

(anti)ideology and its self-destruct button
from CrimethInc. to crimethink

By *Luther Morris*

...

Today I went for an aimless walk in my quiet neighbourhood. It exists just on the fringe of the Toronto subway line, and used to be part of a self-contained village separate from the big city. It exists somewhere in between urban and suburban.

I was walking near where I went to primary school when a monarch butterfly appeared in front of me, fluttering away. It fluttered all the way into a field of power lines and weeds. I followed it. I followed it all the way down the field into the untreated urban jungle that can only exist on the fringes of a railroad, or in this case, beneath a set of ghastly power lines. Neglected government infrastructure. I ignored the beaten-down path: overused, boring, and lined with dog shit.

This monarch butterfly led me to a wonderful field full of hundreds of butterflies, rogue cardinals, squirrels foraging for nuts, insects and bees; an entire ecosystem that thrived halfway between the untouched and the totally ruined. This field was really the last space fit for walking long distances, since the power lines stretched from east to west over the entire region. This is the only sizeable space left in my area that hasn't been entirely domesticated.

Burden and joy feed off of each other, I think.

And then I realized that I couldn't concentrate on enjoying what was going on around me because I was thinking about writing it into my paper, right at the beginning. I shook my head, and I forget what happened after that.

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Introduction

...to create, by any means necessary, a situation that goes beyond
the point of no return.¹

I should point out that I was listening, appropriately, to the latest NOFX album over my headphones when I finally sat down and started writing this. NOFX is one of the first punk bands I really fell for. Punk, or rather a later pop-punk incarnation that I grew up calling punk, is really the first music I felt an immediate identification with; literally,

the first track on the first album I ever bought. I can recall the dramatic sell-out of many bands that I had been so captivated by.² The ‘sell-out’ declaration would usually reach a rough cultural consensus the first time an album was put out on a major record label, with the sound cleaned up and the politics dropped; a heartbreak every time. But I have learned at least two lessons from these experiences. The first is that the recuperated band no longer mattered; I could continue to enjoy and learn from their older music all the same. The second is that nothing is ever totally recuperated or totally pure—this is a dangerous dichotomy—and even recuperated cultural signifiers can hint the way to deeper meanings and conspiracies, *if only you are looking for them*. Seeking, then, is the key.

So this new NOFX album sounds significantly more jaded than the previous. The album represents the danger of getting stuck in the spectacle. What is one of the main conditions of the up-and-coming generation? *We didn’t have the 60s. We are already cynical*. And this can be our greatest weapon, if we could only take heed of the wise warning: “The future belongs to those who can create chaos without loving it.”³

I want to argue that CrimethInc. hopes to smuggle people into a state of mind they call ‘crimethink,’ understood as a psychological disposition and a way of reading between the lines. crimethink always seeks anarchy, in the hopes that more imaginative and radical projects will germinate.

There were points during this reading-and-writing process when I felt like I wanted to write about *everything*, that I could die any moment and I wanted to make sure everything I knew was written down, and people could take or leave whatever. Anarchism would be my starting point, a word that means so many things to so many

people. I'm not going to explain exactly what it means to me, actually I'm resisting a temptation to, but I imagine it speaks through my writing anyway.

Honesty is not synonymous with truth, sure. And perhaps this is a sort of confession; at the very least, propaganda. But a *different kind* of propaganda, the kind that seeks not to deceive but to inspire, seduce, reach out, invite. With—and only with—your consent.

Meet The Cast

In a sense, this paper is all about open-source ideas; so let's take a look at Wikipedia! It might even be fun to cross-check these frozen frames of an ever-changing medium, *the truth on August 8th*, with the truth today. So here you are:

CrimethInc., also known as **CWC** ("CrimethInc. Ex-Workers Collective" or "CrimethInc Ex-Workers Ex-Collective"[1]), is a decentralized [anarchist](#) collective[2] composed of many cells which act independently of one another. Multiple divisions of the group have published books, while others have acted as [record labels](#); less public splinter-groups have carried out [direct action](#), hosted international conventions and other events, maintained local chapters, [rioted](#), toured with multimedia performance art and/or hardcore [anarcho-punk](#) musical ensembles, and supported various large-scale campaigns with publicity work (including the [Unabomer](#) for President and the "Don't Just Vote" campaigns as well as the anti-[FTAA](#) protests of 2003 in Miami, FL). Such activities have earned the collective national media attention.[3][4]

The **Situationist International (SI)** was a small group of international political and artistic [agitators](#) with roots in [Marxism](#), [Lettrism](#) and the early 20th century European artistic and political [avant-gardes](#). Formed in 1957, the SI was active in Europe through the 1960s and aspired to major social and political transformations. In the 1960s it split into a number of different groups, including the Situationist Bauhaus, the Antinational and the [Second Situationist International](#). The first SI disbanded in 1972. [1]

The first issue of the journal *Internationale Situationniste* defined situationist as: "having to do with the theory or practical activity of constructing situations. One who engages in the construction of situations. A member of the Situationist International".[2] The same journal defined *situationism* as "a meaningless term improperly derived from the above. There is no such thing as situationism, which would mean a doctrine of interpretation of existing facts. The notion of situationism is obviously devised by antisituationists."

