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# Parasitic Economy

A Concept

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Retrieved on 3 August 2023 from  
[alpineanarchist.org/r\\_parasitic\\_economy](http://alpineanarchist.org/r_parasitic_economy).  
Alpine Anarchist Productions pamphlet no. 27.

[usa.anarchistlibraries.net](http://usa.anarchistlibraries.net)

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sarily wanna hear that they waste their lives away by doing what they are doing, or worse: that they are foolish to do what they are doing. Most of the militant anti-work kids come from middle class or upper middle class families, hence their whole environment has always invited them to be parasitic; that's what they grew up with, that's what they are used to, that's what's easy for them to do. A lot of other people aren't that fortunate, and they don't necessarily have social resources to tap into, nor the cynical waste lying around that only rich people can afford. (Plus, often enough, they've got families to feed as well, a responsibility which will change one's outlook on 'personal freedom' and the joys of insecurity and 'floating around' drastically.) So, often work becomes their only means of providing for themselves and their families, and they might take pride in that, also (even if unfortunately not often enough) in a revolutionary ('proletarian') sense. And I do think that there can lie something very honorable in this. I mean, I do not think that any legitimacy derives from this to criticize those who embark on a purely parasitic path, but I'm also thinking that those on such a path do not at all hold any moral high ground. Ideally, there'd be respect amongst those who accept their exploitation in the machine to eventually overthrow it and those who try to evade the machine pursuing the same goal. Some comrades on the inside, some on the outside – what could be better?

nostalgia, friends are going, you just wanna have a laugh). As far as small independent festivals go that struggle to put their shit on and really try to do something for the local community: Hey, why not support the event and throw some bucks their way if they need them?

### III Appendix

The most common criticism of an economic lifestyle in the vein of what I just sketched, refers to the notion of sustainability: It raises the question of how – if we only live off the products of others – we will be able to survive at all when these others ain't producing anymore? I don't think that dealing with this question for very long would be all too interesting, especially since I assume it should be clear by now what my response to it would be, since I have tried to maintain throughout this essay that a) a parasitic existence is no economic model for an anarchist society, but a means for anarchists to survive within the socio-economic realities we find ourselves in today, and that b) once these realities would drastically change, we would be forced to entirely rethink our status as producers/consumers anyway, which would also imply the necessity to figure out what we wanna produce, and in what amounts and what ways.

A more interesting criticism, I think (also because it is the one that seems to hardly receive any consideration in the *Evasion*-circles – other than being ridiculed, that is) is the one that raises the question of whether there might lie some virtue in work – mainly as in: 'earning a living' – after all. Even though such a concept is far from popular with the young 'new' anarchists, I think it is not completely preposterous: the flat-out rejection of ('honest', if you will) work as a way of making a living is one of the things that separates us ('the movement') often enough decisively from the working classes who don't neces-

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or her hat, right? So if listening to a band's album gives you joy for months, maybe it would be cool to actually buy it (for yourself, or as a gift) or to maybe go to one of the band's shows. At least when they are on an independent (maybe even their own) label. Should they be on a major, I think such a contribution would be much less critical. In fact, I'm tempted to say that if they are on a major, you have very good reason not to buy any of their stuff at all, as too many other assholes will make money off of your buy. In theory, you could just send some money to the artists directly, if you really wanted to. At the same time, I don't think we'd have to concern ourselves too much with compensating artists on majors, since they are usually rich anyway, and it's not like we'd have to worry about their mouths being fed or their bills being paid. That's why I think the likes of Lars Ulrich really do deserve the wrath they earned for their role in the industry's anti-pirating campaigns. What's their problem, man? Like, are they worried they can't afford a fifth Harley? Fuck that. In the end, I think corporate art should just be seen as public domain. I think that's the least we can demand, given the corporate oppression we have to live under. Bottom line: I think that it generally lies within the anarchist idea and spirit to enjoy art for free, and that this applies to corporate art as well since no one gets hurt if we do. At the same time, I think that it's more than fair to give something back to the artists of the 'starving' category if we can, considering the economic realities they have to live their lives in. This probably just comes down to a matter of solidarity.

*Sneaking into commercial shows and events:* I think this is a variation of what's just been said about pirating: As far as big commercial events go: Fuck it. They suck, many assholes make a profit, and if anything should be free then it should be festivals for the people. So if you can find a way in, more power to you. (The question always remains of course why you'd wanna be at a big commercial event anyway, but okay, there can always be reasons, I guess: one of your favorite bands is playing,

out in like three years, then it would probably make sense to just pocket it. If, however, all we need is a novel to keep us entertained for two hours on a train, and we pick one that gets checked out twice a month at the local library we just happened to pass, maybe it wouldn't be so cool to pocket that. Another question of measure, I suppose.

