

Hakim Bey

Permanent TAZs

1993

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TAZ-theory tries to concern itself with existing or emerging situations rather than with pure utopianism. All over the world people are leaving or “disappearing” themselves from the Grid of Alienation and seeking ways to restore human contact. An interesting example of this — on the level of “urban folk culture” — can be found in the proliferation of hobby networks and conferences. Recently I discovered the zines of two such groups, Crown Jewels of the High Wire (devoted to the collection of glass electrical insulators) and a journal on cucurbitology (The Gourd). A vast amount of creativity goes into these obsessions. The various periodic gatherings of fellow-maniacs amount to genuine face-to-face (unmediated) festivals of eccentricity. It’s not just the “counter-culture” which seeks its TAZs, its nomad encampments and nights of liberation from the Consensus. Self-organized and autonomous groups are springing up amongst every “class” and “sub-culture”. Vast tracts of the Babylonian Empire are now virtually empty, populated only by the spooks of MassMedia, and a few psychotic policemen.

TAZ-theory realizes that THIS IS HAPPENING — we’re not talking about “should” or “will be” — we’re talking about an already — existing movement. Our use of various thought — experiments, utopian poetics, paranoia criticism, etc., aims at helping to clarify this complex and still largely undocumented movement, to give it some theoretical focus and self-awareness, and to suggest tactics based on coherent integral strategies — to act the midwife or the panegyrist, not the “vanguard”!

And so we’ve had to consider the fact that not all existing autonomous zones are “temporary”. Some are (at least by intention) more-or-less “permanent”. Certain cracks in the Babylonian Monolith appear so vacant that whole groups can move into them and settle down. Certain theories, such as “Perma-culture”, have been developed to deal with this situation and make the most of it. “Villages”, “communes”, “communities”, even “arcologies” and “biospheres” (or other utopian-city forms) are being experimented with and implemented. Even here however TAZ-theory may offer some useful thought-tools and clarifications.

What about a poetique (a “way of making”) and a politique (a “way of living-together”) for the “permanent” TAZ (or “PAZ”)? What about the actual relation between temporariness and permanence? And how can the PAZ renew and refresh itself periodically with the “festival” aspect of the TAZ?

THE QUESTION OF PUBLICITY

Recent events in the US and Europe have shown that self-organized/autonomous groups strike fear into the heart of the State. MOVE in Philadelphia, the Kore-shites of Waco, Deadheads, Rainbow Tribes, computer-hackers, squatters, etc., have been targeted for varying intensity-levels of extermination. And yet other autonomous groups go unnoticed, or at least unpersecuted. What makes the difference? One factor may be the malign effect of publicity or mediation. The Media experience a vampiric thirst for the shadow-Passion play of “Terrorism”, Babylon’s public ritual of expiation, scapegoating, and blood-sacrifice. Once any autonomous group allows this particular “gaze” to fall upon it, the shit hits the fan: — the Media will try to arrange a mini-armageddon to satisfy its junk-sickness for spectacle and death.

Now, the PAZ makes a fine sitting target for such a Media smart-bomb. Beseiged inside its “con-pound”, the self-organized group can only succumb to some sort of cheap pre-determined martyrdom. Presumably this role appeals only to neurotic masochists??? In any case, most groups will want to live out their natural span or trajectory in peace and quiet. A good tactic here might be to avoid publicity from the Mass Media as if it were the plague. A bit of natural paranoia comes in handy, so long as it doesn’t become an end in itself. One must be cunning in order to get away with being bold. A touch of camouflage, a flair for invisibility, a sense of tact as a tactic... might be as useful to a PAZ as a TAZ. Humble suggestions: — Use only “intimate media” (zines, phonetrees, BBSs, free radio and mini-FM, public-access cable, etc.) — avoid blustering-macho- confrontationist attitude — you don’t need five seconds on the Evening News (“Police Raid Cultists”) to validate your existence. Our slogan might be: — “Get a life, not a life-style.”

ACCESS

People probably ought to choose the people they live with. “Open-membership” communes invariably end up swamped with freeloaders and sex-starved pathetic creeps. PAZs must choose their own membership mutually — this has nothing to do with “elitism”. The PAZ may exercise a temporarily open function — such as hosting festivals or giving away free food, etc. — but it need not be permanently open to any self-proclaimed sympathizer who wanders by.

