

Direct Action

An Ethnography

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Contents

PREFACE	6
SOME WORDS OF HISTORICAL CONTEXT	7
THE MOMENTARY SUSPENSION OF HISTORY	7
THEN HISTORY BEGAN AGAIN	10
A FEW ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	13
INTRODUCTION: YOU BEGIN WITH RAGE, YOU MOVE ON TO SILLY FANTASIES ...	16
ABOUT THIS BOOK	21
STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK	25
CHAPTER 1: NEW YORK DIARY: MARCH 2001	27
Thursday, March 1, 2001: <i>Ya Basta!</i> formation training, Manhattan, 7PM	28
Saturday, March 3: <i>Meeting with Mohawks</i>	30
Sunday, March 4: <i>DAN meeting, Charas El Bohio Cultural Center, 6PM</i>	31
EDUCATIONAL SESSION	36
Tuesday, March 6: <i>FTAA Coalition meeting, 8PM</i>	40
Thursday, March 8: <i>Ya Basta!</i> meeting, Manhattan, 7PM[5]	41
Friday, March 9: <i>Coalition structure meeting at Amsterdam Pizza at 111th Street, 6:30PM</i>	43
<i>Meeting with Starhawk, 8PM</i>	46
Tuesday, March 13: <i>AUTODAWG meeting at the National Lawyer's Guild, 8PM</i>	50
Thursday, March 15	52
<i>YABBA formation in Betty's studio, 7PM</i>	52
Friday, March 16	53
Saturday, March 17	55
Sunday, March 18: <i>DAN meeting at Charas</i>	55
CHAPTER 2: A TRIP TO QUÉBEC CITY	57
Friday, March 23, 2001	57
<i>We Arrive</i>	58
<i>Our Hosts</i>	58
CONSULTA DAY 1	61
Saturday, March 24	61
<i>The Table Outside</i>	61
<i>The Room Inside</i>	62
<i>12:10PM, First Breakout Session</i>	66
<i>1:45PM, Back to the Plenary</i>	72

4:30PM, <i>Breakout Session</i>	73
8:00PM, <i>Scanner Party</i>	76
CONSULTA DAY 2:	78
Sunday, March 25	78
11:00AM, <i>Plenary Meeting</i>	78
1:15PM, <i>Final Investigations</i>	86
<i>The Road Home</i>	88
CHAPTER 3: FROM BURLINGTON TO AKWESASNE	89
Thursday, March 29, 2001: <i>Ya Basta! meeting, Brooklyn</i>	89
Friday, March 30: <i>Independent Media Center, Manhattan</i>	89
Sunday, April 1	89
<i>DAN Meeting, Charas El Bohio</i>	89
Tuesday, April 3	90
Wednesday, April 4	90
Thursday, April 5	91
<i>Ya Basta! Meeting at Aladdin's Place in Chelsea, 6 PM</i>	91
Sunday, April 8: <i>DAN Meeting, Charas El Bohio, 6 PM</i>	92
Tuesday, April 10	92
Thursday, April 12: <i>Ya Basta! Meeting, Manhattan</i>	92
Saturday, April 14	93
Wednesday, April 17	94
<i>The Burlington Spokes</i>	95
<i>"Plan B"</i>	107
<i>Later That Night</i>	110
Thursday, April 19	111
<i>Akwesasne Itself</i>	112
<i>Border Action Manqué</i>	114
CHAPTER 4: SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS, QUÉBEC CITY	120
Friday, April 20, 2001	120
2:30AM	120
5:30AM, <i>We Arrive</i>	120
8:30AM	121
11:00AM, <i>Convergence, Laval University</i>	122
11:40AM	123
1:30PM, <i>The Carnival Against Capitalism March Begins</i>	124
2:00PM	124
2:10PM	125
2:20PM	126
2:25PM	126
2:40PM	127
2:50PM	127
3:05PM	127

3:15PM	127
3:43PM	129
3:50PM	130
4:10PM	131
4:17PM	131
4:22PM	132
4:30PM	132
4:35PM	133
4:45PM	134
5:22PM	134
5:40PM, <i>I Descend to Get Coffee on the Côte D'Abraham</i>	135
6:30PM, <i>Back to Ground Zero</i>	137
6:55PM, <i>Avenue Turnbull</i>	137
7:27PM, <i>Along St. Jean</i>	138
8:07PM, <i>Stupid Little Spokes</i>	139
Saturday, April 21, 2001	140
11:00AM, <i>Orsainville</i>	142
3:20PM, <i>Finally Back in the City</i>	143
3:35PM, <i>Ground Zero</i>	144
4:00PM, <i>Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce</i>	145
4:20PM, <i>Jean Baptiste</i>	146
<i>Notebook Entry, written the next day, 4/22/01</i>	147
5:25PM, <i>The Park</i>	148
5:53PM	149
6:00PM, <i>Jean Baptiste</i>	149
7:15PM, <i>I enter the IMC</i>	151
7:30PM, <i>still in the IMC</i>	151
<i>(From notebook, 4/21/01, 7:50PM, emergency meeting, Québec IMC)</i>	153
<i>(From my notes again)</i>	156
8:50PM, <i>Outside</i>	157
10:45PM, <i>Côte D'Abraham</i>	158
Sunday, April 22	159
2:15PM	161
4:25PM	162
6:25PM, <i>Bus to Montréal</i>	162
CHAPTER 5: DIRECT ACTION, ANARCHISM, DIRECT DEMOCRACY	164
I) WHAT IS DIRECT ACTION?	164
II) WHAT IS ANARCHISM?	171
III) VIOLENCE AND NONVIOLENCE	179
IV) AN EXTREMELY BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RELATION BETWEEN DIRECT ACTION AND DIRECT DEMOCRACY IN THE US SINCE 1960	183
CHAPTER 6: SOME NOTES ON "ACTIVIST CULTURE"	191
DILEMMAS OF WHITE PRIVILEGE	192

DILEMMAS OF PRIVILEGE THAT ARE NOT NECESSARILY RACIAL	195
THE MYTH OF TRUST FUNDS	196
SO: WHO ARE ACTIVISTS REALLY?	197
I) Work and Education	197
II) Class Backgrounds and Trajectories	200
ART AND ALIENATION	202
STYLES OF BOHEMIANISM	203
RANDOM OBSERVATIONS ON ACTIVIST CULTURE	207
Notebook extracts: June 2000, with some later jotted additions	208
<i>Frailty:</i>	208
Notebook extract, July 2000	209
<i>Cigarettes:</i>	209
<i>Other drugs:</i>	210
ACTIVIST LANDSCAPES	211

PREFACE

A book this size is unusual nowadays. It was certainly not my initial plan. When I first decided to begin writing up some of my experiences of direct action from an ethnographic perspective, I actually had intended to write a fairly short book. But the more I wrote, the more the topic seemed to grow. I realized I was faced with a common dilemma of ethnographic writing: points that seem simple and obvious to anyone who has spent years inside a given cultural universe require a great deal of ink to convey to someone who hasn't. Something similar had happened to me when I returned to Chicago from my dissertation research in Madagascar, many years ago. I remember fretting over just how much I had to say. I felt I had at best two or three really interesting points to make about the community I'd been studying. Then the moment I started writing, I realized that to explain any one of those points to someone who was not themselves from a rural Malagasy community would require several hundred pages. By the time I was done writing, I also realized that most readers would probably find the exposition much more interesting, all in all, than whatever I originally thought was the "point."

Call this book, then, a tribute to the continued relevance of ethnographic writing. By "ethnographic writing," I mean the kind that aims to describe the contours of a social and conceptual universe in a way that is at once theoretically informed, but not, in itself, simply designed to advocate a single argument or theory. There was a time when the detailed description of a political or ceremonial or exchange system in Africa or Amazonia was considered a valuable contribution to human knowledge in itself. This is no longer really the case. An anthropologist actually from Africa or Amazonia, or even some parts of Europe, might still be able to get away with writing such a book. Presently, the academic convention in America (which a young scholar would be unwise to ignore) is that one must pretend one's description is really meant to make some larger point. This seems unfortunate to me. For one thing, I think it limits a book's potential to endure over time. Classic ethnographies, after all, can be reinterpreted. New ones—however fascinating—rarely present enough material to allow this; and what there is tends to be strictly organized around a specific argument or related series of them.

Therefore, let me warn the reader immediately: there is no particular argument to this book—unless it's, that the movement described within is well worth thinking about. This does not mean it does not contain theoretical arguments. Over the course of it, I make any number of them: whether about the ideological role of large heavy objects, the political implications of the word "opinion," the similarity of writing news stories and Homeric epic composition, or the cosmological role of the police in American culture. What makes this an ethnographic work in the classic sense of the term is that, as Franz Boas once put it, the general is in the service of the particular—aside, perhaps, from the final reflections. Theory is invoked largely to aid in the ultimate task of description. Anarchists and direct action campaigns do not exist to allow some academic to make a theoretical point or prove some rival's theory wrong (any more than do Balinese trance rituals or Andean irrigation technologies), and it strikes me as obnoxious to suggest otherwise. I would like to think that, as a result, the interest of this book might also endure not only for

those motivated by historical curiosity, who wish to understand what it was actually like to have been in the middle of these events, but to ask the same sort of questions the actors in it were raising, about the nature of democracy, autonomy, and possibilities—or for that matter, dilemmas, limitations—of strategies of transformative political action.

SOME WORDS OF HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Enough time has passed since the breathless days of 2000 and 2001 that one can begin, perhaps, to see that historical moment in a little bit of perspective. That period, it is now clear, marked a certain watershed for global neoliberalism. These were the years in which the “Washington Consensus” of the 1990s was shattered. It happened very quickly. In fact it is a testimony to the effectiveness of direct action that it took only about three years of large-scale popular mobilizations in order to do so.

It is sometimes hard to remember, nowadays, just what the days of the Washington Consensus were like. Perhaps it might be best to start then with a word of context, to help understand why it was that the Zapatista rebellion in 1994 served as such a catalyst for the global movement against neoliberalism that followed, and why that movement came to take the form it did.

THE MOMENTARY SUSPENSION OF HISTORY

The years just before the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas announced itself to the world were probably the most depressing time to be a revolutionary—or even, dedicated to the ideals of the Left—in living memory. It wasn’t the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe that was depressing; most radicals were glad to see them go. What was depressing was what happened afterwards. With Stalinism dead, most Marxists expected to see a renaissance of more humane forms of Marxism. Social democrats believed that they had finally won the argument with the revolutionary Left and expected to shepherd the former subjects of the Soviet bloc into their fold; a reasonable expectation, since when polled, most of the population of Central and Eastern Europe said they wanted to model their new economies on Sweden. Instead, they got shock therapy and the most savage form of unrestricted capitalism. In almost every way, the world seemed to be heading for a nightmare scenario. The romantic image of the guerilla insurrectionary, which captured so many imaginations in the 1960s, was cascading into a kind of obscene self-parody. Already in the 1980s, the Right, which had been arguing for years that guerilla insurgencies in places like Vietnam, or Zimbabwe, or El Salvador were not spontaneous but fiendish schemes created by foreign ideologues, began to put their own theories into practice, with the US and South African intelligence agencies creating guerilla armies like the contras or RENAMO to sic on leftist regimes. At the same time, existing Marxist guerilla movements from Columbia to Angola that had begun full of high-minded rhetoric were increasingly prone to become pure bandit kings, or nihilistic armies without any cause beyond their own rebellion (those which held to the old ideal of social transformation, like the Shining Path in Peru, seemed if anything even worse). Liberation movements everywhere were transforming into vicious ethnic wars. Then came the wave of genocide, of which Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia were only the most dramatic and visible.

On a dozen interlocking registers simultaneously, the emerging pattern seemed catastrophic. It seemed like it would go something like this: On an international level, capitalism was transforming itself into a revolutionary force. Abandoning the welfare-state version of capitalism that had actually won the Cold War, the old Cold Warriors and their corporate sponsors were demanding a pure, no-holds-barred, free-market version that had never actually existed, and were willing to wreak havoc on all existing institutional social arrangements in order to achieve it. All this involved a kind of weird inversion. The standard right-wing line, since at least the 1790s, had always been that revolutionary dreams were dangerous precisely because they were utopian: they ignored the real complexity of social life, tradition, authority, and human nature, and dreamed of reshaping the world according to some abstract ideal. By the 1990s, the places had been completely reversed. The Left had largely abandoned utopianism (and the more it did so, the more it shriveled and collapsed), and even as they did so, the Right picked it up. Free-market “reformers” overnight began declaring themselves revolutionaries—the problem was, they did so as the worst sorts of Stalinists, essentially telling the world’s poor that science had proved there was only one way to go forward in history, that this was understood by a scientifically trained elite, and that, therefore, they had to shut up and do as they were told because, even though their prescriptions might cause enormous suffering, death, and dislocation in the present, at some point in the future (they were not sure quite when) it would all lead to a paradise of peace and prosperity. The fact that the “science” itself had shifted from historical materialism to free-market economics was a fairly minor detail; anyway, it makes it easier to explain how former Stalinists from Romania to Vietnam found it so easy to simply switch hats and declare themselves neoliberals. Meanwhile, as structural adjustment policies stripped away what small social protections had existed for the poorest inhabitants of the planet, propaganda and statistical manipulation had become so effective that most mainstream Americans who paid attention to such matters were convinced that conditions for the world’s poorest were actually improving, and not just in areas like East Asia that had mostly refused to adopt neoliberal policies.

Every progressive victory seemed to have been threatened or reversed. In South Africa, generations of struggle had finally eliminated racial apartheid; a moment of happiness, certainly, but an almost identical system was being created on a global scale, based on increasingly militarized borders, and on a labor migration regime where, for those trapped in poor countries, residence in rich, largely white countries was dependent on possession of identity papers and willingness to work in jobs the residents themselves weren’t willing to do. Feminism was being retrenched. Former victories over sweatshop labor, child labor, even chattel slavery, were all being eroded or downright eradicated.

Much of the problem stemmed precisely from the rout of the dream of social revolution, and those utopian fantasies that had always been necessary to inspire people to the passion and self-sacrifice required to actually work to transform the world in the direction of greater freedom and greater equality. I am referring here to genuine, living utopianism—the idea that radical alternatives are possible and that one can begin to create them in the present—as opposed to what might be called “scientific utopianism”: the idea that the revolutionary is the agent of the inevitable march of history, which was so easily, and catastrophically, appropriated by the Right. The murder of dreams could only lead to nightmares. It made it almost impossible to form a center from which to fight the incursions of the (now super-charged, revolutionary) Right. Social Democratic parties in Europe, for example, which were born from a reformist strain of Marxism, first seemed rather pleased with the collapse of their revolutionary cousins—they had finally

won the argument—until they realized that their own appeal, and the willingness of capitalists to engage with them, was almost entirely based on their ability to position themselves as the less threatening alternative. Before long, the social democratic regimes had experienced such a moral and political collapse that the few still in power were reduced to becoming the agents for the dismantling of the welfare states they had originally created. The activist Left in industrialized countries was becoming increasingly reactionary, capable of mobilizing passions only to defend things that already existed—the ozone layer, affirmative action programs, trees—and increasingly ineffectively. Elsewhere, it seemed in neartotal collapse.

Then, finally, there was “globalization.”

As Anna Tsing (2002) has recently reminded us, there’s a curious history here. The notion really began as a progressive one. It was a stronger version of internationalism: the sense not only that all men are brothers but that we are the common custodians of a single, fragile planet—an idea encapsulated by photographs of the earth taken from outer space by astronauts in the 1960s. The 1990s rhetoric of globalization had none of this. Essentially, it had two legs: one was that telecommunications—and particularly the Internet—were annihilating distance and making instant contact possible between any part of the planet; the other was that the fall of the Iron Curtain and other barriers to trade were, at the same time, creating a single, unified global market, whose financial mechanisms could then operate through these same instantaneous electronic means. Mainly, it was just about the power of finance capital. But the rhetoric was usually accompanied by a series of very broad generalizations: that not only money but products, ideas, and people were “flowing” about as never before, national economies could no longer dream of being autonomous; old nationalist ideologies, indeed, national borders, were becoming increasingly irrelevant, and so on. All of this was presented as happening all of its own accord. Technologies advanced, people were increasingly in contact with one another: the only possible language for them to deal with one another was trade—since capitalism was, after all, rooted in human nature.

For anyone who was really paying attention, of course, the reality was very different. Borders were not being effaced, but reinforced. Poor populations were still penned into their countries of origin (in which existing social benefits were being rapidly withdrawn). “Globalization” merely referred to the ability of finance capital to skip around as it wished and take advantage of that fact. Most of all, however, the period of “globalization”—or neoliberalism, as it came to be known just about everywhere except America—saw the creation of the first genuinely planetary bureaucratic system in human history.

In retrospect, I very much imagine that this is how the last years of the twentieth century will be seen. The UN had of course existed since mid-century, but the UN had never had more than moral authority. What was being patched together now was a system with teeth. At the top were the financiers—bankers, currency traders, hedge-fund operators, and the like—all connected electronically. There were the gigantic bureaucratically-organized transnationals that during this period were absorbing and consolidating literally millions of formerly independent enterprises. There were the global trade bureaucrats—International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, World Trade Organization (WTO), and so on, but also including institutions like the US Federal Reserve, treaty organizations like the European Union (EU) or North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)—whose chief role seemed to be to protect the interests of the first two. And, finally, there were the various tiers of NGOs, whose role, from providing farm credits to inoculating infants or providing food during famines, increasingly came to be to provide services that states had once been expected to supply, but had effectively now been forbidden from doing by the IMF.

The remarkable thing was that this was achieved through an ideology of radical individualism: above all, a broad rejection of the claims of common community—and political community in particular. We were all to be rational individuals on the market, aiming to acquire goods. Insofar as we were different, it was to be a matter of personal self-realization through consumption, since consumption, in turn, was assumed to be largely about the creation and expression of identities. Then, of course, identity could be said to circle back: since all political and economic questions were assumed to be effectively settled (history, in this respect, was over) identity politics became about the only politics that could be considered legitimate.

THEN HISTORY BEGAN AGAIN

All this makes it easy to see why the Zapatista rebellion—which began January 1, 1994, the day in which the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect—marked such a turning point. The Zapatistas, with their rejection of the old-fashioned guerilla strategy of seizing state control through armed struggle, with their call instead for the creation of autonomous, democratic, self-governing communities, in alliance with a global network of like-minded democratic revolutionaries, managed to crystallize, often in beautiful poetic language, all the strains of opposition that had been slowly coalescing in the years before. As members of the Midnight Notes Collective aptly began pointing out even at the time, opposition to IMF-imposed structural adjustment policies, (whether it took the form of Latin American indigenous rights campaigns, African food riots, or Indonesian Islamist movements) almost invariably was based on the moral defense of some collective resource: the right to treat land, or food, or fossil fuels, or even culture, not as a marketable commodity but as a common good collectively administered by some form of moral community—even if in fewer and fewer cases was the nation-state seen as the proper guardian of such rights or the framework of the moral community in question. Almost always, their sights were set both more locally and on a planetary scale. The Zapatistas, with their deft ability to employ emerging global communication technologies to mobilize international networks to defend their own autonomous enclaves in the Lacandon Rain Forest, were not only the perfect symbol, they managed to articulate what was happening through a new approach to the very idea of revolution.

In turn, it was the Zapatistas who began, with their two international encuentros “For Humanity and Against Neoliberalism,” to lay the foundation for what came to be known as the “anti-globalization” movement. Now this term, as I have said many times before, is something of a misnomer. It was basically an invention of the media. The most dynamic and important elements in the movement always saw it as aiming for a genuine, democratic form of globalization; at the very least a return to the sort of planetary consciousness from which the term first emerged. In the case of anarchists, autonomists, and other such radical elements, it meant the effacement of all international borders entirely. What emerged from the Zapatista encuentros was a loosely organized planetary network called Peoples’ Global Action (PGA), one of whose aims was to put nonviolent direct action back on the world stage as a force for global revolution. PGA was significant above all in that it explicitly rejected the participation of political parties or any group whose purpose was to become a government. It was PGA, in turn, that put out the first “calls to action” that eventually culminated in the November 1999 actions in Seattle. Rather than trying to narrative the story myself—it will be told many times, in different ways, over the

course of the book—let me instead provide the reader with a time line of only the most important events. What follows is a bare-bones account, and it reflects a very North American perspective, but readers may find it useful to consult, now and again, while reading this work:

January 1, 1994. North American Free Trade Agreement goes into effect. Uprising by the EZLN (or Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, or Zapatistas) in Chiapas begins with a surprise military offensive that leads, briefly, to the seizure of Chiapas' capital, San Christobal de las Casas. The Zapatistas, however, quickly transform from an offensive force to a defensive one, creating a series of self-governing autonomous communities, seeking international allies, and promulgating a politics of direct action, democratic experimentation, and a new approach to revolution that converges with the anarchist tradition in its refusal of traditional attempts to transform through the seizure of state power.

August, 1997. Second Zapatista “International Encuentro For Humanity and Against Neoliberalism” in Spain ends with a call to create an international network, that ultimately comes to be known (in English) as Peoples’ Global Action. Aside from the Zapatistas themselves, the core of PGA, at first, consists of the Brazilian Landless Farmers’ Movement (MST), the Indian Karnataka State Farmers’ Association (KRRS, a mass-based Gandhian direct action movement), anarchist or anarchist-inspired groups including Ya Basta! in Italy and Reclaim the Streets in the UK, and various indigenous and agrarian movements and radical labor unions.

June 18, 1999. “J18,” the first massive PGA-sponsored global day of action, known alternately as the “Global Day of Action Against Financial Centers” or “Carnival Against Capitalism” to coincide with the G8 meetings of leaders of the major industrial powers, with coordinated actions in over a hundred cities worldwide from Australia to Zimbabwe. In America, several demos are organized, mostly under the banner of new American versions of Reclaim the Streets.

November 30, 1999. “N30” actions against the WTO ministerial meetings in Seattle, another international day of action proposed by PGA. The action is long in the planning but comes as a total surprise to the mainstream media, who see it as the birth of a movement. Seattle saw sharp divisions over tactics between nonviolent protesters conducting the lockdowns and blockades of the hotel where the ministerial is taking place, organized by the newly created Direct Action Network (DAN), and participants in a smaller “Black Bloc,” mostly made up of anarchists and radical ecologists, who have a more militant interpretation of nonviolence, and who, after police begin to attack the blockaders, start a campaign of targeted property destruction against symbols of corporate power (mostly windows) downtown. On the first day, the meetings are actually shut down, and negotiations end in failure. The next few days see massive repression, culminating in the declaration of martial law and the summoning of the National Guard. The months immediately following Seattle are filled with a burst of new organizing and activity, and the creation of autonomous chapters of DAN in cities across the US, and even Canada.

April 16, 2000. “A16” actions against the meetings of the World Bank and IMF in Washington DC. While not as tactically successful as Seattle (the meetings are not shut down), A16 marks the beginning of a rapprochement between the DAN organizers and the autonomous Revolutionary Anti-Capitalist Bloc—the Black Bloc assembled for the occasion—with the RACB refraining from property destruction and instead providing support for blockaders and those in lockdown.

August 1, 2000. “R2K” actions against the Republican Convention in Philadelphia. Combined with D2K actions against the Democratic Convention in Los Angeles, these are collectively known among activists as R2D2. While LA DAN rejects widespread direct action for a strategy of marches in alliance with community groups, the Philly actions, organized above all by DANs

in New York, Philly, and DC, mark further integration of Black Blocs and blockaders, with the “Revolutionary Anti-Authoritarian Bloc” in this case providing a diversion to draw police away from the lockdowns. Philly is also marked by an attempt to create alliances between the mostly white DANs and radical people of color organizations, with mixed success. Retrospectively, it is seen as the point where the lockdown/blockade strategy has largely run its course, prompting an interest in creating more mobile tactics.

September 26, 2000. “S26” actions against the IMF/World Bank meetings in Prague, Czech Republic. This is the first large and dramatic action in Europe after Seattle. Like many European actions, the level of militancy is much greater than in the US. The actions see fierce clashes between Black Bloc anarchists and police, the first appearance of the festive “Pink Bloc,” and the first international debut of the Italian “white overalls” tactics (the “Tute Bianche,” organized by Italian Ya Basta!), a kind of comic mock army of activists in helmets, padding, shields, and often inflatable inner-tubes, who attempt to storm police lines armed, among other things, with balloons and water pistols.

January 20, 2001. “J20” protests at Bush’s inauguration, the second largest inaugural protests in American history, though they receive almost no attention from the mainstream media. Most members of NYC DAN end up joining another Revolutionary Anti-Authoritarian Bloc. The Black Bloc manages to crash through police barricades and temporarily occupy Naval Memorial, hoisting a black flag and blocking the parade route, and Bush’s motorcade, for some time before finally being forced out by secret service and police.

January 25–30, 2001. The first World Social Forum (WSF) is held in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Originally conceived as the radical alternative to the World Economic Forum (WEF)—a kind of junket and networking session for global officials and bureaucrats, usually held in Davos, Switzerland—the WSF rapidly becomes the intellectual center of the global movement against neoliberalism, with thousands of different organizations and individuals participating in hundreds of sessions.

April 20–22, 2001. Actions against the “Summit of the Americas,” negotiations over the Free Trade Area of the Americas pact (FTAA) in Québec City, Canada. This is the first action where the authorities organize their strategy around building a large fence (“the wall”) around the section of the city where the summit is to take place. The actions, organized primarily by the Montréal-based Convergence des Luttes Anti-Capitalistes, or CLAC, mainly aim attacks at the wall itself, as a symbol of the contradictions of neoliberalism.

July 19–21, 2001. Several hundred thousand protesters converge on Genoa, Italy, for the G8 meetings of the heads of industrialized nations. The wall strategy is again employed, and Italian police, who had traditionally been relatively tolerant of white overall tactics, adopt a strategy of extreme repression this time, refusing any contact with protest leaders and employing a systematic strategy of encouraging fascists and agent provocateurs to provide excuses to attack, arrest, and afterwards, systematically abuse and even torture activists. Genoa is seen as a watermark of repression in Europe and causes European groups to scramble to formulate a new strategy.

September 11, 2001. Attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center. Anarchists in New York are among the first to mobilize against the upcoming war, with marches culminating in a march of six thousand people to Times Square a month after the event. These are almost completely ignored in the mainstream media. Actions being planned for the upcoming World Bank/ IMF meetings in Washington DC are radically scaled back as the movement is forced to reconsider its overall strategic direction.

February 3–4, 2002. World Economic Forum protests in New York City. In the immediate wake of 911, the WEF announces it will relocate, this year, from Davos (where it has become the object of frequent activist sieges) to the Waldorf Astoria in New York “as an act of solidarity.” Anarchists in NYC DAN and the newly created NYC Anti-Capitalist Convergence (ACC) are forced to throw together an action in a matter of months, abandoned by almost all of their usual NGO and Labor allies. The action is successfully and nonviolently pulled off, but is met by massive police intimidation and hundreds of arrests. The stress of 911, and of being forced to create a national mobilization out of nothing in such a short time, creates endless tensions within the New York scene and eventually leads to decline and eventual dissolution of DAN over the course of the next year.

September 10–14, 2003. WTO Ministerial in Cancún, Mexico. Mass actions by Mexican and global activists—including the dramatic suicide of a South Korean farmer—end in a definitive check of the WTO process.

November 17–21 2003. FTAA negotiations in Miami, met by the first genuinely large-scale national convergence in the US since 911. These meetings also see the first use, in the US, of a new policy of massive preemptive attacks and extreme police violence against protesters—an approach that comes to be known as the “Miami model” after Homeland Security announces it as the way to deal with such actions in the future. The free trade negotiations, on the other hand, come to nothing, marking the definitive end of the FTAA process.

I’ll end here, not because Miami represents the end of anything (though some have argued it marks the end of one cycle of at least the North American movement), but rather, because it marks the end of the period covered in this book. September 11 and the “War on Terror” did certainly create a dramatically new climate in the United States, but its effects elsewhere were less profound, and certainly less enduring. In other parts of the world, repression was never so severe, and most managed to avoid the wave of xenophobia and militarist nationalism that did so much damage in the US. In many ways, the movement began to go into a new and broader stage, particularly in Latin America, with the wave of factory occupations and local assemblies in Argentina, or one-time PGA conveners like Evo Morales actually coming to power in Bolivia, events in Atenco, Oaxaca, and other parts of Mexico itself. I do not want to generalize or make predictions: at moments of genuine change, history makes fools of all of us who try. But I will at least repeat what I have said before (e.g. Graeber 2002; Graeber and Grubacic 2004): that anarchism, as a political philosophy, and anarchist ideas and imperatives, have become more and more important everywhere in the world. There is a broad realization that the age of revolutions is by no means over, but that revolution will, in the twenty-first century, take on increasingly unfamiliar forms. First and foremost, I would hope this book will serve as a resource for those who wish to think about expanding their sense of political possibilities, for anyone curious about what new directions radical thought and action might take.

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I came into this project with little but myself and my own sense of optimism. I pursued it with the growing understanding that, no matter how bleak and how dangerous some of the places through which one must pass, to live as a rebel—in the constant awareness of the possibilities of revolutionary transformation, and amongst those who dream of it—is surely the best way one can live.

INTRODUCTION: YOU BEGIN WITH RAGE, YOU MOVE ON TO SILLY FANTASIES ...

“So,” Jaggi says. “I have an idea for what Ya Basta! might contribute to the actions in Québec City. The Canadian press keeps framing this as some kind of alien invasion. Thousands of American anarchists are going to be invading Canada to disrupt the Summit. The Québécois press is doing the same thing: it’s the English invasion all over again. So my idea is we play with that. We reenact the battle of Québec.”

Puzzled stares from the Americans at the table.

“That was the battle in 1759 in which the British conquered the city in the first place. They surprised the French garrison by climbing up these cliffs just to the west of the Plains of Abraham, near the old fort. So here’s my idea. You guys can suit up in your Ya Basta! outfits, and climb the exact same cliff, except—no, wait, listen! This part is important—over all the padding and the chemical jumpsuits, you’ll all be wearing Québec Nordiques hockey jerseys.”

“You want us to climb a cliff?” asked Moose.

“Uh huh.”

“And how high exactly is this cliff?”

“Oh, I don’t know, 60 meters. What’s that, about 180 feet?”

“So you want us to climb a 180-foot cliff geared up in gloves and helmets and gas masks and foam rubber padding?”—Moose acting as if Jaggi might actually be serious about this.

“Think of it this way: the helmets and padding would be very helpful if you fall down at all. Which is likely because you have to figure the cliffs *will* be defended.”

Moose: “Oh, great. So now we’re climbing a 180-foot cliff with riot cops all over the top.”

“Oh come on, you’re probably all going to get arrested immediately just for *wearing* those suits. You might as well actually do something with them first. And the symbolism would be perfect.”

“I refuse to be so pessimistic,” I say. “Let’s imagine some of us get through. We scale the cliffs. Suddenly we’re inside the security perimeter..”

“Well, actually, no,” says Jaggi, looking down at the map of the city. The map of the city is drawn in felt tip on a large unfolded napkin, on the table of a pastry shop in New York City’s Little Italy, surrounded by various salt shakers and sugar bowls being used to represent imaginary activist and police units, all flanked by empty bottles of beer and a former chocolate cake. Six activists are crowded around the table, three Canadians, three representatives of the New York Ya Basta! Collective—all that are left of what had started as a much larger group. “We’re kind of assuming the fence will actually run around the edge of the cliff as well.”

Jaggi confers briefly with his two Québécois friends, who nod agreement. One, Nicole, adds another line to the map to make this more explicit.

“You mean we get over the cliffs and we still have to go over the wall?” someone asks.

“Oh come on,” says Jaggi. “If you can get up a 180-foot cliff, a 15-foot chain-link fence is going to be a problem?”

“Fine, we’re inside.” I’m insisting on my scenario. “Fifty activists in yellow chemical jumpsuits and—what was it, some Québec team’s hockey jerseys?—make it over the wall. We are inside the security perimeter. We have reversed the British invasion. Now what do we do? Occupy the citadel? Present a petition?”

“Actually, that would be really funny,” says one of the Yabbas. “We fight our way up the cliffs past two thousand riot cops, we go over the wall, and then, when we get there, we just present a petition.”

“To who?”

“Well to Bush, obviously.”

“How do we know where Bush is going to be?” asks someone else.

“He will be staying in the Concord hotel,” says one of the Québécois anarchists. “It will be easy to find; you can see it from almost anywhere in the city. Especially easy now,” he smiles. “Just look for the building with the surface-to-air missiles on top.”

“Plus about ten thousand snipers and secret service men, presumably, with endless high tech surveillance equipment..”

“...which will, in turn, be disrupted by our vast fleet of remote-controlled model airplanes...”

Conversation had, in fact, been seriously degenerating for at least half an hour.

It had started out seriously enough, as one of those three-hour marathon conversations about everything. The Canadians were in town as part of a traveling activist tour, put together by the CLAC, a Montréal-based anarchist group whose French acronym stood for Convergence des Luttes Anti-Capitalistes, or “Convergence of Anti-Capitalist Struggles.” It was early March 2001. They were touring to mobilize against the Summit of the Americas due to be held in Québec City on April 20, to be attended by every head of state in the Western Hemisphere (except Cuba). This event was to see the signing of a preliminary draft of something called the Free Trade Area of the Americas Act, an attempt, essentially, to extend NAFTA to the entire hemisphere. These efforts, spearheaded by the United States, were, in fact, ultimately foiled, and the people in that pastry shop, unlikely though it may seem, played a significant role in foiling them. But this is a bit of a different story and anyway I’m jumping ahead. At any rate, the conversation started out in a Lower East Side Mexican restaurant called Tres Aztecas, where several activists from the New York City Direct Action Network took the visitors—Jaggi from Montréal and a quieter, francophone couple from Québec City itself—out to dinner. Actually, two of the NYC DAN people were themselves Canadians: a couple named Mac and Lesley, originally from Toronto, currently living in New York. She was a sociology student at Columbia, he currently employed as a house painter and volunteer for the National Lawyers Guild. Most of the others were also part of the NYC Ya Basta! collective. This was a newly created group inspired by a group of the same name in Italy, whose name, however was derived from a slogan (it means “Enough Already!”) made famous by the Zapatista rebels in Chiapas, who had, in turn, begun their insurrection on January 1, 1994, the day that NAFTA first went into effect.

In activist circles that year, Ya Basta! had something of the quality of a Next Big Thing. Probably, this was most of all for their spectacularly innovative tactics: members of the group were famous for covering themselves in all sorts of elaborate padding, made from everything from foam rubber sheeting to rubber ducky flotation devices, combining it with helmets and plastic shields, so one looked like some kind of futuristic Greek hoplite, then topping the whole thing with gas masks and white chemical protective suits. The idea is that, so suited up, there’s relatively little the cops can do that will actually hurt you. Of course, you are rendered so clumsy there’s probably not

that much you could do to hurt anyone else; but that's kind of the point. Its exponents claim the tactic is rooted in a new philosophy of civil disobedience. Where the old-fashioned, masochistic, Gandhian approach encourages activists to hold out their willingness to let the police beat them up as a sign of moral superiority, the "white overalls" proposed an ethos of protection: as long as you refuse to harm others, it is completely legitimate to take whatever measures necessary to avoid harm to yourself. The costume also makes one look rather ridiculous, but that's kind of the point too. Ya Basta! columns would often play on it by, for instance, attacking police lines with balloons or water pistols. What really impressed a lot of activists in America, though, was that such groups had a real social base. Ya Basta! emerged from Italy's extremely extensive network of squats and occupied social centers (the "white overalls" began, in effect, as the army of the squats). They also had their own intellectuals: around that time the works of Italian Autonomist thinkers like Toni Negri, Paolo Virno, and Bifo Berardi were just beginning to be translated and disseminated over the Internet and were being picked up by activists across America.

I shouldn't exaggerate. In the spring of 2001, the vast majority of American anarchists knew next to nothing of Italian theory. Still, there were certain very enthusiastic exceptions. In New York, the most significant among them was a man who went by the name of Moose. A tall, gangly young man who almost always wore a fisherman's cap, Moose was, by profession, a retoucher of fashion photos. He was also active in NYC DAN. Inspired by what he had read about the movement in Italy after Ya Basta!'s dramatic appearance at the IMF protests in Prague, Moose did a little research and figured out where you could actually buy cheap chemical jumpsuits. He mail-ordered several and started occasionally wearing them to marches. One day, during a police-brutality march, a student from Italy who had actually done some work with Ya Basta! walked up to him and asked what was going on. And, so, New York Ya Basta! was born.

It was, in his conception, simultaneously an embrace of Italian tactics and of some of the broader principles developed by Italian Autonomist Marxism, which emphasized the refusal of work, "exodus" or engaged withdrawal from mainstream institutions, and, critically, freedom of movement across borders. In Italy, "white overalls" had made a series of dramatic actions against immigration detention camps, to highlight the fact much of what was touted as "globalization" actually meant, in practice, opening borders to the movement of money, manufactures, and certain forms of information, while radically increasing the barriers and controls over the movement of human beings. This idea had already struck a chord in North America, where activists were fond of pointing out that the US Border Patrol had actually tripled in size in the years since the signing of NAFTA. A lot of us were already arguing that the whole point of "free trade" was in fact to confine most of the world's population in impoverished global ghettos with heavily militarized borders, in which existing social protections could be removed and the resulting terror and desperation fully exploited by global capital. The question was how to bring the two—ideas and tactics—together.

If nothing else, the prospect excited people. The NYC Ya Basta! collective grew rapidly, just as similar collectives (the Wombles in England, the Wombats in Australia) were growing all over the Anglophone world. Much of the first part of the conversation at Tres Aztecas had consisted of Moose talking about Ya Basta!. Later, at the pastry shop (Jaggi's friend insisted we find one, as he was something of a chocolate addict), the discussion moved on to potential border actions, the state of anarchy in Canada, Ontario's asshole governor, movement celebrities and why they are annoying, philosophy, anthropology, music—A typical endless activist conversation about everything. Jaggi explained that, as in much of Canada, Québécois anarchists were divided largely

between hardcore squatter types and grad students (“like these two—they’ll probably quit the moment the dissertation is finished”)—though there was also a smattering of old-fashioned syndicalist types. No anarchist labor unions per se, but they work within existing unions. The real dramatic growth had been within the globalization movement, where, as in so many places, there was an emerging division of labor between NGOs and big labor groups, which dominated policy discussions, and anarchists, who were quickly coming to dominate the direct action end of things. In Montréal, there were basically two groups organizing actions: CLAC, and something called Operation SalAMI. CLAC isn’t officially anarchist, of course. Officially, it’s just “anti-authoritarian” (well, anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist, opposed to all forms of racial and gender oppression, dedicated to direct action, and unwilling to negotiate with inherently undemocratic organizations, which in practice means, basically, “anarchist”).

“So, what about SalAMI? They aren’t anarchists?”

“Oh, I’m sure there’s some people in it who consider themselves anarchists of some sort or another.”

“So, what are they then?”

Mac interjected, “Oh, you know. The usual anti-corporate types. Not anti-capitalists. They originally came out of the campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment in 1998. At the time, they organized a really good action in Ottawa. But... well, they’re pacifists. I guess that would be the best way to sum it up.”

“Did you see the guidelines they first proposed for the Québec City actions?” asked Jaggi. “Absolute nonviolence. Part of their principles of conduct were no “verbal violence,” no one is allowed to use bad language. No, literally, I’m not making this up. Spray-painting slogans is a form of violence. No wearing of masks or other items of clothing that cover your face...”

The other Canadians were joining in. “Which then gives them the right to micro-manage everything.”

“They’re total control freaks. Marshals, everything.”

“So, I don’t get it,” says one of the Americans. “What kind of process do these guys use?”

“Yeah,” another American asked. “Are they democratic, or do they have a formal leadership structure? Before an action, do they hold spokescouncils?”

“Oh, yeah, yeah, they do all that. Or at least, they do now. When they started out it was totally top-down, with a charismatic leadership, orders from above. Ostensibly, that’s all changed now. But all the key decisions, like the code of conduct, are always already made in the call to action before you even show up to the spokescouncil. So, it’s basically a sham because with marshals to control everything, any kind of self-organization becomes meaningless.”

“Plus,” says Jaggi, “they still do have a sort of charismatic leadership. Which... well, okay. Have you noticed how pacifists *always* seem to develop a charismatic leadership? Gandhi, King, the Dalai Lama. Something about the pacifist ethos seems to just produce them. When I was at A16 I saw these idiots carrying signs with huge pictures of Gandhi on them, and below it there was some kind of quote from him saying ‘what’s important is not me, but my message.’ So I had to go up to them and ask them, ‘don’t you think there’s a bit of a contradiction here?’”

Discussion ensues on the merits of Gandhi, as opposed to other figures in the Indian Independence movement. The consensus seems to be that he was a highly ambivalent figure. On the one hand, he had a lot of very anarchistic ideals. On the other, he was a weird, sexually twisted patriarch who collaborated with the far-from-revolutionary Congress party and openly fostered a cult of personality around himself. One of the Canadians insisted Gandhi’s pacifism actually delayed

independence by a generation. One of the Americans emphasizes that Gandhi did also say that, while nonviolence was an ideal, those who resist oppression violently are morally superior to those who don't resist at all—a sentiment his more self-righteous Western acolytes always seem to forget.

“What bothers me about the whole concept of pacifism,” says Mac, “is that it's fundamentally elitist. Poor people—people who have to live every day with violence by police, who are used to it, who expect it... they're not going to see anything admirable, let alone heroic, in *inviting* police violence, and then facing it passively.”

I always find such opinions slightly disconcerting, coming from who they are. Mac is one of the most likeable, easygoing, rather self-effacingly silly people I know. I often wonder if he's even capable of anger. His wife is much the same.

“What do you think?” I ask Lesley.

“Oh, I totally agree. First of all, the whole idea that you're going to reveal the true coercive nature of the state by showing how they'll attack you even when you are posing them no physical threat—well, come on. You're telling poor people something they don't already know?”

“I worked with OCAP—that's the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty—for three years in Toronto,” said Mac, “and one thing we found is that if, say, you're working with homeless people or genuinely oppressed communities, either they're not going to do anything, or they're going to want to directly confront the people who've been fucking them over. Which is how you get those 'riots' like the one last spring in Toronto.” Lesley explains Mac is referring to a march on June 15, 2000, organized by OCAP, in which over a thousand homeless people, along with housing activists, were attacked by riot police when they insisted on the right to address parliament, and ended up in a pitched battle that lasted hours. “After the third cavalry charge against peaceful protesters, everyone just exploded. They started throwing everything in sight, ripping up the sidewalks, street signs, throwing trash cans.”

“Now, wait a minute,” I protest. “Gandhi himself worked with a lot of poor people.”

“True,” Jaggi interjects, “but that's within a very specific religious tradition. If you're a Hindu, being able to endure your lowly position within the caste hierarchy, making that a sign of virtue—that's what it's all about.”

And so on. The whole conversation seems to me a little pat and one-sided. I point out that, since Seattle, unions had been panicking about the possibility of “violence,” or even just property destruction. Others countered that I was talking about union bureaucrats, not the rank and file. Well, what about the poor people's groups that critique militant tactics as a product of middle-class white privilege, that real oppressed groups would never be allowed to get away with? Someone changes the subject.

“And have you noticed how the SalAMI types are always carefully keeping track of which politicians or celebrities or rich people approve of them. The whole mind-set is completely elitist.”

Anyway, SalAMI put out their pacifist call to action, and then CLAC put out their own, calling for a “diversity of tactics.” By this they meant, space should be made for art and puppets, space should be made for traditional Gandhian “come-take-me-away” civil disobedience, and space should be made for more militant tactics too. The critical thing is to ensure that, in the end, everyone will stand in solidarity with one another. As it turned out, very few people registered for the SalAMI spokescouncil, so they cancelled it and now were concentrating on doing something in Montréal. CLAC's spokescouncil on the other hand went well enough that it led to the creation of a new local group—called CASA, the Summit of the Americas Welcoming Committee.

CASA was now doing frenetic local organizing. Teams were going to door to door in working-class neighborhoods near the old fortress. It was a unique opportunity because the Canadian police had recently announced that, come the summit, the old town and the area surrounding the Convention Center where the meetings were to be held was going to be surrounded by a four kilometer-long security fence. Only those with ID cards certifying that they lived within the perimeter would be allowed inside. They kept issuing contradictory statements as to where, exactly, the fence would run, but it would definitely be cutting many neighborhoods in half. Children would have to pass heavily militarized police checkpoints to return home from school. Local people were already referring to it as “the wall.”

One should bear in mind, Jaggi noted, that this is a population that’s, because of its history, already extremely suspicious of the central government. Even Québécois nationalism is a very weird, proletarian kind of nationalism: Frenchspeakers see themselves as the white working class of Eastern Canada, which to some extent, is true. It was at this point—right around the time Mac and Lesley had to leave—that we got into the politics of the wall; about the promised militarization of the Canadian border (during trade talks in Windsor the year before, for instance, two-thirds of the Americans who tried to cross the border were turned away, and a fair number were arrested). The question was how to plan a border action that would draw attention to the hypocrisy of militarizing the border and building walls inside a city in order to be able to shield the political leaders from any danger of contact with their constituents—not to mention the rhetoric of “free trade” knocking down walls and unifying the planet, when, in order to even be able to sign them, one has to do the exact opposite. The rest of us started bouncing around ideas. Possible border actions. Eventually, this started leading to scenario questions, and then, to the cliffs of Québec City. That was toward the end of the conversation, actually—by that point we were all a bit worse for wear, and not long after we broke, went home, and went to sleep.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

I’ve started with the conversation at the pastry shop for a number of reasons. For one thing, it’s funny. I thought it might convey something of the sense of a movement that is, as we shall see, particularly prone to forms of action that are simultaneously profoundly foolish and utterly serious. Such a conversation, especially juxtaposed with the serious arguments about Gandhi and so forth, seemed the best way to give the reader an immediate sense of what being involved with such a movement is actually like. Also it makes for a better book.

Such a conversation also immediately raises an issue I’ll be struggling with throughout the book: what does one do with actors’ identities when discussing politically and legally sensitive conversations? New York Ya Basta!, for example, is almost certainly still listed in certain police intelligence systems as a terrorist organization. In the weeks before the summit, both American and Canadian police identified it as one of the principle potentially “violent elements,” and anyone suspected of involvement in Ya Basta! was seized when trying to cross the border, detained for days, and extensively interrogated. All this was ridiculous. Ya Basta!, as I mentioned, was based on a principle of what is sometimes called “radical defense.” Members armored themselves against batons and rubber bullets, but they justified doing so precisely because they refused to do anything that might hurt anyone else. But in this context, the fact that claims are ridiculous is largely irrelevant. Reclaim the Streets New York, a group that specializes in unpermitted street

parties, has been classified by certain police task forces as a terrorist group as well.[1] These things never make any sense. One thing one learns quickly as an activist is that the hand of repression is extremely random. As a result, the conversation with which I began, however obviously facetious, could, conceivably, be classified as a terrorist conspiracy.

Imagine, for a moment, that there had been a hidden microphone in the pastry shop. Imagine some policeman or FBI agent monitoring the above conversation. This is not outside the realm of possibility: perhaps they had been expecting some Mafiosi to meet there and plan an actual crime. Next, imagine—a not unlikely possibility—that the policeman listening to this conversation has absolutely no sense of humor. What would he be likely to think? Here are members of a possibly terrorist organization, they are meeting with a Canadian named Jaggi Singh, and talking about taking part in some kind of violent conflict involving President Bush. If the officer in question proceeded to run the names past the Canadian police, he would immediately be informed that Jaggi Singh is a notorious anarchist who has been arrested time and time again in connection with illegal protests.

Now this latter point is technically true, but once again, absurd if you have the slightest bit of context. In Canada, Jaggi is something of a public figure. He appears on TV regularly, as spokesperson for CLAC or some other radical organization. As a result, he gets arrested all the time. It has become something of a running gag in radical circles in Canada. Before every big action or mobilization, the police will almost invariably come in and arrest Jaggi Singh; partly, it would seem, just because he's the only prominent anarchist they've actually heard of.

“Here come the anti-US protesters again. Everything in place?”

“Riot control gas?” “Check.”

“Shields and batons?” “Check.”

“Security barriers?” “Check.”

“Jaggi Singh arrested?” “Check.”[2]

One could multiply examples. It's always a preventative arrest; Jaggi has never actually been charged with much of anything, let alone convicted, at least in part because he's never actually done anything illegal. More than anything else, Jaggi is a radical journalist. As such, he became the regular public spokesperson for revolutionary groups. But the whole point of using the same person as one's spokesperson all the time is that, that way, the faces of those actually planning the actions need never be seen. The idea that Jaggi, who is in fact on a public speaking tour, appearing under his own name, would come to an action planning meeting is absurd. But again, the fact that it's absurd is not strictly relevant. If the police decided to charge us all with conspiracy to commit an act of terrorism, legally, it would quite possible for them to do so. They would have an extremely hard time getting a conviction, but they could easily make all our lives quite difficult for years to come.

All this might make the very idea of writing an ethnography like this rather a dubious proposition. But one has to weigh the legal possibilities with the fact that nothing like that has ever actually happened. I don't believe there has ever been a case, over the last four years, of an activist being arrested because of something they said, or were said to have said, in a meeting—let alone an informal conversation. Activists are regularly arrested for being public spokespeople, like Jaggi. Activists have been detained at borders for belonging to supposedly violent organizations—like,

for instance, many members of the New York Ya Basta! collective were eventually to be. Hundreds of activists—and, often, ordinary citizens who just happen to be standing next them—have been swept up in mass arrests during protests. When this happens a few will almost always be randomly singled out for felony charges: “assaulting an officer” or the like. These charges almost never hold up because they are almost invariably completely made up; however, they succeed in tying activists down with endless court dates and legal fees. There have definitely been bizarre and outrageous acts of repression against individuals. Activists have been put in jail for links they put on web pages, or for the possession of devices used to detect genetically modified food. None have been charged over anything they were supposed to have said in a meeting. Nonetheless, the fear that they might has had a stifling effect on activist life for years, and that fear has only grown with increasing state repression. Meetings themselves have become increasingly secretive. Those attending them become more paranoid. The results, I think, have been disastrous.

They are particularly disastrous, in my opinion, because what goes on in meetings, the structure of decision-making, is critical to the movement. Perhaps more than anything else, this is a movement about creating new forms of democracy. One reason why the media have been able to largely write off the so-called “anti-globalization” movement as an incoherent babble of positions without any central theme or central ideology is precisely because its ideology is embedded in its practice. In conscious contradistinction to past revolutionary groups, we are not going to come up with some abstract party line favoring “democracy” and then turn ourselves into a well-oiled authoritarian machine dedicated to seizing power wherever possible, so as to someday, eventually, be able to introduce it, groups like DAN or CLAC are determined to live their principles. To a large extent (as I’ve argued before: Graeber 2002), the democratic practice they’ve developed *is* their ideology.

To my mind this is an extremely healthy and an extremely refreshing attitude. It’s a large part of the reason I became involved in such groups to begin with. On the other hand, it creates some real dilemmas of representation. We have a movement that sees itself as creating new forms of democracy, but, because of security fears, its actual democratic process cannot be represented to anyone outside the movement in anything but the most abstract terms. Everyone is so worried about the dangers of legal repression that one can never talk about the concrete specifics of what happened at any particular meeting. It is especially ironic because this is a movement that’s otherwise remarkably sophisticated at self-representation. It includes a host of radical filmmakers, web journalists, radio activists; it involves a vast Independent Media network that first emerged from Seattle and has continued, during every major convergence, to provide detailed minute-by-minute accounts of the action. Afterwards, a video documentary will quickly, and invariably, appear. However, none of these representations will normally contain a single description of a concrete act of collective decision-making. Every major action, for instance, tends to be preceded by a series of spokescouncils, assemblies where hundreds or even thousands of people gather to plan the action collectively, without any formal leadership structure. Yet none has ever been filmed. This despite the fact that, at some point during at least half the major spokescouncils I have attended, some radical filmmaker asked permission to film some part of the proceedings. They were invariably rebuffed. In principle, spokescouncils are open events: anyone is allowed in who is not working either for some news outlet or law enforcement, and participants are often reminded not to discuss anything they wouldn’t want the cops to know. Still, when requests are made to film, someone always blocks. As a result, as far as I’m aware, no such event has ever been recorded. So one ends up with video documentaries that show activists marching down the

street chanting “this is what democracy looks like,” but contain no images of anyone actually practicing democracy.

The result is a peculiar disconnect. When activists talk to each other, they tend to talk endlessly about “process”—the nuts and bolts of direct democracy. While preparing for a major action, it seems all one does is go to meetings, trainings, more meetings. But, when one reads accounts of the same action written afterwards, almost all of this tends to disappear.

So, first of all, this book is meant to fill a gap. I will begin by using my own experience to convey a sense of what it’s actually like to take part in the planning for, and eventually participate in, a major action against a global summit. To illustrate the sorts of things activists actually argue about, what sort of issues or events become collective dramas; to get some sense of what it’s like to wade through a marathon, two-day meeting, and to come out of it feeling as if one has, in fact, just waded through a marathon two-day meeting, but at the same time that one has witnessed something profoundly transformative. As the reader may have noticed, I am making no pretense of objectivity here. I did not become involved in this movement in order to write an ethnography. I became involved as a participant. I come from an old leftist family, and for most of my life have considered myself an anarchist. If for most of my life, I also rarely got involved in anarchist politics, it was mainly because, in the 1980s and much of the 1990s, the anarchist politics I was exposed to struck me as petty, atomized, and pointlessly contentious—full of would-be sectarians whose sects consisted only of themselves. To suddenly discover the existence of a movement with a radically different sensibility, which placed enormous emphasis on mutual respect, cooperation, and egalitarian decision-making, was profoundly exhilarating. It was as if the movement I’d always wanted to be part of had suddenly come into existence. Even when I’m critical of the movement, I’m critical as an insider, someone whose ultimate purpose is to further its goals. My eventual decision to write an ethnography emerged from the same impulse. To some degree, of course, as a trained ethnographer you can’t really help yourself. Almost as soon as I got involved, I found that the notes I was taking at meetings were growing more and more detailed. They started containing little observations about hair and shoe styles, posture, habits, parenthetical reflections on little activist rituals. Still, my decision to write all this up in ethnographic form came largely because, as a participant, it struck me as an important way of furthering one of the movement’s goals: the dissemination of a certain vision of democratic possibility. In my anthropological training, I had acquired a skill that seemed perfectly suited for conveying much of what was missing from existing accounts of the movement. Though it did also occur to me that doing so would also make an extremely interesting ethnography.

But then there was the problem of how to do so without actually endangering anyone.

In the end, the solution I came up with was this. On really sensitive issues (as opposed to silly fantasies) I would not quote anything that had not already been said in some kind of public forum. I would quote things that had appeared on activist listservs, which everyone knows are monitored, or in spokescouncils or meetings open to the public, that one has to assume are probably infiltrated.[3] About other forums I would be more oblique. When dealing with things said in public forums that had any bearing on actions, I would avoid using actual names. This is not hard because for the most part, I don’t actually know people’s actual names. Or, at least, I don’t tend to know full names. Many activists go by “action names,” which they use even with their closest friends. In activist circles, it is possible to work very closely with someone for years, become close friends, even perhaps lovers, and never actually learn their full legal name. When I do know someone’s full legal name it is almost invariably because they are, like Jaggi, public

figures of some sort or another whose identity does not need to be protected. Finally, whether I am describing meetings or actions, I would stick to events in which I myself fully participated; this meant I would not be asking anyone to assume, pseudonymously, a risk that I am not willing to undergo under my actual identity.

I didn't have to start by telling the story of the mobilization around the Summit of the Americas in Québec City, of course. There were a number of others I could have chosen. In part, I started with Québec precisely because of these sorts of considerations. Not only because all the felonies described in the account were committed in Canada, but also, because this was a very militant event—the most militant, in fact, in which I've ever been involved—in which, as it happens, the most serious act of conspiracy of which I could possibly be accused is conspiracy to pull down a chain-link fence and then walk away from it. The story of Québec City has other obvious advantages. For one thing, I think it's a pretty good story. It's also useful because I wanted to avoid both the temptation to idealize the movement, or the (equally annoying) habit many activists have of only talking about its problems, which often leaves outsiders wondering why anyone would get involved in such a movement to begin with. The Québec story seemed perfect in this respect because it combines some of the best and the worst of everything. It allowed me to talk both about groups whose democratic process worked remarkably well, and others in which it was really quite atrocious; both groups which endured, and groups that fell apart; both actions that were amazingly successful, and others that were complete disasters.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Part I, therefore, will largely be about Québec. Chapter 1 will consist of a kind of diary account of the month immediately following the CLAC caravan's visit; Chapter 2 of a more detailed account of the "consulta" in Québec City about a month before the actions; Chapter 3 will describe events leading up to the abortive action at the Seaway International Bridge at Akwesasne; Chapter 4 will describe the Québec actions themselves. It will take the form of a first-person narrative, with a fair amount of reconstructed dialogue of the kind with which I began. It will also include some pretty extensive extracts from my field notes, these mainly consisting of detailed reconstructions of what each person actually said at important activist meetings, but with occasional comments or reflections.

Part II will consist of analysis. It begins (Chapter 7) with comments on the social content of the movement, about which, I believe, there is a great deal of misunderstanding. This will be followed by a long chapter (Chapter 8) on meetings, and experiments in the creation of new democratic forms; another mapping out a typology of actions (Chapter 9), and finally a discussion of the politics of representation: media, puppets and so on (Chapter 10). I will end with a theoretical conclusion ("Imagination," Chapter 10) consisting of a single chapter about violence and the imagination.

Writing this book—particularly the first part—has presented me with some real dilemmas of representation. I first tried to write Part I almost completely in diary form, which I thought would give some sense of the fractured and episodic quality of activist life. It was impossible, though, to maintain this. For one thing, it soon became apparent that, if I did any real justice to the richness of events, I would produce a book that no press would even consider publishing. It would be far too long. Condensation, however, brought with it endless compromise. The more one had

to economize, the more the urge to put the whole thing in some sort of overall narrative form. Narrative imperatives, on the other hand, to some degree flew directly in the face of the logic of what I was trying to describe. Most obviously: good narratives don't have hundreds of characters. Yet to employ standard narrative techniques and allow some individuals to typify others would be to employ exactly the logic of representation that the activist decision-making structures I was trying to describe were trying hardest to avoid. Even more, to place too much of a narrative framework on events would necessarily obscure the actual experience of direct actions, in which one spends months preparing events that one hopes could be narrated in certain ways, passes through a brief flurry of action in which one has very little idea what is going on, and then, ultimately, spends weeks trying to figure out what happened and arguing about how the story should, in fact, be told. I hope I have come up with a reasonable compromise, a story that is at the same time readable, publishable, and at least somewhat true to the integrity of its object.

I also hope the results will live up to the best tradition of ethnography—an attempt to describe, and to capture something of the texture and richness and underlying sense of a way of being and doing that could not otherwise be captured in writing. I also hope that, in doing so, I can offer the reader a glimpse of one small, North American fraction of a much larger, growing global social movement whose existence many are not even really aware of.

CHAPTER 1: NEW YORK DIARY: MARCH 2001

When the CLAC caravan came through, most of us in New York had been locked in a prolonged debate over whether we should be trying to get to Québec at all. At the time, the NYC Direct Action Network was concentrating its efforts on helping to organize a mass “convergence” of activists in Burlington, to run for several days leading up to the action. There everyone would hold a spokescouncil to decide what to do next. Ya Basta! had largely been left to come up with action scenarios. The problem was that there was little reason to believe that several dozen known activists loaded down with gas masks, helmets, padding, and chemical jumpsuits were ever going to be allowed across the border. That meant we either had to forgo the gear or send it to Canada well in advance—neither of which, for various reasons, were particularly plausible alternatives. Faced with a similar dilemma during the World Economic Forum protests in Geneva, Italian Ya Basta! had carried out their actions at the border itself.

For a lot of us, that made a lot of sense. All along, we had been concentrating on immigration issues. We had already appeared, in our colorful costumes, at protests at two different immigration detention facilities in New York. The New York area was particularly full of such facilities. Even in those days before September 11, there were hundreds of asylum-seekers and undocumented aliens locked up in New York, including many asylum-seekers languishing for years under twenty-three-hour lockdown, under conditions considerably worse than for many murderers and rapists. If the ultimate purpose of the international system of immigration and border controls was to lock most of humanity away in places where people in rich countries did not have to think about them, this was its ultimate manifestation: locations where human beings were literally made to vanish. Almost no one in America knew any of this was going on. One idea we were bouncing around was to somehow dramatize the situation, aggressively make the invisible reappear: for instance, to get hold of portraits of some of these detainees, and place them, perhaps along with statements or biographies, on the outside of our shields. We were also aware that the Canadian border post at Champlain, the one Americans normally pass through to travel to Québec, was right next to a very large immigration detention facility of its own. We would demand our rights, as global citizens, to march (in formation) through the border. There was some small possibility we might even get through.

Not all were entirely happy with this plan, or with the idea of any sort of border action. Many thought all this would produce was a media stunt the media wouldn't even cover. “Direct action,” one DAN activist argued, in a post to several activist listservs, “is not symbolic!” It's a matter of directly confronting the policy-makers responsible for capitalist globalization, of directly trying to stop their plans. Really, we should be concentrating our efforts on figuring out some way to get into Canada (and how difficult could that really be?).

I was following much of this debate online from New Haven, where I was teaching at Yale three or four days a week. At the time, my activist schedule started with the weekly Ya Basta!

meeting on Thursday and ended with the DAN meeting at 6PM Sunday; then I'd take the train up to Connecticut again. It seems to me one way to give the reader a feeling for what an activist life is like would be to simply go through my notes, and give some indications of the meetings I attended during the weeks following the CLAC caravan's visit. As will soon become apparent, there are reasons these are particularly good weeks to start from. What follows will be something like a diary, and draws extensively on the diary-like notes I did keep at the time—though very much rewritten. It will also contain some much more literal extracts from my field notes.

Thursday, March 1, 2001: *Ya Basta!* formation training, Manhattan, 7PM

Every other week, instead of meetings, Ya Basta! would hold what we called “formation trainings.” These were held at a dance studio in Chelsea, made available to us by a member of the collective named Betty. Betty was a dancer and choreographer, at that time known around the New York art scene for her unique brand of shadow-dancing. She had first got drawn into activism after the electoral fiasco in Florida in 2000, fell in with the Ya Basta! crew in the bus heading down to the inaugural protests in Washington. She later explained she was attracted mainly to Ya Basta!'s theatrical, performative aspect—though she soon became a stalwart of NYC DAN as well.

The training was attended by maybe twenty people.

I should point out the term “training” is being used here very loosely, since none of us, except arguably Betty herself, really had enough experience to “train” anyone. Moose had been to Italy and seen real Ya Basta! tactics and equipment, but he'd never participated in any actions. Betty, as a dance instructor, knew a great deal about how bodies move around in space, but was new to the world of direct action. The rest of us were basically making it up as we went along. Some members of the collective had been studying ancient defensive warfare techniques involving shield walls and the like, or exchanging ideas with other collectives around the country working on similar experiments. One had recently found a pamphlet on shield tactics put together by an anarchist collective somewhere in the Midwest and posted it on our listserv (which was to have unanticipated effects later on, since the listserv was, like most activist listservs, monitored by the police). One sometime member had once been part of the Society for Creative Anachronism, and knew something about armor. Still, the question of who was “training” whom was always somewhat arbitrary: the role seemed to devolve mainly on the self-important. Not that anyone made much of an issue of it at that point because everything was so obviously all in good fun. “Trainings” were mainly just a chance to put on chemical suits and improvised padding, don the shields we had begun to put together from ashcan-shaped orange highway markers (the big plastic ones—if you cut them in half, they make two perfect three-foot shields), and bash each other about with padded sticks.

It was also a chance to debut new gear and toys. Two weeks ago, someone had come with a box full of cheap Israeli gas masks he acquired through a mail order house. This week I bring a box of kazoos (we had been talking, on and off, about the possibility of creating a Ya Basta! kazoo section). Emma immediately starts serenading us with her rendition of “I Fought the Law and the Law Won.”

“Not necessarily the most inspiring tune to have chosen.”

“Well, someone did a version called ‘I Fought the Law and I Won,’ but the music is the same.”

We have a long discussion of possible larger-scale tactics. One idea that has been floating around forever has been that of some kind of donut gun. The joke goes back to the days before the Republican National Convention in Philly, in 2000, when a newspaper reported that police commanders had been warning street cops not to accept any food protesters might “offer to try to win them over to their side.” One affinity group found this so amusing that they actually proposed setting up a table completely covered in doughnuts, with a sign saying “Police: Join Us and All This Could Be Yours!” The table never materialized. But a lot of us in Ya Basta! felt that purely defensive tactics seemed just a bit limiting. If they’re shooting plastic bullets and tear gas at you, you want to shoot something back—just not anything that could possibly be construed as harmful. Something ridiculous, absurd, but which nonetheless implied that, if this were a battle, we’d be giving as good as we got. Donuts did seem the most obvious choice of projectile. We puzzled over possibilities for how to deliver them: would it be a catapult (echoing the ancient/medieval theme)? Or more of a slingshot-type arrangement? Someone had dumpster-dived a gigantic tube and some kind of huge rubber band and brought it to the formation training but we all concluded we would have to consult with someone who actually knew something about engineering.

Anyway, the training was the fun part. Afterwards we’d have a brief formal meeting, and that was always something of a letdown. It was not only because we first got all sweaty and exhilarated and then had to sit on the ground for an hour and talk. It was also because two or three people tended to do all the talking. From the start, Ya Basta! meetings had mostly consisted of a prolonged conversation between three activists: Moose, who was in his twenties, and a slightly older married couple named Smokey and Flamma. Some had specific roles: Laura and I, for instance, constituted the propaganda and media group. But, mostly, the rest of us were relegated to throwing in occasional comments or questions. All this was partly due to the group’s unusual make-up. Moose had come out of DAN, a group that took meeting dynamics extremely seriously. DAN employed a formal consensus process with rotating facilitators, an elaborate system of “stacking” designed to ensure no small group of voices dominated the conversation. Smokey and Flamma hated DAN. Like a number of other anarchists in New York—I’ll call them the “hard-cores,” for lack of a better name, the sort that were likely to have more experience in Black Blocs, tree sits, or the squatter scene, or anyway used to working in small, intimate collectives—they saw DAN’s formal structure as itself stifling and oppressive. Since Ya Basta! meetings, unlike trainings, rarely involved more than a dozen people, there didn’t seem to be too much need for formal process anyway. Usually Moose acted as de facto facilitator. This itself would have been a cardinal sin in formal consensus process, since it’s a basic principle that those intending to bring forward proposals at a meeting should never also be running it (in formal meetings, facilitators should try to avoid expressing opinions at all). Since Ya Basta! had originally been Moose’s idea, he normally did bring most of the proposals. At the time, though, none of us saw this as much of a problem—though it did make meetings rather tiresome.

The reason we didn’t see it as problem was because NYC Ya Basta! was still a new group. It’s not unusual for new activist groups to emerge from one person’s vision, and for the first few months, for one or two people to do almost all the coordinative work. Still, this cannot last forever. If the group is to become a real, sustainable collective, there inevitably comes a point where the other members take ownership. Participants start asking “why is it always the same person leading the meeting? Why is the facilitator also the one presenting all the proposals?” There follows a kind

of peasant insurrection and, if the collective doesn't dissolve in bitter recriminations, it becomes a genuinely democratic group.

In Ya Basta!, this was an open question, because, somewhat unusually, there were two foci of imaginative energy: Moose on one side, Smokey and Flamma on the other. One might think of them as different tendencies, perhaps, the DAN types versus the hardcores.[4] At the time, the situation fascinated me because I couldn't find any sociological basis for the split: in terms of class background or trajectory, ethnicity or educational background, the two groups were indistinguishable. It was purely a difference in philosophy.

The question is of course what would happen when the peasant insurrection actually arrived.

In recent weeks, at least, meetings had started to become more interesting. Two weeks earlier, Mac, one of the Canadians in New York DAN, had come to the training to urge us to consider an alternative to Champlain: a border action at Cornwall, on a bridge in the middle of the Akwesasne Mohawk reservation. Mac was in contact with an old friend, a member of the Mohawk Warrior Society on the Canadian side, who was very enthusiastic about using the FTAA mobilization to make an issue of the fact that the US-Canadian border ran right down the middle of Mohawk lands. Despite the fact that both the US and Canada recognized their territory as sovereign by treaty, local people had to pass through an international border, and submit themselves to customs, just to visit their relatives on the other side. The Cornwall idea had an obvious appeal—especially since Mac thought he could line up a number of Canadian trade unionists to support us on the other side—but it meant abandoning the whole immigration detention issue that we'd been focusing on. It also seemed just a little too good to be true. At the first meeting we consensed to stick with Champlain. The next day, several people thought better of it and we decided, over the listserv, to postpone a decision until the next meeting. The final decision had been to investigate further; so today's meeting was largely devoted to putting together a group of volunteers to go up to Cornwall over the weekend and check things out for themselves. Shawn, Mac's contact there, was already getting together some fellow Warriors for the meeting. Moose had already found a car.

Saturday, March 3: *Meeting with Mohawks*

Actually, we ended up with two cars, since a couple of people from Philadelphia had driven up as well. In addition, we had Moose, Smokey and Flamma, with Mac representing DAN, and a couple of local anarchists currently living in the Independent Media Center (IMC). They were to set out on Saturday morning.

I was supposed to be going too, but a family medical crisis forced me to drop out. Two carloads of activists set out around 9AM. One car broke down in the Holland Tunnel and everyone had to flip coins to see who would continue on.

That evening the following report appeared over the Internet:

Representatives of NYC DAN, NYC Ya Basta!, IMC NYC, Philly Direct Action Working Group and the People's Law Collective met in Cornwall on Saturday with Tyendinaga Mohawks, Members of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), and the Guelph Direct Action Group and the People's Community Union (PCU) in Kingston.

The Mohawks announced that they were prepared to open the border at Cornwall to activists wishing to pass into Canada on April 19, so that the latter can join a caravan to Québec City already being organized by activists in Kingston.

The Mohawks intend this “Day of Rage” as an assertion of sovereignty, since the bridge crossing this border is on Mohawk Land. Currently, Mohawks allow use of the crossing 364 days a year, and open it once a year to assert sovereignty.

This information has since been taken back to the groups in question and submitted to their own process of democratic decision-making. So far, NYC-DAN, NYC-Ya Basta!, and several traditional Mohawk houses have publicly declared their support for this action.

