

**Book Review: Hakim Bey's *Millenium*. Brooklyn/Dublin: Autonomedia/Garden of Delight, 1996, 102 pp.**

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The publication, in 1985, of *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* signalled the arrival of Peter Lamborn Wilson's mystic alter ego Hakim Bey as an important voice in the recent renewal of anarchist theory. In the years since the publication of *T.A.Z.*, Bey's work proved both immensely influential and controversial. Indeed, the debates it inspired in the pages of *Anarchy* magazine and various "do-it-yourself" publications within the anarchist milieu were among the most lively in decades. Young anarchists took Bey's call for "poetic terrorism" as inspiration for the waves of "@-zones" (anarchist community centres) which emerged in inner-city neighbourhoods across North America in the 1990s. Others, most notably Murray Bookchin, condemned Bey for supposedly offering up apolitical "post-modern" bohemianism in the guise of anarchism. Wherever one stands *vis à vis* Bey's vision of anarchy, however, there is no question that he continues to pose a creative and intelligent challenge to traditional notions of what constitutes critical theory and radical politics at the turn of the millenium.

The future of radical politics, especially the future of what used to be called the "Left," remains at the forefront of concerns in Bey's most recent publication, appropriately titled *Millenium*. In this work the author despairs over the prospects for resistance to what he terms "too-late capitalism," the mono-culture of global capital.

In the opening chapter, which is an interview, Bey covers a broad sweep of issues ranging from the publicity surrounding his earlier publications and the place of political radicalism in media circles, to his pre-occupation with "the revolutionary potential of everyday life" (7). His primary concern, expanded upon in the second and principle essay

"Millenniennium," rests with the possibilities for multiplying the secret or clandestine spaces in which commodification might be avoided and the creative powers of everyday life (re)affirmed.

Much of this book revolves around Bey's view that capitalism, with the collapse and discrediting of socialism, has finally conquered the world. "Capitalism is now at liberty to declare war & deal directly as enemies with all former 'alternatives' (including 'democracy')" (52). There is no longer a "third path" (or third way or Third World), he argues, since the second (Communism) has disappeared. This leaves us with a simple choice: "either we accept ourselves as the 'last humans', or else we accept ourselves as the opposition. (Either automonotony — or autonomy)" (30). Neutrality is no option. The crumbling of the Berlin wall signals for Bey the real end of the 20th century. The new millenium is already upon us and, moreover, *it has been* for almost a decade. The only way out is anarchy.

According to Bey, the newly enthroned "one-world" (of money and finance capital) obliterates space and presence, reducing complexity to sameness. Almost everything enters into representation in the "empire of the image" (of which money is the exemplar).

While, on the surface, seeming to echo neoliberal "end of history theorists" such as Francis Fukuyama and Daniel Bell, Bey is not yet ready to yield to their hubris. The one world's claims are, after all, spurious. Every enclosure has an outside, "not to mention a liminality around every border, an area of ambiguity" (35). It is here that the uprising, the opposition, finds *its* "heartland."

Only lived experience (desire) can present another world beyond the enclosures of money. "The 'spirituality of pleasure' lies precisely in a presence that cannot be represented without disappearing..." (32). Bey rejects the bleatings of advertisers that capital can satisfy desire. Instead he follows Walter Benjamin in arguing that capital, rather than liberating desire, only exacerbates longing as "Capital liberates itself by enslaving desire" (32). Against the hermetism of the one-world "risk society," its management of desire and imagination, its dread of carnality, Bey advocates "a reenchantment of the forbidden" and a return to the senses (taste, touch and smell — against odourless civilization). Eros must escape the enclosures or, we must rescue it!

Fortunately, resistance to "the Market" persists in gift economies of reciprocity, mutuality and redistribution (in do-it-yourself (DIY) cultures

and underground economies). Drawing upon the economic work of Karl Polanyi and the anthropology of Pierre Clastres, the author highlights the resistance that has met every threat of "the Market's" emergence. Bey looks to the "self-made aspect of the social" (DIY), a spontaneous ordering of reciprocity, as expressing a "non-predatory expansiveness," a "convivial connectivity," an "eros of the social" (42-43). The one world is never alone; the archaic presence of revolution still stands as its Other.

