



A New Bird, vol. 2 | 2020Q3M2 | The Most Potent Weapon  
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We have social media too, because you have to: A New Bird Zine

# **A New Bird**

**Vol. II**

# Letter From the Editor?

Ollie Lost

Woo! Volume 2, exists; and it's been a ride. I was originally scared that this wouldn't come out, it was so hard finding folks to contribute initially. However, thanks to a lot of awesome folks and a shit ton of grassroots work we landed a couple of folks to write for us! We do still very much want more people to contribute, many hands make light work after all.

Please consider reaching out to us via our Italian Anarchist run secure email [anewbird@privacyrequired.com](mailto:anewbird@privacyrequired.com) or through our social media accounts on Facebook & Twitter, both A New Bird Zine. We're especially looking to amplify the voices of the historically marginalized, so those folks are especially encouraged. We need writers, artists, and folks to help with some of the admin shit too, if that's more your speed.

We continue our tradition of also including pieces from elsewhere in the world. This issue we have two pieces that are as important as they are timely; the Combahee River Collective Statement & Are You an Anarchist?. The former is a piece written in the 70s by Queer Black Feminists and the latter asks you to think about what it really means to be an anarchist instead of the violent propaganda we're beginning to see in the media and from the current President.

While you'll still find immediately useful information that will help you in direct action, this month we expanded our focus to include a little more 'theory,' a word leftists love to use to sound fancy. Ollie Pro Tip: it's just stuff about how to build a better world. The two outside articles above are theory. You don't really need to worry about it much unless you want, and even then be careful you remember the point is to do something about all those ideas, not just debate them.

One last thing: I always envisioned the physical copies of this zine having hand printed covers with different designs each volume, so they'd be fun art as well as a useful book. I wanted each to involve a quote or reference to something relevant that I would then explain here, in this letter. But I totally forgot to do that last month, so now I have a new plan!

I'll explain last month's here and now, and *next* month I'll do this month's cover. So last month's cover featured a quote stating "I have seen the fnords". If you missed last month's you can read the PDF on our website, which is linked in all our socials, and is way too long to type out here.

The line “I have seen the fnords” comes from an old parody of religion called *Principia Discordia* but was made popular by a series of plays and books entitled the *Illuminatus! Trilogy*. In the original story small children were conditioned to not be able to consciously see the word Fnord. Seeing the word in print causes a feeling of unease because of that dissonance, leading folks to not be able to think about what’s written and generates a low level fear the government uses to control the populace. In the novels & plays they add a consumerist angle, where there are no Fnords in the advertisements, causing trust and comfort; ultimately leading to rampant consumerism.

Once someone breaks through the conditioning and “sees the fnords” they can always see them, and how prevalent they are, all without being affected by them. They can help others start to see the fnords so they are free and free to help even more people see them, until the word and those who wield it have no power.

—Ollie

Editor?

P.S.—I learned of fnords recently from Tom Swiss’ article on Patheos, [Police Violence: Seeing the Fnords](#). Look it up, it’s worth a read!

P.P.S.—The digital (PDF) version of all issues are available on [anewbird.itch.io](http://anewbird.itch.io), and if you’re willing & able to donate, you can also do so there; any surplus from this volume will be donated to **Enough is Enough Fort Worth**.





# BLACK LIVES MATTER



During this time, we understand that it may be difficult to physically attend events. Our goal is to provide several opportunities to support the movement.

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ON EVENTS, PROTESTS, AND GENERAL INFO

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# The Combahee River Collective Statement

Combahee River Collective

We are a collective of Black feminists who have been meeting together since 1974. <sup>[1]</sup> During that time we have been involved in the process of defining and clarifying our politics, while at the same time doing political work within our own group and in coalition with other progressive organizations and movements. The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face.

We will discuss four major topics in the paper that follows: (1) the genesis of contemporary Black feminism; (2) what we believe, i.e., the specific province of our politics; (3) the problems in organizing Black feminists, including a brief herstory of our collective; and (4) Black feminist issues and practice.

## 1. The genesis of Contemporary Black Feminism

Before looking at the recent development of Black feminism we would like to affirm that we find our origins in the historical reality of Afro-American women's continuous life-and-death struggle for survival and liberation. Black women's extremely negative relationship to the American political system (a system of white male rule) has always been deter-



mined by our membership in two oppressed racial and sexual castes. As Angela Davis points out in "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," Black women have always embodied, if only in their physical manifestation, an adversary stance to white male rule and have actively resisted its inroads upon them and their communities in both dramatic and subtle ways. There have always been Black women activists—some known, like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frances E. W. Harper, Ida B. Wells Barnett, and Mary Church Terrell, and thousands upon thousands unknown—who have had a shared awareness of how their sexual identity combined with their racial identity to make their whole life situation and the focus of their political struggles unique. Contemporary Black feminism is the outgrowth of countless generations of personal sacrifice, militancy, and work by our mothers and sisters.

A Black feminist presence has evolved most obviously in connection with the second wave of the American women's movement beginning in the late 1960s. Black, other Third World, and working women have been involved in the feminist movement from its start, but both outside reactionary forces and racism and elitism within the movement itself have served to obscure our participation. In 1973, Black feminists, primarily located in New York, felt the necessity of forming a separate Black feminist group. This became the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO).

Black feminist politics also have an obvious connection to movements for Black liberation, particularly those of the 1960s and 1970s. Many of us were active in those movements (Civil Rights, Black nationalism, the Black Panthers),

and all of our lives were greatly affected and changed by their ideologies, their goals, and the tactics used to achieve their goals. It was our experience and disillusionment within these liberation movements, as well as experience on the periphery of the white male left, that led to the need to develop a politics that was anti-racist, unlike those of white women, and anti-sexist, unlike those of Black and white men.

There is also undeniably a personal genesis for Black Feminism, that is, the political realization that comes from the seemingly personal experiences of individual Black women's lives. Black feminists and many more Black women who do not define themselves as feminists have all experienced sexual oppression as a constant factor in our day-to-day existence. As children we realized that we were different from boys and that we were treated differently. For example, we were told in the same breath to be quiet both for the sake of being "ladylike" and to make us less objectionable in the eyes of white people. As we grew older we became aware of the threat of physical and sexual abuse by men. However, we had no way of conceptualizing what was so apparent to us, what we knew was really happening.

