



HOW IT IS TO BE FUN

It's been almost a year since Occupy Wall Street began and quickly evolved into a nation wide series of events. In that time we have witnessed an increase¹ of attention and interest in anarchism and black bloc activity. We are excited about all the new arrivals but are also concerned for their safety. There are many texts available about black bloc tactics as well as about how to minimize your risk of experiencing harm while engaging in these kinds of actions, but these texts are largely only available through obscure publications and websites. We wonder if things would have been different for the Cleveland five if they had been able to access some of this information prior to winding up in a police trap. The following is a letter to the new arrival, may it find you well and be of some use to you as you experiment with new means of approaching freedom.

So you caught wind of some of the media hype about the black bloc or maybe you saw us at a protest doing what we do and now you want in. Sweet, welcome! We're not an organization so you don't have to sign up anywhere, we are people all over the world who employ a certain tactic against domination when we see fit to do so and we're excited to meet you. Together we'll create and destroy history. However, before crossing that line into illegality with us there are some things you could benefit from knowing and considering.

Alright, first things first, Security Culture². Security Culture is exactly what it sounds like, it's when we adopt a set of habits and practices that allow us to create and maintain a culture in which we keep ourselves and each other secure from police repression. Obviously, we hate the police and the police hate us. We attack them when we can and they attack us when they can. This does not only take place in the arena of protest. When we're not openly fighting them in the streets we are doing everything we can to undermine their authority and make their jobs more difficult. We spread anti-police propaganda, we collect and exploit information about them, we clandestinely sabotage their infrastructure, we figure out ways to solve our own problems and keep ourselves and our neighbors safe without them, and in rare cases throughout history we've even murdered some of the bastards! And likewise, when the police are not beating, gassing and arresting us at protests they're doing everything they can³ to put us in jail. They⁴ listen to our phones, read our text messages, infiltrate our events, surveil our spaces⁵, record keystrokes on our computers, plant evidence, raid our homes, force our friends to give up information on us, send undercover agents to entrap us⁶, and in some rare cases throughout history they've even murdered some of us⁷ bastards. The State has and uses many agents towards this end; they're expanding their technologies⁸, developing their tactics and getting paid well to do so.

This brings us to the most basic element of Security Culture, keeping your goddamn mouth shut. This means not talking to people about illegal things you've done to prove you're cool. It sounds easy but a lot of people fuck this up. The only people you talk to about sketchy stuff are the people who you're doing it with (those people are your affinity group, we'll explain what that is in a second). It also means never talking to police or feds for any reason ever; the only thing you will ever have to say to them is "I want to speak to an attorney". And the second most basic element of Security Culture is staying off their radar. This means being careful of what you say on your cell phone and where you bring it, the same goes for email and what you look up online. It means not announcing your intentions to overthrow the government via violent means during and Occupy General Assembly in Cleveland. The whole thing basically boils down to being careful that the government has no idea what sneaky plans you have cooking up in your head, you don't want to go to prison for years BEFORE you even got to burn a bank just cause you let it slip to the wrong person you're going to bring molotovs⁹ to the party.

You've probably heard all that before but it never hurts to hear it again. Even experienced criminals can sometimes find themselves caught in police traps, and

inexperienced criminals often fare little better than fish in a barrel. Type Cleveland bridge 5 into an internet search engine to find out what can go wrong when inexperienced people allow a sketchy dude they just met into their affinity group.

Now for some basics about a key elementary component of the black bloc: the Affinity Group¹⁰. If you haven't got one yet don't worry, you can still riot, it just won't be nearly as much fun or as destructive. An affinity group is basically three to eight people who trust each other well enough to get their hands dirty together. Don't just grab a hold of the first few anarchists you meet and form an affinity group. These should be people you know well, preferably people you like and get along with. Friendship is helpful in these groups for developing bonds of trust, but remember that someone who is an awesome party buddy might be a total liability in an arrest scenario, and likewise someone who is totally solid, down, and capable might be a complete bore to hang out with. It can also be helpful if you share subcultural roots like punk¹¹ or hip hop¹² or fly fishing enthusiasm or whatever. This is not because a shared subcultural identity is in any way a magic defense against betrayal, but because it makes it easier for you to find out about someone's personal history. You can find out through friends of friends what this person was up to before you met them last year. Were they volunteering at an infoshop¹³ somewhere with people whose friends you're acquainted with, or were they getting busted with a bunch of drugs and mysteriously doing no time for it only to show up later in activist circles trying to get people to do illegal actions? Also it's best to avoid having people in your group who are mentally or emotionally unstable, as well as people who are addicted to drugs or alcohol. You're not going to get much sleep if someone from your group gets busted and they're sitting in a jail cell with a head full of information the police want to mine and they're getting dope sick or having a panic attack. You might also want to be cautious of committing crimes with rich kids. It could be very easy for someone to decide that their rebellious phase is over when they are forced to make a choice between going to jail, or enjoying wealth and leisure. For more on why you should avoid doing actions with drug addicts or rich kids look up 'Jake Ferguson¹⁴' and 'Jennifer Kolar¹⁵' on the internet¹⁶.

