

A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of a massive tree trunk. The trunk is thick and textured, with a rough, brown bark. Above the trunk, the dense canopy of green leaves fills the upper two-thirds of the frame. Patches of bright blue sky are visible through the foliage. The overall lighting is natural, suggesting daylight.

# **Recipes for Disaster**

**Supplemental DVD Digital Edition**

**Selected texts to accompany  
CrimethInc. Guerilla Film Series Vol.1**





# Affinity Groups

## Ingredients

A CIRCLE OF FRIENDS	STRUCTURES FOR RESPONDING TO
TRUST	UNEXPECTED SCENARIOS
CONSENSUS	A LITTLE COURAGE ( <i>may be optional,</i>
SECRECY	<i>but should be at hand just in case</i> )
A GOOD IDEA	ACTION!
PLANS FOR DIFFERENT SCENARIOS	SUBSEQUENT DISCUSSION

## Instructions

Chances are, even if you have never been involved in direct action before, even if this is the first radical text you have ever encountered, that you are already part of an affinity group—the structure proven most effective for guerrilla activities of all kinds. An affinity group is a circle of friends who, knowing each other’s strengths, weaknesses, and backgrounds, and having already established a common language and healthy internal dynamics, set out to accomplish a goal or series of goals.

An affinity group is not a permanent arrangement, but a structure of convenience, ever mutable, assembled from the pool of interested and trusted people for the duration of a given project. Once assembled, this group may choose to be “closed,” if security dictates: that is, whatever goes on within the group is never spoken of outside it, even after all its activities are long completed. A particular team can act together over and over as an affinity group, but the members can also participate in other affinity groups, break up into smaller affinity groups, and act outside the affinity group structure.

The size of an affinity group can range from two to, say, fifteen individuals, depending on the action in question; but no group should be so numerous that an informal conversation about pressing matters is impossible. You can always split up into two or more groups, if there are enough of you. In actions that require driving, the easiest system is to have one affinity group to each vehicle.

Affinity groups can be practically invincible. They cannot be infiltrated, because all members share history and intimacy with each other, and no one outside the group need be informed of their plans or activities. They are more efficient than the most professional military force: they are free to adapt to any situation; they need not pass their decisions through any complicated process of ratification; all individuals can act and react instantly without waiting for orders, yet with a clear idea of what to expect from one another. The mutual admiration and inspiration on which they are founded make them very difficult to demoralize. In stark contrast to capitalist, fascist, and communist structures, they function without any need for hierarchy or coercion: participation in an affinity group can be fun as well as effective. Most important of all, they are motivated by shared desire and loyalty, rather than profit, duty, or any other compensation or abstraction: small wonder whole squads of riot police have been held at bay by small affinity groups armed with only the tear gas canisters shot at them.

Affinity groups operate on the consensus model: decisions are made collectively, based on the needs and desires of every individual involved. Democratic votes, in which the majority get their way and the minority must hold their tongues, are anathema to affinity groups: if a group is to function smoothly and hold together, every individual involved must be satisfied. In advance of any action, the members of a group establish together what their personal and collective goals are, what their readiness for risk is (as individuals and as a group), and what their expectations of each other are. These matters determined, they formulate a plan.

Since action situations are always unpredictable and plans rarely come off as anticipated, an affinity group usually has a dual approach to preparing for these. On the one hand, plans are made for different scenarios: *if A happens, we'll inform each other by X means and switch to plan B; if X means of communication is impossible, we'll reconvene at site Z at Q o'clock*. On the other hand, structures are put in place that will be useful even if what happens resembles none of the imagined scenarios: internal roles are divided up, communication systems (such as two-way radios, or coded phrases for conveying secret information or instructions aloud) are established, general strategies (for maintaining composure, keeping sight of one another in confusing environments, or blocking police charges, to name some examples) are prepared, emergency escape routes are charted, legal support is readied in case anyone gets arrested. After an action, a shrewd affinity group will meet (again, if necessary, in a secure location) to discuss what went well, what could have gone better, and what comes next.

An affinity group answers to itself alone—this is one of its great strengths. Affinity groups are not burdened by the procedural protocol of other organizations, the difficulties of reaching accord among strangers or larger numbers of people, or the limitations of answering to a body not immediately involved in the action. At the same time, just as the members of an affinity group strive for consensus with each other, each affinity group should strive for a similarly considerate relationship with other individuals and groups—or, at the very least, to complement others' approaches wherever possible, even if these others do not recognize the value of their contribution. People should be thrilled about the participation or intervention of affinity groups, not resent or fear them; they should come to recognize the value of the affinity group model, and so come to apply it themselves, from seeing it succeed and from benefiting from that success.

An affinity group can work together with other affinity groups, in what is sometimes called a cluster. The cluster formation enables a larger number of individuals to act with

the same advantages a single affinity group has. If speed or secrecy is called for, representatives of each group can meet ahead of time, rather than the entirety of all groups; if coordination is of the essence, the groups or representatives can arrange methods for communicating through the heat of the action. Over years of collaborating together, different affinity groups can come to know each other as well as they know themselves, and become accordingly more comfortable and capable together.

When several clusters of affinity groups need to coordinate especially massive actions—for a big demonstration, for example—they can hold a spokescouncil meeting. In this author's humble experience, the most effective, constructive spokescouncils are those that limit themselves to providing a forum in which different affinity groups and clusters can inform one another (to whatever extent is wise) of their intentions, rather than seeking to direct activity or dictate principles for all. Such an unwieldy format is ill-suited to lengthy discussion, let alone debate; and whatever decisions are made, or limitations imposed, by such a spokescouncil will inevitably fail to represent the wishes of all involved. The independence and spontaneity that decentralization provides are our greatest advantages in combat with an enemy that has all the other advantages, anyway—why sacrifice these?

The affinity group is not only a vehicle for changing the world—like any good anarchist practice, it is also a model for alternative worlds, and a seed from which such worlds can grow. In an anarchist economy, decisions are not made by boards of directors, nor tasks carried out by masses of worker drones: affinity groups decide and act together. Indeed, the affinity group/cluster/spokescouncil model is simply another incarnation of the communes and workers' councils that formed the backbone of earlier successful (however short-lived) anarchist revolutions.

Not only is the affinity group the best format for getting things done, it's practically essential. You should always attend any event that might prove exciting in an affinity

You can give your friends massages on a regular basis; this will help everyone stay relaxed and feel close.

Let five girls and boys meet who  
are resolved to the lightning of  
action rather than the quiet agony  
of survival—from that moment,  
despair ends and tactics begin.

group—not to mention the ones that won’t be otherwise! Without a structure that encourages ideas to flow into action, without friends with whom to brainstorm and barnstorm and build up momentum, you are paralyzed, cut off from much of your own potential; with them, you are multiplied by ten, or ten thousand! “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world,” as Margaret Mead wrote: “it’s the only thing that ever has.” She was referring, whether she knew the jargon or not, to affinity groups. If every individual in every action against the state and status quo participated as part of a tight-knit, dedicated affinity group, this revolution would be over in a few short years.

You don’t need to find a revolutionary organization to join to get active—you and your friends already comprise one! Together, you can change the world. Stop wondering what’s going to happen, or why nothing’s happening, and start deciding *what will happen*. Don’t just show up at the next demonstration, protest, punk show, traffic jam, or day at work in passive spectator mode, waiting to be told what to do. Get in the habit of trading crazy ideas about what should happen at these events—and of making those ideas reality!

An affinity group could be a sewing circle, a bicycle maintenance collective, or a traveling clown troupe; it could come together for the purpose of starting a local chapter of Food Not Bombs, discovering how to turn a bicycle into a record player, or forcing a multinational corporation out of business through a carefully orchestrated program of sabotage. Affinity groups have planted and defended community gardens, built and burned down and squatted buildings, organized neighborhood childcare programs and wildcat strikes; individual affinity groups routinely initiate revolutions in the visual arts and popular music. Your favorite band—they were an affinity group. It was an affinity group that invented the airplane. Another, composed of disgruntled Nietzsche enthusiasts, nearly succeeded in assassinating Adolph Hitler during the Second World War. One published this book.

For affinity groups and larger structures similarly based on consensus and cooperation to function, it is essential that everyone involved be able to rely on each other to come through on their commitments. When a plan is agreed upon, each individual in a group and each group in a cluster should choose one or more critical aspects of the preparation and execution of the plan and offer to bottomline them. Bottomlining the supplying of a resource or the completion of a project means guaranteeing that it will be accomplished somehow, no matter what. If you’re operating the legal hotline for your group during a demonstration, you owe it to them to handle it even if you get sick; if your group promises to provide the banners for an action, make sure they’re ready, even if that means staying up all night the night before because the rest of your affinity group never showed up. Over time you’ll learn how to handle crises, and who can be counted on in them—just as others will learn how much they can count on you.

Although one of the rules of thumb for affinity groups is that they should not be so large as to need formal structures for discussions, larger meetings—between clusters of affinity groups, for example—may require them. Be warned: using such protocol unnecessarily will bog down discussions and alienate participants, and can even foster needless antagonism and drama. On the other hand, if an assembly shares good faith in a given approach and works out its details together, such structures can make group decision-making quicker, easier, and more responsive to the needs and interests of everyone involved. No system is better than the people who participate in it; make sure in advance that everyone is comfortable with the format you use.

In one common format, the discussion goes around a circle, each person taking a turn to speak. In another, suited better to larger gatherings, the group begins by agreeing on a facilitator, an individual who will help keep the discussion constructive and on topic. Another individual volunteers to “take stack,” keeping track of the order in which



people raise their hands to speak; if people feel it is important to make sure different demographics represented in the group get equal time speaking, this person can take a separate stack for each, and alternate between them. Next, individuals propose items for the agenda of the discussion, then come to consensus on an order for these items and, if time is pressing, a time limit for the discussion of each. During the discussion process, individuals can ask to respond directly to questions, so the group doesn't have to wait until the stack comes around to them to hear their responses. Individuals can also make comments on the process of the discussion, urging people to focus when they are getting distracted, or proposing a break so people can stretch their legs or discuss matters in smaller groups. When it's time to make a decision on an issue, individuals make proposals, propose amendments, and then address concerns until the group reaches consensus or the closest thing to it.

Plan A is backed up by the rest of the alphabet.

# How to Make a Record Player from a *Bicycle*

There are hundreds of ways to make a bicycle into a record player, just as there are hundreds of items that can be turned into record players. For that matter, you can turn just about anything into just about anything else—just think about what they've done with soybeans. Please take this recipe as an example of how to cash in your suspicions of an object's constructed identity.

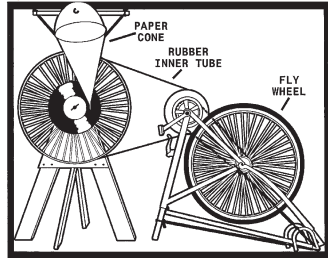
We made our record player during a thinktank. You can read about thinktanks in this book too. We had quite a time figuring this all out and we wouldn't want to take that opportunity away from you. Also, a step-by-step guide would be absurdly long and boring, not to mention unadventurous to follow. Instead, we will start with the basic concept and move on to a few specific aspects of our design. With the fundamentals in mind, you can get busy on anything within reach.

When I was twelve, my friend David demonstrated something to me; you should try it too. He pinned a needle into a piece of paper as if it were a lapel, so the sharp end extended past one edge of the paper. He turned his record player on and, holding the paper up, allowed the needle to drag gently in a groove. Led Zeppelin II rose faintly but clearly out of the piece of paper. I was dumbfounded.

But there's nothing too crazy about it. If you want to talk about crazy, crazy is getting sound off a compact disc! A record is analog. In the case of a record, analog means that the texture inside the groove fluctuates the same way air molecules moved in the

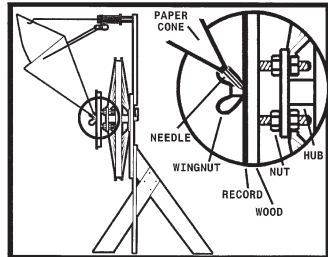
## Instructions

4.1



### Field Notes

4.2



### Make a Bicycle into a Record Player

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recording studio when the music was played, and the same way your eardrum vibrates when you hear the sound. The surface of the record is the *texture* of the sound. The only trick is making the leap from one medium to the next. The needle David used was tiny enough to fit inside the groove. The paper it was stuck into had enough surface area to put those vibrations into contact with enough air that it would be audible. Simple shit.

Fifteen years later a good friend and I locked ourselves in an abandoned office with food, water, a shit bucket, tools, Zegota's first record (with "Bike Song," natch), and, of course, a bicycle. With the latching of the door, we vowed not to leave the room until we had played that song on the bicycle. We could try this because we knew any piece of paper and any needle could make it possible. Our job was simply to make a machine that could turn the record at a steady speed and an apparatus to hold the needle in the groove while the record turned.

Our speaker cone was made of paper and glue. A standard sewing needle was pinned into the end of the cone and superglued in place. The angle between the needle and record surface was around 45 degrees.

Our record player was vertical. This made the weight of our paper cone easier to deal with, because most of it was supported by a hook. The cone was further supported by a few stabilizing threads that prevented it from flopping to one side or another.

We made a Masonite platter, which we attached to the wheel of the bike with threaded rods, nuts, and washers. We used another threaded rod as the center post. We kept the record in place using a wing nut and washer.

We isolated the hand-crank apparatus from the turntable and cone by building the record player in two parts. We decided on separation because in our first attempt the vibration and jiggle caused by hand cranking made the record skip. After splitting the machine in two, the crank side could be wobbly and the record side would still spin

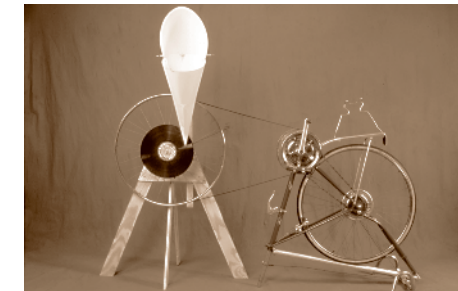
clean. We connected the two halves with a thin rubber belt. The pulley on the crank side was fabricated from scraps; the pulley on the record side was a 27" bicycle wheel with no tire. We made the belt from thin strips of inner tube.

At first, the belt had trouble staying in the trough of the pulleys. It would gradually climb up the side and jump over the edge. We solved this problem by sewing the flat belt into a tube.

Gearing the machine was important. We wanted to be able to turn the pedal at a comfortable speed and still have the turntable going approximately 33 1/3 RPM. It turns out that is a really slow speed for a hand to turn. That's why we used such a big pulley with such a small pulley. We coupled the 27" front wheel with a 10" pulley that we cobbled together from scraps and fixed to the bottom bracket where we took off the other crank.