(There is one specific aspect I wanna add to this paragraph: Scamming free access to university facilities is always justified, I think. Education should be open to all, so the resources allocated to it should serve all too. As far as not just using but actually liberating university material goes, I think university material has to be seen as public property akin to what's in a public library, so the considerations from above would apply: For example, liberating paper and things that are used for creative or educational purposes: anytime, as far as I'm concerned. Liberating computers to play games on while others could use them for research? Me, personally, I wouldn't feel so comfortable with that. But, needless to say, it is a personal call. Maybe some of my comrades' health depends on spinning sick virtual 720s on good computers – what do I know?)

*Pirating:* Generally, I think this is fine. I think ideally all art should be public and copyright shouldn't exist. It gets more complicated of course once we admit that in contemporary society artists live as much under capitalism as anybody else – they have mouths to feed and bills to pay, and so they need money, and so why shouldn't they get it from those who appreciate reading their books, listening to their music, watching their films? Then again, what if these appreciators don't have so much to share themselves? I think the answer to this lies in a compromise between the idealistic principle of art being public domain, and the realistic need for artists to earn money. I don't think anyone ever does wrong by consuming art for free, but I do think that it is noble to give back to artists if we feel they've enriched our lives. Like, if you stop for a street musician playing a song you enjoy, it's fair enough to throw a quarter in his

## I An Anarchist Economy – Asking the Right Question

One of the most common criticisms of anarchism is that it contains no viable model of an anarchist economy. Hence – the argument usually goes – no anarchist society will ever be able to exist, since no society can maintain itself without a proper economic plan.

First of all, it is questionable whether the admitted necessity for some form of economic organization among people requires set economic models – one can argue that economic relations might just as well (and possibly much more aptly and humanely) develop once individuals relate to each other and associate freely. But this is not even a question this essay wants to pursue. My rejection of the above critique begins elsewhere: Namely where neither models of any sort nor the abstract ideal of 'an anarchist society' mean much to me. My idea of anarchism is one much rather following notions of action than of social models. Anarchism to me revolves around certain ethical principles (respect, awareness, responsibility, modesty), social ideals (freedom, justice, equality, solidarity), modes of behavior (kindness, consideration, attention, aid). It is not an ideological set of answers, and does not provide a model of how society at large needs to be; in (admittedly unhip) postmodern terms, it is no "grand theory".

Needless to say, this implies that in regard to questions of an anarchist economy, models of an anarchist economy do not interest me very much either. This does not mean to take anything away or deny respect to anarchists who have put a lot of very valuable and important work into developing economic ideas for anarchist societies – from Silvio Gesell and the theory of free money to Michael Albert and Parecon. These ideas contain a lot of vital aspects for attempts at an anarchist life, and it doesn't even matter how realistic their implementation

on a grand scale will ever be. They still inspire and can help establish social relations and networks within the belly of the beast that contain the notions of freedom and justice we are after (like established community money projects prove as much as workers-run collectives). However, none of these ideas will ever be able to define the economy of anarchist society as a whole, because a) it is rather uncertain whether there'll ever be an anarchist society as a whole, and b) because if there ever was one, it would, by definition, have to be diverse or it would cease to be anarchist. Which means that, in the end, these ideas will not (and, I might add, should not – at least in my opinion) entirely define how economic relations will work in anarchist communities, but they'll be part of a wide range of ideas shaping and defining these relations. (And just to make the following clear: The people who have developed these ideas might not make these claims anyway. This was not what I was trying to suggest. All I wanted to do was emphasize the necessity of a pluralistic approach when it comes to questions of how to arrange anarchist life, its economic aspects included.)

The point I'm trying to come to is: When we speak of anarchist economics, I think we speak of a wide array of ideas, structures, actions that deal with what defines economic relations: providing goods to satisfy material human needs – from the needs for food and shelter to those of leisure and entertainment. The general question in this regard mostly seems to be: How would we be able to produce the goods needed to satisfy these needs in an anarchist society? If anarchism is not about models, however, but about action, this question seems to shift to: How can we get our hands on these goods as anarchists? As stated above, the question becomes one of action rather than one of theory. (Or of theorizing action rather than theorizing theory, if we wanted to split hairs.)

