

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



an open invitation

subsistence and secession

seaweed

seaweed
an open invitation
subsistence and secession
2012

open

theanarchistlibrary.org

2012

Contents

An incredible voyage	5
intimacy	6
Our future is shrinking.	7
If we exclude surrendering, what's left?	9
It promises to be an incredible voyage and you are invited!	13

the primary tactic of a thrust toward autonomous, genuine communities embedded in nature. A rural intentional community based around principles of mutual aid, cooperation and ecology might be a qualitatively superior place to live than most others, but truly self-directed people embedded in a habitat requires secession from private property and a refusal to obey the laws of both the market and the nation-state.

In the countryside practicing subsistence ways can immediately be part of our means, but in the city, challenging urban ways is the necessary first step.

Power abhors subsistence. Capitalism depends on obedient producers and consumers spending our lives shopping and at work, not friends and neighbors practicing communal self-reliance within a shared habitat. But together we can say no, we can disobey, and in this negativity there will birth a positive and creative force.

An incredible voyage

This is an encouragement for local, anti-authoritarian secessionist activity aimed at acquiring land bases. Ecological insights and awareness, an inspiration from primal ways and a desire for autonomy, both individual and collective, would characterize this push for different ways of living.

Secessionist action is not aimed at establishing new, smaller nation-states, but toward the creation of stateless zones. The actions aim for a decisive break from a world that damages and stunts us. Secessionists secede not only from nation states but ideology as well. This type of rupture is based in a desire for new relationships, between each other, within ourselves and with the world that surrounds us.

This is about notions of regeneration and renewal, a call to look to the time after the death and darkness of authoritarian civilizations as one when life will return and growth will begin anew. It is an appeal for a persistent, global May Day, to ideas and actions inspired by the midpoint between the spring equinox and the summer solstice, the time when the sun is set free to bring the pleasurable warmth of summer back to earth once again.

Numerous ancient cultures were suffused with anarchic qualities. Sexuality and fertility were viewed as joyous expressions of wild nature, of creation. Ecstatic community dances rejoicing in the many cherished wonders of life were common. Let our rebellions aim for planetary rejuvenation, let them signal a time to celebrate abundance and fecundity, let them be yearnings for new life and blissful days in the pleasing heat of our new season.

Humans are at a juncture. We can continue to be conned, obedient citizens who venerate the market and respect the institutions of capitalist civilization or we can try to put into practice new ways of living, ways that implicitly acknowledge the rich potential that comes with freely-chosen communalism, that honor earth wisdom and continued renewal. The techno-utopian argument

remains wholly unconvincing. Who wouldn't rather have clean rivers flowing with abundance, intact mountains and healthy forests teeming with wildlife and purifying our air, than polluted rivers supporting only a few contaminated fish, mountains cleaved in half for coal and minerals and forests reduced to monoculture or scraped into clearcuts?

intimacy

These attempts would be highlighted by the widespread sharing of skills, resources and burdens now carried by individuals and families locked into their private lives. They would involve the creation of common lands, gardens and gathering spaces, collective child rearing and collective responsibility for shelters. Subsistence activities would be explored and practiced. Secessionists would consciously aim at permanently freeing their territory, their habitat, from political power.

In the beginning, openness for intimacy with others, with strangers, will be essential, because we have all become strangers to each other. Ultimately these local movements aim for true kinship, authentic community, genuine inter-relationships that allow each individual to be all that she can be yet part of a whole. These expressions of collective will would involve measures of offense and defense, for there are those who cannot accept community autonomy, who fear individual freedom or who have an interest in maintaining control from the top.

Many people now assume that a pitiless chaos is on the horizon. A chaos birthed and driven by a social system based on hierarchy and exploitation. Our fragile biosphere is sick. Its health is deteriorating fast. Desertification of vast areas, global warming, diminishing sunlight, widespread cancer and daily extinctions are but a few of the symptoms. Our planet's diversity of life forms is in peril.

are familiar with the cycles of the place where you live. Sense of place. Sensual wisdom.

