

PROPER IS THEFT



Wondering about “anarcho-tourism”, and my (A)-experience of Greece, I’d like to focus on a non-glamorous part of it. Not that I am not interested in the demonstration techniques, or conspiracy theories, or terrorists’ accusations, nor that I want to be the boring one either. Moreover, it is a complicated task to get some knowledge about what is really going on politically here concerning the different groups and places of our little anarchist world. So, I find it easier to talk about everyday experiences and practices. Individual practices, but shared practices in the milieu. To be more clear : this article is about the current way of living that I used to have in France and that I am trying to go on with, here, in Athens.

Take a ticket, let’s say, for Larissa or an other station on the way for Athens... It will be half of the price. But it is very risky to take the train from Thessaloniki without a ticket.

So, as a newly-settled barbarian, I have to say that my first conversations with friendly people I met here were about taking the train for free. I was in Thessaloniki, and after being kept in the police station for 3 and half

hours because I was on my way to a demonstration, I asked my co-captives how they handle going to Athens for free, or for less money. This way of travelling, a condition of going back and forth to places for political reasons – demonstrations, gatherings, seminars, etc – is also a way of living, a kind of everyday practice that makes me part of the community I belong to.

WAYS AND MEANS : IMPROVISATION, PREPARATION, EQUIPMENT, ETC.

First, let’s talk about the practice itself. As to sneaking on the train, experience says that there is no rule. To me, everything’s played out once the doors are closed, and I don’t have a ticket. Afterwards, it is all about improvisation.

This first time, I found allies. I recognized them from a political event – not really anarchist – and told them straight away my condition. They helped me. One of them just dropped his ticket close to me after the controller followed me while coming back to my seat from the toilets. We felt kind of forced to socialize after that. I gave them a lot of cigarettes.

The second time, the train was so full of servicemen that I just crossed the controller’s way. In France, we enjoyed those kind of extraordinary occasions like a crazy guy who gave his “crazy-guy-certificate” as a ticket and ran all over the place – I had the information from the controller himself ! – or a guy dying in a wagon...

Also, in regards to the state of exception, the position of the foreigner helps: if you get a fine, you don’t care. That’s what my room-mate told me when we talked about controls in the metro. “In Greece, if you are a young man, you can go to prison during your military service if it appears that you are a compulsive ticket-skipper. And of course you get a big fine.”

I would prefer not to be caught anyway. And it never gets that easy, though, like buying something at the supermarket. In France, we have those expressions about stealing when you have to admit that you felt uncomfortable : either you piss on yourself, or you shit on yourself (*se pisser dessus/ se chier dessus*). The first means you stole the thing, and the second means you put it back, or worst, you bought it. Here, I piss on myself

everytime. But everytime I go to the supermarket, I have to get something for free, most of the time, feta. Even if I am obviously followed – in three months, it happened to me twice...

To the happy few : En bref, je suis tricarde.



When you decide to be a compulsive thief, you have to be organized. Hence, you need some preparation, knowledge, techniques, strategies. At first, when I came to Greece, I had this joyful feeling of being in a country of cheaters. Everybody is kind of an outlaw : locking the electric counter, or not wearing a helmet, or smoking just next to the sign that forbids it, or writing whatever you want on the walls, etc. This is the state of mind, then comes the preparation like wearing the *right* clothes, especially the shoes (those grown-up shoes you use only to go to weddings, burials and...the super market).

Finally, you have to be cautious, check the cameras, the security guys, locate the blind spots, etc. but being discrete at the same time. I learned that from collective stealing. I used to do it alone and spontaneously, catching the occasion, let's say. Later, I stole for political reasons – you won't pay to cook a solidarity meal, will you? – and I had a very impressive teacher, whom I now ape. I can still feel him taking my sunglasses off my nose with a fatherly gaze... So, there is also transmission of knowledge...

Last but not least : the thrill. It's not depreciated by the preparation, quite the opposite: it's increased by it.

A MATTER OF SUBJECTIVITY

At this point, I have to expose my point of view concerning this kind of everyday practice. I have to say that these individual behaviours contain an individual interest because it gives pleasure, or, to be more spinozist, joy (as for everything, otherwise there is no point). Joy is about increasing your power of being i.e becoming more powerful i.e becoming able to do more stuff.

1st proposition: It increases my power of being to eat good feta that I stole.

Pleasure of freeness.

Scholia: There are so few free things to enjoy, uh? Although, we can discuss this point, a friend told me that we have to make the intellectual effort not to feel that we earned money.

2nd proposition: It increases my power of being to steal feta because I took it from my enemy.

Pleasure of revenge.

Scholia: This one is totally fantasmatic, and symbolic, of course. But, on the individual scale, it works.