It might be necessary to talk about needs a little in order to make what I am trying to say more clear: I do think that there are basic needs that demand to be provided for in a soci-

lie idle since it throws a wrench (no matter how small) into the destructive machine of permanent economic production that controls and determines our lives. Of course I would say that if you use anything that's public, you have a responsibility to maintain it in a way that it will be of further use to people once you personally don't use it anymore – but first of all, this just seems to be pure common sense, and, secondly, most times this will be the case anyway since it lies in the nature of personal property (which is what public property can become when it is used by certain people on a regular basis – e.g. squats) that people take care of it. So as long as this is kept in mind, I honestly can't think of a single scenario where it would not be okay to use public property for whatever. Again, in fact it seems more like a revolutionary duty since sharing resources, etc., would, I believe, necessarily be part of pretty much any anarchist community we'd envision, no matter how it'll be arranged in detail and all.

Things seem a little different once we start talking about liberating public property. What would be examples? Stealing books from a library; taking inner city community bikes home; plundering the medications distributed for free at the local free clinic. In a similar vein it would probably not be cool to scam endless free internet hours at a cultural center while others are waiting for available computers, or to incessantly occupy the basketball court in the park when others wanna get a game. In these cases we wouldn't use something for a while that had been lying idle before we'd pass it on to others – we would rather take something that is supposed to serve a public function and use it purely for our personal gains. And so obviously we gotta ask ourselves if that's okay or not. The answer seems to lie in finding the right balance: in this case between the public interest and our personal: For example, if we are really keen on studying edible plants in the forest where we just set up long-term camp with our buddies, and there is this book in the library that'd be really helpful and that hasn't been checked

their folks and the folks are sympathetic to their situation, why schmooze on others instead? I mean, pride is good and all, but do other people have to end up paying for it? I mean, if your folks are ready to support your ass unconditionally, wouldn't it be the socially soundest thing to accept that? And I don't think it makes you a mama's or a daddy's boy or girl either. You can always just take the money and run, if you know what I mean. So – to sum this up – I don't think there should be a general revolutionary ban on tapping into family resources. At the same time, I totally understand the personal issues that might prohibit one from doing this nonetheless. I do still believe that it might be virtuous if one was able to step over these issues before taking from other people (especially when they don't have much themselves) just so you can say you don't take from your family, but again, I really do understand the personal pains this can afflict on some comrades, so I don't like it when they are being dissed either. Well, I guess I'm back to where I was at the beginning of this entry: no other parasitic technique discussed here seems as personal as this.

*Using and liberating public property:* First, a qualification: I'm against what is commonly called private property and would support only a concept of personal property, which – in contrast to private property – means that you 'own' something only by actually using it; in this sense you 'earn' the right to 'own' something by looking after it, maintaining it, tending it. Private property as something that people own to speculate, capitalize, exploit (the infamous means of production), gain status, show off, whatever, I don't consider rightfully owned property, so it becomes public property to me, so everything I'm gonna write from now on about public property will apply to private property (in this sense) as well.

I would say that there is a fair difference between using and liberating public property: Using it – man, if it ain't used by anyone else, of course! Prime example: squatting. In fact, it almost seems like you have a duty to make use of resources that

ety allowing for happy individuals. People need to drink and eat healthily, need to be warm when it is cold, need to be dry when it is wet, need to be looked after when they are sick or hurt. People also (for the most part) enjoy care and affection, play, and artistic expression. Fine. How these needs are met can already be wide-ranging though: there are many healthy things to drink and eat, numerous ways of providing heat or shelter, and endless ways to show care and affection, to play, or to express oneself artistically. Different levels of economic development might have an impact on the complexity, sophistication, and variety in which these needs can be met, but higher economic development does not necessarily meet these needs better, especially when considering the price we pay in terms of exhaustive and abusive labor and exploitation and destruction of natural resources. However, I am no primitivist. I don't think soda pop is evil per se, nor the electric guitar, nor motorcycles, nor video technology. I do not think these things necessarily make our lives better lives; but I also don't think they necessarily make them worse. Material goods are just material goods. We can have them, we can not have them; we can use them, we can not use them; we can produce them, we can not produce them. I think in the grand scheme of things this has little significance in regard to our happiness as human beings, individually as well as collectively. The questions of happiness emerge rather from the way we relate to each other, from whether we feel loved and supported, from whether we feel that we are free. The tools/toys that are around are secondary. So, to summarize the first point that I consider crucial for the line of argument this essay is trying to follow: Material tools produced by us just are; they are neither to be particularly rejected, nor particularly desired.