This doesn't mean that primal people don't make mistakes. But overall, they rely on directly lived experience complimented by generations old wisdom to make their decisions.

Life in nature isn't nasty brutish and short. This is a lie of the fearful and the fear mongers, of ruling classes set on the conquest of land based people.

Subsistence means no or very little material waste; no dumpsites, no burning piles of garbage, no necessity of a recycling industry and no mountains of appliances, gadgets and plastic. It is based in the natural cycles of your group's land base. It means respecting nature where you live and all of the life forms that you share your habitat with, even the ones that are threatening to you, because we are all interconnected.

Subsistence isn't about dumpster diving, scams, food banks, stealing and welfare cheques. It is directly participating in a collectivity's future and thus ensuring your own.

For now, a group of five or ten folks acquiring food and shelter together is a form of surviving or pioneering. Fifteen or twenty people providing food and shelter for themselves, communally rearing their children and generally taking care of each other is perhaps the ember of a clan, but true kinship probably takes a few generations.

When fifty or more people spend their lives, within the context of a successful break from the current world of hierarchy and private property and ideology, making sure that everyone within their group is fed and sheltered and nurtured and have built an infrastructure of ways and tools to assist them, anarchy begins to take hold.

This speculative glimpse is just my notion of how an urban area might de-urbanize should the present social order get cast overboard. Today, inhabitants of rural communes and eco-villages can practice some subsistence skills, but these are generally projects of the fortunate, out of reach of the majority, and can't be viewed as

ble around them and made sure that everyone knew to stay away; a chemical factory, a prison, places of psychological ugliness and ecological sickness. This is why specific physical areas of cities will need to be abandoned, not just the urban ways that sustained them.

Whether cities were just a bad experiment and shouldn't be repeated, or whether they were an imposition of forces opposed to genuine living, re-forming them can't be part of the solution. Transformation will be the healing medicine this time. Our land bases will be places where experiments in living are a constant opportunity.

What is subsistence? Subsistence means committing to a place and the people who live there. It means generally getting food from your region because that is the geographical area that you understand and are familiar with and therefore you know when and how much of each item or animal is acceptable to gather or hunt.

Subsistence means fishing with friends. It means preserving food with others in your group or village or clan or whatever. Subsistence is getting together, voluntarily, with folks that you have an affinity with, to provide yourself with food and shelter and musical instruments and friendship.

Subsistence means abundance and balance, it means wildness and harmony at once. Subsistence is not an impoverished, depleted existence.

Time spent repairing the fishing nets or pickling vegetables or building a communal smokehouse isn't alienated time. It is meaningful and joyous. In some places likely characterized by songs and mead, in others by quiet satisfaction. It means providing for yourself where you live.

Subsistence is participatory. It involves understanding your habitat and finding a healthy place within it.

Subsistence could be the bedrock upon which an anarchic culture's ways rest on. It is the foundation of a healthy, independent, autonomous set of living practices. Subsistence assumes that you

This crisis has been caused by the institutions of the state and the urban ways of industrial capitalism. It is maintained by ideologies, especially the ideology of Progress. Our way out is to collectively de-urbanize and de-industrialize. It is to relearn how to feed and shelter ourselves without governments or markets. It is to create our habitats as we are simultaneously created by them, thus re-establishing a healthy relationship with our environment.

Unfortunately every crisis is compounded by the existence of yet other crises on our horizon: nuclear waste waiting to sit up like a corpse and spread its death, the ongoing possibility of nuclear war, the disappearance of the protective ozone layer, scarcity of potable water and even complete ecological meltdown. The warning lights are blinking wildly, the alarms are getting louder and the elders are warning us; it's urgent.

Our future is shrinking.

Will there always be seeds of the old world in the revolt for the new? Perhaps, but a genuine rebellion won't be fertile ground for them to get established. Liberating humans from alienated and massified life is possible. We are all potential agents of change. By emphasizing local resistance, our strengths become more obvious and defeatism wanes. We need not prolong the time it takes to travel from the possible to the impossible.

