Anarchism is, itself, an idea, even if a very old one. It is also a project, which sets out to begin creating the institutions of a new society "within the shell of the old," to expose, subvert, and undermine structures of domination but always, while doing so, proceeding in a democratic fashion, a manner which itself demonstrates those structures are unnecessary.

It insists, before anything else, that one's means must be consonant with one's ends; one cannot create freedom through authoritarian means; in fact, as much as possible, one must oneself, in one's relations with one's friends and allies, embody the society one wishes to create.
Anarchist groups operate by a consensus process which has been developed, in many ways, to be the exact opposite of the high-handed, divisive, sectarian style so popular amongst other radical groups. Applied to theory, this would mean accepting the need for a diversity of high theoretical perspectives, united only by certain shared commitments and understandings.
In consensus process, everyone agrees from the start on certain broad principles of unity and purposes for being for the group; but beyond that they also accept as a matter of course that no one is ever going to convert another person completely to their point of view, and probably shouldn't try; and that therefore discussion should focus on concrete questions of action, and coming up with a plan that everyone can live with and no one feels is in fundamental violation of their principles.

The question becomes: What sort of social theory would actually be of interest to those who are trying to help bring about a world in which people are free to govern their own affairs?
For starters, I would say any such theory would have to begin with some initial assumptions. Not many. Probably just two. First, it would have to proceed from the assumption that, as the Brazilian folk song puts it, "another world is possible." That institutions like the state, capitalism, racism and male dominance are not inevitable; that it would be possible to have a world in which these things would not exist, and that we'd all be better off as a result. To commit oneself to such a principle is almost an act of faith, since how can one have certain knowledge of such matters? It might possibly turn out that such a world is not possible. But one could also make the argument that it's this very unavailability of absolute knowledge which makes a commitment to optimism a moral imperative: Since one cannot know a radically better world is not possible, are we not betraying everyone by insisting on continuing to justify, and reproduce, the mess we have today? And anyway, even if we're wrong, we might well get a lot closer.

It is often particularly the egalitarian societies which are torn by terrible inner tensions, or at least, extreme forms of symbolic violence. Of course, all societies are to some degree at war with themselves. There are always clashes between interests, factions, classes and the like; also, social systems are always based on the pursuit of different forms of value which pull people in different directions. In egalitarian societies, which tend to place an enormous emphasis on creating and maintaining communal consensus, this often appears to spark a kind of equally elaborate reaction formation, a spectral nightworld inhabited by monsters, witches or other creatures of horror. And it's the most peaceful societies which are also the most haunted, in their imaginative constructions of the cosmos, by constant specters of perennial war. The invisible worlds surrounding them are literally battlegrounds. It's as if the endless labor of achieving consensus masks a constant inner violence— or, it might perhaps be better to say, is in fact the process by which that inner violence is measured and contained—and it is precisely this, and the resulting tangle of moral contradiction, which is the prime font of social creativity. It's not these conflicting principles and

contradictory impulses themselves which are the ultimate political reality, then; it's the regulatory process which mediates them.

There would appear to be no society which does not see human life as fundamentally a problem. However much they might differ on what they deem the problem to be, at the very least, the existence of work, sex, and reproduction are seen as fraught with all sorts of quandaries; human desires are always fickle; and then there's the fact that we're all going to die. So there's a lot to be troubled by. None of these dilemmas are going to vanish if we eliminate structural inequalities (much though I think this would radically improve things in just about every other way). Indeed, the fantasy that it might, that the human condition, desire, mortality, can all be somehow resolved seems to be an especially dangerous one, an image of utopia which always seems to lurk somewhere behind the pretentions of Power and the state. Instead, as I've suggested, the spectral violence seems to emerge from the very tensions inherent in the project of maintaining an egalitarian society.

There is a way out, which is to accept that anarchist forms of organization would not look anything like a state. That they would involve an endless variety of communities, associations, networks, projects, on every conceivable scale, overlapping and intersecting in any way we could imagine,and possibly many that we can't. Some would be quite local, others global. Perhaps all they would have in common is that none would involve anyone showing up with weapons and telling everyone else to shut up and do what they were told. And that, since anarchists are not actually trying to seize power within any national territory, the process of one system replacing the other will not take the form of some sudden revolutionary cataclysm—the storming of a Bastille, the seizing of a Winter Palace—but will necessarily be gradual, the creation of alternative forms of organization on a world scale, new forms of communication, new, less alienated ways of organizing life, which will, eventually, make currently existing forms of power seem stupid and beside the point. That in turn would mean that there are endless examples of viable anarchism: pretty much any form of organization would count as one, so long as it was not imposed by some higher authority, from a klezmer band to the international postal service.

Anarchism is, already, and has always been, one of the main bases for human interaction. We self-organize and engage in mutual aid all the time. We always have.

Once during the protests before the World Economic Forum, a kind of junket of tycoons, corporate flacks and politicians, networking and sharing cocktails at the Waldorf Astoria, pretended to be discussing ways to alleviate global poverty. I was invited to engage in a radio debate with one of their representatives. As it happened the task went to another activist but I did get far enough to prepare a three-point program that I think would have taken care of the problem nicely:

• an immediate amnesty on international debt (An amnesty on personal debt might not be a bad idea either but it's a different issue.)
• an immediate cancellation of all patents and other intellectual property rights related to technology more than one year old
• the elimination of all restrictions on global freedom of travel or residence

The rest would pretty much take care of itself. The moment the average resident of Tanzania, or Laos, was no longer forbidden to relocate to Minneapolis or Rotterdam, the government of every rich and powerful country in the world would certainly decide nothing was more important than finding a way to make sure people in Tanzania and Laos preferred to stay there. Do you really think they couldn't come up with something?