Spiritual Journeys of an Anarchist

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Sacred Drift: Summer Camp and Hobo Poetics
Talking Raven: A Journal of Imaginative Trouble, Vol. 4, #1, Summer Solstice 1994

The Caravan of Summer
Gnosis: A Journal of the Western Inner Traditions No. 39, Spring 1996 (p. 39-43)

My Summer Vacation in Afghanistan
Fifth Estate Vol. 37 #2 (357) Summer 2002 (p. 15-20)

Roses and Nightingales
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Grange Appeal
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Summer Camp & Hobo Poetics

an interview by antero alli

Author of Scandal, *and his recent collection of "essays on the margins of Islam"* Sacred Drift *(1993; City Lights Books, SF CA) Peter Lamborn Wilson's written work shows scholastic rigor married to a poetics of anarchy. A self-defined "comparative religionist", Wilson sifts enigmatic Islamic memes through semantic and philosophical sieves of Western culture. We spoke briefly on the afternoon of May 23, 1994, by telephone between his place in New York and mine, in Port Townsend. After ribbing me about what he thought was Seattle's current state of morbidity, I had to laugh. It's true; there seems to be a down mood around town. Or is that just the way it always is and I'm just now noticing it? In the confusion of the moment, I ask him a safe question about his recent book.*

Antero Alli: In your recent book, Sacred Drift *(reviewed in* Talking Raven*; vol. 3, #3) I enjoyed the way you transferred certain memes from Islamic cultures and applied them to Western language and customs. Of these, what can you say about nomadism in particular?*

Peter Lamborn Wilson: There's a thesis I develop in the last chapter about a kind of sacred nomadism, a factor in Islamic culture and even

in religion, as far as symbolism is concerned. The prophet himself was not a nomad per se but had a wanderer's life to a large extent. The very basis of the religion is, what you might say, based on a journey from Mecca to Medina and the triumphant return to Mecca, in the making of a pilgrimage. This pilgrimage preserves this constant movement within the Islamic world which is also crisscrossed with all sorts of other traveling concepts to lesser shrines, the whole image of the caravan; the desert as sea. When you add all this up you find the Islamic culture is permeated with nomadism in the anthropological sense of the term, as well as a sacred nomadism. Sociologically, Islam is understood as a culture for being at least half-nomadic. As I mention in the book, I think within every sedentary Moslem there's a nomadic Moslem trying to get out.

AA: Did you write Sacred Drift, *in part, to encourage nomadism in America?*

PLW: It's not so much encouragement as the fact (that's been noticed by plenty more people than me) that "nomadism" has reappeared in Western culture. After a period of sedentarism followed by a period of imperial expansion, the urge to move has turned inward in Western societies so that nomadism has reappeared. Everything from the average American changing homesites nine, ten,

eleven times (or whatever it is now) in a lifetime to continually changing jobs to the retirees on the road with their RV caravans to the hippies' old vans and rainbow buses. The homeless are, in fact, a kind of forced nomadism; nomadism as victimization. What is tourism?! Tourism is a kind of malignant or inverse nomadism.

AA: Tourism as temporary weekend nomadism.
PLW: Yeah. Our whole society is permeated with a very badly understood return of the nomad. It's necessary to throw some light on this and draw out the best possible features that might exist within it, the most liberatory aspects of it.

AA: Liberatory aspects. Like what?
PLW: In the essay *Sacred Drift*, I concentrated on intentional travel in Islam. This is where travel becomes an exercise of the spiritual will, where you travel on the face of the earth according to signs and wonders. Move through a world of the imagination which coincides with the "real world." This is an aspect of travel that is only potentially present in the West. It needs to be drawn out and emphasized. I've often wondered if today's homeless could develop a theory of their situation that emphasizes some "sacred" aspect of being without a home, in effect, like the way the old hobos did. The hobos made an adventure of it, made a virtue out of necessity by exercising their

will—their intentionality—on their own poverty and homelessness, turning it into some kind of a poetics. Of course, not every hobo did this but if you read the hobo literature—Boxcar Bertha and stuff like that—you get a very different feeling for what it meant to be homeless in America in the 1920s. Stretching the meaning of the word, you could say there was a sacred quality to being a hobo. I met some people last summer from the Hobo Convention in Brit, Iowa and there's still a tiny remnant of intentional travelers out there. But, in general, we lack an ethos for our travel; we lack travel memes. My whole project in being a comparative religionist is to introduce memes from other cultures and transfer them across. I always have a polemic purpose in anything I write.

AA: On the individual level now. What do you think propels an individual to pull up camp and migrate? I'm using the word migration here in the broad sense, not the literal.

PLW: Self-realization. There's an old Jewish proverb, "Change your stars, change your luck." The interpretation is that you move and get under a different set of stars and it isn't just luck. It's the whole process of becoming. You can't become if you never move; you can't just sit and be, which has its charms, too. The serenity of just being, etc., etc. and the Zen of place. Most of us don't find ourselves so complete when we look; there's

something missing. This (moving on) is a natural human impulse as old as the species. Human beings just get up and go to realize themselves. For many cultures this becomes ritualized to a certain extent and the presence of ritual is always a sign of the sacred and of working with nonordinary states of consciousness. As all travelers know, travel does induce nonordinary states of consciousness. It's really about the constant breaking of habits. When you're on the move, you're constantly breaking through habitual cognition by breaking physical habits. This, in itself, is very very similar to what people attempt to do on a spiritual path, which is trying to break down received cognitions and consensus patterns of perception. The traveler does that naturally just by traveling. If you add an intentionality to consciousness—a theory—to these physical acts you can do some really strong work on your consciousness. This intentionality is lacking in a lot of wandering going on in the west right now.

AA: What is a Temporary Autonomous Zone?

PLW: The Temporary Autonomous Zone is not something I invented but something I'm trying to analyze. The Temporary Autonomous Zone is everywhere at any given time or place. The Temporary Autonomous Zone is, in effect, a kind of nomadic phenomena because it has this tendency to shift. You just find out where it's

happening. I've been thinking this way ever since I was a hippie wandering around the world asking myself, "Where is it happening, man? This is not such a bad thing; this is not to be despised. Where is there some kind of creative spirit suddenly springing up? Where is there a whole bunch of people suddenly scammed away out from under oppression and breathing a little more freely for awhile?"

AA: What kinds of Temporary Autonomous Zones have been engaging you lately?

PLW: I've been working on an idea called "psychic trans-humancy," a semi-nomadic thing of getting up to the mountains once a year to herd goats or sheep, for part of the year. You could call this a kind of Periodic Autonomous Zone; it happens every year. Summer is a season of pastoralism, therefore of light work which is by comparison, play, to the drudgery of the agricultural village where you spend the winter. Every summer the transhumant has his little autonomous zone where love affairs take place and people play flutes under the moon and whatnot. What's the equivalent in the modern world? As ridiculous as it seems, it's the summer vacation and even more, the summer camp. This isn't just you the isolated lonely atom going on vacation to the south of Florida as an alien intruder or, as they used to say, taking your vacation in the middle of other people's misery. It's

a whole group acting as a group and creating a Temporary Autonomous Zone. So the fact is that the old summer camps all around America are closing down. The old economics of running a summer camp are no longer possible; either there's too much government interference or the price is too high. But all these old run down, slightly haunted summer camps are now coming on the market. I know several cases where a group of artists, anarchists or whatever have managed to club together to buy on of these places and keep it running as a summer community... a summer commune.

AA: A commune based on mobility rather than security...
PLW: Yeah: There're so many ways to look upon mobility as liberatory. This happens to be a very humble one; it's certainly not the revolution. It's not even a training camp for the revolution but it is something. Relative freedoms and relative pleasures for relatively extended periods of time are worth more than absolute boredoms, absolute miseries and absolute drudgeries.

AA: Absolutely. Hence, the value of the temporary.
PLW: Yes, there's a value to the temporary itself as any state, no matter how blissful, extended indefinitely eventually loses its edge. It can also become its own form of victimization and when you're being victimized then it becomes necessary to rei-

magine yourself. By reimagining yourself, you can actually begin to change your material situation and that we call, insurrection, or revolution, or the radical project, whatever that is and whatever that means.

The Caravan of Summer

Something of the real difference between pilgrim and tourist can be detected by comparing their effects on the places they visit. Changes in a place—a city, a shrine, a forest—may be subtle, but at least they can be observed. The state of the soul may be a matter of conjecture, but perhaps we can say something about the state of the social.

Pilgrimage sites like Mecca may serve as great bazaars for trade and they may even serve as centers of production (like the silk industry of Benares), but their primary "product" is *baraka* or *mana*. These words (one Arabic, one Polynesian) are usually translated as "blessing," but they also carry a freight of other meanings.

The wandering dervish who sleeps at a shrine in order to dream of a dead saint (one of the "people of the Tombs") seeks initiation or advancement on the spiritual path; a mother who brings a sick child to Lourdes seeks healing; a childless woman in Morocco hopes the Marabout will make her fertile if she ties a rag to the old tree growing out of the grave; the traveler to Mecca yearns for the very center of the Faith, and as the caravans come within sight of the Holy City the *hajji* calls out, "*Labaika Al-lahumma*"—I am *here*, O Lord!

All these motives are summed up by the word *baraka*, which sometimes seems to be a palpable substance, measurable in terms of increased charisma or "luck." The shrine produces *baraka*. And the pilgrim takes it away. But blessing is a product of the imagination—and thus no matter how many pilgrims take it away, there's always more.

In fact, the more they take, the more blessing the shrine can produce (because a popular shrine grows with every answered prayer). To say that *baraka* is "imaginal" is not to call it "unreal." It's real enough to those who feel it. But spiritual goods do not follow the rules of supply and demand like material goods. The more demand for spiritual goods, the more supply. The production of *baraka* is infinite.

By contrast, the tourist desires not *baraka* but cultural difference. The tourist consumes difference. But the production of cultural difference is not infinite. It is not "merely" imaginal. It is rooted in languages, landscape, architecture, custom, taste, smell. It is very physical. The more it is used up or taken away, the less remains. The social can produce just so much meaning, so much difference. Once it's gone, it's gone.

The modest goal of this essay is to address the individual traveler who has decided to resist tourism. Even though we may find it impossible in the end

to "purify" ourselves and our travel from every last taint and trace of tourism, we still feel that improvement may be possible.

Not only do we disdain tourism for its vulgarity and injustice, and therefore wish to avoid any contamination (conscious or unconscious) by its viral influence, we also wish to understand travel as an act of reciprocity rather than alienation. In other words, we don't wish merely to avoid the negatives of tourism, but even more to achieve positive travel, which we envision as a productive and mutually enhancing relationship between self and other, guest and host—a form of cross-cultural synergy in which the whole exceeds the sum of parts.

We'd like to know if travel can be carried out according to a secret economy of *baraka*, whereby not only the shrine but also the pilgrims themselves have blessings to bestow.

Before the Age of Commodity, we know, there was an Age of the Gift, of reciprocity, of giving and receiving. We learned this from the tales of certain travelers, who found remnants of the world of the Gift among certain tribes, in the form of potlatch or ritual exchange, and recorded their observations of such strange practices.

Not so long ago there still existed a custom among South Sea islanders of traveling vast distances by outrigger canoe, without compass or sextant, in order to exchange valuable and use-

less presents (ceremonial art objects rich in *mana*) from island to island in a complex pattern of overlapping reciprocities.

We suspect that even though travel in the modern world seems to have been taken over by the Commodity; even though the networks of convivial reciprocity seem to have vanished from the map; even though tourism seems to have triumphed; even so, we continue to suspect that other pathways still persist, other tracks, unofficial, not noted on the map, perhaps even "secret," pathways still linked to the possibility of an economy of the Gift, smugglers' routes for free spirits, known only to the geomantic guerillas of the art of travel.

Perhaps the greatest and subtlest practitioners of the art of travel were the Sufis, the mystics of Islam. Before the age of passports, immunizations, airlines, and other impediments to free travel, the Sufis wandered footloose in a world where borders tended to be more permeable than nowadays, thanks to the transnationalism of Islam and the cultural unity of *Dar el-Islam*, the Islamic world.

The great medieval Muslim travelers, like Ibn Battuta and Naser Khusraw, have left accounts of vast journeys—Persia to Egypt, or even Morocco to China—which never set foot outside a landscape of deserts, camels, caravanserai, bazaars, and piety. Someone always spoke Arabic, however badly, and Islamic culture permeated the remotest back-

waters, however superficially. Reading the tales of Sinbad the Sailor from *The 1001 Nights* gives us the impression of a world where even the *terra incognita* was—despite all marvels and oddities—still somehow familiar, somehow *Islamic*. Within this unity, which was not yet a uniformity, the Sufis formed a special class of travelers. Not warriors, not merchants, and not quite ordinary pilgrims either, the dervishes represent a spiritualization of pure nomadism.

According to the Qur'an, God's wide earth and everything in it are sacred, not only as divine creations, but also because the material world is full of "waymarks," or signs of the divine reality. Moreover, Islam itself is born between two journeys, Muhammad's *hijra* or "flight" from Mecca to Medina, and his *hajj*, or return voyage. The *hajj* is the movement toward the origin and center for every Muslim today, and the annual pilgrimage has played a vital role, not just in the religious unity of Islam, but also in its cultural unity.

Muhammad himself exemplifies every kind of travel in Islam: his youth with the Meccan Caravans of Summer and Winter as a merchant; his campaigns as a warrior; his triumph as a humble pilgrim. Although an urban leader, he is also the prophet of the Bedouin and himself a kind of nomad, a "so-journer," an "orphan." From this perspective travel can almost be seen as a sacrament. Every religion sanctifies travel to some degree, but

Islam is virtually unimaginable without it.

The Prophet said, "Seek knowledge, even as far as China." From the beginning, Islam lifts travel above all "mundane" utilitarianism and gives it an epistemological or even Gnostic dimension. "The jewel that never leaves the mine is never polished," says the Sufi poet Saadi. To "educate" is to "lead outside," to give the pupil a perspective beyond parochialism and mere subjectivity.

Some Sufis may have done all their traveling in the Imaginal World of archetypal dreams and visions, but vast numbers of them took the Prophet's exhortations quite literally. Even today dervishes wander over the entire Islamic world, but as late as the 19th century they wandered in veritable hordes, hundreds of even thousands at a time, and covered vast distances. All in search of knowledge.

Unofficially, there existed two basic types of wandering Sufi: the gentleman scholar and the mendicant dervish. The former category includes Ibn Battuta (who collected Sufi initiations the way some occidental gentlemen once collected Masonic degrees) and—on a much more serious level—the "Greatest Shaikh," Ibn 'Arabi, who meandered slowly through the thirteenth century from his native Spain, across North Africa, through Egypt to Mecca, and finally to Damascus.

Ibn 'Arabi actually left accounts of his search

for saints and adventurers on the road, which could be pieced together from his voluminous writings to form a kind of *rihla* or "travel text" (a recognized genre of Islamic literature) or autobiography. Ordinary scholars traveled in search of rare texts on theology or jurisprudence, but Ibn 'Arabi sought only the highest secrets of esotericism and the loftiest openings into the world of divine illumination; for him every "journey to the outer horizons" was also a "journey to the inner horizons" of spiritual psychology and gnosis.

On the visions he experienced in Mecca alone, Ibn 'Arabi wrote a twelve-volume work (*The Meccan Revelations*), and he has also left us precious sketches of hundreds of his contemporaries, from the greatest philosophers of the age to humble dervishes and "madmen," anonymous women saints, and "hidden masters." Ibn 'Arabi enjoyed a special relation with Khezr, the immortal and unknown prophet, the Green Man, who sometimes appears to wandering Sufis in distress to rescue them from the desert or to initiate them. Khezr, in a sense, can be called the patron saint—and the prototype—of the traveling dervishes. (He first appears in the Qur'an as a mysterious wanderer and companion of Moses in the desert.)

Christianity once included a few orders of wandering mendicants (in fact, St. Francis organized one after meeting with the dervishes in the Holy Land, who may have bestowed upon him a

"cloak of initiation"—the famous patchwork robe he was wearing when he returned to Italy), but Islam spawned dozens, perhaps hundreds, of such orders.

As Sufism crystallized from the loose spontaneity of early days to an institution with rules and grades, "travel for knowledge" was also regularized and organized. Elaborate handbooks of duties for dervishes were produced which included methods of turning travel into a very specific form of meditation. The whole Sufi "path" itself was symbolized in terms of *intentional travel.*

In some cases itineraries were fixed (for example, the *hajj*); others involved waiting for "signs" to appear, coincidences, intuitions, "adventures" such as those which inspired the travels of the Arthurian knights. Some orders limited the time spent in any one place to 40 days; others made a rule of never sleeping twice in the same place. The strict orders, such as the Naqshbandis, turned travel into a kind of full-time choreography in which every movement was preordained and designed to enhance consciousness.

By contrast, the more heterodox orders, such as the Qalandars, adopted a "rule" of total spontaneity and abandon—"permanent unemployment," as one of them called it—an insouciance of bohemian proportions, a "dropping out" at once both scandalous and completely traditional. Colorfully dressed, carrying their begging bowls,

axes, and standards, addicted to music and dance, carefree and cheerful (sometimes to the point of blameworthiness!), orders such as the Nimatullahis of nineteenth-century Persia grew to proportions that alarmed both sultans and theologians; many dervishes were executed for "heresy." Today the true Qalandars survive mostly in India, where their lapses from orthodoxy include a fondness for hemp and a sincere hatred of work. Some are charlatans, some are simple bums, but a surprising number of them seem to be people of *attainment* . . . how can I put it? . . . people of self-realization, marked by a distinct aura of grace, or *baraka.*

All the different types of Sufi travel we've described are united by certain shared vital structural forces. One such force might be called a "magical" world view, a sense of life that rejects the "merely" random for a reality of signs and wonders, of meaningful coincidences and "unveilings." As anyone who's ever tried it will testify, intentional travel immediately opens one up to this "magical" influence.

A psychologist might explain this phenomenon (either with awe or with reductionist disdain) as "subjective," while the pious believer would take it quite literally. From the Sufi point of view neither interpretation rules out the other, nor suffices in itself to explain away the marvels of the Path. In Sufism, the "objective" and "subjective" are not considered opposites, but complements.

From the point of view of the two-dimensional thinker (whether scientific or religious), such paradoxology smacks of the forbidden.

Another force underlying all forms of intentional travel can be described by the Arabic word *adab*. On one level *adab* simply means good manners, and in the case of traveler, these manners are based on the ancient customs of desert nomads, for whom both wandering and hospitality are sacred acts. In this sense, the dervish shares both the privileges and the responsibilities of the *guest*.

Bedouin hospitality is a clear survivor of the primordial economy of the Gift—a relation of reciprocity. The wanderer must be taken in, the dervish must be fed, but thereby the wanderer assumes a role prescribed by ancient custom—and must give back something to the host. For the Bedouin this relation is almost a form of clientage: the breaking of bread and sharing of salt constitutes a sort of kinship. Gratitude is not a sufficient response to such generosity. The traveler must consent to a temporary adoption; anything less would offend against *adab*.

Islamic society retains at least a sentimental attachment to these rules, and thus creates a special niche for the dervish, that of the full-time guest. The dervish returns the gifts of society with the gift of *baraka*. In ordinary pilgrimage, the traveler receives *baraka* from a place, but the dervish reverses the flow and brings *baraka* to a place. The

Sufi may think of himself or herself as a permanent pilgrim—but to the ordinary stay-at-home people of the mundane world, the Sufi is a kind of perambulatory shrine.

Now tourism in its very structure breaks the reciprocity of host and guest. In English, a host may have either guests or parasites. The tourist is a parasite, for no amount of money can pay for hospitality. The true traveler is a guest and thus serves a very real function, even today, in societies where the ideals of hospitality have not faded from the collective mentality. To be a host, in such societies, is a meritorious act. Therefore to be a guest is also to give merit.

The modern traveler who grasps the simple spirit of this relation will be forgiven many lapses in the intricate ritual of *adab* peculiar to a specific culture (how many cups of coffee? Where to put one's feet? How to be entertaining? How to show gratitude? etc.). And if one bothers to master a few of the traditional forms of *adab* and to deploy them with heartfelt sincerity, then both guest and host will gain more than they put into the relation—and this "more" is the unmistakable sign of the presence of the Gift.

Another level of the meaning of the word *adab* connects it with culture, since culture can be seen as the sum of all manners and customs: in a modern usage the department of "arts and letters" at a university would be called *Adabiyyat*. To have

adab in this sense is to be "polished" (like that well-traveled gem), but this has nothing necessarily to do with fine arts or literacy or being a city slicker, or even being cultured. It is a matter of the heart.

