Viable Freeganism?

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STUDY AREA
Fayetteville, New York

Adjacent to Green Lakes State Park lies a plot of land roughly 300 acres in size. This area was once an agricultural landscape. Since then it has been acquired by the state of New York and transformed into a public outdoor recreation area. There are numerous trails traversing the property, and they are all utilized by mountain bikers, runners and hikers. When navigating these trails it’s easy to forget what was there previously. It isn’t until one ventures off the beaten path that they are reminded of what used to be. Hidden behind thick vegetation lies trash and agricultural artifacts. Some artifacts are more significant than others, however, they all share a similar narrative.

Prior to this investigation I typically remained on the designated hiking trails rarely venturing off. Through my brief bushwhacking experiences I came to realize there was much to be uncovered. As a way of discovering more artifacts I applied my explorations to a topic I was greatly interested in. I decided to research freeganism and determine if any of the artifacts I found could be utilized by freegans. To fully understand this project one must be well versed in the principles of freeganism.
FREEGANISM

According to www.freegan.info, "freegans are people who employ alternative strategies for living based on limited participation in the conventional economy and minimal consumptions 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."

The term freegan is derived from combining the words free and vegan. While vegan's avoid animal products, freegans reject the complete economic system in which our society adheres to. This practice is based on the idea that many large companies are corrupt and dishonest. Since freegans refuse to purchase many of their goods, they are not supporting the system that they find immoral. Freeganism exists because consumers are continuously throwing things away and replacing them with newer items. Freegans recognize this pattern and capitalize on the opportunity. Through foraging or "dumpster diving", freegans are able to support themselves while being less wasteful than the typical consumer. Many of the items claimed by freegans are in good condition and far from being considered trash. There is a wide range of recoverable items including food, clothing, electronics, bicycles, appliances and artwork.

Through foraging for discarded items in dumpster's, freegans are reducing the amount of trash entering the waste stream. They compost all organic matter and attempt to repair broken items before looking to replace them. Items that are no longer needed are reallocated to other people who share similar views. Community gardens are highly valued by freegans and medicinal plants are utilized rather than drugstores. While some freegans don't own automobiles, many hitchhike, walk, bike, trainhop, or skate to their destinations. Of those who own automobiles many are diesel engines that run on vegetable oil.

According to www.freegan.info, "freegans believe that housing is a right, not a privilege." It is common for freegans to occupy abandoned buildings that are dilapidated or in poor condition. Many times they improve the appearance of the structure both inside and out, granting them the permission to stay there by the property owner. Freegans are not typically employed; rather they focus on things that are important to them. Since many of their basic necessities are met through foraging, more time can be spent volunteering and caring for their families. Freegans believe that too much time is spent working, greatly affecting ones physical and mental well being.

www.freegan.info

To properly determine what items could be used by a freegan, I will walk the entire property and photo document everything I see. This exploration will span two days. I will walk both on and off the trail, so as not to overlook anything important. I will complete the photo documentation in the spring before there are leaves on the trees. There is no way of knowing exactly what I will find, but I believe many of the things I encounter could be utilized by freegans.
SMALL ARTIFACTS
CONCLUSION

Upon the conclusion of this project it seemed that the majority of the items I found wouldn't be particularly valuable to freegans. Many of the artifacts could be transformed into interesting art pieces, but were limited in their other uses. The large dump piles were littered with useless items like tires, plastic containers, and old batteries. There was a limited amount of reusable wood and nothing I found was in good condition. Glass bottles, chicken wire, and car hubcaps were the only items that could be reused. There was an excessive amount of metal on the site, but these items would only be beneficial if they were brought to a metal recycling facility. If freegans were to recycle all the metal found on site they would make a significant amount of money that could then be spent on goods. This whole idea rejects the principles of freeganism, but if they were to spend the money locally maybe this would be a viable option.

If this study were to be improved upon or altered I would have completed it in a different location. After two days of walking through fields and wooded areas it became apparent that freegans would have a difficult time removing some of these items. Not to mention many of them do not have cars, making it nearly impossible for them to get the artifacts back to their homes. It would have been beneficial to choose a more urban location. There probably aren't any freegans that reside in the area considering it's several miles outside the city of Syracuse. The urban context paired with human wastefulness and greed allows freeganism to exist, not old agricultural land with artifacts from the past.

WORKS CITED