Black feminists often talk about their feelings of craziness before becoming conscious of the concepts of sexual politics, patriarchal rule, and most importantly, feminism, the political analysis and practice that we women use to struggle against our oppression. The fact that racial politics and indeed racism are pervasive factors in our lives did not allow us, and still does not allow most Black women, to look more deeply into our own experiences and, from that sharing and growing consciousness, to build a politics that will change our lives

and inevitably end our oppression. Our development must also be tied to the contemporary economic and political position of Black people. The post World War II generation of Black youth was the first to be able to minimally partake of certain educational and employment options, previously closed completely to Black people. Although our economic position is still at the very bottom of the American capitalistic economy, a handful of us have been able to gain certain tools as a result of tokenism in education and employment which potentially enable us to more effectively fight our oppression.

A combined anti-racist and anti-sexist position drew us together initially, and as we developed politically we addressed ourselves to heterosexism and economic oppression under capitalism.

## 2. What We Believe

Above all else, Our politics initially sprang from the shared belief that Black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's may because of our need as human persons for autonomy. This may seem so obvious as to sound simplistic, but it is apparent that no other ostensibly progressive movement has ever considered our specific oppression as a priority or worked seriously for the ending of that oppression. Merely naming the pejorative stereotypes attributed to Black women (e.g. mammy, matriarch, Sapphire, whore, bulldagger), let alone cataloguing the cruel, often murderous, treatment we receive, indicates how little value has been placed upon our lives during four centuries of bondage in the Western hemi-

sphere. We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work.

This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression. In the case of Black women this is a particularly repugnant, dangerous, threatening, and therefore revolutionary concept because it is obvious from looking at all the political movements that have preceded us that anyone is more worthy of liberation than ourselves. We reject pedestals, queenhood, and walking ten paces behind. To be recognized as human, levelly human, is enough.

We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women's lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously. We know that there is such a thing as racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual, e.g., the history of rape of Black women by white men as a weapon of political repression.

Although we are feminists and Lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand. Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not

need to have with white men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors. We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism.

We realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy. We are socialists because we believe that work must be organized for the collective benefit of those who do the work and create the products, and not for the profit of the bosses. Material resources must be equally distributed among those who create these resources. We are not convinced, however, that a socialist revolution that is not also a feminist and anti-racist revolution will guarantee our liberation. We have arrived at the necessity for developing an understanding of class relationships that takes into account the specific class position of Black women who are generally marginal in the labor force, while at this particular time some of us are temporarily viewed as doubly desirable tokens at white-collar and professional levels. We need to articulate the real class situation of persons who are not merely raceless, sexless workers, but for whom racial and sexual oppression are significant determinants in their working/economic lives. Although we are in essential agreement with Marx's theory as it applied to the very specific economic relationships he analyzed, we know that his analysis must be extended further in order for us to understand our specific economic situation as Black women.

A political contribution which we feel we have already made is the expansion of the feminist principle that the personal is political. In our consciousness-raising sessions, for example, we have in many ways gone beyond white women's revelations because we are dealing with the implications of race and class as well as sex. Even our Black women's style of talking/testifying in Black language about what we have experienced has a resonance that is both cultural and political. We have spent a great deal of energy delving into the cultural and experiential nature of our oppression out of necessity because none of these matters has ever been looked at before. No one before has ever examined the multilayered texture of Black women's lives. An example of this kind of revelation/conceptualization occurred at a meeting as we discussed the ways in which our early intellectual interests had been attacked by our peers, particularly Black males. We discovered that all of us, because we were "smart" had also been considered "ugly," i.e., "smart-ugly." "Smart-ugly" crystallized the way in which most of us had been forced to develop our intellects at great cost to our "social" lives. The sanctions in the Black and white communities against Black women thinkers is comparatively much higher than for white women, particularly ones from the educated middle and upper classes.

As we have already stated, we reject the stance of Lesbian separatism because it is not a viable political analysis or strategy for us. It leaves out far too much and far too many people, particularly Black men, women, and children. We have a great deal of criticism and loathing for what men have been socialized to be in this society: what they support, how they act, and how they oppress. But we do not have the misguided

notion that it is their maleness, per se—i.e., their biological maleness—that makes them what they are. As Black women we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic. We must also question whether Lesbian separatism is an adequate and progressive political analysis and strategy, even for those who practice it, since it so completely denies any but the sexual sources of women's oppression, negating the facts of class and race.

### 3. Problems in Organizing Black Feminists

During our years together as a Black feminist collective we have experienced success and defeat, joy and pain, victory and failure. We have found that it is very difficult to organize around Black feminist issues, difficult even to announce in certain contexts that we are Black feminists. We have tried to think about the reasons for our difficulties, particularly since the white women's movement continues to be strong and to grow in many directions. In this section we will discuss some of the general reasons for the organizing problems we face and also talk specifically about the stages in organizing our own collective.

The major source of difficulty in our political work is that we are not just trying to fight oppression on one front or even two, but instead to address a whole range of oppressions. We do not have racial, sexual, heterosexual, or class privilege to rely upon, nor do we have even the minimal access to resources and power that groups who possess any of these types of privilege have.

The psychological toll of being a Black woman and the difficulties this presents in reaching political consciousness and doing political work can never be underestimated. There is a very low value placed upon Black women's psyches in this society, which is both racist and sexist. As an early group member once said, "We are all damaged people merely by virtue of being Black women." We are dispossessed psychologically and on every other level, and yet we feel the necessity to struggle to change the condition of all Black women. In "A Black Feminist's Search for Sisterhood," Michele Wallace arrives at this conclusion:

We exists as women who are Black who are feminists, each stranded for the moment, working independently because there is not yet an environment in this society remotely congenial to our struggle—because, being on the bottom, we would have to do what no one else has done: we would have to fight the world. [2]

Wallace is pessimistic but realistic in her assessment of Black feminists' position, particularly in her allusion to the nearly classic isolation most of us face. We might use our position at the bottom, however, to make a clear leap into revolutionary action. If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.

Feminism is, nevertheless, very threatening to the majority of Black people because it calls into question some of the most basic assumptions about our existence, i.e., that sex should be a determinant of power relationships. Here is the way male

and female roles were defined in a Black nationalist pamphlet from the early 1970s:

*We understand that it is and has been traditional that the man is the head of the house. He is the leader of the house/nation because his knowledge of the world is broader, his awareness is greater, his understanding is fuller and his application of this information is wiser... After all, it is only reasonable that the man be the head of the house because he is able to defend and protect the development of his home... Women cannot do the same things as men—they are made by nature to function differently. Equality of men and women is something that cannot happen even in the abstract world. Men are not equal to other men, i.e. ability, experience or even understanding. The value of men and women can be seen as in the value of gold and silver—they are not equal but both have great value. We must realize that men and women are a complement to each other because there is no house/family without a man and his wife. Both are essential to the development of any life.*

[3]

The material conditions of most Black women would hardly lead them to upset both economic and sexual arrangements that seem to represent some stability in their lives. Many Black women have a good understanding of both sexism and racism, but because of the everyday constrictions of their lives, cannot risk struggling against them both.