When I read this at the time it seemed a bit opaque. Things became clearer at the DAN meeting the next day. Let me give a fuller account that particular meeting, since it was one of the more interesting I attended.

Sunday, March 4: *DAN meeting, Charas El Bohio Cultural Center, 6PM*

We met in our usual room at Charas, an activist social center in the Lower East Side. The meeting started small: perhaps ten or twelve of us, though over the next hour or so a lot more drifted in, until, at its height, there were twenty-five or thirty. That day, we also had no less than three foreign visitors: Mike and Corey from SalAMI, and Olivier de Marcellus, who worked with Peoples’ Global Action in Switzerland. The SalAMI people were on an eleven-day American tour, giving action trainings in cities across the Northeast. They were being hosted largely by the International Socialist Organization (ISO), and were accompanied by a local ISO organizer. Olivier just happened to be in town.

Nicky and Betty facilitated. I volunteered to take minutes.

Unlike Ya Basta!, DAN meetings had an explicit formal process. They always began the same way. First, we put together an agenda. There was always a skeleton agenda already written on the wall, but everyone had the opportunity to add new items, and then we allocated time for each of them: five minutes for one, fifteen for another, one or two very minor announcements. Mike and Corey had to leave early so we put them up first.

I think everyone was at least a bit curious about Mike and Corey because until now we’d all been dealing only with CLAC, and hearing about the SalAMI folk only second-hand as the irritating pacifists. Most of us were curious what they’d actually be like. As it turned out, both young men were quite well-groomed in button-down shirts and dockers—pleasant-looking fellows who spoke with a slight French accent.

They both stood up. Mike explained that SalAMI had been organizing in Québec City for three years now, but since word had got out about the security fence, they had determined that they weren’t going to be purely reactive and face the enemy on their own terms. So, instead of Québec, they were planning an action in Ottawa, the Canadian capital. The key issue, he explained, was that all the negotiations around the FTAA were being conducted in secret. Apparently, after the failure of WTO talks in Seattle, the US trade negotiators had decided their big mistake had been to give the public some idea what it was they were negotiating. This time they weren’t going to make the same mistake. None of the drafts or any information about what was in them was being

released to the public—though all this information was being made available to corporations like McDonald's, Monsanto, and Citibank.

Mike: The idea is that on April 1st, we'll organize a mass demo in Ottawa. We've reserved three rooms in Parliament to put the FTAA on trial...

Someone: Wait a minute—you managed to reserve rooms in *Parliament*?

Corey: Well, it was one of our labor union allies that made the actual reservations.

Majeed: Remember, Canada is a different country. Unions actually have some rights there.

Mike: ...also, we're going to invite anyone working on FTAA projects to let us drill them there, so the next day, the 2nd, we can conduct a nonviolent CD—a blockade of the Foreign Affairs and Trade offices. We're going to do what we call a “search and seizure” action, go in, in search of the text. We've announced we're going to do this if they don't release the text by March 20th. Of course, in order to pull it off, we'll need lots of help, to raise media awareness.

Various details followed on attempts to get folksinger Ani DiFranco's support and possible participation, the media blackout on the FTAA in the US (though coverage was pretty decent in Canada), and other issues. Majeed asked about diversity of tactics.

Mike: Well, obviously we would never turn people over to police, like some emails have been saying. And, if you're talking about our earlier guidelines, with the rules against masks and whatnot: no, we've gotten rid of those. But when we hear the phrase “diversity of tactics”—well, that sounds to us like a euphemism for “free-for-all.”

SalAMI has been putting together what we call a “convergence table,” with over thirty different groups, including unions and student and church groups that the CLAC would never be able to reach. That's what we consider *real* diversity. But it's necessarily based on a principle of non-violent action; these groups would never even be talking to us if they thought we'd ask them to endorse an action with no parameters at all.

Corey: As for CLAC ... Sure, there are leadership issues. And alpha male issues. But we're still trying to pull things together. Our Creative Action Training is meant for both sides, and we hope that, when the action finally happens, we won't have two different spokescouncils. If we can at least agree on no molotov cocktails, we can have a single spokescouncil. Otherwise, well, we're just playing to a fraction of one percent of the movement in my own personal opinion.

Mike: I'll leave my email.

Corey: Tomorrow we're having a training at NYU, at 7PM, Help spread word!

Brooke: Actually, I should probably point out that DAN represents a diversity of opinion and our Continental DAN principles are actually sort of vague on the nonviolence issue. I think intentionally so. The exact wording is DAN calls for “nonviolent civil disobedience and direct action.” So we support both. LA DAN is pretty strictly nonviolent. CLAC is trying to get on the CDAN call and it would be good for you guys to also hook into that too.

Mike: These are not easy questions, but I think it'll all work out (*laughs*) and Québec will be amazing. It might not be all smiles and hugging each other, but when push comes to shove, we're all in this together.

Zoe: How long will it be before the barbed wire fence goes up?

Mike: Well, most of the concrete was already laid down before the ground froze. But that's just the base. Apparently it will be four kilometers around—that's a 2.5 mile perimeter—surrounding a section of the city with 25,000 residents. They're all going to be receiving special cards which will authorize them to move in and out. There's been some effort to encourage people to refuse or even better—this was my suggestion—burn them.

SP: What about people who work in there?

Mike: I'm not sure how they're handling that. Presumably they'll be getting some kind of ID too.

Majeed: I have a question. CLAC and CASA (Comité d'accueil du Sommet des Amériques) are explicitly anti-capitalist. What about SalAMI?

Mike: Well, yes, I think you could say we are. Myself personally, I don't like to use the word 'capitalism' because it turns some people off. We've taken a common ground approach, but in order to promote a radical alternative vision—right now we have a committee working on mapping some of that out. Certainly you can assume all the basics: we're anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchy, anti-homophobia.

Corey: You have to understand this is going to be one of the largest security actions in history. We decided early on that a Seattle-style shutdown is highly improbable. We're not going to stop the Summit from happening. So the question when it comes to the wall was: how can we come up with a model for what might be considered a win? What would give us the right to declare victory? People are working on it. One women's group sent out a call to weave images and slogans of resistance into the fence itself. This would be powerful for the media, but wouldn't please everyone, certainly. So then what? Target the airports? Do a blockade, close off the gates, and piss off all the residents? This is why we're calling for a strategic spokescouncil, to make our tactics square with our strategic aims. What's really important is how our actions effect the public, what they'll do in terms of constructing long-term alliances...

Olivier remarks, in a soft, very dignified voice, that all this sounds very similar to what happened in Davos during the World Economic Forum protests the month before. The police overreacted and were stopping people miles away from the actual meetings. The repression was so brutal—they were sending police out into the fields to gather cowshit to mix with the water in their water-cannons—that it backfired, causing a huge public backlash and complete victory for us. By the end, when there was a little riot in Geneva (they set fire to several banks), polls actually showed the public were still more supportive of the protesters than the government. And this is in Switzerland!

The SalAMI folk are skeptical. "You can try to go through the wall if you like," says Mike. "But you have to bear in mind there's going to be eight thousand cops, five hundred Darth Vaders you'd have to outrun if you actually did get in. That's why we decided our strategy during the Summit itself will be not to approach the wall at all, but to establish what we're calling the "Freedom and Truth Areas of the Americas," maybe a kilometer away. SalAMI wants to maintain this as a truly liberated zone, and you know" (significant glance at the Yabbas in the room), "there's real room for Ya Basta! tactics to keep the cops out of it."

Mike and Corey have to run off for a training at NYU. They leave with their ISO chaperone and the meeting carries on.

Next up is Lesley's report-back from the Mohawk trip—which, she says, went very well indeed. The seven or eight people who made it to Cornwall had met not only with members of the Mohawk Warrior Society but also members of the Kingston Labor Council on the Canadian side ("along with a couple guys from Guelph who we're calling 'the Guelph Action Network'"). The Mohawks pledged to open the border to demonstrate their control over the land in Akwesasne. Shawn, their main spokesman, was framing the action as a "day of rage" over the division of their land and both governments' trampling of treaty rights. The Warriors were hinting at very militant tactics, talking of opening the bridge "by any means necessary"—all of which, Lesley remarks, is

really something of a bluff, but it could put the Canadian government in an extremely delicate position as they really would not want to use too much force on Mohawk lands. That really would unify the community against them. In fact, they did not expect any significant opposition: the Warriors actually had been in the habit of seizing the bridge one day a year, for the last few years, as an assertion of sovereignty, and the government had never made any effort to stop them. Canadian auto and postal workers were already planning a caravan from Toronto and Kingston to Québec City; they'd be happy to be there on the other side of the border to support us. "Oh yes," she added, "and the District Labor Council says they will serve tea."

All sorts of radical ideas were being bounced around. Some Canadians were talking about the possibility of taking over the locks of the St. Lawrence, to close down shipping traffic. But there was also a word of caution. "Bear in mind Akwesasne itself is a very fragmented, very divided community. They had their own little civil war over there in the 1980s over plans to build a casino. The people we're dealing with are from the Warrior Houses (who were against the casino); they're with us, even if everyone in these communities is hardly unanimous."

I ask how much of this was to go in the minutes—which are posted to an open-subscription listserv. "In fact, the Mohawks told us specifically they *want* this information to be made public, especially the phrase: 'Mohawk Warriors calling for Days of Rage.'"

Lesley's report-back is followed by a number of other announcements: of a benefit for Casa del Sol, a squat in the Bronx; upcoming court dates for the Esperanza Garden defendants (they had been arrested defending a community garden from bulldozers some months before); a reminder of puppet-making every Saturday afternoon for the More Gardens! group. There were also report-backs from various DAN working groups: Labor, Police and Prisons, Legal; the WBAI campaign; the Web team; the Women's Caucus. Brooke announced that Continental DAN (CDAN) had received a request from some people in Santa Cruz to join the CDAN network. ("Probably a bunch of hippies and deadheads, but we love them anyway.") There is also a report from the newly created Banner Working Group, which seems to consist of two decidedly crusty looking individuals in black hooded sweatshirts, who unveil a beautiful banner that one of them had painted for DAN to carry during marches.

Next comes New Business. The first item on the agenda is the Burlington Convergence. This, Brooke explained, is beginning to turn into a problem. The original idea had been to provide a place for people to start gathering on Monday April 16, so as to proceed to the border Thursday and ideally make it to Québec in time for the CLAC "Carnival Against Capitalism" parade on Friday the 20th. That way, there would be several days for everyone to hold trainings, educational events, and spokescouncils. However, at the moment we had just four or five people in Vermont trying to organize everything. Also, the event was technically being organized through NEGAN, the "New England Global Action Network." In principle, NEGAN was the local equivalent to DAN—but unfortunately, it was top-heavy with "anti-corporate" types, liberal reformers, Greens, and socialist groups—notably the ISO. The ISO had its own agenda and it appeared to have little overlap with ours.

Some background is required here. The ISO is one of the few of the innumerable Trotskyist sects that were founded and split from one another over the course of the 1960s and 1970s that had managed to survive and even expand in the intervening years. It had done so because, unlike the others, the ISO did not concentrate its recruiting efforts in factories but on college campuses. In 2001, the ISO was, in many ways, the anarchist nemesis—particularly, DAN's. This was in part because they were trying to do similar things via radically different methods. Both were

revolutionary anti-capitalists. Both believed in working within broad coalitions and trying to encourage them in more radical directions. The problem was that for the ISO, this was a very long-term process, and in the meantime they were mainly interested in numbers. They were always trying to put together the broadest coalitions possible, which meant wooing the leadership of unions and mainstream NGOs, who would, in turn, almost invariably want guarantees against violence or, often, against direct action of any kind. From the anarchist perspective, this was like trying to put an army of a hundred thousand people in the field, but only on condition that none of them actually do anything.

It would not have been nearly so annoying if the ISO were simply opposed to direct action. Then one could just ignore them. Their members attended spokescouncils and, often, took part in actions themselves. Hence, they were the ones at the spokes always trying to talk everyone into ratcheting things down, turning a plan for militant direct action into an act of strictly nonviolent civil disobedience, turning a plan for nonviolent civil disobedience into a unpermitted march, turning a unpermitted march into a permitted one. The strategy of seeking the largest possible coalition ensured they tended to be chary even of groups that put out too radical a message: it became a kind of running gag among anarchists that if you label an organization “anti-capitalist,” you can guarantee the socialists won’t show up. Finally, groups like the ISO were explicitly vanguardist. They saw themselves as having the correct analysis of the world situation. When they did get involve in broader coalitions, it only made sense that they should provide direction and leadership.

Anarchists, in contrast, tend to refer to their strategy as “contaminationist.” The assumption is that direct action and direct democracy are infectious; almost anyone exposed to them is likely to be transformed by the experience. Anyway the point is not to organize people but to encourage them to organize themselves. Rather than making deals with labor bureaucrats, then, groups like CLAC or DAN tried to appeal directly to the rank and file. Rather than try to take over large organizations, they aimed to create dramatic models of self-organization that others might be inspired to imitate, if, inevitably, it was assumed, in their own idiosyncratic ways.

All this no doubt makes it easier to see why the SalAMI tour was being sponsored by the ISO, and why Mike and Corey came, and left, escorted by an ISO chaperone.

To return to NEGAN then...

The week before, Moose and Marina, a longstanding DAN activist (and former ISO member), had gone up to a NEGAN meeting in Worcester, Massachusetts. Neither were at the DAN meeting today—they had come back with the flu—but everyone knew what happened. The meeting was full of ISO people, who insisted on creating a steering committee, and pushed for majority voting instead of consensus. (One cannot, after all, attempt to pack a steering committee that does not operate by majority vote.) They also proposed that NEGAN concentrate on organizing buses to go up to Québec City on Saturday, so they could work with the labor unions that were going to be bussing their people to the march that day. They argued that this would make it much easier to get through the border. It would also, however, mean completely skipping the day of direct action scheduled for the day before. It was all an enormous problem because the logical thing should have been for DAN to throw all its resources into the Burlington Convergence—organizing spokescouncils and the like was, after all, what we did best. But it looked like the anarchists were simply being bypassed:

Brooke: I have a lot of names of people up there [in Burlington], but... I hope I don’t insult anyone by saying this but: Burlington used to have a Direct Action group. But it was overrun by

ISOs and socialist types. Biella and the Native Forest Networks are more anarchist—the former is one woman who’s doing most of the organizing for the convergence basically single-handedly. I’m trying hard to get the Institute for Social Ecology involved (which they will if they know what’s good for them), but so far they haven’t done much either, so for the moment things are really not in good shape up there.

Majeed: You know, I don’t mean to be vulgar or sectarian, but I say, “fuck the ISO.”

David: Um, should I put that in the notes?

Majeed: Actually, yeah. Put it in the notes.

Brooke: Bear in mind there are people reading the notes as far away as California.

Majeed: Whatever. Frankly, I’m just sick of those guys. The moment there’s the slightest illusion of being in a position of power they take over and immediately cut off all debate. They’ve been doing this since at least the Gulf War. I say let’s just contact the “authentic elements.”

David: (*still scribbling*) “Authentic elements?”

Majeed: You know: people who are doing this because they want the mobilization to succeed, not to further some fucking organizational imperative.

Majeed, a former member of the Iranian Communist Party (which he explained to us was largely Kurdish), now active in DAN Labor, had, since becoming an anarchist, become unusually impatient with vanguardists.

After renewing our determination to help out with “authentic elements” in Burlington, we talk a little about the next scheduled weekly meeting. As it happens, this falls at the same time as a Critical Resistance protest against the Horizon Center, a juvenile detention center in Midtown. Someone suggests: Why don’t we all go to the rally and, if there’s any urgent business that needs to be discussed, we can do it on the subway platform where everyone is supposed to be assembling anyway? Everyone agrees, though Brooke is careful to insist we post it to the list immediately and prominently.

The end of the meeting is quite unusual. Technically, there was an option at the end of every DAN meeting to hold an “educational session.” I don’t think we ever had. But everyone is anxious to learn about Peoples’ Global Action. We had all heard of PGA—in fact, DAN was in a certain sense modeled on it—but few of us (except for Lesley, who has been studying PGA as a grad student in Columbia) really knew that much about, aside from the fact that it was a global network created by the Zapatistas that put out calls for simultaneous global days of action and, most famously, had originally come up with the idea of a global day of action against the WTO meetings in Seattle. So we asked Olivier—or “Oliver,” as he insisted on calling himself—to give us a little background. Olivier is a man who looks to be in his fifties or early sixties, a very aristocratic, European-looking fellow with a truly extraordinary nose. We’re rather surprised to learn he’s actually an American, a 1960s refugee who fled the country over Vietnam and had been living in Geneva ever since.

EDUCATIONAL SESSION

Olivier: Hello. My name’s Oliver de Marcellus, and I’m from Geneva. I’ve been living there since I left the States in 1968. I’ve been with PGA since it started in 1998; before that, I was working with the Zapatista movement.

Brooke: We’d really like to hear more about the history.

Olivier Well, you can read more about it on our web page, which is [<http://www.agp.org>][www.agp.org]. (That's from the French or Spanish acronym. If you type "pga" it'll send you to the Professional Golf Association.)

About PGA ... hmmm. I guess there's two ways of talking about PGA. The easiest is to say, you can be a member of PGA whether you know it or not. Because PGA is nothing but five principles (which are, I believe, DAN's founding principles as well). Well, that, and also, taking part in actions which accord with those principles. So, if you look at it that way the only definition of PGA is "people who agree with the manifesto." By that definition there's millions of people in PGA and most of them don't even know it.

That's the large definition. The smaller definition, which almost doesn't exist, is as an organization. We're not *supposed* to be an organization. We have no funds, no secretariat, no one is qualified to speak for PGA. We do have an International Conveners Committee, with representatives from groups from different continents who are rotated every two years. All this Committee can do is convene international PGA meetings, decide who comes and who from the Global South gets free tickets.

Maggie: How do you define "Global South?"

Olivier: Everywhere but Europe and North America.

At first the Conveners were also supposed to decide on global days of action, but as it turned out it was so hard to get some of them to answer emails and the like, that groups started taking the initiative on their own. So, the way it's worked out is that actions end up being proposed by the most concerned local groups, the call circulates on the Net to everyone involved, and those who are interested take part, those who aren't, ignore it. Which I guess is the most democratic way to go about it. (Usually the actions then end up getting approved five months later by the Conveners Committee, retroactively, but no one really notices.)

For instance, the Geneva demonstrations in 1998 were called by the Conveners. The Reclaim the Streets in England called the J18 demos the year after—they proposed it, and people just started doing it. N30 was the same thing—that was the biggest thing we ever did, but it started just as a call to have an action against the WTO, wherever it met, even before we knew it was going to meet in Seattle. In the case of [the actions against the IMF meetings in] Prague it was the same thing—a local group proposed it, and it was taken up. So I guess that's how we've been doing it since 1999.

Brooke: Could you talk about the upcoming conference?

Olivier: Yes. The International PGA conference is going to be held in Cochabamba from the 17th to the 24th of September, and the call *really will* come out this week (I'm sorry, I know we keep saying it, but it really will this week). We're aiming for two hundred delegates, of whom seventy percent have to be from the South or East; sixty from Western Europe and North America and the rest from the "Global South." The most sizeable contingent will be from Latin America. Right now the epicenter for resistance to globalization is the Andes; that's the vital spot, which is why we're holding it in Bolivia to begin with. Well, obviously of course, because that's the city where there was the huge campaign against Bechtel when they tried to privatize the water system, which was spearheaded by PGA-affiliated groups.

But we're really hoping there won't be a coup before it happens.

Stuart: If they did have a coup, it could hardly make the government any worse.

Olivier: But if the hosts are all in hiding, it will make it very difficult to organize.

Also we're trying to start a more decentralized funding system—which is crucial for getting tickets to the delegates from the South because airfare is just hugely expensive. At the Conveners Meeting in Prague in December, we decided we couldn't keep getting money from foundations because the more effective we become, the fewer foundations will want to give money to us.

Lesley: And what is the money actually used for?

Olivier: Just for the one thing: to fly delegates into the meetings.

[some discussion follows of DAN's potential involvement in the Cochabamba meetings... We decide we should really put the PGA manifesto on our web page]

Olivier: That would actually be useful, as one of the functions of the conference is to amend the manifesto. For instance, European delegates will want to make sure something about climate change is put in there as it didn't seem as obviously pressing when we first wrote the thing in 1998.

David: Can you tell us a little about how it all started?

Olivier: Well, PGA was very definitely first conceived as part of the Zapatista movement. You could sort of say it was founded during the Second Intergalactic Zapatista Encuentro in Spain in 1997. That was when the groups that became the backbone of PGA first met: the European anarchists, the Brazilian Landless Peasants Movement, and—actually, probably the most important group of all was the KRRS. That's the Karnataka State Farmers' Association, which is a Gandhian Socialist peasant movement in India which has something like ten million members. They first became famous for their "Cremate Monsanto" campaign in the mid-1990s, where they systematically burned genetically modified crops. Last year KRRS mobilized 51,000 people in bullock carts who tried to seize the port of Bombay—and for them, that was, really, just a medium-size action. In May 1998 they turned 280,000 people for a mass anti-WTO demo. That was probably their biggest. But they work on a colossal scale.

Natalie: You know you should really have all this history stuff on the web page.

Olivier: I know. We should. We probably have the corniest web site in existence; it was probably the first anti-globalization web page, but the design is horrendous.

Stuart: You talk about proposals emerging from local groups—by "local groups" do you just mean "any groups that have endorsed the principles"?

Olivier: Well, another aspect of this non-organizational status is that there's no formal membership. Anyone can propose something.

David: So in theory, we could too?

Olivier: Oh, absolutely. Why not?

But back to the history. PGA had its first meeting in Spain, in 1998, and at that first meeting there were a lot of anarchists from England, like people from Reclaim the Streets-London, active in the anti-roads movement who had no idea similar things were happening on the continent and vice versa. They met the squatters in Italy and Germany, and ideas started to spread. None of us on the Continent, for instance, had ever heard of the idea of a British-style illegal street party. A month later we were organizing one in Geneva. And it was wonderful. Before long, people were organizing them everywhere.

Someone came up with the theory that the result was a kind of global brain: the interconnections of communication are such that you can imagine people not just communicating but acting, and acting damn effectively, without leadership, a secretariat, without even formal information channels. It's a little like ants meeting in an ant-heap, all waving their antennae at each other,

and information just gets around—even though there’s no chain of command or even hierarchical information structure.

Of course it would be impossible without the Internet.

Someone: Of course, they said that at first about the Zapatistas, too.

Olivier: Actually, it was a little annoying at first how the media used to say how the Zapatistas were simply an Internet phenomenon—annoying, that is, for people who actually know how hard it is to reach them. But in a way it’s sort of true. An Internet list by nature can’t be authoritarian—you just put out a proposition and people discuss it, those who like it, go do it. If it’s not that good a proposal, people will do it less. The one thing you absolutely can’t do over the Internet is vote.

Stuart: All this sounds so much like DAN!

Olivier: You know, when I arrived in Seattle for the WTO actions, I didn’t even know what DAN was. Then I picked up a DAN leaflet and there were the PGA principles and pictures of Geneva actions inside, and I said, “Oh, it’s just PGA.” That happens to me all the time. I met someone from PGA Korea last week, and it was: “Really? That exists?” In Prague, there were two busloads of Turks who showed up. It turned out there was a five-city PGA network in Turkey, they’d downloaded our principles from the web page and were going around showing films of Seattle. None of us had the slightest idea until we actually met them. It keeps happening all the time.

Of course, now that there’s Indymedia the information gets back to us more than it used to. When the Net-freaks first explained the idea of simultaneous demos to us, we used to try to coordinate it by everyone sending emails to Geneva. It didn’t work. But now we outsource it to Indymedia, as it were. So, during the actions in Prague, we had 250 simultaneous demos worldwide, of which 70 were reported on Indymedia. And that, in turn, changes our relation to the corporate media—basically, we don’t even need them any more. A few months ago we had an action in Geneva where we occupied the Ecuadorian embassy in solidarity with people holding an action there. After the whole thing was over, we realized we had forgotten to even tell the media about it, because who needs them? It’ll get back to the people in Ecuador that we did it through Indymedia, and that’s all that was really important to us.

What’s happening now is surely the biggest thing since May 1968. At least in Europe. The first time that I’ve felt such a huge, global upsurge. Prague was just... whoa! There were at least eight different countries that sent contingents of over a thousand people. When we started none of us had any idea how to put together a mass convergence or a spokescouncil, we had to make it all up from scratch. Then, come September: lo and behold! It worked! And we ended up kicking the IMF out of town a day early.

And every meeting had to be coordinated in seven different languages: English, France, German, Turkish, Spanish, Italian, Czech...

Brooke: Jesus!

Olivier: But it worked!

Betty: Could you speak about the actions in Davos, and what lessons we could learn from them for Québec City?

Olivier: Well, on that:

Unhappily, we appear to represent the biggest threat to the Empire around right now, and they appear to be getting *really* concerned. I’m sorry to say it because really we’re just a ridiculous bunch of clowns, but there you are.

In Nice, we thought they'd try to block the frontiers before we even got there, and in fact they did—totally illegally—at least against the Italians who in theory have the same EU passports. They also used interesting divide-and-conquer tactics like providing free trains for the union people, and then trying to beat the shit out of the Autonomous people.

We expected the frontiers to be blocked, and that getting to Davos itself would be impossible; so we said, if we can't get there, we'll do actions and blockades wherever we have to. If we couldn't get further than the bottom of the valley where the train meets the highway, below the ski resort where the meetings was actually being held, then fine, we'd block the auto routes there. Or if we can't get into the country, if they try to close the border, we'd close the border ourselves. We ended up having demos in all three, which was great—five hundred Italians stopped at the border blocked the highway there, five hundred other people snuck into Davos itself, which was great, and there were something like five different groups in the valley bottom... It was a *total victory*, despite the biggest security mobilization in Swiss history, with tanks and barbed wire everywhere, blasting us with water cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets the moment we'd even appear—even when it was just a bunch of silly floats and people dressed up on stilts or in Ronald McDonald costumes. In the end, they overdid it so much even the highly bourgeois Swiss public was on our side. Several cantons voted to remove the federal police from their territory, the president ended up making a fool of himself at the press conference that night because he wanted to talk about the deliberations in Davos, and kept snapping at the reporters, “Why do you keep asking about the demonstrations?”

Natalie: Were there any arrests?

Olivier: Oh yes. But they had to let them out quickly.

So as far as the FTAA is concerned—there's no reason not to block them in, even if there is this enormous security fence, there still have to be gates. Any place you can block them, the point is made...

We go on talking for some time, about the problems of coordinating with groups with little or no Internet access, about the amazing PGA group called the “Network of Free Black Communities of South America,” founded by escaped slaves in the nineteenth century, about a dozen other things. By the time we headed off to a nearby coffee shop to continue the conversation, it was already almost 11PM.

Tuesday, March 6: FTAA Coalition meeting, 8PM

Actually I missed this one (along with the DAN Labor meeting held at the same time), but I heard what happened.

The FTAA Coalition is a broad, New York-wide group which includes DAN, the Greens, the ISO, and various independent activists organizing for Québec City. So when Moose and Marina finally emerged from their sickbeds to give their report-back from the NEGAN meeting, they had to be relatively circumspect. Apparently there was also some ambiguity about the degree to which the Mohawks on the US side are really on board, since we had only been talking to Canadian ones so far. There was some kind of process going on among the Warrior Houses on the American side and no one was quite sure how things would turn out. There were also increasing tensions about the structure of the coalition itself.

Thursday, March 8: *Ya Basta!* meeting, Manhattan, 7PM[5]

A much better meeting than usual, held at Aladdin's apartment in a public housing development in Chelsea. There were about twenty people. This time, the meeting was even facilitated: informally, but well. Even more unusual, everything was captured on videotape.

There's a long story behind this, but the short version is that there was a young filmmaker named Sasha who had contacted people in the activist community because he wanted to make a documentary. His idea was to contrast standard media images of scary masked anarchists with portraits of the real human beings behind the masks. He soon became involved in *Ya Basta!* and within a month or two had become effectively part of the group. No one had much trouble with that. But this was the first time he had actually shot a meeting. Actually, it's the first I know of anyone shooting a meeting of any such group at all—in part, he got away with it only because he promised not to show anybody's faces, always keeping his camera pointed low. One or two members actually wore masks for the meeting, mainly, I suspected, for dramatic effect.

Anyway, as meetings went, it turned out to be an excellent choice.

There was already a small crisis brewing with the Mohawk action, due to premature publicity. While Shawn, our main ally, had specifically asked for us to use the words "Days of Rage," and while a piece had immediately come out in a local magazine called *Eye News*, quoting him as saying that they would seize the bridge "by all means necessary" and showing pictures of masked Mohawk Warriors with machine guns from the Oka occupation in Québec in the 1980s, all this was something in the nature of a bluff. Shawn was calculating that, after the trauma of the near-insurrection and long standoff with the Canadian government over Oka in the 1980s, and a previous near-civil war in Akwesasne itself, the Canadian government would not risk sending a large military contingent if they thought real conflict was likely.

What Moose was really worried about was premature publicity. Specifically, about a dispatch sent out by the two independent, IMC anarchists who had come along on the trip, Target and Warcry. Both were in their own way minor legends in the movement. Target was a punky kid famous for his Black Bloc exploits, who seemed to change his name every other week. Warcry, born in India, was a former tree-sitter, eco-activist, and independent journalist, who then had a reputation as a kind of anarchist poster girl, prominently featured in just about every movie about Seattle—partly owing to charisma, partly because she was one of the few Black Bloc anarchists willing to give interviews. On their return from Canada, they had immediately posted a call of their own that was forwarded to a series of anarchist listservs. In it—at least according to Moose—they had grossly misrepresented what was going on as an ultra-militant armed event and urging anarchists to participate. Apart from being childish, Moose stressed, this was completely out of process: we'd promised not to say anything we weren't specifically authorized to say. He said we'll be talking to Warcry later to see if they can't post some kind of correction, or at least milder version.

Actually, some people were growing concerned with the whole situation. What's up with the picture of the Mohawk Warrior with the M16? Are these guys really going to be carrying guns? Moose assured us they wouldn't. At Oka, they occupied a bridge for two months before they even started carrying guns, and even then they never used them on anyone, even when the police fired on them. It's all a bit of a ploy, he told us. People who lack the privilege of white activists are not in a position of being able to claim to be doing nonviolent action even when, in fact, they are.

Moose also says Shawn has been assuring us that getting through at the bridge will not be a problem, anyway. The problem is more likely to be roadblocks on the way.

So we formally consense on our support for the Cornwall action. Then, after yet another report on NEGAN, we start talking about the larger, New York-wide anti-FTAA Coalition, which actually is experiencing similar problems. The coalition is top-heavy with Greens and ISO people, and organizational tensions have become such that we've agreed to a special meeting on Friday just to sort things out. ("Marina is going. She's the process queen," observes Moose. She's also a one-time ISO member turned anarchist who presumably knows how such people think.)

The big news is that CLAC is having a "consulta," or spokescouncil in Québec City on the 23rd, and Ya Basta! needs to send representatives—especially since during the last consulta, our people didn't make it through. I volunteer. So does Emma, an artist currently working in a health food store on the Lower East Side. Emma points out she might not be an ideal choice, since, while part of the collective, she doesn't intend to do Ya Basta!, but is going to be with the Black Bloc. No one seems to mind.

The selection of delegates is not as delicate a matter as it might be because spokes are not, technically, empowered to make decisions for the group. They're not really representatives. They are basically conduits for information: they explain what their group is intending to do, bring proposals, and convey information and proposals back to the group for it to consider collectively. (In a proper spokescouncil, where the other members of the affinity group are actually present in the room, this can happen on the spot. At a consulta where they aren't, the number of decisions that can be made is much more limited.) Still, this raises the question: what is Ya Basta! in fact planning to do, if we do get through to Québec City? For the rest of the meeting, we consider the possibilities. Since no one is much interested in the idea of protecting SalAMI's autonomous zone in the middle of nowhere, these come down to: (1) helping pull down the wall, (2) trying to get through the wall and enter the perimeter, or (3) providing some sort of diversion—since one thing we do know is that if you do dress up in bright padded outfits, the police will definitely follow you around. The wall is an obvious symbol of the hypocrisy of neoliberalism, but some of us find it a little too symbolic. On the other hand, if we could get inside the perimeter, what would we do there? Smokey had heard a story about a homeless shelter there that effectively had to close down operations because of the Summit—perhaps we could get them to formally invite us to provide security? Someone else had been pursuing the idea of dramatizing the fates of disappeared asylum-seekers: the Coalition for the Defense of the Rights of Immigrants had suggested we might think about placing not their pictures, but a series of specific demands on shields and banners and delivering them to the Summit. But to whom? And how to air them? The US media would never cover the story.

This led to a long debate on the pros and cons of an action against the media itself. Would it be possible, for instance, to shut down the media tent outside the summit building, or even demand they play some tape containing the voices of those frozen out of debate? All agree that the corporate media is a legitimate target, but how would an action against it be effective? What would constitute success? This is the basic question we come up with over and over again in planning for an action: how do we frame the event in such a way that we have the right to declare victory afterwards? And in the case of the media it was particularly acute: even if you did carry out a successful action against the media, who would know?

We don't come to any decisions. Anyway, as a few people point out, we're just one collective. Other Ya Basta! groups will be joining at Burlington and we don't want to make decisions for

them. We can save that for the Burlington spokes. But by the time the meeting is over both Emma and I have a fairly clear idea of what we're going to say.

A final announcement. Moose says: "I'm supposed to tell people that Starhawk is going to be in town tomorrow." (He pronounces it with a note of mild mockery: Staaaarhawk.) "I mean, me, I'm not too down with this kind of superstar celebrity bullshit, but she apparently wants to meet some of the New York Ya Basta! Collective so I figured I would pass it on."

Friday, March 9: Coalition structure meeting at Amsterdam Pizza at 111th Street, 6:30PM

This meeting consisted of maybe twenty activists ranged around a table in the back of a pizza joint pretending that they weren't having an argument.

What is now called the FTAA Coalition began as a Direct Action Network working group. DAN had a general meeting every Sunday, and a whole series of working group meetings on other days of the week. Some of these working groups are structural (legal, media, outreach), some are engaged in ongoing campaigns (DAN Labor, Police & Prisons) but there are always some that are just created to work on some specific action: whether the IMF protests in Washington, the Republican convention in Philly, and now, the FTAA in Québec. Often, these latter working groups themselves could start looking like miniature versions of DAN, with their own working groups to handle outreach, communications, transportation, and the like. They became like cellular structures budding off and then reproducing the same internal relation between the parts. We could afford to be flexible because after all, there was no fixed, top-down chain of command; initiatives were supposed to rise from below anyway; so everyone was free to improvise whatever organizational form seemed to work for them.

The problems came when DAN tried to work with members of groups with profoundly different organizational imperatives. I've already mentioned the great DAN bugaboo, the ISO. The ISO had become involved in DAN-style politics only recently. They had played little or no part in Seattle. Sometime afterwards, however, they apparently received orders from central command in England to get involved with the global justice movement. Suddenly, all sorts of high-ranking ISO organizers started appearing at DAN meetings. Their enthusiasm seemed to ebb and flow. They had participated enthusiastically in the first big NYC-DAN action—A16, the anti-IMF protests in Washington on April 16, 2000—but, after the Republican convention protests in Philly, during which the ISO contingent was widely accused of having abandoned their position and run away, they largely dropped out and threw their energy behind the Nader presidential campaign. Now they were back.

Working groups were in principle open. Anyone could join. In this case, when DAN created a working group for the FTAA mobilization back in January, the ISO folks had suddenly reappeared, along with members of some other groups they had been working with—the Green Party, certain NGOs—who had never, in fact, been to a DAN meeting proper. Since the ISO and Greens, at least, were not there as individuals but as representatives of organizations, the working group in effect became a coalition. So it seemed only reasonable to declare it one and abandon the pretense of its being a part of DAN. This was not a problem since DAN working groups were pretty much autonomous anyway.

So now we had a city-wide coalition which ostensibly worked on anarchist, or anyway directly democratic, principles. In principle, this was just what DAN should have wanted: we were all about disseminating this kind of decision-making model. But there followed an inevitable clash of institutional cultures. The newcomers immediately started treating the coalition like a new organization: they wanted to adopt principles of unity, create outreach literature, and try to get other groups around the city, immigrant groups, labor unions, and the like, to join. The anarchists didn't think of the coalition as a "group" at all. They saw it not as a decision-making body but more of a forum, a way for groups already organizing against the FTAA to exchange information and avoid reduplication of effort. It was something along the lines of a spokescouncil. Certainly they saw no reason for it to adopt an ideological "line" of any sort. For some reason, a lot of the arguments ended up aimed at trying to convince one person: a young woman named Julie, who worked for something called the Urban Justice League. Partly this was because none of us really knew her; she seemed fresh on the scene, but very enthusiastic, active, and eager to learn. Julie, on the other hand, turned out to be a creature of the NGO world, and she ultimately swung decisively to the ISO position. In fact, she soon began acting like a one-woman steering committee of her own, making phone calls to union presidents, pastors, and the leaders of various community groups in our name, and trying to assemble the broadest possible coalition. In theory, this was hard to argue with. But we all knew what was likely to come next: these same groups would start demanding we tone down the direct action, or at least stop talking openly about it. The DAN people and other anarchists responded by forming their own autonomous direct action working group *of* the coalition—calling it, appropriately enough, the "autonomous direct action working group," or AUTODAWG—with its own listserv and separate meetings. AUTODAWG, we decided, would send one representative to the coalition meetings each week, but otherwise we would work together, much like we'd expected the original DAN working group to do.

The problem was that Julie and the ISO people immediately started showing up to all the AUTODAWG meetings too. Technically, of course, there was no reason they couldn't—they were open meetings—but it caused great deal of discomfort on all sides. Julie started complaining on the Internet about exclusion and, before long, everyone agreed we really ought to have a special meeting to discuss process and iron things out.

The result was about twenty people all sitting around a table at a student hangout near Columbia University, sharing out slices of two large cheese pizzas, and trying to be reasonable to one another. Julie offered to facilitate (which probably was not a good idea). It soon became apparent that the main problem was lack of trust in one another's instincts, since, in principle, the ISO side were making some very reasonable points. First of all, they said, consider the new people. There were a lot of new people, especially students, showing up wanting to do direct action. How exactly were they going to plug in and decide what working group they wanted to join if the direct action folk were meeting in an entirely different time and location? Secondly, if one is going to form a coalition that includes labor unions and organized community groups, and you do outreach, they *will* want to see some kind of mission statement. You can't just tell them you're against the FTAA. Of course, the anarchists in the room might have replied by asking what was the point in getting these endorsements anyway: none of these groups were interested in taking part in the action, and any group that might be interested in sending people all the way to Québec to march in the labor parade was almost certainly already making their own arrangements. So, why collect names just to have them on a piece of paper? But no one

wanted to preclude the possibility that *some* new group might be pulled in and decide to take a more radical posture. So, instead, we ended up endlessly talking process.

Julie: For me, there are two issues: First, how do we integrate with the other organizations we're outreaching to? Having them sign on to a mission statement is a tried and true method for doing that. Anyway, people at large, individuals who aren't part of an organization, won't be able to fit into a spokescouncil model. The second is how to avoid reduplication of efforts.

Moose: But the idea of a coalition is not to have an ideology; it's a means for people with different ideologies or perspectives to work together on an issue.

Green: I want to know what an endorsement would mean in practice. Will unions distribute our flyer to their members? If so, that would facilitate individuals joining, as individuals.

Meredith (ISO): Well, the Outreach Working Group has already decided to write a statement and pass it to us. I guess the question becomes what does it mean to be part of the coalition?

Julie: Yes, exactly. When AUTODAWG formed, it was never clear to me if it was a part of the coalition or not. Then, when I showed up at one of their meetings I felt like I was crashing a party.

Enos: Look, I understand how you might have felt that way. But I think part of the reason it happened was because, every time we formed an autonomous direct action working group, it seemed like everyone in the entire coalition would show up. So we started asking ourselves: in what way are we autonomous? In what way are we a different group? Remember, this all started when DAN decided it wanted to work on the FTAA, and created its own working group. Then when all these people showed up, that working group effectively became this coalition. So DAN General was confused and we tried to create a new working group. And it just kept happening.

Marina: You should understand something about how DAN tends to operate, because some of the problem might just be confusion. The people we normally work with—the Lower East Side Collective people, Reclaim the Streets, Ya Basta!—all these groups see themselves as loosely part of DAN. We're kind of halfway between a group and a spokes network. Reclaim the Streets people for instance, they never come to our meetings, partly because they're more concerned with local New York issues, partly just because they don't like meetings, they're fun-loving party people, that's part of their whole schtick. But they always show up to actions. So, really, this was a working group for that larger, direct-action oriented community. Some people didn't want it to be a DAN working group, so we said, all right, let's just call it an "autonomous" one.

Meredith: Maybe, just to float a proposal here, why not just make a list of working groups we can post on the wall during meetings, so that new people can plug in? How would people feel about that?

Marina: I thought we were here to brainstorm ideas to take back to our groups. I'm uncomfortable about making this a decision-making body. I mean, don't get me wrong—that's a constructive proposal...

James: She's just suggesting we better articulate what we're doing. Calling that "decision-making" seems just like a matter of semantics, from where I sit.

Enos: I don't think it's just semantics. I think the problem is the different nature of the groups involved.

Maggie: I just want to know what to say to people who want to join us...

And so on, apparently *ad infinitum*. I step out early, partly because, though I had my hand up frequently, Julie never once called on me; partly because several of us had told Starhawk we

were coming over at eight. She was staying with a friend named Nesta in Columbia University Housing, just a few blocks away.

Meeting with Starhawk, 8PM

A much, much more pleasant meeting. Inspiring, even.

Just about anyone active in the movement had at least heard of Starhawk. She was a sometime science fiction writer (her most famous novel was about a war between San Francisco and Los Angeles), sometime author of works on feminist paganism, who had been involved in direct action campaigns since the late 1970s. Almost everyone had seen images of her, beating a little drum, leading spiral dances. A practicing witch, she had a reputation as a kind of den mother for the pagan cluster, many wiccans in their forties or fifties, but including many much younger members. Most of us came to the meeting highly skeptical. It was not just the automatic suspicions about movement celebrities, or even East Coast attitudes towards purportedly flaky Californians. The one thing most of us had read by Starhawk was a piece she had written in a widely circulated collection that came out right after Seattle, called “How We Really Shut Down the WTO,” in which she castigated the Black Bloc for refusing to take part in the spokescouncil, defying agreed-upon codes of conduct, and even spoke approvingly of pacifists who pointed out window-breakers to police. The piece, along with even angrier statements by NGO activists like Medea Benjamin, had set off a veritable explosion of rage from the more militant anarchists. Rage, eventually, had led to debate: over questions of solidarity, tactics, what activists owe each other on the streets. A lot of people had changed their minds, Starhawk among them, but at that time, her image had been fixed in everyone’s mind—especially because, unlike characters like Medea Benjamin, who could just be dismissed, she considered herself an anarchist—which gave the whole thing something of the color of a personal betrayal.

So, at any rate, we were suspicious. Still, we came. At least five of us: Moose, Marina, Rufus, Warcry, and myself. If nothing else, everyone was willing to admit Starhawk’s affinity group, the RANT collective, was doing excellent work giving trainings all over the country. By the end of the evening, we were pretty much completely won over.

Partly it was just that she so defied expectations. I don’t know exactly what we were expecting, but at the very least one imagines an anarchist witch would be at least a little bit *outré*. Instead, what we encountered was one of the most pleasant, reasonable people imaginable. Everything about her was open, friendly, and completely down-to-earth.

Starhawk was staying with her friend Nesta, a noted ecofeminist theorist and occasional *Nation* writer who was around the same age, currently getting around in an extremely high-tech wheelchair. She was curious about the direct action scene in New York. Moose talked about Ya Basta!, Marina about the People’s Law Collective, Rufus about the Action Medics.

Starhawk talked about her own experience, “I was one of those people who went to Seattle to do my civic duty and, after that, I expected I’d just get back to my life again. Here it is two years later and I haven’t got back yet.”

Nesta was quick to point out that it was not like she had no experience in this sort of thing. Really, they had got their start in the Diablo Canyon blockade in 1981. “Remember, how we had to invent all this stuff from scratch? We had no idea what we were doing, how to do things the present generation just takes for granted.”

“Oh, there’s been *enormous* progress,” Starhawk agreed. “I can’t tell you how many times I’ve seen kids, sixteen, seventeen years old, and they’re already know how to do things it took us fifteen years to figure out.

“Well, if you want to know the history... I was basically an author back then. I had written several books on paganism, the Goddess religion. The network I’m with, Reclaiming, is based on a principle of Magical Activism—we wanted to use magic as a way of reshaping consciousness, to add a spiritual dimension that wasn’t simply Christian. Because, at first, it was only Quakers who really knew how to do any of this. Spokescouncils, affinity groups—all of that really started with the Clamshell Alliance, working against the Seabrook Nuclear Power Plant in New Hampshire. There was this rebel Quaker group called Movement for a New Society that conducted trainings on nonviolence, but also taught this new mode of organizing—consensus, spokescouncils, how to make decisions democratically through small groups and then let them coordinate, bottom-up. And it worked so well that it just took off. At first, there was a kind of battle between the old and new ways of doing things. Most of those campaigns still had paid staff—the usual tiny underpaid staff, but paid staff nonetheless—and what were in effect steering committees, and there were always tensions between the top-down principle and the bottom-up.”

Mumbles of “it’s not exactly like such things never happen any more.”

“And, as I say, then there was the problem of—well, we used to call them the “Quaker fascists,” sometimes—whose kind of spirituality was almost completely alien to ours.

“I was part of a group we called the Matrix Collective, which was part of Reclaiming. We first got involved at the blockade in Diablo Canyon, which was this insane idea they had to build a nuclear power plant directly on a fault line in California, and then later with Lawrence Livermore Group, which was one of the main nuclear weapons labs at Berkeley. We wanted to use the same horizontal structure they’d used at Seabrook, but we also wanted to do ritual. In a way, that meant reinventing everything, because we soon realized that traditional nonviolent civil disobedience is deeply rooted in the ethos of Christianity—or anyway an extremely patriarchal version of religion. There was a reason there was always some male religious hero at the head of the movement. It’s all about chastisement, self-denial, being willing to subject one’s body to pain and suffering in the name of an idea—which is probably Truth or Love or something very nice like that, but still something abstract, transcendent. You negate the corporeal in the name of something higher. Which is what the big world religions are all about, really. So how do you square that with an immanent cosmology which celebrates the body and sees pleasure—especially sexual pleasure—as itself divine?”

She left the question open. “I don’t know if any of us have really figured that out yet. One idea we had was to pull sources of strength out of apparent weakness, to show how little homely things like yarn can, if woven together—sort of like a spell—stop even military machinery. Remember all those webs of yarn from A16?”

“Oh, you mean ones all over the intersections so you had to crawl under them to get back and forth between blockades?” I asked.

“That was the Pagan Cluster’s contribution. Actually the first time I remember using yarn was at a Bohemian Grove action sometime in the early eighties. They are the exclusive men’s club that includes CEOs and lots of Reagan’s cabinet—probably some of Bush’s but it seemed more urgent during the Reagan years. They have a club in downtown San Francisco and a fancy summer resort on the Russian River where every year they have a weeklong summer camp for the rich and powerful, which they begin with a ritual called the Cremation of Care, in which they burn

the effigy of a woman. Their motto is “Weaving spiders come not here,” (I’m *not* making this up!) so we did a direct action where we webbed the whole Boho club in downtown SF and blocked them in.”

“That’s amazing.”

“Yeah, it’s funny,” I said. “I always used to assume it was just paranoid conspiracy.”

“Then probably the best web story ever was an action at Livermore in... ’82?’83 was it?”

“Oh, that was so hilarious!” said Nesta, who had just driven in from the other room. “I remember that story. The women had woven a long web, like a warp, wasn’t it?, on two sticks that could stretch across the road, wove in pictures of people’s kids, flowers, herbs, etcetera, and used it to block busses of workers...”

“And we had thought of it as a basically symbolic gesture, an artistic statement, really. Nothing that would actually be physically effective. We’d almost finished it and I remember there were these three bike cops sneering at us. Suddenly, they gunned their engines and decided to just plow through it. The next thing we knew, there we were on the ground, and there were the three cops on the ground, and there were their motorcycles, and we were all so hopelessly tangled together it took ten minutes just to cut us out.”

“Do you remember Bork, from the RNC in Philadelphia?” someone asked. “Remember, the one who appeared at the press conference the next day with two black eyes and her face all puffy? The reason they beat her up so badly in Philly...well, they had these cops on bicycles with big scissors. Every time they’d seen one of our banners, they’d hold the scissors out and drive their bikes right through them. Except Bork—obviously she had no idea they were going to be doing this—but she’d reinforced her banner with piano wire.”

“Ouch!”

“If they’d tried to peddle through on neck level they’d have been in big trouble. As it was, two of them got some nasty cuts. (I mean—they never would have if they hadn’t been illegally trying to destroy protesters’ signs.) But, anyway, so they got off the bikes and started smashing her head on the ground.”

Before long everyone was swapping war stories. Starhawk, as it turns out, was mad at the Black Bloc in Seattle mainly because they didn’t respect the collective process—they refused to even attend the spokescouncils. Since then, she had come to thoroughly embrace the principle of diversity of tactics. “We used to do nonviolence training,” she said. “Now we don’t even call it that any more. We give what we call direct action trainings, with classic nonviolence as just one element of a much wider repertoire. After all, it’s the refusal to cause harm or suffering to others that’s the moral point, especially from any spiritual perspective that makes sense to me.” Marina tried to suggest, gently, that she might seriously think about making this change of opinion on her part more broadly known.

One of the reasons Starhawk was anxious to meet with New York Ya Basta!, she finally admitted, was that she was a little worried whether that sort of tactic would translate across the Atlantic. She had first encountered Italian Ya Basta! before the actions against the IMF/World Bank meetings Prague in the fall of 2000. Prague was in many ways just extraordinary. She’d gone early to give trainings on consensus process, and ended up facilitating one of the big spokescouncils. “And it was one of those situations where... well, you know how it has to turn out. There were four different groups and two proposals. Either there would be four marches all starting in different places and they’d all converge somewhere, or there’d be one march and they’d all branch off in four. And there could only be one conclusion really: we’d start together, split apart, and hope,

if everything went right, to eventually converge. But, of course, first we had to go through every possibility, every conceivable concern or objection for four, five hours, and finally you'd come up with the conclusion that everyone had to know we'd eventually come up with. By the end I was just exhausted, and practically saying, what's the point of all this anyway? And then this Romanian guy walked up to me and 'I can't believe what just happened. I would never thought anything like that was possible—a thousand people speaking twelve different languages all in a room together, making a decision together, without leaders.' He was just awestruck. Maybe we sometimes forget how revolutionary a lot of this really is."

"So did you have much to do with Ya Basta! in Prague?" someone asked. This had been their debut on the larger European stage, and they had performed spectacularly, ending in a famous confrontation with riot police on a bridge leading to the Convention Center where the IMF was meeting, which all of us had watched repeatedly on video.

"Oh, yes. To be honest, at first they rather gave me pause. In part, it was the blatant sexism. For three days of meetings, there was one guy, Luka, who did all the talking. He spoke a little English, but mainly he spoke in Italian. Then there was a woman who did all the translation work—that's three days of simultaneous translation, which I didn't think anyone could do for three days without going crazy—and a third, also a woman, who just sat there taking notes. They never rotated, never switched roles. It was obvious both women spoke perfect English, too, but they didn't venture an opinion once the whole time. Internally, within Ya Basta!, I couldn't make out any kind of an internal democratic process either. Maybe there were things going on I wasn't aware of."

Then it came to tactics. After three days of meetings, Ya Basta! finally decided that their front line would be armed with two-by-fours. Starhawk began talking very slowly and precisely. "To beat against the shields of the riot cops. Not to actually hit them with. The idea was they could push through the police lines that way and they wouldn't really be attacking the police."

Eyes blinked.

Mouths opened.

"They really brought two-by-fours?"

"It took us days to consense on that."

"Jeez," said Moose. "I mean, okay... I can see the logic but... None of us have ever dreamed of doing anything like that."

"To be honest," said Starhawk, "I'm rather glad to hear it. Because when I first heard there were Americans intending to use Tute Bianche tactics, I was a little worried that people might get seriously hurt. You have to bear in mind that it took them five, maybe six years to get to the point where they could do something like that in Europe. Six years of continual media work, hammering away at the idea of the legitimacy of defensive tactics, endless media stunts. And you have to bear in mind that the media in Italy is a thousand times more sympathetic to social movements than the media here. Even on the TV, which is almost all owned by Berlusconi, Luka is up there every time there's a big action, on talk shows, debating the police or rightwing journalists—things that would be inconceivable in this country."

"Wow. You know, since I'm the one handling media for New York Ya Basta!," I said, "I've actually been a little worried about that. We've considered various media stunts. But basically, the press here always let the cops frame the story—and there's no way to even broach the subject of, say, the philosophy behind our actions. Believe me I've tried. There's no interest. They just ask us if we're going to be 'violent,' with padding and shields taken as evidence that we're looking for a

fight. We've been trying to create the same effect just by being over-the-top silly, with a kazoo band, silly crests, and costumes, so that if people just see us on TV and they're calling us violent, it'll be obvious there's something wrong. But even then we know perfectly well, even if we all dress up as Barney the Dinosaur with our hands tied behind our backs, a good editor could still be able to come up with some image that'll make us look frightening."

"Plus, in almost all European countries, there's a different relation with the police. Everybody knows each other. The whole thing is a little like a game."

And so on. We drifted off to other topics, but Starhawk had registered her concerns. They had echoed some that had certainly occurred to me at one time or another. I had no idea if any of this was actually going to work.

Tuesday, March 13: *AUTODAWG meeting at the National Lawyer's Guild, 8PM*

This was actually the first meeting I'd attended with the Direct Action Working Group everyone had been complaining about.

It began with a report-back. Two Brooklyn activists had just returned from Québec City and were all agog over the beauty of the city, its ancient towers and anarchist graffiti. Then Mac went over breaking developments. He had stayed on at the meeting at the pizza place until the bitter end and done his best to patch things up with the ISO, who, in turn, now wanted to assure us they were completely committed to getting people up to Québec for the direct action on Friday, and not just the labor march the next day. The latest developments from Akwesasne were promising as well: the Canadian Union of Postal Workers was interested in helping, also some auto workers; Warclub, a Mohawk hip-hop band, wanted to be involved in some capacity; our Warrior allies on the Canadian side were already in contact with the Boots family, who were one of the most important Mohawk families on the US side and seemed interested, and so forth.

There were two main orders of business for the meeting itself. The first was the CLAC consulta: I end up being put in charge of coordinating the whole thing. Some discussion followed on the safest options: train, bus, car.

The other was an action planned for April 1. Enos, a local underground cartoonist had been taking point on this one with a friend named Nicky. They had also successfully managed to draft an activist named Twinkie, and this was a bit of a coup. Twinkie was an androgynous young woman whose parents were from Thailand, maybe nineteen or twenty years old with a dramatic punk haircut, famous for many things, but probably most of all for her enormous lung capacity. She was much sought after at demos for her amazing powers of projection, not to mention her knack for being able to invent songs and slogans for any occasion, on the spot. Such people are, as one might imagine, an enormous asset in any demo. In the past she'd largely avoided DAN, preferring to work with more community-oriented groups, but she had decided to throw herself into the FTAA organizing. She also had considerable experience in graphic design.

Enos: We figured that since NEGAN is going to be meeting on the 31st in Burlington, we could go up from there to the border the next day—which, of course, is also April Fool's Day. It's basically a kind of publicity stunt, a media thing, to bring people's attention to the issues, but also to the fact that they've been systematically stopping political activists from crossing over into Canada. And not just turning away people with molotovs, but regular community activists.

Mac: Just last week they refused entry to Lorenzo Komboa Ervin—on the basis of some arrest thirty years ago.

Enos: If they think you're political, they go through your record and all they need is to come up with one arrest, and they can deny you entry. It doesn't even have to be a conviction. In some cases, they've been denying people entry just on suspicion.

This was, of course, part of the point of the police custom of making mass arrests of hundreds of people at a time during protests. The DC police were particularly famous for surrounding and trapping columns of hundreds of marchers, and then arresting them for "failure to disperse." The arrests never hold up—they are obviously illegal—but, in the process, everyone is photographed and fingerprinted and this information is then put out on international databases.

Nicky: So, anyway, the idea is to do something to highlight the hypocrisy, since the FTAA is supposed to be all about eliminating border controls—except, of course, what they mean is border controls that affect corporations, not those that affect people. So, we figured we'll have a bunch of activists dress up as the sort of products that will be getting through. I was going to go disguised as a dollar bill. Someone else was going to dress up as a genetically modified tomato... you get the idea. So when they stop us we can say, "We thought that was the only way we could get through the border."

Twinkie: I was going to go as an HMO. Though I'm still not entirely sure how the costume is going to work.

Someone: Maybe an insurance salesman?

Enos: Anyway, so we could do some kind of skit based on that, throw a press conference while, in the background, the Canadian police are interrogating and beating up a bunch of vegetables. We're in contact with some radical media people in Vermont who would definitely cover the story, and we're hoping to get WBAI, maybe even *Frontline* for television coverage.

Mandy: You know, technically, if they're excluding any American with an arrest record, that would include Bush, wouldn't it? Maybe we could get someone to go as George W with a big "DWI" written across his forehead?

Steve: Doesn't this all kind of depend on the assumption that they will, in fact, stop us at the border? What happens if they just wave us through? Just out of spite?

Nicky: You don't have to worry about that. That's not the way cops work. If the police are under orders to stop activists, then that's what they have to do. The danger is more they might not even notice we're activists. That's what I'm worried about.

Enos: Well, we all know cops are dumb, but... I'm thinking, if they see some guy trying to cross the border dressed as genetically modified food, they're probably going to figure out they're dealing with an activist.

Gradually, the meeting becomes something more like a conversation. Two queer activists named Mandy and Jen are wondering if we are romanticizing these "Mohawk Warriors." Aren't we really dealing with people who aren't even remotely on the same page as we are on issues like sexism or homophobia. Twinkie, Target, and Mac are all tripping over each other to respond, detailing the whole history of women's councils and the constitutional niceties of the confederacy of the Six Nations. (Everyone, it seems, had been reading up on this.) "Actually," Mac says, "one of the main accomplishments of the Warrior Society during the standoff at Oka was to revive the Clan Mother system as an alternative to the government-sponsored tribal government. By now, all the key decisions on the Canadian side are in the hands of women's councils. One of Shawn's hopes for Akwesasne is to start a similar process moving on the other side."

Mandy is surprised, but guarded. “It sounds wonderful. But don’t you sometimes think it’s all just a little too good to be true?”

The thought had occurred to me as well—maybe all of us. It was hard to deny that, from the perspective of your typical New York anarchist, to have a bunch of Mohawk Warriors promise to open a bridge for you—let alone a bunch of Mohawk Warriors aiming to revive a matriarchal decision-making structure—was about the coolest thing one could possibly imagine. You can only wonder if it’s all just a little bit too cool.

An hour later, we were all strolling over to St. Mark’s place for drinks at the Grassroots Tavern. There was some kind of trash worship party in Brooklyn that night. Everyone was discussing whether it would be worthwhile to go. Mac and Moose get into a long argument about whether DAN was, at this point, an explicitly anarchist organization. Are there any explicitly non-anarchists in DAN? Or at least, other than in DAN Labor? No one is quite sure. Twinkie vanishes and reappeared fifteen minutes later with some Radical Cheerleaders and a huge pile of dumpster-dived sushi. Minor tensions ensued when some of them weren’t let into the bar for lack of ID. After a brief consultation outside, the matter was resolved somehow. Twinkie, on discovering I’m not a vegetarian, keeps handing me pieces of sushi with fish. Not keen on eating dumpster-dived sushi, I kept trying to hide them. She keeps noticing. Rufus gently explains that it’s really the exact same stuff one would have bought in the store twenty minutes earlier: there are laws about when sushi has to be thrown away and, half the time, the moment they put it out, there’s already an activist or local punk kid or two waiting to take it away again.

Thursday, March 15

Outrageous article appears in the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, reporting rumors that Akwesasne Mohawks will be illegally “smuggling” activists with criminal records over the border into Canada. Apparently, Akwesasne itself has the reputation in Canada of being a den of smugglers—mainly of liquor and tobacco—so the implication is the same boats will be carrying a new criminal export—anarchists—presumably for money. Emails and phone calls are immediately exchanged about how to respond.

YABBA formation in Betty’s studio, 7PM

We merrily bash each other about. This time, Smokey has come up with a suit made out of empty plastic coke-bottles, which proves remarkably resilient against most powerful blows of our padded billy-clubs. We go through various defensive scenarios: How to hold the line if cops are simply trying to break through a shield wall. How to defend a specific individual they’re trying to snatch. One thing that is becoming obvious is that with all this gear, we’re going to need at least twenty minutes prep time before we can go into action.

There’s a long discussion of crests: we’ve managed to secure a fairly large number of surplus British riot police helmets from a mail-order catalogue (and each comes with two free rubber shin guards!), and spray-painted most of them pumpkin-orange. A plan has been floating around to personalize them by putting mock-heraldic devices on top: stuffed penguins, kewpie dolls, pinwheels, that sort of thing. The problem is, as Smokey points out, that this would individualize us: police could easily pick any one of us out for arrest if we no longer all looked alike. Would it

be possible, perhaps, to have some kind of widget on top of each helmet so that one could plug and unplug crests at will? That way, we could constantly switch them around? But the project seems more trouble than we're likely to put into it.

Announcements: There will be legal trainings in Burlington from 1PM to 5PM Saturday, probably one mini-training just for Yabbas.

Emma and Moose are away doing a street training.

Smokey and Flamma point out that, even without padding, a Ya Basta! formation could serve as a perfect diversion. During an anti-sweatshop rally two weeks earlier, six of us just put on the chemical jumpsuits. The moment we started suiting up, the top cop ran up and demanded to know what was going on and, throughout the subsequent march, we were surrounded on four sides by police at all times. We tied down the bulk of their forces just with the six of us.

I draft Sasha to join me at the Québec City consulta.

Friday, March 16

Another thing that emerged from the Thursday meeting was that, as "Minister of Information" for Ya Basta!, it was my job to fashion a press release responding to the *Globe and Mail* piece. After the meeting, I locked myself in my room with a laptop and, around 2 or 3AM, sent off a draft to the Yabba list for feedback:

PRESS RELEASE

**From: the New York City Ya Basta! Collective
& the New York City Direct Action Network**

On Thursday March 15, an article appeared in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* which misrepresented the results of an historic meeting between US and Canadian activists and traditional Mohawks from Akwesasne earlier this month.

Contrary to the article's claims, there have never been any plans to "smuggle" activists (let alone "criminals") across the border. Our intentions have been, from the beginning, public and above-board; public statements were released, among other places, through the NYC Independent Media Center (<http://www.nyc.indymedia.org>) and on the Internet. It is hardly our fault if reporters and police (who we had assumed were monitoring us fairly carefully!) could not be bothered to look up these readily available public documents.

After setting out the actual facts of the matter, it continued, using a lot of the language we'd developed in previous discussions within Ya Basta!:

WHY HAS THIS BEEN NECESSARY?

While we have always been open, the FTAA itself has been, from the beginning, a secret project, created by government and corporate elites with as little input from the public as possible. For this reason, its sponsors have regularly used international borders to prevent representatives of the public from coming anywhere near their meetings, even though these protesters are, in their opposition to the treaty, simply expressing the views of the overwhelming majority of the citizens of the countries these signatories claim to represent. During the OAS meetings in Windsor, Ontario last summer, which laid the groundwork for the FTAA, approximately two out of every three activists who attempted to cross the border from the US were prevented by physical force. In past months, activists trying to attend meetings in Québec have been turned back at the border, been detained, and been subjected to illegal searches and seizures. We have every reason to

believe authorities are intending to use force to prevent environmentalists, union members, and other political dissidents from airing their opposition to the secret negotiations in Québec City in April.

AGAINST THE STUPIDITY OF BORDERS

The use of international border controls to squash political dissent is yet more proof that the process referred to as “globalization” is in fact nothing of the kind; as well as the absurdity of calling the vast international movement that has risen to oppose it in the name of global democracy an “anti-globalization movement.” It’s time to drop the propaganda and speak honestly about these things. If “globalization” were to mean anything, it would mean the gradual dismantling of national borders to allow the free movement of people, possessions, and ideas. Corporate “globalization” has meant the exact opposite: it has meant trapping the poor behind increasingly fortified borders so as to let the rich take advantage of their desperation. The number of armed guards along the US-Mexican border has more than doubled since the signing of NAFTA; refugees and asylum seekers languish like criminals in twenty-three hour lockdown; immigrant communities live in constant terror. We can only expect more of the same if NAFTA is extended to the entire Western Hemisphere.

Instead, Ya Basta! is calling for the abolition of national borders and recognition of a principle of global citizenship. We believe that every human being born on this planet has the right to live where she chooses, and not have her life chances be determined by some random geographical accident of birth. We hold that every human has an equal right to the basic means of existence: air, water, food, shelter, education, and health care. We want to see the authority of nation-states gradually dissolve and power devolve onto free communities on the basis of true economic and political democracy; a process that will lead to an outpouring of new forms of wealth and culture that the impoverished minds of the current rulers of the world could not possibly imagine. The Direct Action Network offers its own success as a rapidly growing continental federation, based on principles of direct democracy and decentralized consensus decision-making, as living proof that rulers—and this includes elected “representatives”—are simply unnecessary. Ordinary people are perfectly capable of governing their own affairs on the basis of equality and simple decency.

National borders were created through violence, and are maintained through violence. They are the remnants of a barbarous age that humanity must, if it is to survive, eventually overcome. We refuse to recognize their legitimacy.

FOR THE SELF-DETERMINATION OF COMMUNITIES AND MOHAWK SOVEREIGNTY

We are choosing to travel via Cornwall in order to express our solidarity with the Mohawk Nation and our recognition of its sovereignty over territories it occupied long before the US and Canadian governments even existed. Nothing illustrates the insanity of national borders more than the fact that the same governments that waged genocidal war against the Mohawks now claim the right to determine who can cross from one part of Mohawk territory to another. Our solidarity with our Traditional Mohawk sisters and brothers is rooted in our support for regional autonomy and communal self-determination in the face of the arrogant power of the state; but, also, in our profound respect and admiration for a Nation whose political contributions to the world—the creation of a federative constitution without a centralized state, the collective management of resources, respect for individual autonomy, the role of peacemaking, the political empowerment of women—provide, for many of us, visions of how a future just society might work that is far more compelling than the US Constitution, which was partially inspired by it. We wish to thank our Mohawk friends for their generous invitation and express our profound

commitment to furthering their struggle for sovereignty, communal rights, and social justice, just as they have recognized our right, as world citizens, to make our presence known to the politicians who presume to act in our names in Québec City on April 19th–21st.

It ended with contact numbers for Ya Basta! (me), DAN (Eric), and the Mohawk Warriors (Shawn).

Saturday, March 17

9PM, Saturday night there's a huge Zapatista event. The EZLN had marched into Mexico City to lobby for an indigenous autonomy bill a month before, and the movie was already out. The showing was accompanied by report-backs from two DAN people who'd been there at the time.

Afterwards, parties. Powwow outside one of them about the press release. Time is of the essence, certainly, but (several ask) shouldn't we have to clear this with the Mohawks before releasing it? Moose says he called Shawn and Shawn just said, "Well, we don't ask you to approve our press releases." Eric from the DAN Media Collective agrees to send them out by Blast Fax to every major news outlet in the country the next day, and a copy goes up on the web page.

It's not clear if anyone ever read it. Certainly no one ever calls us back. All such grand statements simply disappear into the ether, just like all the op-eds and letters we regularly send out to newspapers before major actions. Then, the same media outlets who refuse to run them complain to their readers that it's impossible to figure out what these anti-globalization types are actually for.

Sunday, March 18: *DAN meeting at Charas*

Another long meeting. Prolonged discussion on the current state of negotiations with Shawn and OCAP.

Mac urges DAN to endorse the Cornwall action: best, he says, to do so as quickly as possible before the next NEGAN meeting on the thirty-first to ensure people do go to the direct action rather than leaving with the union buses the next day. So we endorse it.

There's a long discussion about a fund-raising party being planned at a place called the Frying Pan, about the *Globe and Mail* story and others like it, and, especially, about the media event planned for April Fool's Day. An April 1 working group had already formed and hashed out the details:

Enos: That recent article in the *Globe and Mail* is actually symptomatic of the kind of press we've been getting. It's all pretty much the same: we're going to be violent, disruptive, we're a bunch of hoodlums, not representative of anyone or anything, coming to set fire to the city. So, we were trying to figure out how to provide some more realistic images of who we are and what we're about. That's how we hit on the idea of doing an action with funny costumes, something silly and harmless. The idea was that we could time it for April 1st, which is not only April Fool's Day, it's the day that SalAMI is carrying out their "show the text" action in Ottawa. We show up at the border, we tell them politely that we're going to join the protests in Ottawa; we get turned back; we hold a press conference. Explain to them this is what we have to do to get any media attention.

That's pretty much it. To make this work, though, we're going to need lots more people at the meetings. We only got three or four last time. I'm going as Bush, Nicky will be a dollar bill. Julie from the Urban Justice League is going to be a genetically engineered tomato...

Target: It's too bad it's on the first, actually, because that's the day they're having the men's anti-sexism workshop at Charas.

Nicky: Oh, yeah. Oops. Well, hopefully it won't be the last one.

I spend much of the next week trying to figure out exactly how one goes about renting a car (I don't drive), making preparations for Québec. Several people say they might be interested in coming, but only one follows through: Dweisel, from the Free CUNY Collective. That makes four of us in one car. I skip the next week's Ya Basta! meeting and head off the next weekend.

CHAPTER 2: A TRIP TO QUÉBEC CITY

Herein lies the story of my first trip to Québec City. One strange thing about the months leading up to the FTAA actions was how our imaginative landscapes were constantly flipping back and forth. When Jaggi and his friends were in town everything was about Québec City and the wall there. After about a month of meetings in New York, all that had become ghostly, insubstantial; Cornwall, Mohawks, border actions, all seemed tangible and real. Over the next weekend, that all reversed again, and I came out of it utterly, completely determined to make it to the Summit. This determination was to create considerable strain with some of my friends, at certain points, but I never abandoned it.

