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Leaving Out the Ugly Part — On Hakim Bey

Robert P. Helms

2004

The Brooklyn Rail (July-August 2004) has just published an interview of Peter Lamborn Wilson (Hakim Bey), that gives the reader a misleading and incomplete picture of the subject. The interview was then forwarded to the Research on Anarchism list-serve. “Wilson rightly became celebrated as a kind of urban prophet,” the interviewer writes, “It was an identity to add the others he bears seamlessly and without contradiction: anarchist, poet, public intellectual, psychedelic explorer, artist, social critic, Sufi mystic.”

The interviewer’s special phrasing, “seamlessly and without contradiction,” is where she begins, unintentionally, to mislead. I am writing to describe another unusual way in which Mr. Wilson has distinguished himself that may make a wrinkle or two in the average person’s opinion: he is a public paedophile intellectual of international reputation, and one who mixes anarchist ideology into his paedophile discourse. Even though we’re talking about a writer whose work has now been translated into French, Russian, German, Dutch, and other languages, I should like to emphasise that there is no reason why

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the interviewer should have already known this. The Rail's pages, however, have presented him as entirely respectable thinker, and I am writing to correct that mistake.

It was actually the very first thing I ever heard about the man: "Same person as Hakim Bey. Goes for little Boys," was the matter-of-fact comment from one of his New York City comrades, around 1991, when I was still new to anarchism, and living in Philadelphia. At first there was no special reason for me to make an issue of it. I have known people who have mentioned sexual encounters they had with adults when they were children, and which they considered to have been harmless. I've simply pointed out that the burden of responsibility lies only with the adult, and not with the child, and that was the end of it. I have not once been considered a prude by anyone who knows me, nor anything but blunt and heavy-handed when discussing in favour of one's right to choose the sexual lifestyle. But choices made by consenting adults is the realm of the discussion.

Peter Lamborn Wilson (who writes at least as often as Hakim Bey and makes no secret of the pseudonym), uses anarchism in an ethically warped, opportunistic way by pretending that adult-child sex is a natural freedom. It isn't, and not only would almost any anarchist disagree with him, but they'd also dispute a child-rapist's right to a non-violent remedy in many cases. As a person who is and always is, in both public and private life, as an anarchist, I feel the responsibility to simply put my disagreement on record. I do so now because the forwarding of the Rail interview creates an error of omission on the r-a list.

There is a periodical, preserved at the University of Michigan's famous Labadie Collection, that seems to make an unlikely fit with the purpose of that special archive, which is to preserve anarchist materials in particular, as well as those of other social movements, including sexual freedom and gay liberation. It is the NAMBLA Bulletin, which has been published monthly since 1983 by the North American Man-Boy Love As-

sociation. “Man-boy Love” is a term used by apologists of paedophilia. I hereafter use the term paedophilia where such people would object to its use. But why was a paedophile magazine acquired by an archive with such a charter? Most people would argue that “Man-Boy Love” is not an issue relating to gay culture at all, since paedophilia occurs no more or less frequently among gays than it does with straights. Very few people of any politics consider adult-child sex to be a legitimate lifestyle choice. But the former curator who added NAMBLA Bulletin to the Labadie was actually keeping to the central mission of the anarchist archive when he subscribed to the journal.

Beginning with the July-August 1985 issue, the magazine carried a long series of items by Hakim Bey, who was already a distinctly anarchist writer. Most of them were discussions of the paedophile obsession with a clear anarchist slant. Anarchist ideology was the mode of justification, the method of persuading children to have sex and to keep it secret. Take for example the following poem, “My Political Beliefs,” from NAMBLA Bulletin’s June 1986 issue, page 14:

barelegged on his bicycle in the park he rides
beneath
a children’s fountain droplets catch his hair which
the afternoon makes somewhat bronze, beaded
with molten dew
— the sunset over Jersey like an industrial
krakatoa:
Newark Gold, Secaucus Red, East Orange.
The button on his blazer: Anarchist Bicyclists
he’s in the bathtub, I see
him through a crack in the door playing with himself,
he calls me in, shows me
underwater push-ups and sit-ups, except for his
gallic buttocks his skin is gilt as the air over the
Hudson. The touch of his wet, bath-wrinkled fin-

gers in my hand... but then...
one of his parents clumps down the hall... I suppose to make sure neither of us is raping the other...
[chorus of groans] Ohhh! for a
Buster-Keaton-bomb all spherical & black as coal-dust with sweet sparkling with sweet sparkling fuse a mindbomb to
Drop on the Idea of the Family! O for a libertarian isle of runaways! O goodnight
Moon, I am lost, actually lost without him
But I didn't want this to be
Just another poem about hopeless love. Pretend it's a manifesto instead. Down with School! Boy Rule OK! In the land of dreams
No governance exists
But that of anarchs and kings, for dreamers have not yet learned to vote or think past the unfurling of the moment. He touches my cheek, runs delicate fingers through the hairs on my arm.
My liege shatters all Law for a triple kiss.
— Hakim Bey