The reaction of Black men to feminism has been notoriously negative. They are, of course, even more threatened than Black women by the possibility that Black feminists might organize around our own needs. They realize that they might

not only lose valuable and hardworking allies in their struggles but that they might also be forced to change their habitually sexist ways of interacting with and oppressing Black women. Accusations that Black feminism divides the Black struggle are powerful deterrents to the growth of an autonomous Black women's movement.

Still, hundreds of women have been active at different times during the three-year existence of our group. And every Black woman who came, came out of a strongly-felt need for some level of possibility that did not previously exist in her life.

When we first started meeting early in 1974 after the NBFO first eastern regional conference, we did not have a strategy for organizing, or even a focus. We just wanted to see what we had. After a period of months of not meeting, we began to meet again late in the year and started doing an intense variety of consciousness-raising. The overwhelming feeling that we had is that after years and years we had finally found each other. Although we were not doing political work as a group, individuals continued their involvement in Lesbian politics, sterilization abuse and abortion rights work, Third World Women's International Women's Day activities, and support activity for the trials of Dr. Kenneth Edelin, Joan Little, and Inéz García. During our first summer when membership had dropped off considerably, those of us remaining devoted serious discussion to the possibility of opening a refuge for battered women in a Black community. (There was no refuge in Boston at that time.) We also decided around that time to become an independent collective since we had serious disagreements with NBFO's bourgeois-feminist stance and their lack of a clear political focus.

We also were contacted at that time by socialist feminists, with whom we had worked on abortion rights activities, who wanted to encourage us to attend the National Socialist Feminist Conference in Yellow Springs. One of our members did attend and despite the narrowness of the ideology that was promoted at that particular conference, we became more aware of the need for us to understand our own economic situation and to make our own economic analysis.

In the fall, when some members returned, we experienced several months of comparative inactivity and internal disagreements which were first conceptualized as a Lesbian-straight split but which were also the result of class and political differences. During the summer those of us who were still meeting had determined the need to do political work and to move beyond consciousness-raising and serving exclusively as an emotional support group. At the beginning of 1976, when some of the women who had not wanted to do political work and who also had voiced disagreements stopped attending of their own accord, we again looked for a focus. We decided at that time, with the addition of new members, to become a study group. We had always shared our reading with each other, and some of us had written papers on Black feminism for group discussion a few months before this decision was made. We began functioning as a study group and also began discussing the possibility of starting a Black feminist publication. We had a retreat in the late spring which provided a time for both political discussion and working out interpersonal issues. Currently we are planning to gather together a collection of Black feminist writing. We feel that it is absolutely essential to demonstrate the reality of our politics to

other Black women and believe that we can do this through writing and distributing our work. The fact that individual Black feminists are living in isolation all over the country, that our own numbers are small, and that we have some skills in writing, printing, and publishing makes us want to carry out these kinds of projects as a means of organizing Black feminists as we continue to do political work in coalition with other groups.

#### 4. Black Feminist Issues and Projects

During our time together we have identified and worked on many issues of particular relevance to Black women. The inclusiveness of our politics makes us concerned with any situation that impinges upon the lives of women, Third World and working people. We are of course particularly committed to working on those struggles in which race, sex, and class are simultaneous factors in oppression. We might, for example, become involved in workplace organizing at a factory that employs Third World women or picket a hospital that is cutting back on already inadequate health care to a Third World community, or set up a rape crisis center in a Black neighborhood. Organizing around welfare and daycare concerns might also be a focus. The work to be done and the countless issues that this work represents merely reflect the pervasiveness of our oppression.

Issues and projects that collective members have actually worked on are sterilization abuse, abortion rights, battered women, rape and health care. We have also done many workshops and educationals on Black feminism on college cam-

pushes, at women's conferences, and most recently for high school women.

One issue that is of major concern to us and that we have begun to publicly address is racism in the white women's movement. As Black feminists we are made constantly and painfully aware of how little effort white women have made to understand and combat their racism, which requires among other things that they have a more than superficial comprehension of race, color, and Black history and culture. Eliminating racism in the white women's movement is by definition work for white women to do, but we will continue to speak to and demand accountability on this issue.

In the practice of our politics we do not believe that the end always justifies the means. Many reactionary and destructive acts have been done in the name of achieving "correct" political goals. As feminists we do not want to mess over people in the name of politics. We believe in collective process and a nonhierarchical distribution of power within our own group and in our vision of a revolutionary society. We are committed to a continual examination of our politics as they develop through criticism and self-criticism as an essential aspect of our practice. In her introduction to *Sisterhood is Powerful* Robin Morgan writes:

I haven't the faintest notion what possible revolutionary role white heterosexual men could fulfill, since they are the very embodiment of reactionary-vested-interest-power.

As Black feminists and Lesbians we know that we have a very definite revolutionary task to perform and we are ready for the lifetime of work and struggle before us.

[1] This statement is dated April 1977.

[2] Wallace, Michele. "A Black Feminist's Search for Sisterhood," *The Village Voice*, 28 July 1975, pp. 6-7.

[3] Mumininas of Committee for Unified Newark, Mwanamke Mwananchi (*The Nationalist Woman*), Newark, N.J., ©1971, pp. 4-5.

THE COMBAHEE RIVER COLLECTIVE: "The Combahee River Collective Statement," copyright © 1978 by Zillah Eisenstein.

Editor's Note: This piece was immensely influential on so many things; feminism, socialism, anti-racism, etc. It's widely considered to be the origin of many central aspects of the movement(s) today, including terms like 'intersectional,' 'identity politics' (which has been perverted from its original meaning), and more. For more information I highly recommend the book [How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective](#).