Friday, March 23, 2001

The day was mainly spent driving. Me, Emma, Sasha, all from Ya Basta!, and Dean, from the Free CUNY Collective, set off from the city fairly early in the morning with a supply of vegan food and large collection of music cassettes.

Technically, Sasha, the filmmaker, was not actually going to the consulta but to an Independent Media Center conference going on a few blocks away at the same time. He also had the inestimable quality of enjoying day-long stints of driving, which was good because I didn't drive at all. Emma, who was spoking for Ya Basta! despite the fact that she was going to do Black Bloc, was a budding artist, also in her twenties, known for installations around the city. A dedicated vegan, she worked in a health food store in Lower Manhattan. Dean was a grad student in sociology, tall, clean-cut, looking vaguely like a young Montgomery Clift. He started the trip famished, convinced us to stop for a considerable breakfast, and soon after started complaining of car sickness. I pulled a Dramamine from my medicine tin. He took it, nodded off almost immediately, and ended up spending almost the entire trip from the Hudson Valley to Montréal dozing in the back seat.

We made the border crossing without a problem, trying to look as clean-cut as possible. (Emma attempted to cover up the green parts of her hair with a little stocking-cap, and pulled a hoodie over the grungy Clash T-shirt, but we wondered if it was even necessary. American punk rockers, as Sasha pointed out, are quite regularly allowed entry into Canada.) Sasha, in the driver's seat, explained that we were going to an Independent Media Conference, a claim made infinitely more convincing by the large expensive video camera sitting next to him (he had been occasionally stopping to do panoramic shots of the countryside). The border cops waved us on. We skirted through Montréal, staring at a gigantic folding map to the music of Professor Longhair, getting lost only once, marveling at the billboards advertising vacations in Cuba (the first dramatic evidence that we really are in a different country), and started the final, flat, rather dreary run to Québec as the sun began to set. We hit the city itself by early evening.

We Arrive

Navigating our way through the city itself is not easy. The city planners seem to have seen nothing wrong with putting three or four one-way streets in a row, all going in the same direction; they also didn't seem to feel it was very important to put names on said streets, at least anywhere one might be able to see them. There's also the fact that the CLAC driving instructions we're using are exceptionally bad. Finally, we manage to locate our first stop: the Independent Media Center.

Actually, the IMC is a pretty standard first stop when you come to a new city because the place is almost never empty, and full of information. Technically, the building at which we arrived was not exactly the IMC but the CMAQ (Centre des médias alternatifs du Québec; it was pronounced "smack"), run by an NGO-funded, SalAMI-allied media group called Alternatifs. This, at least, is what we learn from Madhava, sometime of the New York IMC, sometime camp counselor in Poughkeepsie, who we discover sitting hunched over a computer scratching a scruffy blonde beard. "The nice thing about Alternatifs," he says, "is that they have money. Oodles of it. We've got equipment coming out of our ears. The not-so-nice thing is they have an extremely traditional, top-down idea of journalistic organization: beat assignments, desk editors...that sort of thing. Of course, give us time," gesturing towards the other old IMC hands huddled in a small meeting on the other side of the room. "We'll democratize things."

He introduces us to a tiny, slightly pixyish woman named Isabel, who then gives us directions. The next twenty minutes are spent trudging up a steep hill to the CLAC/CASA Welcome Center, in a beautiful old building with extremely heavy wooden doors, only to discover that the Welcome Center is really only a place to find housing and we actually already have housing lined up (everything had been arranged by phone with the CLAC people before we set out). Finally, around 10PM, after securing what we think are adequate directions, we return to the car and set off to meet our hosts.

Our Hosts

Our hosts, as it turned out, lived in an extremely beautiful neighborhood, all cornices and chimneys and tiny shops set in the corners of nineteenth century apartment blocks. It looked vaguely like the West Village, but much less pretentious—partly, I thought, because positioned as it was across an insanely steep hill, it had never been seriously gentrified. I was later to learn this was the heart of Jean Baptiste, one of the few "popular" neighborhoods left in the high part of the town near the old, walled city, now mostly full of hotels and convention centers.

"Welcome, my revolutionary friends!" beamed the young man who greeted us at the door. He was surrounded by five or six young people practically piling on top each other to show their happiness at our arrival, but throughout the night, he did almost all the talking—presumably, because he was the only one with any sort of command of conversational English.

All in all, the group looked almost exactly like one would imagine a group of revolutionaries should look—at least, if all you knew was that they were from a place that was in some ways sort of like Europe, but in others sort of like Latin America. The one who first greeted us was tall, almost emaciatedly thin, with a beret and Mephistophelian beard. Soft-spoken in his uncertain English, he otherwise looked almost exactly like Leon Trotsky. His companion with a dark beard pulled off a plausible Ché Guevara; a third man, named Pascal, with a long pony-tail and Ché Guevara T-shirt was harder to call. He didn't seem to correspond to any revolutionary hero I

could remember, but I couldn't help thinking, if there wasn't one, there really ought to have been. (I asked myself: why do we assume that if someone has spent a good deal of time and energy ensuring they look exactly like we think a revolutionary should look, that in itself makes them somehow inauthentic? Most capitalists spend a great deal of time and energy into ensuring they look exactly like we assume capitalists are supposed to look like. No one suggests it makes them any less a capitalist.)

There were also two teenage girls in the living room who appear largely ornamental: they never say a word in our presence, even in French, though they invariably started talking the moment we leave the room. Later, we're told they are both around seventeen years old and embarrassed by their lack of English.

The apartment contained two bedrooms, a large hammock, and several mats already spread out for sleeping bags. Our hosts were obviously used to multiple houseguests. Actually, it was a pretty typical student activist apartment: endless bookshelves, all the books in French, volumes of cartoons and poetry scattered around on second-hand furniture, mock religious posters, leftist magazines, a refrigerator largely full of left-over takeout. "You are hungry?" asked Trotsky. Emma asks if they have vegan food and Trotsky, assuring her there is, heads to the kitchen to find some.

"I shouldn't have asked that," she realized, as we stand around smiling at our silent companions. "I bet this is like Poland. If you ask people in Poland for vegetarian food, they think that means, not *much* meat. If you ask for vegan, they think that means 'actually is vegetarian.' Real vegan they've never even heard of."

"Maybe we should have picked something up on the way," said Dean.

"We probably wouldn't be able to find anything at this hour anyway."

Ché fetches wine, Trotsky brings out bread and charcuterie. It's all extremely tasty. Emma samples some bread, looks suspiciously at the rest; later, when our hosts aren't looking, sneaks off to another room, pulls out her backpack, and produces a giant vat of organic peanut butter and some pita bread.

Over wine, we explain we're all anarchists, working with CLAC/CASA. Trotsky—actually, his name is Sebastien—explains that, yes, they understand that we're connected to CLAC. Here, they are all Trotskyites—but, he's quick to add, "not part of any sect." They're with GOMM (Group Opposed to the Globalization of Markets) and Sebastien is also with OQP (Opération Québec Printemps 2001), which was organizing logistics for the protests (it was pronounced "occupée," appropriately enough considering they were planning various campus occupations). GOMM's position is that it is critical to take part in larger social movements, even if they are reformist, so as to radicalize them. "Of course," he continues, "in Québec, owing to the political situation, every group has to take certain positions: either you are for immediate independence, or you are for some kind of autonomy in coalition with working-class groups in English-speaking Canada. So we had to take a position. We are for complete independence. But we work mainly with student unions,"—which in Québec, Sebastien explained, is a slightly unusual situation because of the extremely weird form of the educational system here. In the 1960s, the longtime old-fashioned right-wing governor who'd ruled Québec for twenty years was finally voted out. He had felt no more than twenty percent needed higher education. The new Governor raised it to sixty or seventy percent. However, he took his model from California: not the system they have in California now, but a bizarre model used in California between 1954 and 1964 or so, where they take one year from High School and one from University to create a two-year Intermediate School. These Intermediate students, he explained, are actually still the most radical, much more so than the

University students. And they will all be on strike for the FTAA. (Some will be occupying the colleges too.) They could turn out as many as fifty thousand, for the protests, if they mobilize fully. Probably they won't. Well, they'll definitely turn out at least twenty thousand. (The two silent girls represent this stratum.)

As the evening continues, more food appears, and effects of hunger are replaced by those of the wine. We all discover that we are really quite fascinated in the dynamics of Québécois socialist politics. Sebastien is happy and chatty. Others pop in and out. Talking to Sebastien is sometimes a little frustrating, owing to his typical Trotskyite habit of using the term "we" ("we don't like to work with this group," "we take a strong position on that") without ever actually telling us what "we" meant. Usually, it didn't seem to refer to GOMM. It seemed to refer to a much tighter Marxist organization that saw GOMM as part of a broader popular front, which, of course, it was their duty to build up to be as broad as possible. Therefore, they didn't want to be too radical or too militant. But we never heard its name. Not that it really bothered us. Sebastien explained GOMM was not working directly with CLAC and CASA or attending their spokes (they seemed to be going to the SaLAMI spokes instead), but planning its own action, a classic nonviolent civil disobedience, Seattle style, with lockdowns and blockades. They did, however, want to coordinate with CLAC to ensure they found an appropriate spot, which could be reserved for classic nonviolent civil disobedience. The best would be to blockade the one highway that leads up to the perimeter. He points to a map on the CLAC/CASA information pamphlet already lying on the corner of the table. "You see, here, in Zone H."

"You mean down at the foot of the hill there?" Dean asks. "It's extremely steep, isn't it?"

Sasha confirms: "Yes, I think we passed through it five or six times when we were getting lost earlier in the evening."

"Yeah. It's far too steep to be appropriate for red tactics. It would be suicidal to try to charge up there."

Sebastien wants us to put in a good word at the spokescouncil, and we, of course, agree. Conversation shifts back to the complex dynamics of anti-FTAA coalition building. Pascal produces a Xeroxed page with a kind of flow-chart, illustrating the three or four different labor confederations, umbrella groups, full of circles and arrows and alliances. The thing is you have such widespread unionization in Canada, compared to the US anyway, and so many unions are so militant. "Which, actually," I say, "makes me think of some possibilities. Has anybody thought of talking to the hotel workers in the place the Summit is actually going to be held?"

Sasha nods vigorously. "Or more relevant, perhaps, the food handlers union."

Sebastien smiles. "Yes, actually, there were some people talking to organizers for some of the workers in the Conference Center about the possibility of maybe putting laxatives into the big feast. It wasn't even a serious discussion, just like putting out silly ideas. The very next day, the Summit organizers publicly announced that they would be using their own special caterers and all food would be flown in from another province."

CONSULTA DAY 1

Saturday, March 24

After breakfast, we drop off Sasha at the IMC and head to the spokescouncil, which is being held below the old city, in some kind of adult education building along a broad avenue called Réne-Lévesque. The spokes is only just getting started. The antechamber is a long hallway with vending machines, a little niche for drinking coffee, and a vast table full of activist literature.

The Table Outside

On the table, endless stacks of papers. Arranged in neat piles are all the handouts one always sees, in any action: Legal Information, Medical Information, resources for independent journalists. There are also various calls for border actions, one for a feminist action, numerous informational broadsheets about the FTAA itself and the damage it will do to labor and environmental rights, replete with dramatic headlines and cartoon illustrations. Most are bilingual; a few are only in French. There are beautiful “Carnival Against Capitalism” posters available for a suggested ten-dollar contribution, unattended, with a bowl in front for the money. I pick up two, leave twenty bucks American. Towards the very end of the table is a priceless ten-page pamphlet called “The Summit of the Americas From the Bottom Up.” It explains who CLAC and CASA are, with a Plan of Action, Tour Guide for politically minded visitors, transportation information, URLs, and, crucially, a map of the city with an outline of the security perimeter, divided into zones. This is the one that was sitting on the table last night. I take two of them.

There’s also an enormous bowl full of homemade stickers, apparently free:

FTAA: free trade accords menace our forests.

FUCK Cars.

Don’t Fear Technology. Fear Those Who Control It.

No Government Can Ever Give You Freedom.

A Rich Man’s Heart is a Desert. An Anarchist’s Heart is a Kingdom.

It Didn’t Begin in Seattle. It Won’t End in Québec City.

HOLY SHIT! We’d better do something... End Corporate Rule! (with a cartoon of a gas mask)

THE MOST FUN YOU’VE HAD SINCE SEATTLE: QUÉBEC CITY. (with another cartoon of a gas mask)

Get Your Hands Off Our Bodies. (with a picture of a naked female torso)

Armed and Dangerous. (with a cartoon image of a scary-looking cop)

No Matter Who You Vote For, I’m Still Here. (with a cartoon image of an even scarier-looking cop)

Along with these are a variety of tiny colorful buttons, suggested donation of fifty cents, with CLAC’s lovable raccoon mascot, fist in air. (Anarchists have a thing for small furry animals, par-

ticularly if they live underground.) No T-shirts, though. Dean picks up a couple buttons. Then we go in.

The Room Inside

Inside is a very large room which seems to normally be used for dance recitals, or maybe gymnastics. There are polished hardwood floors and one wall is made entirely of mirrors. There are already about a hundred fifty to two hundred activists sitting in a giant circle amidst endless piles of coats and other gear. Near the door is a registration table, attended by a young woman with a box full of squares of colored paper, who assures us that the meeting has only been going on for at most twenty minutes. Whispered clarifications: anyone attending the meeting can speak, but only spokes can actually vote. Each collective or affinity group is allowed up to two votes, indicated by paper squares. Have our groups empowered us as spokes? Yes? She hands us our two pieces of paper, one red, one blue. “Oh yes,” she says, “I almost forgot. None of you are working journalists or in any way connected to law enforcement?”

“What do you think?”

“Well, you know, we have to ask.”

As the spoke from NYC DAN, Lesley has already joined the circle, along with her ride, an activist named Lynn, also from New York, who works with Rainforest Relief. Hugs are exchanged all around. The two have already constructed a little nest of documents, coats, sweaters, thermoses, and the like on their section of the floor. I take out my field equipment, which consists of a cheap CVS three-subject notebook and a very expensive rapidograph (technical pens: I like them because you don’t have to apply any real pressure in writing so your hand doesn’t cramp even if you have to write for hours, which, in such meetings, I usually did). I unpack a couple of cashmere sweaters to be used as pillows, my contribution to the nest, and everyone starts whispering.

The first question is inevitable. “So what’s all this about voting? What kind of process are they using here?”

“Well, that’s interesting,” explains Lesley. “CLAC is kind of weird that way. As for CASA, they’ve never organized a spokescouncil. I mean, I think they’re doing really well for people with no experience.” Basically, she said, activists in Québec City have had, until very recently, no real experience with consensus process at all; they’re learning this completely from scratch. But they’d already made enormous progress, having moved in the last few months from using a majority vote system to a sort of semi-consensus system, in which, if they fail to find consensus on the first go, they move to seventy-five percent super-majority vote. It ends up working about the same as full consensus would. Most of the people facilitating this meeting are from Montréal, however, and some of them are very experienced facilitators. “CLAC also uses a rather unusual system for taking turns—it’s a little controversial—where they insist on strict gender equity. For every contested proposal, they alternate between one woman speaking in favor of the proposal, one man in favor, one woman speaking against the proposal, one man against. In practice, it turns out a little bit more a rule of thumb than a strict practice, but it’s a useful way to make sure no one can forget the underlying principle.”

The process, she goes on to explain, is a bit more formal than we’re used to. This is, in part, because this is technically a consultation, not a spokescouncil properly speaking: the local organizers are coming up with the broad framework for the action, but they want affinity groups

coming from outside the province to give them some advice. Also, they want to get some idea of what those outsiders are intending to do. Therefore, the plan is to move quickly from the general meeting to a breakout session, where we'll divide into small, manageable groups and each take on a series of questions provided by the organizers. At the end of the breakout, everyone will explain just what their affinity group was thinking they would actually be doing during the Summit. This will become the basis on which the facilitators can construct a list of different sorts of action (blockades, street theater, etc.), which, in turn, will then allow for a further breakout, allowing people to consult in small groups with those who intend to do roughly the same sort of thing. After which there will be dinner and a party, and the next morning we'll reconvene for a final plenary.

In most spokescouncils, there are two facilitators: one male, one female. In this one, there are four. This is mainly because of the language problem: the local CASA folks seem to speak only French; the Montréal activists switch back and forth according to no logic I can decipher; everyone else is speaking English. So, there are four people sitting on chairs at the head of the circle: two, apparently, who are actually facilitating, two just to translate—though, in practice, I observe (I have my notebook out most of the time, scribbling observations furiously) they seem to periodically switch. Except for Jaggi, who is clearly trying to keep himself in a merely auxiliary role.

As we came in, the facilitators were fielding a request by a radical video team to record part of the proceedings; after hearing the usual objections, the proposal is reframed: we will invite them to come back later in the afternoon, when we are not discussing action plans but only logistics, and then put it to a vote again. (In the end, of course, there is too much opposition.) A woman from CASA, who I think was called Celine, began by summarizing the information already printed in the handouts.

Celine[6]: These color blocs are not fixed, and they will not necessarily be physically separate, though we will have one area reserved for the Green Bloc. They are:

The Green Bloc is the more artistic, festive style of demo, where there is no risk of having to defend themselves.

The Yellow Bloc is obstructive. This is classic nonviolent civil disobedience. It is defensive, nonviolent: blockades or attempts to occupy ground, for example, which involve a definite risk of arrest.

The Red Bloc is disruptive. This is the disturbance bloc, which will try to disrupt the Summit, where participants should be aware of a high risk of repression and arrest. We are expecting creative, diverse styles of disruptive action here.

We emphasize “disruption” because, from early on, CLAC and CASA came to the conclusion that, given the constraints of the security fence and massive police mobilization, attempting a repeat of Seattle and actually trying to shut down the meetings was a strategy unlikely to succeed. We decided on an alternative strategy, which combined efforts to disrupt the Summit, with efforts to create Temporary Autonomous Zones, liberated territories throughout the city.

CLAC and CASA have developed a series of proposals about the actions themselves that we would like you to consider. [*She begins translating from a page in French*]:

On Thursday, April 19th, we are proposing a spokescouncil at 3PM, of everyone who's here by that time, to finalize details of the action. That same night, we are proposing we hold a torchlight parade. This will be a Green action, our goal is not to be arrested before the 20th, but to welcome the Summit, as it were. We just want to specify again: this is a demo, not a confrontation. It will

stop as soon as the cops appear. Just a way to say “hi” and begin to mobilize our people. Those are the only goals for that day.

[*Various people have questions.*]

Facilitator: Can we go through the whole schedule and only then go to questions?

Celine: On Friday the 20th, the Carnival Against Capitalism march will assemble on the Plains of Abraham at noon, and then people can choose where we go. At roughly 2PM, everyone will disperse into their own blocs and types of action; there may be a march but we have not organized one yet because we don’t know what the security situation will be like.

Now, bear in mind: everything we’re presenting here can be modified. These are just proposals. Right now, we are also proposing that at 6PM Friday the 20th we hold an assembly to go over the day’s events and plan for the next.

On Saturday the 21st, we will participate in the big labor demo as an explicitly anti-capitalist contingent. We will however, respect the organizers’ parameters during the march. So, this is not, itself, an occasion for direct action.

That evening, a lot of demos and diverse actions could go on, and of course jail solidarity actions.

Sunday the 22nd will be the same: there will be space for different actions, but also for prison solidarity.

So... back to the 20th. What CLAC and CASA have sort of organized is two different demos, Yellow and Green. If you look at the handout, you will see, on the right of page two, both proposals. Both assume the existence of a free zone, in which there will be very limited risk of arrest [*some skeptical laughter*], a place for Green, creative demos. It will be a fixed location, a free place where everything will be beautiful. At the moment, assuming we assemble on the Plains of Abraham at noon, we have two possibilities. It’s a little vague because we don’t know where exactly the security perimeter will be, but basically, one is that the Yellow Bloc will break out of the Plains and march directly to carry out a carnivalesque action in front of the security perimeter; the second is that we begin together with the Green Bloc on the Plains of Abraham and carry out a much longer march which would snake through the city, allowing the Green Bloc to split off, and then arrive in the same place some hours later.

In either case, the ultimate goal is a gigantic, marvelous carnival, with both small affinity group actions and bigger collective ones—we need all of you!

Oh yes, and for the longer, march—we could also rearrange its path depending on smaller actions, to be in solidarity with them.

Again, we urge people to respect different blocs and decisions of people taking part to ensure a level of unity and solidarity.

Question: During the breakout sessions we are having after, could you ensure there’s one person from either CLAC or CASA’s action committee in each workshop to answer questions?

Celine: Yes, we’ve already arranged for that.

Facilitator: So, does anyone have any clarifying questions about any of these proposals? We will be alternating between men and women.

There were, of course any number of questions: about the actual extent of the security perimeter, roads from the airport, the possibility of pre-emptive arrests during the Thursday torchlight parade. (Answer: this sounds like an important concern, but we’re doing clarifying questions now.) Was the organizing committee aware that the official opening of the Summit might be moved to 1PM?

Man: I'm puzzled. What sort of solidarity can the Red Bloc expect from the other blocs? It seems like this whole issue is being left out. I need to report back to people in Toronto and I have no idea what to tell them.

[*Lesley to me: "That's my question too."*]

...as they'll be the ones needing support. It seems to me this whole bloc idea needs to be fleshed out a bit more.

Celine: I agree we need to do this. That's why we're here.

Facilitator: I don't want to be a castrator [*laughter*] but we have twelve people on stack, this is the time set aside for the technical questions on the plan of action, not theoretical questions.

The problem was that it was almost impossible to answer any of the technical questions without having a more precise idea what this color scheme would look like on the ground. And clearly it had not been thoroughly hashed out.

Man: A point of clarification. The Green and Yellow Blocs have specific marches. Do I understand the Red does not?

Celine: Yes. CLAC and CASA are working on organizing the Green and Yellow Blocs, but the Red Bloc actions should be discussed in small affinity groups, not general assemblies of two hundred people like this.

Woman: In the introduction, you referred to the blocs not as geographical entities, but as attitudes. But a lot of the questions I've been hearing make it sound like they really are going to be separate groups in separate places. Is this just a product of confusion? Or has this been completely worked out? [*A pause as the facilitator asks for more detailed translation.*] That is to say, if the Red Bloc were near the perimeter in a geographical sense, and the Yellow Bloc wanted to do some kind of nonviolent direct action... well, clearly, people will want to do that near the perimeter too. So it raises a question about the zones. Will we be dividing up the map of the city by color?

Celine:: Well, the Green Bloc *will* be geographically delimited. It will be relatively far away from the perimeter.

Nicole [*a CASA person, the one who was in New York, steps in to clarify*]: The Yellow Bloc will be more mobile than the Green, delimited not so much in space as in the types of action it can engage in. The best way we've found to help those who intend to be in the Red Bloc is to organize the Green and Yellow as best we can, so the people who'll want to do Red will know our plans and arrange to do their actions elsewhere.

Woman: The problem as I see it is, if Red and Yellow Blocs are mobile and defined by attitude, how will people know what Bloc they're even in? Will there be separate marches, armbands, some equivalent of marshals who can tell you?

Nicole: That's definitely something we should try to clarify. Remember: Yellow doesn't confront, but is defensive. But that also depends on the attitude the cops take. If the police carry out an all-out assault, if they begin attacking everyone indiscriminately, then presumably everyone could end up in the middle of a de facto Red zone.

Celine: We cannot make any absolute assurances to anyone about what anyone else will be doing. But we'd like people to call out what sort of actions and demos they intend to be carrying out, what color code best fits that, and will expect them to try to stay that color as well as they can. But we know Yellow can slip into Red.

Nicole: I'll add that this is where affinity groups become crucial. If this happens your affinity group could decide collectively to leave the area. Communication will be very important here.

Conversation continued in a similar vein for another fifteen minutes. No one was quite sure what all this would really look like, and it seemed the planners had left large parts of the picture intentionally vague. The CLAC plan was, essentially, to solicit our collective advice to fill in the details. Hence, the structure of the meeting. After the first plenary, where we just got to ask clarifying questions, we were to break up at noon into randomly selected smaller groups of roughly twenty people each. These smaller groups would be given the same list of issues to discuss; each would be provided with someone from the CLAC or CASA planning team to answer informational questions. The results would be written down and serve as a resource for the local working groups. Finally, everyone at the session would explain what role their affinity group was planning on taking on during the actions themselves: whether they were coming as artistic groups, support groups, flying squads, and so on. These would be used as the basis for a second round of breakouts, in which everyone would get to coordinate things with representatives of other affinity groups intending to do roughly the same thing. After that, we'd go home for the evening and hold a final plenary Sunday afternoon.

Lunch was on the fly. We grabbed plates, scooped out some sort of large casserole and salad, a cup of cider, and took it with us to the rooms where the breakouts were being held downstairs. We were mostly assigned different rooms, of course, though somehow Lynn and I both ended up in the same one: Group Five.

12:10PM, First Breakout Session

Downstairs were a whole series of small rooms that had the feel of seminar rooms, big tables, fluorescent lights, mostly without windows.

I will include a fairly long extract from my notes here. Hopefully, they'll convey something of the texture of a consensus meeting—particularly, of the somewhat swirling quality conversation takes when stacking speakers ensures participants rarely reply directly to one another's points, and discussion seems to circle around its object rather than immediately attacking it. What follows is pretty typical of such discussions. I will label individuals roughly as they appeared in my notes, since for the most part, I did not write down their actual names. Also, though the conversation was bilingual, with translations provided—I'll restrict myself here to English, only providing the translations of statements originally made in French.

According to my notes, Group Five originally consisted of twelve men and ten women, though two more women later drifted in. The CLAC person assigned to our room was named Radikha, a willowy young woman of South Asian descent. She was already seated as I came in, chatting with a friend who worked with the Toronto IMC.

Radikha: So, the facilitators have asked each group to consider three questions in this first break-out session. First, the protection of the Convergence Center. Second, the attitudes each bloc (Red, Green, and Yellow) will take towards the police. Finally, what sort of actions your affinity group is thinking it will take part in.

Bob: Hi, I'm Bob from the Toronto IMC. Is it okay if I facilitate, so as to leave Radikha available for answering questions?

Radikha: That would be just fine with me. I guess then I can be the notetaker, too, since the organizers want to have a record of everything each group comes up with.

Meredith: Also, do we want to set time limits on each agenda item?

[*Many nods and affirmative noises*]

Should we select a time keeper, then, or does everyone have a watch? [*Various people do not have watches*]

Another Woman [*to Meredith*]: Would you be willing to do it?

Meredith: All right then, I'll be time keeper.

Facilitator: So, what do we have, until 1PM? That's forty-five minutes. Shall we say ten minutes for the Convergence Center question? [*To Radikha*] Is there any background we should know?

Radikha: Well, within CLAC, we came to a decision to create a Convergence Center, a place to hold meetings and for people coming in from out of town. We also decided to organize some kind of defense in case the police attack. The question is how to organize that, and how to let people who want to leave get out. For example, will there be surveillance outside? And... well, also I guess some of us have been talking about some sort of surveillance inside to prevent police provocations inside the Center. How do we organize this? We don't have much experience with these things and we were hoping some of you might be able to help.

[*The facilitator is taking stack as various people around the table catch his eye, nod slightly, or otherwise indicate they wish to be put on the speaker's list. He calls on people, pointing mostly, since few of us know each other's names.*]

Woman: So, CLAC did make a decision. Now you just need some advice?

Older Guy: My question is: before we talk about vigilance and protection, shouldn't we also be talking about decentralization? What exactly is going to be happening at the Convergence Center? Are people there going to be covering everything from finding people housing to press conferences to food or providing art spaces? And if so, is it tactically wise to concentrate all those functions in one place?

French Guy: When will the Convergence Center actually be set up? [*We all start looking at the handout, but there's no indication.*]

Radikha: In response to the centralization question: by "Convergence Center" we mean a meeting place to hold spokescouncils, also to welcome people, place them in housing, that sort of thing. We haven't decided what other functions the place might serve. As for the date, we don't know that yet, but it certainly will be up and running by Wednesday the 18th.

Younger French Guy: What about the giant puppets? Will they be made in the same place?

Radikha: I think some smaller puppets may be made there, but the larger puppets will be someplace else.

Facilitator: This is a small group so I'm not going to be using the strict one man, one woman rule here, but I'll still try to maintain gender equity. So let me skip ahead in the stack now... the woman in the red scarf?

Red Scarf: My affinity group is intending to give direct action trainings before the Summit: will it be possible to do that at the Convergence Center?

Radikha: I imagine the Convergence Center will be available for trainings.

American: At J20 [the inaugural protests], we had not one but a series of very decentralized Convergence Centers, and that worked really well. Also we had signs up everywhere saying "No Drugs or Bombs Allowed," that sort of thing, which apparently—I know it sounds stupid—makes it a little harder for the police legally to just crash in. Also, we were very careful about hiding the puppet warehouse.

Radikha: So, I'm hearing a lot of concerns about the puppets. Do you think we should have an entirely separate place for puppet-making?

Lynn: I'm actually fearful about using the inauguration protests as our model. At the inauguration, it was pretty clear the police didn't want arrests; several cops actually told me that after they detained me.

Someone: If they didn't want arrests, why did they detain you?

Lynn: I took off my clothes at the inaugural ball with a slogan across my chest. But even then they just let me go after half an hour or so.

Someone else: Jeez, how did you get tickets to the inaugural ball?

Facilitator: Um, maybe we should bring ourselves back to the proposal: what shall we do about defense and evacuation?

Anglophone Guy: It seems a little silly to devote a lot of resources to defending an empty building. Maybe it's important—if we really do want to defend this space—to ensure there'll be something going on there all the time, I mean, when the spokes aren't meeting. Otherwise, you'd just be tying people down. Perhaps we could offer continual trainings, for example.

[Brief problems with translation. We pause to make sure the French speakers on one side of the room are caught up.]

French Guy: It seems to me that the major reason law enforcement has invaded convergence spaces in the US is to destroy the art and puppets, so as to kill the message the protesters wish to convey. They haven't messed much with spokescouncils or meetings. So it seems to me what's really important is to defend the puppet space—wherever that will be—and if the puppets aren't being built in the Convergence Center, then maybe we shouldn't be defending it at all.

Facilitator: Can I just check for consensus: we seem to be talking about how and what to defend, not whether...? So: are we agreed on that? Any disagreement that we do in fact want to defend the space? That this is even a priority?

Suzette: My name is Suzette and I'm with the student movement. We're going to be on strike during the Summit, and we need our people in our own space...

Facilitator: I'm sorry, Suzette, we still have a stack here. You're talking out of turn.

Suzette: Oh, sorry. I guess I'm just saying sure, let's defend the space, but don't expect the Québec Student Movement to be able to dedicate any resources to this.

Second French Guy: I like the idea of ensuring people will be able to leave if the place is besieged. But: is it a Yellow defense or a Red?

Facilitator: Can I have a time check here?

Meredith: We're actually fifteen or twenty minutes over time already.

Facilitator: And we have five people left on stack. Shall we make these the last comments and then move on?

[nods]

Red Scarf: Can't we make some of the puppets in the Convergence Center, and some elsewhere? Just to be on the safe side?

[General twinkling][7]

Facilitator: So it seems we have consensus on that.

[More twinkling. Radikha is scribbling rapidly.]

Lynn: In LA, we made a very successful legal move beforehand to defend the Convergence Center. We knew that, when the cops attacked our spaces in Philly and DC, their excuse was that the places were fire hazards, so that was part of our defense: we asked people not to bring certain things, which they could say were fire hazards, but most of all, we got legal assurances beforehand that they wouldn't come in.

Francophone Guy with Sideburns: Wait a minute: are you actually suggesting we could get an order of protection from a judge, and that would make it legally impossible for them to make a preemptive attack like they did, say, on the puppets in Philadelphia?

Lynn: There was a legal injunction.

American: I really can't see how that could work. After all, at A16 and Philly, the cops didn't exactly say, "We think this is a fire hazard" and close us down. They claimed there were molotovs and bombs inside. It's not like there actually were any. They just lied. So, I don't see why we're assuming that whether we actually have anything dangerous in there has anything to do with it.

Facilitator: I think we're having serious process problems here. People are jumping stack and anyway we're long since over time. Radikha, do you have an answer to his question? Has anyone looked into legal possibilities?

Radikha: Actually, no. We haven't looked into any of that yet, since we've been too busy locating a space. Anyway, the laws are different here.

Meredith: Maybe we should have legal people on hand. In Philly, there weren't any legal people around when they attacked the puppet space—and, anyway, the puppet space was a huge warehouse out in the middle of nowhere with no other buildings anywhere nearby, so there was no way to do a blockade. So, if you're still looking for a space, that might be something to think about. We can also make sure there's material for a lockdown on hand here. Also: a way to get the media down there immediately if something happens.

New Englander: You do realize we've only got twenty minutes left for the whole session and we still haven't got off question number one? I'd also like to suggest that the language being used here—Red, Yellow, the vagueness—is a real impediment to action. Perhaps, for the sake of time, we should just come to consensus about what we'll actually do if the cops do attack us. That might actually help us move on to the next topic—wasn't it supposed to be, attitudes towards the police in the different blocs? Come to think of it, we really should have addressed that first, then moved on to talking about the Convergence Center.

Radikha: Well, the organizers sort of took it for granted we wouldn't really be able to do all this in an hour. I want to add that Yellow is supposed to be characterized by a "defensive attitude": blockading is Yellow. If your group does not intend to respond to police orders, you're Yellow. Of course, your affinity group can decide for itself how to act when cops attack, there's no code saying "all Yellow affinity groups have to do this." Red is more... targeted.

Older Guy: Though not necessarily violent.

Radikha: No, not necessarily.

Red Scarf: In the interest of moving on, I propose we classify the Convergence Defense as Yellow. You know, technically, we're not supposed to be planning Red actions here anyway.

By 12:45, we concluded that this was about as far as we could go without even knowing where the Center was going to be or what it was going to be used for, so we finally moved on to defining the blocs. One woman said her affinity group was intending to come with plexiglass shields. Would this still count as Yellow? Radikha assured her it would, since shields are by definition defensive. Lynn claimed that, in America, cops had definitely been known to interpret defensive gear as weapons.

The problem with the blocs, it turned out, was whether to interpret them geographically. A Green zone made no sense unless it was physically separate. You need to give people a safe space, far enough from the action that they're not in danger of being mistaken for combatants, close enough that they're clearly part of the same event. To mark off a specific space for a red zone,

on the other hand, would be clearly suicidal. You might as well put up sign saying ‘police, here are the ones to arrest.’ So we were stuck with one Green zone, in some specific area out of the action, and the rest of the city a vast Yellow zone, any part of which might turn Red at any time. But if so how would it be possible for anyone to do classic civil disobedience? You can’t claim to be engaging in a nonviolent sit-in if, at any time, someone else might pass by and chuck a brick over your head. Out of a sense of obligation to our Trotskyite friend, I suggested that perhaps certain zones, maybe of a block or two, might be set aside for purely Yellow actions. I was a bit startled to hear loud and vehement objections. For a couple of minutes, I found myself cast as the reactionary, with many of the local activists—including the woman from the Student Movement—angrily rejecting any notion that Red tactics would be declared off limits, anywhere. I withdrew the suggestion: “Well, probably groups will simply cluster spontaneously. Maybe we don’t need to actually formalize any of this.”

Facilitator: Let’s move to the third question: specific action ideas. Anyone have any objections to just doing a go-round here? [*None are indicated*]

Suzette: We’re not supposed to be talking about Red stuff here?

Facilitator: Yeah, that’s my understanding of the situation. Only actions we would be able to discuss in a completely public space.

Older Guy: I’m with the Pagan Cluster, which is concentrated in Vermont, and we’ve come up with a proposal for an action based on the Cochabamba statement, about access to water as a basic human right. We want to create a Living River of people that can flow through different zones in the city, trying to cause as much disruption as possible as it does so. That might include actions around the central zone near the wall, where we assume things will turn the reddest, but it’s basically a Yellow sort of action we have in mind here.

Radikha: I’ll skip my turn as basically I’m going to spend the weekend doing support work for protesters. (You know, I’m with CLAC.)

Olive (French student with rainbowish hair): I don’t know if my affinity group will be doing an action or support.

Sideburns: We want to disturb the summiteers as much as possible. We have nothing specific beyond that yet, but we’ve been throwing around the idea of blockading the highway to the city.

Jane: My name’s Jane. I’m actually speaking for two different groups. One group is from Carleton University and will be doing disruptive street theater—clowning sorts of things. We’ll show up and wander around, and we have these little skits we can put on the moment we see something. The other group is the SSSA, from Ontario. That’s a group of secondary school students. They’ll be doing drumming with found instruments and blockade sorts of thing.

English Guy: I’m representing two affinity groups based in the University of Toronto that are also doing theatrical skits, but want to be in the Yellow Bloc, not the Green. Also, in Toronto, we have the Guerilla Rhythm Squad. Some of them want to get involved in any possible airport actions but don’t know if those are still on.

David: I’m with New York City Ya Basta! We have four or five ideas for action scenarios, none of which can be discussed here. Well, I guess there’s one we can discuss. Some of us had an idea to come out, suited up in our padding and chemical jumpsuits, and get a really large ladder, and just kind of wander around with it right next to the wall. If nothing else, it would work as a diversion. We find that whenever we show up in the suits, cops tend to follow us wherever we go.

Young Québécois Woman: I represent a popular neighborhood committee in the neighborhood of St. Jean Baptiste—this is a neighborhood that is going to be cut in half by the wall. We’re planning a series of actions on the 17th and 18th having to do with that. Can we discuss those here?

Facilitator: Sure, why not?

Young Québécois Woman: Well, this is still in the planning stage, but one idea is that people in the neighborhood will save their garbage for a week, and then throw it along the wall to show this is what consumer society produces. And there are two more. One is putting lines of old clothing along the perimeter (the theme of waste again), the other is noise. So as to disrupt the Summit, twice a day everyone will put on music as loud as possible—something really annoying, and all at once, to try to drive the delegates crazy.

Young Francophone Guy: We are planning to take part in border actions at Akwesasne, but nothing concrete beyond that.

Plexiglass Guy: My collective in Toronto is organizing communities to do massive border actions, too. After that we’re coming to Québec with our shield wall. We might actually help with the Convergence Center defense if people really do end up needing that.

Lynn: I’m with Rainforest Relief in New York. We have some people coming from Ecuador, Nicaragua, who can talk about the potential effects of the FTAA on their communities. We’re hoping to do a panel and then take them up to the Mohawk action—though I’m worried whether we’d be putting them in danger if we actually try to cross. In Québec itself... well, my hope is that we rush the wall in some way. Maybe completely nonviolently. I have this very powerful image in my head from the movie *Gandhi* of all those people marching up to the soldiers, and getting clubbed down, but then, more people keep coming and though each one ends up getting hit, they just keep coming anyway... Or maybe like that except we’re climbing.

Bob: I’ll also be doing Indymedia, covering the heavier actions.

Man in Blue Bandana: I represent Québec Medical, and we’ll be giving support before, during, and after the actions. We are trying to work with people to make sure we have medics at each of the border actions as well, but that’s a little more complicated.

Older Woman: I’m also from the Vermont Mobilization. Our aim is to move folks across the border, but we’re also trying to come up with scenarios for what to do with people if they don’t make it.

Facilitator: Okay, time’s up.

Someone asks if we are also supposed to be discussing the march: whether we’re going directly from the Plains of Abraham or snaking through the city for an hour first? “Well, no,” says Radikha, “but it looks like a lot of breakout sessions are still going on (yes, we flagrantly lied about the time). People aren’t going upstairs yet, so we could certainly talk about that a little if people want to.” Sentiment is clearly leaning towards the longer march (is it really a good idea to have everyone about to do a direct action assemble and just hang out in one place for several hours before they do anything?), when someone comes downstairs to tell us the breakout sessions are over.

In the hall, I run into Lesley. We compare notes. Most of her session was also wasted on meandering discussions of Red and Yellow. Only at the end did anything useful come out. Dean had a similar experience. Emma appears to have vanished. As I head upstairs, several people point me out as the Ya Basta! delegate—I’m getting the definite impression there’s a feeling this is going to

be the big new innovation for this action: shields and padding and defensive tactics. (As it turns out they're wrong; it won't be. But it was kind of fun being a de facto celebrity.)

1:45PM, Back to the Plenary

A brief, abortive effort to find myself a cup of coffee ended when I remembered I still didn't have any Canadian money, and there were no obvious ATMs. Still, it gave me a chance to step outside. After hanging out a little in the antechamber, where there had been rumors of a *Montréal Gazette* reporter, I returned to discover the newly rotated facilitators busy synthesizing. Having gone over the written reports from each session, they were now drawing up a list of ten different sorts of action to be addressed in the next breakouts, writing them on huge sheet of butcher paper taped to one wall, sparking occasional chuckles at some of the evocative not-quite-English circumlocutions:

1. **Festive and Arts groups**
2. **Protectors of the Convergence Center**
3. **Blockaders of Streets and Boulevards**
4. **Blockaders of Outside Specific Buildings**
5. **Occupations of Buildings**
6. **Walking/Advancing on/Visiting/Moving towards the Wall**
7. **Redecoration of the Urban Scenery**
8. **Food and the Reappropriation of Different Things**
9. **Flying Squads/Support Groups**

Halfway through, a woman from the Pagan Bloc asks "can I propose one more? I think you've heard our proposal for a Living River..."

"Would that not be considered a kind of flying squad?"

"No, it's not a flying squad. It's a whole bloc unto itself."

"All right then." He writes:

10) Riviere Humaine

The facilitators are trying to get some sense of the consensus on the Convergence Center and color attitude questions; tell us if anyone absolutely missed lunch there's still some food on the table; and then introduce representatives of various working groups: Legal and Medical, Housing and Finance.

The Legal collective (they seem to consist mainly of English-speaking students from McGill) handed out information sheets and explained that each affinity group should name one member to serve as legal contact. That person should strive to avoid arrest, and keep track of where everyone is at all times. They said the legal contact should probably attend at least one legal training, especially if they come from the US, as laws are different here. This is also the person who knows what needs to be taken care of if any member of their affinity group is arrested:

who'll need someone to feed their cat, lie to their boss, etc. They will be adopting the system used at mass action in the US: members of each affinity group will be asked to fill out a form registering their real names—or at least, some letters of their real names—along with their action names, and these papers will be guarded assiduously by the legal team. That way they'll be able to keep track of who's in jail as the names come in, and make the information available on a special legal phone number. "And don't everyone call at once about people missing if there's a mass arrest! Only your legal contact person should call the number."

Someone asks: "Does this mean we're not doing jail solidarity? Should we bring IDs or is everyone going to be refusing to give their names once arrested? A lot of this hasn't been completely worked out yet."

The medics explain that no one should assume that, if injured, they will be able to rely on official paramedics and ambulances. Usually ambulances will refuse to go anywhere near an action. Therefore, the medical team will be providing three levels of medical infrastructure during the action: a clinic with trained professionals, probably somewhere near the IMC; several street teams of experienced action medics with proficiency in first aid, hypothermia treatment, and dealing with tear gas and pepper spray, and, finally, each affinity group should name one person as their own medical monitor and make sure that person attends at least one medical training.

As questions begin I step out into the antechamber, do a quick interview with a reporter in exchange for a cup of coffee, take a stroll outside. We've been meeting for five or six hours. When I stroll back in, Jaggi, representing the financial team, is explaining the organizers are currently about \$20,000.00 in the red. Then, they ask for volunteers to facilitate the next round of breakout groups. I end up in the "approaching the wall" group (assuring myself this is because that's what my affinity group is intending to do and has nothing to do with the fact the facilitator, a young blonde woman looks strikingly like a punk rock version of Buffy the Vampire Slayer). Dean joins me—along with Emma, who has spent most of the session making friends with some Black Bloc types on the other side of the circle. Lesley says she's going to cruise out with Lynn to find the place where she's supposed to stay.

4:30PM, Breakout Session

The final meeting of the day was a little frustrating. In theory, it was the most militant session—though we still couldn't discuss militant tactics explicitly. It was also a strange mix: there were twenty-six of us (fifteen men, eleven women, as I duly set down in my notebook), mainly anarchists but also including representatives of the ISO, IAC, and other Marxist types with whom anarchists don't usually feel comfortable discussing militant actions. Everyone seemed a little uncertain how much they could say. Spokescouncils are by definition not truly secure environments, most of us didn't know each other. Anyone might be a cop.

We start by examining our maps. A local woman in her forties with green streaks in her hair and a prominent nose ring explained some of the background for out of towners:

Punk Woman: I'm not sure how large the perimeter is going to be. When they first announced it, it was going to be 2.8 kilometers but now it seems to have become smaller. We've been asked to stay away from the zones marked 2 and 6, which is a working-class neighborhood called St. John Baptiste where the local community group has come out in strong support of us, but is also hoping to avoid any provocations that might cause the police to tear gas their neighborhood.

Zones 4, C, and B will be the most difficult areas as there's in effect a natural stone wall, with cliffs all around. We can pretty much forget about approaching the wall from there..

If there is anyone here who knows this part of the city better than I do, they should probably step forward to help us. But I think we all agree that coming in through a working-class neighborhood that will be hurt by the FTAA should be scratched off. So, that pretty much leaves Zone 3, an approach from the west. The problem is that zone is also going to have the most police as it's the main entrance.

Grey Beard: Yes, it's going to have to be Zone 3. If we're going to attack the fence, I'd assume that would be in a fairly large group. Not only are all the other areas less easily accessible, there's no place to retreat (even if we could get up on the cliffs, we couldn't run down them again if the police started pushing us back). Areas C and B are below the river—no place to retreat either—so maybe only Zone 3 is physically possible?

Facilitator: [also staring at her map] ...which is the one where these big streets are?

Grey Beard: Yes, I think so.

Someone: That's the northwest section of the wall?

Someone else: Will there be many entrances to the perimeter, or just one or two?

Facilitator: They said there would be nine but they haven't announced where they'll be yet.

Craig [*anarchist type with giant earplugs*]: Do we know what kind of fence it's going to be?

Someone: Not for sure. We know it's going to be a chain-link fence with concrete base, and then barbed wire on top. A small stretch of it has already been put up on the Plains of Abraham, near the cliffs, but I'm not sure if anyone has seen it yet.

Suzette: Zone 3 was the site of a big demo and battle last year around this same time of year, around school reform. It ended with a pretty big victory for us in an open field. I heard Zone E is Touristville, if anything should go wrong it should be there, perhaps between residential areas

Punk Woman: Hitting two places at same time might be a good strategic move, also, if we're talking about Zone 3... might it be easier to advance on (what kind of language are we actually allowed to use here? Visit? Attack?) a place where the wall opens and closes. Another possibility might be not to actually attack the fence at all but to shut down the main entrance; maybe by locking down to it. That would effectively shut the cops in and away from the rest of us. A third option (perhaps something to do at a different location) might be to get grappling hooks and actually haul the fence down with lots of people. Would that be possible? I don't actually know if the concrete part will be cemented to the ground but probably it won't be.

Lesley: Not until now!!

[Much laughter and glancing up at invisible microphones in the ceiling]

Young French Girl: Do we know if the security forces will completely surround the fence? Or might there be gaps in their lines?

Grey Beard: Well, we know there'll be five thousand riot police to protect maybe two, maybe three kilometers of fence. I'm not sure how that translates.

Presumably they won't be evenly dispersed, They'll have large units at the gates, small squads here and there

Facilitator: Does anyone have a proposal for anything to put on the formal agenda? Because, you know, we don't actually have an agenda yet.

There seems little point and we decide to keep it informal. So: What would be the best day to try to breach the wall? CLAC has only been talking about Friday, the 20th, but the big labor march was on Saturday and that would be at least forty, fifty thousand people. As always, the union

leaders were doing everything possible to keep their people away from the action. The march would begin at a location fairly far away from the Summit and then proceed in the opposite direction. Still, if it would be possible to divert even a fraction of the marchers towards the wall itself, it would completely change the balance of forces. Many people remark on the unlikelihood of such a thing. Since Seattle, union bureaucrats have become remarkably good at ensuring this never happened. Others remark that Canada is different. Finally, we all end up yielding to the authority of an old man in a fisherman's cap and scraggly beard who had been largely silent until now. He explains, in French, that he grew up in the old city, and might have some insights others don't. After a little bit, seeing that the out-of-towners are paying rapt attention, he switches to English:

Fisherman: It's true, we do not know where the police will be, but we can assume they're not just going to be inside the perimeter—to get near it might be a battle in itself. If so, if we are going to be under fire from tear gas and the like as we approach, I think we should not approach from our own neighborhoods. There are two broad thoroughfares: one is René Lévesque, the other Grand Allée, which runs parallel to its south. These are the streets of the bourgeoisie. They are both streets where top bureaucrats and wealthy people live; so this would be a good area from which to advance on the perimeter.

David: What my affinity group has been wondering is: if by some miracle we do get inside the perimeter on the 20th, well—then what? We've heard talk about disrupting the opening ceremonies, if only by our being there, or somehow cutting off the media control center.

Dean: Once inside, will we be able to mix into the crowds? Will there be guards checking for people with passes?

Fisherman: It's not clear. A lot depends on how much of a threat they think we are [*glancing up again at the imaginary microphone*]. If, after this spokescouncil, they feel the perimeter is insecure, they will make the area smaller, and more easily defensible. As a result, there will be fewer ordinary citizens inside. That will mean they'll be better able to see who's who (that is, there will be more suits, less people dressed like us); but, then, we'll be able to see who's who as well. If they end up having to make it a capitalist ghetto, even if that means they can do what they want inside, that in itself is a big victory for us—and an attack on that space, even a purely symbolic one, would be a great victory as well.

Gradually I realized what was going on. As I mentioned, in any such meeting, one had to assume someone in the room was a cop (the references to microphones were mostly a way of being polite). Therefore, the only person who was completely comfortable talking was the one man who actually thought it was tactically advantageous for the police to know our plans. Everyone else was beginning to look increasingly fidgety and uncomfortable. Finally, someone suggested we'd gone about as far as we could, and we broke for dinner; with Emma and some others passing word that those who were really serious about the project, and had someone who could vouch for them, would meet later at the CASA party that night to reconvene. Meanwhile, we will write in our official report that it's too soon to come to any real conclusions, but we need to convene a spokescouncil to plan this specific action a few days before the summit, when we have some idea what things will actually look like.

8:00PM, Scanner Party

The party was held at a place called the Scanner Bistro, a “multimedia club” with an Internet café and bar downstairs, along with a small bandstand. Upstairs there was another bar, a pool table, foosball, a Judge Dredd pinball machine, and scattered monitors and speakers on the wall that enabled one to see and hear whatever live act was on stage downstairs. As our crew came in—about twelve of us from the wall breakout group, including most of the New Yorkers—two women were on stage, performing some sort of spoken-word piece in highly colloquial French. Later, there was a man who I think was a comedian; we were told a band was going to be coming out later, but by that time none of us were paying much attention. We ended up upstairs, looking for a table, because, finally, someone had found a proper map.

Or almost all of us. Dean went straight for the pool table, where he was soon engaged in a long conversation with a lanky, sandy-haired fellow with whom he was, ultimately, to have a tumultuous six-month romance.

We found a spot in the corner, in an area where the free dinner had been earlier. We pushed together a couple tables and made short work of the remaining food, which consisted of a huge tub of rice, a dish with beans and veggies in tomato sauce, and some loaves of French bread and oleo. The vegans wouldn't touch the oleo, but everyone was munching bread for the first half of the parley. Large maps of the city were spread across the surface of the table and taped into place. Everyone huddled, and the parley continued for hours, with pitchers of beer periodically appearing out of nowhere, always to another collective toast of “smash the state!”

It was the perfect meeting, except, perhaps, for the fact that we were right below the speakers, and combined with the ambient noise of dozens of festive conversations, it made it a little difficult to hear. So the real meeting was always the seven or eight people in the center at any given time, who could actually hear each other, usually with several others hanging at the edges waiting to get in. It never took all that long. Someone would always be taking off to fetch beer or smoke a joint or use the bathroom, and then have to wait at the fringes when they came back. Still, we kept it up for something like three hours, a little bubble of activist intensity, almost completely oblivious to the increasingly rambunctious dance party that eventually encompassed us and, later in the evening, began to die away.

It was here we finally planned the attack on the wall. It didn't take long to go through the possibilities. Even if it did prove possible to enter the security zone, there was no obvious thing to do once we were inside. A banner hang would be possible, but it would probably require the collaboration of homeowners inside the perimeter—there doubtless would be some, but they could hang the banners themselves. We could occupy a building, but it would lead to absolutely certain arrest, and it was not clear what would be the point. There was only one thing for it. We had to destroy the wall. Doing so would be utterly legitimate. We would be providing a public service. The heads of every state in the Americas were coming to this city to set up fences right through people's neighborhoods; we anarchists were coming to take them down. The question was how, and most of the next three or four hours was spent going over possibilities: grappling hooks, wire clippers, tactics, tools, diversions, angles of approach. Normal wire clippers are not, in fact, strong enough to cut through the chain-links of a security fence; they are, however, strong enough to sever the wires that connect the chain-links to the upright posts. Once severed, it was a matter of weight: at least one person had to climb to the top of the fence and lean backwards as others pulled. Alternately, fences could be taken down by a small team armed with grappling

hooks and cables. Probably the best approach would be not to start all in the same place. We should have several columns. Ideally, three, each with their own peculiar tactics. Ya Basta! could come down one big avenue, the Black Bloc down the next, the CLAC/CASA people (none of whom were actually present) down a third. Each would thus approach a different section of the fence, but all be in sight of one another. Each would also have its own particular style: the CLAC people more militant, Ya Basta! more silly, Black Bloc more mobile. Members of Toronto and Montréal Ya Basta!—two groups of which I had hitherto heard only the vaguest rumors—promised to lead any other Yabbas into action, since they knew the territory.

In fact, we discovered that there would be four different Ya Basta! contingents: the two from Canada, one from New York, and one from Connecticut. The latter was represented by a young woman who everyone just knew as “Kitty from Connecticut,” a music student at Connecticut College, who I knew as an activist with the CGAN (the Connecticut Global Action Network). Kitty had just gotten into town and had missed most of the spokes, but gravitated directly to the Scanners meeting. I was really gratified to see her; she was a talented facilitator and all-around impressive activist (CGAN had already scored two major victories, over the last year: the first when they blockaded downtown Hartford with an alliance between anarchists and janitors, the second when they almost single-handedly managed to force Hartford airport to settle a strike with their restaurant workers, by proposing an action to support the picket line, which apparently left management convinced they were about to face a hoard of rampaging Black Bloc’ers.) At the moment, though, she was mainly interested in finding someone who could roll her a joint. She disappeared, someone from the Prince Edwards Islands slid into her chair, and Sasha, fresh from the IMC, took the position that person had had sitting on a nearby table.

The conference continued. If American Ya Basta! didn’t manage to get through the border, we’d have to reduce it to two columns. We kept having to remind each other though that we probably wouldn’t be able to just walk up to the fence; we’d more likely have to have to fight our way up the last three blocks to even get in a position to start using wire cutters. And once we were there we’d need at least four to six minutes to bring down a fence. So, the plan would only work if larger numbers of other protesters join us. Probably what would end up happening was that half the Yellow Bloc would be inspired to join in, the other half run away. Whether there would be enough of them to let us fight our way to the wall depended on the total numbers and no one had any clear idea what those numbers were likely to be. Columns might be anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand. Really it all depended on the local students. They certainly seemed militant enough. But would they come through?

By about 1AM, after what must have been the sixteenth round of “smash the state!,” we ended up composing a call to action—called, since it had a certain ring, “the Scanner Accords.” It began: “We are all calling for everyone who feels hemmed in by walls to come to Québec City.” Only a paragraph, really, but somehow it was only by releasing it that the meeting seem complete. We wrote out five or six sentences, on a sheet of paper, edited it collectively, posted the text anonymously on an IMC web page somewhere in the United States, with a note saying it was to be forwarded everywhere. Then, we went outside and set the sheet on fire. Sasha offered to film the ritual, but someone objected, just in case high-tech means could be used to gather fingerprints from the close-ups of our hands. (This seemed to almost everyone else kind of ridiculous, but one learns that, on matters of “security culture,” it is usually best not to argue.) We went home agreeing to meet at 1PM the next afternoon, as the spokescouncil was winding down, to investigate the areas where the first advance on the wall was likely to take place.

CONSULTA DAY 2:

Sunday, March 25

Our group slept through the official CLAC/CASA tour of the city, which was supposed to be in the morning, but we managed to make it over to the spokes by around 11:00AM—for a change, just as it was getting under way. (Actually it was supposed to have started at 10AM but we seemed to be dealing with a serious case of “activist time.”) Numbers were smaller than the day before, but not much. Lesley, Dean, Lynn, and I reconstructed our little nest—now with Sasha and Kitty joining us—Emma was off with her new Black Bloc friends. The CLAC team had rotated too: Jaggi was no longer translator, but was actually facilitating this time, along with an older woman I hadn’t seen before.

11:00AM, Plenary Meeting

The meeting began with report-backs from the breakout sessions the night before; afterwards, we would consider a series of concrete proposals. The report-backs are worth documenting, I think, because they give some sense of how, through such open-ended and sometimes apparently unproductive discussions, action plans really can take form. In each case, the idea was to create a summary of ideas that spokes could take back to their affinity groups across North America to see which they would like to develop and plug into, and to provide the means to stay in touch with one another (usually by email).

1) The “festive artsy sort of group”

We decided to make sure there were events happening all over the city. One idea: to have festive performances that would support blockades without actually being a part of them. Another was to turn the wall into a sort of art show (um, before it was attacked that is). We can animate, decorate it. We spoke about the need to make very large objects like puppets well beforehand, and to ensure we have a space in which to do this. As for supplies: fabric, scraps, a lot of things can be made out of found objects. We’re asking everyone to start putting aside anything they find that can be used for costumes, props, or construction projects.

We’d also like to make a couple small points: we heard a lot of ideas about drumming, street theater, puppets; we’re expecting a lot of that. Some suggested the idea of perhaps also sectioning off some area for an ongoing silent or unmoving vigil, to represent the voices that are silenced by this kind of summit.

2) Protectors of the Convergence Center

We decided Convergence Center defense is indeed a priority, and that we’ll employ three methods:

- a. continual surveillance inside and outside
- b. organizing evacuations of people and materials if attacked
- c. organizing active resistance to any police provocation or attack.

3-4) Blockading groups

In the end, it didn't seem to make any sense to have two different blockade working groups, so we merged.

Most of us are in favor of blockading highways, but we're not at the point of being able to make concrete proposals as to which. There is also the question of how to bring up the kind of equipment (for example, lockboxes) that would be necessary to maintain a really effective blockade. The border is a big problem for people from the US who would otherwise have access to such things; also CLAC/CASA is too busy to organize this. We suggest affinity groups should make arrangements in advance with friends elsewhere in Canada, for instance the Maritimes, to get things delivered—if they were sent here, they would probably be intercepted. We decided that the city should be divided into zones, to ensure that everything is covered.

There's also a specific proposal from the GOMM for a plan they have to organize a festive-style blockade with three hundred people or more near the center of the city.

There was some discussion of the possibility of a blockade of the airport, possibly motorcades of some of the heads of state, but no specific proposals were discussed.

Another idea was blockading off particular symbols of capitalism; like trains, or shopping centers. Someone proposed an organizational meeting regarding that at 3:30 this afternoon, after this meeting. It was 3:30, right?

[Woman in Spider-Man T-shirt: 3:30, that's right.]

Finally, there was the idea of blockading some major media outlet and demanding that they play a prepared tape, setting out some of our principle objections to the treaty.

5) Occupations of buildings

There are three colleges here in Québec City and one of them is already occupied by OQP. For the other two, we're discussing whether and how to occupy them.

6) Walking/advancing on/visiting/moving towards the wall

Many affinity groups expressed a desire to pay a visit to the security perimeter. There was clearly a strong willingness to undertake this, and a feeling there were multiple goals to be served by this: to disrupt the perimeter, disrupt the Summit, possibly even penetrate it. But that's about as far as we can go in this context. A lot of information still needs to be clarified, and most of the logistics still need to be worked out. We would have to decide on official visit points and the means to be employed to make any adjustments to the wall that might be required. Shall it be through a mass mobilization, or separate affinity group actions? Since there's so much to be considered, and so much depends on numbers, information as yet unavailable, we suggest that a spokescouncil be convened a few days after the fence is actually put up to make final decisions.

7) Redecoration of the urban furniture

Or, I guess that should properly be, "urban scenery." (There were certain translation problems. Mainly they seem to be referring to the judicious use of spray paint and other artistic materials.) We didn't have a formal meeting, really, but just said hello to each other and then all went off to join other groups. We recommend that these issues be left to each individual affinity group. There's nothing that really needs to be coordinated on a city-wide scale.

8) The reappropriation of food and other items

There are all kinds of means that can be used by the Red, Yellow, and Green Blocs to reclaim things. Our idea is to do some advance scouting of potential sites for food commandos (*commando du boeuf*). A Food Manifesto will be written to explain why this type of action is taking place.

As a sidenote: Montréal Food Not Bombs is currently preparing a large amount of food that will be frozen and brought in for a collective feast, perhaps to be held underneath the highway on Friday or Saturday night.

9) Flying squads (*groupes mobiles*)

The purpose of flying squads is to provide support for hot points during the action; also, to take advantage of opportunities that might open up suddenly. All this, of course, depends on having accurate information on what's happening. A comms system is essential, and we're not sure what sort of communications infrastructure (radios? walkie-talkies?) has already been set up. We are imagining numerous relatively small groups of three, four, or five people, well-coordinated with each other. They will decide for themselves which of the three blocs they will be supporting, what calls to respond to. The coordination already being organized.

10) The living river

We decided... well, this action is organized with Vermont pagans. [*There are five of the Pagan Cluster in attendance: four women, one man. Starhawk isn't with them. All of them are sitting, somewhat incongruously, on chairs. They're mostly older, I note, so it might just be bad backs.*] We will be taking the St. Lawrence as an ally, and using it, along with generally using water as a theme to represent what we're fighting against and what we're fighting for, as a form that will let us move easily back and forth from one action, or one kind of action, to another.

We are asking people who would like to participate to bring blue material, ribbons, clothing. The idea is to create a sort of Blue Bloc...

[*This is translated. "Oh no! Yet another Bloc," sighs one of the facilitators. Everybody laughs.*]

...that way we won't be stuck to one zone or style of action. People can join, rivulets can split off, streams will flow back together again. If people want to stay at blockade, they can do so; others can perform ceremonies or offer support for other groups.

Male Pagan: If folks want to join, they are encouraged to join affinity groups beforehand. Not necessarily to join as individuals.

Oh, yes: our other theme is free access to water for all people, inspired by the Cochabamba declaration. In consequence, we'll be providing bottled water for everyone, and are encouraging people to bring samples of water from your particular homes to contribute to one great ritual that will take place at the same time as the opening ceremonies of the Summit.

Facilitator: We have a very brief period for questions—just five minutes, because otherwise this can go on forever.

Flying Squad Spokesman: Oh, the flying squad group forgot to add: we'll have a listserv, to talk about communications equipment too, as that's very important for this. You can sign up through the CLAC website.

Bearded Man: Also, one idea that came out of our first breakout concerning the Convergence Center was to do like LA and seek a legal injunction stopping the cops and firemen from coming in. We want to make sure Legal is aware of that.

[*Few questions follow, but lots of announcements of listservs being set up, contact information, and so on.*]

Facilitator: Let's pass to new proposals, then. I'd like to remind people we have to be out of here by five.

The first proposal was, once again, the Convergence Center defense. It was not clear to any of us why this proposal had to be restated—it was, in fact, the exact same one CLAC had made earlier. Presumably, it was some kind of formality. In theory, each proposal was supposed to be

followed by five people speaking in favor, five against, but since no one proved interested in speaking against the proposal, it was considered consensed on and we moved to the next.

The next was much more interesting, because it brought in an element of sharp conflict. It also gives an example of how consensus decision making actually operates (because, despite the formal rules, we were effectively using a system of “modified consensus”), most of all because the conflict never explicitly came to the surface. Objectionable proposals are rarely shot down. Even when any one person in theory has the right to veto (“block”) a proposal, it almost never happens: instead, there is a process that could almost be described as killing with kindness.

The proposal was brought forward by a young woman in a big white cableknit sweater and pink woolen cap:

Pink Cap: Among the blockade group, we decided it would be really useful to form a tactical committee.

Such a committee would consist of people here willing to come up early, and also, of course, CLAC/CASA folks as well. That way, it would be able to scope out the city as the wall goes up, figure out what hotels, or other important spots need to be hit to disrupt the Summit as much as possible. So, when the various people come to the Convergence Center on Wednesday and Thursday we’ll have a plan so we can direct people to the best places where they can make an impact, disrupt, even stop it. That’s what the 3:30 meeting will hopefully be so *please* come if you have any insights, or just are willing to help in any way.

Older Facilitator: What is the proposal, then? To create such a group? Are you just asking people to come to your meeting or making a formal proposal?

Pink Cap: We feel we need the help of locals to pull this off. So we want to know: is this an idea embraced by the group? Because, if not, we can’t do it. The idea is to take account of past experiences, thinking what’s worked out and what hasn’t at Seattle, in DC, and so on.

Older Facilitator: So, on the proposal, are there any clarifying points or questions?

Woman in Rainbow Dreads: Is this a call from one group, or a decentralized call, open to all? Because in CLAC/CASA we have been trying to develop a process that will ensure that not one single group ends up dominating coordination. We feel that’s very important.

Pink Cap: We are envisioning different people, people from many affinity groups, people from different parts of the US and Canada, who come together with an idea. It would be like a spin-off of spokescouncil. To ensure that when thousands of people come, we can really close down the city, really make an impact on the Summit.

Older Facilitator: I see one more clarifying question.

American Woman: This is not a question, but: if all this is centralized only around street blockades...

Jaggi: Um, we’re only asking for clarifying questions at this point.

Another American Woman: Actually, I believe the facilitator called for “clarifying points or questions.” So I have one of those, too. This proposal is being made by people who come from the blockade group, and while we all consider that important, we also hope any such committee would take into account the tactics of other affinity groups so as to help us coordinate the action as a whole collectively, without its being centralized. It would be useful if it were a conduit for information, so people know where to get tactical information to make actions as effective as possible.

Older Facilitator: Please don’t make interventions—we’re asking for clarifying points or questions. A question from a man?

Man: All right then, I'd like to clarify whether the committee will just gather information, or make suggestions. Or will it have any other functions? That is, would it have functions other than as an information bank?

Pink Cap: It would be both. So when people come from out of town, they will have some idea where the important places are—as they might not be familiar with the city...

Older Facilitator: A question from a woman?

Kitty [*who had her hand up before*]: No, I pass.

Older Facilitator: The woman in the grey hat then.

Lesley: I thought there already is an action committee, created locally. I would like to know what their role will be in relation to this new tactical one.

Pink Cap: There's an action committee? Where is it, then?

Nicole: There is an action committee within CLAC/CASA, created to deal with logistics and propose actions. We haven't discussed it yet but if we did we would probably feel we'd be happy to share experiences as it would help us to do our work.

Woman in Spider-Man T-shirt: Yes, I also think it's a great idea.

Pink Cap: I really feel this is something where we can work together to really make an impact on the Summit.

The interesting thing about this conversation is the delicacy with which it was conducted. At the time, I had only an intuition of what was going on. Certainly, I found it a bit odd that the woman making the proposal kept using the same phrases ("really making an impact on the Summit") over and over; and, later, that her chief supporter, the woman in a Spider-Man T-shirt, was using remarkably similar terms. Normally, the word "committee" would have been a tip-off as well. An anarchist would have said "working group," but we were in a foreign environment so it seemed unwise to read too much into word choice. As time went on, it became increasingly clear toes were being stepped on, but such was the non-confrontational ethos that no one was willing to express the fact directly. Rather, almost all the responses were highly constructive, at least in tone.

Woman: In the flying squads group, a lot of us observed that in the past, there has been a problem with unreliable information: Flying squads end up going to someplace based on rumors that turn out not to be true. Would this committee give assistance to communications for us?

Spider-Man: Yes, absolutely

Pink Cap: Yes.

Medic in Blue Bandana: And will this committee be responsible to the spokescouncil? If so, how would that work in real terms?

Spider-Man: The answer to first question is yes—it would provide information for whoever's at the spokescouncil. To the second: it depends on who's participating, but judging from previous actions, maybe it will end up dividing the city into sections. So if an affinity group comes and people say, "We want to go do Yellow Bloc, we want to find a blockade, but we won't resist arrest," we can say, "Well, we know they need another fifty people here in this sector." The group can also help facilitate gathering equipment.

Older Facilitator: We'll let conversation continue for fifteen minutes, which is the maximum we decided to allow for specific proposals, because at the rate we're going now, it won't be possible to make decisions. Let's move from clarifying questions to concerns.

Eric: I'd actually still like to clarify something. This sounds a lot like what we were talking about in the flying squad group, because people didn't seem to know what was already in place

for communications or tactical. We need to figure out somehow how CASA/CLAC tactical and communications and flying squads are all supposed to work together.

Rainbow Dreads Woman: I find the idea of a strategic group interesting, but I want to ensure that there's not a reduplication of work here. CLAC/CASA has recently formed a communications group, so I want to ensure this committee will be just coordinating blockades.

Spider-Man: We invite you to join the group.

Pink Cap: We want to work with you.

Kitty: I am a little concerned this new group is undertaking to do too much, and might get overwhelmed. Perhaps it would be better to decentralize, divide up the responsibilities a little.

...

Jaggi: Perhaps it's time we move to straw poll, to get a sense of the room. If we have consensus, we can move on to something else; otherwise we can have a full debate. Remember: this is just for spokes, people empowered by their collectives or affinity groups, who have the little red or blue pieces of paper.

Man: One last question before we vote: this is a committee just to coordinate blockades?

Blue Bandana: Wait, isn't it a general tactical committee to coordinate the action?

Many: No! No!

Not only were the proponents of the committee leading a coordinated effort, they seemed to be intent on pushing it as far as it could go. That is, the proposal had started as a committee to convey information about blockades, and seemed to be morphing into something with much broader powers.

Lesley, who had been watching attentively, jabbed me when I reached for my paper. "Don't vote 'yes'! Every one of the people pushing for this proposal, they're all ISO. It's an ISO coup!"

Which would explain it. When it came to a vote, we were the only ones who voted no, but there are about fifteen abstentions. This was unusual in itself.

