

THIS LOW INTENSITY  
CULTURAL WARFARE  
HAS REALLY GOT ME **BUGGERED!**



# 8

## The Financial Advantages of Anti-copyright

*Speed and wealth go hand in hand.*

—Paul Virilio

One of the constant concerns of cultural producers about the anti-copyright movement is how they can be compensated for their labor and not lose their work without engaging legitimized procedures for obtaining ownership. This problem has not been addressed by prominent figures in the plagiarism, electronic mirroring, and anti-copyright movements, who seem content to develop the principles of the movements more on theoretical rather than practical levels. The oldest (tracing back to Lautréamont) and most common position (Debord, Home, Benjamin, Gyson, Isou, Kraus, as well as the Karen Eliot, ®TMark, and

Luther Blisset Projects) taken as to why information should not be privatized is the belief that experimentation and invention would be hindered by lack of access to the building blocks of culture. Once cultural artifacts (images or language) are privatized, they become cultural capital, and hence function to reinforce hierarchical social strata like any other form of capital. Privatization of culture is a process through which meaning is stabilized within ideological codes that serve the status quo. In addition, privatizing cultural artifacts elevates the producer to the false status of metaphysical creator and surrounds the makers with the false aura of mystic individualism. The truth of the matter is that they have simply participated in the general cultural practice of recombination—a process in which representation as a reflection of individuated genius has no reality except as a cynical ploy to generate sales of the artifacts. Further, privatized culture is market culture, and since cultural resisters do not want to give the market anything more to present as “new,” tactics to create new meanings from common representation have been developed over the past century. Perhaps these tactics are about as concrete as the discourse on anti-copyright gets, although there are the more cavalier thoughts on the matter, such as the idea that participating in privatization is a sellout to market demands. Yet to avoid this fate in late capital, one can only choose to be a garret artist (another sad stereotype created by capital to undermine the development of social identity and solidarity) or sell out elsewhere (i.e., work). No matter where a cultural producer turns, there is no real practical advice, and one only finds the imperatives of ideological purity or abstract theory.

However, practical observations in regard to anti-copyright can be made. First, copyright is not about *individual* access or use (even though that is often a side effect). The two key principles for the existence of copyright are to protect one *institution* from the aggression of another, and to maintain exclusive control over a product so that the highest amount of profit that the market will bear can be obtained. In neither of these cases is the individual a part of the process. These principles are fairly simple. In any form of capitalism, an institution that competes with another will do anything to undermine its competitor and insure its own survival, and that includes stealing products (industrial espionage, particularly at the international level, is a fact of business). Luxury products are the least prone, while digital products are the most prone—seemingly bad news for writers, video/film makers, recording musicians, and Net/Web artists). Copyright regulations temper and slow the process of theft, and obfuscate the public perception of product acquisition as being little more than open piracy. If the process of theft can be slowed down, the product and the market can be reasonably well managed, but this is all at the macro level. From the market perspective, theft at the individual level is something that must be endured. Photocopies of books will be made, photos of artworks taken, sounds will be sampled, duplicates of video produced, and copies of all these things will be passed around from person to person.

Here is where the confusion sets in: Individual cultural producers (in the broadest sense of the term) are worried about being denied compensation for their work due to unbridled duplication. This is a false anxiety. Unless an artist is transformed into

an institution, there is no need to worry. For example, Elvis was transformed from an individual into an institution. “Elvis” does not refer to a human being; it refers to videos, films, records, and all kinds of merchandise. Elvis the individual is so irrelevant to the formula that he does not even have to be alive for “Elvis” to continue. Celebrities in whatever cultural field are no longer people; they are institutions that need to protect their capital, which is why they need copyright. However, for those who are still individual producers, copyright is not necessary—in fact, in most cases it’s counterproductive. For example, let’s say a writer has published a book that will sell five to ten thousand copies. No major publisher cares about that; too little profit is involved for them to pirate the book and risk legal ramifications. Of course, there will be people who will photocopy it and pass around copies. Who knows, someone may even key it into the Net and offer it for free, while small publishing houses in other countries may translate and publish it. CAE argues that such activities will only help in the long term, and should be encouraged through anti-copyright. The more people know of a work, the more likely they are to buy it, and it’s very likely that commissions, lectures, and other fund-generating opportunities will follow from this situation. The money lost through the gifting of the text will be remade in other ways. The faster the information is disseminated, the better it is for the many discourses to which the information is relevant, and on the individual level, more money will be generated. Speed and replication develop funds in the digital era! Slowing the process down with copyright is counterproductive, both in terms of individual compensation as well as in terms of resistant cultural production.