PULLING SUSTAINABILITY FROM THE DUMPSTER:
RADICAL COMMUNITY, ACTIVIST IDENTITY, AND HUMAN POSSIBILITIES IN THE FREEGAN MOVEMENT

By

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This thesis represents my own work in accordance with university regulations.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEGEMENTS V

ABSTRACT VII

INTRODUCTION 1

A Short History of a Tomato 1
The Visible and Invisible Sides of Food 3
Enter the Freegans 9
Situating the Freegan Movement 15
Strange Parallels 18
Plan for the Research 20

CHAPTER I: BECOMING FREEGAN 25

Madeline 25
Social Movement Recruitment: Rational Choice, Structures, and NSMs 28
Freegan from Birth? Homes and High Schools 32
Exposure to Radicalism: College and Beyond 36
Searching for an Activist Fit 40
New York's Anarchist Scene 43
Adopting the Freegan Label and Taking the Freegan Plunge 46
Spiraling into Freeganism: Identity-Recruitment and Commitment 50

CHAPTER II: VEGANISM AND THE FREEGAN COMMUNITY 57

Adam 57
Human-Animal Sociology: Not an Oxymoron 60
A Brief History of the Rise (and Fall?) of Vegetarianism 63
The Freegan Connection to, and Problem with, Veganism 68
If You're Freegan, Then Why Be Vegan Too? 73
Freegan Community and the Re-emergence of Veganism 79

CHAPTER III: ANIMALS, ENVIRONMENT, AND A FREEGAN FUTURE 84

Cindy 84
The Animal-Nature Connection 87
Animals and Humanity's 'Wrong Turn' 90
Primal Vegetarianism and the Ideal World 92
Reconnecting with Our Animal Nature 94
The Problem with Civilization 100

CHAPTER IV: FREEGANS AND THE CITY 104

Jason 104
The Civilized, Capitalist City 107
Freeganism in the City: Why Stay? 110
Urban Ecology and Dumpster Diving New York 114
Space, Squatting, and the Barriers of Urbanism 118
(Wage) Work and the City 122

CHAPTER V: FREEGAN PRACTICES AND URBAN-NATURE 126
ZAAC *126*
CULTURE, NATURE, AND THE URBAN-RURAL CONTINUUM *128*
NATURE-WORK IN THE CITY: WILD FORAGING AND GARDENING *132*
DUMPSTER DIVING OR URBAN FORAGING? *135*
FREEGAN TIME *140*
SENSING THE WORLD AS A FREEGAN *144*
A FETISH FOR WHEELS: FREEGANS AND BICYCLING *146*
BRICOLEURS IN A MODERN CITY *150*
RECONSIDERING NATURE, RECONSTRUCTING THE CITY *154*
CHAPTER VI: THE ALLURE OF FREEGANISM 158
LEIA AND JANET *158*
UTOPIANS, DEVIANTS, AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS *161*
THE MANY FACES OF FREEGANISM *163*
RECRUITING AROUND FOOD *169*
THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF ANTI-WASTE *172*
SHOPLIFTING AND THE PERILS OF A BROAD APPEAL *177*
NEW TYPOLOGIES OF FREEGANS: ANTI-WASTE AND ANTI-CAPITALIST *180*
THE PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS OF DIVERSITY *183*
CONCLUSION: US AND THEM 187
APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY 202
DIVING IN: THE BASIC METHODOLOGY *202*
THE SUBJECTS OF THE STUDY *204*
STUDYING FREEGANS, CHOOSING FREEGANISM *205*
GOING NATIVE IN NYC *207*
APPENDIX B: RACE AND THE FREEGAN MOVEMENT 211
THE HOMELESS AND THE BOUNDARIES OF FREEGAN APPEAL *211*
A KLANSMAN AT THE FREEGAN BIKE WORKSHOP *214*
THOUGHTS ON RACE AND FREEGANISM *217*
APPENDIX C: FREEGAN DOCUMENTS 221
WHY FREEGAN? AN ATTACK ON CONSUMPTION—IN DEFENSE OF DONUTS *221*
FREEGANISM IN PRACTICE *226*
FREEGAN.INFO APRIL 2009 CALENDAR *232*
FREEGAN READING LIST *234*
APPENDIX D: PHOTOGRAPHS 236
WORKS CITED 244

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Marcel Mauss once likened ethnography to fishing. Unlike quantitative research, in which the researcher can carefully design and systematically carry out a project, qualitative study is a bit more like casting a net into the ocean and crossing your fingers in the hope that you catch something. My own freegan fishing expedition, though, turned into something more: as Ferguson points out, sometimes, "when it comes time to inspect the haul, it is not always so clear: did you catch it, or did it catch you?" (1999:18).

I am the first to admit that the freegans "caught" me. In June 2007, my girlfriend Jackie sent me an article on freeganism that appeared in the New York Times. Included with her e-mail was the admonition, "please don't go freegan." At least part of that caution quickly fell by the wayside: I've been hooked by the freegans for the last year-and-a-half. I have a huge number of people to whom I am indebted for their support in a project that has become one part academic obsession, one part activist crusade.

Whoever says Princeton is staid and unsupportive of unconventional pursuits has not met its sociology faculty. I approached Professor Delia Baldassarri—whom I had never before met—in 2007 and told her that I wanted to study dumpster divers. To my surprise, she offered to advise me and has since provided fantastic support and guidance. It has also been an honor and a pleasure to work with Professor Mitch Duneier as my current adviser. His work is a shining example of the power of ethnographers to show the humanity of even the most unconventional subjects, and I hope that my own study of the streets of New York is able to meet at least some of the high standards set by his own work..

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ABSTRACT

While a great deal of popular and scholarly attention has been focused on the ethical dimensions of food *production,* comparable effort has not gone into examining food waste. This study uses food waste as an entry point into examining "freegans," a movement of individuals who seek to minimize their participation in the capitalist, consumer economy through scavenging, community production, do-it-yourself repair, dumpster diving and other strategies of mutual-aid. While we typically view such groups as drop-out, deviant subcultures, this study, using qualitative field-work, interviews, and document analysis, focuses on how freegans engage with and are influenced by society at large. By exploring how freegans are recruited, the ethical concerns that drive them to adopt freeganism, and the way they adapt their practices to life in an urban, capitalist space, I demonstrate that—despite their political radicalism—freegans remain connected to real problems and structures within our society. As a result, the boundaries between freegans and the rest of us are not as clear as they might otherwise seem, even as their group itself remains highly marginal. I conclude that, given changing environmental and economic conditions, their worldview is a highly relevant critique of dominant discourses of sustainability and consumption.

INTRODUCTION

> *We do this not just for our benefit. It's for everyone's benefit. Not just humans. Everyone. No one deserves to have their life wasted, because that's the biggest disgrace of all: to have a whole life wasted, crushed in a garbage truck. I won't stand for it any more than I would sit and watch my friends die.*
>
> Wendy Scher, February 11, 2009

A Short History of a Tomato

On a certain night in February, 2009, a slightly over-ripe tomato sits in a trash bag outside a D'Agostino's Supermarket in Murray Hill, a wealthy residential district on the east side of Manhattan, New York City. A sticker on its, side reading "Grown in Mexico," hints to the long and complex process that brought it here.

Agriculture has a convoluted 10,000 year history, but to understand how this tomato got to New York City, a good starting point is 1994, with the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) by the United States, Canada, and Mexico (Barndt 2008).[1] The pact removed barriers to the movement of agricultural products across borders, and as a consequence, Mexico was flooded with heavily subsidized corn from the United States. Thanks to plunging prices for agricultural products, Mexican *campesinos* were driven from the farms where they had eked out a subsistence living for centuries. Some fled to the cities; others to work in the United States. Many, however, became laborers for huge, corporate-owned farms growing tomatoes, a fruit which is now Mexico's largest agriculture export and the most widely grown fruit in the Americas.

Tomatoes are a highly labor intensive crop, and so entire families of *campesinos*—including children, as formal schooling past a young age is almost unknown in the major tomato growing regions of Mexico—work six days a week. They

[1] I am heavily indebted to the second edition of Deborah Barndt's *Tangled Routes: Women, Work, and Globalization on the Tomato Trail* (2008) for the analysis contained in the following four paragraphs.

must fill forty pails of tomatoes over the course of a twelve hour day in order to make $5. This miniscule wage understates their economic hardship, though, since the picking season is not year-round. Consequently, most are seriously under-employed and subsist on less than a thousand dollars a year.[2]

This tomato is not only emblematic of the human cost of agriculture, but its environmental cost as well. Mono-cropped, high-intensity farming devastates the land, producing on it for a few years and then leaving it fallow and vulnerable to insect blight for decades. In order to yield well-shaped, blemish-free tomatoes, farmers spray their crops constantly with pesticides, fertilizer, and preservative chemicals, which eventually trickle back into the local water supply. These tomato farms are part of a food system with even broader ecological ramifications: half of the world's usable land and 90% of its freshwater now go to agriculture (Tilman, Cassman, Matson, Naylor and Polasky 2002; Conkin 2007). The problems of food production are not confined to land, with fisheries collapsing worldwide (Pauly, Christensen, Guénette, Pitcher, Sumaila, Walters, Watson, and Zeller 2002) and 80% of the main schools of fish either depleted, overexploited, or already harvested to maximum capacity (FAO 2009).

The environmental costs of food production only grow after the farming stage. Tomatoes are 56% of the cargo of the 900 to 1300 Mexican trucks that daily cross the U.S. southern border at Nogales, Arizona. Partially thanks to the de-regulation imposed

[2] Many individuals from these same communities pick tomatoes north of the border, in Florida, which provides produce for the United States in warmer months. Although they earn substantially more—closer to $50 a day—they still face working conditions that have been described as slave-like. Indeed, some employers have recently been prosecuted for holding immigrants in debt bondage, forcing them to work at gunpoint, and stuffing dozens of workers into tiny trailers (Estabrook 2009). Even if these attention-grabbing abuses are isolated, the poverty of this undocumented, invisible population is not. The workers have had to spend years protesting to be paid an extra cent per pound of tomatoes. Major tomato buyers—particularly Yum! Brands Kentucky Fried Chicken, Taco Bell, and Pizza Hut—have resisted paying six cents instead of five for picking a pound of tomatoes.

by NAFTA, the U.S. government is unable to tighten emissions standards on these trucks, which helps explain why a tomato from Mexico entails 2.85 times as much greenhouse gases spewed into the atmosphere as a locally grown one. The tomato's case is not unique: food in the U.S. now travels an average of 1,494 miles from where it was grown to where it is consumed, an order of magnitude farther than it did just two decades ago (Pirog and Benjamin 2003). Indeed, the average American diet requires as much energy as all the activities in the life of the average Asian or African *combined* (Schueller 2001).

When this tomato reached New York, it was unpacked, processed, and placed on display by workers. While invariably paid better than the individuals who picked the tomatoes, food service employees are some of the most vulnerable workplace demographics in the United States. Most store employees work short shifts for low wages, a situation deliberately created by employers who want to avoid the need to pay for breaks, prevent any sort of regularity in contact between employees that would facilitate unionization, and keep hours low enough that they need not provide benefits.

Once on the shelf, though, the tomato seems to contribute unproblematically to an image of abundance that now greets most American consumers. Shoppers face historically unparalleled choices, with more than 50,000 products in the average grocery store (Kantor, Lipton, Manchester and Olivera 1997). Each and every single one has a complex history behind it, but rarely is this history known by the person buying them.

The Visible and Invisible Sides of Food

Brandt's work about the origins of our tomatoes is part of a broader range of journalistic and academic efforts in recent years that have sought to render the invisible

costs of our food system visible (Nestle 2006; Singer and Mason 2006; Katz 2006; Pollan 2006). Note Singer and Mason, "we don't usually think of what we eat as a matter of ethics" (2006:3), yet the proliferation of new terms like "locavores," "slow food," and "humanocarnivores" testify to the widening array of new ways that people are approaching ethical eating. Even new First Lady Michelle Obama has declared "healthy eating" to be a key priority for her, suggesting that Barndt is right that there have been "major shifts" (2008:vii) in public consciousness about food production in the last decade. While partly this change is due to a new humane awareness among consumers, this alteration in our thinking about food is also necessitated by the realities of a burgeoning population. With food demand anticipated to double in the next half century (Tilman et al. 2002; MAE 2005), addressing these environmental and social concerns will soon become an unavoidable fact of continued existence on the planet.

For all this attention to where our food *comes from,* though, there has been far less attention to where it actually *goes*. Perhaps this is because the outcome of that part of a food item's journey seems so obvious. We assume that almost all food is purchased and eaten by consumers, with any surplus donated to feed the hungry, who then eat it themselves. Barndt, for example, devotes only a paragraph in her work to where tomatoes wind up after they are produced, stating that unsold tomatoes are either composted or donated to food banks. The idea that food should be eaten, not wasted, is a deeply engrained moral imperative; most of us can recall some version of the admonition, "Clean your plate; remember there are starving people in China." Indeed, while there *are* starving people on other continents—840 million worldwide (Conkin 2007)—there are also starving people here. 36.5 million Americans live in homes that are food insecure at

some point during the year (Berg 2008). The present economic downturn has sent food prices skyrocketing even as wages spiral downward, leading to growing lines at U.S. emergency food providers (Wenzl 2008; Greenwell 2009).

As this tomato seems to indicate, though, the story of where food winds up is a little more complicated than those of us concerned about the above statistics might hope. Perhaps this tomato had a blemish, or was simply on the bottom of the pile presented to consumers. It is possibly the store overestimated demand and ordered too many. For whatever reason, though, it was thrown out—not bought, not donated, not composted, but put in a plastic bag and dumped on the curb to be collected. City Harvest, an organization that collects and redistributes soon-to-be-discarded food from supermarkets in New York, states that D'Agostino's is a "great partner"[3] which donates an impressive amount of food. Yet on the sidewalk the tomato sits, along with several hundred pounds of produce, bread, and packaged goods, a testament to the fact that there is a gaping hole in all the recent attention lavished on food: no one talks about waste.

Estimates of the proportion of food production in the United States that is ultimately wasted range from 25 to 50%, adding up to about 96 billion pounds per year (Rathje and Murphy 1992; Kantor et al. 1997; Harrison 2004). Producing an accurate estimate is a challenge because huge quantities of food are wasted at every step of the production and distribution process. Twelve percent of crops in the United States are plowed under without being harvested, motivated by economic imperatives and facilitated by government subsidies (AE 2005). More food spoils in transit. Stores deliberately overstock to avoid the possibility of not having every item a consumer could

[3] This statement was made by a media spokeswoman for City Harvest in an interview with the author on March 2, 2009.

want, confident that if they do have to throw something out, they can use the spoilage as a tax write-off. Additional food waste comes from pure negligence among consumers, whose behavior is distorted by subsidies that have lowered the cost of food to historically unprecedented levels. Regardless of who throws it out, much of this discarded food is still good: at least 15% of food waste is composed of products that are still in their packages and still within their "sell-by" dates (Harrison 2004).[4]

Food is one part—only a quarter, in fact—of the massive 500 billion pound-per-year waste stream in the United States, created by a five pound-per-day contribution from every man, woman, and child in the country (Strasser 1999; Rogers 2005). In the last century, waste has grown five times as fast as the population, thanks to rising affluence, packaging, cheaper products, planned obsolescence, and a growing taste for the convenience of disposability (Gandy 1994). It's hard to say whether consumers or producers are more to blame, but either way, the reality is that 80% of products bought in the U.S. for any purpose are used once and then discarded (Seldman 1995). With the U.S. producing one-third of the earth's solid waste (Miller 2004), it is no exaggeration to say that ours is truly a country "awash with debris" (O'Brien 1999:275).[5]

This waste makes the U.S. a complicit and significant participant in a global waste system that currently generates massive human and ecological problems. The two billion tons of municipal solid waste produced yearly are only one component of the total

[4] Sell-by dates, in and of themselves, inflate waste. Such dates are set early for liability reasons, and thus food thrown out by stores because it is 'past date' is generally still perfectly edible. Moreover, the 15% statistic does not include produce that might have blemishes or divots yet is still nutritious.

[5] The sheer magnitude of the waste problem suggests that waste is not just the aggregate of individual acts of negligence. Instead, as Rogers (2005) shows, it is the product of decades of intensive lobbying by manufacturers to prevent any sort of law that would limit wastefulness. Prior to the most recent half century, waste was far more cyclical; it would be reused, recycled, or returned to the ecosystem in a degradable form (Strasser 1999). Any return to this more sustainable system of waste processing, however, is likely to be resisted by powerful interests: waste removal is a $270 billion a year business worldwide (McBride 2009), generating $43 billion in revenue in the U.S. alone (Rogers 2005).

waste problem, which is magnified by far greater quantities of industrial and mining waste (Davies 2008). Landfills eat up an increasing amount of livable space and generate 4% of total greenhouse gases (McBride 2009). Each square kilometer of the ocean now has approximately 13,000 pieces of plastic floating in it, and the middle of the Pacific is now by weight six times more abundant with plastic bottles than plankton (Mayell 2002; McBride 2009). Moreover, the burdens of processing garbage and toxic waste are not shared equally: the affluent consumers who produce most of the world's waste rarely face the consequences of storing and processing it. Instead, those costs are born by poorer populations, which helps explain why waste disposal is a critical front of the environmental justice movement (Pellow 2004).

The problems of waste are made more evident when we consider its widely touted alternative, recycling. Recycling has assumed a huge amount of symbolic significance among consumers who seek to set themselves apart as environmentally conscious (Gandy 1994; Strasser 1999; Conkin 2007). More Americans now recycle than vote (Rogers 2005), yet the ecological value of recycling is contested terrain. While recycling a product is generally preferable, from an environmental point of view, to manufacturing a new one, recycling still requires large quantities of energy and generates toxic waste byproducts (McBride 2009). Moreover, from a political perspective, "Recycling has functioned … to divert public attention away from stronger reforms" (Rogers 2005:158), allowing consumers to feel justified in perpetually increasing their consumption. Irrespective of its cost and benefits, interest in recycling—along with interest in environmental issues more broadly—has plummeted alongside the economy (Rawlins 2008; Richtel and Galbraith 2008; McBride 2009; Revkin 2009).

These facts about waste and consumption of food and other items are in many ways just as disturbing as those I wrote about earlier in terms of food production. Indeed, the scope of the problems posed by consumption and waste has led some commentators to claim that "consuming can no longer be innocent" (Hearn and Roseneil 1999:6). For most people, though, consumption and wasting still *is*. "Belief in the logic of the absolute right of individuals to consume whatever they want is at the heart of identity and status in Western capitalist culture" (Weigert 1997:142), and "the freedom to generate waste and not worry about what happens" is a taken-for-granted principle of economic behavior (Rufus and Lawson 2009: 83). These observations remain true despite the efforts of a few waste activists to bring the externalities of waste into popular consciousness. As a result, in contrast to the attention given to food production, food waste exists in "half-existing zones that no one ever sees" (Scanlan 2005:158). All of us, notes Pellow, tend to cover our eyes, ears, and nose when garbage nears us: "Everybody loves the garbage man when he picks it up, but hates him when he puts it down" (2004:44). Not just in the public milieu, but also in sociological theory and research, there is a "glaring absence" (O'Brien 1999:262) of serious discussions of waste.

This tomato, then, is poised on the precipice of a huge but hidden waste stream. All the forces that went into producing it—all the trade negotiations, the low-wage labor, the pesticides and fossil fuels—will soon be forgotten, ignored, and squandered. From the sidewalk where the bag sits, you can't see the underpaid worker in Mexico, the truck releasing greenhouse gases into the biosphere, or the landfills where this tomato is slated to end up. This tomato is, for the moment, invisible.

Enter the Freegans

Unlike most food waste, this particular tomato's final resting place, as it turns out, is not a landfill. Shortly before the garbage truck arrives to take it away, the bag in which it rests is untied. A hand reaches in, feeling the various vegetables to determine which are rotten and which are still edible. That hand is attached to a thirty-two-year-old woman, dressed in an earth tone fleece vest, with long blond braids flowing out from a knit cap and sporting various tattoos of trees that symbolize "mother nature." The woman holds up the tomato, displaying it to an assembled group of people. It's difficult to characterize the twenty-five people in the gathered crowd. While a few display tattoos, piercings, and tight black clothing, the unofficial uniform of urban youth counter-culture, the rest of the group is more diverse. Among them are retirees, cab-drivers, teachers, students, doctors, full-time activists, secretaries, artists and computer programmers.

Together, they listen as the woman—herself a lifelong environmental activist—rails against the system that brought the tomato to this curb. Her speech bares for the world to see all the things about the tomato which were about to be invisible and forgotten. The tomato is a prop with which she criticizes what she perceives to be a wasteful capitalist society that exalts consumerism above community and degrades the environment with impunity. Other items found in the trash serve a similar purpose. She holds up a package of chicken and explains her opposition to factory farming and mechanized slaughter. A few seconds later, she grabs a bag of organic lettuce and challenges those who think that the purchase of products labeled "green" or "sustainable" is any more ethically defensible than buying the tomato or the chicken.

The talk levels criticisms not just at the food system but the economic system at large. The woman claims that capitalism exploits workers, concentrates power in the hands of just a few corporations, and uses resources unsustainably. She doesn't stop with challenging businesses, adding that she opposes states that subsidize agribusiness and facilitate global trade. Her final attack is on consumers themselves, whose "never ending desire for better and more modern things" provides the demand that fuels the economic system. All of this criticism is underpinned by a seeming confidence that this capitalist, consumer economy will soon collapse under the weight of its own garbage and ecological devastation.

When the women is done speaking, another individual, a muscular man in his mid-twenties, chimes in, challenging the crowd: "What sense does it make that we're finding all this food in the trash? What sense does it make that we're giving our money every week to an entire city that feeds people making money, rich getting richer, and people starving. Does that make sense?" He answers his own question: "No, it doesn't." For him, he explains, dumpster diving is a logical alternative to this seeming absurdity. He then invites the crowd to join him at a series of events: protests, do-it-yourself bicycle-repair workshops, and more opportunities to scavenge for wasted food.

If we follow this tomato for a little bit longer, its story grows even stranger. In a recent special report on waste, the magazine *The Economist* wrote, "There are really only three things you can do with waste: burn it, bury it, or recycle it" (McBride 2009:5). Once again, our tomato suggests an alternative to conventional wisdom. The tomato and other food items found outside the D'Agostino's are placed inside bags, carts, and backpacks. Carried by subway, bicycle, or on foot, this tomato might make its way to a

communal apartment, where it will help feed a handful of unemployed full-time activists. Or, quite possibly, it will find itself at a Brooklyn anarchist community center, where it will be cooked and served as part of a free meal for the surrounding low-income community composed entirely of scavenged food. In short, far from disappearing, this tomato provides a window into an entire alternative world that most of us—accustomed to dismissing those that go through the trash as homeless or crazy—might never notice. This is the world of the "freegans."

The etymology of the word "freegan" provides some hints as to its meaning: it is a combination of the word "free" and "vegan." While veganism is an ideology that promotes non-participation in animal exploitation, freeganism pushes non-participation in the economic system at large. Beyond this basic principle, however, freegans define their ideology in many ways, a mutability which undoubtedly helps to explain its diverse appeal. As Cindy[6]—the woman with the long braided hair who was scavenging that night in February—puts it, freeganism is "appealing to people, because it's not a set of rules." She goes on to explain:

> You're either vegetarian or you're not. But you're freegan if you decide you're freegan. You could be just starting to reduce consumption or you could be really far off the money economy grid. But it's just about empowerment and identifying with others.

Others, however, admit that the term "freegan" is "contested terrain" and its meaning is a "moving target." Freegans describe their ideology as ranging from a "strategic boycott of exploitative industries" to "free stuff, with a purpose."

The best definition of a freegan that I have heard, though, is a "practicing anti-capitalist." While a variety of labels could apply to the political philosophies held by

[6] All names used in this paper are the individuals' actual names, except for "Lola" and "Evie" which are pseudonyms.

freegans—green anarchist, socialist, eco-feminist, social ecologist, or in some cases, simply left-leaning liberal—what freegans share is a common commitment to finding ways to implement their beliefs in everyday life. Freegan practitioners seek to extricate themselves from the monetary economy, acquiring as many goods and services for free as possible. According to the website freegan.info:

> Freegans are people who employ alternative strategies for living based on limited participation in the conventional economy and minimal consumption of resources. Freegans embrace community, generosity, social concern, freedom, cooperation, and sharing in opposition to a society based on materialism, moral apathy, competition, conformity, and greed.

That website goes on to provide a long list of practices that fall under the banner of freeganism. A partial inventory includes urban gardening, wild food foraging, freely exchanging unneeded goods though a "gift economy," squatting in abandoned spaces, repairing clothing and furniture, recycling, bicycling and hitchhiking, sharing skills and food, developing non-corporate media, voluntarily becoming unemployed, "couch-surfing," reducing personal energy use, composting, and—perhaps most notably—"dumpster diving"[7] discarded food.[8]

Freegans envision their work as gradually constructing a functioning community entirely outside of capitalism. Adam Weissman, a short thirty-one-year-old with a thick mane of black hair and an unkempt beard, one of the freegan movement's most prominent spokespeople, offered this explanation of what freeganism needed to do:

> The fall of capitalism is going to require a fundamental challenge from people who owe it nothing. People aren't going to be willing to kill capitalism while

[7] It is worth noting that, in New York City, freegans rarely encounter dumpsters, and as such, the term "dumpster diving" is something of a misnomer. Even though many freegans acknowledge this fact, they still use the term to refer to gathering items from the trash, and for simplicity's sake, I use this term throughout this paper.

[8] For a more complete list of freegan practices, please see the document "Freeganism in Practice" from freegan.info, located in Appendix C.

> capitalism provides their food, clothing, housing, medicine, culture, and entertainment. People are not going to bite the hand that feeds them.

Adam envisions freegans creating a network of gardens, mutual aid houses, health care collectives, and repair workshops that "bring the essentials of living to a community level" in order to accelerate what he perceives to be the inevitable decline of the present system.

This freegan vision of a post-capitalist society brings about the question of what exactly it is that freegans oppose. To some extent, freeganism is an attack on the typical boogey-men of leftist activists, like corporations, the government, and capitalism. It is also, however, a challenge to conventional progressive activism in its own right. Freegans note that the dominant response to global warming, species loss, and ecosystem collapse has been an emerging discourse and practice of "green capitalism" (Rogers 2005:211). Green capitalism seeks to morph existing structures, markets, and states into more environmentally friendly institutions without changing their underlying imperatives (Gandy 1994; Tranter 2004; Dryzek 2005; Conkin 2007).

This version of sustainability is now so popular that it seems as if everyone is quite literally "buying" into the idea of greening society through capitalism:

> Environmentalists of one sort or another are to be found just about everywhere, with claims of environmental credibility emanating from the most unlikely sources. Citizens recycle, politicians issue obligatory policy statements on 'the environment', and protesters take to the streets or chain themselves to trees in support of urgent environmental concerns. Compared to the middle of the 20th century, most people living in affluent countries could now be described as 'environmentalists' in some sense (Tranter 2004:185, see also Steel 1996)

For major corporations, "greenness" is as much an opportunity to enhance profits and appeal to new demographics that make purchasing decisions based on the imperatives of "sustainable" consumption as it is an attempt to save the environment (Williams 2007;

Rosenbloom and Barbano 2009). On the consumer side, massive support for environmentalism coexists with a general unwillingness among most people to accept major, sacrificial reforms (Kempton and Holland 2003; Conkin 2007). There is, then, a rather strong disparity "between the radical ecological prognosis and the few, rather mild, remedial and reformist measures either sought or achieved in various countries" (Lower and Worboys 1980:438).

Drawing on this observation, freegans argue that it is futile to suggest that the planet can be saved by turning down the thermostat, using cloth rather than plastic bags for groceries, or switching to compact fluorescent light bulbs. Their activism is a product of frustration with the fact that, in nearly 50 years of modern existence, the environmental movement "has not basically altered a political and economic system which … is the source of an environmental crisis that is steadily worsening despite stopgap reforms" (Conkin 2007:225; see also Rucht 1999; Dryzek 2005; Jensen 2006). Freegans note that what impact the environmental movement has had is largely regressive, helping affluent populations avoid the impact of waste and pollution while failing to address human and animal justice issues (Buttel 1987). By eating trash, freegans reject the growing fetishism of organic and local food (Katz 2006)[9] just as they reject the idea that environment can be

[9] While Katz claims that organic food is "absolutely" (2006: 17) better than non-organic alternatives, freegans have plenty to draw on when they reject the idea that organic or local agriculture is assuredly ethical. A British government report determined that organic tomatoes require twice as much energy to produce as their non-organic equivalent (Milmo 2007). There is, in the end "an irresolvable tension between the idea of growing crops with techniques that take good care of the environment and then using jet fuel to send them half way around the world to environmentally aware consumers" (Singer and Mason 2006: 157). In many cases, labels like "organic" or "Animal Care Certified" have been watered down so much as to make them almost meaningless: humane-slaughtered chickens are still starved for two weeks before molting, kept in a meager space that barely allows them to spread their wings, and have their beaks cut off without anesthetic and their male chicks discarded in a dumpster at birth (Singer and Mason 2006). Local foods are often no better that organic ones: rice grown in Bangladesh and eaten in California, for example, requires only one-fifteenth the energy to produce as rice grown locally (Singer and Mason 2006).

saved without substantial changes to the underlying economic, political, and cultural structure of society.

Situating the Freegan Movement

The individuals I have been describing so far are not just any freegans, but freegans affiliated with the New York based website, "freegan.info." The history of freegan.info starts with the Wetlands Night Club, a "hippy dive bar" in Tribeca, Manhattan, that closed in 2001. When the club was shuttered, many of its members decided to continue with some of the activist projects that had previously been based out of the building, forming the Wetlands Activism Collective. Wetlands projects encompassed a host of social justice causes, with campaigners protesting against fur and free trade as well as organizing boycotts of companies that waste paper and run sweatshops. Many collective members were full-time activists, and in an effort to survive without paid work, engaged in practices such as dumpster diving and careful non-wasting.

In 2004, Adam Weissman, Wendy Scher, and a handful of others decided that these practices that they had been using to survive were, in and of themselves, worthy of an activist project. They founded freegan.info as an organization under the Wetlands umbrella, and published a website under the same name. The group started with just a few, occasional "trash tours"—organized dumpster diving expeditions—but as media interest and membership grew, the group broadened its activities to include regular freegan feasts, speaking forums, wild food foraging expeditions, and bicycle repair and sewing workshops. Additionally, the group provides "food solidarity" and freegan

catering for other activist events, like "Really, Really Free Markets," where goods and services are exchanged for free.

Freegan.info does not fit the mould of what most of us would imagine an "organization" to be. The group has no formal membership requirements, no offices or titles, and no collectively articulated goals or mission statement. Decisions are made by consensus: anyone who has attended two meetings and done "some work" for the group can block any proposal for any reason. Most decisions are carried out by semi-autonomous, voluntary "working groups,"[10] that, like the umbrella group, have no set structure.

This history and discussion of group structure is important because it helps us contextualize freegan.info with respect to the broader fields of movements advocating for animal rights, environmental justice, and social change. Several recent books have suggested that some freegan practices—particularly scavenging and dumpster diving—are becoming increasingly common (Ferrell 2006; Rufus and Lawson 2009). Freegan.info is distinctive, though, because the group has always treated these practices as intensely political acts. Moreover, while prior scholarly study of freegans has emphasized the ways freegans seek to "drop out" of the system (Edwards and Mercer 2007), my own work suggests that freegan.info seeks as much to engage with the system as to withdraw from it (Barnard 2008).

Such "sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities" (Loveman 1998:479) is the primary characteristic of a social movement. New Social Movement Theory, in particular, helps us understand freegan.info as one among many modern

[10] The working groups of freegan.info are constantly shifting and often are composed of just a single person. At the time of the writing, the organization has working groups for strategic planning, the bike workshop, films and forums, calendar preparation, media, the office, and the website.

political mobilizations that have an educated, middle-class base as well as fluid organizational structures (Cerulo 1997; Pichardo 2001). Other New Social Movements (NSMs)—like the gay rights, women's liberation, animal rights, and ecological movements—focus on impacting the cultural sphere of society and everyday life, predominantly by using unconventional and attention-grabbing tactics that bypass voting and more normal forms of political action (Melucci 1989; Gamson 1991; Melucci 1996). Each of these characteristics can be seen in how freegans mobilize around food and waste using a loosely organized network of largely privileged individuals.

In my earlier work, New Social Movement theory was most helpful for explaining the seemingly inexplicable strategic choice of freegans to make dumpster diving the primary manifestation of their collective action. Given the strength of traditional attitudes about food (Gabaccia 2002; Bentley 2002; Jacobs 2005), dumpster diving seems particularly unlikely to win the ideology many adherents, even when compared to the other radical practices of freeganism. Using the framework offered by Goffman (1959), however, I explored how freegans use the crossing of social purity boundaries relating to food (Douglas 1966) to turn the dumpster dive into a form of attention-grabbing, performative protest. Freegan.info successfully structures its dumpster diving events to grab the attention of both media and passer-byes. In short, I revealed that the freegans were not just making "statements about identity" (Polletta and Jasper 2001:292) or asserting their difference from mainstream society, but actively and directly challenging the capitalist system with their collective behavior.

Strange Parallels

My previous focus on group behavior and public practices of freegan.info, however, left major holes in our understanding of freeganism. It offers little in the way of an accounting of who the freegans are and what they believe. In an effort to answer these questions, I have engaged in an extended qualitative research project with freegan.info. My research has included several hundred hours of participant observation, eighteen semi-structured interviews,[11] and the review of thousands of messages from the freegan.info e-mail lists as well as archived group minutes and documents.

As I attempted to answer questions about individual freegan identity and personal ideology, I began to search for parallels with freeganism outside of the social movement literature. The only published study on freeganism, by Edwards and Mercer (2007), focused on thirty freegans in Australia who were overwhelmingly young and were more interested in "dropping out" than engaging with society. I was convinced that, in contrast, the freegans I observed were doing something far more complicated than acting out a well-rehearsed script of youthful deviance. Descriptions of another similar movement, the Voluntary Simplicity Movement, did help me see how freegan practices, while radical, tap into traditional American values of thrift and self-reliance. However, this literature still did not offer a framework for understanding freegans' engagement with others (Grigsby 2004). Repeatedly, I found that studies of subcultures, deviants, and communes drew sharp distinctions between "us"—the reader, researcher, and the general mainstream public—and "them"—the deviants, freaks, and drop-outs. The fluid boundaries of freegan.info and the varying degrees to which individuals maintained

[11] Sixteen of my interviews were with freegan.info activists; two were with individuals involved in organizations that engaged in work related to the freegan project.

normal lives outside of their participation suggested that such a framework was not sociologically helpful.

In exploring questions about freegan community and boundaries, I encountered one intriguing—if highly distasteful—parallel. In her ethnographic study of women involved in white power organizations, Blee (2002) describes a movement that grows out of concerns about lack of control, a disconnected government, and economic and social change, just as freeganism does. The appeal of racist groups is grounded in the way that they offer individuals a "sense of control over the circumstance of life [and] a feeling of self-empowerment**"** (Blee 2002:163). Moreover, Blee offers insightful observations about the persistence of mainstream community structures among individuals who believe in marginal or extreme ideologies. Blee describes, for example, how racist gatherings mimic basic elements of American life, while combining these components with radical practice and ideology. The result is what Blee conceptualizes as a "fun house mirror" that presents a community that is both "familiar, yet distorted" (2002:186). As Blee further explains:

> Like any culture, it [the community] helps people locate themselves in society and history. It sets up ways of doing and ways of being that create a sense of an 'us,' forging collective identities and goals. It carries the sense of common purpose that brings people into social groups and makes those groups work (Blee 2002:186).

In such a community, "the bizarre begins to feel normal, taken-for-granted, both unquestioned and unquestionable," a situation that results from a "perpetual contraction" (Blee 2002:19) of worldview. Blee also comments on the recruitment of racists. She points out that, even though racists seem deranged, they often started participating in

racist groups essentially out of happenstance. As such, even the most extreme racists maintain connection with the non-racist world.

The situation for freegans that I encountered is similar. Freegans engage in radical practices, but they also construct community around group meals and skillshares in ways that harken to traditional notions of Americana. Moreover, many freegans reported to me the way that their involvement had constricted the options available to them in their life, as well as narrowed the range of worldviews they found ethically acceptable. Like Blee's organized racists, then, freegans constructed their activism as "involuntary, automatic, and unconscious" (Blee 2002:51), showing how in certain situations and contexts, activities like dumpster diving truly make sense to the freegans and seem like the only rational decision available to them. Despite their radicalism, though, freegans continue to make compromises and negotiate between their commitment to the group and their desire to prevent it from overcoming and controlling all facets of their lives. In one way or another, freegans always maintain some social contact with the outside world, no matter how acrimonious their critique of it is. Like Blee's book, then, this is a study about exploring the barriers between "us" and "them" and understanding that while freegans may be political extremists and deviants on the fringes, they are also humans coming from the same society that we do.

Plan for the Research

The basic arc of this thesis is straightforward. Filling in the gaps of my previous research, I start by explaining who the freegans are, and then move on to what they

believe, and how those beliefs translate into practice. I close by examining the future prospects for and relevance of freeganism, both sociologically and politically.

Chapter I charts the life histories of freegans, drawing heavily on how freegans presented their pasts to me in interviews. I start by exploring how experiences early in life functioned to radicalize freegans while disillusioning them to mainstream activism. I then examine how basic demographic characteristics—particularly having a higher education—introduced freegans into modes of behavior that are gateways to freeganism. After reviewing the literature on social movement recruitment, however, I suggest how that literature must be revised to account for the fluid and mutable boundaries between movement participant and non-participant in the post-modern world. I close by showing how commitment to freeganism progressively pushes freegans further and further into heavier involvement in the group.

Chapter II focuses on one specific element of freegans' prior activism: their involvement in animal rights and vegetarian movements. I start by pointing out that human-animal sociology—despite growing substantially in prominence during the last three decades—has only rarely shown how human-animal interactions can have a wider significance outside the social spaces of pet ownership, animal shelters, and animal-testing labs. I then briefly consider the history of the animal rights movement, explaining the ways in which freegans see themselves as responding to concerns about that movement. Alongside their criticism of the animal rights movement, though, many freegans continue to practice veganism. I argue this is tied to the important role that veganism has in structuring freegan community interactions.

Chapter III continues with the theme of animals, but shifts to using animal as a window into a wider discussion of freegan ethics and worldview. Although there are obvious reasons why the two should be linked, animal and environmental sociologists have generally not engaged with the work of each others' fields. Freegans provide a sociologically fruitful example of how to bridge the gaps between the two. Particularly, freegans use animals as a focal point for their vision for how an ideal human society should function and how humans ought to live with respect to the environment.

Chapter IV takes this focus on freegan ethics and examines how these beliefs are put into practice in the urban environment where freegan.info is based. I begin by noting a seeming contradiction within freeganism: the group objects to many facets of the city—its role in coordinating capitalism and dominating nature, for a start—yet is based in New York City. I examine several possible explanations, and determine that a desire to engage with capitalism in the "belly of the beast" is the best one. Using an urban ecologist perspective that highlights the importance of the physical environment to behavior, I explain how this decision has a broad impact on freegan practices. New York City facilitates dumpster diving, helping to explain the central role it plays in freegan practice, while making other equally "freegan" behaviors much harder, particularly squatting. The consequent need to pay for space necessitates that many freegans work; I therefore use this opportunity to discuss the freegan ethic regarding employment.

Chapter V makes "work" its general theme, but starts with a review of the literature of environmental sociology. These texts generally claim that nature and the city are on the opposite end of a "rural-urban continuum" and thus are often opposed to one another. In this section, I consider how various freegan forms of "nature-work" break

down this barrier. Through wild food foraging, urban gardening, and bicycling, freegans make nature a presence within their lives, even though they live in an urban environment. At the same time, though, these practices are an example of how participation in freegan.info can creep into and influence how individuals conceive of space and time in sometimes unintended ways. These practices also function to enact on a local level the freegan vision of a re-skilled society without a division of labor.

Chapter VI notes the problems inherent in this vision, particularly, that all societies without a division of labor have also been marked by homogeneity. Based on my research, however, I argue that the freegan movement is actually fairly diverse, and has a more widespread appeal than similar movements based in an anti-capitalist or anarchist political philosophy. This appeal—however surprising the observation may seem—centers on the way freegans intermix food and waste, providing an empowering way to provide for personal needs while presenting a straightforward and understandable critique of readily apparent problems within modern society. This diversity, however, has perils, and I show how debates over the freegan relationship with the media and shoplifting push freegans into two factions, which, while not always clearly distinguishable, generally focus on being either "anti-waste" or "anti-capitalist."

An ongoing theme of this work will be an exploration of the boundaries between "us" and "them," in the tradition of Blee (2002). As will emerge in the early chapters on freegan recruitment, the starting point of freeganism is often less-than-extreme concerns. Through a complex of internal and external factors and a degree of happenstance, freegans become involved with a group that takes these concerns and pushes them to the extreme. As a result, while the people of freegan.info are still "us"—and seek to balance

their commitment to freeganism with other concerns—the context of the group itself facilitate every-increasing radicalism and ongoing shifts in identity towards being more freegan. In the conclusion, I will examine what this dynamic says about the long-term prospects for freeganism, and how rapidly changing environmental and economic conditions may necessitate changes in the environmental and social justice movements that could make the rest of us look a little bit more like them.

CHAPTER I: BECOMING FREEGAN

Madeline

Madeline Nelson was the first freegan I met, and I recall being surprised at her unassuming appearance: she was a middle-aged, healthy-looking woman, dressed in clothes that were neither flashy nor ragged. Like most freegans I interviewed, Madeline presented her upbringing as taking place in a normal suburban, middle-class household. Nonetheless, she claimed that models for her later political behavior were presented to her early: her parents were depression babies who "grew up with frugality." Madeline recalled her grandparents having gardens, preserving food, knitting, sewing, and repairing, all activities that she now engages in as part of being a freegan. She remembered an ethic of non-wasting that pervaded her household, and, reflecting on her own vision for a utopian future, she told me, "I look at my grandmother's generation, and I think 'not so bad.' They were reusing, they were repairing, they were composting, and they weren't consuming as a form of entertainment."

Madeline's introduction to more overt political radicalism came at State University of New York Stony Brook where she studied theater in the late 1970s. College for her was a time of increased awareness: her neighbors across the hall were anarchists, and, as she became cognizant of her own bisexuality, she was exposed to gay activism. She dropped out of college after a year-and-a-half, intent on pursuing theater. When she found opportunities in that field limited, she moved to the countryside and started learning about "survival living": she cut her own firewood, trapped animals for meat, canned food, and bought almost nothing. She and her partner became heavily involved in the anti-nuclear movement, and both were arrested and held for two weeks after a protest. After a year of relative isolation, though, Madeline started longing for

community. She took a tour of radical, alternative, and back-to-the-land societies across the country and moved to Bellingham, Washington. There, Madeline told me, she worked at a vegetarian restaurant, operated an alternative printing press, and started a battered woman's shelter. As time went on, her activism grew steadily more unconventional: she engaged in street theater, graffiti, and "phone freaking" (stealing corporate calling cards for personal calls), all under the general auspices of the philosophy of "Situationism."

Madeline explained to me that she started to scale back her lifestyle activism when she was caught spray-painting and was changed with a felony. Her Situationist friends organized on her behalf, turning her into a "poster girl." Madeline, then nearing thirty years old, said she felt uncomfortable with being reduced to a set of characteristics designed to fit the typecast profile of a political prisoner. She pled guilty to a misdemeanor and then, in her words, simply "backed off." She returned to school at Western Washington University, finishing her degree in theater. She abandoned the stage, though, when, as she described it, she "just got tired of being poor." For the first time in years, she took a full-time job, as a conference organizer for a non-profit.

She describes her life for the next two decades as a "slippery slope." In 1989, her employer sent her to live in Paris, where she experienced opportunities for travel and material comforts she had not enjoyed in a decade. She returned to New York and entered the finance world, where she ascended the ranks quickly. Even without previous experience in business, as she described it, "I just proved to be good at climbing the corporate ladder. I played it like a video game." By the late nineties, she was in charge of international communications for Société General, the French investment bank. She

then moved to Barnes & Noble, earning what she would describe as a "dream life." As she describes it, "I had been bought off. I had been co-opted. And it felt good."