Bey's greatest hope for resistance (revolution) rests in the assertion of difference against capitalist hegemonism (sameness). In his view, difference is revolutionary in an age of one-world capitalist globality precisely because it disrupts the single-world, the mono-culture (25). To be revolutionary, however, particularity must not seek hegemony but must instead remain anti-hegemonistic in character. As in classical anarchism the two necessary forces of the opposition are autonomy and federation. Autonomy without federation would be reaction whereas federation without autonomy would end self-determination. Authentic difference is non-hegemonic and must be defended against the hegemonism of reaction (and Capital). Against (one world) sameness and separation — difference and presence. Bey's favourite example of revolutionary difference is the Zapatistas of Mexico because, from his perspective, they defend their difference as Mayans without asking others to become Mayans.

The hegemonism of the one world, however, leads Bey to retreat from his earlier enthusiasm for aesthetic withdrawal ("disappearance as will to power") as a mode of resistance. In the new millenium there is only capitulation or opposition and Bey is now clear that flight, far from offering an instance of resistance, is now marked primarily as an instance of capitulation. (This does not diminish the tactical importance of clandestinity, however; the secret remains revolutionary in its escape from absorption into the totality.)

In the third chapter, a short essay "For and Against Interpretation," Bey decries Capital's monopoly of interpretation in the one world. This monopoly results in a "scarcity of interpretation" (60) which renders people as objects within the interpretations of (Capital's) authority. Not only does it mediate our material transactions, Capital stands between us and awareness. Everything must be mediated by money; nothing ("not even air, water, or dirt") is to be experienced outside of this mediation ("the exacerbated mediation of a power that can only grow by creating

scarcity and separation," 64). Against Capital's monopoly Bey renews classical anarchist calls for self-creativity and convivial meaning production. No interpreters (revolutionary or otherwise) — only companions in networks of reciprocity.

Those reading Bey primarily for insights into political strategy and action against the one world will likely be most troubled by the two concluding chapters, "Religion and Revolution" and "Note on Nationalism." Certainly most Marxists and many anarchists will regard Bey's suggestions in these chapters as anathema for radical, liberatory politics.

"Religion and Revolution" offers an extended meditation on the relation of spirituality and resistance to Capitalism. Specifically, Bey explores the "suppressed content" or "counter-tradition" of religious resistance, looking for points of reconciliation with contemporary political radicalism. For Bey, the alliance of Romantic spirituality with the emerging rationalist radicalism of the Enlightenment provided the basis for a nascent Left and a new alliance with religion may be needed to save the contemporary Left. Bey harkens back to the radicalism of the Protestant sects (Levellers, Diggers and Ranters, for example) for inspiration as well as drawing upon shamanism and Afro-american syncretisms. Following the revolutionary syndicalist Georges Sorel, he argues that any revolution requires a myth; it cannot live on "pure reason" alone. Indeed, Bey sees the meeting of spirituality and resistance as the very root of radicalism (even the "muted mysticism" of Marx).

Bey issues a challenge to radicals who have too easily dismissed religion rather than addressing its lingering appeal. Religion now stands along with the other "third positions" within the one world, facing the choice to capitulate or revolt (76). In place of self-satisfied denunciation, Bey prefers to ask how radicals might encourage the potential for (sincere) Christian radicalism. Indeed, he cannot imagine how a successful mass movement against Capital (a "progressive populism") could occur in the U.S. without participation of at least some of the churches. Likewise, any global anti-Capitalist coalition must engage Islam. Rather than succumb to Western portrayals of Islam as a fundamentalist monolith, Bey prefers to reach out to its radical and egalitarian traditions. As he details at length in this essay, every religion can point to a radical tradition of some sort. Still, this is unlikely to help readers swallow a stew which throws together reaction in Serbia and the uprising in Chiapas in the same pot of resistance to the hegemonism of the one world.

His appeal for a recuperation of nationalism, "Note on Nationalism," is similarly unlikely to win many converts among the traditional political Left. Bey calls for a new theory of "nationalism" (and Capitalism and religion) as a crucial aspect of the critique of Capital as a "single power in a unified world" (97). Like religion, nationalism is supposedly on a collision course with Capital in the one world. The Nation presents a potential zone of resistance but, again, one which may take a Rightist (hegemonic particularism) or a Leftist (non-hegemonic particularism) course.

