THE TEMPORARY AUTONOMOUS ZONE

> "...this time however I come as the victorious Dionysus, who will turn the world into a holiday...Not that I have much time..."

--Nietzsche (from his last "insane" letter to Cosima Wagner)

Pirate Utopias

THE SEA-ROVERS AND CORSAIRS of the 18th century created an "information network" that spanned the globe: primitive and devoted primarily to grim business, the net nevertheless functioned admirably. Scattered throughout the net were islands, remote hideouts where ships could be watered and provisioned, booty traded for luxuries and necessities. Some of these islands supported "intentional communities," whole mini-societies living consciously outside the law and determined to keep it up, even if only for a short but merry life.

Some years ago I looked through a lot of secondary material on piracy hoping to find a study of these enclaves--but it appeared as if no historian has yet found them worthy of analysis. (William Burroughs has mentioned the subject, as did the late British anarchist Larry Law--but no systematic research has been carried out.) I retreated to primary sources and constructed my own theory, some aspects of which will be discussed in this essay. I called the settlements "Pirate Utopias."

Recently Bruce Sterling, one of the leading exponents of Cyberpunk science fiction, published a near-future romance based on the assumption that the decay of political systems will lead to a decentralized proliferation of experiments in living: giant worker-owned corporations, independent enclaves devoted to "data piracy," Green-Social-Democrat enclaves, Zerowork enclaves, anarchist liberated zones, etc. The information economy which supports this diversity is called the Net; the enclaves (and the book's title) are *Islands in the Net*.

The medieval Assassins founded a "State" which consisted of a network of remote mountain valleys and castles, separated by thousands of miles, strategically invulnerable to invasion, connected by the information flow of secret agents, at war with all governments, and devoted only to knowledge. Modern technology, culminating in the spy satellite, makes this kind of *autonomy* a romantic dream. No more pirate islands! In the future the same technology-- freed from all political control--could make possible an entire world of *autonomous zones*. But for now the concept remains precisely science fiction--pure speculation.

Are we who live in the present doomed never to experience autonomy, never to stand for one moment on a bit of land ruled only by freedom? Are we reduced either to nostalgia for the past or nostalgia for the future? Must we wait until the entire world is freed of political control before even one of us can claim to know freedom? Logic and emotion unite to condemn such a supposition. Reason demands that one cannot struggle for what one does not know; and the heart revolts at a universe so cruel as to visit such injustices on *our* generation alone of humankind.

To say that "I will not be free till all humans (or all sentient creatures) are free" is simply to cave in to a kind of nirvana-stupor, to abdicate our humanity, to define ourselves as losers.

I believe that by extrapolating from past and future stories about "islands in the net" we may collect evidence to suggest that a certain kind of "free enclave" is not only possible in our time but also existent. All my research and speculation has crystallized around the concept of the TEMPORARY AUTONOMOUS ZONE (hereafter abbreviated TAZ). Despite its synthesizing force for my own thinking, however, I don't intend the TAZ to be taken as more than an *essay* ("attempt"), a suggestion, almost a poetic fancy. Despite the occasional Ranterish enthusiasm of my language I am not trying to construct political dogma. In fact I have deliberately refrained from defining the TAZ--I circle around the subject, firing off exploratory beams. In the end the TAZ is almost self-explanatory. If the phrase became current it would be understood without difficulty...understood in action.

Waiting for the Revolution

HOW IS IT THAT "the world turned upside-down" always manages to *Right* itself? Why does reaction always follow revolution, like seasons in Hell?

Uprising, or the Latin form *insurrection*, are words used by historians to label *failed* revolutions--movements which do not match the expected curve, the consensus-approved trajectory: revolution, reaction, betrayal, the founding of a stronger and even more oppressive State--the turning of the wheel, the return of history again and again to its highest form: jackboot on the face of humanity forever.

By failing to follow this curve, the *up-rising* suggests the possibility of a movement outside and beyond the Hegelian spiral of that "progress" which is secretly nothing more than a vicious circle. *Surgo*--rise up, surge. *Insurgo*--rise up, raise oneself up. A bootstrap operation. A goodbye to that wretched parody of the karmic round, historical revolutionary futility. The slogan "Revolution!" has mutated from tocsin to toxin, a malign pseudo-Gnostic fate-trap, a nightmare where no matter how we struggle we never escape that evil Aeon, that incubus the State, one State after another, every "heaven" ruled by yet one more evil angel.