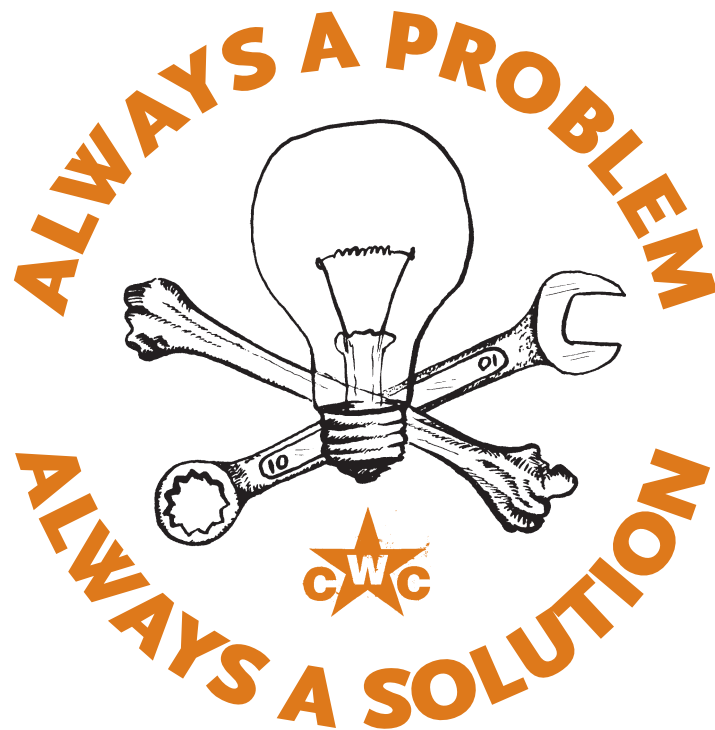
Being made of bike parts, the entire drive train weighed very little. That seemed good at first, but it wasn't. Low mass means low inertia, so the record could change speeds quickly in response to slight changes in cranking speed. To add mass, we ran a chain from our crank pulley to the sprockets on the back wheel. We froze the sprockets in place, as on a fixed-gear track bike, so the back wheel functioned as a flywheel. The flywheel smoothed out the inconsistent power of hand cranking, making the pitch easier to control. It also allowed you to stop cranking for a moment or change hands without too much drop in pitch.

You might break through this technological barrier, but we found that old records played louder and tracked better than new records. This is because the grooves are deeper and more widely spaced.



### Make a Bicycle into a Record Player

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# Blocs, Black & Otherwise

*As one middle-aged mother observed while members of the Quebec black bloc hugged each other before going off to battle the cops, “I always thought this was going to be sinister, but these are just brave kids!”*

**MATCHING CLOTHING**  
*that conceals the wearers’ identities\**

**A MISSION**  
**TRUST AND COMMUNICATION**

**PROVISIONS:** water (*plenty, especially if you’ll be dressed in hot gear or expect chemical weapons attacks*), food (*don’t rely on shops or shopkeepers in contested zones*)

**CAMOUFLAGE:** different layers of clothing for different purposes or stages of the action

**DEFENSIVE GEAR:** banners, shields (*possibly disguised as puppets or placards*), steel-toed shoes (*should still be comfortable for running!*), body armor or padding, gas masks or goggles and bandannas soaked in lime juice (*store in zip-lock bags until necessary*), rain coats or chemical protection gear (*if there is a risk of chemical attack*), whatever relevant medical supplies you know how to apply

**OFFENSIVE GEAR:** spray paint, projectiles, slingshots, signs or flags on thick poles (*or just plain poles*), molotov cocktails, bright lights (*to obscure police or camera vision during night actions*), ladders and/or bolt cutters for scaling or breaching barriers

**COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT:** hand radios, cell phones, police scanners, flags, drums, shared codes for making internal announcements

**TRANSPORTATION:** bicycles, enough change for the subway, keys to your SUV (*easy there, killer, it’s just a joke!*)

## Ingredients

### Optional Ingredients

*\*Never participate in a bloc with patches, pins, or other identifying marks on clothing; never leave hair, piercings, or tattoos exposed. This can defeat the entire purpose of masking up. Remember, you’re not only obscuring your identity to protect against possible future prosecution, but also to make it impossible for police to target specific individuals in your bloc during the action.*



## Instructions

*What is a bloc? Are there other kinds besides the black bloc?*

You may have heard of the notorious black bloc, a venerable, if not doddering, anarchist tradition in which a mass of direct action enthusiasts gather, all wearing black clothing and masks, and engage in some form of illegal activity. This tactic has won some famous victories in the past two decades, and failed utterly more times than anyone can count, too. The specific cultural characteristics that are associated with the black bloc tactic today can make it easy to overlook the long history of the bloc tactic and the wide variety of applications for which it can be used. The Boston Tea Party, for example, was a perfect example of a bloc in action: the participants organized secretly, wore matching disguises (though their choice to costume themselves as “Indians” wasn’t exactly politically correct), and engaged in a mass act of provocative property destruction; presumably their strategies for communication and mutual defense weren’t much different from those used by the famous black blocs that, a couple hundred years later, attacked similarly noxious coffee corporations in Seattle. Those who practice direct action would do well to keep in mind the wide range of scenarios in which a version of the bloc approach can be useful.

*What is a bloc good for?*

Acting in a bloc is especially useful when some of the participants in the action expect they may break laws. When everyone in a group looks the same, it is difficult for the police or others to tell who did what. Most criminal activities are better carried off in a less obvious manner, of course, but there are situations in which it is necessary to step outside the limits in public. The bloc tactic as it’s known these days is best for conditions in which the action called for occupies the gray area between overt and covert, and as such it must be applied carefully: if you participate with a bloc in an entirely legal action, you may make a police target of yourself unnecessarily, or needlessly frighten bystanders; on the other hand, if you intend to engage in serious organized criminal activity, you might be better off doing so outside the traditional bloc format, in a totally closed group, with

the element of surprise and so on. It’s not an accident that people don’t liberate animals from fur farms in black blocs.

One of the positive sides of public bloc activity is that, unlike entirely underground activity, it can create open-ended situations, in which the actions of a few can open the floodgates for others to join in. One of the many objectionable qualities of clandestine terrorism is that, at best, it is still a spectator sport; a bloc, on the other hand, can be a participatory and contagious radicalizing experience. The most obvious way to facilitate this is to organize an open or semi-open bloc.

In an open bloc, a general call goes out to all interested to gather and act in a bloc; open meetings are held to discuss goals, strategies, and so on. The benefits of such an approach are that more people can be involved; the obvious drawback is that security is so compromised that the possibilities for action are severely limited. In a semi-open bloc, the organizing takes place in secret, between people who know and trust each other, but when the bloc itself comes together, others in bloc attire are welcomed to it; in the past few years of black bloc activities, this has been the most frequent format. In such blocs, it is still necessary that the participants be prepared to deal with infiltration, but they at least have the benefit of secure planning and internal structures.

In an entirely closed bloc, the participants prepare in secret and do not welcome the participation or company of any outsiders during the action. Even when such a bloc is called for, it can still be valuable to act openly, as a bloc, rather than covertly: the public nature of the action may send an important message, others outside the bloc may be inspired to engage in similar actions of their own, and the crowd cover itself might enable an escape that would actually be more difficult for those opting for a clandestine approach.

Besides getting away with public criminal acts, there are other reasons to act in a bloc. Bloc participation can be really exciting, and good for morale—acting in a mass of people who are ostensibly prepared to do what they believe is right regardless of police intimi-

dation is often a hell of a lot more empowering than chanting weakly with the liberals, and matching battle-dress is a ritual for inspiring courage that need not be abandoned to our uniformed enemies. A bloc presence may convey important information: to the powers that be, *don't fuck with this march*, or *don't you dare rig that jury*; to allies or possible allies, *don't despair, we're with you*. Finally, anonymity: there are countless reasons to conceal your identity at mass actions. Even if you do not plan on committing any crimes, even if you don't mind the secret police capturing your image for their files, you still do a great service to others by masking up and increasing the number of people who are disguised, thus making it more difficult for the police to keep up with all of you. Those others might not just be criminals, either; they might be foreigners who don't want their participation in radical activities to be used as grounds for deportation, or teachers who don't want to risk losing their jobs. Sometimes a masked crowd is unnecessarily intimidating to the public; sometimes few enough people are masking up, or police attention is so focused on the bloc, that you may deem it safer not to draw attention to yourself by doing so, even if you may engage in illegal activities; and sometimes it's better to show your neighbors where you stand, or let the public and the cameras see that not everyone involved in radical activity is young, white, and male. Otherwise, if others are masking up, you might as well do the same.

Those masks don't necessarily have to be black ski masks, anyway; there are plenty of more fun, family-oriented ways to obscure your identity. Beyond the black bloc, endless possibilities open up: pink blocs, clown blocs, doctor blocs, maintenance worker blocs . . . . Wherever a bunch of people are wearing identical clothing or costumes, the bloc tactic could be deployed, utilizing the matching crowd for camouflage. Halloween, for example, could offer a great opportunity for bloc action—as could a high school graduation!

Black bloc actions have been a hit at mass actions over the past couple of decades: there have been blocs in the protests at meetings of such despicable gangs as the World Trade Organization, at political events such as debates between presidential candidates, at antiwar demonstrations and solidarity marches with communities that are suffering police brutality. Wherever there is a mass gathering of protesters, it may make sense to deploy or call for a bloc.

In such environments, the bloc can serve many purposes. As mentioned before, it can simply be present as a promise of solidarity, or a threat. It can act as a line of defense for or a distraction from other activists doing civil disobedience actions such as lockdowns and blockades, who will be unable to defend themselves from the police. It can engage in property destruction—this can achieve economic ends, such as inflicting financial losses upon wicked corporations, or other practical goals: a city can be persuaded never to risk hosting another vivisection conference, or alienated workers (and even activists!) can experience firsthand that the stranglehold their oppressors seem to have on reality can literally be broken. A bloc can attempt to prevent delegates from reaching an unwanted meeting, or trap them inside the meeting space to make sure they get the message that their shenanigans are not welcome. It can reclaim urban space, opening up and protecting a street or park for others to reinterpret and enjoy, or rerouting a permitted march into unpermitted areas. It can engage the police in conflict, and thus disrupt business as usual—a meeting in Quebec City to discuss the Free Trade Area of the Americas agreement had to be halted temporarily when tear gas from the streetfighting below entered the vents of the building hosting it. It can offer the possibility of contesting power and control in immediate actions, rather than mere words, and thus keep spirits up and appetites whetted. A bloc might attempt to set off full-scale rioting, in hope of precipitating an insurrection—or it could simply create a spectacle, to emphasize the anarchist presence and foreground its romantic appeal: liberal carping

*Where and how can the bloc tactic be applied?*

about “alienating the public” notwithstanding, the black blocs in Seattle and afterwards did as much to increase the mass appeal of anarchist action as any propaganda publication. If nothing else, a bloc action can be good practice for similar future actions that may achieve more.

When choosing goals for a bloc at a mass action, it is critical that the intentions, needs, and comfort levels of locals and others who will be present be taken into account. Alienating people needlessly is not only counterproductive, but endangers bloc participants; the police are already enemies enough for anyone breaking the law. The last thing you want to do is endanger others with your actions—so don’t throw stones at the police from the back of a crowd, or risk provoking police attacks on peaceful marches, especially if you’re not planning on sticking around to bear the brunt of them. If you’re operating in a mostly out-of-town group that will be acting in a residential neighborhood, don’t be so arrogant as to think you should be the ones to decide what level of conflict is most appropriate for the situation—far better you show that you respect the needs and perspectives of the locals, and are willing to follow their lead. There may be cases in which it is appropriate to bring a level of intensity to an action that others aren’t prepared to—for example, if liberal organizers are addressing a gross injustice with useless gestures that will do nothing to put things right—but it’s good form to make sure that the first ones to pay the piper for whatever goes down will be you and your companions, not innocent bystanders.

Similarly, it is important to be realistic about what you can hope to accomplish in the situation at hand, given your experience, numbers, and other resources. If the local populace hates the arrogance of the leaders who are meeting in their city, but mistrusts the equally foreign hordes who have gathered there to protest them, it might make more sense to target those leaders than to smash corporate windows in what the locals might perceive as an outsiders’ attack on their home streets. Take everything into account: the

personality of the police force, the current local political climate, how aware others will be of what happens to you and your companions, whether the authorities will want to teach you a lesson this time or avoid inopportune media coverage, whether the police will be trying to secure the whole area (in which case you can expect them to attempt mass arrests, if they have the numbers) or simply protect a part of it (in which case they may resort to dispersal or defense tactics, if they are outnumbered or uncertain). Is your action intended for media coverage, for those who witness it in person, for those who participate in it, or for those who foot the bills? Is your goal worth the risk, is it appropriate to the event in question?

Outside the mass at mass actions, acting in a bloc is a much riskier proposition, for the bloc can be easily surrounded and neutralized by the police. Historically, at demonstrations, almost every bloc that has mixed well with a much larger mass of law-abiding protesters has managed to maintain some degree of safety and coherence, while almost every bloc that has attempted to operate in their absence has suffered or at least risked serious police repression. Some lessons we can draw from such previous successes and failures are:

1. The bloc should not operate without either the element of surprise or the benefit of broad crowd cover, at least not unless it is expected to be of vast numbers, high morale, and great defensive experience, or unless the purpose of the action is to get a lot of participants arrested.
2. Announced direct actions (blocs, unpermitted marches, etc.) at mass events should always take place on or before the big day of general protest, never after them. When direct action precedes or coincides with massive marches and gatherings, it often sets the tone for everything that follows, upping the ante and radicalizing the event in general; when direct action enthusiasts are the only ones left out on the street after the law-abiding activists have gone home, the police know they can isolate, abuse, and arrest them



You can make a harmless noise bomb by sealing a piece of dry ice in a plastic soda bottle with a little bit of water; for a distraction, try throwing these away in garbage cans a block or two from police activity.

without fear of stepping on the toes of the “wrong” citizens, or being observed by such citizens as they do so. The presence of others who would witness police brutality is an important deterrent; work without it at your peril.

3. Those operating in a bloc need to have the support or at least the respect of some, if not most, of those outside the bloc, so as to ensure their safety on the field, let alone general good will in the activist community. In one historic instance, a black bloc was surrounded and cornered by police, who were moving in to finish it off when a march organized by a liberal women’s organization was re-routed to pass through the area and provide members of the bloc with an opportunity to blend in and escape. To this end, it helps a great deal if the goals or targets of the bloc are instantly comprehensible to outsiders, so whether or not others agree with the tactic itself they can at least understand why it is being employed.

On the other hand, there are cases in which none of these rules of thumb is relevant. Entirely outside the realm of mass actions, there are many other environments in which the bloc tactic can be applied; indeed, such applications may be the most promising for the future of the bloc, now that police are very familiar with and prepared for bloc presence at demonstrations. A bloc operating swiftly against an unprepared target can accomplish a great deal. Consult the account at the end of this text for an illustration of how a bloc can be deployed outside the demonstration format to wreak havoc on corporate and governmental property.

