

are sworn to never go back, and they can no longer get the resources they need to survive by collecting the leavings of the capitalist market . . . well, right there you have a revolutionary group that is totally ready to go. If the resolve and ambition of their desires could be infectious, so that others would join them in demanding back the resources of our society, that would quickly become "a situation that goes beyond the point of no return," in the words of the poets.

Gregarius: I know I can do this as long as I choose to. I've been lucky enough to find out how many different things are possible in life, things that I never could have seen from a more standard vantage point, and I've met so many other great people who are doing wild things with their lives, people who I know would help me or point me in new directions if I ever needed it. I believe in myself enough now enough that I'll be ready to try out whatever crazy plan I have next, no looking back. And I would absolutely recommend doing absurd things like quitting your job forever to anyone who wants to have a full, adventurous life.



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Tricks of the Tradeless



Interviews with the gainfully unemployed

“Work is the very opposite of creation, which is play.

“The world only began to get something of value from me the moment I stopped being a serious member of society and became—*myself*. The State, the nation, the united nations of the world, were nothing but one great aggregation of individuals who repeated the mistakes of their forefathers. They were caught in the wheel from birth and they kept at it until death—and this treadmill they tried to dignify by calling it “life.” If you asked anyone to explain or define life, what was the be-all and end-all, you got a blank look for an answer. Life was something which philosophers dealt with in books that no one read. Those in the thick of life, “the plugs in harness,” had no time for such idle questions. “*You’ve got to eat, haven’t you?*” This query, which was supposed to be a stopgap, and which had already been answered, if not in the absolute negative at least in a disturbingly relative negative by those who knew, was a clue to all the questions which followed in a veritable Euclidean suite. From the little reading I had done I had observed that the men who were most *in* life, who were molding life, who were life itself, ate little, slept little, owned little or nothing. They had no illusions about duty, or the perpetuation of their kith and kin, or the preservation of the State. They were interested in truth and in truth alone. They recognized only one kind of activity—*creation*. Nobody could command their services because they had of their own pledged themselves to give all. They gave gratuitously, because that is the only way to give. This was the way of life which appealed to me: it made sound sense. It *was* life—not the simulacrum which those about me worshipped.”

—Henry Miller, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*

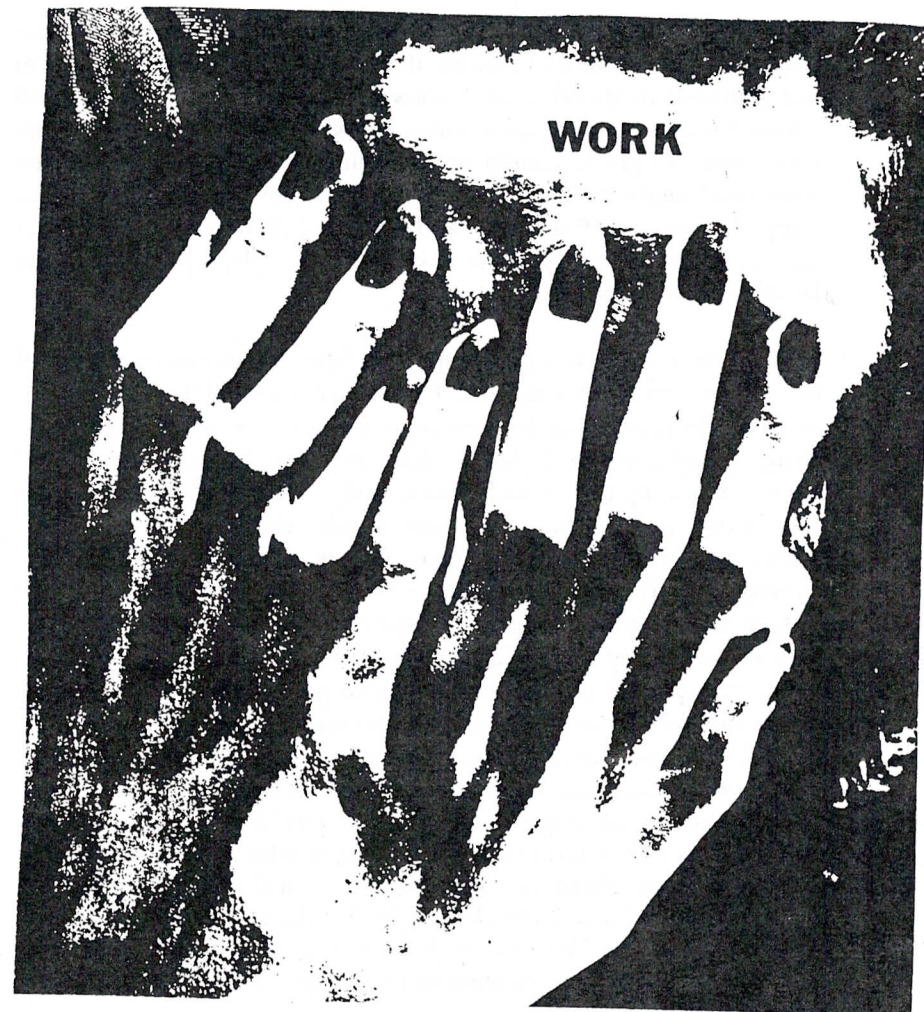
community with others, sharing what I have with them and doing things the way I feel is right, I’ll have people there for me and my children when I need them. There are women’s health clinics and places like that already that can provide support, they just need more people like me to devote our lives to them.

