

## • 1 The Usefulness of Disaster Areas

- **idea one:** the most effective place to work on social change is where the previous social order has sustained damage; i.e. disaster areas
- **idea two:** the most effective place to do almost anything big, artistic, or community-oriented is in first world disaster areas, at the points where incoming capital, volunteer resources, and general disorientation collide.

## • 2 A New Kind of Disaster Relief

- **idea three:** large-scale anarchistic festivals like Burningman and the Rainbow Gatherings have acted as training grounds for a kind of post-capitalist "special forces" agent: men and women capable of landing in inhospitable terrain and rapidly assembling shelters, food supplies, and large outdoor swimming pools, all while wearing cowboy hats and clothing in garish and shiny colors.
- **idea four:** these people are just beginning to discover the relevance of their skills in non-festival environments, and especially their use, and the great (see above) fertility of disaster areas.

## • 3 Characteristics of the New Disaster Relief Lifestyle

- **idea five:** the communities assembled by these "special forces" nonconformist organizers in disaster areas are delightful to live and work in.
  - although free from prescribed hierarchies of authority, it is immediately apparent who the most capable and effective people are because (a) everyone lives on site with little privacy, and (b) most projects are executed in a timeframe of minutes, hours, or days.
  - the communities, consisting of around 100 volunteers at a time, are at a familiar and pleasant scale for humans, like a village of familiar, creative, helpful people, living and eating together in ample space, and with a common aim
- **idea seven:** volunteer economies create a different social structure and a different quality of work than for-pay economies.
  - work needs to be fun, or volunteers will leave.
  - volunteering lessens shame issues and coverups in employment and productivity. it is less likely to find a volunteer holding on to a level of responsibility s/he is not suited for.

- most importantly: "the contagious gift"—the economy of reciprocity, individuality, expression and generosity, marked by the sense that contributions are *personally meaningful* because they are not transactional, not paid for—is fostered in volunteer economies.

## • 4 Financial and Legal Issues and Opportunities

- **idea eight:** although attempts are being made in these communities to make the lifestyle sustainable for long-term volunteers by covering their expenses, the volunteer lifestyle as it currently stands prohibits saving for retirement, land ownership, or family life. also, at present college graduates with student loans cannot participate in these volunteer communities. it would be advisable to have some means (endowment-based?) to provide for some of these needs, so that volunteering can be a lifestyle choice for more people.
- **idea nine:** the existence of volunteer work villages is predicated on the availability of land for this use. this is currently only possible in disaster areas where the concern over and enforcement of rules re: private property have been suspended. even in disaster areas this is a precarious situation, and as disaster-area property is consolidated by for-profit development interests the post-disaster land use situation may involve even less space for this kind of community than was possible pre-disaster. the situation cries out for novel non-profit financial and legal land-rights solutions: a disaster area land trust.

## • 5 Personal Reflections

- **reflection one:** an environment of disaster relief, village life, and large-scale cooking calls me to skills and capabilities I didn't know I had, or that aren't apparent or useful in my everyday Massachusetts life. my ability to remain calm, for instance. my ability to have a sense of humor about social problems. my ability to augment and improve other people's plans.
- **reflection two:** it is rare in modern life to find great need coupled with vast resources available to meet that need. it is a joy to work at the intersection of great need and vast resources.
- **reflection four:** it is also a joy to be surrounded by dedicated & smart people that i admire. we note that the activist population of new orleans is self-selecting: they all decided to leave their normal lives and plans to come. now they are all gathered in one place.
- **reflection five:** now that i'm back, i feel like a dilettante here, surrounded by dilettantes. there is no good work of comparable scale.
- **reflection six:** and creating community in the context of modern automobile-scale american city is almost so difficult as to be pointless. a veneer of community is created instead. witness the weekly potluck, in which people share food, eat, and talk together on one night a week. contrast with the village soup kitchen, in which all three meals a day are taken together, and prepared together too. constant community is an entirely different thing from these thin patches we make on top of isolated lives.