When acting in a bloc with no demonstrating mass for cover, the most important advantage you have to work with is surprise. If you organize in such a way that the authorities don’t see your action coming, you may be able to get everything done and escape before they’re able to respond. Even when they do arrive, chances are they will not be prepared to make mass arrests, so you can expect them to attempt only to seize individuals; in this situation, the individuals carrying out high-risk actions may be able

to disappear in the commotion (enthusiasts of civil disobedience could even snarl the police up in petty arrests to facilitate this, though they might risk a conspiracy charge if they were connected to the bloc)—or, if the group is able to act with a high degree of solidarity and audacity, staying close together and not permitting police to get their hands on individuals within it, it might be possible to negotiate a departure en masse, though you can expect to be followed at the very least. It has happened before that groups of activists breaking the law together, who showed that they would not be intimidated nor allow members to be picked off, have been permitted by unprepared police to leave an area in return for concluding their action. It’s also happened that they’ve had rubber bullets shot at them, though! If some of you are planning illegal activity of a serious nature, it may be a good idea to have others in your group applying a wide range of less confrontational tactics, so the police won’t be as likely to treat you all as hard-core criminals. Whenever it’s possible without compromising security, try to make sure everyone in your trusted affinity group, especially the ones who aren’t keen on taking great legal risks, knows what the highest level of possible illegal activity is, as you never know whether the police will choose to hold others responsible for the actions of those they couldn’t catch!

If you’re showing up at a corporate office at sunrise, you can expect to be practically the only ones there, and you’ll have to count on speed and clever escape routes for your liberty; but there are other situations in which, just as at a demonstration, there will be crowd cover—even potentially supportive crowd cover—to melt into. Who knows, a sports fan bloc mixing with the jubilant crowd celebrating a home team football victory might be able to touch off hard-core anticorporate vandalism and looting!

When making plans and setting goals for a bloc action in a particular context, it is always important to look back in history for precedents. If the last time someone tried something similar to what you are trying was a disaster, you had better figure out what



new element you can throw in to give yourself a better chance. History tends to repeat itself—at least when we don't use our ingenuity to derail it! Get familiar with the history of bloc actions over the past few years; whenever you're considering joining in one, pick out and consider the previous example that best indicates what you can expect from this one—keeping in mind, of course, that your adversaries have been doing the same, so counting on a particular stratagem to work twice is a risky proposition. It is at least as important to know when not to do a bloc action as it is to know when to try one: unsuccessful attempts to act in bloc, when there are not enough participants available or the conditions are not favorable, can sap energy better applied elsewhere. When you strike in bloc, strike hard and impressively, then wait for the next realistic chance to do so again.

#### Structure

Naturally, the affinity group is the basic building block of any bloc. It is impossible to overstate the importance of engaging in bloc activity as part of a small group capable of fending for itself and making decisions; to do otherwise is to abdicate responsibility for yourself to the mass, and to deny that mass the benefit of your participation as an equal. Blocs made up of self-sufficient affinity groups can make democratic decisions quickly, can split up into equally effective smaller groups, and can handle stressful situations without the added stress of herding a flock of confused followers. Within your affinity group, you should establish common expectations about what goals are, what level of risk is acceptable, what kind of security is appropriate. Security is especially important in bloc activities, because of the sketchy mix of public and unlawful activity that may be involved; be sure everyone has an understanding of security culture (see *Security Culture*, pg. 461).

Regardless of the total size of the bloc, each affinity group should be totally self-sustaining, at least with regard to the goals it intends to achieve. Escape routes, legal resources, emergency backup plans, knowledge of the area—every affinity group should have all of these. A buddy system inside a group is useful: if the group itself is dispersed,

individuals can take responsibility for the safety and whereabouts of their partners. Internal roles can be assigned: for example, scouts who keep track of activity and police presence (these can be equipped with hand radios or cell phones for communicating with the main group, and can ride bicycles for extra speed and mobility; it usually makes sense to position them at least a block or so away from the group, so they can provide early warnings and broader perspective on the area), communications people (also with radios or cell phones, and perhaps a police scanner) to exchange information with the scouts and other groups, runners to communicate new information to nearby groups, experienced folks to correlate and consider information and take responsibility for making split-second decisions, persons to carry out the actions planned, lookouts to cover them, perhaps a flag-bearer or marching band to maintain morale and keep the group visible from a distance, and so on. It might be wise to have one person in non-bloc clothing to attend the bloc, to handle such tasks as explaining to spectators that they should not take photographs, since the police can seize their cameras and use the pictures in court. The role the affinity group plays in a larger group can also be specialized: an affinity group could serve as scouts for a larger bloc, or set out to blockade a particular intersection, or concentrate on maintaining a banner at the front of a large group.

An affinity group can form a small, ad-hoc bloc on its own, but a cluster of affinity groups can form a larger, more powerful bloc. In this case, it is critical that efficient and democratic structures be set up within the cluster. It should be possible for news, questions, and answers to be communicated swiftly within and between affinity groups, even in the tensest situations. Some have argued in favor of a more militaristic bloc model, that would presumably operate more like the hierarchical regiments our enemies pit against us, but the very strength of the bloc is its decentralized, unpredictable nature; it seems foolish to try to beat our oppressors at their own game rather than capitalizing on our own strengths. Better we improve our coordination than focus on control: we are



conductors setting the stage for improvisation, not military tacticians with underlings and commanding officers.

In a bloc made up of affinity groups from different areas, the local group will inevitably have the most information about what is possible, and may well consequently have done the most thinking and preparing. This is not necessarily a problem, as long as others trust them and are organized enough themselves to retain their autonomy. The local group should make provisions for sharing as much information with others as is safe, and also be sure not to assume unthinkingly a position of authority over the other groups: a local group attempting to lead an uninformed mass on an unrevealed secret mission can be a real recipe for disaster. On the other hand, as the element of surprise is the most important factor in almost all bloc actions, provided that there is a high level of trust between organizers and participants a secret plan that only becomes clear to everyone at the instant it comes to fruition can be a powerful thing.

### Preparation

One of the most important things to do before an action is learn the area. As many members of each group as possible should spend time traversing it, taking careful note of escape routes and dead ends, cameras, places where the police may mass or that they may seek to protect, possible targets, possible resources (barricading materials such as moveable fences, etc.), and above all making sure they will not get lost. Those who cannot be there in advance should at least memorize maps. For locations for which street maps are unavailable or do not suffice, it is possible to get aerial maps off the internet.

Make sure you have a safe place to stay before the action if there's any chance the police are expecting it. Far too many times, the police have raided activist housing before an action and arrested hundreds of people; do everything you can to find a place to sleep and prepare that is off their radar, so you won't run that risk. Stay with a friend of your uncle, or rent sleeping space at a YMCA. Don't be stuck trying to sleep in your car on the

streets they're patrolling in preparation for the next day's riot! If you're from out of town, make equally sure your traveling group (which may not be the same as your affinity group) has planned a safe regrouping and departure from the area, and has a backup plan in case of emergency. Keep in mind that if things really go off, certain parts of the city may be closed off to you after the action, so you'll need to regroup elsewhere.

Advance meetings are a critical part of the preparation for most blocs. Again, how secure or public these meetings are will depend on how many people (and with what level of direct action experience) you hope to involve, and what degree of legal risk you're willing to take. If you're trying to organize a massive but largely symbolic open bloc, you might choose to circulate meeting times openly; if you're organizing the core of a bloc that will be open in the street but needs some preparation in private, tell others you trust to pass on an invitation to the meeting only to those they trust; if you're preparing an entirely closed bloc, not only should you only reveal the time and place of the meeting to your companions in the action, but you should also make sure they all know not to mention the existence of the project itself to anyone, and to have alibis ready so their other friends won't wonder what they're up to. For more vital information about security precautions, consult the *Security Culture* recipe on pg. 461.

If you are part of an affinity group participating in a larger bloc, you'll want to have your own meetings first, so when a representative of your group attends the larger meeting she can present the information you have, the resources you have to offer, the goals you hope to achieve, and the plans you propose, according to how much of this you trust a larger number of people to know. If this is a mass action and there is a larger spokescouncil meeting taking place, at least one person from the bloc or in communication with it should attend; it may or may not be safe for this person to identify herself as such, but she should at least be there to take note of what else is going on. A representative of the bloc could attend the spokescouncil presenting herself as a part of an affinity

Immediately before actions that will involve participants who are unprepared or unfamiliar with the terrain, you can distribute maps of the area. These can also include a legal number (see *Legal Support*, pg. 329), in case of arrest—but take care lest possession of such maps incriminate arrestees.

group hoping to do support for those involved in bloc activity, and thus test the waters or even meet others interested in the bloc.

In the meetings with your affinity group and the bloc, you'll want to establish a plan of some kind for the day (these almost never come off as intended, but they help to get everyone in practice thinking about the situation, and it's good to be prepared to have something to do in case everything does work out), and a structure to facilitate communication and quick, democratic decision-making within the bloc, as described above. Structure will make you adaptable and thus effective, whether or not your plans come to fruition. You should establish a meeting point for the bloc, plans for dispersal, and a possible time and place for regrouping, if that would be desirable should the bloc be divided early. Share legal information, what resources will be available for those who are arrested. Go over every possible scenario, what you can expect from each other in each of them. Psychology is important here: plan for the worst, but don't demoralize yourselves—you're considering the possible problems so you'll be ready for them, not to talk yourself out of action.

Finally—if there will be more than one language spoken among demonstrators or locals, make sure to learn a few important phrases in each of them: “we are not against you, we want no trouble with you,” “don't run, walk!,” “medical assistance needed!”

#### *During the action*

It is often wise to write the phone number of a legal contact on your body in permanent marker shortly before an action, so you can be sure it will be available to you if you are arrested, regardless of what else transpires (see *Legal Support*, pg. 329). You may need to know other cell phone numbers and so on for the day's actions: try to learn them by heart or, failing that, write them on your skin in an ink that you can rub off if necessary. You'll also want to have enough money on you for food, transportation, and phone calls, but no more, as it will probably disappear in the event of arrest. Remove piercings that

could be torn out. Do not carry your address book, unnecessary anarchist propaganda, or anything needlessly incriminating or illegal. Take your I.D. with you if you want to be processed as your “true” identity in the event of arrest; if you plan on withholding your identity from the police, make sure you have no identifying papers on you. Carry plenty of water and high-energy foods with you; be prepared for emergencies—if you get separated from everyone and have to spend the night hiding out in a dumpster, you don't want to be starving, too—but don't weigh yourself down with anything unnecessary. Carry with you whatever first aid supplies you know how to use that might be useful. Be aware of what medical assistance—such as street medics and clinics—is going to be available in the streets, and have a plan if you have to go to a hospital (a fake name and social security number, and an alibi, if you fear you might encounter police there); be similarly aware of whether legal observers and media will be present in the streets, and whether you'll want them around or far away from you.

Be prepared for the situation at hand. If the police outnumber you and are waiting for you and there are reporters and civilians in the area, don't come in a gas mask and body armor like the folks in your favorite street riot photographs—they're not going to gas and beat you, they're going to try to encircle and arrest you, and you'll need to be able to move quickly and blend well to avoid it.

Clothing is the one essential feature of the bloc tactic, and the rock upon which it rests or founders. Far away from the action itself, you may want to practice moving and acting freely in your bloc gear, so you won't still be getting used to it when it's too late. The whole idea of a bloc is to look indistinguishable from each other, so make sure whatever your bloc theme is, everyone is on the same page about it, and that your own clothing doesn't bear any features that distinguish it. In a worst-case scenario, you can make a t-shirt into a mask: use the neck hole for your eyes, and tie the sleeves behind your head.





Your clothing should protect you from the hazards you expect, while not weighing you down unnecessarily; it should be adaptable should unexpected situations arise. Layers are key: if possible, wear an outer layer in which to travel to the bloc action, a layer of bloc clothing, and then another layer of getaway clothing beneath this—without risking heat stroke, of course. In some situations, it may be more sensible to carry the outer layer of your getaway layer in a sealed bag, in case you are covered in paint or tear gas by the time you need to use it. Consult the *Health Care* recipe (pg. 275) for information on how to handle chemical weapons attacks, if you risk incurring them. I've read that ear plugs can offer some protection against concussion grenades, but how one is supposed to know when to put them in and when to have them out so as to be appropriately attentive is beyond me. If you expect to risk receiving blows or projectile fire, wear body armor of some kind (protective sports gear can suffice) and foam or padding, and a bicycle or motorcycle helmet.

A bloc that intends to defend territory in clashes with the police may decide to use shields. These can be made from trashcan lids or cut traffic barrels, layered (superglued together) and reinforced plexiglass, or inflated rubber rafts heavily reinforced with duct tape and possibly a layer of tarp or good old-fashioned cardboard. Wrap duct tape thickly around the handles so the shock of impact won't break your wrists, and provide plenty of room between the handle and the shield so your knuckles don't take the entire blow. Larger shields are better for protecting against projectile weapons or functioning as a mobile barricade, while smaller ones provide better mobility and serve better in hand-to-hand combat. A line of individual shield-bearers can form a shield wall, especially if they are practiced at moving together; alternatively, massive multi-person shields can be constructed, such as the insulation board placards mentioned below. The latter shields should have enough joints in them to navigate narrower streets; keep in mind that these joints are also their weakest points.

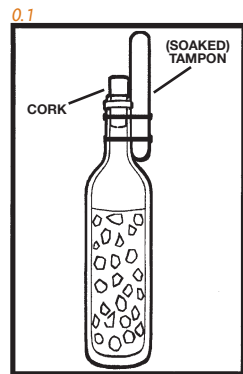
Slapstick as it is, it often happens that comrades who discussed and prepared together will not be able to recognize each other in their bloc gear on the day of the action. You may want to identify yourselves to each other early on, especially people from different cities and affinity groups who intend to work together, so it will be easier to keep up with each other in the chaos.

The moment the bloc forms can be pivotal. Where and when to mask up is a hard question. If you do it too late, once you've joined the bloc, you risk being identified; if you do it too early, before you've joined the bloc, you risk being nabbed by the police. Little masked groups walking around before or after events are perfect targets for their enemies. At a big demonstration, one of the best options is to get in your gear in the midst of a large crowd that is not yet under much surveillance, with people around you that you trust, and to move in the body of the crowd to a meeting point with your fellows in the bloc. Wearing layers is important here, too: if you can start in a disposable outermost layer that makes you look like a civilian or liberal activist (if perhaps one overdressed for the weather), masking up will simply mean discarding it and simultaneously pulling up your mask. At an action in which you have the benefit of surprise, you can always pick a safe, quiet place near your convergence point and mask up there.

In a mass action situation, the convergence of the bloc should never occur before other protesters are out in the streets; once again, the police will simply pick off the bloc when no one else is there to provide crowd cover or bear witness. Don't mill around for long at your convergence point—be timely, and get moving. It can happen that the bloc has a difficult time getting out into the field of action, once it has gathered. At a mass action, one of the best solutions for this problem is to have the bloc form somewhere outside the area of heavy police presence, and move into that area as part of a much larger mass—if there's nothing more interesting to do in the other direction, that is! When moving with a mass of others, a bloc should keep close to them as well as tight internally; police may try to push in and isolate the bloc.