Once you've gotten with a sick tight clique and are ready to go all out, it's probably a good idea to start small. Before paintbombing¹⁷ the face shields of a line of riot police together, you can instead go out at night and do some wheat pasting¹⁸ or graffiti¹⁹ together. After that try moving on to more risky nighttime vandalism, a smashed ATM here a slashed cop tire there, use your imagination. You'll get a better idea of who you're working with and whether or not you want them by your side when the stakes are higher. A great way for you and your group to deepen your knowledge of each other is to do a reading group²⁰ together. Not only is this helpful for expanding and deepening your own ideas about why you wish to destroy the current order, but you also learn important stuff about who is in your group. Someone who is an adrenaline junky just in it for the kicks will often have little interest in reading and discussing ideas²¹. This person is a liability because if they are motivated not by a desire to resist domination but only by a desire to get their pulse up, then the likelihood that they'll roll on you when the fun part is over

and they're facing charges increases greatly. Often, but not always, an informant or provocateur will also have no interest in developing and expanding their analysis and will only be interested in pushing you to commit crimes.

There are no easy answers²² for dealing with snitches and infiltrators. It's important to out snitches publicly so they can't just move onto their next victims, but before outing someone as a snitch or an undercover you want to be completely sure which is usually difficult. If you get too hasty you could end up needlessly ruining friendships and reputations just because you let your paranoia get the better of you. It's a good idea to discuss your suspicions with others and get some feedback; you might find out there is a reasonable explanation for what was making you suspicious. But if someone is acting in a way that makes you uncomfortable and you're having a hard time trusting them, just stop associating with them, they can't entrap you if you don't plan or commit crimes with them. There have been instances where people have collected information about people they've suspected of being infiltrators and found out for sure, like when Peter Bohmer²³ managed to get a hold of the parents of a suspected informant on the telephone, he pretended to be an insurance salesman and they mentioned that their son gets insurance through his employer, he then asked who their son was employed by and they proudly told him that their son is an FBI agent! There have been other times when informants have been so obvious about it that there was never a period of doubt. It would be cool if we dealt with snitches the way the mob does but so far as I know, no one snitching on anarchists has wound up in stitches yet.

If you have to, go it alone for your first few times out with the black bloc²⁴. Keep in mind that even though you won't have an affinity group watching your back or helping you to pull off some of the more exciting things we black bloc's have been known for, you at least know your group isn't compromised. Patience is key with forming a crew. Choosing the right affinity group could be the difference between a series of exciting adventures in your war on Control or an excruciating sentence in a prison cell²⁵. While it is important to stay snitch free and safe, there's really not too much to worry about so long as you keep your senses sharp and exercise good judgment. For every agent or snitch out there trying to bust you there are a hundred people like you who want to destroy this world and experience joy and freedom in the process. You'll end up meeting just the right people and you'll be doing this for a long time, I promise.

So how do you find out where the next rowdy action is going to take place? There's a number of ways to find out about upcoming Black Bloc marches and/or riots. The best and easiest way is to be in a community of anarchists - don't worry you'll meet them (although after a while you might wish you hadn't, I won't lie to you, we're a strange bunch!). But barring that, you could look for call-outs for upcoming black bloc actions on websites like Anarchistnews.org²⁶ or Infoshop News²⁷, but you might find it easier to try to connect with anarchists in your region through more local sites like Puget Sound Anarchists²⁸ for Seattle or Bay of Rage²⁹ for the SF-Oakland bay area³⁰ or Sabotage Media³¹ for Eastern Canada. If

you live in a big city try and look for posters at anarchist spaces or just around town announcing any upcoming anarchist demonstrations. You can usually tell whether or not it's going to be a riot based on the language in the call-out and the imagery in the posters. There is no point in going to a liberal protest march with very few other anarchists and proceeding to vandalize ATMs and fight the cops. It's much better when it's 300 or more of us chasing off the riot police³² and helping each other loot and burn the property of the ruling class. Again be patient³³ and vigilant because there's gonna be some crazy shit going down as the system continues to crumble and you won't want to miss it!