Madeline remembered going to anti-Gulf War protests in 1991, but for over ten years thereafter, she was by her own admission "no longer politically involved." She said she was disturbed by the Bush Administration and the Iraq War and she even contemplated housing Republican National Convention protesters in 2004. Still, she took no action until she read about "Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping," a street theater troupe dedicated to convincing people to limit their consumption. Within a month, she was involved in a pro-First Amendment protest at Ground Zero, and was doubling for Reverend Billy at a civil disobedience action on "Buy Nothing Day" 2004. The anti-consumerist ideas of Reverend Billy resonated with her Situationist past: for her, reintegrating into political activism was "like living under water for ten years and then sticking my head up and breathing."

Madeline described herself as then entering into an intense period of personal change and self-exploration. She looked into organizations as diverse as the Catholic Workers, who base their activism in the ministry to the poor of St. Francis of Assisi, the liberal MoveOn.org, and the New York Metro Anarchist Association. Surfing the web and following links from activist websites, she read about freegan.info. She attended her first meeting, which she described as "horrendous" and lacking any organization whatsoever. Something about the trash tour she attended afterward, though, "clicked" with her past experiences and current political beliefs. As she muses, "There's this whole opportunity for more activities than you could ever do in New York City. So I guess it's significant that I stayed with the freegans." While she said she always identifies herself

first and foremost as an activist first, the dumpster dive marked the point where she adopted a new label: freegan. Within the space of a year, she quit her job, left her apartment in a doorman building, and dedicated all of her time to activism. She became one of freegan.info's chief spokeswomen.

The arc of Madeline's life—from survivalist drop-out to corporate success-story to full-time freegan activist—is dramatic and stylized enough to have received a chapter in a book (Grierson 2007), been the focus of a New York Times article (Kurutz 2007), and even earned Madeline an appearance on Oprah. I did not choose to highlight Madeline for her biographical singularity, however. Rather, themes of Madeline's story—the importance of early childhood experiences, the formative impact of college, the role of prior activism in facilitating the transition to freeganism, and the symbolic significance of dumpster diving for freegan self-identification—were reoccurring throughout my research on the process of becoming freegan. While these processes and events did not occur in the same order and did not all appear in all cases, they do hang together as a generally coherent model of recruitment into the freegan movement. Moreover, they provide a background for understanding the ways that freegans push one another into ever increasing commitment to freeganism, steadily radicalizing one another.

Social Movement Recruitment: Rational Choice, Structures, and NSMs

As discussed in the introduction, my previous work argues that the structure, behavior, and goals of the freegan group I studied are best understood within the framework of a social movement. Social movement theory, then, would seem a fruitful place to start for theoretical guidance in understanding *why* it is that certain individuals

become involved in freegan.info. Early social movement theory was dominated by the rational choice model, which assumed that individual actors decide whether or not to participate in a social movement by weighing the likely costs and benefits of action and taking whatever course would maximize their utility (Becker 1976; Coleman 1990). In such a model, the more socially or materially deprived an individual is, the more likely he or she is to participate (Cantrill 1941; Gurr 1970). This idea that personal, psychological characteristics compel certain individuals towards participation (Zuckier 1982) is problematic, however, because it fails to account for why attitudes so rarely translate into behaviors. Many individuals adhere to basic principles of freeganism—concern about waste, the environment, or animal rights—but few adopt the radical beliefs of freeganism, and even those that do adopt freegan ideas rarely choose to embrace freegan practices to express those beliefs.

More recent scholarship has largely discarded the individual level focus of rational choice theory in favor of a more structural approach (McAdam 1986; Wiltfang and McAdam 1991; Loveman 1998). McAdam (1986) studied the civil rights movement and noted that both participants and non-participants in high-risk activism shared equally strong support for civil rights. What set participants apart from the rest was their previous history of activism, their integration into specific organizational fields that contained the movement into which they were being recruited, and their high degree of biographical availability, which refers to an absence of factors that might place constraints on an individual's occupational and spatial mobility, such as being married or having children. McAdam's model remains paradigmatic within sociology, and offers a set of factors—history, integration, and availability—on which to focus while attempting

to explain participation. Moreover, McAdam pushes sociologists to pay greater attention to within-movement variation between activists and the disconnection between ideology and behavior.

While McAdam studied a classic "Old Social Movement," the civil rights mobilization, more recent scholarship has focused on "New Social Movements (NSMs)," such as the gay rights, feminist, animal rights, or ecological movements (Pichardo 1997). Such movements differ from traditional social movements, which are typically focused on economic change and electoral politics, in their organizational forms, goals, and actions. It is thus unsurprising that NSM scholarship also asserts different modes of activist recruitment. Unlike traditional social movement actors, participants in "post-citizenship" movements are assumed to be "already integrated into their society's political, economic, and educational systems" (Lower and Ginsberg 2002:204), and are thus typically white, middle-class, and educated. Beyond this, NSM theory has swung the pendulum away from structural explanations back towards individual-centered ones. Rather than mobilizing for material gain or political power as the rational choice model might presume, though, individuals mobilizing for NSMs do so in order to assert and defend specific identities (Melucci 1989; Cerulo 1997; Polletta and Jasper 2001). The paragon of an NSM participant is someone who acts in order to show that they are "a certain kind of person" (Teske 1997:121).

The example of recruitment into the vegetarian movement is particularly helpful in our case, since vegetarianism—much like freeganism—can encompass both political and lifestyle behavior and can be practiced both within and outside of formal movement organizations. Mauer distills the process of becoming vegetarian into "predisposition

mediated by social contact" (2002:7) and argues that evolution into vegetarianism tends to be gradual (Stiles 1998). McDonald (2000) elaborates further, arguing that veganism is produced by prior love of animals, catalytic experience such as becoming aware of animal abuse, orientation to further learning about such issues, and eventual reintegration into society when activists reconcile their new lifestyle with previous behaviors.

While McDonald's model is helpful for understanding the early process of transitioning to freeganism, the concept of "reintegration" is immediately problematic. Why do some activists not "reintegrate" but instead become more and more radical? Calhoun (1991) argues that some activists follow this alternative path because one radical behavior can snowball into others as an individual's identity becomes more and more wrapped up in activism. In Calhoun's model, movement participants seek to demonstrate their commitment in order to preserve their integrity and authenticity in the eyes of other activists. Calhoun's identity model of activism is closely tied to theories of deviance, which demonstrate how deviance can become a "self-fulfilling prophecy" (Becker 1963:32) as individuals try to conform to the image others have of them.

Taken together, the theories coming out of the NSM literature which I explored above call for an examination of social movement participation that pays careful attention to ideas, ideology, and identity (Jasper and Nelkin 1992). These theories, however, largely take for granted the pre-existence of these identities and ideologies. Thus, while accounts of collective action must "offer a coherent understanding of who participants are" (Calhoun 1991:9), in this section I also investigate who participants *were* and *how* they came to be the way they are. The following sections explore how components of the above models can be used to explain freegan recruitment.

Freegan from Birth? Homes and High Schools

Psychologists and rational choice theorists have paid substantial attention to early childhood and adolescent experiences as predictors of later activism (Block, Haan and Smith 1968; Thomas 1971; Lewis and Kraut 1972). Scholars of deviance, in particular, have suggested the importance of early experiences that exposed individuals to hypocrisy and injustice (Moran 1977). Subsequent literature from social movement theorists, however, largely ignores early experiences except to suggest that NSM actors come from privileged backgrounds (Jasper and Nelkin 1992).

This last observation is certainly true with respect to the freegans. All but one—the exception being Leia—of the freegans I interviewed about their backgrounds indicated to me that they came from middle-class or upper-middle class, urban or suburban, stable homes. Janet, a mid-forties Spanish teacher, even went out of her way to assure me that there was nothing in her childhood that presaged her current "abnormal" behavior: she was "appreciated, loved, and comfortable." She did think, though, that this privilege might have facilitated her later freeganism:

> My upbringing made it easier for me to become a freegan. You see people who go into the Peace Corps or 'giving' sorts of lifestyles, and they are often people who grew up with comfortable upbringings. It's harder for someone who grew up deprived to grow up un-materialistic.

Most theories about recruitment have been content to establish just this kind of demographic profile, suggesting that it is sufficient to show than an activist has this sort of biography to demonstrate the foundation of his or her participation (McAdam 1986).

Political psychologists have suggested, however, that a privileged, mainstream background is an insufficient explanation for political radicalism, since so many non-radicals come from similar settings (Ellis and Eckstein 1977). On the other hand, there is

certainly some truth the observation Blee makes with respect to organized racists that we cannot simple "comb their background" in search of some "flaw" (2002:21) that single-handedly determines their life course. Whatever theory we choose to apply, it must account for the fact that my interviewees consistently indicated that they felt that elements of their backgrounds distinguished them and presaged their later activism.

Particularly, freegans use their own childhood privilege as a text onto which they ascribe different meanings and attribute different influences. As shown in Madeline's narrative, growing up in an anti-waste household, for many freegans, provided an example of an alternative ethic of consumption which freegans could contrast with the behaviors of the wider society. Janet, for example, described herself as having always been "intrinsically non-wasting," following the thrifty example of her parents. Even when surrounded by shopping-obsessed peers, Janet remembered that she never wanted new clothes: "If someone gave me a sweater, I would leave it hanging in my closet for a year before wearing it. I preferred hand-me-downs." Even when she did engage in more mainstream teenage pursuits—like listening to music—she assured me that she did so with a frugal twist: rather than buying CDs or records, she would wait for a favorite song to come on the radio and then tape record it.

Her own privilege provided Janet with a sharp awareness of the disparity between her situation and that of many of those around her. Janet's father worked on Wall Street as an accountant, and Janet spent much of her free time in the city. At age eight, she was driving with her father and saw a homeless man who appeared to be "on the brink of death." She considered asking her father to stop but didn't, and her father kept driving. As she put it, "It made an impression. I was thinking about how strange it was, and I was

conscious that my dad plays with money, and I live in a neighborhood where you don't see that at all, but you drive through burned-out buildings to get there." For freegans, the seeds of disillusionment from the mainstream economic system were planted early, if in varying ways.

While some freegans attributed to their past the seeds of an anti-wasting ethic, others credited their home lives for more explicitly politicizing them. Leia, a twenty-five-year-old mother from Brooklyn, said that her household had been politically radical for as long as she could remember. Her grandfather was an avowed communist, and her father had "communistic leanings." Lola, an Aquinas University student in her early twenties, offered a similar description of her home life, recounting that her parents took her to rallies in California to support striking grape-pickers at a young age, and pulled her out of school for almost a decade. While not anarchists, her parents had "anarchist ideas about schooling"—letting her spend days in the library learning about whatever she chose—and her father, a professor, taught courses about American colonial abuses of Native Americans.[12]

Home environments did not always provide positive models that freegans sought to emulate. Instead, in some cases, home provided early exposure to the factors against which freegans would later rebel. Wendy, a twenty-nine-year-old co-founder of freegan.info who now helps run the freegan bike workshop, told me that her parents filled their suburban, New Jersey home with "as much stuff as possible," since they were bargain shoppers. When I asked Adam about his father, he ticked off a litany of characteristics and behaviors his parents engaged in that he opposed from an early age,

[12] This contrast in the upbringings of the two middle aged women, Madeline and Janet, and the younger and more radical Leia and Lola displays some of the possible roots of ideological differences between "anti-wasters" and "anti-capitalists," which I will discuss further in Chapter VI.

including the cardinal sin of driving an SUV. As with several other freegans I interviewed, Adam expressed to me that he had been interested in going vegetarian from an early age, but had been "arm-twisted" out of it by his unsupportive parents.

For many freegans, though, experiences at school were far more influential than experiences at home. Leia's family bounced around when she was young, and she spent some time in Georgia. She obtained a copy of the "Satanic Bible" and tried reading it in class, but had it taken away from her. When she challenged her teachers to explain why her peers could read the Bible and she wasn't allowed to read her somewhat unconventional version of the same tome, she was told, "Reading the Bible is normal, this is not normal." She conflicted with her teachers over dress, too: when the school directed students to "Dress for Success," she snidely told administrators her torn jeans and t-shirts reflected her desire to "succeed" as a "dirty-ass punk rock star." Her negative attitude towards schooling was compounded by what she perceived to be pervasive discrimination against her based on her Hispanic ethnicity.

Jason, a muscular punk-looking video editor in his mid-twenties, had a similar story to tell about his experience with formal schooling. Jason reported that he experienced serious ostracism for hanging out with "the kids with long black hair and trench coats and Nine-Inch Nails [an alternative metal band] t-shirts." When his high school received bomb threats, he said, "Everyone always suspected us." Later, one of his friends was interrogated for sending out an e-mail challenging the "right-wing Christian gun-nuts" at his school. Jason recalled feeling like he was the only person who thought there was something wrong with the police intruding into his friend's life. These experiences were disillusioning, if not transformative: "I remember thinking, 'Man, cops

suck, this system sucks.'" These experiences in school led many freegans to believe, as Alex—an anarchist activist who attended parochial school in Houston—said, that "school is for the oppressors."

When I asked Adam about the origins of his political beliefs, he confidently stated that his politics were "there" from an early age, and that he was an anarcho-primitivist at twelve, though he didn't know the term. Few other freegans would be able to so confidently assert such an early genesis of their radicalism. Nonetheless, recurring themes in the backgrounds of freegans I interviewed suggest that pre-college experiences—despite the limited role given to them in most literature on activist recruitment—were significant, confirming an observation made by Keniston in his 1968 work *Young Radicals* but largely downplayed since then. In the freegans' own minds, this phase in their lives provided models for their later practices and beliefs while also disillusioning them from the system at large. Like the long-term love of animals cited by McDonald (2000) as a factor influencing the adoption of veganism, the true impact of these experiences often emerged later in life: as Jason described it "I was always radical. Sometimes it was latent. Sometimes it wasn't encouraged. Sometimes it was covered up by other things."

Exposure to Radicalism: College and Beyond

As mentioned above, many freegans got an early start in activism. Sowmya, an environmental technology Master's Degree student who was born in Bangalore, India, told me that she was an activist since age twelve, and has always believed that "without activism, life is useless." She rattled off a list of organizations with which she was

involved early on: the World Wildlife Fund, Greenpeace, and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). Each of these is familiar and, compared to freegan.info, moderate. Sowmya found each to be ineffectual. Wendy similarly told me that she was active in high school, as part of an environmental club that "didn't do anything" and Amnesty International, which consisted of "a few people lecturing about how bad things were and then some letter writing." While both Sowmya and Wendy were interested in activism from an early age, they felt that these impulses were largely diffused by the lack of a supportive and equally committed community.

In contrast, college[13]—as Madeline found with the anarchists across the hall in her freshman dorm—was for many freegans a chance to be exposed to new and more radical ideas. Even while attending the conservative Trinity College, Alex reported that university gave him a chance to "really challenge my ideologies and mental structures," although his participation in activism was limited. Wendy told me that on her first day at The College of New Jersey, she went to the activities fair and was roped in by her college's animal rights group. A vegetarian since age twelve, she thought to herself, "You are the people I've been waiting for all these years." Wendy was honest about the limited impact her college activism had on the issues she cared about: she said that her college environmental organization was named "Students Acting for the Environment," or SAFE, and added that this cautious moniker accurately captured the unambitious scope of the group's activities. What her activism did do, however, was expose her to political projects going on elsewhere, including the Wetlands Activism Collective and Food Not Bombs, an organization that has been closely linked to freeganism (Edwards and Mercer

[13] Fifteen of the sixteen freegans I interviewed had either attended college or were working towards a degree. Adam was the only exception.

2007). Another freegan, David, told me that college more explicitly got him involved in dumpster diving, and that he and his peers became so systematic and organized in their trash collection that they provided for all the material needs of several dozen students.

While college seemed rich in ideas, for many freegans, it was impoverished in action. Lola recalled reading about pacifism and the civil rights movement and thinking, "Things really haven't changed. Or maybe, they've changed, but they haven't progressed." While many of their peers might have claimed to be leftists, freegans reported to me that they saw this supposed radicalism as inconsistent with those students' unawareness of their own economic privilege. Once again, freegans claimed to have perceived themselves as "different" from an early stage, and saw others around them as politically uncommitted, unaware, or ineffective.

Many freegans added that, upon graduation, they quickly realized—or perhaps, decided—that their life opportunities were narrower than their educations and backgrounds might suggest. While some freegans knew they wanted to become activists, others tried their hand at a more mainstream existence—and failed. Wendy, a media and film major, realized that she simply couldn't get a job, because she had been engaged in activism during the time she should have been procuring internships. She found herself "extremely discouraged." Jason, another film student, did find a job doing film editing in New York City, but quickly grew disinterested in career advancement:

> I spent so much time in college keeping track of people and how much money they're making. Is their life better than mine? Are they living better than I am? That was something that was really, really hard to stop thinking about. I definitely had a complete reversal in the past year.

These anecdotes suggest that many freegans are part of a general movement of highly educated individuals being increasingly forced to confront the loss of control and

autonomy experienced by erstwhile "professionals" within modern society (Carlsson 2008).

One factor that swung Jason back towards the radicalism that he had lost touch with in his youth was the Bush Administration: "Bush winning in 2000, I thought that was total bullshit. And then the Iraq war. When Kerry lost it was like, 'This is the last straw, I'll never vote Democrat again,' because [of] what a loser he [Kerry] was." McDonald (2000) describes occurrences in the wider world that lead an individual to seek personal change as "catalytic experience," and for Jason, that seems like an apt description. McAdam's (1982) political process model of social movements asserts that changes in the political opportunity structure can impact movement mobilization precisely, providing this kind of experience. Movements need enemies against which to define themselves and issues that spark passion and action from individuals, and the rise of Christian conservatism and the Republicans seemed to offer that.

Moreover, as Loveman (1998) points out, state repression—which we might assume would stifle activism—often plays a huge role in promoting activism by creating a concrete target against which to organize. It is thus less than surprising that many freegans reported late 2004 as a time of huge ideological transition. New York was then the site of huge demonstrations against the Iraq War as well as the Republican National Convention, each of which led the police to arrest large numbers of protesters. When mainstream progressive mobilizations failed to achieve change—exemplified by the defeat of John Kerry in the 2004 presidential elections—many erstwhile freegans' latent sense of the inadequacy of conventional activism became overwhelming. While it would be an exaggeration to say that freegans responded to a changing "political opportunity

structure"—after all, most practices within freeganism do not directly engage with the state or mainstream political system—for many, broad political factors intersected with personal biography to lead them to search for new ways of expressing their politics.

Searching for an Activist Fit

Zaac, a thin computer engineer from Connecticut, carries a crinkled notebook with him to all freegan events. Inside, written in cramped handwriting, are summaries of a vast array of repair manuals, wild plant guides, and radical literature. "You never know when you might need a summary of [the prominent early 20th century German anarchist] Emma Goldman's writings on a note card," he once told me. Zaac's passion for exploring political philosophy through reading is evidenced by his bi-weekly hour-long train rides into New York City to attend the freegan reading group. The role of reading in Zaac's self-perception as a political activist is consistent with McDonald's (2000) assertion that reading is critical to the adoption of veganism. Particularly, reading helps potential social actors realize that feelings of disaffection they experience are not products of internal pathology, but the result of external factors (Moran 1977).

According to McDonald, the decision to become oriented to learn more through reading is often made "conspicuously and purposefully" (2000:11). Adam, for example, describes a period of his life during which he intensively researched agriculture, after which he realized that "even plant farming, even *organic* plant farming, even *local organic* plant farming involves a lot of animal exploitation," because clearing the land destroys animal habitat and because agriculture machines capture birds and small rodents. The inescapable conclusion of his research was that buying food of any kind was

unethical. Alex reported engaging in a similar process upon his arrival in New York City in 2007; he used his free time to study ideas he had heard about from Adam, and quickly found that "The stuff that I was reading was presenting itself really heavily in my daily life." After Alex had spent several unhappy years at college, abstract ideas from this literature like "patterns of alienation" and a "critique of everyday life" started to seem tangible and applicable for him. He said that his reading and study:

> … dismantled this wall that was guarding me from a life outside of capitalism, outside of the structure of daily life which seems so natural. I guess I just came to the conclusion that Adam was actually making sense and he was actually making more sense than someone I hated on TV that night. I realized that if I really believed this stuff, this isn't just philosophy. It's real life.

While studying had a life-altering impact for many freegans, though, it alone was not enough to cause some of them to implement radical practice. As Jason put it, "Reading books like Noam Chomsky and Derek Jensen, I basically decided 'This is crazy, I've got to be thinking about bigger things than just my own life.'" But it wasn't until later that he was able to take action.

This point of transition, from ideological affinity to action, is the point at which McAdam's structural model should have the most explanatory power. Applying McAdam's (1986) model to the freegan.info group, ideological affinity for freegan ideas, prior activism, and biographical availability would all create factors that would "push" them towards freeganism. McAdam would argue, however, that these factors alone do not explain why these *particular* individuals joined the freegan movement: after all, many elements of the stories evinced so far are not particularly uncommon. Instead, structural "pull" factors, stemming from direct contact with organizations connected to freegan.info or with freegan activists, should play the critical role.

To some extent, the importance of these "multi-organizational fields" (Fernandez and McAdam 1988) reveals itself in the process by which some individuals began to affiliate with freegan.info. Alex, for example, was brought into the Wetlands Collective in 2007 in order to work on trade justice issues (Alex had studied trade and economics in college). While they were working together, Adam asked Alex if he'd ever heard of dumpster diving, and convinced Alex to join him for a dive. Numerous other freegans—like Wendy and Cindy—also came to freegan.info through their prior involvement in Wetlands, and some attendees of freegan events cite their past patronage of the Wetlands night club and bar as providing the impetus for interest in freegan.info. In each of these cases, involvement was precipitated by an organizational network.

One element of Alex's story of becoming involved, however, hints at a problem for the application of McAdam's framework to the freegan context. Alex found out about the position at Wetlands through a job posting on idealist.org, an online search engine for progressive jobs. Consistent with the increasing role of the Internet in sub-cultural recruitment and development (Williams and Copes 2005), a solid majority of freegan.info members and event participants reported to me that they found out about freeganism through the web. Much like Madeline following links while searching for new causes for her new life, Sowmya learned about freegan.info from meetup.com, which directed her to the freegan website and prompted her to realize freeganism combined "all the causes I am so passionate about." Freeganism—especially at the time when many of the group's central activists joined—was, and despite increased media coverage remains, obscure, unknown, and isolated from mainstream activist groups, making the Internet a particularly important space for publicizing events and recruiting

new participants (Williams and Copes 2005). While McAdam's structural theory assumes that formal movement organizations mediate between activists and the ideologies that draw them to participate, the internet allows some individuals to bypass that process. In a modern, digitally connected society, potential participants in activism can decide which movement to affiliate with by considering a whole host of causes and ideologies from a desk chair, rather than just those movements within an organizational field to which they are directly connected.

Moreover, as I have pointed out several times throughout this chapter, prior freegan activism did not operate in the way the structural model predicts it would. While McAdam conceives of one organization directly facilitating involvement in sister organizations, in most cases freegans reported that their previous affiliations with activist groups influenced them primarily by disillusioning them. Freegans mobilized not as a response to positive activist experiences, but specifically because they perceived their previous activism to be ineffective. Madeline, for example, told me that during her exploratory phase, she considered joining an array of organizations: "I explored loads of different things, many of which I opted not to get involved in." She spent some time with the New York Metro Anarchist Association, for example, but decided that they were doing no more than "just sitting around talking." Prior activism pushed freegans towards searching for new movements, rather than pulling them into affiliated groups.

New York's Anarchist Scene

The need for modifying McAdam's structural recruitment theory to apply to freegans becomes more apparent when we consider the state of New York's anarchist

activist scene. Through freegan.info, I was exposed to a variety of other groups with a similar anti-capitalist frameworks and modes of practice. Wetlands, Global Justice for Animals and the Environment, the Rainforest Action Network, Times Up!, Food Not Bombs, and the In Our Hearts Collective represent a few of the organizations with which freegans also affiliate themselves. The boundaries between these different groups, however, are blurred and their activities overlapping. Wetlands meetings, for example, are generally attended by Adam, Alex, Wendy, Cindy, Leia, and Tate—all of whom are part of freegan.info—while the entire membership of Global Justice for Animals and the Environment now consists only of Alex and Adam.

Clearly, participation in one of these groups facilitates participation in others, as McAdam would suggest. Rather than being constituted by formal organizations, though, these data suggest that such social movements are better conceived of as informal networks composed not of members, but participants (Melucci 1996). These groups feed into one another cyclically, rather than extending outward into an ever-broader field of groups. While they provide mechanisms for ensuring commitment among previously recruited activists, another process is necessary to explain recruitment.

In short, freegans do not "join" the movement in the way someone might join an organization (della Porta and Diani 1999), even when they choose to affiliate themselves with freegan.info. In fact, the groups I interacted with during my fieldwork are indeed better described as "projects" rather than "organizations." The Rainforest Action Network, with which some freegans work, is not a broad organization but a network devoted solely to the project of convincing the Mass Transit Authority of New York to cease using wood culled from the rainforest for their tracks. In many such cases, the

different groups I observed were constituted by the same people engaging in different activities. This concept of activist "projects" downplays the primacy of formal affiliations and again places alignment with organizations as less significant than alignment with ideologies.

Statements from freegans themselves led me to look beyond the structural model for sources of recruitment. Alex described the complicated field of organizations of which freegan.info is a part in this way: "There are a lot of people who like what they do. So there are a lot of people who mix in the same kind of network. This is why it is hard to call it a movement, because there's a multiplicity. It's very diverse, or multi-verse." Moreover, for Alex, his work with freegan.info is "just a side project to the main project, which is being freegan," confirming Jason's observation that "there are kinds of activism that aren't involved in any group or organization." As Pickvance (1976) argues, many urban movements are better understood in terms of the problems, issues, stakes, and identities which they address, rather than the organizations they contain. That appears to be the case with freeganism.

The processes I have outlined in the preceding sections—particularly the use of the internet and interaction with other activists—help to explain how individuals became aware of freeganism and affiliated with freegan.info. The concept of "project" pushes our scholarly attention to a related, but different topic: why individuals choose to adopt the label "freegan" and making freegan living and freegan activism a major project of their lives.

Adopting the Freegan Label and Taking the Freegan Plunge

One surprising theme that emerged from my research was that many individuals who now identify themselves as freegan were initially resistant to the label. Wendy, for example, remembers going to an activist conference in 2000, while still in college, and picking up a copy of the pamphlet *Why Freegan*? Far from being pulled in, though, her response was to think the document, which is generally described as the "freegan manifesto," was "silly."[14] While at this point in her life she had begun dumpster diving, she would simply shrug when people told her that what she was doing was "freegan." Her perception of the meaning of freeganism simply did not correspond to the activist projects that were important to her at that point.

Others reported that their initial perception of freegans was more deeply problematic. Adam recalled that his original notion of freegans was that they were "people who look for ways to 'cheat' on veganism." The idea that freegans are cheap, lazy, or ethically lax was repeated to me over and over again as a critical barrier to self-identification as a freegan. Janet remembers that she first heard about freeganism from a former student, who told her that she had a freegan boyfriend. As Janet perceived it, though, this meant he was a "freeloader." The boyfriend didn't work and expected his partner to pay rent. "It seemed sort of negative when I first heard it," she told me, an assessment with which Leia—whose first experience with freeganism was when a friend refused to chip in for a phone service they were sharing because he claimed to be freegan—agreed. Even those with a better sense of what freeganism is were still

[14] There's something to be said for Wendy's perspective. The pamphlet—written by an anonymous vegan working with Food Not Bombs in Florida, rumored now to be Against Me! drummer Warren Oakes—discusses the merits of drinking your own urine and the ethical importance of handkerchief use, as well as referring to the capitalist system as "the whole burrito." To read the entire document, see Appendix C.

reluctant to affiliate themselves with the label, because they perceived it as a completely "parasitic" ideology that was self-negating, since it relied on using the waste it protested and lacked any comprehensive vision for a post-capitalist society.

What changed in these individuals' perceptions of freeganism? A large part of the process of becoming freegan as informants described it was the realization that freeganism embraced and enacted views that they already held. Leia, for example, told me that freeganism resonated with Marxist beliefs she had adopted during a brief stint with the communist Spartacists when she was in high school. The practice of recovering and redistributing food, to her, was an immediate way of engaging in the redistribution of wealth. One phrase that recurred throughout my interview with Leia was that she eventually realized that freeganism "makes sense" in a way that other ways of interpreting the problems she perceived did not. When Lola was first told about freeganism by an activist from Chicago she met, she thought, "It all made sense. It was a lot of the stuff I was already doing." What excited her was the realization that "there are organizations and groups that are living this life," rather than just her.

Many freegans reported some experience with dumpster diving before becoming freegan. Alex, for one, told me he was scolded by his mother for rooting through the trash at age eight, and Lola said that she dived for "angsty thrill" in high school. Nonetheless, the adoption of regular dumpster diving marks a clear point at which many individuals began to consider themselves freegans.[15] Janet told me that, even before she was "freegan," she was already engaging in many freegan practices: she biked rather than drove, spent as little money as possible, and carefully reused household resources. As

[15] It is worth noting, also that dumpster diving marked the start of freegan.info as an organization. Freegan.info first became a project within the Wetlands Activism Collective in 2004, with the first organized dumpster dive.

she put it, her tendencies "have always been freegan" and she has long "felt activist in my lifestyle." In 2005, she received an e-mail from Wetlands which described a group that dumpster dived food, and she thought incredulously, "Are they really able to eat that way?" When she attended her first trash tour, though, she was "hooked from moment one" and kept attending events after that.

Emotions have been cited as a critical force in mobilization (Tarrow 1998). As McDonald notes, with respect to vegans, "Emotions seem to have been one of the major defining characteristics of the more memorable catalytic experiences" (2000:10). Philosophy, as animal rights thinker Tom Regan puts it, "can lead the mind to water, but only emotions can make it drink" (qtd. in Jasper and Nelkin 1992:112). For freegans, dumpster diving is often what Berger describes, with reference to rural communards, as a "mind-blowing" (1981:204) experience that radically changes what a person will and will not do.

For Madline, her first trash tour indeed "blew her mind." As she described it, when faced with the waste she saw, "I thought, 'Oh my gosh, I had no idea.'" When she attended that first trash tour, she was already heavily involved in anti-consumerism, but she had continued to let herself buy food as her last remaining luxury. Dumpster diving was an "Aha!" moment for her that made her realize that food, too, could be "intensely political." She was drawn to the fact that the trash tour seemed to be a form of "propaganda of the deed," connecting to her past history as an actor. More than anything else, though, she, like others, articulated that dumpster diving was an emotional, eye-opening experience.

Once individuals see the scale of the waste, the response tends to be immediate. As Cindy explained it, "You can't go home from a trash tour and say 'yeah, that's okay.' You have to question." Dumpster diving remained a highly emotional activity even long after the first trash tour. One night, Cindy, having returned from four months in Montana, told me "the waste really got to me. I thought 'I just can't take it.' I eventually had to leave." The thousands of pounds of food bagged and thrown onto the sidewalk in New York City serve as a visceral reminder of why freegans choose to be freegans and to engage in so much waste oriented behavior.

Considering these stories in their totality, the adoption of freeganism, as freegans portrayed it, essentially represents the culmination of a personal quest to find an ideology and set of practices that conformed to pre-existing beliefs and concerns. Sowmya described her transition into freeganism as a "wonderful journey" in which she ceased trying to hide aspects of her identity that she claimed had always been there. Similarly, Marg Uerite told me that she saw becoming freegan as her "destiny," an interpretation of the complex process of becoming freegan that is consistent with the way freegans seek to show the seeming inevitability and logical nature of their beliefs. Jason added that, coming out of college, he was "anti-environmental destruction. Anti-this and anti-that. But I didn't put it all together and think about what was a rational way to respond to this aside from being anti a lot of things." Freeganism "clicked" for him because it helped him pull together and systematize the concerns he was feeling. "I just put together a list of things in my life that I wanted to change, and freeganism happened to be one of them [the things I wanted to adopt]."

As I have suggested in the previous sections, there is indeed a great degree of the process of becoming freegan that was for these individuals self-directed, rather than structural. At the same time, though, freegans tended to represent their transition to freeganism in a way that downplays what influence of social context and coincidence there was. Perhaps freegans' initial interest in activism had an entirely internal origin; nonetheless, the fact that they eventually settled on freegan.info was a result of the political context of the organizations with which they had previously affiliated themselves. Moreover, since waste is largely hidden in our society (O'Brien 1999; Rogers 2005; Scanlan 2005), organizations are necessary for exposing individuals to waste of which they would otherwise be unaware. The process of becoming freegan, then, is mediated by networks and organizations, though not in the straightforward way predicted by structural theories. In short, the emotional and symbolic impact of the trash tour points is the capstone to a complex of factors, including ideological identification, catalytic emotional experiences, organizational ties, and past activism, that combine to lead individuals to identify themselves both as freegans and members of freegan.info.

Spiraling into Freeganism: Identity-Recruitment and Commitment

In McDonald's (2000) model of becoming vegan, a final step in the adoption of the vegan lifestyle is "reintegration," the process through which vegans re-learn how to relate normally with non-vegans. Most social movement scholars might describe this as a process of social movement co-optation, as activists lose interest in an overly demanding political ideology and either seek to moderate the movement or return to more conventional pursuits. As Keniston points argues, "Membership in a small, fragmented,

struggling, and largely unsuccessful radical movement is clearly difficult to sustain" (1968:33). In contrast, though, most freegans told me that, after becoming freegan they have continuously sought to deepen their involvement in freeganism. This is surprising, given both the demanding nature of freegan practices and the seemingly quixotic nature of the freegan cause. A complete understanding of freegan recruitment must account not just for how freegans become involved, but why so many of them *stay* involved in face of these barriers.[16]

The identity theory of activism propounded by Calhoun (1991) helps explain why some individuals might not return to mainstream society. According to Calhoun, once an individual's identity becomes highly wrapped up with being activist, that individual feels compulsion from within the movement to act in more and more radical ways. Moreover, by interpreting all experiences through a political lens, individuals increasingly push away individuals with whom they previously interacted in the non-political spheres of their lives (Moran 1977).

This is process is precipitated by the stigma attached to associating with waste. Anthropologist Mary Douglas describes the importance of societal purity boundaries, and how, in traversing them, actors make themselves "wicked object[s] of reprobation" (1966:140). Janet explained to me that, when she first started dumpster diving, she was acutely aware of the negative way people evaluated her:

[16] To some extent, this observation might be marred by sampling problems. My interviewees were drawn from people active in freeganism, so obviously they tend to be people who have opted not to reintegrate. I was aware of this potential bias, though, and attempted to compensate for it. The small size of freegan.info made it possible for me to know the names of most the people who had been active in the group at any time since its inception, and thus I was able to observe that most are *still* active. I did make an effort to track down some individuals who I knew had been active with the group in the past and were no longer as active. What I discovered, though, was that many were still active in freeganism but were no focused on different organizations. This seems to confirm my finding that most freegans had opted not to reintegrate.

> It is a big step to do something that is repugnant to other people. And this [dumpster diving] certainly is: to open the trash, put your hand in, pull stuff out, and later (or right then) consume it. It is horrifying and disgusting to some people and it will cause them to judge me negatively.

Classic scholarship on deviance has pointed out that societal judgments like this help to make aberrant behavior self-reinforcing. Once labeled a "deviant" by society, an individual's range of actions is restricted and they are thus more likely to act in a way that conforms to that label (Becker 1974; Gibbs and Erickson 1975).

On one trash tour, I met John, an Asian-American in his late twenties with long hair pulled back into a pony tail. He told me that he grew up on Long Island and attended Cornell University. For six years afterward, he worked standard, conventional jobs, but, after being exposed to freegan ideas about employment, he got sick of his job and quit. He explained to me that he spent the next three years on organic farms and animal shelters. When his savings ran out, though, he was forced back into working a more "normal" job, organizing a college activities program in Newark. Even with an Ivy League degree, though, he told me the gaping hole in his resume has made reentering the mainstream economy difficult—not everyone, it would seem, has as easy of a time transitioning between activism and non-activism as Madeline did. While he originally saw freeganism as a way to liberate his life, now he engages in dumpster diving and non-wasting simple in order to make ends meet.

Dumpster diving is, to a degree, a path of no return for some freegans, because it partially constricts their social circle to primarily those who approve of such behavior. Freegans described to me how maintaining their friendships in settings outside of the group could be a challenge because of their beliefs. As Janet explained:

> You can sit in a room of five or ten people, and they're talking about bargains and sales and 'where'd you buy that' and what the latest technology is. You can really feel like you don't want to participate at all, or that you have to guard it [your freeganism].

Freegans described how adopting freeganism required them to reject their normal modes of action with friends and family. When traditional activities like shopping, going to the movies, or eating out became morally problematic, freegans find themselves socially isolated, thus pushing them to further fall back on the group.

It was often unclear whether the barriers between freegans and the rest of society were material—as John suggested—or cognitive—as Janet did. Alex described how his freeganism made getting a mainstream job virtually impossible, which in turn necessitated falling back on freegan practices just to survive.

> For an activist, for someone who is working against capitalism, the question 'what do you do for money' becomes a really funny thing. What do I do *for* money? As in what do I do to get money? Or what do I do to help the inflationary state bank get money out of my dollars? The answer is 'nothing.' I don't want to do anything for money, I don't like money. And so when you don't believe in the capitalist system it's nearly impossible to get a job. If you're going to be a capitalist, you have to understand that capitalism is great

To some extent, freegans are not able to reintegrate simply because they cannot suppress the knowledge of injustices or the disillusionment that they gained through their activism.

Regardless of the reason, what Alex and John both indicated to me is that the freegan lifestyle—that is, avoiding mainstream employment and engaging in practices that many people find repugnant—forces freegans to fall back on each other. I was struck by this realization when Tate sent an e-mail to the freegan list, asking for a way to cope with pink eye. The list responded with suggestions ranging from herbal remedies to pharmacy scams and community health centers. Conventional health care was simply off the table, for both financial and ethical reasons. To an extent, freegan.info really is a self-

help group, which supports individuals who have found themselves cut off from conventional avenues of survival.

This reliance on the freegan community is reinforced by a high premium that freegans place on authenticity. Scholars studying the "straight-edge" subculture, composed of youth who elect not to engage in drug or alcohol use, have noted how important proof of commitment to movement ideals is to these individuals (Haenfler 2004; Williams and Copes 2005). Becker describes a process by which such judgments about authenticity can have immediate and tangible consequences:

> The individual, as a consequence of actions he has taken in the past or the operation of various institutional routines, finds he must adhere to certain lines of behavior, because many other activities than the one he is immediately engaged in will be adversely affected if he does not (1963:27).

The parallel between freeganism—which also is based around abstention from activities many people in mainstream society do for entertainment—and straight-edge deviance should be apparent, and further confirms the value of maintaining credibility as a freegan, which was repeatedly expressed to me in interviews.

Freegan interactions are marked by ongoing attempts to present personal authenticity and monitor the authenticity of others. I have seen freegans chide one another for buying food, failing to turn off computers or recycle, or travelling by airplane. Numerous people mentioned to me during their interviews that they felt "challenged" by Adam, and that his serious commitment to freegan ideals made them feel guilty or uncomfortable about elements of their lives that are inconsistent with freeganism. While many freegans felt isolated from their old friends because they had become unwilling to consume, they faced isolation from the group if they *did* consume. Cindy described the important role that the group had in limiting her purchases:

> You're just around people so much who are questioning purchasing. If you're not part of a community, you might use mass transit or grow your own food, but it's so ingrained in our society to buy things that it takes a lot of retraining of your brain to actually consider whether or not you need to buy things.

Through everyday inter-group practices and conversations, then, the freegans are able to pull one another further into the lifestyle and prevent them from backsliding on their ideological commitments.[17]

These examples provide empirical support for Calhoun's theory of identity-based activist recruitment. While Polletta and Jasper claim that "the literature on collective identity still leaves fuzzy the relations between identity and an individual's calculus of self-interest" (2001:299), these data indicate a clear relationship: identity *is* the basis for that calculus. Freegans choose to engage in freegan behaviors because, through a long process of integration into the movement, their identities have become closely connected to political activism in such a way that they see that their own psychological, social, and material needs can increasingly be met only through participation in freeganism. The freegan example confirms the importance of ideology, compared to structural factors, in "value-based social movements" (Kanter 1973:266) such as NSMs.

At the same time, these observations add to this literature, which typically takes identity and ideology as a given, by showing the process by which ideology is adopted and identity constructed. As I have shown, both ideology and identity are not just embedded and individuals but heavily influenced by the contexts of various movements themselves. As such, I would argue that questions about whether collective identity or

[17] In this context, a simple statement that would cause no pause in mainstream society—like when Leia commented "I've been buying a lot of food recently"—becomes a failure that must be rectified. On the other hand, certain rituals—particularly those involving food—can be used to prove authenticity. At nearly every single meeting, for example, almost every attendee will bring some dumpster-dived item. Each bizarre or uncommon item has an attached story, confirming that its bringer's commitment to the freegan lifestyle extends beyond the confines of formal freegan.info events into other facets of their lives.

movement came first are moot (Polletta and Jasper 2001): social movement actors like freegans evolve their identities and affiliate with organizations simultaneously. Ideology often came before joining the movement, but the movement reinforced that ideology and reified it into actual practices.

Lola put the intricate process of becoming freegan best when she reflected to me, "Realizing what you believe and trying to live that is very complicated and something that a lot of people—especially myself—are going to spend the rest of our lives trying to figure out." Committing to a revolutionary cause, as Keniston notes, is "a process rather than an achievement, an evolving style and orientation rather than a finished identity or fixed ideology" (1968:20). Being freegan is a "moving target," and even if the label is adopted at a specific moment, its meaning is mutable thereafter.

This chapter has introduced key themes that frame the rest of this thesis. One critical, and pervasive, observation is the way that freegan community normalizes and reinforces certain freegan behaviors. The second is the multiplicity of ways people become freegan, and the diversity of philosophies people bring with them when they join the freegan movement. Both themes are explored in the next chapter through the relationship between freeganism and veganism.

CHAPTER II: VEGANISM AND THE FREEGAN COMMUNITY

Adam

I have often heard Adam Weissman described as the most "hardcore" member of the freegan.info group,[18] and it is easy to see why. At thirty-one years old, Adam has worked sporadically for non-profits, but has spent the majority of his time as a full-time independent activist. Someone once asked Adam how he managed to avoid getting in trouble with the government over his resistance to paying taxes, and his quick response was "no income, no taxes." Adam is involved with so many activist groups—most of them dealing with globalization, environmentalism, and animal rights—that he admits he is "perpetually overcommitted" to these different causes. He recently was arrested for chaining himself to Former Senator Hilary Clinton's office building to protest a free-trade agreement, and he is quick to admit that the FBI probably has a file on him. He lives rent-free in the freegan office and subsists almost entirely off dumpstered food, much of which he eats raw and unwashed. I have never seen Adam wearing anything that did not look like it could have been pulled from a dumpster a few hours prior. Adam is an avowed anarcho-primitivist, and he mixes this belief that capitalism, industrialism, and even civilization will (and should) collapse with a deep antipathy for the human race.

Adam's dislike of humanity is juxtaposed against a deep compassion for animals. Adam went vegetarian at age eight and vegan at twelve, and claims he would have done both earlier "if it weren't for parental pressure." Now, though, he considers veganism—

[18] In the interest of full disclosure, I should note that Adam left freegan.info late in the winter of 2009 due to conflicts with others in the group. These group dynamics, however, are not the topic of the thesis: while I am certainly interested in how the group deals with ideological differences, my own evaluation was that Adam left for reasons related to group procedure and process. Such conflicts are not novel to freegan.info, but I think a focus on this sort of disagreement would detract from the wider applicability of this thesis. Given Adam's long involvement in the group and role in shaping its current form, examination of his life is still a fruitful avenue of sociological inquiry into freeganism as well as freegan.info.

the moral baseline of animal rights for many activists (Francione 1996; Munro 2000; Torres 2007)—a "bourgeoisie ideology that worships consumption" and "continues to contribute to capitalist exploitation." Nonetheless, Adam's continued rootedness in the animal rights community is indisputable. Adam founded the Wetland's project "Global Justice for Animals" in order to protest animal rights groups' support for free trade agreements. Adam is a frequent gadfly at animal rights conventions and conference. In fact, he has been forcibly removed from such gatherings for criticizing better-known organizations like PETA and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) for their partnerships with corporations and cooperation with conservative groups. Adam's critique of the animal rights community as overly divorced from other progressive causes and insufficiently committed to animals is significant enough that both Peter Singer, the movement's ideological forefather, and Bruce Friedrich, PETA's Vice President, indicated to me in conversation that—despite Adam's seeming marginality—they were familiar with both him and his arguments.