You can carry umbrellas to make it more difficult for cameras or overhead observers to monitor the activities of your group.





You can mix styrofoam into gasoline to make it stick—this recipe has been used for the filling of molotov cocktails.

Once together, stay tight spatially (with the obvious exception of the scouts, who need to be further out): you need to keep police out of your ranks, prevent snatch squads from getting in to grab individuals, and also keep your friends at your sides rather than strangers or possible undercover officers. Banners down the front and sides of a group can offer useful barriers to this end. You can reinforce cloth banners with PVC pipe or wooden planks; far better, use tough but limber insulation board to construct great placards—these can be tied or chained together, to create a mobile, jointed full-size barricade. Remember, your physical presence and togetherness comprise your strength, your readiness to repel police charges and foil arrest attempts is your marching permit. If you strike when they’re not prepared to make mass arrests or attack with chemical weapons, they’ll be forced to try to intimidate you by singling out individuals for attack or arrest; make this impossible, defend each other and don’t back down.

It’s possible to conceal useful materials in an area in advance—a dumpster can be filled with sticks and rocks or spray paint cans, and all the better if it’s on wheels. Sensitive materials (such as projectiles) can be transported to the action concealed in puppets, and puppets built from paper maché over stronger stuff can serve as effective shields—though those poor puppeteers get enough shit from the authorities already without suffering on your account, too. Keep in mind that carrying a bag of rocks, bottles, gasoline, etc. will not look good if you get arrested. Don’t forget, also, that with a simple tool it’s always possible to break concrete or asphalt up into projectiles on the spot—beneath the concrete, the paving stones, isn’t that how the old French saying goes?

Everyone in your group should have a one-time-only nickname for the duration of the planning and action, so you can address each other without giving away your identities. Those communicating over cell phones or hand-held radios should assume that the police are listening in; it may be wise for those doing communications to learn a code of some kind, or at least keep in mind what not to say over the air. It can also be

good for an affinity group or bloc to learn coded announcements in advance, so you can communicate openly without anyone else understanding. “Tighten up!,” “The pigs are moving in!,” “We need to break through their lines!,” “It’s time, let’s do it!,” “Split up and regroup at convergence point B!” are all examples of typical announcements you might want to code. Don’t use codes unnecessarily, or assume that if you just say “cookie” every time you mean “molotov cocktail” it’s going to protect you; clumsy use of code can actually put you in greater danger, for the authorities can claim that your coded terms stood for more serious things than they actually did. Also, don’t be afraid to make uncoded announcements to everyone: “Don’t panic, stick together!,” “We need to get closer and fill in this space here, slow down up ahead!,” “Medic!,” “Who can verify what he’s saying?,” “Hold the fucking line!” The more everyone feels entitled to do this, the better, so long as it doesn’t create more confusion than it solves; this will make it hard for your enemies to single out supposed leaders they perceive to be giving orders.

In the heat of action, it’s easy for all the structures you have set up in your affinity group to dissolve as individuals get caught up in new developments. Don’t lose your head and let the mob mentality take over; make sure to stay spatially close with your group at all times, keep in communication with them about what is happening, don’t get distracted from your role. It might help to have an informal formation—you can stay a few paces behind a particular companion at all times, with another friend always at your side, and another behind you, for example. Moving in lines can maintain cohesion and make police snatches and infiltration more difficult. Plans will change, but don’t lose the structures that enable you to change them in unison.

Don’t panic, don’t believe unsubstantiated rumors. You probably won’t get a clear idea of what was going on everywhere else during the action until the day after, if you ever do; in the midst of everything, it will be easy to get buffeted about by waves of faulty information, so resist acting on news until you’ve double-checked it. Don’t spread ru-

mors yourself, and don't just tell others your conclusions based on what you've seen or heard—tell them what you've seen or heard and let them draw conclusions too.

Scouts should practice using communications equipment without being obvious, and while bicycling, if applicable; those recognized as scouts can count on police harassment, which will be all the more problematic because they are alone and critical to the success of the group. They should be particularly quick and alert. Those using radios should make sure they have decided together on a channel to use in advance, and a backup channel should there be problems.

Barricades can be made out of anything from newspaper dispensers to burning dumpsters, and can serve to slow police progress or simply halt traffic; if you've scouted in advance, you should be able to get them in place very quickly, amid crowd confusion. Don't ever completely block off an escape route you may need! In a less confrontational situation, you can make it more difficult for the police to follow you in an organized line by simply moving the wrong way up a one-way street, provided there's still traffic coming down it. Offensive use of projectiles is serious stuff—one can go to prison for many years, if arrested—but it can serve to keep police at a distance in order to protect an area, or provoke them into using tear gas (which may actually be a tactic they hoped to avoid). Don't begin throwing projectiles in a small group that can be surrounded—save it for massive clashes in which the city belongs to the police in one direction and the protesters in the other. When you throw, do so as part of a large group, from the front of the crowd, and maintain a steady hail in the contested area. Those behind the throwers can provide more ammunition via bucket brigade.

If you're planning to do property destruction, come equipped with the appropriate tools. Make sure you're informed about your targets and their weakness or strength; if you get in position and strike that felonious blow only to find you're unable to break the shatterproof glass, you've just risked a lot for nothing. Sometimes spray paint can

be more eloquent than broken glass: "Network TV, keep your eyes on the issues" across the front of the smashed corporate storefront they'll want to film—or, of course, if possible, you can always just spray paint their camera lenses! Stay abreast of the different stations' coverage, so you can offer a pithy retort to the reporter who accuses you of interfering with free speech: "We saw your coverage of the social forum last night—you know as well as I do you don't care about free speech." Then disappear into the crowd while he angrily telephones his boss.

The most dangerous weapons you should probably ever consider using in a street confrontation are molotov cocktails. Understand that if you use these, you can expect serious reprisals from the police; only do so when you've got a police-free zone behind you and a sympathetic crowd close by that you can escape into without unnecessarily endangering anyone. Best-case scenario, a small team splits from the angry mass, applies a cocktail or two, and disappears. Is it right to throw molotov cocktails at police? With the government spending thousands of dollars on each officer's special storm trooper suit, throwing stuff at cops is practically a victimless crime\*—but you might be better off throwing paint bombs at them (see "Distance and Projectile Painting," *Graffiti*, pg. 258), or shooting paint gun pellets from your slingshot. If they get paint over their clear visors and shields, no one's injured, but they're rendered blind in their expensive armor and have to retreat.

A variety of police weapons may be deployed against you: pepper spray, tear gas, water cannons, concussion grenades, rubber bullets, clubs, charging horses or vehicles. Know what to expect in each situation, and be prepared. Sometimes the best defense really is a good offense: a bloc prepared to act more quickly and courageously than law enforcers expect might be able to disable a water cannon before it is employed against them. Tear gas canisters can be thrown back at the police, but they will be extremely hot when they land; if you expect to be doing this, make sure you have on welding gloves or

*\*Don't give me that shit about more police officers than demonstrators going to the hospital at the anti-IMF protests in Prague—first of all, how many demonstrators do you think felt safe going to those hospitals, and second of all, haven't you ever heard of offensive injuries?*

other serious protection from heat, and that you have a good enough throwing arm and aim to get them out of the area entirely. Don't pick them up until they begin releasing gas—they may explode and injure you. Horses may balk at approaching an area where things are on fire; a less confrontational mass can deter a horse charge by all sitting or lying down.

Police will endeavor to disperse unwanted crowds when they are not prepared to arrest them. Tear gas, concussion grenades, horse charges, stun guns, rubber bullets, etc. may be employed first, if the mass seems particularly rowdy; then, when they deem it safe, the officers will move in. They will probably do so in lines, charging and falling back to regroup and consolidate their gain before charging again. Violent arrests of individuals will take place at this time to intimidate the mass, unless the side of the throng facing them is tight-knit and protected by barricades or united by linked arms at the least. While the crowd seems volatile and daring, the police may well keep a distance; if the crowd is confused, passive, or disintegrating, they may move in to form lines in its midst, to speed the process along. At no point should you panic and run—this can only increase your chances of charging into trouble, and endanger others in the process; if others start running, shout out “Walk, don't run!” At the same time, keep moving quickly, keep things chaotic to prevent the police from getting a sense of where their opponents are or what to expect. Never let police come together inside the mass.

If you are on the street, they will attempt to force you onto the sidewalk: this thins the crowd, lowers morale, and puts you a step closer to being cornered. If you are forced onto the sidewalk, you can use a street crossing or turn onto a side street to retake the asphalt; banner-carriers can rush forward and block the space to be taken while it is filled with people, as can bicyclists. The same goes for other lanes of traffic, if they are endeavoring to limit you to the one you have seized. If the police cannot get everyone onto the sidewalk, they will at least try to scare the less militant in the crowd into moving onto

it and adopting a spectator role, so they can then deal with the hard-core contingent; in this case, try to keep moving and circulating so the “spectators” can be absorbed again, though of course if you are moving in a tight bloc you don't want to lose your cohesion in such a situation. In an urban environment, it can be possible for an organized, alert group to move more quickly on foot than even mounted police officers; always keep moving and stay ahead of your foes. Sudden bursts of speed and changes in direction can keep them particularly confused—just make sure your group can engage in these without itself becoming confused or divided. To coordinate simultaneous action in large groups, you can shout out a countdown from ten to one.

Police snatch squads can be sent into a crowd to grab individuals the police consider leaders or dangerous (or who have been observed committing a crime). Sometimes you can clearly see the commanding officer point out an individual to be snatched (this can also be the case if there is an officer firing rubber bullets—another officer may be picking out the targets for him, and by watching you can tell who is about to be targeted). The squad will attempt to surround the target, while keeping an open corridor back to police lines. To protect against this, keep a close watch on police movements—they may form a straight line perpendicular to the mass before pushing in. If you know who the target is, get them out of the area and into different clothing. Put your body between approaching officers and the target; keep moving and obstructing their path, while making it seem as accidental as possible, so as not to become a target yourself. If a group can isolate and surround individual officers that have entered a crowd, these will back off if they don't feel in control.

Others can attempt to unarrest individuals who have been nabbed. The time to do this is as soon as the police strike, before they have made their way back to their lines. You'll need a few people to break the officers' grip and others to block their path. As soon as your comrade is free, link arms and disappear immediately into the crowd. The squad





will probably try to snatch again, and will aim for the unarresters, too, this time; keep in mind that unarresting may result in more serious criminal charges than the original target would have faced, so only hazard it if you have a good chance of success or the stakes are too high not to. It has happened before that police vehicles surrounded by an angry crowd have been forced to release arrestees, but they have to be trapped there, not just heckled. If their tires are punctured (stick the sidewall, not the tread), that will force them to a halt, but popping tires can be loud—again, don’t try this unless you’re in a trusted crowd with cover in range.

If you are grabbed by police, keep in mind that even self-defense of the mildest sort can result in assault charges. If you expect your companions to try to snatch you back, keep the arresting officers’ job difficult by continuing to move, or else go limp: this will not result in assault charges (though “resisting arrest” is not unheard of), and will force the officers to work much harder to move you. Bear in mind that going limp may provoke them into being even more violent to you; but if every arrest they make costs them a lot of manpower and time, your friends will be in a better position to escape or attempt to rescue you.

There’s always the chance that the police will totally surround your group and arrest you one by one. If this occurs, you’re in trouble. The best defense is to keep abreast of police movement by means of scouts: they may attempt to move up side streets to surround you, or lure you forward while sending a line around to cut off your retreat. If you find your group surrounded by police lines that are thin in one direction, you can attempt to charge out: use your own tight front line, protected with a barrier (banner, shields, fencing, linked arms at the least), to push as a solid wall, potentially with a plow point at the very front to divide them. A bloc once used a wheelbarrow appropriated from a construction site to front a charge that broke through police lines. Apply this tactic as soon as possible after you’ve been encircled, before they are entirely sure of the

situation, and with maximum confidence if you want it to work. Often your best chance to escape will be all together as a cohesive group; this also allows you to keep your equipment and clothing in the process, so you can maintain your effectiveness as a bloc, even if you only choose to use it to escape. On the other hand, if you are part of a crowd that is moving into what you think is a trap, it may be wisest just to disappear onto the sidewalk and out of your bloc gear before you enter a space you can’t escape. If you are hopelessly trapped, make sure you ditch all incriminating items before you are arrested, hopefully in such a way that they cannot be connected to you.

Remember that the police won’t be able to make mass arrests unless they have lots of plastic handcuffs and vans or buses in the area, so these can be a good tip-off for what to expect. The same goes for chemical weapons; if they’re ready to use tear gas, they’ll all be wearing gas masks themselves.

Think about what the goals of the police will be, and how these affect your options: if they are trying to keep a parade route or fenced area secure, you may actually have free run of other areas for some time. If they are trying to keep a massive march under observation, they will have to split their forces to keep up with a breakaway march; this will only be difficult for them if they are unprepared in numbers, of course, but in certain situations it may be true that ten groups of fifty are much more effective than one group of five hundred. There will be moments during unexpected developments when they are paralyzed waiting for orders; take advantage of these—but if an unusually long period passes without police activity, it may be an indication that they have a trick up their sleeves, such as a new, more heavily armed and armored force massing nearby.

At an action the powers that be have seen coming, you can expect to be under surveillance by undercover officers, and you may have to deal with agents provocateurs, too. Stay aware of those around you, especially strangers; undercover agents may be easy to identify (pairs of big men with two days of stubble on their faces, nice wristwatches, and



communications equipment), or very difficult to. Keep your companions aware of every person you suspect, but don't "out" undercover agents unless you are absolutely sure they are agents (for example, one of your scouts has been following one, and seen him chatting with his coworkers), and something concrete can be gained from it. Unsubstantiated accusations between demonstrators can only make situations more tense and demonstration environments less welcoming. As for agents provocateurs and just plain stupid people, they may be moving among or near you, smashing locally-owned stores and private vehicles; whether or not you can prove they are cops or allies thereof, you can certainly make it clear to them that what they are doing is unacceptable and has to stop. Don't get snarled up in a tactical debate in the middle of an action, just make your point (or, in a worst-case scenario, intervene) and get on with things.

Stay aware of others, too, besides the police. Other demonstrators of more "liberal" or authoritarian bents may take it upon themselves to interfere with your activities, unmasking you, assaulting you, or pointing you out to authorities; the same goes for local civilians. It's almost never advisable to respond to this with violence; walk away, or run if necessary. A direct action that turns into a brawl with locals or other activists is disastrous for everyone. Attempt to talk out differences, if this appears possible and worthwhile, when tempers have cooled, in a safe space removed from the immediate action; send a spokesperson if necessary, preferably a supporter from outside the bloc. At the least, this can distract the meddlers while the rest of the group moves on to other actions.