Now let's say you know the date, time and location of the anti-capitalist march³⁴. You know there's going to be a black bloc³⁵ and you're either going it alone or with your affinity group. You're bound and determined to get fierce against oppression, but do you know the terrain? You might consider walking, skating or biking around the area beforehand to take it in and familiarize yourself with its features. This could include noting the locations of Corporate targets, banks, State buildings like courts and probation offices, as well as other insidious institutions like anti-gay mega churches or white supremacist meeting places. Note whether or not these places are near the march routes. Try to locate CCTV surveillance cameras³⁶, escape routes, good places to hide things before the demonstration, rooftops with quick and easy access, bars or coffee shops you can dip into. Keep an eye out for weapons caches, maybe a hotel's fountain is full of heavy river rocks, or perhaps there's a construction site guarded by a rickety chain link fence that's full of rubble and rebar. Take note of whether it's on a hill or not, what the weather will be like and anything and everything you can think of. If there is a lot of hills try to remember where the dumpsters are, those things can get rolling pretty fast with the help of gravity and whatever they crash into is going to feel it. Captain Obvious gets caught, so look sharp, and try to not act suspicious.

So now you know the area and the demonstration is still a few days away, what are you going to do during it? If you're alone you might want to start small. You might have fun printing or photocopying a leaflet you made for the demonstration or printing already made³⁷ ones from anarchist websites. If you size it so you can cut the paper into fourths with the text and images on the front and back, you can fill your backpack with these and throw them up into the air when people start breaking shit³⁸ and that way the gawkers can be informed of why this thing they just witnessed took place. You might have noticed that there is a staircase to a roof overlooking the march route and you took steps to make sure it was open during the march so you could run up those stairs and make it rain propaganda leaflets as the march passes. You could also shoot off some fireworks³⁹ or hang a banner⁴⁰ from up there. Any of these things can serve the purpose of both communicating to others and raising the excitement level of the march, which is important because a bored march is a vulnerable march. Maybe you just want to show up with a can of spray paint⁴¹ express your ideas all over the walls of a city in the midst of revolt. You might consider bringing something sharp you can use to slash the tires of police cruisers or corporate media vans before blending back into the bloc. Perhaps you'll bring a hammer, crow bar, U-lock, plastic bag of rocks, a chain or

some other blunt instrument you can use to smash capital⁴² (literally) and or protect yourself and others from police attacks. Remember to keep these items concealed from the cops when they're lining both sides of the march looking for troublemakers like you, or you can hide your heavy wooden pole in plain sight by attaching a black flag to it and waving it proudly! (A flag pole by the way will go through a window easily if instead of swinging it like an axe or a baseball bat you use both hands and jab with the end of it.) It's also helpful to know that the flow and mood of the march at some point might call for mobility, defense from police attack, and to not to stick with preplanned march routes. When this happens be ready to use the forces of spontaneity and improvisation.

Now let's say you do have an affinity group and don't need to act alone. What can groups do together that you can't do by yourself? Well, for starters, you can act as organs within the bloc⁴³. You could be medics⁴⁴, window smashers, paint bombers, graffiti writers, wheat-pasters, scouts, a communications team, a shields team⁴⁵, a video team⁴⁶, looters, or you could just hold a sweet banner⁴⁷ you and your friends made. Your crew could take on the task of building barricades with whatever is around to impede the police. Newspaper boxes, trash cans, tables from fancy restaurants, or dumpsters (lit or unlit, your choice) can all be used to slow the pigs' roll with little effort. Some clever graffiti during the May 68' riots in Paris⁴⁸ read, "Barricades close the street, but open the way" referring to their use of cars to block roads in their informed push towards freedom. Even though the demonstration you're planning to attend probably won't involve burning barricades or hanging the last capitalist with the guts of the last bureaucrat, the point is that it is a good idea to have a game plan.

Police and Feds call the part where you and your crew come up with said game plan as 'the conspiratorial stage of a crime', so it's important to do this part carefully. Many arrests happen because of mistakes people made while putting their plan together. So watch what you say on the phone, or what you look up on your computer. Don't buy sketchy things on your credit cards or from a place near where you live. Before excitedly hashing out your menacing plans with your affinity group make sure you're someplace where you're not going to be heard. It could be a good idea to *ditch your phones* and go for a walk in the park, or on a hiking trail just to be sure that your conversation isn't under surveillance. Not that you're going to be doing anything larger than Black Bloc but when Fox News⁴⁹ uses "Black Bloc" and "Al'Queda" in the same sentence it makes sense to take precautions.