This isn't to say that an international anti-authoritarian uprising can't or won't happen. It is to ask how might this come about if we recognize that institutions of domination are complex and global, and that there are too many variables for any particular minority group to grasp and control in order to strategically and intentionally instigate such a global process. Many Marxists hold that planned, coordinated revolutions are possible by putting our power into the hands of a specialized intelligentsia and often the political party they work for, but history has shown us the misery

and repression waiting for us when we do allow them to hijack our insurgencies.

The breaks I am encouraging don't require the permission of parents, parties, or productive forces. There is no need to wait for history, god or material conditions to authorize them. I'm exploring willful ruptures among friends, neighbors, fellow conscripts and comrades, ruptures and breaks that are valid adventures unto themselves, yet journeys and breakaways that might coalesce into something larger, something planetary even.

Where do authentic rebellions originate? Most often they originate where people spend a lot of time together and therefore know each other enough to have shared their misery and their desires, to have built some trust: ghettos, neighborhoods, factories, universities, prisons, reservations. Frequently rebellions happen along tribal, ethnic or kinship lines.

Of course any individual who wants to make a break, who wants to live an intense life can. This is making one's life a cause sufficient unto itself. These folks can inspire others, can implicitly give others permission to stand up and shine and flourish. But when such individuals are embedded somewhere, are surrounded by friends and neighbors with whom they have tried to have real relationships, the virus can take hold, the contagion can spread. If they are entrenched only in a milieu, then the infection will likely be contained by its typically narrow demographic limits. Occasionally anti-authoritarian elements from these sub-cultures can intervene in various oppositional struggles in order to try and push them deeper or further, or to question the notions of directors and representatives, but these opportunities aren't always present and nevertheless we shouldn't be basing the realization of our dreams and desires on a strategy of joining others in their reformist and thus limited revolts.

The endless stream of ecological and social catastrophes can be stopped. When you're in a battle you don't have many choices: continue to fight, surrender or retreat and regroup. It would be wise

Gardens need fences and constant attention. As subsistence skills spread and grow, gardens and orchards contract, making room for the expansion of dream and play time, for the nurturing and blossoming of carnal and ludic adventures.

Tomorrow is music day in the field just outside the garden. There will be a bonfire with wild meat and fish and herbs shared. What used to be a dead zone, a polluted, homogenized, top down city, a habitation without wildness, an insane density of atomized people is turning into a fascinating collection of autonomous neighborhoods and villages.

If you walk an hour south you enter what used to be just another aspect of the same standardised urban life of producers and consumers that existed everywhere before the rupture succeeded. Now it is like going to another realm. A different etiquette, different ways of food gathering and preservation, different approaches to sexuality, perhaps even a different dialect have all been slowly emerging. Everything there is different because individuality was allowed to blossom and communal identities only take hold organically and voluntarily. One doesn't have to travel to a faraway place for adventure, in search of diversity or difference anymore. Walk to any other village, only a couple of hours or so away and you enter a unique zone.

In the countryside, subsistence might immediately be the primary way of living. In the healing zones of formerly urban centers, permaculture might take center spot. Permaculture is a set of practices that emphasize efficiency in our food production activity. Composting human waste into manure, for instance would be such a practice. Within permaculture philosophy and practice, various food preservation techniques need to become a widespread set of cultural skills. In this sense, permaculture might be a stepping stone while crossing the turbulent waters of post-urban living.

And there are places inside the city walls where no one enters anymore. These are the dead zones. They are so polluted and ugly and unsafe to be in that long ago we piled up a mountain of rub-

vate property, work and cops also control the countryside. There too habitats are invaded, plundered, polluted. Country folk are also incarcerated, carcinogized, monitored and punished.

Our destruction of urban life entails the destruction of rural life. The goal is a geography where villages and clans and groups of friends dominate the social landscape, not vast tracts of farmland that feed cities or country estates that the privileged and lucky retreat to. The goal is healthy natural homes, the creation of healthy environments and the healing of sick ones that can sustain all the life forms that live within them.