And finally,

Surrealism^[1] is a cultural movement that began in the mid-1920s, and is best known for the visual artworks and writings of the group members. The works feature the element of surprise, unexpected juxtapositions and [non sequitur](#), however many Surrealist artists and writers regard their work as an expression of the philosophical movement first and foremost with the works being an artifact, and leader [André Breton](#) was explicit in his assertion that Surrealism was above all a revolutionary movement. From the [Dada](#) activities of [World War I](#) Surrealism was formed with the most important center of the movement in Paris and from the 1920s spreading around the globe, eventually effecting films such as the [Angel's Egg](#) and [El Topo](#), amongst others.

I will draw a genealogy of crimethink that parallels historical developments over longer periods of time with more recent changes in CrimethInc. propaganda, in an attempt to intervene and contribute to ongoing discussions within anarchist scenes/movements/cultures in North America.

Ethical Questions

“Why give away our secrets? Because if they stay secrets, we’re fucked.”

-CrimethInc. Agents Provocateurs⁴

We all wear more than one mask, and perhaps even shadows cast shadows. There are things fit for these papers, and things that are not, and the early protagonists of this paper are magicians that choose to reveal some of their secrets.

This is really a reflection on the investigations that led to this paper. My first reading of *Days of War, Nights of Love* was appropriately instigated after following a trail laid by a video posted on the internet which gives visual sequence to the chapter “Join the Revolution: Fall in Love.”⁵

The work that went into stealing and recasting these ideas in a new light came from lots of reading, reverse-lookup internet goose chases, comparing editions of books page for page, dissecting images of self-representation, endless discussions with my

closest friends, a radio show experiment, rewind-pause-play, rarely-but-fruitfully-returned emails, and a chance meeting halfway around the world. So you should all be acknowledged, and hopefully you know who you are. If in doubt, *yes!*

A Love-Hate Relationship with Structure

Infinite ways are available to organize what follows: theoretical developments, historical moments, and changes in the field of psychoanalysis all operate in the background of this genealogy. I chose the easiest way to roughly organize things, chronologically following three ruptures and using them as indicators. Just don't say I didn't warn you; I am fairly embracing of tangential ideas and scandalous breaks from the agreed-upon structure. In contradiction, scandal, and secrets: that's where the real goods lie.

Approaching this topic pseudo-historically may at first glance be taken as blasphemy, or an attempt to render CrimethInc. to the 'dead weight' of history. There is a particularly vehement rejection of capital-H History in *Days of War, Nights of Love*:

Today's radical thinkers and activists are no closer to changing the world for their knowledge of past philosophies and struggles... their place in the tradition of struggle has trapped them in a losing battle, defending positions long useless and outmoded... the solution is not to combat their supposed "objective truths" with more claims to Historical Truth... we must realize that it is up to us to reveal what is true about the present and what is possible from here.⁶

In place of history, CrimethInc. proposes a notion of myth that is detached from time, decentralized and 'democratic,' or what could be understood as open-source. A very important book that represents a series of revisions and updates to the theory of *Days of War, Nights of Love*, written two years later by the Curious George Brigade (CGB), is *Anarchy in the Age of Dinosaurs*. The book is a "manifestation of the CrimethInc. underground" and early versions of the website (currently unavailable) for the book have a link to contact a "guest CrimethInc. columnist."⁷ So the relationship between semi-

anonymous writing collectives is once again mysterious, but some clues can be pulled from the fray. The CGB appears to consciously revise certain ideas written down in *Days of War, Nights of Love*, posed as friendly amendments. The book is more of an ‘insider’ text than DoW, written by and for anarchists so to speak, but doesn’t shy away from relentless attacks on sanctified traditions within anarchist subcultures in North America: the very first page is titled ‘How I Forgot the Spanish Civil War and Learned to Love Anarchy.’ There is an explicit turn in this book, collapsing the false but useful dichotomy in DoW between History and myth:

If we accept only the official histories of high school textbooks we have no reason to treat the past as anything but yet another dead hand that weighs us down. But history can be a living cultural memory that can be remembered, and re-experienced. We can challenge it on new fronts and, when it is no longer needed, abandon it... If we can uncover the voices bulldozed by official histories, reading behind and between the lines of the official texts, we can discover together a history worth remembering.⁸

For CrimethInc., this creative moment is made possible only by first rejecting official History wholesale. Perhaps it is the same with theory; and this is where I approach the text. The questions posed in this paper, then, are questions of how one ‘withers away’... how are histories abandoned when found useless? If it does, how does the ideology of ‘thinking for yourself’ escape the traditional hegemonic traps of other ideologies? What are the consequences of anarchism’s flirtation with the mass media in the past decade? Big questions indeed, and please, don’t expect answers. This is merely one map of the last decade of crimethink ideas and activity, simultaneously presented as a seed and a weapon; take what’s useful and leave the rest.