Now that the big day is coming you might be thinking 'what do I wear⁵⁰?' Obviously you want a black jacket with a hood to hide your hair and something to cover your face. A black ski mask⁵¹ will cover more of your face than a black bandana will but you also might be the only one there wearing a ski mask and will therefore be easier to single out. It's probably best to go with a solid black bandana (solid black means no pictures or designs printed on it) and maybe some dark sunglasses. Underneath your black party clothes should be some normal-flauge, something you can blend into an unmasked crowd with after you're

done tearing shit up. You want to look like a yuppie, a college student -a liberal peacenick- someone the police aren't going to think to search for the hammer that just smashed that ATM ten minutes earlier. Maybe wear a nice button up, or an Obama 2012 shirt, or a preppy blouse. At this point you might be wondering, do I just show up to the march already in bloc? No. Have your black bloc clothes in your backpack ready to put on when you start to see other people mask up, if you show up to the bloc and everyone is already masked then go inside the crowd (these are your friends) and mask up, if not, then duck down behind a car or something and quickly assemble your ensemble. The reason you duck low behind something is so there aren't photographs of you bloc-ing up that can be used to connect you with all the crazy shit you did that's featured on the next days' front page. Something not so obvious to some that the police use to sort out the differences in the black bloc are shoes and backpacks. [Insurrectionary anarchists in Chile](#)⁵² have dealt with this by wearing their hoodies over their backpacks and covering their shoes with plastic grocery bags so they don't have to throw them away afterwards. Maybe showing up to your first or second riot with plastic bags on your shoes isn't the best idea, but it does give you an insight in the ways the police police the bloc. Sometimes police will kettle and mass arrest entire crowds, if for some reason you can't get away make sure you do not get arrested with your party clothes on you or in your back pack. Mass arrests take a long time to execute, giving you plenty of time to ditch anything sketchy you're still carrying.

This might be a good time to go over [body armor](#)⁵³. Unless you plan on confronting the police head on with sticks, shields and helmets along with thousands of other people in the streets all day long, which does happen but not often (enough), you probably don't need it. If you're new to this whole riot thing, try to wear things that help you remain [agile and reflexive](#)⁵⁴ to your surroundings; always remain ready to run, attack, defend, [de-arrest](#)⁵⁵, disperse and blend in. You've probably seen many of us pick up tear gas canisters and throw them back the way they came. Well those things will burn your hands so we do this with gloves, heavy duty gloves stolen from Corporate chain stores, like just about everything we arm ourselves with, even computers and video cameras. If you think you might find yourself in a situation of prolonged conflict in tear gas, a gas mask is handy to have and if that fails lemon juice and apple cider vinegar on a black bandanna pre-sealed in a ziploc bag will help counter the effects. During the [December 2008 riots in Greece](#)⁵⁶, people neutralized the tear gas in the air by setting fire to cars, dumpsters, and whatever else was around to burn up the gas, while the jury's still out on the scientific merit of these anecdotes, word on the streets of Athens is it works. However, it's usually a bad idea to play with fire outside of the context of total open insurrection in the streets. If you find yourself in something like [the 92' LA riots](#)⁵⁷, or the above mentioned Greek insurrection, then sure go for it, but if it's forty people in hoodies breaking away from an anti-war march, then maybe don't up the ante so much.

So the big day is here! You're so glad you went to bed early last night, but you're so nervous you wanna throw up. Well I'm glad you noticed because on a day like today it's really important to listen to your body. It's normal to feel some

butterflies but if you're gut tells you something is Totally Wrong: listen to it. This might mean ditching your super sketchy plan and just going and playing it by ear, seeing how the day unfolds and striking only if an opportunity arises. Even if you decide to commit no crimes at all, just being another body in the crowd dressed in black is helpful, the more of you there are the harder it is for the police to single anyone out. Try to have a Plan B scenario worked out beforehand in case one of you doesn't feel up to it. Make sure to stay well hydrated throughout the day and avoid eating huge meals. Have a lite meal before leaving home and eat small amounts of food periodically throughout the day, think apples and protein bars. Also do some stretching; you're going to be on your feet all day so you want to feel limber and agile. Make sure you and your friends look inconspicuous on your way to the demonstration. Arrive 5 to 10 minutes later than it officially starts, avoid police lines, and find your people. It's customary for at least one person to raise a black flag⁵⁸ high so that others can find the black bloc before the demo starts.

So what ends up happening? Maybe nothing memorable. Maybe you just go home with blistered feet and no cool stories. Maybe you all just get beaten and arrested. Or maybe you start a fight that sets off something big and the police flee in terror while you and your friends burn the banks and loot the shops. Whatever happens remember, we don't do this because we believe we have a road map out or a blueprint for a better world, we know that any one who claims such absurdities is a lying politician. We do this because capitalism has created a world here and now that has nothing for us and this is just one way our deep and total desire to destroy that world can manifest itself materially. We don't believe in waiting⁵⁹ for some magic moment to strike. The system perpetuates itself by controlling you, promising you a future so long as you politely endure a miserable present that seems to never end. When we resist their control the present becomes ours for as long as we can keep it. This is the state of exception, this is what we want to create and expand. We might never end up expanding it into perpetuity, but we don't see that as a reason to simply accept the conditions of the nightmare we're currently living. We refuse to go down without a fight.

Be dangerous and stay safe. We'll see you in the streets. ATTACK!⁶⁰

Footnotes

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28. <http://pugetsoundanarchists.org/>
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