Adab is sometimes given as a one-word definition of Sufism. But insincere manners (*ta'arof* in Persian) and insincere culture alike are shunned by the Sufi—"there is no *ta'arof* in *tassawuf* [Sufism]," as the dervishes say; *darvishi* is an adjectival synonym for informality, the laid-back quality of the people of the heart—and for spontaneous *adab*, so to speak. The true guest and host never make an obvious effort to fulfill the rules of reciprocity. They may follow the ritual scrupulously, or they may bend the forms creatively, but in either case, they will give their actions a depth of sincerity that manifests as natural grace. *Adab* is a kind of *love*.

A complement of this technique (or Zen) of human relations can be found in the Sufi manner of relating to the world in general. The "mundane" world—of social deceit and negativity, of usurious emotions, inauthentic consciousness (*mauvaise conscience*), boorishness, ill will, inattention, blind reaction, false spectacle, empty discourse—all this no longer holds any interest for the traveling dervish. But those who say that the dervish has abandoned "this world"—"God's wide earth"—would be mistaken.

The dervish is not a Gnostic dualist who hates the biosphere (which certainly includes the imagination and the emotions, as well as matter itself). The early Muslim ascetics certainly closed themselves off from everything. When Rabi'a, the woman saint of Basra, was urged to come out of her house and "witness the wonders of God's creation," she replied, "Come into the house and see them,"—that is, come into the heart of contemplation of the oneness which is above the manyness of reality. Contraction and Expansion are both terms for spiritual states. Rabi'a was manifesting Contraction, a kind of sacred melancholia which has been characterized as the "Caravan of Winter," of return to Mecca (the center, the heart), of interiority, and of ascesis and self-denial. She was not a world-hating dualist, nor even a moralistic flesh-hating puritan. She was simply manifesting a certain specific kind of grace.

The wandering dervish, however, manifests a state more typical of Islam in its most exuberant energies. He indeed seeks Expansion, spiritual joy based on the sheer multiplicity of the divine generosity in material creation. (Ibn 'Arabi has an amusing "proof" that this world is the best world, for if it were not, then God would be ungenerous—which is absurd. QED) In order to appreciate the multiple waymarks of the whole wide earth precisely as the unfolding of this generosity, the Sufi cultivates what might be called the *theophanic gaze*:

the opening of the "eye of the heart" to the experience of certain places, objects, people, events as locations of the "shining-through" of divine light.

The dervish travels, so to speak, both in the material world and in the "world of imagination" simultaneously. But, for the eye of the heart, these worlds interpenetrate at certain points. One might say that they mutually reveal or "unveil" each other. Ultimately they are "one," and only our state of tranced inattention, our mundane consciousness, prevents us from experiencing this "deep" identity at every moment. The purpose of intentional travel, with its "adventures" and its uprooting of habits, is to shake loose the dervish from all the trance-effects of ordinariness. Travel, in other words, is meant to induce a certain state of consciousness, or "spiritual state"—that of Expansion.

For the wanderer, each person one meets might act as an "angel," each shrine one visits may unlock some initiating dream, each experience of nature may vibrate with the presence of some "spirit of place." Indeed, even the mundane and ordinary may suddenly be seen as numinous, as in the great travel haiku of the Japanese Zen poet Basho—a face in the crowd at a railway station, crows on telephone wires, sunlight in a puddle . . . Obviously one doesn't need to travel to experience this state. But travel can be used—that is, an art of travel can be required—to maximize the chances for attaining such a state. It is a *moving*

meditation, like the Toaist martial arts.

The Caravan of Summer moved outward, out of Mecca, to the rich trading lands of Syria and Yemen. Likewise, the dervish is "moving out" (it's always "moving day"), heading forth, taking off, on "perpetual holiday," as one poet expressed it, with an open heart, an attentive eye (and other senses), and a yearning for meaning, a thirst for knowledge. One must remain alert, since anything might suddenly unveil itself as a sign. This sounds like a bit of paranoia—though *metanoia* might be a better term—and indeed one finds madmen amongst the dervishes, "attracted ones," overpowered by divine influxions, lost in the Light. In the Orient, the insane are often cared for and admired as helpless saints, because mental illness may sometimes appear as a symptom of too much holiness rather than too little reason. Hemp's popularity amongst the dervishes can be attributed to its power to induce a kind of intuitive attentiveness that constitutes a controllable insanity—herbal metanoia. But travel itself in itself can intoxicate the heart with the beauty of theophanic presence. It's a question of practice—the polishing of the jewel—removal of the moss from the rolling stone.

In the old days (which are still going on in some remote parts of the East), Islam thought of itself as a whole world, a wide world, a space with great latitude within which Islam embraced the whole

of society and nature. This latitude appeared on the social level as tolerance. There was room enough, even for such marginal groups as mad wandering dervishes. Sufism itself—or at least its austere orthodox and sober aspect—occupied a central position in the cultural discourse. Everyone understood intentional travel by analogy with the *hajj*; everyone understood the dervishes, even if they disapproved.

Nowadays, however, Islam views itself as a partial world, surrounded by unbelief and hostility, and suffering internal ruptures of every sort. Since the 19th century, Islam has lost its global consciousness and sense of its own wideness and completeness. No longer, therefore, can Islam easily find a place for every marginalized individual and group within a pattern of tolerance and social order. The dervishes now appear as an intolerable difference against society. Every Muslim must now be the same, united against all outsiders, and struck from the same prototype. Of course, Muslims have always imitated the Prophet and viewed his image as the norm—and this has acted as a powerful unifying force for style and substance within *Dar al-Islam*. But nowadays the puritans and reformers have forgotten that this imitation was not directed only at an early medieval Meccan merchant named Muhammad, but also at the insani al-kamil (the Perfect Man or Universal Human), an ideal of inclusion rather than exclusion, an ideal of inte-

gral culture, not an attitude of purity in peril, not xenophobia disguised as piety, not totalitarianism, not reaction.

The dervish is persecuted nowadays in most of the Islamic world. Puritanism always embraces the most atrocious aspects of modernism in its crusade to strip the Faith of "medieval accretions" such as popular Sufism. And surely the way of the wandering dervish cannot thrive in a world of airplanes and oil wells, of nationalistic/chauvinistic hostilities (and thus of impenetrable borders), and of a puritanism that suspects all difference as a threat.

Puritanism has triumphed not only in the East, but close to home as well. It is seen in the "time discipline" of modern too-late capitalism and in the porous rigidity of consumerist hyperconformity, as well as in the bigoted reaction and sex hysteria of the Christian Right. Where in all this can we find room for the poetic (and parasitic!) life of "aimless wandering"—the life of Chuang Tzu (who coined this slogan) and his Toaist progeny, the life of St. Francis and his shoeless devotees, the life of (for example) Nur Ali Shah Isfahani, a nineteenth-century Sufi poet who was executed in Iran for the awful heresy of meandering-dervishism?

Here is the flip side of the "problem of tourism:" the problem with the disappearance of "aimless wandering." Possibly the two are directly related,

so that the more tourism becomes possible, the more dervishism becomes impossible. In fact, we might well ask if this little essay on the delightful life of the dervish possesses the least bit of relevance for the contemporary world. Can this knowledge help us to overcome tourism, even within our own consciousness and life? Or is it merely an exercise in nostalgia for lost possibilities—a futile indulgence in romanticism?

Well, yes and no. Sure, I confess I'm hopelessly romantic about the form of the dervish life, and to the extent that for a while I turned my back on the mundane world and followed it myself. Because, of course, it hasn't really disappeared. Decadent, yes—but not gone forever. What little I know about travel I learned in those few years—I owe a debt to "medieval accretions" I can never pay—and I'll never regret my escapism for a single moment. But I don't consider the form of dervishism to be the answer to the problem of tourism. The form has lost most of its efficacy. There's no point in trying to preserve it (as if it were a pickle or a lab specimen); there's nothing quite so pathetic as mere "survival." But beneath the charming outer forms of dervishism lies the conceptual matrix, so to speak, which we've called intentional travel. On this point we should suffer no embarrassment about nostalgia. We have asked ourselves whether or not we desire a means to discover the art of travel, whether we

want and will overcome the "inner tourist," the false consciousness which screens us from the experience of the wide world's waymarks. The way of the dervish (or the Taoist, or the Franciscan) interests us—not the key, perhaps—but . . . a key. And of course—it does.

My Summer Vacation in Afghanistan

First time in Afghanistan, late winter 1968/9, making the Overland Trail fast as possible through howling cold of Central Asian steppes. Minibus from Mashhad to Herat, arriving at the border crossing: dark, dusty, cold, and bleak. (Later, I was to discover that somehow Afghan border-crossings were always dark dusty cold bleak, even on nice summer days.) Bus-load of hippies pulls up at the checkpoint. Suddenly a huge Afghan officer with bristling mustaches and fierce scowl thrusts himself onto the bus: "Any you got *hashish*?!" he screamed.

Chorus of "No," "No," "Not me," "Not me, Sir"—squeaky and scared. What the hell?!

"Sssooo..." hissed the officer, reaching menacingly into his jacket... "You like to buy?" he whipped out a chunk of hash the size of a loaf of Wonder Bread. "Very good, grade-A Afghani."

I don't know exactly when the Overland Route to India really opened. I presume not till after WWII, maybe not really till the early 60s. It lasted till 1976 when the Communists took over in Afghanistan and effectively closed the borders. Then, in 1978, with the Iranian Revolution and the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, the Route was sealed, perhaps forever. Like the Silk Route

(which really functioned only during the Han and T'ang Dynasties and under the Mongols, and even then only sporadically), the Overland Route represented a unique falling-together of political and economic forces for peaceful trade against fissiparous war and banditry. A rare "window of opportunity" for Marco Polo—or for me. We hippies, ignorant of history, never realized our once-in-a-millennium stroke of luck. We were… just there, man; just passing through.

A few vivid memories from that first dash across Afghanistan: changing money at the National Bank in Herat—mud floor with chickens pecking in the dirt. An Afghan soldier/bank-guard asleep leaning on his rifle, barrel down in the mud; the frigid austere 5¢ per night hotel; a horde of Kuchi nomads on the move along the Herat-Kandahar highway: thousands of them, scores of black tents, hundreds of camels and donkeys. People with pale blue and green eyes, some of the kids blond.

(Note: I recently read that the Kuchis are Pathans but they don't really look it. They may have a client relationship with a Pathan tribe without actually being related to them. I'd guess the nomads are "pure" Indo-Aryan remnants, like the Kaffirs or the Dards. But I've never found any ethnography on the Kuchis.)

In the public park in Kabul, some old men in turbans and traditional gear praying, sipping

tea, smoking hookas. It occurs to me for the first time that in a society not devoted to constant "progress" and change, old people have a different meaning. They're not obsolete human junk, they're repositories of accumulated experience, maybe even "wisdom." I watch the graybeards being elaborately polite to each other, like a ritual. I'd always assumed that "good manners" equals hypocritical bullshit, unworthy of an individualist and conscious rebel. But suddenly I begin to suspect that there might be something beautiful about manners, like an art form.

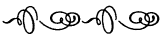
The Kuchi women (like most nomads) were not veiled, and in Kabul one could see modernized Afghan women without veils, but all other women over twelve wore burqas, total sacks, the most extreme purdah in the world. I never met any Afghan women. Most Western women, especially hippies, were so shocked by the burqa they never even attempted to penetrate this secret world. I only know about it through books, especially those of my old friends Chuck and Cherry Lindholm (anthropologists from Harvard)—Cherry covered Pathan women while Chuck dealt with the men. The novelist Doris Lessing (who followed Afghan sufi guru Idries Shah) visited Peshawar during the Russian period, interviewed Afghan women refugees, and wrote a good but small book on the

subject.

(Note: Idries Shah wrote a weird novel, *Kara Kush*, a fantasy of sufi resistance against the Russians, badly written but worth reading.)

One thing I learned by talking to men however was that many of them could not afford to marry, since Afghan custom requires the groom's family to pay a bride price, which at that time could run to hundreds or even thousands of dollars. The burqa therefore cannot be seen simply as a symbol of oppression of women (though it is that) but also as a symbol of the *value of daughters.*

Societies without dowry customs may paradoxically seem to allow women more "freedom" because they value them less than societies with bride-price customs. In any case, sexual tension is high in Afghan society. It's not surprising that the Taliban came to power on an anti-rape platform (at least according to their own propaganda). Also, the notion that Moslems hate women because they veil them must be weighed against the conscious beliefs of most Moslem men: i.e., that they value women far more than—say—Hollywood America, where women are used to sell products through fleshly exposure. Given sexual relations in Afghanistan, the burqa can be seen as a form of freedom from harassment and exploitation. I'm not saying this is my opinion. I'm just trying to explain the attitude of the average Afghan.



After a couple years in India I was expelled for overstaying my visa and headed back to Afghanistan. Again it was winter, I was stuck in Kabul waiting for a money-order to arrive, penniless, in another frigid hotel, holed up with a German hippy who was shooting raw opium four or five times a day. At one point I had to visit the US Embassy about some problem, perhaps a visa extension. The vice-consul I met was a young guy from the Midwest, not much older than me. This was his first posting abroad. As I seemed friendly he kind of opened up, expressing amazement at my foolhardiness in wandering alone around Afghanistan. He admitted he himself was terrified. With a shaking finger he pointed at the window, "There...there's no law out there!" he quavered. I kept a straight face, but secretly I was quite pleased.

I got in so much trouble overstaying visas that when I finally left the country an official wrote a huge essay (in Pashtu) in my passport, which had two twelve-page accordian fold-out additions full of highly dubious seals and stamps. (I was especially fond of a page of tax-stamps from the Libyan monarchy.) An Afghan friend translated the essay for me later. Basically it ID'd me as a penniless drug-

addled hippy and suggested strongly that I never be allowed back into the country. Later, however, this passport was stolen—by the Visa Office in Islamabad, Pakistan—and presumably sold on the black market for $2000 (so one lone friendly official told me in secret). When I described what had happened to the US Consul there in Islamabad he screamed, "What, again?!" So, anyway, I got a new passport and could now safely go back to Afghanistan; and I did, many times.

Around October 1971, the owner of my hotel in Kandahar invited me to spend the evening smoking opium. When night fell cold clear and moonlit, we left town in a horse-drawn gari for the teriak-khaneh, the O-den, quite a drive over the desert to a huge old mudbrick, multi-domed caravanserai. There was no electricity, but moon and stars illuminated the scene. A caravan had come in earlier and settled down for the night. Literally about one hundred camels in the courtyard of the caravanserai plumped on the dirt with their legs tucked under them, each one glowing in the moonlight like a teapot the size of a Cadillac: big double-humped Bactrian camels.

Later that winter I suffered on through to Bactria itself, to Mazar-i Sharif, over mountain passes in a blizzard in an unheated bus. Sometime in the middle of the night and howling snowstorm the bus stopped—to let a camel caravan cross the highway. Shivering and amazed, I counted about

twenty-five big Bactrians, humps frosted with snow, and heard for the first time the clanking of caravan bells, a sound used as a cliché in Persian poetry to signify departure, with all its sadness and anticipation. The caravaneers—muffled in padded sheepskins and turbans of snow—yanked the undulating giants by ropes through their noses, exhorting and cursing as the beasts honked and groaned. Then they disappeared into the storm, heading north for the Soviet border.

Later, I managed to get to Balkh, the ancient capital of Bactria. The old city walls with watchtowers are still crumbling under the blows they received seven hundred years ago from the Mongols. We drove through a vast gate into a city that wasn't there, then kept on driving. On the inside of the wall was the same desert as on the outside. I think it was sixteen kilometers, all inside the wall, before we reached the center and shattered remains of Balkh: a ruined mausoleum (the dome collapsed) still flowery with patches of Timurid tile: the tomb of a sufi shaykh in the line of Ibn 'Arabi. In a circle around the tomb, a dozen or so teahouses were huddled together—nothing else, not even trees—just Central Asian desert and patches of snow. The great "Mother of Cities," birthplace of Jalallodin Rumi, already a metropolis when Alexander conquered it: nothing now but a flattened waste

and the Ozymandian stump of a cenotaph.

There's an old sufi legend about Gengis Khan (said to be part of The Secret History of the Mongols, but I could never find it in any translation): he's just fourteen and hiding out alone in the desert from his enemies; he goes to sleep in a cave and dreams of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara who gives him a gold ring and tells him that his mission is to go forth and destroy civilization, to erase the blight of cities from the world. When he wakes, the ring is still on his finger. As far as Balkh is concerned, Genghis Khan did his duty, or one of his descendents did it for him, I forget which.

Only one thing kept Balkh alive in 1971: hashish. The chai-khanehs there were set up to host a charas bazaar, and the famous north Afghani green-gold enticed gourmet connoisseurs from all over the universe. I wasn't there to buy bulk, however, just a few "candy canes" of the Number One, so I drank sweet green tea with cardamom and sat around sampling the product with the extremely genial host.

The "dialect" of Persian spoken in Balkh and northeastern Afghanistan is called Dari; but in fact it's not a dialect, but pure and more archaic than Iranian Persian (Farsi), rather like the Elizabethan English spoken by country people in remote

parts of eastern America. Once in Tehran I met a professor of Persian linguistics from the University and he told me about his recent vacation in Balkh. "I was sitting in one of the chai-khanehs, you know, the ones where they sell charas, chatting with the proprietor, an extremely nice man and polite to a fault. Suddenly, I burst into tears. He was very upset. 'Was it something I said, dear sir?'

"'Yes,' I sobbed, 'something you said.'

"'Ah, honorable Presence, how have offended thee?'

"'No, no! you didn't offend me. It was your use of the subjunctive! So beautiful! Like visiting the 15th century!'"

Two border towns in Pakistan—Quetta and Peshawar—have been mentioned in the news lately as refugee centers. Peshawar is mostly a Pathan city; Quetta has Pathans but also Baluchis, Brahuis (a mysterious people speaking a Dravidian language), and sprinklings of Hazaras, Turks, Persians, Punjabis, etc.—very cosmopolitan, a smuggler's paradise. One special feature of Quetta were the *saki-khanehs* or teahouses, where hash was served in huge hubblebubbles. I spent months in one that was frequented by ne'er-do-well Brahui "princes" and presided over by a witty disreputable Sayyid (descendant of the Prophet); I divided my day between the *saki-khaneh* and the *teriak-khaneh* (opium den) run by a genial Uzbek called Khan Baba. Quetta food is famous: barbecued meats and

rich milk sweets are the specialties. By comparison Afghanistan itself was not what we hippies called a "food trip." Even in Kabul restaurants the cuisine was that of poor shepherds: tough kebabs, greasy pilaw, flat bread, and tea (either black or green, always toothachingly sweet).

Of course, given the crisp weather and the hash, one was always hungry and appreciative of even small treats such as yoghurt or leek dumplings. One recipe I recall fondly: mutton meatballs fried in mutton fat with tomatoes and onions; add eggs to make an omelette swimming in grease; mop up with flat bread. Afghan bread, though simple, is real staff-of-life stuff. I'm certain bread in the Neolithic tasted just like that, bursting with wheat flavor and slightly smoky from the wood-fired clay ovens.

Peshawar always reminded me of Dodge City or maybe Tombstone. A tough border town at the foot of the Khyber Pass, capital of Pushtunistan (the idle dream of Pathan nationalists), where the Great Game still seemed to go on as if Kipling had never died. The Peshawar bazaar is famous for its "break fast" delicacies during Ramadan, the month of fasting (and feasting). I recall for instance spiced larks en brochette. I learned to appreciate the Pathans here as extreme examples of the Mountain Warrior ethos, like the Kurds: the best friends and the worst enemies in the world. (Tibetans are really mountain warriors, but Buddhists, like the ancient Afghans.) Like the old

Scottish clansmen, all Pathans are noble even when dirt poor, and they act like noblemen: proud, self-assured, unconquered.

I know I'm guilty of stereotyping here, but the types seem very real when you're soujourning amongst them. And the Pathans, unlike say the Scots or Tibetans, are still actively engaged in war, Hatfield/McCoy blood feuds in the 1970s, real full-scale war in the 80s and 90s, etc. In the Khyber Pass, the tribes ruled openly and in total disregard of all government. Up there, gunsmiths could copy any small weapon in world history from a flintlock (still very popular because you can make your own bullets) to an Uzi or AK-47, complete with serial numbers. Wild-looking longhaired types with crossed bandoliers and rifles. Shops full of smuggled electronic goods and gaudy jewelry.

The term "tribal anarchy" has been used to describe this situation. In effect, no central government has ever controlled the tribal hinterlands of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The unit of freedom, to coin a phrase, is not the individual but the coherent group: family, clan, tribe. The successful military forces of Central Asia are always tribal confederations, usually with a charismatic khan (like Gengis) to unite them. When the leader dies, the confederation usually breaks up and returns to "tribal anarchy."

In the 70s, people said the king—Zahir Shah—controlled Kabul and the other major cities

and highways but the tribes controlled everything else. (Note: two stories I heard about the king: When I asked someone "Where are all the famous Afghan hounds? Why haven't I seen any?" I was told that that king owned them all. Once in Herat, some dervishes gave me the best hashish I've ever smoked. One hit felt like 50 mic's of LSD. They told me that this grade AAA first-pressing charas, the finest few kilograms of Balkh's best, was reserved for a few special dervish shaykhs—and the king! Even if neither of these tales is true they reveal something about the magic of archetypes.)