Despite his criticism of veganism, Adam's diet is both freegan *and* vegan. While other freegans and erstwhile vegans on trash tours flock to a bag of donuts in order to eat animal-product-laden sweets guilt-free, Adam stands to the side. Eggs and dairy, to Adam, are no more than poison, and as he once told me, "Just because I eat garbage doesn't mean I want to eat trash." Other practices I've seen Adam engage in with regard to animals set him aside as far more committed to animals than even strict vegans. The freegan.info and Wetlands office where Adam sleeps most nights (when he isn't staying at his parents' house in Jersey City) is a dingy basement infested with insects. Nonetheless, Adam is adamant about clearing out the pests infesting it using only no-kill

herbal remedies. I've watched Adam comb through bags of trash before they were thrown out in order to search for flies, and seen him sit on the curb during a trash tour frantically picking insects off of a piece of wax paper. Adam is constantly on the prowl for rat-poison traps littered around New York City, and always willing to handle the poison himself rather than risk it be eaten by a rat.

Adam represents a particularly staunch pro-animal position, even within the freegan community. Nonetheless, his background and present activism hint at the sometimes opposing, but nonetheless intertwined, relationship between freeganism and the mainstream vegetarian and animal rights movements.[19] I once suggested to Adam that—based on my observations—it seemed that the animal rights community was the main population from which freegan.info draws recruits. He immediately took exception to this assertion, reiterating that he viewed freeganism as a critique of veganism. In a sense, both Adam and I were right. Freegans use veganism as a foil against which they define themselves; at the same time, though, many of their practices are adapted from veganism and drawn on veganism for justification. This section explores how freegans seek to reinterpret and reapply the animal rights ethic, and how this ethic and the practices tied to it are a common point around which freegans create community.

[19] For the sake of simplicity, I generally use "vegetarian" to refer to a diet that restricts animal products, whether that be meat, dairy, or eggs and use the terms "vegetarian movement" and "animal rights movement" essentially interchangeably. These are not necessarily coterminous (some vegetarians choose the diet for religious or health reasons and thus are not concerned with animals, and some anti-vivisection or anti-hunting activists eat meat). However, in a modern context, the animal rights movement essentially *is* the vegetarian movement, and vice versa (Munro 2000; Lowe and Ginsberg 2002).

Human-Animal Sociology: Not an Oxymoron

Animals have, historically, received little attention from social scientists. While the traditional anthropological literature examines animal rituals and practices, it generally does so only in the context of primitive and non-Western societies (See, e.g., Durkheim 1933; Levi-Strauss 1962; Douglas 1966; Geertz 1973). These studies do make a valuable contribution by showing that animals are not just a material resource for society, but can also be symbolic objects of cultural and social significance. Still, these studies tend to be both anthropocentric and "speciesist,"[20] relegating non-human animals to the category of social "other" (Passariello 1999:12). For their part, sociologists have throughout the discipline's history been "dismissive" (Arluke 2006:13) of scholarship that studies human-animal relationships.

In 1979, Clifton Bryant, in *The Zoological Connection,* attempted to shift sociological discourse about animals. He charged that sociologists were "singularly derelict" (1979:399) for their failure to pay attention to the role of animals in human language, entertainment, health, interaction, and economic behavior. Looking at the wide array of ways humans use animals, Bryant argued that "there is virtually no element of social life that is untouched by animals" (1979:403). Claiming that "our social enterprise is not composed of humans alone" (1979:417), Bryant asserted that animals were an appropriate object of study for sociologists.

By and large, sociologists have ignored Bryant's call for a comprehensive inclusion of animals into social scientific study (Arluke and Sanders 1996). Still, work like Bryant's has spawned a new specialty field, human-animal sociology, that has its

[20] 'Speciesist' is a term analogous to 'racist' or 'sexist' that denotes an individual who arbitrary discriminates on the basis of species membership (Singer 1990).

own journal—*Society and Animals*—and an American Sociological Association section devoted to it. The scholars who have begun to examine the significance of animal-human relations are primarily clustered in the field of symbolic interactionism (Jerolmack 2007). These studies have focused on direct human-to-animal contact and its effects in the context of pet ownership (Serpell 1986), animal shelters (Alger and Alger 2003; Irvine 2004), animal abuse (Arluke 2006), and laboratory use (Birke 2003). A key emphasis of these studies has been to turn animals into subjects rather than objects, challenging the portrayal of non-human animals as "mindless, emotionless, self-less, reacting rather than acting, apprehending rather than comprehending, and existing only in the immediate situation" (Sanders 2003:406). The symbolic interactionists have done more than just show animal "self-hood" (Irvine 2004:2), though. They have also demonstrated how human selves and identity can be wrapped up with animal ones.

One thing that human-animal sociology has told us about human beings is that "one of the most glaring consistencies [in human attitudes and behavior towards animals] is inconsistency" (Arluke and Sanders 1996:4). The public believes rats are filthy and carry disease, but scientists breed them for medical testing (Birke 2003). We treat pigeons as "flying rats" and pests, but city-dwellers continue to feed them in city parks as a mode of entertainment (Jerolmack 2008). We send our pets to psychologists and bury them in pet cemeteries (Franklin 1999), but euthanize them without a second thought when they become inconvenient (Arluke 2006). Indeed, one of the most barbaric of modern human societies—Nazi Germany—had the strictest anti-animal-cruelty laws of any Western nation of its time or since (Arluke and Sanders 1996). Truly, on a basic level, our relationship with animals is a confused one.

The most glaring inconsistency in human-animal relations, however, has not been the primary focus of human-animal sociology. Americans keep 61 million animals as pets, use 80 million in scientific and product-testing laboratories, and kill 26.8 *billion* per year for food (Bekoff 2007). Yet attention is given to these different uses of animals in the exact reverse levels that the numbers might suggest. Human-animal sociologists have by and large not explored the fact that while the vast majority of Americans express concerns about animal welfare (Franklin, Tranter and White 2001, McDonald 2000), few take this far enough to consider the impact their diets have on animals. In fact, while there are only six million vegetarians in the United States (HRC 2005), an astonishing one-third of the population claims to support "equal rights" for animals (Jerolmack 2003).

Partly, this focus on companion animals rather than agricultural ones is a product of the symbolic interactionist perspective, which emphasizes how humans interact with animals on a face-to-face basis (Petto and Russell 1999; Sanders 2003; Myers and Russell 2003). On any given day, though, even the most avid pet owner is likely to interact with more animals through his or her diet than in any other way (Singer 1990; Adams 1990). This issue of animal use for food, however, is primarily addressed by a separate body of literature on the vegetarian and animal rights movement (See, e.g., Jasper and Nelkin 1992; Fox 1999; McDonald 2000; Munro 2000; Mauer 2002; Stuart 2006). Strange as it may sound, though, animals themselves are not the focus of these vegetarian studies, which emphasize abstract ideologies and the people who hold them.

Looking at the body of human-animal sociological literature as a whole, it is clear that in the past three decades, scholars have made significant strides towards

demonstrating the role animals can play in human subjectivity and boundary construction. As Jerolmack points out, though, the ultimate relevance of the human-animal discipline will "depend largely on its ability to show how incorporating animals into our investigations of society will enhance understanding across many avenues of sociological inquiry, including identity, community, politics, and economy" (2005:651). This, however, is a challenging task, since "drawing links between ethnographic studies of human-animal interaction and large-scale social conflicts among humans will strike many as a stretch" (Jerolmack 2005:659). To be taken seriously as more than just a scholarly wing of the animal rights movement, human-animal sociologists must show how individual relationships—not just with individual animals but with the category of "animal" at large—can structure worldviews and animate communities (Bryant 1979). This study seeks to make just such a "zoological connection" by showing how freegan individuals troubled by the way we relate to animals seek to tie this into other political issues and use activities regarding animals as a focal point for their activism.

A Brief History of the Rise (and Fall?) of Vegetarianism

If there is indeed a place where we would anticipate finding individuals making connections between animals and society, we would certainly expect to find them in the vegetarian movement. Vegetarianism has an extensive history (Fox 1999) and is the "original manifestation of food activism" (Katz 2006:255). Dietary restrictions surrounding meat have had an ongoing presence not just in the Hindu East, where they have been widely practiced for thousands of years, but also in the Christian West (Stuart 2006). Before there was an official ideology of "vegetarianism" encapsulated within a

social movement, "meat-eating was an open question that concerned everyone, and it affected not just people's choice of diet but their fundamental ideas about man's status on earth" (Stuart 2006:xvii). During the Middle Ages, vegetarianism was perceived as problematic by elites because it challenged the legitimacy of those who "are superior in terms of strength, wealth, power, or the like, [and challenges those who] dominate, subordinate, exploit, and oppress those who are inferior" (Fox 1999:14). In short, prior to modernity, vegetarianism was more than a dietary choice; it was a challenge to the dominant forces of society.

The word vegetarian—referring to individuals who elect to abstain from the consumption of meat—was coined in the 1840s, coinciding with the formation of the Vegetarian Society in Great Britain (Stuart 2006).[21] At that time, vegetarianism was closely tied to humanitarian movements sweeping Victorian England, and as such was connected to organizations that advocated pacifism, prison reform, and women's rights (Taylor 2004; Adams 1990; Leneman 1999; Munro 2001). It is no exaggeration to say that before the animal rights movement came into prominence in the 1970s, vegetarians had a place in the majority of utopian projects and leftist reform movements (Twigg 1979). As such, for much of the 19th and 20th century, vegetarianism was symbolic of generalized resistance to traditional structures and "strongly associated with an egalitarian, anti-structural ethic" (Twigg 1979:16), which helps explain why authors examining that time period associate vegetarians with "communists, anarchists … and other non-conformists" (Heider 1994:27).

[21] The term vegan—referring to individuals who abstain from eating using any animal products, including eggs and dairy for food or wool or leather for clothing—did not come into use until later, around 1910, again in Britain (Leneman 1999). The meaning of 'vegetarian,' however, has always been contested, with some within the movement claiming that a 'vegetarian' diet not only precludes meat but also eggs and dairy.

The 1970s were a critical turning point for vegetarianism and the animal rights movement. In 1975, Peter Singer published *Animal Liberation,* a book now considered the bible of animal rights activism. Singer presented a compelling but simple case for a drastic revision of our relationship to animals. He argued that animal liberation would be the next great liberation movement—following on the heels of movements advocating for women, racial minorities, and homosexuals—and backed up that assertion by showing how the claims made by vegetarians and animal rights activists paralleled those of abolitionists and other liberators.

In the last three decades, the movement has indeed made significant strides. Support for animal rights is "substantially established" (Franklin et al. 2001:139) in many Western countries and animal welfare laws have grown tighter and more encompassing. Animal liberation organizations have hundreds of thousands of members, millions of dollars, and media attention that would have been unthinkable a half-century ago (Jasper and Nelkin 1992). By 1999, for example, PETA was considered "super-trendy" and, among adolescents, the nation's number one "hip cause" (Franklin 1999:186).

With increased visibility, however, has come significant change to the meaning of vegetarianism within society. Corporations have ceased to view vegetarianism as a "deviant" and "oppositional" lifestyle but instead as a "new marketing and profit generating opportunity" (Beadsworth and Keil 1993:233). In a variety of ways, vegetarians have been pigeon-holed as an affluent niche market that is interested in one specific ethical dimension of a food item but relatively indifferent to other elements of its production (Lower and Ginsberg 2002; Mauer 2002).[22] The vegetarian movement has

[22] Singer and Mason (2006) provide an excellent accounting of how even vegan products, like tofu, can have serious negative environmental consequences.

been to an extent de-radicalized by the availability of humane slaughtered meat and vegetarian specialty items: "the puritanical, Spartan nature of earlier vegetarianism has given way to a less strict version where occasional lapses are tolerated, if not endemic" (Franklin 1999:161). Consequently, the meaning of the term itself has been diluted, with more than half of self-described "vegetarians" in one survey admitting to still eating meat on occasion (Richardson, MacFie and Shepherd 1994).

These changes in how vegetarianism is received by the rest of society is concomitant with underlying shifts in the for the practice for most vegetarians. Concerns about the environment, animal rights, global trade, or working conditions for agricultural laborers are all secondary to the primary reason driving most vegetarians to make their dietary choices: personal health and fitness (Krizmanic 1992; Richardson et al. 1994; Stiles 1998; Lindeman and Stark 1999; Franklin 1999; Katz 2006). As the vegetarian lifestyle has, for many, become "completely detached from any movement ideology" (Mauer 2002:146), the connections between the practice of vegetarianism and any broader activist or political framework have weakened (Beadworth and Keil 1993). Vegetarians are no more likely to be politically active than meat-eaters (Mauer 2002), and a vegetarian lifestyle is essentially unconnected to other political preferences (Jasper and Nelkin 1992; Beadsworth and Keil 1993).

This tendency towards normalizing and moderating vegetarianism among the wide body of its practitioners is concurrent with a trend towards rising militancy and rigidity among a small cadre of dedicated animal rights movement activists. As Munro (2000) argues, the modern animal rights movement has two sides: outwardly, the movement is respectable and moderate, but internal publications reveal a high degree of

militancy and moral rigidity. Moreover, although these modern activists are "moral crusaders" just like their 19th century forbearers, their crusade has only one target. Contemporary animal liberation groups tend to focus on a "narrowly defined set of issues … with little regard to their implications for other ideological questions" (Jasper and Nelkin 1992:41). Nowhere is this more evident than within PETA, which is under increasing criticism for ostensibly degrading, commodifying, and sexualizing women in its advertising campaigns (Francione 1996; Torres 2007). Confirming that animal rights campaigns are now truly single-issue, PETA has defended these practices by emphasizing that its concern is with liberating animals, not women. The modern animal rights movement is marred, then, by an unwillingness to engage with other issues, persistent racial and gender hierarchies within the movement, and a contempt for democratic process that creates "a degree of totalitarianism" (Wolfe 2003:21) in movement organizations.

Looking at these changes from a distance, it is clear that, before animal liberation gained prominence in the latter half of the 20th century, vegetarianism was perceived to be a drastic choice that indicated a desire to seriously challenge society. Thomas Jefferson Hogg was an 18th century proponent of vegetarianism who was once confronted by about his diet by a clergyman. The priest told him that his choice of vegetarianism was of concern to him because it seemed to indicate that "your determination [is] to deviate from all the old established ways of the world" (Adams 1990:111). Centuries later, George Orwell described the impact of vegetarianism in similar terms, stating, "It could plausibly be argued that changes of diet are more important than changes of dynasty or even of religion" (1937:82). Both examples indicate that, in the past,

vegetarianism "said something" about how that individual wished to be perceived as a "historical actor" (Adams 1990:146).

The reality of vegetarianism and the animal rights movement today, as indicated by my brief history and analysis, is substantially different. While vegetarianism may indeed entail a shift in worldview (Stiles 1998; McDonald 2000), that shift is, for most, limited exclusively to the way an individual views animals. In short, mainstream vegetarians, just like the sociologists Bryant criticized, are failing to connect animals to other social issues. This divorce between vegetarianism and other leftist causes is one of many criticisms freegans use to distance themselves from the animal rights movement, a process I will explore in the next section.

The Freegan Connection to, and Problem with, Veganism

The freegans I have met are, by and large, not "animal people" in the sense of the avid pet owners and shelter workers described by Irvine (2004), Sanders (2003), or Arluke (2006). I have observed little direct interaction between freegans and animals, because they are rarely present in living form at freegan events. Though a few freegans keep companion animals[23]—Janet is always excited to talk about her cats Dakota, Gina, and Bouncy—they certainly do not keep them in numbers disproportional to the general population.

A significant majority (13 of 16), however, were vegetarians and vegans prior to becoming freegan. At one freegan feast, I asked John, a middle-aged black man who had been living on the streets as part of a vow of poverty, what had drawn him to freeganism,

[23] Most would probably be skeptical of referring to them as 'pets,' given that it implies an owner-property relationship.

and his first response was to say, "Well, I first became vegetarian sixteen years ago." Freegans often describe their current practice as an extension of previous involvement in vegetarianism, veganism, and animal rights. In fact, numerous freegans—like Adam, Sowmya, Zaac, Janet, and Wendy—described animal rights as their "big thing" prior to joining freegan.info. This helps explain why their philosophies with respect to animal rights tend to be very hard-line. David, a masters student at the New School who nearly constantly wears clothing with a pro-vegan message, put his feelings straightforwardly: "I do not believe it is okay to kill animals for anything no matter what, and I would never promote the consumption or use of any animal product."

Given this close connection, it is unsurprising that the demographics of the animal rights movements are parallel to those of the freegans. As in other NSMs, vegetarian activists tend to be white, educated, upper-middle class, and non-religious (Jasper and Nelkin 1992; Plous 1998; Lower and Ginsberg 2002).[24] Vegetarians are generally unmarried and do not have children (Kendall, Lobao and Sharp 2006). Moreover, a strong majority of animal rights activists and vegetarians are women (Pifer, Shimizu and Pifer 1994; Nibert 1994; Peek, Bell and Dunham 1996; Einwohner 1999). Most of these predictions bear true for my sample of freegans: while perhaps not overwhelmingly so, the freegan.info group I studied is mostly white and female, and tends heavily towards educated individuals from upper-middle class backgrounds. Returning to the model of activist recruitment put forward by McAdam (1982), which I discussed in the previous section, this shows how "biographical availability" is key to participation in freeganism.

[24] For an alternative perspective, which asserts that basic support for equal rights for animals is more established among minorities and low-income communities than is typically assumed, see Jerolmack (2003).

Freegans are able to engage in the activism they choose thanks in part to a lack of dependents, such as children or spouses.

Despite these demographic similarities the relationship between freeganism and the vegan movement is not straightforward. Like many others, Sowmya told me, "I began in animal rights and I still see myself as an animal rights activist." In her teenage and undergraduate years, she was active with PETA in India, protesting against Kentucky Fried Chicken in an effort to convince them to improve their chicken-killing practices (and even picketing some events where her father—a prominent Indian politician—was a guest of honor). When she first moved to New York to continue her education, she attended "almost every" anti-fur protest she could find.

As I explained in the previous chapter, prior experiences with activism like these do not straightforwardly facilitate their adoption of freeganism. Instead, freegans were primarily impacted by their prior activism insofar as it left them disillusioned and searching for an alternative. Somwya exemplifies this observation. Reflecting on her years of protests, she told me, "I'm not sure what any of that accomplished." Despite being vegetarian for over half her life, she was skeptical of vegetarianisms' impact as well: "People think 'oh, I'm vegan or I'm vegetarian and I'm going to save the world' and now they have a halo. But it's way beyond that. It does make a difference, but it's negligible." Like several other freegans in the group, she was turned off by some characteristics of the major animal liberation organizations. While some cited concerns about centralization and sexism, Sowmya was particularly bothered by the unwillingness of PETA to engage with environmental issues alongside animal ones.

Cindy described similar disillusionment with the animal rights community, stemming from a time in the past when Wetlands would participate in anti-fur protests organized by animal rights organizations. When Wetlands tried to incorporate anti-sweatshop arguments into the campaign, "we got slammed" by groups that wanted to keep the exclusive focus of the campaign on animals. Now, she admits:

> I have way more in common with someone living off hunted elk than I do with an animal rights activist who thinks the solution is genetically engineering meat that isn't sentient. They don't eat animals, but other than that, we don't have a lot of common ground. So I feel like I've separated a lot from the animal rights movement over the past few years.

Beyond basic concerns about the effectiveness, structure, and tactics of movement organizations, freegans explained to me that they had more serious ethical concerns about veganism itself. Even after carefully reading ingredient labels on food, it is nearly impossible for an individual living in industrial society to avoid contributing to some form of animal abuse, given that animal products can be found in such omnipresent items as refined sugar and rubber tires (Fox 1999; Benton 2003). The fields which produce vegan food displace wildlife habitat, and the machines used to harvest vegan crops kill millions of small mammals. Moreover, even those freegans who weren't bothered by the residual harm vegan products caused to animals told me they were still concerned about other problems with the philosophy. Lola told me that in high school, she saw veganism as "absurd" because of the narrow focus on animals it imparted. Vegans, in her eyes, will "readily support a corporation that is destroying fields and taking over family farms. Then there's all that plastic. There are problems with buying processed food, no matter what it is."

In short, the logic that leads to veganism often leads to freeganism as well. Many vegans with whom I have interacted describe their decision to become a vegan as driven by the realization that the concerns about animals or the environment that drove them to be vegetarian also apply when we consider dairy cows and laying hens. In a similar pattern, freegans decided to go beyond veganism when they realized that the same concerns about agricultural workers and the planet applied not just to factory farms but also the fields where tofu is grown. To minimize the harm they cause to animals, humans, and the environment, an individual must abstain from buying any agricultural product (or at least, so the freegans assert).

My interviewees told me that they saw most vegans as completely unaware of all of these concerns, and that this further drove them to distance themselves from the animal rights community. Zaac related to me how he perceived most vegans as engaged in a constant contest to prove "I'm more vegan than you," which led them to worry more about a trivial amount cow bones in refined sugar than the petroleum products in the item's packaging. Adam joked about vegans who wear t-shirts beating slogans like, "I saved eighty-four animals this year." He said that he usually points out to such people, "No, you didn't. Eighty-four more animals got thrown in a supermarket trash can because you are vegan." He explained, "There's not some guy at the store saying 'Bob went vegan this week, so we're going to order one less chicken.' There's nothing that precise going on." Many vegans see their behavior as a perfect model for achieving change within capitalism: they reduce demand, so eventually farms will reduce supply. In Adam's view, though, the economic system is totally unresponsive to such behavior, which is part of why he wants to completely overhaul that system.

While few of them have actually made the connection, many of the criticisms of the animal rights community freegans offer are rooted in the way the animal rights community has moved away from the comprehensive radicalism of its past. David—while still closely involved with the animal rights community and an adamant advocate of veganism—admitted that, "I certainly don't think you have to be progressive or radical or critical of the oppressive institutions around us to be vegan. And a lot of people who are extremely oppressive and extremely fucked up and involved in these institutions are still vegan." Alex delivered an even more blistering critique:

> I share a lot of time with *really* dedicated animal rights activists. Many of them are *strict* vegans. Some of them are strict vegans who buy all of their commodities, and those are usually the most hard core ones. They buy their stuff from agricultural factory farms. And as a pretty convicted freegan, I feel at odds with that. You have all these people walking around feeling so self-assured and wonderful, and they're not quite realizing all the economic exploitation involved. People don't take enough into account that they are involved in an economy that is still incredibly ecologically destructive.

Interestingly, though, Alex qualified his statement, stating, "It's a really difficult subject. I definitely support vegans all the way." Given this wholesale attack by freegans on how veganism is typically practiced, this might seem surprising. While this section has examined how freegans problematize veganism, the next shows how veganism nonetheless continues to play a significant role in the group.

If You're Freegan, Then Why Be Vegan Too?

Most freegans would agree that their philosophy permits the eating of dumpstered animal products. The people I interviewed were driven to veganism out of opposition to factory farming and environmental degradation, and realize that as long as someone is not *purchasing* animal products, they are not contributing to these processes. When I asked

members of the group if they saw a problem with "meaganism"—the eating of dumpstered meat—only one responded affirmatively.[25] Even Adam told me, "I don't think allowing a carcass to go to waste is particularly ennobling or shows a greater level of respect." Previous literature on politically radical dumpster diving communities confirms that many individuals who call themselves "freegans" do indeed eat dumpstered animal products (Clark 2004; Katz 2006; Edwards and Mercer 2007), and media coverage of freegan.info often highlights this fact.

On one trash tour, a passer-by asked if freegans were "okay with eating meat." Evie, a speech pathologist in her early thirties, responded, "Well, we're almost all vegans and vegetarians, but, yeah, I guess." In short, Evie realized that the reality of freegan practice was largely vegan, even if the ideology ostensibly supported non-veganism. Some freegans admitted to me that, while they considered themselves vegan, they would occasionally eat dumpstered pastries or other items with animal products in them. Still, only three people reported that they practiced meaganism: Jason, Marg Uerite, and Madeline, and Marg Uerite said she would prefer not to eat meat but did so out of health concerns. On the other hand, several individuals told me that, even though they were not vegan prior to becoming freegan, they actually converted to veganism through their involvement with freegan.info. This fact is strange when we consider that freegans indicate substantial disillusionment with veganism and believe that freeganism makes veganism ethically unnecessary. Being a vegan freegan is also practically difficult, since

[25] Alex explained to me that, while eating dumpstered animal products does not directly contribute to animal suffering, eating meat contributes to "an ecological gap. People start eating meat and become insensitive and indifferent to life in general. This is what we see all the time. Complete indifference to biological devastation." My own conversations with animal rights philosopher Gary Francione indicate a similar criticism of meaganism: that eating animals from the trash reinforces the idea that animals—dumpstered or not—are something to be eaten.

vegan sources of protein, such as nuts or soy, are rare finds in the trash, while milk products and meat are quite common.

To some extent, freegans maintain veganism as a force of habit. Janet, who has been vegetarian for over twenty years, explained to me, "At this point in my life, I wouldn't eat animals even if they were raised humanely." The very idea of eating flesh or drinking milk—regardless of where it came from—simply struck her as disgusting. Freegans explained to me that veganism was simply a part of their identity they weren't going to relinquish just because the ethical situation around it changed. As David described it, "There's never been a question that I'd be vegan. I know it's possible, and I think it's healthier for my body, and I want to show people that it's possible." Health was a major factor in maintaining veganism not just because many freegans see animal products as toxic, but because dumpstered vegan food is less likely to be spoiled or contaminated than quickly rotting animal food (Edwards and Mercer 2007).

There are other reasons, though, why individuals in the group choose to maintain veganism in face of the push and pull forces within freeganism that could spur an end to vegan practice. Zaac explained to me that he liked remaining vegan while freegan because it reminded him that his primary reason for being freegan was to help animals. My own analysis, though, was that a major factor in pushing freegans to maintain veganism stemmed from the dynamics of freegan.info. Being vegan, I argue, is another way to show freegan authenticity and for a freegan to integrate him or herself into the community.

Freegans are able to draw on veganism to show their freegan authenticity because the group has made veganism central to its events. The freegans' "Live Animal Policy" states:

> Animals are not food and not trash: Occasionally on trash tours, we find live animals in the garbage, discarded by food retailers. We want to stress that freegan trash tours are NOT expeditions to collect live animals for food—if you find a clam, lobster, mussel, or other live creature, please return the creature to an appropriate water body, NOT a cooking pot.
>
> At times we also find mice stuck to glue traps, insects stuck to fly paper or caught in plastic bags, and other instances of animals in peril in human refuse. Please consider helping these animals to find freedom and escape injury. To assist you in this, we've prepared a series of suggestions for how best to care for animals found in the trash. We recommend consulting this before embarking on a trash foraging expedition.

The context of this policy is notable. Although the policy is Adam's brain child, everyone in the group supported it when it was brought to a general meeting. It is to my knowledge the *only* official policy freegan.info has governing the behavior of its members. Freegans are not "required" to dumpster dive, bicycle, or even attend meetings, and, as I explore in Appendix B, the group was not even united behind banning a Ku Klux Klan member from its activities. Freegans are, however, prohibited by this policy from gathering live animals or hunting during activities connected to the group. This issue is so important that freegan.info held off on passing guidelines to allow chapters of the organization to form outside of New York City until it had made clear its policy with respect to animals.

The Live Animal Policy is indicative of a broader trend in freegan discourse: concern for particularly marginal animals. Mainstream animal rights campaigns tend to focus on large mammals with substantial cognitive capacities and visual appeal; even Peter Singer (1990) admits that his version of vegetarianism is ambivalent with respect to

eating shellfish. The freegan group, on the other hand, drafted, discussed, and passed a policy directed specifically towards protecting the interests of these "lower" orders of animals.[26] The one occasion on which I have seen the policy enforced was when someone asked if it would be okay to eat bugs during a wild food foraging expedition, to which the group responded, emphatically, "No." Even outside the contexts of formal group policy, freegans frequently discuss animals which are typically placed on the fringe of vegan discourse. Normal conversation at freegan events might include a debate over the ethical dimensions of gathering oysters or smashing bugs. Cindy, for example, once told me that she would not approve of keeping a beehive for honey, even if a single bee wasn't harmed: "I don't believe in humans having dominion over animals and I don't believe in non-human animals belonging to humans." While she describes herself as an "animal liberationist"—using Singer's terminology—what she advocates is clearly more extreme.

These observations are indicative of the more general way that freegans talk about animals in ways that normalize and reinforce radical animal liberationist positions. In January 2009, a U.S. Airways passenger jet crashed into the Hudson River, adjacent to New York City. The New York Post and other newspapers blamed the wreck on Canada Geese which had congregated near LaGuardia Airport, where the plane took to the air. This attribution was consistent with a general human predisposition to condemn "out of place" animals that have strayed into human spaces (Griffiths, Puler and Sibley 2000; Philo and Wilbert 2000; Jerolmack 2008). The freegans' response, when the incident came up, was one of incredulity. An exasperated Cindy told me, "What did they expect? They built it [the airport] in the middle of a migratory route, and then they killed the

[26] After all, it is supremely unlike to find a live pig or chicken on a New York City trash tour.

coyotes that controlled the population because they ate peoples' dogs." Others in the group nodded their heads in agreement. Within the freegan community, the perception is that the *rest* of society, not freegan.info, is being absurd in how it views animals.

Of course, the most evident way freegans normalize veganism and pro-animal philosophy is through practices regarding food. There is a great deal of contempt for freegans who use their ideology as an excuse to get around the rigors of veganism. On one trash tour, I entered a Dunkin Donuts to ask them if they had any donuts they were about to throw out. I emerged from the store only to be confronted by Janet, who asked me, "Did you just solicit non-vegan food?" When freegans do admit to eating non-vegan food, they often do so with a great deal of hesitancy and remorse. Alex, who when I interviewed him had recently finished a nationwide speaking tour on free trade issues, confided to me that in certain parts of the country he had to dumpster dive at McDonald's, but only because "It's really not convenient to be starving all the time." Freegans are acutely conscious of the potential for group disapprobation that comes from appearing to be less than a strict vegan. This process is consistent with that described by Calhoun (1991) and discussed in the previous chapter as functioning to reaffirm activist commitments and demonstrate authenticity.

When freegans cater for activist events or hold freegan feasts, the food they prepare is almost always strictly vegan. Indeed, within most freegan social contexts, veganism is *assumed.* A frequent greeting directed at new attendees of trash tours is the question, "You vegan?" On the other hand, if one individual finds a meat or milk product while dumpster diving, they will often announce to the group, "I have some non-vegan food… if anyone eats that." In this way, the freegan community flips the standard

relationship between vegans and meat-eaters. Usually, vegans must identify themselves as the outliers, while at freegan events, meat-eaters are the anomaly. Essentially, freegans construct an entire social framework in which veganism becomes normalized and positive. On one trash tour, we were cleaning up after a dive when someone found a container of gazpacho left on the sidewalk, unclaimed. The finder shouted, "It's vegan!" in an attempt to convince someone to take it: to freegans, vegan connotes tasty and desirable, while for mainstream society, it means just the opposite.

Freegan Community and the Re-emergence of Veganism

These anecdotes suggest how veganism has become a central aspect of the freegan.info community. In August, I attended a freegan feast at Leia's Brooklyn apartment. On the menu was broccoli rabe, vegetable stew, bread with hummus, stir fry, and, for dessert, a fruit smoothie; someone commented how nice it was to be at an event where, as a vegan, she could eat every single dish served. Over our meal, the conversation turned to animal rights. Individuals present differed over the efficacy of animal welfare legislation and the recent decision in Spain to grant some human rights to Great Apes. When I mentioned that I had taken a class with Peter Singer, Cindy called out from the kitchen, "Wait, isn't he the guy who says it's okay to eat mollusks?" Her tone of voice was one that implied that she was not looking for justification to crack open a shellfish, but that she thought such a practice would be anathema. Later, Jason brought up that he thought the example of early hunter-gatherers indicated the possibility that some forms of meat eating could be ethical, a proposition that soon became contentious.

When the argument became heated, Jason sat back and laughed and said it was nice to be able to debate this sort of "minutiae."

That evening—and many nights like it—stand in contrast to the way freegans describe the way veganism impacted their social relationships prior to joining freegan.info. People like Adam, Janet, and Wendy described their choice to be vegan earlier in life as isolating, drawing the ire of parents and the taunting of classmates. They are not alone. For all the normalization of vegetarianism that has occurred, to be a politically active, ethical vegan in American is still "to perpetually find oneself in the minority, chastised, excluded, challenged, and reminded of one's difference" (Clark 2004:24-25). In a meat eating society, vegan arguments and concerns are both muffled and denigrated (Adams 1990). Asked about the biggest barrier to practicing their philosophy, many cite the social isolation of not sharing mainstream food habits (Singer and Mason 2006). What vegetarian community does exist is often weakened by ideological differences that erode any sense of solidarity (Mauer 2002; Alger and Alger 2003; Taylor 2004).

In short, with the narrow ethical focus of modern animal rights philosophy, vegetarianism does not provide enough commonality to provide the basis for a community that functions outside of animal rights work. In contrast, freegans prioritize community: many interview respondents stated that "community" is a critical element of freegan practices. While initially this seemed like a nebulous idea to consider a "practice," I have since realized that in their events, conversations, and everyday practices, freegans are constructing exactly the type of community that they perceive veganism lacks. The 123 Community Space—where the freegan.info bike workshop is

located—is adorned with signs stating things like "You Are Not Alone" and offering alternative modes of mental health support. These are indicative of the fact that a desire to find a community of like-minded individuals is a key factor in explaining the draw of freegan.info. Through feasts and dumpster dives, freegans are reaffirming the important role food can have in constructing social relationships while simultaneously making those relationships more meaningful by injecting an ethical or moral component to them (Mennell, Murcott and Otterloo 1992). A couch in a freegan apartment or even a dumpster can become exactly the sort of proverbial vegan table freegans couldn't find elsewhere, a space where their ethical concerns are respected, their dietary choices accepted, and where conversations about animals can take place with willing listeners.

These observations about the function of veganism with the freeganism lead me to make two broad points about freegan.info. The first is that the way freeganism defines itself vis-à-vis veganism is critical to how freegans view themselves as historical actors and how we situate freegan.info within the wider field of political movements. The freegan-vegan shows the degree to which freegans are still *within* the society of the animal-rights movement, even as they claim to be *outside* of it. What I am arguing here is that, in many ways, freeganism is a logical extension of vegetarianism and veganism that adapts these to the barriers and challenges the modern vegetarian movement faces, such as a dearth of non-hierarchical, safe community and a failure to recognize connections between different political issues. Vegetarianism "entails seeing connections that others miss or disregard" (Fox 1999:47); freegans realize, however, that even vegetarians miss the links between some of their behaviors and animal exploitation. Given these considerations, freegans realize that the only way to be vegan—in the sense

that veganism is an ideology of non-participation in any and all forms of animal exploitation—is to avoid participation in the economic system at large.

Freeganism, then, is not so much a step beyond veganism as it is a form of veganism that takes vegan principles more seriously. Carol Adams introduces the concept of a "vegetarian quest" (1990:175), arguing that true vegetarianism is not an attainable end goal but is instead an ongoing process of searching for ways to live ethically. She defines vegetarianism as based not on a specific dichotomy between animal-products and plant-products, but instead as a set of cognitive boundaries around what is "good" (Twigg 1979) or a "way of redrawing the mental geography with which we negotiate around our world so that it includes an expanded sense of what has value" (Fox 1999:111). Such a conceptualization has a historical precedent in the earliest self-conception of the vegetarian community. The Royal Vegetarian Society has originally claimed that the word vegetarian does not stem from "vegetable" but from the Latin word "vegetus," which means, "whole, sound, fresh, and lively" (Tester 1991:143). In short, the meaning of vegetarianism to the movement has never been fixed but is instead a mutable concept tied to a purer, more ethical diet. In this sense, freeganism is an attempt to recapture and redefine vegetarianism and tie it back to the social justice causes alongside which it was originally born.

The second point I would like to make is that the example of freeganism relationship with veganism pushes us to reconsider the potential roles that human-animal relationships can play. Animals are, to the freegans, more than just a companion or even a reason to change their diet. They are a concept around which freegans find commonality with one another. Animal practices are a way freegans can monitor and

encourage commitment to the group and its philosophy. As I suggest in the next chapter, animal ethics are also a way to frame a much broader political outlook.

CHAPTER III: ANIMALS, ENVIRONMENT, AND A FREEGAN FUTURE

Cindy

Based on appearances, Cindy is the freegan.info member who best exemplifies freeganism's connection to 1960s hippies, an association with which she probably wouldn't disagree. Her long blond hair is generally pulled back into braids and she is typically clad in earth-tone fleece vests and knit caps, making her appear younger than her thirty-two years of age. Some of the beliefs and experiences she described to me similarly fell within the purview of the hippie stereotype. She told me that she had always felt drawn to wild places, even when living in the suburban, middle-class home in Milwaukee where she grew up. Her first introduction to environmentalism came at the age of eight when developers started clearing the woods behind her house. She claimed she then started writing letters to the mayor to prevent the destruction, but said she received no response. Next, she and her brother came up with the idea of pouring sand into the gas tanks of the bulldozers, a plan that was stymied when her mother found out.

In high school, she worked with her school's environmental club, which mostly focused on promoting recycling in the school. As she admits, "I was digging through other people's trash at an early age," sorting waste from the lunchroom to be composted and recycled. Around the same time, her concern for the environment broadened to include animals. She recalled going on a canoe trip with her science class, during which her teacher suggested that the students shouldn't douse themselves in bug spray because it harmed insects unnecessarily. To her, "the idea that someone would care about bugs was just so new to me. That really got me thinking." At age sixteen, she visited the state fair, and after seeing the livestock there, she went vegetarian. Her ability to act on her

budding concern for animals, though, was stifled once again by her mother, who said, in reference to animal rights activists, that "all those people are crazy."

Like so many of the other freegans, college—for Cindy, the School of Visual Arts in New York—was the time during which her political radicalism reached fruition. She recalled going to the Wetlands Bar during college for a social event, but her interest was piqued by an activist meeting she saw happening at the same time. Wetlands drew her in because "they were unique in that they were involved in multiple issues … [both] animal rights and environmental justice. They made the connection between different things." At Wetlands, she was introduced to dumpster diving. She told me that she started by just going to bakeries to get cake and pastries after a long night at the bar, but she eventually realized that she could get healthy food from the garbage as well. She was involved with Wetlands when freegan.info first spun off as a side project, and said that her own personal identification as a freegan was closely tied to her increasing involvement in the group.

As with other participants in freegan.info, Cindy's beliefs represent a close intertwining of pro-animal and pro-environment activism. In her present life, though, the two sometimes become contradictory. In the spring and early summer of each of the last four years, Cindy has left New York to participate in the Buffalo Field Campaign, an activist project which attempts to use photographs to publicly shame the hunters who kill bison straying outside the protected area of Yellowstone National Park. Cindy openly admits that the campaign is "single issue" and therefore fails to engage with many causes she finds important, but justifies it because it is an opportunity to be outside and connect with nature. This opportunity to help some animals, however, is problematic for other

animals. While on the campaign, she tells me that she lives in a house with forty other "hippies." While they don't purchase animal agricultural products, the other people in the house—who describe themselves as "carnivegans"—eat a lot of hunted meat and road-kill. As she explains:

> As a freegan, I don't see a problem with eating road-kill—though I wouldn't do it myself—but I do have a problem with people hunting. But at the same time, when everyone else is eating the two fish caught in the lake, and I'm eating a block of tofu grown on a mono-cropped farm in Brazil and then shipped there, my diet has a greater ecological cost. That's a hard thing to deal with, but I just couldn't do it [eat meat].

Her time on the campaign further provides her time to reflect on the future she envisions building through freeganism. While she envisions a primitivist future without agriculture, she's not willing to concede that this necessarily requires hunting, even though she realizes that "If I wasn't purchasing food in Montana, and I'm not hunting, I'm going to starve [*sic*]."

Her own efforts to resolve these contradictions are emblematic of the broader role animals play in structuring freegan identity. Particularly, in this section, I explore how freegans use beliefs about animals as the basis for broader political ideologies about the environment and humanity's place in it. While in the last chapter, I showed how animals were a topic around which freegans could find commonality and form community, in this one I emphasize how animals can be the basis of disagreement and difference. This chapter goes deeper into freegan ethics, setting us up to transition into discussing freegan practices in subsequent chapters.

The Animal-Nature Connection

Human-animal sociology has offered useful, and typically underreported, insights into the role animals play in human thought. Animals provide cognitive objects from which humans can develop mental hierarchies and categories that allow them to make sense of the world around them. (Searles 1960; Arluke and Sanders 1996; Franklin 1999). Moreover, animals are devices for "thought, metaphor, communication, and differentiation" and thus "provide the basis for much human expression" (Kellert 1983:260). Indeed, psychologists have argued that, historically, "thoughts arose, in large part, from the interactions from people and animals" (Hindley 1999:186). Among early humans, for example, encounters with animals "forced comparisons, categories, and conclusions" (Mason 1993:93) about the place of humanity vis-à-vis the natural world, and were critical for drawing boundaries between nature and culture (Douglas 1966). Even a cursory review of human-animal literature suggests that the category of "animals" ought to play a central role in any analysis of how human groups understand the natural world (Miller 2005).

Some studies that have tried to link views of animals to views of nature have found just such a connection. The practice of consuming animal flesh is a ritual symbolic of humanity's dominance over nature (Levi-Strauss 1983; Fiddes 1999). As such, early vegetarians argued that meat-eating functioned to build a wall between humans and their true propensities as natural organisms (Stuart 2006). Modern vegetarians are more likely to understand that their food practices are linked to broader environmental issues than are omnivores (Twigg 1979), and as such, pro-animal and pro-environmental beliefs are strongly correlated (Kalof, Dietz, Stern and Guagano 1999). Other human-animal

sociology studies have explained this correlation by arguing that the animal rights view "subverts … the objectification of the non-human world in general" (Kinsley 1995:183) and shown that "to have empathy with animals … promotes ecological practices" (Earley 1997:279). In short, the study of vegetarianism ought to provide fertile ground for creating linkages between human-animal and environmental sociology.

Environmental sociologists, however, have paid far less attention to the role animals might play in attitudes towards nature or conflicts over the environment than have human-animal sociologists. A review of major texts in the field of environmental sociology and environmental psychology reveals surprisingly little mention of the role of animals in human constructions of nature (Brownlow 2000; Clayton and Opotow 2003; Munro 2004; Hannigan 2006). Animal rights and environmental groups, for their part, are "potentially overlapping" (Mauer 2002:62) due to their common concern for entities outside of society, the environmental impacts of animal agriculture, and the harm visited on animals by environmental destruction.[27] Nonetheless, the sociological disconnection

[27] The connection between animal agriculture and environmental devastation is now both well documented and compelling. According to a report from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, livestock use over 30% of the earth's land surface, literally eating up 70% of its agricultural land (Steinfeld, Gerber, Wassenaar, Castel, Rosales and de Haan 2006). This system accounts for 55% of global erosion as well as one-third of all the nitrogen and phosphorous that goes into water supplies, which livestock themselves already heavily stress. The study goes on to note that livestock are a major contributor to biodiversity loss and are implicated in the decline of 85% of all threatened species.

Livestock production is highly inefficient from a food production point of view—it takes thirteen pounds of grain to produce a pound of beef (Marcus 2005)—and as such, an animal-based diet places a far heavier strain on the environment than a plant-based one. For example, it requires 284 gallons of oil and 792,000 gallons of water to produce a 1000 pound steer (Singer and Mason 2006). Meat takes twelve times as much water, calorie-for-calorie, as producing bread, sixty-four times as much as potatoes, and eighty-six times as much as tomatoes. With global demand for pork and beef predicted to double by 2050 (Tilman et al. 2002; Rosenthal 2008), these negative externalities will only grow in magnitude.

