approach is more uncompromisingly radical, shedding boundaries, 'ordinary' concerns (such as work), and fixed identities. In contrast, authors like Starhawk are careful to tread a middle path between ordinary and altered consciousness, carefully encouraging restraint and protection from a complete loss of self. This is arguably the difference between a revolutionary use of magic, which seeks to overturn the ordinary, and a supplementary use, which seeks to survive within and subtly alter the ordinary.

Often, self-transformation becomes a substitute for revolution, and a pretext for capitulation. Bey does not replace outer revolution with inner change, but connects the two. He is also unusual in theorising capitalism, the state, and social hierarchy as forms of dark magic. This makes it hard to combine his theory with conformist goals or practices, and requires an anti-systemic position. As a result of this element, his theory is very much oppositional to, rather than supplementary of, the mainstream. Furthermore, he is inclined to embrace risky emotions (such as anger) and practices

is a more pressing problem holding back transformative politics. Anxiety, trauma and burnout seem to contribute to the ineffectiveness of tactics inherited from the struggle against Fordism.

This makes it harder and harder to create TAZ's, in a society marked both by the intensified 'management' of social life, the pre-emption of possible spaces of autonomy, and the generalisation of anxiety. Bey's strategies focus on providing excitement and peak experience, but people are already overstimulated. The lack of a sense of safety, and the focus on boredom rather than anxiety, limit the effectiveness of such processes. However, it is also possible that altered consciousness provides a standpoint from which anxiety and demoralisation are undermined. It often feels like no change is possible. But this is an effect of media trance-consciousness, of neoliberalism. Altered consciousness might offset the feeling.

If, as Bey argues, the universe is chaos, founded on nothing solid or representable, this can easily be experienced as terrifying or anxiety-inducing, rather than exhilarating. Many of Lovecraft's depictions of monstrous experiences sound similar to Bey's affirmative proclamations. Take for instance the following passage from *The Call of Cthulhu*: "That cult would never die till the stars came right again, and the secret priests would take great Cthulhu from His tomb to revive His subjects and resume His rule of earth. The time would be easy to know, for then mankind would have become as the Great Old Ones; free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and revelling in joy. Then the liberated Old Ones would teach them new ways to shout and kill and revel and enjoy themselves, and all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom". This almost sounds like a passage from Bey – but for Lovecraft it is portrayed with a sense of terror! Could this be an effect of different ways of dealing with the flow of becoming?

In some respects, this difference between Bey and Lovecraft models the difference between the revolutionary exodus of the 1960s-70s and the neoliberal precarity which recuperated it. Under-

## Pirate Utopias

Wilson's *Pirate Utopias* focuses on pirates operating out of North Africa, particularly Salé and Rabat (in modern Morocco), from the late 1500s to the 1700s. Many of these pirates were European 'Renegadoes': white Christians who rejected European power-structures, converted to Islam, and fled to pirate enclave-states along what was then called the Barbary coast. Seen as blessed in the Muslim world, such converts were killed on sight in Europe, where rampant prejudice against Islam was already prevalent.

Others were Muslims driven out of Spain after the *reconquista*. These so-called *Moriscos* sought revenge against Spain. There were also Jews, whom Wilson claims had a reputation for magic. Still others were slaves captured by pirates. Wilson expresses discomfort with the fact the basis for pirates' liberty involved enslaving others, though he provides evidence that slaves were well-treated by the pirates and were able to become citizens. He also suggests, following B.R. Burg, that pirate enclaves devoid of European laws and morals were attractive refuges for gay men.

Some pirates were Muslim converts, and the attraction of the Islamic world for European dissidents is significant. Wilson suggests that Islam might have had a 'positive shadow', or pull, for dissident Europeans. This might have stemmed from esoteric or mystical ideas, or European speculation that such ideas existed. It might also have stemmed from the European stereotype associating Islam with sensuality, a stereotype which reflects Islam's comparatively sex-positive doctrines. Or it might reflect the fact that Islam, as a newer religion, contained a revolutionary critique of Christianity.

European hermetic reformers, such as Rosicrucians and Freemasons (and later Nietzsche and the Enlightenment), were allegedly influenced by Islamophile European intellectuals attracted to the absence of an authoritative priesthood of the European type, or to Islam as the geopolitical antithesis of Christianity. They probably misread Islam, and yet the misreading was productive as a means of cultural transfer. Barbary pirates were also influenced by European free-spirit heresies such as Ranterism. They were seen in North Africa as waging a just war against countries such as Spain.

Like many scholars, Wilson interprets piracy as social resistance, particularly in relation to the inegalitarian structures of commercial and state navies. The 'Moorish' pirates raided European coastal villages, but more often, targeted Spanish and Portuguese ships returning from plundering America. They persisted for centuries, but states gradually increased their control over uncontrolled regions, and pirate republics gradually disappeared. Wilson does not discuss it (the work is too old), but piracy has re-emerged as a form of autonomy today.

The political forms of the pirate republics are particularly interesting, in a period where Europe was ruled by absolutist monarchs. For several decades, Salé was ruled by a council of pirate chiefs. It operated with a two-chamber parliament similar to those established centuries later in France and America. In other words, European democracy might actually be an imitation of pirate politics. In Algiers, the ruling council was decided by strict seniority. Any pirate who survived long enough would be promoted until they reached it. However, its power was so limited in practice that it struggled to attract recruits. Wilson suggests that such structures reflect a desire to prevent strong political power from emerging. The pirates also evolved a language of their own, known as *Franco*. It was a lingua franca, but for Wilson suggests the pirates had become a 'people' in their own right, with their own culture. We don't know if such a culture really existed, but it could have existed, since all the conditions were present.

## Other Critiques

There has also been a dispute between Bey and the anarcho-primitivist theorist John Zerzan. Zerzan's main criticism is that Bey is too technophile. Zerzan believes that technology is at the root of alienation; Bey does not. In his critique of Bey, Zerzan repeats many of the leftist criticisms that Bey's work is insubstantial, fashionable, and 'postmodernist' (taken to entail a refusal of decisive political positions, and a resultant liberal politics). In addition, Bey and Zerzan have real disagreements on the role of art. For Zerzan, art, and even shamanism, are forms of alienation. For Bey, art engages with a primordial problem of the human condition, and has a specific role in disalienated societies.

While there are real disagreements here, I believe Zerzan is wrong to claim that Bey does not reject the contemporary system as a 'totality'. Rather, the disagreements are at the level of which aspects of the world are utterly implicated in the totality, and which can be reclaimed as tools. Bey also claims that some Latin American critics are uneasy with the 'adventurousness' of TAZ. The context of this criticism is unclear, but Bey's approach is clearly more playful and joy-oriented than neo-Marxist tendencies common in Latin American autonomous movements.

There is also a psychological critique of approaches such as Bey's which rests on the prevalence of feelings of anxiety and powerlessness. Bey is typical of a generation of theorists (from the 1960s to the 1990s) whose main adversary was the boredom, emptiness and conformist habit of modern life. This was in turn an effect of the fact that they were struggling against the Fordist, Keynesian form of 'organised capitalism'. Today, it has been argued that anxiety



intuitive grasp of the experience of altered consciousness, this is doubtless how Bey's work appears. However, the success of the hoax suggests that some of Bey's readers are similarly unaware of the gist of his work.

Pirates weren't usually social bandits in the Marxist sense, because they had no peasant 'social base'. (There are exceptions in unmapped zones with base communities). However, they weren't capitalists engaged in primitive accumulation. At least amongst themselves, they practiced economic near-equality and social and personal freedom. Social nequality was limited. Captains only took one-and-a-half to two times the share of a regular pirate, compared to forty-to-one among state privateers. Local rulers were elected, and could be removed. Bey concludes that the Salé pirates were less egalitarian and libertarian than those of Libertatia, but more so than Europe of the time. Wilson sees pirates as creating rather than expressing a community of resistance (whereas social bandits express an existing community). Their rebellion is a kind of self-expression, otherwise similar to the mass expression of peasant movements.

Methodologically, it is difficult to establish many of Wilson's claims. The source-base on 'Moorish' pirates is somewhat limited, and Wilson restricts it further. He discounts much European history-writing as an attempt to preserve a myth of barbarism to justify a civilising mission. However, Defoe's fictionalised *General History of the Pyrates* is used alongside several biographies as a basis for guessing what pirate ideology would have been. Bey takes such sources as Defoe's, and Gosse's *History of the Pirates*, to be plausible because they were believable in their day. He also suggests that such sources carry the 'aura of seduction' of the 'positive shadow' discussed above. In other words, even if they were untrue, they convey the appeal of piracy – why it had (and has) an imaginal attraction.

Wilson suggests that pirates were anti-establishment, influenced by liberal and republican ideas, and determined to steal from the rich. They had a 'Zerowork' ethos, financing months of leisure with a few summer expeditions. They also preferred trickery and camouflage to battle. He also speculates that they may have practiced Sufism, maybe a then-current variant involving drugs or

spirit possession. The erotic nature of pirate culture is suggested by certain folktales, and for Bey, is connected to their spiritual and geographical nomadism.

Pirates are said to have functioned as a globe-spanning information network, held together by islands in the net, some of which were intentional communities. They were often multiracial. Some adopted indigenous cultures from the Caribbean. Some declared themselves to be 'at war with the world' or in a 'state of nature'. They forbade punishments, and resolved disputes by voting or duels.

Daniel Defoe's account of Libertatia (or Libertalia) provides the clearest picture of a progressive pirate utopia. It is debated whether it is factual or fictional. Libertatia reputedly recognised a right to necessities of life, primordial freedom, anti-racism, and a socialist economy with common ownership. Other pirate utopias emerged in the Caribbean and on Madagascar. Caribbean enclaves such as Hispaniola drew a mixture of drop-outs and escaped slaves. Wilson emphasises the democratic structure of pirate ships and their lack of command hierarchies; disputes were resolved by voting or duelling. On shore, radical democracy seemed to give way to anarchy.

tion is faint. Why would people seek to overthrow a system which determines what they seek? The answer typically hinges on internal contradictions, or the subject as a 'void' in the structure – conceptions which are unhelpful for formulating radical practices. In practice, such theories tend to restore power to a revolutionary vanguard (which can identify the real contradictions) or restrict people to reformist tactics on the 'margins' of existing structures. In any case, the idea that desire is never 'outside' capitalism, but simply an effect of it, is false – and calling it 'liberal' a million times will not make it true. I engage with this issue more thoroughly – in relation to Spivak's critique of Deleuze – elsewhere.

The argument that Bey reduces capital and the state to images is a more solid criticism. Bey emphasises tactics of invisibility, withdrawal and media subversion. He tends to reject head-on conflict. This is due to a view of the system as dangerous mainly in terms of recuperation through images. However, there are also solid empirical reasons for Bey's belief that capitalism now takes this form.