If History IS "Time," as it claims to be, then the uprising is a moment that springs up and out of Time, violates the "law" of History. If the State IS History, as it claims to be, then the insurrection is the forbidden moment, an unforgivable denial of the dialectic--shimmying up the pole and out of the smokehole, a shaman's maneuver carried out at an "impossible angle" to the universe. History says the Revolution attains "permanence," or at least duration, while the uprising is "temporary." In this sense an uprising is like a "peak experience" as opposed to the standard of "ordinary" consciousness and experience. Like festivals, uprisings cannot happen every day--otherwise they would not be "nonordinary." But such moments of intensity give shape and meaning to the entirety of a life. The shaman returns--you can't stay up on the roof forever-- but things have changed, shifts and integrations have occurred--a *difference* is made.

You will argue that this is a counsel of despair. What of the anarchist dream, the Stateless state, the Commune, the autonomous zone with *duration*, a free society, a free *culture*? Are we to abandon that hope in return for some existentialist *acte gratuit*? The point is not to change consciousness but to change the world.

I accept this as a fair criticism. I'd make two rejoinders nevertheless; first, *revolution* has never yet resulted in achieving this dream. The vision comes to life in the moment of uprising--but as soon as "the Revolution" triumphs and the State returns, the dream and the ideal are *already* betrayed. I have not given up hope or even expectation of change--but I distrust the word *Revolution*. Second, even if we replace the revolutionary approach with a concept of *insurrection blossoming spontaneously into anarchist culture*, our own particular historical situation is not propitious for such a vast undertaking. Absolutely nothing but a futile martyrdom could possibly result now from a head- on collision with the terminal State, the megacorporate information State, the empire of Spectacle and Simulation. Its guns are all pointed at us, while our meager weaponry finds nothing to aim at but a hysteresis, a rigid vacuity, a Spook capable of smothering every spark in an ectoplasm of information, a society of capitulation ruled by the image of the Cop and the absorbant eye of the TV screen.

In short, we're not touting the TAZ as an exclusive end in itself, replacing all other forms of organization, tactics, and goals. We recommend it because it can provide the quality of enhancement associated with the uprising without necessarily leading to violence and martyrdom. The TAZ is like an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, *before* the State can crush it. Because the State is concerned primarily with Simulation rather than substance, the TAZ can "occupy" these areas clandestinely and carry on its festal purposes for quite a while in relative peace. Perhaps certain small TAZs have lasted whole lifetimes because they went unnoticed, like hillbilly enclaves--because they never intersected with the Spectacle, never appeared outside that real life which is invisible to the agents of Simulation.

Babylon takes its abstractions for realities; precisely *within* this margin of error the TAZ can come into existence. Getting the TAZ started may involve tactics of violence and defense, but its greatest strength lies in its invisibility--the State cannot recognize it because History has no definition of it. As soon as the TAZ is named (represented, mediated), it must vanish, it *will* vanish, leaving behind it an empty husk, only to spring up again somewhere else, once again invisible because undefinable in terms of the Spectacle. The TAZ is thus a perfect tactic for an era in which the State is omnipresent and all-powerful and yet simultaneously riddled with cracks and vacancies. And because the TAZ is a microcosm of that "anarchist dream" of a free culture, I can think of no better tactic by which to work toward that goal while at the same time experiencing some of its benefits here and now.

In sum, realism demands not only that we give up *waiting* for "the Revolution" but also that we give up *wanting* it. "Uprising," yes--as often as possible and even at the risk of violence. The *spasming* of the Simulated State will be "spectacular," but in most cases the best and most radical tactic will be to refuse to engage in spectacular violence, to *withdraw* from the area of simulation, to disappear.

The TAZ is an encampment of guerilla ontologists: strike and run away. Keep moving the entire tribe, even if it's only data in the Web. The TAZ must be capable of defense; but both the "strike" and the "defense" should, if possible, evade the violence of the State, which is no longer a *meaningful* violence. The strike is made at structures of control, essentially at ideas; the defense is "invisibility," a *martial art*, and "invulnerability"--an "occult" art within the martial arts. The "nomadic war machine" conquers without being noticed and moves on before the map can be adjusted. As to the future--Only the

autonomous can *plan* autonomy, organize for it, create it. It's a bootstrap operation. The first step is somewhat akin to *satori*--the realization that the TAZ begins with a simple act of realization.

(Note: See Appendix C, quote by Renzo Novatore)

The Psychotopology of Everyday Life

THE CONCEPT OF THE TAZ arises first out of a critique of Revolution, and an appreciation of the Insurrection. The former labels the latter a failure; but for us *uprising* represents a far more interesting possibility, from the standard of a psychology of liberation, than all the "successful" revolutions of bourgeoisie, communists, fascists, etc.

The second generating force behind the TAZ springs from the historical development I call "the closure of the map." The last bit of Earth unclaimed by any nation-state was eaten up in 1899. Ours is the first century without *terra incognita*, without a frontier. Nationality is the highest principle of world governance--not one speck of rock in the South Seas can be left *open*, not one remote valley, not even the Moon and planets. This is the apotheosis of "territorial gangsterism." Not one square inch of Earth goes unpoliced or untaxed...in theory.

