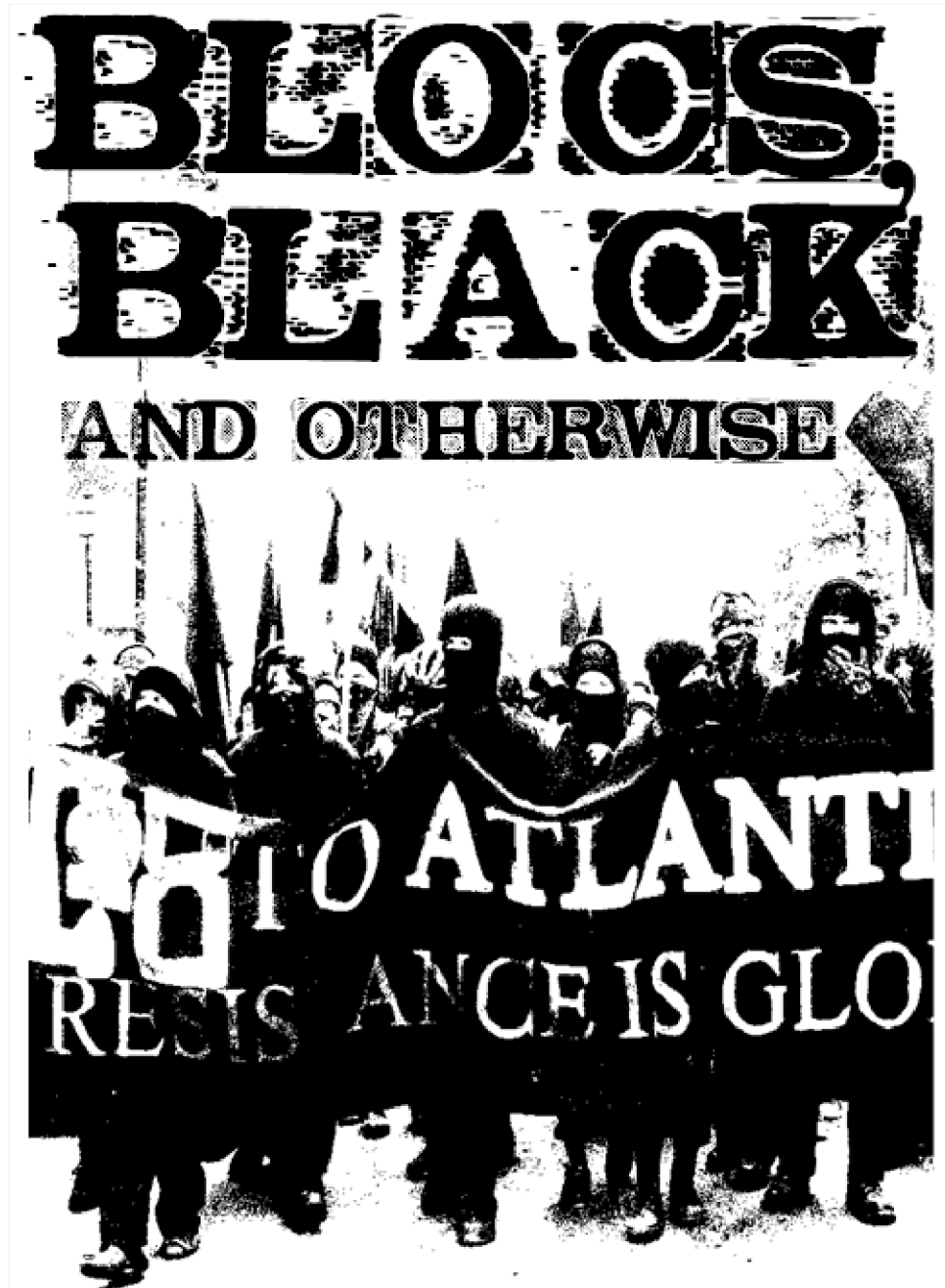




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- Don't just cover your face! Bandanas are popular and convenient, but they don't conceal enough. Cover your head completely so your hair cannot be seen—especially if it's distinctive. In a black bloc, you can do this by wearing a ski mask or making a mask out of a T-shirt—stretch the neck hole across your eyes and tie the sleeves behind your head, with the rest of the shirt covering your head and shoulders. In other circumstances, you could try a wig, if that fits the aesthetic of your action.