Imagine your city neighborhood without cars. The sounds are returning: birds, leaves rustling, children laughing and squealing. The smells are returning too. In springtime and summer the perfumes of buds and blossoms and new growth fill the air, the haze from automobile pollution is beginning to dissipate and the sky is visible again. It's so much safer to be outside without two ton machines whizzing by at 60 kilometres an hour. Most of the roads are breaking up from the new shoots pushing through the pavement and concrete. There are footpaths everywhere. Even bicycles seem strangely out of place.

Parks have become community gardens and orchards. Creeks and small rivers are beginning to form and re-form here and there. Someone claims that a salmon was spotted moving up a regenerating creek during spawning season. Life is returning!

Sharing and giving have become the preferred way of circulating everything. You don't get up and head to work in a factory or a mine or in a store or for someone else's profit. You pack a lunch and head to the garden. It's a long day, but an enjoyable one.

There are over a hundred people in your vast community garden. Today you are all weeding and watering and mulching and repairing fences and water catchment systems. There is a playground inside it where the children play. But in every place some food is also wild crafted, gathered and fished and hunted, depending on where the city was located and on the level of knowledge of its inhabitants.

to look at all the means at our disposal, to honor all the paths that offer us euphoria, that can take us to an oasis, to a place and time where self-organized people can create the lives they choose.

If we exclude surrendering, what's left?

Fighting includes riots, sabotage, insurrections and other forms of self-organized mutiny. Some may be spontaneous, like waves that seem to swell up suddenly wherever you live that you can participate in. Others might involve instigation and intent like blockades and occupations.

We can withdraw, drop out, encourage absenteeism, stop participating and refuse various forms of conscription. We can regroup, build trust, come to some agreements, and then perhaps lay some plans.

We can also plant seeds for the future. This sometimes involves making attempts at creating a different world here and now. Other times it means acquiring skills and tools that may be useful for sustenance should a cataclysm turn the world upside down. This would help ensure that the Old World doesn't immediately return, preventing genuine New Ones from taking hold. It often prioritizes withdrawal over direct attacks. Sharing skills, growing food, hunting and fishing, prioritizing conviviality, pirate radios, gatherings and communal child rearing are just some examples of this approach. Finally we can share our world views, put alternative perspectives in the public arena for debate.

There is no approach that guarantees that we can realize a more unprejudiced and authentic world, a world without commodities or money, without states or wage labor, without prisons and politicians. In fact, the most we can likely hope to intentionally accomplish is to free, temporarily or permanently, our home, the place where we live, of these institutions and ways and values.

Of course we want our rebellions to be global because our adversary is global, yet we must avoid being paralyzed by an attitude that views all local attempts and activity as marginal and ineffective. We have to counter all of the doctrines that promote a view of humans as helpless, powerless objects of history. History can be a story that we all have a voice in authoring. It is our activities, taken collectively, that create history. It's just that right now our powers are under the control of malevolent, impersonal institutions which we ironically reinforce by continuing to not only obey, but believe in, as though they were gods. There are gods, but they are you and me. We are just afraid of our powers, of the possibilities they might unleash.

One thing is certain: waiting, either for ecological or economic collapse, for global rebellion or local insurrection, shouldn't be the main choice. We can change the world because we can change our world, the place where each of us lives.

A new world can't be created by the activities of a small group of radicals. However, there is no megalomania in considering critically the possibility of initiating and participating in a local, organically self-organized thrust aimed at freeing the place where they live from the selfish, myopic bullies that enforce injustice, ecological plunder and exploitation. And this process could be healing, because it would likely create the space and the possibility for better relations between us and these new relations would in turn create the possibility for a complete rupture with the current reality of sickness and domination.

Yet, it isn't just an economic class and their henchmen and police that need to be confronted, but the values that permeate authoritarian societies generally. In other words, each of us must also wage an internal struggle and in the process free ourselves and help create an atmosphere that supports others doing the same.