Of course, tribal anarchy is not *anarchism*. For one thing, Islam—which has always been anti-tribal—has deeply influenced the Afghans and modified their customs. But I can't help thinking Bakunin might have admired the Pathans: the people armed, resisting all other powers. Even Marx and Engels sympathized with the Afghans, who they felt had been betrayed by perfidious British foreign policy. The Afghans missed a lot of Imperialist/colonialist history. There's something to be said for fierce independence.

My favorite city in Afghanistan—the one I kept going back to again and again—was Herat. I felt quite at home in its decayed Persian ambience, more Persian even than Iran with all its oil money and "West-intoxication." The Timurid Mongols who ruled Herat in the 15th century loved Spring best of all its seasons, but I remember Herat in

October when the sky was really a "turqoise dome," the air crisp and clean—no factories for thousands of kilometers in all directions!—smelling only of pine trees and distant mountains. Or December with snow on the pines and mud domes, starry nights, the smell of woodfires, the sound of horses' hooves. (Herat in the 70s still had more horsedrawn garis or droshkys than automobiles.) The Timurids had left traces, ruined mosques, tombs, minarets, encrusted with the most beautiful and vivid of all Islamic tilework. (I believe most of this was destroyed by the Russians in the 80s.) In the old city there was no electricity, a luddite paradise, night alleyways black as blindness. I remember stumbling back to my hotel from the teriak-khaneh, a cozy den under a dome in the old town. The owner, a sweet tempered Hazara family man, had painted the ceiling of the dome with flowers, birds, and pastoral scenes in Grandma Moses-style, so that his customers would have something pleasant to enhance their *nusha*' or intoxication. In the Herat bazaar one might see hunting hawks for sale, or rainbow-striped *chapans* like the wasp-waisted coats of courtiers in old miniatures. Herat teahouses had no tables or chairs but only wooden platforms called *takhts* (lit. *thrones*) with carpets, sometimes outdoors under chenar trees or next to a little rivulet lined with watercress. Sometimes, bards played *rebabs*, archaic instruments never seen nowadays in India or Iran, but mentioned often in medieval poetry.

Someone told me there were five hundred sufi shrines in Herat. I only managed to visit a few of the major ones. I found those wandering dervishes who turned me on to the "royal" hashish in the tomb of the famous Timurid miniaturist Behzad, perched on a bare hillside outside the city with a view of the whole valley. Most sufis in Afghanistan belong to the Naqshbandi or the Qadiri orders, two of the biggest worldwide Sunni sufi turuq. Two of the mujaheddin militias during the Russian period consisted of these sufi orders armed and following their *pirs* (i.e., their gurus). The most famous saint of Herat was an 11th century sufi shaykh, 'Abdullah Ansari. I reached the tomb in Gazargah, a suburb of Herat, by horse carriage. The cargah or enclosure was rich and well-preserved, and the tombstone was amazing, a lacey cake of Koranic calligraphy carved in solid marble. Ansari's tomb enclosure was considered *bast*, a sanctuary for criminals. As with certain cathedral closes in medieval Europe, anyone—even a murderer—who takes refuge there is exempt from prosecution. We met a number of these fugitives: ragged and hungry-looking to be sure, and stuck inside a tiny garden. But the garden had cypress trees and mountain views, and the men were free inside the garden, not too miserable. In fact, they looked rather happy. Ansari's post-mortem influence is warm and forgiving. (All active sufi shrines seem to take on the personality of the dead saint.)

In the agony suffered for you,
The wounded find the scent of balm:
The memory of you consoles the souls of lovers.
Thousands in every corner, seeking a glimpse of you,
Cry out like Moses, "Lord, show me yourself!"
I see thousands of lovers lost in a desert of grief,
Wandering aimlessly and saying hopefully,
"O God! O God!"
I see breasts scorched by the burning separation from you,
I see eyes weeping in love's agony.
Dancing down the lane of blame and censure,
Your lovers cry out, "Poverty is my source of pride!"
Pir-i Ansar has quaffed the wine of longing:
Like Majnun he wanders drunk and perplexed
Through the world.

—Khwaja Abdullah Ansari,
Intimate Conversations
Trans. by Wheeler M. Thackston
(Paulist Press, N.Y., 1978)

In my book, *Scandal*, I've described a number of shrines in Herat, but I can't resist retelling the story of Baba Qaltan. This sufi came to pay a visit to Jami, the great 15th century poet of Herat, by rolling on the ground—hence his name, which means Papa Roller. An Islamic Holy Roller. At

his tomb there's an open courtyard empty and covered with small pebbles. The pilgrim lies down with his head on a broken bit of gravestone, closes his eyes and recites a prayer. Then—according to my informant—he *rolls*. If he's a "good Moslem" he ends up coming to a halt facing Mecca. My informant was Hajji, an extremely sharp young Herati merchant whose shop was my hangout. Hajji was not a sufi but—like all good traditional Afghans—he revered them highly.

He told me that a cousin of his, a terribly worldly and sinful young man, had openly mocked Baba Qaltan's "miraculous" tomb and announced his intention of making the pilgrimage and *refusing to roll*. So he did. He lay down and closed his eyes—and suddenly he was rolling, rolling around the courtyard in circles, out of control, around and around, faster and faster. His friends had to jump on his spinning body to stop it, drag it to a halt. Pebbles were embedded in his bleeding cheeks. "After that," said Hajji, "he became a believer."

I decided to try it. I followed the protocol exactly. The shrine attendant gave my shoulder a tiny nudge. I'll roll a bit, I thought, so as not to disappoint him.

All at once I felt the world tip over at a 45 degree angle. This is not a metaphor. I couldn't have stopped rolling if I'd tried. Nor could I open my eyes. Zoom! Finally, I rolled to a halt. "Masha'Llah! he's facing Mecca!" Believe me, I'm

not a very psychic person. This was one of the weirdest experiences I've ever had.

Hajji, by the way, like many Afghans, was a phenomenal speed-chess player. I used to sit in his shop and watch him annihilate one Westerner after another. Ten seconds between moves! Good Moslems don't gamble, otherwise Hajji could have hustled professionally.

After Zahir Shah was ousted in 1973 by his cousin Da'ud, I was sitting in Hajji's shop one day and asked him how people felt about the fall of the Monarchy and the proclamation of a republic. "We Afghans have an old saying," he replied: "Black dog out, yellow dog in."

The fact that the Taliban succeeded in taking over Afghanistan has always seemed to me a certain sign that the Afghanistan I knew was completely smashed to hell by the Russians and by civil war. I never heard any Afghan, however pious, praise "fundamentalism" or mullah-inspired bigotry. No one had ever heard of this perversion of Islam, which then existed only in Saudi Arabia. Afghan Islam was very orthopractic, but also very pro-sufi; essentially it was old-fashioned mainstream Islam. The idea of banning kite-flying would have probably caused hoots of incredulous laughter. It must have taken twenty years of vicious neo-imperialist ideological cultural murder and

oppression to make Talibanism look like the least of all available evils.

Since American readers have not, generally speaking, been offered a very multi-dimensional view of Islam and Central Asian culture, I thought it might be useful and amusing to dip into Afghan literature to discover what the great poets of the past might have said about the Taliban. Jalaloddin Rumi lived and died in Turkey, but was born in Balkh (his family fled the Mongol invasion) and wrote in Persian. In this poem he describes the post-mortem fate of a Khwajeh (pron. "khoja"), a professional Islamic "cleric" and puritanical killjoy:

What's all this fanfare in the morning?
Ah! The khwajeh's going to the grave!
won't be back till late, I suppose:
a rather distant caravanserai, Death.
Instead of fair beauties he'll consort
with scorpions and snakes;
he's come from the silken pavilion
and inherited the sepulcher.
No more free lunch—
his neck is firmly broken.
How steadfastly,
how patiently he makes his exit.
While he lived no one

had the guts to cross him;
but now, one imagines, where he's going
the Khwajeh's own guts will be kebabs.
He does not go purified by purity,
nor in the way of fidelity,
he does not go in God-intoxication
but stone-blind drunk on lies…
The Khwajeh: how many fine robes tailored,
how many turbans fitted—
And now, undressed by God,
a naked nobody.
Every exile returns home at last,
East to East, West to West;
he who was born of devil's fire returns to fire,
he who was born of light to light.
Spawn of the imp,
he spread out the fingers of cruelty;
do you think it likely he'll be
rewarded with 78 houris?
The witty and nimble
are seated at God's dining table—
but he, unsalted, unripe,
is headed for the pits.

(adapted from the version by W.C. Chittick
and myself, in *Sacred Drift*)

I must confess that I've never been able to overcome my Romanticism vis-à-vis Afghanistan or the "Orient" in general. At times I thought perhaps I should try. The "Subaltern Studies" critics of post-colonialism condemn all orientalism as "appropriation." I remember a Native American poet who summed it up thus: "First you took our land, then our languages, now you want our 'spirituality'!" It's easy to see that there can exist such a thing as too much translation. Why don't we palefaces get a culture of our own? As Ghandi told Mountbatten (when he asked the Mahatma, "What do you think of British Civilization?") "Yes, it would have been a good idea."

On the one hand: true. On the other hand...

It seems to me that there exists something I'd like to call an oriental Romanticism of the Orient. After all, the very idea of the romance came to us from the Islamic East. Emerson and Goethe sometimes seemed to think that Romanticism had been invented by the Persian poet Hafez of Shiraz. Chivalric love is probably an Islamic trope. This ill-defined oriental Romanticism doesn't situate itself dialectically in relation to the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, but to the "worldly" world in general, in an a-historical and existentialist manner. Love, the beloved, the saki and wine shop, music, dance, the rose garden and the nightingale—all these exist both as sensual

reality and as an "other world" of imagination and intoxication. One illustration: a poem by 'Abd al-Rahman Jami of Herat:

Edge of the garden, brink of the stream, lip of the goblet:
Saki, get up! Here abstinence is crime

If the old monk of the cloister is drunk on music's delight
I'll take the tavern—where this state endures forever

You touch cup's lip to your lip and I the drunkard
can't tell which is wine's ruby and which is yours

I'm not the only heart snared in your dark tresses:
wherever hearts are birds they're caught in your net

You draw the sword to slice my heart in two
—don't bother. One glance will do it

Don't discuss love's problems with the rationalists
and don't tell secrets: this is a public assembly

Jami's never seen wine nor cup yet he's drunk on your love:

This is the banquet of love. What room for cup or wine?

(adapted from E.G. Browne's version in *A Literary History of Persia*)

Maybe it's true that we hippies were merely casting our "gaze" on such treasures. But although the treasures are imaginal they're real enough. And unlike other "resources," the more such treasures are taken the more they are given. "Appropriation" renews the source rather than depletes it. When the treasures are withheld or refused, they die. Perhaps now they exist only in the form of a terrible nostalgia—a nostalgia so severe it could be called tragic. It's no wonder that some Afghan people look back on the 60s and 70s as a kind of Golden Age. They've even brought back old Zahir Shah out of mothballs in Rome, like a lucky talisman lost for thirty years, even propping him up again in Kabul. Probably a big mistake. Hell, nowadays you can't step in the same river even once.

But the romantic impulse seems irresistible. Who wouldn't regret the peace and prosperity, or the now-long-lost pleasures of rebabs in the teahouse or kite flying in the Spring? To have been there then is to be overwhelmed with regret.

I offer no defense based on theory or ideology. You can despise me for it, but you can't argue me out of it. And you—you've seen all those images in *The New York Times* and on TV. You can't tear your gaze away, can you? What does it look like to you? Like the last real place in the world?

Roses and Nightingales:

looking for traditional anarchism in 1970s iran

It was 1971. After two years on the Hippie Trail in India and Pakistan, a winter of poverty in Afghanistan, months of opium smoking in Quetta (capital of Pakistani Baluchistan) followed by a severe and hallucinatory bout of intestinal malaria, I must not have looked very respectable to the Iranian Consul.

The Consulate, a concrete box in a dreary new suburb of Quetta, appeared to be empty except for me and the Consul, a small sour man in a suit, who seemed to have nothing to do except make life difficult for me personally. He was quizzing me about why he shouldn't simply issue me a fourteen-day transit visa rather than the standard Tourist Three Month visa I wanted. He seemed to suspect me of something. Recently, I'd been sort of thrown out of India and also Afghanistan. Clearly the Consul took me for a wealthless vagabond, which was rather perspicacious of him.

"*Why* do you want to visit my country?" he kept asking.

I felt too tired to make anything up so I said, "Well, you see, I'm interested in sufism..."

"Sufism!? Do you know what is sufism?"

"I know enough to want to know more. Some sufis I met in India told me to go to Iran. So..."

The Consul metamorphized before my eyes into a different person: all at once he became a cultivated and poetic soul unfairly and inexplicably consigned to this empty concrete box in Baluchistan. He unbent. He beamed, "This is fantastic! You must let me give you the maximum possible visa," he began fumbling for seals and stamps, "One Year With Extensions, Yes?"

"Well...but..."

"You must remain in my country until you have learned everything. Please, promise me!"

Although I never learned "everything" about the Consul's country or even about sufism, I did spend the next seven years there, more or less, so my problem now is one of choice; what to leave out of this little memoir and what to put in. I follow a loose thread suggested by the theme of the Consul's unbending, his strange transformation from bureaucrat to human being. My motive for this arises from the probability that over the next few years no one in the US is going to be discussing these aspects of Persian culture. Iran will be consigned to the evil pseudo-discourse and vacant imaginary of the "News." Persian humanism (as Iqbal called it) will be forgotten, denied, and even betrayed—precisely because it belongs not to the realm of ideology and the "clash of cultures,"

but to "everyday life" and the ordinary and even unrepresentable beauties of the soul.

Music, tea, and glass-eating

By a strange coincidence possible only in a "developing nation," the strongest force for traditional and creative preservation of classical music was then the Iranian National Television. Radio Tehran by contrast represented a lovely but impure neo-traditionalism, which even ran to experiments with violin and piano—I love Persian piano music, which always reminds me of the mirror-mosaic architecture of Shiite tomb-shrines and other late 19th-century public buildings. Like pianos (mostly uprights), European mirrors were shipped to Iran by caravan and naturally many of them broke en route.

Tile-mosaic craftsmen bought up shards by the camel-load and created a vulgar but scintillating hybrid form in which whole domes and *iwans* are transformed into glittering ice-diamond bursts of illumination. Purists hate this stuff. The pianos were re-tuned to Persian modes and played like dulcimers, unpedaled, using only four fingers. Another comparison: all over Asia traditional embroidery techniques were given a creative burst by the introduction of foot-pedaled Singer sewing machines. Sooner or later modern technology (inextricably linked with Capital) will suffocate and destroy traditional crafts, but the

initial contact is often a stimulus, and gives birth to vigorous hybrids.

Be that as it may, the TV musicians were all rigorous but creative purists, and the 1970s witnessed a mini-renaissance of excellent Persian music: played by very young enthusiasts and very old virtuosi who'd been rescued from oblivion by the new wave and the TV budget. The Shiraz Festival was one of its epicenters. I spent a lot of time talking with Dr. Dariush Safvat, TV's director of The Centre for the Preservation and Propagation of Traditional Iranian Music. One night in Shiraz, Dr. Safvat told me an interesting story. I already knew most of it because Nasrollah Poujavady and I had written about it in *Kings of Love*, our study of the history and poetry of the Ni'matollahi Sufi Order, the spiritual progeny of Shah Ni'matollah Wali. In 1792, one of these dervishes was martyred in Kerman; his sufi name was Mushtaq Ali Shah and he was a madzub, a sufi "madman" totally absorbed in divine ecstasy. He was also a legendary musician and played the sehtar, the little three-stringed lute of Central Asia (ancestor of the Indian *sitar*). One day, in his craziness, Mushtaq played an accompaniment to the Call to Prayer (*azan*) from a nearby mosque, and this blasphemy aroused the puritanical wrath of a bigoted mullah. The mullah called on a mosque-full of people to stone Mushtaq Ali Shah, and he was crushed to death along with one of his disciples. Dr. Safvat told me the story

over again, but he hadn't read it in a book. He'd heard it as a youth from an old musician friend who heard it from his grandfather who had actually been present in Kerman on May 19, 1792, and witnessed the death of Mushtaq.

The Ni'matollahi Order in the 1970s was still very pro-music (although they never used musical instruments in their actual sufi praxis). Several times a year on happy holidays such as the Birthday of the Prophet or Ali, the Ni'matollahi *Khaniqah* [spiritual center] in downtown Tehran would organize a *jashn* or musical fest. Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh, the *qotb* or Shaykh of the Order, counted many musicians among his disciples and friends, all glad to perform at his parties. Several thousand people from all classes and every part of Tehran (including women and kids) would attend, and each and every one received a free hot meal of rice and meat and all the tea and sweets they could stomach, along with several hours of excellent traditional music. The grand finale was always provided by a troupe of wild-looking Qadiri dervishes from Kurdestan, who roused the crowd to delirium with dramatic chants and pounding drums. Dr Nurbakhsh told us that at home in Kurdestan they'd follow the music with feats of power such as sticking knives through their cheeks or eating light bulbs. "But I don't allow any of that in my *khaniqah*," he said with a twinkle in his eye. "You'll have to go to Sanandaj if you want to see

that sort of thaumaturgy."

So, of course, we did.

The Kurds are a sight for sore eyes after the Iranians, who have all (except the mullahs) adopted western-style clothes with generally counter-aesthetic results. The Kurds dress Kurdish: big fringed turbans, tight soldierly jackets, baggy trousers, riding boots—and guns, if they can get away with it. The women dress in dozens or scores of layered flower-patterned petticoats of dark, rich, saturated, velvety colors, and look like black tulips; some tattoo their face with blue marks, and go unveiled.

In Sanadaj, my friends and I—all of us American journalists working for the rackety Tehran English daily journals and all fascinated by sufism—met Dr. Nurbakhsh's contact, a small 88-year old gentleman who lived in a small house near the Qadiri *khaniqah*. He invited us in for tea, and showed us an old photo of himself in military uniform with a really huge live snake draped over his shoulders. "You came to see us eat glass, my young friends? Ah, that's nothing. One need not even enter the trance state for such tricks. I'll show you!"

He snapped his fingers and his young grandson brought in a silver tray upon which sat a single light bulb. The old soldier broke it up with his fingers as he uttered an invocation, then began scooping up shards and popping them in

his mouth, crunch crunch crunch. Swallow. As we gaped at him, he winked his eye and offered us the tray, "Like to try it yourselves?"

That night in the *khaniqah* (after a big dervish meal of mutton and tea on the floor around a *sofreh* or dining-cloth), we indeed witnessed feats of power, including cheek skewering, electricity eating, scorpion handling, light bulb chomping—all performed (after a really rousing *zikr*) without any trace of damage or visible scars. I later visited Sanandaj several times, and I have to admit these tricks soon came to seem rather ordinary (though I never tried any myself). But I never again saw the feat our tiny old soldier friend performed. After achieving *hal* or trance by dancing wildly and whirling to the zikr, he suddenly ran at tremendous speed across the whole length of the room (say, the length of a tennis court at least), launched himself headfirst like a rocket into the air, and crashed his skull into the far wall—bounced off, onto his feet, and went around whirling and dancing and singing ecstatically for the next hour. I believe it was this chap who told us that the Grand Shaykh of the Qadiri Sufi Order in Baghdad was able to cut off the heads of his disciples, as part of the initiation ceremony, and then replace them, no harm done. After seeing the old soldier himself perform, I was inclined to believe this, though I admit that later I became skeptical again. But it's a nice story.

Sufism: Islam's „traditional anarchism„?

Sunni Islam is "built" upon Five Pillars: Confession of Unity, Belief in prophets and angels, Prayer, Pilgrimage, and the Poor-tax. To these Shiism adds a Sixth pillar: Social Justice. Shiism has usually existed as a religion without state power and traditionally as a source of potential revolt against Sunnism. But in the course of time, the Pillar of Justice has been given an even wider interpretation. The late Ali Shariati, a radical mullah assassinated by the Shah's secret police, converted many Iranians to the concept of Shiite Socialism. Shariati's tracts reveal a fascinating blend of Marxist humanism and reverence for Ali and Husayn as rebels against State oppression. Official revolutionary State Shiism in Iran today has taken another direction, not socialist, and not particularly radical. But the link between social justice Shiism and revolution is quite solidly historic and real—and always capable of regeneration. Iran is generally depicted as ninety percent orthodox Shiite, and this may be so.