The "map" is a political abstract grid, a gigantic *con* enforced by the carrot/stick conditioning of the "Expert" State, until for most of us the map *becomes* the territory- -no longer "Turtle Island," but "the USA." And yet because the map is an abstraction it cannot cover Earth with 1:1 accuracy. Within the fractal complexities of actual geography the map can see only dimensional grids. Hidden enfolded immensities escape the measuring rod. The map is not accurate; the map *cannot* be accurate.

So--Revolution is closed, but insurgency is open. For the time being we concentrate our force on temporary "power surges," avoiding all entanglements with "permanent solutions."

And--the map is closed, but the autonomous zone is open. Metaphorically it unfolds within the fractal dimensions invisible to the cartography of Control. And here we should introduce the concept of psychotopology (and -topography) as an alternative "science" to that of the State's surveying and mapmaking and "psychic imperialism." Only psychotopography can draw 1:1 maps of reality because only the human mind provides sufficient complexity to model the real. But a 1:1 map cannot "control" its territory because it is virtually identical with its territory. It can only be used to *suggest*, in a sense *gesture towards*, certain features. We are looking for "spaces" (geographic, social, cultural, imaginal) with potential to flower as autonomous zones--and we are looking for times in which these spaces are relatively open, either through neglect on the part of the State or because they have somehow escaped notice by the mapmakers, or for whatever reason. Psychotopology is the art of *dowsing* for potential TAZs.

The closures of Revolution and of the map, however, are only the negative sources of the TAZ; much remains to be said of its positive inspirations. Reaction alone cannot provide the energy needed to "manifest" a TAZ. An uprising must be *for* something as well.

1. First, we can speak of a natural anthropology of the TAZ. The nuclear family is the base unit of consensus society, but not of the TAZ. ("Families!--how I hate them! the misers of love!"--Gide) The nuclear family, with its attendant "oedipal miseries," appears to have

been a Neolithic invention, a response to the "agricultural revolution" with its imposed scarcity and its imposed hierarchy. The Paleolithic model is at once more primal and more radical: the *band*. The typical hunter/gatherer nomadic or semi- nomadic band consists of about 50 people. Within larger tribal societies the band-structure is fulfilled by clans within the tribe, or by sodalities such as initiatic or secret societies, hunt or war societies, gender societies, "children's republics," and so on. If the nuclear family is produced by scarcity (and results in miserliness), the band is produced by abundance--and results in prodigality. The family is *closed*, by genetics, by the male's *possession* of women and children, by the hierarchic totality of agricultural/industrial society. The band is *open*--not to everyone, of course, but to the affinity group, the initiates sworn to a bond of love. The band is not part of a larger hierarchy, but rather part of a horizontal pattern of custom, extended kinship, contract and alliance, spiritual affinities, etc. (American Indian society preserves certain aspects of this structure even now.)

In our own post-Spectacular Society of Simulation many forces are working--largely invisibly--to phase out the nuclear family and bring back the band. Breakdowns in the structure of Work resonate in the shattered "stability" of the unit-home and unit-family. One's "band" nowadays includes friends, ex-spouses and lovers, people met at different jobs and pow-wows, affinity groups, special interest networks, mail networks, etc. The nuclear family becomes more and more obviously a *trap*, a cultural sinkhole, a neurotic secret implosion of split atoms--and the obvious counter-strategy emerges spontaneously in the almost unconscious rediscovery of the more archaic and yet more post-industrial possibility of the band.

2. The TAZ as *festival*. Stephen Pearl Andrews once offered, as an image of anarchist society, the *dinner party*, in which all structure of authority dissolves in conviviality and celebration (see Appendix C). Here we might also invoke Fourier and his concept of the senses as the basis of social becoming--"touch-rut" and "gastrosophy," and his paean to the neglected implications of smell and taste. The ancient concepts of jubilee and saturnalia originate in an intuition that certain events lie outside the scope of "profane time," the measuring-rod of the State and of History. These holidays literally occupied gaps in the calendar--*intercalary intervals*. By the Middle Ages, nearly a third of the year was given over to holidays. Perhaps the riots against calendar reform had less to do with the "eleven lost days" than with a sense that imperial science was conspiring to close up these gaps in the calendar where the people's freedoms had accumulated--a coup d'etat, a mapping of the year, a seizure of time itself, turning the organic cosmos into a clockwork universe. The death of the festival.

Participants in insurrection invariably note its festive aspects, even in the midst of armed struggle, danger, and risk. The uprising is like a saturnalia which has slipped loose (or been forced to vanish) from its intercalary interval and is now at liberty to pop up anywhere or when. Freed of time and place, it nevertheless possesses a nose for the ripeness of events, and an affinity for the *genius loci*; the science of psychotopology indicates "flows of forces" and "spots of power" (to borrow occultist metaphors) which localize the TAZ spatio-temporally, or at least help to define its relation to moment and locale.