It was not entirely clear to me what would happen next, since CLAC was not, technically, using a consensus process. If this were DAN, we would have blocked, and that would have been the end of it. Or, alternatively, if the facilitator was sufficiently skillful, it would have been clear earlier that some people felt strongly enough about the issue that they would block, and therefore, if the proposal was not simply withdrawn, it would be altered: various people would suggest "friendly amendments" until all the concerns had been addressed. CLAC however was using a system of modified voting: in theory, we were to proceed to debate, with one male speaker for, one male speaker against, etc, and finally, a vote requiring a 75% majority. But, in fact, what happened is precisely what would have happened if this were pure consensus.

Jaggi: So now, since we don't have complete consensus, we pass to debate. First let's see if those who voted against wish to clarify the reasons for their opposition; then we'll take three speakers for the proposal, and three against.

Lesley: I've been on tactical committees before...

Someone: Could you stand up please? It would be easier to hear.

Lesley: Yes, sorry. I'm Lesley from NYC DAN. I've been on tactical committees before and my experience has been that they don't tend to work out very well. In Seattle, remember, there was no central coordinating committee. Everything was done by consensus between affinity groups, even on the streets. At A16, though, we had some problems, some gaps in the blockade and, therefore, during the convention protests in Philadelphia and LA, the organizers decided to create tactical teams to provide overall coordination—really more in the way of an experiment than

anything else. What we found was that, in Philly, the cops were able to pick off members of the team fairly easily and that caused more disruption than if we hadn't had any centralized coordinating at all. I wasn't in LA, but from what I heard, the tactical team quickly became a power structure unto itself, the LA DAN folk ended up being treated like gods and it completely stifled any kind of independent initiative.

Finally, I have some concerns that creating such a team might end up centralizing power away from the local organizers. So, I oppose it, as I believe it's important to ensure we maintain a very clear commitment to keeping power in local hands.

Jaggi: And the other no vote?

David [*interrupted in the process of scribbling notes*]: Who me? Um, similar concerns.

Jaggi: Well let's open up the floor then.

Old Punk: I'd like to propose that as a friendly amendment, the committee be put together in such a way as to ensure that as many affinity groups as possible are represented.

Jaggi: [*to Pink Cap*]: If that is a friendly amendment... Is it?

Pink Cap: Yeah, okay.

Man: I would also propose it be clarified that the committee not be a decisional body, but one that will gather information and suggest possibilities for action. I think that should be added as a friendly amendment too.

Another man: When we were first talking about this proposal, we formulated it just as a strategic committee specifically to coordinate blockades. Since the straw poll, it seems we are talking about something that will coordinate the entirety of the action. So, there would seem to be a bit of confusion here—it is not clear to me which this is. Creating the first would be great. If it's the latter, there are groups created to do that already. I would be for it if it is former.

[*Brief consultation between the facilitators*]

Jaggi: The language we have says "strategic committee to coordinate with other groups," keeping in mind the friendly amendments...

Of which more quickly followed. By the time it was over, we had a strategic committee committed to a principle of decentralization, to coordinating with CLAC/CASA, and that would have no more than one representative from any specific affinity groups and as diverse a range of such groups represented as possible. When it did finally come to a vote, interestingly, there were a few no votes, but also a good deal of applause—a kind of mutual appreciation for having resolved the issue—and the threat of any sort of central committee emerging had been decisively defanged.

After the vote, Lesley and I went up towards the front, to confer with the CLAC people. Helene—that was the name of the woman with rainbow dreads—thanked us warmly for our opposition. "There is, of course, a strategic committee," she said, in somewhat uncertain English. "But we didn't want to seem like we were excluding them. Still, I did see the ISO people there..."

What happened was also, I might note, an excellent example of another key principle of consensus decision making: that one must never question the honesty or good intentions of another activist. In fact, to have even mentioned the ISO in the discussion would have been seen as almost shockingly confrontational.

We take some air; though I end up coming back pretty quickly because it's still freezing outside and I'd left all of my sweaters in the meeting. I find some coffee and come back just in time to catch the only major incident in which the careful surface of mutual respect and generosity actually begins to break down—predictably enough, around the issue of nonviolence. The issue had, apparently, been the almost exclusive topic of the first spokescouncil a month before. Now,

someone is trying to return to it. I am not sure who the man was, but he was a big, bearded, Anglophone fellow in a lumberjack shirt, with a sheet of paper in his hands and a small squad of supporters behind him. His aggressive gestures seemed to mark him immediately as one of those classic activist stereotypes: the belligerent pacifist.

Lumberjack: I would like to talk about diversity of tactics.

[*audible groans from around the room*]

Older Facilitator: I don't believe this is an appropriate time or place to discuss this issue.

Lumberjack: Well, if I can't do it now, where else can I do this? I have a statement I would like to read. Some of us have prepared a statement...

Older Facilitator: Excuse me, I'm trying to explain that...

Lumberjack: ...a statement to be adopted by the Red Bloc. We felt it would be appropriate because you did, after all, call for discussion on each bloc's attitude to the police. So, if you'll let me begin: [*begins reading*]

"The goal of the Red Bloc is to express the people's democratic opposition to the FTAA and Summit of the Americas. To that end our actions will be to disrupt or prevent the Summit meeting. Our direct action will remove any barriers that will block our ability to express our opposition directly to the participants. We will likewise not honor any police actions or requests which will similarly attempt to block our access to these meetings. Our issues are opposition to FTAA and Summit; therefore, we won't take actions versus the working class people of this city. And while we will not allow the police or their barricades to block our access to the Summit, we will not use offensive weapons or attack the police; if attacked, however, we will respond in a defensive fashion."

[*the speech is continually interrupted by catcalls and heckling*]

Jaggi: If you will allow me to translate the heckles here... There has been endless discussion of this already, and this is out of order. What you are saying runs against the principles of diversity of tactics, which we have already discussed (at great length) and finally consensed upon.

Lumberjack: Well, for those of us who are not in Québec City, but in... distant places, it's hard to translate what a vague phrase like "diversity of tactics" is actually supposed to mean. We feel that if we're asked to extend our responsibility for solidarity to everyone in the group, we have the right to ask the group to take responsibility for clarifying what limits, if any, they are imposing. We support the idea of diversity of tactics, but that doesn't mean support for any tactic whatsoever.

Older Facilitator: As one of the co-facilitators[8] I don't think we can enter a debate on diversity of tactics. The call to attend this spokescouncil was made on the principle of diversity of tactics. And, also, remember that our organization is decentralized, so there is no overarching authority that can place barriers or limits on what particular affinity groups can do. We are a consultatory body, we can't impose. So, I'd like to pass to a real proposal, if anyone has one.

That is unless there's a profound feeling in the room that we should discuss this. Is there?

No? Should we have a straw poll?

[*There are about 120 people left in the room*]

Jaggi: Allow me to explain to anyone unfamiliar with our process that if someone asks for a "straw poll," that is not a binding vote but a way to get a sense of the room, of people's feelings on a question, for the guidance of the facilitators. In this case, it would be to find out whether people want to discuss the proposal. Who's for debating this?

[*In favor: one pagan, a small cluster of Lumberjack's supporters*]

[Against: overwhelmingly large number]

[Abstain: about twelve]

Jaggi: All right, we have 75% in favor of moving on so that's what we'll do.

The next proposal concerned the starting point of the march: whether to assemble on the Plains of Abraham. There were concerns that it would be unwise to have thousands of activists chilling their heels in a large park in clear sight of the police for several hours before a major action. Others felt it was unwise to change plans so late in the day, because it was important for the Green Bloc at least to be able to know a definitive location in advance. Opinion seemed to be leading towards the former.

Kitty took off, explaining she had promised a friend in the US she would check out the road to the airport. Her friend had heard there's only a single-lane highway, with no alternate routes. Dean, Sasha, and I head out for our own informal tour with the Scanner folk (Emma's disappeared somewhere). We assemble, as promised, at 1PM and munch sandwiches as we stroll through the cobbled streets of the soon-to-be forbidden zone.

1:15PM, Final Investigations

The Plains of Abraham, a huge stretch of parkland at the top of Jaggi's cliffs, is still entirely covered with snow. It's mostly deserted on a frigid Sunday afternoon. About a dozen of us set out in search of the stretch of wall supposedly already installed. We look incredibly obvious in our black hoodies, military pants and endless patches (the kid next to me, in blonde dreads, is wearing a jacket emblazoned with the words "Vegan Death Squad.") Only Buffy, the previous night's breakout facilitator, is incognito in brown suede jacket and a camera. She makes a not entirely unconvincing tourist (the camera is in fact to document information of possible tactical use). Sasha has a huge video camera, to document our expedition. Others have cameras too.

As we approach a bemused middle-aged skier for directions, I realize we've become the very embodiment of another classic activist stereotype. Actually, it's the perfect complement to the belligerent pacifist: the crowd of anarchists looking like a bunch of soldiers from some unholy army—what kind of army, you don't even want to imagine—who, when you actually talk to them, turn out to be the sweetest, most self-effacing people imaginable. Someone asks the skier, sheepishly, about the wall. He first thinks we're asking about the walls of the old city, but we explain ourselves. "Oh, the new kind of wall," he smiles, and points us past an ancient tower and down the hill.

The tower is a huge cannon tower overlooking the cliffs; after that things get very steep very quickly. A few of us try to climb down; one of the Prince Edward Islands kids gets a spontaneous nosebleed; only a few of us (me, Dean, two members of Montréal Ya Basta!) actually go down. The fence wasn't really visible even when we do, but Sasha gets some beautiful panoramic shots for a future documentary.

Later, we took extensive pictures of the area near the Grand Théâtre, where our imagined three-pronged attack was most likely to run into heavy resistance. "See that little park, right next to the theater?" asked Greg, one of the Montréal people. "That's where we had the huge battle last year over school reform."

Someone else explains that the government was holding a public hearing on how to carry out educational funding cuts. "They had promised that student groups would be allowed to participate, but then they only invited the right-wing ones." Those excluded announced their intention

to disrupt the conference; the government announced their intention to surround the building with riot police. In the end, it came down to a stand-up battle: riot cops armed with tear gas and plastic bullets on one side and students armed with bricks, pool balls, and molotov cocktails on the other.

“Molotov cocktails?”

“They have totally different standards here. You have to bear in mind there was a kind of guerilla war going on here back in the 1970s. People got killed. Québec itself was under martial law for years. It’s a very different place than the rest of Canada.”

Fifteen minutes later, huddled in a bus shelter to parley on tactics, Greg, a little uncomfortable, brings up the matter again. “Actually, I’ve been meaning to bring this up. We’ve been discussing this a lot in Montréal and I think the consensus is, we’re all thinking, that molotovs are definitely not a good idea.” Milton, from the same affinity group, is nodding vigorously. “I’m not saying this as a moral thing,” he notes to the Americans, “because I’ve never seen molotovs used against people who are actually vulnerable. You only use them against police in full flame retardant riot gear, who you know aren’t going to get seriously hurt no matter what you do. So... it’s not like you’re actually trying to set anyone on fire. It’s more... Okay, the way I see it, it’s a way of showing *really* serious purpose, showing that you’re determined to get through. A cop who sees a firebomb coming at him can’t help but be startled, even if he knows it won’t kill him; it can’t help but make him wonder if he really wants to hold his position. It’s a way of driving people back. And it works for that.”

“It worked last year during the park battle, definitely,” says one of the PEI kids. Then after a second: “not that I’m endorsing it either.”

“The problem with molotovs...” Milton says. “Well, okay, first of all, if you throw anything, you have to do it *from the front of the line*. That’s true of anything you throw and it seems obvious, but I can’t believe how often some idiot forgets it. In the last year’s battle, we had a shield wall, and some people would lob bricks and bottles over the line from waaaay back—so, of course, occasionally one would hit the back of a shield-bearer’s head. If I hadn’t been wearing a helmet, I would have got brained totally.”

One of the PEI kids chimes in: “Even worse, if you’re going to use molotovs, you have to practice first. It’s amazing how many people don’t realize that. At the very least, you have to practice packing it. If you don’t, then half the time, when you cock your arm back to throw, the rag will pop out and the gasoline’ll spill all over the guy behind you, so now his clothes are soaked with gasoline and there’s people playing with open flames all around him.”

“So no molotovs.”

“Yeah.”

“The one really legitimate use for molotovs,” Buffy points out, “might be for property destruction. For example: say there’s a water cannon. Now, that’s a totally legitimate target.”

“Remember, the water cannon didn’t slow people down too much in that last demo.”

“Water cannon can be pretty effective if they’re used right.”

“Still,” says Greg. “The reason I wanted to have this little parley was to get consensus we *didn’t* want molotovs—that tactically, it’s just not a good idea. So: does anyone actually have an objection to that? Or do we have consensus?”

Nods all around. I assure him that no one on the US side has even considered using them.

We swung back to the spokescouncil just in time to see Emma and her new friend Craig come out in tremendous irritation. Apparently, a GOMM representative had, indeed, come in and asked

for certain zones to be named Yellow-only; one was presumably the highway area, which we don't want anyway, so that's fine, but another was right up to the fence on one of the three streets we were going to march on. We shrug and figure, they'll work it out. Anyway, if we want to get home before 2AM, we'd better start driving.

The Road Home

For about an hour, Emma is still fulminating against pacifists. Why is it that people insist on trying to impose their own codes of conduct on others? How can they call themselves anarchists? These things should be left strictly up to each affinity group to decide for themselves.

"Are you saying," I ask, "that you're against written codes? Or any kind of code?"

"I'm saying any kind of code. What possible purpose do they serve?"

We go at it for some time. I remark on the possibility of Nazis showing up. Emma points out that Nazis do try to crash anarchist events fairly regularly. That's why many affinity groups allow only one exception to the general principle of nonviolence: when one has to deal with Nazis.

"All right, then, say you're at an action and you notice that another affinity group has shown up with a tactical thermonuclear device."

Emma rolled her eyes. "Which of course you could have easily prevented if only you had earlier published a code of conduct specifying 'no tactical thermonuclear devices?' Look, someone does something crazy, then all right, people around them have to do what they have to do."

Mercifully, Sasha changes the subject. We spend another fifteen minutes trying to get straight the different varieties of Canadian security to be ranged against us: from the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) to the Sûreté du Québec—names which gives the American activist the impression that we are about to be attacked by a combination of Dudley Do-Right and Inspector Clouseau. (Inevitable repartee: "Does your dog bite?" "Do you have a license for that minkey?") I remark that in Vermont, at least, with its socialist administration, we can expect the police to treat us with kid gloves. Emma is extremely skeptical about this. More likely they'll be especially harsh to prove themselves. Anyway, what influence do local politicians have over the police? By Montréal, we're talking families. Sasha grew up in Hollywood. I'm from a lefty working-class family in New York. Both Emma and Dean, however, turn out to be from Catholic working-class families from the Midwest, and this trumps everything. Emma's parents, for instance, adhere to some extreme charismatic sect. Dean thinks his mom is slightly schizophrenic (it runs in the family); she completely freaked when he was sixteen and she read his diary and discovered he was gay ("and it's not like there was anything explicitly sexual in there; I just admitted I had a crush on someone"). She covered the diary in pictures of saints and the Virgin Mary and to this day hasn't given it back to him. She used to send him underwear secretly blessed with holy oil to control his genitals. Visions and signs: Emma's mom thinks she's possessed by the devil and that's why she became an anarchist. She has monks praying to rescue her daughter. Sasha grew up around Hollywood, his mom Jewish, his dad Polish. Mom banned pop music from him for many years. Emma and Dean are unimpressed. They go on exchanging Catholic stories for what seems like approximately two and a half hours. Somewhere in upstate New York, I manage to go to sleep.

CHAPTER 3: FROM BURLINGTON TO AKWESASNE

The next couple weeks were increasingly frenetic. I'll give only the most schematic account.
NEW YORK DIARY CONTINUED

Thursday, March 29, 2001: *Ya Basta!* meeting, Brooklyn

Ya Basta! meeting, a big circle in Moose's living room. This meeting marks the first appearance of Smokey and Flamma's friend Jesse, a cocky-seeming young man newly arrived from Louisiana. Tells us he's an "organizer," needs something to organize, and Ya Basta! is clearly in need of help. He's actually a pretty good facilitator and insists we have a proper meeting, but just about everyone not of the Smokey and Flamma faction takes an instant dislike to him.

Friday, March 30: *Independent Media Center, Manhattan*

Hours at the IMC, mainly spent consoling Moose over a recent romantic disaster. Everyone is dashing about making preparations for the border action. Warcry is going as a dollar bill. Julie from the Urban Justice League is popping in and out, looking alternately sweet and officious. Twinkie and Brad¹ are out on bicycles when I come, searching for sushi. There's an enormous store of the stuff in the IMC fridge, mostly with the fish parts carefully picked out.

Sunday, April 1

¹ Brad Will—the same Brad Will murdered in Oaxaca in November 2006. There seems little point now in disguising his identity.

Early word coming in about the border action. It sounds like it went fairly well—everyone was detained, and most told not to enter Canada for five years, but that was kind of expected, and at least we got coverage on WBAI and even some Canadian TV. Still, there seems to have been some kind of falling about between activists. The SalAMI action in Ottawa also went extremely well and grabbed headlines all over Canada. Of course, US media never even mentioned it but that was only to be expected.

DAN Meeting, Charas El Bohio

I was at the DAN meeting at Charas at 6 PM. Lesley and I gave our report-back from the Québec spokes, trying to explain the dynamics of the three color blocks. There were the usual worries about what was actually going on at Akwesasne and about Shawn's rhetoric, as well as a long

discussion of PGA's upcoming general meeting in Cochabamba, and the need for Continental DAN to finally get on board and formally endorse the PGA principles (which we do).

Various people in phone contact with the crew at the Canadian border explain what the problem there was: it was Julie again. No one seems surprised. This time it's racial insensitivity. Twinkie had participated in the border action mainly to make a point about immigration issues: where white people can, normally, cross at will, things are entirely different for anyone who looks like they're from Asia, Latin America, or Africa; and, of course, if white people try to make a political issue of all this, then suddenly, they can't cross either. Julie, in her inimitable style, managed to not only completely fail to point this out to the WBAI reporter, but ignored Twinkie herself when she tried to get a place at the mike to explain it. Twinkie was very, very angry.

Tuesday, April 3

The "Pagan Call to Action" appears, one of perhaps a dozen minor calls for different groups or clusters taking part in the upcoming actions. It does indeed cite the Cochabamba Declaration, framed by Bolivian groups who successfully fought back an attempt by the government to privatize the local water into the hands of Bechtel:

The Cochabamba Declaration:

1. Water belongs to the earth and all species and is sacred to life, therefore, the world's water must be conserved, reclaimed, and protected for all future generations and its natural patterns respected.
2. Water is a fundamental human right and a public trust to be guarded by all levels of government, therefore, it should not be commodified, privatized, or traded for commercial purposes. These rights must be enshrined at all levels of government. In particular, an international treaty must ensure these principles are noncontrovertable.
3. Water is best protected by local communities and citizens, who must be respected as equal partners with governments in the protection and regulation of water. Peoples of the earth are the only vehicle to promote earth democracy and save water.

Here on the banks of the St. Lawrence/Magtogoek, with the river as our ally and the ancestors marching with us, we will become a living river, to bring this declaration as a challenge to the world's governments and an inspiration to her peoples.

Wednesday, April 4

The name-calling on the listservs is getting unusually vituperative as everyone seems to be pouncing on everyone else over the April 1 Border Action. The organizers themselves aren't saying much, but the moment anyone raises the issue of racism, someone else seems to slam them as a Marxist sectarian. Twinkie herself hasn't posted anything, but finally, one of her friends uploads Twinkie's own version of events:

Can someone remind me why we are protesting the FTAA? Hmm???? To recruit more people in our organizations??? Or the fact that corporations ignore borders and people are oppressed by

them! What about Cornwall and what's happening to the Mohawks? Are we going there because it's an easy way into Québec, or is it because we really support the fact that the border is a daily affront to their living and sovereignty?

SO! That is what happened on Apr 1st at that media action thingy. No one addressed those issues and only focused on their lame, privileged, white asses not being able to get into Canada this ONE TIME because of this mass mobilization protest...

Meanwhile, she noted, as we were being politely and speedily processed there were poor-looking people of color waiting on line forever, some probably to end up in immigration detention. Did anyone even think to bring know-your-rights flyers or any kind of outreach? Did anyone even mention them at the press conference? Twinkie ends with a ringing declaration "NO MORE STREET THEATRE WITH PRIVILEGED ACTIVISTS AT SITES OF OPPRESSION!!!! Call me a separatist if you will, but I will not work with people with bad politics, and I will publicly call out people on their racism."

Thursday, April 5

The *Montréal Gazette* reports that prosecutors in Québec are saying that they've been asked to delay all bail hearings for protesters arrested at the upcoming summit for three to five days to keep them off the streets (Marsden 2001). Several, outraged, are announcing they intend to refuse to cooperate.

Ya Basta! Meeting at Aladdin's Place in Chelsea, 6 PM

Ya Basta!, meanwhile, is on the verge of break-up. April 5 was supposed to be the meeting at which we discussed common principles: what the collective is ultimately supposed to stand for. Jesse threatens to block any such discussion on the grounds that Ya Basta! is supposed to be "anti-ideological." Laura and I barely managed to restrain Moose from marching out. "Anti-ideological means we're not declaring ourselves anarchists or communists or adherents to any particular... you know, ideology. It doesn't mean we don't stand for anything at all. Or why are we going to Québec to begin with? Maybe we should form into two teams, one protesting the FTAA, one supporting it, and fight each other!"

As a compromise, I pull out a copy of the PGA principles of unity I'd been carrying around for just such an occasion. But that too is shot down, over objections to the phrase "nonviolent civil disobedience," which, as Target and Jesse and several others point out, could be interpreted as a condemnation of groups in the Global South like the Zapatistas, who have no recourse but to resort to armed struggle. When I try to point out that the Zapatistas actually created PGA, Smokey, who's facilitating, tables the discussion: "We've got a whole series of practical issues we still have to work out tonight and clearly this is going to be a long conversation. Let's see if we have time to get back to it next week." At this point, I go out and find Moose, who's been sitting outside in the hall next to the elevator, to tell him that, if he still wants to leave in a huff, he has my full support.

Sunday, April 8: *DAN Meeting, Charas El Bohio, 6 PM*

A small meeting, a little over twenty people, mainly concerned with what to do about what's beginning to be called the "Akwesasne hemorrhage." We've been getting nothing but bad news. It would seem the Band Council has definitively called Shawn's bluff. There are rumors that the Feds have been sending around tapes of street battles in Prague, claiming we're coming to do the same thing in their community. Rumors abound. Some of the Warrior Houses appear to be mobilizing against us. Shawn, on the other hand, keeps assuring us it's just a matter of working through the process, we have to expect opposition, there are always reactionaries. It's hard not to notice though that his public statements have completely changed in tone: he's now calling for us to attend a fish-fry, a festive, "child-friendly" event to discuss trade issues with the community, followed by an entirely peaceful crossing in which activists and community members will mix together and overwhelm customs with our sheer numbers. This creates a dilemma: on the one hand, rumors are necessarily going to be flying that the action will be a disaster. On the other hand, since everything depends on numbers, if enough people believe it will be a disaster, that alone will be enough to make it true.

Tuesday, April 10

Reports from Québec City are growing increasingly surreal. An anonymous Canadian celebrity is reported to have announced his or her willingness to provide funding for the construction of a giant medieval catapult with which to lay siege to the summit. Meanwhile, 1,700 prison guards, having received orders to clear hundreds of inmates from the Orsainville and Hull detention facilities to make way for protesters, decide to go on strike. Police are called in to take over the prisons, and the guards adopt tactics of nonviolent civil disobedience, blockading the prison entrances. The police attack, and a dozen guards are arrested.

"They came in formation. They crushed us. They hit us with their clubs," said Michel Gauthier, a guard at Orsainville for twenty-three years.

"The summit protesters who are scared to come here are right to be scared. We're the proof today that police here are very dangerous." (King and Van Praet 2001)

Thursday, April 12: *Ya Basta! Meeting, Manhattan*

The preceding week had been full of internal reconciliation efforts within Ya Basta!: parties, messages, proposals to perhaps split into allied but autonomous affinity groups. In the end, when the time for another meeting comes, we have too much practical business to take care of to vituperate: the Burlington trainings, Canadian border scenarios, legal, communications, tactical questions. Moose is feeling increasingly guilty about the idea that he might be encouraging people into a situation where some might get seriously hurt. We end the meeting with a big go-around where we all talk about our parameters and limits concerning violence and nonviolence. Remarkably, just about everyone says exactly the same thing. None of us would be willing to attack someone else, or carry out an act we feel likely to cause physical injury to another person; none of us had the slightest moral problem with damage to corporate property; for pretty much all of us, the really difficult question was what we'd do if a companion or someone we cared about

were being physically assaulted—that is, would we be willing to attack someone to save them? Most of us feel we wouldn't really be able to predict how we would react to such a situation until it actually happened.

Perhaps, I thought, we weren't really so far apart as I'd imagined.

Another minor crisis demanding my offices as Minister of Information: the Band Council, or Council of Chiefs had issued a statement expressing alarm at the prospect of violence and destruction and begging activists not to sow discord or commit illegal acts in their community. I am asked to draft a response.

To the Mohawk Council, Akwesasne,

We are writing in response to your recent letter concerning our plans for a crossing through Akwesasne via Cornwall Island and into Canada on April 19th.

We would like to say, first of all, that we are deeply grateful to you for the understanding and spirit of tolerance that you show in your letter, and wish to do everything possible to put your minds at peace about the concerns you raise. Rest assured that we are coming to Akwesasne only as guests of residents who have invited us to do so; we have never planned to do anything, let alone anything violent or destructive, on our own accord. The last thing we would want would be to cause disruption to your lives or create difficulties for you.

Our understanding is that we have been invited to a peaceful, festive event which will involve fried fish, children, and an educational session, in which our hosts will explain to us some of the political issues important to the Mohawk Nation and First Nations people more generally. Afterwards, we will proceed peacefully across the bridge, keeping one lane open to ensure residents will not be inconvenienced and emergency vehicles can get through. At no time have we even contemplated ourselves engaging in confrontation with anyone; rather, we consider ourselves guests on someone else's land, and wish to act as such, with all possible respect to the Mohawk Nation and all its people. As political activists, we hope that this action will make it possible for us both to gain a greater understanding of the problems facing your Nation, your achievements, and your hopes for the future, and to better enable us to act in solidarity with you in the future, just as our hosts have already shown enormous kindness, understanding, and solidarity with us. We come as friends and we hope to establish a friendship that will endure long after we are gone.

Yours sincerely,

The members of the New York City Direct Action Network
The members of the New York City Ya Basta! Collective
The members of the Philadelphia Direct Action Group

Saturday, April 14

Québec police announce (*La Presse*, April 14, 2001) that “all possibilities would be examined before using tear gas” and that even then, doing so would be preceded by announcements in four languages. As for plastic bullets, the police said that these would be used only as a last resort before the use of lethal force, always against an individual, never against a crowd, and only when that particular individual “presented a serious threat to the police.”

Marina, who is doing legal work for the Burlington mobilization, reports that her cell phone account was suddenly cancelled, along with two different email accounts. One company sends

her a note explaining that her account was terminated because it was being used for “illegal activities.”

All sorts of rumors are spinning around of impending disaster at Akwesasne. Several of us spend hours on email trying to squelch them—Target often suggesting the rumors are spread by police, me emphasizing that without turn-out, there’s no way the action can work.

BURLINGTON

Wednesday, April 17

Finished with the last week of classes, I’m finally free to throw myself into the action full time.

I arrived at the Burlington Convergence after it had been going on for a couple days, almost at the tail end really. Most of my time there had a strange, disjointed, choppy quality. In retrospect, I think some of this had to do with the fact that it seemed half the places I went—in cars, cafés, public places—someone seemed to be playing the Ramones (“I Want to be Sedated,” “Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue,” “We Want the Airwaves”). It was only later someone explained to me that Joey Ramone had just died of liver cancer. Mainly, though, it was because everything seemed to be falling apart. Checking in at the housing desk, I ran into Raoul, one the Yabbas—a huge, teddybearish fellow in a tiny porkpie hat. “David, you have *no* idea how glad I am to see you here,” he said, giving me an enormous hug.

“Why? What’s going on? How have the Ya Basta! trainings been going?”

“We only had one. It was a disaster. Now it’s not even clear Ya Basta! exists.”

Apparently, tensions between the trainers had been the spark. The training, held on a UVM campus soccer field, had actually drawn a fair-sized crowd, perhaps fifty all told, and that was on the first day of the convergence when not many people had arrived. There was a kind of vast foam party as everyone played around with different sorts of possible body-armor, then the idea was to have everyone practice group formations in their newly created gear. That was where things began to fall apart. Betty, the dancer—and of course the only one of the trainers with an actual skill or teaching experience—was being systematically sidelined by the triumvirate of Moose, Target, and Jesse, who were all battling with each other for attention. It got to the point where even Betty, normally the most cheerfully philosophical person one might imagine, started to complain. So did a number of the other women participants. Moose exploded at the other two men for their gender insensitivity. “They ended up in a complete shouting match.”

“They were actually shouting?”

“Well, maybe not quite literally shouting. But making no effort to disguise the fact that they were really pissed off.”

The display of rage however itself made many of the women so uncomfortable they left, taking with them a good portion of the non-Ya Basta! participants.

Someone called in an activist from the West Coast named Laura, repeatedly described to me as “a kick-ass gender sensitivity trainer,” who, after observing the group briefly, concluded that its dynamic was so deeply problematic that it probably wouldn’t be worth the time and effort to try to salvage it.

“And...?”

“And that was it. That was our last training. None of the other scheduled trainings have even happened.”

“Where’s Moose?”

“Finally, he just threw his hands up and said he was giving up on us. He joined a different affinity group, some people from Philadelphia.”

“Oh... I’m sure Betty really appreciated that. What about Smokey and Flamma? Emma? Where are they?”

“I haven’t seen them since. I don’t know. Someone said they might have left town.”

I also discovered that, when it came to the sympathies of the local socialist administration, Emma had been spot on. Far from welcoming us, they had been doing all the fear-mongering one might expect from a local government bracing for a major action—despite the fact that we had repeatedly insisted to them there weren’t going to be any actions in Burlington, just meetings. Local businesses had been warned of potential window-breakers, police patrols were everywhere; activists regularly found themselves being followed by unmarked black SUVs which seemed to serve no purpose other than to create a climate of fear and intimidation. That was the other thing I was hearing everywhere, aside from the Ramones music: scary stories. One car full of obvious Feds, had pulled up to Kitty and asked her if she wanted to jump in for a ride. Another SUV had chased Target through an alley. Someone had walked down the street in Ya Basta! gear and returned to his car ten minutes later to discover some enormous bruiser in a business suit examining the trunk. Several local activists had already reported mysterious break-ins.

After dropping off my bags at the Burlington IMC, and coordinating with the people who were going to be sharing my accommodations, I set off for the spokescouncil.

The Burlington Spokes

At the housing office, I’d picked up a flyer which explained that the spokescouncil was going to be at a place called “Billings Student Center,” on the University Terrace of UVM, not far from the center of town. The building turns out to be a huge turreted structure in red stone, looking somewhere between church and castle. Apparently, it used to be the campus library. There are already a couple of black flags and banners on the lawn outside. At the door, we’re asked to affirm that we are not police or working journalists, then peruse the usual tables full of documents, along with large black markers with which to write the legal and medical phone numbers (posted everywhere) on one’s leg or arm. The meeting itself is located in a large, circular room with a circular balcony surrounding it; too small to use for an actual theater, it must be some kind of campus meeting-space. Up on the balcony, apparently, are various offices of student clubs, including the student radio station, where there’s a small crowd of technical types—mostly IMC people—making use of the equipment. In the center of the big room is a big round wooden table; empowered spokes are sitting directly around it; everyone else is milling around behind them, sitting in clumps on the floor, or drifting in and out of other rooms. There’s no expectation that the audience should stay quiet during meetings—actually, spokes are expected to be continually conferring with their affinity groups, and members of affinity groups with each other. Though, in a room this small, the facilitators usually end up having to intervene periodically to remind everyone to keep it down to a reasonable volume.

The meeting has of course already started (have I ever actually witnessed the beginning of a spokescouncil?) though only about two-thirds of the spokes are already there. The facilitators, male and female, have arranged the usual pieces of butcher paper against a nearby wall and are

writing out an agenda with colored pens. This is a real spokes so everyone is participating in constructing the agenda.

Looking for someone from New York who can fill me in on the situation, I spot Twinkie, munching on a muffin in the corner.

“So how have things been going?”

She pauses, draws in a deep breath, searches for appropriate words. “Could be a lot better. Yesterday a delegation of Mohawks came from Akwesasne, asking us not to come.”

“These were Band Council people?”

“There were seven or eight of them; a deputy chief, some people who put on a little ritual..”

“Really? I mean, like, a Thanksgiving ritual? Where they thank the Creator for having made the skies and waters and strawberries and everything?” (I too had been reading up around that time.) “You know that’s the standard Mohawk way of starting any important event. I’ve always wanted to see one of those.”

“Yeah, yeah, that’s exactly what it was like. They started with a Thanksgiving ritual. It was very beautiful. Then they told us not to come.”

“So there were people from the Council *and* Traditionalists? So is it,” confused now, “...the Traditionalists against the Warriors now?”

“No, there were people who said they were from the Warrior Society with them too. Progressives, Traditionalists, Warriors... It was kind of a disaster.”

I sat down nearby and started scribbling out initial notes: there seemed to be about 150–200 people, with fairly reasonable gender balance, something of an ethnic mix, though, I noted, absolutely not one single African-American in the room. No, actually, one. A West Indian looking fellow on the balcony. But that was it.

Laura, the gender sensitivity trainer, is also acting as co-facilitator with some fellow from Boston named Mark. As I started jotting meeting notes, she was in fact telling everyone that they’d been having big problems in this regard. However grudgingly, I was forced to admit she was pretty good at this.

Laura: I just wanted to say before we start that I’ve been really impressed by the respectfulness people have been showing in terms of the racial dynamics here. And this despite the fact we’re in a really difficult situation. In terms of the gender dynamics, we’ve been having some problems. So before we do anything else, let me just say: guys, please, check yourselves before you speak. If you’ve already spoken two or three times on the same issue and others haven’t said anything: step back. Give other voices a chance to be heard. If your point is really as crucial as you thought it is, then probably someone else will make it anyway. And if they don’t, you can always put yourself back on the stack. Remember: this shit is deeply internalized in all of us, so guys, *please:* be conscious.

We start as usual with a go-round, each spoke identifying themselves and the affinity group they represent.

Laura: Any more housekeeping items? No? Okay, several of the people who facilitated last night were also involved in prior negotiations with the Mohawks. We’ve given them a fifteen-minute slot to fill us in on some of the history, in way of background. Mac?

[People start searching for Mac. Someone on the balcony says he’s on the phone. There’s a brief huddle at the head of the table]

All right, so Lesley from NYC-DAN will take his place. No, wait, here’s Mac.

[Other people introduce themselves as part of the team: Twinkie, of AUTODAWG, Jessica from the Philadelphia Direct Action Group, Nisha, an activist from New York, who explains she's not speaking for anyone but herself]

Mac: And I'm Mac. I'm with DAN and the People's Law Collective. Hi, how's everyone doing?

I've been the main person speaking with the Boots Clan and Warriors from Akwesasne and Tyendinaga Reserves. The main organizer I've been dealing with is Shawn Brant from Tyendinaga. I spent three years on the streets with Shawn in Ontario; he's one of the most solid, dependable activists I know.

Back in January, we were working with groups in Canada to help move folks across to the other side—the idea was to shut down any border post that refuses to let us in. Shawn said he'd speak with the Mohawk community in Akwesasne, and eventually some of us went up to meet him. At the time, he framed it as a very strong action, opening with a statement about the bridge as a daily affront to their sovereignty, and claiming that they would do whatever it took to seize it.

As a result some people on our side put out some premature statements.

Meanwhile, Shawn went to the Boots, who are big in the Bear Clan at Akwesasne. Out of respect, he also approached the Band Council, which is the formal, elected body, but they became alarmed at the prospect of a possibly divisive action taking place on their lands.

So, when we went to a second meeting at Akwesasne, they made it clear, first of all, that the action won't involve actually closing the border as the Band Council was concerned about that. We told them, sure. Later there were more concerns: at the third meeting, Harriet Boots came out strongly in support of the action, along with her husband John and their son Stacey. She wanted to ensure that we emphasized the terrible health conditions on the reserve—the fact that the local clinic tells women there not to breastfeed their children because the water there is so toxic—and the bridge as an affront to Mohawk sovereignty. She also said that, as their goal is to unify the nation, they wanted us to be peaceful and organized. That we shouldn't talk too much on the reserve itself, but they were going to organize a fish-fry, then we would go to meet our Canadian allies halfway across the bridge. The idea was that, first, vehicles would pass lawfully, then, simply by weight of numbers, we could peacefully overwhelm the border authorities and everyone would be able to get through. After that, the Band Council said okay, but they registered some strong reservations.

Shawn told me a joint statement of support came out yesterday. The Wolf Clan is closer to the Band Council (there had been a kind of civil war between the Wolves and the Bears, who tend to work with the Warriors, over plans to build a casino some years ago) so they've definitely been suspicious.

Last night, though, they issued a letter of support—so it's too bad some of the Band Council people and Brian Skidder came to our spokescouncil and urged us not to come. They told us that police showed them videos they claimed were from Seattle, but I think must have actually been from Prague, of people throwing molotovs and battling police, and told them this was the sort of thing they'd be bringing on their people. After the meeting, the delegates said that, after having actually met us and seeing how we treated one another, they recognized we were good people and they didn't fear us any longer. But Brian Skidder still told us not to come.

I spoke with Stacey and Shawn this morning, and I'm trying to get hold of a press release they put out. They are still very much asking us to come—they want our support, they want to see a peaceful, safe action. They're still having the fish-fry, they've invited us to it, and they also want

to help us with crossing into Canada. I recognize this is not a simple action, but I believe in our action and believe it's high time the anti-globalization movement does something like this, and establish ties to First Nation activists on both sides of the border.

Mark: Are there any clarifying questions?

Laura: ...that is, for the team who have been working with the Mohawk organizers?

Jessica: I should also point out that I was at the second and third meetings at Akwesasne, and that this "statement of support" was really more a statement of non-opposition.

Woman: What's happening on the Canadian side now?

Mac: Our allies in Kingston say they will be there on the other side of the bridge, they will be flexible and willing to help in whatever way they can. Oh—I should add there's a rumor (and there are going to be lots of rumors; we're going to have a hard time sorting all this out) that the police have already set up buses and two trucks along the highway on the other side of the bridge. That may or may not be true, but we have to assume the police *will* be there too.

Man: Our affinity group wants to know if the Wolf Clan was ever approached directly?

Mac: No, we felt we should let our allies deal with them. Which might have been a mistake.

Woman: I'm from the legal team and we're prepared to shift to another crossing location if we have to. Also, a clarifying question: why is it that Shawn, who's not actually from Akwesasne, is speaking for that community?

Mac: Shawn is not speaking for the community. He's been an organizer for ten or fifteen years; he's from a leading family at Tyendenaga; he went through the protocols to get the support of the Boots family, but nothing more.

Woman: My affinity group is concerned: will they still have to go through customs?

Mac: There's a chance we will. We hope to overwhelm them, but we might not. The best we can say is there's as good or better a chance of doing so here than anywhere else.

Man: If Shawn isn't from Akwesasne, who is it from Akwesasne who actually does want us to be there?

Mac: I won't guarantee numbers, but one of the most powerful clans does want us there. The Band Council goes back and forth, and the Wolf Clan is definitely against us. Our allies say we have ninety percent support in the community as a whole, but we don't know what's really happening there. I don't want to tell you something that turns out to be wrong.

Laura: Okay, let me open the floor now to anyone who wishes to ask questions.

Famous: Hi, I'm Famous. I'm with the medics. I'd like to know whether we'll have an escort as we approach the Reservation?

Mac: No, our allies are going to be concentrating on security on the reserve itself. There won't be any actual opposition once we get there, but there may be before—there's been some talk of police roadblocks. But that'll be up to us to deal with.

Famous: No, I mean at the edge of the Reservation.

Mac: Yes, there will be.

Mark: Remember this is clarification on background history, not logistical scenarios.

Tony: Hi, I'm Tony, also with the medics. What impressed me about the delegation that came here last night were their concerns about opening wounds from the civil war. Would anyone be able to address that?

Mac: Well, our allies say this will be a unifying action, that they're more unified now than ever. I can't tell you who's right.

Laura: Other questions specifically from spokes—not logistical now, that’ll be later. Right now, history questions that need to be clarified.

This is looking bad. Mac is a dedicated anarchist and normally one of the most open, friendly, people one could possibly imagine. His usual manner is so innocent and playful some find it hard to take him completely seriously. Now, trapped between his friend Shawn and the American activists, as he answers one question after another with carefully worded statements, he’s beginning to sound like a politician. Presumably, in his position, it’s almost impossible not to. After all, I reflect, isn’t this just what makes politicians talk like weasels to begin with: being caught between constituencies who want radically different things, trying to make everybody happy? But the audience is noticing, and many are not happy.

Woman: I suggest we talk directly to Shawn about this.

Mac: I’m still talking to him. To be honest, he’s getting very frustrated with our movement. He feels he’s had to hold our hand through this whole thing.

Laura: Any more questions specifically about the history of negotiations? No? Okay. As facilitators we’re unclear on what’s happening next. We were told we might be getting a phone call from Akwesasne, we might be getting a letter faxed in. So [*to the team*] do you have input? Help me here.

Nisha: Jodie, could you step up? This is your section on the agenda now.

[*A woman named Jodie steps up.*]

Jodie: Hi. I’m from Philly, I do a lot of work with Western Shoshone and other Native American groups out West. I was going to be holding a cultural respect training before the action, but it looks like we’re not going to have time for that. I’ve got a handout I was going to use for that (people can share it with their neighbors if there’s not enough copies) but, the main thing is: we’ve also got Russell Black here, of the Oglala Lakota. And I felt maybe first we should hear from him.

So, Russell, could you stand up and share a bit of your understanding of this situation?

A tall skinny kid appears, who looks like he might be about seventeen years old. He stands at the other side of the table. “I am here on behalf of my elders,” he begins. He then pronounces a brief prayer, and a slightly longer speech, emphasizing how his nation, the Oglala (still erroneously referred to as the Sioux) are divided by similar factionalism between the traditionalists and a so-called “pragmatic” group tied to the official reservation government, who are corrupt and really just agents of the federal government. Only the traditionalists have made a principled stand against genocide and violations of the earth... Everyone listens in rapt, respectful silence. Myself, I can’t help but reflecting this would feel a trifle more convincing if there hadn’t been traditionalists with the party yesterday telling us not to come. At the end, people in the hall react half with applause, half with energetic twinkling.

“No matter what we decide tonight,” another woman says, “we want to do it in a respectful fashion. We’ve been invited to a meal. Surely it must be disrespectful not to show up for it.”

Madhava, one of the IMC folk upstairs, announces we’ve got a call coming in from Akwesasne. Then we seem to have lost it again.

“A very interesting piece of information,” remarks Laura as Mac and the technical people all scramble upstairs. “Our fax lines have been mysteriously jammed all day. We’ve been unable to send or receive anything. Plus the phone lines are uncertain. We’re trying to put the call through DSL ...”

Techie Upstairs: I think we’ve got it on the PA system...

Mac: Ready Shawn? [*crackle*] Are you still there? [*crackle*]

Techie: Shit, this isn't going to work. We're going to have to use another phone.

[*Much futzng about with equipment*]

Laura: So give me some good news here, guys. Can we proceed?

Mac: [*on a phone line with Shawn*] How would people feel if I were to come down and repeated Shawn's words

[*Twinkles*]

[*Mac explaining the situation to Shawn*]

Laura: No, don't come down. Just do it from the balcony.

Mac: Okay. [*from the balcony, begins repeating what Shawn is saying*]:

First, I want to apologize for having to do things in this way. It would have been much more appropriate for us to be there with you, but just not possible right now. I just also want to say there's a lot of bullshit going on here...

Someone: Um, can you repeat that, sorry?

[*Much laughter*]

Shawn [*via Mac*]: As activists, we share a common responsibility. "Free trade" is about the people being manipulated by the government. What happened at your meeting last night was us being manipulated by the native government. These people do not represent the best interests of the people of Akwesasne, and the people have reaffirmed yesterday their welcoming of Americans coming to protest the FTAA. We do not have Indian titles behind our names, but we carry the honor and integrity of, and are the true leaders of, the Mohawk Nation. That honor and integrity is reflected in the commitment we've made, and the fact that we have done those things we said we would do. These attempts being made to reduce our numbers by asking activists not to come are based on fear: the government knows they are not in control, that they are part of a system that has allowed our community to be poisoned, our children to be born with birth defects, our integrity and our culture to be lost. And now they claim to be working in our best interest to prevent people from coming.

We affirmed yesterday that we will extend the honor that's required to people going to Québec City to legitimately dissuade governments from further free trade negotiations. We acknowledge that those who go to fight the governments that we fight shall be recognized for their commitment, because we share the same enemy. If people are dissuaded from coming, then that is by their choice, we have made a pledge and a commitment and we stand by that. You are all welcome in Akwesasne, and to the same degree that we have said in previous discussions.

All I can say is that I hope people will come, but I can certainly understand the confusion that's been put in people's minds by the people last night. But the people are with you.

[*Wild applause*]

After some vain attempts to keep the line open so people can ask Shawn questions, the connection collapses in hissing static and, from then on, no phones in the building could be made to work. Eventually we turn our attentions back to meeting logistics (with the time crunch, Jodie's cultural sensitivity training, scheduled for 7PM, will have to be moved over another building at 8 or 9PM. Then there's the problem of dinner...).

Laura: So. Have affinity groups actually brought proposals about how we should proceed from here?

[*Indications from several that they have*]

Not everyone has to, but if any do, we can try to sort out how the various proposals overlap and relate and hone them down to a workable list of alternatives.

Woman in Yellow: Here's our proposal. We propose we should go to Akwesasne, but keep things open in our minds whether we'll cross there or in another place. We should stay in contact with the Mohawks on the Canadian side, so they can tell us what's happening there. We go to the fish-fry and reassess, hold a spokescouncil there.

Laura: Well, that's one proposal. Awesome. Others? Oh, and bear in mind we can also develop alternative scenarios tonight—you can propose something new. So: any others? No?

Woman in Blue: Our collective made an alternative proposal after last night, when things seemed shaky. First, for the sake of solidarity with Mohawks, we should attend the fish-fry, if we're still invited (we obviously are), so as to forge a working relation with activists up there and pick up others who will be coming to Akwesasne to cross. Then we should actually attempt to cross into Canada at a different spot.

The other possibility proposed last night was to join together with Canadians and any Mohawks who want to cross, and attempt to do so together at a different point.

Eric from NYC DAN: When was that other location to be decided?

Another Woman from that collective: I don't think it would be strategically wise to say here. But there are definitely people working on it.

Laura: Also we have this. [*Someone starts passing a printed version of the first proposal around the room; the spokes all seem to already have one*]

Woman: Was there a proposal to talk to the Band Council?

Laura: Actually, I think that's all we have now. You can offer friendly amendments—but, right now, let's first move to concerns...

Enos: Hi, I'm Enos and I'm speaking for the Ya Basta! Collective, along with NYC DAN. I've heard two concerns from New York folk: First, that the original proposal to just go and cross, from before the delegation came yesterday, is still on the table, and no one's discussing it; second, that it might be too difficult to make a decision once we get there.

Enos, is a radical cartoonist from New York, fortyish, with a long blonde ponytail and only the faintest trace of a Brooklyn accent. How he ended up our spoke is unclear to me; it's not clear to what degree the Ya Basta! Collective even exists, at this point, though by now I notice there's now maybe a dozen Yabbas in the room. It seems we're reconstituting ourselves, at least as an affinity group. At first, though, I'm too busy taking notes to participate much.

Laura: Well, in that case, can someone restate the original plan?

Woman: [*reading off the handout*] That the caravan proceeds to the fish-fry; we meet there at around 12 noon; listen to two or three speakers and any other events our hosts have arranged; then, at 4PM, after we eat, we return to our vehicles, go to bridge (keeping one lane of the highway open as the Band Council has requested so emergency vehicles and so forth can pass through), meet Canadians at the center, mix together with them, proceed to the other side, and together approach customs.

Laura: Are there any other proposals that needs to be on the plate?

[*Apparently not*]

Mark: Okay, so the first proposal we've heard tonight is go to the fish-fry, keep contact with our allies in Akwesasne, reassess our support, reconvene the spokes, and decide there how to proceed. At any rate, that's how it stands now—tonight we can certainly add further elaborations to it.

[*Spokescouncil members raise hands*]

Woman: I have a point of process: are we now trying to come to consensus on this proposal?

Mark: No, we're not trying to come to consensus, but just to get a feeling for, I guess, which one to start with...

[*Three hands shoot up around the table*]

Woman: Maybe it would be better to start with a straw poll to see where we're at, which proposal most of us are leaning to, then do a breakout so that spokes can consult with their affinity groups about how to proceed from there?

Mark: No, I think we really need to flesh this out. There will be sort of a breakout later, when we eat. Then we can all confer in more detail with our affinity groups.

Tony: If we did hold a straw poll, would that be of everyone in the room, or just of spokes?

Mark: I was assuming just the spokes. Unless someone wants to propose we open it up?

[*No such suggestion emerges. Until...*]

Enos: I'm concerned that this room really represents the bulk of the group that's actually going to go. In which case we probably should just sound out everyone now that we have them in one place; because the more time goes by, the more people are likely to start drifting away. So the sooner we can confer with our groups, the better.

[*Much twinkling*]

Laura: Okay, I'm seeing a lot of support for that suggestion. We'll do it that way.

Woman: Could you read through each proposal first?

Mark: Good, we'll get a sense of the room, then have a quick breakout.

Laura: How long a breakout are people suggesting? I'm seeing two minutes... five minutes... ten... No, please, not the room, just the spokes... Okay, then, the feeling seems to be for ten.

Mark: Proposal #1 then is to go to the fish-fry and then decide; #2 is to go to the fish-fry, don't cross, but invite other Mohawks to go with us to another crossing; #3 is the original plan where we all meet at the center of the bridge and try to overwhelm customs.

Laura: I see three hands of spokes who wish to say something. [*Makes a stack*]

Man with Blonde Dreads: I want to put out a proposal that we not go to the fish-fry at all and find an altogether different spot to cross.

Laura: Is there any reason this didn't come up earlier?

Dreads: The matter was just brought to my attention.

Woman in Yellow: My understanding is that this is supposed to be a gathering just outside the reservation for us to meet with our allies, but also rally for community—Shawn was saying that it was going to be “child friendly,” a kind of party with balloons and games—an opportunity for them to hear us talk about free trade and then for us to mostly listen. Also, they're making us vegan food—traditional corn chowder—in addition to the fish. Which is amazing in itself. I've never heard of such a thing.

Laura: I can see there's a lot of energy here, but... someone has a process point over there. Yes?

Man: Yes, it's about that last proposal. If I'm not mistaken, we called this particular spokescouncil to discuss plans for Cornwall. Now, of course, none of us are under any obligation to go to Cornwall if we don't want to go, but if someone wants to talk about not going to Cornwall at all, shouldn't he withdraw that from this spokes and simply call for a different spokes for people who don't want to go?

Laura: Hmmm. [*to Dreads*] Do you in fact want to withdraw the proposal? Or not?

Dreads: Yes, I'd like to strike it then.

Mark: OK, any more clarification needed on first proposal?

Woman: If we did hold a spokescouncil in Akwesasne, would the spokes there include Mohawks?

[Much discussion. It's not clear anyone knows.]

Enos: Ya Basta! have just passed information to me that there will be some members of the Band Council at the fish-fry.

Neala: The first proposal says, if we go, we should be "open in our minds" about what to do next. But, like Enos, I would really prefer the decision to be made earlier. We have no idea what things will be like there, whether we'll even be able to hold a spokes.

Mark: Okay, but technically we're still back on clarifying questions about the first proposal, not concerns.

Laura: Also, the crowd should not be speaking directly to spokes. The facilitator should. I know it sounds constrictive, but if we don't do it that way, the spokes can end up feeling ganged up on.

Woman in Yellow: I want to clarify my proposal (that's proposal #1 now). What we're saying is the fact that Mohawks are willing to make us vegan food is an amazing, unprecedented show of hospitality. We *must* come.

Mark: So far, I'm not hearing any clarifying questions but only concerns and supporting arguments. Can I take that to mean we're moving on to concerns?

Laura: I'm informed the answer to "will Mohawks be involved in the spokescouncil" is "if they want to."

[She begins writing on one of the sheets of butcher paper on the wall, starting a column labeled "concerns."]

Woman: Oops. I still have one clarifying question. Would it be impolite to go to the fish-fry and not to cross? Or has this already been asked, and Mac said it wouldn't be?

Man: Also the idea of reconvening the spokes there, does that...

Mark: I will interpret this question as a concern, now.

Man: ...would it go against respect?

Woman: Also, Justin just told me that there will be people coming from all over the Northeast who will be coming straight to Akwesasne, without passing through Burlington. Maybe several hundred.

Mark: That's an appropriate use of point of information, but I'm still looking for any clarifying questions or concerns, here.

Enos: Concerning the first proposal: what will be the criteria for calling off the action?

Woman in Yellow: If people from the community don't come, don't speak to us... If we get a feeling we're not wanted, then we leave as soon as we can.

Man: If we do cross, will that mean going through customs?

Another man: Is it that we don't want to do anything on our own—it's all up to them? We don't want to do an independent disruption?

Fred: And, if we're turned away, will we then go to an alternate site?

Woman in Yellow: The question was, what kind of border crossing will happen with each proposal? In the case of mine, #1, I think the answer can only be: whatever sort the Mohawks propose. Lucy, you've been in negotiations with people in Akwesasne. What do you think?

Lucy: I've heard no guidelines yet. Other than nonviolence.

Man: Mac told me it would be considered disrespectful if we just go to the fish-fry and then leave immediately.

Woman: If we go to the border, is it all or nothing? What if some of us get through and not others? Do we split up, or do we all turn back in solidarity?

Woman in Yellow: That's a logistical decision; I think we're doing logistical proposals after we finish this part.

Mark: So are there any other clarifying questions or concerns about proposal #1? No? Okay. How about #2?

[*They restate the proposal*]

Enos: How would this be consistent with following the lead of Mohawk security?

Mark: Okay, that's a concern.

[*Laura writes it down*]

Nancy: Hi, I'm Nancy from Pittsburgh. What does it mean to "invite" the Mohawks to cross with us elsewhere? Are we going to sit and strategize with them, or just bring the proposal to them already made? Because, if the former, there's not much difference between the two proposals.

Woman in Blue [*who brought the proposal*]: To me that's kind of a question of semantics. I don't know, but we'll tell them they're welcome to come with us.

Nancy: But the idea is we come with a preset plan?

Woman in Blue: I don't see any other way to do it.

Laura: Okay, so we come with a predetermined plan.

Woman in Blue: Due to the situation, many of the people here have no other chance—so I would definitely say "all or nothing." The first person who's turned back, the rest of us go too, in solidarity.

[*Many twinkles*]

This was key: the emerging plan was to overwhelm the border post with sheer numbers, and that would only work if we insisted everyone go through together. So there was some sort of emerging consensus. This having been established, though, we all broke up to consult with our spokes over dinner.

The remains of NYC Ya Basta! was assembled in one corner of the room, with plastic plates full of some kind of vegan couscous and paper cups full of apple cider. It was 7PM. This was, I discovered, the first time that our collective had actually met, in any capacity, since the last abortive training. Moose was gone, but otherwise it was mainly the DAN people—the hardcore faction, never large, had by now completely disappeared. We went over the three proposals quickly and decided that, if we did go, which we probably would, it would be best to stick with the original plan and try to cross at Akwesasne. Proposal #1 felt too weak. Proposal #2 we could keep as a backup if things went wrong. There was also a strong feeling we should support the "all or nothing" principle. We empowered Enos to block any proposal that did not include it. Enos returned to the table and I got some more food, and tried to track down the people I'm going to be staying with to make sure of my housing situation.

A few minutes later, I ran into Kitty from Connecticut, who asked about the Ya Basta! crack-up. It was all very irritating to her, she remarked, as a representative of what's probably the second largest Ya Basta! collective on the East Coast. "I mean, I recognize that the gender dynamics were fucked up. But just throwing up your hands and running off like that. Where does that leave us? Anyway, I have an idea. We still have all the gear lying around. Why don't we try to have a meeting of everyone who was intending to be part of a Ya Basta! contingent and see what

sort of resources we still have, what sort of numbers? Try to see if we can't still pull something together?"

I said it sounded like an excellent idea to me.

Finally, anyway, I had a project. There was an empty conference room right next to the antechamber, with tables already arranged in a square. We located paper and a magic marker, put up a notice that there would be a Ya Basta! meeting at 10:15, then go off to start alerting possible interested parties.

By the time I got back to the main room and my note-taking, at 7:35PM, things were getting uglier. Apparently the straw poll had split fairly evenly between the three proposals, providing little guidance on how to proceed. Laura was writing concerns, one at a time, on the wall behind her, trying to see what the sticking points are, whether a proposal could be patched together that incorporated all of them. It was beginning to look more and more though like we would end up backing #3—the new argument being that, if we were to show up and not attempt to cross, we would be insulting the Warriors who had arranged the crossing.

Enos: Look, we're never going to be able to do anything that won't offend someone. And, yes, sometimes that person who we're going to offend *will* be a member of an oppressed group. Maybe we should just get over it.

Laura: Could you speak more clearly, so I can write?

Mark: Also, we've been hearing a lot of the same points made over and over, so let me ask you: If you're on the stack, but someone else voices your concern before you do, please don't repeat it. Just pass and let the next person speak.

Woman in Yellow: Well, in response to the question, proposal #2 was proposed in response to concerns of people last night. Maybe Russell can enlarge on why I feel it crucial to attend the fish-fry. Russell?

Russell: I fear there's a lot of confusion about First Nations. In my Nation, if a warrior society was to invite you formally, and offered food and a prized dish, if you were to reject it, that would be the utmost disrespect. I would strongly urge you to support the Warrior Society, as they'll be on the forefront of struggle, and I'll go representing my society as well. In my society, there are also "progressives" claiming to speak for all, but the traditionalists should always be the strongest voice.

Man: I feel it's very important when we get there to see what kind of support we really have in the community before we commit ourselves.

Another man: My affinity group absolutely won't get through customs. I am still waiting to find out whether we're being asked to or not.

Mark: Point of information: are there are other spokescouncils, other actions, for those who don't want to go to Cornwall? Is anyone organizing alternatives? No?

All right, are there other concerns?

Woman: What will happen to any other people who come to the fish-fry *if* we go off?

Neala: In response to Enos's point earlier: if we have to offend anyone, it shouldn't be our allies.

[*Scattered applause*]

Man: As far as I'm concerned, this whole process is racist. We should have been talking to all parties from the start. It's unfortunate how we've allowed ourselves to be misled by people downplaying the conflict in the community, and I know it's unfair to say any *one* person is racist,

but a lot of the points I've been hearing here are just bullshit. I'm not saying we should go home, or not go, but I really feel obliged to point this out.

Laura: Okay, can I ask that we not identify anyone else's point as "bullshit" or do similar emotional spin-work? Look, we're all frayed. But we have to remember why we're here: We're here because we're all trying to figure out the best thing to do in a difficult situation. Also, I'm a little worried people are behaving more irritably because they're hungry. So, people, if your spoke has not been fed yet, check with them, there's still plenty of food.

Enos: Look, I'm sorry if I've said anything that offended anyone. I understand that we're all here for the right reasons. I never meant to imply otherwise.

Mark: We must give each other the benefit of the doubt for honesty and good intentions. Consensus is not the same as majority rule; it's not a competition. We are all working together to figure out the right thing to do.

So, that being said: are there other concerns about proposal #2?

Ariel: Should I read the statement in which we explain to our Mohawk allies why we would be crossing elsewhere, and inviting them to come along?

Mark: Well that sounds relevant, but I think it would be more appropriate to read it later on.

Woman in Yellow: I'm concerned that making such an invitation to the Mohawks would be interpreted as contradicting the original idea of our supporting them. Now we're inviting them to dismiss their own action?

Laura: [still looking at the list of "concerns" on the wall] Will this fit into the category of going to their land and ignoring their initiative? Because that concern has already been raised.

Woman in Yellow: For me, it would be the ultimate negation of why I came here, which was to support *them*.

Enos: If people have worked out alternative locations, I'd hope we'll hear about them. I keep pointing out that both #1 and #2 presuppose an alternative route but does one even exist? We *can't* just improvise this later. We need a plan!

Woman: Remember, the reason it first seemed #2 was most desirable was because we don't have a clear sense of what the community there wants. I came here to support Mohawks, but clearly there's a diversity of desires. And some of the concerns I've heard ring deeply. I'm swayable...

This could be going on forever. Some insist they are here to support the Mohawk Nation as a whole, and wonder how to do it. Others are here to support our allies, even though it's not clear who or how many they actually are. Organizers are using cell phones to try to contact Shawn and the Boots family, occasionally getting through long enough to make additional clarifications.

Sizing up the room again, I'm beginning to understand what the problem is. This isn't just an ordinary crowd of activists. Or even anarchists. It has a distinctive Black Bloc feel. Warcry and Target's call on the IMC had been far more effective than any of us had anticipated: just about every anarchist who knew for sure they would not be able to get through the border legally, some from as far as LA, were now stuck here in Burlington. On the one hand, there was a strong contingent—Twinkie, for instance, was one of them—who felt that once we had committed to work with Mohawk activists on Mohawk issues, our responsibility was to do right by them, and if that meant we didn't get to go to Québec City, then so be it. For them, to think of the Mohawks instead as a means to an end, as a way to get through to Canada, was yet another example of arrogant, racist exploitation. Others felt equally strongly that they hadn't come all the way from Iowa or South Carolina just to have lunch on a reservation, where most people didn't seem to want them anyway.

I drift in and out, alerting people about the upcoming meeting. In the main room, the spokes are slowly moving towards accepting the original proposal, but no one is particularly happy about it. At 9:48, Enos is almost shouting. “How, exactly, has this plan totally changed in the last two hours? Now they’re asking us to submit ourselves to *customs!*” Mac is insisting that the plan hasn’t changed, the idea is and has always been to overwhelm customs. By having people come from both sides of the bridge, by having sufficient numbers, we can create a logistical nightmare for them and, eventually, they’ll just wave us through.

Mac: Maybe I’m dense but I don’t see how that’s different than what Russell is saying. And I don’t think the Mohawks will be upset with the idea that we all go through together. Yes, they can detain people at border posts, but it’s not all that common, and if we try to get through at another point along the border, we could end up in jail there too.

Mark: All right, so the plan is we try the original plan, but we have a backup. I see a lot of nods whenever I hear the words “all or nothing,” so do I take it that’s our decision too. If anyone is turned back at first, we all leave and fall back on our contingency action?

[*Huge twinkle*]

Mark: So that’s the proposal. Are there any more concerns.

[*No*]

All right, we can finally move to consensus. Stand asides?

[*No*]

Blocks?

[*No*]

There we have it.

[*Huge cheer rings out*]

Someone: Let’s have a round of applause for our facilitators. You guys did an amazing job.

The plan being approved, we move to the next leg, which is logistics. There are two new facilitators. There are speakers from Legal, Medical, and Transport. The legal team starts handing out forms. I head out to meet Kitty and prepare for what everyone’s now calling the “10:15 meeting.”

“Plan B”

Then, something interesting starts happening. Somehow, it’s not at all clear when, the plan for a Ya Basta! meeting transmogrifies into something else. It becomes a meeting, sponsored by Ya Basta!, for everyone who feels stifled by the structure of the spokescouncil, and who wants to talk about strategies for actually getting through. When I first walk into the room, I’m startled: there’s at least sixty people already around the table, a pretty substantial chunk of the activists still in the building, and more trickling in steadily. To some degree, I think many came just for an excuse to sound off. The first ten minutes were an endless gripe session, with an emphasis on just how little they or some members of their affinity group were prepared to submit themselves to customs (endless priors, outstanding warrants, etc.). There was one girl who was seventeen years old, who had run away from home a year before. She and her family had since reconciled, but she was still officially listed as a missing person; presumably, if she tried to cross the border, not only would she be held, but anyone in the same car could be arrested as her kidnappers. Many are especially bitter after having abandoned other, perfectly viable options, such as unpatrolled stretches of forest or obscure rural roads, or chances to cross the border weeks before. Everyone accepts that, yes, we have no choice but to attend the fish-fry. Solidarity is important. Anyway we

made a commitment and we have to respect our allies, even if, as some suspect, they hadn't been completely honest with us. But just what are our chances of overwhelming customs, anyway? Who has real information? And if it's not possible, isn't it about time we start working on some kind of Plan B?

I run off to locate Eric, who was, at the time, NYC DAN's de facto media working group (much as I was for Ya Basta!, except he had some idea what he was doing). Eric had been keeping up with developments from the tech booth, and he gave me a quick briefing as to what he understands the official plan is now. After the fish-fry, we will all march to the bridge. It will be a peaceful march, with 50–100 Warriors and their families, including children, mingling together with activists. Then, hopefully, we overwhelm them. A lot of people are skeptical it'll work. But it seems the best we can come up with.

As the gripe session continues, I dart in and out trying to find people (Twinkie passes by: "What's this?" "It's a meeting of people who want to prioritize actually getting to Québec. Um, want to come?" "No!" She rolls her eyes in exasperation.)

Finally, I locate Mac, who looks jolted to discover upwards of eighty people in a meeting he didn't even know was happening. "Um, what is the relation of this meeting with the spokescouncil still going on in the next room?"

People ignore the question and launch into questions of their own. One Black Bloc kid from the West Coast with bad teeth is asking what is likely to happen if someone is detained:

Bad Teeth: If someone is detained trying to pass through the border—which I would definitely be, if I submit myself to customs—what's most likely to happen? What will the Warriors do?

Mac: I would advise you to stay towards the back. If we overwhelm customs, then you won't need your ID. Otherwise, people in front will be turned back and we'll all turn back in solidarity.

Bad Teeth: But what would the Mohawk Warriors do? I *know* I'll be towards the back. I don't need you to tell me that. That's obvious. I want to know if the Mohawks have told us what *they'd* do?

Mac: They'll cross along with us. Obviously, they're not going to attack the border post or anything like that, but as a collective we need to protect each other and, if they turn people back, then fuck 'em. We'll just go somewhere else.

Someone: I don't get it. The Band Council asked us not to block the bridge, to keep a lane open. If we're going to try to overwhelm customs, we'll obviously be effectively blocking the bridge. So we're already defying their will. Why would taking it a little further be so different?

Mac: Look, I don't have a magic answer, all I know is that as a collective we're stronger than as individuals.

Someone: Yeah. And also a hell of a lot slower.

Kitty: My personal feeling is that we're here to come up with an alternative plan of what to do if we get turned away—because if we say "all or nothing," then, let's be honest here: we're probably going to get turned back pretty quickly. Does anyone want to speak to that?

Someone else: Well, does anyone have a map?

Mac: I'll go get one.

I step out with Mac for a second as he does so, just to check in. I can hardly imagine what a nightmare this all must be for him. "The problem" he says, "is they all want magic answers. There aren't any magic answers. Anyway, what exactly *is* the relation of that meeting to the spokescouncil?"

I say “I think people realized that, at the rate the spokes is going, there’s no way we’re going to have a plan down by 11PM when the building closes. So they decided to constitute themselves as an autonomous working group of people who really wanted to get through.”

“Oh. Well, I guess there’s no reason they *couldn’t* do that.”

“Anarchy in action.”

“Uh huh.”

Before long, everyone inside is looking at maps and discussing logistics, but we hardly get started before someone sticks his head in to tell us it’s 11PM and we’re supposed to be out of the building. People gather on the steps. As cars drive by playing Ramones songs, Eric tries to kidnap me to join with a couple other members of the newly created Media Working Group, to blast-fax some kind of statement from Russell. I tell him I can’t, I had promised to meet up with my housemates at 11:30. The media team heads off to find an open coffee shop. By 11:30, people are still drifting out of the building (no one had actually come to lock it yet) and I finally find my people—Rufus, Warcry, Chango, plus now also Betty the Dancer—who it turns out have all been sitting for some time in a park not far away, under an elm tree, sharing clove cigarettes, waiting for our ride. Kitty, and a large cluster of mostly black-clad activists, set off in another direction, to work on our Plan B. They look rather obvious with their two giant red-and-black flags.

Finally our car arrives, with two women in it already. We all somehow manage to squeeze in.

Most of us are just exhausted. The driver, Sara, a woman in her late twenties, is venting about hygiene issues. She launches into a long diatribe about activists who refuse to wash.

“Oh, yes, the ‘Cruddies,’” said Rufus, agreeably.

“Maybe I’m just old, but I think it’s unsociable. It’s disrespectful of others.”

“What cruddies?” I hadn’t noticed anyone who gave off a noticeable odor at the spokes.

“You know, all those kids with the dirty dreadlocks and crusty clothes, who are pleased with their own body odors? They’re all like eating beans and breaking wind and smelling and refusing to wash?”

“Oh.” Since there seemed little point in arguing, I remark that several groups representing people of color that DAN had worked with in Philadelphia had always made an issue of that sort of thing. “Smelly white anarchists” had become a kind of code word—a form of racial privilege being waved in their faces.

But Sara is not much interested in the racial aspects. “Don’t get me wrong,” she continued. “I understand the appeal. When I was sixteen I was exactly the same way. I was in love with my own personal smell. It was like... well, natural. That’s what human beings are actually supposed to smell like. There’s a certain kind of integrity, I do understand that. But come on! There comes a point where you have to start thinking about other people.” It emerges that, after living for some years as a squatter, Sara had finally gotten a real job in town, with some sort of nonprofit. With a salary, benefits, everything. She was still trying to get used to the new life.

“It’s a phase, I guess. I mean, are there any unwashed activists who *aren’t* teenagers?”

Her friend Janna, a Catholic Worker from Denver, however, is very much on the racial issue. “I’m still trying to figure out if I should be really angry about this whole thing. I think I really should. The whole process was completely racist.”

“Racist in what way?”

“Racist because we were just working with one tiny group, and didn’t even try to contact anyone else in the community. It was always ‘the Mohawks’ say this, ‘the Mohawks’ want that.”