But the dervishes and heretics have played a larger role than such statistics would suggest. Inside the "fat" Iranian a "thin" dervish often struggles for self-expression and freedom. Sufis are very pious, certainly—but dervishism (even without the outer signs and practices) also allows a way to cock a snoot at all dreary conformism, class suffociation, puritanism, overly formal

manners, and philistine consensus aesthetics. In modern Persian, the adjective *darvishi* implies a whole complex of such attitudes and tastes, not necessarily even connected with any sufi praxis. It means something like "laid back," "cool," informal, and relaxed ("Don't dress for dinner; we'll be very *darvishi*"); also "hip" and bohemian. Dervishism and the strange sects (too many even to list in this essay) seem to me to provide something quite vital to Persian culture and even "politics" in a broad sense of that term—something that might be called "traditional anarchism."

In the old days (say, up to mid-19th century), Iranian dervishes adhered to an ancient way of life very similar to that of Hindu *saddhus* in India: long hair (or shaved bald), patched cloak, begging bowl (made from *coco de mer* shells) and ritual axes (also useful for chopping vegetables), distinctive cap or *taj* (crown); endless aimless wandering, music and dance, sometimes wine and hashish, an attitude of insouciance vis-à-vis the claims of orthodoxy; yogic asceticism and libertine excess—and a theology of ecstatic love. The Ni'matollahi Order once occupied the vanguard of this sort of dervishism, but severe repression and even executions for heresy (such as that of Mushtaq Ali Shah), carried out by powerful mullahs (one of them known as *Sufi-kush* or "sufi killer") gradually drove the radical dervishes underground. Inwardly, they retained their anti-puritanical convictions, but

outwardly, they conformed to orthodox Shiism. Some of the shaykhqs even dressed as mullahs in dark sober robes and snow white turbans.

Sufism of the wild qalandari variety may be older than Islam, harking back to an Indo-Iranian antiquity or even a common shamanistic culture traceable in the earliest Indian and Iranian scriptures (the Vedas and the Yashts). Hallucinogenic plants (called Soma or Haoma) must have played a central role in this ur-cult. First orthodox Brahminism and Zoroastrianism, and later Islam, pushed these power-plants into the outer darkness of "heresy," or "forgot" them, or turned them into metaphors like the flavorless "wine" of so many mediocre sufi poems.

But dervishism resists change. In the hierarchic world of Asia, with its rigid sets of inherited identities, the dervish life always offers a way out, a kind of traditional bohemianism, not exactly approved by authority, but at least recognized as a viable identity. It's no wonder the hippies immediately gravitated toward the company of these "1000 year-old beatniks," sharing the same zero-work ethic and predilection for intoxicants and phantastica. In India, I found both dervishes and sadhus in plenty, but in Iran they had mostly vanished, at least outwardly. The only patched cloaks belonged to an Order called the *Khaksariyya* or "Dust-Heads" (as in the image of prostrating in the dust of the Beloved's doorway,

or throwing dust on the head in mourning). In Shiraz, I attended *zikr* in one of their *khaniqahs* in a beautiful garden called Seven Bodies, where they recited Hafez and then turned out the lights and wept in darkness. Patch-cloaked Khaksari dervishes still occasionally wandered about begging or selling incense against the Evil Eye (*esphand* aka Syrian rue, a potent hallucinogen if ingested; also used to make a red dye for fezzes). I knew a teahouse in Isfahan staffed by Khaksari dervishes, where the headwaiter, their shaykh, recited from the epic *Shahnameh* acting out all the parts, a one-man theater. The Khaksari Order has initiatic links with a strange Kurdish sect called the Ahl-i Haqq or "People of the Truth" (the same Divine Name claimed by Hallaj, the sufi martyr). This is not a sufi order but a folk religion, a syncresis of pre-Zoroastrian paganism, extreme Shiism, dervish sufism, and perhaps Manichaeanism. One branch of the Ahl-i Haqq actually worship Satan, eat pork, and drink wine; several friends of mine traveled to their remote valleys and found them quite warm and hospitable. The "orthodox" Ahl-I Haqq had established a *jam-khaneh* or meeting-house in Tehran under a charismatic shaykh, Ustad Elahi, a famous musician and master of the sehtar. Many Tehran musicians were drawn to him as disciples, as were some Westerners, including my friend the French ethnomusicologist, Jean During. Ustad Elahi's son

has written books in French and English.

Some sufis are very *darvishi*, like the Safi Ali Shahi branch of the Ni'matollahi Order, who owned a very nice *khaniqah* (with garden and tiled dome) in Tehran. Many of them were professional musicians at Radio Tehran, and some of them (so people said) smoked opium. I attended a fashionable funeral in their garden once, since the dervishes rented it out for such occasions. Other sufis criticized them for this and looked on them as slackers. Not all sufis are *darvishi* by any means.

Sufism in the past has occasionally taken its "traditional anarchism" as far as armed uprising against injustice, but in recent times, it has transferred its energies to theological and intellectual liberation and applied its wildness to more inward dimensions. Given a political reading, sufism provides plenty of inspiration for resistance—think of Hafez's line, "Stain your prayer carpet with wine!" Given a cultural reading, sufism has sparked off countless revivals of traditional culture precisely by resisting tradition's "dead weight." The tremendous changes in Persian Classical music in the late 19th century for example—larger ensembles, new melodic material, experiments with European influences—were all carried out by sufis or artists steeped in cultural sufism. "Radical tolerance" may prove impossible as a political program at a given time and place, but it can always be internalized by the artist and

externalized as art. Since the "Orient" never really experienced the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution (except as imposed by colonial imperialism), it retained many traditional forms of Romantic resistance within the "permitted dissidence" of sufism and the arts.

Under the conditions of overwhelming oppression, the dervish becomes *rendi*, that is to say, clever. A *rend* can drink wine under the very nose of the Law and get away with it. The *rend* is a secret agent of self-illumination, a strange combination of mystic monk and prankish surrealist. Perhaps this is where Gurdjieff found his notion of the "clever one" who avoids onerous paths of religion and yoga and slips into heaven like a burglar, so to speak. In folklore, the *rend* becomes a comic figure like the famous Mulla Nasroddin, outwardly a fool but in truth a realized sage.

Iran? . . . or Persia?

By traveling in India and Iran rather than only reading about them I came to appreciate and actually love certain "late decadent periods" of the sort that are universally despised by the Orientalists for their aesthetic impurity, despised by the new breed of Islamist bigots for their religious impurity, and despised by modernist pro-Westerners for their medieval impurity. Pretty much the only people who don't despise these late decadent periods are the people who are actually still living in them and

are too ignorant and backward to realize their own irrelevance, outdatedness, political incorrectness—and impurity. In India, the remnants of the late Mughal era still provide a ghostly and melancholic but exquisitely refined matrix for the lives of many. In Iran it's the Qajar period (the dynasty before the Pahlevis); a past recent enough that in the 1970s one could still touch it through stories (like Dr. Safvat's story about Mushtaq), through buildings, paintings, music, crafts, poetry, and even food. The past lingered in a way inconceivable to Americans or even Europeans; enough of it lingered that one could live in it.

Late decadent periods attract me for many reasons, e.g. they're usually rather peaceful (too tired and blasé for war); often they're devoted to "small happinesses"—which as Nietzsche says may be more important than the big ones, the ones that always betray us. Maybe great original art fails to thrive in such periods—since the kings and lords can no longer afford it—but the "minor arts" often experience a kind of perfection; aristocratic tastes (in cheap folkish forms) filter down even to the lowest levels. I remember late one winter night in Tehran, as I passed the skeleton of a half-built pseudo-Californian office block, I saw a lone night watchman warming himself by a barrel of burning trash; he wore a sheepskin coat and he was entertaining himself by reciting Hafez *viva voce* to the snowflakes.

"Iran" is the proper ancient name for Persia, but wasn't the official name till the mid-20th century, changed by decree of Reza Shah (the last late Shah's father) from "Persia" to "Iran." His motive for this was suspect, because he was a Nazi sympathizer and because "Iran" means "land of the Aryans"—and the name-change left a bad taste in the mouths of many Iranians. The name "Persia" was supposed to represent all that was backward, medieval, superstitious, anti-progress, late and decadent—everything "Oriental" in the land and its people. But the land and its people (or some of them) still lived in that world and loved it.

I know it's perfectly illegitimate and indefensible for me to say that I also loved it. I know that I was an outsider (although at times I convinced myself otherwise); I know that I cannot "represent the Other" and even that the whole project of representation has become suspect amidst the "ruins" of post-modernity. I even know that the entire hippie project of Romantic travel was largely illusory and certainly doomed to failure. The "post-colonial discourse" has made all this perfectly and painfully clear. Sadly, however, I'm unable to repent or to write off my experiences as irrelevant, crypto-reactionary delusions.

Iran as represented in the News, a two-dimensional image of oil wells and atomic reactors under the control of evil fanatics in black robes... Is this Iran any more real than the Persia in which

I tried to travel and even to lose my self?—the Persia of roses and nightingales that impinges so sensibly on my memory? Or, are both equally real and unreal? The truth must certainly be more complex even than such paradox could suggest. But since Iran is now being pumped up in the media as the next spoke of the Axis of Evil, I doubt that Persia will get as much airplay over the next few years. Hence this essay. Persia has become a part of The World We Lost—its perfume lingers even as it recedes into a past that's half imaginal. It leaves behind it only something that might be called difference. How else to define that which we feel is leaving us?

Grange Appeal

The work we are going about is this, to dig up Georges Hill and the waste grounds thereabouts, and to sow corn, and to eat our bread together by the sweat of our brows.

And the First Reason is this, THAT WE MAY WORK IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND LAY THE FOUNDATION OF MAKING THE EARTH A COMMON TREASURY FOR ALL, BOTH RICH AND POOR. THAT EVERYONE BORN OF THE LAND MAY BE FED BY THE EARTH AND HIS MOTHER THAT BROUGHT HIM FORTH, ACCORDING TO THE REASON THAT RULES IN THE CREATION.

—Gerrard Winstanley, the Digger
"The True Levellers Standard Advanced,"
April 26, 1649

Brothers of the plow, The power is with you;
The world in expectation waits For action prompt and true,
Oppression stalks abroad, Monopolies abound;
Their giant hands already clutch The tillers of the ground.

(Chorus)
Awake, then, awake! the great world must be fed,
And heaven gives the power to the hand that holds the bread.

—Geo. F. Root,
"The Hand that Holds the Bread"
Grange Melodies (Philadelphia, 1905)

I.

One summer day in Colorado some years ago, the poet Reed Bye drove me around to look at a few of the still-standing Grange Halls of Boulder County. Plain wood-frame structures, simple in an almost Amish or Shaker manner (American Zen) and almost barn-like, these rural outposts of farm culture have been overtaken by the county's insane rate of development. The farms that once surrounded the Grange Halls have been sold and subdivided—the Denver gentry have built huge trophy homes, strip malls, defense and biomutagenic labs, New Age supermarkets, etc., etc. The few horses and bewildered cows that still stand around in the shrinking "open spaces" appear to be waiting for the End. A thick but slightly luminous atmosphere of nostalgia hangs over the lonely halls baking in the sunlight.

Ever since childhood Sunday afternoon excursions in the fifties, I've been noticing Grange Halls in little American towns and admiring them. The bigger halls sometimes resemble charming Victorian churches—"carpenter gothic"—or firehouses. Not many of them appear to be still active

or owned by the Grange. In Rosendale, a town near where I live in Upstate New York, the slightly ornate but decaying Grange Hall was saved by artists but tragically burned down several years ago.

So far I've been unable to discover any nice coffee table books devoted to this rich cross-section of American working-class vernacular public architecture. Not even the Grange itself seems to have published a study of its own disappearing heritage. At first I wasn't even certain that the Grange still existed. But eight years ago when I moved to the Hudson Valley, I began to see signs that the organization was not entirely moribund. At the Ulster County Fair, I met some exceedingly pleasant old ladies selling spiral-bound cookery books compiled by local Grangers.

At one point I thought about doing a book on Grange Hall architecture, but soon realized how huge a job it would be. Between 1868 and 1933, New York State alone spawned fifteen hundred thirty-one Granges.[1] I'm no photographer, and I don't even own a car. I'd need a grant just to record the Granges in my own immediate area, let alone the state or the whole country.

Old photo archives do exist, as I learned when I tracked down some Grange historians and corresponded with them. But in the meantime I'd discovered other and even more fascinating aspects of Grange history. In its heyday, the

1 See Leonard L. Allen, *History of New York State Grange* (Watertown, NY: Hungerford-Holbrook Col., 1934).

Grange was one of the most progressive forces in the Populist movement, not just a club for lonely farmers in those long-dead days before cars and TVs atomized American social life. Once upon a time, the Grangers were firebreathing agrarian radicals. Moreover, it turned out that the Grange was a secret society with secret rituals.

Why hadn't I ever heard about this before?

II.

Of course, the Grange wasn't the first manifestation of American agrarian radicalism. In colonial times, for example, rural New York experienced a number of "Anti-Rent" uprisings against the feudal-manorial "Patroon System" introduced by the Dutch but preserved and even extended under the British. Even after the Revolution, farmers were still subjected to feudal leases and rents and treated as a rural proletariat by manor-lords like the Rensselaers and the Livingstons. In 1845, the long-simmering situation exploded in an Anti-Rent War. Farmers disguised as "Calico Indians" tarred and feathered some sheriffs.[2] A few people got shot. English and Irish Chartists, German Communists, and Manhattan radicals supported the rebels. But the movement was co-opted by the usual clever politicians who rode to power on radical slogans, then delivered only tepid reform.

2 See Henry Christman, *Tin Horns and Calico* (New York: Henry Holt, 1945); see also Dorothy Kubik, *A Free Soil—A Free People: The Anti-Rent War in Delaware County, New York* (Fleischmanns, NY: Purple Mountain Press, 1997).

Private property was saved from the extremists who had really dreamed of abolishing rent. Like Punk squatters in Amsterdam or Manhattan who win legal control of their squats, the Anti-Rent farmers were transformed suddenly into landlords.

Looked at from a "Jeffersonian" point of view, America seems founded on agrarian principles as a revolutionary democratic nation of free yeoman-farmers. However, the 1789 Constitution acted as a counter-revolution and put an end to any immediate hope of extending the Jeffersonian franchise to slaves, Indians or women. (The Bill of Rights represents the last-minute "tepid reforms" of Jefferson himself, who—like many of the Founding Fathers—was a slave owner and land speculator.)

Back-country farmer uprisings like Shay's Rebellion and the Whiskey Rebellion were crushed by Washington, the new "King George." The American ruling class would consist of slave owners, merchants, financiers, lawyers, manufacturers and politicians—all male, all white. When freedom is defined in terms of property, those with more property have more freedom. Most Americans were still small farmers, and this remained the case throughout the 19th and even into the 20th century. But already by the end of the 18th century, the Jeffersonian yeoman had lost control of the American future.

This loss, however, went largely unnoticed. Because of the existence of the frontier (itself a creation of land speculators and Indian killers),

the farmer could always leave rents and oppression behind and find forty acres and a mule somewhere over the horizon. By the time of the Civil War, however, the frontier was already beginning to vanish. Slavery was abolished largely because it no longer suited an emergent capitalist economy based on money rather than land as the true measure of wealth. Labor had to be "free"—that is, regulated by wages and rents. In the Gilded Age of the Robber Barons following the Civil War, two classes emerged as the prime victims of this supposed freedom: the urban proletariat and the small farmers.

Railroads "opened up" America's rural hinterlands, true, but railroads also acted as the tentacles of predatory capitalism. Financiers and monopolists controlled the farm economy at nearly every point of supply, demand and transportation. Farmers didn't work for wages, and they might even own property; nevertheless, they were exploited just like factory workers in the city. "Money interests" ruled reality itself, or so it seemed.

The Civil War had put an end to many of the old antebellum reform movements, but the post-War era created a whole spectrum of new ones. "Populism" was in the air—a hard-to-define radicalism, both urban and rural, that began to give birth to new organizations and take up new causes. In 1866, a Bureau of Agriculture clerk (and Freemason) in Washington, D.C., named Oliver Hudson Kelley, toured the devastated South and reported back not only to his office but also to a

small circle of friends, all minor government clerks with farming backgrounds. They agonized over the plight of the American farmer and decided to take action. They founded a fraternal order, the Patrons of Husbandry (ie, agriculture), that became known as the Grange (an archaic word for barn).

The "Seven Founders" of the Grange were all white men, but Kelley's niece, Miss Carrie Hall, convinced him to include women in the new organization, even as officers. For this she is recognized as "equal to the Founders" of the order. Aside from Father Kelley himself, a tireless, idealistic, and charismatic figure, two founders exercised great influence on the order's forms and functions: William Saunders, a prominent landscape gardener originally from Scotland, and Francis Morton McDowell, the only non-bureaucrat, a fruit farmer from Steuben County, New York. Three Celts! and their inspiring ideas for the order breathe a glorious and eccentric air of imagination and poetry. They proposed nothing less than a Masonic-style mystic and secret society, complete with ritual, regalia, and seven degrees of initiation, all based on the symbolism of farming.

In 1868, the first Grange of the infant order, Number One of Fredonia, New York, was founded in Chautauqua County, where another great Populist organization, the educational Chautauqua movement, also originated. (I wonder if the Marx Brothers knew of this when they or George S. Kaufman chose the name "Fredonia" for the fictional setting of their great anti-war comedy

Duck Soup.) After a slow start, the new organization began to experience almost unbelievable success. Within eight years, some twenty-four thousand charters had been granted, and membership was pushing a million. The Grange had hit on a magical formula: economic self-organization, cooperation, and mutual aid; no involvement in legislative electoral politics but militancy on social and economic issues; plenty of picnics, outings, celebrations, socializing and shared fun; and a really impressive but simple ritual based on the Eleusinian Mysteries.

III.

Patrons, on your weary way,
Is there darkness and delay?
Have you trouble, constant strife
To attain the higher life?
Seek Pomona's signet ring,
Talismanic words 'twill bring,
Words that conquer far and near;
Always hope and perservere.

—Jas. L. Orr,
"Hope and Perservere"
(initiation hymn for 5th Degree)
Grange Melodies

Between, say, 1840 and 1914, at a rough but reasonable guess, one out of every three Americans belonged to a fraternal organization—Masons, Oddfellows, Elks, Woodsmen, Rosicrucians, Good Templars, Druids, Daughters of Isis, etc—or

at least to some cultural society such as the Athenaeum or Chautauqua. With hindsight we can speak of a society falling away from organized religions but needing a secular substitute for the sociality or conviviality of the churches. After all, we reason, without telephones, TVs and automobiles, humans needed to come together physically to reproduce social life. (We moderns appear to have evolved beyond this crude physicality and require only the image of the social.) As technology came to mediate and even determine all aspects of the social, those fraternal and cultural organizations collapsed or disappeared.

This abstract view sees only a negativity (social isolation) and its negation in association. It tells us very little about the consciousness and motivation of the fraters and sorors of these organizations, nor of the positive and creative aspects of their thought and activity. Nineteenth century America possessed a great seriousness about raising its consciousness and reforming its institutions. It still dreamed of itself as a new world wherein the poisoned human relations of the past could be cured and transformed. The more radical of the fraternal organizations should really be considered as elements of the historical movement of the social.

The Grange cannot be seen merely as a refuge from isolation; nor can it be understood solely in economic terms, as some historians seem to imply. Certainly these motives existed, but they were enriched and informed by philosophical ideals

which themselves were enacted or "performed" as social act in festivals and rituals. The masonic-inspired rituals of organizations like the Grange or the Knights of Labor can't be dismissed as epiphenomenal frippery or mere fraternal icing on the cake of ideology. These rites were experienced as an integral aspect of practice that included conviviality and cooperation—indeed, as the essence or very meaning of such practice.

Historians writing from a perspective outside the Grange, such as the excellent Solon Justus Buck,[3] have little to say about its ritual. Insider Grange historians, such as Father Kelley[4] have little to say about the ritual's meaning, which for them is a given—and moreover to some extent a secret, and thus not discussable. So, in order to lift even a tiny corner of the veil, I've tracked down a very rare and obscure privately published (but not secret) book by C. Jerome Davis.[5] Davis's sources seem to imply that the real meaning and purpose of Grange ritual was the creation for modern agriculture of a craft Mystery in the classical sense of that term:

3 Solon Justus Buck, *The Grange Movement: A Study of Agricultural Organization and its Political, Economic and Social Manifestations, 1870-1880* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, reprint 1963, c. 1913).

4 Oliver H. Kelley, *Origin and Progress of The Order of the Patrons of Husbandry in the United States: A History from 1866 to 1873* (Philadelphia: J. A. Wagenseller, 1875).

5 C. Jerome Davis, High Priest of Demeter: Notes uotes on the Origin of the itual and arly Years of the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry (No place of publication, 1974). Many thanks to New York State range Historian Stephen C. Coye for a photocopy of this gem.

an "open cult," so to speak, or symbolic discourse orchestrated toward transformation of life through transformation of consciousness.