A Brief Outline Of What Follows

Coming from a youth activist generation nostalgically fixated on the 1960s, it seems appropriate to begin there with the Situationist International and the events of May 1968. Next, I discuss CrimethInc., best understood as born in the fires of the Seattle riots of 1999.⁹ This is perhaps the more recent ‘golden age’ contemporary anarchists tend to nostalgically glorify, the general peak¹⁰ of the alter-globalization assemblage¹¹ in North America. Finally, we move to Miami 2003, the ‘counter-counter-spectacle,’ which brought to light criticisms regarding the effectiveness of mass demonstration, helped shape *Anarchy in the Age of Dinosaurs* which would ‘crimethink CrimethInc.,’ and brings us to contemporary questions about the future of anarchist struggles in North America and beyond. So without further ado, as they say,

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PARIS, FRANCE

May 1968

Next year will be the 40th anniversary of the (in)famous uprisings of May ’68. A ton of material has been written on what exactly happened during those mysterious few months: *what caused* such an uncompromisingly revolutionary consciousness to spread so broadly so suddenly, *why* the student and worker uprisings failed to sustain themselves and totally transform society (i.e. lots of justified finger-pointing at the union bureaucracy and the Communist Party), and *how* to recreate (or prevent) a repeat of the events. It’s an obsession.¹²

Some involved with the Situationist International were heavily involved with the uprisings of May '68, and Vienet recalls the importance of a S.I. pamphlet distributed en masse by the overthrown student council at Nanterre University in precipitating a class consciousness among French students.¹³ But if we are to view the Situationist International as a precursor to CrimethInc., and in particular the more anarchistic writings of Raoul Vaneigem, it is useful to study how Vaneigem evaluated a pair of his own precursors, namely Dada and the Surrealists.

Searching for Origins to an Eternal Recurrence

If there is any truth to the notion that the drowning see their whole life replayed before their eyes in a few short seconds, surrealism might well be described as the last dream of a foundering culture.¹⁴

Vaneigem's *A Cavalier History of Surrealism* maps out the tensions between the Situationist International, the Surrealists, and Dada. There are a few that are exceptionally important to the present study. Vaneigem criticized Dada for its nihilism, claiming that in seeking an absolute break from ideology and deconsecrating culture entirely it isolated itself and maintained its refusal merely on an abstract level.¹⁵ The Surrealists fell to the same forces of co-optation, because they sought to overthrow culture 'strictly culturally' and did not understand the Dadaist tenet of destroying art and culture as separate spheres once and for all. By presenting partial activities such as art and dreaming as totalities, a false sense of unity was created while maintaining the artificial separation between mind and matter. For Vaneigem, both Dada and the Surrealists presented abstract partial solutions (i.e. the liberation of the mind) to questions of alienation under capitalism, Ideology and Spectacle. He credits Andre Breton, a leading figure of the Surrealist movement, for defending a 'new unity' of myth against

the social relationship of Spectacle, which implied a return to love, dreams, madness, childhood.¹⁶ But by restricting practical action to the abstract realm of aesthetics, and by placing their interventions at the service of the Communist ‘Revolution’ even after the Bolsheviks took power,¹⁷ the Surrealists were co-opted into a game of false opposites which served the ideology of Ideology, first and foremost. This was the Surrealist *ressentiment*.¹⁸

Free Minds Will Die In Imprisoned Bodies

Unfortunately, Surrealism had been an Ideology in the profoundest sense from the beginning. It was always doomed to be part of the game of old and new in the cultural sphere and could have avoided this destiny only if, say, the Spanish Revolution had triumphed over both the Stalinists and the Fascists and hence made possible a transformation of Surrealism into revolutionary theory.¹⁹

Vaneigem’s philosophy might strike one as resigned to despair and nostalgia, trying desperately to recreate a unity that has been lost; a story of trying to stay on a tightrope that traverses total nihilism on one side, and misplaced faith on the other. Yet this is precisely where Vaneigem’s radical consciousness comes into play, which is perhaps his most significant contribution to S.I. literature. Radical consciousness is defined against Ideology with a capital I: the only function of Ideology for Vaneigem is to mystify, while a radical consciousness is properly understood as the anti-ideology. This radical consciousness is the self-destruct device that an increasingly totally spectacular world is truly in need of, since “myth cannot operate today... there is only spectacle”.²⁰ The myths that contribute to the infinitely unique diversity of the world are being swallowed by a colonizing arrangement of everything into manageable fragments, pre-empting any lingering desire to realize a ‘revolution of everyday life.’

Vaneigem's understanding of our *zeitgeist* is heavily influenced by Nietzsche's writings on decadence, childhood and anti-martyrdom.²¹ His reading of Dada as active nihilism and Surrealism as an attempt to reclaim creativity from *ressentiment* suggest that his conception of the Situationist project includes a fusion of the two, among other things, in a bid to end 'separation' under the Spectacle once and for all. In his widely read *The Revolution of Everyday Life*,²² Vaneigem reveals the aims of his seductive writing style, deeply invested in the potential of a constructive negativity:

The function of conditioning is to assign and adjust people's positions on the hierarchical ladder. The reversal of perspective entails a kind of anti-conditioning. Not a new form of conditioning, but a new game and its tactics; the game of subversion (*détournement*).²³

Importantly, Vaneigem and the S.I. in general were deeply invested in generalizing psychoanalytical prescriptions for emotional repression and particularly the supposedly therapeutic violent eruptions that were examined so closely by Freud, Reich, and Fanon. Vaneigem attributes the causes of 'hate' to forces resigned to the death drive, and endorses a program that seeks to ultimately erase the causes of repression:

The barbarity of riots, the arson, the people's savagery, all the excesses which terrify bourgeois historians, are exactly the right vaccine against the chill atrocity of the forces of law, order and hierarchical oppression... Everything we do not have to destroy should be saved: such, in its most succinct form, is our future penal code.²⁴