The connection between animal production and global warming has become particularly prominent with the increasing attention given to climate change. Tallying the carbon emitted from cutting forests for pastures and fields with gases coming directly from the animals themselves and the trucks, planes, and ships that move them, the U.N. determined that 18% of CO(2) equivalent greenhouse gases come from animal agriculture (Steinfeld et al. 2006). The contrast with a vegetarian diet is once again notable. The average American diet produces 1500 kg more CO(2) equivalent per year than a vegetarian

between those that study the environment and those that study animals is mirrored in the groups advocating for each. In fact, these two movements' relationship is often marked by acrimony and conflict (Franklin 1999; Munro 2000; Munro 2004). For example, in the 1990s, The Nature Conservancy, a prominent environmental group, drew the ire of PETA for using snares to kill non-native pigs that were ravaging Hawaii's ecosystem. As in other cases, animal rights groups perceived environmentalists as indifferent to the suffering of individual animals (Jasper and Nelkin 1992), while the environmentalists saw vegetarians as "anti-nature" (Manes 1990:146) for failing to prioritize the whole ecosystem over single organisms. Because of this bias in favor of animal welfare over the environment, animal rights discourses are "weakly ecological" (Dryzek 2005:215), even when they invoke environmental concerns. For opposite reasons, the "movers and shakers of conservation … stop dead in their tracks when they approach the 'animal question'" (Mason 1993:277).

These sorts of conceptual boundaries between concern for animals and environment might seem abstract, but as environmental sociologists have noted, the way we conceive of environmental problems is critical for the shape those problems take (Darling 1951). Dryzek describes such conceptualizations in terms of discourses:

> [A discourse is] a shared way of apprehending the world. Embedded in language, it enables those who subscribe to it to interpret bits of information and put them together into coherent stories or accounts. Discourses construct meanings and relationships, helping to define common sense and legitimate knowledge. Each discourse rests on assumptions, judgments, and contentions that provide the basic terms for analysis, debates, agreements, and disagreements (2005:9)

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diet, a difference equivalent to the disparity between driving a regular sedan and a hybrid car (Eshel and Martin 2005).

These statistics offer a strong ideological and scientific basis for connection between the animal rights and environmental movements. That these movements remain in many ways unconnected in spite of these facts offer freegans grounds for condemning both movements. Moreover, it further confirms the freegan skepticism of mainstream 'green capitalist' discourses: for all the attention lavished on global warming, Al Gore—and most of the U.S. population—still eat meat.

Discourses about the environment—that is, how we "construct, interpret, discuss, and analyze" nature—have "all kinds of consequences" (Dryzek 2005:10; MacNaghten and Urry 1998). While the conceptual divisions between animals and the environment that scholars and activists make might not seem significant, then, they are, because they meaningfully factor into how individuals view the world around them. This chapter delves into how discourses—and disagreements—about animals and the environment frame how freegans perceive past societies, understand present problems, and imagine future utopias.

Animals and Humanity's 'Wrong Turn'

As part of my fieldwork, I attended the freegan reading group, which meets twice a month to discuss texts relevant to the beliefs and practices of freeganism. More than just a glorified anarchist book club, though, the freegan reading group sees itself as the "research wing" of freegan.info, providing background for freegan beliefs and a framework for envisioning freegan goals. On one such night, the topic of the discussion was author Jim Mason's book *An Unnatural Order* and the somewhat unconventional argument Mason made with respect to where humanity "went wrong" and ceased living in harmony with the environment.

The "conventional" critique of civilization—if the application of the word "conventional" could ever really apply to such arguments—tend to focus on the origin of agriculture as the central turning point in human-environment relations. The "wrong turn" (Earley 1997:10) for humans, according to these authors, came when humans abandoned their natural hunting and gathering ways in favor of a settled, farming

existence (See, e.g., Leonard 1960; Earley 1997; Quinn 1999; Jensen 2006). In such accounts, animals play a relatively minor role in the historical arc of humanity's decline, their part in the story subsumed beneath more general changes in humanity's relationship with nature at large. Some of the freegans in the group with less of a history and interest in animal rights—like Madeline or Jason—reflected to me that this view was fairly close to their own.

Mason (1993) offers a different argument. According to Mason, the key point of transition in humanity's social evolution came not with the switch to agriculture, but when humans became hunters as well as gatherers. "This reduction of animals—the soul and the essence of the living world to the primal mind," Mason argues, "reduced all of nature, creating … a view of the world where people were over and distinctly apart from nature" (1993:146). Mason argues that animals were the ultimate symbols of nature, and as such, by turning them into prey or chattel—rather than objects of interest and awe—humans transformed their view of the entire natural world. While such a perspective is consistent with other arguments that have cited large animal domestication as a major point in the evolution of human societies (Caras 1996; Shepard 2005; Zerzan 2005), the historical and conceptual distinction between gatherers and hunter-gatherers is not frequently made in the literature and, I imagine, strikes many readers as strange.

The freegans in attendance that night, though, gave a lot of credence to Mason's ideas, and I have heard individuals express similar understandings to Mason's outside of the cerebral context of the reading group. Adam told me that he believed that "rather than glorify hunter gatherers"—as do many anti-civilization authors—we should realize that there is a "sharp distinction between gatherers before hunting and gatherers after

hunting." He added that the transition from gatherer to hunter-gatherer was the point at which humans developed patriarchy and started abusing nature. For Adam, the "interwoven threads" of these processes represent the origins of a modern "culture of domination" which provoked humans to start to see themselves as the "centerpiece of the world." The key point, though, is that animals started it all: Adam claims that "non-human animals were the first thing we decided to dominate." In this way, freegans tap into a long-standing strain of argument among vegetarians that argues that meat-eating was "the Pandora's box that introduced savagery into the world" (Stuart 2006:386) and is the key ritual through which the natural is subordinated to the human (Adams 1990). While this argument is largely lost in modern, mainstream animal rights discourses, it marks another way that freegans are linking veganism with other political causes.

Primal Vegetarianism and the Ideal World

These beliefs about how humans ought to relate to animals take on more explicit significance in the inter-group debate among freegans over whether or not humans are biologically meant to be vegetarians. The assertion that humans are predisposed to vegetarianism is critical for Mason's distinction between gatherers and hunter-gatherers to make any sense. During one discussion, Zaac staked out one position on the issue: "Looking at our closest relatives"—referring to our ape ancestors—"their 90% vegetable diet is pretty telling." Zaac added that "people are just sort of primally [*sic*] vegetarian." When I asked Madeline about the same issue, though, she laughed and told me:

> I seriously challenge someone who says that they're primitivist and is a vegan. Because I don't think a primitivist vegan living in a temperate climate could happen. I would like to see that person be set down in the Adirondacks and see how they meet their minimum calorie intake and protein. Sure, you can get

> vitamins from chewing on pine needles and eating roots, but I just don't think it [being a wild forager without hunting] is viable. There's something psychological there, something about being ashamed to be alive. Yes, we're predators.

Scholars have given different answers to the question with which Zaac, Madeline—and, at various times, much of the freegan group—are engaging. While some argue that hunting and consumption of animals is an intrinsic element human evolution and identity (Watson and Watson 1969; Catton 1980; Tuan 1984; Harris 1990; Jensen 2006), to others animal consumption is a recent and problematic addition to human existence (Hockett and Ascher 1964; Lee and DeVore 1976; Myers 1986; Adams 1990). The point, however, is not which group of scholars has offered the correct answer. What is significant in the context of this analysis is that for the freegans, the answer *matters.* They attach a great deal of significance to primitive models in structuring their own visions of the future.

While our society frequently views the lives of primordial humans as "full of starvation, hardship, and deprivation" (Mason 1993:59), "almost all leftist anarchists, past and present, share Rousseau's notion of the noble savage inside us" (Heider 1994:151). Freegans, for their part, often idealize individuals living a primitive existence. Adam—as is typical for him—put it to me bluntly: "The foragers were the ones who had it right and everything else was completely fucked up." Some of my other discussions on the topic, however, were more nuanced. At one feast, Tate—who describes himself as *anti-*vegetarian based largely on his understanding of primal peoples—and I discussed the !Kung bushmen in the Kalahari Desert of Botswana. I told him that I had read a study suggesting that murder rates among that forager societies were actually quite high. The next day, Tate sent me an e-mail containing a list of anthropological studies that showed I

was wrong. From my observations, it seems that many in the freegan group are quick to defend forager societies as a model for the future, even as they accept that such a model could not be immediately implemented in a world with six billion people.

Discussions among the freegans about human pre-history and modern tribal societies factor into more general questions about human nature and the utopias that freegans seek to build. Some, like Adam, Zaac, or Jason, look at primal societies as a nearly ideal model, and as such, their visions of utopia are grounded in their understandings of the past.[28] Other freegans, however, offer substantially different ideals. Once again, Madeline presented a contrasting persepective:

> I think it's great if someone wants to be vegetarian or vegan, and in an ideal world, there certainly wouldn't be massive production of cattle, but there probably would still be production of sheep, since their wool is one of the most environmentally friendly fabrics there is. I would rather buy leather shoes than one made out of a petroleum products. In an ideal world, there would still be domesticated animals. And there would still be agriculture. I don't think we can just turn the clock back to a million B.C.

Irrespective of their different conceptualizations, though, both Madeline and the more primitivist individuals in the group derive some of their beliefs and justifications from how they understand past cultures' ways of life and particularly their relationships with animals.

Reconnecting with Our Animal Nature

Freegans use animals to explore how humans are supposed to live in more ways than just diet. Adam explained to me, "Our society was a lot more bonobo-like before [hunting] and lot more chimpanzee-like after," noting that bonobos are peaceful and

[28] Though Jason once qualified this by saying, "To a large degree, my belief is that what we did before civilization was pretty much the right thing. But in the case of hunting, perhaps we don't just have to revert to a pre-civilized way of life."

communal, while chimpanzees tend to be violent. At other times, though, Adam referred to animals at large, rather than making distinctions between them, in order to offer advice on how humans ought to live: "There's a way we're supposed to be, then there's fucking everything up … [if you look at our ancestors] you see they're not taking any more than they need, pretty much just food, food, water, food. Maybe some medicinal plants." Adam carried on, adding that humans should "stop living anywhere but the ecosystems we're evolved for." Pointing out that humans should not live in cold climates, he told me "Note the lack of fur. We are mammals with large sections of exposed skin. Someone is telling us something here. Anywhere we need clothing to live is somewhere we were clearly not intended to be." In his view, humans should "stop adapting every ecosystem for us, rather than staying where we're adapted to ... we're basically an invasive species on the vast majority of the planet." Over and over, Adam invoked analogies and descriptions of animals in order to frame his own argument about how humans ought to live. Zaac said something similar in our interview, explaining to me that examination of other animals is "a good way to structure what is the healthiest thing for us." He pointed out, for example, that the need for psychological medicines for depression might stem from the fact that "we aren't in some heavily forested area being spontaneous and finding wild asparagus," adding, "I can see how being in a shopping mall for a while might drive me crazy."

Adam and Zaac are tapping into a particular strain of environmentalist discourse that notes that while the human animal was once part of nature, culture has isolated us from that close relationship with the natural world (Watson and Watson 1969). Environmental scientists have noted that the degree to which human culture is out of sync

with the environment makes humanity unique among all animal species (Garry 1972). Radicals have also seized on this point. Ted Kaczynski, better known as the Unabomber, wrote in his manifesto, "Technology is creating for human beings a new physical and social environment radically different from the spectrum of environments to which natural selection has adapted the human race" (Kaczynski 1995:139). By rejecting the notion of human's "animality," scholars and radicals claim, modern societies have essentially "reject[ed] nature as a whole" (Shepard 1967:6).

All of these comparisons between humans and animals fit within a framework developed by Dunlap and Catton (1979) which divides between the Human Exemptionalism Paradigm (HEP) and the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP). According to Dunlap and Catton, HEP has dominated our society for millennia. It is an ideology that places humans above all other life forms and assumes that the laws of nature can be bent to our will. In contrast, adherents to the NEP understand that human beings are embedded within nature, like any other organism. Dunlap and Catton's advocate not only that sociologists adopt the NEP, in order to better understand the role the environment plays in human societies, but that humanity at large must adopt the NEP in order to survive.

For many freegans—certainly, more than just Adam—animals provide a comparison that helps explain where human beings went wrong as well as a model for better living. Cindy, for example, described her environmental ethics as "all about not putting ourselves over other species." Leia echoed an almost identical sentiment when she expressed that:

> What needs to go in this society is the idea that humans are something other than animals. We are animals, and animals are just like us. We know they have

> consciousness, we know they have feelings. But so long as we have an economic system based on abstract figures and profit, before the needs of ecology, they're going to bypass all these things.

In Leia's case, the relationship between animal and environmental ethics has multiple dimensions: humans not only need to acknowledge their individual similarities to animals, thus restricting our ability to abuse them, but also that our species is an animal one, compelling us to live with nature in a more harmonious way. These examples shows us one way that the abstract idea of the NEP can actually be implemented through a changed relationship with one component of nature, animals, a possibility not noted by Dunlap and Catton.

One of the most significant conclusions freegans draw from connecting themselves to other animal species is the importance of considering the earth's carrying capacity. Environmental sociologists have come to the conclusion that the human population has grown to the point where it exceeds the capacity of the earth to support it (Catton 1980; Weigert 1997). Freegans draw on this concern to underpin their assumption that some sort of crash in human society is inevitable. As with any other species that is overpopulated, the excesses of *Homo sapiens,* many freegans assume, will eventually cause the population to collapse as resources become less and less abundant. Jason told me with confidence that:

> I think that a crash is going to happen. We're going way too fast. Population, environmental destruction, usage of natural resources, it's all going so fast and it's so complex and we have so much momentum that it's not just going to fix itself. It's going to be a messy collision. But I do think we could work to meet it well, versus completely just ignoring it and it will be absolutely catastrophic. There's different ways that it can go down. If we start dismantling now, then it will be a lot smoother.

When I pushed him about what he meant by "dismantling," he explained to me that, once again, the key thing that needed to happen was for humans to start living more like animals, in harmony with their environment.

To some extent, the focus on carrying capacity allows freegans to explain their criticism of human society in terms which lay the blame for environmental problems on the species as a whole, rather than corporations, government, or individual actors. This is important because it helps freegans package really quite radical ideas in somewhat less confrontational terms (a theme I will develop in Chapter VI). Marg Uerite, a mid-50s mother who once lived in an Ashram studying Yoga but now resides in Surrealestate, a communal housing project affiliated with freegan.info, explained to me that the problems humanity is experiencing with respect to the environment are evolutionary rather than political. To her, our species is "still learning what it means to be fully human." Drawing on an analogy with animals, she explained, "The first organism to have an eye, it wasn't very sophisticated, it had a lot of problems," and added that humans, too, were working out the kinks of their highly evolved minds. Some anti-civilization discourses, then, are not necessarily apocalyptic or negative; Marg Uerite was confident that, like other species, humans would eventually adapt to a better mode of living.

Adam was similarly able to use the idea of carrying capacity to frame his usual misanthropy in surprisingly non-confrontational terms. As he put it, "It's not a good people, bad people issue. It's an issue of there being too many people for the planet. We need more peregrine falcons. We need more tigers. We definitely need more cetaceans. But we don't need more people." Adam's concern about the size of the human population segues into one relatively ignored (at least by the mainstream media) element

of freegan practice: the deliberate decision not to have a child. Almost everyone in the group expressed to me their support for people choosing not have children, a fact born out by the fact that only two of my interviewees, Leia and Marg Uerite, have children.[29] Adam argued for childlessness by stating, "The single most ecologically responsible thing we can do is not breed. I will flat out tell people, 'Buy your fur coat, eat your cheeseburger, drive your SUV, but don't have a kid.'" This seemingly clear-cut condemnation of having children, though, leads to serious questions within the group about the future of the movement, since many freegans have pointed out to me that while they do not anticipate having children, they anticipate that less ecologically conscious citizens inevitably will.

Other lessons that individual freegans draw from animals, however, are less universally accepted within the group. In fact, differing conclusions drawn from observing animals create disagreements and are used to defend unpopular perspectives. While some freegan discourses about animals function both to romanticize and idealize animals, freegans can also use animals to justify what either the group or society might consider "bad behavior." At one feast, Leia and Jason were discussing Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid: a Factor in Evolution* (which we had recently read in the freegan book group). Leia brought up Kropotkin's example of "rebellious worker bees," present in every colony, that are "sometimes anti-social, they don't want to conform to society, they eat other bees' honey." Pointing out that the hives function nonetheless, Leia then used the "rebellious bee" example as justification for why society ought to leave her alone and

[29] To some extent, of course, the fact that most freegans do not have children may simply be a product of their relative youth, rather than ideology. It could also be a self-fulfilling prophecy, insofar as generally only people without children would have the time or opportunity to become involved in freeganism. Nonetheless, the frequency with which freegans mentioned the issue of having children bears reporting.

respect her aversion to employment and culture. For Leia, animals are an example to follow, and the idea of humans being an animal is an important part of her identity.

As is so often the case in the freegan group, though, the contested use of the animal analogy appears most often around food. Jason explicated his decision to eat meat—and his belief that in a future society, hunting could have a place—by pointing out, in defense, that "It's something that animals do." The claim that a behavior is engaged in by animals is a proposition with substantial currency in the freegan community. It is not particularly surprising, then, that Madeline resorted to it to when she explained to me that she supported agriculture and the idea of storing food. After giving other justifications, she tacked on that "numerous animals do it," implying that it must therefore be appropriate. Janet, for her part, told me that private property—a concept opposed by many of the group's more hard-line members—is inherent to all animals: squirrels defend their nests, she points out, and dogs growl when you take their food. Animals, therefore, are a contested concept through which the freegans can argue about fundamental questions of human nature and political philosophy.

The Problem with Civilization

Implicit in the way many freegans use animals to critique society and direct its future development is an attack on civilization—those structures that isolate human beings from animals and nature—itself. Writing early in the 20th century, Sigmund Freud came to the "astonishing" conclusion that many individuals believed—according to him, quite rightly—that "civilization is largely responsible for our misery, and that we should be much happier if we gave it up and returned to primitive conditions" (1961:33). More

recent authors have claimed that, with the demise of the Soviet Union and with it any hope for socialist utopia, criticism of civilization has become more relevant because technological solutions to human misery appear to have failed (Zerzan 2005). Nonetheless, no matter how common these attacks on civilization are in the academic press, by and large the questioning of civilization "happens almost exclusively in private, because a lot of these activists are afraid that if they spoke this in public, people would laugh at them, and they would lose whatever credibility they have" (Jensen 2006:92).

As with radical discussions of veganism, though, the freegan community generates a safe space in which attacks on civilization are—if not universally accepted—certainly normalized and accepted as legitimate aspects of political debate. Jason offered one such vision for utopia in our interview:

> My vision is that eventually we live in a world where we don't have any of this modern technology. Live with the land, on the land, and everything we get comes from nature. We can have communities, art, philosophy, language, and all these types of things.
>
> I don't like talking about going back to pre-civilization, but going forward to post-civilization. Civilization is fundamentally, inherently crazy and unsustainable. And eventually it exhausts itself. I think we can be mature, responsible beings, but still be wild animals. That's what other animals on the planet do, why should we be any different.

Jason's vision is not particularly unique, but the free way he can discuss it within the group is. What really sets the freegans apart, though, is the way that freegan practices with respect to animals enable them to enact anti-civilization beliefs, at least to a degree. While many anti-civilization theorists write completely in the abstract, the critical role of animals in freegans environmental and anti-civilization discourse offers them the chance to put their ideas into practice. As so many commentators have noted, civilization is inextricably tied to certain forms of food production. Thus, for the freegans who believe

animal abuse set humanity on the wrong track, veganism becomes not just an ethically "right" act but central to realizing their vision of a future utopia. In the context of how freegans interpret the past and envision the future, seemingly quirky behaviors—like Cindy eating a block of tofu in Montana, rather than the fish from the lake—suddenly become acts laden with deep political meaning.

Another related point is the way that the freegan example encourages us to broaden our understanding of the role animals can play in individual human cognition and human society. Tester (1991) advances the hypothesis that the cause of animal rights is more about human beings than it is about animals. Without empirical support, Tester's argument seems strange. The freegans, however, show us exactly how, as Tester imagines, animals can become a "blank paper" (1991:42) on which humans draw the society they imagine. How a person relates to animals can be broadly indicative of how that person will relate to other humans and to nature. Indeed, as the past two chapters have shown, a freegan can start by noting the contradiction within society between support for animal rights and low numbers of vegetarians and wind up with a philosophy that rejects civilization. Even the most radical ideas of freeganism can, if we trace them far enough, be tied to the rest of society.

For their part, some environmental sociologists have picked up on how animals can become a "stand-in … for the larger domain of nature" (Capek 2006:158). Generally, however, animals do not play much role in accounts of how modern humans are restructuring environmental ethics. Animal sociologists, on the other hand, have tended to focus on how people relate to individual animals, rather than the category "animal" (Kellert 1983), thus restricting the breadth of their conclusions (Jerolmack

2005). As the previous two chapters have made clear, both environmental and human-animal sociology could benefit from some "cross-fertilization" (Buttel 1987:484) between one another.

Moving beyond the theoretical implications, this chapter has suggested how freegans can take a seemingly absurdly utopian set of ethics regarding the entire domain of nature and make them seem real through a changed relationship with one specific category of other: animals. Through examination of historical examples—both of primal humans and of animals—freegans are able to make their utopian beliefs seem like a potential reality. The example of freegan practices with regard to animals is exemplary of the more general way that freegans endow with symbolic significance practices with a seemingly limited direct impact, a process facilitated by the context created by the group itself. In the next chapter, I transition to exploring how freegans negotiate disjunctures between this ideology and their practices, inconsistencies which are created by the urban context in which the freegan movement exists.

CHAPTER IV: FREEGANS AND THE CITY

Jason

Jason's life story captures the tension between one-time conventional aspirations and present radical politics that intermix in the narratives told to me by individual freegans. In his mid-twenties, Jason dresses in the blue jeans and black hoodies common among activists his age, but he is too tall and muscular to fir the subculture stereotype. Jason told me that he was born into a middle-class family living in a Pennsylvania suburb. He claimed he flirted with anarchism in seventh grade but "didn't run into cool adults who could nurture that," so his political interest was channeled into being what he described as a "mainstream Democrat." He went to Syracuse University to study film, and while he was politically active in college, he said he never did any more than minor environmental activism and campaigning against former[30] President George Bush.

After graduation, he moved to New York City, hoping to become a film editor. At that time, Jason was, in his own words, "really concerned about my life and making money. And being financially independent and pursuing my dreams. Kind of 'American Dream' kinds of ideas." While in New York, though, something changed drastically. Jason told me that when he came to the city, "I was still liberal, basically." The ideologies and communities he was exposed to in New York City, however, helped him finally draw connections between political positions he had long since held and concrete ways to act upon them.

Reading anarcho-primitivist author Derek Jensen "clinched it" for him. The book "made me realize that my life was about living in this comfortable cushion of exploitation and I'm not doing anything about it." Jason had heard of the idea of freeganism in

[30] Thank god.

college and, inspired by the ideas he was reading about, looked up freegan.info online. After attending a few events, he threw himself into the organization. Jason is now one of the organization's regulars, active particularly in the films and forums working group that holds events to propagate the ideas behind freegan practice as well as the freegan sewing workshop.

Jason's current situation is emblematic of a deep ambivalence in the freegan relationship with the city where many of them live. Jason's personal philosophy is anti-civilization, anti-technology, and pro-primitive, back to nature living. On the other hand, Jason's existence in New York City leaves him tied to many of the things he claims to now oppose. Jason's apartment is located near Prospect Park in Brooklyn, but a look out his window reveals nothing but man-made structures and a courtyard filled with twisted metal and trash. Moreover, a pile of beer cans, movie posters, and two non-freegan roommates sharing the apartment testify to Jason's continuing connection to more conventional youthful pursuits. GRE study books, a relic of Jason's past aspirations, sit next to radical literature, sharing a dumpster-dived shelf with a video game system and a television. In order to maintain this apartment, Jason continues to work as a documentary film editor, even though he has frequently expressed to me a strident distaste for any form of money or currency. He said he's looking into squatting in abandoned buildings, because, in his words, he's "tired of all my money going to pay rent," but he knows that such a situation would be hugely unstable and require him to quit his job, something he's not yet prepared to do.

While we typically imagine cities as places of opportunity where young people can go to make their way in the world, for Jason, the city has been a place where his prior

dreams and aspirations have died. "I make half of what I used to. I live in a way worse apartment. I don't go to cool parties … I don't envision myself doing any of the things I used to think I would." While he admits that he might be happier elsewhere, he chooses to stay, a decision for which he has complex reasons:

> Setting up a commune out in the country would be good for me, but I don't know how that would be for the overall resistance. I definitely want to get out of the city eventually, because I don't think this is going to be a good place to be when all this goes down … [but] there's a lot of work that needs to be done in all different places, all different types of work, and lots of it needs to happen here, and not in the country. Since I'm here, I should do the work that needs to be done here. I mean, my background is in communications and things like that and working with ideas and working with consciousness of people of culture.

For all his criticism, Jason understands that the development of his radicalism and his discovery of freeganism were precipitated by moving to New York. Moreover, he knows that many of his freegan practices make the most sense in an urban context, and that if freegans seeks to engage with capitalism, they must do so in the city.

Freegans highlight the importance of living in harmony with their environment, yet their relationship to the city seems to be one of disharmony. How do freegans reconcile their choice to remain in the city with the fact that many of their ideals would be better realized outside of it? Why has a "back to nature" movement like freeganism gained most prominence in a world capital? What price must freegans pay in order to reconcile these contradictions? In this section, I begin to transition from discussing what freegans believe to what they do, and discuss how an urban context creates conflicts and opportunities for relating the former to the latter in the fields of dumpster diving, finding living space, and working.

The Civilized, Capitalist City

The idea of the city "rarely elicits a neutral reaction" (Krupat 1985:20): people either see the city as the pinnacle of advanced culture or a cruel, impersonal, and alienating institution. Since the problems of contemporary society "take their most acute form in the city" (Wirth 1940:744), the city is the site at which new ideas and modes of living are most likely to emerge (Fischer 1975). As a result, the city has always been an object of fascination to sociologists, who describe it as "the greatest stage on which we enact and reenact our cultural dramas" (Borer 2006:173).

Typically, we conceive of ideology and culture as closely tied with the space where they are practiced (Borer 2006). We would therefore expect that the urban context of freeganism should have a significant impact on the freegan ideology. As Jason's narrative demonstrates, though, this connection is not straightforward, since urbanization is tied to much of what freegans conceive of as wrong with society. As the radical author Derek Jensen—who was cited by Jason as a huge influence on his philosophy—notes, the civilization which freegans critique is fundamentally a system defined "in terms of the city and what it necessitates" (Jensen 2006:17). Early urban sociologists also noted that the concept of civilization and urbanization are inseparable: "what we call civilization … has been cradled in the city; the city is the center from which the influences of modern civilized life radiate to the ends of the earth and the point from which they are controlled" (Wirth 1940:744).

Intuitively, we might link the concept of "city" and "civilization" because we associate both with high culture like art and theater. For Jensen, though, the distinctive characteristic of cities is their close connection to agriculture (Parker 1982), a

consequence of the fact that their inhabitants—at least, other than those participating in movements like freeganism—are incapable of gathering or growing their own food. Indeed, the increasing urbanization of the world population makes decentralized or local agriculture appear less and less plausible, since the steady depopulation of rural areas necessitates the mechanization and conglomeration of farms (Buttel 1980). What is more, in exchange for the useful foodstuffs imported from the countryside, cities export massive amounts of garbage that cannot be stored within their own limited space (Scanlan 2005; Conkin 2007).

These facts suggest how a large city can wreak "havoc" (Brechin 1999:187) on the surrounding ecosystem and can be the underlying force behind the creation of environmental problems (Cronon 1991). The processes of industrialization and urbanization, then, go hand in hand, because the city is a site from which capitalism is coordinated and extends over the rest of the world (Morris 1968). Cities are "centers of dominance" (Hollingshead 1969:263), "world capitals" (Slatter 1985), and the "main seats of the money exchange" (Simmel 1957:639). In particular, cities are where the division of labor in modern capitalism becomes most pronounced (Park 1915; Simmel 1957), creating disconnection between different social roles and disunity about morals and vales (Durkheim 1933; Parker 1982). New York itself is all of these things pushed to the extreme: a world center for finance, flows of money, and global capitalism (Sassen 2006).

The city is not just the antithesis of freegan ideals in terms of the concrete processes and institutions that constitute it, but also in what it symbolizes. Urban areas are powerful representations of humanity's domination of and disconnection from nature

(Gordon 1995). Cities represent all that which is most unnatural about modern existence: living in a built environment, subsisting off of manufactured and imported goods, and interacting only with other humans (Cronon 1991). These factors have consequences at an individual level. According to Simmel (1957), the fast paced and competitive nature of life in the city leads individuals to abandon their hearts and follow their minds, to become calculating, to devote themselves to money, and to regiment their lives according to the desires of employers. It is these characteristics of the urban personality that enable exploitation and domination to be "more fully legitimized in an urban society" (Morris 1968:81).

Given these multifaceted oppositions between freegan philosophy and urbanity, it is no surprise that many freegans perceive the city as being a harsh place to live. Alex once told me that he thought most New Yorkers didn't want to live in New York.[31] Alex assumed that most people experienced the city as he did: an institution like "Treblinka [a Nazi concentration camp] or a large *gulag*." For him, "the city is incredibly psychologically destructive, and freeganism to me is like a shaft of light in a solitary confinement cell." Like Jason, though, Alex's harsh criticism of the city was contradicted by some of his own life choices. Alex told me that after college, he lived in Houston for a time, but eventually "explored [it] and didn't find it interesting." He "wanted to be integrated into a less fabricated system; a system that had potential in every square foot." That place, for him, was New York City. For all their criticisms, the city is nonetheless a place of opportunity and possibilities for freegans.

[31] Alex is wrong on this assertion, at least according to a survey of 25,000 households in New York in which 51% rated their quality of life as 'excellent' or 'good' (Santos 2009).

Freeganism in the City: Why Stay?

Alex's story shows that, rhetoric aside, freegans are not trapped by a "cell" that keeps them in the city. Many of them have the resources and education to make a living elsewhere. Indeed, freegans can—and do—leave New York. Cindy spends a few months of the year in Montana protecting buffalo, Alex left on a speaking tour across the country for several months, and others freegans told me that they envision spending a summer visiting organic farms. Aside from these isolated instances, though, most of the freegans I interviewed had actively chosen to make their lives in New York City.

Their choices are indicative of a wider truth about freeganism: it is an urban movement. I have monitored the "freeganworld" e-mail list for over a year, and not encountered a single discussion about the practice of freeganism in rural or wilderness areas. Alex told me that while many people who live outside the city "forage and stuff like that," those individuals "don't call themselves freegans." Alex claimed that freegans in the city feel these rural practices as "an act of solidarity." The feeling, however, does not appear to be reciprocated; I have yet to encounter someone from a rural area who considers him or herself a freegan. While freegans in the city perceive freeganism penetrating the world around them, the practices *they* engage in are specifically tailored to urban life.

This leaves unanswered a significant question, however: why stay? It is difficult to understand why sincere anarcho-primitivists like Adam or Jason, who claim to reject technology and the trappings of civilization, would elect to remain in New York rather than follow the example of their heroes like Derek Jensen and live in a wilder place.

Part of the answer is fairly simple. Many freegans grew up in the city, describe themselves as city people, and simply cannot imagine living anywhere else. Although freeganism aspires to be a totalizing ideology, the reality is that not every choice in a freegans' life is likely to be made in accordance with freegan philosophy. During our interview, Leia talked about her ambivalent relationship with the city and how she hoped to go WWOOFing (World-Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) at some point. Eventually, though, she admitted, "Honestly, I love the city. I grew up in the city. I'm used to people." Because they were born in suburban or urban environments, freegans also see their choice to remain in the city as tactical. Lola explained to me the importance of organizing in a familiar environment: "It's important to organize and be involved in the place that you know, a place that you're not an outsider. Having lived a lot of my life in an urban place, it's important to focus there." The fact that many freegans were born "city people," then, is part of the answer to the question of what keeps them there.

The way that a majority of my interviewees answered the question, "Why do you live in New York City?" though, was more complex. By concentrating people and ideas, cities are places where deviance can flourish through supportive networks (Park 1915). While the city can be repressive, it is also "a place of ferments" (Morris 1968:83) where "new lifestyles are generated every year" (Parker 1982:197). The city is the "tabula rasa of modernity, the blank slate of imagination that functions as the site of erasure and inscription" (Scanlan 2005:155). As usual, New York is at the forefront of this characteristic of urbanity, containing "diversity and complexity perhaps unrivalled in the Western world" (Gandy 1994:70).

Sociologists are not the only one who have made these observations about the people who live in cities. Freegans in the freegan.info collective see themselves as embedded in a distinctly urban subculture that stretches from anarchist community centers to bicycle promotion groups to the punk rock music scene. This breadth and diversity is attractive to many freegans. Wendy told me that when she graduated from school, "I knew I had to go to New York. I felt like all the activism, all the culture was here. It wasn't in the suburbs." She then added, "The answer has got to be here. Everything that has to be done has to be done here." Other freegans described New York as a "crucible" where radical ideas were really "cooking" thanks to their being a critical mass of activists present.

As I will argue in Chapter VI, however, not all—or even most—of the individuals active in freegan.info can be typecast as stereotypical activist "scenesters" (individuals who draw on the activist scene not just for political action but also for culture and leisure). As such, many freegans see themselves as disconnected from the urban anarchist activist community, often deliberately so. Alex said he found himself dissatisfied with the unserious tenor and rampant drug use characteristic of urban youth punk subcultures (Fincham 2007), a concern he shares with many other members of the freegan.info collective. Freegan.info, as I have repeatedly emphasized, seeks to bring more people into the fold of freeganism, rather than to simply exist as an oppositional subculture. Many anarchists in New York that I have met, though, are surprisingly unenthusiastic about having their ideas propagated. This might sound like an absurd attribution to make to any activist movement, but the reality is that freegan.info has frequently encountered resistance among other activists to making freegan ideals and

practices more accepted and mainstream. Some individuals, it would seem, are different from the rest of society and do not want society to change to be more like them. Moreover, given that the demographics of freegan.info differ from those of most anarchist groups in New York City—particularly in terms of the number of older participants—the explanation that freegans stay in New York to be part of a wider subculture seems unsatisfactory for at least many freegan.info participants.

Instead, the reason freegans choose to be in the city seems directly tied to the problems of the city itself. When I asked Adam, "Why do you choose to live in a city that is the antithesis of what you stand for?" he responded, "You just answered your own question." Freegans believe that since the problems that they perceive reach their nadir in the city, action must be taken there. As my interviewees described it, New York is "the belly of the beast," "the black hole that is sucking up the resources of the planet," or "the evil haven of decadence and debauchery." In my previous work (Barnard 2008), I argued that the freegan.info group was distinctive in so far as they chose not to drop out of capitalism, but to engage with and challenge it. This is consistent with the present analysis. Alex explained to me that:

> There are freegans all over the place. The ones in the city are also often activists; they're people who are structuring their whole lives around living outside of capitalism. Cities are the place to do that because they're kind of the center fuses [*sic*] of late capitalism. If you're going to strike at capitalism, you've got to do it in the city.

While Alex once again claimed that freeganism is a world movement not confined to cities, he reiterated that the freegan.info model was an urban one. Freegans do not see themselves as hypocrites for living in the city; I think a closer description, at least in their eyes, would be self-sacrificing activists.

Examining the reasons freegans offer for their decision to live in New York City illustrates how freegans perceive themselves as historical and political actors. I have often been struck by the extent to which freegans perceive themselves as part of a much larger an anti-capitalist movement that is extremely widespread. One conversation I had with Leia is typical: I commented to Leia that freegans are part of only a tiny fraction—1%—of the nation's population that is fed up with capitalism and "the system" entirely. Leia responded that the number was closer to 40%. In freegan speeches and statements, they often assert that there are thousands upon thousands of people engaging in freeganism worldwide (even if some of them are not using the label). I believe part of this perception is produced by the way cities "intensify the effects of crisis" (Park 1915:596). Cities concentrate many of the things freegan oppose—waste, corporations, and consumers—but also the networks, people, and organizations they see as the solution. It is no surprise, then, that freegans describe to me the sense that the "whole world is looking to us" and that "we are at the fulcrum of history."

Urban Ecology and Dumpster Diving New York

Of course, freeganism is more than just a mode of perceiving an individual's place in society and within the city. It is also a concrete set of practices which are impacted and constrained by the city itself. The earliest urban sociologists focused on examining the city through the lens of "urban ecology," which showed on how macro-level environmental forces impact the individual (Slatter 1985). Robert Park, the founder of the "Chicago School" which dominated the field of urban sociology for decades, asserted that the city as an institution is composed of far more than just people but also

physical characteristics like spatial distribution and neighborhood organization (1915). While this environmental determinism of the urban ecology perspective has been attacked and largely discredited (Borer 2006), the basic idea of the discipline is still useful. Any analysis of human cultures and social relationships should take into account where those relationships are situated and to what resources that location gives them access (Vaillancourt 1995). As such, examining the links between freegans and their habitats ought to be a fruitful approach to understanding their behavior (Hollingshead 1969).

When a newcomer appears at a freegan event and announces that he or she has come to New York from elsewhere, an immediate question is, "How is the dumpster diving there?" Most of the freegans with whom I have interacted are adamant that dumpster diving for food is a plausible strategy for subsistence in almost any town or city in the Western world. This assumption, however, seems out of sync with reality. A far-flung would-be freegan from another city or country occasionally sends an e-mail to the freeganworld e-mail list describing the plight of freegans outside of New York, such as this individual:

> In my city I don't find much food ... I'm afraid to dumpster at the supermarkets alone, because the Germans are very odd with their dumpsters. Every thing at Germany belongs to somebody, so when someone sees me carrying supermarket trash away, he [*sic*] will call the police.

Freegans from across the world frequently contact freegan.info with concerns about locked dumpsters, garbage destroyed with bleach by unsympathetic store managers, and police harassment.

Freegans in New York rarely, if ever, have to deal with any of these problems. In a variety of ways, New York City has a unique "ecology" that facilitates dumpster diving.

The most obvious reason dumpster diving in New York is comparatively easy is concentration: a favorite freegan trash tour route in the Murray Hill area visits two D'Agostino's grocery stores in the space of three blocks. The importance of this level of concentration becomes apparent as soon as one leaves the borough of Manhattan. Trash tours which freegans hold in Brooklyn, for example, generally have to be conducted on bicycle, because few neighborhoods have a large enough number of grocery stores in a small enough area to make dumpster diving on foot with a large group of people feasible.

New York is an advantageous environment for dumpster diving in even more ways. Adam told me he has only been confronted by police once during his thirteen years of dumpster diving in the city, and in that case the officer simply asked him, "Finding anything good?" Freegan trash tours are held in the open, and there is no scurrying or hiding when police cars drive by. While Adam explained to me that there is an obscure law that makes dumpster diving illegal, representatives of the New York Police Department have supposedly gone on record as stating they will not crack down on dumpster diving.[32] Moreover, Adam has a unique—though probably incorrect—interpretation of the Supreme Court's ruling in *California vs. Greenwood*—which stated individuals have no protection from warrantless searches of their trash—as essentially legalizing dumpster diving nationwide. While trespassing onto store premises in search of garbage is illegal, dumpster diving *per se* is not banned in a meaningful sense.

There are other practical characteristics of urban foraging in New York that make it easier to do than elsewhere. New York's size and long history mean that its garbage

[32] In March 2009, for the first time in New York City, I encountered a counter-example to what Adam told me. Some freegans reported to me that a Trader Joe's in Brooklyn—which had been featured in several media pieces on freegan.info—was now being guarded by a police car at night, which would ticket people if they strayed onto Trader Joe's property. This, however, remains the exception, not the rule.

collection scheme is not the same as other cities in the United States (Strasser 1999). Freegans describe what they do in New York as "dumpster diving" only because that's the conventional term for recovering food from the trash. In New York, though, grocery store waste is not placed in dumpsters. It is instead bagged and left on the curb, which means that freegans in New York neither have to contend with gates and fences blocking trespassers from store property nor do they ever have to physically go inside a dumpster to gather food. With the bags already spread out on the ground, they are easier to access and examine. Freegans can quickly feel them before opening them to determine if there are any useable items contained within.

The New York City Sanitation Department does freegans a service not just in terms of making dumpster diving more convenient but also safer. Trash, at least in Manhattan, is collected every day except Saturday, and in most places within a range of only a few hours. As a consequence, stores put out their garbage every single night, meaning that freegans can be confident that trash on the curb has been there for a few hours at most. Freegans can therefore be much more confident that their garbage is unspoiled and has not yet been reached by rats or cockroaches. In a variety of ways—from curbside dumping to police apathy to daily pick-up—New York is a practically ideal site for dumpster diving. Each of these factors is a physical characteristic of the New York environment that nonetheless has an impact on the freegan "culture," offering an example of the value of an urban ecologist perspective.

Space, Squatting, and the Barriers of Urbanism

The above observations about urban foraging contrast markedly with the impact that the ecological characteristics of New York City have on other freegan practices, such as the pursuit of free space. Space is necessary for realizing the freegan ideal of constructing a community outside of capitalism: freegans need places to hold events, conduct skillshares, and store goods they scavenge. In short, without access to space, there can be no self-sufficiency (Jensen 2006), and as such, the inability to maintain control over one's own shelter generates both alienation and uncertainty (Gordon 1995). Cities are problematic in this respect, because by putting more people, businesses, and industry into a single finite area, they intensify competition for space (Morris 1968). The physical and legal structure of New York City, in particular, makes many freegan strategies for finding space nearly impossible.

True freegans "don't pay rent," according to Quinn. Although I just discussed how easy dumpster diving is in New York, freegans tend to downplay its importance within freegan practice while idealizing strategies for avoiding paying for housing, such as squatting. In the summer of 2008, Alex returned from a four month trip touring a number of different squats in Spain and Latin America. The freegans put on two forums for him to talk about his experiences, and each was well attended, with one attracting more than fifty people. In his speech, Alex romanticized squatting as a form of "constant protest," stating that "the act of squatting is an act of resistance." Yet when someone e-mailed the freegan list asking, "Does anyone have any information about where one would find a freegan living situation, in other words, rent free?" the list—usually heavily trafficked—went silent. No one responded. When the group was discussing, informally,

during a feast what the hardest item in New York to get for free is, there was nearly universal agreement with Tate when he said "housing." Despite being high on the hierarchy of truly freegan practices, squatting is not something actively engaged in by a single freegan with whom I have interacted. Certainly, some freegans have non-traditional living situations—Alex and Adam spend most nights on the floor of the freegan office—but the most colorful version of squatting—breaking into a deserted building and refitting it for community use—is not part of the freegan.info repertoire of activities.

Once again, the way that freegan ideology is manifested in the city is framed by the characteristics of the city itself. During his talk, Alex stated that in Barcelona squatters can call the police, who then come check the squatters' papers, take their pictures, and subsequently leave them alone. In contrast, the New York police actively search for and remove squatters. Moreover, the city is so densely populated that few buildings remain abandoned for long enough to make long term squatting possible.[33] In areas where there are abandoned buildings, the neighbors are rarely tolerant of squatters (as Alex discovered when he attempted to occupy a run down apartment building in Bedford Stuyvesant). All these facts lend credence to Quinn's description of squatting in New York as being "unsafe and unstable."

The fact that nearly all freegans continue to pay rent is clearly a source of psychological discomfort within the freegan community. During the short speech freegans usually give on the trash tour (called the "Waving the Banana" speech), Jason proceeded to rattle off the activities other than dumpster diving which individuals could

[33] Jason told me that this situation was changing because of the economic downturn. Numerous other freegans told me that they thought that the new economic circumstances and the present wave of foreclosures might make squatting more plausible.

engage in under freegan auspices: "We can make our own clothes, we can find our own clothes, we can have our own transportation." He then hesitated for a few seconds, before stating, "We can squat. It's harder to do, maybe, than eat from the trash, but if we really put our minds to it we don't even have to pay to have a place to live or to sleep." Jason approached me and Zaac during the summer about trying to live in an abandoned building he had found. When Zaac asked him if he was planning to live there, Jason laughed and said "No, I have an apartment. But I'd try it for a few days." Freegans might spend a few nights in a squat in order to have an edifying, interesting experience, but few pursue it as a lifestyle.

Space presents a problem for the freegan group as well as freegan individuals. Freegan.info has a difficult time finding places to screen movies and hold forums without having to charge admission, a must for any event to be sponsored by them. The same issue crops up with meetings: freegans need a place where they can sit for two hours and talk without anyone buying anything or being asked to leave. The closest thing that freegan.info has to a space of its own is the 123 Community Center, where the bike workshop is located, but even there, making monthly rent is problematic. Indeed, the first thing a person encounters on entering the "free" bike workshop is likely a request for a twenty-five dollar donation.[34] Although the bike workshop is now financed largely through fundraisers, Quinn admitted to me that for a long time, the only way it stayed open was thanks to money he received from his mother or that Christian raised illicitly.