Many of Hakim Bey's best-known anarchist pitches first saw print as paedophile apologies. NAMBLA published his "Association for Ontological Anarchism, communiqué #2" in July-Aug 1986, and a journal called Gayme ran "A Temporary Autonomous Zone" and "Pirate Utopias" in issues of 1993-95, along with his more obscure "Contemplation of the Unbearded."

Bey's best-known book *Temporary Autonomous Zone* (TAZ) describes spiritual zones in which anything goes, where the oppressive rules of the outside society need not interfere with what feels good to do. I realise that many honest people have read TAZ without taking any sleazy impression from

can't deal with a new ethical problem, they probably would not know what to do with that new, real revolutionary opportunity for which they pine so passionately.

The fact that a widely celebrated, living anarchist writer has smeared the anarchist tradition with a sugar-coated image of paedophilia is an issue that will continue to be raised. I feel that this is fair and relevant because I keep spotting distorted presentations of Hakim Bey and his motives, as in this last issue of the Brooklyn Rail.

* * *

Anyone who wants a copy of the Hakim Bey paedophile bibliography (a work in progress) should just ask, and the author will email it to you.

it. I hope they'll forgive me for pointing out that paedophiles say these same things to children. In his essay "Obsessive Love" (Moorish Science Monitor, Vol. 7, #5, Summer 1995), in which he pretends to be quite the classical scholar, he talks about ancient religious views on romantic and obsessive love. "The Greco-Egypto-Islamic ferment adds a pederastic [i.e. paedophile] element... the ideal woman of romance is neither wife nor concubine but someone in the forbidden category..." He uses the term "spiritual alchemy" for witnessing the "Divine Beloved in certain beautiful boys," and remarks that, "since all homosexuality is forbidden in Islamic law, a boy-loving sufi has no 'safe' category for sensual realisation."

In fact, one of the commonest defence lawyerish lines about paedophilia is how "the Greeks did it," or how incredibly well Michael Jackson sings and dances; or how some long-dead and noteworthy author was also was in the habit of boning the baby. These are feeble and irrelevant ways to side-step the ethical issue. Knowledge is power, and children know almost nothing. But just so we go through the points, it was a minority of rich Athenian Greeks during the Classical period, not all "the Greeks," who accepted paedophilia, while, by the way, they were also proclaiming their misogyny in rhetorically gorgeous ways. Athens was a slave-owning society in which democracy was observed only between citizens not between everyone — and the use of slaves as sexual chattel carried no age-restrictions. Furthermore, in no way should artistic talent cause one to be forgiven a sexual abuse or rape. In fact, when a paedophile is very witty and well-spoken, this very same skill is used to attract young, gullible targets. To argue for paedophilia is imbecile when it is sincere. It is so logically pathetic, in fact, that one almost needs to be a child to believe that it's sincere.

Pressing the anarcho-paedophile cause in another way, Wilson (Bey) reviewed the reprint of the late 19th century German-based anarchist John Henry Mackay's book Fenny Skaller and

Other Poems, etc.. Bey's essay was entitled "Man-Boy Love Novel Still Relevant 100 Years On." (NAMBLA Bulletin April 1989). In "Obsessive Love," Bey again invokes Mackay (1864–1933), whose paedophilia was never known to other anarchist writers during his life: "I admit to a philosophical preference for Mackay's position..." [which means the] "giving up of all false chivalry and self-denying dandyism in favour of more 'pagan' and convivial modes of love." He closes the essay with his clearest anarcho-paedophile statement: "it has taken on a tantalising reality and filtered into my life in certain Temporary Autonomous Zones an impossible time and space and on this brief hint, all my theory is based." What he means by this is that he really has sex with children, rather than leaving the matter to fantasy, and that this is his purpose when he preaches anarchism.