And so the goal at all costs is for Vaneigem the total and permanent revolt, freedom realized through the destruction of the repressive other. The planned authority of the so-called anti-authoritarians leading the permanent revolution, curiously analogous to the dictatorship of the proletariat, is a failure of this text based on a binary understanding of the revolutionary project (with us or against us) and moments of disturbing Jacobin-like logic: "There is no justification for putting up with people whom the system can very

well put up with. Expulsions and breaks are the only defense of an imperiled coherence.”²⁵ To be fair, Vaneigem is speaking specifically about the Situationist International. However, his belief that a group of such internal regimentation and policed coherence that seeks to wipe out every perceived enemy that stands in the way of its utopian vision does not contribute to prefiguring the group’s vision of a free society. The idea that mechanisms of ‘social cleansing’ *never wither away* has been understood by (most) anarchists since Bakunin was expelled by the followers of Marx from the First International. In reflecting on the events of the Paris Commune and the resulting Terror, Bakunin turned against Marx and criticized his ideas as authoritarian, and in particular the idea of the worker’s state that would be set up to defend against ‘counter-revolutionaries.’²⁶ This informed Bakunin’s distinction between political and social revolution, one that would inform more recent anarchist writing celebrating and encouraging non-hegemonic forms of change.²⁷

Vaneigem may have been a more anarchistic member of the Situationist International, but he certainly had his totalizing tendencies that lend easily to (micro)fascism. And so one ought to loot his work for what’s useful, and discard the rest. Reading the texts of the Situationist International, one gets the sense that the authors were aware that their own ideas would ultimately be *détourned*. Which brings us to CrimethInc.

Dropping Out to Fight Back and Affirmative Solidarity: CrimethInc. and the Situationist International

Just as it makes sense to understand how the Situationists drew from Surrealism through Vaneigem’s *Cavalier History on Surrealism*, it is also useful to review CrimethInc

literature on the Situationist International to pinpoint the ‘anarchist turn’ in Situationist theory. In “Introduction to the Situationists: ...the next badge of intellectual elitism,”²⁸ the anonymous author(s) write(s) that CrimethInc. holds in common with the Situationist International an identity of being ‘full-time revolutionaries.’ This means, when possible, refusing wage labor, taxes, rent, and the fulfillment of other obligations to the state and capitalism that steal time.

Despite vowing to ignore the onslaught of pseudo-critique of a straw-CrimethInc. that plagues the internet, I will take a time out from that to point out the significance of this with respect to a common misconception: CrimethInc.’s advocacy of ‘dropping out’ is not to promote hitchhiking, theft, dumpster-diving and squatting as ends in themselves—as explained in the ironically titled “All Traveler Kids Purged From CrimethInc. Membership”²⁹—but to better enable those *who can* detach from and leech off the capitalist economy to be agents of social change. Of course, issues of accessibility are crucial to this idea, and much of the criticism includes unfounded speculation about the identities of individuals involved with the publishing collective. The truth or untruth of such statements is unverifiable if we understand CrimethInc. as the literature demands it be understood, as an ‘open discourse’ that can be freely appropriated by anyone. In fact, I would suggest that repeated accusations (as opposed to constructive analysis) of ‘white middle class’ homogeneity in CrimethInc., indeed about anarchists in general, can only contribute to the ongoing creation of and perpetuation of limited demographics within self-identified anarchist communities. It is, when dominant, a self-fulfilling prophecy.³⁰ So I would rather not get sucked into that debate, and instead read the texts from the perspective of an ally: simultaneously critical and encouraging.

In the preface to their seminal book *Days of War, Nights of Love* (2000), one finds a self-definition that draws on Situationist theory:

[The Situationist International] was unique in that it represented a *stance* rather than an ideology (“not a position, but a proposition”). It would be tempting to say that CrimethInc. improves on their method in that it is founded on a shared desire, rather than a common critique; but this also misses the mark. CrimethInc. is a web of desires, all unique to the individuals who feel them; what sets CrimethInc. apart is that it is a means of *interlocking* these desires, or creating mutually beneficial relationships between people with different needs.³¹

So, CrimethInc defines itself as an *ideology against ideology*, a self-destruct theoretical device that resists the stipulation towards internal coherence so strictly maintained within the Situationist International. CrimethInc.’s ‘revolution’ can be interpreted as a series of contingent acts which are manifestations of anarchistic dispositions; i.e., a continuously transforming (permanently impermanent) process. In their own words:

Self-determination begins and ends with your initiatives and actions, whether you live under a totalitarian regime or the canopy of a rainforest. It must be established on a daily basis, by acting back on the world that acts upon you—whether that means calling in sick to work on a sunny day, starting a neighbourhood garden with your friends, or toppling a government. You cannot make a revolution that distributes power equally except by learning firsthand how to exercise and share power—and that exercising and sharing, on any scale, is itself the ongoing, never-concluded project of revolution.³²

In a moment of affirmation, a solidarity based on negation is passed over in favour of a “shared web of desires.” Thus, it would seem to follow that the fragile solidarity embodied by the alterglobalization assemblage would be rejected as baseless. This is the question that underpins the following investigation of CrimethInc.’s relationship with economic summit mobilizations and the spectacle in general.