It's not my intention to attempt a full description and history of the Grange degrees and their symbolism. In any case, much of this material remains secret, and I have no access to it. In order to set the scene for the Eleusinian connection, however, I'll begin with Solon Buck's brief summation of the "mystic" aspects of the Grange—in which, by the way, he takes very little interest.[6]

When the Grange was founded on December 4, 1867, Bro. McDowell was not present. He arrived in Washington on the eighth of January, 1868, and immediately suggested changes that resulted in a complete reorganization of the upper framework of the order.

> The arrangement then adopted, which has remained substantially in force ever since, embraced seven degrees, four to be conferred by the subordinate grange, one by the state grange, and the two highest by the National Grange. The four subordinate degrees for men were entitled

6 Most historians seem rather embarrassed by "secret societies" and unwilling to discuss them seriously lest they themselves be seen as conspiracy-cranks rather than real scholars. I've scanned many histories of, say, the intellectual origins of the American evolution or Constitution that made no mention of Freemasonry! One needn't be a mystic to discuss the history of mysteries, but this subtle point seems to elude academics.

Laborer, Cultivator, Harvester, and Husbandman; and the corresponding degrees for women were Maid, Shepherdess, Gleaner, and Matron. The state grange was to confer the fifth degree, Pomona (Hope), on masters and past-masters of subordinate granges, and their wives if Matrons. The National Grange would confer the sixth degree, Flora (Charity), on masters and past-masters of state granges and their wives who had taken the fifth degree. Members of the sixth degree would constitute the National Council and after serving one year therein might take the seventh degree and become members of the Senate, which body had control of the secret work of the order. This degree, Demeter or Ceres (Faith), embraced a number of new features introduced by McDowell and was put forward as "a continuation of an ancient Association once so flourishing in the East." McDowell accepted the position of supreme head of this degree with the title of High Priest. Although there was considerable agitation for the abolition of the higher degrees among the rank and file of the Grangers when the organization was at the height of its prosperity in the seventies, all that was accomplished was a series of changes which rendered these degrees accessible

> to all Patrons in regular order; while the control of the order was kept in the hands of representative delegate bodies.[7]

The "ancient Eastern flourishing Association" was, of course, the Eleusinian Mysteries. McDowell electrified the DC conclave with the revelation that he himself had been initiated in Paris in 1861 into the Mysteries by the last High Priest of Demeter, the Duc D'Ascoli of Naples. Contrary to received opinion, the Mysteries had not been stamped out by the Church in the 4th century AD but had survived secretly in Magna Graecia (southern Italy, originally colonized by Greeks) throughout the centuries. McDowell was to be the next High Priest of Demeter.

It's impossible to sort out a precise chronology from Notes & Quotes, but it's clear that McDowell had first visited Europe in 1858 looking for esoteric experiences relevant to his passion and profession of pomology. At some point he meets the mysterious Duke (and Duchess) and is persuaded to undergo initiation. He receives certain symbolic regalia, described in the following letter:[8]

> To the Officers of National Grange
> Dear Brothers:

7 Davis, op. cit.

8 This letter, dated April 8, 1868, from Wayne, NY, McDowell's home town, was written by Father Kelley. The last page or pages and signature are missing. Spelling errors and punctuation in original.

I reached here yesterday noon & became the guest of Brother McDowell our Worthy Priest of Demeter. I need not assure you I found a cordial welcome—that you already anticipated. As instructed by you I made him familiar with the entire work we have accomplished since he confered upon us the seventh degree—and our labors have met his most hearty approbation while he expresses himself even more sanguine than ourselves of the success of the order. It is his intention, now that the work is completed, to take immediate steps to organize Subordinate Granges in several towns in this vicinity, having the proper material already selected for that purpose.

I have already had the pleasure and satisfaction of examining the papers and paraphanilia which he received from the Duke of Ascoli at the time he had the Degree of Demeter confered upon him & am perfectly satisfied with the authenticity of the same. The portraits of the Duke & Duchess are both before me also the Priests cap with which the Duke decorated Brother McDowell at the time he was made a Priest. This cap is well worthy a description & is the work of a Nun. It is composed of various colored silk & pure gold thread, the later, predominating. The designs upon

> it are leaves of various hireogliphics & to every design even the minutest there is an appropriate explanation. It is lined inside with a pea green silk very finely quilted & its weight is about two pounds. You can form some idea of the workmanship when I assure you it required two years steady labor of a nun to make it. There is no tinsel or bead work about it—it is all genuine needlework. While the purity of the gold shows for itself being now over three hundred years old & as bright and brilliant as when made.
>
> I have had this cap on my head & while describing it have it on the table before me. Could it but speak & tell of the honored heads that it has decorated & which now have crumbled to dust, could it exemplify to us the mysteries where it has been present what interesting mementos we should possess.

Kelley then describes McDowell's "Surplice" (black silk with gold trim) and hierophantic vest of white satin embroidered "with designs appropriate to agriculture" (dove, pruning hook, sickle).

> When we were first told about the Duke's regalia I must confess that I had some misgivings, but seeing is believing in this case. Besides the Duke has his biography

in print, & on page 195 New American Encyclopedia you will find a notice of the town of Ascoli an ancient city in Italy, from whence the Duke was made Grand Chamberlain to the King of Naples. However [in]credulous others may be in regarding this degree of Demeter, just rest easy and do not trouble yourselves about showing proof—the whole history is at hand & it is ours & we have the bonafide thing. Your Scottish & Memphis rites & Solomon's Temple are completely eclipsed. We can just bust the wind out of anything in the way of antiquity. It will be the height of my ambition to receive at some future day the position & the regalia & occupy the chair of the Priest of Demeter, the very highest position in our order but as it is a life office & must descend in regular rotation I shall probably be binding grain in the harvest field above long before it will come my turn.

However it is in good hands as it now is and there is no one connected with the Order to whom we can all look with greater pride & respect than to Bro. McDowell. It was our salvation that he came to Washington at the time he did & he is worthy of all honor for the interest he has taken in the Order. When he shall appear in the seventh degree during the session when it will be confered—we

can all bow to him in deep reverence & do so with heartfelt pleasure.

All masonic-style organizations require a legend or founding myth, such as the Masons' myth of the Temple of Jerusalem, the Rosicrucian story of Christian Rosenkreutz's tomb, and the Shriners' links to the Bektashi Sufi Order of Turkey. Ancient Greece, Rome and Egypt, India (and the American "Indians"), Chaldea, Islamdom, the Druids and many other exotic sources were invoked. Scholars always assume these myths are bogus, but they may sometimes judge too hastily. For example, I believe the Bektashi-Shriner connection may be real (for reasons too twisted to get into here). As for the Grange legend, I reserve judgment but also see no reason to debunk it. However, even without a genuine "apostolic succession" from remote Antiquity, the legend remains very suggestive. Naples since the Renaissance seethed with alchemy, hermeticism, and secret societies; pagan and obsessed with magic, Evil Eyes, phallic cults (think of the murals at Pompei), ancient Naples never died. Eighteenth century Egyptian Freemasonry had origins in southern Italy (Cagliostro), once a hotbed of Isis worship. The Eleusinian Mysteries had already been introduced into Masonry in the 18th century when Antoine Court de Gébelin, French occultist and author of *Le Mond primitif*,

performed his own version of the rites at Voltaire's initiation as a Mason.[9]

In another unsigned paper probably by Father Kelley, we find further clues:

> The Temple of Solomon was dedicated in the year 1004 before Christ—800 years before that time the Mysteries of Ceres were celebrated, and in 1356 BC they were introduced into Greece by Emolpos—where they became the most celebrated of all the religious ceremonies. History tells us that for 1,800 years these Mysteries of Ceres were maintained and the Ceremonies were of the most costly and magnificent in the known world. Both sexes were admitted and of all ages & so popular did they become that it was considered a crime to neglect them. So great was the influence of the prominent officials, that the Emperor Valentinian attempted to suppress them, but he met with strong opposition, they were finally combatted by Theodosius in the year 370 AD and the public displays discontinued. After that they were maintained privately & by prominent supporters introduced into Italy. There the Mysteries of Vesta were the most popular and after became mingled with the forms in the Church of Rome. Somewhat modified

9 See James Stevens Curl, *The Art & Architecture of Freemasonry* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2002).

> the Mysteries of Ceres here met with favor & handed down from generation to generation after a while became almost a secret political organization, which it is claimed had much to do in curtailing the temporal power of the Pope of Rome. Its principles were strongly Republican and its ceremonies of the very highest order.

So, the mysterious Duke appears to have been an anti-papalist and man of "strong Republican principles," perhaps a radical aristocrat, like Prince Kropotkin or Lord Fitzgerald of Ireland. If so, might he have had connections with the Italian Masonic-inspired secret society of the Carbonari? The "Charcoal-Burners" were real revolutionaries, admired even by the young Marx. In any case, most Italian Masons are anti-Pope, and most Popes are anti-Mason. (The last Pope to die at the hands of a rogue Masonic order—"Propaganda Lodge II"—was John Paul I, at least according to a rather persuasive conspiracy theory.[10]) The Church automatically excommunicates any Catholic who joins the Masons. The Carbonari went farther "left" and embraced anti-monarchism as well.

These suppositions about the Duke may or may not be borne out by subsequent research. In any case, when the Grange adopted the Eleusinian Mysteries as their Seventh Degree legend, they were

10 David Yallop, *In God's Name: An Investigation into the Murder of Pope John Paul I* (London: J. Cape, 1984).

able to consult recent scholarship and archaeology in order to flesh out their understanding of the mythic material. What exactly were the Eleusinian Mysteries? The short answer is that no one really knows, since the initiatic vow of secrecy was (almost) never broken in Antiquity. We depend on the fulminations of early Church Fathers. But the founding myth on which the secret and very theatrical rites at Eleusis were based has never been kept secret: a strange and poetic version of Persephone's Quest, her rape by Pluto, Demeter's grief, the final resurrection, the magical link with the fertility of grain, the intimations of immorality, and so on. Consult any good source on classical mythology for details.

But the nocturnal underground ritual theater at Eleusis remains shrouded in obscurity. What "miracle" did the Priests of Demeter produce so infallibly year after year for their audiences of initiates? Philosophers found it as convincing as the simplest pilgrims. Alcibiades dared to mock the Mysteries and was overthrown and exiled. The show went on for several millennia. According to the Grange, it never ceased. Perhaps the Seventh Degree Grange ritual would shed light on the elusive mystery of Eleusis. But the Seventh Degree is secret, and I respect secrets.

One of the most radical and controversial interpretations of Eleusis was proposed by the Classicist, Carl Ruck. Following the speculations of poet Robert Graves, and in collaboration with ethnomycologist Gordon Wasson, he proposed

that the key to the Mysteries was a psychedelic mushroom. Before descending into the chamber of the ritual, each initiate was given a cup of the kykion, a drink composed of water, barley and mint. If I understand him correctly, Ruck suggests that the barley was deliberately infected with ergot fungus, the organic source of LSD. The famous discoverer of LSD, Albert Hoffman, collaborated with Wasson and Ruck and suggested a simple way to remove toxins from ergot with water, a method well within the possible bounds of ancient technology.[11] If the audience at Eleusis was undergoing a directed "entheogenic experience," this would explain the awe, deep emotion, and the sense of having witnessed a miracle that informs the ancient texts despite their pious "silence" about details. (This notion was first proposed, I think, by the magician Aleister Crowley in 1913 when he tried to revive the Eleusinian Mysteries in London and dosed his audience with mescaline! Ruck, Wasson, and Hoffman, however, offer a genuine hypothesis in keeping with archaeology and ethnobotany, whereas Crowley relied on sheer imagination.)

Pardon this digression, which has nothing to do with the Grangers—temperance advocates to a man and woman. (Wine, yes. Distilled spirits, no.) The Seven Founders (and Miss Carrie Hall) found in the myth only spiritual intoxication. For

11 Gordon Wasson, Stella Kramrisch, Carl Ruck, and Jonathan Ott, *Persephone's Quest: Entheogens and the Origins of Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

them, the most important aspects of the Eleusinian complex revolved around a) its openness to all, originally all free Greeks, and by extension all humanity; b) its literal "re-enchantment of the landscape" of agriculture, its divinizing of the farmer's labor; and c) its feminism, manifested both as "goddess worship" and as full and equal gender participation in rites and offices.

In Masonry, women are usually excluded from initiation and membership. The Utopian Socialist, Charles Fourier, among other radical 19th century hermeticists, proposed an "Androgynous Masonry" that would erase this outdated male chauvinism and provide a new source of magical potency for masonic rites. The official lodges never accepted androgyny, but it proved to be an important key to success for the Grange. Kelley and McDowell, if not intoxicated, certainly seem to have been elated and "empowered" (in New Age jargon) by their contact with the Mysteries. Kelley writes:

> History shows that in the Temple of Ceres at Eleusis the most magnificent scenic displays & transformation scenes were produced all having the object & aim of impressing the most beautiful lessons upon the minds of the initiates—visions of the creation of the Universe—to witness the introduction of agriculture of sound laws & gentle manners which followed the steps of the Goddess Ceres to recognize the immortality of the

Soul as typified by the concealment of corn planted in the Earth, by its revival in the green blades.

The initiates were taken to the Vestibule of the Temple & there arrayed in the Sacred fawn skin. From this it was intended to make our regalia, and the first regular regalia ever made from the National Grange was this one I now wear. But when we took into consideration the terrible slaughter of Fawns that would be necessary to furnish the entire order we decided upon the kind after adopted at the suggestion of Brothers McDowell & Thompson. The nankeen was the nearest to resemble the dressed fawn skin.

When we consider that the mysteries was the oldest organization founded upon the cultivation of the soil & in which woman was admitted upon an equality with man & no other secret agricultural society having existed since until the Grange was introduced, we can claim to be fortunate in making the connecting link by Bro. McDowell.[12]

IV.

Some curious weeds I might mention
That lend to the landscape no charm;

12 Davis, op. cit.

To one let me call your attention,
Keep politics off your farm.
Tho' weeds will with politics mingle,
Potatoes with politics fail;
Devote your whole mind to your business,
And make ev'ry effort avail.

(Chorus)
Keep politics off your farm (your farm),
Your crops they will certainly harm (will harm);
If you would successfully labor,
Keep politics off your farm.

—C.E. Pollock,
"Keep Politics Off Your Farm"
Grange Melodies

How Radical was the Grange?

As an organization, the Patrons of Husbandry formally eschewed politics and religion—but the political implications of its tenets were obvious, and most Grangers followed them to logical conclusions. Populism in general cannot be called "revolutionary," since it proposed neither overthrow of the state nor the abolition of capital. Perhaps Populism should be compared with the Social Democratic movement of Europe rather than with communism or anarchism.

Nevertheless, Populism's enemies certainly saw it as socialistic, and in newspaper cartoons of the period, the Grangers are depicted running wild

in tandem with anarchists and other undesirables. I don't know if any anarchists supported or joined the Grange, but I've also never seen any anarchist denunciations of the Grange. Some anarchists and libertarian socialists have sometimes practiced some sort of "united front" politics with other radical forces. The Populist moment seems to have been so uplifting, inspired and urgent, so optimistic (even naïve) in its anticipation of universal reform that it no doubt attracted and absorbed energies from both left and right. Some especially ungenerous historians go so far as to interpret Populism as a "prelude to fascism"; in my view, the racist and authoritarian aspects of later Populism constitute a contamination rather than an essence.

In effect, the most anarchistic aspect of the Grange manifests precisely in its avoidance of legislative politics and organized religion. In this it seems to harmonize somewhat with the Transcendentalist/Individualist wing of American anarchism—Thoreau, Emerson, Josiah Warren, and S. Pearl Andrews. And the very idea of an agricultural cult is quite reminiscent of Fourier and his disciples at Brook Farm. (The word "Association" appears rather often in Grange literature; it was a Fourierist keyterm, introduced to American radicals by A. Brisbane and the "utopian socialists," a generation before the Grange appeared.)The Grange can certainly be seen as part of the great 19th/20th century movement of cooperation, whereby the real producers of value (eg, farmers and workers) can eliminate

parasitic capitalists and middlemen by organizing voluntarily, as producers and/or consumers, and pooling their energies and resources. After a few rocky starts and even disasters, the Grange settled on the English Rochedale System and experienced real success with many cooperative ventures in grain merchandizing, purchase of farm equipment, etc.[13] Of course, like all cooperative ventures in competition with capitalism, such voluntary associations can always be undersold and ruined by combinations or even simply by rival companies with more capital. Given the chance, coops nearly always succeed—at least at first. In the "war to the knife" of the free market, however, coops always seem to lose in the end.

Given its premises, the Grange logically supported state control and regulation of economic activity—ie, a kind of socialism. On one level, Populism can be seen as the culmination of the 19th century's struggle between the people and the corporations. Although most state legislatures are supposed to have the power to grant, refuse, or revoke corporate charters, in practice, the corporations have literally bought and paid for very dubious legislation, such as the amazing legal miracle—one might even call it "Mystery"—of the "fictitious person," the corporate body with more rights but far fewer liabilities than mere

13 Founded 1844 in ochedale by nglish weavers under the influence of obert Owen. It really worked, unlike other Owenite ideas; its principles still form the basis for many contemporary Cooperative systems.

flesh-and-blood humans. This process was well underway by the "gilded" post-Civil War era of trusts, monopolies, the railroad, ravenous bankers and financiers, and the railroads—the powers arrayed above the heads of American farmers and workers: the "Octopus."

In the end, as we know, the corporations won. But the Grange at least gave them a run for their money. The story of the "Granger Laws," the many attempts to regulate the railroads, and the ultimate defeat—if all else failed, the railroads simply declared bankruptcy and vanished—is too complex to detain us here. I only want to emphasize the style of the Grange, which might justly be called agrarian-social militancy.

Little by little, Grangers were drawn into the ferment of Populist politics:

> So many political meetings were held on Independence Day in 1873 that it was referred to as the "Farmers' Fourth of July." This had always been the greatest day of the farmer's year, for it meant the opportunity for social and intellectual enjoyment in the picnics and celebrations which brought neighbors together in hilarious good-fellowship. In 1873, however, the gatherings took on unwonted seriousness. The accustomed spread-eagle oratory gave place to impassioned denunciation of corporations and to the solemn reading of a Farmers' Declaration of Independence. "When, in the course of human

events," this document begins in words familiar to every schoolboy orator, "it becomes necessary for a class of the people, suffering from long continued systems of oppression and abuse, to rouse themselves from an apathetic indifference to their own interests, which has become habitual . . . a decent respect for the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to a course so necessary to their own protection." Then comes a statement of "self-evident truths," a catalogue of the sins of the railroads, a denunciation of railroads and Congress for not having redressed these wrongs, and finally the conclusion:

"We, therefore, the producers of the state in our several counties assembled . . . do so solemnly declare that we will use all lawful and peaceable means to free ourselves from the tyranny of monopoly, and that we will never cease our efforts for reform until every department of our Government gives token that the reign of licentious extravagance is over, and something of the purity, honesty, and frugality with which our fathers inaugurated it, has taken its place."

That to this end we hereby declare ourselves absolutely free and independent of all past political connections, and that we will give our suffrage only to such men for office, as

> we have good reason to believe will use their best endeavors to the promotion of these ends; and for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.[14]

If only the Grange had adhered strictly to its original non-political forms of organization—economic self-management, voluntary association, etc.—it might have been spared the fate of collapsing along with the Populist political movement. Every radical "third force" in American history that falls for the lure of party politics ends the same way. (The Libertarian Party and the Green Party seem to be the latest of these paper tigers.) Genuinely radical possibilities are buried under the rubric (and rubble) of "practical goals" (ie, tepid reforms), economic organization abandoned for third-party futilitarianism, cooptation, and eventual suppression. The featherbrained Democrat, W.J. Bryan, promised the Populists that their cause would never be "crucified on a cross of gold"; instead it was crucified on a cross of silver. The anti-racist, feminist, and socialist promise of Populism collapsed, and the movement devolved toward the eventual demagogy of a Huey Long. Leftwing remnants moved on into other forms of organization and resistance—also eventually crushed by World War I

14 Solon Justus Buck, *The Agrarian Crusade* (Washington, DC: Ross and Perry, 2003 [1913]).

and the "Red Scare" of 1919-20.

For the Grange a collapse had begun as early as 1874 (the year after the "Declaration" and the entry into politics), and by 1880 the number of active Granges had shrunk from about 20,000 to 4,000. Cooperative failures and electoral failures can be blamed even more than organizational problems, such as too-rapid expansion and infighting. When the Grange began to achieve results with the Rochedale System, the collapse was contained and the order survived. But its heady days of rebelliousness receded into a lost past.

The independent American farm—the old Jeffersonian ideal—began to appear doomed. The Great Depression marked a new low point for the family farm. Just like any other industry, agribusiness depends for its triumph on the elimination of competition. The number of independent farmers seems now to have fallen to a point where political and economic power becomes impossible. The "farm lobby" represents the multinational agribusiness corporations, not Mom and Pop. Where I live in the Hudson Valley, I hear a lot of pro-farming rhetoric from politicians. But in the real estate sections of newspapers and magazines, I see apple farms—"ideal for development"—vanishing every day. How is one to conceive of a resistance against such conditions?