The media invite us to "come celebrate the moments of your life" with the spurious unification of commodity and spectacle, the famous *non-event* of pure representation. In response to this obscenity we have, on the one hand, the spectrum of *refusal* (chronicled by the Situationists, John Zerzan, Bob Black *et al*.)--and on the other hand, the emergence of a *festal culture* removed and even hidden from the would-be managers of our leisure.

"Fight for the right to party" is in fact not a parody of the radical struggle but a new manifestation of it, appropriate to an age which offers TVs and telephones as ways to "reach out and touch" other human beings, ways to "Be There!"

Pearl Andrews was right: the dinner party is already "the seed of the new society taking shape within the shell of the old" (IWW Preamble). The sixties-style "tribal gathering," the forest conclave of eco-saboteurs, the idyllic Beltane of the neo-pagans, anarchist conferences, gay faery circles...Harlem rent parties of the twenties, nightclubs, banquets, old-time libertarian picnics--we should realize that all these are already "liberated zones" of a sort, or at least potential TAZs. Whether open only to a few friends, like a dinner party, or to thousands of celebrants, like a Be-In, the party is always "open" because it is not "ordered"; it may be planned, but unless it "*happens*" it's a failure. The element of spontaneity is crucial.

The essence of the party: face-to-face, a group of humans synergize their efforts to realize mutual desires, whether for good food and cheer, dance, conversation, the arts of life; perhaps even for erotic pleasure, or to create a communal artwork, or to attain the very transport of bliss-- in short, a "union of egoists" (as Stirner put it) in its simplest form--or else, in Kropotkin's terms, a basic biological drive to "mutual aid." (Here we should also mention Bataille's "economy of excess" and his theory of potlatch culture.)

3. Vital in shaping TAZ reality is the concept of *psychic nomadism* (or as we jokingly call it, "rootless cosmopolitanism"). Aspects of this phenomenon have been discussed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Nomadology and the War Machine*, by Lyotard in *Driftworks* and by various authors in the "Oasis" issue of *Semiotext(e)*. We use the term "psychic nomadism" here rather than "urban nomadism," "nomadology," "driftwork," etc., simply in order to garner all these concepts into a single loose complex, to be studied in light of the coming- into-being of the TAZ. "The death of God," in some ways a de-centering of the entire "European" project, opened a multi-perspectived post- ideological worldview able to move "rootlessly" from philosophy to tribal myth, from natural science to Taoism-- able to see for the first time through eyes like some golden insect's, each facet giving a view of an entirely other world.

But this vision was attained at the expense of inhabiting an epoch where speed and "commodity fetishism" have created a tyrannical false unity which tends to blur all cultural diversity and individuality, so that "one place is as good as another." This paradox creates "gypsies," psychic travellers driven by desire or curiosity, wanderers with shallow loyalties (in fact disloyal to the "European Project" which has lost all its charm and vitality), not tied down to any particular time and place, in search of diversity and adventure...This description covers not only the X-class artists and intellectuals but also migrant laborers, refugees, the "homeless," tourists, the RV and mobile-home culture--also people who "travel" via the Net, but may never leave their own rooms (or those like Thoreau who "have travelled much--in Concord"); and finally it includes "everybody," all of us, living through our automobiles, our vacations, our TVs, books, movies, telephones, changing jobs, changing "lifestyles," religions, diets, etc., etc.

Psychic nomadism as a *tactic*, what Deleuze & Guattari metaphorically call "the war machine," shifts the paradox from a passive to an active and perhaps even "violent" mode. "God"'s last throes and deathbed rattles have been going on for such a long time--in the form of Capitalism, Fascism, and Communism, for example--that there's still a lot of "creative destruction" to be carried out by post-Bakuninist post-Nietzschean commandos

or *apaches* (literally "enemies") of the old Consensus. These nomads practice the *razzia*, they are corsairs, they are viruses; they have both need and desire for TAZs, camps of black tents under the desert stars, interzones, hidden fortified oases along secret caravan routes, "liberated" bits of jungle and bad-land, no-go areas, black markets, and underground bazaars.

These nomads chart their courses by strange stars, which might be luminous clusters of data in cyberspace, or perhaps hallucinations. Lay down a map of the land; over that, set a map of political change; over that, a map of the Net, especially the counter-Net with its emphasis on clandestine information-flow and logistics--and finally, over all, the 1:1 map of the creative imagination, aesthetics, values. The resultant grid comes to life, animated by unexpected eddies and surges of energy, coagulations of light, secret tunnels, surprises.

CONTINUE