# Guiding Principles of Harm Reduction

## *Harm Reduction. . .*

- Accepts that licit and illicit drug use is part of our world and chooses to work to minimize its harmful effects rather than simply ignore or condemn them
- Understands drug use as a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon that encompasses a continuum of behaviors from severe abuse to total abstinence, and acknowledges that some ways of using drugs are clearly safer than others
- Establishes quality of individual and community life and well-being—not necessarily cessation of all drug use—as the criteria for successful interventions and policies
- Calls for the non-judgmental, non-coercive provision of services and resources to people who use drugs and the communities in which they live in order to assist them in reducing attendant harm
- Ensures that drug users and those with a history of drug use routinely have a real voice in the creation of programs and policies designed to serve them
- Affirms drugs users themselves as the primary agents of reducing the harms of their drug use, and seeks to empower users to share information and support each other in strategies which meet their actual conditions of use
- Recognizes that the realities of poverty, class, racism, social isolation, past trauma, sex-based discrimination and other social inequalities affect both people's vulnerability to and capacity for effectively dealing with drug-related harm
- Does not attempt to minimize or ignore the real and tragic harm and danger associated with licit and illicit drug use



## ***What does That Mean?***

- Don't shame someone. Only care what type of drug they use so you can give them real info on how to safely use drugs
- There is no simple reason why someone uses drugs, there are countless reasons. Many people have multiple reasons. Drug use is a spectrum, just like gender, autism, and rainbows. Some ways of using drugs are safer than others, smoking>injecting
- Work towards "best practices" for drug use. Let people know how they can use drugs safely with a goal of switching to safer use methods. Stopping is not realistic for everyone
- Don't force someone to tell you something, take the information you have, or take the supplies you have. Accept who they are, no strings attached. Give people what they want
- Ask people what you can do better. Listen when they have advice on what to do. They know what they need best!
- People who use drugs know their needs. You are simply there to help them achieve their goals. You are not the hero, they are their own hero
- Life is fucked and some people get fucked over and over. We live in a society built on fucking people.

People who are routinely fucked may have a harder time unfucking their life

- Drugs are bad, mmmkay. Let's not pretend they aren't. Be real but not shaming or belittling

*Editor?'s note: This info came from a friend of the Zine, Sarah Beth, who runs a harm reduction organization. There was supposed to be more content, but we were short on space and I saw short on time; expect more on this in future volumes!*

# What Does an Opiate Overdose Look Like?

- Deep snoring, gurgling, or wheezing
- Breathing is very slow, irregular, or has stopped completely
- Will not respond to your voice or touch
- Clammy, sweaty skin
- Blue/gray skin tinge- usually lips and fingernails show first

*If your friend is just in a heavy nod, but is still conscious and breathing, make sure to stay with them, walk them around, keep them talking and moving. Watch their breathing. Someone can slip into an overdose hours after they used their prescription or nonprescription drugs! Have your Naloxone kit around just in case!*

# What Puts You at Risk of an Overdose?

- Your tolerance is down due to not using—whether you took a break, missed doses, changed medications, were in treatment or jail
- When you mix drugs, especially a few kinds of downers, like prescription opioid pills, heroin, methadone, benzodiazepines (Xanax, Ativan, Klonopin, Valium), and alcohol
- When you get stronger prescription or non-prescription drugs than you're used to
- If the supply changes or you go to a new dealer or you're new in town
- If you get a new doctor and they change your dosing or prescriptions
- When you use if no one is around to help you out if you overdose

# RESPONDING TO AN OPIOID OVERDOSE

## 1

### TRY TO WAKE THEM UP

Shake them and shout. If no response, do a sternum rub by grinding your knuckles into their breast bone for 5 to 10 seconds.



## 2

### RESCUE BREATHING

*If they are breathing on their own, but still not responsive, continue to step 3.*

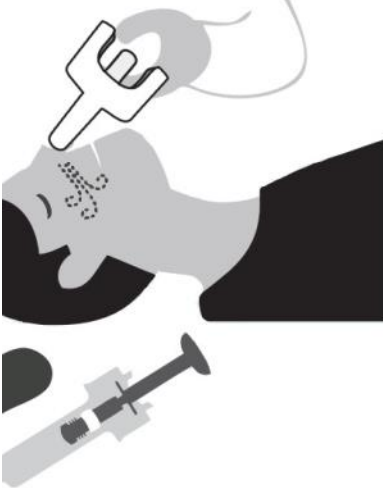
1. Make sure nothing is in their mouth
2. Tilt head back and pinch nose
3. Give one breath every 5 seconds



## 3

### GIVE NALOXONE NASAL SPRAY

Remove from box, hold with your thumb on the bottom of the plunger. Gently insert the tip of the nozzle into either nostril and press plunger firmly.



## 4

### CALL 911

If you report an overdose, California State 911 Good Samaritan law

protects you and the overdosed person from being charged with drug possession

SOMEONE IS OVERDOSING  
SOMEONE ISN'T BREATHING



## 5

### EVALUATE AND SUPPORT

Move the person on their side (recovery position) and watch closely. If the person does not respond by waking up or breathing within 2-3 minutes after receiving Naloxone, another dose may be given. Continue rescue breathing until first responders arrive or they are breathing on their own. Stay with them at least 2 hours or until they go to the hospital to make sure the overdose doesn't come back.



# Are You An Anarchist? The Answer May Surprise You!

David Graeber

Chances are you have already heard something about who anarchists are and what they are supposed to believe. Chances are almost everything you have heard is nonsense. Many people seem to think that anarchists are proponents of violence, chaos, and destruction, that they are against all forms of order and organization, or that they are crazed nihilists who just want to blow everything up. In reality, nothing could be further from the truth. Anarchists are simply people who believe human beings are capable of behaving in a reasonable fashion without having to be forced to. It is really a very simple notion. But it's one that the rich and powerful have always found extremely dangerous.

At their very simplest, anarchist beliefs turn on to two elementary assumptions. The first is that human beings are, under ordinary circumstances, about as reasonable and decent as they are allowed to be, and can organize themselves

and their communities without needing to be told how. The second is that power corrupts. Most of all, anarchism is just a matter of having the courage to take the simple principles of common decency that we all live by, and to follow them through to their logical conclusions. Odd though this may seem, in most important ways you are probably already an anarchist — you just don't realize it.

Let's start by taking a few examples from everyday life.

- *If there's a line to get on a crowded bus, do you wait your turn and refrain from elbowing your way past others even in the absence of police?*

If you answered “yes”, then you are used to acting like an anarchist! The most basic anarchist principle is self-organization: the assumption that human beings do not need

to be threatened with prosecution in order to be able to come to reasonable understandings with each other, or to treat each other with dignity and respect.

Everyone believes they are capable of behaving reasonably themselves. If they think laws and police are necessary, it is only because they don't believe that other people are. But if you think about it, don't those people all feel exactly the same way about you? Anarchists argue that almost all the anti-social behavior which makes us think it's necessary to have armies, police, prisons, and governments to control our lives, is actually caused by the systematic inequalities and injustice those armies, police, prisons and governments make possible. It's all a vicious circle. If people are used to being treated like their opinions do not matter, they are likely to become angry and cynical, even violent — which of course makes it easy for those in power to say that their opinions do not matter. Once they understand that their opinions really do matter just as much as anyone else's, they tend to become remarkably understanding. To cut a long story short: anarchists believe that for the most part it is power itself, and the effects of power, that make people stupid and irresponsible.