In 1874, its year of greatest power, the Grange held a convention in St. Louis and proclaimed a Declaration of Purposes. Among other planks, this document endorsed the motto: "In es-

sentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." By odd coincidence, this also happens to have been the motto of Stephen Pearl Andrews.

S. Pearl Andrews (1812-1886) embraced every Reform cause of the 19th century: abolitionism, free love, women's rights, phrenology, individualist anarchism, spiritualism, you name it. With Josiah Warren he founded the marvelous and amorous commune Modern Times in Brentwood, Long Island, and he edited a newspaper for Victoria Woodhull (*Mrs. Satan*), spirit-medium, stock broker, Free Lover, and the first woman to run for President of the United States. Andrews believed himself a synthesis of Fourier, Swedenborg and Bakunin. He created his own science, "Universology," his own political system, "Pantarchy," his own church, and even his own language.[15] Andrew's version of the motto was: "In things proven, Unity; in whatsoever can be doubted, Free Diversity; in things not touching upon others' rights, Liberty; in all things, Charity." Perhaps an anarchist strain can, after all, be detected in the radical heritage of the Grange.

Some while ago, I accompanied my friend, local beekeeper Chris Harp, who had been invited to address a nearby Grange. The hall was decrepit but beautiful; the Grangers (including a Ceres and a Pomona) were ancient and none-too-prosperous looking but warmly hospitable; babies and toddlers symbolized future hopes; hot dogs,

15 See my biography of Stephen Pearl Andrews in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Vol. 250, 2nd series, Gale Group, 2002).

cake and coffee were served. When Chris began describing the plight of the honeybee in today's polluted, overdeveloped countryside, the senior Grangers all nodded knowingly. One toothless old character thumped the arm of his chair and said, "That's capitalism!"

V.

The gas-lighted hall with its pleasures,
He dreams of, and longs to be there;
And heedless of trouble and labor,
He hitherward seems to repair.
"How stupid a life in the country,
The city has many a charm!"
My boy, from your reverie waken,
'Tis better to stay on the farm.

—J.H. Tenney,
"Tis Better to Stay on the Farm"
Grange Melodies

None of the issues that once agitated the Grange have ever been resolved—not one. They've simply changed their outward forms. Some of them were mitigated, or at least held in check, during the 20th century. For example, although the US preached free-market capitalism, it still practiced protectionism, because it had to. The inherent contradictions of American agriculture (like many other problems) were suppressed by Keynsian government spending, the New Deal, and post-WWII prosperity.

With the triumph of global capital and

neoliberalism at the end of the 20th century, however, the old problems and contradictions were suddenly once again revealed and even exacerbated. To speak of the agricultural crisis is to speak of an ecological/environmental crisis that threatens all life, not merely vegetables or cows. To mention only one new form of an old problem: the Grange campaigned against unfair patent laws that gave patent-holding monopolies the oppressive "right" to set unfair prices on farm machinery and other socially necessary resources. Nowadays the issue reappears as "intellectual property," as agribusiness megacorporations like Monsanto buy up the "rights" to natural plant-DNA, eradicate biodiversity, fix prices and standards, patent genetically modified (GM) crops and "terminator seeds," fertilizers, pesticides, and so on. The old-time Grangers had already diagnosed the essential principle: knowledge is a social good, not a commodity. But their struggle failed, and we've inherited all the original muck plus a century of vile accretions.

The struggles over privatization of land, water, and air; the Green movement and the ecological struggle; the battle against genetic prometheanism and "frankenfoods"; the anti-globalization movement and its call for local autonomy and economic justice; the uprisings against neoliberalism (the new mask of the old-time Mammon-capitalism) spreading throughout Latin America; the growing movement to disempower the bloated multinationals—these are

all variations on the old causes of the Grange.

The World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other "global" treaties and institutions have to some extent superseded the old nation-states as the primary powers behind the new oppression. The US empire acts as a hegemon for this illusory "free market," dispensing corporate welfare and waging war on behalf of Big Oil and at times, Big Agriculture, leading the onslaught against the global environment, and dumbing down the world with its viral consumerist disinfotainment industry. In the great neoliberal, neocon mall that constitutes late—or too-late—capitalism, the US has appointed itself both CEO and security cop. It may be a New World Order, but it's the same old Octopus of trusts, monopolies, and state power.

All the planks in the old Grange platform could simply be repainted and spruced up with trendy vocabulary to serve as groundwork for a new agrarian radical movement. For instance, to speak locally, the utter devastation facing our independent apple farmers owes much of its genesis to "free" global economics. Not only is the US apple lobby controlled by northwest Pacific area agribusiness, but even the megafarms there are being ruined by cheap Chinese apple juice concentrate dumped on the world market in vast quantities. Any 19th century Granger could have analyzed this situation in two minutes.

On a very small scale some positive actions are being taken to create a real alternative to the

utter demise of agriculture. In the organic farm movement—already in danger from agribusiness, which has scented a "market niche"—CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farms are sprouting up all over our region. CSAs connect people, who sign up as members, with the source of their food, since members pay the farmer up front for a season of produce. Even a few genuine food co-ops do a lively trade in local and organic produce. "Seed Savers" and other movements have appeared to protect biodiversity and popularize tasty old strains and plant varieties. Herbalism offers a source of income for gardeners and wildcrafters. Permaculture and other sustainability systems are gradually gaining recognition. Guerilla gardens are springing up even in urban wastelands. But the question remains: does all this amount to real resistance?

In Europe, where there are heroes and martyrs like René Riessel and José Bové serving hard time for attacks on McDonald's and GM crops, yes. Europe even has a Slow Food movement. And yes, struggle thrives also in India, where mass movements are organized around some of these issues to provide resistance against the so-called Green Revolution, GM seeds, dams, forest destruction, and other measures that are destroying traditional agriculture, and with it, the peasantry itself.

In America the answer is not so clear. In America the activists are mostly Earth First!-type militants and wilderness defenders. By contrast,

the new forms of agriculture sometimes seem like hobbies for well-meaning (and well-off) do-gooders rather than radical praxis for agrarian rebels. Where is the modern Grange that could provide both an ancient tradition of militancy along with a real appreciation of the contemporary Green position in today's terms and vocabulary? Where is the movement to embrace all independent farmers and gardeners as part of larger movement for a "sacred Earth" and economic justice? Or is this just an idle dream?

VI.

Scholars of prehistory used to speak of the "neolithic agricultural revolution." Nowadays the term "revolution" is not much used in reference to the introduction of agriculture, since in fact, the appearance of agriculture stretched over a few thousand years. Moreover, it wasn't really agriculture, but horticulture—gardening.

Historians also used to assume that agriculture represented "progress" in relation to the million-year human economy of hunting and gathering. In the 1960s, however, anthropologist Marshall Sahlins turned this notion upside down when he demonstrated that hunter/gatherers were the "original leisure society," "working" on average three or four hours a day and enjoying an average of 200-odd different food items.[16] Primitive

16 Marshall Sahlins, Stone Age Economics (Chicago: Aldin Atherton, 1972).

agriculturalists, by contrast, worked twelve to fourteen hours a day and got by on twenty or so foodstuffs. Hunters spent vast amounts of time napping, dancing, making love, or getting high. "Advanced civilization" doesn't appear magically with the new agricultural technology. Gardeners are self-sufficient no more; yet Sumer and Egypt were still 10,000 years away.

In this context, the reason for agriculture suddenly becomes very mysterious. Why give up the good life of hunting for the brow-beating labor of farming? The "neolithic revolution" now looks more like a fall from grace—from Golden Age or Eden into the curse of Cain, work, and war. Sahlins himself never said this, but many of his readers believed it, since it chimed nicely with 60s radicalism and "zero-work" rebelliousness.

In subsequent years, however, I came to reconsider this critique of agriculture in light of the work and writings of botano-historians like N.Vavilov and Carl O. Sauer and archeologists like Marija Gimbutas. Sahlins and his school still seem relevant, but a more nuanced picture emerges.[17]

Nomadic hunter/gatherers usually move in an annual round within a given territory, returning to the same camps at the same seasons. Men

17 On N.I. Vavilov, see references in the bibliography in Hakim Bey and Abel Zug (eds.), *Orgies of the Hemp Eaters: Cuisine, Slang, Literature & Ritual of the Cannabis Culture* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004); and Frank Browning, *Apples* (New York: North Point, 1998) for Vavilov's work on the origin of apples and his (fatal) disagreement with Lysenko and Stalin.

hunted and women gathered, more or less. Seeds of favored plants would fall around the campsite into disturbed soil enriched by garbage and feces. Next year when the band returned, they found their favorite plants waiting for them, as if the plants had followed them and loved them as much as they loved the plants. The first gardens appeared in an intense erotic aura, realized in the universal figure of the Earth Goddess and her many avatars. As gardening thus took on more and more meaning, women came to play a greater role in the tribe.

The first gardenstuffs, or "cultivars," were all luxuries, not necessities. In the old world, in South Central Asia, the first cultivars seem to have been barley (for beer), grapes (for wine), and hemp (for intoxication). In the New World, the earliest cultivar was tobacco. Gardening may involve hard work, but its origin was in love, its end in sheer pleasure. No wonder it proved popular and began to spread, most likely through "Women's Mysteries" and shamanic secret societies.

Neolithic gardening/hunting humans organized themselves into small villages of "free peasants." They preserved and maintained the old rights and customs of the hunters: rough egalitarianism (no "classes"), no leaders (only elders and specialists), a "gift economy" and a shamanistic spirituality, with a new emphasis on earth goddess mysteries and the calendrical cycle. Eventually they managed to produce a surplus, largely of stored grain, which became their communal wealth. The village temple served as a center for redistribution. Everyone

received a fair share, more or less. In Mesopotamia, the villagers even began to experiment with small-scale irrigation.

Then around the Fourth Millennium, something suddenly went drastically wrong with this harmonious polity. Was it the discovery of metallurgy and new weapon technology? A revolt of the warriors or of bad shamans against ancient egalitarian folkways? Or even a revolt of men against women? In any case, it happened with the swiftness of revolution (or coup d'état): the sudden emergence of the state.

The essential act of the state was to seize control of the surplus on behalf of an elite who, from then on, would concern themselves not with work but war: the new form of war, source of booty and slaves. The rest of the tribe was reduced to the status of peons. The earliest dynasties of Sumer and Egypt indulged in paroxysms of cruelty, hecatombs of human sacrifice, self-glorifying architecture, and a new temple ideology of war gods and divine kings. Land was no longer a "commons" but was divided into property, most of it belonging to the temple and palace. The disappearance of the commons proved to be a long drawn out process. Here and there some scraps of socially owned land may still survive even today, as yet overlooked by the forces of privatization. But the problem began in Sumer in about 4000 BCE. By the time of Gilgamesh (an actual historical figure), few humans farmed for themselves and their community; most farmed for the Man, the ruler and owner. Naturally,

resentment and rebellion ensued, and memory traces of the turmoil linger in the old myths. Civilization—and its discontents—arose from the violent appropriation of the agricultural surplus.

From this "fall" many other miseries arose—at least for the majority of humans. The usurping minority recreated for itself all the old leisure and freedom of the hunters—in fact, they spent their leisure hunting and monopolized hunting, the "sport of kings," and punished all poachers. Stealing the king's game must be one of the very oldest forms of radical resistance. Many others soon followed.

Charles Fourier believed that civilization was based on agriculture, and that civilization was a tragic mistake. He was, of course, defining agriculture as alienated labor. Humans should have progressed directly from horticulture to utopia (or "harmony" as Fourier called it); and the husbandry of the utopian future would consist of complex horticulture practiced by voluntary associations of community-dwelling "gastrosophists" (gourmet philosophers) devoted to pleasure and luxury for all, not for a tyrannical few. Fourier's odd and poetic notions found many enthusiastic followers in America, and he was also considered a seminal figure in the Cooperative movement.

Agrarian radicalism might be seen as a deeply conservative concept based on shared culture memories (perhaps unconscious) of the Neolithic polity of free peasant horticulturalists. The image of the neolithic certainly survives in

folktales and myths, from Hesiod's Hyperborea to the "Big Rock Candy Mountain." The free peasant village form seems to be so natural that it reappears spontaneously wherever and whenever it can. William Morris and other socialists admired the European Middle Ages, not for their feudalism but for their craft guilds and peasant communes. The ancient Russian Mir, or free peasant commune, inspired many radical thinkers—Kropotkin, Herzen, the Narodniks, the Mystical Anarchists, Gustav Landauer, and even Marx (otherwise a fierce Russophobe).

In the 19th century during the Imperialist era, radical agrarian ideas spread to colonies where the economy still depended on peasant labor. These ideas invariably resonated with ancient folkways and local myths of resistance and freedom. In Mexico, for example, agrarian radicalism melded with indigenous and mestizo culture in interesting ways. The anarchist Magon Brothers (who ironically operated as the "Mexican Liberal Party") popularized the slogan Tierra y Libertad—almost a three-word definition of agrarian radicalism. Zapata took the message to the people, and in 1994, the whole tradition, now with a strong Mayan input, re-emerged in Chiapas as the EZLN. The Zapatistas were the honorable first to declare war on global capital and neoliberalism—either desperate fools or prophetic heroes.

Looking at the "long duration" of the history of agriculture, the Grange seems to fit with many of the themes outlined above, and

even to offer a "proof-text" for some of them. The impulse to rediscover a "sacred" dimension in farming, with the inevitable reappearance of the Goddess, strikes a chord of recognition that vibrates back to the neolithic. Nineteenth century American farmers were not peasants in any strict sense of the term and cherished no specific image of a "commons," no specific tradition of non-authoritarian self-management such as the Mir. But the rank injustice they experienced plus the exuberance of their imagination conspired to awaken in them archaic forms of mythic desire—for autonomy, conviviality, mystery and pleasure—for the return of the Goddess.

VII.

1. You may talk of all the nobles of the earth,
Of the kings who hold the nations in their thrall,
Yet in this we all agree, if we only look and see,
That the farmer is the man that feeds us all.
2. There's the President . . .
3. There are Governors and legislators . . .
4. There are speculators . . .
5. Then the preacher. . . lawyer. . . doctor. . .
Tailor . . . smith . . .
6. Now the Patrons true are coming to the fight.
7. From the rising to the setting of the sun,
Great monopolies are surely doomed to fall;
Then onward in the fight, and we'll battle for the right,

While the farmer is the man that feeds us all.
—Knowles Shaw,
"The Farmer Feeds Us All"
Grange Melodies

The title of this essay has a double meaning. First, I wanted to try to describe the appeal of the Grange, its colorful history of radicalism and mysticism. I find that very few educated Americans have even heard of the Grange, much less its significance. I hope I've managed at least a brief sketch of the inspiring importance of this history for contemporary Green theory and praxis.

However, since the Grange still exists, I also intended an appeal to the Grange. With all due humility and deference as an outsider, I'd like to point out that some movement very much like the Grange will undoubtedly emerge to offer some coherence to the struggles of the new agriculture, in all its myriad forms, against the antibiosis and oppression of the megacorporations. True, the appropriation of the surplus has reached the point where five or six behemoths own and control 90 percent of the world's food. But the 6,000-year resistance is still not ended and cannot end until the last grain of wheat is dead.

If a Grange-like movement is thus demanded by history (assuming we haven't already reached the end of history, as the corporate globalists proclaim), then perhaps it could be. . . the Grange.

Two different worlds would have to unite to create a new and militant Grange—but those

two worlds have a great deal in common. The same forces are crushing peasants in India and the last few family farms in America. The Zapatistas and the urban gardeners of New York City's Lower East Side are ultimately on the same side as the independent farmers—the side of life, of biophilia, of love of life.

Well, it's a nice thought. If Populism is going to be reborn in America, then the question of politics arises, though this is not a political essay. Instead it merely wants to establish the general principle that the radical Green agenda has deep roots; it has ancestors, precursors, patron saints. It has tradition—"that which is handed down." Old principles can be creatively adapted and applied to new situations.

Terms like "Gaia Hypothesis" and "biophilia" are not sentimental or poetic devices, nor political slogans. They might perhaps be called scientific mysteries. (In fact, both terms were coined by scientists.) That the earth is alive and in love with life may be true but unprovable, like certain axioms in mathematics. Precisely here mysteries can become Mysteries. Hermeticism is perhaps a science of the unprovable, and it is based on the axiom that the earth is not only alive but in some sense sacred. Long before modern neo-pagans began worshipping Nature, the cult of the goddess was already reborn, as it always will be—but this time in the hearts of hardworking Temperance/ Protestant American farm families. A strange moment in radical history, to be sure—this birth of Green Spirituality.

Interview with High Times

Joel: Why don't we start off by asking you where you are from and how you got to the place you are at now.
PLW: Well the standard information, which is all I give, is that I was a court poet of an unnamed Northern Indian principality and that I was arrested for an anarchist bomb outrage in England and that I live in the New Jersey Pine Barrens in an Airstream trailer. And when I come to New York I stay in a hotel in Chinatown.

I see. So let's just cut to the fat and why don't you tell us a little bit about Temporary Autonomous Zones.
Well, the Temporary Autonomous Zone is an old idea which some people think I originated and I don't think I originated it. I just put a clever name on something that is already going on. And what is already going on is the inevitable tendency of individuals in groups to seek freedom. And not to have to wait for it till some abstract utopian post-revolutionary future. So the question is how do individuals in groups maximize freedom under present day situations, real life, the real world. Not,

what we wish the world was like, not what we are even struggling to change the world into, which is also important as I'll explain, but what can we do here and now.

You have some examples...

I'll get to it, but first let me lay out the groundwork. So actually, when we talk about a Temporary Autonomous Zone, we're talking obviously about groups, no longer about individuals. We're talking about how does a group, a voluntary, presumably non-hierarchical affinity coagulation of people, maximize freedoms for themselves on a real time social level. Once again, not just organizing for political action as a goal that's beyond reality, which is put off into the future, which is turned into an abstraction, or not just groups organized for those kinds of struggles for ideas and for solutions, but, organizing for the maximization of pleasurable activities uncontrolled by oppressive hierarchies. And I put it in that kind of general terminology to indicate that the only oppressive hierarchy that we're dealing with is certainly not the state.

In fact for a great many people the state is not a terribly impingent reality, when you think about how many times the state interferes in your life on a daily basis, to minimize your freedom, yes, it happens, but it doesn't happen very often. You know what I mean? It's not every day that

you're pushed around by the police, it's not every day that you're forced to pay more taxes than you can afford to pay to a corrupt government that's using them for ends that you don't agree with, and so forth and so on.

However, there are points in everybody's life in which oppressive hierarchies do intrude on an almost daily basis, and you could speak about education for young people which is compulsory and therefore couldn't be more of an intrusion.You could speak about work for the supposed grown-up, you're forced to make a living and working itself is organized as an oppressive hierarchy, unless you're very very lucky and very very talented. So most people most of the time—nearly every day—have to put up with the oppressive hierarchy of alienated labor: of work that they're doing which they're not getting a full return on, which is in itself alienating and oppressive for a lot of people.

So these are real oppressive hierarchies, and therefore, to create an Autonomous Zone means to do something really about those really oppressive hierarchies, and not just to announce one's theoretical dislike of those institutions. You see the difference that I'm making here? So, in the wake of the popularity of the book which I simply hadn't planned on, a lot of people have glommed on this term and used it as a label for all sorts of things which it really isn't.

This is inevitable and I really don't give a shit, you know, as long as the virus of the phrase itself is out there in the network, to use computer metaphors, whether people misuse it or not really isn't so important, you know, because the meaning is imbedded in the term—I think that's what's successful about this phrase—*Temporary Autonomous Zone*—is it's like a verbal virus: it says what it means. So for example, people have done commercial imitations of raves and called them Temporary Autonomous Zones where there is in fact still a commodity relation going on and there are people making profits out of it when it's really just like a one-night nightclub, which would be a much more realistic description of it, you know.

People who are already involved in institutions would sometimes like to think of them as Temporary Autonomous Zones because they enjoy them or support them, and that could be true in some cases, not true in others. In any case, the borders of this definition are very fuzzy, needless to say, and more depends on what the people involved actually feel than on what you might call objective parameters.

So a TAZ doesn't necessarily remove itself from money.
Well, no. Because it's a real world situation. Now if you take the Rainbow gatherings which do remove themselves from money, this in a sense is almost

a guarantee of a much greater deal of autonomy, of temporary autonomy for the people who are doing that because they have actually managed to increase their pleasure by getting out from under the money-slash-commodity economy.

Would you call the InterNet a TAZ?
No. Now you see there's where a very distinct misunderstanding has arisen. I'm glad you brought it up. *Time Magazine* (when they did a story on cyberspace and Mondo 2000) misquoted me on this, which I'm actually quite pleased about because if *Time Magazine* understood what I was talking about I would be forced to restructure my entire philosophy, or perhaps, disappear forever in shame.