Bey takes pains to clarify that nationalism can only be supported where it does not seek power at the expense of others. This disqualifies statism for Bey, as no State can ever meet this requirement. Where it tends to hegemonism, nationalism must be opposed and secession, inasmuch as it is anti-hegemonic, must always be supported. "National struggles" can be considered revolutionary where they are both non-hegemonic and anti-Capitalist. Perhaps, in the end, this will not be so hard for some Leftists (even revolutionaries) to support. After all, Trotskyists have long defended movements for national liberation against the upholders of imperialism.

Bey finds the most (indeed the only) interesting beginning of this rethinking, once more, in the EZLN in Chiapas. The EZLN is interesting both because it found its inspiration beyond the "Internationale" (because it appeared at the same moment as the U.S.S.R. disappeared) and because it was the first revolutionary movement to define itself against "global neo-liberalism." Chiapas, according to Bey, is the first revolution of the new millenium.

Strikingly for Bey, and key for his re-evaluation of politics, the EZLN is a "nationalist" movement (Native American) yet draws inspiration from anarcho-syndicalism and anarchist-communism. In this, Bey sees connectivity with earlier (forgotten) anarchist visions (the "left volkism" of Gustav Landauer, the General Strike of Sorel and the "culture" of Rudolph Rocker). The result is a provocative and challenging "neo-Proudhonian" rendering of the Zapatista rebellion; one which, unfortunately, is not sufficiently developed in the present text. A note of hope is certainly struck: "The goal of 'neo-Proudhonian' federalism" would be the recognition of freedom at every point of organization in the rhizome, no matter how small — even to a single individual, or any tiny

group of 'secessionists'" (101-102). It remains for the reader of *Millennium* to pursue Bey's lead.

Despite his best intentions, Bey's enthusiasm for revolutionary potentialities (irrespective of sources) gets in the way of a searching analysis of the political conditions which make a non-hegemonized difference possible (or which encourage instead the transformation of difference into the atavistic or xenophobic particularisms of ethnic nationalism or religious fundamentalism). For instance, his only response to ethnic cleansing and violent chauvinism is to hold out the possibility of federation and solidarity. Likewise, he overstates the case that nationalism (or religion) is now opposed to Capital.

All said however, *Millennium* is a compelling and challenging (though not always satisfying) work. Bey is at the forefront of recent efforts to develop the political implications of the writings of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and to bring the insights of these analyses to bear on socio-political practice. Along with critics such as Ronaldo Perez and the Critical Art Ensemble, Bey has attempted a conjoining of Deleuzian analysis with anarchism.

One exciting outcome of his adventurous forays into theory is to re-read Proudhonian federalism as Deleuzian rhizome. Here the "non-hegemonic particularities" of federalism express a "nomadological mutuality of synergistic solidarities," the revolutionary structure of opposition to the one world (43). This is the structure of revolution and resistance in the contemporary context.

For too long, perhaps, political theorists and activists have been satisfied with dated and worn categories and definitions having as their sole recommendation familiarity. Certainly a critical and extensive re-thinking is overdue. Some (especially Marxists) will feel uneasy with Bey's recommendation to "rescue" the concept of "nation" (or perhaps more troubling "volk") from the instigators of base reaction. Others will relish Bey's invitation "to re-read Proudhon, Marx, Nietzsche, Landauer, Fourier, Benjamin, Bakhtin, the IWW, etc. — the way the EZLN re-reads Zapata!" (45).

While expressing a distaste for "hyper-intellectual, pyrotechnical writing" and the contemporary vogue of pessimism among cultural theorists, Bey decries what he sees as a reactionary "seduction into inactivity and political despair" (13). He seeks another way, preferring an "anti-

pessimistic" (though not optimistic) politics which seeks the revolutionary potential of humour.

In the end, Bey's discussion itself remains esoteric, of greater interest (and significance) at this point to cultural theorists than to activists seeking strategic assistance in their daily battles against the one world. His political "insights" remain largely at a level of the naive or even the ridiculous. Appeals to religion and nationalism we may count among the former; suggestions that Capital is most vulnerable in the realm of magic (!) belong to the latter. Such effusions will surely hold greater appeal for academic thrill seekers than for revolutionaries. Hakim Bey has taken a worthwhile step in renewing socio-political thought by bringing the insights of Deleuzian theory to social action. It appears the journey still has several more miles to go.