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

November 1999

*And I'm afraid, that this fight we're all caught up in, will leave us the same
as that which we oppose*

- Defiance Ohio, "I Don't Want Solidarity if it Means
Holding Hands with You"

Let's contextualize the so-called anti-globalization movement. The Marxist project is basically dead. Real-existing-socialism is generally held to be discredited, and the Wall is long since fallen. Out pops a 'social movement' that has scattered bases of resistance throughout the globe, and is based on relatively fragile alliances. In November of 1999, trade unions, environmental activists, fair trade advocates, indigenous groups, anarchists, religious fundamentalists, and even right-wing state sovereigntists converged on the city of Seattle by the tens of thousands to demonstrate at the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference. The stage was set for anarchists utilizing the black bloc tactic³³ to make its first widely-broadcasted appearance to the American public. The (in)famous images to emerge from Seattle would include smashed windows of targeted corporations, street blockades, heavy police brutality against both resisting and passive participants, and seemingly endless clouds of tear gas.

CrimethInc. distributes a documentary video entitled *Breaking the Spell*³⁴ using materials compiled from the events of Seattle that both indulges in spectacular images of resistance and repression as well as giving a voice to anarchists who participated in property destruction, who defend their actions both as a way to catalyze a confrontation with the state as well as spectacular 'propaganda of the deed,' a traditional anarchist tactic that promotes public resistance (of varying degrees) as a way to inspire and catalyze revolution.³⁵ The spectacle of street demonstration as propaganda is a major

focal point for CrimethInc., and Seattle in particular would serve as a reference point for the publishing collective for years. CrimethInc. literature certainly provides a number of peepholes for understanding the phenomenon that has been critiqued to death and labeled ‘summit-hopping,’ through call-outs for and reflections on Seattle, the FTAA summit in Miami, and more recently their endorsement of the RNC-Welcoming Committee’s strategy against the upcoming Republican National Convention in 2008.³⁶ Seven years after Seattle, CrimethInc. released “N30: A Memoir and Analysis, with an Eye to the Future”:

Rumor has it that every seven years, every cell in our bodies regenerates: every seven years, we are born anew and begin a new phase of life. If this is true, then today we should finally be able to reflect on the WTO protests without nostalgia, glorification, or defensiveness and derive lessons from them to apply to our current efforts. Today, we are finally free of this specter that has haunted us, and it can finally become our own.³⁷

The pamphlet consists of a preface, afterword, and two reflections. The first reflection, a heroic personal tale, is styled similarly to *Days of War, Nights of Love*. It is inspiring and passionate, a hopeful story of collective resistance that has the potential to seduce readers into demanding similar excitement. It is *good propaganda*, no doubt, given that it is pleasurable to read and incites a restlessness in the reader that can spill over into concrete action. The second piece included in the reflection is a study conducted by the RAND Corporation, a military thinktank that is primarily funded by the U.S. government.³⁸ The study is a lucid analysis of the successes and failures, from a social control perspective, of the police in isolating the anarchist black bloc. It is useful to anarchists as a manual on successful street tactics. In this sense, it can be placed in the same vein as CrimethInc’s second book, *Recipes for Disaster: An Anarchist Cookbook*, which consists of straightforward advice compiled by affinity groups across the continent on direct action tactics,

artistic interventions, interpersonal politics and social relationships, dropping out, and much more. These two articles, which can be mapped in stylistic correlation to CrimethInc.'s major books up until this point,³⁹ represent two major approaches by the CrimethInc. publishing collective thus far. I would call the first spectacular performance, and the second tactical conspiracy. They do not necessarily contradict each other—this is not a binary—but I *do* argue below that too much emphasis on the former always threatens to subsume the latter. The afterword to N30 recognizes this potential pitfall:

The breakthroughs in Seattle that affected the anarchist community turned out in the long run to be dangerous gifts: as soon as the media attention, the thrill of victory, and the effectiveness of the new model were taken away, many anarchists felt they were back at square one.⁴⁰

And so went the summit mobilizations following the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States...

A Broken Spell

“...And we feel that *atypical* actions kind of break the spell that holds on people; we’re trying to wake people up.”

-Travis Riehl, speaking to a local news station shortly after being indicted for property destruction. Emphasis mine.⁴¹

In the quote above, Riehl is quoting the closing line of *Breaking the Spell* word for word. In that film, this sentence is spoken to the news crew of *60 Minutes*; 8 years later, they are being repeated verbatim to a local news reporter in Spokane. This is indicative of a problem for anarchists in North America, and in particular those inspired by CrimethInc. materials. The tactics used in Seattle do not represent a successful insurrectionary model. They represent *good propaganda*. This fact is recognized widely enough; the question that doesn't come up enough is: “propaganda for whom?”

Returning to the example of the black bloc, one can identify two tendencies guiding the employment of this tactic that mirror CrimethInc.'s stylistic tendencies. The first is spectacular: the black bloc is putting on a show for spectators. That means embracing the presence of video cameras, indeed sometimes even representatives of news corporations. *Breaking the Spell* is primarily an exploration of this flirtation between corporate news and anarchists in Eugene, Oregon following the riots in Seattle. A second tendency that guides a black bloc is pragmatic. Put simply, when a group of people are all dressed identically, illegal direct action can be easy to get away with. Drawing on personal experiences and accounts from friends, there have been numerous situations in which corporate media representatives are treated not as spectators to be performed to, but as legitimate targets for attack.⁴² Examining the chapter entitled "Blocs, Black & Otherwise" in *Recipes for Disaster*, it is clear that the writers are invested in both tendencies: "Besides getting away with public criminal acts... participation can be really exciting, and good for morale."⁴³ Excitement and morale aren't the same as performing for corporate news, but will oftentimes depend on an *aesthetic of resistance* that can be independent of any economic or political efficacy. Of course, like all dichotomies, this spectacle/pragmatic dichotomy is false. The black bloc tactic is, in both cases, still an act of *public defiance*.