- *Are you a member of a club or sports team or any other voluntary organization where decisions are not imposed by one leader but made on the basis of general consent?*

If you answered “yes”, then you belong to an organization which works on anarchist principles! Another basic anarchist principle is voluntary association. This is simply a matter of applying democratic principles to ordinary life. The only difference is that anarchists believe it should be possible to have a society in which everything could be organized along these lines, all groups based on the free consent of their members, and therefore, that all top-down, military styles of

organization like armies or bureaucracies or large corporations, based on chains of command, would no longer be necessary. Perhaps you don't believe that would be possible. Perhaps you do. But every time you reach an agreement by consensus, rather than threats, every time you make a voluntary arrangement with another person, come to an understanding, or reach a compromise by taking due consideration of the other person's particular situation or needs, you are being an anarchist — even if you don't realize it.

Anarchism is just the way people act when they are free to do as they choose, and when they deal with others who are equally free — and therefore aware of the responsibility to others that entails. This leads to another crucial point: that while people can be reasonable and considerate when they are dealing with equals, human nature is such that they cannot be trusted to do so when given power over others. Give someone such power, they will almost invariably abuse it in some way or another.



- *Do you believe that most politicians are selfish, egotistical swine who don't really care about the public interest? Do you think we live in an economic system which is stupid and unfair?*

If you answered “yes”, then you subscribe to the anarchist critique of today’s society — at least, in its broadest outlines. Anarchists believe that power corrupts and those who spend their entire lives seeking power are the very last people who should have it. Anarchists believe that our present economic system is more likely to reward people for selfish and unscrupulous behavior than for being decent, caring human beings. Most people feel that way. The only difference is that most people don’t think there’s anything that can be done about it, or anyway — and this is what the faithful servants of the powerful are always most likely to insist — anything that won’t end up making things even worse.

## But what if that weren’t true?

And is there really any reason to believe this? When you can actually test them, most of the usual predictions about what would happen without states or capitalism turn out to be entirely untrue. For thousands of years people lived without governments. In many parts of the world people live outside of the control of governments today. They do not all kill each other. Mostly they just get on about their lives the same as anyone else would. Of course, in a complex, urban, technological society all this would be more complicated: but technology can also make all these problems a lot easier to solve. In fact, we have not even begun to think about what our lives could be like if technology were really marshaled to fit human needs. How many hours would we really need to work in order to

maintain a functional society — that is, if we got rid of all the useless or destructive occupations like telemarketers, lawyers, prison guards, financial analysts, public relations experts, bureaucrats and politicians, and turn our best scientific minds away from working on space weaponry or stock market systems to mechanizing away dangerous or annoying tasks like coal mining or cleaning the bathroom, and distribute the remaining work among everyone equally? Five hours a day? Four? Three? Two? Nobody knows because no one is even asking this kind of question. Anarchists think these are the very questions we should be asking.

- *Do you really believe those things you tell your children (or that your parents told you)?*

“It doesn’t matter who started it.” “Two wrongs don’t make a right.” “Clean up your own mess.” “Do unto others...” “Don’t be mean to people just because they’re different.” Perhaps we should decide whether we’re lying to our children when we tell them about right and wrong, or whether we’re willing to take our own injunctions seriously. Because if you take these moral principles to their logical conclusions, you arrive at anarchism.

Take the principle that two wrongs don’t make a right. If you really took it seriously, that alone would knock away almost the entire basis for war and the criminal justice system. The same goes for sharing: we’re always telling children that they have to learn to share, to be considerate of each other’s needs, to help each other; then we go off into the real world where we assume that everyone is naturally selfish and competitive. But an anarchist would point out: in fact, what we say to our children is right. Pretty much every great worthwhile achievement in human history, every discovery or accomplishment that’s improved our lives, has been based on cooperation and mutual aid; even now, most of us spend more

of our money on our friends and families than on ourselves; while likely as not there will always be competitive people in the world, there's no reason why society has to be based on encouraging such behavior, let alone making people compete over the basic necessities of life. That only serves the interests of people in power, who want us to live in fear of one another. That's why anarchists call for a society based not only on free association but mutual aid. The fact is that most children grow up believing in anarchist morality, and then gradually have to realize that the adult world doesn't really work that way. That's why so many become rebellious, or alienated, even suicidal as adolescents, and finally, resigned and bitter as adults: their only solace, often, being the ability to raise children of their own and pretend to them that the world is fair. But what if we really could start to build a world which really was at least founded on principles of justice? Wouldn't that be the greatest gift to one's children one could possibly give?

- *Do you believe that human beings are fundamentally corrupt and evil, or that certain sorts of people (women, people of color, ordinary folk who are not rich or highly educated) are inferior specimens, destined to be ruled by their betters?*

If you answered "yes", then, well, it looks like you aren't an anarchist after all. But if you answered "no", then chances are you already subscribe to 90% of anarchist principles, and, likely as not, are living your life largely in accord with them. Every time you treat another human with consideration and respect, you are being an anarchist. Every time you work out your differences with others by coming to reasonable compromise, listening to what everyone has to say rather than letting one person decide for everyone else, you are being an anarchist. Every time you have the opportunity to force someone to do something, but decide to appeal to their sense of reason

or justice instead, you are being an anarchist. The same goes for every time you share something with a friend, or decide who is going to do the dishes, or do anything at all with an eye to fairness.

Now, you might object that all this is well and good as a way for small groups of people to get on with each other, but managing a city, or a country, is an entirely different matter. And of course there is something to this. Even if you decentralize society and put as much power as possible in the hands of small communities, there will still be plenty of things that need to be coordinated, from running railroads to deciding on directions for medical research. But just because something is complicated does not mean there is no way to do it democratically. It would just be complicated. In fact, anarchists have all sorts of different ideas and visions about how a complex society might manage itself. To explain them though would go far beyond the scope of a little introductory text like this. Suffice it to say, first of all, that a lot of people have spent a lot of time coming up with models for how a really democratic, healthy society might work; but second, and just as importantly, no anarchist claims to have a perfect blueprint. The last thing we want is to impose prefab models on society anyway. The truth is we probably can't even imagine half the problems that will come up when we try to create a democratic society; still, we're confident that, human ingenuity being what it is, such problems can always be solved, so long as it is in the spirit of our basic principles — which are, in the final analysis, simply the principles of fundamental human decency.