Hakim Bey is the pseudonym for 59-year old Peter Lamborn Wilson, who has been based in New York City for most of his life, but is now living upstate in New Paltz. The Brooklyn Rail's interviewer, has this mistakenly reversed, giving Bey as the original name, Wilson as the pseudonym. The guy was born a WASP, and perhaps became Sufi one day while prowling the mountains of Asia. He has no occupation, and in 1994 told an interviewer (Voice Literary Supplement, New York, Feb. 1994) that he "thanks God that a trickle of family money keeps him 'independently poor.'"¹ The name Lamborn is rare in New York, and it is where the Sugar industry magnate Ody Lamborn died in 1971. It's been my impression that Hakim Bey's trust fund was originally earned by tormented labourers on sugar plantations. Whether it's from sugar or from something else, this brings us to Wilson's touching concern, about what he called "a class war situation" in the Rail interview: "Where's our support for the Mexican migrant agricultural workers?"

¹ Erik Davis, interviewer, "The Wandering Sufi: Introduction to the Mystic with Peter Lamborn Wilson," Voice Literary Supplement, New York,

was glad to have been informed, and there was a short, respectful exchange between us. But the editors of the Rail merely tossed off a form letter: "Thank you for your input..." There was no evidence of any sort of concern, nor admission that the interview made a completely skewed impression of its subject, no hint that editors have an ethical responsibility for what they put on their pages.

Worse still is for there to be no reply, not even a private note. I was particularly disgusted by Andrei Codrescu, the (obviously anarchist) National Public Radio commentator who gave "TAZ and the Tazzerites" a glowing ten minutes of his voice on All Things Considered in July of 2003. I very respectfully wrote him about these concerns, then I confirmed that he'd received my letter, but I received no reply at all. The obvious message is that it's beneath Codrescu's consideration to acknowledge in a ten-second message — Yes the paedo-stuff is a drag but I like his other writings, sorry but I disagree or whatever he thinks. He means that Hakim Bey's 25 or more years as a public intellectual of anarchist paedophilia is not any problem for him when he tells seventy million people what cool stuff the guy writes, without reference to the paedophile origin and undercurrent of TAZ, the same item he recommended.

No one anywhere denies that Peter Lamborn Wilson (Hakim Bey) is paedophile, least of all the man himself. I state what I see on his pages, I offer my opinions as opinions only, and I make no accusation of criminal conduct. The citations are right there, for anyone to check for accuracy. Endlessly, anarchists have privately agreed that I am absolutely right, on-the-money correct, about this issue. The number who have written that opinion down where anyone else can read it is very close to zero. I am left with the impression that they are not taking responsibility for what they know. This does not speak well of the anarchists of the United States. I feel that with anarchism becoming ever more popular, the greater portion of new anarchists are just consumers of anarchist stuff. Since such people

reasons for people (including a huge number of anarchists) to take their anti-clerical rage into action. Many anarchists have denied that any of this happened, saying that it was all just fascist propaganda, or that it's been wildly exaggerated. Actually, there is plenty of hard evidence that it did happen. Rather than a bizarre, revisionist denial, I would rather hear us say that the current craze for anarchist soccer-teams has its roots in Spain (Madrid, I believe), where teenagers played football with the skull of a saint, out in the plaza in front of the church named after him. Why don't we just talk about it? Why can't we talk about a fairly well-known anarchist author as the paedophile personality that he most certainly is? What's the point of calling oneself "anarchist" if there's some area of discussion where it's too disturbing to ever step?

More directly intriguing to me is why I have been shut out of letters columns or declined for print in anarchist periodicals on about twenty occasions (and again now, in the Brooklyn Rail) when I cite the articles, name the issue, and express my disapproval for a man who presents child molestation as a point of anarchistic freedom. The reasons given by editors vary widely. Some reactions are hostile, taken very personally. Other cases express appreciation and some concern for the information. Certain editors have written so much thick, loving praise for Bey, and printed so much of his work that they find themselves cornered when the paedophilia item is raised. They have no sympathy for child-molestation but they frantically search for paths by which they can stay clear of its discussion, perhaps fearing that somehow, the stink of it would cling to them and their publication. They'll sometimes argue that it's unfair to link the person with the person's writings. I point to these editors, as I have here, that it's in the writings that all this is happening, with the less bold examples sometimes drooling out in their own anarchist pages.

In the present case, the writer who interviewed Lamborn Wilson recently at his green wood-frame house in New Paltz

I have operated dangerous machinery in factories, carried lumber up flights of stairs, and I have (like most anarchists) done other boring, low-paid jobs to feed myself, starting around age thirteen. Still, I have known several anarchists who come from wealthy families, and I've thought well of them because they make the choice to use their privilege (freedom allowed by their trust fund) in good faith; perhaps to heal wounds made earlier by their own relatives. But Peter Lamborn Wilson gives me an unquiet feeling when he pretends to understand and hold concern in his heart for that other world, where he's never paid a visit, and where people work because they must work. It has the very phoney ring of someone pouring syrup into a liberal ear.