Paul: Sometimes people ask me if I feel like a parasite, living off the excess of this society. There’s a lot I want to say about that. First, I know it’s not possible for everyone in this country to do this—a lot of people have families to take care of, or want to try “working within the system,” as they say, or are already coming from poverty—and that’s OK. And more than that, a life like mine would be almost impossible in a place like Brazil where there are less resources to go around—they do have the M.S.T. that squats farmlands there, but that’s not the same as the life I’m leading. Anyway—the fact that not everyone has the privilege to be able to arrange a work-free life for themselves is a good reason, in my opinion, why those of us who do have the chance should take it. I’m not tormented by any middle class guilt about the chances I have in my life, as long as I really use those chances to try to make chances available to other people too. I think those of us who have the privilege to take ourselves out of the system, the better to work for its downfall, have a responsibility to everyone else as well as ourselves to do just that, the more so because the poor factory worker father of three down the street and millions of people across the rest of the world don’t have that option. Especially since there are so many things that go to waste in this society, why not put them to use, instead of helping to create more waste, more consumption? Don’t people who participate in the status quo feel like parasites, destroying the earth and suppressing their own idealism in the process? No one is self-reliant, that’s an American myth; the question is not whether you are paying your own way—everyone who has claimed to be doing that has always done it at the expense of others—but whether you are using whatever chances you have to make the world a better place. People have asked me before what would happen if more people would live the way I do, if the resources wouldn’t run out. First of all, like I said before, the more people who are living like this the easier it is to do—so I think if more people join us outside the work system it can only help. And second of all—let’s say that happens and the excess we’ve been living off of does run out—that will be a good thing, too. If you have a large number of people who are not willing to work inside the world of competition and corporate control anymore, who want more out of life than it has to offer and

kinds of voodoo and older traditions of healing, she's really cool. There was Dan, I heard he faked an accident at his job to trick them into paying for surgery he needed when he had a slipped disc in his back—I think he got the job just to do that, that was some tough fucking shit. And Ernie just leaves his hospital bills unpaid, like I have before, like Cheese did when he got his jaw broken. He went there with his broken leg, then again with that abscess he had, and for some other shit, and got treatment every single time. It helps to keep moving around, to stay ahead of the bills . . . you can give a fake name, too. Stealing some vitamins and cooking that shit you get out of the dumpsters can be good preventative medicine, though—that's the best advice I can give.

Markatos: People ask me about what I want to do in the future, about having children, all that. As for a nice wife and fast-track career and fancy house and all that, I'm a grown man now and I find it hard to believe I'll have a reverse mid-life crisis and wish that I'd traded everything I've had for that bullshit. Honestly, even if I die tomorrow, I think the last ten years of adventure have been worth more to me than fifty years of any other life could be. I've had conflicts where I've been romantically involved with people who haven't been ready to go as far out as I am, but you can resolve those conflicts, it's not impossible—and I don't want to be involved with anyone who won't accept my way of life, that's ridiculous. As for kids, I think there are a lot of good reasons not to have children and right now I don't think I'll ever really want to. But I help my friends with their children, so I'm not excluding them from the possibility of enjoying this lifestyle. A couple good friends of mine are single mothers and I do what I can to babysit, bring them vegetables from our garden, that stuff. They're both awesome, still able to do a lot of great social work—although I'd like to mention that the welfare system in this country is totally fucked and provides no support for people like them, especially when they're trying to do good things for other people with their lives. But anyway, it'll be really interesting to see how those children grow up.