Conflict over the idea of what can and cannot be "freegan" space emerged over "Surrealestate," a housing project in which Marg Uerite and Quinn—as well as fifty others—live. Marg Uerite said that originally, she and Quinn had envisioned

[34] To be fair, individuals may also volunteer a few hours of their time if they would rather not pay.

Surrealestate as a place for freegan.info to hold meetings and events. Now fully occupied, Surrealestate—a three story tall brick building located in an industrial area in Brooklyn, with the freegan office downstairs—is indeed largely run based on freegan ideals. Decisions about the use of the space are made based on consensus, most of the food eaten there is dumpstered, and tenants are expected to volunteer several hours a week to activist projects and fundraisers. It is, however, by no means free: renting a communal loft in Surrealestate, according to Quinn, costs between three and four-hundred dollars a month. When Quinn advertised over the freegan e-mail list that he was renting out "freegan" space in Surrealestate, Adam expressed outrage. To him, a place that requires rent cannot call itself "freegan," and he has continued to "block" any freegan.info events from taking place there, claiming that the space is nothing more than first-wave gentrification.

The examples of dumpster diving and squatting provide two examples of the value of the urban ecology perspective. On an ideological level, freegans value both dumpster diving and squatting as ways to avoid wasting a resource, be it space or food. Both are strategies for achieving the overarching freegan goal of constructing a community outside of capitalism. And yet one is practiced by almost everyone in the freegan group and the other by essentially no one. The institutional structure of New York City—its laws and its physical environment—provide an explanation for this disparity. It is another example of how individual identities and lifestyles of freegans are impacted by their social context, be it the group they choose to be a part of or the place where they choose to live.

(Wage) Work and the City

A theme of this study, developed with my discussion of Calhoun in Chapter I, is how one element of an individual's life—their choice of community and their commitment to a certain cause—inevitably has implications for other aspects of their life. In this case, the fact that freegans must pay rent in order to get space to live creates a perpetual and recurring need for money. In most cases, this means freegans have to work, even though freegan.info claims, "Freegans are able to greatly reduce or altogether eliminate the need to constantly be employed." As Alex explained it to me, as long as you have to pay for space, "It's way too idealistic to expect that you will never need money," and as a consequence, wage work—in one form or another—remains an "unpleasant reality."

Certain freegans—Adam being most prominent among them—adhere to the idea that "everyone hates work" and that "any job for money is the problem," since, according to Jason, "Money is the fuel for global destruction, and it doesn't really matter where we spend it." Such a view is consistent with the widespread anarchist view that "work" as it is traditionally conceived of in our society is both bad for the individual and bad for the planet (Graeber 2004). The younger freegans—many of them fresh from college and quickly disillusioned with their job offerings—tend to be the most unequivocally opposed to the idea of working in *any* situation that requires them to engage in some task on behalf of someone else, whether or not they are paid for it. Lola expressed this sentiment when she told me she was "embarrassed by the fact that I still work." Alex explained to me that since idleness is socially frowned upon, within this context being lazy and unproductive is essentially a form of resistance. Nevertheless, only a few freegans, like

Adam, Alex, and Quinn, have actually successfully managed to almost completely extricate themselves from wage labor, and even Adam expressed to me that he was not sure he would remain "unemployed" indefinitely.

A different faction of freegans tends to frown on this anti-work attitude. As Janet, a proud Spanish teacher of over twenty years, explained to me:

> I don't think everybody hates work. I think work should be a part of one's life that is valuable and part of community. What I'm doing is certainly part of community. I don't envision a world in which nobody works, which maybe is what some anarchists envision.

She did tell me, though, that in her utopia she saw the nature of work changing: people should rotate jobs, for example, and share their skills. She added that she did feel certain jobs—"like manicurists"—shouldn't exist. She wasn't opposed to the idea of work in and of itself, or even the idea of working for money, but specific types of work she saw as harmful or useless. Leia also told me that she is annoyed by the anti-work sentiments expressed by some freegans and thought freegans should be more accepting of the need for people to make labor a part of their lives: "Anti-wage labor, sure, but not anti-work. I believe in work. Everyone should be contributing to the world around them. It's selfish to say 'Fuck everybody, I just want to live in a cave.' There's so much work that needs to be done in this world." As an employee of the New York Public Interest Research Group, Leia sees her occupation as doing sufficiently positive work that she can overcome her opposition to the idea of wage labor. Ultimately, though, she also has to pay her apartment's rent, which is perhaps a primary motivator.

Thus, for many freegans, work becomes a sphere in which the inevitable reconciliation between ideals and practice must take place. Cindy admitted to me that she does "wage-slave work" to make rent. For three days of the week, she teaches

environmental arts in after-school programs through a non-profit. She added that teaching about the environment and art is, "Something I'd be doing whether or not I'm being paid for it." She then told me that she works two days a week as a freelance graphic designer. When I asked her what she designs, she told me product packaging. "That's an absurd contradiction," she admits, but explained, "I do periods of wage-slavery type stuff for a set period of time so I can do something else." She further qualified what she said by pointing out that, if she didn't design the packages, someone else would, and at least this way she could make sure that the packages didn't use animal products like leather. While these justifications are hardly consistent with Cindy's stridently anti-capitalist version of freeganism, they are necessary for her to be able to cope with some of the unfortunate realities of urban life.

The relationship between freegans and wage labor is, as with other things, more complicated than the direct transposition of ideology into practice. Each of the three practices of "making a living" as a freegan I described here—gathering food, finding living space, and working—is heavily influenced by the urban area in which freeganism is practiced. Together, they show how the meaning of freeganism "resides in the contexts through which groups give them life and carry them through time" (Berger 1981:194). Like other urban social movements, freeganism is heavily dependent on the structural characteristics of the city in which mobilization takes place (Castells 1976a; Pickvance 1976). This observation ties into a broader point I have made the preceding chapters about *context:* irrespective of the beliefs a freegan holds, social position matters. Freegans are heavily influenced by the milieu of the organizations with which they

affiliate, the place where they live, and the time-period in which they exist. I will return to this topic of the importance of contextualizing freeganism in the conclusion.

Nonetheless, this study does not intend to fall into the trap of environmental determinism, for which urban ecologists are criticized (Krupat 1985). The environment does not just act on freegans; freegans act on their environment. Indeed, freegans actively conceptualize and construct the city environment, which I intend to show in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V: FREEGAN PRACTICES AND URBAN-NATURE

Zaac

On first blush, Zaac seems like an unlikely candidate to be a primitivist. Born in Greenwich, Connecticut—one of the richest areas in the United States—to a father that runs a corporate headhunting firm, he attended the University of Connecticut to study computer science. Zaac, still a Greenwich resident, describes his job as "40 hours a week doing stuff that I don't find important." Specifically, Zaac programs touch screen computers in rich peoples' houses, thereby "making it easier for them to watch T.V."

Zaac sees his career as a choice: without it, he'd have to spend his time dumpstering, finding shelter, and scavenging other things he needs for survival. Having a job, on the other hand, lets him focus on the things he describes to me as important: writing, studying to learn new skills, and building things. Zaac asked me, "How effective would I be if I'm worried about a place to sleep? My job allows me to be the change I wish to see." There are 168 hours a week, though, and while the other 128 are not filled by what we would traditionally consider "work," they are far more important for understanding Zaac's identity.

Like other freegans, Zaac is an avid dumpster diver, and frequently brings a wide variety of found food to freegan events. Of slight build and with piercing blue eyes, Zaac is inevitably clad in a Farm Sanctuary t-shirt that reads "Peace Begins on Your Plate," an indication of the passion for animal rights which initially brought him into the freegan fold. Zaac's appearance, however, suggests that his interests go far beyond just collecting waste and helping animals. When Zaac showed up at one reading group in August, he was wearing a backpack that he had built out of bike tubes and was clad in sandals he put together from discarded fire hose. Attached to his backpack was a trowel

he told me he used to dig up edible plants he finds in his travels, as well as a milk jug containing a green he had found while wild food foraging.

I asked Zaac where his interest in making things came from, and he told me that he started in high school when he built a tree house out of dumpstered materials. "I've always been a little crafty," he explained. I queried him about what he saw as the purpose of these skills. He seemed a little unsure, and admitted to me that he knew he could probably dumpster dive a backpack or shoes. He explained to me, though, that

> When I buy something I really need, I don't feel like I own it. I'm afraid to sew it, patch it up. This backpack, I can feel it. I know what's wrong with it; I know what's right with it. If something's not working, I can cut it up and make it work for me in a new way. It's all about ownership … once you make something, you can control exactly what it's going to do.

I pressed further, asking him if he envisioned *needing* these skills anytime soon. He responded, "I don't know where exactly my learning is going towards, so I don't know what I'm aiming for." He cited the devastating hurricane in New Orleans as one example of when survival skills might be made necessary thanks to failures of traditional social institutions to provide for people. Ultimately, he says now is the time to gain such knowledge, since to him the environment is nearing collapse and "you don't wait to learn to sail until you're on the sailboat."

Learning how to create things isn't the only skill Zaac is working to develop. He said that he is increasingly interested in herbal remedies. When Sowmya told him that Adam couldn't come to a reading group because his back was hurting him, Zaac rifled through the notebook he always carries with him until he found a medieval back pain remedy. On weekends, Zaac often looks for wild herbs in the forest or goes "mushrooming" with a group in Greenwich. Wild food foraging is, for him, part of

adopting a completely different outlook towards nature. As he explained it, "When you're my age and you go through the woods, you're supposed to learn how to hike faster. But I'm all about slowing down and becoming more engaged." Foraging, to him, is about an entirely different way of looking at survival, one which focuses on making do with what is at hand and developing skills to cope with the unreliable resources of nature.

Zaac is, to some extent, the epitome of a "back to nature" freegan. As such, Zaac seems like a particularly odd candidate for life in a suburban area in Connecticut. I pushed Zaac on the topic and he explained to me, "This is the area I've always been around, so I'm most familiar with it. I'd get more plants if I were away from it. Less waste too. But the big thing is that I've always been in the area, and I feel at home with it." Zaac's knowledge of plants and navigating the nature is tied to the area where he was born and raised, and he told me that he sees the lack of local knowledge as a significant problem that stems from the frequent movement of people within modern society. Zaac's narrative, then, builds on the issues of habitat and space from the previous chapter and adds in another variable: nature.

Culture, Nature, and the Urban-Rural Continuum

The existence of vast disparities between rural and urban areas is a taken-for-granted assumption in sociology (Castells 1976b; Fischer 1975). Field and Burch (1988), for example, argue that rural communities are more dependent on both natural resources and the land than their urban counterparts, and therefore are more closely connected to nature. Consequently, rural sociologists are expected to engage more closely with the literature of environmental sociologists than would someone studying issues of a city,

which have been relegated to the fringe of the environmental sociology discipline (Field and Burch 1988).

Bell's acclaimed ethnography *Childereley* takes this rural-urban continuum for granted. Searching for a place to study how human beings relate to nature, Bell adopts the lens of "pastoralism." This perspective asserts that some human places are simply closer to nature than others: "In general, the furthest away from nature are the lives of city dwellers and the 'civilized'; closest to nature are rural dwellers and 'primitives'" (1994:125). In Bell's formulation, nature is defined in terns of contrasts: we know that people are in nature specifically because they are *not* in the city (1994:129; see also McKinley 1964; Fine 1998; Macnaghten and Urry 1998). Fundamentally, this dominant perspective is one which creates a dichotomy between rural areas, which are tied to nature, and urban areas, which are tied to unnatural culture (Watson and Watson 1969). Indeed, the "back to nature" movements of the 1960s were precisely based on the idea of getting away from urban areas (Berger 1981; Carlsson 2008).

When cities have entered into environmental discourses, they have frequently been used to show only that cities and nature are in perpetual competition. In such a view, urbanization is the primary process by which nature is destroyed (Clay 1957; Cronon 1991; Brechin 1999). All that is left of nature within the city, then, is a few scattered parks, tree eking out a living along the road, and vegetation growing up through cracks in the sidewalk (Kaplan 1983; Griffiths et al. 2000; Sommer 2003). Most city residents, from this sociological perspective, are forced to resign themselves to the idea that their physical environment will be both unpleasant and unnatural (Clay 1957). It is thus a "familiar theme" in the discussion of urban life that "the city is unnatural" and that

the city "interposes man-made limitations and constraints between the person and nature and therefore throws the two out of direct contact with one another" (Krupat 1985:157).

Many of the same authors that assert this opposition between the built environment and nature also adhere to the perspective of "environmental constructivism." This perspective argues that the various categories and concepts that make up what we use to understand the world around us do not have any independent existence of their own but are instead created by humans. Applying this idea to nature might seem counter-intuitive at first. After all, individual animals and plants, rocks and hills, rivers and lakes certainly exist, whether or not humans think they do. At the same time, to a social constructivist nature is nothing more than a category into which we place objects like rocks and plants and a frame through which we understand these objects (Bell 1994; Weigert 1997; Fine 1998; Macnaghten and Urry 1998; West 2006). "Strictly speaking," then, "there is no such thing as nature" (Macnaghten and Urry 1998:22).

It seems that the consequence of such a view is that binary oppositions between society and nature make no sense. Instead, the two are intertwined inside the concept of "socio-nature," which assumes that both society and nature are "inseparable, socially produced, and transformed" (Hannigan 2006:35). This is not a new observation. Marx—certainly not known for his concern for the environment—nonetheless noted that there can be "no absolute division between nature and society" (Schmidt 1962:49). Instead, nature and society are mutually constituted, since nature provides the raw materials for the existence of society and then society creates the category of nature (Foster 1999).

This process by which social actors interpret and construct natural space is described by Fine as "nature-work" (Fine 1998:2). A similar concept is introduced by

Thomashow, who describes "ecological identity work," through which actors use the experience of nature as a framework for "personal decisions, professional choices, political action, and spiritual inquiry" (1995:xiii). Like other environmental sociologists, these social constructivist authors still assert that nature and cities are opposed to each other, even as they accept that nature and culture are not. As Thomashow notes, ecological identity work "couldn't happen in New York City" (1995:16).

The idea that urban dwellers have nature "available only rarely" is conceived of as a problematic situation, since the lack of nature "deprives people of tranquility and of spiritual sustenance" (Kaplan 1983:155). We would expect this to be of particular concern for the freegans, whose ethical worldview, as discussed in Chapter III, is predicated on pursuing a closer relationship with nature. My research certainly bears out the idea that freegans are concerned about being alienated from nature. Annabelle, a mid-twenties actress working in a luxury real estate office, told me that she often goes to Central Park during her lunch break to avoid being overwhelmed by the city. To her, New York can seem like "all cement and flashing lights. It feels empty. Sometimes I just need to go watch ducks."

Not all freegans passively accept the idea—so confidently asserted by many sociologists—that the city is a place devoid of nature. Their resistance to this idea stems from the fact that the space of the city is multi-dimensional. On one level, space is a built and physical environment, but on another, space is something that is "interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined" (Gieryn 2000:465). "Space" can be "constituted, produced, and made" from different things: space starts from either "an idea (mental), a location (material), or a relationship between people (social)" (West 2006:27).

In this chapter, I endeavor to show how freegans actively reinsert nature into the space of city through various forms of "nature-work." While social constructivist authors have maintained a division between the city and nature, I aim to demonstrate that, in some circumstances, the physical material of the city can serve as a template for imagining, experiencing, and constructing nature. While the previous chapter asserted the city environment impacted the freegans, in this chapter I show how the freegans nonetheless retain agency and—on some level—create the space in which they live.

Nature-Work in the City: Wild Foraging and Gardening

The idea that the city could be constructed as a natural institution came to me during a wild food foraging tour led by Zaac through Inwood Hill Park on the northern edge of Manhattan. Constantine, a mid-twenties occasional web-designer and full-time anarchist activist, is from the west coast but came to the tour because he was in New York visiting family. He told me he often foraged for wild food in city parks in California. He was surprised to discover that many of the plants in this park were similar to what he would find at home, despite the vastly different climates of the two areas and the different environmental bioregions in which the cities were situated. On another tour, Zaac made a similar comment, stating that "There's lots of biodiversity in the rainforest, but there's unique species here [in the city] too." What struck me was how each tour showcased a specific form of ecological knowledge, tied to one particular ecosystem—the city. If approached from a freegan perspective, the urban environment has its own flows of resources and cycles of food availability, in much the same way that traditional bioregions like a high desert or tundra might.

As a form of work that provides for freegans' basic needs, wild food foraging is hardly effective. Wild mushrooms, the chief object of our search that day in the park with Zaac, are difficult to find, and when they are found, only an experienced mushroomer can safely identify an edible one (Fine 1998). Even Zaac, the group's most experienced forager, gets little of his food from wild foraging, even though he has, by his own admission, spent hundreds of hours learning scientific names of mushrooms and techniques for finding them. Indeed, the most useful advice Zaac could offer a novice like myself was that it was possible to eat dandelions growing in Prospect Park—if you cooked them properly. Moreover, wild food foraging does not represent the same kind of symbolic, performative attack on corporate waste as does dumpster diving (Edwards and Mercer 2007), nor is it as interesting to the media. To top it all off, Leia admitted to me that—in her experience—"dumpster diving has tastier food" relative to finding plants in a park.

Despite all these things, the group is inevitably incredibly enthusiastic whenever Zaac decides to lead a wild food tour. Nature-work seems to provide the best explanation for why freegans relish such an impractical activity: wild food foraging is socially functional insofar as it provides an opportunity to experience and connect with nature in an urban environment. Wild mushrooms are "patches of anarchy" (Fine 1998:34) that serve as a reminder of natures continuing power to exist irrespective of humanity. Wild foraging is a chance for freegans to attempt to live in harmony with nature, rather than modify it, in a way consistent with the ethic of the New Ecological Paradigm discussed in Chapter III.

Freegans carve out space for nature in their lives in other ways. Freegans claim to be participants an urban gardening movement that has created over eight-hundred community gardens in New York City since the 1970s (Carlsson 2008). With many of these gardens destroyed by Mayor Giuliani in a 1990s crackdown, freegans actively promote unauthorized "guerilla gardening" in public spaces, as well as private gardens in places ranging from windowsills to apartment rooftops. These urban gardens are an attempt by freegans not just to "feel, understand, and imagine" (Gieryn 2000:465) a place for nature in the city, but also to physically create one. Moreover, urban gardens actively challenge the contention that cities must import food and cannot contain self-reliant communities.

Leia recently indicated to the group her interest in setting up a community garden in her backyard. She framed her proposal noting, "I was thinking that we freegans should [probably] be doing a [little] more when it comes to actually growing food and greening the city … so I thought I could open up my yard to freegans that are interested in learning how to garden." Edwards and Mercer claim that, for freegans, urban gardening is "conventional" (2007:283) compared to dumpster diving, because, like wild food foraging, it is not a direct attack on capitalism.[35] What Leia had in mind for her backyard, though, was far from a conservative vegetable garden:

> My ideal is a little different than just having a mini-farm. I'm very interested in letting the plants that just naturally grow in the area do their thing and even help them grow. This includes 'weeds.' I don't really believe in the concept of an undesirable plant. I believe in biodiversity.

[35] That is to say, the association of gardening with old ladies in sundresses led the young radicals in Edwards and Mercer's freegan study to look down on the practice as boring, staid, and bourgeoisie. Aside from the fact that some of the freegans in freegan.info actually look like the type of people those Australian freegans saw as too "conventional," the way freegans envisioned gardening is far different from this rather square conception.

Leia suggested that freegans promote her idea by collecting seeds from the food that they dumpster dive for planting. The group responded excitedly to her proposal.

Nonetheless, when last I went to her apartment, Leia's backyard was littered with toys and weeds to an extent that, even her by her low standards of what constituted a "garden," her backyard was clearly not one. It was evident that no garden had been planted. As evidenced by the limited scope of wild food foraging and gardening in the group, the urban backgrounds of most freegans limit the skills they have available to pursue these direct "back-to-nature" practices. Moreover, from a theoretical perspective, these practices do not really challenge the binary that authors like Fine and Bell create between the built environment and nature: wild food foraging and urban gardening happen at the margins of the city where little manifestations of nature—plants and dirt—can be seen. For the rest of this chapter, I focus on how freegans create nature out of less likely objects and activities.

Dumpster Diving or Urban Foraging?

Dumpster diving serves numerous functions within the freegan group, and I would assert that one of these is nature-work While we typically assume that "garbage is death" (Scanlan 2005:154), the very label "urban foraging"—preferred by many freegans over the moniker "dumpster diving"—implies that to freegans, garbage is very much alive. Particularly, the term "foraging" evokes primal hunters and gatherers, and in fact "all modern day scavengers … are in some sense hunter-gatherers" (Rufus and Lawson 2009: x). Like their prehistoric and non-Western counterparts, freegans conceptualize their ecosystem—the city—in terms of flows of resources (waste) into which they tap.

Alex described the city as a series of processes divorced from the city's residents: "there's a flow of traffic and there's a common movement in the city that's not really defined by anyone *per se*, but is taken advantage of by a few people." While the "waste stream" (Rogers 2005:12) in our society is massive, few people really understand where the waste comes from or where it goes.

In contrast, freegans amass place specific knowledge tied to effective foraging. Through trial and error and information shared with the group, freegans learn which stores put out food when, which days are best for foraging, and which sort of neighborhoods have the highest quality waste. Leia told me that when she foraged in Minnesota, food waste from stores went into dumpsters and alleyways, and was left there all day long. When she moved to New York, she and Tate were starving because they did not understand how the waste stream in New York worked. They knew that there was food waste *somewhere*, but they could only find it with the help of more experienced foragers from freegan.info.

Like Fine's (1998) mushroomers, freegans are eager to impart the rules of etiquette for and techniques of effective dumpster diving. Any newcomer to the group is quickly warned not to dumpster dive on Saturdays (there is no garbage collection), to tie bags when they're done looking (so stores do not perceive divers as a nuisance), and to feel bags before opening them to ensure there is something within worth diving. While this knowledge is partially shared in order to integrate newcomers into the group, it also serves as a recognition that freegans operate within a larger society. Very practically, it protects against stores lashing out at freegans by ensuring that sources of food are not ruined by stores slashing open bags of lettuce, mixing in non-food waste with food waste,

or even pouring bleach on the garbage. It is, in a sense, a method of tending to the freegan ecosystem and preventing "overharvesting."

To be a meaningful natural experience, according to Fine, an activity "must include uncertainty" (1998:49). Most of the things we can think of that involve engaging with nature—be it taking a hike or planting a garden—are bound to be less scripted and predictable than an activity taking place in "society." In situations outside of nature, human beings are isolated from this uncertainty thanks to technology and the capacity to construct and control their environment (Michelson 1976; Hannigan 2006). By adopting a forager mentality, however, freegans prostrate themselves before the vicissitudes of the urban ecosystem and return to this natural uncertainty. As Zaac described it to me, "The difference between foraging and agriculture is trying to control nature, versus preparing yourself to respond to whatever nature throws at you." Freegans see the uncertainty of dumpster diving as a positive thing: freegans certainly derive far more excitement from finding a pomegranate or box of tempeh (a soy-based meat alternative) in the trash than they would if they purchased either in a store. Offering advice to novice dumpster divers, one freegan told the group: "Try it, and expect some wasted time and gross outs, along with spectacular finds … great fun!" While city life is usually marked by routinization (Hollingshead 1969), even the repeated daily activities of freegans are bound to include substantial variation in their outcome.

At other times, though, the freegan project of living in harmony with the environment, rather than molding the environment to fit their needs, becomes challenging. As the economy soured in 2008, freegans began noting that stores were putting out less and less garbage in response to the belt-tightening within corporations

precipitated by the economic downturn. Zaac bemoaned over the e-mail list that there were "no more bulk boxes with one bottle broken and the rest intact (but slimy)." Like other foragers, cooperation and sharing are critical ways freegans cope with scarcity (Watson and Watson 1969; Lee and Devore 1976), and urban foraging, then, is one way freegans seek to enact the "gift economy" they idealize. Typically, rather than bartering or exchanging items they find in the trash, freegans simply *share,* both with other people on a dumpster dive and with passer-byes.

On the other hand, freegans—like their primitive gatherer counterparts—face tension between their ideal of sharing and their desire to preserve the best sites for those within the group (Fine 1998). As urban ecologists note, "Just as plants compete for light, space, and water, so do people in the city compete for scarce economic and social resources" (Krupat 1985:50). This issue becomes particularly salient for freegans attempting to construct a healthy vegan diet entirely out of dumpstered food. While the idea that you can find essentially anything you would want to eat in the dumpster is a key part of freegan mythos, the vast majority of things that they find at a given site are either bread or produce, which spoil far more rapidly than staples like rice or pasta. The menu at one freegan feast is indicative of the kind of things they tend to find: broccoli rabe with oil and garlic, a roast vegetable dish with endives, asparagus, parsley, and sweet potato, salad with mixed vegetables, sliced bread with hummus, and veggie stew. Obviously missing from this varied spread was any good source of protein. Items like tofu or beans can only come from specific locations at specific times. Even after a year with the group, I have not yet been told the location of the celebrated "Pom Dumpster" or "Odwalla Dumpster." Despite the abundance of waste, freegans—like other organisms—are in

competition for the best items, and use their New York-specific knowledge to gain advantage. Forager knowledge must be cultivated and passed on, but also protected.

Anthropologists have long since taken for granted the idea that rural, primitive people "know things about their environments" (West 2006:181). Sociologists, however, have been far less likely to examine the proposition that people in modern societies have skills and knowledge tied to specific places other than the site where they are employed. Living effectively as a freegan, however, requires that an individual possess what anthropologists describe as "*metis*," a Greek word that describes "ad hoc, local, ingenious, and colorful" (Lansing 2007:xxvii) knowledge. *Metis* is what allows supposedly "primitive" communities to live in harmony with their environment, and makes a freegan existence feasible.

Ultimately, of course, freegans realize that the resource base they are living off through dumpster diving is unnatural. If freeganism meets with any success, this waste stream will eventually cease to exist and dumpstering will become impossible. Nonetheless, dumpster diving's function within freeganism is not just as a mode of surviving in the short term. By developing *metis*, freegans are moving closer to a pattern of existence that was practiced by pre-industrial humans. The practices of urban foraging give freegans an opportunity to develop modes of relating to nature that enact the New Environmental Paradigm and learn how to live within the constraints of the environment, as do other species. They manage to do all of this in a space where what we typically conceive of as nature is not actually present.

Freegan Time

Effective dumpster diving requires freegans to conceive of time in ways uncharacteristic of urban living. Indeed, in this way, "nature-work" for the freegans is a subtle rebellion against the very idea of the city. Simmel (1957) noted that individuals living in the metropolis live their lives by the wristwatch. Humans in modern society at large—but particularly in cities—are oriented and disciplined towards "clock-time" (Macnaghten and Urry 1998:137). This regimentation of time means that the lives of humans in capitalist society are not governed by their organic impulses and bodily needs, but instead by the requirements of the industrial system (Mukerjee 1990). This subservience to rigid clock time "constitutes a form of alienation," because it rids the world of "spontaneity, creativity, and novelty" (Lewis and Weigart 1990:85). On a macro-level, the capitalist goal of constantly accelerating time to maximize profit leads to an ever more rapid decline of the natural environment (Adam 1994).

My own research has given me a striking introduction to the far different way that many freegans conceive of time, confirming that different individuals can live in fundamentally different temporal domains within a single physical place (Jaques 1990). After one trash tour, Adam offered to walk me back towards the train station, an offer I accepted with some reservation because the final train out of New York was soon to depart. Before we left, though, Adam dawdled for several minutes, trying to decide whether he would sleep at his parents' house in New Jersey or in the freegan office. I told Adam several times that I was in a rush, but he walked ploddingly, and told me that if I missed my train I could just sleep on the freegan office floor. It didn't seem to occur to Adam that I might have classes the next morning.

Adam isn't alone in his lax approach to time. Despite the protestations of certain members of the group, particularly Janet, against events starting late, many freegans *do* show up to things late (often including my pre-scheduled interviews with them). The standard joke is that "freegan-time" means being fifteen minutes late to everything, but in my experience, it is closer to an hour late. While being chronically tardy certainly does not set the freegans apart, I believe that this lateness stems, in part, from the fact that some freegans do not have to face the temporal rush of having a job or providing for a family, and assume the situation is the same for others.

Dumpster diving is the most obvious arena in which this attitude towards time is manifested. While it is often assumed that primitive gatherers must spend a huge amount of time finding food to survive, anthropological studies of gatherers reveal that they spend far less time finding food than we spend working to buy it (Lee and Devore 1976). Similarly, most freegans say that they can find the food they need for a week during a few hours of dumpster diving on one night. Freegans claim that their ideology is convenient, a characteristic which other food ideologies—like veganism—have been cited as lacking, which therefore makes them less appealing (Singer and Mason 2006). Freegans describe the ease of being able to "dive" a meal whenever they are hungry, in locations like train stations and airport food courts. At the same time, Janet described to me finding an overwhelming amount of food some nights and then spending hours trying to give it away. "It's time consuming," she admits.

On balance, though, dumpster diving is not so much time-*consuming* as it is time-*changing*. For all their claims of dumpster diving being convenient, freegan practices for acquiring food place restrictions and constraints on freegans' lives. One night, I was

working with Adam in the office when he looked at the time on the computer and said, "It's eight-thirty. We can almost go dumpstering." While a grocery store might be open sixteen hours a day, the window of time for dumpster diving is narrower. More generally, being an effective scavenger requires a great deal of opportunism. Given the uncertainty of finding certain items, freegans will rarely pass up on opportunity to look through promising garbage, even if they have somewhere to be. Freegans could encounter a bag of trash that merits investigation anytime, anywhere, and as such, they cannot maintain a rigid distinction between time spent foraging and time spent not-foraging. This contrasts with the largely impassible division between production/work and leisure/consumption characteristic of capitalist society (Zerubavel 1990).

Other aspects of the freegan lifestyle are more straightforwardly time consuming. Quinn, for example, told me that freeganism makes it hard to do anything on a time schedule, offering the example of building rooms for eleven people moving into a community house. Freegans told me with confidence that, if they wanted an appliance or other item, they could eventually get it for free through Really, Really Free Markets, "freecycle.org" (a network of people who share goods), or scavenging. But, at the same time, as Rufus and Lawson note, "Not buying things full price pretty much mandates having to wait" (2009:8). Freegans described freecycling as something they ethically supported wholeheartedly, but noted that it could be extremely frustrating to pour over hundreds of e-mails and spend hours on the site just to find a single item.

Another characteristic of pre-capitalist time is a focus more on the momentary than the past and the future (Thrift 1990). As political actors, freegans certainly have an acute sense of the past and the future: where humanity went wrong and what are the

prospects for the future are frequent topics for discussion. At an individual and lifestyle level, though, freegans tend to focus on there here and now of quotidian survival. At one feast, Cindy mentioned how ridiculous she thought it was that her friends would talk about their retirement plans in their twenties. "How do you know you're going to live that long?" she mused. During my interviews, I concluded with the question, "Where do you see yourself 10 years from now?" Many respondants said they either had no idea or they anticipated they would be doing the same thing then as they currently were. While many freegans are planning for the future—witness the skills Zaac is developing—they do not seem to view their own lives as a steady, goal-driven progression.

Time plays an unconventional role not just in freegans' lives but in the activities of freegan.info. The consensus process by which freegan.info runs requires each individual to stay abreast of a host of different projects going on in the group at any given time. Cindy one day expressed to me exasperation at feeling wedded to her computer by the sheer volume of e-mails she was getting about freegan business. Meetings, too, move slowly because of the need to gather input from everyone about any given issue and the time required to convince a wide group of people to agree on a decision. In a host of ways, involvement in freeganism tends to crowd out other interests and pursuits, creeping into and structuring their entire lives by eating up and restructuring time.

In a variety of life spheres—ranging from dumpster diving to consensus process to "planning" for the future—freegans are enacting a different set of relations between themselves and the concept of "time." In many ways, these harken to a pre-capitalist view of time in which individuals work until they have enough to provide for their immediate needs and then stop (Thrift 1990). Punctuality is unknown, because the focus

of pre-capitalist time is on the task, rather than the time taken to complete it (Harper 1987). Like time in the natural environment, which is characterized by "rhythmic variation, synchronization, and an all-embracing, complex web of interconnections" (Adam 1994:94), freegan time in the city is, fundamentally, flexible. It is a subtle form of objection—sometimes conscientious, at other times not—to one particular process that underlies the city and capitalism.

Sensing the World as a Freegan

Simmel (1957) classic essay on the ways the city disciplines modern life does not just focus on time. Simmel also argues that another form of domination by the city rests in how the built environment and the concentration of people tends to overwhelm the senses. This characteristic of the city precipitates the development of a hyper-competitive, aloof urban personality. Later scholars have shown how the city is constructed to control sensory perceptions, isolating people from the smells of industrialism and the images of environmental degradation (Macnaghten and Urry 1998).

Freegans perceive part of the system of oppression against which they are rebelling as stemming from this urban sensory assault. As Alex articulated to me:

> Repression has a lot to do with the senses. I feel like pollution has a lot to with the senses. And I feel like, at the same time, as our sensitivity is oppressed by society, our senses are polluted through the increase of industrialism. I feel like a lot of industrialism and a lot of pollution is just caused by that kind of insensitivity to the climate, to the environment.

As bodies in rebellion, freegans reject the modern dismissal of the power of the senses. In fact, being a successful forager requires freegans to keep their senses constantly attuned. Freegans are always on the look out for potential finds, and must rely on their

senses—rather than neon store signs—to find their next meal or other goods they need to survive.

While stores rely on expiration dates to determine which food to throw out, freegans take expired and discarded food and use sight, smell, and touch to determine if it is still edible. At one freegan feast Rachel expressed concern that some dumpstered grape-seed oil had gone rancid. She passed the bottle around to each of us in the kitchen. One by one, we sniffed it and offered our opinion. Jason once explained to me that he often does not know what the vegetables he discovered are, so he follows the maxim, "If it looks like green onions, I just cook it like green onions and I figure it's fine." Each anecdote exemplifies how eating as a freegan requires a degree of trust in one's senses.

Freegans' faith in their senses is underpinned by the gradual development of forager skills. Outside of one grocery store, Adam discovered a bin filled with discarded items from the store's hot food bar. Mixed in with the desirable (from Adam's vegan perspective) tofu salad were chicken curry and a dish containing cheese. Adam reached into the mixture and pulled out a sauce-covered white chunk, which in the darkness appeared as though it could be either cheese, tofu, or chicken. He explained to me how to identify one from the other based on their texture and the way they broke when crushed between the thumb and forefinger.

Adam's relish for eating straight from the dumpster would likely strike many observers as disgusting (which helps explain why freegan.info discourages trash tour participants from eating straight from dumpsters when media are present). It does, however, segue into another tactic through which freegans enact a closer relationship with nature. Edwards and Mercer note the increasing adoption among "back-to-nature"

subcultures of the "hygiene hypothesis" (2007:389), which asserts that that food production has weakened the human constitution by isolating individuals from dirt and germs. Most freegans seem to buy into this idea. In response to questions from the media about the safety of dumpster diving, the group's standard response is that no one gets sick from eating trash, partially because their bodies have been strengthened by the practice. When someone asked Cindy about a potentially spoiled item, her advice was to simply, "Take it home and try a bit. You'll know."

Anthropologists have shown the political significance of the senses: rituals that purify food isolate humans from nature (Douglas 1966; Levi-Strauss 1933), and elaborate systems of manners maintain capitalist hierarchies. By using their bodies as a "vast reservoir of signs and symbols" (Foster 2003:395), freegans challenge these norms of cleanliness and reject these boundaries. Simultaneously, freegans are challenging the idea that nature cannot be experienced in an urban environment. Literature on the psychological experience of nature tends to assume nature is something encountered primarily through sight (Weigert 1997; Macnaghten and Urry 1998). What freegans *see* on a day to day basis are the concrete canyons of New York skyscrapers and the twisted metal of cars and subways. As this section demonstrates, though, what they *experience* and *feel* through their lifestyle is something far closer to our traditional conception of "nature."

A Fetish for Wheels: Freegans and Bicycling

Of all freegan activities, bicycling is one of the most cherished. Aside from dumpster dives, the freegan bike workshop is the main recurring activity organized by

freegan.info, open every Wednesday and Saturday night. The group values the bike shop enough to maintain it even though the rent they must pay for it creates a perpetual need for hated money. Additionally, the group is careful to avoid scheduling events which conflict with Critical Mass, the collective bike rides through Manhattan on the last Friday of every month. Freegans endorse public transportation: as Lola explained, mass transit "brings people together and they're forced to interact, as opposed to driving your car by yourself down the freeway." Still, bicycling is considered the ideal mode of transportation by many of them.

Quinn is one the primary "bottom-liners" for the bike workshop; that is, he is the main freegan.info member who commits to being present on a given night. Quinn, a twenty-five year old occasional cross-dresser with a huge mass of bright red hair, told me that when he left college—armed with an in-demand degree in computer science from prestigious Wesleyan University—he was sufficiently disinterested in his trade that he decided to work as an electrician for a year. That job "got me into working with my hands," something he wanted to continue. Quinn met Christian at the National Conference for Organized Resistance, and Christian convinced him to come to the freegan bike workshop, which was then located in Manhattan. Quinn spent six weeks building his own bike from scratch, starting from just the triangle in the center of the frame. Passing time at the bike workshop was what made him realize that freegans "had a great life and did a lot of good things. It seemed like they were cutting to the chase, cutting out things that were superfluous to working on the things that were important." He was drawn to the way that the bike workshop let him "do whatever I wanted without spending six years training for it."

Bicycling is more than just a free, ecologically considerate mode of getting from one place to another. Instead, freegans like Quinn describe bicycling as an "iconic." For Lola, bicycling is another mode of experiencing nature:

> Bicycling is such a freeing feeling. You're in direct contact with nature. The physical aspect of it is amazing. It feels to me like breaking through some kind of invisible barrier … You can't fall asleep on a fixed gear. You can't just ignore things that are going on. You can't just look up at the stars; it's actually being in contact and being directly involved with what is happening.

Zaac concurred, describing his joy at the spontaneity of travel by bicycle. Chronicling lengthy trips he has taken on his bicycle, he notes, "Everyone will tell you, 'You're going to die. You're going to get sick. The weather is going to be bad.' But it always turns out to be a lot of fun. You can stop and pick up things along the way. Sure, stuff is problematic, but you work around it."

Mukerjee (1990) notes that the speed, regularity, and efficiency with which the modern transportation system moves people is critical for maintaining the accelerated time necessary for capitalism. Bicycling, however, exists in stark opposition to regimentation. Indeed, freegans see bicycling as a symbol of resistance to environment destruction, interpersonal alienation, and isolation from nature. Bicycling subculture "stands for localism, a more human pace, more face-to-face interaction, hands-on technological self-sufficiency, reuse and recycling, and a healthy urban environment that is friendly to self-propulsion, pleasant smells and sights, and human conviviality" (Carlsson 2008:115).

One of the most important aspects of bicycling for freegans, as Quinn described, is that bicycle repair and maintenance is a hands-on, practical skill that almost anyone can learn. Lola said that she built her bicycle two years prior, out of frustration both

with her "crappy" previous bike and her inability to fix it. She chose a "fixed gear" bicycle because of the ease of travelling with it, and said that she can break it down and put in a box in five minutes and carry it with her anywhere she needs to go. By building it herself, she said, she is able to "know every part of it and understand why and how everything works." Other freegans cited to me the way that learning about bicycles broadened their perspective on problem solving, teaching them how to approach things creatively.

Freegans perceive most people as profoundly deskilled and consider this to be one of the most alienating and disempowering facets of modern society. Commenting on the extent to which people are abstracted from the process of production, Graeber argues:

> Human beings create their worlds, but owing to the extraordinary complexity of how all this creative activity is coordinated socially, no one can really keep track of the process, let alone take control of it. As a result, we are constantly confronting our own actions and creations as if they were alien powers (2007:140).

Bicycles, on the other hand, are representative of how freeganism democratizes knowledge and makes the self-production of human existence a more transparent and understandable process. On one trash tour, we encountered a few bicycle rims in a trash can. Jason pulled one out and spun it between his hands. Much like everyone gathering around to offer an opinion on whether or not the grapeseed oil at a feast had gone rancid, everyone speculated as to whether the wheel was salvageable. The theme of bikes being easily repaired increases their appeal in another way. Bicycles symbolize permanence and sustainability, and the mounds and mounds of twisted and rusted frames in the freegan bike workshop are a testament to the fact that the parts of a bicycle can be reused for decades.

Debates within the environmental movement often boil down to questions of whether or not technological solutions can save humanity (Clow 1995). Freegans, too, debate the merits of technology, and bicycles often factor in to the discussion. While a serious primitivist like Adam might assert that "I don't believe humans should have anything more advanced than a spear," others in the group, like Sowmya, are skeptical of anti-technology views. "It's really nice to talk about an ideal world, but reality is different," she says. "We're never going to be without technology." Interestingly, though, some of those in the group most skeptical of technology are also its most avid bikers, like Zaac. He reconciles his continuing use of the bicycle by pointing out, "At this point, technology is a tool. It's there. With tools, anyone has to be careful." He draws distinctions between "democratic technology," which is locally produced and controlled, with certain types of technology he thinks can never be good, like bombs and guns. The matter is one of negotiation: freegans combine both a passion for enacting their vision of a utopian society with realism about the society in which they are currently living. Until the revolution comes, they figure, bicycles are perhaps one of the easiest productions of the capitalist world to appropriate and make freegan.

Bricoleurs in a Modern City

While bicycling is a highly practical strategy for actualizing values of sustainability, connection with the physical world, and self-sufficiency in an urban environment, the freegan enactment of a return to nature within an urban context at times seems absurdly impractical. After one freegan feast in Jason's apartment, eight of us stayed around to watch Zaac conduct a "skillshare" for the group. Zaac removed a

handful of yucca leaves and placed them on the floor. He demonstrated to us how to scrape off the flesh of the yucca leaf, leaving only the internal fibers, which we then weaved into rope. After half an hour, Zaac had created a draw string for his hat, while the rest of us had a few sloppy, short strands of what could only vaguely be described as "string." Nevertheless, the enthusiasm amid the group for *making something* was palpable. Jason closed the evening by suggesting ideas for further skillshares, asking for a tutorial on sewing. Someone else mentioned canning, and another person chimed in that learning to make wine would be fun.

In many ways, the response to the skillshare was analogous to the "endless pride" (1981:106) Berger observed among rural communards at developing survival skills. Jason describes the freegans as a group preparing for an oncoming storm, after which the skills they are developing may become more practical. City dwellers are particularly unprepared for the anticipated crash of civilization (Jensen 2006) because they tend to be the most alienated from the basic knowledge of survival. But there is a key difference between the commune dwellers and freegans: communards actually need their skills. In any proximate and immediate way, weaving rope out of yucca leaves found outside a gas station is not actually a survival skill. Freegans could much more easily scavenge or dumpster something like rope. As with wild food foraging, it appears that the social function of the skillshare, then, outweighs its practical purpose.

Particularly, I think freegans participate in skillshares because it moves them towards being a certain type of person that the group idealizes. Levi-Strauss' *The Savage Mind* introduces the concept of the "bricoleur," an individual in primitive society who is "adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks" (1962:17). Unlike a modern

engineer, though, Levi-Strauss' bricoleur "does not subordinate each of them [the tasks] to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project" (Levi-Strauss 1962:17). Harper writes of a bricoleur living in contemporary America, a shop mechanic who manages to "make do with whatever is at hand," often using "what others throw away" (Harper 1987:74, 91). The mechanic has a close relationship with the materials with which he works, and his work is not run on a rigid, profit making schedule, but instead is directed by a methodical completion of each individual task. Although the mechanic works on cars and tractors, engines and machines, his shop is essentially "pre-modern" (Harper 1987:133).

Freegan ideals regarding work, skill, and knowledge conform closely to the concept of the bricoleur. Madeline described to me an attitude that freeganism is not "pie in the sky" but is instead about "making use of the resources at hand." Many freegans delight in opportunities to exercise creativity in making things on a daily basis. On one trash tour, it began to rain, and Christian fashioned a makeshift umbrella out of a piece of Styrofoam and a metal pole he found on the sidewalk. Freegans perceive that these sorts of skills, as Alex once told me, are "not wanted or useful within capitalist society." To some extent, I think Alex's statement misses the mark. As a college graduate with an economics degree, Alex certainly has useful skills. But his *values about skills*—the values of a bricoleur—are indeed not cherished within capitalist society. Freegans respond to this fact by attempting to create a space within the city where practices like wild foraging or learning to sew are valued. Like other "out of place" practices, these modes of living constitute a form of resistance against the city as a capitalist, civilized institution (Gieryn 2000).