It is also true that Bey focuses on individual and small-group resistance. But this makes complete sense in terms of avoiding recuperation. Small-group resistance is not necessarily ineffective relative to large-scale resistance, as is shown in James Scott's example of cumulative peasant resistances which defeated particular policies. Similarly, leftist critics assume that class is the only politically effective identification. This claim, at the very least, needs testing empirically.

On a slightly different note, Luther Blissett, a pen-name for a post-Situationist culture-jamming collective associated with Stewart Home, published a hoax volume of translated 'Hakim Bey' articles to expose the naivete of Bey's Italian readership. The volume included everything from Zerzan's critique of Bey to barely-altered Stalinist material. The hoax apparently worked. The collective take this as evidence for the insubstantiality of Bey's project, which they deem a mixture of 'Hippie bullshit', 'oriental trinkets', post-structuralism and 'cybercrap'. Without the integrating force of an

intellectually conservative. In response, Sellars replies that Bey is aware that d'Annunzio later became fascist, but is interested in the moment of suspension between the old world and the new – and hence in Fiume before it was associated with fascism.

Armitage's critique is based on a reading of Bey as exaggerating the impact of the Spectacle, and ignoring 'material' aspects of capitalism. Bey emphasises images, such as 'cop culture', to the exclusion of social forces. Armitage complains that Bey rarely discusses capitalism. He suggests that Bey's theory is Situationism or *autonomia*, shorn of the Marxist elements. Instead of class struggle, Bey talks about resistance by individuals and marginalised groups. Armitage also criticises Bey for his objection to social order, and calls him a 'liberal' because he separates the state, society and desire. (This way of using the word 'liberal' has an Althusserian structuralist heritage. People who follow this tradition believe that desire is simply an effect of social structures).

This seems to entail a misunderstanding of Bey's position. Armitage presumably believes that Bey does not refer to capitalism because Bey rarely uses the *word* capitalism (or other Marxist-rooted terminology). However, if we include references to the Spectacle, the totality, mediation, civilisation, the planetary work-machine, and other such system-concepts as instances of capitalism by other names, Armitage's argument collapses. In fact, Bey has a strong analysis of contemporary capitalism, focused on the power of the media, the virtualisation of money, and the recuperation of alternatives. There is nothing inherently liberal in separating the state, society and desire. In fact, a separation of state and society seems as necessary to the Marxist idea of dual power as to Bey's theory.

As for desire, Bey's (and Deleuze's, Nietzsche's, Debord's...) refusal of the Althusserian structuralist view that desire is simply an effect of subjectification by the existing system is not necessarily any less revolutionary than the structuralist alternative. If desires are effects of the existing system, then any possibility of revolu-

## Alamut and the Qiyamat

Unsurprisingly given his background in comparative religion in Iran, many of Wilson's references are to Islamic social movements. One recurring location is Alamut. This 'tiny but intense civilization' was founded by Hasan-i Sabbah, a Persian Ismaili convert who lost a power-struggle in Cairo. The Assassin 'state' was a network of remote castles and valleys connected by information flows. Its Imams, or rulers, lived in 'concealment' in Alamut, an impregnable mountain fortress in modern-day northwestern Iran. It was a refuge for philosophers and scientists attracted to meditation and pleasure, and for 'extreme' mystics and revolutionaries in the Shi'ite world. Initially a kingdom, Wilson sees Alamut as reaching an intense level of autonomy at a later stage. According to him, Hassan II of Alamut proclaimed the end of profane time and the beginning of angelic time, or the time of the Holy Spirit. This meant that the religious law was abrogated, since its esoteric meaning was now directly revealed. There are no full prophets after Mohammed, but there is a new cycle of esoteric interpreters who play a similar role. In effect, Wilson claims that Alamut realised a millennium which restored the immediacy of spiritual experience.

This process was based on a religious doctrine similar to Wilson's/Bey's. The Ismailis of Alamut gave a radical meaning to the concept of *ta'wil*. They saw the relationship between law and spirit as like that between a shell and a reality underneath. Law (*shari'ah*) was seen as a shell which had to be broken or reinterpreted to reach the underlying Spiritual Path (*tariqah*), behind which is God or absolute Being. This reflects broader interpretive traditions of the time. Human thought is structured through forms, which both re-

veal and conceal the reality beneath. These forms had to be interpreted to reach the ineffable. Usually, such interpretation is carried out in a way which preserves the necessity of law, at least for the majority of followers (clerics and rulers may be excepted). However, Wilson suggests that it took a more radical term in Alamut. In Hassan II's doctrine, the meaning of the Path is found in the reality of the Imam (spiritual ruler), which ultimately devolves into the Imam-of-one's-own-being, the inner soul or perfected human. This is a position Bey paradoxically terms 'anarcho-monarchism': each person is her or his own ruler.

In this view, the law is not a necessary shell, but something which will fall aside like a used husk once the essence is revealed. Once the Imam (higher self) is realised, the Law and Path fall away. Those who have reached the kernel can discard the shell. They still consider themselves Muslims, but discard religious law. Once someone has reached inner perfection, everything they do is permitted. There is no path and no goal, only reality or truth (*Haqq*). However, Wilson suggests that this does not mean that any and all ways of life qualify as divine. The Ismaili is meant to be constantly intoxicated with intensity.

In Alamut, the Qiyamat, or day of judgement, was believed to have already come. Alamut claimed to be a 'hidden garden' freed of state, religious power, law, and so on. What this means for Bey is that time has become completely immanent. We are no longer waiting for revolution. We are already in angelic time, but do not realise it. The Millennium, or the moment of radical transformation, is always *now*, the present, the awakening of each soul to its own divinity.

This argument repeats Bey's general ontology in religious language. People are alienated through the loss of immediacy, and achieve transformation through its reclamation and expansion. The idea of the Imam-of-one's-own-being leads to freedom. This is different from mysticism as quietism or asceticism. People realise

of exodus lead to a sense of being 'special' or even 'sanctified' relative to the masses. This is combined with a concern that Bey proposes avoiding direct confrontation with the state. I feel these concerns are misplaced for several reasons. Firstly, 'dropping-out' is by no means limited to privileged groups, but occurs worldwide, from shanty-town alternative economies to the New Traveller movement (who were mostly working-class), from American freight-train riders to indigenous movements like the Zapatistas. Secondly, the sense of being 'special' is certainly preferable to the sense of being submerged in a dominant, oppressive culture. When leftists urge post-leftists to refrain from exodus so as to avoid separating from the masses, they reveal the extent to which they have internalised oppression as politically desirable. In any case, any critic, however traditionally leftist, who wants to avoid accepting reactionary 'common sense' will necessarily have to adopt a critical distance from the majority's 'false consciousness', however they choose to spin it.

In addition, I'd argue that Bey is right when he says that traditional leftist demonstrations, pickets and publishing activities 'don't add up to a vital, daring conspiracy of self-liberation' today. More is needed, especially in everyday life. Bey is producing original theories of power and resistance today, paying close attention to the current context and the latest theories about it. This brings him closer to the strategic issues of activism today than those groups which trust in historical models. Many of today's cutting-edge movements, from Tahrir Square and Occupy to the ZAD, the Greek revolt and Anonymous, look more like TAZ's or tongs than they do like Marxist models of revolution.

Along similar lines, John Armitage and Richard Barbrook make a great deal of Bey's enthusiasm for TAZ's with reactionary associations. Fiume is a particular point of disagreement. Armitage sees the Fiume occupation as proto-fascist and politically reactionary. Cross-reading this with a few of Bey's comments on anarcho-monarchism, Armitage argues that Bey's theory is

As we have seen, Bey is not strictly individualist. He has a distinct theory of conviviality, or social life based in passion, which is compatible with his emphasis on intensity and personal becoming. He would thus disagree with Bookchin that authoritarianism is 'necessary for social life'. However, he opposes social integration through self-denial and normativity. This is a real bone of contention with some left-anarchists.

Bookchin believes that countercultural eruptions die down without social effects. They provide 'kicks' rather than 'temporary commitment', and do not even change those who take part, let alone the wider society. Yet there are many cases of social transformation due to counterculture – for example, the collapse of lifelong monogamy and the recognition of 'youth' as a social category. I know many people who have been changed permanently by participation in drop-out movements. The very awareness of a possible outside is one of the most lasting changes. As Williams puts it, a TAZ allows us to 'sample the autonomous life'. There are also many cases of recruits to left-wing groups who do not become lifelong revolutionaries, and of organised campaigns which are unsuccessful.

Sean Sheehan accuses Bey of a 'mere politics of style', without political substance. In particular, he alleges that Bey lacks a class perspective. To me, it's pretty clear from earlier discussions that Bey's theory has plenty of substance. There are good strategic reasons for the approaches he adopts, which follow logically from his analysis of capitalism. He doesn't emphasise class exploitation because he sees mediation, alienation and recuperation as the main problems. Another critic, Gavin Grindon, argues that Bey succumbs to the Spectacle by imagining the world of the autonomous image to be the real world. This misunderstands Bey's point that the system functions mainly through the power of the image.

Benjamin Franks advances elements of a similar critique. He argues that nomadic strategies might only be available to economically independent, privileged actors. He also argues that strategies

their divine nature by following their true nature or becoming, conceived as a 'subjective arc of spiritual progress'.

The radical Ismaili approach was extremely controversial in its day. While many Sufis used variants of the shell/being metaphor, the open abrogation of religious law was considered outright heretical. Furthermore, the Qiyamat story was feared by the elite, who were concerned that eliminating initiation and duty would eliminate their assassins and workers. After the murder of Hassan II, they managed to restrict the libertarian doctrine to the elite. Orthodoxy maintains that unenlightened selves need the religious law. Wilson responds that we are already free, whether we recognise it or not. Realisation is not a 'becoming', a process of becoming something else, but a 'being', something we already have.

Wilson also sees the social system of Alamut as an inspiration. For most of its existence, Alamut had a hierarchy – albeit one defined by spiritual attainment. However, it had a more libertarian social system than other kingdoms of its period, and encouraged science and learning. The networked nature of the society, and its economic 'communism', are reminiscent of syndicalism and council communism. It was primarily oriented to 'gnosis' or spiritual knowledge, but it also used militancy and stealth. Alamut defended itself from larger neighbouring kingdoms, which considered it heretical, by means of the order of assassins. The risk of assassination created a fearful reputation which deterred action against Alamut for centuries (S 37). Its castles were impregnable even to siege, since they had their own gardens in their mountain valleys. They were able to communicate and trade because of porous borders. This situation lasted for centuries, until the Mongol invasions.