As if they're all like one person. Really they were just talking to two or three people the whole time. Notice how we were even doing it in the spokescouncil. 'The Mohawks.'

Now, this is cutting a bit close to home. "Okay," I said, "you certainly have a point about the language, I'll give you that, but..." I paused for thought. "Well, what *would* you have wanted the organizers to do?"

"They should have talked to everyone in the community."

"And went behind our allies' backs? I don't know. It's really easy to start throwing around words like 'racism' when somebody fucks up. But what if we were dealing with a community of, oh, I don't know, French people? Or Swedes or something? Would we have behaved any different? Wherever we go, we're always going to be talking to the most radical elements in the community (and actually, in this case, it was them that contacted us). If we had started making independent overtures to Mohawk politicians behind their backs, people would be saying we were racist for doing *that*."

"Well," she concluded, "maybe the racist accusation is unfair. But I'm still angry."

"I'm not real happy myself."

Later That Night

Eventually, they dropped us off at the home of our host, an elderly Quaker woman who had volunteered her house for activists. It was a cozy, carpeted two-story house with a terrace so full of potted plants it was a little like a greenhouse, and a parrot flying around free of its cage. About eight or nine people arranged sleeping bags on the floor. We commiserated over the death of Joey Ramone. Warcry won permission to use the computer in the study upstairs; a while later, she asked me to come up and look at the draft of a story she'd been working on about Timothy McVeigh. Eventually, I drifted downstairs again and ended up in a fairly long conversation with our host about the Society of Friends. Her husband had recently died, but she had children and grandchildren in Burlington and the vicinity. She was from an old Quaker family and had been active in the Church and local activism all her life. So is it true, I asked, that Quaker meetings work by consensus? Because anarchists' do too, and I'd heard that ultimately a lot of what we do was inspired by the Society of Friends. She launched into a fairly detailed description of how Quaker meetings operated, interrupted only occasionally by wondering comments by me ("Wow, that's so similar."). People, she said, sit in a circle. If the spirit moves them to they speak, proposals are made and any one person there can, in theory, block a proposal if they feel sufficiently strongly about the matter. Blocks rarely actually happen, but, in principle, anyone has the power to derail any proposal and the fact that everyone knows that they can is itself enough to ensure they act responsibly. Yes, I said. Precisely the way we do it, too. Giving everyone the power to block is like telling people, "We dare you to act responsibly." And, generally speaking, unless you're dealing with a total wingnut, that's all it takes.

She continued: in a Quaker meeting itself, there's always a facilitator, who is not supposed to give his own opinion, but simply run the meeting, listen, and repeat if something needs to be clarified. (Uh, huh. That's just like us too.) Participants can speak only to the facilitator. There's no cross-talk.

"Wait, you mean no one is allowed to speak to each other at all?"

"No. Conversation is for secular events. A meeting is a sacred event, so you can only speak to the facilitator."

“Oh, that’s... really different. In our meetings the facilitators keep stack—that is, watch for who wants to speak and keeps count of whose turn it is—but it’s not like you can only speak to them. Usually, you are speaking to everyone, but you *are* allowed to make a direct response to someone else’s point. So, you can’t do that in a Quaker meeting?”

“No, you can only speak to the facilitator.”

“Why?”

“Because otherwise it would be a secular event.”

I reflected for a moment—between the Thanksgiving ritual, Russell’s prayer, the Quaker notion of meetings as spiritual events—whether there was some significance to the fact that the “process” anarchists are so obsessed with is always, elsewhere, seen as partaking of the sacred. Creating accord is the creation of society. Society is god. Or, perhaps, god is our capacity to create society. Consensus is therefore a ritual of sacrifice, the sacrifice of egoism, where the act brings into being that very god. But I was far too tired, and my brain too fuzzy, to do more than make a mental note of it. Anyway, one thing I did know is that, if this action was going to be anything like the other ones I’d been to, I’d be getting at best two or three hours sleep for the next few nights, and maybe nothing. I mumbled some pleasantries and went to bed.

AKWESASNE

Thursday, April 19

The next morning we got up, did something or other in the IMC in Burlington, picked up something else at the Quaker Meetinghouse, full of activist magazines and flyers, and set off on the caravan. We’re only rolling at 10:46AM.

There are five Ya Basta! vans out of the twenty or so that make up the caravan, which is followed by a rented bus. Wacry had brought huge tinsel streamers from some IMC event to festoon the vehicle. As long as it’s going to be a festive event, she says, we might as well look the part.

The caravan has a comms system, walkie-talkies distributed every couple vehicles or so, and we have one, but the comms people spend most of their time monitoring the state troopers who escort us out of town, and appear, periodically, with cameras filming us at different points along the way. Aside from that there’s not much to communicate but periodic messages like “gorgeous waterfall coming up on the left” or “good music on 105.7.”

In the van, I’m flipping through an endless stack of documents downloaded from listservs and web pages before I left. There’s one about the difference between American and Canadian legal systems and how it might affect protesters. There’s a document about how to deal with the effects of tear gas and pepper spray, and two different documents about hypothermia. There’s a document with pointers on how not to make an ass of yourself on a Mohawk reservation, and another, meant to give activists some background on nationalist sensitivities in Québec. Unlike Montréal, the average man or woman on the street in Québec City cannot be assumed to speak English. They will not take offense if your French is poor, it is much better to make the attempt than to simply accost them in English. My favorite is a circular by the “Québec Medical Fashion Brigade” with detailed advice on clothing:

Today’s well-dressed militant in Québec City for the Summit is wearing long underwear made of the new synthetic materials like soft warm polyester that WICKS away sweat from your skin.

Much of the Summit's perimeter is perched on a hill, and climbing up streets to reach it, or running here and there, will make you sweat. And sweat next to skin can make you cold...

You should have many loose layers that can be removed if you get hot, and put back on when cold... Your outer layer should be water proof. We HIGHLY recommend a cheap rain suit — not only will this keep you dry against the rain or snow, but also keep those nasty pollutants like tear gas and pepper spray from being absorbed by your clothes. As a bonus, it will block the wind too. If you wear fleece, make sure it is beneath your rain gear if you are in a chemical weapon risk zone (near the police). Pepper spray & tear gas gets sponged up by fleece, and then released over time into your face. Yuck! For that extra sexy look, try out those cheapo translucent ponchos folded up in a little plastic bag—it will look like a condom, and you will get extra kudos for your safe sex message!

We understand the objections you might have to not being able to get rain gear in basic black. However, your plastic rain suit is a perfect medium for spray painting (black, right?), magic markers, and all your stickers. Black garbage bags can also work against water and chemicals...

There follow suggestions about gas masks, goggles, the use of bandanas soaked in vinegar as protection against tear gas. I check myself for extra socks, layers, etc. The caravan is moving almost unimaginably slowly, something like 45 MPH on a two-lane highway, and no one is quite sure why.

"I don't suppose we could at least put on our Ya Basta! outfits for the fish-fry?" someone asks. "It'll probably be our last chance, since there's no way we're getting any of that through customs."

"I don't think so. Mac was saying if we even show up looking like we're prepared for action, it might be taken as aggressive."

"Well... maybe we actually *will* overwhelm them at the bridge."

No one seems to think this is particularly likely.

Hours go by. We move to small rural roads, rolling past abandoned farms and gun shops, going even slower. Someone is explaining his activism all goes back to a childhood realization that the Power Rangers were really evil. Periodically cops film us from the side of the highway, some in uniform, others plainclothes. When we pause for a pit-stop by a river, most of us come out in masks, and some of the men gallantly form a human wall to allow the women some privacy from the cops on the other side of the road, who insist on trying to film them while they pee. At least there are no roadblocks. Finally, after a seeming eternity, maybe around 4PM, the radio crackles "we have a visual on Akwesasne."

Akwesasne Itself

There was not, as it turns out, anyone to greet us at the main entrance to the reservation, though this might, I reflect, have something to do with the fact that we are by now something like three hours late for a party that was supposed to start at 1PM. Anyway, the scene is desultory. Everything about Akwesasne seems desultory. The caravan proceeds through the reservation to occasional curious stares but there is almost no one even on the porches.

Finally, we pull into a very large space of grass with tables set out for the fish-fry. There are no children. Actually, there is hardly anyone at all. Just a few dozen activists who had been waiting around since noon, a few members of the press, and what looks like four actual Mohawks. Later it grows to six. The food, served on paper plates, is dished out by what appears to be a skeleton crew; everything is minimal; the Boots family is there (Stacey does indeed have his hair cut in a

Mohawk, which is somehow strangely gratifying). There are a couple other Warriors who show up now and then to talk to them, apparently scouting police positions over the hill, but that's about it. It is obvious we have been totally outmaneuvered. The community is absent. Even the location turns out to be an empty lot that is, we later learn from one of the journalists, technically just over the line and not quite on the Reservation itself.

Several activists wander around trying to locate someplace to pee; there are no porta-potties or obvious outhouses, and no one is sure whether it would be considered desecrating Indian land. Finally, someone tells them that the chiefs have said it's okay to go in the underbrush, as long as we're relieving ourselves in the opposite direction from the Reservation. I grab some fish with Warcry, until someone calls us over to speak to a news team from PBS *Frontline*. Warcry shifts instantly, effortlessly, from grumpy to passionate, extemporizing a little speech on the connection between indigenous oppression and the FTAA. I stand by, slightly bemused, and make a little statement of my own about solidarity, then wander off again.

A little ways off, I find Twinkie sitting by herself, on a wooden bench, crying.

I sit down next to her. "What's the matter, Twinkie? I mean, I'll admit the scene is a little depressing..."

"No, it's not that," she said, trying to smile, even as the tears continued. "It's the fish." There are remains of a pickerel still on her plate.

"The fish?"

"I'm a vegetarian. My family is from Thailand. We were brought up very strict Buddhists."

"Then, why did you eat it? I'm pretty sure they had a vegan option. Cornmeal porridge, no?" Twinkie was, though I hesitated to point it out at that moment, something of an expert at extracting the fish and crab meat from dumpster-dived sushi rolls.

"Well, I thought it would be a gesture of solidarity. After all, here we are on their land. And they made them for us specifically. And, when I was actually eating it, it was okay. But afterwards I just started crying."

I considered making some kind of philosophical observation about how everybody was feeling caught in double-binds of late, but decided not to. Instead I said: "Really? I didn't know your folks were from Thailand. I thought I'd heard someone say you were from the Philippines!"

"Huh? No! We're from Thailand."

"Were you born there?"

"I was pretty young when my family came over."

There is a brief ceremony, starting with Stacey Boots giving a little speech from the top of the van. He talks about the history of Native Americans welcoming and protecting foreigners who came with peaceful intentions. "And now, I guess, we'll protect you." A Latina activist from New York gets up and gives a speech about how the FTAA is just the latest manifestation of a five-hundred-year campaign of conquest and genocide that began with Christopher Columbus. A folksinger climbs on top of the van with a guitar and plays something called "The Indian Wars." After one or two spontaneous spoken-word performances from activists, the caravan reassembles and we head up the ramps toward the "toll plaza" where, apparently, we're going to actually try to cross the border.

Border Action Manqué

Our van is toward the front of the caravan, maybe five cars from the front: me, Warcry, Betty, Rufus, Sasha the documentary filmmaker, and his girlfriend Karen, who is helping him on his video project, since Sasha is at this point going basically as an activist. Karen, on the other hand, is nothing if not a media professional, armed with expensive equipment, and will be documenting everything he does.

There was a long and extremely slow-moving line of vans leading to the border station, which was a cookie-cutter, white, one-story structure with what looked like at least a hundred police officers of various sorts gathered outside, behind numerous barricades. So much for the idea of proceeding directly to the center of the bridge and overwhelming them on the other side. Everyone was going to be checked on this side. We had promised to keep a lane open so emergency vehicles could get through, but it immediately filled with people on foot. At first, as activists began marching up the ramp, the event had some of the quality of a festive march: there was someone on stilts, there were drums, scattered musical instruments, a few attempts at rousing chants. But it was entirely unclear whether this was actually an action. Then, everything stopped. Warcry goes out to scout and never returns. I stick my head out to see if I can catch any signs of our supposed Warrior escort, and aside from one or two who had been on the podium, didn't see anyone. Certainly no families.

Almost nothing we had been promised had actually materialized.

Betty heads off for a cigarette break, then returns. I end up in a long conversation with her about gender issues, the disastrous Ya Basta! trainings, and the resultant crack-up. "It's not like I actually *want* to cut off a bunch of little boys' penises," she says. "I mean, I understand that little boys need their penises. I really don't mind if they feel the need to wave them around a bit. All I wanted was to get a word in edgewise. But, as soon as I raise the issue, they all start screaming at each other, and now they won't even speak to each other and I feel like it's all my fault."

"Were they really screaming at each other?"

"Okay, maybe not literally screaming..."

After a while. "So what do you think? Should I go try to find out what happened to Warcry?"

"Sure," says Betty. "We'll probably be sitting here for another hour one way or the other. Go stretch your legs. Catch some air. It'll be good for you."

Karen volunteers to come with me to see if she can get some useful footage. Sasha gives her a kiss and takes over driving.

I climb out and stroll up towards the toll plaza. As I pass, Moose is taking a cigarette break a couple vans up, looking sheepish, trying to avoid eye contact. There are no Mohawks anywhere in sight now. Neither is there any sign of postal workers, steelworkers, or in fact anyone at all on the Canadian side of the border—though there do seem to be a crowd of Mohawk teenagers behind a chainlink fence in what looks like a huge basketball court some ways beyond the border station, with Mohawk cops patrolling in front of them. A dense crowd of activists is assembled right in front of the border station; some angry, some hoping to talk their way through. There are flags and banners. One woman in black has climbed halfway up a traffic pole, drumming. Periodically, someone tries to start a collective chant. Bad Teeth tries jumping up and down starting a chant of "Days of Rage! Days of Rage!" and a few take it up, but it doesn't really catch on, and fades back into gripes and muttering.

Finally, I see the reason for the delay. The first van is stopped at the border post; the Canadian police have taken out every single bag that was in it and arranged them all on the asphalt, and seem determined to go through every object in every single one of them. Enos, the driver, was one of the first to submit himself to customs—probably not a good idea, since he had already been denied entry to Canada during the April 1st action two weeks before. After a few questions, his name is put through a computer and he’s asked to step into a shed-like structure to the side. A minute or two after that we see him being led to a police van, in plastic handcuffs, with a world-weary, exasperated look on his face, a kind of visual sigh.

Warcry is standing with Target and a small cluster of IMC journalists. “Did you see them take off Enos?”

“Yeah.”

“So why are we just standing here? I thought it was all or nothing? Let’s get the hell out of here and go to someplace we can actually cross.”

After a brief parley, we decide we need to do something more dramatic. We’ll gather together four or five people who are definitely not going to get through, but probably also won’t be actually arrested. Warcry and Target are probably known to every FBI agent in the US, but have no outstanding warrants; I am carrying no passport or official ID; Madhava and Jenka had been denied entry on previous occasions. We decide we’ll walk up and formally submit ourselves together. Then, when we’re turned back, we can try to turn the line around and head for another crossing.

Karen offers to document the event on video.

The five of us link arms and advance. Karen, looking every inch the professional videographer in a neat beige jacket, her blonde hair tied back, is filming us from up ahead as we advance.

As I step up, I try out a line that had first occurred to me in the van—more than anything else because I’m curious to see what the response will be. “I do hope you bear in mind,” I say to the first policeman, looking him in the eye, “that we’re only doing this to save your health care plans.”

“We’re not unaware of that,” he says. “That’s one reason we’ve decided to go so easy on you guys.”

Oh. Slightly surprised, I wait as they send us each to speak to a different officer. Warcry goes first. Then me. Suddenly I’m being interviewed by a beefy Canadian border officer in a flat white cap.

“Purpose of your trip to Canada?”

“I’m going to protest the FTAA conference in Québec City.”

“So, when was the last time you were in front of a judge?”

“A judge? Well, last year I was on jury duty for a couple weeks.”

Slight impatience. “You know what I mean.”

“As a defendant? Never. I’ve never stood before a judge accused of any crime.”

He nodded. “All right then.” Then gestured me on to a younger officer, a pimply kid who looked like he was fresh out of high school. The kid asked me for my passport.

“Sorry, I didn’t bring one.”

“Driver’s license?”

“No. I’m from New York. I don’t drive.”

Pause.

“A lot of people from New York don’t know how to drive.”

Karen has somehow talked her way over to the other side of the post and is now filming everything from Canada.

The kid is clearly a bit flustered. He goes off to confer with the beefy guy, who appears to be his commanding officer, then returns. “Well, what *do* you have, then?”

“I have a university ID,” I said, pulling it out of my wallet. It was, actually, a Yale faculty ID but nowhere on the card did it actually say “faculty.” He probably assumed, as most people did, that I was a grad student. He also didn’t seem to care. It had a picture and the picture looked like me.

“Okay,” he said.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean ‘okay.’”

I was startled. “You mean...?”

Pointing. “Just move along to that stop sign over there.”

“Wait... You mean I’m through?”

This was one outcome I had never anticipated. I had never even stopped to consider what might happen if I actually got through. The pimply officer was starting to look impatient. Karen was already over the border in Canada; there was an endless line of people waiting behind me, and equally endless-looking bridge in front.

“Well, look,” I said. “I have an agreement with my friends. I promised I wasn’t going without them. Can’t I just wait for them?”

“You can’t wait for them here,” he said. “This is the processing area. You’re going to have to wait for them there, in Canada.”

Since “Canada,” at this point, seems to consist of a short piece of tarmac eight or nine feet away, this doesn’t seem too inherently unreasonable. Karen comes with me, taking some wide-angle shots of the caravan, which is still immobile on the American side. I’m trying to figure out what happened to Target and Warcry, but they’re nowhere to be seen. I think they might have been taken inside for questioning. After a minute or two, though, another border policeman shows up to tell me “You can’t wait here inside the border post. If you’re going to wait for someone, you’ll have to walk over there to that stop sign,” pointing again to a sign by the edge of the road.

We comply. The stop sign, however, seems to be a very large stop sign, because it ends up being two or three times as far away as it had seemed from the border station. Now we’re on a stretch of asphalt far from anything and, for all my squinting, I can’t make out a thing that’s going on at the American side. There’s still a crowd of school kids behind the fence in the basketball court, and we wave to them, but we’re too far away to really see if they wave back.

It was at this point that the huge Mohawk cop with the taser shows up, driving a buggy. One could tell he was a Mohawk cop because on his shoulder is a patch reading “Akwesasne Mohawk Police.” Unlike the police at the border station, who ranged from businesslike to almost friendly, this one looks extremely unaccommodating. He informs us that we’re on reservation land and we’re going to have to move off it and start walking across the bridge. Karen points the camera at him—usually a fairly effective way to elicit better police behavior. He’s entirely unimpressed.

“I’m sorry, officer, you see we’re just here because the border people told us we had to...”

“You’re on Indian land! You’re not wanted by the community. We want you out. You will start moving immediately across the bridge.”

The presence of the taser struck me as a very compelling argument. Anyway, halfway up the access ramp there was another little post and I could make out a couple of activists—they could

only be activists, from the way they were dressed—milling about in the same sort of confusion as we.

“Well, you want to come along?” I asked Karen.

“Seems like I don’t have a lot of choice.”

“Well, presumably they’d let *you* back. And Sasha is still back with the caravan.”

“True. But Sasha would want me to at least try to get some footage from Québec City. I’ve actually several hours worth of blank tapes and batteries in my bag. And this might be our only chance for one of us to get there.”

We start walking up the ramp and discover that the activists we had seen there were, in fact, Kitty from Connecticut along with a couple of her fellow Yabbas—a slender, slightly effeminate Asian kid named Lee, a woman named Andrea—all looking as puzzled as we about having gotten through.

We started walking towards the bridge. After some small confusion, when one group of police told us we couldn’t enter the bridge, and another told us we couldn’t go back (and negotiating access to a bathroom at a small station at the base of the bridge) we took stock.

Needless to say all the Yabba gear was back in the van. I hadn’t even brought my shoulder bag, with my notebooks and other essentials—so convinced had I been that I would not get through. I had the one pocket notebook that was in my pocket at the time; a cell phone with maybe a couple hours juice (no recharger). Otherwise, I had basically what I was wearing: a black hoodie that claimed to have “arctic fill” lining, a black bandana in the pocket, military pants over thermal underwear, three different cashmere sweaters layered over a fairly nice red formal shirt (I find it is useful to have something presentable for passing through police lines). That was it.

My friends were in much the same fix. No one had any gear or baggage. Except Andrea who had a sleeping bag.

“So much for Ya Basta!” says Lee.

“Yeah, it looks like we’ll all be doing Black Bloc,” Kitty agrees.

“So we *are* going?”

Kitty gazes back towards the toll plaza. “Well, if we go back, what would that mean? The caravan is moving so slowly there’s no way we’ll be able to even try to cross again until sometime tomorrow.”

“There is a ‘Plan B’ though, isn’t there? I mean, you guys did come up with something after the spokes?”

“Well, yeah, that’s the thing. We did. We figured it was important to keep it secure, so only two people actually have the maps and know all the details. Problem is, one of them is me.”

“The best-laid plans of mice and men.” smiles Lee.

“Well, what’s the chance both of you got through?” I suggest.

Karen has gone off to shoot panoramic footage off the side of the ramp.

“Anyway, it’s not like it was all that amazing a plan. Probably anyone with a good map could have come up with it.”

We decide to at least try to check in with our affinity groups, but I’m the only one whose phone is working. Which is somewhat miraculous. Everyone else’s cell phone conked out hours before we even got to Akwesasne—no one was quite sure whether because of police interference or because we were just too far out in the boonies. I spend a few minutes trying the numbers for Betty, Rufus, and a variety of people on the legal team. In each case I’m sent immediately to

voicemail. The same thing happens when Kitty uses my phone to try to contact other members of her own affinity group.

Finally, she says, "I guess it's kind of obvious what we're going to do. We can stand here and agonize over it for another hour, and then go, or we can get going now. What do you say?"

"I'm game."

Everyone nodded.

And so we began to proceed across the bridge.

The Seaway International Bridge turned out to be almost three kilometers long, and was made up of two different structures, connected by a little island in the middle. The road was mostly empty. Very occasionally, a vehicle would pass by, usually a pickup truck. Occasionally, too, Mohawk police buggies zipped by, apparently just to keep us jumpy. We spent a lot of time gazing down into the St. Lawrence Seaway. The view was extraordinarily beautiful. There were inlets, islands, tiny little boats, chalet-like cabins here and there along the shore. Most of it gave a sense of pristine natural beauty, the contours of a coast hardly changed since the first arrival of human settlers ten thousand years ago. Intellectually, I knew this was anything but true: in fact, one of the themes the Mohawk organizers had wanted us to emphasize was environmental racism. There was a GM plant built right on the border of reservation land on the US side (in fact, I thought I could just about make it out in the mist), and the place was so consistently used for toxic dumping that mothers in Akwesasne were told not to breast-feed and babies were occasionally born with their intestines outside. But from the bridge, all this was almost impossible to imagine. It just looked grandiose, beautiful.

The sun was setting by the time we arrived in Cornwall.

CORNWALL

I'm still not sure what the town of Cornwall looks like; I never saw it. What I saw was a kind of loose mall at the end of the bridge, a small, low open space with retail outlets perched on eminences to either side. At the very foot of the bridge, we passed two lines of riot police, maybe forty of them in all, geared up and just standing there, facing a small crowd of perhaps a hundred or two hundred Canadian activists who were clearly the remnants of a much larger crowd. Some were masked. Most looked tired. Both sides seemed slightly ridiculous, dwarfed by the vastness of the bridge. We never saw the promised tea, but we did pass one banner from the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, welcoming us. Karen dutifully filmed it. Everywhere there were people with cameras but very few seemed to be our cameras. We passed Shawn Brant, standing on the back of a pickup truck making some sort of defiant declaration for Canadian television. He looked just like he did in the photographs.

Scattered among the Canadians were other Americans who, like us, were trying to come to terms with the fact that they had gotten through. Gradually, people began clustering, found a spot on a strip of damp grass near the highway to form a mini-spokes to assess our situation.

Our group split up temporarily to get food. I picked up a cheap chicken sandwich at a take-out joint up the hill, investigated the Walmart. I had never been in a Walmart before. It was vast. I picked up a small bottle of Tylenol with codeine, which I remembered one can get over the counter in Canada, figuring it might come in handy later on. Returning, I discovered the meeting in full session, with some forty American activists sitting in a circle, trying to put together a list of names to convey to Legal so people's affinity groups back in Akwesasne will know they're okay, they got through, and to go on without them. We have to hold the meeting masked because we're soon surrounded by TV cameras. When one extremely self-righteous CBC video journalist

refuses to stop filming people's faces, a few of us are finally obliged to strongly imply we might be inclined to spraypaint his lens. Karen films the confrontation, then uses her camera to document his every move as he eventually starts packing up his equipment. There's nothing that annoys TV journalists, she explains, more than filming *them*.

Finally I'm assigned to call in the list on my dying cell phone. I leave a recording on the legal office's machine in New York and a couple other places, and hope it somehow gets back to people.

By this time it's dark. The mall is almost empty. Even the cops are gone. There were a few vans when we arrived, most were already leaving during the spokes, including one or two full of Mohawk activists—almost everyone who was actually there at the fish-fry. Mac and Lesley appear and disappear. For a while, I'm afraid we won't find a ride, but we do, with some School of the Americas protesters, one of the only groups at Akwesasne whose vehicle actually got through. By 10PM we're on the road to Québec City.

CHAPTER 4: SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS, QUÉBEC CITY

At this point I'll return to diary mode. What follows is built up largely from notes quickly jotted at the time, fleshed out from memory and later checked against those of other participants, and published (usually web-published) firsthand accounts.

Friday, April 20, 2001

2:30AM

I have always had a stubborn inability to sleep in moving vehicles. Kitty and the Connecticut crew quickly pass out in the back of the van. Karen and I, insomniac, end up having a long conversation with Janna, the Catholic Worker from Denver, who is there with the SOA contingent. Janna is actually a pagan, but for radicals in that part of the country, she explains, there's not a lot of choices. "I'd have joined Pagan Worker if such a thing existed." She was gassed in Seattle and had been in and out of hospitals for six months afterwards. On the third day of the protests, she explained, they brought in the National Guard, who started using CS, a form of tear gas so powerful only the military is allowed to employ it (when the Serbian army used it against rebels in Kosovo, the US government called it a war crime). One pregnant woman lost her baby; another activist died of complications some months afterwards. Janna's doctors told her that her lungs had been seriously damaged, and that she should avoid any future exposure to such toxins at all cost.

"Which made her slightly crazy, I admit, to be going to Québec City. But some things are just too important."

5:30AM, We Arrive

The SOA people drop us off at Laval University, on the edge of the city. Both New York and Connecticut Ya Basta! already have sleeping spots reserved for us on the floor of the main gymnasium. A teenager working the late-night desk points us in the right direction—yes, he remarks, the university has been quite generous with their facilities. "They were afraid we'd occupy the campus."

The gym looks like it's about the size of a football field. Its shiny hardwood floor is covered with perhaps two thousand sleeping activists, arranged in geometrical clumps separated by walls of bags and backpacks. We pick our way through the bleachers (also covered with sleeping bodies), eventually locate our appointed spot, D17, which is sectioned off with white tape, and toss our meager possessions on the pile.

The Connecticut kids never go to sleep, though. After almost an hour setting up, washing, and conferring, Kitty announces: "I know it's really fucked up, but we've kind of decided we'd

better start looking for some gear or we're going to be completely useless on the streets today." The three of them, Kitty, Lee, and Andrea, have pooled and are counting out their money, which comes to around forty dollars. I lend them a credit card and they vanish in search of supplies. This does, at least, mean that Andrea, who had been wise enough to carry a sleeping bag, leaves it behind (there was some discussion of using it as padding, but we conclude it would be too annoying to carry it around). Karen and I arrange it as a kind of long pillow, throw down our jackets and sweaters as mattresses, and grab a couple hours sleep.

8:30AM

Almost everyone is starting to get up. Groggy activists are yawning, stretching, fumbling for toothbrushes, searching for the bathroom. Karen and I decide to head down to the IMC to get Karen an Indymedia pass. This way she can be filming in some sort of official capacity. It might, conceivably, afford some slight protection against arrest. This requires padding about in the halls of Laval—one of those grey modernist complexes with vast fluorescent halls that make you feel like you're underground even when you probably aren't—with cups of bad vending-machine coffee, looking for some table with maps and information. Eventually, we find one, manned by a couple of bleary-eyed students who try to explain the local bus system.

Happily, buses are still running; though we never quite figure out the ticket system, and it looks like bus conductors aren't bothering to collect them anyway. We follow the map up towards the IMC, which I vaguely remember from my last visit. Just a block away, we encounter a miracle. There, on the corner, plain as day, is an Army/Navy store. It's still open! And there, in the plate-glass window, large as life, is a gas mask. I dash in and ask if they still have any in stock, and—equally miraculously—it turns out that they do. Precisely one. Forty bucks Canadian. And it's one of those good, Canadian military gas masks, too, with the filter on the side, not like the crappy civilian-issue Israeli gas masks from the first Gulf War everyone complains about, where the eyes fog up and the plastic isn't even shatterproof. This one is thick black plastic, with a dozen straps on the back in black with fine yellow stripes that are to my eyes, at that moment, strangely beautiful.

We also each pick up a camera bag.

The IMC (no one is calling it the CMAQ any more, at least, in English) is located on a cobblestone avenue on a very steep hill—so steep, in fact, that the building it's in is two stories on one side and five on the other. It appears to be largely empty; you enter through a recently refurbished storefront area that looks like it's temporarily attached to some radical group (it's unfurnished except for a couple chairs and posters on the wall). Visitors have to proceed through the empty offices then head downstairs to the IMC itself—still half empty, though there are a number of media activists sleeping in corners and about a dozen more playing with equipment, or pasting up lists of tasks, collective rules. I glance at one sheet on which participants can assign themselves to cover different events (the operation has, as Madhava predicted, been successfully democratized). At the front desk is a short, bearded, gnome-like fellow who seems to be engaged in a prolonged flirtation with the two young women at the computers behind him (they do little but mock him, and he seems to take great delight in their mockery). He snaps a digital photo of each of us and then cheerfully remarks that because of some sort of computer glitch, it's been impossible to print new press badges all day. He's working on it. After about half an hour, we finally do manage to secure badges. I get one too: after all, I will definitely be covering this story

for *In These Times*, a Chicago magazine I write for. Karen and I both sign solemn statements saying we agree to the IMC principles of unity, and to contribute at least an hour of our time to some sort of work for the IMC at some point in the future. “Don’t worry about that right now,” remarks one sleepy activist, “but we’ll probably be needing all sorts of help over the next day or two. Just check back in.”

Then, armed with gas mask and press badge, we head back to the university.

11:00AM, Convergence, Laval University

All the fuss about defending the Convergence Center turns out to have been something of a red herring. Once the idea of converging on the Plains of Abraham had to be abandoned for fear of preemptive attack, the decision was to fall back on the university. The university, however, is seven miles from the perimeter. It’s going to be a very long march.

By the time we get there, there are already thousands of people, most scattered across a vast open quadrangle near the gym where we’d slept, preparing for the CLAC/CASA Carnival Against Capitalism march. Almost immediately, I run into people I know. Sam, active with the New York IWW and DAN Labor, had not been with the caravan but had come to Akwesasne independently, and somehow got through. He had hitched up with a carload of radio activists and independent journalists: two couples, Shawn (not to be confused with Shawn Brant, the Mohawk organizer) and Lyn, Ben and Heidi. They are mostly in their thirties, which makes them—like me—rather old by activist standards. Since we’re all separated from our usual affinity groups, we decide to constitute ourselves as a new one, which I dub “the Akwesasne Refugees.” After a brief huddle, we come to a quick consensus about our parameters and role. We will follow the main action, acting partly as reporters, partly as participants. Our participation will be red/yellow in orientation, but we’ll concentrate on providing support rather than direct confrontation. We will stay mobile, try to avoid arrest, separate when we care to, but if we do, always establish times and places to meet up afterwards.

Happily, Shawn has secured a place to stay: Heidi has a friend Pierre who is building himself a house in the Lower City. It’s unfinished but perfectly serviceable if we don’t mind sleeping on the floor. Shawn also has a car.

Now, all this puts me in a rather odd situation because I am now, effectively, in two different affinity groups: since I’m also a de facto member of the Yabba group, even though this now consists of three kids, all around twenty years old, who have gone off to join the Black Bloc. Well, I figure, it will give me a certain flexibility to be able to go back and forth.

We select a large green banner near a woman on stilts dressed as the Statue of Liberty, and decide that if anyone wanders off, this will be our reconvergence point.

So I wander off, notebook in hand. Karen breaks out the camera.

This part of the campus was all huge quadrangular spaces and concrete, with a distinct lack of greenery. At the moment, however, it was filled with an enormous variety of colored banners, furred and unfurled, some just solid unusual colors—salmons and lavenders—but also endless variations on red and black. Everywhere, young people were sipping bottled water or cups of bad microwaved coffee, milling about, sitting in circles, playing snatches of beats on drums made from inverted five-gallon water bottles, fiddling with gear. The weather was still crisp, but gave every sign of wanting to turn into a genuine spring day. No cloud in the sky. The snow that had covered much of the city a month before had melted. I set out in search of Ya Basta! people,

without much luck. At one point, I saw a cluster of men who looked, from a distance, like a Tute Bianche affinity group, but it turned out they were actually all dressed as the Québec City mascot “Bonhomme,” in smiling Santa-style masks and dirty white jumpsuits.

Jaggi, with an amplified megaphone was going around to each cluster of people to announce that the GOMM parade was to start moving at 12:30PM to the lower city, the CLAC/CASA Carnival Against Capitalism parade, due to leave at 1:00PM, was to proceed down Avenue René Lévesque because the Plains of Abraham had been determined to be a trap.

I grab him for a second.

“Hey, David,” he smiles. “So where’s Ya Basta!? How was Akwesasne?”

“Kind of a bust. We didn’t exactly make it through. As for New York Ya Basta!, at the moment, I think I’m kind of it.”

“So everyone else was turned away?”

“We’d made a decision it would be all of us or nothing.”

“Huh? Why did you do that? We need all the bodies we can get out here!”

“Well, because...” Come to think of it, why did we do that? I shrugged. “Solidarity. It seemed to make sense at the time.”

Jaggi had time to give me only the briefest rundown of what emerged from the last night’s spokescouncil. GOMM had their own parade, which would include SalAMI people, and various Trots. They were going to carry out pure Yellow, classic civil disobedience, with lockdowns and the like, below one of the security gates. The CLAC parade, much bigger, would be Yellow (but not “safe Yellow”) and also include a Green contingent. The plan is for Green Bloc to veer off before we got to the fence and occupy the area even further down the hill from GOMM, centered in a zone called Ilot Fleuriot beneath the highway overpass, and including the neighborhood of Jean Baptiste. Everyone else will proceed directly to the wall.

Then he ran off.

11:40AM

The Black Bloc at this point is at 250 people, maybe less. Mostly wearing black hoodies, though there are some in military-style gear or even vinyl raingear. All, of course, are in black. Most have gas masks pulled back on top of their heads, and black bandanas tied around their necks. They are mainly lounging about, at this point, smoking or napping, but there’s a huge red banner in the front of what is to be their column, and all sorts of red and black flags scattered around. Not far away is a woman dressed as the Statue of Liberty, on stilts, and a little further, a Medieval Bloc with tin pan hats and potlid shields. I am pleased to discover they do, indeed, have a catapult: quite a big one, twenty-five feet long. Around them are a variety of flying squads which seem to me half Black Bloc, with gas masks and bandanas, sometimes even hockey padding, only in cheerful colors, not in black.

A fair number of people in fact are already masked up; not so much for security reasons (there seem to be no police anywhere) as because they have, by far, the coolest bandanas ever: which, if folded in half, cover the bottom half of your face with a life-size picture of the bottom half of someone else’s face. I start noticing them everywhere: they come in red, orange and yellow.

Ben already has one, in orange. He proudly displays it: one side is the happy side, with a big smiling face; the other has a face with its mouth taped closed behind barbed wire.

“Yeah, apparently Reclaim the Streets, London, shipped over at least a thousand. They were handing them out earlier, but I guess you missed them. Story was they were designed by this old guy who used to work with the original French Situationists. Or something. I’m not completely sure.”

Inscribed on the margin, in French and English, are the following lines:

We will remain faceless because we refuse the spectacle of celebrity, because we are everyone, because the carnival beckons, because the world is upside down, because we are everywhere. By wearing masks, we show that who we are is not as important as what we want, and what we want is everything for everyone.

The big surprise is our numbers, which everyone is saying seem significantly higher than expected. I keep hearing numbers like five thousand, maybe even ten. There are no police anywhere in sight, though here and there are clumps of legal observers, easily identifiable in their bright yellow vests.

Jaggi keeps dashing up and down with updates and announcements; “In Ecuador, they’ve occupied the Canadian embassy in solidarity with us!” There are apparently also border actions going on in Mexico and people blockading a bridge in Chicago.

Finally, slowly, lumberingly, the Carnival Against Capitalism gets under way.

1:30PM, The Carnival Against Capitalism March Begins

Maybe twenty minutes into the parade, there’s some kind of altercation when a university security guard tangles with someone on the front lawn of a building by the parade route. I arrive as people are trying to de-escalate, and never find out what exactly happened. The house’s owner and an eight-year-old boy are standing right there next to their porch. Someone is yelling at him: “Get that kid back in the house! It’s not safe with all these cops around!” Someone else tells me the guard freaked out and drew his gun (only to be immediately surrounded by activists with video cameras), but it wasn’t clear what had sparked the incident to begin with.

Shortly thereafter (circa 1:50PM), there’s another minor tangle when some TV journalists try to drive a car through the crowd. Marchers swarm around it, some pound on it, others lay down in front. “He was an asshole,” people told me, but not exactly how—I’m guessing he was just arrogantly trying to push through. Eventually, the car pulls back to a side street and the march continues.

2:00PM

At first, we’re passing through a purely residential area, all family houses and the occasional small brick apartment block. There’s not a commercial establishment anywhere in sight. Chants are in French, English, even Spanish. Most are extremely familiar: “Ain’t no power like the power of the people cause the power of the people don’t stop!” “Who’s streets? Our streets!” “*El pueblo, unido, jamas sera vencido.*” Others would become so: “*Sol! Sol! Sol! Sol-i-dar-i-té!*”

Karen checks in, she has been ranging up and down the parade getting all sorts of useful footage. There are cameras everywhere, but this time, they’re almost all our cameras. Even the people photographing us from the side of the road seem not cops but ordinary citizens.

Marches, I note, are always somewhat accordion-like. They have a tendency to stretch thin over time, which means we have to stop periodically so everyone can reassemble their affinity groups.

The Black Bloc, never large, is by now already becoming more diffuse. I take advantage to work my way into the middle and finally locate my Connecticut friends: who are now part of an affinity group of some six or seven people, having located a few other former New England Yabbas. They are calling themselves La Resistance (later it becomes La Resistance II, when they discover the name is already taken). Kitty has given herself the action name Kid A, though everyone keeps forgetting to use it. Lee—a strict vegan—is calling himself Cheesebacon, and Andrea is still just Andrea. She’s the only one who has a gas mask (it had been wrapped in her sleeping roll). The others sport newly acquired green military helmets and a variety of other gear they’d picked up in town earlier. “Thanks so much for the cash card,” says Lee, handing it back to me. “You’re a life saver. I promise I’ll send you back the money.”

“Oh, don’t worry about the money.”

“No, really. I promise I’ll get your address after the action and I’ll get it back to you.”

2:10PM

Whoops all around as the march stops.

Nobody around knows why.

The Black Bloc are marching immediately behind what seems to be some kind of Marxist group, carrying a dozen identical red flags emblazoned with images of US political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal. You can tell the Marxist groups because, like union folk, they tend to wear some kind of uniform. In the States there’s a group called the Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade, who come to big actions in Black Bloc attire, except all in identical T-shirts under their hoodies and all wearing the exact same red bandana—looking so perfectly like anarchists that you knew they couldn’t actually be anarchists, because, even though the whole idea of black blocs is that everyone is indistinguishable, no group of anarchists would ever really be dressed exactly the same. I don’t see any equivalent here in Québec City (though, I later learn they were in fact there, mixed in with the Black Bloc). There are, however, many sections of the parade that obviously represent one or another socialist group, usually identifiable by matching T-shirts and the fact they carry professional-looking, printed signs. The larger socialist blocs are conducted by marshals with matching arm bands, patrolling the perimeters, linking arms when the march stops. Even the smaller groups usually have a leader with a megaphone, often walking backwards, leading them in chants. This, of course, makes them stand out from the crowd, while the anarchists, with their hand-painted signs and banners, mostly blend in—giving one the vague sense that everyone not affiliated with a particular, identifiable group is most likely an anarchist of some sort or another. In this particular march, this is also probably true.

I sit down on the street for a second to watch the show. After the Mumia brigade passes, and the Black Bloc, comes the Medieval Bloc with their catapult. The catapult is followed by a wooden cart full of stuffed pandas and other soft toys to be used as projectiles. Then come the autonomous elements in all their affinity groups, their signs and flags and banners an infinite anarchist heraldry of every conceivable variation on red and black. (My favorite, a crimson heart on sable field, which I saw repeated with slight variations six or seven times, sometimes alone, sometimes accompanied by the caption “ANARCHY = LOVE”). There were signs: *Automez Vous* (Autonomize Yourself), *Betail en Revolte* (Cattle in Revolt), and dozens of plays on the FTAA/ZLEA acronym (FTAA, Forced To Accept Aristocracy). There are Radical Cheerleaders and Raging Grannies, jugglers, stilt-walkers, and at least one man on a unicycle. At one point, I detect a

group chanting “Ya Basta!” spot a Ya Basta! sign among them, and quickly close in—but they turn out to be some sort of Zapatista support group, in T-shirts without any sort of gear. They are immediately followed by the SOA folk wearing skeleton masks, with an enormous green banner.

The only thing missing is giant puppets: I’m told several were carried out the night before for the torchlight parade, but they’re hidden away now, waiting for the labor march tomorrow.

2:20PM

Someone announces we’re ten minutes from the wall. We’re starting to see stores now, mostly shuttered.

An activist in an Easter Bunny suit is trying to throw candies to a group of children watching the parade from an apartment terrace. He becomes an instant celebrity: the “bunny guy,” everyone calls him, as in, “Hey, did you see the bunny guy?” He is not however to be confused with the other “bunny guy,” a student who actually carried his pet rabbit with him during the march. Bunny Guy manages to land a few on one terrace, and the children eagerly scoop them up.

Onlookers still seem guarded, though their numbers increase. Activists are banging on street signs as they pass, more loud than particularly musical. Here and there are clumps with actual musical instruments.

Still not a cloud in the sky. In fact, it’s becoming quite hot. I’ve been stripping off layers steadily, and those geared up—such as, for instance, my Black Bloc friends—are really beginning to feel it. People are calling for water. I’m sometimes with the rest of the Refugees, who’ve positioned themselves behind and on the edge of the Black Bloc, sometimes exploring the parade, occasionally touching base with Karen. La Resistance, geared to the hilt, wants water too, so the Refugees scour the streets for someplace to buy some (we did decide we were going to do support work), but without much success. Eventually, I locate a convenience store that’s open, but it’s only letting people in in groups of two, with some guy posted at the door to lock and unlock it each time. Shawn and I wait in line for a while, but realize that, by the time we get in, we’ll have lost the parade entirely.

Shawn, who has been monitoring the local media for some time now, is amazed by the complete absence of police. “For months they’ve been waging a terror campaign, telling everyone we’re going to destroy the city. Now look! Have you seen a single cop? At any point? If anyone had actually wanted to, we could have burned down this entire neighborhood.”

“Maybe they’re hoping someone does, to give them an excuse to attack.”

“Maybe. But my point is: either they knew they were lying when they tried to convince everyone we were a threat to the city, or they don’t really give a shit about the people they’re supposed to be protecting.”

2:25PM

We pass a construction site. A small crowd goes up an alley made by two chain-link fences, but they’re not, as I first guessed, going to yank up a stretch of fence to carry with them. Instead, the men and a couple women pull on their masks and start breaking and gathering bricks and rocks. A (mainly female) chorus stands above them chanting “We’re Gonna Fuck Shit Up Tonight!” in slightly accented English.

They're not, in fact, in Black Bloc attire, but appear to be students, or maybe just local teenagers. Actually I have no idea who they are, but I'm guessing this would have to be the Red Bloc.

2:40PM

Some Black Bloc'ers are carrying a mattress with them, as a kind of giant shield. Somehow, there's now a truck ahead of them, just past the Mumia battalion, playing some sort of French rap music. Mac and Lesley come bouncing by, masked, in military garb. We exchange pleasantries. Then they disappear again.

The parade stops periodically. Starts again.

2:50PM

The Avenue de Erables is the point where the parade is supposed to split into two columns, Green and Yellow. The Green group will march north up Avenue Cartier, which is two blocks north, and then enter the working-class neighborhood of St Jean-Baptiste that lies on the steep streets that slope off just to the north of the perimeter. Heidi, who has been doing radio interviews up and down the parade, explains that the neighborhood itself, along with the area further north, around the highway, has been declared a Green Zone. Puppeteers and street theater groups will occupy the area and put on performances for the local community groups, who are working closely with us. (CASA had been going door to door in Jean Baptiste for months now with flyers and petitions, explaining what was going to happen.) Such was the plan. At this point, though, it seems not many Greens are actually leaving: even the dragonfly drummers—a theatrical group with diaphanous dragonfly puppets bouncing over their heads—and other obviously Green groups are continuing with us for the time being. Meanwhile, as we pause, someone in a food truck seizes the opportunity to provide a quick snack. Everyone is passing around plates of pasta. We grab some, but pass most of it to La Resistance.

3:05PM

While we are waiting, I head back to the convenience store with Lyn and successfully buy several bottles of water. As I'm heading back we hear rumors three squads of cops have been sighted heading our way (none materialize).

3:15PM

Finally, we're moving. It turns out that, all that time, we were only a few blocks from the wall. Passing Avenue Turnbull, the march enters the area we had scoped out so carefully during our last visit. We pass Grand-Théâtre de Québec, entering a small park that is soon to be known to many of us as "Ground Zero." The park is mostly just a huge lawn with some hillocks and a few small copses of trees here and there. At the far end is the wall, with its three-foot concrete base and seven feet of chain-link on top of it. It runs along the next north-south street, the Rue d'Amerique Francaise, then curves back sharply to the north. Squinting, I notice it is already covered in most spots with ribbons and images and sculptures woven into it during a women's action the night before. The base has been liberally spray-painted.

In the middle of the park is a line of cops, maybe forty or fifty of them, ranked out in full riot gear. We never saw any police that day who weren't fully armored. These ones seem to be there to protect access to a checkpoint/entryway opposite the northeast corner of the park. Otherwise, there's nobody around. Even the two media trucks with satellite dishes sticking out of them seem unattended. Yellow surveillance helicopters rattle overhead.

The parade begins to pour into the open space. Everyone is marching directly towards the police. The police hesitate (one can only imagine what it might feel like to be in a detachment of forty-odd riot cops watching several thousand anarchists march directly at you). Then they turn around, march back behind the checkpoint, and we sweep into the park.

Next to me someone is shouting angrily in French and tossing a half-full bottle of water at the retreating cops. A companion takes him gently by the arm, as if to say: "We all know what's going to happen. We shouldn't be the ones to start."

The Black Bloc isn't at the head of the march. The vanguard is completely heterogeneous, though it includes some of the best prepared: many in one or another form of padding, some in helmets and shields. As I pull up to the front, there's already one guy in a yellow jacket who's scrambled up to the top of one section of the wall near the checkpoint (it does not, in fact, have barbed wire on top). He's swaying back and forth, trying to use his own weight to make it wobble. A crowd converges around him with grappling hooks—or, really, they're fist-sized, nut-shaped hooks attached to long strong cords. Others set to work with wire cutters. A faceless line of police, all in gas masks and battle armor, stand impassively, maybe thirty feet away inside the perimeter as the first panel comes off its concrete moorings and collapses to the ground. The police do nothing.

Before long, everyone has found some empty portion of the fence. Mostly, the procedure is like this: small teams with ropes will use hooks to attach them to the chain-link, then everybody streams in to help pull. When the wall starts to give, people will climb on top to force it down. By the time I arrive, there are eight or nine sections down and I have to move northeast of the checkpoint to find a spot where I'm needed. I end up pulling on the same rope as Mac and Lesley and one insanely large Mohawk Warrior (I'm later told such individuals are referred to on the reservation as FBIs, "Fucking Big Indians") who probably has the strength of the three of us combined. Nobody is even wearing masks at this point. I, like many people, have my gas mask perched on top of my head. When our section of the fence comes down, we move on to another one. At one point, a section comes down directly on top of my head, and those of a couple people next to me. We all laugh, two of us shake hands, then we move on to the next spot.

Soon, twisted pieces of downed chain-link fence are scattered across the edge of the perimeter. For some weird reason, the cops are still doing nothing, just standing there. Apparently, they had orders to resist any attempt to enter the security zone, and are taking their orders extremely literally.

Finally, a small squad of activists, I guess about twenty of them, assembles for a charge. To me, it seems completely insane, but maybe they have some kind of plan. If they do, I never find out, though. Because, almost the moment they begin to sprint towards the police, pepper bombs start exploding all around them. Some start stumbling, fall; within seconds, the entire contingent pulls back in disarray.

From that moment on, for the next two days, it was continual chemical warfare. Police started firing up and down the wall at teams still pulling sections down (about 150 feet had been completely cleared at this point). Tear gas canisters started bouncing, spinning, exploding all around

us. I pulled on my gas mask; so did about half the people there. (I saw at least a dozen makes of gas mask, Israeli, Czech, Belgian, Canadian, some kind of weird Russian thing with a long tube flowing down to a pouch strapped to your belt.) Others were using scarves, bandanas, whatever was on hand. I saw people fumbling with visors and plastic swimming goggles as tears and mucus streamed down their faces. At one point, as I looked for a new position on the wall, a pepper bomb must have gone off right next to me. Unlike the tear gas, it went straight through my gas mask and I was suddenly blind and couldn't breathe. I stumbled back out of range, into the open air of the park, eyes still burning and unable to focus, gasping for breath, and wandered in a circle for a moment until I found a clear spot, pulled off my mask, and sat down on the grass. After maybe a minute, I was basically functional again.

The park was by then full of clusters of people, moving at different speeds in different directions; it was also spotted with increasingly numerous clouds of gas. At first, they dissipated fairly quickly: there was a strong breeze which, to everyone's amusement, was blowing back directly on the police. Here and there were small groups of activists sitting in circles on the grass on patches of higher ground, engaged in earnest consultations—Yellow affinity groups, I'm guessing, trying to figure out what to do. For most, the decision seemed to be to stay in the park and create as much of a carnival spirit as possible, despite the chemical assault.

By the time I was back at the fence again, a few minutes later, it had turned into a stand-up battle. After laying down a wall of gas, the police apparently tried to advance, only to be driven back by a rain of rocks. Masked figures close to the perimeter, now marked only by the battered concrete base of the former fence, half of it toppled, were still lofting rocks and bottles at them when I arrived. There were a couple pacifists up there, for some reason—at least, a couple women were angrily shouting, "Stop throwing shit!" The cops were by now sheltered behind a line of plastic shields, firing tear gas canisters and plastic bullets directly at them. The pacifists beat a hasty retreat.

Me, too. I fell back on the park and jotted down a few notes.

3:43PM

[from notes I took during a quiet spell]

The police at this point are still hopelessly outnumbered. Rock throwers appear whenever they try to advance, but otherwise largely seem to hold their fire. Nor does anyone attempt to advance on the shattered perimeter.

By this time, gas canisters are coming down pretty constantly, not just near the perimeter but everywhere. They're falling like mortar rounds, soaring in arcs way up in the air, usually three to five at once, then falling in clusters, striking throughout the open area of the park. At first, each time one lands, it sets off a small stampede.

Still, it was becoming something of a carnival. People were dancing, drumming, and clapping, trying to create a festive occupied territory in and out of the tear gas clouds. I pass four women doing a dance with gossamer scarves, all of them wearing gas masks. Others are spinning around without even bandanas, just out of sheer defiance.

The Bunny Guy advances on the wall, arms swinging, with great drama. Gassed, he beats a hasty retreat.

There are activists with hockey sticks systematically thwacking the canisters back at the perimeter, and one guy in a gas mask scoops one up, runs up to the perimeter with a plume of gas billowing behind him, and chucks it back over the wall.

“Don’t do that without gloves,” a medic warns me. “They’re red hot. You can get major burns from doing that.”

“And that doesn’t mean any gloves,” says another. “It’ll burn right through thin leather. You really need a hockey mitt.”

3:50PM

When I find Shawn and Heidi, he excitedly reports that we’ve foiled the cops’ first attempt at a flanking maneuver. They tried to bring up a water cannon—it was basically an armored fire truck—from the northwest, behind the theater, to cut us off. Several Black Bloc affinity groups ran to the scene and disabled it, smashing the windows and attacking the tires until the driver, convinced he was about to be pulled out of the cab, reversed the vehicle and pulled a hasty retreat. No one was hurt, but there were rumors the accompanying squad of police nabbed a few random activists near the scene (not the Black Bloc kids, of course, that would have been too difficult) and took them off with them—possibly the day’s first arrests.

We watch from a distance as another line of cops marching towards the theater ends up getting pelted so heavily they too had to retreat. “The ones in blue,” Heidi points out, “are provincial police. The ones in green are local, city cops. They’re no big deal. It’s the blue guys who are the really scary ones, because they’re brutal and they get all the high-tech gadgetry.”

Someone is claiming they just saw one of the cops near the theater trip, fall down, and thwack the ground repeatedly with his baton in frustration. Another minor victory. Someone hears it, and smiles.

There were all sorts of cameras, everywhere. Many activists are carefully documenting acts of carnivalesque defiance; others are filming the cops. Karen finds us. She says she’s choking on the gas and can’t film any more; she’s heading down to the Green Zone. We say we’ll meet her down there later. Almost as soon as she left, I run into Time’s Up Bill, a bicycle activist from New York. Bill was unmasked, looking grimly indifferent to the gas, but armed with a huge video camera.

He spots me because I have my mask off for a moment.

“Hey, David, are you busy right now? Would you be willing to do a brief interview about Akwesasne?”

“Sure. Well, how brief are we talking about?”

“Just a minute or two.”

I smile. “You want to do it here?”

“Yeah.”

We stroll up to a spot with relatively clear air, about forty feet from the checkpoint, and I start giving a brief description of the caravan, the fish-fry, the crossing. About halfway through, we both look up and spot three canisters descending in a graceful parabolic arc directly at our heads. We start running, laugh, reposition ourselves a little further from the action, and finish the interview.

4:10PM

It's turning into a standoff. No one is throwing rocks unless the police try to advance, and for the time being, they're no longer trying. Instead, they just loft endless tear gas and pepper bombs into the park, as activists along the perimeter either toss them back, or throw anything that might look like a response in kind. It started largely as an exchange of tear gas for smoke bombs, which arc in a similar fashion. They are also completely harmless—a purely symbolic tit-for-tat, but somehow very satisfying. Later, people seemed to be shooting off flares, and I saw colored lights that I think must have been Roman candles, bottle rockets, or something. Further off, the catapult was flinging teddy bears over remaining sections of the wall. It was all purely expressive, almost like a matter of principle that we could give as good as we got.

At first, the landing of a canister in a crowd would create a panicked stampede, despite the people shouting not to run. It would happen especially when the police started using canisters that would burst into flames and start spinning crazily, obviously impossible to throw back. Before long, though, the panic subsided, as it was mainly gas-masked or sturdy people who had the wherewithal to remain. Someone showed me the trick of standing directly in front of a group of panicked, fleeing people with your arms spread out; invariably, they would slow down and then stop. But, before too long, the panicked flights pretty much stopped anyway.

4:17PM

At the north of the park, there's a little cluster of trees that's become a kind of observation center for noncombatants. Next to it stand several Mohawk Warriors, including Stacey Boots, who apparently never himself advanced to the wall, but hung back like a proper military leader, giving occasional tactical advice. There are also five or six metalworkers, some Anglophone, some Francophone, unmasked, but carrying bandanas and vinegar just in case. They're not in action, but literally showing the flag: they're surrounding a large placard they've arranged near a tree with their union colors.

It is around this point that I begin noticing, as I probe the zone near the perimeter, that a lot of the masked figures around me are actually friends. La Resistance emerges from the mist, with a general exchange of hugs. A bit further north is Buffy, entirely in black, with a reinforced bicycle helmet and a round garbage lid as a shield. Behind her are most of the other Prince Edwards Islands kids, similarly dressed. She pulls off her mask briefly to wave. If the PEI group is taking the role of peltasts, light and mobile, Montréal Ya Basta! are the hoplites. About twenty of them are standing in formation nearby—with a shield-wall of thirteen and five or six drummers: also in black, mostly, with black motorcycle helmets, black gas masks, and three-foot black plastic shields, but all covered in strange, foam, rainbow padding, with dinosaur spines down their backs, complex shapes emerging from their helmets, pentagram-like symbols on their shields. The drums were made of plastic water-bottles. It's visually extraordinary, though, tactically, somewhat pointless. In such a wide open space, a phalanx is about as effective as the original cop line had been: unless you had a line of hundreds, one could be fairly easily outflanked and surrounded. The shields, however, are highly effective against tear gas canisters and plastic bullets (which the police are beginning to use fairly indiscriminately), if useless for holding ground. The Yabbas seem to have found something of a purpose in simply interposing themselves and drawing fire.

This seems to be the emerging division of labor. The Black Bloc, especially the Americans among them, are taking the role of first line of defense. They're not themselves throwing projectiles, just holding ground—though they're willing to grab any opportunity to rip down new sections of the fence. Everyone throwing rocks seems to be local; I'm guessing many might be those militant seventeen-year-olds Sebastien had been telling me about, who, unlike the Bloc, never subscribed to principles of nonviolence.

4:22PM

A lot of the action at this point is by the side of the area where the wall first fell: there is a wide street running just below, and another strip of wall as such.

I fall back to the observation post, where the huge Mohawk Warrior I'd shared a rope with earlier seems to have just come back from the fray, apparently for the first time. He's joyously narrating the story of how the wall first came down. Stacey, ever stoic, allows himself a brief smile. He turns to two masked Black Bloc'ers, offering strategic advice.

"Careful to guard your left flank down there and allow an escape route, because, if they sweep up that street and surround you, it can turn into a 'kill zone.' That's how massacres happen."

The police strategy, now that earlier attempts to drive a wedge into the park or cut us off have failed, seems to be to simply pump tear gas—and increasingly nasty tear gas, I notice—into the zone surrounding the wall for hours, until our numbers start to thin. Then, presumably, they'll move out and secure the area for the opening ceremony, scheduled for 5:30. Ultimately, there will be no way to stop them, because they are receiving reinforcements, while our numbers can only dissipate. We'll never have as many as we did when we first hit the wall. Our aim then becomes to slow them down as much as possible.

Detail of Quebec City indicating the security perimeter (heavy line) and the approximate area of tear gas deployment (thin line, grey area), i) The site of the CLAC/CASA action on Friday April 20th. It was at this intersection that the wall first came down. 2) Site of many of the Rue St. Jean actions. Designated as a green-zone on Friday, it became red when the fence was beached on Saturday. 3) Alternative media center. 4) Site of the GOMM action on Friday and continued confrontation during the days that followed. 5) Îllôt Fleuri, end point of the candle-light march from Laval, beginning of Thursday night's celebration, home of both the free kitchen and green zone actions. 6) Gathering area and starting point for Saturday's March. + = medical center. The medical center, sites 3 and 5 were all directly tear gassed by police, despite their green zone designations and distance from the perimeter. (Raphaël Thierrin and Steve Daniels)

The late afternoon turns into a kind of gradual, fighting retreat.

4:30PM

Major exchange of tear gas for smoke bombs.

The park is now under a continuous cloud of tear gas. Different affinity groups have taken positions in it, marked by flags: some red, some black, some multicolored. There's one very colorful Native American flag with the head of a Warrior in red and yellow on it, which Mac tells me is called the "Flag of Many Nations," displayed prominently in the middle of the square. People have been using it as a signal to indicate where the police are trying to advance. A moment ago, it helped rally people to drive back a line of cops by chucking bricks—the cops, Mac is careful to

point out, were completely armored so it's not like any of them are likely to get seriously hurt. For the most part, the projectiles simply bounce off their shields. "Still it's pretty much impossible to maneuver, let alone begin arrests, under a continual rain of bricks, so it does, effectively, drive them back."

Tear gas is continuously being thrown back near the perimeter. Medics, who at first had been largely at the far end of the park, washing out eyes and treating asthmatics, start moving up to treat burn victims—the cops are increasingly using tear gas launchers like guns, shooting them directly at people's chests and heads. Over and over, I'm hearing cries of "Medic!" or more often, the French chant: "*Sol! Sol! Sol! Soli-dar-i-té!*" Whenever someone went down, hit by a canister or plastic bullet, people would gather and start chanting for solidarity. Other activists would come and form a human wall as medic teams ran up—usually three or four to a team, always in white, with giant red crosses all over them—to hustle the victims out of range. Medics had to run fast or the police would start firing at them.

Initial phenomenological notes on the QC actions, written shortly afterwards:

1. In a major action, there's absolutely no way to grasp even a fraction of what's going on. There are a hundred tiny dramas happening at once, later to be given narrative form by participants. At any given time, you are probably seeing tiny pieces of a dozen—someone running off in what seems a random direction, someone standing engrossed, a cluster of people doing something you can't quite make out in the distance. Major events might be happening twelve feet away—behind a wall, under an escarpment—of which you have absolutely no idea; at least, until much later, when you start to synthesize accounts.
2. Tear gas creates an utterly hostile urban landscape. That which should be designed for our convenience, parks, streets, one's own clothing potentially, becomes painful, but it also encourages the endless hugging and bonding, because everyone you do see who isn't actually firing on you is your friend. Being gassed is a little like being set on fire; or, at least, what one imagines being set on fire might be like. Pepper spray is the same except more so.
3. Normally one can confront the cops. When one of them does something obviously unjust, you shame them: there are often literally chants of "Shame! Shame! Shame!" "The whole world is watching!" In New York, one popular chant during obvious acts of repression is "Go Fight Crime! Go Fight Crime!" None of this is possible here. Even when, as at A16, a policeman is beating you with a baton as you lie on the ground, you have some idea who is beating you. You can compare him to bullies who used to beat you up in grade school, or to police on TV. These cops are specters, ghosts, mechanical abstractions. It is utterly impossible to see them as individuals. They are only pieces on a board, and the sources of various forms of terror and pain.
4. Gas masks makes one feel a little like a machine oneself—the hugging and embracing is in part to remind you that you're not.

4:35PM

More gas—periodic calls of "Medic!"—as people are hit by canisters or plastic bullets, which are now being used more or less indiscriminately. So much for the rules of engagement announced

with such fanfare before the Summit. People are running up and lobbing smoke bombs and tear gas canisters directly back at cops.

Whoops arise as one cop trips in retreat. The battle is still very much seesawing back and forth. I see someone being carried off screaming, with serious burns and blood-splattered clothes.

Craig, the huge fellow from the spokescouncil, comes clambering up toward the fence, armed with a big two-by-four he found somewhere, carrying it like a sword, looking immensely pleased with himself. He's in what can only be described as a black battle suit, wrapped in plastic bags, with a round shield and gas mask perched on his head. About twenty seconds later, two medics run up and ask if they can use the two-by-four for splints—someone's been incapacitated, needs to be carried away. He sighs, shrugs good naturedly, and hands it over.

4:45PM

We're starting to take serious casualties.

Kitty, standing some thirty yards from the wall, is hit in the foot by a tear gas canister. A team of medics runs up, removes her boot, confirms that nothing's broken. Still, it hurts like hell and she's limping for some time afterwards. Kitty doesn't have a gas mask, just two or three bandanas drenched in vinegar. A bit in front, Craig is struck in the ribs and doubles over in excruciating pain. Medics ask everyone in the area to form a circle around him for protection as they investigate. At first, we thought he was hit by some kind of dowel or wooden bullet, but it turns out to be yet another tear gas canister, the kind that had been fired up in the air, but in his case, was fired directly at him. Apparently he had broken a couple of ribs in exactly the same spot at A16 a year before—hence the agony. People rush up with water, trying to help. In the end it takes four people to carry him away.

5:22PM

I fall back to check up on the Refugees, who are mostly hanging back for lack of gas masks.

The big question at this point was lines of retreat. Remembering Stacey's remarks about kill zones, it occurred to me that escape routes were going to be increasingly important. Especially since we'd promised we would try to keep the action out of St. Jean Baptiste, and no one I talked to was quite sure how we'd be able to leave if they tried to cut off René Lévesque again and we couldn't just fall back the way we came. We all agree this is going to be increasingly important as the Summit's opening ceremony approaches. They're obviously not going to be able to hold the ceremony with a major battle going on twenty yards away and tear gas everywhere, the police are beefing up their numbers and, presumably, preparing for a big push, to get us at least within what they consider some reasonable distance. We try to find a clear space to look at maps, but the maps we have are hard to read especially because they give no indication of gradients, so we have no idea if what looks like an open space is actually a cliff.

The Barricada collective, from Boston, seems have occupied the north end of the park. There's a single masked figure, entirely in black, standing on the base of an empty fountain near some large colonial buildings that mark the north edge, looking not unlike a sable peacock as he scans the action below. I pull up my mask and ask him: "Do those streets go through behind here?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"I'm just worried we'll get cut off if they move into this side of the park."

“Why don’t you check?”

I spend some time investigating. There are indeed cliffs, at some points, or at least very precipitous stretches with boulders (this was also one of the few areas still covered with dirty snow), but also stairs and several streets that look wide enough it’s hard to imagine anyone closing them off. Even the cliffs look climbable. So, it looks like there won’t be a problem.

Loud explosions ring out as new, even nastier tear gas is employed. There has been a persistent rumor, too, that the police were going to be bringing in attack dogs. Briefly, I actually do see one, a German shepherd on a leash, on a ledge occupied by police far off in the distance. It’s the only one I see.

“Not surprising they’re not using the dogs,” someone remarks. “If they let a dog out in all this for more than a few minutes, it would probably strangle on the gas.”

Someone else sighs philosophically. “You know I quit smoking a year ago. Now one day is probably going to do all the damage ten years of smoking probably would have.”

“That’s what we get for trying to fight pollution.”

5:40PM, I Descend to Get Coffee on the Côte D’Abraham

Mac is heading down the hill to meet Lesley and some friends for a coffee break on the Côte d’Abraham to our north, on the edge of the Green Zone. He assures me cafes are indeed open there. Would I like to come along? I find most of the rest of the Refugees, who decide it wouldn’t hurt to take a little while to clear our lungs.

In fact, the Côte d’Abraham is nothing like the shuttered expanses of René Lévesque (which was, after all, as we’d been warned, “the street of the bourgeoisie”). Here everything is open: shops, restaurants, at least a dozen streetside cafes. Protesters mill about in clumps. Some have their gas masks pulled back like medieval helmets, most have bandanas wrapped around their necks and jangling action gear of one sort or another: backpacks, goggles, water bottles, ropes and grapples, binoculars, or silly masks and street theater props taped around their backs for safekeeping. It was hard to see them as anything but a random crowd or, at best, meandering bands, but underneath, one knew there was a whole invisible architecture of organization—collectives, clusters, blocs, affinity groups. I try to envision what it would look like if somehow, all the organization could somehow be made visible: streets suddenly lighting up with a hundred colored lines, circles, diagrams.

There’s a dramatic, strikingly beautiful church at the very foot of a steep cobbled street. In front of it is Lesley, talking to someone from *MacLean’s*, one of the more popular Canadian magazines.

“Hey, David,” she asks, “you want to talk to a reporter?”

“Uh, sure.”

The woman is in her early thirties, wearing a tasseled jacket and carrying a pad. She is cheerful, enthusiastic, even perky. I feel like I’m dealing with a visitor from another world.

“David Graeber? Isn’t your father or something a professor at Yale? He’s an anarchist of some sort, right? I was reading about him in a recent issue of the *Montréal Gazette*.”

“No, that’s me, I’m a professor at Yale.”

“Would you mind if I ask you some questions?”

“Um, no. I mean, yes, sure. I don’t mind. Go ahead.”

“Well, a recent survey showed that a majority of Canadian citizens are actually in favor of free trade. For me, that raises a lot of questions about how much you can really claim to be representing ‘the public’ in protests like this.”

I have absolutely no idea what she’s talking about: what sort of survey, how the question was framed, what responses to other questions might have been. Even thinking about it makes my brain hurt. I consider raising the issue of what the word “free trade” is supposed to mean anyway, how it’s a loaded term, how even I would hesitate if someone asked me if I was against free trade. But that’s more complicated than I’m really capable of expressing at that moment. Instead, I try to make a case that the fact that the government is intentionally trying to keep the contents of the treaty a secret shows that they don’t believe the public would accept it if they had any idea what it actually entailed. At least, that’s what I was trying to say. I walk away with the distinct impression I had just come off like a blithering idiot. It also strikes me that at least now I understand why it is that anti-globalization protesters interviewed on television almost invariably look like blithering idiots. I’m normally a pretty articulate guy. In fact, one could say that, as a professor, being able to sound intelligent—even, to provide glib responses to unexpected questions—is kind of what I do for a living. If I can’t put together a coherent sentence on no sleep, coming out of two hours of chemical warfare, how on earth do they expect anyone else to?

Mac and Lesley have vanished again. The rest of us end up sipping cappuccino in a tiny restaurant in which even the waiters have bandanas still tied around their necks. The owner is handing out free bottles of water to anyone who looks like they’re back from the front, and activists are continually filing in and out of the bathroom to wash out kerchiefs, eyes, and faces.

“Careful,” the owner says, periodically, in French. “Remember, if you get the clothes wet, the tear gas will come out again. Remember, it’s also in your hair...”

There’s one question on everyone’s mind. Somebody’s got to ask it.

“So,” I say, “what happened? How did we win? I mean—so fast. Last month at the consulta, we were all assuming that we’d have to fight our way through thousands of cops to even be able to get to the wall.”

The general feeling is that we hadn’t been doing the math right. “After all,” Heidi reflected, “when they say there’s going to be ‘three thousand cops,’ that doesn’t mean they’re all going to be on duty at the same time. Even if they’re on triple overtime, only maybe half of them are going to be on duty at any given moment. Plus, they have to maintain a strategic reserve. So you have maybe one thousand cops to defend a seven kilometer perimeter, along with doing everything else they normally need cops to do.”