There is a constant negotiation between these dual tendencies, which can be extrapolated to understand the question of anonymity generally. As the CrimethInc. publishing cells are themselves anonymous and the brand is founded on an open source model, there are many advantages enjoyed from such a position of limited invisibility. On the defensive side, members are (ideally) unidentifiable for state repression or personal

attack by enemies. Furthermore, if the CrimethInc. meme works to the extent that people identify with it and contribute to its ongoing transformation and reinvention, then anonymity can theoretically support accessibility without formal hierarchy.⁴⁴ Finally, CrimethInc.'s anonymity aims to spark imagination and hope, an appropriate response to a bureaucratic 'end-of-history' modernity. But is spectacular confrontation at street demonstrations as a means of inspiration still viable?

MIAMI, FLORIDA

November 2003

The fluke in Seattle was not that the police were so aggressive but that the corporate media were caught off guard and accidentally reported on their violence.⁴⁵

The most effective thing that the police learned to do after Seattle was to sharpen their propaganda skills. The police understand that the media will uncritically report anything said by the police about protesters.⁴⁶

Miami's Counter-Counter Spectacle

The demonstrations at the 2003 Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) Ministerial in Miami, Florida were met with an inflated and overwhelming police presence, and a wartime-like tactic of embedding corporate reporters with the riot police as part of a broad strategy of defusing the spectacle of resistance. The cops used geographic and other advantages to assume the theatrical role of all-powerful but benevolent state. As the Indymedia-produced and CrimethInc.-distributed *The Miami Model* (2003) reveals, protestors met with severe and often pre-emptive police repression that was at least comparable to the brutality in Seattle, but this time there was no corresponding representation of participants' perspectives in the corporate media. There was near-

complete blackout of this point of view. Independent media organizations did manage to compile extensive footage from the events, but these websites have limited reach. By all accounts, and by most measurements of success,⁴⁷ the FTAA convergence in Miami was for the demonstrators, a spectacular failure. Several corporate media sources including *Seattle Weekly* were quick to announce the death of the so-called ‘anti-globalization movement,’ as if something so multiplicitous could fall as one.⁴⁸ In the eye of the TV-watching North American public, however, anarchist street demonstration all but disappeared.

What Public? What Mass?

Perhaps spontaneous, joyful construction of situations is subversive after all, and that’s why, now that it is happening all over the world, we are not allowed to see it.⁴⁹

Clearly, a lesson to be learned from the Seattle-Miami period is that anarchist tactics ought to work to build better media infrastructure, so as to avoid reliance on the corporate media. If the Seattle spectacle was a mistake, it could be effectively argued that today corporate news as a whole might know better than to give a massive stage to anarchist resistance. More subtly, however, I believe that the experience demonstrates the danger of getting ‘stuck’ in the Spectacle, and in particular, the spectacle of mass action. This potential pitfall is recognized in *Days of War, Nights of Love*:

CrimethInc... is not an elitist vanguard that purports to lead the masses out of darkness into salvation—experience has shown a thousand times that such parties are the social forces that *create* masses.⁵⁰

Just as queer theory has demonstrated that our expectations of gender identity is a key factor in maintaining the current gender-binary system, approaching people in a manner (medium) that communicates to them *as a mass* serves the project of the mass. An

example of this is the video camera, whose gaze can turn much of what it touches into stone. Whether that process is called recuperation, relegation to History, or capture, we find heated rhetorical rejections of this phenomenon throughout every CrimethInc. work. That being said, one can understand the CrimethInc. Guerilla Films Series as an experiment in inverting that relationship; rather than *capturing* action and rendering the spectator passive, the films are openly intended as catalysts:

This is what some have called protest porn... [pornography] is the opposite of sex. It exists to serve its own ends: every representation represents representation itself before anything else... So as with any commodity produced in this society, which necessarily carries within it all the old ideologies... the first and last question is what can be done to subvert its conventional role... Just don't let your desires to live out those fantasies end when you turn the VCR off... Protest porn. Demand the real thing.⁵¹

It cannot (and will not) be determined whether this experiment succeeds or fails. Certainly, the spectacular tactics employed and subsequently broadcasted all over the world initiated (and continue to initiate) repetition of the protest meme, and street tactics are indeed very refined in certain circles at this point.

Recipes for Disaster is a book that represents an evolution in anarchist tactics generally; offering sober advice on various manifestations of *direct action*, a term this work defines as “any action that sidesteps regulations, representatives, and authorities to accomplish goals directly.”⁵² Most topics included in this book could be categorized as relating to interpersonal politics, work-free living, artistic experimentation, group-building, catalyzing situations of social upheaval, propaganda, legal/prison support, and/or economic attacks.

The authors do not claim a complete list, and encourage readers to look elsewhere to others who are more knowledgeable in other tactical realms. Regardless, the omissions are relevant. There is little-to-nothing about workplace organizing, probably because the

authors feel that anarchist literature is inundated with this kind of information, so there isn't a need.⁵³ Another omission, which is for me more problematic, is on the community-rooted institutional level. There are definitely community implications in much CrimethInc. literature, but the community (or biosphere) as social plane is rarely addressed as such. Direct action primarily manifests in *Recipes for Disaster* as mass action (street protest) or directly from one individual to another (as propaganda, or as healthy social relationships).⁵⁴ While I would agree that any meaningful community is built on the basis of affinity, between individuals, there lacks a serious discussion of this realm of 'the community.'

crimethinking CrimethInc.