Direct action, simply put, means cutting out the middleman—solving problems yourself rather than petitioning the authorities or relying on external institutions. Any action that side-steps regulations and representation to accomplish goals directly is direct action. In a society in which political power, economic capital, and social control are centralized in the hands of an elite, certain forms of direct action are discouraged, to say the least. These forms are of particular interest to those who struggle against hierarchy and oppression. There are countless scenarios in which you might want to use this kind of direct action. Perhaps representatives of despicable multi-national corporations are invading your town to hold a summit, and you want to participate in protests against them as more than just another body holding a sign; perhaps they've been there a long time, operating franchises that exploit workers and ravage the environment, and you want to draw attention to or hinder their misdeeds; perhaps you want to organize a festive, community-oriented event such as a street party. Direct action can plant a public garden in an abandoned lot or defend it by paralyzing bulldozers; it can be used to occupy empty buildings to house the homeless or to shut down government offices. Whether you're acting in secret with a trusted friend or in a mass action with thousands of others, the basic elements are the same.



## First of All . . .

**Brainstorming:** Choose a project and devise a plan

If it makes sense for your action to be organized openly, establish a format, such as a public spokescouncil, in which to work out a strategy and tactics. Invite friends, or circulate fliers, or go door to door announcing it. Have a proposal in mind ahead of time, in case no one else does. For more clandestine actions, brainstorm in a secure environment with a trusted friend or two. Keep your ideas to yourselves as you hash them out so you won't have already given them away when you're ready to try them. Brainstorming can start with a problem you want to solve, or a social contribution you want to make; it can be informed by the resources you have, the kind of experience you desire, or the people you want to work with. You can plot a single short adventure, or a long-term campaign. Often, the best brainstorming doesn't happen consciously, but in the course of daydreams and informal conversations—it's a good policy to trust that your craziest ideas can become reality and try them out. Even if you are attending a massive event organized by others, always have a plan so you can contribute to it in your own way.

**Goals:** Establish and prioritize the goals of the action

Who is your action "for"? Is it directed at on-the-spot spectators, corporate media viewers, the owners of specific corporations, their stockholders, the police and government, other members of the radical community, the participants themselves? What is it intended to accomplish? Is it meant to

communicate ideas, to call attention to an injustice, to inspire people, to secure resources, to set a particular tone, to inflict crippling material damages, to provide a deterrent, to demonstrate a model others can apply, to be a learning and bonding experience for those involved? Establishing the goals of the action from the outset will save a lot of headaches later, when your plans shift and potential conflicts arise.

## Structure

**Affinity Groups:** Work tightly with those you know

One of the most secure models for direct action organizing is the affinity group model. An affinity group is a group of friends who trust each other deeply and share the same goals; by working together over a long period of time, they become efficient and effective. For a small action, the members of an affinity group can take on different roles. For a larger action, affinity groups can work with other affinity groups in a "cluster," each group playing a role. This can make decision making easier than it would be in one big mass, as each group can send a representative to discussions. Clusters of affinity groups can work together over long periods, building trust and effectiveness.

**Recruiting:** Bring in other individuals and groups carefully

Once you have a plan to propose, figure out how many people you need to accomplish it. Invite only people you trust to keep

secrets and that you are sure will want to join in--everyone you invite who doesn't end up participating is a needless security risk. Extend invitations one by one, or affinity group by affinity group, so those who decide against participating will not know anything about the others involved; likewise, ask general questions at first, and don't reveal critical details of the plan such as exact target or date until a person is ready to make a commitment. As people are brought into a plan and go on to bring in others, make sure everyone has the same idea of how cautiously this should be done. As more people become involved in the project, it's also important that everyone understands how much commitment is called for. Sometimes the group that first presents a plan will be more invested in it than others: if they do months of work preparing, only to have another group they depended on drop out at the last minute, all that work is wasted. Everyone shares the responsibility of being honest from the beginning about what others can expect from them. At the same time, those who initiate a project should be careful to share ownership of it with everyone else involved.

**Dynamics:** Make sure power is distributed evenly within your group

Make all decisions in a participatory and consensual manner. If your group is large enough to warrant it, use an informal or formal consensus meeting process to make sure all voices are heard: set an agenda for each meeting, and pick a facilitator to keep meetings on track and another person to keep track of whose turn it is to speak. The better structured your pro-

cess, the more likely it is that everyone will participate equally. Be aware of internal dynamics that may be unbalanced, such as those between people with different privilege, or between local organizers and participants from out of town. The more everyone participates in planning and preparing for the action, the more invested in its success everyone will be. A group with good internal dynamics is smarter than any individual can be; together the group can work out the best way to apply the ideas brought in by individuals. Make sure everyone feels supported and comfortable throughout the project; check in with each other outside of formal structures as well as inside them. Maintaining morale is a critical, though often overlooked, aspect of successful direct action organizing—keep level heads in the face of surprises and uncertainty.

## The Basics

**Security Culture:** Be intentional about how you share information

Security culture is a way to avoid unhealthy paranoia by minimizing risks at all times. If you and your friends always conduct yourselves wisely, you'll have little to fear from infiltration and surveillance. The essence of security culture is that information is shared on a need-to-know basis. In some cases, the whole town will need to know about your action for it to be a success; in others, it will be crucial that the action is never spoken of outside the circle of those directly involved. Everyone privy to the action needs to share a sense of what

security has been deemed appropriate, and to respect others' needs regarding safety. Consent is as important in security as it is in sexual intimacy; it is never acceptable to violate another's wishes about security issues. Make your own security needs explicit from the beginning. It can be helpful for people working on a high security project to swear an oath of silence together. Never violate agreements about security, no matter how much time has passed since the action. When a group comes together to work on a project, make sure everyone present is vouched for by others in the group as reliable and trustworthy, and is willing to perjure themselves rather than send their comrades to jail. From the beginning of a project, you should operate according to the highest possible level of security it might require; you can always lower the level of caution later, but if you start out being careless you close off a lot of options you might later miss. Be aware of all the ways your actions can be monitored or tracked: the records of surveillance cameras, the purchases and phone calls you make (both the numbers you dial and the things you say), the fingerprints you leave (on the batteries in a flashlight as well as on the outside of it, for example), the places you go and the people with whom you are seen. Be especially careful about the location of meetings, the items you throw in your trash, and the files you have on your computer. Devise codes and prepare alibis as need be.