As crazy as things get, remember that the police have firearms, and there's rarely any reason to risk getting killed for an action. A street confrontation with better-armed police officers is almost always going to be something more of a spectacle of confrontation than a no-holds-barred, life-or-death battle. There's no shame in this. The police are restricted in what they can do by what public opinion will decree about it; you are limited in what you can do by a similar question, for whenever you move up to a more confrontational

tactic the police will immediately upgrade their tactics to a level higher than yours. In this sense, streetfighting is a matter of chivalry for us radicals: we always permit our opponents the more powerful tools, in order to keep the violence from getting too out of hand—and, of course, to show off how much more noble and courageous we are! If the papers read (as they have before), "Violence erupted when activists began throwing back tear gas canisters fired by the police," it will be clear to everyone what's going on.

Stay flexible, tactically. If you showed up in riot gear for a confrontation with the police, but find yourselves totally outnumbered and unprepared, you can turn the other direction and move through nearby neighborhoods picking up trash and beautifying the area—that'll give the media a confusing message to distort!

Once again, all this will be very different if you are applying the bloc tactic outside the demonstration setting. Rather than provoking a confrontation with the police that you hope will be contagious, you will probably be doing everything you can to avoid encountering them at all. Scouts, in this case, will serve more to warn you about the approach of the police than to monitor the lumbering movements of nearby police forces, and, accordingly, may be better posted at freeway overpasses or in disguise outside the liquor store than on bicycles.

Escape: at the end of the action, the final remaining challenge is to get out of your gear and disappear. Layers, once again, are key: under your bloc clothing, you should be wearing clothing that will make you blend easily with whatever liberal protesters or civilians will be in the area. You may have to get down to this layer at an instant's notice: for instance, if the police have singled you out and are pursuing you. Make sure it's a quick and easy transition to make (though not one that can happen accidentally, in the midst of the action!). Try to do this in a mass of inattentive people, or around a corner or in a bush: if you're seen or caught on camera changing, all that trouble you went to masking up may be wasted. Hopefully you have a clever escape route or two already



planned out: an inconspicuous alley, an open space too wide for any police barricade to block, a fence you can climb more quickly than any police officer (see *Evasion*, pg. 234). If possible, you might want to lock a bicycle somewhere nearby, so once you've gotten away you can hop on that and move quickly; in urban environments, you can also try to get a taxi (provided they're out and about), get on the subway (though in a serious situation this may be shut down, or the police may be checking people coming in), or duck into a restaurant and just eat fries in a quiet corner in your civilian disguise until things quiet down. Unless things have gotten really hairy, you should still be with your partner, if not a few members of your affinity group.

Finally, the number one rule of all direct action: quit while you're ahead. Take things as far as you can, but live to fight another day, unless this really is the Last Battle.

### Afterwards

After the action, gather again in your affinity group at a place and time safely removed from danger and surveillance. Give everyone a space to share how they're feeling. Discuss and critique what happened, what you learned from it, what it means for the future. If applicable, make sure to report on your conclusions to other affinity groups who were involved, and seek their feedback as well. If any of you have been arrested or are facing other difficulties such as injury, discuss how to handle this. Celebrate your achievements, offer emotional support, swear and plot revenge if need be. Make sure above all that all participants know they are loved and supported.

Don't ever brag about your achievements in a bloc, or share anything others don't need to know, especially if it could incriminate someone. Keep in mind that it's possible you've been caught on camera and, however carefully disguised you were, identified by the authorities. In Sweden, a few months after a street confrontation at a meeting of the European Union, early one morning the police arrived at the residences of a couple dozen activists who had been involved and arrested them all at the same moment. That's

a worst-case scenario—don't let it make you paranoid. Just stay aware of the dangers; if you're doing a lot of heavy stuff, or organizing for it, you might want to live in such a way that your enemies would be hard-pressed to know where to find you any given morning.

Local anarchists and partisans of Earth First! wanted to make an offensive strike against a biotechnology company whose crimes had not been brought to public attention (in fact, the corporation had bribed the local town government). There was considerable discussion about what tactics to use—and there was a wide variety of tactical differences, with some of us committed to non-violence and others being wild militant anarcho-primitivists! Being from small towns in an area not known for having lots of activists, we had to work together to allow everyone to participate at whatever level they found comfortable. The non-violent folks could have dropped a banner, or someone might have come at night and shredded the crops, but what could be done that would allow us to work together, be safe, damage this evil corporation, and provide a wake-up call such as our placid small towns had never seen before? What better than a bloc? Who says we need a major mobilization or a giant antiwar protest to use such tactics? We can have the excitement and the action of any global day of action any day of the week in our own hometowns. It's not like there's more state to smash in Washington DC, Genoa, or Seattle than there is in our own neighborhoods. Not only that, but this time the cops wouldn't be ready for us.

Since we were going to combat biotechnology, it made more sense for us to dress in biohazard suits than in black: not only did they disguise us, but they got our message across by themselves. Bought in bulk, they cost less than three dollars each. The suits lacked face masks, so we made a quick trip down to the hospital for them. We started spreading news of the action to our friends by word of mouth, keeping our bloc limited to only those we trusted.

### Account



Committed folks drove in from out of town and set up a “base camp” for the action at a local farm, building banners, preparing flags, and writing fliers and media releases. The excitement was contagious: local puppeteers brought down a gargantuan puppet of an indigenous farmer, a local farmer wanted to dig up the front lawn of the biotechnology company to plant organic seeds. Work was spontaneously and naturally divided among teams. The media team made different pamphlets for different people—one for the corporate media, one for people driving by, even one for the employees working there to explain to them what was happening. As time progressed and more and more carloads of people drove down the dirt road to the farm, we realized that the action was going to be larger than we had anticipated.

We had picked our target in complete secrecy, and only a few people knew its name and location. If somehow word had leaked to the biotechnology company that we were planning something, our action would have been ruined. Unlike many blocs at protests, we didn’t have a horde of protesters to serve as a distraction, so the main element in our favor was surprise. We told everyone else to trust us—it was going to be a biotechnology target somewhere nearby—and that we had scoped it out. Indeed, we had discovered that the entire complex, one of the main research centers for this biotechnology company, had only a few security guards!

This company had genetically engineered corn to feature “traitor seeds,” seeds modified to be dependent on their expensive pesticides. Farmers would purchase these cheap seeds, and then go into debt buying the pesticide, losing their land and livelihood. This destruction of small and indigenous farming and of biodiversity was leading to huge demonstrations in Brazil and India in which these crops were ripped from the ground and the seeds burnt, in public! These seeds were being designed right down the street—and no one even knew about it. The company was so smug they didn’t even hire much

security. Everyone agreed that it was a worthy target, and everyone was happy with keeping the exact location secret until the day of action.

The night before, we went over a map, including aerial photos (easily downloaded from the internet) and detailed maps. We didn’t give away the precise location except to one driver from each of the cars. People were given an all-too-quick training on unarresting and bloc techniques, and communications equipment was distributed among the affinity groups. This lack of training, especially considering most of the participants had never been part of a bloc, was a great mistake. Still, affinity groups had come together naturally over the few days before the action, everyone joining groups with close friends who wanted to risk the same level of arrest and participate in the same type of action. Without any argument or coercion, autonomous groups had formed for a truly diverse range of actions: climbing on the roof of the building and dropping banners, digging up the front yard of the biotechnology company to plant seeds, doing independent media work, passing out fliers on the sides of nearby highways to the traffic that would be snarled by the spectacle we were to create, performing in a play involving the giant indigenous farmer puppet, acting as police liaisons (a police liaison is a person whose job is basically to delay the police by acting as the “spokesperson” for the group), and, of course, property destruction. Surprisingly, there was no predictable conflict about violence versus non-violence: everyone felt that they were participating in a collective action in which every group and every action was vital to the overall success of the whole project—the project at hand being to humiliate a biotechnology company that had counted on no one even knowing they existed.

At the crack of dawn, everyone put on their biotechnology suits, double-checked their props, and jumped into their cars. We parked in the parking lots of a nearby hotel and family restaurant, and ran into the front yard of the massive biotechnology complex. Im-



mediately groups scrambled up onto the roof and dropped banners; other groups began spray painting “Fuck Biotechnology” and “Free the Seed” on the walls of the building. Giant banners were unfurled, and within minutes an unearthly play began, with groups of biotechnology-suited people and a traditionally-dressed farmer tearing up the carefully manicured lawn of the company, planting organic seeds, while giant biotechnology corn visuals were erected facing the highway. The employees of the company must have thought one of their own experiments had gone horribly awry, and fled inside, locking their doors and staring out the windows. The security guards, vastly outnumbered, just watched with mouths agape. This entire action was visible from the highway, and more participants dressed in biohazard suits handed out fliers and carefully talked through the issues with passing traffic—traffic that soon ground to a halt. Within fifteen minutes, our action had completely paralyzed one of the largest biotechnology companies in the world and had frozen traffic on one of the major highways in the United States. Of course, it was the cops that actually shut down the highway—maybe in fear the public would see the spectacle ahead.

Of course the cops did come eventually—although, due to the element of surprise, we had free run of the place for almost an hour. Even when the first cops arrived, they realized, as the security guards had, that they were outnumbered by a large mass of maniacs in biotech suits. They tried talking to our police liaisons, who repeatedly told them we had to consult with each other on any decision, a delaying tactic that enabled us to get more of the action done—a mistake in retrospect, since that was when we should have re-grouped and prepared for the inevitable police assault. Even after reinforcements arrived, the cops were afraid to act until some of the businessmen came out of the office and whispered in their ears. A few of the officers began trying to arrest people, starting by arresting the only person they could identify—the farmer. Unfortunately, all the affinity groups were so absorbed in carrying out the actions they had planned they

let some precious seconds pass before they could act—and by then the police managed to pepper-spray one individual in the face. However, through quick thinking, our white biotech suit disguises, and some ridiculously brave unarresting techniques (including giving cops wedgies and pulling people free from their grasp), we managed to protect almost everyone from arrest.

At this point the bloc had become a very loose cluster of affinity groups, most folks not even spatially near each other, which played into the hands of the cops. When calls to “bloc up” were made, it soon became apparent most people didn’t have any idea what we were talking about, and had little grasp that by gathering together as a larger group we could stand off the cops. Still, when cops came out on bikes, protesters nimbly jumped over fences to avoid them, leading one cop to a near-collision with the fence! For a good fifteen minutes pure pandemonium reigned, with cops unsuccessfully chasing protesters and protesters swarming outside the cops’ grasp without evacuating the premises of the company. The farmer chose to be arrested non-violently while the person who was pepper-sprayed was finally cuffed after a considerable battle. Finally, the cops settled down and agreed to let us move our protest off the premises. Rescuing our giant banners, we managed to regroup our scattered forces and make a quick getaway to our cars. Altogether, out of fifty-some people at the action, there were three arrests.

We tried to make it back to our secret hideout, only to find out the city had sent undercover cops after us. After some quick driving, we escaped the police and pulled into a truck station—we had to dispose of our biotech suits, which we were still wearing! We went around back to an isolated dumpster and began throwing our biotech suits and other incriminating evidence inside. Then, to our surprise, we noticed a trucker watching us through his shades. He gave us a thumbs-up and a shady smile. Our victory was all over the CB radios!







Reunited at our secret hideout, we decided to march downtown to the jail. Everywhere, people were talking about our action, at diners and in shopping centers, old men and young women—no one had seen it coming, and people got the message! Not only that, but almost everyone was supportive: “I don’t believe they’re putting that in our food,” “They’re messing with God’s creation,” “That company’s just out to make money regardless of the cost to this town or the world.” I had never before seen such a positive reaction to an action. When we finally got to the jail, our boring little town was scandalized—as was the biotech company!

A lawyer agreed to represent the defendants for two hundred dollars, and we raised the money through benefit concerts in which every style of music from punk to bluegrass was played. In court, the cops admitted that due to everyone wearing white biotech suits they were unable to identify exactly who did what, so they couldn’t really make any charges stick. At the end, the defendants were let off with community service and the cops even apologized!

As in any action, there were things that went wrong and things that went right. We definitely had free run of the place for a while, and could have inflicted much more serious damage on the biotechnology company than we did—at the risk of possibly alienating some people. Given the weight of the issue, it probably would have been worth it. We definitely should have done more unarresting trainings—the methods we used, like jumping and wrestling with cops, may be courageous, but are not recommended. We also could have used a good bloc training, which became distressingly obvious when people didn’t respond to calls to “bloc up.” The fifty of us together definitely could have stood up to the cops, but when people panicked and began running around as lone individuals, the cops managed to nab them. Lastly, we should have had a lawyer ready ahead of time (see *Legal Support*, pg. 329). Still, hindsight is always clearer than foresight, and the creative use of bloc tactics with great public outreach made this an action people in

our small town will be talking about for years—and one that’s caused the biotechnology company considerable grief and expense.

There are some that say the bloc tactic is dead, but it is only as dead as the ideas that give it life. Trying to repeat Seattle is going to fail: those ideas died after they were employed, but they were well and alive at the time because they were new and creative, and the cops couldn’t see them coming. Don’t just think about previous blocs, look around you for living inspiration. The real question is not whether the bloc is dead or alive, but what new ideas we can dream up for striking the next blow against capitalism. May that blow be a killing one!



# Blockades & Lockdowns

There are many reasons to blockade: to call attention to or prevent an injustice, to support other direct actions by securing a space or creating a distraction, to decrease traffic fatalities. There are many sites that can be blockaded: highways, factory and shopping mall gates, business districts, the front doors of restaurants that are to host corporate dinners or party delegates. Intrepid blockaders can lock themselves to the equipment that is to destroy a forest, or lock authorities out of a building that has been occupied in a political action. One of the most common implements for blockading is the lockbox.

## Locking Down with Lockboxes

When it comes to blockading, lockboxes are very useful, assuming you are willing to be arrested. The design described here has been used in several cities, including some in which the police are experts at “handling” protests, and all the same it can take police hours to move blockaders who use them from a busy street. It is one of the simplest designs; there are many other possibilities. You can make lockboxes with 90-degree angles in them that accommodate both arms of one individual, so one person can comfortably lock down to a gate, a truck axle, or even a railroad track. For serious engagements, you can make big concrete barrels with lockboxes fitted inside them, or dig a hole in the ground and build a vertical one-way lockbox into it with concrete and rebar, or drive a junker car into place, disable it, and lock down to it.

Lockdowns can be used to stop movement into and out of an area, providing a spectacle perfect for attracting media or other attention. They can stall traffic to allow support teams to hold an awareness-raising rally, and distribute leaflets to or otherwise engage

drivers stuck in traffic. After blockaders are removed from the area, police generally block the area for another hour or more themselves, lengthening the impact of the action. Lockdowns can appeal to the public by showing that people are dedicated enough to put their bodies on the line; they are descended from a long heritage of non-violent civil disobedience that many civilians find less threatening than other brands of direct action.