The park conversations or prison letters aren't as efficient [as email spam],
but they are certainly more meaningful.⁵⁵

One must separate 'CrimethInc.' from 'crimethink.' While the former represents a loosely networked ever-changing group of cells that are connected by an anonymous publishing collective, the latter is a term given to the *spirit* of the writing.⁵⁶ Whereas CrimethInc. may be understood as an open source identity, crimethink is an active and breathing verb for intervention. After CrimethInc. has been long forgotten, people will continue assuming a mindset of *crimethought*, only they'll call it something completely different. It is in this sense, then, that one can understand how it is possible, and why it is necessary, to 'crimethink CrimethInc.'

In 2003 the Curious George Brigade (CGB), a 'manifestation of the CrimethInc. underground,' published *Anarchy in the Age of Dinosaurs* with a CrimethInc. logo on its spine. This book has since all but disappeared from the internet, and the email addresses I ordered my first copy from are today inactive. It's strange and I don't know what

happened. However, it is quite possible that the collective simply dissolved and is now working elsewhere under a new alias. Evidence of this lies in their response to a question of membership in the Curious George Brigade, posted on a message board:

cgb is an affinity group. We would suggest starting your own group. Our book has tons of examples of folks doing just that. There is even a small piece on what makes effective affinity groups. best of luck.⁵⁷

Early versions of the website, viewable through researching the internet archive, refer to a “guest CrimethInc. writer.” When reading this book and comparing it to CrimethInc. texts available from the central website, it is easy to see that different people were involved in writing *Anarchy in the Age of Dinosaurs*. The book reads partly as a revision of some of the ideas from *Days of War, Nights of Love*, and partly as a project that aims to address some contemporary meta-questions debated within North American anarchist communities. Like other CrimethInc. works, it is a compilation of loosely related ideas poetically arranged into entertaining and accessible theory. Calling for a politic that transcends the ‘duty’ and ‘joy’ binary (in favour of ‘meaning’), the CGB promotes a non-sectarian, anti-dogmatic strain of anarchism: “Folk anarchy is a culture of theft that enables us to steal the best of every ideology.”⁵⁸ Advocating the total abandonment of mass politics, since they are doomed from the moment they conceive of a ‘mass,’ the CGB take it a step further and criticize ‘dinosaur’ politics that rely primarily on face-to-face confrontation with the state.⁵⁹ While they recognize the need for spectacular defiance, arguing that “courage is contagious,”⁶⁰ the collective points out the efficacy of invisibility, which facilitates the behind-the-scenes construction of alternatives. In the chapter dedicated to this question, entitled “Infrastructure for the Hell of It!,” the CGB writes:

What we are working for is a *counter-structure* that will allow us to live not only outside of, but against, the current infrastructure... anarchist counter-structure's real strength lies in its ability to inspire others to replicate and expand itself... infrastructure begets infrastructure... more "important things" are impossible without a viable anarchist infrastructure... the more explicitly anarchist infrastructure we have, the more time, energy, and resources there are to wage a serious resistance.⁶¹

The Curious George Brigade clearly demonstrates a commitment to the construction of 'outside and against' alternatives to the statist and capitalist models of hegemonic change. This idea is advocated by some writers in the postanarchist tradition⁶² that see the necessity for resource-gathering and sustainable community-building in concert with a heroic propaganda. I believe the idea is valid, and moves beyond the shortsightedness of some CrimethInc.-inspired anarchists that base strategies entirely on a parasitic relationship to capitalism or the state. Parasitism is in many ways a smart adaptation to one's environment, but can also lead to an investment in the system that the social agent is supposedly trying to destroy. This dependency is potentially inhibiting. Similarly, the mindset that identifies as 'criminal' is validated only by the existence of law; this is why I would argue that the crimethink meme is intended less for criminals than it is for outlaws.

Too many people are drawn in by seductive propaganda, and then find nowhere to go (so they become bankers). A strategy reliant solely on propaganda can only reproduce more propaganda, never more than the carrot-on-stick routine that lies at the heart of all bad faith advertising. Bearing this in mind, it is precisely the present moment as part of an upsurge in anarchist ideas in North America in which we must work particularly hard to establish a viable anarchist infrastructure. We need more anarchistic education, healthcare, community self-defense (that goes beyond just street tactics), reclaimed living spaces (whether that means you squat something or buy a property), food production, and

so on. It is this realm that is, in the present context, sorely lacking and relatively neglected, compared to surprisingly successful propaganda efforts. Such an infrastructure enables solidarity between communities. Some possible reference points for one's own community include questions such as:

- Do we have space secured?
- Are we networked, at least regionally?
- Do we have tactical training?
- Do we have strong bonds so as to be able to mobilize quickly in emergencies?
- Do we *love* and *trust* each other? It is joyous to act together?
- Do we risk together on a regular basis, and dare others to do the same?
- Does our community hold a good balance of openness and security culture?
- Is an anti-oppression perspective consistent throughout our organizing efforts?
- Have we secured communications technology?
- Do we have resources and logistics secured for supporting victims of repression?
- Is our resistance still *dangerous* in character?
- Do we continue to *defy* even as we build?
- Do we still dance together?