3rd proposition: It increases my power of being to steal feta because I feel part of the community of thieves.

Pleasure of belonging to an actual (factual) community.

Scholie: Common topic of sociology, mechanical solidarity, positive face, etc. The thing is that such a community doesn't exist as a social organisation. Still it has some tangible consequences on my own behaviour, and that's why this article is deliberately non-exhaustive about my (our) practices.

J'suis pas une poucave.

4th proposition: It increases my power of being because I feel part of the anarchist community. Since I know that most of comrades are acting the same.

Pleasure of belonging to a reflexive community.

Scholia: For example, one trotskyist friend was very pissed off one time as he joined me at the supermarket, because I almost involved him in my crime. But the main reason to his anger was that I was acting like all those stupid anarchists. It was during my first days in Greece and I felt kind of a relief not being alone, although this belonging to a community was experienced from an outsider's view.

5th proposition: It increases my power of being because I feel part of my friend community.

Pleasure of feeling close to "my people".

Scholia: In a letter I told my friends that I felt that going on with these practices, even if it was more difficult here, by myself, was a kind of way of staying close to them, to my community.

We can surely find other pleasureable aims that makes us capable of risking getting caught. The individual point of view deals mainly with the balance of pain and pleasure, it doesn't mean that the pleasure has to be immediate. That's where politics knocks on the door.

The joy I seem to get has a lot to do with belonging. The more obvious example is this article, which is a different form of the pleasure of telling stories, a kind of attempt of meta-storytelling. Telling stories about one's exploits, or giving advice, or commenting upon the different places and techniques

we use – this is definitely a part of anarchist habits. That is one of the things that makes the community effective, even from the outside.

I DO IT BECAUSE I CAN

I was gathering the leftovers of the market and those guys started giving me a lot of things. I was waiting for my roommate to carry the tons of vegetables I had. We had a little conversation in Greek. “Why?”, was the question. I answered “we can feed ourselves (5 people) for one week with all the things I gather”. You don’t have a job? And your roommates? Despite this interaction, the space created at the end of the market is also part of what we can call a “widening home” feeling.

As an example: using the supermarket as a cupboard. A friend of mine who was living upstairs from a super market took this habit of getting there, immediately, the products he missed for cooking, or other activities.

While cooking french fries, I realised that we had no more salt at home, and my roommate had gone to buy coffee, without his cellphone. I went out and shouted at him in the super market. I was still wearing my apron. I had no money on me. He wasn’t there but still I took a packet of salt in my pocket and went out. As if I was home. This idea of extending the sphere of home, or privacy, appears to me as a good metaphor

for the relation with prohibition that has been sketched in this article. The line is moving, getting further and further, or the zone is extending as we go on with these practices. Still, I have this thought that we should mind the scale of our actions, especially stepping away from morality.

As a traveller (you can meet many here if you are a foreigner) such as one who called himself for an unknown and mysterious reason, Nono, came with me at the end of market. It appeared that we were sharing this practice. I have to say that I am increasingly developing techniques and strategies that rely on the interactions with the workers. Actually it’s not really strategy but the more you do it the more you recognize the gazes, the expression of the faces, and how to get some free stuff. A teacher of mine used to say that the law of work is that simple: the less you do the better it is, anyway. The more you get for the less you do, that’s even better. Anyway, one guy looked very annoyed to see me looking at the *skoupidia* (garbage) and gave me some leeks – saleables. Nono did exactly the same after me, got the leeks and later, gave a speech: “I didn’t want to take it, because the point is to eat things that won’t be eaten otherwise”. I answered: “I don’t feel guilty. To me, the point is to get things for free”.

Despite the fact that we are sharing a practice we are doing it for different reasons or giving ourselves different

reasons. I don’t want to link my practice with a whole conception of the world. The idea is to get some light on my relationship with it.

The ascetic life of the not-so-lonesome anarchist...

As a conclusion, I can say that, considering the time it took me to write about this subject and the thousands of thoughts and stories that you’ve been spared, and the importance of those things in my life – *il faut bien manger* – I can say that I feel kind of alienated. It makes my life more complicated. Therefore, let’s say, I have less spare time. I can’t read in the metro ; In the train, I can’t sleep ; I’m using more calories out of anxiety than I put in my pockets when I go to the supermarket. Hard is the everyday way to anarchism! And I didn’t even talk about getting home for free... But, let’s say it is rather the contrary of alienation. For example, when we talk about “being independent”, as a grown up, it is all, in fact, about dependence : work, pay bills, etc. The “hard anarchist life” is closer to independence. Reflexivity is included along the path marked out for this shitty life. Independence goes with the consciousness of the wilderness of the outside. And I can say that I am deeply conscious of it...

-Aut.