- METAL OR PLASTIC TUBING OR  
PIPING—*such as PVC pipe*  
BOLTS AND NUTS—*at least one  
bolt and one nut for each box*  
CHAIN OR ROPE  
CARABINEERS

GLUE—*optional, but encouraged*  
HACKSAW  
DRILL  
BOLT CUTTERS—*optional*  
AT LEAST ONE PERSON READY TO PUT  
THEIR BODY ON THE LINE

## Ingredients

A lockbox is a piece of pipe by which a person can be locked securely to another person or object. The average lockbox accommodates two people; with several lockboxes and people, you can form a human chain.

Lockboxes utilize the width of your torso and arm-span to take up space. To lock down, you attach yourself to a mechanism inside a piece of pipe; in order for a police officer to unlock you, he would have to get his arm into the pipe as well, but as the pipe fits snugly around your arm, this is impossible. Should police attempt to pull you apart, the strain will be on the metal chain and bolt, not your shoulder joints, assuming your box is built correctly. By using a carabineer to connect to a bolt within the pipe, you are able to detach from the box immediately whenever you choose. With lockboxes, a group of people can swiftly move into a space, block it, and defy the efforts of police officers who would remove them.

## Instructions

The first step is to scout the area you want to blockade. There are a wide variety of environments in which you might choose to apply lockboxes, but for the purposes of this introduction we'll assume that you will be operating in an urban environment. You could blockade the entrance to an event or business, or an entrance to a tunnel, highway, or access ramp. The first step is to figure out where the traffic, whether it be car, foot, or other, can best be bottlenecked. Often, if you block one street successfully, you can snarl traffic in a large area. Look for streets that lead to main roadways, and watch the traffic patterns. If you are planning to block a road, listen to traffic reports; determine which roads gridlock easily and which roads feed major transportation routes. Note all the details of your target, including the length of traffic lights, which lanes are open at certain times, and which directions the majority of cars turn.

Once you have found the location that best serves your purposes, you'll need to determine how many people it will take to block it. If you have a well-chosen target, but you do not have enough people, traffic will still be able to pass, and you will simply be a nuisance, not a blockade; if you cannot create a "complete circuit" with your human chain, connecting it at either end to immovable points, it may be easy to move you out of the way even if the lockboxes between people are secure. To measure distances quickly and subtly, you can count your steps heel-to-toe across an area, or run string or yarn across it. You'll also need to take into account the sizes of the lockboxes you are making and the people locking down. If a street is 20' wide and your lockboxes are 3' long, you'll probably need five or six people.

Plan your formation carefully. If you are locking down in a line, the two people on the ends can be locked to stationary objects—with bicycle U-locks around their necks, for example, or by a less secure means such as chain locks. If you use bicycle locks or any other locks that require keys, have an accomplice to spirit the key away quickly, or be prepared to hide it where the sun doesn't shine. For a less durable blockade, you could

leave the ends of your formation open and sit or lie down. Alternatively, you could close the formation at both ends, locking down in a circle, or form two lines crossing each other in an X.

When planning, take into account the strain of being locked in place for a long period. If the lockboxes are not supported by something, those locked together will quickly be worn out by holding them up. There are also the matters of food and blood circulation to consider.

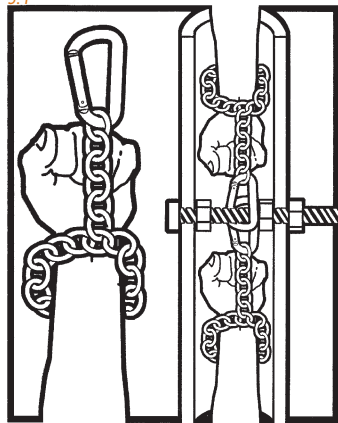
Once you have worked out your plan, the next step is to gather materials. These can be expensive, so look around for places to acquire them for free. PVC pipe can be found at construction sites; chain can be cut from a locked dumpster; tools can be borrowed or stolen. If you do not want to draw attention, you may want to buy the supplies at multiple locations. While purchases of bolts, carabineers, and glue will not attract attention, a septum-pierced revolutionary may raise eyebrows if she brings thirty feet of PVC pipe to the counter. Rumor has it that before and during mass mobilizations, store employees are told to look out for such purchases. Use the same care you would for buying spray paint, crowbars, bolt cutters, or glass etching solution. Do not use a credit card if you do not wish to create a paper trail.

Summary:

1. Cut the pipe to the appropriate length.
2. Drill a hole all the way through both walls of the pipe at its midpoint (or thereabouts, depending on the differing armspans of the two who will be using it).
3. Pass a bolt through both holes.
4. Secure the bolt.
5. Cut a length of chain to fit around your wrist and reach up to the bolt.

Gathering Materials

Design, Construction,  
Adaptation, and Fortification



6. Fasten a carabineer to the chain by which to secure it to the bolt.
7. Repeat steps 5 and 6 for the person who will share the lockbox with you.
8. Fortify the lockbox.

The construction of lockboxes can be a fun group activity. Make sure the people who are going to use the boxes try them on and modify them according to arm length and other variables. How much of your arm goes inside a lockbox is a matter of preference and tactical strategy, but on average your pipe should be about 4' in length. The more of your arm is covered by the PVC pipe, the more of your body is safe from police action. For example, if your bicep is exposed, the police could attempt to use pain compliance there to force you to unlock yourself; if your entire arm is in the pipe, this is impossible.

Everyone's arms are unique. If you are locking down, you need to be able to put your arm far enough into the pipe to grab the bolt, so you can easily connect and disconnect your carabineer. If the people who are to use the box can be present during the construction, measure their arms and custom-fit the pipe. If this is not possible, build the box to a length that almost anyone can use—say, between 3' and 4'. If you are using PVC pipe, it can easily be cut with a standard hacksaw. For more long-lasting lockdowns, use more durable piping.

It's important that your pipe be the right diameter; you should be comfortable sliding your arm in at least to your bicep. Unless your arm is extremely small or large, the pipe should be between 4" and 6" in diameter.

After the pipe is cut so that both people who are to use it can put their arms in as far as they want and touch fingers, secure a bolt at the point where their fingers touch. The length of the bolt should be longer than the diameter of the pipe; if you use 5" pipe, make sure your bolt is at least 5.5". Stay away from bolts with sharp threads or a sharp

point on one end, unless you are prepared to modify them for safety and comfort. Your bolt should be thick and difficult to cut; it will probably be the weakest link in the chain, so you'll want to be careful to make sure it's as secure as possible.

Drill a hole all the way through one wall of the pipe and out the other. If you have to drill the top hole first and then flip the pipe to drill the bottom hole, make sure the holes line up! Put the bolt through both holes. It should be slightly off-center in the pipe, so the people locking to it can fit their fingers around it and have space for their knuckles. Now use nuts to secure it in place; these can go inside the pipe, or outside it, or both. You can use powerful glue to strengthen the bolt; better yet, if you have the means, weld it into place. You could include multiple bolts in your design, to make it harder for the police to know where to start. If you have more than one bolt, you can also experiment with attaching yourself to all of them.

Now you have to build the chain bracelet that secures you to the bolt inside the pipe. Cut a length of chain that can loop around your wrist at one end, and attach at the other end around the bolt in the pipe; it will be in the shape of a P. Experiment with chain length until you have a comfortable fit. Make the clasp that holds the chain around your wrist permanent and durable; use a carabineer to clasp the chain around the bolt, so you are able to unclasp from the lock box in an emergency.

Attaching the chain to the central bolt with a carabineer is a very secure and safe option, but there are others. For a simpler, though weaker, variation, skip the central bolt entirely and run a length of chain through the tube to attach your wrist to the wrist of your partner. This option might be useful if you have limited time and funding to prepare for the action. A benefit of the central bolt is that when you are pulled, the bolt absorbs some of the force, and gripping it can provide some control; if you are connected to another person by a chain directly, and one of you is pulled or dragged, both of you will bear the brunt of it.

Barbed wire need not only appear in your life as an obstacle; you can also apply it yourself to obstruct the movements of your foes.



Once the device is assembled, the holes drilled, the bolt secured, and the chain attached, make sure it all fits comfortably. Put some padding around the chain at your wrist, and pad the entrance to the tube if need be. If nothing else, wrap the chain in an old sock or two, and sand down the edges of the pipe to prevent it from cutting your arm.

The final step is to fortify your creation. Many police departments now understand how lockboxes are constructed and know how to disassemble them. This does not mean locking down is ineffective, since it still takes the police time to react, retrieve the necessary tools, and cut apart each lockbox; but it is worth brainstorming about how to stay ahead of their technology. The police are likely to try to cut the pipe to expose your hand and the carabineer, or attack the box at the bolt. Consider ways to slow this process. You could wrap the lockbox in materials that dull saw blades, for example, or wind layers of duct tape and wire around it, or cover it in viscous tar and sand, or weld rebar armor to it—or do all of these! The more layers of material that require different forms of cutting technology, the better. For heavy lockboxes that can anchor you in place, you could put a layer of concrete around your pipe, and a layer of plastic or aluminum drain tubing around that.

### *Practice and Transport*

After all of the boxes are constructed, practice locking in and out of them. Do this alone until you have it down, then try it with a partner, locking at once into both sides of a box. Before an action, practice for speed and organization with everyone who will be involved, so things will go smoothly on the big day. To prevent confusion, you can label each end of each lockbox, and plan out which direction each person will face and the order in which people will lock together. It can help to have individuals involved who do not actually lock down on the line; not only can they help get things together quickly at the beginning, they can also provide food and water to the people who cannot move their arms, and help deal with police and others.

It can be a challenge to get all the lockboxes to the site of the lockdown. You could hide them nearby in advance, or bear them there in a march, disguised as puppets or banners. If you have access to a car, you can use it to drop off all the lockboxes at the very moment your group suddenly converges at the chosen site. If you are doing a long line, you have access to several cars, and speed is of the essence, pairs could get locked together in vehicles before driving to the area, then all be dropped off at the site and link up in a matter of seconds. A large group of people walking any distance with bulky lockboxes will probably attract the wrong kind of attention, especially if the authorities are on the lookout for civil disobedience, although you could come up with clever ways to camouflage them in a pinch.

As in all blockading, if you are blocking a road or highway that is in use, it is very important to stop traffic first. This can most easily be accomplished by another group working in concert with those who lock down; it is a lot to ask of a small group that they stop traffic, then lock themselves properly together while holding it at bay. Angry drivers can be even more dangerous than police under these circumstances; be careful not to give them the opportunity to do anything stupid.

The people who have come with you to play supporting roles can complement your blockade with a rally, street party, or outreach event. If you are blocking a street, there will be drivers to witness street theater or receive pamphlets; if you're blocking the entrance to an official event, there may be reporters to record you issuing your statement. Either way, there will be curious passersby who deserve to be told more about what's going on and why, and perhaps to be entertained in the bargain. If your lockdown is going to create a traffic jam, and you are concerned that the action might be misinterpreted as an attack on civilian drivers, consider distributing peace offerings such as homemade brownies.

### *Once You're Locked Together*

Those locking down can be dressed in symbolic or expressive garb—or, for that matter, in nothing at all—or draped in a banner explaining the reason for the action. If your human chain is not connected to anything at the ends, you could conceivably move from one point to another while locked together, but this will not be easy or particularly safe. If you are planning on moving at all, you should practice in advance, and perhaps designate coordinators to talk everyone through certain movements or count off marching steps. Whether you expect this to be an issue or not, it is wise to prepare a basic communication and decision-making structure in advance, if there are more than a couple of you planning to lock down together.

#### *Police Reactions, Legal Consequences*

Ultimately, there is no way to predict for sure how the police will react, so avoid spending hours debating it in your group. It is important to have a police liaison present to negotiate with the authorities or at least make sure they understand the situation, and reporters or other witnesses to temper or at least document their behavior. If they start to do something that seems dangerous, calmly inform them that your arm is inside the tube and that you are unable to remove it, and that a team of crack lawyers eagerly awaits the chance to sue them into oblivion. Police will always try to intimidate you; call their bluff, while maintaining your composure. In a worst-case scenario, they may use pepper spray or a similar weapon on you—but remember, this will cost them a lot in the public eye, especially if you bear this persecution courageously.

If your line is anchored at each end, they may begin by trying to disengage the people in the anchoring roles. If they can move the entire line out of the way and work on you once you are no longer blocking traffic, they probably will, but this will be difficult if you are seated or supine. If they can't move you all, they will work lockbox by lockbox, cutting the line into smaller, more moveable sections. The method the police use to

cut you out will depend on how experienced they are. No police department wants a lawsuit, so they will probably be careful not to injure you. If you hide the location of the central bolt, they will have no way of knowing where your hands are inside the tube; this will prevent them from simply cutting the tube in half. Often, the police will call in the fire department to use special tools designed for removing people from wreckage. Last time I locked down, the police brought special wooden frames to support our PVC pipe lockboxes, then slowly dismantled the boxes with wire cutters, saws, and various other tools.

It is also difficult to predict what your charges will be when you are arrested at the end of your lockdown. In this author's experience, among others, the charge has been “incommoding,” the same charge you get for blocking a street or similar conduit with your body. The use of lockboxes is not a separate crime, though the police may make threats or try to tack on additional charges such as “possession of implements of crime” (PIC). In both the lockdowns in which I participated, the police told us that because we used the lockboxes we would be charged with an additional PIC offense, but of course, as police are wont to do, they were lying. PVC pipe, chain, and carabineers are not implements of crime, no matter how you slice it. Regardless, you should have a group ready to provide immediate legal support (see *Legal Support*, pg. 329).

Committing to a lockdown is a serious matter; you must be prepared for the ordeal of interacting with infuriated police officers over a protracted period of time, while being unable to move freely; this will be followed by the further ordeal of being arrested and spending time in jail. Embark on a lockdown in a state of inner peace and resolve, properly fed and hydrated, prepared to weather storms of danger and drama—and if you think you might be there for a long time, wear an adult diaper!

You can heat rocks in a fire and use them to blockade a road or thoroughfare. Use porous rocks, as nonporous rocks will simply explode, and be sure to identify them for everyone's safety. For the sake of convenience, you could set the fire, rocks within it, at the location to be blockaded, so as not to have to work out how to move them.

There are many other ways to create blockades. The most traditional is to build a barricade (see *Blocs, Black and Otherwise*, pg. 127). An individual who desires to lock herself to something or someone can do so by putting a bicycle U-lock around her neck, though this requires the same support infrastructure that a traditional lockdown does. Extremely experienced and prepared groups can build tripods and suspend individuals from them, taking the civil disobedience of lockdowns to another level. Dirt roads can be blockaded by digging ditches across them; fencing, metal or wood poles, cables supporting such poles, or other materials can be planted in them, too. If police become anxious or confused enough, they may block off an area for you.