The organic world consists of paradoxes, chaos, spectrums and gradations, not engineered grids, predictable patterns and axioms. No person or world view or ideology has all the answers. By trust-

to no genuine community, haven't a garden or access to an unpolluted place from which they can gather food or medicine. You aren't alone, at least in your predicament.

One doesn't always have the option of joining in social disturbances, most often you have to take responsibility and help create them. This isn't as difficult as you might think at first. It involves taking time away from work. It means saying hello to a stranger. It asks you to turn off your TV and other weapons of social control. Where possible it involves exploring the wilderness and countryside closest to you.

Revolt requires being optimistic in the face of the nearly insurmountable. It means viewing privacy not as something to preserve and protect, but to unburden oneself from. It demands that you spend more time with children, not only yours, but children in general. It requires you to envision humans as a collection of individual life-forms each an integral part of a natural home.

Cities are not habitats. City folk can, indeed must, participate in a push against urban living because city ways are one of the roots of our predicament and it is city inhabitants who will suffer the most in the coming years.

Obviously, hundreds of millions of people obviously can't move out of cities overnight. So perhaps bringing some wilderness to the city might be part of the route back home. Cities must be de-citified. It will take insurgent imagination and imaginative insurgencies. Cities can become partly abandoned, partly re-created into a collection of autonomous villages and zones separated by vast tracts of orchards, gardens, re-emerging forests and re-establishing wild nature, the whole region healed by becoming a sort of vast permaculture zone.

And cities don't end where the suburbs dissipate into farmland. Rural living presently is but the flip side of the same coin of capitalist civilization. Rural people also work and shop and pay rent or mortgages and live out atomized lives. The air is cleaner and at least one might spot a deer and watch the stars at night, but pri-

there can be no place for those who want power, who want to control others.

An anarchic rebellion aimed at healthy habitats and free, unique individuals embedded in authentic communities makes room for the old and the frail, for the young and the strong, for the impatient and the patient, for those who are repulsed by violence and those who view its use as another weapon in our arsenal. Morality and dichotomous world views cannot choke it, because it is an organic, site specific impetus. Each region, each town, neighborhood, affinity-culture or clan can base its secession from the nation-state on their own desires, tenets and dreams.

Starting from a circle of friends – or a neighborhood, an eco-village, an island, a commune, an ethnic group, part of a city, a city, a region, a clan, a reserve, a cult - its ultimate aim is always access to territory from which the group can sustain itself. This means that it always seeks access to land. Naturally there is room for wandering lone wolves, nomadic families and hobo tribes as long as free villages and liberated zones aren't viewed as mini welfare states for them to depend on.

Do you know how to grow or gather food? Do any of your neighbors? I don't mean a weekend garden, but enough to sustain you and your extended family over a winter. Should the capitalist market collapse, and the stores all get looted, what would you eat? Do you have seeds, a fishing rod or a hunting weapon? Do you know how to use any of these? Is there a place unpolluted enough that you could go to for food? Are you part of a tribe, a community or a clan? Are you woven tightly enough into any social group that would be willing to help each other out in a time of crisis, or are you an atomized individual whose social group consists mostly of your immediate family, with a few friends you see occasionally at work or at play?

The vast majority of Europeans and North Americans, and of urban dwellers everywhere, are just like you. They have no seeds, no survival skills and no fishing rod or hunting weapon, belong

ing our instincts and our desires, new possibilities will open. We can make public what Power wants to keep private: our dreams, our visions, our unhappiness and our anger.

The thousand-mile journey begins with the first step; an old truth. Or, if you never take the first step, you will never get there.

Authoritarian civilization is founded on our systematic self-enslavement and self-exploitation. Humans are at the helm, our fathers, brothers, sisters and mothers are at the helm. Almost every one of us contributes to reproducing this authoritarian, destructive, unjust, oppressive and unimaginative planetary realm. It is hegemonic and therefore difficult to live outside of.