Elise: I certainly do want to have children one day. But when it comes to the issue of security and stability, I have no illusions that money and health insurance and all that stuff can provide more long-term security and safety than a real, loving community can. I think we either put our energies into surviving according to today's rules, or trying to make a world in which they are irrelevant. Someone's got to start to do that sometime. I know if I spend my life trying to build



Olympia Zine Library

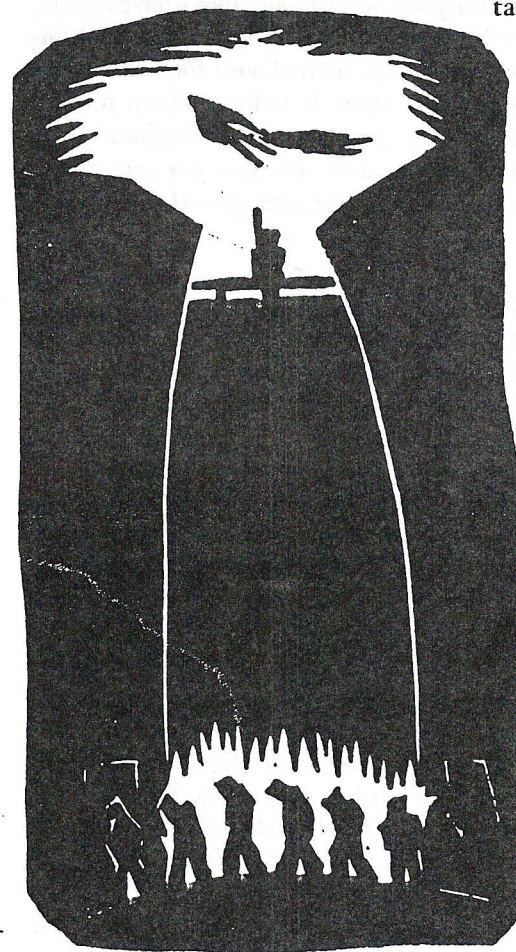
Gregarius: There are a thousand reasons not to work—to enjoy life more, to avoid the humiliation of putting a price on your time or wearing a uniform or having a boss, to deny the capitalist market your labor. And when I say “not work,” I don't mean doing nothing instead, I mean having your time to spend on what you want to do. I think one of the best reasons to not work is the fact that so many people can't imagine what to do instead. You have to have the chance to reclaim your ability to direct your own energy. I wouldn't be able to do so much activist work, or travel so much, if I had a normal job—that's for sure.

Deborah: For me it's also about being as far out of the production-consumption circuit as I can be. If I have no money coming in, I'm not tempted to spend it on useless products . . . which first of all would keep me needing an income, stuck with only one lifestyle option—you can get so caught up in paying off the debts for the last stuff you bought to cheer you up, buying more stuff to fend off the anxiety about that, and so on—and second of all, it's ecologically right on too, not to encourage them to keep mass-producing shit when the landfills are already filled.

Paul: In my case, it was really tough at first, I'll admit—really awful for the first couple years, after I promised myself I'd never get another job, because I barely knew anyone else who was doing the same thing or had any knowledge to share with me. I practically had to learn it all on my own, which seems really sad now that I know how many other people there are doing similar things who could have helped me through the adjustment. All my old friends from college literally couldn't grasp the concept—they had all gotten jobs, or were getting money from their parents, and they'd complain like everyone does about money while they drank at a bar with a cover price or some other place I just couldn't afford to go; eventually we stopped seeing each other, simply because I couldn't afford it. There was a miserable period where I spent a lot of time by myself, wandering around, desperately looking for the necessities of existence. But I used the new time I had to get involved in projects that brought me into contact with new circles of friends, people who understood much better what I was doing and why. They've been able to help me a lot, and life is much better, now. Every day I wake up healthy and alive, every time I put food in my mouth without compromising myself for it, it's another little victory, another little proof to me that resistance really is possible.