“Whereas our forces were all concentrated on one point.”

The big news on the street is that Jaggi has already been arrested—inevitably enough. Someone at the next table has all the details. Apparently, he had never gone near the wall, but turned off with the Green march. An hour ago, he was hobnobbing with some other organizers on the Côte d’Abraham when several plainclothesmen dressed as protesters nabbed him from behind. His friends—including, apparently, several women who’d been co-facilitators at the spokescouncil—tried to intervene and almost succeeded in pulling him back, whereupon they pulled out truncheons and identified themselves as police. Then they roughed him up and threw him into the back of a black SUV. It drove off and that was the last anyone had seen of him.

“Any news from the GOMM Green march?” we ask our new friends at the next table.

Someone grins. “The story I heard is they all sat down in front of the wall near the highway, flashing peace symbols. Of course, the police started gassing them, just like everybody else. Some-

one started up tossing the tear gas back and, before long, they'd ripped down their part of the wall, too." "They went Red?"

"Spontaneously."

"Wait a minute," says a middle-aged woman with horn-rimmed glasses at another table. "I heard about lobbing back tear gas. But I'm pretty sure they didn't attack the wall over by the highway. Anyway, I was passing by less than an hour ago and the fence was still up down there."

"I was there when it happened," says someone else. "What happened was—yeah, someone started kicking back the tear gas. But, almost as soon as they started doing it, some leader type with a megaphone showed up and announced that they'd made their point, and that the action was over, and they all retreated to the Green Zone."

6:30PM, Back to Ground Zero

By the time the Refugees head back towards the wall, all the traffic seems to be going in the other direction. Perhaps seven people are drifting downhill and away for every one moving back up. We pass the dragonfly drummers, in a little circle in the middle of the street. They're trying to rally people, but not too effectively. When we get to the top the reason becomes obvious: phalanxes of police occupy the middle of the park, and smaller squadrons are systematically taking up positions on each approach street, choking off access, then gassing like crazy everyone in sight. Lines of riot police are moving forward systematically, ten or twenty meters at a time. Eventually, they start moving down the three main north-south streets—Turnbull, Claire-Fontaine, and Sainte-Claire—that lead down the hill into St. Jean Baptiste.

It doesn't seem they are trying to do mass arrests. At least not yet. They're just trying to clear the area.

The Flag of Many Nations and a few black anarchist flags are by now at the bottom of the hill, along St. Jean, and the only possible game left was to delay the police advance. Where the Black Bloc is is anybody's guess. Same with the Red Bloc: nobody in this crowd was even thinking about throwing rocks. It had become a matter of sitting in the streets, singing songs, and waiting to be assaulted. Simple stubborn civil disobedience.

6:55PM, Avenue Turnbull

There are about ten to twenty Darth Vaders occupying the heights at the top of the street, looming out of an anxious mist of their own creation, preparing to descend on us. Gradually a group of us assemble along Lockwell Street, and decide to march up to oppose them. We wade up through the mist—partly led by me, since I'm one of the few with a gas mask—and sit down on a stretch of street, with Shawn and Lyn following behind with minidisks to make sure every sound is recorded. A young woman carrying a bullhorn asks if anyone has a copy of the "Charter of Rights and Freedoms" from the Canadian constitution (legal observers had been handing them out before the action).

"I think I have one in my bag somewhere," says Shawn. Lyn also produces a copy.

We sit on the cobblestones, about thirty or forty of us. I take off my gas mask. We are, I notice, in the middle of a purely residential neighborhood. The woman with the bullhorn, wearing a suede jacket and no sort of gear whatsoever, unfolds the paper and begins a dramatic recitation of the section concerning freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. An IMC radio journalist

holds out her microphone right next to the woman, kneeling, one arm dramatically upraised. Behind us, I notice a couple of video cameras focused on the police.

We knew, of course, they'd gas us.

Only twenty or third yards from the police position, for the first time, in fact, we could actually look into their eyes and see their faces. Most of them weren't wearing gas masks—probably because they knew they'd be firing at a distance, and downhill. We all stared transfixed as one woman cop, with a simple inoffensive face and blonde hair pulled back severely behind her visor, pulled out her launcher and began to take aim.

People started calling out to her: "Don't do it! Please! Don't gas us!"

"This is a nonviolent assembly!"

"We're not your enemies. Please, don't shoot!"

Then she fired. The canister sailed a few inches past the upheld microphone and exploded directly behind us.

Within a matter of seconds, it was a barrage. Eight, nine, ten cans were spinning all around us, exploding in flames, scattering everywhere. We scattered too. The young woman with the megaphone started walking slowly, defiantly backwards—then, turned over her shoulder and picked up the bullhorn one last time. "I just want to point out that you just broke the law!"

Another tear gas can landed about a foot away from her, then spun, flames shooting out of it. Another smacked into someone's window right above us, where for all we know some family had just been sitting down to dinner. The entire area turned into a cloud of CS.

That was, as Shawn pointed out, the first use of tear gas we'd seen in an obviously residential neighborhood.

Before long, we're back on the Côte, where the Flag of Many Nations waves. Someone tells us that, while on Turnbull the police were distracting themselves by gassing pacifists and local residents, on a nearby side street—Burton, or maybe Claire-Fontaine—a couple Black Bloc affinity groups had moved up, thinking to do some kind of flanking maneuver, and discovered three empty black SUVs completely unguarded. These were the vehicles used by snatch squads, quite possibly the very ones earlier used to nab Jaggi. They smashed the windows and made away with scores of plastic shields and other supplies, including several documents on cop formation tactics.

Shawn and Lyn, still sputtering from the gas, head off to find their car, which they think they left somewhere in walking distance the night before. We're all going to be meeting in an hour or two anyway, back in Laval.

7:27PM, Along St. Jean

By this time there's a strong feeling that things are winding down. We hear the opening ceremony has been delayed until 10PM (this turns out to be untrue: it actually began ten minutes later, at 7:30, but nonetheless hours behind schedule).

Another gas attack: this one quite close to us. Flaming canisters come spinning all the way down to where we are gathered on St. Jean, on a little intersection near a deserted lot. People come streaming down the same street. Some of the Refugees go out and spread our arms to prevent a stampede, but there's no use trying to hold the position. One young man with a red flag tries advancing, nearly alone. Before long, he has to retreat again. Another guy with a Québec Soviet flag (!)—half fleur de lis, half hammer and sickle—plants it next to the Flag of Many Nations.

Some CLAC fellow with a megaphone is trying to rally everyone in the vicinity in French. A small group drags a dumpster to the middle of the intersection and sets a fire in it. It's a flat space and well ventilated, just above another steep slope; seems as good a place as any to try to make a stand. I notice, too, that several of the people milling around the dumpster do not look like activists, but appear to be local residents, pissed off about the tear gas. And they definitely don't seem to be blaming us. One of the CLAC people is explaining to them that a fire will burn away the residual tear gas.

After a while, another CLAC person—a tall fellow with long, brown, shaggy hair—turns to me. He remembers me from the consulta.

"We are going to Laval: there is a spokescouncil," he says. "Would you like to come?"

"Oh, yeah. Actually that's where I'm supposed to meet the rest of my affinity group in a few minutes. How are you getting there?"

"There's a bus."

I head off with the CLAC team, one man and two women, but before we get there, they decide to stop first for a beer. Would I like to come along? I consider it, it occurs to me that I'm completely exhausted. So they direct me to the bus stop, and after a pleasant chat with a friendly *LA Times* reporter in the next seat, I arrive in Laval.

8:07PM, Stupid Little Spokes

The room, which has every sort of banner draped all over the walls, contains maybe two hundred people, but only half, at best, are taking part in the meeting. I soon see why. The conversation has degenerated into yet another argument about diversity of tactics. There are people complaining bitterly about rock-throwing, others insisting it was the only way to deal with indiscriminate attacks by the police. Nobody seems to be listening to anybody else, or talking about plans for the next day (or maybe that's later? I don't see an agenda on the wall). The whole spokescouncil just seems to be a chance for people to sound off.

Most of the Refugees are already in the room, or nearby, lounging about, playing with their minidisks, and watching images of the action from other peoples' video cameras. I check in and we all agree to head back to the house in an hour and a half.

It was at this moment I also discover that I am no longer the only member of NYC Ya Basta! in Québec City. Laura, the Italian woman and CUNY grad student, had just arrived with a carload of Yabbas—that is, Yabbas of the genuine, Italian variety: Beppe, Sandra, and Roberto. Laura starts laughing the moment she sees me. She runs up to give me a prolonged embrace. "Ha! This is so perfect! So wonderful! All the big pragmatic men of action in Ya Basta!—not a single one got through. They all gave up. And who actually makes it into action? Just you and me. The two intellectuals!"

Her friends are dressed to the nines in gorgeous Italian suits. "It was the only way we could get through," Roberto explains to me cheerfully.

"Yes," Laura said. "When we tried to drive through customs, the man asked where we were going. We said Québec City. Then he asked the purpose of our trip and Beppe said "tourism." So he started going through Beppe's passport, looking at the stamps. 'Hmmm...Geneva, June 1999; Seattle, November 1999; Prague, September 2000. So you just happened to show up at every major protest at a globalization summit for the last three years? I don't think so.'"

"So, what did you do?"

“They all just started screaming at him: ‘WE ARE ITALIAN CITIZENS TRYING TO VISIT CANADA! HOW DARE YOU? WHO THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? I WILL NOT STAND TO BE TREATED LIKE THIS! WHO IS YOUR COMMANDING OFFICER? WHAT IS YOUR BADGE NUMBER? WE’RE GOING TO CALL THE ITALIAN CONSULATE AND LODGE AN OFFICIAL COMPLAINT! WE’RE GOING TO MAKE THIS AN INTERNATIONAL FUCKING INCIDENT!’ And, finally, he just backed down.”

“You mean that actually worked?”

“The suits helped.”

The one thing that really worries me is that no one has heard anything from Karen. I was pretty sure we’d explained to her the importance of making sure other members of your affinity group know your whereabouts—or at least of getting word to them before you simply leave town. Anyway, it seemed like basic common sense. I find a place to check my email. Nothing. My cell phone is dead, all my numbers thus inaccessible (for instance, Sasha’s), but I borrow a phone from which I can check my messages. Nothing. The obvious implication is that she’s been arrested, which is both possible (I am told they have been targeting independent journalists) and disturbing (since she has no idea what she’s doing). I’m trying to remember: did we even make sure she wrote the legal number on her arm? Yes. We did that at the IMC. I borrow the cell phone again and call Legal. All I get are busy signals. I call the IMC. No information.

Finally, I give up. The Italians have a car, and invite me to join them on a brief spin to scout out the action. We end up taking a tour of the Upper City, passing down René Lévesque and the Fields of Abraham, watching occasional night battles—at one point I was pretty sure I saw someone throw a molotov, off in the distance. Somehow, after about ten minutes, all of us were singing:

Riot riot—I wanna riot

Riot riot—a riot of my own

Riot riot—I wanna riot

Riot riot—a riot of my own

(We had all, without noticing, dropped the “white” part.) I think I actually started it. Which is uncharacteristic, since I can’t sing a note. Not that it matters much with the Clash.

“Ah,” sighs Roberto, whose English is not fluent. “Even when we can hardly speak to each other, we all know the same songs.”

Saturday, April 21, 2001

We arrived at the house around midnight, only to discover Janna, of all people, already there. It turns out she’s a friend of Lyn’s.

One result of Janna’s medical ordeal is that she had become something of an expert on the effects of “non-lethal” chemical weapons. Clothing, she explained to us, absorbs toxins. It’s important to wash out everything we’re wearing very carefully before we take a shower or else the next time we get wet, it’ll be just as bad as when we were gassed the first time. My clothes were clearly saturated with all sorts of toxins. On the other hand, I had no bags and, therefore, nothing to change into. I ended up wandering around the house naked at 2AM while everyone else was asleep, doing laundry in a machine in the half-finished basement. My sweaters weren’t washable,

but, fortunately, most of them could be left behind since, according to all reports, Sunday was going to be even warmer than the day before.

Then I caught a good six or seven hours sleep—a rare luxury for a day of action.

For breakfast the next morning, Heidi had fetched croissants, *pain au chocolate*, and a copy of every local paper available. She'd also found several foreign ones. We passed them around while watching TV newscasters endlessly replay the high points of Friday's marches and confrontations. The coverage was amazing for its detail. There were the sort of headlines American media activists dream about, the kind you would never see in the US in a million years: "THE WALL FALLS!" "THE TEARS OF DEMOCRACY," (the latter referring to people's reactions to the tear gas), and so on.

Information available to us was a confusing mix of rumors, news reports, rumors reported in news reports, and official police statements—pretty much all of which could be assumed to be substantially untrue. At the bakery, Heidi had heard that a group of eighty nuns, enraged by the gas, was preparing to march on the main checkpoint to rip down the wall. The TV was reporting only fifty arrests on Friday, but Ben and Lyn, who had been on the phone with someone at the IMC, heard much higher numbers: including 126 in a sweep just a few hours before (both numbers turned out to be wildly inaccurate). The police had thrown a press conference Friday evening, announcing that a special operation had nabbed "the leader of the Black Bloc"—obviously meaning Jaggi. Jaggi's current whereabouts were unknown. (Only several days later did police acknowledge holding him; he was officially charged with "illegal possession of a catapult.")

Even the American press was far better than usual:

Protesters Seize Day in Québec Trade Foes Tear Gassed at Summit of Americas

By Dana Milbank

Washington Post Staff Writer

Saturday, April 21, 2001; Page A01

QUÉBEC CITY, April 20—President Bush and 33 other Western Hemisphere leaders seeking to build the world's largest free-trade zone opened a summit meeting today as clouds of tear gas and violent demonstrations played havoc with schedules and delayed meetings.

Bush remained holed up in his hotel as the summit's opening ceremonies were delayed more than an hour. He was forced to cancel one meeting and postpone or abbreviate others because the movements of heads of state around Québec City were hampered by the anti-globalization protests.

"If they are protesting because of free trade, I'd say I disagree," Bush said. "I think trade is very important to this hemisphere. Trade not only helps spread prosperity but trade helps spread freedom."

In the lobby of the Loews Hotel, confusion reigned, as Bush aides scrambled to keep track of the changing schedule while watching the riots on television. Colombian President Andres Pastrana waited out the delays in the cocktail lounge...

There were rumors of huge numbers already assembling: twenty-five thousand at the Vieux Port, at the very foot of the city, to begin the labor march and People's Summit; a student group massing on the Plains of Abraham; huge numbers at Laval. Everyone, including the newspapers, were going on about the sheer size of the event: there's simply no way the police can handle this. The big wild card, we agree, will be the labor march. The organizers, predictably, have set it up so that everyone starts ten or fifteen blocks from the perimeter and then marches off in

the other direction, to end up in a rally in some distant lot. The question is whether rank and file will be satisfied by this. We know that both CLAC and NEFAC (Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists, a labor-oriented anarchist group) will have people there, trying to divert people to the wall.

Comparing notes, we also try to piece together more of a picture of what must have happened yesterday. Akwesasne we decide we'll never figure out, not until we have more information. Obviously, something fucked up in a big way. Shawn wants to know: why the hell were you guys four hours late? Half the Warriors had left already. I honestly can't tell him. And what was this idiocy of "all or nothing"? The irony about Friday was that, while we were all at Akwesasne eating fish, CLAC people at the spokescouncil were in a near panic that the Carnival Against Capitalism would be a bust. The torchlight parade and women's action were beautiful, but relatively small. No one had any idea how many people would show up Saturday. That's why there had been so much jubilation about numbers Saturday morning.

Janna comes in late, sniffing, in a nightgown—she, at least, got through with all her baggage. She says she'd spent most of Friday in the Green Zone, whose center was below the highway at the foot of the hill, and had caught a glimpse of the Living River.

"Oh, right, the Blue Bloc! I was wondering if those guys even got through."

"They were there all right, a couple hundred of them, actually. I saw them on St. Jean, not long after we heard the wall came down. They had this whole complex organization with four flags each representing one of the four elements—green for earth, blue for water, red for fire and... was it white for air? No, I think it was yellow. Starhawk was there with a little drum and they put on a spiral dance and called on the power of the river to put the elements on our side."

Sam is looking dubious, as if trying not to mutter something cynical into his coffee.

"Well," I remark, "for what it's worth, we did have remarkably good weather yesterday."

"Yeah, the breeze was at our backs the whole time," said Lyn. "You saw how it kept blowing all the tear gas back on the police? Especially at first, when they were firing right in front of them, it all just streamed right back into their faces."

"The earth is on our side," said Janna. "I really believe that."

"Maybe we should make a sign to carry to the park," I say: "'We Know Which Way the Wind Is Blowing.'"

11:00AM, Orsainville

Still worried about Karen, I end up wasting the rest of the morning and early afternoon on some scheme planned by Heidi and her friend, a *Frontline* producer named Claudia, to visit the local prison, in a forest some miles out of town. Claudia has a car. There are already a handful of activists doing jail solidarity in front on the prison, but they have only a limited list of who's inside, and no one has heard word of any IMC or other freelance videographers being held there.

Later, that handful is to expand to a veritable "Solidarity Village," as people pitch tents, bring in jugglers and musicians, and create a continual rhythm of chants and music to ensure the prisoners know they're out there. A squad of riot cops will appear, and entertainers with megaphones will tell jokes and try to crack them up. There will be vegetarian cookouts and an endless supply of journalists. Not now. Only about twenty people who have reason to believe members of their affinity groups or close relatives are behind bars, a couple legal reps, and one rather pathetic middle-aged couple worried sick about their sixteen-year-old daughter.

Everything takes longer than it ought to. Finally, after a marathon cell phone session, Claudia says she wants to catch the tail end of the People's Summit—which the organizers had intentionally placed far, far from the action, near the port several kilometers away. The parade was supposed to set out at noon, marching to the summit; we've definitely missed that. Anyway, I'm reluctant to head that far from the city without knowing how I'm going to get back. She offers to drop us both off at the IMC, where Heidi has to do a radio show. We agree to meet with the rest of our group at the party under the highway in the Green Zone that evening, and I head up toward the park to see if I can find La Resistance.

3:20PM, Finally Back in the City

There's graffiti everywhere: a thousand Circle-As, "FUCK THE COPS," "NO CHOICE," "*MURS BLANCS, PEUPLE MUET*," gas masks painted onto the faces of every half-dressed model on a bus-stop advertisement, not a billboard anywhere left unaltered or undefaced. By the side of the highway, at various spots:

QUI EST LE CHEF DU BLACK BLOC?

THE GATES OF HEAVEN WILL BE TAKEN BY STORM

Y'EN A PAS EPAIS

PROPERTY IS THEFT

At the café, it's still all activists. Within five minutes, I have most of the story of the day. The parade was enormous: the news is saying sixty-thousand people, with an endless display of puppets, banners, floats, and theatrical performances. It ended in a rally with speeches by Jose Bové, Maude Barlow, and all sorts of international celebrities. "Did anyone break off to go to the wall?" Well, not in the thousands, no, but there have been a lot of trade unionists who at least have visited the perimeter. One column of several hundred auto workers formed affinity groups and marched up to a gate somewhere way on the east side of the perimeter, and ended up getting seriously gassed. Many are still there, thinks the fellow at the next table. At any rate, things will really get interesting, he thinks, when the rally breaks up, because a lot of the participants are saying they're going to go to the party underneath the highway.

"That's the Green Zone, right? The Ile Flueriot?" I ask, looking at my map.

"Yes, there. Boulevard Charest Est. You see, there's this huge intersection of six different roads? It's not far from the IMC." A few minutes later, I've resumed my climb towards the Old City. The cops have been gassing all day. There is, literally, a thick cloud of the stuff, hanging like a noxious wall over St. Jean Baptiste, and extending well below it. One thing is a pleasant change, though: by now the loyalties of the surrounding community have become utterly explicit. It was as if, Friday, they were still observing, measuring, waiting to see whether the anarchists would really trash the city, as the federal authorities had been promising them, whether the cops would really gas them, as the anarchists had said they would. By now, they knew. We had hurt no one and damaged nothing. We had done our best to avoid making a battlefield of their neighborhoods. The police had responded by gassing and attacking everyone indiscriminately, firing toxins directly into their patios and gardens.

By Saturday afternoon, half the houses are hanging out some sort of banner or sign: "We are with you!" "No FTAA!," or even, once, "We support the Black Bloc" (except, of course, in French). Many have also brought garden hoses out to their stoops or are dangling them from windows to provide free water for protesters. Grandmas wave and smile from porches. Children giggle and

follow us around. It's like some crazy anarchist fantasy. The one exception, as I pass, is a stocky, middle-aged man who is throwing some kind of tantrum at a handful of Black Bloc kids in front of his building, right at the end of the steep street leading to the park. "Why are you still here?" he's shouting, "I understand yesterday, you tore down the wall, you made your statement. That's good, I support you. But enough now! Still you have to fight the cops, still they're gassing, my home is full of tear gas, for two days it has been full of gas, I've had to send my infant son away to an aunt in the suburbs because he was choking on it. My mother has had to abandon her apartment. Enough! Right now there is a labor march in the Lower City, it says on TV there are 60,000 people marching. Why aren't you marching with them? Why are you still here bringing the gas on us?" The Black Bloc kids seem flustered; they appear to know enough French to understand him, but not enough to make any kind of articulate reply. Finally, three or four neighbors gather and try to calm him down. "It's not their fault, they just want to make sure the heads of state hear their message." "You can't expect them all to march away from where the delegates are actually meeting." "It's not the kids who are gassing us," one woman insists, "it's the police."

3:35PM, Ground Zero

The park is ours again, with scattered collections of people in the square sitting on the ground, putting on performances. Gas explosions are periodic, but nowhere near the same intensity as the day before (they're landing approximately once every three minutes now, says someone with a pocket watch).

The Black Bloc is not in evidence. I'm told they've been scattered in small groups for most of the day, going against exposed sectors of the perimeter. I'm disappointed, though, to see that the section of the wall we'd pulled down yesterday was up again. There's a new, somewhat jerry-built gate. Right behind it, they've positioned a water cannon—actually a pretty clever move, since this means we can't get near enough to trash the thing. The water cannon seems to be set to autopilot, shooting an huge plume of water which slowly swept back and forth across an arc of space in front of it. It is as if they had found a lawn sprinkler that worked at a thousand times the pressure and volume. As a defensive weapon, it was quite effective. A coordinated assault on that section of wall would now clearly be impossible. On the other hand, the presence of plumes of water—no matter how high intensity—on a hot day is apparently just too much of a temptation in the middle of an anti-capitalist carnival. People keep dashing up and making a spectacle of themselves splashing about in the water. Some get knocked off their feet and slide about merrily. Others lean into it and stay up—looking like street mimes walking against the wind—or otherwise clown around. Everyone seems to be enjoying the show; anyway, the cops don't seem to be firing at anyone. Despite repeated warnings about getting my toxin-drenched clothing wet, I can't help myself.

I take a brief dip. It's kind of refreshing.

Back in the park, people are playing Frisbee, bouncing beachballs. Half the time I have my mask pulled up on top of my head.

Old friends are everywhere. At one point Janna appears, entirely wrapped in an elaborate protective outfit made of plastic garbage bags, goggles, poncho, and high plastic boots, carrying a large bag of medical materials for the treatment of the effects of tear gas. She sets up shop by a tree at the very edge of a huge toxic cloud.

"Jesus, Janna! What are you *doing* here?" asks one of her fellow Refugees.

“I just couldn’t sit back and do nothing while people are being gassed.”

“Are you crazy? I’ve heard they’re using CS again. Who knows what would happen if you were exposed again!”

“CS? Is that really true?” Several bystanders confirm the rumor. The matter becomes a spontaneous group discussion. Eventually, Janna agrees to move back down to St. Jean and set up shop there instead. Two of the bystanders accompany her.

Eventually, I notice scattered clusters of Black Bloc anarchists coalescing on the far edge of the park. Looks like some kind of pre-arranged convergence. At that moment, I had been talking with some friends about the feasibility of a flanking maneuver of our own against the southern portion of the wall, which seemed undefended. Scouting out the territory, I run into Dean, who had been lying on a long flat rock in a rather dashing trenchcoat. I explain my project.

“Count me in,” he smiles, producing an enormous pair of wire clippers from under his coat.

But the spot turns out to be better defended than it appeared. Tear gas canisters land directly at our feet, and five robocops appear with what look like giant shotguns, either for the firing of plastic bullets or pepper-soaked beanbags. We don’t really want to find out, and quickly back away.

By this time, though, the Bloc, still only about forty people, is masking up and about to move out. La Resistance is not among them, but I do spot two friends from yesterday, who suggest I come along. We can always do lookout, they say. Anyway, apparently, there’s a plan. I zip up my hoodie, rendering myself entirely dressed in black, mask myself, and follow.

4:00PM, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce

What follows is one of only three major instances of targeted property destruction during the Summit. The target is the local headquarters of one of Canada’s major banks, the CIBC—one of the main forces lobbying for passage of the FTAA, along with profiting from government student loan programs while pushing for massive cuts in health and education funding.

The bank offices are only a couple blocks from the park, on the edge of a residential neighborhood. There’s some kind of confrontation between pacifists and a line of riot cops a couple blocks away, but I can’t really make out what’s going on there. We find the bank itself, on the first floor of some minor office building, already under siege. However, matters are also a bit more complicated than we anticipated. Two members of the affinity group that planned the action have picked up a police barricade and are preparing to smash in the bank’s plate-glass windows. Standing in their way, though, are two fiftyish hippies, apparently a married couple in identical rainbow jackets and tie-dyed clothes. The two are methodically trying to interpose themselves. Eventually, the woman gives up but her husband is persistent. Spry, dancer-like, he keeps leaping in front of their trajectory every time they pull back to swing. The two kids with the barricade are determined not to hurt him, but neither are they about to give up. There follows a peculiar ballet of feints and thrusts, until the Black Bloc kids figure out a system: one bluffs him, and the other swings hard in a different direction. Before long there’s shattered glass all over the sidewalk.

We’re scouting for cameras or police, and seeing neither. There are a couple of bystanders who are probably reporters, but they’re only carrying notebooks; the police line two blocks away seems oblivious, or maybe they just haven’t received orders yet to move. What there are is extremely disruptive pacifists, who seem to have gone through some SalAMI “de-escalation training” and are trying out all their techniques. As we walk along the edge of the scene, one bearded

pacifist, looking rather like the lumberjack fellow from the Spokescouncil (but no, it's not him) is following us along repeating over and over again, in exactly the same words: "These are not the right tactics to use. These are not the right tactics to use. These are not the right tactics to use."

I'm considering asking him if he considers this a form of argument. My companions tell me just leave him be. Which seems wise.

A little further off, things look they might be about to descend into shoving matches or actual scuffles.

It's time for some de-escalation of our own. The Bloc march off, led by a tall blonde guy singing "Kumbaya."

Except for one small team, one of whom stays behind to spray-paint:

Banks don't bleed. Protesters have.

Another pastes up a cardboard sign prepared for the occasion:

I Owe You One for the Broken Window

—The Revolution

And a third splashes the interior with a bucket of white paint.

We march west, away from the park, but before we've gone more than a block or two, we are met by a delegation of middle-aged townfolk (I think to myself, "I am tempted to call them 'burghers,' except that none of them are fat"). They ask us not to go into their neighborhood. It is residential.

One of the anarchists in front is trying to explain that they have nothing to fear from us: we never attack small businesses or personal property. Only corporate establishments.

"Well, there are none of those in this direction. Just people's homes. So there's no need to go here."

After a bit of uncomfortable shifting back and forth, the man next to him is more direct: "Don't destroy the town," he says, pointing back to the park. "Go fight the cops!"

"Yes, fight the cops," says someone else. "We realize you are fighting on our side. We support you. But people are afraid for their neighborhoods."

For many of the Black Bloc, this must be a moment of ultimate moral confusion. After all, most anarchists believe targeted property destruction is legitimate *because* it's not really a form of violence. You can't be violent to an inanimate object. Because nobody actually gets hurt. This is why the rainbow fellow could act the way he did: he knew none of us would be willing to harm another human being—or anyway, certainly not one that wasn't directly attacking us, whereas if he had tried to interpose his body like that against a cop, the cop would simply hit him. Suddenly we were faced with members of the public urging us to forgo property destruction, and instead engage in violence. With the pacifists, we could argue, even scream at each other, but we were screaming in the same language. Here we were dealing with a completely different moral universe.

After brief exchange, we turn around and march back towards the park, to the usual loud cheers and applause. Someone shouts: "It's the People's Riot Police!"

4:20PM, Jean Baptiste

The park is all celebration: "We won! Summit closed for tear gas!"

Not true, of course.

After a bit I finally find La Resistance, to a general exchange of hugs. I tell Kitty about the bank. She tells me that all day there have been running battles along the north side of the wall, where it cuts through Jean Baptiste. Police lines are so thinly stretched, it's usually possible to find a spot that's undefended. Mostly they've been using hooks and ropes and clippers like on Friday, but sometimes you can take advantage of abrupt slopes to roll flaming dumpsters or even just shopping carts into the fence.

The Refugees are nowhere to be seen, so I figure I'm La Resistance for the rest of the afternoon. Before long, we end up on the edge of an ancient church graveyard, where the fence has been particularly heavily festooned with signs and slogans, yanking away with grappling hooks, using paving stones to mash away at the main posts, or to chuck over the fence at police vehicles or even, on one or two occasions, individual police. Much of the wall is already down in this area. Every trash bin seems to have a fire in it—to burn away the tear gas—which means as we march we find ourselves moving through alternating streams of smoke, toxic white, and acrid grey.

Kitty explains they've been paying particular attention to the churchyard because it's directly behind the Congress Center where the Summit is taking place.

Notebook Entry, written the next day, 4/22/01

The Black Bloc was never large that day, rarely more than thirty or forty people, actually, though it would occasionally reconverge at fifty or sixty. People would get scattered, affinity groups of normally six or eight get reduced to two or three people, due to injuries or exhaustion. Though, occasionally, we'd also get reinforcements from people who just arrived in town: like the three Connecticut Yabbas who showed up Saturday morning and joined La Resistance. Just about everyone had been hit by something at some point—often feet or ankles, mostly by tear gas canisters. But plastic bullets were being used increasingly, and from guns with laser sights so at night people could often see that the cops were intentionally aiming for heads or groins. "I got hit in the groin. But I was wearing a cup!" declared one of our new arrivals, triumphantly.

When a scout spotted a plausible target, we'd gather everyone available and form a circle to discuss it. This always involved first getting a couple volunteers to do a camera-check, circling through the surrounding crowds, since there always was one, asking anyone with video cameras or photographic equipment not to take pictures of the meeting. This despite everyone being masked all the time anyway. (Brad told me it was just the same in Prague. The trick is to approach looking vaguely scary, all in black, masked and usually helmeted; and then be scrupulously polite and gracious when you actually open your mouth. The combination proved remarkably effective.) Discussion was pretty free-form, but consensus-based. Then we'd move into action—often greeted by cheers by demonstrators and increasingly, townspeople, whenever we show up in a new place.

The Bloc had only minimal communications—at one point I think our entire comms system consisted of two guys connected via Nextel, whose job was to coordinate so as to make sure we didn't get cut off and surrounded by cops. When we charged—as on St. Jean—one person also hung back to scout. But that was it. This seemed typical of the whole action, though: if CLAC had a comms or scouting system, which presumably they must have, I never saw a sign of it. It must have been very small. Time's Up Bill, who spent some time circling the perimeter on a bicycle, later complained that he'd seen numerous unguarded breaches in the security fence all day. If there had been any sort of proper organization, people would have been able to burst right in. But of course most of us had long since decided we didn't want to invade the perimeter.

In part, too, the attacks on the wall are meant to keep the police off balance, to try to keep them from amassing forces and invading the surrounding neighborhood again.

Not far away from the cemetery, at Rue St. Genevieve, was a huge press of people, a kind of focus of intensity, where the Bloc had earlier been attacking a section of the wall. Apparently, they'd set fire to a dumpster, and rolled it into the fence. It crashed through and flipped over inside the perimeter. Cops then tried to block the breach with a bulldozer, but the Bloc had managed to disable it—by the time we saw it, it looked thoroughly trashed, with revolutionary slogans spray-painted all over it—and escaped just as a squad of maybe thirty riot cops marched up in formation to secure the area. When we arrived, the dumpster was still smoldering, the tractor broken and askew, and the thirty police standing absolutely motionless, surrounded by hundreds of pacifists. The alley was tight enough they had managed to completely cut them off. The police had maybe a couple yards clear in front of and behind them, after that, it was an impenetrable wall of human beings. Someone told us the standoff had now been going on for almost an hour. There was a sizeable band of drummers and other musicians a little bit up the slope, playing slow rhythmic music—actually, it was extremely good, with all sorts of intricate syncopation—and people dancing in hypnotic style. Occasionally someone would leave the human wall and join the dancing, or vice versa. Entranced, I fell away from the Bloc for a moment, promising I'd rendezvous later.

5:25PM, The Park

Now the story is the Summit is delayed because the tear gas has gotten in the ventilation system. Or, alternately, that the Brazilian delegation have used this as an excuse to refuse to go in. (Everybody has been counting on the Brazilians to spearhead opposition to the treaty.)

The police are starting to move down into Jean Baptiste, despite our best efforts to delay them. One unit has encircled a nearby intersection.

They're also trying to take the park again, making liberal use of concussion grenades and pepper spray. The response is an almost dizzying diversity of tactics. There's a cluster of about thirty activists, mostly students I think, in jeans and T-shirts, some without even bandanas, staging a sit-down. They position themselves right in the path of a police line, those in front raising both arms in the air to flash peace signs. They're chanting:

We're nonviolent, how 'bout you?
We're nonviolent, how 'bout you?

As the cops get nearer, the activists break into "the whole world is watching!" and two police officers start firing plastic bullets directly into the middle of the crowd. Someone screams. Someone carries someone off, but the rest hold their position. A priest appears and interposes himself. He's talking with the police. Some Radical Cheerleaders, with black and red pompoms and outrageous hairdos, walk up and begin one of their elaborate chants nearby. Apparently reassured, the cops return to the fence.

Almost immediately thereafter, four molotov cocktails sail over the fence after them. I see a few figures running off in the mist. Oddly, they don't look much like activists: the two I see most clearly seem stocky, fortyish. One rather reminds me of the fellow who'd been complaining about the tear gas on his stoop a few hours before (but I'm pretty sure it isn't him).

I never saw anyone with a firebomb that weekend who wasn't speaking French.

Finally, the pieces started to fall together: Montréal Ya Basta! explaining about how there are different standards about violence in Québec, CASA's confusing refusal to disallow molotovs, even as they appealed for community support, the delegation of citizens telling us to fight the cops—even Mac's diatribe in Little Italy about how the truly oppressed either sit back or fight back, and are not interested in elaborate codes of nonviolence. This is a community with an extremely militant tradition of resistance. Both the priest and the bombers actually represented the same phenomenon: a community beginning to actively intervene on our behalf.

A bearded guy on stilts, in an elaborate green-sequined costume, strides up to the fence with an enormous peace sign. The cops turn on the water cannon and blast him square in the chest. He flies backwards about twenty feet. Medics run up, make sure his spine isn't broken, then turn the stilts into splints and quickly, keeping their heads low, whisk him away.

5:53PM

A huge plume rises over the park. Helicopters rattle overhead.

Another mortar round. Cheers as someone throws it back. Two smokebombs go with it.

"Hey, nonviolent!" someone shouts.

Someone else: "Is there anyone who might be pregnant? They're using CS gas!"

A police squad starts nabbing activists at the edge of the park. It's perhaps the first time I've actually witnessed an arrest. I leave the park and head downhill again.

6:00PM, Jean Baptiste

What follows is something of a blur. I completely gave up on taking notes. I somehow wind up with a column of about twenty-five or thirty Black Bloc'ers who attempt a charge on a fenced position... I think it was along St. Jean again, where a flaming shopping cart had almost collapsed the wall an hour or two before. About halfway through the charge, we're pepper-bombed; at least, it's the same blinding sensation I had experienced at the wall, going right through my gas mask. I stumble back a ways. By chance, there's a medic on a nearby stoop, a young man of eighteen or twenty who looks like he's from Senegal or Cameroon, with spiked hair and a hefty plastic first aid kit. He offers me the full anti-pepper treatment, and we find a sheltered space where he carefully washes my eyes and face with some kind of antacid solution, then scrubs and washes it out with mineral oil. I feel considerably better.

By the time I find the remnants of the Bloc, though, there are only a little over a dozen of them, and a big blonde fellow remarks sternly that no one recognizes me. Where's my affinity group? Maybe you should go try to find them. I look around for Kitty and the rest of La Resistance, but no one is around. I could have sworn I was with them earlier. Still a little dazed, I can't remember anyone's names, let alone action names. Buffy is a ways off resting against a wall with her eyes closed. I've forgotten her name too. I tell him, good idea, yeah, I'm sure they must have moved down to the park or something, and head off to take myself a breather.

Big blonde guy suddenly takes on a kindly tone. "Hey, good luck! I'm sure it won't take long to find them."

At the park, things are getting ever more intense. A small squad of people with fire bombs are trying to destroy the water cannon. Every time they get close to being in range, carefully diving in between its mechanical sweeps, police open fire with plastic bullets. I watch two molotovs make

beautiful arcs and land within a few feet of the machine, producing spectacular, but momentary, splashes of flame. They don't seem to do any damage.

No snatch squads appear to be operating at the moment, so I lie down to rest; but it seemed almost as soon as I had rested a few minutes Buffy is there, tapping me on the shoulder. "Hey, David! We're trying to gather some folks together to head down towards the highway. There's a main entry point there that's really lightly guarded."

"Oh, okay."

"Are there any other members of your affinity group in the park?"

"No, I think I lost them."

Within a few minutes I'm back with the Bloc, in the same spot as before, but this time everyone is there: La Resistance, Craig's group, the PEI kids—only Montréal is missing. We head down St. Jean, then downhill to the occasional cheers of pedestrians, descend to the highway and scope out the situation.

The situation though turns out to be a little too hectic for my taste. There's already a battle going on, with at least five or six cops crouched in the darkness behind a wide chain-link gate, red lasers from their sights sweeping and darting everywhere. There's a huge empty stretch of asphalt, and sheltered spaces where people—I think they're students, definitely not Black Bloc, but really I have no idea who they are—are mixing molotovs in empty glass coke-bottles. Every minute or so one will emerge from their cover and loft it over the gate.

"It doesn't look so lightly defended any more," I say to Buffy.

She furls her brow as another splash of flame lights up the gate momentarily. "Well, we'll see what we can make of it."

The Bloc itself had long since consensed on no molotovs, but now that the genie was out of the bottle, as it were, some of us were at least willing to help prepare them. "After all," someone says, "we said we'd follow the lead of the local people." Others—Lee for instance—are looking extremely skeptical. I found the whole scene enormously disturbing. CS was landing everywhere. Cops were firing apparently indiscriminately. There was one weird guy twirling slowly around in the very middle of everything, dancing in and out of the lights and clouds to a music that must have existed only in his head.

"Jeez, what would make someone act like that?" someone asks.

"I'm guessing Ecstasy."

I figure this is why they tell you never to bring drugs to an action.

Myself, I have no interest in helping anyone try to set someone else on fire— even police in flame-retardant body armor—so it occurs to me this might not be a bad moment to check in with the IMC. I will make one last attempt to locate Karen. They'll probably have a clearer idea what's going on in the city, too, and whether we've really shut down the Summit. Retreating to a nearby streetlamp to consult my map, I realize it's quite close. I wave good luck to everyone (nobody really notices), watch for a moment as they descend to positions closer to the gate.

A few minutes later, I'm passing under a highway ramp where Food Not Bombs is rolling out vast tureens for an upcoming free kitchen. There's a small tent village, and punk-rockers setting up a sound system from the back of a truck. This must be the Ile Fleuriot. It's kind of a grimy, clammy space, but there are already a few hundred people starting to gather for the party. I make a note: I'm supposed to be meeting people here at the party later on. Then I pass the now shuttered Army/Navy store and, finally, descend into the IMC.

7:15PM, I enter the IMC

At the IMC, everything is different. For one thing, there's security now. No one is allowed inside without an Indymedia ID. There's a big fellow at the door, who seems to belong to the building. Downstairs, where once there had been a handful of drowsy, happy activists, the space is now crammed and full of grim efficiency. On the tables are rows of computers and video cameras; there are laptops all over the floor. Wires cover everything. Every electric socket has an extension cord and seven or eight devices plugged into it. Near the door is an enormous pile of gear, gas masks, raincoats, water bottles, every sort of protective equipment. On the walls, lists of rules, work shifts, teams, phone numbers, events. Next to the door is an improvised security desk where you show your ID a second time; behind it, a girl with dark curly hair who looks like a high school student. I flash my IMC card. It turns out she is, in fact, a high school student: part of a small group from another province who are in the city on some sort of alternative media grant. She looks more than a little overwhelmed.

Maybe a third of the faces are familiar to me from other actions. I spot Celia, who I met in the IMC in Philadelphia during the Republican Convention. At the time, we were both working on the team doing liaison with the corporate media. I was a complete neophyte. She, in her mid-thirties, was an experienced media activist, who ended up organizing most of our press conferences.

"Hey, Celia!"

"Oh, hi, David. Just get into town?"

"No, I got through at Akwesasne. One of the few. Been here since Friday morning. You?"

"Me? I've been in town since Wednesday." She paused. "So, what do you think?"

"I've never experienced anything like it." I started going on about Friday and the exhilaration of bringing down the wall.

Celia, however, is unimpressed by macho heroics, and starts telling me instead about her own high point: a ceremony on the first day conducted by the Living River. Had I seen it? She had just been editing images from it on a nearby computer: the blue stream coming to rest along the streets of St. Jean, everything falling silent, then, suddenly, a hundred people simultaneously throwing rolls of toilet paper into the air, creating an effect like a fluttering, billowing sea. After which a Wiccan offered a beautiful incantation.

The images on the computer screen were small and I doubted they really give a full sense of the moment. Still, they were impressive. I look them over even after Celia is called away a moment later, then poke around until I find the legal person who has been keeping track of IMC arrestees. There have been several, but most of them within the last several hours and none of them were Karen. Neither has anyone been in contact with her.

I do find someone who knows Sasha's number, so I use the IMC phone to call him. But it goes straight to voicemail. I check messages. Call friends.

Nothing.

Is it possible she just went home and didn't tell anyone? For an activist, that would have been incredibly irresponsible. But of course, Karen is not an activist.

7:30PM, still in the IMC

Independent Media Centers are another institution born of the WTO protests in Seattle: they are meant to be a way for activist journalists to provide their own account of events, and actually

convey the protesters' message, which the corporate media almost never does. By 2001, there were permanent IMCs in most major North American cities and, increasingly, across the world. Huge ones would also come into being temporarily during every major mobilization. IMCs ran on essentially anarchist principles. Everything was done collectively: people edited each other's stories; there was no hierarchy of editors and reporters; all decisions were made by consensus. The IMC would host live radio shows, prepare videos, and during the key days of action, release a daily newspaper reporting on events. Most immediately, though, it maintained a web page, where one could find up-to-the-minute information on the actions as they happened. One side of the page was open—anyone could post—and, therefore, it largely resembled the rumor mill on the streets; but the center of the page was all dispatches from IMC reporters, who prided themselves on maintaining more exacting standards of accuracy than the corporate press.

Here at the activist info hub, I was finally able to start piecing together the kind of comprehensive, panoramic information that is simply unavailable on the streets. The picture was frightening.

The police had been moving downhill steadily since 6PM, much more rapidly than they had the day before. This time, their strategy was first to seize key points and intersections, then to follow up with mop-up operations and arrest anyone still on the streets within occupied territory. They were also adopting a posture of hands-on brutality. Several Indymedia videographers had already been beaten and arrested. One of the first police targets was the Clinic, where our medics were treating all the worst injuries. First, police had lobbed tear gas directly through the windows, shattering glass and forcing the medics to evacuate the wounded. Fifteen minutes later, a squad of police showed up at the new, makeshift clinic they'd created in the alleyway outside and marched everyone out at gunpoint, rousting patients out of stretchers, appropriating medical supplies, stripping everyone of goggles and gas masks and even vinegar-soaked bandanas, then driving them down the long stairs that wound down from the Côte d'Abraham. The big battle had now shifted to the heart of the Green Zone. Thousands of people had gathered for the free food and dance party that was supposed to celebrate the day's action. Many were coming from the march and People's Summit; there were children and old people. Then, suddenly, the police attacked. The acre-wide "Temporary Autonomous Zone" under the highway was transformed into a vast cloud of tear gas. Would-be partygoers responded by occupying the highway overhead. The police were currently trying to dislodge them, but there were by now at least three thousand of them and they were putting up stiff resistance.

We didn't have clear numbers yet for arrests and injuries. Official numbers, dutifully repeated by TV and wire services, were sheerest fantasy: the cops were reporting about forty injuries since Friday, of which, they claimed, about half were police. Our medics were reporting they had treated over a thousand injuries on the first day alone: including several asthmatics who nearly died from the gas, dozens of broken bones and some very serious burns. The authorities were also still claiming that only a few dozen had been arrested, despite the sweeps in the Old City. This also could not possibly be true. We were already receiving the usual frightening reports, by now familiar in the US, of intentional abuse of prisoners. Buses full of handcuffed detainees were being driven in circles around the city for twelve or thirteen hours to avoid legalities; arrestees who actually were booked were being hog-tied, denied access to water or toilet facilities; injured activists were being denied medical treatment, stripped, hosed down with icy water and left freezing in unheated cells.

Everyone is worrying the IMC will be the next target. This is not just because of its obvious strategic importance in giving activists (and everybody else) some idea what's going on. Ap-

parently, someone had scanned several pages of text that appeared to be from the police SUVs broken into the night before, with detailed intelligence reports and contingency plans on police strategy, and uploaded it to the IMC web page the night before. The editors immediately removed it and passed it on to the IMC in Seattle, who published it—noting there was no way to be sure whether it was forged or genuine. A few hours later Seattle police closed down the IMC there. It seemed reasonable to expect that, given the circumstances, the Québec IMC might be next.

The worst news, however, is that it now looks like one protester has actually been shot dead. It's not completely certain. The report first comes in by phone, from an IMC reporter by the highway. This creates a major crisis, because the question now becomes what to report. A meeting is called. It starts with maybe a dozen people huddled around a desk and ends up including almost everyone:

(From notebook, 4/21/01, 7:50PM, emergency meeting, Québec IMC)

Chuck: Well, let me present this as a formal proposal then. We have an eye-witness report that a protester has been killed after being shot in the throat with a plastic bullet near the highway. Apparently some medics tried CPR, and when he didn't come around, they eventually managed to get him to an ambulance and that's the last anyone's seen of him. So I'm proposing we put the information we have on the web page. Bearing in mind that, in doing so, we'd also be effectively releasing it to the corporate media.

Celia: There's also a counter-proposal that a small group of us do the leg-work to get full confirmation before we run anything. We're not the corporate media. For them, one confirmation would be enough; our job is to do it better. So the proposal is not to run with the story unless we have at least two confirmations.

Chuck: Well, I agree we should definitely create such a team in any event.

Helen: I'm taking stack for anyone who wants to express concerns now, or commentary. Bill?

Bill: Well, for my own part, I'd prefer, if possible, to keep corporate media out of this, because they're fuckers.

Suzette: I agree with the second proposal. We have to check further.

Andrew: I also managed to get through to a street medic who confirmed the first part of the story: a young man was shot in the throat, he collapsed, he wasn't breathing, medics tried to revive him, and he was eventually taken to a hospital.

Helen: So we can report that as confirmed?

Ben: I'd say, since that part is confirmed, let's assemble a small team to investigate; see if we can get any further information from the hospital.

Helen: So you're supporting the second proposal?

Ben: Yeah.

[There are people coming in from the stairs, stripping off gear, talking excitedly]

Helen: Quiet please! We have a consensus process going on!

Annette: I think we should think seriously about the effects of releasing anything this potentially explosive without having absolute confirmation.

Randy: As for first proposal, I agree with Annette. We have over ten thousand people here facing several thousand cops. It's already halfway to a war out there. If we spread the word that somebody died, do we want to be responsible for the result?

[A couple people shout "yes!"]

Annette: Look, we know the corporate media is watching everything we're doing. We put it out there, they'll run with it. If we say something that isn't true, I don't even want to think about what'll happen.

Noah: And people out there are already pissed off enough at the cops.

Chuck: ...and more likely to be in the streets, getting it from the rumor mill. Word will go out that this happened. It's possible, if we run a story saying only what's already confirmed, then someone who knows the rest of the story will call in and tell us. It might be the only realistic way we could have of finding out.

Riley: We've already had reports of several molotovs having been thrown, several points where there have been pitched battles with the cops.

[*Everyone is standing in a circle by now.*]

Suzette: There have also been a lot of incorrect rumors about the Summit being shut down. How do we know any of those stories are even true?

David: Well, I can confirm the molotovs. I've seen quite a few of them by now.

Sheila: Excuse me—point of process. This entire meeting is being conducted in English. Is there anyone who doesn't speak English and wants an explanation of what's going on?

[*One woman does. Sheila gives her an update in French and provides simultaneous translation for the rest of the discussion.*]

Helen: Well, it sounds to me like we've come to...

Jamie [*newly arrived*]: Look, I saw this guy get shot! This happened.

Andrew: Wait, you were there? You saw it?

From the Door: COPS ARE ENTERING THE BUILDING!

The meeting dissolves into a scramble. The cops must be in the upstairs offices, since apparently they're not yet on the stairs. Someone shouts: "QUICKLY, GET THE KEY! GET IT RIGHT NOW!" Someone else is checking the stairs; others grab phones, punching steadily trying to find an open line, trying to contact IMC reporters on the street. After a moment, the crisis subsides. It looks like the cops hadn't done more than poke their heads in, shoot a bullet down the stairs just to scare us, and then make off. Slowly, everyone tries to breathe again, change registers, exit crisis mode. The meeting reconvenes and Jamie, the eyewitness, still geared up with a red bandana and green goggles on top of his head, provides more details: this one guy, the victim, was for some reason by himself not far from the wall, maybe twenty meters from the police. Suddenly two shots rang out and he was hit twice in rapid succession, once in the shoulder, once in the throat. You could see from the lasers that they were aiming directly at his head.

I had a horrified thought: was this that same guy I'd seen dancing in the middle of the melee down by the highway. It had to be. Who else could it be? It would be amazing if that guy *hadn't* gotten shot. Or, no... didn't someone else say it happened in an area outside of the action?

Helen: So it sounds like the emerging consensus is around the second proposal: not to send anything out immediately, but to try to confirm the story. Does anyone have serious concerns with that?

Bill: I'm still not clear how we would do that. We don't know the guy's name. The only way to confirm the name would be from the cops.

Celia: We can contact all the local hospitals. I'll volunteer to be in the team so we can, eventually, publish this.

Joe: I'm really afraid that if we spread false rumors, we'll seriously discredit ourselves.

Riley [*on the phone*]: I'm getting a report from an IMC reporter on the streets outside; he says there's all sorts of police brutality going on up above. Apparently six cops are surrounding the door right now...

Someone else: Some medics say they're coming down. It's an emergency.

Annette: We have to bear in mind the whole world is watching us. If anything we report turns out to be inaccurate, no one will ever forget it. I wouldn't even mention the fact that there are rumors at this point.

(*Medics enter*)

The medics were, unsurprisingly, looking for a new space to set up shop. Could they use the upstairs offices for a temporary clinic? The consensus seems to be that it's not likely to be a very safe location, since we're probably about to be invaded ourselves, but there are not a whole lot of viable alternatives. The medics take off to alert their network.

As a space, the IMC was particularly vulnerable. First of all, there was only one point of access: the stairs. If the police did show up, we'd all be instantly trapped here in the basement. Second, the building did not seem to have a functioning ventilation system. One tear gas canister down the stairs would make it uninhabitable. Already people were jamming scarves and sweaters under the cracks of the doors to prevent bad air from seeping in. The question is, if the cops do try to enter, should we try to defend the space, should we practice nonviolent civil disobedience (everyone sit on the floor, refuse to comply with orders, go limp if they try to carry us), or should we surrender and comply? An earlier meeting had consensed on the second strategy, but in light of developments it was critical to make sure everyone was still on the same page. Also, to try to ensure we have enough advance warning that anyone unwilling to risk arrest was given an option to get out beforehand.

Hardly has this meeting begun, however, when we're faced with another medical crisis. A young woman is escorted down the stairs, carrying a seven-month-old baby. She's sobbing quietly. The baby's screaming. Her IMC escort is desperately searching for a medic.

"Medics? I think they just left."

"Why? What happened?"

"Is the baby sick?"

"The fuckers gassed it."

"What? They gassed a baby?"

Her escort explains the mother is a Food Not Bombs volunteer, who was down at the Green Zone ladling soup when the police attacked. She immediately grabbed her child and took off for higher ground, but a canister landed directly at her feet as she was fleeing.

"Wow. Do you think it was an accident or do you think they actually saw the baby?"

The mother, who up to now had been silent, glared at him. "Of course they saw the baby!" she said, in thickly accented English. "They were thirty meters away from us!"

"The motherfuckers!"

Half the people in the room were speechless. Two women offered to hold the infant, whose face was bright crimson, tried to bounce and quiet him. His name, we learned, was Gabe.

"I can't believe they gassed a fucking baby."

"And they wonder why people throw rocks at the police."

Someone fetches water; someone else suggests they wait for the medics at the very top of the stairwell, where there's a landing on the sixth floor with an open window and relatively untainted air (it had previously been used as the IMC smoking section). It's after eight and I'm beginning

to think it will actually be safer under the highway, where at least there'll be escape routes. A woman who is part of some locally based documentary collective is at the pile of gear, holding up my gas mask. Can she use it "for just ten minutes?" Her crew just wants to go outside to get a few shots of the police.

"Well, is there chance it will be longer than ten minutes? Because I really have to leave."

"No, no," she says. "We will be right back."

I hesitate, make a subjective assessment of the situation. She is a professional videographer, with the kind of air of abrupt efficiency that, to me at least, suggests "person who would lie about this sort of thing without even thinking about it." On the other hand, we are in the sort of communal situation where one cannot really refuse a direct request without an explicit reason, and I really can't say I have one.

"Okay. But I really am going to need it back in ten minutes."

Half an hour later, I'm still waiting. I spend some time futzing around the office, once again confirming that none of the innumerable cell phone rechargers in the IMC will, in fact, recharge my make of phone. I try to see if there's work I can do—I did promise to contribute an hour's work, back when I got my ID card. But everyone is far too distracted. Neither is it possible to find a free computer on which to check my email. Without my mask, I'm basically trapped here. Anyway, if I leave, I'll definitely never get it back. So I head upstairs to help with the baby, who is still up on the landing. Even there, there's not too much I can do other than provide moral support, but it's a fascinating space, all concrete and industrial, with two big factory-style windows tilted slightly open. From one, you can see a rooftop now occupied by police. They're only twenty or thirty feet away, some of them, though, still utterly impersonal in gas masks, visors, and armor. They don't seem to be aware of us.

With nothing better to do, I started to scribble:

(From my notes again)

The problem with the IMC is it's a bubble—not just in the literal sense (no one wishing to open doors or windows and risk the tear gas getting in), but also because it's sealed off from the sense of immediacy, fellowship, and spontaneous intimacy you have on the streets where you're facing continual, tangible danger. Here, everything is mediated. You're in a florescent room full of screens and monitors, you see nothing for yourself but still you know each and every one of the worst things that are happening: every arrest, every grievous injury, every new police outrage. The resulting mood isn't exactly one of hysteria; it is more a kind of manic jumpiness that comes from having far too much information.

But, on reflection, isn't this what news basically consists of? A national report largely consists of the worst things that happen, in any given day, in America. An international report lists the worst things that have happened in the world.

Finally, around 8:45, the video crew returns, chattering animatedly in French. Then they're about to leave again.

"Excuse me, my gas mask?"

"Oh, yes."

Upstairs, the building security guy is only allowing people out in groups, for fear of letting gas inside the building. "I really don't recommend going outside right now," he tells me. "There are cops all over. It's extremely dangerous."

I tell him I'll take my chances. Finally, after about five minutes, someone is rapping on the glass door from the outside, and I'm back on the streets.

8:50PM, Outside

Free at last! At least, oddly, that's what it feels like to be back in the war zone.

Riot cops occupy the wooden stage at the very top of the great stairs leading up to the Old City; they seem to have taken all the commanding eminences. This entire area of the city is wreathed in gas. They're using the more powerful, military grade stuff that everyone refers to as "CS" though I don't know if it really is (the IMC people weren't sure). Just breathing without a mask is already physically painful; passing through low-lying areas leaves the unprotected coughing and gagging; new rounds are falling regularly. There are only a few shadowy figures on the street. I take a lane behind the IMC that seems like it's leading to the highway, and almost immediately run into Kitty. We both start laughing.

We hug. It's probably the seventh time we've hugged today.

"So what's up? Where's everybody? Are they all okay?"

"Well, Andrea got hit twice and went home. She gave her gas mask to Lee (I get the sleeping bag). Everyone else is okay. We're all down at the Temporary Autonomous Zone under the highway. We've been under attack for at least an hour now. It's amazing! There are thousands of people there now, more coming all the time. There was a pitched battle, and we won."

She goes on to describe the building of a giant bonfire in the TAZ space to neutralize the tear gas. The police brought up a water cannon to try to put it out. But people stuck it out. Meanwhile, more and more ordinary citizens are joining us. There are now thousands on the highway. They're calling them the "bangers" because, for an hour now, they've been just banging rhythmically on the metal barriers on the side of the highway, making so much of a racket that it can easily be heard at the Convention Center ten blocks away. The police started mortaring the highway too, and sent lines of troops to clear the area using beanbag guns and plastic bullets, but to no avail. Even when they started using the water cannon. Old people, families, union folk, everyone started raining bricks and boards and flaming debris down at the cops. Finally, the police withdrew.

"So what are you doing here?" I ask.

"We heard a rumor they might be moving on the IMC. I came to check if people need any help down here. What about you?"

"I was checking for news of Karen and ended up getting trapped in the IMC for an hour when someone borrowed my gas mask."

"Oh, I heard someone got in contact with Sasha, who said Karen was arrested and they took her to Montréal."

"Really? Who did you hear that from?"

"Somebody." She thinks a second. "No, can't remember. Maybe someone from New York? And do you know anything about this rumor that somebody got killed down by the highway?"

"It's all they've been talking about at the IMC for the last hour or two. But nobody seems to know if the guy is really dead."

As we scout the police positions around the IMC, we keep running into old friends. Simon, from New York, strolls out of the mist in a helmet, shield, and arm and shin guards, of exactly the sort we had been using in Ya Basta! He seems as surprised as we that he managed to get it through, and about as pleased with himself as anyone could possibly be. A lot of New York

people, he reports, are finally getting through. We join most of the Refugees, various Black Bloc elements, and local residents, and set up a makeshift defense of the IMC. As police helicopters buzz overhead, people strip the boards from shops that have been boarded over, create a bonfire. Then we all start building barricades, making use of metal fences collected from the little park near the foot of the stair.

It's not a moment too soon, as buses and vans full of police reinforcements are beginning to concentrate just a block or two up the road. Battles ensue. We're driven from our positions, disperse, return, build the barricades again. We make endless phone calls trying to get reporters from the corporate press to witness the scene, hoping their presence will keep the police from invading the building. They never respond. Nonetheless, despite a few tear gas shells lobbed in windows on the stairwell, police never end up entering the building itself.

10:45PM, Côte D'Abraham

We finally get a chance to pay back our work commitment to the IMC. Shawn has a radio and agrees to do street reports for the 11–4 shift. This also gives the Refugees a new *raison d'être*, and an excuse to more or less follow the action in this part of the city.

The city itself has taken on a near insurrectionary quality. It soon becomes apparent that the police have completely overplayed their hand. By dispersing their forces so far from the wall, they've ended up with no clear zones of control whatsoever: even most of Jean Baptiste is liberated territory again, with barricades and bonfires being built at a dozen different locations. We wander along the Côte d'Abraham, a winding path along the bottom of a steep bluff, the very foot of the Old City, trying to find a way back up. Isolated clusters of people are walking along the road. Many seem to be apolitical, local boys out for a good time. One good-natured crew toast us as they pass, "This is a very good night for drinking beer!" Another young man had been hit by a plastic bullet on the buttocks and is showing the welt to everyone he meets. ("Look at that! Can you see what those pigs did to me?") It's as if the easy camaraderie of the day before has now extended to the entire city—though, as we climb into the Old City, we do see a couple acts of drunken randomness as beer bottles fly through closed shop windows.

One was a corner print shop that seemed pretty obviously of the "mom and pop" variety.

"Tsk, tsk. That's not a legitimate target, is it?" says Lyn.

"On the other hand," Heidi observes, "compared with what happens after a hockey championship in this town, this is nothing. There's usually hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of damage. I think even the hooligans are holding back."

Up in the Old City, African and Asian immigrants are among the crowds defending positions against the police. Children and old people have already been evacuated. We keep running into activists from New York. Brad Will, an eco-activist living in the NYC IMC, has just got into town; he's got a huge backpack and his face is swathed in a ripped T-shirt, reeking of vinegar. "The problem," he says, "is that people just can't take the gas. We'd have driven them out of the entire neighborhood if it wasn't for the gas."

Brad directs us to a particularly dramatic scene further up the hill that might be worth reporting. Ben and I climb up the hill to investigate. There's a major battle going on as residents crouch behind a barricade of sofas, wooden doors, and bric-a-brac obviously dragged out from their basements; cops are firing on them from a position behind three or four police vehicles further up the street. Young men are pouring gasoline and sugar into empty bottles from a big plastic canister;

then they stuff the bottles with rags and leave them near the edge of the barricade. Periodically, someone will take one, dash up to a little lot between two buildings, light it, and hurl it at the police—then run back again. The police, in turn, are firing pepper bombs behind the barricades to try to force people to come up for air, then shooting at their heads with plastic bullets. I watch as a molotov sails up, misses its target, and lands on the wooden lintel of a second-story window, setting a tiny fire. No one seems particularly alarmed.

“Jeez, they’re going to burn down their own neighborhood!”

A moment later I was blind and couldn’t breathe. Another pepper bomb. I have a distinct memory of telling myself “keep your head down, keep your head down” and, a second later, feeling like someone had just broken a bottle over my head. This is odd because no one has ever broken a bottle over my head and in fact I have no idea what it would feel like, but that was my first reaction. Apparently, I did manage to keep mostly down, and the bullet ricocheted off the very top of my head, coming to rest thirty feet behind us. I sat on the ground a second, then retreated as someone ran past, shouting something helpful in French. Back at the foot of the hill, Brad, still sputtering from the tear gas, presented me with the bullet—or anyway, it was probably the same bullet. “If that’s your first,” he said, “you might want to keep it.”

“Thanks.”

The bullet is gigantic: made of something that felt like hard green rubber, mallet-shaped, large enough to fill the palm of my hand. I tell myself: it’s a lucky thing I swallowed one of those codeine tablets an hour ago, just in case.

We end up, a few hours later, at a little shop-lined park on the edge of the lower city, at the corner of Coronne and Charest, where another huge bonfire has become the center of a spontaneous street party. Someone’s brought out a sound system, people are smoking dope and dancing in the flamelight. Others stream in from the highway, or get called away to battles a few blocks away. Cars occasionally appear, take one look at the scene, and desperately U-turn away. When we head home around 4AM, there’s talk of making yet another attack on the wall, this time from the Plains of Abraham. There are also rumors that the government was calling in the army.

Sunday, April 22

The next morning we were all aglow.

Ben: “That was just hugely successful.”

Shawn: “It was definitely the most impressive demo I’ve ever been in.”

“And I know the people of Québec City are going to have another one soon.”

I asked: “So, who exactly were all those people making noise on the highway all night? Were they really union people from the People’s Summit?”

“That was the amazing thing,” said Lyn. “They were everybody. Union people. Kids. Grannies. Old hippies. Ordinary citizens of every kind.”

“I saw high school kids,” someone chimes in, “mothers with kids, one mother-daughter team both banging away at the guard-rails with sticks. People formed a kind of impromptu rotation system to make sure the sound never started to die down.”

“A lot of the union people had come with masks and bottles of vinegar with them on the bus, already organized into affinity groups and everything.”

“If you think about it,” said Shawn, “it was the perfect civil disobedience, because we could make this huge racket that you could hear a mile away. They could definitely hear it at the summit and the hotels where the delegates were staying. But at the same time we just couldn’t be dislodged. People were already starting to bang at noon and I came back hours later and it was still going just as strong.”

“Also, they were so high up I think the delegates in the Convention Center could actually see them.”

Conversations like this were to continue for days, even weeks, to come, and gradually crystallize in formal “report-backs” to groups at home, web narratives, and published IMC reports, the movies and books that we all knew would eventually come out of this, if restricted to an almost exclusively activist audience. During an action, after all, one is surrounded by an almost infinity of potential narratives, some more immediate (“the cops are moving in on the IMC!”), others more abstract (“the Brazilians are looking for an excuse to sabotage the Summit”), all open-ended, uncertain, most of which everyone knows will turn out irrelevant or untrue. No one, not even at the IMC, is in a position to begin to speculate about how the story as a whole will be told afterwards, especially who won. Insofar as a game was being played, the rules of the game—even the precise nature of the field and players—were being negotiated and renegotiated continually, in action. No one involved was in direct contact with more than a tiny percentage of it (I, for instance, never saw the parade, the Bridge CD or Living River), and it was only in retrospect that we could come up with a plausible theory of what the stakes of the battle even were. Not that there is ever one definitive story, even years later—there never is, with any historical event. But these conversations played a crucial role in narrowing things down.

By noon we were back to yet another CLAC spokescouncil, somewhere on the Côte d’Abraham. The night’s battles were all over, the bonfires not even smouldering—all out. The barricades, even, seemed to have been systematically destroyed by bulldozers, and large numbers of activists had already left town. Much of the discussion was about whether it would be possible to round up enough people to march on the Ministry of Justice to protest the weekend’s police repression. There was also supposed to be a demo going on at the Grand Théâtre, near the water cannon, and a party somewhere else, but nothing inspiring enough to keep us from falling back to the University, to start gathering up our things to go.

Wind-down days of an action are always the most dangerous. In big mobilizations, activist numbers tend to peak at the beginning and then decline steadily, owing to injuries, arrests, and before long, people simply returning to their lives or jobs. Police numbers, on the other hand, remain constant. As soon as the balance of forces begins to tilt significantly, they will usually start to take revenge for perceived humiliations of the days before. Actions of any sort become increasingly dangerous; so, often, does walking down the street, as the cops will often begin the sort of random mass arrests they weren’t able to earlier. Anyone walking alone in gear, or even in green hair, piercings, or tattoos, might be a target; but small groups are not necessarily safe either. At the same time, it’s only during the wind-down that those who participated in the actions begin to get a clear picture of what happened—are able to sort the good information from the bad and, above all, start constructing some overall picture of the event as a whole. The result is a combination of increasing paranoia on the ground and an enormous flow of new and retrospective information. It was as if the sense I’d had at the IMC—the combination of sweeping panoramic view, and claustrophobic terror—had now expanded to fill the entire city, or at least, those parts that activists inhabited.

2:15PM

Back at Laval, Mac was hard at work answering phones and going through lists of arrestees at the legal office. Shawn carried out an interview with a CASA organizer from the Comité Populaire du St. Jean-Baptiste, who emphasized the need to move away from summit hopping and do work within communities. Rumor had it more people had just got in from New York. I returned to the gym, now largely empty except for endless piles of backpacks, to find them. There were at most a hundred people left. Montréal Ya Basta! were performing a little improvisation on the drums. I spent a while chatting with them, taking notes on gear and tactics to bring back to New York Ya Basta!, if, indeed, one still existed.

There was, in fact, an affinity group of seven who had just made it through, including Eric and Enos from New York and a famous activist called Bork, from D.C. Meeting them was a little disorienting at first. I had just spent two days on the streets, where anyone you met who wasn't actually shooting at you was your brother or your sister; they were just heading into action, full of secret plans and grim intensity. Still, I got to learn a little about what had happened to my friends. After everyone turned around at the customs gate at Akwesasne, they gathered to decide what to do next. Night had fallen, our few Mohawk patrons had all crossed the border and abandoned us, and figures in the darkness began shooting the occasional paintball at our vehicles. The caravan only got back to Burlington around 3AM. Some went home. Some tried to submit themselves to customs at other places the next day. Some got through. All reported aggressive questioning aimed at establishing if they were in any way associated with an organization called "Ya Basta!" Warcy joined a crew dubbed the "Snowshoe Brigade," that crossed on foot through a forest in the middle of the night. They got caught when one inexperienced kid panicked and asked a cop for directions. The remaining Ya Basta! contingent tried to take the legal route, but, after submitting themselves to customs twice, all ended up in immigration detention. Except, amusingly, for Moose. He was just turned away. Sasha was locked up with them: that's why his phone was dead. All of them were all being taken to Montréal for processing and presumably being released in a couple days. Karen, who it transpires did indeed just take off on Friday without telling anyone, is already in Montréal trying to find some way to reach Sasha.

Eventually, we hold a small New York meeting. Brad reports that the streets are growing increasingly dangerous, with black SUVs everywhere, along with stretch undercover vans, with guard windows, that seem to be Canadian intelligence. They're picking up anyone with gear—padding or shields, certainly, but even medics or IMC journalists with video cameras. Simon was arrested just this morning. Several other New Yorkers showed up in the city only to be immediately caught in sweeps.

We come up with a plan. Those who have been in action had probably best get out of town. We'll fall back on Montréal and do jail support for our friends in immigration detention, who should be coming up for hearings soon.

Returning to the law offices, I'm surprised to discover Rufus, an old friend and legendary action medic from New York, waiting in line for vegetarian burritos at a free kitchen that's been set up in a nearby hall. Kitty and Lee are there too. Rufus had been working with the medical team since Saturday and has all the details about casualties. It turns out someone was indeed shot in the throat, but he isn't dead. He'd stopped breathing for a while because his larynx was crushed, but medics managed to get him breathing and doctors later saved his life by performing a tracheotomy. He will never speak again. That was the worst single injury. Another man had

his finger ripped off trying to tear down the wall but a medic sewed it right back on again. (Kitty: “Oh, I saw that happen! It wasn’t from close up, but...he was gripping this cord and trying to pull down a section of wall, when this cop climbed on top of a fence and yanked back at it. His finger came right off. He was just standing there, stunned, and everybody was screaming “Medic!” Then one ran up, grabbed the finger, and went off with him.”) There was another who lost an ear when a tear gas canister hit his earring. A lot of broken arms and fractured ribs.