The second point I deem crucial is rejecting the notion that there are any 'natural' ways to satisfy our desires – I do not think any such ways exist. As stated above, there seem to be basic needs common in the experience of human life. How-

ever, the ways in which these basic needs can be satisfied are numerous: to quench our thirst we can drink water, tea, or Gatorade; to relieve our hunger we can eat apples, bread, or soy patties; to play we can go for a hike, hit the ice for a game of hockey, or storm the video arcade; and for artistic experience we can write poetry, watch a play, or listen to Judas Priest. No way of satisfying our needs is in itself morally better than the other (which doesn't say anything about the varying degrees of dangers they portray to our physical health and mental sanity), no way 'more natural' than another. Preferring water over Gatorade, for example, might be better for your health and all, but it's not 'more natural' just because it needs certain social developments for a community to provide Gatorade, while it needs very little (or none – depending on the geography) to provide water. Aligning lower levels of economic development with 'a state of nature' strikes me as a false and – much worse – dangerous concept. It lends itself too easily to drawing strict moral conclusions and judgments implying all the dangers of any strict moralism: dogma, elitism, stigma, oppression, narrow-mindedness. Besides, social as well as material development is inherent in the human experience – factories are as much 'natural' consequences of this as grass huts are. This is not to deny that the particular form in which a basic human need expresses itself is not socially formed. Of course it is. The thought that Argentineans naturally prefer mate, while the Chinese naturally dig green tea is preposterous. Of course this is social conditioning (and the fact that it's based on the distribution of certain natural resources doesn't change that – you can still condition a child to dig Capt. Crunch over oatmeal, or vice versa). So what's natural is only the need itself – not the way it expresses itself and is satisfied. What I'll from now on call a particular need expression is always a result of social conditioning (with various degrees of natural components, as admitted above, but that doesn't change the basic principle). Point being, the needs we have, express themselves according

tion and act accordingly: If we feel we'd be getting from people what they'd need more importantly themselves (or we'd simply be getting 'too much'), we will probably try to find some kind of compromise: We should probably keep a certain social etiquette and not offend, hence take a little, but then back off as soon as we can without insult. At the same time, when it seems that people can (maybe even easily) afford what they are offering, I think it's perfectly fine to accept their brotherly and sisterly deed (within the confines of common courtesy, of course: not making excessive use of offers to "help yourself" or "make yourself at home", not 'overstaying your welcome', etc.). It is probably best for everyone and allows for that sense of lived everyday solidarity I consider so important in our struggle.

*Relying on family:* This is difficult and the way we answer this question may depend on even more personal factors than the answers to the other questions we discussed: Family relations belong to the most complex, messed up, but often nonetheless strongest social ties we find ourselves in. They take on so many different forms that even the vaguest general guideline seems out of place. The only aspect that at least a fair number of comrades might agree upon is that the issues discussed in the context of accepting generosity from people in general will also apply to family members (not asking what doesn't seem appropriate, measuring what we take by notions of common courtesy, etc.). What immediately complicates things here though is that often times issues of independence and pride come into play, (maybe ironically) much more so than when it comes to accepting support from friends, random acquaintances, or strangers. And what kind of action (or non-action) this forces upon us can really only be decided individually. So all I'm gonna volunteer here are some general observations in regard to the question of family reliance and all: I don't necessarily like it when comrades diss other comrades for living off of their parents, may it be for a long time or just for a while. If they have a good relationship with



the Franciscans' boots when you just saw some at Goodwill's you could get for five bucks, is something you might forgo even more so when the service providers are private and not public. At the same time, if you line up at a soup kitchen that has so much food that you know they'll have to throw some out at the end of the day, why should it be wrong to eat there, private service or not? In the same vein, if the Franciscans seem to have endless boot supplies, I think the same rationale applies.

Maybe in the end there are only two differences in making use of private social services as opposed to public ones: One, we feel we have 'less right' to use them, so we'll give more thought into whether we really need them or not (in other words: our usage of private services will be more measured). Two, we will say thank you.