This observation brings us full circle, back to the idea of what "work" means within freegan practice. Discussions of groups moving beyond civilization often talk about "giving up" (Quinn 1999:86) things, and indeed, freegans do acknowledge that their ideology requires them to accept less. But freeganism is about more than just "downshifting" consumption and giving up things. It is also about upshifting local production, and breaking down the barriers between public-production and private-consumption that mark modern life and capitalism (Zerubavel 1990; Hearn and Roseneil 1999; Graeber 2007; Carlsson 2008; Brandt 2008). Rather than treating them as separate spheres of their lives, freegans put production, consumption, and dealing with the waste of both through recycling, repairing, and reusing as part of a single continuum of practices through which they make a living.[36]

Many authors have described this sort of modern bricoleur attitude it terms of a "do-it-yourself" ethic (Rufus and Lawson 2009). Typically, the "you" in that phrase refers to the individual, in line with the classic idea of "self-reliance." For freegans, though, "do-it-yourself" means "do-it-with-the-group." Once again, freegan bricoleur practices can only be learned and carried out with the assistance of others within the network. In fact, most of the freegans could never implement these back-to-nature practices if they weren't in the city, because they wouldn't have access to the people who can teach them the necessary skills.

Fundamentally, by sharing skills and making each individual both producer and consumer, freegans are rejecting the modern division of labor, which has been cited as a key source of the problems of civilization (Zerzan 2005; Heinberg 2007). In contrast to a society marked by "organic solidarity," which Durkheim (1933) describes as one in

[36] This concept of a production-consumption continuum is drawn from Harper (1987).

which tasks and moral outlooks are fragmented and segmented, the society freegans are enacting is more characteristic of "mechanical solidarity." Societies functioning under mechanical solidarity share tasks, skills, and values alongside common conditions of survival (Durkheim 1933). Freegan "nature-work" has meaning not just for getting back to nature, then, but for getting back to a completely different mode of living.

Reconsidering Nature, Reconstructing the City

This chapter—demonstrating that freegans have a *metis* of the city just as Papa New Guinean subsistence farmers possess *metis* for their forest (West 2006)—pushes us not just to challenge our understanding of what the freegans are doing, but to reevaluate our notions of the city and broaden our sense of the ways people can relate to it. The urban ecology perspective has merit: the city environment has certain "fixed, undeniable properties" that "limit the range of interpretations, images, possibilities, and behaviors" (Krupat 1985:11). I made this point in Chapter IV, demonstrating the impact of the city on freegan practices of foraging, finding space, and working. At the same time, though, social entrepreneurs are able to work within those conditions to create a variety of alternative realities (Hollingshead 1969). The notion, "We are where we live" (Gurney 1999:43; see also Newby and Buttel 1980), is valuable, but also must be qualified.

People's experiences of the city are partial: different groups perceive the entity of the city in often mutually exclusive ways (Michelson 1979), and as such to say that the city is universally experienced as a capitalist or industrial institution is overly limiting. Freegans are able to push up against the limits imposed upon them by the city to create a sense of the city that allows them to live in an urban environment in a manner at least

somewhat consistent with their own beliefs. Rural sociologists have long noted that while "the open field is the same physical thing … it carries multiple symbolic meanings that emanate from the value by which people define themselves" (Greider and Garkovich 1991:1). The same is true of the city; its meanings are multifaceted and multiplexed.

These observations also push for a reconsideration of the shape the environmental movement is taking, particularly with respect to the role of the city within it. Texts about environmental movements focus on environmental organizations taking actions on the boundaries of the built environment (Manes 1990). Groups ranging from Earth First! to The Nature Conservancy emphasize the preservation of wilderness from the onslaught of humanity, and strive to push culture away from nature, an activity which takes place at the boundary between the two. Within mainstream environmentalism, residents of the city are expected to provide manpower and money for environmental dramas which are enacted elsewhere.

At the same time, as many scholars examining public opinion on environmentalism and animal rights have noted, the city actually tends to *increase* support for these causes by detaching individuals from utilitarian conceptions of the environment as existing simply to serve man (Thomas 1983; Serpell 1986; Greenbaum 1995; Kendall et al. 2006). My argument takes this observation a step further by showing how, by detaching freegans from nature as we traditionally conceive of it, the city becomes a space in which freegans are able to engage in radical nature-work that enables the adoption and enaction of a particular ecological viewpoint, the NEP. For all their criticism of the city, the freegans are not willing to give up on it. Their example shows

how environmentalism can be both grounded in the city and make it a movement's object.

Finally, the freegan case suggests that sociologists must reconsider our conception of nature. While research on nature in an urban context is "scant at best" (Kaplan 1983:128; Hannigan 2006), the topic of how nature is constructed in an urban environment has been identified as an important strain of urban sociological research (Krupat 1985). Fine (1998:13) notes that:

> Often we casually speak of nature as a totality and refer to 'attitudes about nature.' By doing this we lose sight of the fact that people deal not with a global nature, but rather with a local environment. Our experiences are with small corners of the world we label nature.

It is thus an oversimplification to say that counter-urbanization is the main manifestation of the "back to nature" movement (Bell 1994). As Fox (1999:182) points out, although "city dwellers are less in contact with animals and the land … this kind of proximity seems less important as a factor in moral progress than a desire to be well informed, an inclination to be reflective about the consequences of individual and collective human behavior, and a strong sense of responsibility." Freegans are able to make progress getting "back to nature" without moving into spaces already considered natural. Instead, they engage in practices which turn unnatural spaces natural. The city is not un-nature but rather "nature transformed" (Cronon 1991:14); within the mass of concrete, asphalt, and metal there is still the raw material for constituting an experience of the natural world.

These data assert that nature is indeed constructed, helping to resolve the ongoing "constructionist/realist debate" (Hannigan 2006:29). This fact should serve to refocus our attention on environmental attitudes: if it is cognition that is creating nature, it is also

cognition which is destroying it. Our ethos, then, is "the biggest ecological factor of all" (Darling 1951:256; Clayton and Opotow 2003). This returns to the point I made about discourses in Chapter III, reconfirming the significance of the way actors conceptualize their place within nature and their relationship to animals. Moreover, if nature is in fact constructed then the idea that "there is no nature" (Fine 1998:248) should probably be flipped: there is no *not*-nature, at least insofar as actors in a wide array of contexts are able to relate to their physical environment as a form of nature. Quinn articulated this perspective better than I can:

> Within the city, nature is a park, a tree, or a bug. Or maybe it's noises or creepy things or shadows. That's nature to me … Freeganism is a way of relating to nature in the city. It lets things happen organically. Everyone is part of the equation. It ends up being just, sort of, magic. People are like nature and there are all sorts of varieties and uniquenesses in any situation.

CHAPTER VI: THE ALLURE OF FREEGANISM

Leia and Janet

At this point, I have already introduced Leia—a 24-year-old mother currently attending community college—and Janet—a 46-year-old single schoolteacher with a Master's Degree. Their educations and living situations hint at the range of situations from which freegans come to the group. Janet lives comfortably in a house she owns in Queens, and admits that while she has amassed considerable savings—"I've saved my money and I haven't bought crap all my life, so now I have a lot [of money]"—she says she will stay at her job teaching high school Spanish until age 50. Then, she will receive her maximum pension and move to her second home in Pawling, New York. In contrast, Leia admitted to me that even with her job working for the New York Public Interest Research Group she struggles to make rent for her small Brooklyn apartment, which she shares with her grandfather as well as Tate, the father to her baby. Indeed, Leia came to freegan.info because Christian helped her get legal assistance when she went on "rent strike," spending several months refusing to pay for her apartment.

Their varying positions in life impact the way they approach the practice of freeganism. Janet mentioned her ethical uncertainty about whether she should be willing to occasionally go out to dinner to avoid alienating her non-freegan friends. In contrast, for Leia dumpster diving is not just a matter of ethics but also of being able to provide for her family. Moreover, Leia describes the food waste she sees through freeganism as "proof that we have the resources to socialize the food industry," a statement which hints at her admitted "communist leanings." In short, for her freeganism is all about strategies to achieve revolution. Janet, on the other hand, is far more likely to expound on her strategies to reduce waste in everyday, little ways. She talks, for example, about re-using

99-cent tablecloths as shower curtains and printing her materials for Spanish class on the backsides of one-sided paper other teachers had thrown in the recycling bin. At any given event, Janet shows up with a bag full of rescued goods with varying levels of usefulness—ranging from food to plastic umbrella covers—that she simply couldn't bear to see going to waste. Her commitment to reducing her carbon footprint is evident in how she transports herself to work. While it is easiest for her to drive, she can take three buses to get there. Balancing convenience and ecological concern, she told me she struck a compromise: she often drives her car half-way, so she only has to take a single bus.

I'm fairly confident some of these practices would strike Leia as a distraction from larger issues. Leia is militantly anti-private property, and uses this point to challenge the sincerity of the political commitments of other freegans in the group. She is well versed in revolutionary doctrine thanks to her prior involvement with the Sparticists, and talks about "turning the tables of power" to immediately create a "post-capitalist society." For her part, Janet admits that she hasn't read enough about anarchism to say much about it, except to speculate, "Maybe if I read more, I wouldn't be [an anarchist]" because she's not sure if anarchists can truly create a "world that is respectful." When I asked Janet about her visions for utopia, she suggested the need for "lots of community while still respecting privacy." She envisions parks, community centers, places for "sitting and talking," excellent public transportation, mandated recycling, and a "new type of supermarket that doesn't waste as much." Leia imagines people rising up to create her utopia; Janet prefers strict government regulation. In the fall of 2008, Leia won a scholarship for registering the most voters of any volunteer in a

nationwide contest—but she admits that she would never vote herself. Janet, on the other hand, wore an Obama '08 button to freegan events before the election.

The differences between Leia and Janet sometimes boil over into direct confrontations between the two. At one freegan feast, Leia borrowed a cigarette from Jason, and, upon seeing this, Janet asked her, in a disapproving tone, "You're not going to smoke inside, are you?" She added in her interview, "In my utopia, people don't smoke cigarettes." On the freegan.info e-mail lists, Leia tends to be quick to attack anyone who suggests a moderate brand of freeganism, challenging them, "Why would you fucking like capitalism?" Janet is more likely to express disdain for bad grammar and incivility than for impure politics: when Leia sent an e-mail referring to group members as "peeps," Janet responded that she thought such language was "inappropriate" and "irresponsible."

These conflicts aside, I am profiling Janet and Leia primarily to show *difference,* not disagreement. Janet and Leia might come from wildly different backgrounds, but they still frequently work together on freegan.info projects. Nonetheless, it is hard to avoid the observation that—outside the context of freegan.info—it is unlikely these two women would ever meet. This suggests a more general point: freegan.info is a comparatively diverse group, and freeganism has a wide array of adherents. Many freegans are young radicals who, like Leia, are bent on political revolution. Others, however, are more focused on using freeganism to achieve a revolution in their personal lifestyle. The grouping of these different identities into a single network of activists creates frequent points of contention within freegan.info and creates problems for individual freegans as they try to determine what exactly it means to be freegan. It also,

however, creates the potential for freeganism to broaden its appeal and attract more adherents.

This chapter is about the problems and possibilities of diversity. I seek to explain why freeganism has a wider appeal than similar movements connected to anarchism and how sociologists can categorize those drawn to its message. This exploration builds on the ongoing theme of how pre-existing individual identities are molded through involvement in the group, while furthering a topic which I will examine in the conclusion: the societal relevance of freeganism.

Utopians, Deviants, and Social Movements

In the previous chapter, I closed with a discussion of how some freegans practices can be interpreted as an attempt to actualize a society without a division of labor. Such a society would function based on what Durkheim (1933) describes as "mechanical solidarity." For Durkheim, society is defined by two main factors which vary inversely: the "likeness of consciences" and the "division of social labor" (Durkheim 1933:226). As such, one key characteristic of societies operating with mechanical solidarity is that their populace is an "absolutely homogenous mass" (Durkheim 1933:174) that shares values and norms. Obviously, it is a stretch to extrapolate too much from Durkheim's macro-level analysis to a smaller group like freegan.info. However, Durkheim's work does set a framework for considering issues of sameness and differences with reference to a community which, like freegan.info, seeks to create a radically different form of society. If everyone in a group is expected to be self-sufficient, then each individual will tend to be similar.

Studies of communes and utopian intentional communities have explored the themes introduced by Durkheim at an empirical, local level. Universally, these studies conclude that successful communes are based on shared norms and ideological homogeneity (Kanter 1973; Berger 1981; Roberts 1983; Cornfield 1983). Communities organized around alternative lifestyles—whether those lifestyles are nudity, free love, drug use, or communal labor and property—must have some sort of common values in order to survive, even though they reject the strictures of conventional morals (Cornfield 1983). One way many communes ensure this requisite commonality is by being composed of demographically similar individuals (Kanter 1973).

The need for survival, however, creates tension with other measures of success. Most "successful" communes are isolated and restrict their contact with outsiders (Stephan and Stephan 1973:95), and therefore have only a limited impact on the rest of the world. There is an undeniable link, as Keniston (1968) suggests, between encapsulation and solidarity. As such, many 1960s drop-out hippie communities deliberately chose not to engage with mainstream society, and thus wholly failed to affect long-term change (Earley 1997). The conclusion suggested by this literature, then, is that the *internal* harmony that allows a group to survive often comes at the price of *external* influence.

This same problematic of the tension between diversity and impact have been examined with respect to social movements through analysis of movement "framing." Collective action frames are "action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization" (Benford and Snow 2000:614). Frames hinge on creating "shared understanding" (Benford and Snow

2000:615) of social conditions and problems among a group of people. Unity around a common frame is critical for mobilization, and as such, participants in a social movement must share some ideological notions and values (Zuo and Benford 1995). On the other hand, though, on overly narrow frame limits its attractiveness. As such, creating unity *within* a movement can limit appeal *outside* the movement. Granovetter (1983) conceptualizes this in terms of strong and weak network ties: while movement participants might be united to one another by strong ties, it is weak ties with outsiders and acquaintances that enable a message to disseminate.

These tensions help to explain why the vast majority of communes and anarchistic societies fail, typically within just two years (Berger 1983; Roberts 1983). Anarchist movements, in particular, have a difficult time producing sustained effort towards any goal, due to the diversity of people "united" under that label (Davis 1970). The question this literature poses with respect to freegan.info, then, is whether a movement formed around mutual aid and solidarity can maintain and cope with diversity. While freegan.info has existed for four years, received hundreds of pieces of media coverage, and propagated its message to thousands of New Yorkers, it has also been riven by dissension and disagreement. By paying more attention to the kinds of people drawn to freeganism, we can better understand these two observations and understand how they are, in fact, linked.

The Many Faces of Freeganism

Edwards and Mercer's study of Australian freegans offers four different typologies for individuals under the freegan label. Participants in the dumpster diving

groups they examined could be lumped into the groupings of "purist food co-op hippies," the "anarcho-punk community," well educated anti-globalization "*autonomistas*," and back-to-nature "forest ferals" (Edwards and Mercer 2007:285). While the authors of that study do highlight variation between these different typologies—showing, for example, how each of the four groups has a set of signature political causes—these categories certainly cannot account for the variation of have encountered in New York. While Leia might fit in well with the "anarcho-punk community," for example, it is hard to imagine into what category Janet would fall.

The diversity of the politically active, highly involved freegans in freegan.info, however, pales in comparison to the diversity of the people that attend freegan events but are not regularly involved. While Janet and Leia or Madeline and Adam might seem worlds apart on issues such as animal rights or the need for civilization, they share far more in common with one another than with many of the individuals who come to one trash tour or a single feast. A sampling of the individuals who came to one trash tour which I attended in August demonstrates this, showing that freegan.info has burst open the boundaries of freeganism's appeal and brought some version of its message—however distorted—to a far wider array of individuals than those studied by Edwards and Mercer.

Many of the people who come on trash tours are young and well-educated, like the Australian freegans, and Kara was no exception. She told me that she decided to come on a trash tour because she had just started school at New York University and couldn't stand the food in the dining hall. She enthusiastically grabbed meat and dairy products from the display the group had set up and never once offered to share any of her

finds with the group. I tried to give her a flier for an upcoming movie on corporations and globalization that was going to be shown at the 123 Community Center, and she brushed it off, telling me, "I'm an economics and finance major." I asked her if she cared about environmental issues and she told me, "I'm only interested in environmental things because they save me money. I'm a tight-wad. If I turn off the lights or something, it's just because I'm cheap."

Although also young, Dan—a Puerto Rican from the Bronx with his hair shaved into a disheveled Mohawk—shares little in common with Kara, in terms of both background and ideology. He went to art school in Brooklyn for one semester, but dropped out when they pushed him to study graphic design and ignore his primary interest, graffiti; he now works at an independent movie theater. He told me that his gateway to activism came from listening to punk rock music, and he was drawn to freeganism because "It must be good; it has the same ending as vegan." While Kara actively chose to attend a freegan event in order to learn strategies for saving money, Dan explained that his decision was more passive: freeganism was growing prominent in the radical circles in which he trafficked, and he wanted to understand what his friends were talking about.

That night's trash tour was also attended by a late-middle aged woman. I had seen this woman before at both trash tours and free markets, but neither I nor anyone else in the group knew her name. That night, I managed to initiate a conversation with her, during which she revealed that she teaches in English at a nearby university. I asked her "Where?" and she told me "I don't really want to say." She then added, "I live in a doorman building in this neighborhood. I don't know what they think of me at night

[when I'm dumpster diving], but I don't care." When I asked her why she was so secretive about her freeganism—refusing to give her name or be shown on camera—she explained that, her previous comment to the contrary aside, she was afraid of the way people would judge her. Sounding almost distraught, she carried on, "I can't tell my husband, I can't tell my friends. My best friend of my life I can't tell. I can't tell my students." She explained her interest in freeganism as stemming from both an interest in free stuff and in minimizing waste, an ideology that fits with a type of "freegan" Janet describes as "environmentally conscious individuals who lead stable, boring lives."

The media attention which has been lavished on freegan.info has led to some far more incongruous attendees. Two well-dressed women in high heels carrying designer handbags who were visiting New York from Holland told me that they had seen Madeline on Oprah[37] and added that "We've come all the way from Holland to see you [the freegans]." They dumpster dived enthusiastically, and upon seeing the wealth of food we found, one of them told me, "I want to get this started in my own country." I was somewhat skeptical of the idea that someone would fly all the way from Holland in order to go dumpster diving, so I asked the woman again why she had come to New York. She then told me she came to spend a week shopping on Fifth Avenue. Somewhat taken aback by this seeming inconsistency, I explained to her that freegans were opposed to shopping and unnecessary consumption, and that our concerns were not limited just to food. She listened both to me and the "Waving the Banana" speech, and afterward, she told me, "I'm so moved. But I wonder, are freegans still allowed to buy nice things?" It is really quite astonishing that, for all the media coverage this woman had seen, she was

[37] The social reach of being on Oprah should not be underestimated. In 1996, Oprah did a show on mad cow disease and stated the scare had "just stopped me cold from eating another burger" (qtd. in Mauer 2002: 66). The meat industry sued for defamation as the price of cattle futures plummeted.

attracted to freeganism but simultaneously understood it in such a radically different way from anyone else in the group.

The diversity of freegan.info is visible not just in the individual attendees of freegan events, but also through direct comparison between freegan.info and the other groups with which it interacts. Every month, freegan.info "caters" for Really, Really Free Markets, which are held by the In Our Hearts anarchist collective in progressive Manhattan churches. The free items offered by the events—ranging from free clothing to free haircuts to free advice—attract a wide variety of people. A large number of attendees—as well as the organizers from In Our Hearts—are young, radical punks, clad in studs and sporting dyed Mohawks. Alongside them, though, sifting piles of donated clothes and appliances, are another set of individuals, most of whom are older, female, and who do not present themselves in such a confrontational way. The freegans who generally work in the kitchen to provide food—Janet, Madeline, Cindy, and Evie—look like they belong more to this second group than to the first.

An almost identical division of individuals is visible at the 123 Community Center, the anarchist community space where the freegan bike workshop is located. Most of the young, college educated individuals who run it dress like hipsters and punks, and alternative music is almost constantly blaring over the space's speakers. Downstairs, Wendy, who often volunteers in the bike workshop, looks almost out of place in her loose pants, a bedraggled t-shirt, and skewed glasses. The space is also shared by Food Not Bombs, and at 123 the contrast between freegan.info and FNB is obvious and apparent. On one day in February, FNB was cooking in the 123 Tompkins kitchen, and every single individual present was a white male who looked to be in his twenties. A few hours

later, freegan.info members arrived to prepare for a freegan feast being held that evening. Although their activities were nearly identical, the second group was older and included more women than the first.

Members of freegan.info are often proud of the wider diversity of the group, both in terms of its dedicated members and those that attend its events. As I discussed in Chapter IV, my informants often expressed contempt for the drug use and nihilism that they see as pervasive within anarchist, youth subculture. Sowmya told me that she thought that residents of Surrealestate—many of whom spend time at 123 Tompkins, a few blocks away—are doing nothing but live off their parents' money and just want to "smoke pot, have sex, and sleep." Similarly, David, who has worked with both freegan.info and FNB, told me that FNB participants tended to be unaware and unconcerned with the implications of their own privilege. While FNB is supposed to serve meals to the homeless, his experience was that in Manhattan the organization tended to serve mostly to other rich white kids. Freegans perceive their own group as providing a more mature and diverse alternative.

Admittedly, the extent of this diversity should not be over-emphasized. Freegan.info is certainly skewed towards white, young people of privileged, but as Adam put it, "not entirely or overwhelmingly" so. Instead, he states that freegan.info represents a "combination of a fairly diverse range of constituencies." Yes, freegan.info attracts young politically active punks and hipsters, but also less politically radical middle-aged individuals concerned about waste, as well as a handful of minorities. And, as the example of 123 shows, this situation is to an extent strange. Freegan.info is similar to In

Our Hearts, Food Not Bombs, or the 123 Community Center, both in the types of events it runs and the practices of many of its members. What, then, explains the difference?

Recruiting Around Food

In my previous research, I explained why, for a variety of reasons, dumpster diving is the central activity of freegan.info, and organized, open-to-the-public dumpster divers are, to my knowledge, unique to freegan.info (Barnard 2008). Therefore, an analysis that seeks to explain freegan.info's appeal ought to start by exploring the trash tour itself. Of course, as I argued in my Junior Paper, activities centered on eating from the trash ought to be entirely unappealing to virtually anyone (Rathje and Murphy 1992; Ferrell 2006; Medina 2007; Rufus and Lawson 2009). A lifestyle centered on scavenging or dumpster diving is "not enticing or realistic for the average eco-friendly American" (Rogers 2005:208), and the strength of the social stigma against contact with waste is such that first-time scavengers typically find themselves filled with "disgust and self-loathing" (Strasser 1999:3). Freegans themselves even accept this analysis: Adam expressed his concern about a media piece that assumed dumpster diving and freeganism are the same thing by arguing that "framing freeganism as a trash picking movement is the single best way to marginalize us, because it is the single aspect of what we do that is most alienating to 'normal' people."

The conclusion of my previous research, though, was that the trash tour was actually a brilliant political tactic, insofar as it attracted attention to key freegan issues in a way that other activities might not. My analysis did not, however, go deep enough to really understand why freeganism *appealed* to people; only why it attracted their

attention. In shifting to this more micro-level question, I start by considering specifically dumpster diving's appeal to the large number of women in the freegan movement. By my own rough estimation, about two-thirds of the individuals who attend freegan events are women, an observation which is consistent with high rates of female participation in movements connected to freeganism. Relative to men, women are more likely to exhibit concern for animals (Nibert 1994; Pifer et al. 1994; Peek et al. 1996; Einwohner 1999; Kruse 1999; Franklin 2001; Munro 2001; Jerolmack 2003; Kendall et al. 2006), to vegetarian (Fiddes 1991; Kalof et al. 1999), to feel more connected to nature (Jackson 1994) and to report being more disturbed by waste (Krause 1993).

To a degree, freegan events might appeal to women because they provide somewhat unconventional opportunities to participate in stereotypically female activities. On one trash tour, an African American woman who specializes in holistic medicine told me that she first came to a freegan event because she saw Madeline on Oprah, and had continued to come on trash tours because it gave her a good chance to get exercise. She told me that she had always saved money by recovering and recycling magazines and tabloids like *Vogue* and *People,* and she figured she could do the same with food. The appeal of gathering food from the trash, though, could be tied to more basic predispositions, whether evolutionary or socialized. Women in primal societies were inevitably the primary food gatherers, bringing in as much as 80% of calories for the tribe (Lee and DeVore 1976; Mason 1993). In modern society, women have retained their traditional role as the primary buyers and prepares of food, while also becoming the majority of employees in the food production and distribution system (Barndt 2008). Whether or not freeganism really is a way for women to fulfill their traditional roles as

food providers, some freegans certainly perceive it that way. Annabelle told me that women make good dumpster divers because they are "evolutionarily predisposed to be more opportunistic" in terms of finding things for their families. "If you look at who collects material in our society, who takes care of the household, who does the shopping," she added, "it's always the women."

Of course, the allure of food is not limited just to women. Dumpster diving allows individuals to assume direct control of providing for one of their most basic needs. As I outlined in the introduction, food has become a "hot button" issue in modern American society. Even without that, as Marg Uerite explained to me, food doesn't need a lot of media attention to grab people: "You don't really have to think about it [food], because you're brain is just hard wired." Cindy also highlighted food as a key reason for freeganism's appeal, but she explained it in terms of community, rather than biology. Freeganism has been "more successful in attracting and bringing in people than any other group of which I've been a part" because of food. "It speaks to real needs," she added. Many freegan describe their system of food gathering expeditions, feasts, and distribution at events like the Really, Really Free Market as analogous to the Black Panther school breakfast and free food programs, which were premised on the idea that food is not just a critical individual need but a tool for building inner-city community (Jones and Jefferies 1998; Hilliard 2008). Cindy referenced this theme when she explained to me that in urban areas, "people aren't treating food as social glue which sticks community together. People lack that. People see that [sociability centered on food] is very valuable."

Food shows that, to some extent, the appeal of freeganism is, as Adam put it, "free shit and practical self-interest." Freeganism provides an immediate way for people

to provide for themselves and to save money. For some individuals, this is apparently enough: on every tour, there are individuals like Kara who see "freeganism" as a way to save money and nothing more. They typically listen patiently to the freegans' political rants, and ask questions only about where to find the best garbage and how to avoid getting sick. My own conclusion, however, is that the desire for "free shit" is insufficient to motivate most trash tour attendees to dive into a bag of moldy, wet garbage, even in an economic climate where hunger is rising rapidly and the impetus to pinch pennies is growing greater. Individuals like the shopper from Holland I described earlier may not be motivated by the *same* anti-capitalist ideals that drive Leia or Janet, but they clearly *do* understand that dumpster diving has a degree of political significance.

The Attractiveness of Anti-Waste

The immense popularity of recycling in the United States—even amid a society that concomitantly values disposability and convenience (Gandy 1994)—hints at a very simple fact: people do not like waste. The very idea of waste implies improper use, and as a consequence there is an inevitable degree of "psychological discomfort" (Scanlan 2005:22) attached to seeing a functional item labeled as "waste." This fact leads Rogers to posit, "If people saw what happened to their waste … they might start asking difficult questions" (2005:16). It is perhaps one part coincidence and one part conspiracy that, even as green consumerism and individual environmental responsibility have become significant forces in American discourse, trash by and large remains hidden, and as a result, such difficult questions are rarely asked.

During my interviews, I interrogated each informant about what they saw as the appeal of freeganism. While each saw him or herself as being drawn to freeganism for a complex of ideological and political reasons, most of my informants' explanations for why *others* were drawn to freeganism generally boiled down to the issue of waste. Annabelle claimed that "Everyone has to acknowledge the problem of waste. Anyone who can make a rational decision is going to realize that this [waste] is a problem." Janet told me that freeganism "makes sense … [because] waste is offensive to almost everyone."[38]

My own field work makes me believe that the freegans' own analysis—asserting the primacy of concerns about waste for freegan recruitment—is accurate. Many individuals who see the waste displayed on a trash tour have no prior antipathy towards capitalism. Nonetheless, these people can see that the food freegans recover could be going to meet theirs or others' needs; the fact that it is not doing so strikes almost any attendee as unjust. On one trash tour I spoke with Dave, an ailing elderly man with thick rimmed glasses and gray hair. He told me that he had always seen the pastries thrown out by an Au Bon Pain near his apartment, but had never known what to do about it. He saw a trash tour happening on 6th Avenue, picked up a calendar, and decided to come to a freegan event. He never indicated to me any opposition to capitalism; just that he was bothered by the waste he saw.

Even individuals passing by trash tours who stop for merely a few seconds often seem struck by the waste freegans display. A typical conversation goes like this:

PASSER-BYE: What are you guys doing here?

[38] She paused for a few seconds and then added, "There's also the free stuff."

FREEGAN: We're showing people all the good food that gets wasted every single night.

PASSER-BYE: Yeah, that's awful. Good luck with that.

Such interactions are replayed night after night. To be fair, the social reprobation attached to wasting food while people go hungry is perhaps what drives some of these responses. Nonetheless, the consistency and force of these responses suggests to me that most people who see a trash tour are genuinely offended by the waste they are exposed to, even if they themselves are not ready to cross their own mental barriers and actually touch the trash.[39]

"Waste" is not just a set of objects, of course, but a label that can be applied to different aspects of society that are perceived to be unfair or inefficient. As such, the trash tour is an event onto which differing individuals can ascribe their own meanings. One night, a cab driver stopped his car in order to watch us root through the trash outside a D'Agostino's Market. I was assigned to hand out fliers that evening, so I walked over to his car, gave him a calendar of freegan events, and explained to him why we were dumpster diving. When I started talking about "waste" and how stores throw out food for no particularly good reason, he cut me off and launched into a tirade about the way oil companies were harming cab drivers like himself in the pursuit of profit. Later that night, a man walking by stopped to ask what we were doing. After hearing the freegans' explanation, he adopted that same terminology to attack the "wasteful" wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In each case, individuals were able to take the freegan message against waste and twist it into something with which they could directly relate.

[39] For a discussion of interactions with one particular segment of passer-byes which freegans encounter that are less than moved by the anti-waste message, see Appendix B.

This mutability of the anti-waste message is something that the group itself facilitates. "Waving the Banana" speeches rarely talk about anarchism or Marxism, but instead emphasize the immediate problems of waste, its causes, and ways to address them. Alex explained this strategic choice in a speech he delivered: "A reason why we're not setting up a lot of ideological structure, except to being opposed to these certain things, is because people have a right to build their own lives. They have a right to live without being disciplined, with a sense of control." While Alex framed the speeches' ambiguity in terms of respecting peoples' abilities to think for themselves and come to their own conclusions, this deliberate choice to avoid a clearer message is part of what allows so many people to see freeganism as consistent with their values. This is aided by the extent to which an anti-wasting, pro-repairing and recovering ethic is still considered a classic, traditional American value (Strasser 1999). Freegans are aware of this fact and actively seek to build this connection into their message. Even Adam admits that the two most unassailable elements of a freegan sound-bite are references to "old people and traditional values."

In short, freegan.info is, as Cindy puts it, the "friendly face of anti-capitalism." This role has been constructed over time through the development of a carefully articulated message:

> We've been very clear about being against capitalism, and anyone coming on our tours hears that. But we're not saying we're anarchists necessarily. We talk to people one on one, and we'll say, 'Yeah, a lot of people are anarchist.' But the group isn't officially anarchist. Anarchists in black masks breaking things scare people.[40]

[40] It is worth noting that, according to Cindy, this was not always the case within freegan.info. As she described it, before the group made the strategic choice to try to broaden its message, the "Waving the Banana" speech "involved a lot more waving." Now, she describes it as a bit more like the "Holding the Banana" speech, with the speakers focusing on facts, statistics, and rational arguments rather than tirades against capitalism.

Madeline noted that, although she herself is an anarchist, she often does not share this fact because "the vocabulary of the ideology gets in the way" of relating to people. Freeganism does not just make anti-capitalism friendlier, then, but also makes anti-capitalist ideas applicable, relevant, and understandable. Graeber (2004) claims that anarchists generally realize that few people in society are willing to adopt their ideology wholesale, and as such, anarchists focus on guiding people towards concrete forms of action rather than totalizing philosophies. As Madeline continued to explain to me, this is exactly what freegans are doing:

> The chances that someone off the street will espouse human extinction, primitivism, and extreme animal rights are nil. Real anarchism is when you appeal to what people already know. People know these things already … they know the stuff they're buying isn't making them happy; they know that we're hurting the earth. But you have to give them something to practice. Get their hands dirty.

By exposing society's waste, freegans tap into basic discontents about inequality and mal-distribution and present tour attendees with an "easy and direct"—as Janet describes dumpster diving—way of acting on that frustration.

It really is exceptional how quickly freegan experiences seem to change individual perceptions. On one tour, a middle aged woman from South Carolina told me—as had so many others—that she was introduced to freeganism by Oprah. She quite openly told me that the main reason she had come was for the free food, yet by the end of the tour she was telling other newcomers that the waste we saw was "due to capitalism." Freegan.info doesn't just represent anti-capitalism in a friendly way; it turns anti-capitalism into an ideology with immediate and urgent appeal.

Shoplifting and the Perils of a Broad Appeal

While much of this thesis has highlighted the way the ideologies, events, and structures of the group freegan.info push individuals within the group towards certain beliefs and behaviors, the previous analysis shows that the group also has a degree of flexibility that allows it to appeal to a broader range of individuals. The preexisting and varied identities that those individuals bring into the group, however, can often lead to conflict. Never was this more evident than when the group's e-mail list erupted in conflict over the issue of shoplifting.

Shoplifting has an ambiguous place in freegan ethics. The pamphlet *Why Freegan*? has little to say on the issue, and comes to no clear conclusions:

> Scams/Shoplifting: There are a slew of shady ways to score free food…always let your conscience be your guide!
>
> Shoplifting: There is some debate over how freegan this really is because you are still creating an empty shelf that must be restocked, but it is more freegan than forking over big bucks. This is a more direct attack on the store selling the goods, not the producer (unless you hyper-boycott a product: pick something you can't stand and consistently get it off the shelves, steal it, break it, hide it, just eliminate it and the store will eventually stop selling it) so you should consider if you are putting a ma & pa organic veggie stand out of business or just chipping away at a corporate giant.

The freegan.info group's own literature essentially never makes any mention of shoplifting and stealing is not mentioned in "Freeganism in Practice" (Appendix C).

Shoplifting rarely comes up during group discussions, but Adam did once post an e-mail to the freegan.info list that was from an acquaintance who was looking to gather different viewpoints on shoplifting. Over the next few days, the list was flooded by literally hundreds of e-mails on the topic. Many expressed immediate and unequivocal condemnation of any discussion of shoplifting being associated with freeganism:

> I will be unsubscribing [from the e-mail list]. Shoplifting is stealing... plain and simple. And it does not contribute to a 'free' or 'freegan' lifestyle. It is simply wrong. You made a poor judgment call by including this request in the list. It negates all the effort done by freegans to have their lifestyle accepted and even honored in some cases.

In most cases, these individuals used plain language that suggested they didn't give the issue much thought, but simply concluded that "stealing is stealing" and "just wrong." These individuals reflected a mainstream, liberal view that shoplifting is no more than a "big game" (Weiner 1970:217) played by bored and irresponsible teenagers for "sneaky thrill" (Katz 1988:53).

At the same time, some freegans immediately leapt to defend shoplifting. Leia, for example, challenged people by asking, "If you're a mother and your kid needs food, what if it just happens that there's nothing to dumpster?" I heard similar phrasing from another freegan, who talked about the role stealing played in a squat she visited in Barcelona:

> There was like a family of four in one of the squats we were at that had like a two-year-old and a ten-year-old, and the parents weren't making money. They needed dairy, bread, and lentils that weren't dumpster-able. So they would go to the store and steal because they needed to support their family.

A reader outside the freegan movement might be immediately struck by the seeming absurdity of these statements; there are, in many cases, more options for supporting a family than dumpstering and shoplifting, such as getting a conventional job. Within the narrowing of life possibilities engendered by extensive participation in the freegan movement, though, shoplifting is, to some freegans, an important component of survival off the capitalist grid.

The extensive interest in the debate aside, the reality—at least as far as I have observed—is that very few of the highly involved freegans in the group ever shoplift.

The passionate defenses of shoplifting I heard from individuals like Leia, Jason, and Adam stem from something else than a desire to defend personal practices. Particularly, these individuals see support for shoplifting as symbolic of a more stridently anti-capitalist stance, which some other freegans find unpalatable. Adam told me that while he himself didn't shoplift except for engaging in a few copying scams to make literature for the group, he finds opposition to shoplifting to be absurd, since in his view revolutions are, in themselves, a form of stealing. For Leia and Jason, shoplifting ties in with their adamant opposition to private property. As Jason explained it, "At the root of both stealing and buying is the notion of ownership." Leia took that idea further:

> I think this whole conversation about shoplifting is mired in a point of view that respects the notion of private property. Freeganism is a rejection of private property. What we should all realize is that the privatization and selling of goods (especially things we need to live, such as food) is the true crime.

In each case, shoplifting was emblematic of a broader debate over the basic meaning of freeganism as a political ideology.

Within this anti-property wing of freeganism, contestation over shoplifting tends to focus on whether it is effective, rather than whether it is ethical. On one wild food foraging tour, it started to rain, and one attendee donned a fancy synthetic jacket. Another attendee, Sarah, asked him if he had dumpstered it and he responded that he stole it. He then conceded that "stealing is definitely buying," in the sense that each is another form of environment-destroying consumption. Zaac and this individual then had an interchange about when it is and is not appropriate to steal, citing as factors for consideration whether or not the business is locally owned and whether it stocks the most ethical products available. Essentially, some freegans oppose shoplifting not because "stealing is stealing" but because, as one person wrote in an e-mail to the list, it is a

"faulty tactic, both lazy and ineffectual." Stealing, this person explained, creates a "demand for products that are made by sweatshop workers on stolen land from mismanaged resources that destroy the environment or are tested on tortured animals." Moreover, another added, shoplifting puts "hypocritical blood on your hands" because it leads individuals to possess "products you claim to hate."

New Typologies of Freegans: Anti-Waste and Anti-Capitalist

The debate over shoplifting helps throw into sharper relief some of the lines of division within the freegan movement that I began to draw earlier in this chapter. Particularly, I would like to propose three "ideal types" of individuals involved with freeganism. The first encompasses those individuals who—like the NYU student seeking to avoid the dining hall—engage in freegan practices because they want free things. These individuals range from occasional dumpster divers to full-time scavengers, and have already received some scholarly attention (Ferrell 2006). What unites them, in essence, is what they lack: a political ideology. In *The Scavenger's Manifesto,* Rufus and Lawson assert that they—like other scavengers in this mold—have entered into a "mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship" (2009:50) with society's wasters. These authors explain that, for this reason, they explicitly opt not to try to convince consumers to stop wasting and refrain from encouraging others to become scavengers. They understand that accomplishing either would dry up the stream of waste off which they feed.

While some of the individuals in the category I described above might identify themselves as freegans, few in freegan.info would accept that label as accurate. In

contrast, my remaining two categories do both claim the label freegan. The next typology I offer is that of the "anti-capitalist" freegan. I would assert that this category includes all the labels—the anarcho-punks, food co-op hippies, autonomistas, and forest ferals—described by Edwards and Mercer (2007). It is a largely young, college-educated group in which an anarchist ideology is presumed and prior participation in political movements is extensive. While some of the practices in which they engage in might be novel, this form of activism among this subculture is not particularly sociologically new.

What I believe makes freegan.info distinctive is the presence of "anti-waste" freegans. These freegans are tapping into highly prevalent discourses about sustainability and carbon footprints, but going beyond changing light bulbs and reusing tote bags. On individual presenting himself over the freegan e-mail list almost perfectly encapsulated the type of person I am talking about:

> I am affluent and own several businesses (all successful) but get most of my stuff for free and never hesitate to stop and trash pick or jump in a dumpster to hunt down items to keep out of the landfill. I am very in favor of capitalism, just not corporate or business irresponsibility to the communities in which they operate and supposedly serve. I give away large sums of my business profits and am a big supporter of the local community businesses and organizations (schools - although I have no human children), and other charities and own and operate our local FreeCycle group and moderate 6 others. Moreover I engage in serious barter for other things and services I need including with the local CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farm for most of my food and with the local organic bread baker too for web and computer services.

These individuals' lack of a radical leftist political framework leads some other freegans like Adam to deride them as ignoring broader issues to focus on "fifty little things you can do to live more ethically." Some seeming adherents to this view have even described to me a view that freeganism is "ecological, but not political." What makes these freegans interesting is not so much what they believe but where they come from: many of

them have little or no prior history of activism. On top of this, many have elements of their lives that are, for all intents and purposes, "normal."[41] Yes, they dumpster dive, but many of them also work willingly, and own houses or cars.

As with all typologies, of course, reality is somewhat blurrier. Evie, a mid-thirties speech pathologist, has been involved in every manner of leftist organizing, ranging from Palestinian Solidarity, anti-sweatshop work, and freedom for anti-death penalty activist Mumia Abu Jamal. She identifies herself as an anarchist, and in that sense, her politics are clearly in line with the "anti-capitalist" group. At the same time, though, she describes her practices in anti-waste terms: "I'm freegan in a lot of the little things in my life," but notes that the impact of those pales in comparison to the fact that she resides in a house, travels by plane, and generally lives a "pretty conventional lifestyle." She admits that these contradictions represent a struggle: on the one hand, she rues the fact that "I am paying taxes and funding a couple of enormous wars, and sort of everything bad that's going on in the world." On the other hand, she is proud that she works at a hospital for underserved populations.

Evie is emblematic of the fact that few freegans in the group actually fit into one category or another. Although I used Janet and Leia to introduce this chapter and it might seem like they are "anti-waste" and "anti-capitalist" freegans respectively, that is not really the case: Janet is certainly an avowed anti-capitalist. As Keniston points out during his attempts to find common threads among the activists he studied, "the most important consistency [is] the individuality of those I interviewed" (Keniston 1968: 45).

[41] For more on the division between "anti-waste" and "anti-capitalist" freegans, see the discussion of race at the freegan bike workshop in the second section of Appendix B.

Ultimately, these typologies are primarily helpful for understanding group dynamics rather than pigeonholing individuals.

The Prospects and Problems of Diversity

While few individuals exactly fit these rigid demarcations, these divisions do emerge and become significant during certain debates and in certain contexts. The shoplifting debate, once again, helps us to better understand how these two different groups—each with a claim to the label freegan—interact. Explaining his or her lack of interest in shoplifting, one poster to the freegan e-mail list explained:

> I see now that I have to state my reason to call myself a "Freegan", I just hate waste. That is why I want to be a Freegan, because I am quite willing to dumpster dive to stop things being wasted. I think that about covers it. Not to take what is someone else's property. I therefore, obviously believe in owning property. I value mine and look after silly things other people would think of as rubbish, but in my eyes I see value and use [*sic*]

As was so often the case, Leia sent a fiery e-mail in response:

> The real tragedy is the waste???? Say nothing of the exploitation of workers and resources that went in to making the product? It's just an environmental issue, not a social justice issue, right? For all you anti shop lifters, you are complicit in a MUCH greater crime! Those products are made of pillage, rape and murder. Anti shop lifting apologists are complicit in those crimes! It is a crime that most of those products are there at all. That is the REAL crime. The garbage that they produce on STOLEN LAND by OPPRESSED people IS THE REAL CRIME!! [*sic*].

For more radical, revolutionary freegans like Leia, Jason, or Adam, waste is symbolic of greater problems within capitalism; the waste itself is not the central issue. Even if stores stopped wasting food and consumers stopped buying unneeded junk, the system would still need an overhaul. For those approaching the issue from an anti-waste framework, though, an end to gratuitous overconsumption and subsequent wasting would mean

victory. This division manifested itself in how different individuals represented their visions of a freegan utopia. Some interviewees told me that they would like to see the U.S. return to the reusing and recycling ways of the pre-World War II era. When I suggested this to some others as a possible end-point for freeganism, though, they expressed horror, pointing out that while society may have wasted less at that time, oppression of women, minorities, and lower classes was still endemic.