Or, sit on their board.
Yeah! (laughs) They said that cyber space was an Autonomous Zone and I do not agree. Emphatically I do not agree. Because I think that freedom includes the body. And if the body is in a state of alienation, then freedom is not in any sense complete.

Now, cyberspace is in itself a space with no body. It is in fact an abstract conceptual space. And this can be shown—and I'm not saying anything difficult or theoretical here, I'm talking quite literally—there's no smell there, there's no taste

there, there's no feel there, there's no sex there, or if any of these things exist, they are simply simulacra of those things and not the thing itself, so the only way the InterNet or cyberspace can be in relation to a Temporary Autonomous Zone, is as a tool for achieving freedom, and that is where I think the importance of the Internet could lie, and why it's important at this moment to struggle to protect the freedom of speech and so forth and so on, freedoms of communication that are opened up right now by the net and try to protect that against the FBI and against Clinton and the "Infobahn," a nice German term for the information highway. I like it better 'cause it has that kind of Nazi sound to it. (laughter) And to avoid being road kill on the Infobahn.

So let's be very specific rather than abstract and give a hypothetical example of what I mean. That by communicating through a BBS, a group of people might be able to much more effectively plan a festival, something like a Rainbow gathering, structured on a chance for maximizing potential for the emerging of a real TAZ.

And the reason why the Net might be easier to do this with than telephones or mail is because it's quicker and because you can achieve absolute privacy on it. Now, through this cryptography for example, say you were doing something really extreme and having a festival that involved breaking a lot of laws. You would want to do that

and it would be useful to do that. Another thing that occurs to me about the InterNet, which as far as I know is still in a very infantile stage is that it could be used to set up a genuine economic network, alternative network, which is a very important concept for me. Barter and exchange types of things which are tracked on the InterNet in privileged communications.

> [Note: These ideas have turned out to be quite wrong. The NSA has made CyberSpace a viral panopticon, and commodification rules OK. I can't believe how naïve I was!—2014]

Let's go over to another kind of economy, Marijuana economy, the underground marijuana movement—would you call that a TAZ?

Well a lot of my ideas certainly have very deep application to the world in which your readers are interested.The specific world in which you readers are interested. For one thing it has to do with pleasure, and for another thing it's illegal. So, very logically, a lot of my ideas would come into, would potentially come into play here. For example we know, and there's no use pretending we don't know, that there's a vast underground economy out there which is largely fueled by marijuana money, which is all cash transaction. God knows what percentage of the national economy this is but I'll bet you that it's a large percentage. And once again to descend

to the lowest possible source of information, *Time* and/or *Newsweek* some years ago did an article on pot as an alternative economy and made some extraordinary claims about the percentage of actual cash flow in this country that is involved.

How do you feel about the pot movement in general, where it's going, its direction, what's currently going on?
Well, this is a complex thing to say and I should preface any critiques that I might make by emphasizing that I myself belong to a religion in which Hemp is a sacrament and I'm a lifetime supporter of pro-Marijuana action, and I put it in that sense rather than saying legalization for a very specific reason which I'll get to. So whatever criticism I might have of the Marijuana movement and of the role that *High Times* might have played within that movement, is said in the most possible constructive spirit, the most possible comradely spirit, and I want to make that clear, as Nixon used to say. So having said that I have a lot of problems with what goes on as a Hemp movement in this country right now and...

With the people involved?
No. No, with the overall strategies of the movement and I mean the most central strategies of the movement. Let me be specific: in the years that there has been a marijuana legalization movement,

all the laws in this country have gotten worse and more oppressive. In the time that there has been a marijuana legalization movement, the price of marijuana has gotten impossibly high due to the war on drugs. Is there a direct relation between the war on drugs and the marijuana legalization movement? Probably not a very big one, however, blabbing everything all the time, and making everything open, and to make the statistics and mailing lists available to intelligence agencies and so forth and so on, is just obviously not a good tactic when you are actually dealing with an illegal substance, an illegal procedure. So...

You mean...

I say there's a martyr complex first of all. That there are people who want confrontation with a psychological projection that they think of as authority, in other words who are still relating to an authority in an authoritarian way. Simply by openly defying the authority they're defining themselves as criminals and victims of the state by these kinds of activities.

Do you think they could use a little poetic terrorism?

I think they could use a little sensible clandestinity and a little sense of poetic terrorism, yeah.

Can you explain poetic terrorism before someone, ah...

Yeah, OK. Well, by poetic terrorism I mean largely non-violent action but action that would have psychological impact comparable to the power of a terrorist act except that the act is one of consciousness changing. And how that's carried out sometimes resembles artistic creation, in other words, let's say you have a group of street performers, if you call what you are doing a street performance you've already created an audience and you've alienated yourself from any possibility of impinging directly on their daily everyday lives. But if you stage a hoax, make an incident, create a situation, it might be possible to draw people in as participants and to maximize their freedom. So it's a strange kind of mixture of clandestine action and lying, which is what art is all about, with a penetrating psychological technique of enhancing freedom, both on the individual and social level. That's what I mean by poetic terrorism. So the marijuana movement has been counterproductive, in terms of its own goals which are legislative goals; and another point I'd like to make is that *High Times* was particularly culpable during the last election in urging its readership which consists of—we have to assume—a great percentage of the hemp users in this country, to vote for that asshole Clinton, on the grounds of a very fishy rumor that Al Gore, a known liar, hypocrite, and cheat, whispered to a few marijuana activists that he was

on their side. And for this, presumably, thousands if not millions of pot smokers went out and voted for these stupid buggers, another set of stupid assholes, forgetting all the wisdom of the old anarchist slogan, "never vote, it only encourages the bastards." And that's exactly what *High Times* did, it encouraged the bastards. And I'll make a bet now, I'll eat the issue of the magazine that this is printed in, if, under Clinton's administration, there are improvements in the law relating to Cannabis for pleasure. So I'm excluding the fact that there might be a little easing up on medical marijuana or commercial hemp, but there will be no easing up, in fact there will be a tightening up of the war on Herb as pleasure. OK? And if that's not true, I'll eat the fucking magazine with fucking milk and sugar.

Would that be a poetic terrorist act?
(Laughs) All right. I'm fairly confident on this one. I don't think I'm going to have to do it, because Clinton's general policy of betraying all the groups that brought him into power has been all too obvious. One after another, and this has been obvious to me right from the start.

How about some suggestion for the readership in High Times *about how they can go about creating a TAZ, or alternative method to the movement.*

Okay, fine. I would like to say this to the marijuana movement, on a broader level I would like to direct it to the Libertarian movement in general which is closely allied, crosses over, has areas of contingency, with Hemp, the Hemp movement. If the Libertarians has spent the last fifteen years organizing alternative economic networks to potentiate the emergence of Temporary Autonomous Zones and lead towards Permanent Autonomous Zones, instead of playing the futile game of third party politics which is a losers' position from the start in a null set game, and, and this is a very long sentence, and if; semicolon; and if the hemp movement had put its energy in the last fifteen or twenty years into organizing alternative economic networks, not necessarily based on quote, "criminal" exchanges of cash for hemp but of the same basically sort of real life alternative possibilities...

Create their own...

Create their own networks. If all of this energy had been directed in that way instead of what to me appears as a total chimera, a total abstract spook called democratic legislative political power, then I think we would long since have been clearly on the way to revolutionary change in this society. As it is, all of this good intention and high energy was misdirected into their game, a game in which they

set the rules and which they have fixed so that people like you and me cannot win power within that system. Now this is an anarchist critique that I'm making, as I said, with the most comradely possible motives. I feel it's a tragedy that this energy has been misdirected. I don't think that it's too late to wake up and smell the coffee here. I think that the miserable failures for example of the stupid situation that the LP got itself into here in New York with that utter asinine radio personality Howard Stern who betrayed them just shows the utter bankruptcy of Libertarian legislative politics, it does not at all show the bankruptcy of Libertarian goals and ideals.

It seems a lot of people would prefer to fall for the voting game, so whatever game can they play. Though, in real life, how can someone who's trying to find some other alternative, where can they go for that?

Well, first of all if you say that they're in the middle class world, we have to define what that means. Does that mean that they have already signed up on a life in which they're following all the political and economic rules? Except that they smoke pot? In other words are they just, because I know and you know plenty of pot smokers who are not your political allies. You know when I talk about the hemp movement I'm talking about certain kinds of pot smokers. I think it was Robert Anton

Wilson who said that a lot of Libertarians are just Republicans who smoke dope. And those are the kind of people I'm talking about who are not my comrades any more than murderers who smoke dope are my comrades.

Smoking dope is not a sign that God has chosen you. If we're talking about the hemp movement as a libertarian movement, or as a libertarian phenomenon, then we have to talk about a much broader range of behavior than just dope smoking, and that behavior is social, it's economic, it's educative, creative, artistic, it's the whole ball game of the life that we're really leading, not the life of abstract mental images which are the counters in play in the political game in America. So I think that practically anything that you can do through group cooperation to enhance pleasure and freedom for the members of the group counts for a revolutionary or insurrectionary act, and so therefore I would like to suggest and I would like to see more of the tendencies that I think are already happening ('cause I never make any of this stuff up, I'm just tracking what I think is going on). And I think that what's going on is that there're a lot of pot smokers who are interested in freedom and libertarian goals, who are completely disgusted with the official Hemp liberation movement and who are not cooperating with it because they

very properly have assessed that those groups are playing losing games, so there's a great—still incoherent, but great—tendency towards alternative forms of organization, okay?

Now we can explore what some of these alternative forms are—I sometimes feel that it's better not to explore them too deeply because there's no need to give publicity to actions that for the time being should remain clandestine, or as I put it, virtually clandestine. Which means that you don't blab about them to the newspapers and the media and you go on behaving without any undue paranoia because it's a truth in this world that nobody's paying attention—unless the media focuses attention, no one pays attention. So virtual secrecy just simply means to avoid this kind of dumb nineteen-sixties style yippie tactic of constantly engaging the media as if this was some kind of liberatory game. To appear in the media is simply to be mediated.

So it would be something closer to a Tong, which is something I know that you're interested in, which is sort of like the underground marijuana economy.

Yeah, absolutely. But, it isn't organized like a series of Tongs and that's what the problem is. I don't mean this just in relation to pot dealing. In fact, I don't even know if it works in relation to pot dealing, but it certainly works in relation to a great

many other activities, and let's assume that it could work for pot dealers too—and buyers.

There could be a pot-buyers cooperative, you know, why not? The point is that a Tong is a secret society. And that, again, is something that is not just a fantasy, that's something we could really talk about. An affinity group of friends who get together to enhance their own pleasure and freedom in ways which are not recognized as legal by this society have effectively created a Tong. What I think they should do is consciously create a Tong.

What we need here is an esthetic and a tradition of non-hierarchical clandestine organizations. So I'm interested in this from every point of view, not only from the practical point of view, how do you organize barter networks for example, which I think is very important, how do you organize truly secret barter networks which is a related problem, but also do we create a poetics of this situation, how do we make this something which works not only on a practical economic level but also on the imaginal level, where people's hearts are engaged? This is also a real life truth.

A community.
Yes

Which seems to be lacking in general...

A communitas. You know, I would go so far as to use Paul Goodman's term, "communitas," to show that we're talking about something that's more than a haphazard arrangement here, but actually a goal that we're striving for.

So TAZs are sort of small component parts that are each communities that work independently of themselves…
Well, not necessarily, no. I would visualizes TAZs as the periodic flowerings of success of these networks. I mean like going twice or once a week to a food coop or something, this is not a TAZ. You know you're not really having an experience that maximizes freedom and pleasure.

It's almost hierarchy right there.
Well, almost, but what we're hoping for is that the actual, the non-hierarchical structures will maximize the potential for the emergence of the TAZ. So let's talk about the networks as a kind of mycelium growth underground, which is itself already the actual body of the plant and can spread for miles, as you know…

Hundreds of miles…
Yeah.

From one state to the next…
The mushrooms that appear, the fruiting bodies,

those are like the TAZs, those are the flowerings, if I can mix my botanical metaphor, those are the flowerings of the networks. And one of the most obvious forms of flowering is the festival. So, the rave, the rainbow gathering, the Zippy festivals and things like that, Burning Man festival out in Nevada—these kinds of spontaneous, non-regulated, non-commodified festivals that spring up. A wonderful example in my mind is the Greenwich Village Halloween parade, which for the first years of its existence was a great thing for small level entrepreneurial business and was a great way to promote the Village as a living neighborhood largely made up of artists and gays, right? Those are the people who participated, those are the people who made the festival, who made that parade one of the most beautiful and exciting festivals that I've ever participated in in America. And unfortunately it was so good that it was coopted, it was commodified, it was commercialized, as rights were bought to it by advertising companies and the route of the parade was changed so it no longer went through the back streets where the local merchants were, but only went on the main street where the major merchants were and so forth and so on so that now it's a horror show, you know. Now it's an excuse for a bunch of yahoos from New Jersey to come in and throw beer cans at faggots. And it's been destroyed.

So this is a clear example of what happens to a spontaneous TAZ when it's not clandestine enough.

Or maybe they have lives, shelf lives, you know, only a certain amount of time where they create and flower...
Or they are inherently temporary.

Yes.
There are some things that are inherently temporary. And there are some things that are only temporary because we're not strong enough to make them permanent. Let's say for example, you squat some beautiful land up in a forest by a lake somewhere for a few months in the summer with your friends and you have a real TAZ. Eroticism and beautiful nature and freedom to run around naked and smoke pot or do whatever you want. But since this is all being fueled by the money that people have to make on the labor market where they sell their labor, it can only last a certain amount of time. We'd like it to be able to last forever, we'd like to make that TAZ into a PAZ, a Permanent Autonomous Zone. But we can't do it. We haven't got the economic power to do it. So that kind of thing is not inherently temporary, it's only temporary because we lack the power to make it more Permanent. But other things like festivals are clearly temporary, you know, and some things should be valued for their temporariness. When

the juice has gone out of them we should be the first to realize it and to give up that form and to go on to other forms. So a certain amount of what's been called driftwork is necessary. You have to be in tune with where freedom and pleasure are being potentiated and where it's not, so that you can spontaneously keep on the drift and stay on the edge of this phenomenon. And I think again this is something that I'm simply tracking. I'm simply noticing. This is going on. This is exactly what hordes of people out there in RVs, you know old folks in RVs, young folks hopping freights, it's all happening. I'm not, this is no utopian scheme I'm describing, this is what's going on anyway. Let's be conscious of it. Let's realize that this is a true value, because it really does do something for our lives, unlike all this stupid political game playing, role playing, you know, into which we are constantly seduced into pouring our energies and our love and our creativity into goals which are immediately recuperable and cooptable and commodifiable by "them."

Shoot your television, hop a freight, become a wanderer...
Well, all right, then you come to the question of lifestyle. What I'm talking about is by no means buying into a lifestyle. Lifestyles are simply commodity games. Unless they are actual lives. You know if you have an actual life that's not

commodifiable. There's no way they can buy your life and force you to allow them to sell it back to you. So I'm not holding a torch for people who wear tie-dye t-shirts, or people who wear black clothes or people who listen to certain kinds of music, and I'm not holding a torch for middle class church goers, or any other life style. I think that what I'm talking about is going on in all kinds of life style areas in America if I can put it that way. All different kinds of lives. People leading different kinds of lives have similar goals about non-hierarchical organization and the maximizing of freedoms. You don't have to dress in a certain way or buy products to be part of that movement. On the contrary. And I actually foresee, or I would like to say I could foresee, the breaking down of all these artificial barriers between people on the basis of the way they dress or what music they listen to.

I noticed that in Holland there's a club, the Milkvag, and I see an eighty year old couple and a sixteen year old kid, a young punk couple hanging out together, communicating with each other...

This is the future, I think. The future is not alienated little enclaves of pseudo-bohemians, who view themselves as a vanguard, when they have absolutely no right in terms of their political effectiveness or economic effectiveness, to make such a claim. This is something which is just going

on. This is a natural human desire. Freedom and pleasure, these are natural human desires. You don't have to be a hippie to like those ideas. So I find, for example, that a prominent example of what I'm talking about could be the old folks' RV movement. Old folks without a lot of money retire to an RV and become nomads. And suddenly in the lateness of their age and the lower middle classness of their aspirations discover there's the freedom of the road and the pleasures of travel and nomadism. You've met some of these people, haven't you?

I've been out west and I've noticed that the culture is set up for the RVs.
Yeah!

All of the big parks, with RV centers.
The people who, when you come to think of it, are evading property tax and probably a lot of other taxes too just because they're on the move, they're old and retired, no one's paying attention to them anymore. They're not expected to be victims of the territorial gangsters in the government and tax bureaus. They're sort of forgotten, they've taken the advantage of their no go zone quality. They've been forgotten by society for the most part, with its goods and services, and they're out there just roamin' around, you know. Now of course it's not—again, it's not utopia—and they're still slaves

to the internal combustion machine and all sorts of negative things. But I see a spirit of freedom, a freedom of loving spirit there which I can appreciate in spite of the fact that a lot of these people in terms of their cultural politics are people I couldn't talk with.

I find people have a hard time communicating with each other because they're used to being spoken to by the television. So when you're working in a community, first thing probably towards creating a TAZ would be communication.

Absolutely. People are alienated by media. This is something that constantly has to be repeated. The more you relate to media, the less you are relating to other live human beings in your physical proximity. This is very simple. Again, this is not big time theory here, this is something that is just going on. You spend more time watching TV, you spend less time inter-relating with your friends. And when this is spread out over the level of the social you begin to see some very sick things occurring. You begin to see that the trend has more power than any individual's participation in the trend. There's negative synergy, negative feedback effect whereby your alienation from other people is caused by televisions and radios and movies and news media and newspapers and books and so forth and so on—I certainly don't

exempt print from this critique. And suddenly you discover that it's not just a matter of alienation, it's a matter of immiseration, you know, that this separateness of yourself from physical reality is making your miserable. And I believe a lot of people have reached this point. A lot of people have reached this point. And because they don't know what to do, because we, you know, people, like pot smoking radicals, are not giving them a clear cut realistic alternative, are mooning off into various new age and life-style bullshit.

I've met a lot of young people who have, and myself growing up in the seventies and eighties, had a whole mythos based on television. And I find the mythos of television heading very rapidly in the past twelve to fourteen years towards a real violent fall-into-line war police bent. What do you think about that?
Yeah, absolutely. People from our generation, I mean from my generation, who are nostalgic about TV think about Howdy Doody. Maybe people from your generation, it's Gilligan's Island, Star Trek, and now it's like all these endless real cop shows. We have kids growing up on TV now who are going to be nostalgic about cop shows? Oy vey! I mean there's a distinct problem here.

(something...) on fire... singing the theme song from 911 Emergency or whatever it is on... (unintelligible,

laughter)
Oh, man, it's unthinkable.

Yet at the same time, how do you feel about ideas that come out through the media.
Absolutely.

Like you. You're coming out through the media right now.
Right. All right. Here's a paradox. And it's one that I find hard to actually maintain control over. How am I supposed to get these ideas out with a degree of clandestinity that I want, and not offer simply another form of mediated alienation. I may have failed. I may very well have failed. And I'm perfectly willing to consider that possibility. That by choosing a medium—print—because I've tried to avoid all other media. I've used print because I feel that it's, in McLuhanite terms, the "coolest" of the media—one that people can distance themselves from and intellectualize about. More careful because it's not in your face, it doesn't have the pseudo-immediacy of television.

You have to make your imagination work.
You have to actually participate on the imaginal level when you read—to a certain extent, all right? It's still an alienating experience. We know this. And therefore it could be that this was a tactical

error on my part and that there was really no other medium that was proper for what I want to do other than face-to-face communication. Which is still a medium, by the way. Only telepathy would not be a medium according to the definition that I use and so far as we know, there is no telepathine out there, although a lot of people in the sixties and seventies thought there was. And so even speech, even what we're doing now...in fact we're being mediated by this tape recorder, but even if we weren't, we're being mediated by the air between us and the ineffectiveness of language, the tragic ineffectualness of language. So, you know, what can I do, you know? I had to make certain choices, and I chose print. So sue me. (laughs)

You asked about practical applications of these ideas and it's a perfectly fair question, as anyone would wonder. And I don't like to dream up ideas for other people, you know what I mean, so I'm not going to. I have indulged in a few thought experiments and the ones that I thought were interesting I put in my printed work so we needn't go into that. I, for example, talked about the Malay black djinn curse which has proved popular with a certain number of pranksters. In which you put a black magic spell on some institution or company that you think is malign, and try to infect the consciousness of the people who work for that institution or company in ways

that make them re-think what their relation to reality and to ideas of freedom and pleasure might be. I know some people who have tried that and had fun with it. That's on the poetic terrorism attack mode, and then on the... you see, because I think the attack and the positive action, peaceful action, always have to go together. There has to be a simultaneity there because if you just go off on your own seeking freedom and pleasure you're a selfish son of a bitch. And this eventually has repercussions within your own psyche and you start behaving badly to yourself. Because you have nobody else to pick on. And on the other hand, if you just go out in the attack mode, you're almost sure sooner or later to end up falling into the martyrdom complex. In other words, if you refuse your own freedom and pleasures and say, "I will never be free until aaaallll people are free" or, "I will never smoke dope until it's legal," right? Which is approximately the same statement. Then basically you're turning yourself into a martyr, a martyr to an idea which is not even in existence yet. So either one or the other would be futile, but carrying on both at once gives an interesting balance to your life I think. So for every peaceful action of pleasure, for every festal action, we could say, group celebration, I think there should be a corresponding insurrectionary or poetic terrorist action. So essentially the communities

which I'm envisioning would be communities of resistance as well as realistic utopias. And if they only lasted for a few days or even a few minutes, well, it's still better than a lifetime on your knees. You know what I mean? So, oddly enough, I think in talking about, all right, let's apply this then to marijuana and to the hemp movement. In talking about practical TAZ oriented kinds of activities, that's your question really, isn't it?