*Relying on other people's generosity:* I would say that the considerations in this regard are very similar to those using private social services, only in the context of much more personal circumstances: The crucial general question appears to be: Are we 'abusing' people's generosity (do we take away what they'd need for themselves?), or are we just accepting something they are happily able and ready to give? Yet, the personal dimension of the situation raises another – a social, if you will – aspect to consider: An individual giving something to another individual is an immediate act of lived solidarity – and in this sense I find it to be a gesture of great importance since all revolutionary activity directed towards an egalitarian society builds on such everyday acts of solidarity. So, how do these two aspects (the 'general' and the 'personal') translate into a possible practical guideline here? First of all (and this is very much common sense), we would only ask people for things to give (from a couple of bucks to weeks of shelter) when we feel it's okay for them to do so and we're not taking from them/infringing on their lives too much. If, however, we find ourselves in a situation where generosity is offered to us without solicitation (or beyond what had been solicited), we'll have to assess the situa-

to our social conditioning, and these expressions are no more or less natural than others, no more or less good than others in a strict moral sense. They might, however, be more or less problematic in both a pragmatic and a contextual moral sense – which is what I want to look at now.

The pragmatic aspect refers to, for example, aspects of health (drinking water is definitely healthier than drinking Gatorade), economical considerations (drinking water is cheaper than drinking Gatorade), maybe aesthetics (it's cooler – at least in certain circles – to drink water than Gatorade). The contextual moral aspects refer to the impact the satisfaction of certain need expressions has on our social/natural surroundings – so if we follow anarchist ethical guidelines, we probably find that by drinking water rather than Gatorade we look after our body better, contribute to a cleaner environment, make more direct use of our natural resources, do not support corporate capitalism. These are all important considerations when deciding to de- or re-socialize certain need expressions. But this still doesn't change the fact that the need expressions in themselves are neither good nor bad. That still all depends.

Why is this so important to me? I think this is best understood in the context of understanding ethics as a flexible, open, dynamic process of action that allows us to make specific decisions in specific circumstances according to specific principles, rather than ethics being an intellectual system of static dos and don'ts. And when we talk about our needs and their satisfaction, this logic applies as well: it would hinder any movement of diversity and liberty to try to pass moral judgment on the need expressions themselves; I think it'd be far more beneficial if we considered instead how these need expressions function in a respective social context. I'm convinced that this would allow for a happier, freer, more just society.

Now since a society's economy is responsible for the satisfaction of a society's material needs, the questions raised strike at the core of what anyone concerned with an anarchist econ-

omy would have to think about. As a consequence of what we said though, the anarchist goal can't be a certain economic model suggesting a certain way to satisfy our basic human needs, because there is not just one way in which they express themselves. Much rather, since basic human needs express themselves in many ways (and without moral distinction), there must also be many anarchist economies.

This seems to leave us with two options: develop multiple economic anarchist theories for utopian anarchist societies to come – or circumscribe possibilities of anarchist economies within the forms of anarchist life we can experience, create, maintain today. The first option seems problematic to me again in the sense that I rather believe in developing theory along social developments than developing theory for such developments. Again, it seems to be a question of free-flowing, open, exciting development vs. regulated, contained, preconceived development. So, unsurprisingly, I'd find the second of the above options much more appealing. I think it would allow for the provision of theoretical tools that can strengthen our anarchist lives and our anarchist praxis – right here and now.

So the question we are dealing with then is not so much: What is an anarchist economy?, but: How do we satisfy our needs as anarchists in the societies we find ourselves in?

So, first, what are the needs we are talking about? As stated above, even if there might be a set of natural basic human needs, the ways in which these needs express themselves are, and probably will always be, specific to a certain place and a certain time. And they'll have to be dealt with as such. For example, if we grew up eating hot dogs, playing baseball, and watching *The Simpsons*, these might be needs we want to satisfy, also as anarchists.

The question then becomes how to satisfy them as anarchists? First of all, there will be ethical considerations: We will not want to satisfy them in any way contradicting certain of our principles. For example, if we want to be vegan or vege-

from people who'd need the services more, but because they don't want to claim services (or even think it hypocritical) from an entity (the State) they reject. I think this is very honorable, but I also think it'd be hard to hew a general argument out of this. It's not like the State always leaves us much choice. In fact, it's one of its most despotic aspects that it doesn't. So often enough we depend on using its services in order to get by (and it's not even like we'd have to be principled wage labor rejecters for ending up in that situation – often enough there isn't even any wage labor out there for us). I think that in general dealing with the State lies beyond moral consideration. You can do no wrong. You can only get more or less out of it.