Knight suggests that this reading is 'problematic'. Ismaili doctrine is generally taken to reserve knowledge of the inner meaning to the Imam or the chosen few. Esoteric readings are sometimes treated as privileged readings which empower

particular interpreters. Modern Nizari Ismailis operate with a hierarchical structure based on purported descent from the Shi'ite ruler Ali. The declaration of the Qiyamat or qiama (usually translated as resurrection) is shrouded in mystery, partly because Hassan II destroyed historical accounts. It is usually interpreted as an attempt by the ruler to set himself up as caliph, although it did entail the abrogation of shariah law.

Although Alamut was destroyed by the Mongols, and cannot be reproduced in today's conditions, Wilson suggests that Alamut's Qiyamat remains alive as a state of consciousness in which we are already in paradise. Even if the hidden garden cannot be accessed in the outer world, the interiorisation of the Qiyamat story offers an inner sense of personal freedom that the state cannot touch. It provides a kind of 'moment' outside history which can be accessed existentially. Following Corbin, he suggests that the Qiyamat (or moment of disalienation) is always alive in the imaginal plane, and each of us can participate in it there. This moment of unveiling is sometimes expressed in terms of visits from guardian angels and messianic figures.

## Leftist Critiques

Bey's work has also come in for sharp criticism from left-anarchist writers, including Murray Bookchin, John Armitage, Richard Barbrook, Sean Sheehan and others. These critiques generally have the tone of hatchet-jobs or dismissals, often hinging on marginal aspects of Bey's work (such as the idea of anarcho-monarchism, or a single remark about abortion). Critics argue that Bey is unconcerned about capitalism, despite his extensive theory of alienation, which they generally ignore. They typically fail to appreciate the type of experience to which Bey points, or its subversive potential (which they reduce to hedonism). This is partly a result of Bey's style, which is more suggestive than direct. Without an intuitive connection to the ideas of TAZ and peak experience, Bey's work seems nonsensical. Critics often fill in the resultant void with tendentious interpretations of particular passages. These are condemned as heretical relative to their own political ideology.

For example, Bookchin's 'social anarchism' (before he renounced anarchism completely) included strong elements of social control, structure, responsibility, and collectivism. He labels opponents like Bey as denying the necessary preconditions for social life. He also lumps them together in the rather meaningless category of 'lifestyle anarchism'. This strange conceptual amalgam of deep ecology, eco-anarchism, politics of desire, post-left anarchy, and anarcho-capitalism is unified in its alleged 'individualism' and refusal of socialist collectivism. Besides this purely negative unity it otherwise consists of various distinct positions unified in a bogeyman adversary.

Micro-management generates its own forms of danger by cutting off the life-force itself. The ethos Bey promotes in his work – intensity, peak experiences, bricolage, altered consciousness, living for enjoyment, conviviality, immanent ethics – affirms the life-force and counteracts trauma with experiences of intensity.

## Sufi Journeying

The history of Alamut is one of a number of occasions where Bey/Wilson discusses Islamic history. He argues that medieval Islam was often tolerant. Islam sometimes imagined itself as a whole world, with great latitude – a vision expressed in social tolerance (Caravan). This vision is undermined today, because the Islamic world feels like a partial world, surrounded by hostile forces. The context of conflict causes reactive forces and scarcity. This, for Wilson, is why dervishes and Sufis are persecuted today. The ideological and social closure of Islam is a response to the colonial condition.

Sufi journeying – as a means to altered consciousness – was a particular effect of the earlier, enlightened condition. In *Sacred Drift*, Wilson argues that western mapmaking seeks to fill in unknown spaces. In contrast, Sufi journeying seeks something always 'unknown', no matter how often it has been discovered. Particular geographical points, or even the entire landscape, is invested with imaginal meaning. The journey is carried out in a state of altered consciousness. The traveller is encouraged to maintain psychological openness to adventure, and a type of 'power-without-self-will' or will without distracting thoughts. Travellers are to avoid 'disequilibrium', such as ill-health, because it disrupts the experience of the marvellous. The journey requires hardships, toil and danger. Its goal is entry into the imaginal world. Sufi travel writings often refer as much to poetic significance as real places. The 'tale' is stripped of meaningless or gratuitous elements, and written as a meaningful process. Such stories 'rise above', rather than falling short of, the truth.

According to Wilson, there is a call within Sufism to flight, journey, or migration which is also associated with the death of ego and of an existing 'world'. Travelling dervishes are sometimes full-time guests, offering *baraka* in return for hospitality. Sufi wanderers seek to open up an altered, spiritualised gaze on particular sites, travelling in the material and imaginal worlds at the same time. There might be space among such travellers for people who would be labelled as insane today, who might be regarded and cared for as helpless saints.

Such journeying may provide an option for the modern world. The spiritual pursuit of imaginal points is always possible. However, the related kind of physical journeying is difficult today. The loss of wide and wild lands, of terra incognita (unknown lands not on the maps), interferes with such travel. Wilson suggests that it can be recovered in an experience of 'rootless cosmopolitanism'. Life can never be accurately mapped because it is qualitative. As a result, one can still vanish in fractal complexities missed by linear maps. This is the modern equivalent to Sufi wandering: to disappear into hidden dimensions the media and quantification cannot penetrate. The Situationist *dérive* or drift is an example of this. Ultimately, this might expand into a culture of 'urban nomads' and 'techno-gypsies' who finally become modern Sufi wanderers and restore imaginal travel. (The British New Traveller movement was largely contemporary with these writings).

Sufi journeying is distinguished from tourism. Whereas existentialist travel pursues difference, tourism alienates it. The structure of tourism mediates between visitor and place. The process becomes vampiric, consuming and destroying difference and contaminating the places it affects. In another text, Wilson argues that travel 'faster than a camel' destroys distance and is the same as not moving at all. Other kinds of action at a distance, like writing, also tend to negate travel by taking away the need for it.

Bey refers sympathetically to the Qalandars, a colourful religious mendicant order in South Asia. He sees them as a surviving

too much space" or deviating from etiquette codes is an imposition of outer power onto autonomous spaces. It fails to treat people as immanent singularities or as part of the field of becoming. However, the issue of how to construct autonomously-desiring subjects – and resist formations of alienation and reactive desire – is a real issue for autonomous therapy and pedagogy. The goal should not be to produce 'responsible', cautious people who identify with their positionalities and follow etiquette codes. Instead, the goal should be the emergence of unique subjects who are not reducible to their positionalities. Creating horizontalism and intensity combats social exclusion. There is evidence that conditions of conflict and scarcity lead to closed, intolerant communities, whereas conditions of abundance lead to open communities. An approach like Bey's thus contributes to creating the conditions for acceptance of difference more effectively than scarcity-reproducing identity positions.

Bey's approach may not be perfect in preventing oppression, but it is more likely to be successful in the medium term than the alternative, austere approach. Emotions of joy and euphoria, a social connection derived from experienced intensity rather than normativity, a culture marked by hybridity and nomadism, and awareness of the interconnected and holistic nature of being, all point towards the development of authentically open relations to others. This transformation is one of the most effective means of preventing oppression and abuse – far more effective than bureaucratic 'safe spaces' policies or risk-management approaches, which reproduce hierarchical power.

Overall, Bey's mistake in rationalising one form of abusive power does not render his general theory any less useful in combatting abusive power in general. Authoritarian power leads to abuse by those in power. A TAZ is less oriented to the goal of protection than a modern state with its rhetoric of risk-management. The idea of burning up life in the process of living is counterposed to the idea of risk-minimisation. But still, a TAZ may often be a safer place for difference than a micro-managed institution.



## Structural oppression and autonomy

There is another residual problem. Autonomous zones negate formal structural power, but what about informal power based on patterns of dominant and subordinate identity? The gamble of theories like Bey's is that people can be invited to leave their structural oppression and 'conditioning' at the door, and live by desire and self-determination instead of existing categories. Bey considers dominant subjectivities to be effects of a media trance. Break the trance, and people will re-emerge as distinct, desiring subjects. Some theorists would be pessimistic about this possibility, because they take structural oppressions to be extremely deep-rooted or even inescapable. Although I feel this critique is overplayed, there are also possibilities that people will bring habits and patterns into autonomous zones. For example, someone who is used to deferring to others might continue to do so, even when there is no structural authority. People might continue to prefer to do tasks they are competent at, when their competency is affected by class or gender.

I don't feel this is a reason for rejecting autonomous spaces as oppressive or informally hierarchical, and regressing to authoritarian power-structures. In a horizontal space, it doesn't matter much if some people are louder or more active than others, provided power-relations remain fluid. The reduction of every disagreement or instance of discomfort to macrosocial structures outside the autonomous context is a barrier to effectively constructing horizontal relations. The political style which condemns others for "taking up

variant of the way of the wild dervish. A few are con-men, a few are 'genuine mystics', but most are amiable wanderers of a spiritual persuasion, similar to western drop-outs. Historically recognised, this bohemian order provided an important pressure-valve in an otherwise doctrinally rigid world. The Qalandars are historically one of the most heterodox Sufi orders. They practice a kind of dropping-out, abandoning work and adopting a code of total spontaneity.

Many Sufis adopt views compatible with orthodox Islam. However, some Sufis maintain some degree of immediatism alongside adherence to orthodox doctrine. Neo-Sufism from the nineteenth century onwards is a response to colonialism, and corresponding authoritarian social formations. Sufism views objectivity and subjectivity as complementary. Also, Sufism is often quietistic, promoting 'becoming who you are' over any outer cause. Many adopt the position of being 'in the world, but not of it', carrying on with mainstream lives. However, Sufis have also launched revolutions. In his historical work, Wilson selects those aspects of, and trends in, Sufism which resonate with his own political orientation.

## Cumantsa and Fiume

TAZ's can also take modernist forms. In the essay 'A Nietzschean Coup d'Etat', Bey writes sympathetically of a short-lived independent government in Cumantsa, a region of Romania, after World War 1. The project was set up by an eccentric minor aristocrat, Georghiu Mavrocordato, whom one scholar terms semi-fictitious. Bey suggests it is the only government experiment openly based on Nietzschean theory. At this point in history, Nietzsche was considered a radical rather than reactionary theorist. His thought is based on process, rather than teleology, and inspired revolutionaries such as Landauer.

As a Nietzschean, Mavrocordato condemned the First World War as a conspiracy of moribund powers against life itself. After seizing power from the remnants of an occupying German army, his group proposed radical land redistribution, including Mavrocordato's own estate. This led to massive peasant support. The new rulers declared their intent to create a Nietzschean utopia. They were 'young romantics' who apparently expected their idea to spread. The establishment of Cumantsa was a Nietzschean expressive act, adopting the Dionysian pessimist position of acting in spite of knowledge, out of sheer expression. According to Wilson, the revolt was a kind of peak experience. It quickly drew followers of Stirner, many of whom at the time celebrated any revolt as a means to struggle against the non-self.