These divisions appear clearly in different approaches to group strategy with respect to the mainstream media. Individuals with whom I have spoken—both within and without freegan.info—universally agree that freegan.info has gotten a huge amount of exposure relative to other activist groups involved in similar causes within New York City, and most agree that this has been, on balance, positive. A cursory review of many of these media pieces, however, reveals that—although *everyone* in the group is supposed to make a serious effort to project an anti-capitalist message, at least according to a media spokesperson training I attained—most stories focus more on waste than on capitalism.

How freegans attempt to use the media further indicates differing frames with which individuals approach waste and capitalism. At various times the group has considered revising its general policy of not naming wasteful corporations and stores in media pieces, which was implemented out of concern that it will negatively affect garbage output.[42] Indeed, the freegans in the group can cite several examples of stores

[42] These concerns are validated by experience. A freegan.info trash tour once brought a camera crew to a Trader Joe's Market—a store with a strong green consumer image (Singer and Mason 2006)—and displayed its waste on a major New York news show, Good Day New York. Since then, Trader Joe's has closely guarded its garbage, and getting Trader Joe's waste has become something of a white whale among dumpster divers. After that experience, freegans within freegan.info have been particularly cognizant of the fact that many freegans and dumpster divers *outside* the group resent them for "ruining their source" of good trash. In fact, the group has been confronted on trash tours by other dumpster divers, stating, "Don't you bring those cameras here, last time you did that we went a half-a-year without being able to get to this dumpster. You ruined it for all of us."

that they have publicly shamed about their waste and seen a substantial change in the waste those stores produce. For an "anti-waste" freegan, a strategy that used the media to convince stores to discard less and change their restocking practices would be a successful one. Others, like Leia, expressed concern both for those who dumpster dive out of necessity and for the possibility that, if food waste were diminished, freegans could lose an "activist tool" that they use to recruit people into a broader movement against capitalism.

At one event, the group held a discussion about whether or not freegans should advocate for laws that what explicitly permit dumpster diving. Some of the more radical anarchists in the group resisted the idea of any engagement with the state and disliked the idea of freeganism needing any sort of legitimization from the government. For those that sought primarily to combat waste, though, legalization of dumpster diving seemed a perfectly valid strategy for increasing their philosophy's mainstream appeal. Adam went into more detail about why he opposed anything that, like this, would broaden dumpster diving's appeal. Even though he had been diving for food for a decade, he confessed to me that he thought the practice might be detrimental to the cause of pushing the downfall of capitalism. As he explained it, dumpster diving:

> ... implies that there are benefits to capitalism and we can make it more efficient by re-appropriating its waste. And that's why the dumpster diving aspect of freeganism lends itself easily to cooptation. It becomes a critique of the excesses of capitalism, not capitalism itself.

This is one of several examples that show, once again, that dumpster diving—like freeganism itself—has numerous and mutable meanings. This fluidity of meanings that marks freegan practice is central to its appeal because it allows individuals to tie freegan practices to their own, potentially less radical concerns. This helps explain why it has

broken out of the narrow demographic that typically patronizes anarchist events. At the same time, the very site at which freeganism is the most appealing is a space in which its most basic oppositions and disagreements become apparent. These observations further complicate our understanding of who freegans are: some of them seem to be drawing on traditional values of thrift and appealing to our basic predispositions to provide for basic needs. Others discuss tactics that most people find anathema, like shoplifting. These parallel strains offer a nuanced framework from which I will approach question about the ultimate relevance of freeganism, both sociologically and socially.

CONCLUSION: US AND THEM

Although the previous chapter was devoted to advancing the proposition that freeganism has a much broader appeal than we might expect, I am nonetheless fully aware that some readers will remain skeptical of any argument that does not place freegans among the most marginal of subcultures. If the freegans are indeed just a group of "trash-picking freaks"—which is certainly a view I have often heard expressed—then there are drastic limits to what we can conceive of as the ultimate relevance of freeganism. At best, we could imagine freegans as the modern torch-bearers of a deviant tradition extending from the "beats" through the hippies to the punks, with their highest accomplishment being to ensure that certain radical ideas live on until a new iteration of deviant subculture will take them up (Berger 1981:195).

If we accepted this perspective, we would have to concede that freegans aren't really changing anything, and that they won't in the future. And indeed, there is a certain fatalism among some New Social Movements and the "New Left" that mobilization *isn't* really going to change anything, so the best an activist can hope for is to show to the world that they, at least, object to the current state of affairs, however impotent they are to impact it (Keniston 1968). A recurring theme in my interviews, though, was that freegans *are* confident that they are having an impact: they believe quite firmly that big changes are coming to human society, and that the ideas behind their movement will be critical to shaping the direction that change will ultimately take. This section explores whether this is the case, and if so, how a small group of "trash-picking freaks" could possibly accomplish anything so ambitious.

Erickson asserts that there are generally two sound reasons for ethnographic study of a sociological phenomenon. The first is simply to "get the story straight" (Erickson

1976:246), and in large part, that is exactly what I have strived to do. This work has attempted to offer a nuanced and deep accounting of a community that has been repeatedly reported and represented in shallow and distorted ways. I have further emphasized variation within the community, showing that in truth, there is no precise definition of "a freegan," because every person that considers him- or herself a freegan practices the lifestyle differently. I believe my research, in and of itself, possesses value, because it offers a truer and more complete picture of one piece of the complex fabric that makes up society.

Erickson asserts that the second valuable function of ethnography is to use an individual case study to draw generalizable conclusions for a wider array of social phenomena. While Erickson sees both of these aims as equally admirable, he also claims they are divorced from one another—so much so that Erickson actually writes *two* conclusions to his book, one addressing each point. What I hope to show, though, is that with respect to the freegans, an accurate description—one that fulfills ethnography's first goal—also meets the second aim of saying something generalizable. Particularly, by describing the boundaries between freegans and non-freegans, and demonstrating that these boundaries are not as clear as we necessarily think, I believe that we are forced to engage with the conclusion that the study of freeganism is not just about a small group of societal drop-outs but about society itself.

I introduced the theme of boundaries between "us" and "them" through Kathleen Blee's ethnography of organized racists. As I have shown, freegans—like white power proponents—take as the starting point for their extreme activism less-than-extreme—in fact, rather common—concerns about control, disconnection, and efficacy in a fast-paced

and impersonal modern world. Moreover, I have shown how freegans compromise their desire to live sustainably and ethically with universal human desires for stability, friendship, and happiness. In short, while freeganism certainly makes the process more complex, freegans are fundamentally wrapped up in the same ongoing negotiation between values, ideals, and reality as the rest of us.

What is distinctive about the freegans is that they find answers to the questions "How should I live?" and "What should I believe?" within a particularly radical social setting. While my research might suggest that, as individuals, freegans might still be "among us," any reader can intuitively tell that they are nonetheless different. The key explanation here is that membership in a certain group—which often stems from fairly circumstantial factors—can lead individuals down a rabbit-hole of steadily increasing involvement and radicalism, narrowing their conception of what they can and cannot do and can and cannot believe. While Calhoun (1991) is generally correct to point out how an activist identity can become self-reinforcing, it is critical to note that this process is one of identity constructed in dialogue with an organization and community, which often can take a degree of autonomy away from the individual.

Observations which might seem to do no more than just "get the story straight" about the freegans, though, have broader relevance today. Freegan ideas are gaining more and more prominence amid the present economic downturn. While we may not see much of the population dumpster diving—the recent huge increase in trash tour attendees notwithstanding—freegan values and practices are exploding *everywhere* right now. They are evident in families planting gardens for food instead of maintaining lawns, individuals postponing purchases of new clothes in favor of patching up old ones,

foreclosure evictees squatting in their homes, people choosing to spend time with families and communities instead of paying for entertainment, and a general renewed commitment to depression-era values of thrift and non-wasting. Many of these people might be close to falling under the banner of "anti-waste" freegans I described in Chapter VI. As such, the study of freeganism helps us understand how these practices are adopted, how they relate to one another, and how such activities might hold meaning for practitioners as more than just techniques for saving money. In a sense, when we study freegans, we study more than just a handful of people in New York, but everyone who, in the face of hard times and a bleak environmental prognosis, is taking a critical look at their consumption choices.

Still, few people in our society are willing to accept the "whole package" of freegan ideas, even as the stock market tumbles and unemployment rises. The full-time scavengers who just published *The Scavenger's Manifesto* still consider the political inclinations of freeganism to be extreme (Rufus and Lawson 2009). Over and over again, it is hard to avoid returning to the fact that, for all the evidence of "them" being like "us" in at least some ways, there are moments when freegans are simply *them.* Never was this more evident to me than on one trash tour when Adam announced, with the air of a doomsday preacher, that:

> Global industrial economic capitalism is on the verge of total collapse. We are in fact in the final days of Rome. There is still bread on the shelves, and our newspapers are still filled with the idiot circuses of Paris Hilton and Britney Spears, and other nonsense, but all of these distractions are frankly failing to keep people from realizing that the end, really and truly, is near.

In the context of freegan.info—a social space where veganism is expected and criticisms of civilization are taken seriously—what Adam said might be debatable, but would still

be at least considered by most everyone within the group. However, to the rest of us—including many of the assembled individuals that night—Adam's statements seem pretty absurd. That is because most of us cannot evaluate Adam's pronouncements from the social position of a freegan, but instead as generally willing participants in a hugely affluent society that has produced historically unparalleled material abundance while isolating us from the consequences of producing, consuming, and wasting that abundance. As Kunstler points out, from such a vantage point we cannot help but believe that "our contemporary ideas are the most highly evolved ever known, and that our attitudes are the most acute and progressive" (2005:301).

But what if the context that underpins our confidence in modern society changed? Kunstler carries on to note that while we may believe that there are no alternatives to our present viewpoint, "the truth is that our ideas are suited to a particular set of circumstances" (2005:301). Whether we see Adam as a crackpot or a visionary will ultimately rest not on how we interpret Adam or freeganism, but on our understanding of some disturbing scientific literature that suggests the environmental and economic context in which we make decisions about production and consumption is about to be transformed, not just incrementally, but in massive and significant ways.

Credible estimates from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change now suggest that the earth's temperature could rise as much as 6.4 degrees Celsius, or over 10 degrees Fahrenheit, in the next century (Bernstein et al. 2007). Signs that global warming is already having an impact are evident in the fact that eleven of the past twelve years are among the warmest on record, with 2005 the warmest in 100,000 years (Bernstein 2007; Conkin 2007). Such warming is erasing polar ice sheets, pushing the

earth towards a "tipping point" at which the decreased reflectivity of the polar ice caps and gases released from melting permafrost will make global warming self-reinforcing and perpetually accelerating (Harper 2007; Lynas 2008). Predictions about how much sea levels will rise vary wildly, but range as high as seven meters, which would wipe large parts of low-lying cities like Cairo and New York from the map (Eilperin 2008). Other likely consequences of global warming include extreme weather like hurricanes and fires, resurgence of diseases such as malaria, a collapse in crop yields, and displacement of millions of people (Bernstein 2007). Some of these impacts can already be seen in the 2003 French heat wave that killed 15,000, flooding in Bangladesh in 2004 that killed 800, or in the massive hurricanes that ravaged the Gulf Coast in 2005 (Toner 2004).

While the consequences of global warming seem the most alarming, they are only one among a complex of problems in humanity's relationship with the earth. Scientists estimate that 33 to 58% of all global species will be lost in the next half-century from global warming alone (Thomas et al. 2004), adding to a one-third decline in global biodiversity since 1970. The extinction rate is now 10,000 times the historic norm (Dungan 2008), with an additional one-in-four mammals, one-in-eight birds, one-in-three amphibians, and 70% of plants in some jeopardy of extinction (IUCN 2007; Biello 2008). Thanks largely to the human population having quadrupled since 1900, 11% of the earth's surface—an area larger than India and China—has now been degraded significantly from its natural state (Abragam et al. 1992). In certain areas, the ecosystem destruction is worse, with less than half of pre-industrial rainforests remaining (Ferraz, Gareth, Stouffer, Blerregaard, Pimm and Lovejoy 2003). These conditions reduce the

ability of the natural environment to provide critical services for human society, such as regulating disease, purifying air and water, controlling agricultural nutrient cycles, and processing waste (MEA 2005; Lynas 2008).

In some senses, the one major glimmer of hope for the natural environment—an industrial slowdown precipitated by an energy crisis—points to impending catastrophe for humanity. Fossil fuels comprise 85% of the world's energy sources, and as such it is "no exaggeration to say that reliable supplies of cheap oil and natural gas underlie everything we identify as a benefit of modern life" (Kunstler 2005:2). Yet all the main reserves of these fuels are being rapidly depleted, suggesting that the global energy supply is near its peak (Pursell 2004; Heinberg 2007; Conkin 2007). The world's oil endowment, for example, is approximately two trillion barrels, and the trillion easiest-to-access barrels have been used, consequently oil production is likely to reach its maximum this decade (Deffeyes 2008). With global demand for oil at 27 billion barrels per year and rising, simple math indicates that it is a matter of decades until oil supplies are largely exhausted (Kunstler 2005; Heinberg 2007).

One area that will be particularly impacted by the peaking of fossil fuels is agriculture. Sixteen calories of energy now go into producing a single calorie of grain, a striking example of the extent to which fossil fuels underpin agriculture (Harper 2001). The stress of depleting fuels combined with a declining number of farmers, climate change, and water scarcity indicates that we are facing a renewed possibility of widespread famine in the 21st century (Heinberg 2007). As with the implications of other modes of environmental destruction, problems within the agricultural system will disproportionately affect poorer populations and Southern nations, exacerbating

preexisting inequalities (Lynas 2008; Xanthaki 2009). The future of the Mexican *campesinos* described in the introduction, for example, has only become grimmer as corn yields near the Equator continue to decline (Lynas 2008). The potential unrest that food instability could cause is presaged by the food riots that occurred around the world in 2008 (Walt 2008).

These environmental problems are all, fundamentally, problems of overconsumption: overuse of emissions-emitting cars, overexploitation of farmlands and oilfields, and over-willingness to clear wild animal habitat for human purposes. The recent global economic downturn is a glaring example that shows overconsumption has even more direct impacts on human beings. The global consumer economy which has spawned global warming, gobbled non-renewable natural resources, erased entire ecosystems, and ejected billions of tons of refuse is starting to collapse as financial markets unravel, spurred in large part by unsustainable "consumption" of new houses and an individual unwillingness to save (Barbano 2008; Schwartz 2008; Dewan 2009; Rosenbloom 2009). The signs are at this point are only a tell-tale hint at the magnitude of the issue: a spike in homelessness in the United States (Huus 2009), a rapid rise in shoplifting (Urbina and Hammill 2008), or the trampling death of a Wal-Mart employee by bargain hunters in Queens, New York on "Black Friday," the largest shopping day of the year (McFadden and Macropoulos 2008).

Thus, when Adam told me that he thought, "It's time for us [humans] to pack our bags and go, and I don't mean colonizing the stars," he certainly didn't see himself as a doom-saying crackpot. He realized, though, that others might be skeptical: "Now, how practical is that?" he mused, ultimately responding, "Well, very. Because barring a

miracle we're not going to see the end of the 22nd century, and quite possibly [not] the end of the 21st." Radical environmentalists see themselves as the realists, and those that ignore disturbing scientific accounts about impending ecological disaster are, in their eyes, the dreamers and the utopians (Catton 1980). As Calhoun (2004:376) points out, a belief in emergency or crisis can drastically impact what seems reasonable and feasible. But Calhoun's analysis does not quite go far enough: the presence of real crisis does not just change what we perceive to be feasible, it also changes what *is* feasible. It's hard not to reflect on the literature cited above and not think that the freegans aren't just *imagining* a crisis; they perceive one that is already upon us.

Certainly, the scientific evidence I cited above—while coming from credible sources—is contested. While this evidence helps us better understand where the freegans are coming from, they could still be wrong. At the same time, though, acknowledging that there is at least the possibility that the "human situation" could drastically change in the space of a few decades provides an entirely new lens through which to approach the question of freeganism's relevance. In fact, I think the scientific literature suggests the possibility that, ultimately, those freegans who offer a radical critique of capitalism and civilization might be, to some extent, vindicated. If this were true, "getting the story straight" about how some of the freegans are living *now* could be a glimpse into how a far greater number of us will be living *in the future.*

That potential outcome means that the possibilities for humanity offered by freeganism deserve a closer look. Seeing freeganism in this way, though, requires us to understand freeganism as not just a protest against present injustices but also as a social

experiment into new modes of living.[43] This element of the freegan movement, to an extent, sets it apart. Much of the media attention on hard-line environmentalism has depicted anti-globalization protesters marching with giant puppets mocking world leaders or "monkey-wrenchers" setting fire to suburban developments and breaking bulldozers. While distorted, this coverage does accurately note that, by-and-large, extreme environmentalism is a negative and deconstructive enterprise. Earth First!, an environmental direct action group, was founded to "fight for actions and programs that are necessary in order to preserve the health and diversity of our biosphere" but notes that "We need not worry about how to restructure society" (qtd. in Manes 1990:132). These projects are so focused on destroying the destroyers that they often fail to offer an appealing, constructive alternative (Sklair 1994).

Freeganism, on the other hand, is at its root a positive enterprise. Freegans acknowledge that in the post-socialist world, models for utopia are lacking, so they have to build their own through trial-and-error on a local level. Notes Adam:

> The freegan model for revolution is not just that we can preach this and suddenly people will take to the streets with torches and tear everything down. We realize that many people see the system as their very means of survival. So we believe that the only alternative is to build this new society within the shell of the old.

But what exactly is it that freegans are constructing? The material and practical problems with the freegan project are immediately evident. It is an often-repeated criticism of freeganism that it depends on capitalism for its very survival, and therefore is self-defeating. This is not entirely fair, since it assumes that "freeganism" equals "dumpster

[43] I acknowledge that this seems to contradict the conclusion of my previous ethnography (Barnard 2008) which emphasized the way that freegans used their practices as a protest. I do not believe this observation is mutually exclusive with my present point, though, because that claim was derived from specifically examining the institution of the freegan trash tour. This work broadens my analysis to include the entire repertoire of freegan practices, many of which are less directly protests.

diving"—a practice which would indeed become impossible if stores stopped producing waste, capitalism collapsed, or if enough people joined in—and leaves out consideration of things like wild food foraging, urban gardening, and DIY production that could exist independently of capitalism.

That said, there is truth to the observation that how exactly utopian projects like freeganism would function on a wide scale "remains clouded in a fog of utopian promise" (Heider 1994:71). To some extent, radical groups like freegan.info sometimes avoid discussion of their ultimate vision because it is much easier for a diverse group to agree on what it opposed to than what it is trying to build (Keniston 1968), and I have certainly observed that to be the case among the freegans I studied. In group discussions, participants are far more interested in talking about their dislike of capitalism than their specific visions for the future. Rarely do I hear freegans engaging with the traditional debates that have dominated leftist socialism: the role of the state, how to coordinate a new international order, or the way to organize workers to control industrial production.

This observation about how freegans *talk* carries over into what they *do*. If we compare freegan.info to the utopian projects of the socialist movement, for example, it seems that, even if freeganism was what it aspired to be, it would still be quite small-scale and unimpressive. Freegan.info has not figured out how its participants can avoid work, find free housing, or get health care—much less how they might do this for six billion people. Given the scale of the ecological problems freegans describe, it is hard to avoid coming to the conclusion that actions like dumpster diving and skillshares are little more than a symbolic gestures intended to allow activists to thumb their nose at an unassailable onslaught of capitalism, civilization, and environmental devastation.

As Keniston points out, though, an ideology should not be criticized for "not being what it tries hard not to be" (1968:286). Freeganism is not a grandiose social vision like those propounded by Marx or Bakunin, and it should not be evaluated as such. But to say that freegans do not have a comprehensive vision for organizing the entire world misses the point. In fact, I would assert that freeganism is more directly about changing worldviews than it is about changing the world. Notes Keniston, many political radicals are caught between trying to take action and needing to reflect on what actions to actually take. Freeganism, though, combines the two: freeganism is an exploration of how values can be generated, reconstituted, and implemented through everyday life. It is, in essence, both theory developed through practice and vice versa.

Freeganism is a lived example of Graeber's (2007) observation that both hierarchy and equality are always immanent in quotidian existence. In this way, even banal activities like eating or finding transportation have latent political significance into which actors can tap. Food is particularly critical in this conception because it is a powerful symbol that links a daily practice to much broader social forces: as Madeline described it, diet is an "intensely political microcosm of everything." While another group of cultural radicals—the Black Panthers—divided their social project into projects designed to ensure short term survival and to achieve revolution (Abron 1998). For freegans, day-to-day living and revolution are fused into one. The full name of the anarchist collective that runs the 123 Community Center is "A New World in Our Hearts"—the phrase may also be an accurate description of freeganism.

As an attack on the material and spatial organization of capitalist society, then, freeganism might seem futile, misguided, and ineffective. But, as a challenge to the

underlying ethics of how humans relate to the environment, animals, and one another,[44] freeganism has a more significant impact. As Erickson argues, modernity is marked by "cultural disorientation, a feeling of powerlessness, a dulled apathy, and a generalized fear about the conditions of the universe" (Erickson 1976: 258). Freeganism challenges and replaces these cognitive patterns at the most basic level by reconfiguring how we maintain and use our bodies, how we see space and time, and how we *live.* Freegans, as Alex describes it, are the ones in modern society shouting "Stop!" As he explains it, "We represent the void of the system. It's like a credit card being voided 'no more.' We don't believe in this country. We don't give it any credit, because it's bankrupt."

Freegans are a countermovement to the alienation of modern life, pulling from the very processes that constitute society—such as the waste stream—what they need to create an alternative. They are, in their own words, trying to "empty these institutions. Turn society upside down. Change the signals. Drive people out of their old understandings." In this sense, I believe that we can best understand freegans within the framework offered by Polanyi (2001), who argued that the "movement" of laissez-faire capitalism and the "counter-movement" that sought to preserve human values and community are both perpetually present in society, in constant opposition to one another. Just as the nature of power, oppression, and domination have changed in a post-socialist, globalized world, so too has the response, and the two are locked in conflict at a level of existence more basic than the structure of the economy.

Fundamentally, I think freeganism is best understood as representing the New Social Movement paradigm of a cause focused on the "self-production of the human

[44] Which, as some scholars point out, are the fundamental underpinning of processes of ecological devastation and human exploitation (Darling 1951; Shepard 1967; Kinsley 1995)

species" (Melucci 1989:88). This role is most visible in the way that freegans challenge our traditional conceptions of human nature. The hegemonic power and all-encompassing reach of modern capitalism is such that it now plays a critical role "in shaping our fundamental assumptions about the nature of human beings, human desires, and the very possibilities for human social relations" (Graeber 2007:2). As a result, while anarchist ideas about autonomy, self-organization, mutual aid, and direct democracy have a certain amount of intrinsic appeal, we are socialized to think that enacting such principles in our society is impossible.

In opposition to this, freegans show—in little, day-to-day ways—that humans do not always have to be self-interested, competitive, or selfish. Freeganism, as Quinn put it, taught him to "not give a damn about giving up something someone else needs," and through freeganism, Annabelle learned "not to give a shit about being poor; I'd rather be happy." The aggregate of these individual actions can be quite impressive: freegans demonstrate that community can be built around compassion for weaker organisms and that economic relations can be predicated on sharing and gifting. While Mills claims that the social sciences have taught him that "the limits of human nature are frighteningly broad" (2000:6), I think that the possibilities that freegans offer for what it means to be human are not scary, but exhilarating. If the freegans are like "us," then perhaps the capacity for freegan ideals of cooperation, selflessness, and compassion—however imperfectly they are ever realized—is in our very nature as well.

Of course, a healthy degree of skepticism should be applied to any lessons that the freegans seek to teach us, and a good deal of criticism and scrutiny should be directed at the values they offer. Even freegans admit that their ideals, as Marguerite put it, are "so

far fetched, so elusive, you almost need to have a spiritual outlook on what we are doing to be part of it." Nonetheless, I hope that whether or not we *accept* freeganism as a good or appropriate mode of action this study contributes to the best traditions of the social sciences. My wish is that by setting the record straight on the freegans, I am aiding in the "enlargement of the universe of human discourse" (Geertz 1973:14) and the exploration of "the human variety, which consists of all the social worlds in which men have lived, are living, and might live" (Mills 2000:132).

By showing us one alternative—which is incomplete, utopian, and at times contradictory—the study of freeganism reminds us that "most of what we assume to be immutable has been, in other times and places, arranged quite differently, and therefore, that human possibilities are in almost every way greater than we ordinarily imagine" (Graeber 2007:1). Further study should chart the evolution of freegan ideas as they enter a wider world that is rapidly changing. Our scholarly focus should always be on the point of contact between freegans and those outside the movement, where the human possibilities freegans offer become most apparent.

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

*Diving In: The Ba*sic *Methodology*

It is a standard admonition among ethnographers to warn against "capture" (Newby and Buttell 1980:2), or the state of having been lured into adopting an uncritical stance towards the research subject. In this section, I aim to demonstrate that while I am captivated by freeganism, I nonetheless have avoided capture and have maintained the necessary distance to offer an accurate and probing analysis of freeganism.

The backbone of my research rests in participant-observation of events held by freegan.info. While I have already offered the results from some of this fieldwork (Barnard 2008), this study has expanded my previous body of observations to incorporate over 200 hours in the field. Over the last year-and-a-half, I have attended freegan trash tours; feasts; wild foraging expeditions; organizational meetings; gatherings of the website, strategic planning, and films and forums working groups; trainings; skillshares; free markets; speaking events; and bike and sewing workshops.[45] Even this list, though, somewhat understates the breadth of my experiences with freegan.info, as I have also spent a substantial amount of additional time with freegan.info collective members in more informal settings. I have, for example, passed afternoons helping to clean the freegan.info office and maintained ongoing electronic communications with freegan.info members, neither of which is counted in my official tally of field-work hours.

New to this work was the incorporation of semi-structured interviews. Using a snowball sampling method, I was able to speak in-depth with sixteen individuals who either self-identified as freegans or were—at some point—heavily involved in the

[45] For a listing and description of the types of events I attended, see the April Freegan Calendar in Appendix C.

activities of freegan.info. The number of interviews I obtained was limited by the small number of individuals who fit these criteria: indeed, I interviewed almost every regular participant in freegan.info meetings and organizational business. After a surprisingly small number of interviews, though, clear patterns and trends emerged, and as such, I believe my interviews present a thorough sample. These individuals represent a wide range of demographic characteristics, hold a variety of ideologies and engage in a breadth of different freegan practices. Additionally, I interviewed a representative from City Harvest and Reverend Billy of the Church of Stop Shopping in order to help contextualize the work of the freegans.

My interviews and participant-observation proved to be a highly effective combination (Lofland and Lofland 1995). Because I had already met all of my interview subjects through fieldwork, I was able to concentrate my interviews on analytical and complex questioning, rather than learning the basics of the interviewees' lives. Instead of attempting the impossible tasks of exploring every dimension of a freegans' life through an interview (Kusenbach 2003), I used the results of my interviews to probe for potential contradictions between practices and beliefs during my fieldwork. As a consequence, my time spent in the field was more akin to what Kusenbach (2003) describes as a "go-along"—in which the ethnographer takes an active stance towards prompting and interpreting sociologically interesting situations—rather than simply passively observing and hoping for something interesting to occur.

The search for potential inconsistencies between attitudes and actions was something I decided to explore further by examining freegan.info's written literature and communications. Moreover, since New Social Movement ideologies are often adopted

and developed through reading (McDonald 2000), I took it upon myself to read books that the freegans told me were important to their own beliefs.[46] I was able to use these texts, as well as freegan.info literature, much of it written by Adam, to develop a sense of the "ideal type" of freegan beliefs and practices against which I could compare the reality of freegan practice. My sense of the breadth of what it means to be "freegan" was further enhanced by examination of several thousand messages sent to the freegan.info e-mail lists, which have over 4000 subscribers.

The Subjects of the Study

One challenging methodological conundrum I encountered was attempting to clearly define the object of my study. It is a fallacy to assume that one single group or organization can be entirely representative of a subculture (Fine and Kleinman 1979). As such, it is important not to confuse this study—which is first and foremost a study of freegan.info and the individuals within it—with a study of freeganism writ large. Many freegans within freegan.info are extremely wary of being perceived as freegan "colonialists" who seek to impose their definition of freeganism onto a diverse and wide ranging community. They note, for example, that among those calling themselves "freegans" around the world are wealthy dumpster divers living in hipster lofts, Christians seeking to follow the voluntary poverty ideology of St. Francis of Assisi, erstwhile vegans whose primary interest is in finding a way to eat donuts free of guilt, and middle-aged middle-class individuals whose main experience with "dumpster diving" is picking up free furniture left on their neighbors' lawns. It is particularly telling that the individuals from freegan.info I describe are so different from the Australian

[46] For a listing of many of the texts freegans stated were important to them, please see Appendix C.

freegans interviewed by Edwards and Mercer (2007). Certainly, these results should not be over-generalized to the entire freegan community, and the lack of a comparative case study which might make that possible is certainly a limitation of this work (Fischer 1975).

Those caveats in place, I do not want to under-sell the applicability of this study. First of all, freegan.info is the world's most prominent self-identified freegan group. Media from around the world come to New York to do stories on freegan.info; some of them come despite having freegan organizations in their own countries. When freeganism is mentioned in academic publications, the authors cite to materials taken from the freegan.info website (See, e.g., Singer and Mason 2006; Ferrell 2006). I do believe that as the freegan movement develops and becomes more politicized in response to changing environmental and economic conditions, these observations of freegan.info will become more broadly relevant to understanding freegan practices, whether or not they fall under the freegan label.

Studying Freegans, Choosing Freeganism

A far more significant methodological issue that presented itself in my work with the freegan movement was the implications of my own personal political activism. Values are inevitably involved in the selection of an object of study (Mills 2000), and I freely admit that my own personal interest in animal rights, environmentalism, and social justice played a greater role than sociological fascination in my initial selection of freegan.info as a research subject. My experiences in the field, though, have only confirmed the worth of "starting where you are" (Lofland and Lofland 1995) and lent

credence to the observation that the best social science is produced by scholars who "do not split their work from their lives" (Mills 2000:195).

Freegan.info has been subjected to such an overwhelming bombardment of media coverage—as well as requests from scores of students seeking to write anthropology and journalism papers about them—that many freegans are highly skeptical of new researchers seeking access.[47] Moreover, the sheer volume of interactions they have with the media means that many freegans have carefully rehearsed sound-bites to offer about their beliefs and lifestyles. As an ethnographer seeking an accurate understanding of who freegans are—not just how they represent themselves—deeper access was critical. I found that my own characteristics—ranging from my background as an activist to my vegan diet and personal appearance—were markers of legitimacy that helped me earn the trust of the group. Moreover, Becker (1963) identifies the need for a researcher to abandon their own pattern of life to study deviants as a key barrier to effective ethnography as such groups. For me, though, my prior history allowed me to more smoothly transition to spending time among freegans.

Overall, my prior history of political involvement provided common experiences that helped me relate to my subjects. I could personally sympathize, for example, when freegans talked to me about being pulled over by police at a Critical Mass bike rally or

[47] Some of these interactions with the media have been not just time consuming but frustrating and humiliating. Janet once told me about a student journalist who followed the freegan group for several months creating a documentary film. The group assumed that the student would be producing a straightforward video about freegan ideology and practice. When they went to the films' screening, though, it appeared, in Janet's words, like "an outtake reel." The movie was a compilation of "all the gross things we had done in the last four months."

Adam recounts a similar story of the very first media piece done about freegan.info. He described the reporter from Newsday as "abusive," and told me that the photographer forced him to be depicted holding a mound of rotting cherries. When the story appeared, according to Adam, he looked like he was holding "two handfuls of dirt." These experiences feed into the general perception among freegans that the world is full of people seeking to exploit them, providing fertile grounds for being skeptical of providing overly easy access.

being heckled at an anti-fur protest. These facts confirm that, in some cases, cognitive distance is not the same as objectivity, and effective ethnography requires connection and empathy (Fernandez-Kelly 2006).

Choosing the freegans as the object of my study does indeed seem to perpetuate the bias among urban ethnographers towards examining the "unusual, the exceptional, and the exotic" (Suttles 1976:1). This bias becomes particularly problematic when social scientists force a sense of newness onto their findings. Once again, though, I felt that my prior activism helped me compensate for this tendency. From my own experiences, I understood that even extreme political radicals do not necessarily act from some psychological pathology, but are often simply approaching traditional concerns from a novel perspective. The shape this thesis has taken—emphasizing the situational nature of freeganism and the seemingly rational connections freegans make within their social context—is heavily influenced by the empathy I have for their cause, my understanding of our common humanity, and my capacity to see them as more than just deviant "others.".

Going Native in NYC

The closeness of my connection to freegan.info, however, stems from more than just a pre-existing affinity for freegan ideas. As I became more and more involved in my research—particularly, during three months I spent living in New York during the summer of 2008—I began to adopt freegan practices into my own life. As I argued in my Junior Paper (Barnard 2008), I believe my choice to engage in, rather than just watch, dumpster diving was imperative. It allowed me to personally explore the experience of

transgressing social taboos regarding trash as well as experience first hand the waste which drives so many freegans to take action. I felt first-hand the way that a concern for avoiding waste can become an obsession, and creep into the way an agent structures space and time. Moreover, by incorporating dumpster diving in my own life, I was able to critically evaluate certain claims freegan made through my own experience. For example, when I tried, unsuccessfully, to dumpster dive in my home town of Flagstaff, Arizona, I grew much more skeptical of the oft-repeated claim that a dumpster diving lifestyle is viable anywhere in the United States.

I soon found, however, that dumpster diving was not just methodologically helpful but also emotionally moving. Being exposed to the injustices that freegans confront on a daily basis brought made me more and more empathetic with the group. As Berger argues "powerful experiences can be generated while doing the research" and carries on to say that, rather than suppress those experiences, ethnographers should be "maximally reflexive about those experiences" (Berger 1981:238). In this spirit, I will state bluntly that I was highly offended by seeing starving, homeless individuals and hundreds of pounds of wasted food existing simultaneously on the streets during any given night of fieldwork. This experience drove me to become more involved with the freegan group, but I also think it enhanced my understanding. Either way, as time went on I transitioned into being an active participant in freegan meetings and began adopting responsibilities within freegan.info.

I am now probably among the fifteen most active members of freegan.info, and I acknowledge that this undoubtedly poses some problems in terms of my objectivity and

ability to criticize individuals I consider both friends and co-conspirators.[48] I have attempted to avert some of these issues by maintaining separation between my roles as an activist and an ethnographer. Because of this separation of roles, not all of my experiences as a member of freegan.info are incorporated into this work. Freegan.info meetings are "closed," and as such, I have declined to write about privileged internal discussions, even when those discussions would help to confirm other observations I have made. Additionally, I have attempted to walk a fine line between doing work for the group and changing the course of the group, which is particularly critical in an organization run based on consensus where a single individual—including myself—is able to "block" any proposal. The responsibilities I have assumed—such as moderating the freeganworld e-mail list and formatting the monthly calendar—are largely passive and involve implementing decisions made by others.

Ultimately, I believe that, for all the methodological pitfalls of it, my active participation in freegan.info was a moral necessity. Pellow (2004) argues that ethnographers have an obligation to "give back" to their subjects. Writing about low-income, racialized communities, Pellow is able to fulfill that responsibility simply by giving voice to a population that is typically marginalized and silenced. In my case, though, it is hard to see how simply writing about freegans in and of itself aids them. After all, the freegans have been on Oprah. They are not suffering for lack of exposure:

[48] Mauer (2002), writing about the animal rights movement of which she is a part, notes the challenge of being both a sympathizer and a sociologist: it is difficult to offer observations about the downsides of a movement that you want to see succeed.

plenty of people are studying and writing about them.[49] What they need is change, not discourse, and they desire action, not attention.

It is important for ethnographers not to delude themselves into thinking that their research helps people when it actually doesn't (Berger 1981). While I do hope that this work helps the freegans to develop a better self-understanding, move them towards reconciling conflicts in the movement, and aid them to create more effective strategies of recruitment, I understand that a pile of paper does little to help them address the massive injustices they perceive. As a result, I offer my own labor to the group as a partial compensation for their assistance with my project.

When looked at in its totality, I hope this helps to show that in certain cases, some methodological pretensions must be abandoned in the name of higher understanding (Duneier 1999; Mills 2000). As Berger writes, "rigor has a price, and in the marketplace of research the point is always not to pay too much for it" (1981:231). My goal in this section is not to pretend that I am free of biases but to acknowledge how those biases factored into this work, creating both opportunities and pitfalls.

[49] Adam once joked to me during a trash tour that most tours are one-third group members, one-third media, and one-third anthropologists. His fractions may not be right but there is still a grain of truth in his observations.

APPENDIX B: RACE AND THE FREEGAN MOVEMENT

The Homeless and the Boundaries of Freegan Appeal

During one trash tour, an African American man who smelled strongly of alcohol approached our group. His eyes were unfocused and he looked confused, suggesting drug use. When someone said, "He's hungry," the group leapt into action. Alex started explaining to the man some basic tips for dumpster diving, pointing out all the good food that was being thrown away. Another person on the tour started filling up a bag of bagels for him. Eventually, Alex managed to convince the man to start going through the garbage himself. He picked over a few items of produce, but then put them back. He didn't accompany us to the next stop, and he left the bag of bagels on the sidewalk.

While in Chapter VI I suggested that freeganism is a fairly diverse movement, I would be remiss if I did not admit that this does not really extend to racial or ethnic diversity. In stark contrast to the highly multicultural milieu of New York City, among the highly involved freegans I interviewed, only two—Leia and Sowmya—are non-white.[50] When Leia sought to start a Freegan Women's Caucus, there was widespread interest, but far less when she proposed a Freegan People of Color Caucus. Thus, it is short and situational interactions like the one I narrated above that tell us the most about how freegans deal with race (these encounters further suggest more about the boundaries of freeganism's appeal).

A strong aversion among minorities—even those who appear desperate and hungry—to eating dumpstered food is something I have observed time and time again. One night, after returning from a trash tour laden with food, a black woman came onto

[50] To be fair, some freegans—like Alex—who appear biologically white reject identifying themselves as white, because of what it connotes and the history to which it connects them.

my subway car begging for food and money. I opened my bag to her, and told her that she could have anything she wanted since I had gotten it all from a dumpster. She took a single packaged cookie and spurned all of the rest. The next day, at a freegan feast, I related this incident to Jason, who told me, "That's just dumb." Others suggested to me that, in the future, I simply not tell hungry people that the food had come from a dumpster.

This anecdote might suggest—in my opinion, falsely—that people within freegan.info are insensitive to the plight of homeless or starving individuals. In fact, I have seen many freegans go to great lengths to donate surplus food they find to homeless shelters. Moreover, during tours the group defers to people who appear to be poor or dumpster diving out of necessity, letting them gather what they want before diving in themselves. Such situations rarely present themselves, though, because freegan divers are almost never in competition with poor minorities. The unnamed college professor I profiled in Chapter VI commented to me:

> Indigent people don't do this. I always see people like me doing it, but I never see homeless or starving people doing it. I used to feel guilty for taking it from the homeless starving people, but the homeless starving people don't do it. We do it because we know we don't have to.

The professor's last sentence hit upon a critical point: freegans perceive what they are doing as empowering precisely because they don't have to do it.

This concept of "voluntary poverty" or willful anti-materialism has already been examined by some seemingly unlikely sources. Christian theologians have considered the life of St. Francis of Assisi, a medieval Catholic Saint who preached the merits of poverty, and noted that "the similarities between the poverty of the poor and poverty of the rich could never be more than superficial" (Wolf 2003:4). While Francis was able to

"give away all that he had … it was nowhere nearly as easy for him to dispense with his status as a formerly rich man" (Wolf 2003:43). The same is true of freegans. Although they may choose to live simple lives, it is ultimately very difficult for them to entirely dispense with their privileged status from being (generally) white and (generally) well-educated.

This privilege often makes it difficult for freegans to understand the reticence of poor individuals—many of whom could benefit financially and nutritionally from dumpster diving—to join in. In his ethnography of impoverished street vendors in New York City, Duneier (1999) displays the way that homeless men reject the stereotypical societal image of un-housed men as impotent and desperate. Garbage recovery is at the "bottom of the ladder" (Pellow 2004:123; Gowan 1997) of low-status work, and as such, for reasons of personal pride Duneier's vendors avoid dumpstering except as a last resort. As Leo, a panhandler, states, "I think it is degrading to go through trash, I would never go that low" (1999:84).

This aversion to dumpster diving is strengthened by the fact that whites and blacks are often treated differently for engaging in the same behavior, an injustice Duneier displays by contrasting black street vendors selling magazines and a white family selling Christmas trees. One African American trash tour attendee told me that, while she liked many things about freeganism, she didn't plan on becoming highly involved, because "I think it's a lot easier for white people to do that [dumpster dive]. People almost expect you [referencing the white author] to be doing something like that. When white people do it, everyone just assumes 'Oh, it's a project.'" She added, "You

definitely couldn't do that [hold a trash tour] in Bed-Stuy [a poor minority neighborhood in Brooklyn," because there are so few stores that sell fresh produce in that area.

I spoke with Leia about freeganism's appeal to non-white communities, and she told me that, while she certainly didn't object to freegan.info teaching useful skills for non-wasting to affluent, educated white people, she wished that the group offered more direct economic help to populations in need. In her view, for freegan.info to reach minorities, it needed a different repertoire of events, because people of color have an alternative set of barriers that hold them back from dumpster diving. Although poor, she claimed that minorities have a sense of pride in self-sufficiency: "There's shame attached to accessing social resources. It's like welfare or food stamps. You're supposed to be able to pull yourself up by your boot straps." Leia concluded that freeganism will never be able to reach into minority communities unless it "smashes" the master narrative, imposed on these communities by the dominant order, that "people taking care of each other is a bad thing." Until then, interactions like the one with which I opened this section will continue to be missed opportunities to find common ground.

A Klansman at the Freegan Bike Workshop

The freegan bike workshop is perhaps the most common space in which predominantly white freegans interact with individuals of color. While the people that volunteer the most in the workshop—Quinn, Wendy, and Christian—are white, many of the "patrons" are African Americans from the surrounding community of Bedford Stuyvesant, a notoriously poor and crime ridden community in Brooklyn that has recently been undergoing both urban renewal and gentrification. Some encounters I have

observed in the shop do tend to confirm Leia's observations: many minorities who come in looking for help with their bikes seem incredulous about the fact that they aren't being charged for parts and services. Quinn also told me that many people from the community would try to sell stolen bikes and stolen parts to the shop. These observations, aside, though, the shop exemplifies some positive racial interactions. A large number of people from the community come to the shop for help, and many of them return multiple times. Upstairs, the 123 Tompkins Center runs a popular after-school program for area youth.[51]

The general racial harmony of this situation, however, was almost shattered in late 2008, by Goran, a Bosnian Serb who had served in the Balkan Wars but was now working as a sanitation worker in the city. I met him one night in August, and immediately knew that his presence was going to be problematic. Goran confronted me about an anti-Bush t-shirt I was wearing; stating that he thought Bush was a fantastic President. Within the next few minutes, he had made several inflammatory remarks, stating bluntly that he thought it was appropriate for men to beat their wives and commenting on the inferiority of non-whites. Quinn then came out and chided Goran about the importance of being respectful. Quinn told me that, while Goran was racist, he had also helped some of Quinn's (black) Zimbabwean friends find jobs, and so he had allowed Goran to frequent the bike workshop and Surrealestate, a few blocks away.

Shortly thereafter, it emerged that Goran was a card carrying member of the Ku Klux Klan. Leia sent an irate e-mail to the freegan list, arguing that it was patently inappropriate for a member of an organization that promoted "genocide and apartheid" to be at a community space with a large African American constituency. Leia was not alone

[51] Once again, though, Quinn noted that the after school program had been problematic because many of the kids were unappreciative, disrespectful, and wouldn't obey the rules.

when she called for Goran to be immediately and unequivocally banned from all freegan events, a proposition she thought was self-evident enough that discussion was unnecessary. As Alex explained to me, "Every group has to be defined against something," and to him, there was nothing more opposed to the ideals of freeganism than fascism and racism.

There was a simultaneous chorus of voices raised in opposition to the idea of Goran being banned. Some freegans saw defending Goran at the bike workshop as analogous to the ACLU fighting for the right of the Neo-Nazis to march in the Jewish community of Skokie, Illinois. While no one in freegan.info agreed with Goran, some felt that it was not the place of the group to try to suppress his view. For them, the issue was not one of violence and oppression, but free speech and tolerance. Asked one individual, via e-mail, "So because someone disagrees with the conventional knowledge that racism is bad—he is to be 'banned?'" Added another person:

> My understanding, based on the initial description of the meeting with this person, was that he threatened no one and was willing to engage in a civilized conversation about his beliefs. If this bicycle shop is a place that is open to the general public and this man has not threatened anyone or disrupted any meetings or the shop's course of business, I see no reason why he should be banned.