“You weren’t hit yourself, were you?” asked Lee. “Because they were definitely targeting street medics. I saw that. Not just shooting to scare them, *aiming* at them.”

There is a long line of buses on the main road through campus; every hour, four or five leave to carry people back to Montréal. There is some question of whether one has to be a student but no one seems to be checking IDs. The big story in the local newspapers is that all the big hotels and restaurants had to throw out tons of food because it was tainted by gas, and that, supposedly, George W. Bush tried to take a swig out of a tainted bottle and had to spew it all out—though it’s hard to imagine how this would really have happened.

We pull together a little group: Rufus, Kitty and Lee, Janna, a couple more.

4:25PM

A march is passing by Des Jardins, maybe two-hundred people, led by red and black flags. I think they’re heading down to the Ministry of Justice. Kitty, who’s going to join us in jail support, has somehow acquired a black flag and banner for us too.

By some miracle, the legal office has a compatible cell phone recharger. With about fifteen minutes worth of juice, I call Alison Haynes, the *Montréal Gazette* reporter I’d been meaning to call all weekend. It turns out she was at the CIBC bank too, probably one of those reporters I noticed among the onlookers. She says she’d interviewed the rainbow couple afterwards. They were from Vancouver. After we’d left they wrote a note to the CIBC saying “We’re sorry, we did our best to save your bank.”

I haven’t talked to her for more than a minute or two when Rufus comes to tell me we’re going to miss our bus. Then, of course, the phone dies. The next day in Montréal I pick up the paper and find an article with a brief quote from me, explaining it was cut off by my having to high-tail it out of town.

6:25PM, Bus to Montréal

On the bus, everyone is exchanging war stories. A couple of Montréal Yabbas are already heading home. Greg is listing the three corporate targets that got hit: the CIBC, a Shell Oil station that got trashed (the attackers spray-painted the words “Viva Ken Saro Wiwa!”), and a Subway sandwich shop. Not a McDonald’s, as some people were saying. Subway was chosen because it was the second-largest fast food chain in North America, and Canadian owned. Also, some people trashed one of the TV news trucks left in the middle of the park to protest the coverage on the corporate media. He’s pretty dubious though about the “little riot that night. That was pretty lame. I didn’t see it, but I heard a bunch of Québécois nationalists went crazy and ended up wreaking havoc all over the Old City. I heard they even broke the windows of our clinic!”

“No, no,” I said, “that was the cops.”

“Are you sure about that?”

“Absolutely. I was in the IMC at the time. I even talked to the medics who came in afterwards to find a new space.”

“Oh. Still, I don’t know. I wasn’t involved in choosing the targets, but I know that a lot of thought went into it. One bank, one oil company, one fast-food chain, one television network. I just hate to see a bunch of drunken frat boys go out and dilute the message.”

Two kids from the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory are talking about how they were there for Akwesasne, but couldn’t get across the police line at Cornwall.

“Really?” I ask. “Because none of us were really sure we really had any community support.”

“No, no, we just couldn’t get in because the police were out there with shields and batons blocking the road to everybody. Fucking pigs! This is our fucking home and it was like it was under military occupation.”

“Yeah,” says the other kid. “We were ready to start a riot. We’d been with the caravan in Windsor, and we wanted to join you guys in Akwesasne. But there were just too many of them.”

“Really?” I ask. “Wow. I only wish we knew that at the time. We were feeling awfully lonely out there.”

Mainly, though, everyone is just exhausted. Kitty stares out the window for a while. “What a strange come-down,” she says. “You know what it’s like? It’s like coming down from acid. You know, like when you’ve been tripping for days and you come down and suddenly everything just *sucks*?”

Lee agrees. He’s still feeling weird about the molotovs. “I feel dirty and used.”

Kitty: “I don’t. Well, not used, anyway. But the problem is, when you’re coming down from an action, there’s no way to just take another hit.”

CHAPTER 5: DIRECT ACTION, ANARCHISM, DIRECT DEMOCRACY

Since this is a book about direct action, it might be best to begin by explaining what that is.

I) WHAT IS DIRECT ACTION?

Over the years, hundreds of anarchists have tried to answer this question, in pamphlets and broadsides and speeches. Here's a sampling:

Direct action implies one's acting for one's self, in a fashion in which one may weigh directly the problem with which you are confronted, and without needing the mediation of politicians or bureaucrats. If you see some bulldozers about to wreck your house, you engage in direct action to directly intervene to try to stop them. Direct action places moral conscience up against the official law... It is the expression of the individual's readiness to fight, to take control of his life, and to try, directly, to act on the world that surrounds us, to take responsibility for one's actions.

—*Sans Titres Bulletin*, "What is Direct Action?"

To take a homely example. If the butcher weighs one's meat with his thumb on the scale, one may complain about it and tell him he is a bandit who robs the poor, and if he persists and one does nothing else, this is mere talk; one may call the Department of Weights and Measures, and this is indirect action; or one may, talk failing, insist on weighing one's own meat, bring along a scale to check the butcher's weight, take one's business somewhere else, help open a cooperative store, etc., and these are direct actions.

—David Wieck, "Habits of Direct Action"

Direct Action aims to achieve our goals through our own activity rather than through the actions of others. It is about people taking power for themselves. In this, it is distinguished from most other forms of political action such as voting, lobbying, attempting to exert political pressure through industrial action or through the media. All of these activities... concede our power to existing institutions which work to prevent us from acting ourselves to change the status quo. Direct Action repudiates such acceptance of the existing order and suggests that we have both the right and the power to change the world. It demonstrates this by doing it. Examples of Direct Action include blockades, pickets, sabotage, squatting, tree spiking, lockouts, occupations, rolling strikes, slow downs, the revolutionary general strike. In the community it involves, amongst other things, establishing our own organizations such as food

co-ops and community access radio and TV ... Direct Action is not only a method of protest but also a way of “building the future now.” Any situation where people organize to extend control over their own circumstances without recourse to capital or state constitutes Direct Action... Where it succeeds, Direct Action shows that people can control their own lives—in effect, that an Anarchist society is possible.

—Rob Sparrow, “Anarchist Politics and Direct Action”

Every person who ever thought he had a right to assert something, and went boldly and asserted it, himself, or jointly with others that shared his convictions, was a direct actionist... Every person who ever had a plan to do anything, and went and did it, or who laid his plan before others, and won their co-operation to do it with him, without going to external authorities to please do the thing for them, was a direct actionist... Every person who ever in his life had a difference with anyone to settle, and went straight to the other persons involved to settle it, either by a peaceable plan or otherwise, was a direct actionist.

—Voltaire De Cleyre, “Direct Action”

Man has as much liberty as he is willing to take. Anarchism therefore stands for direct action, the open defiance of, and resistance to, all laws and restrictions, economic, social and moral. But defiance and resistance are illegal. Therein lies the salvation of man. Everything illegal necessitates integrity, self-reliance, and courage. In short, it calls for free, independent spirits, for men who are men, and who have a bone in their back which you cannot pass your hand through.

—Emma Goldman, “Anarchism: What It Really Stands For”

It should be easy enough to see why anarchists have always been drawn to the idea of direct action. Anarchists reject states and all those systematic forms of inequality states make possible. They do not seek to pressure the government to institute reforms. Neither do they seek to seize state power for themselves. Rather, they wish to destroy that power, using means that are—so far as possible—consistent with their ends, that embody them. They wish to “build a new society in the shell of the old.” Direct action is perfectly consistent with this, because in its essence direct action is the insistence, when faced with structures of unjust authority, on acting as if one is already free. One does not solicit the state. One does not even necessarily make a grand gesture of defiance. Insofar as one is capable, one proceeds as if the state does not exist.

This is the difference, in principle, between direct action and civil disobedience (though in practice there often is a good deal of overlap between the two). When one burns a draft card, one is withdrawing one’s consent or cooperation from a structure of authority one deems illegitimate, but doing so is still a form of protest, a public act addressed at least partly to the authorities themselves. Typically, one practicing civil disobedience is also willing to accept the legal consequences of his actions. Direct action takes matters a step further. The direct actionist does not just refuse to pay taxes to support a militarized school system, she combines with others to try to create a new school system that operates on different principles. She proceeds as she would if the state did not exist and leaves it to the state’s representatives to decide whether to try to send armed men to stop her.

Now, the reader might object: surely direct action does, usually, involve direct confrontation with representatives of the state. Even when it does not start with such a confrontation, everyone is quite aware it will probably lead to one eventually. That would certainly seem to imply recognition of their existence. True enough—but even here matters are more subtle. When confrontations occur, it is typically because those conducting a direct action insist on acting as if the state’s representatives have no more right to impose their view of the rights or wrongs of the situation than anybody else. If a man is driving a truck full of toxic waste to dump in a local river, the direct actionist does not consider whether the corporation he represents is legally permitted to do so; he treats him as he would anyone else trying to dump a vat of poison in a local water source. (By this understanding, the fact that said direct actionist rarely simply attempts to physically overpower the culprit is a remarkable testimony to most activists’ dedication to non-violence.) Normally, the conclusion is that it is legitimate for any man or woman of conscience in the vicinity to band together to try to dissuade the would-be dumper, and if necessary, stop him—say, by lying down in front of the truck, or by puncturing its tires. If they do so, and twenty armed men in blue costumes then appear and tell them to clear the streets, they do not, in turn, treat this demand as a legal order, but rather, as morally equivalent to any other demand that a group of men standing on the street might make. Therefore, if police demand that those blocking the truck clear the street because an ambulance is trying to get through, they will almost certainly comply; if police make such demands simply by dint of their legal authority as representatives of the city, blockaders will ignore them; if they threaten to attack, blockaders will consider whether they are willing to take the risks involved in making a stand.[9] The key point though is that one is still acting as if, at least as a moral entity, the state does not exist.[10] At any rate it would be possible to have a secret direct action. It is by definition impossible to conduct a secret act of civil disobedience.

What I have been developing here is what might be called the classical definition of direct action—one developed and elaborated over at least a century and a half of anarchist reflection. Often, nowadays, the term is used in a much looser sense. “Direct action” becomes any form of political resistance that is overt, militant, and confrontational, but that falls short of outright military insurrection (e.g. Carter 1973). In this sense, if one is doing more than marching around with signs, but not yet ready to take to the hills with AK-47s, then one is a direct actionist. The Boston Tea Party, during which a team of colonial revolutionaries dressed as Indians dumped loads of heavily taxed British tea in the Boston harbor, is often invoked as a classic example of a direct action of this sort.[11] Such actions tend to be militant and symbolic at the same time. Used this way, the term “direct action” can cover an enormous range: it can mean anything from insisting on one’s right to sit at a segregated lunch counter to setting fire to one, from placing oneself in the way of bulldozers in an old-growth forest to spiking trees so that loggers who disregard warnings not to cut in certain areas risk killing themselves.

Activists too will often talk as if the difference between direct action and civil disobedience is simply one of militancy. For some, it turns on willingness to accept arrest. Those carrying out a “CD” may willingly surrender themselves to the police; even if they don’t, when they blockade the entrance to a corporate headquarters or lie down in front of a presidential motorcade, they act in the full expectation they will wind up in jail, and when police intent on arresting them appear, they will not flee and will resist only passively, or not at all. Direct actionists, in contrast, whether they are breaking windows in the night or soldering the doors shut in worker-occupied factories, are trying their best to get away with it. Or, alternately, the distinction might turn on how

closely one's tactics come to conventional definitions of "violence." When English suffragettes refused to pay taxes they are usually described as practicing civil disobedience; when they began systematically breaking store windows, they are usually said to have turned to direct action. Of course, by classical anarchist definitions, smashing windows to pressure the government to enact a voting reform is not direct action in any sense at all—it is thoroughly indirect—but the usage demonstrates how much the term has become synonymous with a certain degree of militancy.

All this makes it easy to see why the question of "direct action" has been so often at the center of political debate. During the first half of the twentieth century, for example, there were endless arguments about the role of direct action in the labor movement. Today, it is easy to forget that, when labor unions first appeared, they were seen as extremely radical organizations. They represented, in fact, a kind of claim to revolutionary dual power. To go on strike, to destroy machinery, occupy factories, establish picket lines so as to physically prevent scabs from entering a workplace: all this was a matter of workers seizing for themselves the right to employ coercive force, in direct defiance of the state's claims of holding a monopoly on violence. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, one of the earliest nineteenth-century anarchist philosophers, and closely attached to the French labor movement of his day, actually opposed strikes because he believed the movement should limit itself only to explicitly nonviolent forms of direct action. Very quickly, though, states that could not completely repress unions set out to co-opt them. Certain forms of industrial action (such as picket lines) were legalized, but strictly regulated; others (such as workplace sabotage) strictly forbidden. As one might imagine, all this sparked lively debate within the syndicalist movement. Georges Sorel captures something of the flavor of these debates in his essay "Reflections on Violence," published in France in 1908. In it, he argues that even when a strike or labor action really does challenge the state's monopoly on violence, even if one is dealing with an illegal, wildcat strike, strikes are not really revolutionary because ordinarily, a strike aims to win concessions on wages, hours, or conditions that the state will then guarantee and, ultimately, enforce. One is, therefore, not challenging state violence but trying to enlist it for one's own side. Sorel argued that from an anarchist point of view, the only genuinely revolutionary strike would be a general strike that aimed to overthrow the system of state violence as a whole. Labor actions therefore were legitimate only insofar as they were attempts to move in that direction, dress rehearsals, perhaps, or forms of agitprop.

In the United States, too, philosophical differences often ended up being fought out largely through arguments about tactics. The early part of the twentieth century saw a profound split between mainstream unions like the Knights of Labor, which eventually came to form the backbone of the AFL-CIO, and revolutionary unions like the IWW (the Industrial Workers of the World, or Wobblies). The latter's ultimate aim was "the abolition of the wage system," and they refused to work through the state, which they saw as an illegitimate institution. They were in essence, if not officially, anarcho-syndicalist. Where mainstream unions emphasized higher wages and job security, the Wobblies were—like European anarchist unions—more interested in reducing hours. Still, the main thing they ended up openly arguing about was the Wobbly endorsement of "direct action," which in this context basically came to mean workplace sabotage.

It's important to emphasize here that the *practice* of workplace sabotage was never considered particularly scandalous—at least among workers. The destruction of corporate property, workplace occupations, intentionally shoddy work, slowdowns—all of these have long formed part of the repertoire, the standard tool-kit, one might say, of organized labor for centuries. They remain so to this day. I myself grew up in a building in Manhattan with faulty plumbing because

of workplace sabotage tracing back to some labor dispute from the late 1950s. American strikers still regularly puncture tires and even set company equipment on fire. However, none of this is official union policy. Union officials invariably condemn such actions, or else deny they occur. Part of the reason is because they *are* allowed to strike. Unions are, paradoxically, the only organizations in the US legally permitted to engage in direct action; but they can do so only if they do not call it that; and only at the cost of accepting endless and intricate regulations over how and when they can strike, what kinds of pickets they can set up and where, whether they are allowed to engage in other tactics such as secondary boycotts or even publicity campaigns, and so on. Anything that goes beyond these restrictions tends to be defined as “direct action” and officially disallowed. This is the reason, as we will see, that union leaders invariably do everything in their power to ensure that rank-and-file workers do not participate in direct actions like those in Seattle and Québec City. If union members—in their capacity *as* union members—had helped pull down the wall in Québec, for example, they would not just have been engaging in illegal activities, they would have been jeopardizing the very basis of their leadership’s special relation with the state.

Those continuing to work within the syndicalist tradition will, unsurprisingly, object to this sort of identification of direct action with mere militancy. They tend to prefer definitions like those with which I began the chapter. A few have gone so far as to argue that large-scale actions like Seattle or Québec were not really direct actions at all, for just this reason. Shortly after the shutdown of the World Trade Organization in Seattle in November 1999, for example, a Norwegian anarcho-syndicalist named Harald Beyer-Arensen wrote an article intending to show that Seattle wasn’t really direct action because it did not involve people acting directly to transform their own immediate situation.

Campaigning for wage-workers to join the Industrial Workers of the World, Eugene V. Debs stated in December 1905: “The capitalists own the tools they do not use, and the workers use the tools they do not own.” To this one could add: At times direct action may mean putting the tools we do not own out of action, at times it may mean bringing them into play for our own, self-defined needs and ends. In the final instance, it can only mean acting as if all the tools were in fact our own (Beyer-Arensen 2000:11).

Once again, direct action means insisting on acting as if one is already free. This is why, he goes on to argue, it lies at the heart of the “anarchist, social revolutionary project”: it is the means by which the working classes can emancipate themselves by their own efforts, rather than the guidance of any sort of revolutionary vanguard or elite.

From this perspective we can define direct action as being an action carried out on the behalf of nobody else but ourselves, where the means are immediately also the ends, or if not, as in a wage strike, not mediated by any union bureaucracy, where the means (decreasing the bosses’ profits by our non-work, and thus also diminishing the bosses’ power) stand in an immediate relationship to self-defined ends (increasing our wages and extending our own power). A direct action successfully carried out brings about a direct rearrangement of existing conditions of life through the combined efforts of those directly affected (*ibid.*).

What happened at Seattle? A group of activists tried—and, for a while, succeeded—in shutting down a meeting of trade bureaucrats so as to disrupt negotiations on a new WTO round, and to make a public issue out of the very existence of the World Trade Organization. This, Beyer-Arensen is willing to allow, does in certain ways resemble direct action. Certainly, those who created the “Direct Action Network” to coordinate the proceedings believed that’s what they

were doing. If one simply applies the criterion of militancy, one might be tempted to agree, because the event did involve a prolonged (if nonviolent) confrontation with the police. But in fact, Beyer-Arensen insists, it was not really direct action, because it was not really “direct.” He provides an example. Imagine a town that suffers from a lack of water. What’s more, some real estate magnate owns all the surrounding land and has the mayor in his pocket, so townsfolk cannot simply build new wells. If one were to assemble a group of townsfolk to dig a new well anyway, in defiance of the law, then that would be direct action. But if one were to have them blockade the mayor’s house until he changed his policy, that would certainly not be. It might be far more militant than writing petitions or letters or lobbying, but it’s just another version of the same thing: an appeal to the powers-that-be to change their behavior. It still recognizes the authority a real direct actionist would reject. Beyer-Arensen concludes that the effort to shut down the WTO meetings in Seattle was not an example of direct action because, ultimately, it was simply an attempt to create a media spectacle that would then “influence the powers-that-be by way of some imagined ‘public opinion’” (200:12). The WTO meetings themselves were, after all, basically ceremonial. Most real decisions are made elsewhere. Therefore, the real purpose of the protests was to provide a kind of counter-ceremony aimed at winning public attention, since its ostensible aims (to shut down the WTO as an institution) could not possibly be accomplished by the means employed. It was essentially an act of propaganda, of guerilla theater, meant to influence government policy.

Beyer-Arensen ends the piece by admitting that any direct action is to a certain degree an act of “propaganda by the deed,” since they are meant to teach through example. The community that defies the law by building its own well is not simply acting for themselves; they are also setting an example of self-organization to other communities. But this is a secondary effect of an otherwise direct action, and anyway, they’re not trying to influence the government.

Now, I’m not citing this argument at such length because I find it particularly persuasive. It represents the opinions of one, older, rather curmudgeonly anarcho-syndicalist and I believe the overwhelming majority of contemporary anarchists would certainly disagree with its conclusions. After all, as Sorel pointed out, one could apply this same logic to the very labor actions Beyer-Arensen approves of: since ultimately strikers are seeking binding arbitration by government mediators and even if they are not, any agreements they make with their employers will end up being enforced by the state. If one takes Beyer-Arensen’s line of argument to its logical conclusion, no action that occurs under a framework of legality, or in which public opinion is a factor, could possibly be considered direct. After all, if one places one’s body in the path of the bulldozer about to destroy one’s home, or a community garden, much though one might like to think what one is doing is simply appealing to the moral conscience of the driver, one cannot realistically deny that the driver is also likely to be thinking about the possibility of being brought up on charges of negligent homicide, or of being written up in the papers the next day as a heartless killer. Beyer-Arensen himself is not entirely unaware of this dilemma—at least in the case of strikes. He ends his essay by suggesting that certain strikes are actually better examples of direct action than others. His favorite example is a strike by transit workers in Melbourne during the 1980s in which, rather than walking off their jobs, bus drivers and train conductors stayed on, but stopped collecting fares—effectively making mass transportation free until the action was over. Imagine, he suggests, what would happen if, for just one day, workers in every branch of industry and service trade did the same. This alone could be a major step in showing how a capitalist economy could be transformed into an economy of freedom.

This is a powerful image, but it bears a remarkable resemblance to acts that Beyer-Arensen would no doubt condemn as pure theater. Take for example a publicity stunt organized by members of the squatter community of Christiana, located on the site of a former army base outside Copenhagen:

In 1974, the community engaged in various forms of street theatre to gain a more favorable public image. “The first Christmas for the poor and lonely was arranged and Solvognen organized an army of Father Christmases who generously handed out presents to both young and old from the city’s department stores. Naturally, they were arrested, but as a consequence, pictures of the Police beating up Father Christmases hit the front pages of the papers worldwide.[12]

In other words, they made almost exactly the same point as the Melbourne strikers, but with hardly any real direct action at all. So then the question becomes: where to draw the line? How direct does it have to be? If providing free goods and services to four or five random kids on the street is not enough to make it real, why should ten thousand commuters, for one day, be any different?

The reason I cited this argument at length is that it provides a window on a certain moral universe. Most American anarchists I know find arguments about whether Seattle was really a direct action a bit silly—at best they might make a mildly diverting topic for discussion over beer, but to take such questions too seriously seems academic, even sectarian. Still, the underlying issues are critical. As we’ll see, most of the objections raised to the idea of border actions in the weeks before Québec City were based on a feeling such actions would be merely symbolic, not genuine direct action. Moreover, the essence of Beyer-Arensen’s critique—that actions like Seattle are largely symbolic, and that the point is to work within real communities in ways that allow people to take power over their own lives—is something anyone involved in the movement would agree with. Even before Naomi Klein (2000) wrote her famous article in the *Nation* warning activists about the dangers of “summit hopping,” of “following trade bureaucrats as if they were the Grateful Dead,” all this was already a major item of debate. Those who defended actions like Seattle not only insisted that it was a direct intervention, since people put their bodies on the line so as to block delegates from entering the building, but that they did so in just the way that Beyer-Arensen underlines as key: by mobilizing a community of people in a form of self-organization which provides a living alternative to the existing structure of authority.

This was indeed meant as educational. On the one hand, they set out to expose the undemocratic nature of the WTO and similar institutions that, they felt, together formed the backbone of an unaccountable world neoliberal government that sought the power to suppress existing democratic rights in the name of corporate power. On the other hand, they were determined to organize the whole action according to directly democratic principles and thus provide a living example of how genuine egalitarian decision making might work. When dealing with global institutions, this is about as direct as an action can possibly get.

The Direct Action Network, which forms much of the immediate focus of this book, emerged directly from this project. It was meant in part as a way of organizing actions against neoliberal institutions; in part, as a model of consensus-based, decentralized direct democracy. For all its flaws (and we will be learning a good deal about those), it played an important role in doing so.

To sum up, then: direct action represents a certain ideal—in its purest form, probably unattainable. It is a form of action in which means and ends become, effectively, indistinguishable; a way of actively engaging with the world to bring about change, in which the form of the action—or at least, the organization of the action—is itself a model for the change one wishes to bring about.

At its most basic, it reflects a very simple anarchist insight: that one cannot create a free society through military discipline, a democratic society by giving orders, or a happy one through joyless self-sacrifice. At its most elaborate, the structure of one's own act becomes a kind of micro-utopia, a concrete model for one's vision of a free society. As Emma Goldman (and others) observed, the fact that the authorities define such acts as crimes is not a problem in this regard—insofar as it serves to constantly remind actors to take responsibility for their actions, and behave with courage and integrity, it can be a great advantage. The problems, rather, come when one moves beyond confrontation to other forms of engagement with a world organized along different lines.

A revolutionary strategy based on direct action can only succeed if the principles of direct action become institutionalized. Temporary bubbles of autonomy must gradually turn into permanent, free communities. However, in order to do so, those communities cannot exist in total isolation; neither can they have a purely confrontational relation with everyone around them. They have to have some way to engage with larger economic, social, or political systems that surround them. This is the trickiest question because it has proved extremely difficult for those organized on radically democratic lines to so integrate themselves in any meaningful way in larger structures without having to make endless compromises in their founding principles. For direct action-based groups, even working in alliance with radical NGOs or labor unions has often created what seem like insuperable problems. On a more immediate level, the strategy depends on the dissemination of the model: most anarchists, for example, do not see themselves as a vanguard whose historical role is to “organize” other communities, but rather as one community setting an example others can imitate. The approach—it's often referred to as “contaminationism”—is premised on the assumption that the experience of freedom is infectious, that anyone who takes part in a direct action is likely to be permanently transformed by the experience, and want more. This is quite often the case, but it begs the question of how to make others aware of the idea in the first place. What participants experience as profound and transformative often looks, from the outside, as peculiar at best—at worst cult-like or insane. This, in turn, raises the issue of the media. But in addressing such strategic questions, I am really moving from speaking just of direct action to the more general question of anarchism.

II) WHAT IS ANARCHISM?

One reason I started the chapter as I did was because I also wanted to convey something of the flavor of anarchist debate, which has always tended to differ from the more familiar, Marxist style in focusing more on these kind of concrete questions of practice. Many have complained that anarchism lacks high theory. Even those who are considered its founding figures—Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin—often seem more pamphleteers and moralists than true philosophers, and the best-known anarchists of more recent times have been more likely to produce witty slogans, wild poetic rants, or science fiction novels than sophisticated political economy or dialectical analysis.[13] There are thousands of Marxist academics but very few Anarchist ones. This is not because anarchism is anti-intellectual so much as because it does not see itself as fundamentally a project of analysis. It is more a moral project.

As I've written elsewhere (Graeber 2002, 2004), Marxism has tended to be a theoretical or analytical discourse about revolutionary strategy; anarchism, an ethical discourse about revolution-

ary practice. The basic principles of anarchism—self-organization, voluntary association, mutual aid, the opposition to all forms of coercive authority—are essentially moral and organizational.

Admittedly, this flies in the face of the popular image of anarchists as bombthrowing crazies opposed to all forms of organization—but, if one examines how this reputation came about, it tends to reinforce my point. The period of roughly 1875 to 1925 marked the peak of a certain phase of anarchist organizing: there were hundreds of anarchist unions, confederations, revolutionary leagues, and so on. There was a spurt, towards the beginning, of calls for the assassination of heads of state (Anderson 2006), it was quite brief and anarchist spokesmen and organized groups quickly withdrew support from this strategy as counterproductive. Nonetheless, following decades saw a continual stream of dramatic assassinations by people calling themselves anarchists. I am not aware of any actual assassin during this particular period who actually was a product of those anarchist organizations, much less were their actions planned or sponsored by them; rather they almost invariably turned out to be isolated individuals with no more ongoing ties to anarchist life than the Unabomber, and usually about a roughly equivalent hold on sanity. It was rather as if the existence of anarchism gave lone gunmen something to call themselves.[14] But the situation created endless moral dilemmas for anarchist writers and lecturers like Peter Kropotkin or Emma Goldman. By what right could an anarchist denounce an individual who kills a tyrant, no matter how disastrous the results for the larger movement? The whole issue was the subject of endless intense moral debate: not only about whether such acts were (or could ever be) legitimate, but about whether it was legitimate for anarchists who did not feel such acts were wise or even legitimate to publicly condemn them. It has always been these kinds of practical, moral questions that have tended to stir anarchist passions: What is direct action? What kind of tactics are beyond the pale and what sort of solidarity do we owe to those who employ them? Or: what is the most democratic way to conduct a meeting? At what point does organization stop being empowering and become stifling and bureaucratic? For analyses of the nature of the commodity form or the mechanics of alienation, most have been content to draw on the written work of Marxist intellectuals (which are usually, themselves, drawn from ideas that originally percolated through a broader worker's movement in which anarchists were very much involved). Which also means that, for all the bitter and often violent disagreements anarchists have had with Marxists about how to go about making a revolution, there has always been a kind of complementarity here, at least *in potentia*. [15]

This is why I think it's deceptive to write the history of anarchism in the same way one would write the history of an intellectual tradition like Marxism. It is not that one cannot tell the story this way if one wants to. Most books on anarchism do. They start with certain founding intellectual figures (Godwin, Stirner, Proudhon, Bakunin), explain the radical ideas they developed, tell the story of the larger movements that eventually came to be inspired by those ideas, and then document the political struggles, wars, revolutions, and projects of social reform which ensued. But if one looks at what those supposed founding figures actually said, one finds most of them did not really see themselves as creating some great new theory. They were more likely to see themselves as giving a name and voice to a certain kind of insurgent common sense, one they assumed to be as old as history. While anarchism, as a movement, tended to be very strongly rooted in mass organizing of the industrial proletariat, anarchists (including those who were themselves industrial workers) also tended to draw inspiration from existing modes of practice, notably on the part of peasants, skilled artisans, or even, to some degree, outlaws, hobos, vagabonds, and others who lived by their wits—in other words, those who were to some degree in control of

their own lives and conditions of work, who might be considered, at least to some degree, autonomous elements. One might say, in Marxist terms, that they were people with some experience of non-alienated production. Such people had experience of life outside of state or capitalist bureaucracies, salaries and wage labor; they were aware such relations were not inevitable; quite often, they viewed them as intrinsically immoral. They were often themselves more drawn to anarchism as an explicit political philosophy, and at least in some times and places (Spanish peasants, Swiss watchmakers) formed its mass base—what’s more, those elements of the industrial proletariat that tended to find the most affinity with anarchism were those who were the least removed from other modes of life. Marx himself tended to dismiss the anarchist base as a particularly inauspicious combination of “petty bourgeoisie” and “lumpen proletariat,” and considered the notion that they could in any way stand outside capitalism ridiculous. Capitalism, for Marx, was a totalizing system. It shaped the consciousness of all those who lived under it in the most intimate fashion. The kind of critiques of capitalism one saw in authors like Proudhon or Bakunin, Marx argued, were simply the voice of a petit bourgeois morality, the small-scale merchants and producers railing against the bigger ones. They had nothing to teach revolutionaries. Only the industrial proletariat, who had absolutely no stake in the existing system, could be a genuinely revolutionary class.

Some would no doubt object that this view of Marx’s thought is a bit crude and unnuanced and probably they’d be right. But it represents the view that soon became canonical among those who claimed to speak in the name of Marxism. My purpose here is not to argue the merits of the case but to emphasize the degree to which we have been viewing the entire anarchist project, essentially, through the eyes of its rivals. Even more, that anarchism tends to involve a different relation of theory and practice than what came to be called ‘Marxism’. The latter is—for all the materialist pretensions—profoundly idealist. The history of Marxism is presented to us as a history of great thinkers—there are Leninists, Maoists, Trotskyites, Gramscians, Althusserians—even brutal dictators like Stalin or Enver Hoxha had to pretend to be great philosophers, because the idea was always that one starts with one man’s profound theoretical insight and the political tendency follows from that. Anarchist tendencies, in contrast, never trace back to a single theorist’s insights—we don’t have Proudhonians and Kropotkinites—but Associationalists, Individualists, Syndicalists, and Platformists. In just about every case, divisions are based on a difference of organizational philosophy and revolutionary practice.

How, then, do we think about a political movement in which the practice comes first and theory is essentially, secondary?

It strikes me that it might be helpful, rather than starting from the word “anarchism,” to start from the word “anarchist.” What sorts of people, or ideas or institutions, can this word refer to? Generally speaking, one finds three different ways the term can be employed. First, one can refer to people who endorse an explicit doctrine known as “anarchism” (or sometimes “anarchy”)—or perhaps more precisely, a certain vision of human possibilities. This is more less the conventional definition. Anarchists become the bearers of an intellectual tradition: one whose history can indeed be traced back to founding figures in the nineteenth century, that spread quite rapidly by the turn of the century to the point where anarchist literature was being avidly read in places like China and India well before Marxism or other strains of Western revolutionary thought had made much of an impression (e.g., Dirlik 1991), but over the course of the early twentieth century was largely displaced by it.[16] Any number of prominent figures of the time, from Picasso to Mao, began their political lives as anarchists and ended up Communists. But one can also speak

more broadly. It's certainly not unheard of to hear historians refer to, say, peasant rebels in early China, or religious radicals in medieval Europe as "anarchists"—meaning that they rejected the authority of governments, and believed people would be better off in a world without hierarchies. In this sense, there have always been anarchists, and there is no great intellectual tradition that hasn't seen the development of anarchist ideas in one form or another. (This is of course why the ideas of nineteenth-century European anarchists could make sense to people in other parts of the world to begin with.) Finally, there is a third sense. When an anthropologist like Evans-Pritchard refers to the Nuer as living in an "ordered anarchy" (1940), or Joanna Overing uses the word to describe the Amazonian Piaroa (1986, 1988), they are not referring to either doctrines or, even, quite, to anti-authoritarian rebelliousness. They are referring primarily to institutions, habits, and practices. That is, there are certain societies characterized by egalitarian forms of organization—whether systems of exchange, forms of decision-making, or simply the accustomed ways of going about everyday life—and this tends to inculcate, and be supported by, a broadly egalitarian ethos. Anarchism, in this sense, is a way of living, or at least, a set of practices.

In other words, one can see "anarchism" either as a vision, as an attitude, or as a set of practices. The distinction between the last two is admittedly somewhat fuzzy. Those who go about their daily lives on an egalitarian basis tend to do so because they feel that is what people ought to do; those who find all forms of hierarchy objectionable will, ordinarily, do their best to find ways to live without it. Still, in the first case, an egalitarian ethos may well remain largely inchoate. In theory, at least, one living in an anarchistic society might be entirely unaware that there is any other way to live; anyway, such a person will probably only develop explicit anti-authoritarian attitudes once she encounters someone with very different assumptions—say, for example, a foreign conqueror. Similarly, those indignant about being pushed around by social superiors will often examine their own ways of dealing with friends and neighbors as evidence that hierarchy is not a natural and inevitable feature of human life. They might very well start valuing the equality of those relations, or even try to deal with such people in more self-consciously egalitarian fashion than they had before. The nineteenth-century Spanish peasants and Swiss watchmakers who found the ideas of Proudhon or Bakunin so amenable—and who Marx denounced as *petit bourgeois*—were clearly doing exactly that.

What I would like to argue is that "anarchism" is best thought of, not as any one of these things—not as a vision, but neither quite as an attitude or set of practices. It is, rather, best thought of as that very movement back and forth between these three. After all, the experience of foreign conquest or subordination will not necessarily cause once egalitarian communities to reject the very idea of hierarchy, or to become more assiduously egalitarian in their way of dealing with each other: the effect might well be exactly the opposite. It's when the three reinforce each other—when a revulsion against oppression causes people to try to live their lives in a more self-consciously egalitarian fashion, when they draw on those experiences to produce visions of a more just society, when those visions, in turn, cause them to see existing social arrangements as even more illegitimate and obnoxious—that one can begin to talk about anarchism. Hence anarchism is in no sense a doctrine. It's a movement, a relationship, a process of purification, inspiration, and experiment. This is its very substance. All that really changed in the nineteenth century is that some people began to give this process a name.

Looking at it this way does make it much easier to understand some things that would otherwise be extremely puzzling. For example: why what passes as anarchist theory often bears so little relation to what the majority of anarchists say and do? If one were to try to understand

North American anarchism simply by reading theoretical or ideological statements in the best known and widely distributed explicitly anarchist periodicals, one would end up with the impression that most anarchists were either Primitivists opposed to all forms of technology, even agriculture, or extreme anti-organizationalists, suspicious of any group of more than six or seven people—and that most of the remainder had declared their allegiance to a document called “The Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists” written by Russian émigrés in Paris in 1924. One might also come to the conclusion that the popular impression of anarchists as wild-eyed, impractical nihilists dedicated to rebellion for its own sake was probably not that far from the truth; or, at least, that anarchists seemed to be divided between nihilists and fervent sectarians whose main form of political practice is mutual denunciation. Examining anarchist discussion pages on the Internet would do little to disabuse them of this impression.[17] When I first became involved in anarchist politics, therefore, I was surprised to discover that not only did the overwhelming majority of activists who considered themselves anarchists not identify with any of these positions, many were not even aware of them. Others, who do read the magazines, read them mainly for entertainment value. Elsewhere, I’ve referred to these non-sectarians as “small-a” anarchists, to distinguish them from those who identify with any one particular strain: Green Anarchists, Individualists, Anarcho-Syndicalists, post-Leftists, Platformists, and so on. While statistics are unavailable, Chuck Munson, who occasionally surveys those who frequent [\[\[http://infoshop.com\]\[infoshop.com\]](http://infoshop.com)—probably the most popular anarchist web site in North America—informs me that about 90% of American anarchists would seem to fit into the small-a category, since only about 10% are willing identify themselves with any particular subset.

What’s more, even many of those who do identify themselves with one particular strain act in ways that would be impossible to understand if we were dealing with a political ideology in anything like the traditional sense of the term. Let me take one example—Primitivism—perhaps the most obviously *outré*. In America, Primitivist ideas first began to take form in circles surrounding a journal called the *Fifth Estate*, in Detroit, in the 1970s and 1980s. The argument began as a synthesis of a certain strain of Marxism with ideas first articulated by socialist heretics such as Jacques Ellul and Jacques Camatte, who came to see the nature of technology itself as lying at the core of most of what Marx saw as alienating and oppressive about capital, and thus rejected the idea that the proletariat, as an essential part of the global “megamachine,” could possibly be the agents of a revolution (Millet 2004). As part of a broader critique developing around that time of the productivist bias in traditional leftist thought, it’s hard to see this as anything but perfectly normal debate. By the 1990s, however, the most aggressive strain of Primitivist thought began to coalesce around the figure of John Zerzan, one time ultra-leftist, who began expressing utter hostility not only to “the Left” but to “civilization” itself. Zerzan basically took the most radical position that it was possible to take, arguing that everything from plant domestication to music, writing, math, art, and ultimately, even speech—basically all forms of symbolic representation, anything other than absolute, direct, unmediated experience—were really forms of alienation that could only be overcome through the destruction of civilization in its entirety, and a return to the stone age. Now, the influence of Zerzan on anarchism has been considerably overstated in the media, but, there are a significant number of Green Anarchists who take his ideas very seriously, and these Green Anarchists produce any number of zines and journals that aggressively tout these ideas, engaging in constant vitriolic debates with anyone willing to cast doubt on any aspect of the ultra-Primitivist position.[18]

The idea of a return to the paleolithic—the rejection of plant domestication, let alone language—is obviously absurd. It would require reducing the earth’s population by at least 99.9%. Nor are Primitivists entirely unaware of this: the *Fifth Estate* people had a long debate about the problem back in the 1970s, the editors coming to the conclusion that, since they didn’t really wish to see a global catastrophe such as a nuclear war, the best one could hope for was a gradual process of negative population growth. Most current Primitivists seem to alternate between openly espousing industrial and demographic collapse—I have heard some argue that humankind is a virus which needs to be largely eradicated—to, in defiance of all logic and common sense, denying that massive population decline would even be necessary (Zerzan often does this before non-anarchist audiences). At the same time, these same authors will regularly denounce anyone who advocates the classic anarchist strategy of “building a new society in the shell of the old.” They ridicule any talk of the slow, painful creation of new institutions as outmoded “Leftism,” arguing that only the complete destruction of all existing structures and institutions, followed by a return to our instinctual “wildness,” could possibly bring about real liberation.

My purpose here is not to critique the Primitivist position: this is obviously pointless. It clearly makes no sense to attack any strategy other than waiting for catastrophe, and then deny one is advocating catastrophe. My real point is: if this were a classic ideological position, one should expect the effects to be utterly de-politicizing. If one were really looking forward to industrial collapse or some similar apocalypse, the most obvious course of action would be that followed by right-wing survivalists in the 1980s: take to the woods, dig a bunker, and begin stockpiling canned food and automatic weapons. Or, alternately, perhaps, find a distant island and try to begin reviving stone-age technologies. To my knowledge no proponent of Green Anarchism has ever done anything of either sort. Instead, they tend to act very much like any other anarchist. Primitivists may be more likely to become involved in ecological or animal rights campaigns than in, say, union-organizing, but in New York, for instance, I know ardent Green Anarchists who’ve worked with the Independent Media Center, in DAN, in video collectives, Food Not Bombs chapters, community gardens, prisoner-support networks, feminist groups, bicycle campaigns, squats, cooperative bookstores, anti-war campaigns, campaigns for the rights of immigrants, housing rights, copwatch programs, and pretty much every other major manifestation of anarchist organizing. Often, in fact, Primitivists turn out to be amongst the most reliable and dedicated activists around.

Confronted with this sort of contradiction, it’s hard to avoid asking the same question Evans-Pritchard asked about Zande witchcraft: “how can otherwise reasonable people claim to believe this sort of thing?” If one points out some of these contradictions to actual advocates of Primitivism—for instance, asking them to reflect on what would actually happen if the population of, say, Bangladesh were to one day decide to stop practicing agriculture—the usual reply will be “but it’s not a program! It’s a critique.” Alternately, they might challenge the very logical pragmatic terms of the argument, and insist these are poetic, intuitive understandings about the state of a world that is fundamentally dislocated and wrong. Similarly, even the most avid fans of Zerzan will usually admit, if pressed, that they aren’t really in favor of the abolition of language, but instead emphasize the degree to which language can be deceptive, ideological, or mask and occlude more direct forms of experience.

All this, I think, does much to explain the appeal, and the reason Primitivism tends towards such absolutes. It is really an attempt to take absolutely seriously those feelings of utter alienation that drive so many middle-class, white teenagers to anarchism in the first place, and to at least try

to imagine a world in which every aspect of that alienation would be totally extinguished. The result can only be a kind of myth. Primitivists will often admit this too, claiming that widespread myths of apocalypse, and of the garden of Eden, are intuitive understandings of real truths: that we once did live in a kind of paradise, that we lost it, and that through a catastrophic collapse of industrial society, we will get it back again. The myth of apocalypse comes to substitute for the faith in revolution. It is, in a way, the same thing, except more absolute: the traditional anarchist rejection of political representation becomes a rejection of representation in any form, even art or language. For most Primitivists, this is what we are mainly dealing with: a comprehensive critique of alienating institutions, and a kind of impossible dreamvision of total liberation that can, if nothing else, provide inspiration and continually remind one why one is in rebellion to begin with. For many, the fact that this makes no sense whatsoever to outsiders is probably a major element in its appeal.

Let me take an apparently very different example. One of the main forms for the dissemination of anarchist ideas in recent years in America have been feminist science fiction novels: from Ursula LeGuin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) to Starhawk's *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993). They operate in a similar way. They are crystallizations of certain tendencies of thought, extrapolations from certain forms of practice, experiments in utopian imagining. The main difference is that since the visions developed in novels are not claiming to be anything but fiction, those who enjoy reading (or writing) them do not tend to claim alternative visions are wrong. In the case of Green Anarchism, the vitriolic quality of so much of the writing seems to result from the confluence of two factors. On the one hand, the urgency of the ecological cause, the sense that the planet is being destroyed and we are all doomed anyway if something isn't done very quickly, and a certain habit of extremely contentious argument inherited from the sectarian Marxist origins of so many of the original participants.[19]

In this, they are unusual. As I mentioned, anarchists have long tended to shun high theory. As David Wieck put it back in 1971 (long before anyone had thought of the term 'postmodernism'):

Anarchism has always been anti-ideological: anarchists have always insisted on the priority of life and action to theory and system. Subjection to a theory implies, in practice, subjection to an authority (a party) which interprets the theory authoritatively, and this subjection would fatally undermine the intention of creating a society without central political authority. Thus no anarchist writings are authoritative or definitive in the sense that Marx's writings have been regarded by his followers (1971: ix).

In fact, most of what serves the same role as theory in anarchism makes some gesture to subvert any possibility of its being used as an authoritative text. Primitivism perhaps most closely resembles a traditional sectarian ideology in trying to vanquish all opposing positions, but its content is palpably fantastic and for the most part could not possibly be reflected in practice. Some visions take the form of novels. Others read like comedy routines. One of the more popular anarchist authors of the 1990s—the inventor, for instance, of the concept of the “Temporary Autonomous Zone”—writes under the persona of Hakim Bey, an insane Ismaili poet with an erotic obsession with young boys, his writings taking the form of communiqués from a non-existent Moorish Orthodox Church.

Bey's mystical pretensions typify another tendency: to identify the space that might otherwise be filled by theory, the transcendental position, as it were, with the sacred, but then to make the sacred ridiculous. I'll be talking about this habit later on when I discuss the role of giant puppets—what might be called the main sacred objects of the movement (but also self-

consciously foolish ones). Here, suffice it to say that the relation of anarchism to spirituality has always been complex and ambivalent. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European anarchism always tended to be strongest in countries—Russia, Spain, Italy—with a powerful church, and tended to take on a radically atheist tone, identifying the very notion of God with the principle of hierarchy and unquestioning authority. (So Bakunin’s famous phrase “if God really existed, it would be necessary to abolish him.” There were exceptions—Christian anarchists like Tolstoy—but they were usually not closely related to social movements.) Some have argued that Spanish anarchism, particularly in its rural manifestations, itself took on some of the qualities of a prophetic, millenarian religion (Brenan 1943; cf. Borke 1937)—but, if so, it was one whose main rituals involved acts like burning churches, or removing the mummified bodies of nuns from church crypts to reveal the corruption lurking below (Lincoln 1991). In contemporary anarchism this hostility has largely faded away: in part because in many countries, the church has lost so much of its power; in part because so many anarchist allies (indigenous peoples, for example, or in the United States, Quakers, radical priests and ministers) are likely to have come to their politics through religious convictions; in part, too, because of the development of specifically anarchistic forms of spirituality such as feminist paganism. At the same time, specifically anarchist forms of spirituality are—in addition to being inherently pluralistic and open-ended (hence the polytheism)—almost always at least a trifle self-effacing and capable of distance from themselves.[20] Many pagans have a striking ability to see their views as profoundly true, and simultaneously, as a kind of whimsical comedy. Often they seem to be engaging at the same time in a ritual and the parody of a ritual; the point where laughter and self-mockery are likeliest to come into the picture is precisely the point where one approaches the most numinous, unknowable, or profound. The same whimsical, playful quality is reflected in a good deal of pagan feminist literature, as in other branches of anarchist theory, and appears to reflect a sensibility that, at its best, sees “theory” as, if anything, a form of creative writing, both profoundly true because it highlights certain otherwise invisible aspects of reality, but at the same time profoundly foolish, in that it does so by being willingly blind to other aspects.[21] Also, one in which imagination, the ability to create new theories, visions, or anything else, is itself the ultimate, unknowable, sacred thing.

All this is perhaps a bit overstated: the reader should probably not take my own theoretical effusions too much more seriously than those about which I’m writing. The main point, though, is that—unlike some of the “classical” works of Proudhon, Kropotkin, Rocker, Malatesta, De Santillan, and others, written in the shadow of Marxism—contemporary anarchist “theory,” such as it is, is most explicitly not intended to provide a comprehensive understanding that will instruct others in the proper conduct of revolution. It is not an ideology, a theory of history. It tends, rather, towards a kind of inspirational, creative play. It is more than anything else an extrapolation from and imaginative projection of certain forms of practice: the experience of working in a small affinity group becomes the model for Primitivist idealizations of the hunter/gatherer band, assumed to be the only social unit for most of human history; the experience of real experiments in worker control becomes the basis for an imaginary planet in a science fiction story; the experience of sisterhood becomes the model for a matriarchal Goddess religion; the experience of a wild moment of collective poetic inspiration or even a particularly good party becomes the basis of a theory of the Temporary Autonomous Zone. Even when contemporary anarchists turn to Marxism, their overwhelming favorite theorists are the Situationists Raoul Vaneigem (1967) and

Guy Debord (1967) the Marxist theorists closest to the avant-garde tradition of trying to unify theory, art, and life.

If anarchism is not an attempt to put a certain sort of theoretical vision into practice, but is instead a constant mutual exchange between inspirational visions, anti-authoritarian attitudes, and egalitarian practices, it's easy to see how ethnography could become such an appropriate tool for its analysis. This is precisely what ethnography is supposed to do: tease out the implicit logic in a way of life, along with its related myths and rituals, to grasp the sense of a set of practices. Of course, another way of doing so would be simply to follow anarchist debates, as I did at the beginning, since these have tended to center on ethical and organizational questions. Nowadays, these debates center most of all on how to combat racism and sexism in the movement, about forms of decision-making, and questions of violence and nonviolence. Since the last is most immediately relevant to the question of the relation of anarchism and direct action, let me proceed to a brief consideration of the relation between the two, before moving to a capsule history of the role of direct action and direct democracy in North American social movements in the second half of the twentieth century—starting with the 1960s, and ending in the 1990s, at the point where the two began to definitively merge.

III) VIOLENCE AND NONVIOLENCE

The question of violence, nonviolence, and property destruction has haunted anarchism from at least the nineteenth century.

There are obvious reasons why it should be a problem. On the one hand, there are any number of reasons why anarchists might be suspicious of violence. For one thing, anarchists start from the principle that one's mode of resistance should embody the world one wishes to create. Almost no one wishes to create a more violent world. Anarchists try to organize on non-hierarchical lines, and argue that this is not only more just, but more efficient. Violence—particularly aggressive violence—is one of the few forms of human activity that does seem to be more efficient if organized on a top-down, command basis. This, and the concomitant need for secrecy, ensure that the more one prepares for war, or something like it, the more difficult it is to organize democratically.

On the other hand, anarchists wish to see a social revolution and it's hard to imagine how that could happen without any violent conflict whatsoever.

Moreover, they also insist on the moral sovereignty of the individual, and tend to be very uncomfortable with codes of conduct. In principle, it should be for each who resists to decide what is a legitimate act of resistance to an intrinsically illegitimate power. Now, it's important not to overstate things here: in practice, tacit agreements do always exist. CLAC's principle of "diversity of tactics," about which we heard so much in earlier chapters, might have sounded like "anything goes" to pacifists like SalAMI, but it was premised on a shared understanding that no one was about to show up with firearms or explosives. That would have been simply unthinkable. If my experience is anything to go by, if anyone had even suggested doing so, they would immediately have been assumed to be a police infiltrator for that very reason. Nonetheless, such tacit understandings exist only amongst activists. If outsiders join in, one can never be quite sure what they are going to do. In Québec, for instance, there was a scare-story going around the Black Bloc at one point during the actions that "French gangbangers" were going to show up at the wall with firearms (an act which they assumed would be automatically blamed on them). In

Seattle, the Black Bloc's carefully targeted destruction of corporate targets was, in a few cases, followed by episodes of opportunistic looting by local African-American teenagers. In that case, it's unlikely any in the Bloc objected. To see oppressed communities rise up and join you is, in a way, the whole point. And, as in St. Jean Baptiste, that oppressed community's standards for acceptable tactics might well be different than your own. However, most large mobilizations (including Québec City) also see at least a few minor episodes of what I call "the drunken frat boy problem"—opportunistic violence, mainly for the fun of it, on the part of young people whose politics are likely to have nothing to do with the activists', or even be explicitly right wing. In Europe, this can actually be encouraged by police, providing an excuse for repressive measures. The most extreme example of this came in Genoa, when police apparently let it be known they would turn a blind eye to this sort of thing, and fascists and soccer hooligans from all over Europe descended on the place.

Still, Genoa was extreme and this is usually a fairly minor problem. The worst moral dilemma for anarchists tends to come when isolated individuals, claiming anarchist inspiration, do something genuinely violent. Again, the anarchists who assassinated heads of state around the turn of the last century are probably the most dramatic example. The fascinating thing about such cases is that the majority of such assassinations were conducted by isolated individuals, not people active in actual anarchist organizations. Many had only the vaguest idea what anarchist principles were. However, if one takes the principle of moral autonomy seriously, it's difficult to treat such acts as completely illegitimate. From an anarchist perspective, insofar as it is legitimate to engage in any act of interpersonal violence, heads of state, major capitalists, or high officials are clearly the most legitimate targets. To instead adopt a more conventional guerilla war strategy, form a small army and attack police stations or army posts—thus trying to kill a bunch of ordinary people who are in no sense directly responsible for the policies one objected to—would clearly be far more problematic. (Actually, it's hard to deny that, by any moral standards, assassination is far superior to war.) On the other hand, since heads of state tend to find this kind of logic highly objectionable, the results are invariably disastrous. Anarchist writers like Peter Kropotkin or Emma Goldman, mainly concerned with disseminating anarchist ideas before a broader public, often struggled painfully with what to do or say about such people. Is it legitimate to condemn them? What sort of solidarity does one owe them? Does one not at least have the responsibility to explain to the world their point of view? Debates over broken windows and property destruction, or the possibility of molotovs in Québec City, are simply more recent versions of the same thing.

Activists who have been on the scene even only as long as two or three years tend to complain about the need to constantly reinvent the wheel in such matters. Every time there's a major action, everyone has to go through exactly the same debates. Some will argue that confrontational tactics or property destruction will only make activists look bad in the eyes of the public. Others will argue that the corporate media wouldn't make us look good whatever we do. Some will argue that if you smash a Starbucks window, that will be the only story on the news, effectively freezing out any consideration of issues; others will reply that if there's no property destruction, there won't be any story at all. Some will claim confrontational tactics deprive activists of the moral high ground; others will accuse those people of being elitist, and insist that the violence of the system is so overwhelming that to refuse to confront it effectively is itself acquiescence to violence. Some will argue that militant tactics endanger nonviolent protesters; others will insist that unless one creates some sort of peace police to physically threaten anyone who spraypaints

or breaks a window, some will probably do so, and if so, coordinating with the militants rather than isolating them is much safer for all concerned. In the end, one almost invariably ends up with the same resolution: that as long as no one is actually attacking another human being, the important thing is to maintain solidarity. The last thing you want is to end up in a situation like Seattle, where you actually had pacifists physically assaulting anarchists trying to break windows, or turning them in to the police. Many remark that the conclusion is so inevitable that one wishes it was possible to simply fast-forward the debate, but, as many will resignedly remark, it seems each time a major action rolls along, those newly brought into the movement have to work all these things out for themselves.

One result though is a kind of constant paradox within anarchism. It's not that one cannot find pacifist anarchists. Quite a number of pacifists do see themselves as anarchists. Those contemporary anarchists who are not pacifists, however, tend to avoid any association with pacifism, and in fact are likely to react to mention of the word with vigorous condemnation—despite the fact that, in the larger perspective, their ideas and practices emerged much more from that tradition than from any other. One would be hard-pressed to find an anarchist whose instinct would not be to place himself more on the side of Malcolm X than with Martin Luther King or Gandhi; however, the fact remains that in terms of overall approach, Gandhi's "become the change you want to see" seems a thousand times more in keeping with the anarchist spirit than Malcolm X's "by all means necessary"—and Gandhi himself recognized a strong philosophical affinity of his own ideas and anarchism, which Malcolm X certainly did not. "By all means necessary," in fact, seems an awful lot like the very ends-justifies-the-means logic which anarchism has consistently rejected. Yet practical annoyances with pacifists, combined with the inevitable instinct to identify with the most radical option, tends to ensure that almost invariably, the anarchist will nonetheless identify with Malcolm X.

Most anarchists nowadays, for example, are fond of citing arguments like Native American activist Ward Churchill's *Pacifism as Pathology* (1998), that pacifism itself is mainly a way for white liberals to feel good about themselves, that genuinely oppressed groups do not have such luxuries, and that apparent exceptions—the victories of Gandhi or King—were really only made possible by their opponent's fear of more violent alternatives. (The fact that authors like Churchill also tend to reject anarchist critiques of hierarchy in favor of military-style leadership tends to go unremarked, or written off as inessential.)[22] The fact that Churchill is Native American, however, is significant. In fact, very few North American anarchists would themselves go far beyond breaking a window; almost all scrupulously avoid harming others in any way. As I occasionally point out to journalists, it's hard not to find constant references to Black Bloc anarchists as "violent" amusing when one has spent any time with them, and observes them, for instance, carefully avoiding stepping on worms or debating about whether it's really justifiable to kill a mosquito. The real point of fracture comes, precisely, when it comes to issues of solidarity. To take a consistently nonviolent position, one would have to, for example, tell the Zapatistas in Chiapas that they shouldn't really have conducted an armed insurrection—however brief—or the Black Panthers that a bunch of middle-class white anarchists had more authority to tell them what sort of tactics to employ than they did. This dichotomy—between community-building (in which anarchists have everything in common with pacifists) and solidarity with oppressed groups—is a constant dilemma that will come up throughout this book.

It is interesting to observe that historically, anarchism has thrived as a revolutionary movement most of all in times of peace, and in largely demilitarized societies. As Eric Hobsbawm has

noted (1973:61), during the latter years of the nineteenth century, when most Marxist parties were rapidly becoming reformist social democrats, it was anarchism that stood at the center of the revolutionary Left.[23] Things only really changed with World War I and, of course, after the Russian revolution. The conventional historiography assumes it was the creation of the Soviet Union that led to the decline of anarchism and catapulted Communism everywhere to the fore. Still, it seems to me one could look at this another way. In the late nineteenth century most people honestly believed that war between industrialized powers was becoming obsolete. By 1900, even the use of passports was considered an antiquated barbarism. While colonial adventures were always a constant, a war between, say, England and France seemed about as unthinkable as it would today. The “short twentieth century” (which appears to have begun in 1914 and ended sometime around 1989 or 1991) was, by contrast, probably the most violent in human history. It was a century in which major powers were continually preoccupied with either waging world wars or preparing for them. Hardly surprising, then, that anarchism might come to seem unrealistic. The creation and maintenance of huge mechanized killing machines does seem to be the one thing that anarchists can never, by definition, be very good at. Neither is it surprising that Marxist parties (already organized on a command structure, and for whom the organization of huge mechanized killing machines often proved about the only thing they were particularly good at) began to seem eminently practical and realistic in comparison. It makes perfect sense, then, that the moment the Cold War ended and violent conflict between industrialized powers again came to seem unthinkable, anarchism popped right back to where it had been at the end of the nineteenth century: an international movement at the very center of the revolutionary left. The surprising thing was that it happened almost instantly.

What’s more, one could make a case that the effectiveness of more militant anarchist tactics tend to depend on the effective demilitarization of society. Consider here the battles over squats in Germany or Italy, or even the battles surrounding the expansion of Narita airport in Japan, in which anarchists or their local equivalents were able to fight pitched battles with police, defend territory with clubs and stones against tear gas and water cannons, and as often as not, were actually allowed to win. It’s hard to think of anything remotely like this happening in the United States. In America, the police simply will not allow themselves to lose. If they decide to move in on a squat in force, that squat will be lost; the only reason to defend it is to make the police’s job so difficult that they will hesitate before attacking other squats in the future. It’s not just because American society is far more heavily policed; it’s also because Germany, Italy, and Japan—all, significantly, former Axis powers—have been so effectively demilitarized. Stand-up battles with the police are only possible in societies in which everyone, including the public, is aware that almost no one owns firearms, and therefore, police tactics appropriate to a society where most criminals can be assumed to be heavily armed—for example SWAT teams—seem wildly inappropriate. And certainly, in those parts of Europe where firearms and military knowhow is much more broadly available (one thinks of Russia, Albania, the former Yugoslavia, or for that matter Iraq) classical anarchism and anarchist tactics do not find nearly as fertile ground.

Curiously, the real inspiration for the kind of tactics employed in the current wave of globalization protests comes from movements in parts of the Global South which had not, until recently, really been able to engage in nonviolent direct action at all. People’s Global Action, which put out the call for Seattle, was founded on the initiative of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Chiapas. The Zapatista movement, it seems to me, can best be seen as an attempt by people who have historically been denied the right to nonviolent, civil resistance to seize it;

essentially, to call the bluff of neoliberalism and its pretenses to democratization and yielding power to “civil society.” It is, as its commanders say, an army that aspires not to be an army any more. Since their initial, three-week insurrection in January 1994, it has also become about the least violent “army” imaginable (it’s something of an open secret that, for the last five years at least, they have not even been carrying real guns). The EZLN is the sort of army that organizes “invasions” of Mexican military bases in which hundreds of rebels sweep in entirely unarmed to scream at and try to shame the resident soldiers. The other two key founding members of PGA were the KRRS, a Gandhian peasant movement in India, and the MST, or Landless Peasants Movement, in Brazil. The latter have gained an enormous moral authority in Brazil by nonviolent mass actions aimed at reoccupying unused lands entirely nonviolently. As with the Zapatistas, it’s pretty clear that, if the same people had tried the same thing twenty years ago, they would simply have been mowed down. The most radical movements in South America today, in fact, tend to be about as nonviolent as they think they can get away with: most will, like the militants in Québec City, limit themselves to throwing rocks, and then normally against fully armored riot police, but would never dream of using firearms. The situation is complicated because in many parts of Latin America there is, and has long been, a much richer tradition of nonviolent direct action than in either Europe or North America, but the globalization movement’s immediate inspiration seems to come primarily from groups that, twenty or thirty years ago, would almost certainly have been forced to resort to guerilla warfare, but who, having watched so many earlier guerilla movements destroy themselves, or degenerate into nihilist gangsters, have chosen instead to take a radically different approach. In moving away from military tactics they often also ended up—often rather despite themselves—moving towards much more anarchistic forms of organization.

IV) AN EXTREMELY BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RELATION BETWEEN DIRECT ACTION AND DIRECT DEMOCRACY IN THE US SINCE 1960

Before World War II, the main locus of direct action in North America was as I mentioned the labor movement. The period since the war has seen a gradual merging of the traditions of direct action and of direct democracy, with the two only really coming together in the late 1970s and early 1980s, ready to be revived by the influence of the Zapatistas. The story is very complicated but a caricature version might run something like this:

The 1960s New Left kicked off with a call for “participatory democracy” in the famous Port Huron Statement of 1962, a founding document of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Its principle author, Tom Hayden, was inspired ultimately by John Dewey and C. Wright Mills and the document was notable for calling for a broad democratization of all aspects of American society, to create a situation where people are making for themselves the “decisions that affect their lives.”[24] One might see this as a very anarchistic vision, but SDS, as its inception, had a very different orientation. Actually, their original political program was to radicalize the Democratic Party (they only abandoned it when placed in an impossible position by the Democrats’ continual pursuit of the Vietnam War). Even more crucially, those who framed the statement seemed to have only the sketchiest ideas of what “participatory democracy” might mean in practice. This is most evident in the contradictory character of SDS’s own structure. As Francesca Polletta (2002)

has pointed out, SDS was on paper a quite formal, top-down organization, with a central steering committee and meetings run according to Robert's Rules of Order. In practice, it was made up of largely autonomous cells that operated by a kind of crude, de facto consensus process. The emphasis on consensus, in turn, appears to have been inspired by the example of SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the student wing of the civil rights movement. SNCC had originally been created on the initiative of Anita Baker and a number of other activists who had been involved in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), who were hoping to create an alternative to SCLC's top-down structure and charismatic leadership (embodied, of course, in the figure of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.). Famous for organizing lunch-table sit-ins, freedom rides, and other direct actions, SNCC was organized on a thoroughly decentralized basis, with ideas for new projects expected to emerge from individual chapters, all of which operated by a kind of rough-and-ready consensus.

This emphasis on consensus is a bit surprising, since at the time there was very little model for it. In both SNCC and SDS, it appears to have emerged from a feeling that, since no one should be expected to do anything against their will, decisions should really be unanimous. However, there doesn't seem to have been anything like what's now called "consensus process" in the formal sense of the term. The problem was there was no obvious model. The only communities in North America with a living tradition of consensus decision-making (the Quakers, and various Native American groups) were either unknown, unavailable, or uninterested in proselytizing. Quakers at the time tended to see consensus essentially as a religious practice; they were, according to Polletta (2002:195), actually fairly resistant to the idea of teaching it to anyone else.

The New Left was, as we all know, essentially a campus movement. Paul Mattick Jr. (1970) has argued that the wave of 1960s activism seems to have emerged from a kind of social bottleneck. The welfare state ideal of the time had been to defuse class tensions by offering a specter of perpetual social mobility (in much the same way the frontier had once done). After the war, there was a very conscious effort on the part of the government to pump resources into the higher education system, which began to expand exponentially, along with the number of working-class children attending university. The problem, of course, is that such growth curves invariably hit their limits, and, as any Third World government that has attempted this strategy has learned, when they do, the results are typically explosive. By the 1960s, this was starting to happen. Millions of students were left without any realistic prospect of finding jobs that bore any relation to their real expectations or capacities—a normal prospect in industrial societies, actually, but suddenly hugely exacerbated. These were the students who first became involved in SDS; people who, as Mattick emphasizes, like their equivalents in the Global South, always saw themselves as a kind of breakaway fragment of the administrative elite. This was, he suggests, crucial to understanding the limits of the New Left—that activists invariably saw themselves as "organizers," social workers:[25]

What united all factions of the left was the conception of their relationship to actual or fantasized communities as organizers—after the example of trade unionists and social workers—rather than as "fellow students" or workers with a particular understanding of a situation shared with others, and ideas of what to do about it. Despite the disagreement over the primary target for organizing—unemployed, blue-collar workers, white-collar workers, dropout youth—in each case the "community" was seen as a potential "constituency" (or, in PL's [Progressive Labor Party] language, "base"). The radicals saw themselves as professional revolutionaries, a force so to speak outside of society, organising those inside on their own behalf. Thus the activist played the part

reserved in liberal theory for the state, a point not to be neglected in the attempt to understand the drift of the New Left from an orientation of liberal governmental reform to Leninist-Stalinist concepts of socialism (Mattick 1970: 22).

The contradictions of this situation eventually became apparent as the decade wore on. The crisis was sparked first in groups like SNCC, when demands for civil rights began to give way to calls for Black Power. The radicals in SNCC, who were eventually to found the Black Panthers, called on white activists to stop doing alliance work and return to their own communities, particularly, in order to organize white communities against racism. SDS activists always greeted such calls with great ambivalence (Barber 2001)—in part because they were never quite clear on what their own communities were supposed to be. One could say something along these lines had been attempted in the early 1960s with the Economic Research Areas Project (ERAP), intended as the white equivalent to grassroots civil rights organizing, that brought SDS activists into poor white communities, and tried to mobilize communities around matters of common concern. Some of these projects scored victories in gaining local reforms, but organizers never felt much part of the communities in which they worked, felt isolated from other activists, and few saw the results as worth the sacrifice. The project fell apart in 1965. Instead, as Mattick so keenly observed, many began to realize that if there was a way to overcome the alienation of dead-end jobs, to find work that actually lived up to their imaginative capacities, it was in activism itself. Other activists, in effect, *were* their communities.

The crisis initiated by Black Power ultimately led in two very different directions. Again, at the cost of gross simplification: once their allies in the civil rights movement had abandoned them, white activists were effectively left with two options. They could either try to build countercultural institutions of their own, or they could focus on allying with communities or revolutionary groups in struggle overseas: i.e., the Viet Cong or other Third World revolutionaries, who would take pretty much whatever allies they could get. As SDS began to splinter into squabbling Maoist factions, groups like the Diggers and Yippies (founded in 1968) took the first option. Many were explicitly anarchist, and certainly, the late 1960s turn towards the creation of autonomous collectives and institutionbuilding was squarely within the anarchist tradition, while the emphasis on free love, psychedelic drugs, and the creation of alternative forms of pleasure was squarely in the bohemian tradition with which Euro-American anarchism has always been at least somewhat aligned. The Yippie slogan, “revolution for the hell of it” could be seen as emerging directly from the realization that activism itself could become the prime means of overcoming alienation. The other option was to see oneself as primarily allying with revolutionary communities overseas: hence the obsession with glorifying revolutionary heroes in Cuba, Vietnam, China, and elsewhere (men who, as Situationist and Autonomist critics pointed out, were essentially icons of the sort of new radical administration elites with which the SDS had always tacitly identified), and the feeling one need strike back against the empire from within the belly of the beast.

Each strategy involved a return to direct action, but, simultaneously, a jettisoning of the whole project of creating egalitarian decision-making structures. Hippies and Yippies might be considered a bit ambivalent in this regard, as small communes and many alternative institutions created in the process generally did operate on democratic principles. Still, the Yippies, with their wild, acid-inspired pranks and media stunts, tended to turn into a platform for charismatic impresarios like Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, in a style that proved notoriously alienating to some members of the white working classes. The Weathermen, in turn, attempted a series of bombings directed at military and corporate targets, meant to inspire spontaneous emulation and drive

society towards a revolutionary confrontation—though with the significant limitation that they did not want to kill anyone. They ended up mainly blowing up empty buildings. Interestingly, both had a profound effect on later media policy, since mainstream journalists began to feel complicit, coming to the conclusion that increasingly wild and destructive acts were in fact inspired by a need to constantly escalate in order to make headlines. I have heard persistent rumors from 1960s veterans, for example, that the Weathermen’s bombing campaign was far more extensive and devastating than has ever been recorded, but that there was a conscious decision by the national media to stop reporting on it. I have no idea if this is true. Still, one thing that is clear is that, since this period, the American media has become, more than that of any other industrial democracy I’m aware of, extremely reluctant to report on activist stunts of any sort—or even demonstrations.

This point will become important later on. For now, though, the key point is that none of these groups combined their interest in direct action with an emphasis on decentralized decision-making; to the contrary, whether because the focus turned on the one hand to charismatic figures who were at least potential media stars, or to the kind of cell-like, military structure able to carry out guerilla-style attacks, the impulse was in the other direction. Moreover, both strategies flared up for a few years and very rapidly faded away (though the alternative institutions created around this time often lasted considerably longer).