The question about making use of social services appears more complicated when it comes to privately provided services. In most cases the individuals and groups involved really do have limited resources, and the donations given to them are usually given under the assumption that in one way or another they will reach the really needy. I think this demands some kind of respect. And for us this means, I guess, that what was above called a "specific situational moral choice" becomes a more pressing issue in this context: like, they wouldn't only concern exemplary scenarios as facing the decision of whether to take the last bed in a shelter or leave it for someone who might be in higher need, they would rather concern questions of whether we'll be asking certain groups or institutions for any services in the first place. I guess it would be similar to what was said above in regard to panhandling: We'd have to ask ourselves more seriously if we really need what we are asking for. Do we really need to go to that soup kitchen, or take boots from the Franciscans down the corner? Or are we taking away from people who'd need what we'd take more desperately? In the end, I think the answers would still mostly depend on the specific situation, only that you might be an edge more conscious: Like, eating at a soup kitchen when you can tell the food is just about to run out but the lines are still long, or taking

ple complacent enough not to revolt. They are a formality and have nothing to do with concrete people trying to do good. So, unsurprisingly (and this seems most important in this context), they are poorly and exclusively bureaucratically implemented and do nothing to help alleviate poverty, because this is not even what they are supposed to do. They are only supposed to give the beast a charitable facade and to keep people subjected to the State. So it's not like you are taking anything away from anybody by using social services – the way they are implemented, money runs freely and no one gives a damn anyway. Besides, if there aren't enough funds for everyone who's in need, it's not your fault – it's the State's that rather uses tax money to build roads, arm the military and police, and send business delegations overseas. (I mean, obviously we will still not take the last bed in a shelter from a person who needs it much more than we do – but that's a specific situational moral choice and doesn't change the principle.) In this sense, moral reflections on the legitimacy to claim public social services are, in my eyes, not really necessary. In my eyes, we can take whatever we want. And there is another (more general and political, if you will) reason that, I think, molds my perspective here: It is the fact that we are born into a society that might allow us choices in regard to how to make a living and all (choices for us as bourgeois beings), but that doesn't allow us any choices in regard to creating an independent existence (which would be choices for us as political beings). In short, the State system denies us the ways we wanna live our lives. So isn't the least we can expect from this system to give us crumbs in order to get by under the conditions it forces us to live in? (And despite of what the yellow press might wanna make us believe: I still have to meet those who are kicking it large off of collecting the dole).

On the other side of the spectrum, I have friends who don't use public social services not because they feel like they aren't eligible for them or because they would take anything away

tarian, we will either give up on eating hot dogs (despite our occasional cravings), or eat soy dogs. If we like baseball, we might prefer to go to Little League games rather than the World Series with all its problematic professional and commercial implications. Or if we wanna watch *The Simpsons*, we might at least not get the old shows from Blockbuster's.

Then, however (and this might be more relevant to the theme of the paper), there are the economic considerations – and this is where the strength or weight of our needs comes into place: It is one thing to consume something when it is already there and we just need to grab it. It is another thing to consume something if we first have to go through the process of producing it. So, left-handing a pack of soy dogs at Albertson's is easy – producing a pack of soy dogs not necessarily. So, as long as there are Albertson's with packs of soy dogs that can be left-handed, we might as well left-hand and eat them – once the Albertson's (and, let's say, all soy dogs) are gone, we might not. Unless we really, really want to, and then we'll find a way to produce them. And I think this is true for most things: Like, as long as there are video and DVD players, we will watch movies if we like movies. Once these things are gone, are we gonna go through the whole process of producing the hardware we need to shoot and show films, etc., or are we just gonna put on plays? Again, I don't think it's necessary to answer these questions now as long as the enemy produces films anyway (or at least the material means to make them). We can deal with these questions once this won't be the case anymore.

To be honest though – and this is of some importance to this essay – I doubt it will be the case anytime soon that the enemy's tools and toys will disappear. The industrial-capitalist machine seems strong, and the revolutionary potential weak. If revolutionary potential is measured by the likelihood of *the Revolution*, that is. Revolutionary potential as such (as in: subversive energy, desire, force) is always there – and always pro-

duces what since Hakim Bey's wonderful essay still seems best referred to as the Temporary Autonomous Zones which cut through the totalitarianism of the industrial-capitalist machine and provide both spaces and moments of anarchist life. (In order to avoid the possibility of using a term Hakim Bey introduced in a way he would not approve of, I will speak of anarchist pockets from now on.)

So – to modify it one more time – in terms of an anarchist economy, the most pressing question for me seems to be: How do we satisfy our needs in these pockets? Most of the pockets are small, and we can maintain fair transactions and stuff, but once it comes to producing, our means are very limited. On top of that, we still work within capitalism, so we are under cost pressure (which makes 'righteous' goods expensive, etc.). The challenge then seems to lie in finding the right balance between certain principles as a consumer and our rightful exploitation of the resources of those who deny us an anarchist life on any wider scale. This is where living as parasites becomes a morally sound choice; and, in fact, I believe the most realistic, righteous and fun choice: they fuck us over, so we can at least take their shit (or what we actually like of their shit) – only limited by moral boundaries of social consciousness. What does this mean in more concrete terms?