An attempt was made to imitate revolutionary councilism. In a city with no factories, this was a councilism of different ethnic communities. No community was to have mastery over the others. In practice, Cumantsa pretty much ran itself. The system was pop-

politics of desire are less likely than enclosed, modern subjects to abuse each other. (However, there is a danger that people adopting fusion-based, spontaneous positions similar to Bey's will be easy targets for abusers). Thirdly, people who are less frustrated and angry, less neurotic, and more fulfilled are less likely to be abusive.

The danger of trauma is downplayed in Bey's work. In practice, aimless wandering usually entails risk-taking, and trauma can block the possibility of having peak experiences. Activists who have suffered trauma suggest that it makes these kinds of experiences impossible. Bey is right that a certain kind of consciousness or relationship to chaos might help to make trauma seem overcomeable, but there is a problem of constructing this orientation in embodied as well as intellectual ways. Indeed, Bey writes of a 'healing laugh' which arises from an intoxicated yet serious type of art or play. The paradox is that, while peak experiences are arguably the answer to trauma, the state of being traumatised tends to block people from accessing peak experiences, or even feeling them to be possible. I sometimes feel that Bey is naive in his treatment of trauma, ignoring the difficulty of constructing experiences/relations of abundance and contingency. But this might be because of a lack of sufficient peak experiences, rather than because it's really naïve.

## Trauma and Peak Experience

Bey, and politics of desire in general, seeks intensity, peak experience and affirmation of being. The experience of trauma is a barrier to such experiences. Trauma can cause 'anhedonia' or an inability to feel pleasure; it can make the world feel empty and meaningless. If a free world led to an epidemic of trauma, then the appeal of the politics of desire would be undermined. However, there are various accounts which suggest that stateless societies lead to childhoods which are both freer and happier than in modern societies. Far from these societies being hotbeds of abuse, it is unknown in some societies for children even to be left crying. Punishments are minimal or nonexistent. Comparing such accounts with problems in postcolonial indigenous societies – such as Eduardo Duran's work with Native American communities – shows that physical and sexual abuse are effects of colonisation. Groups who are colonised, dispossessed and alienated suffer big increases in violence, including sexual abuse. Some still remember an experience familiar to readers of Bey, such as Haida Thowhegwelth: 'My principal cause is freedom. I'm old enough to remember what it was like to be free. Free from harassment by police, free from harassment by fisheries... People talk about this country being a free country. They have no idea of freedom. If you ever had the taste of freedom that I have known, you would never give it up, you'd fight for it like I do'.

There are various ways in which freedom reduces trauma. Firstly, it is harder to establish coercive control (the usual root of abuse) in a world without authoritarian institutions. Secondly, the type of self-actualising, immanent selves encouraged by the

ular, based on land redistribution, a tax-free port, and giveaways from the treasury. Bey sees it as akin to a TAZ, although it did have a militia and border guards. It eventually collapsed ahead of a Romanian attack. The leaders of the revolt escaped, and Mavrocordato may have gone into exile and become a Sufi.

Another reputed autonomous zone, the Republic of Fiume, was set up by the poet (and later fascist) Gabriele D'Annunzio, who sought to capture Fiume from Yugoslavia for Italy, for nationalist reasons. Turned down by Italy but unevicted by Yugoslavia, D'Annunzio declared independence. This self-consciously short-lived community attracted artists, anarchists, pirates, bohemians, gay men, fugitives and eccentrics of every stripe. Bey portrays the community operating as a constant party or festival for the eighteen months of its existence. This analysis has attracted controversy, as critics have drawn attention to d'Annunzio's later fascist politics, the nationalistic reasons for the occupation (which deprived the newly-formed Yugoslavia of its main port), and the proto-fascist iconography of its aesthetic. However, Bey takes the position that Italian aesthetic radicalism only later degenerated into fascism. Applying such criteria to Fiume is anachronistic.

kinds of tyrannical adult relations which Herman portrays as the usual context for child abuse are paradoxically encouraged by the same authoritarians who oppose child abuse so aggressively.

## Other Autonomous Zones

Many other movements feature marginally, but sometimes recurrently, in Bey/Wilson's writings. In America, Bey also celebrates so-called 'tri-racial isolate' and Maroon communities formed by escaped slaves, Native Americans, and downtrodden whites. Bey celebrates the fact that some of these groups sought 'Indian' status, and suggests that they were denied it mainly to avoid setting a precedent of recognising dropouts. Many of these groups were targeted by eugenicists in the early twentieth century. Other historical precursors include American settlers who assimilated into Native American bands. People abducted from puritan settler communities often actively resisted being rescued, preferring Native American life. Ranter, Leveller, and Digger revolts seem to have been experienced both as political insurrections and mystical states. In Bengal, Bey claims to have met allies Sufis and Kali-worshippers who introduced him to tantra, and allegedly had their own political party.

Utopianism also has a place as a precursor of TAZ. Bey also writes favourably of early intentional communities such as Fourier's phalansteries. When the map was 'closed' and intentional communities on the frontier became impossible, they were largely replaced by urban communes like the Paris Commune. Some revolutionaries adopted a kind of nomadism between different zones of revolt.

ual. But modern states and capitalism are immensely destructive, in forms such as industrialised warfare, genocide and ecocide. The illusion that "order" provides safety and welfare is really an illusion of in-groups, who are sometimes made safer and richer through the subordination or out-groups. Bey's theory of social triage, and the risk that any of us could be labelled a 'contaminant', is closer to the reality of securitised neoliberalism than the Hobbesian illusion.

Authoritarians are also not on very solid ground believing they have a better response to abuse. Law has been proven to be a clumsy, ineffective response – as it is to most social problems. The protectors are often the abusers. State institutions meant to protect children often reproduce abuse. Age-of-consent laws sometimes criminalise young people, ignore differences in the consent capacity of people in an age-group, and fail to protect anyone over the specified age. Stateless societies rarely use laws for social control at all. Informal, diffuse normative systems might be more sensitive than laws to the actual nature of a relationship and its impact on a young person.

Capitalism does not oppose children's liberation to protect children from abuse. It opposes children's liberation so as to continue to coerce children into being indoctrinated as capitalist subjects through the school system and authoritarian families. The idea of 'protection' is grounded on a misperception of the biggest violent force in contemporary society – the modern state – as a benign guardian to be trusted with the interests of the vulnerable. Look at the miserable faces in any academy playground, look at the use of police in schools, read how children's homes are becoming a conveyor belt to jail, how play is criminalised along with other everyday acts, family courts forcing mothers to turn children over to abusers, and repeated accusations of sexual abuse at children's homes, and the lie of the state as protector from abuse becomes abundantly clear. Indeed, the state and capitalism have an interest in working-class children being traumatised, to prepare them for domination by bosses and to break their will to resist. Indeed, the

## Islamic 'Heresies'

The book *Scandal* is devoted to unorthodox traditions on the margins of Islam. Wilson sees Islam as a continuum of shifting heterodoxies, with no fixed orthodoxy. He is most interested in positions deemed heretical or heterodox, rather than orthodoxies. He also rejects Wahhabism, Khomeinism and other positions he deems hyper-orthodox. He argues that western perceptions of Islam are generally too monolithic and shallow. In his reading of Islam, the human calling is self-perfection. Christian-style martyrdom is rare. Risking death can be used to enhance consciousness of the world, but fighting and concealment are preferred to passive self-sacrifice. Sufism adds other elements which render Islam more progressive, such as the shell/kernel metaphor.

Wilson argues that heretical re-interpretations and popular syncretisms are not unwanted innovations, but useful hybridities. Popular eruptions of playfulness do not betray a religious tradition, but renew it. Heresies speak the language of a culture or religion, but give certain words a 'catastrophic', radically transformative meaning. Mystics and poets seek 'poetic facts', or bits of information which, 'at a certain density', can cause a breakthrough or breakdown in the border between ordinary and altered/imaginal consciousness. Heresy produces a certain kind of scandal, in which a religious veil is removed.

Heresies are usually needed for cultural transfer. For instance, Persia (Iran), Northern India and Indonesia became Islamic through heterodox ideas. Heresies are like lucky or deliberate mistranslations. Most Javanese still practice an eclectic mixture of Islam, shamanism, Buddhism and Hinduism. The Moorish Science

Temple is another instance of heresy as cultural transfer. I would add that heterodoxy and heresy may also be needed in secular radicalisms. For instance, Marxism spread mainly in heterodox forms.

Islam was able to spread so widely because of its democratic element, or openness to interpretation by each believer, with the community as final authority. Of course, this openness often operates only 'in theory', like the Christian commitment to pacifism. However, it sometimes operates in practice. For instance, Rumi accepted non-Muslim disciples, and Islam recognises earlier, non-Muslim prophets.

Sufism is particularly interesting as a source of heresies. Some Sufis played with deliberately 'shocking' themes to highlight the tension between outer law and inner spirit. Mystics sought to shed received opinion and habit, including law, to reach an altered state of consciousness. The mystic 'dies before death' through dissolution of the alienated ego, which is taken to be a programmed illusion. Material arising from the unconscious is neither repressed nor succumbed to, but spiritualised. On this reading, the real message of religion is disalienation. The religious law is at best a means to this truth, a veil over it. Once the truth is accessed directly, the intermediary of law is unnecessary.

Wilson thus reads Sufi radicalism as similar to his own commitment to unmediated intensity. An emphasis on individual realization removes the mediating role of religious authorities and leads to the rejection of hierarchy. Wilson sees mystical, ascetic and religious practices as a 'barrel of tricks' for tricking the mind out of its alienated, illusory condition. The basic point is to find a gateway between ordinary and non-ordinary consciousness so as to access the latter. This position blurs the boundaries between religions.

Echoing Bergson, Bey suggests that the mystical position identifies 'God's point of view' with a holistic world where everything is one. This is contrasted with the hierarchical structure perceived by creatures. In this hierarchical structure, some things are seen

## Children's Liberation

Most post-left anarchists also support children's liberation, and hence oppose laws targeting children, and what Bey terms the serfhood of children in contemporary society. One tenet of children's liberation is opposition to age-discriminatory laws, such as compulsory schooling, prohibitions on leaving one's parents, and bans on drinking and smoking. Discrimination against children makes little sense from a theoretical point of view favouring desire, intensity, pleasure, and immanent becoming (rather than a framework favouring a Cartesian rational subject).

Both paedophile advocates and opponents of children's liberation frequently suggest that children's liberation implies support for paedophilia. However, the two issues are clearly separate. Children's liberation opposes adult exploitation of children for the adult's purposes, whether these be sexual, economic, pedagogical or cultural. The difficulty arises because paedophile advocates claim that children enter consensually into relationships with paedophiles, whereas opponents deny this.

Bey gives the impression of being strongly in favour of children's liberation. For instance, he co-edited an anthology, *Wild Children*, which promotes children's voices. It does not contain any paedophile advocacy material, but rather, children's creative works, and critiques of school. While Helms sees this as a matter of suspicion, to me it suggests that Bey is committed to children's liberation, independently of his views on sexuality. Children are portrayed in Bey's work as beings of wildness, play, imagination, and pure delight. Indeed, Bey's work frequently speaks to the archetype of childhood or the inner child. However, he seems to mix up childhood and sexuality, which are both sites of insurrection and intensity.