Um hum.

So oddly enough I think before we can talk about the practical here, we actually have to end up talking about the spiritual. And when I use the word "spiritual" I don't mean to make any philosophical separation between the spiritual and the material, between the body and the soul or the body and the mind—or the body in cyberspace or any other kind of mind-body split. Let's not forget that cyberspace and the internet very much represent a mind-body split. There's nothing you can do about that. No amount of feel-good rhetoric can cover that one.

Anyway, that's just in parenthesis. The real pot movement in my life has been a spiritual movement. And I say that just because it has taken on the color and the symbolism and the forms and some of the mystique of spiritual or religious activity. And "religious"—you better put it in quotes, because we

don't want to make an error of identity between, let's say, what the psychedelic churches were doing under similar conditions. Organized religion is not what I'm talking about. I just have to make these simple statements because otherwise people might mistake me as an apologist for religion with a capital "R." I'm not.

But I do defend spirituality against pseudo-materialists and fundamentalist materialists who want to throw out the baby of spirituality along with the bathwater of corrupt organized religion. The Rastas, the Coptic Ethiopian Zionists... (a whole bunch of 'em anyway, and probably all these names apply to some group or another), The Moorish Orthodox Church, which I'm associated with—these are specific Hemp churches in which Hemp has been a sacrament. You could also mention the neo-American church which wanted to have mescaline for its sacrament back in the sixties, or Leary's League for Spiritual Discovery, which was organized as a religion in order to be able to claim LSD as a sacrament. And so forth and so on.

If we talk about psychotropic drugs, of which cannabis is one, the history of its emergence as a psychic spiritual influence in our society, we're talking about a history of what I call free religions. Free religions, or weird religions, weird in the scientific sense. And these kinds of organizations

have been the (how can we put it?) seed beds for TAZ experience. I guess my own early experience with TAZ was, you know, in Millbrook with Leary and Art Krebs and Shri Ram Ashram and all of those spiritual groups who had organized, and thanks to a huge infusion of millions of dollars from Billy Hitchcock, were able to bring this TAZ into being, albeit on the basis of a completely inept and false economy.

So it was not self-supporting, any of this stuff. For smaller groups spread across America in the sixties, who didn't have millionaire patrons, it was nevertheless a very liberating experience. And the reason for that is that most of these groups were organized non-hierarchically. There were people who emerged as leaders in these religions, but usually their titles were jokes—the Discordian Popes, right? In fact, the whole Discordian movement is a perfect example of what I'm talking about, by the way. And the Principia Discordia is still a very relevant text in this respect.

So when you, getting back to your question now, when you asked about practical applications in real everyday life for Hemp aficionados, I think that the free religions offer a very good framework for an answer. Because once you've got an affinity group (based on these perhaps playful spiritual ideas, nevertheless it's a real group) it's a real group, it's not just a make believe group. It's

a real group and a real group can begin to act in cooperative ways to maximize and synergize—to use Buckminster Fuller's term—their freedom and pleasure. So that one answer would be every man and woman their own religion. As Blake said: "I must have a system of my own or become a slave to someone else's." And that applies to affinity groups, not just to isolated individuals.

Where can people find Temporary Autonomous Zones that you'd be willing to tell them about and look for?
Well, you can't, because they don't exist precisely on maps with cartesian coordinates. There are other dimensions to the maps on which TAZs can be located. And I like to metaphorize those dimensions as fractal dimensions, which brings in the whole question of chaos and complexity. And one of the reasons why I can't give you any sign posts is 'cause it's a fractal situation fraught with complexity. And at any given moment a TAZ may come into existence. As I've said, on a minimal level, a dinner party at somebody's house can suddenly develop into a TAZ. Not every dinner party is, but the potential is there because it's organized in a non-hierarchic way, for conviviality. And on a maximum level you've had TAZs which have lasted a few years, where the party has actually gone on for a few years. When we're talking about TAZs per se, as really intense, really intense nodes of

consciousness and action, it's possible that human beings can't take too much of this and that maybe eighteen months or two years of straight non-stop partying is about all that anybody can take.

Well I know a few people...
Yeah, right...But we could talk about permanent autonomous zones, you know, which is a different concept.

Would you call a Rainbow Gathering a sort of permanent autonomous zone?
I call it a periodic autonomous zone, which is yet another variant on this idea, in other words there are certain autonomous zones which you cannot maintain on a full-time basis but which you can succeed in calling up on a fairly reliable periodic basis, annual festivals being the model, you know.

Woodstock...
Wwweeelll...

Woodshlock...
Well...what we have to do is avoid commodification. Need I say more on that subject? OK? So, a festival, which is an intense moment, is one thing, but it's a periodic thing, it's momentary, but periodic. Another nice example of the periodic autonomous zone was the summer camp. I don't know

if you had this experience when you were a kid. I actually didn't, but I've observed in other people that despite the outward hierarchization that went into the organizing of summer camps for kids, that in truth, in clandestine truth, were TAZs for kids. And it's interesting now that the summer camp, the economy which made the summer camps possible is crumbling, so a lot of these old camps are coming on the market. And cooperative groups are acquiring them as group vacation sites. And true it's all within the commodity culture, it's all on the up-and-up, there's nothing clandestine, there's nothing insurrectionary about the summer camp idea, but, it is true, that people can acquire a property that is enough out of the way to have certain festive possibilities.

Once again, also in relation to the Rainbow thing, it's not actually necessary to own the property as they have so cleverly discovered. And any group of people in America can do this, you don't have to join the rainbow tribes and follow their lifestyle, which I don't find particularly attractive. Any group of people who wants to do this can do it. You just make a rendezvous for a National Park and you pitch your tents out of the line of sight, or you pick a place where there are very very few smokies, for example the Burning Man festival, where the nearest forest ranger to them is like seventy five miles away. And they

converted him to be a friend and supporter of the festival anyway.

It's a festival that's been going on for, I don't know, about five or six years, mostly organized by some artists from California who go to the worst part of the Nevada desert, really just empty flat black sand as far as the eye can see, and they make a huge statue of a wicker man, sort of a statue, and then, last night of the festival they set it on fire and everybody drinks a lot of beer and watches it burn. And that's the festival and it's a tremendous success out there and it's been repeated over and over again on an annual basis. People love it. A newspaper is printed on the campsite every year, an amateur, illegal mini FM radio station is set up every year and all kinds of different people come, from retired RV types to bikers to hippies, to flower people and rainbow people and hobos and artists from California. And everyone is having a great time and then they pack it up and they go away and that's the end of that and the forest ranger doesn't bother them cause he's 75 miles away and he likes it anyway 'cause they leave the campsite clean. So anybody can do this. You don't have to wait for permission from some tribal authority to do this.

Creating a TAZ is almost like in yourself creating your own free autonomous space.

Well, I keep on coming back to the phrase

"maximize the potential for the emergence." I know it's kind of a grotesque mouthful but it needs to be always inserted into every sentence that we're talking about here. You can't declare a TAZ. Or if you can you're a much more effective magician than I am. You can't just decide to have a TAZ, a TAZ is something that spontaneously happens. When suddenly you say, Wow, you know, there's n number of people here, but there's n plus n energy, excitement, pleasure, freedom, consciousness. Right? That moment of synergistic cross-current that happens when a group of people is getting something more out of a situation than the sum of what the individuals are putting into it. You can't predict that. All you can do is maximize the potential for the emergence.

Live in the moment.

Well, there are all kinds of ways. The free religions movement can teach you about states of consciousness that are going to maximize the potential for emergence. The people studying alternative economic networks can show you how to economically maximize the potential for emergence. People who are studying methods of clandestinity can tell on that level, people who are studying, let's use the word "sociologically" in quotation marks, not to refer to any kind of academic sociology, but people who study

the group dynamics of freedom for the sake of freedom. All these different disciplines, you might call them, have an input, but all you can do is just add as many possible together in the hopes that you're maximizing the potential for the emergence of the TAZ.

How do you see the future of this planet in maximizing its potential for emergence, and perhaps what would be the utopian vision that you would see?

Hum. Yeah, I'm absolutely not ruling out utopia. On the contrary, it's a concept that fascinates me and I would particularly want to draw everyone's attention to Charles Fourier. I know his works are hard to get to but he's the utopian visionary of freedom and pleasure if there ever was one. Anyway, hopefully I'll be able to help get some of his stuff back into print. Um, yeah, the future of the world, I mean, I don't have a real crystal ball, you know? And predictions have a way of going bad on you, even though I've already made one prediction and promised to eat a magazine if it doesn't come true. So I'm gonna have to be careful here and not stick my neck too far out.

I guess I find the concept of the millennium interesting in a lot of ways. The millennium as a festival of insurrection interests me a great deal historically and if we look back to the seventeenth century we see a lot of millennial fervor. Nowadays,

people associate the religious kind of millennial fervor with the Branch Dravidians or Jonestown or something. And on the other hand you've got the fuzzy-wuzzy harmonic convergence or yuppie rapture, and all kinds of pseudo-ideas about the millennium are always out there. What I find interesting about these ideas of the millennium is not so much the negative aspect of ecological catastrophe or armies of Satan—take your pick of metaphor—...not so much the negative aspects of the millennium as the utopian aspects.

And this utopian trace is always very strong there. In fact, there's more than a trace, there's a definite utopian content to a lot of millennial thinking. How that comes about, I don't know.And if I thought that there were inherently objective revolutionary possibilities for the construction of utopia in our society today, I would certainly want to be part of them, but I really don't see that, you know. I don't see an effective revolutionary class, I don't see an effective revolutionary movement, and I have deep suspicions about the whole idea of revolution as the substitution of one government for another.

But it's important not to lose sight of the possibility of utopia, if for no other reason than to have an imaginary or (better term) imaginal goal. To have the actual possibility of actions which are carried out for long term goals as well as short

term goals. Or, to actually be ready with a concept of utopia should those objective possibilities for insurrection and social change ever come into being in a way that we can work with on a mass level because that's what we would be talking about. We're talking about the transformation of an entire society I'm afraid the concept of the mass is something we're going to have to deal with.

John Barlow says no longer do we have a mass technology, just the opposite—he feels that small groups instead of mass...

Yeah, I was gonna say something like that, that there's no such thing as a mass man or woman—you've never met them and you never will. It's like looking for something normal, you'd never find it. And it is true that these large cohesive movements as we used to think of them in the past like communism or anarchism or something, are really not the answers and is not a simple thing but a complex thing, even in the precise scientific meaning of the word "complex." Needless to say we are actually (let's not quibble) talking about revolutionary change here, right? If we're going to talk about utopia, there will have to be some revolutionary changes.

Give me your definition of revolution because...

Well, now I'm using revolution in the narrow

sense of extreme changes, ok? If I use the word revolution in another way with a capital "R" to mean some kind of an institution, then I would critique it because I would just see it as the substitution of one government for another. But revolution just in the broad sense of the word to mean extreme quick change, ok? I'm purposely hedging on the question of whether it's violent or not.

You see it as being an extreme quick change? At this point in our own evolution it seems that we need an extreme quick change.

Well that's what I'm saying. And therefore it doesn't do to just say that "oh, we think in terms of small groups now." This is to veer too much towards the anarchist Club Med concept of TAZ: just drop out and have as much fun as you can before the landscape catches fire around you.

There has to also be some kind of mass (and I purposefully keep needling with this word because I know it's so out of fashion and so shocking)—there has to be some kind of mass revolutionary change if we're going to talk about real time, real life utopia. And I don't think that that is out of the question, I don't think it's out of the question at all. Just because it hasn't happened within our historical consciousness doesn't mean it can't happen.

[blank tape]
...see why it often has to be spontaneous. Now in the book I said don't be spontaneous because I've seen so much bad spontaneity in my life I feel like I should be very critical of spontaneity.

We did a show...
But when it's irresistible you should be able to give way. So there's a zen, a zen of spontaneity obviously...

It's scary...
Zen of spontaneity doesn't mean like I'm going to go out and be spontaneous today like some kind of sinister clown, you know—it's the ability to be spontaneous.

Five of us got together in Eugene and did a blind walk. Two people were leading, we walked through town. That was interesting to see people's reaction to a mass blind group. We then walked though this mall and did various sound performances, just on the spur of the moment, let's try this, about fifteen people and then we made a fake bus in a giant bus zone and a lot of people were taken aback. We walked around a restaurant with one person going around, then two people going around, three people and then four, all talking about the same subject until the restaurant saw nine people go around at the same time.
Uh huh.

And the reaction in the restaurant itself was of these people's jaws dropping, cause I was in the last circle that went around, of just like wow, what is going on here, and their reality is taken aside. Is that a TAZ? Is the reality being made more than it normally is?

There's a distinction between poetic terrorism and the TAZ, and a poetic terrorist act is not necessarily a TAZ, no, although I don't want to... You see, you can't really define a TAZ. You can only just not define it, so, you know, I'm perfectly willing to admit that one person's TAZ might be another person's hell, and not at all apparent to me because it just wasn't my taste and so offended my aesthetic values or something.

Someone's preference is the RV culture...and ah, you know...

Yeah, it doesn't mean I have to embrace that, it just means that I have to see that for them it's a liberating gesture. But for me, no, for me the TAZ definitely has to have more density of organization than the sort of thing you describe. That's creating a situation that's a poetic terrorist thing. To make it a TAZ you have to liberate the mall.

Take over the mall for a few hours.

Really. Somehow.

Give away all the goods.
Yeah, right, absolutely. If you could think of a way to do that then you're on your way.

Or award the police for being there on time by giving them a nice sofa. Then they'd be on their way.
Yeah, well, that's it, you know. They've got all the battalions, as Stalin said. You know, how many battalions does the pope have?

Some people would argue that the pope's got the army from hell, Satan's army from hell, at his disposal at any given moment.
Well, nevertheless, it's a question that we should always remind ourselves of, Stalin's question about the Pope is a question that every group involved in its own autonomy has to ask itself, How many battalions have I got? This is, you gotta be realistic, because if you're not being realistic you're just being a martyr; at worst you're being a self-destructive idiot.

How about economies in general. How do we create new economies? Do we use existing...?
Well, all right, if we're back on tape here I'll repeat what I said about the right. Some of the tactics that the so-called right, Libertarian right, uses are of extreme value to me and that's why I take an interest in the movement and I blame the left,

including the anarchist left, for not being able to come up with practical ideas, and this book here is on how to prosper in the underground economy in the coming economic crash or whatever, right? But there are some really interesting ideas and it's written by two church guys. They are organizing through churches of Libertarian types, I suppose. They're talking about real old-fashioned ways of cooperating.

My example is the quilting bee, which should have an immediate appeal to artists. You know, it's like this anonymous group, creative activity, the quilt is usually for somebody's daughter for their wedding trousseau or something, so it's a gift of the group—quilts, American quilts, a great great artistic tradition, beautiful stuff, amazing, masterpieces of mostly women's art. So that's one kind of group, and another kind of group is a church thrift shop which is run cooperatively by the parishioners. And another kind of group is the food coop. Very banal things, really.

But each one of those you do for very practical reasons is going to maximize some advantage to you. And if you think of that advantage as freedom, and if indeed it does have some qualities of freedom about it, I say go for it. And why shouldn't the free religions and the psychedelic churches have yard sales and thrift shops, you know? There's no inherent contradiction there. It's

a good economic concept. You actually begin to set up little alternative networks that are even outside the cash economy, much less tax supervisors and stuff like that.

How do you feel about communes? There were a lot of communes in the eighties, intentional communities. There's a... I've been noticing a lot of people interested in finding alternative communities.

Intentional communities are great for people who want to follow the rules. It's like everyone's gonna play a big life game and it has certain rules and you agree to play by those rules. And that's great—for people who want to do that, it's fine. You know? No objections to it.

The problem is to find a whole group that has rules that are compatible with your individual freedoms. And I do think that's possible and I think that the whole intentional community movement is splitting open at the seams, in terms of definition and border and boundary, and becoming much more permeable.

And people do what they can first of all, right? Be it even just a food coop, and there's less ideological fervor about the whole thing—you don't have to be a strict back-to-the-land-er to see the advantages of even a consumer's coop. That's something that a lot of ordinary folks are doing out there, which is, in fact to a certain degree, an

economic alternative. It's not a very revolutionary one, but it definitely cuts down costs on basics for the poor and marginal. And I can't see that that's a bad thing. We can think of very extreme versions of this. Clandestine credit networks, entirely in cipher. There's a place where the InterNet and cyberspace could really come in handy.

As a tool for communication without scrutiny.
Yeah, abosolutely. I mean I'd like to think so anyway, this is in the realm of thought experiment because I don't know of any examples of this. So this is science fiction. You want to be clear when I'm talking about something that already exists but just needs to be clarified, like the TAZ, and a situation like this, this ideal cipher, a BBS true economic trade network, which is science fiction but utopian—let's be more complimentary and call it utopian. But is it impossible? Shouldn't somebody try this experiment? I'm not cut out to do it, you know?

Some of the communities I've seen seem to prosper for given points and it usually has to do with the individuals involved or individuals coming together as a group and something happens and some energy enters the group, whether it's a person or...
Yeah. I think a lot of the communes in the sixties that had an open membership policy were

amongst the first to crash and it's the same for the nineteenth century communes. In the 1840s and 50s there was an even bigger commune movement in America than in the 1960s up till now. And the open membership ones were very dicey. If I give a party I don't have to have an open door policy, you know? And if this is our party, we don't have to just let anybody in. That's not anarchism, to do something like that—that's just self-destructive nonsense. People have the right to associate. That is one point on which I'm very much in agreement with the constitutional patriots, speaking of right-wing libertarians. We've supposedly got the right to associate in this country, to make use of it for revolutionary ends. You've got to take advantage of your real freedoms: freedom of the press, you know, freedom of speech. Freedom of the press has gotten to a very delusionary state, you know, and I'm not sure it's really important as the censorship hysterics, the anti-censorship hysterics make out. Every time some government agency doesn't give a grant to some controversial artist, so what? I mean that's more delusional behavior, that's more commodity behavior.

Hmm.

Art should be disengaged from the government anyway, as much as possible. And we can all agree on that. Except for the state-socialist. So, who cares?

I mean, it's not as important. You know Noam Chomsky says that there is freedom of speech in this country, there's freedom of information. And all you have to have is a private income and an anal obsessive personality and you can find out anything you want in this country. That's not the problem. All right? The problem is not data and information, the problem is knowledge.

Using the data.

Yeah, yeah. I don't say wisdom, I say knowledge. And that seems to be different from information. So it's an epistemological problem. In the specific sense of the word. And everything that I've been talking about is that all these concepts are epistemological tools. They're a way to find out knowledge, not just information. And that's once again my critique of the cyber concept, that we've got an information economy. Yeah, sure, right, you've got an "information economy." Let's see you eat information, you know? Let's see you drive around in information. Let's see you get clothed from information. It doesn't exist! It's an illusion, and it's a dangerous illusion.

> [Note: This text feels very dated. Marijuana is now being legalized. The InterNet no longer offers any fantasies of liberation. The Libertarians have become Republicans. But the interview is still worth reading, I hope. (I forget if it was ever published!)—2014]

Late decadent periods attract me for many reasons, e.g. they're usually rather peaceful (too tired and blasé for war); often they're devoted to "small happinesses"—which as Nietzsche says may be more important than the big ones, the ones that always betray us. Maybe great original art fails to thrive in such periods—since the kings and lords can no longer afford it—but the "minor arts" often experience a kind of perfection; aristocratic tastes (in cheap folkish forms) filter down even to the lowest levels. I remember late one winter night in Tehran, as I passed the skeleton of a half-built pseudo-Californian office block, I saw a lone night watchman warming himself by a barrel of burning trash; he wore a sheepskin coat and he was entertaining himself by reciting Hafez *viva voce* to the snowflakes.

from "Roses and Nightingales"

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