## II Parasitic Economy in Practice

It basically means that we'll use the capitalist world as a playground. With all possible criticism of the concept of *Evasion* as portrayed in the underground classic of the same name, the concept followed itself is very much what I'd have in mind: use the machine's resources, its products, its waste as the material we play/satisfy our needs with.

Generally, I'd say that we can use anything we can get our hands on – the only restrictions naturally deriving from our

money and I don't really like to put people on the spot like that; and furthermore I don't really know what kind of money I'd need from people that I couldn't somehow make myself (and it's not like I'd need it for food in order not to starve – food is everywhere in our societies of abundance and waste). At the same time, I do admit of course that we can all end up in a situation where we need to make some cash fast and have no other choice but hitting people up: to make an urgent call, get a transport fare, buy medication, or pay for a bed in winter. It is, I guess, what goes as a judgment call – and, needless to say, it is of course up to each and every individual to make that call.

*Relying on social services:* Concerning publicly provided services, I think this really depends on how you look at the resources you'll be using: Either you see them as the State's, in which case it's perfectly fine to use whatever you need since what entity better to be ripped off than the very entity denying you a self-determined life – or you see it as the people's, in which case it becomes slightly more difficult since one could ask why your fellow human beings need to provide for you, especially if you are young and healthy and socially privileged and all. I think this is a tough call, and I don't really have a strong tendency to lean either way. If pressed, however, I would go with the first – I'll try to explain:

I think the taxes that people pay become abstract assets the second they are paid. Notions of "it's the citizens who pay for this street (or this food, or this shelter)" are true in a sense – yet in another they aren't (or – and I guess that's the point here: they are true only in a very abstract sense): By taking people's money, the State abstracts the abstraction that money already is even further, to a degree where I honestly don't see it belonging to anybody anymore (other than the State of course, but the State isn't 'anybody', the State is a machine). I mean, it's not like citizens have any real influence on, or control over, how what's supposedly 'their' money is spent. Social services provided by the State are a part of the machine to keep peo-

way – there are definitely cases where you would pay an entry fee only if you do get the student price ‘cause otherwise you simply wouldn’t pay at all; in this case I think it’s totally fine to use a fake ID, since that way, in a sense, everyone wins: you get in, and they get at least some money). I mean, generally I think it’s almost always fine to use fake IDs to get free or cheaper access or tickets. I just made that one little reservation, because I’m not sure whether a mentality of trying to get everything for free or less by principle – no matter where and how – is necessarily healthy. I think that sometimes it could violate a spirit of solidarity and justice.

*Pulling insurance scams:* Generally, I’m way down. According to my knowledge, there is no such thing as a righteous insurance company. Get out of them what you can and milk them for what it’s worth. It seems hard to go wrong here. Pulling street scams: The one conning means to get to the goods that I ain’t down with. The reason being that if you pull scams – no matter which – on the street, you will have to lie to random individuals, and I can’t really get behind that, since a) I don’t think random individuals (I’m not talking about cops or nothin’) deserve to be lied to, and b) by us doing so we damage social values I consider much more important than the few bucks we might scam: trust, compassion, generosity. You can ask people for whatever you want if you think it’s okay to ask them. But you can’t lie to them in order to make them give it to you. It just doesn’t seem right to me.

*Panhandling:* Up to the individual. I don’t think there is anything wrong with asking people for something. That should always be okay. Of course it can be more or less appropriate. Like asking your neighbors to use their mobile phone on the weekends if they have free weekend minutes seems like a very reasonable demand, while hitting up your financially struggling roommate for \$50 ‘cause you wanna get wasted over the weekend kinda doesn’t. Personally, I’d have to be very desperate to panhandle since it means hitting random individuals up for

own moral considerations as anarchists. Like, I assume we will still want to be conscious of the social and ecological impacts of our parasitic practices. So, for example, are we gonna use products (even stolen, found or dumpstered) that will leave a negative (problematic) impact on our surroundings (physically: gas, plastic, etc., or symbolically: brand clothes, luxury goods, etc.)? Probably not. However, it is up to each and every one to draw the lines they will feel comfortable with. Some will put a priority on freeganism, figuring that the most important aspect of subversive economic praxis lies in undermining the cycle of production and consumption and the related monetary order; others will prefer limitations to this concept due to differing moral principles, a divergent social focus, or even notions of work ethics. This, though, is all secondary. Once again, it’s not just about accepting or tolerating diversity in anarchist thought and praxis – diversity is crucial to the anarchist project itself.