Jay: It's different for me than for Paul, because I grew up really poor, I never had anything in the first place, including job options. For me, not working is just an extension of what I learned from growing up with my father unemployed, and then having to run away and live on the street... but doing it deliberately means I can make it a positive thing, and not feel like I'm hopelessly at the mercy of the economy. I could sit around being miserable, waiting for the chance to work every once in a while for some fast food shit, or I could do this. Really, since I've got nothing, I at least want to live my life to the fullest, to do the creative things I love.

with projects like shows, money from bands that practice or live there, things like that. It's just like being in a band and getting a van to share instead of all having individual cars. And living together you don't just share the weight of the struggle to survive, but you also learn how to get along and do things collectively, which is the most important thing of all.



Elise: I don't know what other people can do for a place to live, there are probably a million options . . . what I did, I took over an abandoned shed behind a house where some kids I knew lived; it had only one wall, and using scraps of material from construction sites I rebuilt the whole thing and made it into a nice little house with a wood stove and everything. I even ran a phone cord out there from their house, started a garden, made my own fertilizer for it out of my own shit. I started the year with no idea how to do any of that stuff, except what I'd learned from working for a little while on an organic farm—it was incredible to find out I could do it all myself.

Jay: The hardest thing, of course, is getting medical care, but outside of places like Canada and northern European countries that still have a good social health care system, that's a problem for a lot of people who work all the time too. But you can usually figure it out somehow. I have one friend, god knows how many times he's been sick or hurt or infected on tour, and he always manages to find someone who can take care of him—some friend's mother is a doctor, or somebody is studying in nursing school, and then there's this one friend of theirs Sally who will go with them, and she's into all

just a question of what you think the most effective compromise will be. And doing this, I get to have plenty of time and even extra money to dedicate to better things. Another thing I wanted to say—this lifestyle has really given me a different relationship to my fellow men. When you're working, and there's all that tension and competitiveness and hatred, it's so easy to be elitist and hostile. But now I automatically try to be nice to people, to figure out what we have to offer each other, and it's easier to get along with people because I don't feel threatened by them . . . except for the pigs, of course.

Deborah: If you live in places where squatting is an option, like New York or Europe, that's obviously the best way to get housing. There you're not paying rent, you're using space that is otherwise going to industrial waste—it's like dumpstering a home!—and you're putting your energy into building a space that is open to everyone, not another suburban sanctuary-prison. Other than that . . . my friend Mo lived in her truck for a couple years, and at one point Sarah was sleeping there during the day too, when she worked night shift at the copy store. It can be hard to keep up with your belongings, but it reminds you not to have too many and to always share and lend them out. The key with all of this is just to be innovative . . . like if you have nowhere else to stay, organize a camp-out protest on a college campus or something, and just stay there—be sure to tell the media how much you miss your home and pets and TV!

Paul: The bottom line to not working is that you are leaving your place in the every-man-for-himself economy behind, so you have to learn to work with others. Find a group of people and figure out what everyone has to contribute—it doesn't have to be anything material, necessarily, but you have to pledge to take care of each other. This applies to where you live most of all. When I was on my own at the beginning, I rented the most awful little rooms, at more money than I could possibly afford, and then I started living in storage spaces, sleeping in libraries, or worse arrangements. I've spent a couple years of my life just traveling across the world from one friend's house to another so I wouldn't have to pay rent, and that's OK, but you're still depending on other people to pay. The best thing is to get a group together and form a community space, one that is designed for practical purposes—not just to recover from school or work, like most housing—a warehouse space, or a big old house with a basement and an absentee landlord. You can use the space for great things, live really cheaply, learn how to share together . . . and you can pay all or part of the rent

Markatos: I worked full time originally, construction work, and then I started cutting back hours so I could have more time to work on my art . . . when I lost my job, I started just working at little jobs, setting up gallery exhibitions for commercial artists, catering, maybe a temporary two or three week blast of hard labor to pay for a couple months of freedom. I would get jobs because I wanted to learn something that they could teach me, like welding—not unlike the way Sarah gets a job at a copy shop for a week every time she finishes a new issue of her 'zine, just to rip off the copies. I found a really cheap house out here in the country, and planted a garden. At this point I only have to work a few weeks a year.

Deborah: If you want to do it, it's really just a question of jumping off the cliff: quit your job and don't look back—you're bound to land somewhere. I don't know anyone who hasn't eventually succeeded when they set out to make it work, once they believed they really could do it. There's not much in this world that can actually kill you. All that grey area that looks like death and disaster from the perspective of bourgeois security is a lot easier to deal with once you get up close to it.