It has become a conventional habit in liberal scholarship to contrast the serious activism of the early 1960s New Left with the supposed childish extremism of the late 1960s and early 1970s. I don’t want to leave the reader with the impression I agree with this. The standard liberal complaint is that the 1960s counterculture—in effect, the first mass-based, industrial bohemianism—destroyed itself in ultra-radicalism. Moreover, in doing so, the argument goes, it left an opening for right-wing activists to adopt many of the same grassroots organizing techniques developed by SDS to reach out to the very white working-class constituencies SDS had such a difficult time organizing, to mobilize them against that very counterculture. There’s certainly an irony here. But it seems to me it is better to see both periods as attempts to work through certain fundamental dilemmas that are still with us today. I myself suspect the real culprit in the rise and eventual hegemony of the New Right is not the excesses of Maoists and Yippies, but, rather, the fact that America stopped using higher education as a means of class mobility. As most of Mattick’s frustrated administrative classes were reabsorbed into a new, more flexible capitalism, the white working class was increasingly locked out of any access to the means of cultural production—other than, perhaps, their church. The result was a perhaps predictable resentment against the supposed countercultural excesses of the “liberal elite.”[26]

Be this as it may, the second period was far more complex and creative than critics are usually willing to let on. Many of the ideas that came out of it were extraordinarily prescient. Consider, for example, Huey Newton’s notion of “intercommunalism,” which became the official Black Panther position in 1971, and which held that the nation-state was in the process of breaking down as the main stage of political struggle and that any effective revolutionary politics would have to begin by an alliance between local self-organized communities irrespective of national boundaries. The real problem was *how* they were self-organized: the Black Panthers, as typified by figures like Newton himself, eventually came to embody an era in which macho, chauvinist leadership styles themselves came to seem synonymous with militancy.

It’s probably significant that in SNCC, the first move towards rejecting decentralized decision-making was initiated by the emerging Black Power faction. Poletta’s (2002) careful analysis of the

organizational history of the movement shows quite clearly that consensus and decentralization were not challenged because they were actually inefficient. Rather, they were used as wedge issues. By obsessing about democratic process, white activists in SNCC and their allies could be identified with endless talk and fussing about; the more militant, Black Power faction could present itself as the ideal model of the ruthless efficiency appropriate to a truly militant organization. It's probably also significant that Stokely Carmichael, who became the main spokesman for the Black Power position, was fond of saying things like "the only position for women in SNCC is prone."

The fact that, even by the mid 1960s, such things could be said in an organization that was originally founded by a woman as a revolt against charismatic male authority is itself astounding. But it might give a sense of the sexual politics always lying not far below the surface of the old New Left. Militant nationalist movements are of course notorious for providing platforms for the vigorous reassertion of certain types of masculine authority. But sentiments similar to Carmichael's can be found coming from the mouths of white activists of that time as well. The feminist movement, in fact, began largely from within the New Left, as a reaction to precisely this sort of macho leadership style—or simply among those tired of discovering that, even during university occupations, they were still expected to prepare sandwiches and provide free sexual services while male activists posed for the cameras. The revival of interest in creating practical forms of direct democracy, in turn—in fact, the real origin of the current movement—thus trace back less to these male 1960s radicals than to the women's movement that arose largely in reaction to them (for example, Freeman 1971, Evans 1979).

When the feminist movement began, it was organizationally very simple. Its basic units were small consciousness-raising circles; the approach was informal, intimate, and anti-ideological. Most of the first groups emerged directly from New Left circles. Insofar as they placed themselves in relation to a previous radical tradition, it was usually anarchism. While the informal organization proved extremely well suited for consciousness-raising, as groups turned to planning actions, and particularly as they grew larger, problems tended to develop. Almost invariably, such groups came to be dominated by an "inner circle" of women who were, or had become, close friends. The nature of the inner circle would vary, but somehow one would always emerge. As a result, in some groups lesbians would end up feeling excluded, in others the same thing would happen to straight women. Other groups would grow rapidly in size and then see most of the newcomers quickly drop out again as there was no way to integrate them. Endless debates ensued. One result was an essay called "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," written by Mary Jo Freeman in 1970 and first published in 1972—a text still avidly read by organizers of all sorts in the present day. Freeman's argument is fairly simple. No matter how sincere one's dedication to egalitarian principles, the fact is that in any activist group, different members will have different skills, abilities, experience, personal qualities, and levels of dedication. As a result, some sort of elite or leadership structure will inevitably develop. In a lot of ways, having an unacknowledged leadership structure, she argued, can be a lot more damaging than having a formal one: at least with a formal structure it's possible to establish precisely what's expected of those who are doing the most important, coordinative tasks and hold them accountable.

One reason for the essay's ongoing popularity is that it can be used to support such a wide variety of positions. Liberals and socialists regularly cite "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" as a justification for why any sort of anarchist organization is bound to fail, as a charter for a return to older, top-down styles of organization, replete with executive offices, steering committees, and

the like. Egalitarians object that even to the extent this is true, it is far worse to have a leadership that feels fully entitled to its power than one that has to take accusations of hypocrisy seriously. Anarchists, therefore, have usually read Freeman's argument as a call to formalize group process to ensure greater equality, and, in fact, most of her concrete suggestions—clarifying what tasks are assigned to what individuals, finding a way for the group to review those individuals' performance, distributing responsibilities as widely as possible (perhaps by rotation), ensuring all have equal access to information and resources—were clearly meant to precisely that end.

Within the larger feminist movement itself, most of these arguments eventually became moot, because the anarchist moment was brief. Especially after *Roe v. Wade* made it seem strategically wise to rely on government power, the women's movement was to take off in a decisively liberal direction, and to rely increasingly on organizational forms that were anything but egalitarian. But, for those still working in egalitarian collectives, or trying to create them, feminism had effectively framed the terms of debate. If you want to keep decision making to the smallest groups possible, how do those groups coordinate? Within those groups, how to prevent a clique of friends from taking over? How to prevent certain categories of participants (straight women, gay women, older women, students—in mixed groups it soon became, simply, women) from being marginalized? What's more, even if mainstream feminists had abandoned the politics of direct action, there were plenty of radical feminists, not to mention anarchafeminists, around to try to keep such groups honest.

The origins of the current direct-action movement go back precisely to attempts to resolve those dilemmas. The pieces really started coming together in the antinuclear movement of the late 1970s, first with the founding of the Clamshell Alliance and the occupation of the Shoreham nuclear power plant in Massachusetts in 1977, then followed by the Abalone Alliance and struggles over the Diablo Canyon plant in California a few years later. The main inspiration for antinuclear activists—at least on questions of organization—were ideas propounded by a group called the Movement for a New Society (MNS), based in Philadelphia. MNS was spearheaded by a gay rights activist named George Lakey, who—like several other members of the group—was also an anarchist Quaker. Lakey and his friends proposed a vision of nonviolent revolution. Rather than a cataclysmic seizure of power, they proposed the continual creation and elaboration of new institutions, based on new, non-alienating modes of interaction—institutions that could be considered “prefigurative” insofar as they provided a foretaste of what a truly democratic society might be like. Such prefigurative institutions could gradually replace the existing social order (Lakey 1973). The vision in itself was hardly new. It was a nonviolent version of the standard anarchist idea of building a new society within the shell of the old. What was new was that men like Lakey, having been brought up Quakers, and acquired a great deal of experience with Quaker decision-making processes, had a practical vision of how some of these alternatives might actually work. Many of what have now become standard features of formal consensus process—the principle that the facilitator should never act as an interested party in the debate, the idea of the “block”—were first disseminated by MNS trainings in Philadelphia and Boston.

The antinuclear movement was also the first to make its basic organizational unit the affinity group—a kind of minimal unit of organization first developed by anarchists in early twentieth-century Spain and Latin America—and spokescouncils. As Starhawk pointed out in Chapter 1, all this was very much a learning process, a kind of blind experiment, and things were often extremely rocky. At first, organizers were such consensus purists that they insisted that any one individual had the right to block proposals even on a nationwide level, which proved entirely

unworkable. Still, direct action proved spectacularly successful in putting the issue of nuclear power on the map. If anything, the movement fell victim to its own success. Though it rarely won a battle—that is, for a blockade to prevent the construction of any particular new plant—it very quickly won the war. US government plans to build a hundred new generators were scotched after a couple years and no new plans to build nuclear plants have been announced since. Attempts to move from nuclear plants to nuclear missiles and, from there, to a social revolution, however, proved more of a challenge, and the movement itself was never able to jump from the nuclear issue to become the basis of a broader revolutionary campaign. After the early 1980s, it largely disappeared.

This is not to say nothing was going on in the late 1980s and 1990s. Radical AIDS activists working with ACT UP, and radical environmentalists with groups like Earth First!, kept these techniques alive and developed them. In the 1990s, there was an effort to create a North American anarchist federation around a newspaper called *Love & Rage* that, at its peak, involved hundreds of activists in different cities. Still, it's probably accurate to see this period less as an era of grand mobilizations than as one of molecular dissemination. A typical example is the story of Food Not Bombs, a group originally founded by a few friends from Boston who had been part of an affinity group providing food during the actions at Shoreham. In the early 1980s veterans of the affinity group set up shop in a squatted house in Boston and began dumpster-diving fresh produce cast off by supermarkets and restaurants, and preparing free vegetarian meals to distribute in public places. After a few years, one of the founding members moved to San Francisco and set up a similar operation there. Word spread (in part because of some dramatic, televised arrests) and, by the mid-1990s autonomous chapters of FNB were appearing all over America, and Canada as well. By the turn of the millennium, there were literally hundreds. But Food Not Bombs is not an organization. There is no overarching structure, no membership or annual meetings. It's just an idea—that food should go to those that need it, and in a way that those fed can themselves become part of the process if they want to—plus some basic how-to information (now easily available on the Internet), and a shared commitment to egalitarian decision-making and a do-it-yourself (DIY) spirit. Gradually, cooperatives, anarchist infoshops, clinic defense groups, Anarchist Black Cross prisoner collectives, pirate radio collectives, squats, and chapters of Anti-Racist Action began springing up on a similar molecular basis across the continent. All became workshops for the creation of direct democracy. But, especially since so much of it developed not on campuses, but within countercultural milieus like the punk scene, it remained well below the radar of not only the corporate media, but even of standard progressive journals like *Mother Jones* or the *Nation*. This, in turn, explains how, when such groups suddenly began to coalesce and coordinate in Seattle, it seemed, for the rest of the country, as if a movement had suddenly appeared from nowhere.

By the time we get to Seattle, though, it's impossible to even pretend such matters can be discussed within a national framework. What the press insists on calling the “anti-globalization movement” was, from the very beginning, a self-consciously global movement. The actions against the WTO Ministerial in Seattle were first proposed by PGA, a planetary network that came into being by the initiative of the Zapatista rebels in Chiapas. The emphasis on the WTO reflected the concerns of farmer's groups in India and the tactics employed could equally well be seen as an amalgam of ideas drawn mainly from the Global South than as an indigenous American development. It was the Internet, above all, that made this possible. If nothing else, the Internet has allowed for a qualitative leap in the range and speed of molecular dissemination:

there are now Food Not Bombs chapters, for instance, in Caracas and Bandung. The year or two directly after Seattle also saw the emergence of the network of Independent Media Centers, radical web journalism that has completely transformed the possibilities of information flow about actions and events. Activists who used to struggle for months and years to put on actions that were then entirely ignored by the media now know that anything they do will be picked up and reported instantly in photos, stories, and videos, across the planet—if only in a form accessed largely by other activists. The great problem has been how to translate the flow of information into structures of collective decision making—since decision making is the one thing that is almost impossible to do on the Internet. Or, more precisely, the question is: when and on what level are structures of collective decision making required? The Direct Action Network, and the Continental DAN structure that began to be set up in the months following Seattle, was a first effort to address this problem. Ultimately it foundered. In doing so, however, it also played a key role in disseminating certain models of direct democracy, and making their practice pretty much inextricable from the idea of direct action. It's the conjunction between these two phenomenon, now pretty much irreversibly established in the most radical social movements in America and, increasingly, elsewhere, that's the real subject of this book.

CHAPTER 6: SOME NOTES ON “ACTIVIST CULTURE”

I started this book with the first CLAC tour that passed through New York in early 2000. Let me flash forward about a year and talk about the second CLAC tour to do so: one held prior to their “Take the Capital” action in Ottawa during the 2002 G8 meetings in Kananaskis.

The audience for such tours tended to consist mostly of white anarchists, but this time the CLAC people made a point of bringing in at least one speaker from a local community-based group in each city they passed through. In New York, this turned out to be an organizer named Ranjanit from a radical South Asian group called Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM). At that time, DRUM had earned enormous respect in New York activist circles for its work on immigration detention issues—of special interest there in the immediate wake of September 11, when hundreds of people of Middle Eastern or South Asian descent had been swept up and effectively disappeared.

The speakers from Canada described campaigns they’d been involved with, and talked about organizing dilemmas of one sort or another. Ranjanit’s talk was different. It consisted mainly of a condemnation of “activist culture.” He himself, he kept emphasizing, was not only of Indian descent but a working-class kid from Queens. He knew something about the communities with which he was working. Since Seattle, all anarchists have been talking about has been how to move away from “summit hopping” to working more closely with communities in struggle. The problem, he emphasized, was that they had developed their own styles of dress, mannerisms, ways of talking, tastes in music and food—a kind of hybrid mishmash of hippie, punk, and mainstream middle-class white culture, with incorporated chunks of more exotic revolutionary traditions—and this made it almost impossible for them to communicate with anyone outside their own little charmed circle. Some elements of this activist culture—the rejection of personal hygiene standards, for instance—were considered downright offensive by most of those with whom they wished to form alliances. Others, like the vegan diets, made it impossible to sit down at the table with almost anyone who was not already an activist. Activist culture was choking the promise of the movement, and anarchists had to make up their mind what they really wanted to do: create a (tiny, relatively privileged) community of their own, show up at IMF meetings and make grand declarations about the evils of global capitalism, or make a serious effort to work with real communities who were actually bearing the brunt of capitalist globalization.

You can’t be an anarchist in a big city in America without hearing some version of this critique on a fairly regular basis. In part, this is because it’s a critique that needs to be made. Much like the SDS activists described in the last chapter, few white participants in the direct action movement see themselves as coming from “cultures”; most see themselves simply as generic (“unmarked”) Americans, the kind whose issues and concerns are treated as universal, even if at the same time, they feel there is something about that generic American way of life that is deeply inhuman, unsustainable, and wrong. As anarchists and revolutionaries, therefore, they are faced with the

same dilemma: whether to try to create an alternative culture of their own, or to concentrate on alliance work, supporting the struggles of those who suffer most under the existing system, but who are also willing to work with them as allies. To put it crudely: they have to choose between whether to focus on their own alienation or others' oppression.

Certainly, in reality, almost everyone ends up doing a little of both. But this is precisely what leads to exactly the contradictions Ranjanit was pointing to. The more one creates one's own, alternative culture, the more bizarre and outlandish one seems to outsiders, including those with whom one ostensibly wishes to ally. Many people of color see anarchist culture itself as a badge of white privilege being waved in their faces (as one African-American anarchist remarked, in regard to punk styles of dress and comportment, "If I went out on the street looking like that I'd be dragged down to the cop shop in fifteen minutes"). On the other hand, it seems unreasonable to ask anarchists to abandon all attempts to build an alternative culture, to fall back on a way of life they hate, just so as not to put others off.

But can one really be *against* a culture?

This is the question I want to explore in this chapter. "Culture" is a term with such universally positive associations nowadays, it's already slightly odd to hear that the fact that certain people have a culture is treated as a problem. All the more so, when the culture in question is born from a conscious effort to create a less hierarchical, less alienated, and more democratic and ecologically sustainable form of life—to create the kind of culture that might befit a genuinely free society. It seems to me unraveling this paradox will bring us to the core of the fundamental dilemmas of the anarchist project.

DILEMMAS OF WHITE PRIVILEGE

Most often, activist culture is seen as problematic—as it was for Ranjanit—because it is seen as a form of white privilege, and arguments about activist culture are framed in terms of race. America's racial divisions have, of course, been the scourge of radical politics in the United States for centuries. Historically, they have made the maintenance of ongoing class-based alliances extraordinarily difficult. Arguments like these regularly rip direct-action groups apart.

Let me consider one particularly well-documented example. In the 1990s, the Love & Rage Federation (Filipo 1993) dissolved over issues of white privilege. Love & Rage had begun as an initiative to create a continental anarchist network around a newspaper of the same name. In many ways it was quite successful. After ten years, however, they found themselves stubbornly unable to expand beyond their original core of middle-class white activists or include significant numbers of people of color.[27] Furious arguments ultimately broke out over the reasons for this: which also became theoretical debates about the nature of white privilege and ways of overcoming white supremacy.

Some argued that the problem was cultural. The vast majority of white anarchists first discovered anarchism through punk rock and its DIY culture. Walk into a typical anarchist infoshop, they pointed out, and you will almost inevitably be greeted by people with green hair and facial piercings. It doesn't matter how welcoming they were: their very appearance obviously limited the appeal of such places to members of the white working class, let alone poor people of color. Others argued that the problem lay much deeper. The US, they argued, is a nation built on white supremacy, and whiteness is not a culture. When white people talk about their cultural heritage

they talk about being German, or Irish, or Lithuanian, but never about whiteness. That's because whiteness is a category of privilege, a tacit agreement with others categorized as "white"—from home loan associations or police superintendents—to provide aid and protection that is not provided to those not so classified. The only way to destroy the system of privilege is to subvert the category of whiteness, so as to ultimately destroy it.

This was a position being developed in circles surrounding the journal *Race Traitor*, which was launched around this time and avidly read in activist circles. Its motto was "Treason to Whiteness Is Loyalty to Humanity." This was a very appealing notion, but the obvious question then became: how does one actually do that? How does one become an effective race traitor? Who might be an example of an effective role model? Many in Love & Rage found inspiration in the example of Subcomandante Marcos, the famous masked spokesman of the Mexican Zapatistas. Marcos was originally a middle-class Mexican who led a group of mostly privileged urban revolutionaries to organize indigenous communities in Chiapas and, after ten years in the jungle, came to abandon his vanguardist ideology in order to become an agent carrying out decisions made by the indigenous communities. In his willingness to step back and accept the leadership of oppressed communities, he could be considered an example of a genuine race traitor. But Marcos, for his part, had the advantage of being able to ally with indigenous communities that already acted very much like anarchists, with their own style of consensus-based direct democracy. What did this mean for anarchists in the United States, where most revolutionary groups based in communities of color were far more hierarchically organized—where, in fact, many saw emphases on direct democracy as itself a form of white privilege? Would all this mean having to abandon any idea of building a new society in the shell of the old? Or, at least, of white anarchists playing any significant role in the process of doing so? Within a year or two, Love & Rage split into feuding factions over racial issues, and the entire project ultimately foundered.

Similar debates erupted in the early days of the globalization movement. In this case the kick-off was a piece called "Where Was the Color in Seattle?" (Martinez 2000), that sparked continual arguments about the nature of racial privilege, outreach versus alliance models, about how to accept the leadership of communities of color, and about the stifling effects of white guilt. The overwhelmingly white make-up of the emerging movement was felt to be a continual crisis. Certainly this was true of New York City Direct Action Network, originally founded to help coordinate the actions against the IMF and World Bank in Washington on April 16, 2000. DAN's second major initiative was to help organize actions against the Republican Convention in Philadelphia that summer. In order to do so, a group of DAN organizers proposed to ally with SLAM,[28] a radical student group based at Hunter College with a much more diverse membership, and several other POC-based organizations. In those days in the immediate wake of Seattle, everyone was eager to learn DAN's tactics and forms of organization, so the latter were not averse; but they also insisted that the actions themselves focus on the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal (the Black activist and journalist then on death row in Philadelphia) and more broadly on the US Prison Industrial Complex, and racist nature of the criminal justice system. These demands isolated a significant faction in DAN who had seen the convention protests as a chance to move from issues of global trade to a broader challenge to the existing political system as a whole; to juxtapose their own model of direct democracy to the kind of corporate-dominated representative democracy embodied by the conventions. Some felt the two were reconcilable: that prison and death penalties issues could be used, ultimately, to raise the same broader questions. Others felt the compromise was worth the opportunity to create an ongoing alliance. In the end, the effort did

not, in fact, lead to an ongoing alliance, and resulting recriminations caused quite a number of activists to give up on DAN entirely. However, the alliance, however temporary, was quite helpful in disseminating DAN-like tactics and styles of decision making, and even anarchist ideas themselves, in wider activist circles. Shortly after NYC DAN effectively dissolved in 2003, a new “Anarchist People of Color” network (APOC) was in the process of taking shape, based on almost identical organizational principles.

The early experience of APOC, however, already provides an excellent illustration of why direct-action-oriented groups had tended to be dominated by people classified as “white.” When those who lack white privilege began to adopt such politics, they found they faced completely different levels of police repression. As one particularly startling incident in Brooklyn revealed, APOC couldn’t even throw a benefit party in their own offices without having to worry about local police sweeping in to beat and arrest partygoers talking on the street.

All this was, perhaps, predictable. It is a notorious thing that during large-scale actions, police seem to target people of color for particular violence. As a result, many (non-anarchist) POC activist groups see direct action as itself a form of racial privilege, and made a great point of trying to keep those likely to engage in militant tactics away from their events. The short-lived Los Angeles DAN, which organized the protests against the Democratic convention in 2000, took the need to ally with community groups so seriously that they refused to allow their spaces to be used for anarchist meetings at all, and even employed marshals to exclude Black Bloc anarchists from their marches.

New York DAN was very different. To all intents and purposes it was itself an anarchist group. Still, it quickly found itself in trouble for its refusal take the same path as LA DAN. Immediately after A16, for instance, NYC DAN and an allied group—New York Reclaim the Streets—joined with several Mexican immigrant groups to organize a May Day march through lower Manhattan. It was to be an entirely peaceful—indeed, permitted—event, replete with musical bands and giant puppets. Still, as the marchers first assembled at Union Square, a tiny cluster of perhaps sixteen anarchists in Black Bloc appeared, simply intending to show the flag, as it were, and establish an overtly anarchist presence at the event. Before the march even started, police swooped in and arrested about a dozen of them.[29] The Mexican organizers were outraged, but less at the police than at their DAN fellow organizers, accusing them of putting their people—many of them undocumented workers—at risk by allowing a Black Bloc to assemble to begin with. They swore never to work with DAN again.

It’s pretty obvious that when police launch preemptive strikes like this, fomenting divisions of this sort is half the point. The NYPD has actually proved remarkably adept at playing this sort of game, and has in fact made a habit, during particularly sensitive marches organized by POC groups, of nabbing one or two white anarchists on trumped-up charges. A year after the May Day March, during a march appealing for clemency for Native American activist Leonard Peltier in December 2000, for instance, an NYPD snatch squad suddenly broke into the middle of the march to tackle and drag away four (unmasked) anarchists. One was charged with possession of a battery-operated megaphone without a sound permit, the others with “resisting arrest.” This was a very delicate issue, and everyone was making strenuous efforts to avoid anything that could be interpreted as a provocation: none of the anarchists were wearing masks, the woman with the megaphone had not in fact been using it but simply carrying it from one permitted rally point to another (and anyway, as many pointed out, there’s no such thing as a moving sound permit). Still, the fact that everyone knew the arrests were a pretext and consciously intended

to sow dissension didn't really matter. Afterwards, many activists who based their strategy on building alliances with POC groups (including, in this case, several former members of Love & Rage, now turned Maoists) argued that the very presence of black-clad anarchists could itself be considered a provocation. As a result, such activists often ended up challenging the very principle of direct action.

Whatever the underlying reasons, though, there's one thing that it's crucial to emphasize. Groups like DAN were largely white. Particularly striking was the absence of African Americans. For most of its history, NYC DAN had a single Black member, in an active core group of about fifty. This is not to say it was anything like exclusively white. There were always a fair number of Latinos (though more likely to be from countries like Brazil or Argentina than, say Mexico or Puerto Rico), and even larger numbers of activists of South or East Asian (Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean) or Middle Eastern (Turkish, Egyptian, Iranian) descent. Still, their numbers all put together rarely came to more than a third of the active membership. As for the rest, if they had any self-conscious ethnic identity, it was most likely to be Jewish or Irish. While DAN was certainly more diverse than, say, early SDS, in a city as diverse as New York, this was considered a matter of scandal.

DILEMMAS OF PRIVILEGE THAT ARE NOT NECESSARILY RACIAL

I will be returning to the specifically racial issues periodically. They are the bane of all radical politics in North America. What I want to emphasize here is that these dilemmas are not simply effects of racism. Similar dilemmas crop up whenever one has a movement trying to combat situations of extreme social inequality. Always, those on the bottom, who have the most reason to want to challenge such inequalities, will also tend to have the most restricted range of weapons at their disposal with which to do so. Inevitably, this causes endless moral dilemmas for those whose privilege actually allows them to rebel.

This is not a new phenomenon. There is a vast literature on the subject. Eric Wolf (1969), for example, pointed out that in every peasant revolt we know about, the backbone of guerilla armies is always the middle peasantry; since the poorest stratum lacks the means to carry out a sustained insurrection, and the wealthiest lacks motivation. Similarly, E. P. Thompson (1971) and others have demonstrated that the mainstays of Early Modern "bread riots"—in reality, events very like what we would now call direct actions—tended to hail from the more prosperous among the laboring classes: neither bourgeois nor paupers, but members of the respectable working class. In fact, much of the early literature on radical movements seemed to argue that it was impossible for the truly oppressed to become genuine revolutionaries. Karl Mannheim (1929, also Norman Cohen 1957), for example, argued that not only do the truly oppressed tend not to engage in sustained revolt, their mode of imagining social alternatives tends to be absolute and millenarian. While the middle stratum "was disciplining itself through a conscious self-cultivation which regarded ethics and intellectual culture as its principle self-justification" (1929:73), and were developing rational utopias, the truly marginal tended to favor a kind of ecstatic vision of sudden and total rupture. Mannheim called this "chiliasm"—"a mental structure peculiar to oppressed peasants, journeymen, and incipient 'Lumpenproletariat,' [and] fanatically emotional preachers" (1929:204).[30] Hence, when the poorest elements did rise up, they tended to do so in the name of

some great millenarian vision, in the belief that the world as we know it would soon come to an end in one blow and existing hierarchies be swept away. Now, while few nowadays would give much credence to the idea that the poor live in an eternal present or are incapable of long-term planning, Mannheim does have something of a point. Revolutionary movements have always tended to take on much of their temper and direction from those very “middle strata.” At the very least, there has always been something of a gap in this respect between those who suffered the most in an unequal society and those most able to organize effective sustained opposition. In other words, those “most affected”—as the current activist catchphrase puts it—by feudal or capitalist structures rarely, if ever, organized openly against it. One can argue, like Jim Scott (1985, 1992), that the hidden resistance of the lowly is a great unrecognized force in world history—and surely one would be right. But rarely does this resistance take the form of overt rebellion.

When those disjunctions are superimposed over more profound ascriptions of difference—like race, culture, ethnicity—they become far more visible. But it seems to me they are always going to be there in some form or another. They are simply one of the inevitable side effects of social inequality.[31]

Of course, in the case of the globalization movement one common popular perception is that we are not even talking about members of a middle stratum, but about members of the elite. This idea has become so deeply entrenched, in fact, that it has become common wisdom not only among conservative commentators, but to some degree, to the public more generally. Before going on, then, let me briefly take on this perception: one which is, of course, a social phenomenon in its own right.

THE MYTH OF TRUST FUNDS

The stereotype runs something like this. The core of the “anti-globalization movement” is made up of rich or upper-middle-class teenagers, “trust fund babies” who can afford to spend their lives traveling from summit to summit making trouble. In a way, the accusation was predictable enough. Right-wing populism in the US is largely based on the accusation that liberals are part of an upper-middle-class elite whose values are deeply alien to that of working-class Americans. It would be hardly surprising that, faced with leftist radicals, the first instinct of a right-wing talk-radio host would be to assume that if liberals were drawn from the prosperous, revolutionaries would have to be drawn from the actual rich. On the other hand, if one examines the record, one finds that some of the first figures to make such claims—this was around the time of the Republican and Democratic conventions in the summer of 2000[32]—were figures of authority in the cities expecting protests (for example, the mayor of LA and Philadelphia police chief John Timoney), in a tone that certainly implied access to some kind of actual sociological information they could not possibly have had. These were in fact the very political figures who immediately afterwards ordered police to attack what even by conventional definitions were largely nonviolent protesters. It certainly gives one reason to wonder: especially, since so many police in Seattle had at first balked when given similar orders. Given the fact that a whole series of other rumors seemed to mysteriously appear around the same time about activists attacking police with acid and urine, one can only wonder whether this was part of a more calculated campaign to appeal to the class prejudices of the police themselves. The message, at the conventions and similar mobilizations, seemed to be: “Do not think of yourself as a working-class guy being paid to protect

a bunch of bankers, politicians and trade bureaucrats who have contempt for you; think of this, rather, as an opportunity to beat up on their snotty children”—an understanding which would be, for the politicians’ purposes, perfect, since they also did not want the police to actually maim or kill the protesters. Whether this sort of imagery emerges from police intelligence sources—which tend to draw heavily on research units from private security firms and conservative think tanks, and often, to reproduce very odd forms of right-wing propaganda—or whether police were actually listening to conservative radio hosts, is, at this juncture, impossible to say.[33] If nothing else, activists at major summits ever since have regularly reported more or less the same accusations on the part of police—as one friend summarized it to me: “You’re all just a bunch of rich kids who put on masks so your daddies can’t see your faces on the news when you go smash things up, and then go back home to your mansions and watch it all on TV and laugh at us.”

If nothing else, the rumors became remarkably consistent.

SO: WHO ARE ACTIVISTS REALLY?

I) Work and Education

What follows is not based on statistical methodology of any sort, but having spent over seven years now among anarchists and others involved in direct action and I think I am in a position to make some initial generalizations. The first is that activists from truly wealthy backgrounds are exceedingly rare. In terms of economic background, in fact, anarchists tend to be extremely diverse. If there’s anything that does set them off from the bulk of Americans it is that they are disproportionately likely to have attended college. Many, of course, are themselves students, but the activist core seems to be made up of what might even be called post-students: young women and men who have completed college, but are still living something like students, at least insofar as they are not mostly in regular, career-oriented nine-to-five jobs or child-rearing households.

I should emphasize while this is the core, it’s certainly not the overwhelming majority. In New York, for instance, there is now an anarchist mothers’ group. The average meeting of NYC DAN would normally include high school students and retirees as well, along with, say, forty-year-old squatters, many of whom had never attended an institution of higher learning. And NYC DAN was considered by many other activists decidedly upscale. The closer to the squatter scene one gets, the more one encounters activists without formal schooling, and this becomes almost universally the case when one gets to the level of the “travelers”—mostly teens and men and women in their twenties, runaways or living lives of voluntarily homelessness, moving from city to city. Just as, in the heyday of the IWW in the early decades of the twentieth century, there was a rich culture of hobos and hoppers of freight trains, so there is still today. And then as now, most do consider themselves anarchists. Many are orphans, escapees, or runaways of very modest backgrounds, with little access to educational institutions, though many are avid readers, and many versed in radical theory—in my own experience, most often, some variation on French Situationism. While the “travelers” may be numerically a relatively minor element in the movement, and somewhat marginal (most hate meetings), there are likely to be significantly more of them at any major mobilization than anyone who actually has a trust fund. They are also extremely important symbolically, because they set a kind of romantic standard for autonomous existence—dumpster-diving food, refusing paid employment—that represents one possible ideal for those wishing to establish an existence outside the logic of capitalism.

There are also those who join such a world voluntarily: they normally are college-educated, or sometimes college dropouts of a far more exalted social class. This is the sort of universe celebrated in popular anarchist books like CrimethInc's novel *Evasion* (2001), a semi-fantasy of middle-class, white, punk kids who drop out to join this world, living off trash and the left-overs of industrial society.[34] Such a life can represent a kind of vision of moral purity, a total rejection of an industrial society seen as an engine for the production of enormous quantities of waste. Insofar as it is assumed to be no longer possible to simply leave the system, to establish an autonomous existence in the woods[35], the best one can do is to live off its flotsam and jetsam. Many dumpster divers are quite proud of the fact that, despite the fact that they live off trash, they manage to maintain rigorous vegetarian diets. Many younger anarchists, the more "hardcore" sorts, follow suit to varying degrees. In New York, there is a young man named Thaddeus who claims he manages to get by on roughly five dollars a month, occupying empty buildings until the police expel him, dumpster-diving food, and all the while producing, with some friends, a monthly guide to free events in New York. Thaddeus is a regular of the direct action scene. He's something of an extreme case, and considered rather a heroic figure as a result, but many see this as really "living the life" in a way that most do not. While few resort to, say, street hustling or theft, for those who do there is a strong ethic of shoplifting, that insists that it is only legitimate to steal from large corporate outlets, never "mom and pop" stores[36]) if they can avoid it. Practices like dumpster diving are considered entirely ordinary in anarchist circles. In the kitchen of the New York offices of the Independent Media Center (IMC) there was posted, for many years, the schedule indicating at what times local restaurants were legally obliged to throw away their sushi. Activists on bicycles would regularly make the rounds to pick up piles of sushi rolls, all still neatly shrink-wrapped in plastic trays and containers, and deposit them in the IMC refrigerator. At another stop one can regularly find perfectly edible breadrolls and bagels. As Food Not Bombs activists often point out before major mobilizations, there's absolutely no problem scrounging up free food for, say, ten thousand people in a city like New York, if one wants to put in the effort—though coming up with the utensils can often be more difficult.

There is, I should also note, a counter-discourse here. The majority of activists, who are trying to come to some kind of compromise with the mainstream economy can just as easily dismiss the travelers and squatters and dumpster divers as "crusties," "cruddies," "gutter-punks" coasting on their white privilege, or as middle-class kids playing at poverty in a way insulting to the real hardships of the homeless or dispossessed.[37] But often the critique is mixed with a sort of ambivalent respect, too.

Most activists—and again, I am using the term "activist" here mainly as a short-hand for "anarchist or others involved in anarchist-inspired direct action politics"—do feel they have to make some compromise with the existing economic order. Most feel that how one does so is very much a personal call. It is rather rare, in my experience, to hear the same sort of accusations of "selling out," of compromise as treason, that were so common in the 1960s and 1970s. Obviously, if one became a publicity agent for Monsanto, or a stockbroker, it would certainly be felt to compromise one's activist credentials. But it would have to be something almost that extreme.[38] Obviously, here too there are exceptions. The more hardcore one's own choices, the more likely one is to write off those who live a more comfortable or compromised style of life.

Older activists (over thirty, or especially, over forty) who are most likely to have full-time jobs often work in industries centering on the dissemination of knowledge and ideas. In the New York scene I know a handful of writers and journalists, a large number of teachers (especially

grade school through high school), librarians, even one high school guidance counselor, and many tied in one way or another to the printing industry (a very traditional radical occupation). Some are theater managers, playwrights, choreographers, or otherwise adjacent to the arts. A surprisingly small number, in my own experience, work full time for NGOs (at least this is true in the specifically direct action end of things). Younger activists—the majority, living that kind of extended quasi-adolescence that I’ve called “post-student”—tend towards the sort of part-time jobs that allow very flexible times and hours. This is partly because the changing nature of the job market in the US has made full-time work harder to come by—many end up temping—but also because flexibility is so important to them. Some pick up a specific translatable skill: they learn bartending or web design, become lighting or sound technicians, acquire skills in catering. All are skills that make it fairly easy to pick up work for a week or a month and then move on. (Working as a musician also gives flexibility, but it pays so little one really can’t support oneself without working full time.) Some work in activist-friendly enterprises: most often vegan kitchens or health-food stores. Others become civil engineers.[39] There are also a handful of full-time organizers who work for activist groups like the Rainforest Action Network, Ruckus Society, various peace groups, or labor unions, or needle-exchange programs, though these jobs pay notoriously little and activists of more modest means often can’t afford to take them. Many such jobs pay nothing at all, but activists will still do them on a part-time volunteer basis.

In what follows, I’ll try to outline an ideal-typical activist life-course, generalizing from people I knew in DAN, CLAC, the ACC, IMC and similar groups in the Northeast around 2000–2003. Doing so is necessarily a hypothetical exercise, since it assumes history will remain constant (which is unlikely) but projecting current patterns one might come up with something like this:

Our ideal-typical direct actionist is likely to either become politicized in high school, especially through the punk scene, or in college, becoming active in campus organizations. After either graduating or dropping out of college, they are likely to spend anywhere between one and ten years of intense involvement in activist groups. During the first few years, they will attend meetings regularly, perhaps, three, four or five a week (in the days right before action, sometimes four or five a day), usually in a variety of different groups, while supporting themselves through casual or part-time labor. This first phase is very intense and almost impossible to sustain continuously. Most break it up in one way or another. For example, one might spend six months doing activist work in one’s home town, then spend a few months intensely working for money; then, once one has saved enough for an airplane ticket, take off to some distant locale: to help set up IMCs in South America, do solidarity work on the West Bank or Chiapas, absorb the squatter scene in Europe, or participate in a tree-sit. Many at this stage are on the road around half the time. Or one might keep oneself sane by occasionally plunging into a completely different sort of project—an artistic one, for example, an intense romance—only to reappear a few months later. One might run off for a few months to work on an organic farm—a habit so common there’s actually an acronym for it: to woof (Work on an Organic Farm).[40] Those who concentrate all their energies on one place often tend to burn out completely after a year or two, and quit in exasperation; or else, find some specific, international or community-related project to concentrate their energies on and withdraw from everything else. As a result, groups like NYC DAN soon came to be made up of an active core and a kind of penumbra of semi-retired activists who were never really seen at meetings any more, but did often show up at actions or parties, and whose knowledge, contacts, and experience were available for those who still had personal contact with them.

Younger anarchists who don't live in squats—again, the majority don't—often live in collective houses or apartments, frequently in poor or artsy, gentrifying neighborhoods. Some live in activist spaces: there were several people living in the New York IMC during the years 2000 to 2003, and others in Walker Space, a kind of IMC adjunct that housed a performance space and television studios. Those prosperous enough to be able to afford a reasonable size apartment often allowed at least some space in the apartment to be used for larger collective purposes.

Eventually, almost everyone ends up in a kind of semi-retirement. Those who become professional, paid activists usually end up in a different social milieu. Some go to grad school: grad students typically remain involved for a few years, then, as they become overwhelmed with work and experience the pressures of professionalization, drop out of activism entirely.[41] Others have children, or settle down—frequently with non-activists—or finally take on full-time, career employment. There are, certainly, those who maintain an ongoing presence nonetheless, but this is typically either because they find some career that keeps them close to the activist universe—become a labor lawyer and still do legal work for anarchists as well, for example; or manage a radical bookstore; or because they continue to live in a collective house, or squat, or intentional community; or else, because they learn how to carefully limit their involvement to a single, manageable project. The latter is difficult, since demands on an activist's time are potentially infinite. The trick to staying involved over the long term is to find a way to resist the temptation to overcommit. Relatively few, in my experience, successfully manage to do this.

One's later thirties, or certainly forties and fifties, then, are typically a period of complete or near-complete withdrawal. But if historical patterns hold, there is, for a certain number, a period even later in life of reengagement. After one's children are in college, one breaks up with a long-term partner, or retires, one might very well find oneself drawn back into the world of activism again, occasionally, at least for a little while, on as intense basis as at the beginning.

II) Class Backgrounds and Trajectories

I've mentioned that the only sense in which those involved in direct action could be said to be part of an elite is educational: the large majority have had some access to higher education, despite the fact that most Americans (slightly over half) have not.

Otherwise, if one looks at class backgrounds and trajectories, one encounters endless variation. Again, I have not conducted surveys. Still, I can say from my own personal experience that in the Northeast, the actual number of activists with trust funds can be counted on one hand. There are far fewer, in fact, than, say, the number of activists whose parents are career military officers—which is actually surprisingly high. But we are dealing with relatively small numbers in either case.

Speaking broadly, it seems to me activist milieus can best be seen as a juncture, a kind of meeting place, between downwardly mobile elements of the professional classes and upwardly mobile children of the working class. The first consist of children of white-collar backgrounds who reject their parents' way of life: the daughter of a tax accountant who chooses to work as a carpenter, the daughter of veterinarian who chose to live as a graphic artist, the son of a middle manager who chooses to become a civil engineer or professional activist. The other consisted of children from blue-collar backgrounds who go to college.

In historical terms, both correspond to a classic stereotype. The first represents the classic recruitment base for artistic bohemia; if not children of the bourgeoisie, as they were often assumed

to be in 1850s Paris, where the term was first coined, then children born to members of administrative or professional elites, living in voluntary poverty, experimenting with more pleasurable, artistic, less alienated forms of life. The second represents the classic stereotype of the revolutionary, particularly in the Global South: children of the laboring classes (workers, peasants, small shop-owners even) whose parents strived all their life to get their sons or daughters into college, or even who managed to get themselves bourgeois levels of education by their own efforts, only to discover that bourgeois levels of education do not actually allow entry into the bourgeoisie, or often, any sort of regular work at all. One can compile endless examples among the ranks of the last century's revolutionary heroes: from Mao (child of peasants turned librarian), to Fidel Castro (unemployed lawyer from Cuba), and so on. In fact, both bohemia and revolutionary circles have historically tended to be a meeting place of both.

Obviously this is a highly schematized picture. First of all, it leaves out some significant groups entirely: for example, those who adopted bohemian lifestyles because their parents were bohemian, or the children of professional activists. One should not underestimate the degree of self-reproduction in such sub-classes. Also: while the stereotype of the bohemian as rich kid—secretly supporting his absinthe habits with money from home, eventually either to die of dissipation or go back to the board of daddy's company—is strikingly similar to the stereotype of the activist as trust-fund baby, it is probably no more accurate. Certainly there have always been scions of the bourgeoisie in both milieus, all the more influential for their money, social skills, and connections. But bohemian milieus of the last 150 years never really consisted primarily of children of the upper, or even professional, classes. As Pierre Bourdieu (1993) has recently shown, the social base for nineteenth century bohemian culture in Europe emerged, in part, through exactly the same processes that shaped social revolutionaries in the Global South: among talented children of peasants, for example, who had taken advantage of France's new educational system, and then found themselves excluded from conventional elite culture anyway. What's more, these milieus tended to overlap. Bohemia was full not only of working-class intellectuals and self-taught eccentrics, but outright revolutionaries. The friendship between Oscar Wilde and Peter Kropotkin was not atypical; actually, it could be taken as emblematic. Similarly, revolutionary circles have always been filled with children of privilege who have rejected their natal values: Karl Marx (lawyer's son turned penniless journalist) being the archetypical example. Every Mao had his Chou En-lai, even Castro had his Ché. The constitution of both milieus, then, is really quite similar. Which probably helps explain why artists have felt so consistently drawn to revolutionary politics.

All this is important to bear in mind, especially because there are those who have consistently tried to keep the two apart. In the 1990s, for example, social ecologist Murray Bookchin threw down the gauntlet in an essay called "Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Divide," in which he argues that anarchist theory has always had two sources: the individualist tradition tracing back to bourgeois bohemian figures like Stirner, and the social anarchism that emerged from the labor movement, with Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin:

Hardly any anarcho-individualists exercised an influence on the emerging working class. They expressed their opposition in uniquely personal forms, especially in fiery tracts, outrageous behavior, and aberrant lifestyles in the cultural ghettos of fin de siècle New York, Paris, and London. As a credo, individualist anarchism remained largely a bohemian lifestyle, most conspicuous in its demands for sexual freedom ("free love") and enamored of innovations in art, behavior, and clothing (Bookchin 1997).

Even the bomb-throwers of the 1890s, assassins of heads of state, Bookchin suggests, were not social anarchists (and it's true that they almost never seemed to be part of organized groups), but extreme individualists acting out their personal rage. While Bookchin doesn't really pursue the argument—the article is mainly a platform for an attack on John Zerzan, Bob Black, and Hakim Bey—the practical implications seem to lead in much the same place as Ranjanit's: a rejection of any existing “activist culture” as a product of bourgeois privilege, as setting one apart from the genuinely oppressed.

The essay as one might imagine has drawn almost endless attacks and made Bookchin's name anathema for whole sections of the anarchist movement. In fact, it seems to me the premise is simply wrong. This is not an unbridgeable divide. There was never anything remotely unbridgeable about it. Instead, I would argue the main problem for would-be revolutionary coalitions is that they always combine those primarily in rebellion against alienation, and those primarily in rebellion against oppression, and that the dilemma is always how to synthesize the two.

ART AND ALIENATION

One of my most striking memories of the NYC Direct Action Network was a very early meeting at which we were discussing a potential fundraiser. Someone announced they had booked a space for a benefit show and asked if anyone in the room had any particular skills or talents to contribute. Just about every single hand in the room went up. In the end, the facilitator asked everyone to go around in a circle and announce what they could do: there were poets, scene painters, fire jugglers, members of a cappella singing groups, shadow dancers, performance artists, flamenco guitarists, punk singers, magicians... Of forty-two people in the room, it turned out there were precisely five who could not come up with anything they might be able to contribute. It was all the more remarkable because DAN—unlike say, Reclaim the Streets, an allied New York group—was not even considered, by activist standards, a particularly artsy group. The direct-action scene in general is overwhelmingly dominated by people who were also engaged in some kind of creative self-expression. Musicians. Puppeteers. Drama people. Cartoonists. Artists. Much of this could be said to emerge just as much from the DIY (Do It Yourself) ethos of punk culture as the craftsperson-oriented small-scale creativity of hippie culture.[42]

Just one telling case study:

Glass' father is a policeman, her mother an aerobics and yoga instructor. In high school she was a punk who made her own clothes, designing elaborate creations from cast-off and dumpster-dived clothing. She tells me she has keen memories of being laughed at by the “fashion punks,” rich kids who bought their clothes pre-ripped at expensive boutiques, and how ridiculous they were, unaware they were proving themselves frauds to the whole spirit of what they were doing. She put herself through college largely by winning writing contests. After graduating she worked briefly for a glossy ecological magazine, lost her job when the magazine went bankrupt (she was never paid for most of her work) and now, in her mid-twenties, alternates between bartending and activist adventures, living in squats everywhere from Cleveland to Buenos Aires to Honolulu, occasionally publishing pieces in national magazines. Her aim she says is to buy land and spend at least half her time on a collectively managed, permaculture farm.

Characters like this could be seen, as I say, as trapped in a kind of suspended social adolescence. After all, in America, everyone engages in creative activities as a child (indeed one is forced to in

school, from finger-painting to school plays). Normally, as one leaves adolescence one is expected to give most of this up. Adults, unless they are lucky enough to find a career involving creative work, are expected to express themselves largely through consumerism, or perhaps some kind of hobby—the latter especially when they retire. To my mind, though, this helps explain one of the great paradoxes of radical politics. One might say: adolescence is for most Americans the stage when one is simultaneously most alienated, and least alienated. This is why revolution can sometimes be pictured as a final overcoming of the adolescence of humanity—the break with the past that will finally rescue us from our perennial alienated state—or as the dawn of a kind of eternal adolescence, “the beginning of history.” For most of us who are not living within the confines of a caste or guild society, adolescence is a period of potential: one could do, or be, almost anything. Maturity, social adulthood, is not even so much a matter of accepting one’s particular role (as secretary, security guard, fund manager, mechanic) but even more, of coming to accept all those things that one is never going to be: rock star, olympic ski jumper, globe-trotting investigate reporter, first woman president, etc. If one looks at Marx’s one famous (and notoriously minimal) attempt to define communism, it’s almost completely defined around not having to do this: one can go fishing in the morning, herd sheep in the afternoon, and criticize over dinner, all without ever becoming a fisherman, shepherd, or critic. One is a generic human, undefined by one’s current role. In contemporary terms, a perpetual adolescent.

This is not to say activists are immature—unless, that is, one assumes maturity necessarily has to be a matter of renouncing one’s creativity and sense of possibility, and accepting a life of mind-numbing boredom and daily subservience. Neither, though, do I find it useful to see all this simply in terms of “resistance”—at least, in the conventional academic sense that assumes that, since power is the ultimate reality, any form of practice can only be seen as either reproducing or resisting it.[43] This is why it seems to me more useful to return to the alternative intellectual traditions that activists largely prefer, and to see the operative terms here as a balance between the revolt against alienation and the revolt against oppression.

STYLES OF BOHEMIANISM

The hippies of the 1960s, and then the punk movement of the late 1970s and 1980s, have been seen as the first movements of mass bohemianism[44]: a broad popularization of the bohemian ideal of the sacrifice of bourgeois comforts for the pursuit of spontaneity, creativity, and pleasure. Or one might see them as points where forms of bohemianism themselves took on the aspect of mass movements. There is of course an endless debate about the significance of all this: to what degree is this all a form of resistance (i.e., Hebdige 1979), to what extent are these movements really the avant garde of consumerism, exploring domains of experience that can be effectively commodified in the next generation (Campbell 1987). For me, though, one of the interesting things is the degree to which these historically constituted categories become, effectively, permanent. They are seen as modes of being. The sense today is that there will always be punks and hippies:

Extract from notebooks, Winter 2001

Brief excursus on the terms “punk” and “hippie”

No one would ever use these terms to describe themselves. I’ve never heard anyone say “I am a punk” or “I am a hippie.” They are terms you use to describe someone else. In East Coast circles,

to call someone a hippie is always to make fun of them, at least slightly: this despite the fact that half the time, the speaker herself might so be considered from another point of view—i.e., Brooke’s comment about the new Santa Cruz chapter of DAN, “probably a bunch of hippies and deadheads but we love them anyway.” Or: “when you’re proposing we organize a drum circle, are we talking *good* drumming, or just bad hippie drumming?” The term “punk” in contrast is almost never pejorative, It tends to be used in a more simply descriptive fashion: i.e., “I’m talking about Laura. You know, that kind of punky girl with the green hair?”

Still, there are very few who can be easily and clearly categorized as either one or the other. Some exist. Ariston with her mohawk is pretty obviously very punk; Neala is hard to see as anything but a hippie (even if her partner is about as Goth as one can be). But these are extreme cases. Most are more like, say, Warcry, who wears dirty hooded sweatshirts and patches as she arranges leaves and flowers all over the Independent Media Center walls—an idiosyncratic mix of both.

Often the terms are contrasted generationally, with the hippies always being the stodgy older generation. Brad talks about the striking contrast between the old fashioned, 1960s-style, hippie forest blockades in Oregon and Northern California and the new energy and militant tactics introduced when the punk kids got involved. This coming from a forest activist who, though instrumental in bringing the punks to the forest in the first place, is, by New York standards, nothing if not a hippie. “Hippie” in fact regularly becomes a synonym for “pacifist,” and “punk” for “younger, militant anarchist.” Thus, in Seattle when self-appointed “peace cops” in some cases physically assaulted Black Bloc anarchists to stop them from breaking windows (the Black Bloc anarchists refused to hit back, since they were nonviolent) it’s almost always described as a case of “punks getting beaten up by hippies.”

Of course, these are hardly the only terms evoked (I am not even entering into the influence of the rave scene, for example, or radical hip-hop), but I don’t think it’s illegitimate to focus on the centrality of punk, if only because so many of the most active white anarchists seem to have been drawn in from an early experience of the punk scene.

A lot has been written about punk as a subculture, but what I want to emphasize here is the role of punk as a venue for the dissemination of a kind of pop Situationism. This Situationist legacy is probably the single most important theoretical influence on contemporary anarchism in America, and it means that—much though many anarchists are familiar with academic terminologies—they are using a very different theoretical vocabulary.

The Situationist International was originally a group of radical artists who, over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, transformed themselves into a political movement. One can see them as the culmination of a certain trend. From at least the time of the Dadaists and Futurists, avant-garde artistic movements had begun acting like vanguardist parties, putting out manifestos, purging one another, and the like. The Situationists were the first that made the transition entirely, ultimately making no original art of their own at all. As a group, they behaved like a kind of caricature send-up of Marxist sectarians, constantly purging and condemning one another.[45] Guy Debord (1967) laid out an elaborate dialectical theory of “the society of the spectacle,” arguing that under capitalism, the relentless logic of the commodity—which renders us passive consumers—gradually extends itself to every aspect of our existence. In the end, we are rendered a mere audience to our own lives. Mass media is just one technological embodiment of this process. The only remedy is to create “situations,” improvised moments of spontaneous, unalienated creativity, largely by turning aside the imposed meanings of the spectacle, breaking apart the pieces

and putting them together in subversive ways. (Hence the most enduringly popular Situationist product, called “Can the Dialectic Break Bricks?” often shown at fundraisers, is a Hong Kong kung fu film, resubtitled.) Raoul Vaneigem (1967, 1979) elaborated a theory of revolution built around a destruction of all relations built on the principle of exchange, on “survival” as opposed to “life,” with an often odd, jangly, but still somehow exhilarating, mix of ultraleft Marxism—a glorification of spontaneous worker’s councils and the insurrectionary wildcat strike—and the pursuit of unmediated forms of pleasure, an unleashing of desire and the collapse of art into life.

There’s actually a concrete, genealogical connection between punk and Situationism. Malcolm McLaren, the English producer who effectively invented the Sex Pistols, and hence the punk movement, had been involved in a Situationist splinter group and Sex Pistols’ artist Jamie Reid used Situationist principles to design their cover art and general aesthetic (Savage 1991). Whether McLaren was serious or not (some—e.g., Elliot 2001—claim he was just talking out of his hat), Situationist principles have become firmly ensconced in the punk philosophy—particularly among the hundreds of smaller, explicitly anarchist punk bands that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s (Crass, Conflict, the Exploited, the Dead Kennedys). Catchy lines from Vaneigem endlessly recur in song lyrics, and Situationist literature is widely available in any anarchist infoshop or bookstore, along with their contemporary, Cornelius Castoriadis and other members of the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group, and historical material on the French near revolution of ’68. Notably missing in most such bookstores is any significant space for most of what in France has come to be referred to as “’68 thought”: Deleuze, Foucault, or Baudrillard—those authors seen as representing radical French thought in the academy. Essentially, punks and revolutionaries are still reading French theory from immediately before ’68, the academics are mainly reading theory from immediately afterwards, much of which consists of a prolonged reflection on what went wrong, most often, concluding that revolutionary dreams are impossible (Starr 1995).

Punk, of course, is designed to be somewhat off-putting for the uninitiated. This makes it difficult for the outsider to notice that—despite the violent, angry, over-amplified aesthetic—it effectively played the same cultural role for white urban youth of the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, as folk music did in the 1950s and 1960s—as a kind of stripped down, anyone-can-do-it music of the people. It also played a similar political role. The spirit is best summed up in the late 1970s punk zine cited by Dick Hebdige (1979:123), which provided a little finger chart of three chords and the caption, “now go form a band and do it yourself.” DIY became the basic punk credo. Make your own fashion. Form your own band. Refuse to be a consumer. If possible, become a dumpster diver and don’t buy anything. If possible, refuse wage labor. Do not submit to the logic of exchange. Reuse and redeploy fragments of the spectacle and commodity system to fashion artistic weapons to subvert it.

One might say, in fact, that there are two intellectual streams that emerged from the period of May ’68 in France that are still alive in the US and English-speaking world: the pre-1968 revolutionary strain, kept alive in zines, anarchist infoshops, and the Internet, and the post-1968 strain, largely despairing of the possibility of a mass-based, organized revolution, kept alive in graduate seminars, academic conferences, and scholarly journals. The first tends to recognize capitalism as an all-encompassing symbolic system that creates extreme forms of human alienation, but sees it as possible to rebel against it in the name of pleasure, desire, and the potential autonomy of the human subject. The second tends to see the system (whether it is now labeled capitalism, power, discourse, etc.) as so all-encompassing that it is constitutive of the desiring subject him- or herself, rendering any critique of alienation, or possibility of a revolution against the system

itself, effectively impossible. At the risk of editorializing (though in this context, it would be dishonest to pretend I could possibly do anything else), the situation is full of endless ironies. The Situationists argued that the system renders us passive consumers, but issued a call to actively resist. The current radical academic orthodoxy seems to either reject either the first part or the second: that is, either it argues that there is no system imposed on consumers, or that resistance is impossible. The first has long been most popular: since the early 1980s, in fact, anyone who makes a Situationist-style argument in an academic forum can expect to be instantly condemned as puritanical and elitist for suggesting consumers are allowing themselves to be passively manipulated. Rather, consumers are creatively reinterpreting consumer styles, fashions, and products in all sorts of subversive ways (e.g., Miller 1987, 1995). In other words, ordinary folks are already practicing detournment.

The great irony here is that this emerging orthodoxy, which quickly became the mainstay of cultural studies (and later, anthropology), it was strictly confined to the academy. Cultural studies tracts were rarely, if ever, read by the 'ordinary folk' in question, while Situationist literature, which by these standards was the most elitist position possible, actually does have a certain popular audience. *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (Vaneigem 1967), for example, is almost never assigned in courses or cited in academic texts, but it's just as regularly read by college-age radicals now as it was thirty years ago. It all rather confirms that, as my friend Eric Laursen once suggested to me, the reason Situationism can't be integrated in the academy is simply because "it cannot be read as anything but a call to action." This is, of course, precisely what makes it so popular with activists. Situationism, with its total rejection of the system, its call for militant artistic interventions, its faith that these might ultimately contribute to social revolution, is the perfect philosophy for an activist first drawn to punk by a feeling of profound alienation from mass society, and determined to do something about it.

Another effect of this rift is that the academy has, starting with the post-1968 thinkers in France, largely jettisoned the idea of "alienation." Without either a unified subject, or any notion of more natural or authentic relation of that subject with the world and other people, older theories seemed naïve and indefensible. The term disappeared in much social theory. Insofar as it was retained, it was in certain branches of sociology where alienation became something that could be statistically formalized and measured in questionnaires: leading quickly to the conclusion that the most alienated (isolated, angry) members of society were the most marginal (undocumented aliens, for example, or members of oppressed minorities). Partly as a result, alienation has come to be seen as the psychological experience of oppression: modern studies of the subject speak of "racial alienation," "gender alienation," alienation based on sexual identity or poverty, and so on (Schmidt & Moody 1994, Geyer & Heinz 1992, Geyer 1996). This in itself helps explain the continuing appeal of '60s theorists: everything now is cast in terms of exclusion from mainstream society. Alienation is a measure of this exclusion. This is, however, essentially a liberal conception. The power of the older view of alienation was to insist that it is not just a matter of exclusion, but that there is something profoundly, fundamentally wrong with the mainstream itself. That even the winners are ultimately miserable, at least, compared with what they could be in a free, egalitarian society. Anarchists—at least, those who cannot claim to come from some oppressed group—are left with a visceral feeling of rage and rejection against a system that seems both all-encompassing and monstrous, and an official intellectual culture which can offer no theoretical explanation of why they should feel that way.

I've taken up some of the questions elsewhere. In an earlier essay on anarchism (Graeber 2003:337), for example, I asked why it was that even when there is next to no other constituency for revolutionary politics, one still finds revolutionary artists, writers, and musicians. My conclusion: that there must be some kind of link between the experience of non-alienated labor, of imagining things and then bringing them into being, and the ability to imagine social alternatives. I concluded by suggesting that revolutionary coalitions might always be said to rely on a kind of alliance between society's least alienated and its most oppressed (and that revolutions actually happen when these two categories largely coincide). This would, at least, help explain why it almost always seems to be peasants and craftsmen—or even more, newly proletarianized former peasants and craftsmen—who actually overthrow capitalist regimes, and not those inured to generations of wage labor—or, alternately, the otherwise puzzling fact that so many teenagers can be led from the experience of moshing in punk clubs to conclude that their own freedom is intimately tied to the fate of impoverished Tzeltal-speaking farmers in Chiapas.

Still, this formulation remains more than a little crude. Probably, the real opposition should be between those brought to radical politics in a revolt against alienation, and those who are revolting against oppression. Obviously, it's not as if there are many for whom it is simply one or the other. Still, from the activist's perspective, there are very good reasons not to abandon the distinction entirely. Without it, it would be impossible to argue that revolutionary change would be in the interest of everyone, even those who cannot be said to be in any way oppressed. On the other hand, one would hardly wish to argue that the despair of a wealthy suburban teenager in the US, faced with a life of soulless consumerism, has quite the same moral weight as, say, the despair of a poor Mozambiquan teenager slowly dying of a preventable disease. It is precisely this dilemma, I think, that leads to the endless tensions and recriminations that haunt activist life.

RANDOM OBSERVATIONS ON ACTIVIST CULTURE

A society that denies us every adventure makes its own abolition the only possible adventure. —Reclaim the Streets slogan

If one sees capitalism as a gigantic meaningless engine of endless expansion that reduces the majority of the planet's inhabitants to hopeless poverty, that reduces even its beneficiaries to lonely isolated atoms doomed by fear and insecurity to lives of mind-numbing work and meaningless consumerism, even as it threatens the destruction of the planet—but if at the same time, one does not wish to, or does not believe it possible to simply flee the system, but rather wishes to stay and fight—then what precisely can one do? What sort of social relations is it possible to create among those who wish to make their lives a refusal of the very logic of capitalism, even as they necessarily remain inside it?

The logic of bohemian life has always been an attempt to answer this. It has always tended towards both the cultivation of adventure, danger, and extreme forms of experience, but at the same time, of relations of mutual aid and trust between those pursuing it—even, often, those who might otherwise be strangers. This is precisely the sensibility one encounters in direct actions too.

Consider again the idea of a mosh pit, in which dancers hurl themselves into one another, or stage-dive into the crowd. It's a matter of both creating dangerous, even violent situations, but

at the same time, placing an almost blind faith in surrounding strangers—for help and support—since, after all, if they did not catch or buffer you, you might well end up with a broken neck. In principle, the logic of play aggression and ultimate trust has much in common with the sado-masochism that is constantly alluded to (though rarely practiced) in the punk aesthetic. It's the kind of pleasure that arises from adventure: excitement, unpredictability, faith, and reliance on one's companions—which can only be real with the endless possibility of betrayal. At the same time, though, it is anything but an ethos of machismo. One thing that struck me very quickly in becoming involved in anarchist circles was the acceptance of physical frailty.

Notebook extracts: June 2000, with some later jotted additions

Frailty:

Most activists do not seem incredibly physically fit—certainly not athletes. They tend to be wiry, occasionally fat, but almost never muscular. “Scrawny vegans” as the stereotype goes. (Famous LA newspaper comment during the DNC protests in 2000: “There were twice as many police as demonstrators; or if you count by weight, four times as many.” Similarly from the other side in the “anarchist guide to LA,” published at the same time: “the athletic-looking guy dressed like a Hollywood version of a punk rocker who’s urging you to attack the cops—he is a cop.” In other words, one way to detect an infiltrator is sheer physical fitness. This despite the fact that many have, as one might expect, plenty of outdoorsy skills and experience, climbing trees and walls and that sort of thing. Hippies with their hiking boots and trail mixes tend to be more fit than punks: they are at least wiry and resilient. This is especially surprising at first when you first get to know Black Bloc kids, who in the press are supposed to be the “violent” ones and who, even among activists, have been called “the marines of our movement,” and discover they’re mostly a bunch of shy, ectomorphic teenagers. They, of course, are also the most likely to be vegans. I suspect this is one thing that must really complicate relations with the police, since they are probably exactly the kind of kids that those grade school kids who were later to become cops used to bully.[46]

The curious emphasis on weakness seems echoed by the marked concern for people with disabilities and medical conditions taking part in actions that I—like most newcomers, I think—at first found rather disconcerting. There were endless discussions in legal trainings of what to expect if arrested and in need of insulin, or AIDS medication, or a host of other conditions. “Will the police let you keep your medicine? No. They are supposed to supply you with medicine from a police medic, but usually don’t. What about hypoglycemics?” (There was a widely circulated story about a hypoglycemic woman at A16 who went into a sugar-fit and ended up arrested when she grabbed someone’s cell phone thinking it was her own.) The obvious first reaction, which most neophytes have to suppress, is what is a diabetic AIDS patient even doing putting him- or herself in the way of tear gas, truncheons, and arrest in the first place? But it’s a combination of the obvious desire to be maximally open with, I suspect, a covert sense that, if one is engaged in a moral contest with police, weakness can be strength. We must force them to be humanitarians!

Combined with the endless food taboos, all this makes for a kind of maze of barriers: some people are vegetarian, some are vegan, others are allergic to nightshades or suffer from environmental illness, many seem very close to hypochondria with endless real or imaginary ailments. Yet these same people often live some of the most adventurous lives imaginable.

Then we can get into the phenomenology of backrubs, like the chain backrubs in the break from facilitation training. Holding hands or linking arms in human chains. General patterns of touching: ordinary Americans almost never touch each other. Anarchists seem especially fond of hugs (though some, Crusty Canadians from CLAC have been known to bemusedly ask us New Yorkers whether we've been corrupted by California Starhawk types with all this touchy-feely nonsense), people leaning on each other, holding hands. From very early on, at the legal training in DC, I noticed how much of this: all the trainings involved physical contact, from carrying people off limp, to just sitting pressed up against others in overcrowded rooms.

I wonder if one reason for the touchy/food finicky/embracing weakness aspects is the prominence of women in the movement—though this is slightly confusing, since women are almost never a majority in large meetings and often make up at best a third of the people in the room. On the other hand, they often include the most prominent organizers and participants. Is it better to say that feminine sensibilities pervade, or, that the style of interaction consensus process tends to encourage draws on sensibilities that have, in the United States, historically been associated with the way women interact with one another than with the way men do; or, for that matter, with the way men interact with women? It is largely, but not strictly, desexualized. Often the feeling, at least if one is not part of some sexual identity group, is that one should act (at least in public) as if sex is not particularly important, just one possible aspect of a more general common physicality.

Obviously, all of this varies from one subculture to another. For many years at ABC No Rio, an anarchist social center in the Lower East Side, there was—aside from the usual zine magazine, computers, and the like—a weight room used by members of a group called RASH, the “Red Anarchist Skinheads.” But subcultural groups are always defining themselves against one another.

The play of desire and mutual dependence reappears on all sorts of subtle levels. Here's an extract from the same notebook, not long after:

Notebook extract, July 2000

Cigarettes:

A lot of activists smoke. Most older ones seem to have smoked at some time in their lives. I always found it a bit incongruous, at A16, to see all these idealistic kids blockading the streets with cigarettes hanging out of their mouths; especially, teenage girls sitting around bumming cigarettes from each other. But this is actually rather appropriate, because it creates a constant mobilization of feelings of need, discipline, sharing, and desire (the “community of addiction,” as I used to call it, that binds all smokers). Usually for every three or four activists who smoke, or might, there's one who actually has a pack. Kevin was cast in this role with Scully et al. last week. The distribution of cigarettes, lighting them off others, etc., becomes a constant willed collapse of autonomy—me, when I used to smoke, it was a matter of principle *never* to allow myself to be trapped in a situation where I'd run out and wasn't in a position to buy more, but here it's the opposite. One is dependent on communal good will and sharing for what one *really* desires most urgently in the world, at least at that moment.

Especially large proportions of vegans smoke.

It rather reminds me of a story I heard about Martin Luther King. He was actually a chain smoker, but was convinced early on it would convey the wrong lesson to the nation's youth to

ever be seen smoking in public. Endless discipline, but with endless desire lurking behind the public facade. Needless to say, no one smokes in meetings, or indoors at all. Thus, the end of a meeting is usually followed by clusters of people immediately running out to smoke, sitting on the concrete to roll tobacco, bumming butts from one another, people just taking a few puffs off someone else's or passing individual cigarettes around.

Other drugs seem to play a less prominent role because they aren't so addictive. Therefore, the whole dynamic of desire and community doesn't enter in. My notes in this case continued:

Other drugs:

This varies by scene. Pot is occasional, but surprisingly infrequent. It's used roughly to the degree one would expect from any young people of the same class or socioeconomic background. Beer is quite a bit, often at bars. Ecstasy is popular among the raver types with which there's a definite overlap with certain parts of the activist scene. Of course, during street actions, drugs are totally bad news and you're always reminded not to bring any: "Even if you ditch a joint the moment the cops appear, someone's going to get it pinned on them." So bringing drugs to an action would be an act of total lack of solidarity. For an activist to show up completely drunk, or completely stoned, at an action is taken as either a sign no one would possibly want to be in an affinity group with them or, in my experience, most often, as a sign that activist in question is personally falling apart and needs help. As for drug paranoia, there are all sorts of levels of context and historical experience: I am reminded of the time I made a beverage run while showing a film with some former Black Panthers. When I suggested I pick up some Coke, one startled woman immediately corrected me: "Please! Say 'Coca Cola!'" These were, obviously people used to constant surveillance at a time when drug busts commonly landed activists in jail. I've never heard anything like that amongst anarchists nowadays: paranoia is directed at other things. In fact, at minor events, or street party-style actions that are halfway to raves anyway, attitudes towards drugs can be very relaxed. One friend told me a long story about being searched and locked in jail overnight after the RTS Times Square event only to discover, after he got out, that he'd forgotten he'd had a joint in his shoe the whole time. But these are "Temporary Autonomous Zones" of a rather different sort.

The one theme that recurs endlessly in all of this is "autonomy": simultaneously the greatest anarchist value, and the greatest dilemma. Certain forms of autonomy—the isolated individualism of mainstream American society, with its solitary pleasures—are precisely that against which one is rebelling. Or, perhaps, one might say, the question is how to balance autonomy, solidarity, and freedom. Cornelius Castoriadis (1987, 1991), for example, defined "autonomy" as the ability of a community to live only under rules they had themselves collectively created, and had the right to reexamine constantly. For many anarchists, freedom appears to mean the ability to create new communities, and ties of mutual dependence, more or less on the spot, and to move back and forth between them as one wishes. An action, a party, a picnic, a dance, can all be temporary autonomous zones where desires coalesce and the leap of faith involved in trusting strangers itself becomes a large part of the adventure—even when police are not present, which, as we shall see, is rarely, since police have a notable tendency to show up whenever anarchists get together. The dilemmas, though, become much more acute when attempts are made—as they regularly are—to turn TAZs into PAZs, to move from temporary to more permanent zones of autonomy.

In the next section then let me talk a little about more permanent activist spaces. As we'll see, these are almost never quite, entirely, permanent. Every space has to be, to some degree, conquered, and most are almost instantly besieged.

ACTIVIST LANDSCAPES

In a city like New York, anarchist spaces often have the quality of an archipelago. Certain neighborhoods contain relatively dense clusters of squats, community gardens, social or community centers, radical bookstores/infoshops, and other more-or-less friendly institutions: co-ops, vegetarian restaurants, second-hand bike shops, avant-garde theaters, friendly churches, or even cafés and bars where activists are likely to be found hanging out.

Sometimes there's a center to them; sometimes they're more diffuse. Between the beginning of 2000 and the end of 2001, the heyday of New York City DAN, there was a very much a center for the activist scene in New York's Lower East Side. This was a local community center called Charas El Bohio, located inside a former schoolhouse. Charas El Bohio stood at the center of a nexus of institutions almost all of which had been won by prolonged community struggle.

The story of Charas is quite interesting. Technically, "Charas" was the name of a community group—"El Bohio" referred to the building. The community group had been fou

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