So, what follows is my personal take on a parasitic economic praxis. I will look at what seems most pressing and most important to me and I will share thoughts along these lines. Needless to say, I don’t wish for any subscriptions to these thoughts, but simply hope that some of them may inform, inspire, stimulate.

Generally speaking, ripping off the man (in whatever shape or form) is always fine by me, and there are no exceptions. Unfortunately, however, it is a little more complicated than that, since it’s not always entirely clear whether we are actually ripping off the man, or whether we’re just ripping off brothers and sisters. This will be the main question I’ll be focusing on while going step-by-step through what I consider the most important techniques of a parasitic anarchist existence within the capitalist beast: dumpstering, shoplifting, pulling return scams, pulling ID scams, pulling insurance scams, pulling street scams, panhandling, relying on social services (public and private), relying on other people’s generosity and hospitality, relying on

family, using and liberating public property, pirating, sneaking into commercial shows and events.

*Dumpstering:* The archetypical anarchist technique of acquisition. No restrictions. Whatever arguments one wants to construe against it – not allowing people to take what is thrown out by others is stupid, absurd, cynical, and often times cruel. Dig in that trash and come out with the goods!

*Shoplifting:* I don't think there can ever be a problem with liberating goods corporately owned, and since I think that most readers of this essay would agree that corporatism is evil and would hence not have a big problem with the stated perspective either, I save myself its whole moral explanation/defense. I think a moral debate becomes much more interesting when we look at the other end of the retail services. Like, as accepted as it is in our circles to left-hand from Wal-Mart's, most of us would probably agree that it'd be wrong to steal from a kid's table at a flea market. Or from the mom-and-pop store around the corner. But what about the local bakery chain that has five outlets? Or the regional supermarket chain that buys its produce from local farmers at better rates than others, that allows its workers to unionize, and that supports the region's art communities? Probably we figure that both these economic endeavors already qualify as corporatism (if on a small scale) and, as a consequence, we'd deem it okay to clear their shelves. But what if some people think both of these examples would rather qualify as 'alternative business' that needs to be supported because at least it's makin' capitalism a bit more humane? I mean, I don't necessarily believe so and think that – unless we are talking a really small trading enterprise that a family, a commune, or a small group of workers directly make their living of – goods become abstract capitalist gear on those shelves (like, even if a shop is small, if you see them throw away 30 sandwiches every night, why not steal one during the day, right?) and hence fair game in our parasitic pursuit. Likewise, if a shop – again, no matter how small – tries to blatantly make an unreason-

able profit out of the stuff it sells (special target: many organic or health food stores who seem to think that supposed political righteousness earns them a free ticket to charge the most ridiculous prices), why not take it for free? Well, as always, I draw my personal lines, others shall draw theirs. I don't think though that it's always right to liberate something just 'cause it has a price tag on it. There's gotta be a line somewhere, and even as left-handers we should display some social consciousness. I guess that would be the bottom line of this.

*Pulling return scams:* This one seems easy, since it's usually only big corporations who have generous uncomplicated return policies anyway, so (see above) of course I think it's alright to rip them off. As far as businesses I wouldn't shoplift from go, I think that – according to the logic of not shoplifting from them – it'd be wrong to use return scams to get yourself something for something you never bought; so returns based on recycled receipts, or on goods brought to the counter from the store (which, in fact, is more like shoplifting anyway), wouldn't appear kosher to me. At the same time, if you just wanna turn a Cliff peanut butter bar that someone gave to you into a Cliff brownie bar, I don't see any reason why they shouldn't exchange it for you. That's not exploitation, that's common courtesy – and if they're too uptight to exchange a random bar you bring in, you might just wanna bend the truth and claim you got it from the shop. Undermining uptightness is not stealing.

*Pulling ID scams:* As far as scamming free or cheaper tickets with fake youth or student ID's are concerned, I think that also here, basically, the rules of shoplifting apply: If we don't think that whoever gets the money really deserves it (movie theatre chains, corporative stores, airlines, fancy clubs, etc.), of course we'll try to scam our way in. On the other hand, if a struggling independent local theatre asks \$5 for a show but lets students in for \$3, and we aren't students and have the two extra bucks – wouldn't it be kinda stingy not to pay the five? (This of course assumes that the prices are fair and that we would go in any-