His use of his word-skills, of course, has me feeling still worse. As he conjoins his paedophile mission with anarchism, he knows very well that anarchism is now very popular among the very young. This is not "spiritual anarchism," as he entitled a public "Chaos Day" lecture in December of 2002. It is paedophile opportunism. Another device he uses a lot is exemplified in "Tectum Theatrum" (Fifth Estate, Summer 2003), in which he uses Latin phrases over and over, never to say something there's no English word for, but to impress the utterly naive reader. Having read Classical languages in college, this is especially tedious and transparent to me, but it certainly will have its desired effect on adolescent readers.

While he has no occupation, Bey/Wilson has not been idle. In Fifth Estate #363, just this past winter, he relates how, when he was in his mid-twenties, he was wandering around Persia and South Asia, smoking opium and "looking for traditional anarchism" in Sufism. Under his pseudonym (Bey), he's found some paedophile culture over in that region as well. His translation of Abu Nuwas' poetry, O Tribe That Loves Boys was published in Amsterdam in 1993.

February 1994

When he was about thirty, Bey founded the Semiotext(e)-Autonome Publishing group in New York. It has since become one of the larger of the US-based anarchist publishers, and Bey remains with the group, which carries several of his titles. An early release was *Loving Boys: Semiotext(e) Special* (1980), edited by Bey. Thus he's been on this crusade, in print, for at least twenty-five years. For some time, he had a program on WBAI Radio, entitled "The Moorish Orthodox Radio Crusade."

In the letters column of *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* (#20/21, Nov-Dec 1989, p. 42), a letter announced a new zine for contributors 17 and under. *Wild Children*, as the zine was called, solicited articles on "anarchy (of course!), sci-fi, sexuality & love, spiritual paths (or lack thereof), and anything else kids would like to submit." The letter gave Hakim Bey as the editor, at a Brooklyn PO Box. Lev Chernyi, the editor of *Anarchy*² replied that "Wild Children sounds like an interesting idea. I hope it works out. Any young readers interested?" In 1998, a 64-page anthology of this zine was published, switching over to the name Wilson as editor.³ While the anthology is not considered a paedophile text and is carried by some anarchist bookstores without concern, it should be noted that its contents were solicited by a public anarchist-paedophile apologist during the same years (1993–1997) when he was contributing pieces of clearly anarchist-paedophile intent to the magazine *Gayme*, which was a bit more strident than other child-molester periodicals, and was once the target of a public prosecutor in Massachusetts. Due to legal issues relating to the its contents, in fact, the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives in Toronto preserves the title but will not allow scanning or copying of its pages. I have been unable to locate original copies

² The same editor sometimes uses the name Jason McQuinn.

³ *Wild Children: A Zine For Kids*. New York, Scb Publishers, 1998. Peter Lamborn Wilson (Editor) and Dave Mandl (Editor).

of the zine *Wild Children*, but in yet another NAMBLA publication, its *Journal* (#7; 1986), the age "ten-and-a-half" occurs as the age of a boy in a sketch by Bey. In typical paedophile style, everything is pushed to where he can't go farther without the expectation of some angry person attacking him. But Bey takes things to the next step by using a name by which he (Peter Wilson) is actually identified. He's safe in doing so because of the extreme toleration of anarchists in general, and the shallowness of many.

Paedophilia is not the only opinion for which Hakim Bey has irritated other anarchists. One example is his views on abortion. In "Communique #9" of the Association for Ontological Anarchy, Bey wrote: "According to Chaos Theory, it does not follow that we are obliged to like or approve of murder or abortion. Chaos would enjoy seeing every bastard love-child carried to term & birthed; sperm & egg alone are merely lovely secretions, but combined as DNA they become potential consciousness, negentropy, joy... If 'meat is murder!' as the Vegans like to claim, what pray tell is abortion?"

I will not offer any reason to be offended by the paedophile literature or the misogynist position of Hakim Bey as quoted above. The ethical idiocy of both are self-evident, and neither is part of anything that should be considered an anarchist idea. I am not surprised that these opinions exist, but I am most uncomfortable for realising that there is a discreet haven for both within the anarchist culture of the United States. It makes me wonder, in fact: why did the world-wide Catholic Church sex abuse scandal go by a few years ago, without any commentary from American anarchists? Is this another dirty little anarchist secret?

As for what I mean by a "dirty little anarchist secret," here's another example: when about 7,000 priests were killed, many Catholic churches burned, and many saintly cadavers mockingly defiled at the beginning of the Spanish Revolution of 1936, it was in pretty bad taste, but there were very logical and fair