Hobbesian critics assume that outer accountability makes the world a safer place. However, there is little evidence for this view. Both states and stateless social groups can be peaceful or conflict-

theory, altered consciousness provides a context in which competitive, scarcity-oriented social practices can be overcome.

Bey's support for 'boy-love' is not based on a conscious endorsement of harming others on the grounds of desire. (If he took such a position, then he would also support overt rape, torture, and murder). It is based on a denial that 'boy-love' entails harm. This is an empirical dispute, and I believe Bey is wrong on this point, but it does not at all undermine the politics of desire. In other words, if the view that adult-child sex is oppressive/abusive to children is right, then such acts are also inconsistent with Bey's wider theory.

In response to the question, 'is it wrong to act on one's desires when it harms others?', the mainstream has a simplistic answer: it's always wrong, because morality is abstract and is not connected to desire. However, this answer is wrong, because morality can have no basis other than desire, and because moral regimes have themselves produced much sadism and suffering. The politics of desire answers that it is sometimes right and sometimes wrong, but for different reasons. It is wrong when it is based on reactive or negative desires, rather than the free flow of becoming. The politics of desire implies that, if something is *really* someone's desire at an existential level, then they have a right to act on it. However, people are not only discrete entities, but also part of the flow of becoming, and reactive actions, which block and repress becoming in general, are alienated from the flow of becoming. There may be rare cases where a desire with destructive effects is really an effect of self-actualisation, and will thus have to be accepted and embraced. (Predatory animals are a good example; the 'bandit-bolo' in *Bolo'Bolo* is also theorised this way). Usually, however, destructive effects are signs that desire has been distorted through alienation – much the same way as in neuroses, addictions, and self-abnegations. Crucially, this is not a normative condemnation but an awareness of the social deviant as the site of a blockage in the wider flow of becoming.

as more important, central or powerful than others. For mystics, anything which can illuminate the oneness of being is a 'grace of God'. Anything can be either a poison or support, in relation to disalienated perception.

Wilson discusses aspects of the doctrines of a number of dissident Sufi and Ismaili theorists, such as Mansur al-Hallaj, Ibn Arabi, and Hamid al-Din al-Kermani. Many of these figures were persecuted by the orthodox establishment. For example, Wilson suggests that the Establishment had Hallaj killed, although the story has been rewritten as orthodox martyrdom. Similarly, dervishes were persecuted as radicals. Historically, they wandered between places, owned nothing, sometimes begged, played music and danced. They sought ecstasy through rhythm and dancing. From the mid-nineteenth century, Sufis suffered persecution. Many stopped wandering and adopted more conventional religious positions. This process seems to stem from colonisation and the reaction to it.

Some of the scholars Wilson discusses proposed otherwise prohibited means to reach altered consciousness. The image of wine was sometimes used to connote intensity, for instance in the poetry of Fakhroddin Iraqi. Although prohibited by religious law, many people in Iran, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan use marijuana for religious purposes. The basis for this seems to be that people in 'ordinary' consciousness lack the attentiveness and willpower to see the Real or truth. Prayer and perfume can also act as gateways. Wilson was told by a Sufi leader that Love is more important than specific doctrines. He suggests that, for mystics, love is the binding power of being, or the substance of which being is composed.

According to Wilson, some mystics accepted the idea of romantic love or physical attraction as a divine state, since the other is a part of or stands for God. Hence, there is Sufi love poetry from authors such as Ibn Arabi, comparing a woman, girl, or boy with God. Through total concentration on the beauty of the beloved, the mystic escapes ego and self, and remembers the beauty of her/

his spiritual nature. Some, such as Kermani, saw self-realisation occurring more perfectly in love than in religious practices.

Wilson uses the term 'imaginal yoga' for the intense contemplation of an object or form until it is transformed by the imagination into a metaphysical focus. One example is the 'Witness Game', a practice in which one contemplates an attractive person without acting on sexual urges. The state of unrequited attraction provides a pathway to spiritual experience. Bey sees this as a means of transmuting erotic, bodily energy into spiritual consciousness. It is a special case of the broader process by which Islam transmutes nature into spirit, rather than destroying nature as modernity does. However, he is also aware that authors such as Ibn Arabi tend to be masculinist.

Poetry can also be a means to altered consciousness. Wilson protests at the relegation of mystical poetry to a lesser status than 'realistic' tragedies and the like. He argues that mysticism is not substanceless, but rather, points to an altered state of consciousness. It is a model in which one relates not only to reality/truth (*haqq*), but also to creativity. Creativity is a mirror of divine outpouring.

Mysticism can be expressed in different ways. Often, the oneness of being experienced by mystics is expressed in terms which crystallise back into literal systems of dogma. Some orders focus on each detail – through precise rules and instructions – until each detail becomes luminous. Others are more 'bohemian', promoting drugs, parties and sex.

Another possible gateway is art. Austere official Islamic artwork can seem devoid of the spirit of play. But popular and commercial artworks are playful, creative and day-dreamy. For instance, Wilson describes *The Black Div* as 'jagged, violent, hallucinatory' and 'brilliant'. The figure of Buraq expresses a concealed feminine side to Islam. There is also popular music with similar attributes.

has in recent years fuelled a move in radical politics away from autonomous organising and towards quasi-bureaucratic models of organisation with formalised protection procedures.

Both of these positions rest on a Hobbesian view of anarchy. The misunderstanding underpinning this type of critique is the idea that people *either* act in destructive and abusive ways *or* submit to outer norms and morals. The politics-of-desire position, however, is that people can follow their passions and pursue intensity, without becoming predatory on one another. Accountability to outer norms, authorities and moralities is rejected. However, there is a kind of immanent ethics which emerges for each person from an experience of balance and becoming. (This is similar in some ways to the treatment of "badness" as imbalance in ancient and indigenous philosophies). As we have seen, Bey does not believe in living without ethics. He believes in a type of virtue ethics in which conviviality, mutual attraction, and intensity are valued. He rejects what he terms 'libertine' positions such as those of the Marquis de Sade.

Theorists of desire usually argues that truly living – intensely, passionately, playfully, without limits – is more important than simple survival. For this reason, they are not open to criticism based on risk or harm. If people sometimes live shorter lives because they (or others) pursue their pleasures intensely, this does not mean the situation is worse than in an authoritarian society. However, there is little reason to believe that an egalitarian, free, passion-driven social world would be worse than today's dystopian nightmare. The restraint of passions entails institutional systems which themselves cause immense harm, for example war, police brutality and economic exploitation. There is an inherent contradiction in the Hobbesian argument from harm, in that it both posits the value of (bare) life and yet denies it, by rendering life subject to exterior standards. According to the politics of desire, the disalienation of desire increases general freedom and intensity. In Bey's



## Is Bey's position on child abuse an indictment of autonomy?

On a more general, theoretical level, Bey's problematic position on 'boy-love' is sometimes taken to discredit autonomy in general. Bey can here be grouped with Deleuze and Guattari, Nietzsche, Reich, Stirner, Situationism, post-left anarchy, and arguably anarchism more broadly, as part of a *politics of desire*. This type of position is often dismissed by opponents in a too-easy way which goes something like this: the author rejects authority and morality, therefore everything is justified and anything goes, therefore they must condone all kinds of abuse, murder, rape, and so on. It is basically a re-hash of the Hobbesian argument against anarchism, spontaneous order and autonomy, on the basis that freedom leads to chaos and violence. According to this ideology, people who follow their desires will harm each other. This claim leads to ideologies of security, order and protection. And for someone trying to make this argument, the fact that a famous anarchist advocates child-abuse is useful confirmation! This kind of argument arises in all the main critics who focus on Bey's ideas on child sexuality – Knight, Helms and Gupta. It also appears, for example, in certain critiques of Deleuze, such as Eve Bischoff's argument that the 'Hanover werewolf' is an instance of Deleuzian desire.

This overlaps with a second issue, of 'safeguarding' or 'safe spaces'. Does the type of anarchy propounded by people like Bey – and to which I'm also extremely sympathetic – entail a lack of protection for vulnerable people? This is the usual argument against children's liberation, and is also advanced by various identity-based critics of post-left anarchy, including some feminists. TAZ and anarchy imply the removal of the formal protections which are meant to prevent all kinds of violence and abuse. It is (or it creates) an 'unsafe space' for people who need to avoid particular kinds of abuse or harassment. This critique

## Dreams and Writing in Sufism and Taoism

Another means to altered consciousness is dreaming. In 'The Anti-Caliph', Wilson refers to hidden figures such as Khezr the Green Man, the Hidden Imam, and the idea of prophetic visitations in dreams. In *Shower of Stars*, Wilson argues that initiation into non-ordinary (spiritual, esoteric) consciousness can be performed by archetypal figures in dreams. He argues that this process is recognised in both Sufism and Taoism. The spiritual realm is something one can contemplate directly.

Sufism and Taoism have different ontologies. Chuang Tzu (Zhuangzi) is a linguistic relativist, though not a nihilist. Words 'say something', but the map is not the territory. The nature of reality cannot be conveyed in speech or silence. In contrast, Sufis tend to be linguistic Platonists. Words have magical powers because of the correspondence between signifier and signified. However, both approaches allow access to knowledge through dreams. For example, Oveissi dervishes are trained to induce 'veridical dreams' believed to give access to initiatory figures, rather than being initiated by a master.

Dreams are a site of knowledge because they exist in the liminal (in-between) zone. The dream is a 'privileged locus' of the identity of everything, the oneness of being. Wilson suggests there are particular ways to intentionally create the conditions for these kinds of dreams. In the book *Shower of Stars*, Wilson argues that the unconscious tends to be sensitive to suggestion. Hence, the practices of *istikhara*, used to call initiatic dreams, are a kind of 'imaginal ma-

chine' for producing effects in the unconscious. In dream initiation, the dreamer often visits heaven in the present (not the afterlife), to be taught shamanic secrets.

Writing is derived from dreaming. It depends on the ability to detach images from materiality, and hence on the imaginal level. Dream, angel, star and book are interchangeable but autonomous images. In *Aimless Wandering*, Bey suggests that intermediaries such as muses and spirits are invented because of the oversupply of meaning which occurs in chaotic language.

Themes of dreaming might even manifest in orthodox religion. For instance, Mohammed received the Qur'an in a 'shower of stars', over a long period, and Wilson suggests this must have been a mystical experience. All three Abrahamic religions (Islam, Judaism, Christianity) are reticent about *how* Scripture was revealed, so as to maintain its uniqueness. However, Wilson suggests it may have been a similar process to that found in Spirit Writing or Mao Shan Taoism. In this tradition, a type of spiritual writing is deemed possible, in a cosmology which sees everything as an emblem or sign of an underlying cosmic order. Books are considered to represent or symbolise something in this way, and to contain spirits.