When blockading a busy thoroughfare, it is important to slow traffic to a safe speed first. A bicycle parade (see *Bicycle Parades*, pg. 100) can slow to a stop, becoming a blockade in itself and offering the opportunity for more permanent blockading to take place. Old bicycles, perhaps outfitted with extra metal, could be locked together and abandoned as a blockade by such a parade. It is possible to set off the automatic arms of railroad crossings by using jumper cables to complete the circuit between little trigger wires on the tracks. Individuals dressed as construction workers can put out traffic cones and barrels and wave down cars; for that matter, giving drivers a spectacle of any kind to stare at will slow them down. A banner drop over a busy highway can slow traffic significantly, potentially creating a traffic jam which might itself constitute a blockade of sorts—nothing obstructs cars like more cars! Speaking of, you can drive old junker cars into place and disable them (see account following *Reclaim the Streets*, pg. 421); be sure to buy them with cash from people who won't remember anything useful about you if the authorities come asking. They can be loaded with barricading material, which can be deployed from them; people can even lock down to them. Once traffic is slowed or stopped, you can stretch cables or fencing across highways and affix it to telephone poles, light posts, or guardrails.

You can obtain a lengthy audience with an otherwise unavailable public official or similar personage by handcuffing yourself to him or her.

Don't forget that quick-drying concrete can effectively seal many gates and other means of access. Mix nuts and bolts or other material into it for greater durability. For a humorous effect in a low-risk environment, you can brick up the door of an office or business. Pick a quiet night, so the mortar will have enough time to dry.

When blocking off both ends of a street or bridge, make sure you leave an exit. You don't want to let traffic in, but you also don't want to trap civilians—or yourself. Always make sure that you are not blocking access to a hospital or similar establishment.

In the winter of 2003, before the second Gulf War began, direct action was happening all across the globe in an attempt to stop the war before it started and to connect the impending invasion of Iraq to the larger war that capitalism wages everywhere. Direct actions in New York City and San Francisco had shut down the Holland Tunnel and Financial District, respectively, and other protests were also making headlines.

Anarchists and direct action enthusiasts in DC were organizing regular actions, while trying to put into place a plan that could be carried out once it was announced that the bombs had started falling on Iraq. Our theme was “When the War Starts, America Stops.” We put out fliers calling for an “Emergency Response Direct Action—the Morning After War on Iraq Starts.” People who wanted to participate on bikes could show up for a “Race Against War” in Dupont circle; at the same time, people who wanted to participate on foot would head to the other side of town for a “March of Resistance” at the Eastern Market Metro stop. We also put out a call for groups to carry out actions on their own to further disrupt business as usual throughout the city.

We've had a lot of direct actions in DC over the last few years. The state is usually aware when there's going to be a lot of protest activity, and the police presence is really intense. Given this atmosphere, just meeting up for a protest without being shut down from the start can be really difficult. To counter this, we came up with a complicated

To get a flammable barricade through the streets and into place, you can stuff newspaper soaked in gasoline into large cardboard boxes, connect them together, and drape a banner across them. March through the streets bearing this structure to the site that must be blocked, set it down, and strike a match.

plan like nothing we'd done before. We would use the city's public transportation system and the fact that the city is wedged between two different states to our advantage. The march started in southeast DC, near the US Capitol. But instead of the march taking to the streets of what is a pretty typical area of DC for protests, the crowd was led down into the subway station. We handed out different colored slips of paper which corresponded to the colors of the flags participants were to follow onto different cars of the same subway train. The people leading the groups into the different cars were responsible for making sure no one got separated from the protest and that everyone made it to the correct stop. On the train people sang, chanted, had conversations with commuters, and passed out fliers about why we were there. A lot of folks in DC ride the train to work at that hour, so it was a good opportunity to take our message directly to many people.

After the train crossed the river into Virginia, the various color-coded groups were instructed to exit at the Roslyn stop, a short walk from the Key Bridge. The Key Bridge is a main artery between DC and Virginia, and serves as the entrance to Georgetown, one of Washington's richest and most upscale shopping districts and also full of targets which could be related to the war. In addition, the Metro stop was only a couple of short blocks away from the offices of the Boeing Corporation, another possible target with obvious connections to the war.

Meanwhile, as the march headed toward the Key Bridge on the Virginia side, the Critical Mass ride was weaving its way through the DC streets to meet the march on the DC side of the bridge. This, we hoped, would allow us to block the bridge effectively from both sides and thus bring business as usual to a halt, focusing attention on the war begun only hours before. To add to the display of visible resistance and accompany our actions with precise and pointed messaging, other affinity groups, separate from the march and bike ride, brought banners to the bridge and hung them up around the main

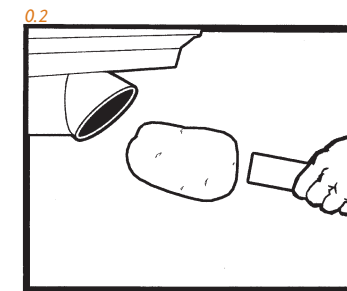
intersections while others handed out fliers detailing our reasons for shutting down the bridge and explaining our opposition to the war.

Two drivers sat in junker cars near the bridge on the Virginia and DC sides, waiting for the word that the march and bike ride were nearing so they could get into place. When they learned the march was coming, both cars drove out, and stopped and parked at the DC side of the bridge. Originally there was to be a car on each side, but the police presence on the Virginia side of the bridge, combined with the landscape of the area, made a successful getaway for the driver who would have to abandon the car there seem very unlikely.

The drivers parked their cars at an angle to take up as many lanes as possible, hopped out, moved to remove the license plates that had enabled them to drive around safely, and ran like hell to get away. Unfortunately, there were hundreds of cops on the DC side of the bridge, some of whom started chasing one of the drivers immediately. They eventually caught up to him, punched him a couple of times, and threw him in the back of a paddy wagon. They also picked up one of the scouts who was doing communications on the bridge and mistook her for the guy that was driving the other car. In custody, she heard over the radio that the cops realized their mistake. The cops then suddenly opened the doors to the police van and said, "Get out, we don't want to deal with you right now," and let both people go!

Three people were arrested on the Virginia side of the bridge; we had a bail fund and legal support team ready to go to get them out. They were out in a couple of hours, and thanks to the coordination of the national lawyers guild and DC's local direct action legal collective, a local lawyer took the cases for free.

Let's back up and talk about how we put this together. This action posed several organizing challenges because of the uncertainty of when the war would start. Because of this, we took steps to ensure we had all the needed action roles sorted out weeks in ad-



You can disable cars and trucks quickly and easily by using a stick to push a large raw potato into the exhaust pipe and out of sight (figure 0.2). This technique can baffle even skilled mechanics, and once the potato is removed the automobile will work again.

vance. We even had understudies for some of the roles, in case certain people happened to be unavailable the day we needed to carry out the action.

In the planning for the action, we secured two junker cars that would be used to help stop traffic from reaching the bridge. The two cars, one of which was a minivan, were also loaded up with big scraps of wood and metal (including a bed frame), chains, and locks that would be used to form barricades that would fill in the areas around the cars. In the vicinity of the site of the action, there were also road signs and other construction-related barricades that could have pulled into the street. The plan was for an affinity group in the march to open up the cars and pull out all the materials to set up the barricades—but it happened that the folks who were going to do this were tied up on the other side of the bridge by a heavy police presence. By the time they got near the cars, the police had blocked them off and made them inaccessible.

In addition to getting drivers for the vehicles and people to assist in building the blockades, we secured volunteers for several other key roles. We had a loop of communications people within the bike ride, the march, and on the bridge as scouts, as well as folks on site in advance to check for any early police presence. Cell phones were used to insure the simultaneous arrival of both the march and the Critical Mass ride. We also had a couple of people set to lead the various risk levels of the march: those who couldn't risk arrest followed one color flag to a support rally across the street, while those who could engage in blocking the street followed another. While our ultimate goal was for no one to be arrested, we wanted to make sure that those for whom arrest was not an option were able to participate as well and feel comfortable participating. Action medics and legal observers accompanied the march, and the variety of roles allowed for those who could not engage directly in the blockades to take on equally active and important roles.

This plan was largely organized in public, so the police presence awaiting us was unavoidable. Only a handful knew the full details of where we would end up, but un-

fortunately that must have been leaked. Had we done a better job of keeping the target point a secret, we might have had more time to get things in place; on the other hand, the bridge we picked is one of the main entrances to the city, and it may have had a large police presence regardless.

However, the bridge was completely shut down for about 30 minutes, and partially shut down and made into a spectacle for hours after that. It was a nasty day, cold and pouring rain. The action didn't entirely go as planned—the idea was to shut down both ends of the bridge and have a street party against the war in the middle. Instead, the police cleared all of us from the bridge pretty quickly. But it was shut down, our message against the war and business as usual was all over the news, and the action clearly affected the morning commute to work. In addition, we gained useful experience for our future endeavors.

When puncturing tires, aim for the sidewall; if you want to be sure the spare won't help, you can puncture at least two of them.

You can permanently disable an automobile by pouring sugar in its gas tank.



# Thinktank

## Instructions

### A Method for Intensive Collaboration

A thinktank is a period of self-imposed isolation and concentration for creative purposes; it enables the participants to live within the creative process, centering their attention and liberating their imaginations.

The thinktank method focuses on exploring formats of production and interaction. A thinktank is not simply a way to produce results: it is also a way to experiment with process. A thinktank can produce science, performance, stories, music, healing, art, a machine, a philosophy; the composition of the thinktank determines the conditions, rules, materials, facilities, and individuals with which these products are hewn. The exact goals of a thinktank might not even be established in advance; the development of goals may itself be a goal.

A thinktank is a free university: inside, we get smarter and more capable. Accordingly, the objects, insights, and lifeways that arise out of it are to be shared. In that spirit, we have assembled this guide. It is a framework of ideas, not a list of rules. Italicized texts are anecdotes or examples from specific projects. If you carry out a thinktank, or whatever else you call it, be sure to pass on your findings, as well.

### Premise 1

In a thinktank, a set amount of time—two weeks, for example—is devoted to a specific goal. Examples of such goals could include designing and building a mechanism or a piece of art, producing a performance or intervention, occupying an unusual space, creating a publication, building a whey-powered airplane, or all of these at once.

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The stated goal of a thinktank is not the ultimate end, but rather a means to it: the ultimate end is to conduct and enjoy an experiment in collaboration. For this reason, it may be enough in some cases to set the conditions of the thinktank and let its goals develop in the process of exploring those conditions—see Premise 5, below.

A thinktank is intense and focused. Because of this, it can generate in participants the same excitement, urgency, and supernatural powers that otherwise appear only during natural disasters, popular uprisings, thesis defenses, and similar emergencies, without any of the nasty side effects.

*“Day 11, midday: I was sewing a six-foot inflatable Arnold Schwarzenegger prop, Drew was in the subbasement troubleshooting beats on the sequencer, Erik was hunting down projection equipment, Jason was screening the last of the t-shirts and posters, and Chris, while out on his trailer bike picking up an electric motor, managed to dumpster dive two pizzas and a head of cabbage, which we ate for lunch.”*

A thinktank is holistic. Every part of life during the thinktank belongs to the project. There are no lunch breaks or business hours. For the given period, the thinktank is in effect twenty-four hours a day. Activities like eating and sleeping are part of, not breaks from, the project; they are integrated into it as experiments or adventures in themselves.

*Dearest -----,*

*Believe it or not, I am writing you from Wal-Mart. I am now well into my thirty-seventh hour of occupation. My plan is to stay for seventy-two hours, but I have had absolutely no luck finding a suitable place to sleep—go figure! In fact, I just got busted trying to nap. I was settling down under a rack of orange camouflage cover-alls, when I saw a pair of feet approaching. “What are you doing under there?” the employee asked. I assumed that I’d be escorted out the front door (or worse), so I didn’t bother with an elaborate ex-*

### Premise 2

### Premise 3

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cuse—“Hiding,” I said, as I climbed out and waited, like a good criminal, for the firing squad. But the strangest thing happened! She just stood there looking at me. (She wanted to open the application but she didn’t have the right program.) After a few seconds, I just walked away. I took off my wig and spent next few hours hiding in the magazine section. Now the “Radio Diner” is open again, and I’m back in the booth where my refill cup hides . . . I think the whole thing’s blown over.

Always Wal-Mart,

Always, -. ---- -----

#### Premise 4

Design your thinktank like you would design a machine. In support of your specific goal, assemble a group of people, facilities, materials, and tools. Each part should be integral to the project.

For a long while, I had a project in mind that required serious bike mechanic skills and an inventor’s tenacity. I had a friend in Boston with both. He came to McLeansville for two weeks so we could give it a shot. Taking turns doing what we each did best, we ended up succeeding moments before the bell. In the process we learned a lot from one another.

At the same time, forget about recruiting the perfect mix of specialists; a thinktank is neither a machine nor a management team. There are experts in small things, but no experts in big things, and a thinktank is strictly a big thing. Instead, focus on designing an environment that is perfect for the people who ought to be involved.

“Two weeks prior to lock-in we still had a spot to fill. A friend of a friend of a friend recommended Tera. She couldn’t claim any of the mechanical skills we thought we were looking for, but she was excited about the project. The project ended up revolving around her energy and ideas. My subsequent projects have gotten a million times better, thanks to that experience. Three years later she invited me to be part of a thinktank she designed. I humbly accepted!”

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The thinktank is first the tool by which the work is made, and thereafter the lens through which the results are to be understood.

“We could not have set out for our results; before the project, they didn’t yet exist. All we did was create a situation that seemed fertile and let ourselves loose in it. We built up our Galapagos island, and let the beaks of its birds evolve as they would. Now, for our performance to be relevant to the outside world, we will have to go some distance toward recreating, in each performance, the world that brought it into being.”—journal entry upon exiting Thinktank Eight

A thinktank is not just temporary, it is necessarily temporary. Like a fifty-yard dash or a temper tantrum, a thinktank is, by definition, unsustainable.

“A modern day vision quest, [thinktank] does violence to the borders between self and group. We begin like steel, but the process energy is a heat and things begin to bend. At moments the line between individual and group becomes fluid; inertia evaporates and change is all there is. It can’t be sustained. It’s not about being sustained. It’s about building up an uncommon intensity, then pouring it, at the right moment, onto the other world.”—Manifesto for Concentration [thinktank], Jamaica Plain, MA 1999

The rules for a thinktank can seem confining from the outside. If being locked into certain rules seems harsh, consider what is being locked out. Carefully chosen rules can liberate spaces and individuals from the implicit rules that had dominated them. Finding freedom doesn’t necessarily mean abandoning all rules: it can also mean choosing rules that have potential to reveal new possibilities.

“Running off to the store or even the dumpster is against our stated rules. This felt ridiculous at first. I was always thinking something like ‘We’re out of staples, really, what’s the problem if I run to the hardware store?’ But it feels good, actually, to switch from a

#### Premise 5

#### Premise 6

#### Premise 7

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consumer mode in which solutions are selected to an inventor mode in which solutions are imagined based on what is available. In this mode every ‘possible’ resource is right under our noses. It invests us with a feeling of real presence.”

**Premise 8** The methods for documenting a thinktank should be carefully considered. Doing “that funny thing” again for the camera really screws things up.