Gregarius: If you're not ready to go the jobless route all out, like someone like Paul or Debbie, there are plenty of other options. I discovered juggling early on, and then I figured out that if I present myself right to the running dogs of corporate America they'll pay me \$500 or more for single engagements. I made up fancy business cards, got myself an agent, and I'll perform perhaps twenty nights a year at their meetings and conventions. It's like highway robbery, basically, because it finances the rest of my life, which I use to undermine all their work. And there are other, less rare opportunities—if I wasn't doing this, I could get a paid position working for one of the activist groups I volunteer with. My friend Anna up here is manager of a non-profit radical bookstore, and that salary is enough for her to help out some of her less fortunate friends. That's an important part of this whole workless undertaking, to be able to recognize when you have more resources than other people and be willing to share them. I'm not saying you have to take care of everyone, but recognize that people might have something else to offer besides money, and don't be afraid to share with them what you have . . . like one of the guys who stays with her a lot does all the folding and stapling and other volunteer work for their newsletter, because he has the time and no one else does. When everyone is committed to giving their all to each other, it's wonderful to

be able to stop measuring, stop worrying about fair trade and equal exchanges and just give and share with people.

Jay: For a few years I was just hitchhiking, begging for change, hanging out with other homeless people . . . I had to fight pretty hard with depression, yeah. But I did other things, too, I always kept myself sharp in some way or another. Like when I was sleeping in the libraries, I taught myself to use their computers so I can program webpages and shit for my friends and for things we do . . . anyway, I got really lucky last year when I met Liz totally by accident on Lee Street. She's a professional writer, really cool even though she's completely middle class—I actually knew her daughters already. She has an overload of writing assignments—she's supposed to do all this boring shit for in-flight airplane magazines—so when she found out I can write too, she started having me do some of the assignments and letting me have the money. Now I'm the only one here with a decent income, even among my friends who came from the middle class! It's weird. I guess the world will always surprise you, if you stay around long enough for it to.

Paul: I spend a lot of my time in the library on the college campus here—libraries are awesome, that's the way all property should be arranged anyway, and at this one I can get free books, movie showings, videos (they even have VCR's and TV's for us to use), access to the internet on computers, quiet rooms to sleep, bathrooms . . . and I can tape all the records I want when I sneak into the college radio station



next door. I just try to be aware of all the stuff I can collect easily through urban hunting and gathering—toilet paper, matches, plates and silverware at corporate restaurants, free cassettes from record store giveaways—there's so much shit that goes to waste in the U.S., it's ridiculous. You can get almost anything out of a garbage can—food, furniture, I remember when Jay even found a fucking good guitar amplifier, that worked! You can also help out small businesses in return for their extras—I used to steal big cans of olives from the back room of the private dormitory cafeteria (it was open through the back door) and trade them for burritos at a little closet place—and then there's shoplifting, or getting free stuff from disgruntled employees, which is easy with so many people unhappy at their jobs . . . you should never pay for photocopies, or bagels, for example. Once I traded a few records to a friend for a good bicycle that had been abandoned at the bike repair shop where he worked! Then there are scams—once you know other people living the same lifestyle, a new one will come around every month or so: free phone calls, or postage stamps, or subway passes from some kind of trick. I've heard of some great ones, like in Abbie Hoffman's *Steal This Book* where he figures out which foreign coins can replace quarters perfectly in machines, and finds a struggling third world currency where he can trade twenty five cents for something like one hundred coins that can act as a quarter each! Learning to adapt yourself to living with fewer clothes and amenities is important, but that can be an empowering experience, too, it doesn't have to be humiliating the way it looks from a distance to an unreconstructed middle class kid. Oh yeah! It really helps save money and enables you to do more interesting stuff if you don't smoke, drink, or use drugs.

Jackson: I got lucky, I just did things I liked to do and my present source of income just fell into my lap. I was really into rare old comics and stuff like that, something none of my friends could understand, and I discovered I could make a fortune bootlegging. It's not a bad thing to do—the people who want this stuff have the money for it, and they wouldn't be able to get it otherwise, right? And it's a lot safer than the shit some of my career criminal friends do, like stealing cars. I live pretty comfortably—really, without people like me to support them, some of my more diehard anti-work friends would have a much harder time of it. I understand it's not so revolutionary to be a criminal—or an artist or entertainer, for that matter, like some of the other people you're interviewing—but seriously, everything is a compromise in this world, until we can get the whole thing changed around. It's