Perhaps more telling, though, was that many individuals wrote to say that they saw any discussion of racism and the Klan as totally unconnected to freeganism. One individual asked why an e-mail list that, in her view, should be used solely for providing "information on how to live more frugally and do things that would help create a better world through less wasteful policies" should be used to discuss race, inequality, and colonialism. To an extent, then, this conflict over banning Goran seemed to reflect the division between the "anti-wasting" group of freegans, who saw the debate as

unconnected to their concerns about sustainability and the environment, and those who approach freeganism through a broader anti-capitalist and anti-oppression lens.

Of course, as I have frequently admitted, the different positions people took on Goran do not neatly divide freegans into "anti-capitalists" and "anti-wasters." While Leia and Jason talked about chasing Goran out of the shop "with a blunt object," Adam—generally one of the group's more radical members, and also one of those who expresses the most concern about racial dynamics within the group—admitted that he was speaking with Goran regularly in an effort to "rehabilitate" him. Others pointed out—quite rightly, based on my own cursory observations—that Goran appeared to have a mental disability, and that he told people of his membership in the KKK more to annoy people than to actually propagate an ideology of racial dominance.[52] Either way, while Goran has not been around the 123 space in months, the incident is still used by some to hint at both insufficient radicalism and insufficient tolerance within freegan.info.

Thoughts on Race and Freeganism

Consistent with Pellow's (2004) idea of "advocacy research," in which the researcher offers something back to the community he or she studies, I would like to identify a few problematic attitudes regarding race that I have at times encountered during my fieldwork, in the hopes that individuals within freegan.info can consider them and, if my observations prove supported, rectify them. The first stems from the frequent popular assertion that American in 2009—flush from electing its first ever black

[52] A few weeks after the freeganworld e-mail list exploded over the revelations about Goran, Adam sent an e-mail announcing that Goran had publicly renounced his membership in the KKK. Goran gave two reasons for his decision: first, that the organization wouldn't allow him to have black friends, and second, that the KKK allowed in women.

President—is essentially "post-racial." While I think few freegans would argue that race is irrelevant, I do believe that many perceive issues of race and discrimination to now be secondary in importance to environmental injustices. To some extent, this is reinforced by the tight-knit and self-reinforcing ideological setting of the freegan community: as Leia told me, some people think, "I don't believe in race, so there can't be racism." Just as freegans perceive a widespread interest in freegan ideas that perhaps exceeds actual interest, some may extrapolate from the lack of racism within the group a lack of racism in society at large.

The second problematic assertion I have heard is that freegan ideas don't "play well" in low income communities of color, or that freegans and such communities simply are not "on the same page." This is undoubtedly true of some elements of the freegan message. Adam once pointed out to me, "For some people, the message of 'stop buying so much' is inane and offensive, since they can't even provide for their real needs." Clearly, the idea of opposing waste applies differently in communities that lack the resources to even *produce* waste.

Nonetheless, as both the freegans and progressive scholars have pointed out, "everyone has many reasons to contest this world" (Carlsson 2008:240)—it's just that the reasons for contesting the system may be different in different settings. Causes that are often assumed to be the domain of rich, educated activists—like animal rights—receive a surprising level of support from minority communities (Nibert 1994; Jerolmack 2003; Kendall et al. 2006).[53] As such, the low participation of minorities in the animal rights

[53] These scholars describe this finding in terms of the 'underdog hypothesis:' minorities feel concern about the plight of animals because they perceive animals as suffering under the dominant forces of society, much like themselves.

movement may be a self-fulfilling prophecy. When outreach focuses on upper-income white communities, most recruits also come from that social stratum.

I believe the same may be the case of freeganism. Quinn once said that freegans and the poorer minorities interacting at 123 often did not understand each other, because freeganism "is about making things for the hell of it, but they need money, they want money." While this is one manifestation of freeganism, there are certainly other freegan practices that focus on providing for basic community needs in a way that might seem more relevant to people trying to survive day-to-day. The Black Panther Party acknowledged, "in order to bring people to the level of consciousness where they would seize the time, it would be necessary to serve their interests in survival by developing programs which would help them to meet their daily needs" (Newton qtd. in Hilliard 2008:3). Radical political ideologies can "play" quite well in low income communities if they help individuals overcome not just the abstract harm of capitalist exploitation but the challenges of everyday life. As Graeber (2007) notes, successful revolutions inevitably depend on coalitions between society's least marginalized and its most oppressed, and require the recognition that each has a critical contribution to make. Blacks and whites, gays and straights, freegans and professional hot dog eaters can all agree, for example, on how much the Citadel sucks.[54]

I do not, however, want to in any way insinuate that most freegans are racially insensitive. In fact, my observation is that freegans are among the most racially conscious white people I have ever met. Sometimes, though, their methods of approaching anti-racism strike me as misguided. One woman once told me excitedly that she found a book on race at a Really, Really Free Market. She said that since then she

[54] Seriously, fuck the Citadel.

has been reading "books about black people by black authors" because "I want to learn more about combating racism." While that is certainly one approach to learning about anti-racism, it struck me as a little silly that she saw reading books as the best way to learn about combating racism when she lived in one of the most diverse cities in the world.

In order to truly overcome racial issues within the group as well as identify concrete strategies for expanding freeganism into communities of color, dialogue and direct, face-to-face engagement are critical. I can see, however, how this call for more discussion and more debate could be frustrating. When I asked Quinn whether Surrealestate constituted first wave gentrification, he responded, "I choose not to think about that. You've got to do something." Quinn had a valid point. Activists should not be paralyzed from doing anything at all by the fear that their actions will be perceived as racially insensitive. At the same time, though, no one benefits from forging (or is it foraging?) on blindly.

APPENDIX C: FREEGAN DOCUMENTS

Why Freegan? An Attack on Consumption—In Defense of Donuts

(Reproduced unaltered—with the author's errors intact—from http://freegan.info/?page_-id=182)

Why Freegan?

Freeganism is essentially an anti-consumeristic ethic about eating; asking "Why freegan?" is essentially asking "Why not consumerism?" so here is a quick criticism of consumerism. Treading lightly on the Earth - Our high impact, produce & consume society puts a very intense strain on the Earth and her resources. Rainforests are clear-cut to provide more land for food production. Food production also consumes vast quantities of fresh water, one of our fastest-depleting resources. And then there is the packaging! Go look in your trash right now and most likely it will be filled with plastic, paper, and Styrofoam packaging from food products (if not you get mad props!). Go look in any trash or landfill and you will see literally tons & tons of packaging. The act of consumption is the transformation of natural land and resources into money for corporations and acres of trash in landfills. (This is not a good thing.)

Anti-Capitalism - If you are an "anti-capitalist", what better way to protest the economy than withdrawing from it and never using money?

Working Sucks - Where does the money you spend come from? You or your folks working long hours at a dehumanizing job, most likely. You don't have to compromise yourself and your humanity to the evil demon of wage-slavery! Working sucks and if a little scavenging can keep you from needing a job than go jump in a dumpster! Even if you do need to work to pay your bills, think about how much less you would have to work if you didn't have to buy food.

Privilege - We, in America, have so much and so many people all over the world have so little. Why do we have more? Because we're number one! Other folks are literally starving so that we can have fully-stocked shelves at our supermarkets and health food stores. If this concerns you (as it should) you can protest the unbalanced distribution in America and the world by sacrificing some of your privilege and feeding yourself off of the ridiculous excess of food instead of consuming products from that supermarket shelves we are so unjustly privileged to have access to.

The Ultimate Boycott - By not consuming, you are boycotting EVERYTHING! All the corporations, all the stores, all the pesticides, all the land and resources wasted, the capitalist system, the all-oppressive dollar, the wage slavery, the whole burrito! That should help you get to sleep at night.

Your Life - Think about how your life is wrapped up in the game of consumptions: think about the job you hate, the ugly billboards in your community, the horrible waste, the

stink, the fast pace and lack of compassion that surround you and understand that as you consume it, it consumes you. How much of your day is spent dealing with money? How does money affect your ideas about other people? Think abut how much more to life there is and find it, do it, go!

Criticism of Veganism:

The vegan theory is essentially a boycott of any products that injure animals in their production. The vegan consumers are flexing their monetary muscle and "voting with their dollars" for the products that don't injure animals. These dollars are voting for coca-cola, big corporate grocery stores, greasy-fast food (we all know Taco Bell vegans), and worse. Shouldn't truly conscientious folks seek something more? I don't vote because no matter who I vote for, the government always wins and when you "vote with your dollars", consumerism always wins, capitalism always wins. So…. make a list of all the unethical practices that really piss you off and make a list of all the corporations and products you want to boycott. Veganism is a good first step, but is your only concern animals? I made this list and when I was done, I couldn't really justify buying anything, I couldn't get behind any aspect of the corporate death consumer machine so I decided to boycott everything. I still spend money sometimes (I love going out for Thai food) but I try to be very conscientious about my consumption. Besides the concern that veganism as an ethic for eating stops short, it is also still a very high impact lifestyle. The packaging from vegan food doesn't take up less space in the landfill or consume less resources just because the food is vegan. The whole produce and consume dynamic is still played out, but the setting is a fancy health food store instead of a supermarket. veganism is not a threat, or a challenge to the wasteful practices of our capitalist society.

How Freegan?

Freeganism, also known as ethical eating, voluntary simplicity, monetary minimalism, the ultimate boycott, etc is fun and easy. Here are some basic tips:

Quality of Food - Freegans widely vary in their concern for health - some freegans gorge themselves on dumpstered donuts and some are still totally vegan, but get all their food for free. Most fall in the happy medium who would rather eat a load of bread with whey in it than make a $2 donation to the corporate death machine. Some freegans eat "edgy" food (on the edge of edibility) and some don't take chances. Some folks are even "meagan" - they eat meat if they get it for free.

Quantity of Food - A lot, everywhere. You have all seen that Food Not Bombs flyer about how many million pounds of food is wasted, well it is true. The food is plentiful. The food is good.

Strategy:

Dumpster Driving! - The best, easiest way to get the most food. Just head to your local grocery store, produce store, bagel and donut shop, bakery, K-mart (expired shelf

goodies), and open up the dumpster and take a look. Don't be afraid to climb in and dig around! Have fun, go with your friends! If you just find a big, scary compactor behind the store (a bunch of big supermarkets have these) you can't get in, but you can fight back. Start a local DLF (Dumpster Liberation Front!) and stick it to those compactors: superglue them so they don't work or hit them a bat or pee on them or pain them up; have fun - compactors are the enemy. P.S. Food is not the only thing in dumpsters! Happy scavenging!

Give-Aways! - A lot of small, independent places and even some bigger stores will give you food they are about to throw out if you just ask them for it. Also, free lunches and soup kitchens! Make sure you aren't taking food from someone who really needs it if you don't but most places have a lot of extra to go around. If you can get government food or food stamps, go for it! Go to Food Not Bombs and help out, then take some extra soup and bagels for the road… Just don't be afraid to ask and the food will come to you.

Plate scraping/Table-Diving - Go in a restaurant and either ask a worker if you can eat plate scraps or just sit with a drink and hop up and grab plates off tables when diners leave and finish off what they left. In fast food places you can pull half-drunk sodas and half-eaten orders of French fries out of the trash. Me and my dear sweet friend Peter once sat in Denny's for hours eating table dives. After awhile, diners would intentionally leave food on their plates for us or actually bring leftovers to our table. If a waitress/waiter lets this go on, leave a tip! I have heard stories of plate-scrapers in the mall food court getting offered money to buy some food- free cash if you want to work the pity. It is possible that you will get harassed and kicked out so this method is not fool-proof.

Wild foraging/Gardening - Get a book on edible plants and start looking around; there is a lot more edible food growing all around us than we realize. Also, if you live down the street from orange and grapefruit vines, don't buy oranges and grapefruit! If you live down in West Palm Beach, don't buy cans of coconut milk for Thai curry. Learn what grows in your area and find it or plant it. You can start your own garden in your yard or in that empty lot up the street. You don't need a lot of land of gourmet soil, just some dirt. Maybe your city even has a community garden and you and your friends could get a plot. For seeds, remember all those great fruits and veggies you just dumpster-dove? Plant the seeds and stick the bad parts, stems and excess in a pile outside with some dirt. As the plant matter decomposes it will be magically transformed into super-rich compost, which makes a great fertilizer. Your newly planted seeds will be thrilled.

Barter - Set up a local network that trades and/or shares goods and services. "I'll give you my extra tend pounds of broccoli if you fix my bike." "Hey dudes! Feast at my house! We made a great find and I love sharing the wealth of the dumpster!"

Scams/Shoplifting - There are a slew of shady ways to score free food…always let your conscience be your guide!

Shoplifting - There is some debate over how freegan this really is because you are still creating an empty shelf that must be restocked, but it is more freegan than forking over

big bucks. This is a more direct attack on the store selling the goods, not the producer (unless you hyper-boycott a product: pick something you can't stand and consistently get it off the shelves, steal it, break it, hide it, just eliminate it and the store will eventually stop selling it) so you should consider if you are putting a ma & pa organic veggie stand our of business or just chipping away at a corporate giant.

Employee Theft - Some folks believe this to be more ethical than shoplifting because it is a trade-off: they steal your time and energy and you steal their food. If you work somewhere that sucks, hook yourself up, hook up your friends, hook up strangers, hook up your local FNB! I have heard tales of a kid who feeds a three-person household of his workplace acquisitions from the health food store. They eat damn good, too! You can also get the insider scoop and may be able to intercept food headed for the dumpster.

Returns - Example: we just dove a bunch of jars of mayonnaise. We don't want to eat it, so we return it to the store, say we bought it and couldn't use it/don't want it and trade it in for cash or good food or store credit. Some stores throw away anything that is returned that costs less than $50, so you can find expensive stuff, in a package, with a receipt!

Extending the Ethic - Withdrawal from the consumer death culture doesn't have to end with food:

Energy - Use solar energy, make a solar oven, hang our wash on a line, don't use the air conditioner or heater when you can put on/take off clothes, open a window or use a fan, wash your dishes by hand - dishwashers consume a lot of energy and water, turn off lights when you aren't using them.

Water - Don't shower often and when you do, instead of showering, "go swimming" in the shower with a friend - it is fun, explorative, liberating, and consumes less water! Don't flush when you pee! If won't hurt you, pee just sits in the toilet not bothering anyone; it doesn't warrant the 10 gallons per flush just to get rid of it. Wait until you get a good healthy poop in there and then flush it all away. If you don't like the smell of pee stagnating in the toilet, pee outside our dilute your urine (7 water to 1 pee) and fertilize with it or drink it (Gandhi drank a cup of his own pee every day). Also, you can make manure out of your own poop! Or… dumpster dive some adult diapers and have a party where everyone straps one on and fills it up -no water wasted.

Carlessness - cars are gross and expensive, not to mention the gas companies, who are as evil as can be (look at Iraq, do you really want to fund the slaughter of innocent people?). Ride a bike or a bus or put a bike on the bus or hitchhike or walk or roller skate or canoe or skateboard or hop a train or if you are gonna use a car than carpool, for Pete's sake! Or have 10 people split the cost of a community car that you all share. Or at least convert your engine to run on recycled vegetable oil. (Yes, this can be done!)

Homebrew - Don't buy alcohol! Alcohol corporations are big and scary and perpetuate fucked up gender roles and beauty myths with their advertising. Brew your own wine and beer!

Get a Cup! - Get a big, durable plastic cup with a lid and a fork or spoon and carry if with you at all times. This will dramatically reduce the amount of disposable silverware and bowls/plates/cups/bottles you consume. Instead of buying a bottle of beverage, fill up your cup with water. Eat out of it too. If you get on the seals, you can take home restaurant leftovers in it instead of in Styrofoam!

Get a Hanky! - Carry a handkerchief with you and you won't need tissues or paper towels and it is handy to have for spills, tears etc.

Squat - If you can live in an abandoned building for free, do it!

Stretch - Stretch what you have! Before you throw something away, ask yourself (repeatedly) "will I ever use this for anything? Do I know anyone who will?" Before you buy anything figure out if you can make it, borrow it, do without, fix the one you already have or get it for free somehow. How long will it last, how often will it get used, can you share it with others, can you recycle it or reuse it when it stops working? If it costs $5, ask yourself if it is worth an hour of your life. If not, do without it. Repair your clothes, buy second-hand, share! Fix old stuff instead of buying new stuff. Learning how to fix things yourself saves you money and brings independence and self-reliance. Free yourself from the consumer mindset - the solution to all your problems can not be found at the shopping mall!

Conclusion:

There are two options for existence: 1) waste your life working to get money to buy things that you don't need and help destroy the environment or 2) live a full satisfying life, occasionally scavenging or working your self-sufficiency skills to get the food and stuff you need to be content, while treading lightly on the earth, eliminating waste, and boycotting everything. Go!

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NOTE: This was typed up by an anonymous vegan in Feb of 2000. Nothing was really changed from the original version obtained from the Death Metal Militia Distro/Green Monkey Collective. If you lack a printer or are reading this at a library with no printers, etc, and want paper copies, send a dollar to them at PO Box 17838 / Clearwater, FL 34622 or write to them via email at clearwaterfnb@hotmail.com for more info.

Freeganism in Practice

(Reproduced from the writings of Adam Weissman with minor formatting and removal of extraneous information)

Freeganism in Practice:
Strategies for Cooperative, Sustainable Living Beyond Capitalism.

1. Visit http://freegan.info and learn about freegan philosophies, facts, and practices.

2. Join the Freeganworld email list at http://freeganworld.freegan.info

3. Start a local community of people committed to resisting capitalism by creating a sustainable, local, cooperative economic model as an alternative.

4. Read books on the injustice of capitalism, the unsustainability of industrialism, and on practical strategies for sustainable living. Start a book discussion group! Familiarize yourself with concepts like mutual aid, the notion of a society based on voluntary cooperation, and gift economics, an economic model where everything is shared freely. Learn about why the threat of human extinction within the century as a result of climate change makes ending our current economic model an absolute necessity.

5. Grow your own food—even if you live in the city! Urban dwellers are growing food in abandoned lots, on rooftops, and terraces.

6. Eat wild! Edible and medicinal wild plants grow all around us. Learn about your local plants and forage them from parks and yards. Share what you learn with others!

7. Start a Really, Really Free Market at a local community center, school, or place of worship. Really, Really Free Markets are fairs celebrating gift economics and mutual aid. People bring food, clothing, books, and all manner of goods cluttering their homes to give away to others free of charge. People also freely share services, education, and entertainment—musical performance, massage, lessons on practical skills like crocheting and bicycle repair, free films and lectures on political affairs and current events.

8. Freely share and receive useful goods with others in your community via http://freecycle.org.

9. Live rent-free! With your community, occupy abandoned buildings and restore them into "squats"—rent free housing and community centers with arts and educational programs for low-income communities.

10. Start a bike program to wean your community from petroleum addiction. Set up a "bike library"—a free bike sharing program. Establish a free bike repair workshop, where people can build and keep working bikes out of donated and discarded bike parts or fix their own bikes with the help of experienced volunteer instructors.

11. Set up free repair workshops for furniture, clothing, computers, and other goods. Fixing the goods we already have diverts resources from the landfills and incinerators while helping people avoid buying more stuff.

12. Tap the waste stream! Recover wasted goods from the garbage of supermarkets and other retail stores, college dorms, houses and apartment buildings, factories and distribution centers, and offices and schools. You'll easily find food, books, clothing, office supplies, furniture, computers, construction materials, musical instruments, appliances and other items, often in brand new condition. Food retailers discard enormous quantities of fresh, clean usable food in great variety--50% of all food is wasted worldwide! "Urban foraging" (also called "dumpster diving" can easily reduce your food costs to zero! Visit college dorms around the end of the semester—homebound college students toss a treasure trove of usable goods to avoid the cost and difficulty of moving them home. If you find things you don't need, instead of leaving them in the trash or selling them, share them for free with others on Freecycle or at a Really, Really Free Market.

13. Share food with your community. Food Not Bombs groups in over 200 cities recover food that would otherwise go to waste and use it to prepare warm meals on the street to promote and ethic of sharing and feed hungry people, challenging a society that can always pay for war, but never seems able to ensure that all are fed. Learn more at http://foodnotbombs.net.

14. Organize skillshares to disseminate practical Do It Yourself knowledge on living sustainably and money-free-- teach people how to make clothing soap, or ecologically friendly household cleaners; how to create set up passive solar food dehydrators, ovens and heating system, or terrace planters using materials found in dumpsters, rainwater collection or how to convert cars to run on straight vegetable oil. Search the internet and DIY manuals for info on how to make soap and all manner of practical goods for free using waste materials.

15. Embrace carlessness. Use bikes, feet, foot scooters, skates, or skateboards. Get a free bike from a bike collective in your area. Try hitchhiking (http://hitchwiki.org) or finding a ride from someone already going your way on a rideshare board. Hop freight trains to travel long distances. If none of those are options, use public transportation. Acquire a heavy-duty bike trailer or cargo tricycle for moving groceries or other supplies. For multi-passenger trips, consider a four wheel, four-seat quadracycle.

16. If you must use a car, acquire a used diesel vehicle and convert its engine to run on straight vegetable oil. Consider a shared community car or truck for heavy moving jobs or passenger-dense road trips rather than owning a private car. If you are making a road trip and have extra car space, pick up hitchhikers or post details on your trip to rideshare boards. Arrange carpools for regular frequent trips.

17. Once you've read a book, pass it on! Visit http://www.bookcrossing.com/ for suggestions. Or, create a lending library in your apartment building or community center.

18. Develop free, independent, non-corporate media. Start a free newspaper or news website or get involved with your local Independent Media Center (http://indymedia.org). Launch a pirate radio station. Get your information about the world from independent, free media, rather than listening to the capitalist propaganda of the corporate media.

19. Keep a free box inside you home by your door of items you don't want or need, but that are too useful to end up in the trash. Encourage friends, relatives, and neighbors, to help themselves.

20. Set up a permanent "free store" at a local place of worship, community center, or in a common space of your apartment building. Encourage community members to donate items they don't need and freely take ones they do.

21. As your monetary needs diminish, consider quitting your job, and changing careers to work for a non-profit charitable or environmental, social justice, or animal rights activist organization. Or cut back on your work hours or quit your job altogether, devoting your time instead to volunteering in your community. Freeing up countless hours from waged labor, you'll also find more time for appreciating friends and family, communing with nature, pursuing artistic interests and hobbies, and learning more practical skills for freegan living.

22. Avoid disposable goods. The goods we use should be designed to last and preserved for longevity. Use rags over paper towels, handkerchiefs over paper tissues, and carry mugs rather than use disposable cups. In the process you'll reduce your need to continually buy replacements and conserve natural resources.

23. Appreciate and create free culture. Attend and share information about free events parties, educational forums, free schools, nature hikes, walking tours, workshops that teach practical skills, concerts, discussion group and other activities where people can learn and have a great time without spending a dime. Find events and activities on email lists, free calendars, and websites like http://freenyc.net. Consider creating a print and/or online free events calendar for your community. Organize free movie screenings, lectures, and discussions on environmental and social justice issues.

24. Welcome travelers and others who need a place to crash, and replace the absurd, oxymoronic concept of the "hospitality industry" with genuine hospitality. You can list the availability of your home as a crashpad for travelers on couchsurfing sites. And when you need a place to stay on your own travels, you can visit these same sites for a welcoming home happy to invite you to crash.

25. Stop shopping! Resist manipulative advertisements that tell you that you can find happiness and self-worth on retail store shelves. Research the social and ecological consequences of every product you consider buying. Before buying, ask yourself‹do I really need this? Can I fix something I already have? Can I acquire what I need by a means other than buying? If you must buy, purchase second-hand items to avoid directly financing the production of new commodities—and save money in the process! Craigslist (http://craigslist.org) is a good place to look for 2nd hand items for fee or for sale by individuals, not corporations. Local thrift stores are also an option.

26. Celebrate Buy Nothing Day, the international day of protest against consumerism. Organize a creative protest or street theater event in your community to tell people to stop shopping on the traditional busiest shopping day of the year.

27. Establish a community healthcare collective. Develop a network of healthcare practitioners who are willing to provide free or low-cost healthcare, provide healthcare on a sliding scale, or to exchange healthcare for goods or services. Hold free workshops on health and wellness. Distribute publications on healing with wild herbs. Collect and redistribute vitamin bottles discarded by vitamin shops. Hold free yoga classes. Set up a free community health clinic for uninsured people. If you live in a city with a healthcare collective, take advantage of the services they provide!

28. Use passive solar and passive cooling instead of fossil fuel consumptive heat and air conditioning. Make a solar cooker and a solar food dehydrator out of found objects.

29. Make candles and oil lamps using waste oil or grease.

30. Establish or volunteer with a mutual aid childcare collective. It takes a village to raise a child, but under capitalism child care has become yet another salable commodity. Childcare collectives share the childcare responsibility, making childcare accessible to those who could not otherwise afford it and making childcare a community function.

31. Start a free school. Free schools provide learning opportunities outside of the money economy while rejecting the rigidity, coercion, competition, and authoritarian hierarchal structure of conventional schools.

32. Compost organic waste to create new soul for your garden. Learn how at http://vegweb.com/composting/.

33. For additional practical tips that go beyond the three Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle), visit http://3rs.freegan.info.

34. Bring it all together. Freegan practices are not intended to be practiced in isolation, but rather are intended to be components of an overall cooperative, decentralized, egalitarian social structure and economic system based on ensuring that the needs of all people are met while respecting the planet and the creatures we share it with. No one has time to do everything, but everyone can do something. Maybe your focus will be childcare or rooftop gardening or helping others create passive solar heating systems. Maybe you'll rotate between a few tasks. Others will work on the projects you don't have time for. The critical thing is for the all these projects to network and coordinate the resources they offer. We need all of these things. We need childcare and healthcare. We need food and shelter. In isolation, living without participating in capitalism is overwhelmingly difficult. However, as more and more projects come together to offer alternatives to more and more needs normally served under capitalism, living mostly or entirely within the freegan gift economy and the capitalist economy will be a viable alternative. The freegan economy will offers a better quality of life, more freedom, and a deeper sense of community than people can find under capitalism. Organize meetings and social events like freegan dinners to bring together representatives of various mutual aid projects to build relationships and encourage collaboration. Make sure the people of your community know the full range of mutual aid resources and services available to them by publishing and freely distributing community mutual aid directories in print and online.

35. Recognize that freeganism is primarily a social project, and avoid "lifestylism." Lifestylists believe that all we need to do to protect the environment, advocate for social justice, and stop animal exploitation is to change our personal consumption practices. This makes about as much sense as believing that the holocaust could have been stopped by a boycott on German products. The significance of freeganism is not primarily in the reduced consumption impact of each individual, but rather in the construction of a new ecologically sustainable and socially equitable economic model. As a new economy rises to provide for people's basic needs amidst the ongoing collapse of global capitalism, a robust freegan counter-economy will help people realize that the expansion of the freegan economic model and the total destruction of global capitalism represent the best chance of ensuring that their basic needs will continue to be met. Similarly, at a time when global warming caused by industrial civilization threatens the survival of all life on earth, a functional freegan economy operating simultaneously with industrial capitalism will help people recognize the solution to global warming is not "market solutions" or regulation, but rather the total destruction of capitalism and a shift towards simple, local, sustainable subsistence-based gift economies.

Industrialism and capitalism will collapse inevitably as they exhaust the resources they rely on, but if they collapse on their own, the irreparable damage they do our planet's climate and ecosystems will guarantee the demise of almost all life on the planet, including human life, by the early 22nd century. As we build our new, humane, equitable, and ecologically sustainable culture, we also need to work to bring down capitalism and industrial society. This will involve direct action in the tradition of the Luddites and other revolutionary groups. The capitalists will not voluntarily surrender the system that has created their riches. It will involve conflict and risk. But given the price of inaction we have no other choice. In the words of Frederick Douglass, "This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without demand. It never did and it never will."

April 2009 Freegan Events Calendar

Freegan Bike Workshop * Every Wednesday & Saturday
Learn to turn found bike parts into working bicycles & build your own bike. More info? (727) 424-2868. Workshops are Wed. 6-9pm, & Sat. 2-7pm. On Weds, a free vegan dinner will be served.6pm to help cook & 8pm to eat. Media WILL be welcome at the Wed. workshops with appointment, but the Sat. workshops are media-free. At the 123 Community Space in Bed-Stuy, Bklyn at 123 Tompkins, G train to Myrtle-Willoughby.

Friday, April 3 * Freegan Film Night
The Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil: join us for a free film screening of the powerful documentary presentation of how Cubans have adapted to limited energy resources and the continued US embargo. For more info on the film, see www.powerofcommunity.org
When & Where? 7:30pm at The Change You Want to See (www.changeyouwanttosee.org) at 84 Havemeyer St. in Williamsburg, Bklyn. Take the L to Bedford, J to Marcy, or G to Metropolitan

Saturday, April 4 * Freegan Sewing Workshop
Learn how to turn found fabrics into clothing & make and repair your own clothes. Together we teach and learn hand and machine sewing, patching, darning, quilting and alterations. If you have sewing skills, please come and share them! For more info call Jason at (610) 764-7587. NOT open to media.
When & Where? Workshops are held the first and third Saturdays of every month from 2-7pm at the 123 Community Space in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn at 123 Tompkins, G train to Myrtle-Willoughby.

Monday, April 6 * Freegan Meeting & Trash Tour
An organizational meeting to report on working group activities and discuss and decide on policies and activities. Meetings are for active Freegan.info volunteers and people interested in volunteering, and are not introductory discussions about freeganism. After, we will explore the area's wasted food and other goods. Meeting is NOT open to media, but the tour WILL be open to media that have scheduled in advance.
When & Where? 7pm at the Sakia atrium, 150 Park Ave at 42nd St. To come just for the tour, meet at 9:30pm at the NW corner of 38th St. and 3rd Ave.

Thursday, April 9 * Reading Group
Our book group reads and discusses books on topics relevant to freeganism. This week will be a summary and book discussion of Peter Gelderloos' *How Nonviolence Protects the State*. Please read prior to the meeting. If you have any questions, call (203) 571-8866. Not open to media.
When & Where? Meef at 7:30pm at the Sakia atrium, 150 Park Ave at 42nd St.

Sunday, April 12 - Edible Wild Plant Foraging Walk
Join freegan forager Zaac on a walk to learn to identify common wild edibles. Bring a garden trowel if you have one, and bags for collecting wild edibles. Media WILL be welcome with appointment.
When & Where? 11am at the at stone benches at the Grand Army Plaza entrance of Prospect Park in Brooklyn. (2 train to Grand Army Plaza or Q to 7th Ave.) Can't find us? call Zaac at (203) 571-8866.

Thursday, April 16th * How can freegans respond to the economic crisis?
Join us for speakers and a discussion on the current economy and our possible responses to it.
When & Where? 7:30pm at The Change You Want to See (www.changeyouwanttosee.org) at 84 Havemeyer St. in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Take the L to Bedford, J to Marcy, or G to Metropolitan

Saturday, April 18 * Freegan Sewing Workshop
Learn how to turn found fabrics into clothing & make and repair your own clothes. If you have sewing skills, please come and share them! For more info call Jason at (610) 764-7587. NOT open to media.
When & Where? Workshops are held the first and third Saturdays of every month from 2-7pm at the 123 Community Space in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn at 123 Tompkins, G train to Myrtle-Willoughby.

Monday, April 20 * Freegan Meeting & Trash Tour
An organizational meeting to report on working group activities and discuss and decide on policies and activities. After, we will explore the area's wasted food and other goods. NOT open to media.
When & Where? 7pm at the Taco Hell on 14th Street between University and 5th Ave. (where we won't be buying anything!) For the tour, meet at 9:30pm just outside the meeting location.

Thursday, April 23 * Reading Group
Our book group reads and discusses books on topics relevant to freeganism. This week we will start Larry Lohmann's *Carbon Trading: a critical conversation on climate change, privatization, and power.* Please read the first couple chapters prior to the meeting. Any questions? call (203) 571-8866. Not open to media.
When & Where? Meet at 7:30pm at the Sakia atrium, 150 Park Ave at 42nd St.

Thursday, April 23 * Brooklyn Bicycle Trash Tour
Bring your bikes to visit some favorite spots for dumpstering in Brooklyn. There are bicycles available to lend. Any questions or if you cannot find us, call Sara at (516) 526-0805. NOT be open to media.
When & Where? 8:30pm at Court & Montague in Brooklyn Heights (near the 2/3 Court St. subway).

Friday, April 24 * Trash Tour
Join us to collect the quality products that stores throw out. We give advice on how to salvage these goods & comment on the reasons for such waste.
When & Where? Meet at 9pm on the NW corner of Broadway and 115th St.

Saturday, April 25 * Freegan Feast and New Volunteer Orientation
First, share in food preparation and then in the good company of a group of people who care about each other and about change. After this month's freegan feast, we'll explain a bit about the internal workings of freegan.info, and hear from all of our working groups, who will explain more about what they do and how you can get involved.Media WILL be welcome with appointment for the cooking portion of the night.
When & Where? Location is TBA; meet at 5:30pm to cook and 8pm to eat and have the orientation.

Can't find us, call Janet: (347) 724-6954 • More info? ask@freegan.info • www.freegan.info

Freeganism = living beyond capitalism.

In a society of massive overconsumption, enormous quantities of usable resources go to waste. Through dumpster diving, squatting, guerilla gardening and other strategies, freegans transform waste into resources to meet real needs, allowing us to live our values of ecological sustainability, cooperation & sharing while reducing our contribution to capitalism's abuse of humans, animals and the earth.

Ongoing Sustainable & Freegan Events

Composting
Lower East Side Ecology Center accepts organic material for composting (fruit and vegetable peelings, cut flowers and similar organic material). LESEC has drop-off bins at the Union Square Greenmarket (Mon, Wed, Fri, & Sat. from 8am-5pm), or drop off at the center on E. 7th St. btwn. Aves. B & C any time through the opening in the gate. For more info see www.lesecologycenter.org.
The W. 181st St. Beautification Project has compost drop-off: 880 W. 181st St. (Bronx) in the garden.

Computer and Electronics Recycling
Per Scholas is a recycling facility in Hunts Point that allows individuals to drop off residential computer & electronic equipment. They accept equipment Mon. to Fri. 9am-4pm at 1575 Bronx River Ave. in the Bronx. For more information, see www.perscholas.org
Lower East Side Ecology Center has e-waste recycling 4/5 from 10am-4pm in the north plaza of Union Square; 4/18 at Travers Park, 78th St. btwn. Northern Blvd. & 34th Ave. in Jackson Heights, Queens; and 4/19 in Pelham Bay Park, Middletown Rd. parking lot, off Staduim Ave. in the Bronx.

Plastics Recycling
Park Slope Food Co-op accepts many plastics for recycling that are NOT collected by the city. (NEW guidelines!) They accept: #1 and #6 transparent plastics (but NOT bottles, which NYC recycles), #5 plastics (remove any paper labels), and clear plastic film only. All plastics must be CLEAN AND DRY. They're open every month on the 2nd Sat, 10am-2pm; the 3rd Thurs, 7pm-9pm; & the last Sun, 10am-2pm. The co-op is at 782 Union St. (btwn. 6th & 7th Aves.) in Park Slope. See: www.foodcoop.com/go.php?id=112
Whole Foods now accepts #5 plastics and Brita filters (bagged after being allowed to dry out for 3 days) at their stores at Union Square, Columbus Circle, Greenwhich St. and Houston St. Many of their stores also accept household batteries for recycling.

Weekly Bike Repair Workshops by Times Up
Times Up! bike repair workshops are now in two locations! See www.times-up.org for more info.
MANHATTAN WORKSHOPS are at ABC No Rio, at 156 Rivington St. in the Lower East Side.
Women & Trans Bicycle Repair Night: Every Mon, 6:30pm. No previous experience required.
Bike Repair Workshops: Every Tuesday, 6:30pm. Come learn how to fix bikes, do simple maintenance and tune-ups at the bike mechanic skill share.
Fix Your Bike Workshop: Every Thursday, 6:30pm. Share skills and fix up your own bike.
BROOKLYN WORKSHOPS are at the new Brooklyn space at 99 South 6th St, off Bedford Ave.
Fix Your Bike Workshop: Every Wednesday, 6:30 p.m. Share skills and fix up your own bike.
Bike Repair Workshops: Every Sunday, Lessons from 2-4 p.m., Open Workshop from 4-6 p.m.

Textile Recycling (NEW LOCATIONS!)
Of course, the best thing to do with clothes and other textiles is to reuse them! BUT, if you have scraps that can't be used even one more time, there is textile recycling: Fridays, 8am-2pm at the 97th St. Greenmarket, 97th & Columbus; Saturdays, 8am-4pm at the Grand Army Plaza Greenmarket in Brooklyn; Saturdays and Mondays, 8am-6pm at the Union Square Greenmarket; and Sundays, 8am-4pm at the Tompkins Square Greenmarket, E. 7th St. & Ave. A.

Food Not Bombs
Food Not Bombs in Manhattan offers a vegetarian meal share (using donated food that would otherwise be wasted) Sundays at 3:30pm in Tompkins Square Park. Help cook at ABC No Rio, 156 Rivington St. btwn. Clinton & Suffolk at 1pm. More info: fnb@abcnorio.org or (212) 254-3697 ext.395
Brooklyn Food Not Bombs prepares food from 12-3pm on Saturdays at the 123 Community Space in Brooklyn (123 Tompkins, G train to Myrtle-Willoughby) and serves at 3pm just outside Von King/Tompkins Park (NW corner of Lafayette Ave. & Marcy Ave.). More info: brooklynfnb@gmail.com
Bushwick Food Not Bombs prepares food Thursdays at 10:30am at Surreal Estate, 1st floor of 15 Thames St. (L to Morgan) and serves at 1pm at Bushwick Park on Knickerbocker Ave between Starr St & Suydam St. For more info email fnbbushwick@gmail.com or call (972) 743-5669.

Wild Food Tours
"Wildman" Steve Brill holds tours where you can learn to find wild growing plants for food and medicine. The fee is $12 ($6 for children) sliding scale, but no one is turned away for lack of funds. Tours this month in NYC are 4/12 in Central Park; 4/19 in Prospect Park, Bklyn; 4/25 at the Woodhaven Library in Queens, and also in Forest Park, in Kew Gardens, Queens; and 4/26 in Central Park. See details and reserve a spot at www.wildmanstevebrill.com or call (914) 835-2153.

Grub Community Building Meal
1st & 3rd Sunday every month. A mostly freegan dinner for strangers and co-conspirators in a relaxed environment. There is no charge but donations are requested. At Rubulad, 338 Flushing Ave. (btwn. Classon & Taaffe) in Brooklyn. Doors at 6:30pm; dinner at 7. www.suckapants.com/grub.html

Freegan Reading List

(Reproduced with editing from http://freegan.info/?page_id=443)

Anarchism, Communism, and Anti-Capitalism

Against His-story, Against Leviathan, by Freddy Perlman
Anarchist Morality, by Peter Kropotokin
Capital, by Karl Marx
Kropotokin: The Politics of Community, by Brian Morris
Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War—Gerrard Winstanley and the Digger Movement, by David Petegorsky
Rebels Against the Future: The Luddites and Their War Against the Industrial Revolution, by Kirkpatrick Sale
The Case Against the Global Economy, by Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith
The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power, by Joel Bakan
The Dispossessed, by Ursula Leguin

Animal Rights

Animal Rights/Human Rights, by David Nibert
Animals as Persons, by Gary Francione
Introduction to Animal Rights: Your Child or Your Dog, by Gary Francione
Making a Killing: The Political Economy of Animal Rights, by Bob Torres
The Way We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter, Jim Mason and Peter Singer

Consumption and Waste

Affluenza: The All Consuming Epidemic, by John de Graaf, David Wann, and Thomas Naylor
Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole, by Benjamin Barber
Consuming Desires: Consumption, Culture, and the Pursuit of Happiness, by Roger Rosenblatt
Empire of Scrounge, by Jeff Ferrell
Garbage Land: On the Secret Trail of Trash, by Elizabeth Royte
Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago, by David Pellow
Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage, by Heather Rogers
Made to Break: Technology and Obsolescence in America, by Giles Slade
Rubbish!: The Archaeology of Garbage, by William Rathje and Cullen Murphy
The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need, by Juliet Schor
Voluntary Simplicity, by Duane Elgin
Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash, by Susan Strasser
Waste Makers, by Vance Packard

Guidebooks to Freegan Practices and Freegan Narratives

A Field Guide to Edible Wild Plants, by Lee Allen Peterson
Anybody's Bike Book: A Comprehensive Manual of Bicycle Repairs, by Tom Cuthbertson
Barnett's Manual: The Ultimate Technical Bicycle Repair Manual, by John Barnett
Bin Raiders, by David McKay
Eat the Rich, by Food Not Bombs
Field Guide to Medical Wild Plants, by Bradford Angier, David Foster, Arthur Anderson, Jacqueline Mahannah, and Kristen Workman
Food for Free, by Riachrd Mabey
Hopping Freight Trains in America, Duffy Littlejohn
Identifying and Harvesting Edible and Medical Plants in Wild (and Not So Wild) Places, by Steve Brill
Living Well on Practically Nothing, by Edward Romney
Making Stuff and Doing Things, by Kyle Bravo
Steal This Book, by Abbie Hoffman
The Joys of Not Working, by Ernie Zelinski
Veganic Gardening, by Kenneth O'Brien

Organizing and Resistance

Critical Mass: Bicycling's Defiant Celebration, by Chris Carlsson
Days of War, Nights of Love, by Crimethinc
Easy Bay Food Not Bombs, by Lydia Gans and Cary Karacas
Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkey-wrenching, by David Foreman
Ecotage! By Sam Love
Grassroots Revolutionary Strategy, by Brian Dominick
No Trespassing: Squatting, Rent Strikes, and Land Struggles Worldwide, by Anders Corr
Nowtopia: How Pirate Programmers, Outlaw Bicyclists, and Vacant-Lot Gardeners are Inventing the Future Today, by Chris Carlsson
Recipes for Disaster: An Anarchist Cookbook, by Crimethinc

Primitivism, Anti-Civilization, and Environmentalism

Against Civilization, by John Zerzan
Against the Megamachine: Essays on Empire and Its Enemies, by David Watson
An Unnatural Order, by Jim Mason
Endgame, by Derrick Jensen
Growth Fetish, by Clive Hamilton
Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution, by Peter Kropotokin
My Name is Chellis and I'm in Recovery from Western Civilization, by Chellis Glendinning
Six Degrees: Our Future on a Hotter Planet, by Mark Lynas
The Long Emergency, by James Kunstler
The Party's Over: Oil, War, and the Fate of Industrial Societies, by Richard Heinberg
Walden, by Henry David Thoreau

APPENDIX D: PHOTOGRAPHS



Cindy takes a tomato from a display made for the "Waving the Banana" speech (Photo by Courtny Hopen).





Janet with the accumulated finds from the "Freegavaganza" (Photo by author).



Adam breaks the rules and eats on camera (Photo from freegan.info).





Unspoiled bread and lettuce removed from its packaging by store employees serves as a testament to the lengths stores will go to stymie dumpster divers (Photo by author).



A newcomer on his first trash tour is already busy explaining waste to the media (Photo by Courtny Hopen).



Freegans typically find food, but occasionally encounter things like designer shoes (Photo by author)



David, Cindy, and Sowmya prepare food for the Really, Really Free Market (Photo from In Our Hearts Collective).



Young punks and older mothers comb over clothes at a market in Judson Memorial Church (Photo from In Our Hearts Collective).



The inconspicuous façade of the 123 Community Center. The bike workshop is located in the basement (Photo by author)



Cindy and Jason at a sewing skillshare inside 123 (Photo by author)



The cramped bike workshop interior, cluttered with recovered parts (Photo by author)



Wendy helps a bike workshop 'customer' (Photo by author)



Jason accommodates a somewhat strange request from a Japanese media crew to talk to a puppet during a freegan feast (Photo by author)





Zaac shows off a piece of burdock root and a mushroom during a Wild Food Foraging expedition in Prospect Park, Brooklyn (Photo by author).



Zaac's shoes—made from dumpstered fire hose—backpack—constructed with discarded bicycle tubes (Photo by author).



Janet, Zaac, and Madeline use their senses—and a little help from guidebooks—to figure out which plants are edible, and which edible plants taste good (Photo by author).

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