**Legal Support:** Prepare an infrastructure to provide support during and after the action

Everyone involved in the action should be aware of and prepared for the risks they are taking and the potential criminal charges associated with them. It's important not to take things further than you feel ready to go: if you get hurt or arrested or otherwise in trouble while engaging in a level of risk for which you are not emotionally prepared, the effects can be debilitating. Far better that you get started slowly, building a sustainable involvement with direct action projects that can continue over a lifetime, than rush into an action, have a bad experience, and swear off all such activity. If your action may result in arrests, prepare a legal support structure for those who participate. This could include a legal aid number for arrestees to call, legal observers to monitor and document the actions of police, money for bail, lawyers to provide immediate support to arrestees and to represent them in court, and a circle of people prepared to offer emotional, financial, and logistical support throughout court cases. The legal aid number should be open to receive incoming calls at all times throughout the action; bear in mind that often you cannot call a cell phone from jail. It should not incriminate the arrestees or the people who receive the calls—if part of your alibi is that you don't know each other, don't all call the same number from jail. If you fear you will forget the number, write it on your body in permanent marker. The person operating the legal aid number should know the full names of those who may be arrested, so as to check on their status. To bail someone out of jail, you can either give the entire amount of the bail to the court system, in which case you will presumably

receive it back when the legal process is finally concluded, or you can go to a bail bondsman and pay 10% of that; in the latter case, the bondsman's fees may cost you a significant amount of money. If no one can pay bail for someone, they may sit in jail until their court date, although in the case of minor infractions it can happen that police release people on their own recognizance so as not to have to deal with them. If you are risking arrest, decide whether you want to have your identification on you to expedite processing, or you want to be without it, so they cannot identify you immediately. A group of arrestees who refuse to give their information can tie up the legal process and sometimes gain bargaining power. If you need any forms of medication, consider hiding them on your person, or carry a note from a doctor explaining what you need. Find a sympathetic and trustworthy lawyer, or perhaps a few of them for large actions; a lawyer cannot represent more than one defendant on the same charges. You can research which lawyers have taken on similar cases in the past, or approach the American Civil Liberties Union or National Lawyers Guild. If you don't give away anything sensitive, you can ask sympathetic lawyers about the charges associated with hypothetical acts, or specify the dates and times you may require their services—but don't let them know anything that could implicate them: in order to do their job, they need to be able to prove that they are not connected to anything illegal. Any community whose members may suffer arrest would do well to establish a bail fund in advance; this can save a lot of running around in the middle of emergencies. Throw benefit shows, set aside infoshop profits, solicit donations from wealthy sympathizers, have your

friends at the university book you speaking dates at their school in return for student funds; make sure the bail fund stays with someone who is even-handed, trustworthy, and always easy to reach. Likewise, consider what your media strategy will be in different scenarios—whether it will be wiser to attract a lot of attention and support to the case, or to try to keep it under the radar.

**Media:** Establish what coverage you want and get it

Long before an action, when you are establishing and prioritizing goals, work out exactly how much media coverage you want, from which sources, and how you are going to obtain or avoid it. This could mean composing and sending out a press release (Who, What, When, Where, How, Why) or a communiqué, electing a spokesperson to represent your project to the press, inviting corporate or independent reporters to the action or to a press conference, faxing announcements or making press calls, offering interviews (in person or anonymously over the phone), or having members of your group cover documentation themselves. If you want to avoid certain kinds of coverage, it could also mean assigning a participant to make sure photographers do not aim their cameras at those involved. If you are communicating with the media, compose “talking points,” sound bites that your spokesperson repeats to be sure they get in the media coverage; give representatives of the press as little material to work with as possible, so you can control what they use. Watch which reporters tend to provide positive coverage, and approach them personally. Set up a webpage or use an existing website; if possible, get

this address into corporate media coverage, to reroute their viewers or readers to your own media. You can also provide information to the public yourselves by posterizing, pirate radio, mailing out letters, or starting conversations door to door. If your action warrants high security, send your communiqué from a public computer that leaves no record of who uses it. Be aware of how the devices you use can incriminate you; for example, electronic cameras imprint photos with coding that can be used to identify the camera that took them.

## Groundwork

**Planning:** Study the context, chart a strategy, plan for different scenarios

Proper planning is the essence of safe, effective direct action. Keeping your goals and priorities in mind along with the resources you have to work with, plot and compare different strategies. Weigh out the risks and potential rewards of each: always pick the safest way to accomplish a given objective, and make sure you can afford to take the risks you choose. It often happens that as the planning process goes on, a project will get more and more ambitious and hazardous, until some of those involved start to have doubts; at this point, it may be necessary to work out a safer or scaled-down version of the plan, so it can still take place. There are countless factors to take into account in planning. You must pick the most effective tactics in the context of the current social and political situation. You must pick the best location for the action and take into account all its attributes; likewise, you must pick the

best date and time of day. You must bear in mind the others who will be in the area, and how they can be expected to react—will they be sympathetic, or will hostile vigilantes interfere with your activities? You must coordinate the timing of different parts of the action, predicting how long each will take, and figure out how those involved in the action will communicate. When predicting the responses of others—say, for example, the police—consider the factors influencing them: Are they expecting what you’re planning, or do you have the element of surprise? If you have the advantage of surprise, how long will it last? Will there be a lot of attention focused on the event? Will it be immediately apparent what you are doing? Will there be middle-class citizens or reporters around, and will their presence put a damper on the authorities’ response? What is their strategy likely to be? Do their bosses want them to come down hard on you, or to avoid provoking a scene? How well do they communicate, how fast do they move, where are they located and what routes will they take? Don’t underestimate the challenges of simple logistical matters, such as transporting people or communicating in stressful situations. Don’t forget to plan an exit strategy, either. Because plans rarely come off exactly as they are laid, it’s important to have backup plans worked out for different scenarios: “If \_\_, we’ll \_\_; if \_\_, we’ll \_\_.” Have a few different objectives in mind, in case your ideal one turns out to be impossible. Having a basic structure for communications and decision-making in place will help you be prepared for situations that play out differently than any of the scenarios you had imagined. Be careful not to put some people at risk for others’ actions; the authorities will probably

charge whomever they get their hands on with the worst crimes they can, so it's important both to get those who take risks out of the area safely and to make sure serious charges can't stick to anyone else. In some cases, you can bring together multi-leveled groups in which everyone knows the general goal but only a few know critical details such as what the target is (until the last minute) or who is carrying out the riskiest activity. Be prepared for the best case scenario as well as the worst. New ideas, if they are good ones, tend to fail because people don't take them far enough, whereas older ideas usually fail because they are too familiar to everyone, including the authorities. Sometimes the best results come from applying familiar tactics in entirely new settings. Look back in time for precedents, occasions when similar actions were attempted in similar contexts; these can be very instructive. As you gather years of experience and learn from the successes and failures of others, you'll develop skills for predicting and preparing for a wide variety of situations.