*“In our first thinktank, we overextended. We spent the first week doing everything twice so we could get good pictures. Finally, we realized we were missing out on the experience so we could have photos to look at. For the second week, we scrapped the burdensome documentation in hopes that memory would serve. It does.”—unpublished reflections on Safety Bike Thinktank, 1998*

**Premise 9** A thinktank both produces works of art and is itself a work of art rendered as movement through and alteration of every kind of space.

*“It’s hard to locate the borders of this project. Fuller and I have been tied together with an invisible rope for eight days now. He tastes the Food Not Bombs spaghetti and I say “needs salt.” We are desperate to get this show functioning; our intensity leaves traces on carpets and sidewalks. Perched on a park bench outside the third venue, we grapple with last minute decisions. I see my anxiety expressed on the faces of innocent passersby. Everywhere we go there is a vortex. Everywhere we go it rains.”—Symposium of Very New Music tour, 2000*

**Premise 10** A thinktank is the ache of a new world; as powerful as it may become on the inside, it is vulnerable to things outside. Like the most epic dream, it can be chased beyond memory by a single crack of light from under the door. Take steps to isolate your group: go somewhere else, find a neutral territory, bar the door, rip the phone off the wall. Checking email is out of the question.

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*“After two weeks, we five were almost one thing. I didn’t even notice it, actually, until we got out. It felt awful to travel in separate vehicles. That connection was deep. There were these incredible synchronicities, especially on stage . . . I’m thinking of one amazing moment where we had built up to a huge, loud, messy percussion climax and without any warning we all stopped on a razor’s edge . . . I remember opening my eyes in this round silence before people remembered to clap.”—from Auto Revision interview, 2001, in Cho Family ’zine*

A thinktank is a visitor, a simultaneous but separate occurrence. When a thinktank is over, it is impossible to go back. As for your pre-thinktank life, leave a forwarding address—you’ll never get back home.

*“It was like I got used to a zero gravity situation; when I got out of that building, all of a sudden I weighed a hundred and thirty pounds again. For a few days I could hardly move. Plus my eyes ached so bad from the light . . .”—excerpted from a letter from Kelly, St. Petersburg.*

Kelly and three others stocked up food and water, entered an abandoned building, and agreed only that they would stay for ten days. By day three they had decided to blindfold themselves for the remaining period and build a shrine. As I understand it, there is now a giant deer head sculpture in some unoccupied building in St. Pete.

From May 26 to June 8, 2001, five collaborators confined themselves in a 26' by 20' squatted room with food, water, fasteners, adhesives, tools, makeshift sanitation and documentation equipment, and a decrepit 1985 Saab 900. While in the room, the group dismantled the car and made its parts into musical instruments. The participants wrote music and rehearsed it on the new instruments, shot video footage that they later edited into a documentary video, and collected words and images for a 'zine that they assembled afterwards. During that period, the only interchange between the room and the outside world was the heat, light, and air flowing in and out, the electricity flowing in, and the webcam data flowing out.

**Premise 11**

## Account

*Automobile Re-Vision Project,  
Thinktank Number Eight*

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Compiled from journal entries:



We all met at my place at 7:00 that morning, packed up the car and (thank god it started!) shoved off for a two-week road trip. By 7:30 a.m. we had traveled eight and a half miles, more than enough driving for two weeks. We idled briefly in front of the small brick building before driving through its double doors. With a turn of the key, the car's engine went quiet for the last time, and our travels began.

The steel door slammed and was barred shut; there was a moment of silence as each of us stared at the four other strangers with whom we would live for two weeks. An instant later, a rush of excitement spread over the room: there was spontaneous clapping, laughing, and shouting—then another silence. We looked around the room, and then at the car—and saw that it had been a musical instrument all along. We had driven there in that car, but in this room, by an act of declaration, it had become nothing less than a limitless material.

We began by locking ourselves in, but it was just as much a lockout. We locked out as much of the world as we could, in an attempt to find modes of collaboration and production that had been inconceivable in our day-to-day experience. We locked-out in order to make new instruments and new music. These would be the exclusive products of the new world we had claimed. They would be inconceivable in the terms of the outside world!

Yet, inevitably, we made drums, basses, didgeridoos, thumb pianos, slide whistles, and little percussion tools. Even the mechanical drum machine was derivative of instruments we had seen. But didn't we use these instruments to make music that was a pure expression of a hermetic society? As it turns out, no: the music we made could only be a strange hybrid between the circumstances we chose and the music we had heard and made all our lives.

Our building never stood still. In it, we roamed through the rain of one region into the cold of another. Through the open roof and our one window we met a world increasingly foreign as we became a world of our own.

One would think our open roof showed us the same sky through the leaves of the same six trees. But as we traveled, we left Pittsburgh's black-orange midnight for the ul-

traviolet glow of a late morning that promised to soak us all day. And it did. The next day we drifted under a sunny gap in the clouds. We climbed up to the old I-beam structure to be closer to the sun.

On the west side of the building was our only point of contact with other humans, a plate door with an expanded steel window. Through this window, we saw blazing hot streets, pedestrians sweating in shorts, motorists with their windows rolled down for dogs with their noses to the wind. All of this, while our massive brick walls kept us cold and our flywheel trees made the long-gone rain coast on for hours. The disjunction between out and in proved our suspicions and confirmed the gap between worlds. Nevertheless, we dragged the whole scene with us as we went: windowless corrugated steel architecture, pavement, telephone poles, and litter all followed. A huge hospital building with an emergency room dock was inertia-free and hot on our tail. Ambulances screamed and ran hot just to catch up and deliver their goods.

Even the inside of our building transformed: one moment it was a living room with stories in the air, the next it became a deafening garage, a dining room, a studio . . . seconds later we stumbled into a house of worship with high walls and a ceiling fresco of living green.

Visitors sometimes misunderstood our circumstances as hard or painful. They found the fact that we didn't "get to" take showers for two weeks troubling, and often betrayed the assumption that it is human nature not to get along with one another. Folks would ask through our window, "Aren't you all going crazy in there?"

We had put out word that on the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup>, people were invited to come help us celebrate our exodus. But after falling in love with our circumstances, leaving didn't seem like such a cause for celebrating. Moments before we were to emerge, we changed our minds. We began to play our instruments, building from a whisper up to out and out chaos, then threw open our doors and let our friends come in because—"Aren't you all going crazy out there?"



# How to Join CrimethInc.

Georgia O'Keefe did when she was a teenager, by taking the painting she considered her best work to an internationally acclaimed art gallery and nailing it up on the wall beside the classics of the old masters. Bank robber Jacques Mesrine did when he returned to the maximum security wing of the Saint Vincent de Paul penitentiary only two weeks after his second escape, equipped to liberate all his former fellow prisoners. Amber did it by sending a letter to the headquarters in Atlanta that read, simply, "Give me a time. Give me a place. I'll meet you there. I want to live. Fuck everything else." One of us wrote her back about six months later to suggest a rendezvous point. She met us there, and it was glorious.

By now you've heard of the notorious CrimethInc. ex-Workers' Collective, an underground railroad of escapees and freedom fighters hell-bent on total liberation. Perhaps you have contemplated how you might join such romantic, adventurous circles; perhaps you are yourself one of the many who have written to or shown up at the various CrimethInc. addresses, seeking to do so.

If the latter is the case, then you have already learned that no one can join CrimethInc. To repeat it once more, no shortcuts exist to freedom, self-determination, or adventure. Accordingly, CrimethInc. is not a membership organization: there are no recruitment drives, no yearly dues, no boards of trustees. Nor is it a movement: movements come and movements go, but CrimethInc. endures like a ghost. One could describe CrimethInc. as a decentralized underground, but it would be more precise to say that it is a myth—not in the sense of that word that designates superstition, nor that indicates celebrity, but rather that suggests a self-fulfilling prophecy (see *Spell Casting*, pg. 501).

A myth is greater than the sum of the parts that give rise to it. Considered in isolation, the projects undertaken by individual CrimethInc. cells have only a limited effect; together, they are powerful because they draw upon and imply the existence of subversive currents in every psyche and sector of society. Indeed, crimethought is practically ubiquitous: it is present in every life, in every heart, woven into the history of humanity and the cosmos as surely as submission and inertia and everything else are. If it were not, there would be no such thing as CrimethInc., and you certainly wouldn't be reading this book.

If CrimethInc. is everyone, then, by the same token, it is no one. There is no enchanted inner circle that can claim credit for its achievements, no secret cabal behind the daily revolts that give teeth and a heartbeat to the rhetoric in pages such as these. Those in need of a device with which to transform their lives might seize upon the CrimethInc. collective as a screen onto which to project all the dreams they need to

believe are possible, but they, not CrimethInc., are due the credit for the possibilities they thus envision. The various saps and sects that act as CrimethInc. have no patent on crimethought—they barely know what they're doing. You, dear reader, with your vivid imagination and fresh perspective, are bound to know much better than they do what CrimethInc. is capable of and must do next.

There is no way to go about joining a myth—on the contrary, mythology is what remains of human activity when the participation of individuals has been factored out. One may be inspired by a myth, one may even inspire myths, but one always acts in the real world. At the same time, in acting anonymously, one can arrange for one's actions to highlight or augment a mythology, rather than add to one's own reputation. In doing so, one can avoid both the attention of law enforcement agents and the adulation and vilification of spectators, while connecting one's actions to a larger current of similar activity. At its best, CrimethInc. can serve these practical purposes, becoming a sort of mythological revolutionary organization for those who know that the traditional "revolutionary organization" with all its hierarchy and inertia is a contradiction in terms.\*

It is not unrealistic to suppose that, though largely mythological, CrimethInc. might be able to play a part in bringing about the end of global capitalism, epidemic ennui, and all the other current manifestations of hierarchy and misery. These monstrosities are themselves largely grounded in myth: they have a reputation for being eternal and unsailable, without which they would swiftly be assailed and brought to an end. Nothing can fight a mythos like a counter-mythos put into action. Like cultures and economies, myths may seem to have power over human beings, but that power flows both ways: as they are distilled from human activity, they can be refashioned by means of it.

CrimethInc., like any mythical force, belongs to anyone who has the audacity to claim it. Anyone can put on a bandanna and join the Black Bloc, anyone can dumpster food

*\*Any revolutionary organization must be dissolved at the moment of revolution; otherwise, it becomes another vanguard, another authority. For years, we wondered how this could be accomplished—after all, "revolution" isn't just one moment, it's an ongoing process of decentralization and empowerment, one therefore always impeded by the existence of purportedly revolutionary elites. For that matter, how is it possible to undo the power of a group that has already achieved a high status? Even if the organization is disbanded, its legacy will continue to exert influence over the present: for example, the various revolutionary groups that have been contemplated as "authorities on revolution" for decades since their self-annulment, despite all their opposition to authority. Power, once centralized, is hard to redistribute.*  
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*The solution finally struck us: the way to dissolve the authority of the revolutionary organization is simply to communalize its powers by extending them to everyone. The greatest resources a non-hierarchical, largely mythical organization like CrimethInc. has are its reputation and the skills of its participants: if these can be put at the disposal of all, then any authority CrimethInc. has can be effectively undermined. The moment of revolution is the dissolution of the revolutionary organization—that is, the appropriation of its resources by all.*

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and become Food Not Bombs, anyone can burn down buildings as the Earth Liberation Front or design a poster with the familiar bullet logo at the bottom. So while you cannot join CrimethInc., you can make use of its power once you have apprehended your own. Remember, energy proceeds from you to the tools you use, not the other way around.

You could begin the way some of us did: with a few treasured friends, set out upon a quixotic mission to transform the world, turning every resource at your disposal to this task. Work from the moments of liberation with which you are most intimately familiar, grounding your revolutionary struggle in the concrete pursuit of more of these. Use existing countercultures as staging areas from which to launch assaults on society in general, neither being too comfortable within nor too critical of these enclaves; choose your enemies carefully, as they will shape your activities more than any other forces. When you strike, strike with the times, and know when to dig trenches and when to disappear into the night. Throughout, use the CrimethInc. moniker when it will enable you to find or inspire companions, and set it aside whenever it would be superfluous.

If you still cannot imagine how to get started, flip through the pages of this book and pick a recipe at random. Carry out the instructions, claiming credit in the name of CrimethInc. If there is a communiqué to be issued, add a CrimethInc. logo—you can find one two pages hence if you do not wish to design your own. Derive what lessons you can from the experience and repeat as desired, drawing on what you learn to hone your objectives and techniques. Joining CrimethInc. is this simple, and this difficult.

Once you apprehend that CrimethInc. is not a party or a platform, that whatever it has been and is to be is up to you, you will be free to dispense with your superstitions about it—and then, if you like, to make use of it, unhindered by infatuation, defensiveness, or cynicism. Certainly it has its shortcomings, like any format; it also offers some advantages others don't. Consider this an invitation to show what can be done with it. Who knows, maybe you will find this tome in a dusty attic two decades hence, when all

its authors and editors have long been defeated by the twin scourges of repression and depression; then, if you like, you will be the elusive inner circle of the CrimethInc. ex-Workers' Collective, and what it is and does will be up to you.

Ultimately, like anything, CrimethInc. must be superseded to be realized. Whether you act autonomously as "CrimethInc.," or under any other name, is immaterial—the important thing is that you begin to act autonomously, to discover your own capabilities and dispel the superstitions you have about those who exercise theirs. The next move is now in your hands, the fate of CrimethInc.—and much more important things—along with it.

1. Have your own reasons for being involved, your own goals for and interpretations of what you're doing. No one can act as CrimethInc. who is still waiting for instructions—to be an ex-worker is to be self-starting and self-directing. Those who are already active are busy enough with their own projects; besides, management corrupts both leaders and led.

2. Accept the responsibility of making the best of the legacies of both CrimethInc. specifically and revolutionary activity in general. Thinking in terms of collectives rather than atomized individuals means recognizing that when one of us acts, he or she acts on behalf of whatever part of the rest of each of us, however small, would do the same thing. The important question is not which projects or tactics to passively endorse or oppose, but what you can add to existing contexts to make the most of them.

3. Be careful to avoid accruing personal glory in association with anything claimed by CrimethInc. At worst, CrimethInc. could become a hierarchical organization after all, with status established simply by celebrity standing.

*How to Hijack the CrimethInc. ex-Workers' Collective, in Five Easy Steps*

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4. Choose some projects that need doing and do them. If you need help, contact others, fellow “CrimethInc. ex-workers” or not, for advice and collaboration. If you need raw materials, don’t hesitate to steal from previous CrimethInc. projects, or from anywhere else for that matter.

5. It can be fun, not to mention useful for preserving anonymity, to assume a pseudonym or three. Think of something that says everything that needs saying without an essay or manifesto, like Jello Biafra or Rolf Nadir. Once the fictions of intellectual property and changeless identity are dispensed with, the signature on any work has significance only as an element of the work itself. Remember that using just one alias will not obscure your identity for long—better that you shift between a series of them, or borrow someone else’s name or pen name from time to time. All existing CrimethInc. aliases are fair game, for example. Confusion as to who is really who protects revolutionaries from both stardom and investigations, and keeps the focus on the relevance of the ideas to the readers’ lives, where it belongs.