Yet one persistent mutiny on this global slave ship could unlock all the doors, could let loose the animals, could let us all find our wings and our immortality once again. Any generation can change the world. But one generation must soon, because there may not be a future one healthy enough to do it.

This transformation would create the possibility of authentic, intense lives lived in genuine, autonomous communities embedded in healthy habitats.

And having a healthy habitat in which to live offers the possibility of having a sense of place. A sense of place in turn offers the opportunity for rediscovering feelings and experiences of awe, reverence and wonder, not for science and technology, but for nature and its marvels.

The simple proposal is this: a widespread insurgency, based on a multitude of local rebellions, each one demanding enough land to sustain its inhabitants. More specifically, occupying or re-occupying territory with the explicit view that it becomes our habitat. And these withdrawals, while ends in themselves, as far as flourishing under adversarial conditions goes, are also only a means to a much greater vision. We withdraw to build strength, to succeed for ourselves but also in order to offer assistance to other revolutionary projects and attempts, to intertwine our liberated

spaces with the struggles of others who want to make a final break with global institutions of domination.

Yes, we have much anger and rage toward the class of rulers, yes we are inspired by expressions of hatred and destruction aimed at the bullies who organize society. But here I suggest that we emphasize, among ourselves, fraternity and cooperation. This proposal is about intent, about not waiting for the right conditions, about consciously taking advantage of the cracks and fissures in the dominant reality wherever you live, prying them open, creating space for ourselves. It is from many of these free camps that capitalism might potentially be attacked as rebels and dreamers join with others for whom life under the civilized order is unbearable.

In the long term, acquiring a home, a habitat, is essential. This means freeing up colonized land, rehabilitating plundered land or seizing land. In the short term it might mean rent strikes or squatting. It could involve wilderness camps, fishing shacks, shared berry patches, collective harvesting of wild foods and group gardening and permaculture, etc. Learning from and being in solidarity with people of the land, elders and traditionalists among indigenous people for instance, who may live nearby, might be a priority. It seems obvious that acquiring food in groups, sharing food among many, are possible foundation stones. From every angle, a land base becomes essential.

In a small but significant way it is a proposal to take the initiative, because we can't win if we are always on the defensive.

These organically self-organized subsistence movements are autonomous but linked, small but many, local but together spread out and therefore occupy great amounts of territory. They don't want new popes or statesmen, better governments or better representation, new countries or new republics. They aim for a world of ungoverned individuals, clans, free wanderers, nomads and villages.

This strategy doesn't aim for a mass movement, but for a dynamism of local rebellions that offers to sweep up everyone who isn't afraid of being energized and carried by it.

There are no books necessary to read, no leaders to follow, no traditions or jargon or vocabulary to adopt. You don't have to live in the countryside or in the city. It is homegrown, like a euphoric weed that grows everywhere and spreads easily. It is against the laws of the unjust, the arrogant and the elite, the powerful, the intolerant and the unimaginative. It is strengthened by critical observation. It has no room for bullies. It is intuition and rationality hand in hand. This effort would be courageous and celebratory. It would succeed through persistent self-directed activity by people without labels.

It promises to be an incredible voyage and you are invited!

Any authentic anti-authoritarian resistance should be an offer. An open offer to all who cherish freedom, sharing, giving, healthy habitats, mutual aid, cooperation and voluntary association.

It isn't just for the ultra-exploited or the severely marginalized. It isn't open only to the excluded or the imprisoned or the hungry and poor. But it listens carefully to all these voices because they know firsthand of the most brutal hardships authoritarian systems impose on their inhabitants. It doesn't scapegoat or blame one demographic. It isn't led by victim-politicians and morality. We are all in this mess together, and we should make room for all of us to contribute meaningfully to a way out. Our solidarity is an invitation to all.

But History has created identities marked by privilege for some, victimization and powerlessness for others, and the rebellions are determined to free everyone from these chains. In the meantime