- If possible, cover your eyes. Goggles can do this while serving the dual purpose of protecting your eyes from chemical weapons; nondescript sunglasses could also work in a pinch. Both of these can be obtained in prescription form and are better to use than your regular glasses, particularly if your regular glasses are distinctive. Contact lenses are not recommended in situations where you may come into contact with chemical weapons.

- Be careful not to leave fingerprints and DNA evidence! Wear cloth gloves—leather and latex can retain fingerprints and even pass them on to objects you touch. Wipe down tools and other items with alcohol in advance, to clean fingerprints off them—you never know what might get lost in the chaos. Don't forget about the batteries inside flashlights!

- Practice at home! Don't go out in a bulky outfit you've never worn before expecting to pull off cop-shocking feats of dexterity. You need to be familiar with your outfit and comfortable moving in it; it's important that your vision isn't compromised, too.

- Do not let any of this give you a false sense of security. Be careful! Assess your relationship to risk honestly; don't do anything if you're not sure you could live with the worst possible consequences. Stay aware of your surroundings and listen to your instincts. Make sure you know and trust the people you're working with, especially when it comes to high-risk activities. Practice proper security culture at all times. Know and assert your legal rights, especially in stressful situations. Doing so may not make things better, but failing to do so will certainly make them worse!

Don't get caught! Stay safe(r), and smash the state!

This zine compiles two texts by CrimethInc that provide an excellent introduction on how to participate in and organize black blocs. The first is "Blocs, Black and Otherwise" that appeared in *Profane Existence* #43 and CrimethInc's *Recipes for Disaster*. Surprisingly, we couldn't find a PDF of that text online, so we're reproducing it for everyone's benefit. As a bonus, we added a second piece titled "Fashion Tips for the Brave" that first appeared online.

This pamphlet is dedicated to Chris Hedges and Derrick Jensen — you make us want to party like it is 1999 all over again!

For those seeking a historical background on the black bloc tactic, we highly recommend the zine "Can't Stop Kaos: A Brief History of the Black Bloc."



Blocs, Black and Otherwise

Materials:

· Matching clothing that conceals the wearers' identities

· Trust and communication

· A mission

Optional Materials:

· 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), etc.

· 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 ziplock 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, etc

· Offensive gear: spraypaint, 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, etc.

· 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!)

• If you're going to wear a mask, keep it on at all appropriate times! If you are captured on camera or witnessed at any point with your mask off, you can then be easily identified with it on.

• Be extremely conscientious about where and when you change into and out of your mask and anonymous clothing; there should be no cameras or hostile witnesses. If possible, explore the area in advance to find appropriate spaces for changing. Remember that police are especially likely to target masked individuals who are not in a crowd that is similarly dressed.

• Wear different outfits layered one upon the other, so you'll be prepared for any eventuality. Ideally, you should have one outfit for getting to the site of the action without attracting attention, your anonymous gear for the action itself, and then another outfit underneath so you can look like a harmless civilian as you exit the area. Don't forget to stay hydrated, particularly if all those clothes get hot.

• If you have tattoos that are or could be visible, cover them up! You can do this with makeup or concealer, especially if you use heavy-duty products designed for that purpose. Many actors and dancers use Dermablend to cover up tattoos, burns, and scars. It comes in numerous colors that can be mixed to match your skin tone, and it's water resistant and rated for 12 hours of wear. It's expensive, but cheaper than bail! If you can't find Dermablend or a similar product, cover your tattoos with clothing that won't ride up. Tuck your clothing in if you have to.

• Likewise, if you have visible piercings, take them out—or at least cover them up so they are sure not to be exposed.

• Do not march in a bloc wearing your regular clothing, especially if it's distinctive. Cops may be stupid, but they can probably match the pictures of the masked-up person with the purple polka-dotted pants to pictures of the same person in the same outfit minus the mask—even if the pictures were taken on different days.