**Preparation:** Gather equipment and dress appropriately

Once your plans are laid, draw up a timeline until your action, counting backwards from the big day to establish the deadlines for all the pieces that must be in place. Early on in the planning, work out what funding, materials, and other resources you will need and how to obtain them. If security is a priority, obtain what you need in such a way that it cannot be traced to you; affinity groups from out of town can acquire potentially incriminating materials far from the site of the

action. Make sure everyone has appropriate clothes for the action, including different outfits in layers if necessary. Take security issues into account as they relate to clothing: if everyone is dressing in black for anonymity, be sure no one's clothes have unique identifying features; likewise, if you're going to be posing as random passers-by, remember that civilian dress is different in Miami than it is in Seattle. If timing is important, make sure everyone's watches are synchronized. Double-check to make sure everything is ready by your deadline; go through a practice run, verbally if not physically. If participants are unfamiliar with the area, distribute maps. If need be, plant necessary materials in the area in advance of the action; be careful not to give anything away by doing so.

**Scouting:** Study the site of the action and keep up with changes

Before the action, study the area carefully. Chart safe routes in and out; look for hiding places, obstacles, potential targets, and surveillance cameras (including those in ATMs and stoplights). Note how long it takes to travel key distances, and be aware of the visibility from and of key locations. How close are the authorities, how long will it take them to arrive? Can their approach be delayed? Who else is in the area? While scouting, be careful not to call attention to yourself or leave an obvious record of your passing. Be sure to do at least some of your scouting at the same time of day as the planned action, and if possible do a quick check immediately before it to make sure nothing has changed. If your action calls for daunting tasks, such as climbing a steep rooftop, it may be good to

make an actual practice run at some point. Information can also be gathered from photos, maps, and brochures; aerial maps may be available on the internet. In some cases you can obtain information from a tourist center, or call and ask questions on a pretext (as a student doing a report, for example), or even receive a guided tour. Once you've collected a lot of information, it can be helpful to consolidate the important parts into a map suited to your needs. Be careful to dispose of all your paperwork securely.

**Roles:** Divide up responsibilities and set up decision-making structures

Establish all the roles necessary to pull off your plan, and make sure every one of these is filled. Roles might include lookouts, scouts, police liaisons, media spokespeople, internal ("embedded") media, legal aid contacts, legal observers, medics, distractions, "plants" (for example, people disguised as innocent bystanders who are ready intervene if necessary, or who will politely honk their horns while a barricade is erected in front of them), getaway drivers, people to transport materials, people to receive information and make tactical decisions, and people to carry out the actual action. In some situations, it is wise to have understudies for important roles, in case it turns out at the last minute that someone can't participate. This is especially true if you don't know in advance what the date of your action will be—for example, if it is to coincide with the beginning of a war not yet declared.

**Diplomacy:** Consider the way the action will affect others

If your action is taking place during or as part of a larger event, there may be large meetings at which different groups try to coordinate their efforts; these can be useful, but they tend to consume a lot of time and energy, so make sure you go into them knowing exactly what you hope to accomplish. Whether you're acting in the midst of thousands of other activists or far away from anyone, take into account the way your actions will affect other people. Will your actions endanger others? Will they provoke police repression? If so, will others bear the brunt of it, and is it possible to offset this? Will your actions make it more difficult for other people to do important work in a given community? Are there negotiations or reassurances that should be made to others before, during, or after the action? Honor all agreements you make with other groups; some might be willing to help you, with or without knowledge of the specific details of what you're doing. Over time, if you prove reliable and considerate, you'll build alliances with them.

## During and After the Action

### Awareness: Stay alert throughout the action

Awareness is key to the success of any action. Often, the atmosphere and the conditions that determine it can change very quickly. It is important to keep up with what is going on around you, and to have established in advance how you will react to a given scenario. For example, is the arrival of one police car a big deal? How about ten? Is it common for police to tail marchers in this city? While you can never be certain of exactly what will happen, going over possible scenarios in advance and having an idea of how your group wants to deal with them will give everyone a more solid idea of how to react—and how not to overreact—as the situation develops. When informing others of a development, announce the raw information, not the conclusions you may have drawn from it (“The police are putting on gas masks,” not “They’re going to gas us!”), so others can draw their own conclusions. Resist the urge to panic, and the tendency to get carried away as well.

### Communications: Keep each other informed

During the action, scouts can keep track of changes in the terrain such as arriving police, crowd movements, others’ activities nearby, and safe zones. They can use communication systems such as cell phones, text messaging, two-way radios, or whistles to keep in touch; audio or visual signals such as car horns or fireworks can also be useful. A police scanner can be used to monitor police communications. To

make communication more efficient, scouts can report to an individual or sub-group in the center of the action; in a larger setting, they can phone in their findings to a central information hub, which others can call with questions. Just as communications equipment can make you more efficient and effective, it also increases the risk of surveillance. You can use codes and code names, but be judicious—complicated codes are easy to forget, and prosecutors can argue that your codes meant something more drastic than they actually did. Even if no other communication system is used, it can be useful to have the option of an “abort” signal for emergencies.

# DIRECT ACTION



*This pussy grabs back!*



## Dispersal: Quit while you're ahead

A safe escape is the most commonly overlooked part of direct action organizing. Be sure to have an exit strategy worked out in advance. If you'll be in a large group, especially with others who haven't been part of the planning process, think about how to avoid the herd mentality that keeps crowds together after it would be better to split up. Know when to press your advantage, and when to quit—when to run as fast as you can, and when to walk nonchalantly. Discard anything that could incriminate you, if possible in a place it will not be found; wait to change your clothes until you're sure you're no longer under observation. If need be, gather in a safe place afterwards and make sure everyone is accounted for; collect bail money, seek outside assistance, write press releases. While everyone involved is still around, get contact information for anyone who might be able to testify or provide documentation to assist arrestees.

## Debriefing: Regroup to discuss what went well and what lessons can be learned

After the action, destroy any evidence that could be used against you; keep tools that could be tied to the action in a hiding place outside your home. Get together in a secure setting and go over what happened. Follow up on ongoing matters, such as supporting those with court cases, providing further clarification to the public as to the goals of and ideas behind the action, and sorting out conflicts. Celebrate your victories, offer each other constructive criticism, learn from your mistakes, and lay plans for the next project.

# DON'T MOURN ORGANIZE





THE POLICE TALK TO YOU  
**24h. a day**  
*and watch you, too.*