THE EMERGENCE OF A GENUINELY ALTERNATIVE ECONOMY

Once again, this is already happening — but it still needs a huge amount of work before it comes into focus. The sub-economies of “lavoro nero”, untaxed transactions, barter, etc., tend to be severely limited and localized. BBSs and other networking systems could be used to link up these regional/marginal economies (“household managements”) into a viable alternative economy of some magnitude. “P.M.” has already outlined something like this in bolo’bolo — in fact a number of possible systems already exist, in theory anyway. The problem is: — how to construct a true alternative economy, i.e. a complete economy, without attracting the IRS and other capitalist runningdogs? How can I exchange my skills as, say, a plumber or moonshiner, for the food, books, shelter, and psychoactive plants I want — without paying taxes, or even without using ally State-forged money? How can I live a comfortable (even luxurious) life free of all interactions and transactions with CommodityWorld? If we took all the energy the Leftists put into “demos”, and all the energy the Libertarians put into playing futile little 3rd-party games, and if we redirected all that power into the construction of a real underground economy, we would already have accomplished “the Revolution” long ago.

THE “WORLD” CAME TO AN END IN 1972

The hollowed-out effigy of the Absolute State finally toppled in “1989”. The last ideology, Capitalism, is no more than a skin-disease of the Very Late Neolithic. It’s a desiring-machine running on empty. I’m hoping to see it deliquesce in my lifetime, like one of Dali’s mindscapes. And I want to have somewhere to “go” when the shit comes down. Of course the death of Capitalism needn’t entail the Godzilla-like destruction of all human culture; this scenario is merely a terror-image propagated by Capitalism itself. Nevertheless it stands to reason that the dreaming corpse will spasm violently before rigor mortis sets in — and New York or LA may not be the smartest places to wait out the storm. (And the storm may already have begun.) [On the other hand NYC and LA might not be the worst places to create the New World; one can imagine whole squatted neighborhoods, gangs transformed into Peoples’ Militias, etc.] Now, the gypsy-RV way of life may be one way to deal with the on-going melt-down of Too-Late Capitalism — but as for me, I’d prefer a nice anarchist monastery somewhere — a typical place for “scholars” to sit out the “Dark Ages”. The more we organize this NOW the less hassle we’ll have to face later. I’m not talking about “survival” — I’m not interested in mere survival. I want to thrive. **BACK TO UTOPIA.**

FESTIVALS

The PAZ serves a vital function as a node in the TAZ-web, a meetingplace for a wide circle of friends and allies who may not actually live fulltime on the “farm” or in the “village”. Ancient villages held fairs which brought wealth to the community, provided markets for travelers, and created festal time/space for all participants. Nowadays the festival is emerging as one of the most important forms for the TAZ itself, but can also provide renewal and fresh energy for the PAZ. I remember reading somewhere that in the Middle Ages there were one hundred and eleven holidays a year; we should take this as our “utopian minimum” and strive to do even better. [Note: the utopian minima proposed by C. Fourier consisted of more food and sex than the average 18th century French aristocrat enjoyed; B. Fuller proposed the term “bare minimum” for a similar concept]

THE LIVING EARTH

I believe that there exist plenty of good selfish reasons for desiring the “organic” (it’s sexier), the “natural” (it tastes better), the “green” (it’s more beautiful), the Wild(er)ness (it’s more exciting). Communitas (as P. Goodman called it) and conviviality (as I. Illich called it) are more pleasurable than their opposites. The living earth need not exclude the organic city — the small but intense conglomeration of humanity devoted to the arts and slightly decadent joys of a civilization purged of all its gigantism and enforced loneliness — but even those of us who enjoy cities can see immediate and hedonic motives for fighting for the “environment”. We are militant biophiles. Deep ecology, social ecology, permaculture, appropriate tech. . . we’re not too picky about ideologies. Let 1000 flowers bloom.

PAZ TYPOLOGY

A “weird religion” or a rebel art movement can become a kind of non-local PAZ, like a more intense and all-consuming hobby network. The Secret Society (like the Chinese Tong) also provides a model for a PAZ without geographic limits. But the “perfect case scenario” involves a free space that extends into free time. The essence of the PAZ must be the long-drawn-out intensification of the joys — and risks — of the TAZ. And the intensification of the PAZ will be... Utopia Now.

Hakim Bey

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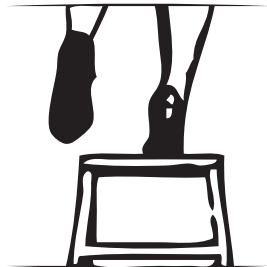
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