• If you are going to carry a backpack or bag, don't take the one you carry around in everyday life. No matter how perfect your outfit is, it's all for naught if your bag is recognizable—especially if, like many people, you change bags much less frequently than you change clothes.

• The same goes for your shoes, for similar reasons—wear different ones during the action than you wear every day. This is also important because cops can attempt to use footprints or other traces from shoes as evidence.

• Do not wear patches or other identifiable insignia on your clothing while in a bloc, unless everyone else has exactly the same ones in exactly the same places.



Fashion Tips for the Brave

Do you desire to be an autonomous individual rather than a faceless, mass-produced cog in the machine? Great! That is, unless you are marching in a bloc—where conformity is a weapon that you can use to smash the machine itself.

The goal of the bloc as a tactic is to have everyone look as similar as possible, so that, ideally, no single individual can be identified within the anonymous mass. This helps to keep everybody safer. If only some people within a bloc take these precautions, the cops can more easily spot and target individuals and groups, which is dangerous both for those who are acting within the bloc and for those who are not. Those who make the effort to stay anonymous can draw extra police attention; those who don't can be more easily identified, which can make them easier targets. Neither of these situations is desirable.

Take this stuff seriously! If you're setting out to accomplish something risky, taking these precautions is crucial. If you're not, you can help to protect your comrades and avoid making yourself a target.

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 level of illegal activity. This tactic has won some famous victories in the past couple 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 at work: 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 grey 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 a coincidence that people don't liberate animals from fur factories 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 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, the crowd cover itself might enable an escape that would 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 intimidation 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 service 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 there are a bunch of people wearing either 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!

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 pig officer. 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), or get on the subway (though in a serious situation this may be shut down, or the police 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 everyone involved knows 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.

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 your activities, unmasking you, assaulting you, or pointing you out to authorities; the same goes for local civilians. Never, ever 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 fact, it's just important to take into account. 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 engaging in a confrontation with the police which you hope will be contagious, or at least risking the possibility, you will probably be doing everything you can to avoid encountering the police. 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.

Where and how can the Bloc tactic be applied?

Black Bloc actions have been a hit at mass actions over the past couple 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 anti-war 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 lock-downs 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 fill-in-the-blank, 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 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 ever has. If nothing else, a Bloc action can be good practice for future such 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 involved or present be taken into account. Alienating people needlessly is not only counterproductive, but endangers Bloc participants; the police are already enough enemies for anyone breaking the law. The last thing you want to do is endanger others with your actions—don't throw stones at the police from the back of a crowd, don't 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,

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 busses 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 gasmasks 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 see 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

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 now too; 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. 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

and arrest them 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, as long as the element of surprise is present, 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 and with the element of surprise against an unsuspecting target can accomplish a great deal, especially if it is of decent size. Consult the illustration at the end of this text for an example 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 in question 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 thus 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 . Always be sure everyone in your group, especially the ones who aren't keen on taking great legal risks, knows exactly what the highest level of possible illegal activity is in advance, 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 anti-corporate 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, can handle stressful situations without the added stress of herding a flock of confused followers. It goes without saying that 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 the same sense of security culture.

There is a variety of police weapons that 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 can 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 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, 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 individual arrests 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. 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 them 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

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 take 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 shatter-proof 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 spraypaint 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, you split from the angry mass in a small team, apply your cocktail, and disappear. Try to aim them at property, not officers, if possible. Of course, with the government spending thousands of dollars on each officer's special storm trooper suit, throwing stuff at cops is practically a victimless crime (and don't give me that shit about more police officers than demonstrators going to the hospital at the anti-I.M.F. 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?)—but you'd be much better off throwing paint bombs at them (which can be made from glass bottles, light bulbs, hollow Christmas tree ornaments, or wax balls filled with paint), or shooting paint gun pellets from your slingshot. If they get paint over their clear helmets and shields, no one's injured, but they're rendered blind in their expensive armor and have to retreat.