According to Wilson, such writing was often conducted under the influence of marijuana. It involved the use of a chanted, incantatory language which ruptured discursive language and had very different effects, infecting language with an excess of meaning with spiritual effects. The book becomes a god in a polytheist world, moving both towards its reader and towards heaven. In contrast to monotheist texts, scripture in Mao Shan Taoism was part of a repeated or reiterated game. This allows people to participate directly in the descent of revelation, instead of relying on a pre-written, authoritative text. It reflects a view that beings respond to each other through categories, or archetypes.

Such writing is ludic, and related to 'aimless wandering'. It was largely a male monopoly, although Wilson suggests this was challenged by the Tzu-Ku cult. In Taoism the body is considered to

untary, mutually pleasurable and harmless. But is Bey's image of adult-child relationships anything more than a fantasy? Studies generally show that child sexual abuse as conventionally defined causes post-traumatic stress and other psychological harm, although some survivors are surprisingly resilient. In addition, there are approaches which suggest that repressed memories of sexual abuse are at the root of many psychological problems. Variations in trauma have been taken to suggest that certain types of abuse are not psychologically harmful (as Bey would probably argue). But these variations seem to reflect the same sources of resilience which reduce the impact of any kind of trauma.

Most of those who discuss experiences of underage sex with adults report feeling abused at the time or in retrospect, even when there was not outright coercion, because of a wider context of vulnerability. However, a few report complex, ambivalent experiences in which repression and moral panics did more harm than the relationship itself. There are a few cases where people retrospectively deny that any harm came from experiences which would usually be called abusive. But the first group of experiences seem much more common.

Bey would probably respond that bad experiences result from authoritarianism he opposes, or from social responses such as shame, guilt and sexual puritanism. Experiences might be quite different if adult-child relations were not as power-laden as they are. Future cross-cultural research might change current conclusions. But shame, social responses, and the adult's social power do not seem to account for all the negative accounts. In any case, shame is better explained on a trauma model than a social model, because abuse survivors are not socially classified as committing a shameful or deviant act. Given this evidence, Wilson/Bey's rejection of dominating and non-consensual forms of sex should logically cover those forms of child-abuse he supports. The scenarios Bey fantasises about are probably impossible in practice.

subordination of flows of becoming to the dominating narrative of an abuser – but disguised as active desire, or consensual love. The problem underlying this distortion is the propensity to rationalise as consensual a type of action which actually objectifies the other – in effect, the disguising of reactive desire as active desire. This position is thus contradictory with his broader position of supporting active desire against reactive desire. Or possibly, he imagines there is a non-abusive outlet for his desire, which is not based on the 'misery of others' (in effect as well as intent), when in fact there is not. He might not intend to abuse anyone, but he desires things which require such abuse, or else are unactualisable.

In practice, abuse is closely tied-up with objectification. Abuse generally involves objectifying a child, using them to produce adult pleasure, usually without concern for the effect on the child. Survivors report feeling 'used or hurt', feeling a violation of trust, and suffering loss of self-respect. According to Judith Herman, sexual abuse usually happens in a wider context of control, or even 'pervasive terror, in which ordinary caretaking relationships have been profoundly disrupted'. This usually occurs in a climate of totalitarian control enforced by isolation from horizontal relationships, capricious and violent enforcement of petty rules, and absence of trust. Social isolation is enforced to preserve control and secrecy.

This has serious psychological effects. Herman argues that, unable to protect themselves, children deploy an 'immature system of psychological defences' which 'simultaneously conceal and reveal their origins'. Survivors often blame their own 'innate badness' for the abuse. This feeling of innate badness leads to the projection of an inauthentic outer self. Many survivors feel an almost indescribable psychological state known as dysphoria, which is a mixture of confusion, agitation, emptiness and aloneness. Some discover that pursuing extreme arousal or excitement can offset this, creating cycles of crisis and dependency.

What Herman discusses may well be the normal situation, but it isn't what Bey advocates. The encounters he portrays are vol-

be alchemically transformed by being infused with starbeams. Initiation through altered consciousness (dreaming, possession) also appears in religions such as Batuque and Santeria.

Writing is often a means to transmit such visions. The words revealed in dreams are important in allowing them to be revealed or shared socially, and to benefit others. Books may contain keys pointing to particular psychological states for sensitive readers. The text 'spills over' in an excess of meaning, pointing to something beyond it. This excess is not fixed, but is also not empty. Such words 'play', rather than segmenting and categorising. Language comes to reflect or reproduce the abundance of nature.

However, writing and even speaking carry a danger of alienating or ossifying the 'living word' into something 'dead'. The way to resist this is to keep the book an open process, constantly renewed or reinterpreted into new existential contexts. Language can be a means of control, but it can also be possessed by imaginal content. Wilson argues that writing can be interpreted as symbolisation. The rise of writing led to the interpretation of events as symbolising hidden meanings. Hermetic doctrine identified letters or hieroglyphs with Platonic forms or archetypes. Hence, writing is itself a magical practice. Letters are 'pictures' of supernatural realities, not abstract signs (as in structuralism).

## Angels

Wilson wrote the volume on angels for the Art and Imagination series. Here, he argues that angels, or winged messengers of the spirit realm, appear in many different traditions – shamanic, classical European, Christian, Zoroastrian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist. They are beings which are believed to move between earth and heaven, bridging the two worlds. Winged creatures such as Buraq play a similar role. Angels and winged beings are associated with the field of becoming. For instance, in some traditions, the air from which God creates the universe is made up of angels.

Angels are often messengers of some kind. Some bring spiritual knowledge, appearing with (or as) a book or letter. For instance, each letter of the alphabet might have an angel, or angels might be said to have created human languages. Others provide the basis for journeys to heaven or the spirit realm. Still others reveal an uncontrollable divine fire which extinguishes reason and which humans cannot, or can barely, perceive. In some shamanic traditions, the shaman 'marries' and sexually cohabits with a guardian spirit, which is often terrifying in appearance.

The role of angels in Christianity is ambiguous. Worship of angels stems from the peasantry rather than the church hierarchy. They closely resemble earlier 'pagan' beings. They are rooted in the popular and/or mystical imagination, and are more common in art than theology. Their role in Scripture is more about their function than their nature. Angels are considered to be outside profane (or homogeneous empty) time; in some traditions, they govern the realm of time, and profane time is an illusion. Angelic time is eternal time, a single ray of light with duration but not se-

Hence, Bey treats fusion instead of separation as desirable. Multiculturalism similarly protects cultural boundaries, rather than stimulating conviviality. In this article, Bey assumes that the origin of trauma is the erection of borders to protect against chaos. Instead, he promotes the Bakhtinian idea of 'permeable boundaries', in which bodies are not self-enclosed.

Bey admits that such permeability leads to crossings which can be either pleasurable or catastrophic. However, such a space is necessary to reach intensity. In *Sacred Drift*, Wilson argues that we are not progressing towards liberated desire, but regressing towards fear of sexuality 'in which all desire will eventually be experienced as "abuse" or "sin"'. Against the association of abuse with sexuality, Wilson suggests that it makes sense in terms of abuse of authority (which undermines consent). In other words, consensual sex is never abuse, but sex in an authoritarian context might be. Bey/Wilson argues that sexuality should be based on conviviality, mutual pleasure, and non-domination. He denounces 'libertine' positions and calls for a spiritual aspect to sexuality.

While this tends to rebut the various theories positing a Sadean rejection of ethics in Bey's work, it does not free him from the accusation that he's (unintentionally) encouraging abuse. Bey does not support sadistic sex or sexual exploitation. However, most advocates of paedophilia would also make such disclaimers, as part of a strategy of neutralisation. This position does not preclude abuse in practice. Sex offenders often perceive their actions as involving mutual attraction and consent, despite often manipulating, socialising, and 'grooming' the children concerned. This is presumably a variety of psychological projection.

In other words, abusers sometimes believe that the third category of consensual relations exists because they rationalise and misrepresent actions in the second category – those involving indirect coercion. These beliefs are probably ways to avoid negative self-awareness. Applying this analysis to Bey, it can be argued that his support for 'boy-love' actually promotes reactive desire – the

pleasure that rests on someone else's slavery or misery cannot finally satisfy the self because it is a limitation or narrowing of the self, an admission of impotence, an offence against generosity and justice'. However, a page later, he discusses the Witness Game as an 'apologia' for what he terms 'boy-love'. He also writes enthusiastically of the importance of consent. It is precisely because of the importance of consent and conviviality that he opposes parental power over children. His fantasy is a kind of initiation into pleasure and spirituality, which occurs outside or against the grain of the dominant system.

In other words, Bey does not disagree *ethically* with the mainstream position, that children should not be coerced or exploited. He disagrees *empirically* about the capabilities of children or the nature of adult-child encounters. He disagrees about whether the third category of relationship can exist between adults and children, except as a rationalisation for the first and second categories.

Bey/Wilson has written a few pieces on sexual freedom which touch on the controversy, mainly by denouncing moral panics as puritanical. In 'Boundary Violations', Bey criticises the rejection of Freudianism and the idea of false memories, as well as the Freudian view of childhood sexuality. He argues that current views of abuse are based on a denial of childhood desire. The idea of boundaries imitates nationalist discourse and the immune system, with fear of contact or contamination. He suggests that this carries the implication that pleasure is evil and non-contact is desirable. Abusers are seen as aliens, and are the site of projected, forbidden desires. Anxiety about border violation leads to a protection- and safety-focused philosophy, which empowers the security state. In a wider context of social triage and zones of depletion, we are likely to find that the enemy is already ourselves. We have lost in advance by defining ourselves relative to loss and borders, which can be reclassified to make any of us the contaminant. Sexuality is displaced into contactless forms, such as phone sex. The absence of direct contact and conviviality in turn provide space for mediation.

quence. Angels can be tricksters and magicians, like the Greek god Eros. Female angels are often modelled on Sophia, goddess of wisdom.

This book, and a passage in *Sacred Drift*, also discusses the Devil as an angel. The idea of the Devil is a metaphor for separation from God, and hence for alienation. Wilson refers to mystical traditions in which the Devil or Lucifer, the fallen angel, is akin to a Jungian shadow. He is to be redeemed and saved along with humanity, and maybe stands for the ego as something which alienates us from the spiritual realm. In one reading, Satan is a projection of humans' spiritual imperfection. According to Wilson, in Judaism, there is no separate principle of Evil. Christianity created such a principle as a side-effect of emphasising God's goodness.

Again, Wilson draws on Sufi radicals who effectively deconstruct religious doctrine. Husayn al-Hallaj advocated a principle of complementarity. Evil is a necessary companion of Good. Ayn al-Qozat maintained that the story of the Devil is a story of true love of God, proven by the separation necessary to test love. Aziz ad-Din Nasafi argued that the story of Satan is a metaphor. All the powers submit to spirit, except imagination, which refuses to submit. Such positions were too outrageous even for medieval Islam, but they provide interesting parallels to Wilson's views.

In *Sacred Drift*, Wilson also discusses the Ahl-i-Haqq and the Yezidis. He was unable to encounter the former, but managed to meet Yezidi people in Kurdistan, and also draws on anthropological studies. According to his account, they worship a figure known as the 'Peacock Angel', broadly identical with Lucifer, but not alienated from God. This figure is said to be unjustly demonised, and to free them from the Law. He is a principle of energy, not evil. From these various accounts, Wilson concludes that Satan is a gatekeeper at the doorway to the land of imagination. In one poem, *Ghazal*, Bey parodies the idea of 'neighbours from Hell' by taking it literally. Since everyone has a neighbour from Hell, one in four Americans must be demonically possessed. Globally,

America itself is the neighbour from Hell, polluting and offending others.

There are other places where Wilson/Bey discusses archetypal imagery. Javanese shadow puppets, for instance, shift perceptions to represent the spirit world. In a traditional context, they are viewed at length, monotonously, in a context where everyday action (eating, sleep, playing with babies) goes on uninterrupted. The process relies on active imagination, to a much greater extent than TV or cinema. For this very reason, shadow theatre is losing its appeal. Wilson also shows a recurring interest in drawings which combine Arabic text and realistic art, such as the Green Man figure which appears on the cover of several of his books. Elsewhere, Wilson suggests that love and death are often mystically connected. Dragons and serpents stand for vital spirit. The myth of dragon-slaying is actually about taming the spirit to use it for intellectual or religious ends. However, it also accompanies the emergence of hierarchy and oppression.

ality is intertwined with Bey's theory of disalienation, but only as one of several paths – drugs, music, meditation, conviviality, art, travel, etc. Bey is no more promoting autonomy 'in order to' molest boys than he is doing so 'in order to' traffic drugs or promote a tourism business.

In my view, Bey's support for 'boy-love' is actually in contradiction with his core theory. It does not rest on theoretical support for abuse, but on an empirical confusion about the possibility of non-abusive relationships. To clarify, among adults, sexual relations can be divided into three types. There are outright relationships of domination, using force, threat, blackmail and so on. These are opposed (in principle) by just about everyone. Then there are relations which involve apparent consent, but where one partner reluctantly or naively 'consents' in return for bribery, attention, or because of a relation of structural power. Feminists also treat these as rape or abuse, whereas mainstreamers tend to accept them as minimally consenting. Finally, there are fully consenting relationships which are both actively sought and enjoyed by both partners, in a relation of equality.

Someone like Bey would also oppose the first two kinds of sexual relations between adults and children, but support the third. But opponents would maintain that the third type, between adults and children, is in effect an empty set. Encounters of this kind cannot happen, either because children can't consent in the appropriate sense, because the power-relation is too unequal, because the encounter risks harm to the child, or because it is impossible to eliminate subtle manipulation or abuse of trust. Hence, critics argue that the third type of relationship is precluded by developmental hierarchies and power differentials, which allow adults to manipulate children, 'without regard for the welfare of the partner'.

It thus appears to critics that Bey believes that manipulative abuse is unproblematic. But Bey has *also* explicitly written against abuse of power differentials, and actions 'without regard for the welfare of the partner'. In *Sacred Drift*, he writes: 'A freedom or

methods. This makes things harder for opponents of repression. I don't believe in jailing people for expressing the wrong opinion, but I also don't believe in sexual enslavement or homophobic killings. One can oppose both totalitarian Islamophobia *and* totalitarian readings of Islam, support free speech for radical Muslims *and* Charlie Hebdo (without supporting the views of either). Similarly, one can oppose both Stalinism and American McCarthyism – and the human rights violations against Russian dissidents *and* against American communists.

So how can one respond to Bey's position? Firstly, as will be apparent from my writing this series, I don't feel it is appropriate to 'no-platform' Bey/Wilson because he takes one potentially oppressive position. The field of political thought will become extremely small if everyone who has made a racist, sexist, abusive, or problematic statement is excluded. Labelling someone with a negative category and then refusing to engage with their work is unhelpful in drawing constructively on perspectives other than one's own. Zizek and Plato have been accused of condoning child abuse. Freud failed to expose child rape when he had the chance. Heidegger, de Man and Jung had problematic relations to Nazism. Derrida might be no-platformed for defending de Man. Proudhon was sexist and anti-Semitic; Marx was Eurocentric; Rousseau was ableist; Aquinas was sexist and homophobic; Aristotle condoned slavery. Foucault wanted rape treated as simple assault. I feel it is important to recognise the value in theories, even if one rejects strongly a particular position within the theory. Often, the oppressive view is on the margins of the theory, and does not affect its main contributions.

In the case of Bey, it's quite possible to embrace his theory of alienation, his theory of altered consciousness, his ontology of chaos, or his model of TAZ without supporting child-abuse. In my view, Helms and Gupta are massively exaggerating the importance of the issue in the structure of Bey's work. There is little textual evidence for Helms's claim that Bey's emancipatory theories are simply ways of creating spaces where abuse can flourish. Sexu-

## History of Ideas

Wilson reads the history of ideas in a similar way to social history. The moment of desire underpins revolutions such as the French Revolution, an event which is still ongoing. In particular, the nineteenth-century socialist Fourier is considered a forerunner of Wilson because of his emphasis on pleasure. Fourier was opposed to marriage and other modern customs. He celebrated lesbianism. He also had a theory of voluntary erotic slavery. Fourier also perversely celebrated money, provided it was purified of alienation. He is best known for his utopian intentional communities, the Phalansteries, which attempted to realise his eccentric theory of a balanced life. For Wilson, Fourier's system is not literally true, but is useful as a focus for meditation. Fourier created and lived in a world of words, but this world was also inflected by music.

In Fourier's model, the key organising principles are luxury and harmony. Harmony in Fourier's sense entails finding ways for differences to coexist. The desire to be 'carefree' is to be unfettered. The passion inspired by Fourier's poetry is a pale foreshadowing of that promised in his utopian world, in which passion is the driving force. Production could only be liberated when people did the tasks they were attracted to. Society would only reach its potential when all desires are free. In effect, says Wilson, Fourier invests hope in the magic power of Eros. Wilson views Fourier as ambiguously despising present bodies but deifying the body in general. He suggests that reading Fourier is like discovering a lost ancient cult.

Fourier saw erotic attraction as the basic force of existence. Gravity, for instance, is a special kind of attraction. Everything is alive and sexually active. This is the basis for Wilson/Bey's view

of attraction as the basis of order. Fourier believed that everything is related, in terms of belonging to a category. Everything is attracted erotically to other things in its category. The problems of modernity have arisen because civilisation has knocked the Earth out of its place in the system of categories and passions. Fourier's utopian politics is an attempt to restore cosmic balance by arranging everything in line with its passions.

For Wilson, Fourier is relevant today because we are still within his context in some respects. He theorises that we are stuck in the nineteenth century, as capital abandons humanity for the ether. He proposes a thought-experiment to reconstruct past moments and rewrite them as they should have been. (This thought-experiment is reminiscent of visualisations used in trauma therapy). He proposes an imaginary history in which Marx became an anarchist. He also proceeds to cross-read Marx and Proudhon on property. What they saw as the hidden essence of capital is now its real form.

Bey also suggests that we are back where Marx and Proudhon were at the time of their disagreement. He suggests the disagreement was a mistake. Existing Marxism is weakened by its history of excluding and slandering perceived enemies, leading to purges. Against the idea that revolution is impossible until capitalism is perfect (or 'fully developed'), Proudhon and Landauer propose that revolution is always possible in response to alienation and misery. The main disagreement between Marx and Proudhon was on the question of authority, or the state. Proudhon believed that contradiction or difference is eternal (not dialectical). It should be harmonised and balanced, not reconciled and eliminated. Wilson also speculates that hermeticism lies at the root of modern radicalism. For instance, Marx may have been connected to the Polish messianic leader Jakob Frank.

In *Aimless Wandering*, Bey analyses the Taoism of Chuang Tzu (Zhuangzi). He reads Zhuangzi as anti-metaphysical. Zhuangzi's major text does not offer transcendental realisation, but a path to self-realisation. Human misery stems from falling out of sync with

The issue of paedophilia as conventionally conceived is highly emotionally loaded and lacking in important distinctions. It's the type of issue where it's hard to have a reasoned or compassionate, rather than a visceral, reaction to an opposing position. As a result, it's too easy to ignore important distinctions. Attraction to children is not the same as molestation or rape. Adults who are attracted to other adults are usually capable of being attracted to teenagers. Not all child rapists or convicted abusers, even against young children, are specifically attracted to children. Most people who rape or exploit teenagers are attracted mainly to adults. (As feminists often point out, rape and exploitative sex are more about power than sexual attraction). The issue has unfortunately become the focus of moral panics which blur boundaries and create an unrealistic image in which child abuse is perpetrated by a small, monstrous outgroup of predators. These panics are often homophobic (portraying gay men preying on boys) or racist (labelling Muslims as 'child groomers' or Aboriginal communities as abusive), channelling broader fears of sexual difference, of sexual predation by racial outgroups, of race-mixing, and of sexuality in general.

Critics like Helms are clearly mobilising this moral-panic discourse to demonise Bey and impugn both the man and the content of his theories – deliberately blurring the question of exactly what he has said and done (there is no evidence, for instance, that he has been accused of rape). This treatment of Bey is an expression of a wider trend to exclude or 'no-platform' theorists, politicians and activists who are deemed to be oppressors – sometimes based on a single remark on a controversial topic. This type of move has sadly become increasingly common in the current climate.

On the other hand, the fact that a position is subject to hysteria, overreaction and emotive category-blurring does not mean that the position is either right or harmless. For example, Wahhabi/salafi varieties of Islam are deeply politically problematic, even though their adherents are often also victims of Islamophobic police-state



lished by NAMBLA re-frames the image as an attempt to portray child-porn moral panics as religious witch-hunts.

Learning of this position in support of 'boy-love' has shocked many of Bey's readers, myself included. Indeed, some still seek to deny it. I've come across a variety of readings from scholars and others interested in Bey: he doesn't mean it literally, but as Sufi-style allegory; he's doing it to provoke and shock; he's simply raising questions about child sexuality; or he's mainly talking about sexually active youths. (The fact that children and adolescents have a sexuality of sorts is now widely recognised, independently of issues around paedophilia). For instance, Sellers reads Bey's position as a Foucauldian attempt to stimulate discussion about adolescent sexuality. He accuses critics of 'institutionalized homophobia', and of taking Bey's playful writings too literally. References in Bey/Wilson's works can often be read in this way. However, I feel that Bey's poetry and literature, his NAMBLA affiliation, and his exchanges with Knight defeat such readings.