Regardless of the total size of the Bloc, each affinity group should be totally self-sustaining, at least in regards 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, so 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 with which to communicate with the main group, and can ride bicycles for extra speed and mobility; it usually makes the most sense to position them 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 actually 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, for 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 larger, more powerful Bloc can be formed as a cluster of affinity groups. 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 between individuals within affinity groups and between affinity groups themselves, in even the tensest of 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, rather than 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.

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 the police may mass or 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. It is possible to get aerial maps off the internet, for locations for which street maps are unavailable or do not suffice.

Make sure you have safe accommodations 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.

Meeting location is an important factor in security. You don't want a place that can be monitored (no private residences), you don't want a place where you can be observed all together (not the park across from the site of the next day's actions), you don't want a place where you can be seen entering and leaving or that someone could enter unexpectedly—post scouts, lock the door once things get started, watch out for anything suspicious. I'll never forget exiting an ultra-high security meeting in a university basement only to discover that while we'd been locked in, a crowd of liberal student protestors had flooded the adjoining room to watch a slideshow—which all the organizers of the next day's militant Black Bloc had to wade through in

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 can count on the possibility 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!"

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 couple paces behind a particular companion at all times, with another friend always at your side, and another behind you, for example. 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 rumors 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 communication 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

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. One of the best options at a mass action is to have the Bloc form somewhere outside the area of heavy police presence, and move into it (uh, if that's really where you need to go! maybe you should consider what you could accomplish in the other direction...) as part of a much larger group, before separating to act as a Bloc. 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.

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 (reinforced with PVC pipe or, far better, if you can get them safely out into the streets, great placards made from tough but limber insulation board, with hand-holds cut into them; these can be tied or chained together, to create a mobile, jointed full size barricade) down the front and sides of a group can offer useful barriers to this end. 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 spraypaint cans. Sensitive materials (such as projectiles) can be transported to the action concealed in puppets, and puppets built from paper mache over stronger stuff can serve as effective shields—though those poor puppeteers get enough shit from the secret service 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?

embarrassment! Oops! Small groups can take walks and chat; larger groups can meet in quiet outdoor settings—go hiking or camping, if there's time—or in private rooms in public buildings, such as library study rooms or empty classrooms. Best case scenario: though he has no idea you're involved in direct action, you're close with the old guy who runs the café across town, and he doesn't mind letting you have the back room one afternoon for a private party, no questions asked.

Once everyone is together, if the folks in attendance do not all know each other already you can establish the level of security by playing the “vouched for” game: each person puts a hand on someone else present they know and trust. Hopefully, everyone in the room will be touching, through one connection or another, and the meeting can begin with some degree of confidence in the air.

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 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 the Bloc communicating and making quick, democratic decisions, 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. 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 absolutely necessary. You'll also want to have enough money on you for food, transportation, and phone calls, but no more, as that would probably disappear in the event of arrest. Remove piercings that could be torn out. Do not carry your address book, or 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, make sure you have no identifying papers on you if you plan on withholding your identity from the police in that event. 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 present 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, 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, 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 hyperthermia, of course. It may be most sensible to carry the outer layer of your getaway layer in a sealed bag, in case you are covered in paint, tear gas, etc. by the time you need to use it. If you expect chemical weapons attacks, wear a waterproof outer layer that admits no access, and under that synthetic fibers that won't absorb chemicals (cotton will). For serious confrontations, choose a gasmask with shatter-proof lenses and replaceable non-asbestos filters that won't obscure your vision too much; otherwise, you can breathe through a bandanna soaked in vinegar or lime juice (transport the bandanna to the action in a sealed bag; you can carry a lime or two with you to keep it fresh) and wear swimming goggles (these can be obtained in prescription form for those who wear eyeglasses; when not wearing them over your eyes, keep them inside out on your forehead so they won't fog up). You can add a particle mask underneath the bandanna for extra protection. 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 (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 trash can lids or cut traffic barrels, inflatable rafts or inner tubes heavily reinforced with duct tape and possibly a layer of tarp, good old-fashioned cardboard, or layered (super-glued together) and reinforced plexiglass. Soften up the handles with a thick wrapping of duct tape so the shock of impact won't break your wrists, and provide plenty of room on the grip so your knuckles don't take all the 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