Unsurprisingly, Bey/Wilson's position has produced strong negative reactions. There are people who refuse to promote Bey's work or use his concepts on the grounds that they consider him a 'paedophile' or an 'apologist for child abuse'. For example, his entry has been deleted on ZineWiki for this reason. An opponent by the name of Robert Helms has written a series of articles condemning Bey/Wilson on these grounds. Helms goes so far as to portray Bey's theory of autonomy as simply a way of creating lawless spaces in which children will be vulnerable to abuse. Another critic, the eco-authoritarian Vinay Gupta, uses the child-abuse issue as a hook to argue against autonomy in general. He suggests that only people with nefarious desires want the abolition of the state. In fact, Helms, Gupta, and Knight all read Bey's position on abuse broadly in this way – as exposing the problems with his opposition to moral order. This is roughly a re-hash of the Hobbesian argument that abuse and 'crime' would flourish in an anarchist society. I shall come to this broader issue later.

the Tao. Zhuangzi's response is to seek to reverse this separation and return to the flow, to spontaneity. To achieve this, one must reject all deities and metaphysics. This approach is opposed to the Confucian social structure, and oriented to aimless wandering.

In linguistics, Bey writes of a 'hermetalinguistics' in which God reveals language (as in Platonism and in a secular form Chomsky), and a 'nihilistic linguistics' in which words mean nothing essential (as in poststructuralism). Bey seeks an alternative to both positions, and finds it in Zhuangzi. The Taoist position both distrusts words and uses them magically. Words which 'ward and sector' – which classify and categorise – are not Taoist words, and reproduce separation. Both positionality ('from a lodging place') and hierarchical language ('ahead of others') are 'ward and sector' language.

Zhuangzi's third alternative is 'spillover saying'. Things are in flux, unfixated, and become blurred. Spillover saying reproduces this structure of reality. It leads to a kind of excessive, superabundant, generous language which reflects a similarly abundant view of reality. It thus defies the capitalist imposition of scarcity and restores a sense of existential abundance and excess. Such words do not 'ward and sector'. Instead, they play. Bey suggests that they operate like 'strange attractors' in chaos theory, acting as determinants yet only existing within the process itself. Grammar is a kind of strange attractor rather than a genetic structure.

## The Moorish Science Temple

Wilson has also written about the Moorish Science Temple, a black-led religious movement which peaked in the 1920s, from which Wilson's Moorish Orthodox Church is descended. Wilson portrays the Temple as a 'powerful means of cultural transfer', adapting Islam to American conditions. He claims that its leader, Noble Drew Ali, was an 'American prophet'. Like other 'prophets', Drew created his own set of founding myths. Moors (black people) originally came from Asia. Their empire covered America, Ireland and Atlantis. They were dispossessed by the American Founding Fathers, and their identity forgotten, but now restored. The myth is fabulous, but effective as an organising narrative. It may have had its roots in Muslim traditions preserved among African slaves, which was combined with theosophy and political radicalism.

There is an earlier episode recounted by Wilson in which runaway slaves and poor whites formed a community led by Ben and Jennie Ishmael. This group opposed land-ownership, believed property should be moveable, and opposed the law, courts, rich, and police. They fled Indiana in response to a draconian eugenics law, and eventually vanished.

The Moorish Science Temple claims its origins in Islam. However, Drew Ali's *Circle Seven Koran* is allegedly derived from Christian New Thought texts, and his movement was denounced by Islamic leaders in Cairo. The Temple was founded by Drew Ali. Founders were given new surnames – Bey or El (presumably the origin of Hakim Bey's surname). It practiced a series of restrictions – no meat, alcohol, shaving, smoking, etc – and used a quiet style of worship. The Temple had its own 'Koran', with an emphasis

## Hakim Bey, children, and sexuality

The biggest controversy around Bey's work is not his ontology or his theory of autonomy, but his association with what he terms 'boy-love'. In other words, he thinks it is possible and desirable for adults to have 'consensual' sex with children. In defence of this view, Bey has written a number of pieces for NAMBLA (a paedophile or 'boy-love' advocate group) and the gay magazine *Gayme* which allegedly promote sexual abuse of children. These pieces are not widely available, and seem to mainly consist of poetry. According to Knight, one poem includes a rant against a mother who discouraged Bey's interest in her son. Knight describes these works as 'a child molester's liberation theology... for an audience of potential offenders'. There's also an obscure novel, *Crowstone*, which includes fictional depictions of a world where man-boy sex is normal. Then there's a piece on the 'Witness Game' in historical Sufism, and a (loose) translation of related works by Abu Nuwas.

This issue appears only occasionally in Bey/Wilson's political work. One of the communiques in *TAZ* calls for xeroxing pictures of a ten-year-old boy masturbating, marked as 'the face of God'. Bey portrays this as an image of life, which – unlike contemporary artists' images of death – is banned and punished because it points to intensity. On the surface, this gesture is both shocking and disalienating. It associates enjoyment and divinity – a recurring aspect of Bey's theory – and it is shocking because it is prohibited. It is usually read as provocation, drawing attention to child sexuality. However, according to Knight, a version of the communique pub-

falsified or absurd. Famous scientists such as Newton, Franklin, and Bacon were closet hermeticists. However, they seem to have succumbed to conventional power and contributed to a process of dimming our awareness of reality. Such a dimming is part of the 'dead-matter' worldview of capitalism, the state and the Enlightenment. They gradually rejected their own belief in an 'ensouled' or animist universe. Science is similar to magic and occultism in that its ideas are also actions. However, only a science freed from capitalism and the state can create ideas which could save the world from alienation.

Wilson discusses Novalis's fragmentary novel/manifesto *The Disciples at Saïs* as an example of 'hermetic-Romantic science-theory'. Like all Romantics, Novalis believed in a more natural, primordial human condition. He argued that we have a direct relations to nature as something which stirs our feelings. *Disciples* prefigures an eco-spirituality in its critique, however nascent, of scientific spirituality. Wilson suggests that this kind of theory is a necessary prerequisite for resisting ecological destruction.

on spiritual individuality and self-sufficiency, and references to forerunners such as Marcus Garvey. Relying on others to think or act for us is alienating, and creates 'Hell'.

Groups like the Nation of Islam appear to have been spin-offs, although the Temple lacks later groups' anti-white sentiments. White people were allowed into the Temple by being given passports as "Persians" or "Irish" (identities Wilson has taken semi-seriously). Irish were included on the basis of a story that the Moors had been expelled from Ireland, and possibly because early Irish settlers were poor and mistreated. This was an earlier period, when cooperation among marginalised racial groups was common.

The history of the group is also recounted. In 1912, Noble Drew Ali demanded recognition of former slaves as a separate nation at a rally in Washington. The group moved to Chicago following persecution for defying the draft in World War 1. It underwent a meteoric rise in its early years, after its official founding in 1928. Wilson attributes the group's downfall to its growing visibility. Some members began flashing their membership cards and openly ranting about the overthrow of European civilisation, against the orders of Drew Ali. In September 1929, two police and one Moor died in a shootout. Police turned Chicago into an 'armed camp'. Drew Ali was arrested, and died while released on bail – either from injuries caused by the police, or assassinated by a rival. However, Bey suggests that the group slowly revived and grew by the 1980s.

Wilson/Bey himself belongs to the Moorish Orthodox Church of America, a spinoff of the Moorish Science Temple formed by some of its white members. It is a non-hierarchical organisation in which members choose their own titles. He apparently has little direct connection to the remaining members of the Temple, instead acting as the senior figure in the spin-off Church. Knight describes this group as all-white, quasi-parodic, and with so few members that Wilson is the last remaining elder.

## Pastoralism and Green Hermeticism

Wilson also sometimes sees the pastoral tradition as a variety of autonomy and intensity. In the essay *Grange Appeal*, Wilson argues that the Grange was once a progressive part of the Populist movement, and a hotbed of rural radicalism. (It still exists, as a series of social clubs, a co-op, and campaigning organisation for rural interests). The Grange 'formula' had four elements: economic cooperation, social militancy without electoral involvement, plenty of outings and social activities, and an Eleusinian ritual. The organisation officially disavowed politics, but its ideology had obvious political implications. It was initially anarchistic, in avoiding organised politics and religion. It campaigned on issues of its day which reappear today – for instance, against patent-holding monopolies. Historians generally consider populism a right-wing movement, but Wilson suggests its racist and authoritarian elements were late additions rather than parts of the original movement. He argues that one in three Americans belonged to a fraternal organisation in the 1840-1914 period. Later, these organisations were undermined by media. But nineteenth century Americans still imagined they were creating a new world. In relation to co-ops, Wilson suggests they succeed when given the chance – but they are often ruined by corporations with more capital.

In *Ec(o)logues*, Wilson argues that pastoralism had an original radical heritage. In American history, Jefferson had an inconsistent attachment to pastoralism. This was taken further by rebels, as in the Shays Rebellion, the Green Mountain Boys, the Whiskey

Rebels, the Anti-Rent War and so on. Wilson interprets such rebellions as attempts to create a free yeoman or pastoral republic similar to his own vision of pastoralism as a Clastean diffuse power-structure.

His recent, ecologically-inflected work draws on similar themes. In *Riverpeople*, Wilson presents a history and speculative mythology of the Esopus River, near his home in New York. He claims he fell in 'green love' with the river. Green love is his recent term for intense connections to ecological sites which become the source of altered consciousness. The area is today owned by the Rockefellers, but regularly attracts beatniks and neo-survivalists engaged in rambling and camping. Wilson discusses the area's indigenous population, the Esopus 'Indians', and their dispossession and genocide by the Dutch. The damming of the river is treated as a terrible violence in which villages become ghost towns and the Water Supply Police act as an 'invading occupying force'.

Wilson's history includes discussions of Oscar Wilde's visit to the area, and what Wilson suspects was a relationship with the young George Wharton Pepper, later a local politician. By visiting the area, Wilde becomes one of its saints and martyrs. Others in the list include the folklore hero 'Big Indian', the local witch Becky de Milt, and her enemy Dr. Brink, who performed charms against witchcraft. Wilson attempts a ritual reconciliation and revival of the two magical figures. He suggests that belief in witchcraft coincided geographically with the areas where the 1845 Anti-Rent War happened – expressing a hidden dissident tradition. At other points, Wilson describes rituals he has performed in the area, and hidden wonders such as waterholes.

Wilson's recent theory of Green Hermeticism articulates similar themes. He argues that science can be reconnected with Hermeticism or romanticism to re-enchant nature. Over the *longue durée*, science serves capital and the state by making war and money. Another science might have been, and might still be, possible or conceivable. But it might have to rely on ideas which now seem