This approach to solidarity is based on the affinity model: build up your own first, and then *swarm*. Investing at least as much energy into anarchist infrastructure, economies and social structures as that which is currently invested into detournement of the spectacle will lead to the co-emergence of entirely new possibilities supported by sustainable communities. The day we stop dreaming is the day we die.

The good news is, the only time is now and it's the most important moment that ever has or ever will exist. Which reminds me, I've got to get back...

Endnotes

¹ CrimethInc. Ex-Workers Collective. 2004. *Recipes for Disaster: An Anarchist Cookbook*. CrimethInc.

² Interestingly, the word captivate which in current usage means "To hold interest," has an alternative meaning declared obsolete: "to capture."

³ Oft-repeated Situationist slogan.

⁴ Website for *Recipes for Disaster: An Anarchist Cookbook*, <http://www.crimethinc.com/a/cookbook/>

⁵ A film by SubMedia, <http://submedia.tv>

⁶ CrimethInc. Ex-Worker's Collective. 2000. *Days of War Nights of Love: CrimethInc. for Beginners*. CrimethInc. 111-114

⁷ Only available through the internet archive at:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20030909044114/www.ageofdinosuars.com/about.html>

⁸ Curious George Brigade. 2003. *Anarchy in the Age of Dinosaurs*. 85

⁹ The CrimethInc network predates Seattle, but like most of what happened in Seattle, the myths took on a life of their own.

¹⁰ Along with D.C. in 2000 and Quebec City in 2001.

¹¹ I think this term better explains the phenomenon, avoiding both the misleading connotations of 'antiglobalization' and the false premise of it being a coherent 'movement.'

¹² One anti-authoritarian group organizing for major mobilizations during the Democratic National Convention in 2008 has taken on the name *Recreate 68*.

¹³ Rene Vienet. 1993. *Enrages and Situationists in the Occupation Movement: Paris, May, 1968*. New York: Autonomedia.

¹⁴ Raoul Vaneigem. 1999. *A Cavalier History of Surrealism*. Oakland: AK Press. 123

¹⁵ Ibid 8

¹⁶ Ibid 108

¹⁷ There was fierce internal debate among Surrealists about the relationship to Bolshevism, and soon afterwards the rise of Stalin would tear the group to pieces, given the so-called innocent investment in the Russian Revolution.

¹⁸ A Nietzschean critique of oppositional (as opposed to creative) identities; for further reading, see *Beyond Good and Evil* by Friedrich Nietzsche.

¹⁹ *Cavalier History of Surrealism*, 29

²⁰ Ibid 121

²¹ Vaneigem quotes Saint-Just on page 245: "To tell the truth, the only reason anyone fights is for what they love. Fighting for everyone else is only the consequence."

²² Originally published in 1967 as *Traité de Savoir-Vivre à L'Usage des Jeunes Generations*.

²³ Raoul Vaneigem. 2001. *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. Rebel Press. 188

²⁴ Ibid 269-270

²⁵ Ibid 273

²⁶ For Bakunin's critique of Marx and Marxism, see his *Statism and Anarchy*.

²⁷ For an elaboration of this idea, see Richard Day's *Gramsci is Dead*.

²⁸ Originally published in *Inside Front*, available at <http://www.crimethinc.com/texts/atoz/situationists.php>

²⁹ <http://www.crimethinc.com/texts/selected/purged.php>

³⁰ Interestingly, CrimethInc. writes at length about the power of prophecy in *Recipes for Disaster*, a tactic they call "Spell Casting" (page 501).

³¹ *Days of War, Nights of Love* 9

³² *Recipes for Disaster* 11

³³ The black bloc is not a group but a tactic, usually employed by self-identified anarchists at street demonstrations. Affinity groups (small cells of close and trusted friends) dress all in black and form into a bloc in order to enable large-scale anonymity. Often, illegal direct actions are undertaken (such as property

destruction and graffiti) as well as clashes with police. The idea is to protect individual actors from arrest and other police reprisal by making it difficult to tell who did what.

³⁴ *Breaking the Spell* (1999), CrimethInc Guerilla Film Series, Volume One.

³⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Propaganda_of_the_deed

³⁶ <http://www.crimethinc.com/blog/2007/12/15/crimethinc-groups-endorse-rnc-strategy/>

³⁷ <http://www.crimethinc.com/blog/2006/11/30/seattle-seven-years-later/>, 2.

³⁸ http://www.rand.org/about/clients_grantors.html

³⁹ As I write this in December 2007, the third major book has just been released and is in the mail. I have to get this paper in before I read it or I'll never write it.

⁴⁰ N30 60

⁴¹ "Anarchist linked to local property crimes," *KXLY News* August 24th, 2007.

http://www.kxly.com/news/?sect_rank=1§ion_id=559&story_id=13801

⁴² I've never heard of reporters being physically attacked; only of property damage inflicted on their equipment, vehicles, etc.

⁴³ *Recipes for Disaster* 129

⁴⁴ See above for a longer discussion on the question of accessibility.

⁴⁵ N30 61

⁴⁶ Chuck Munson, "Seattle's WTO Protests, Five Years Later" in *CounterPunch*.

⁴⁷ i.e. disrupting or shutting down the meeting, achieving representation in mass media, or boosting morale.

⁴⁸ "Seattle's WTO Protests, Five Years Later"

⁴⁹ Richard Day, "Setting Up Shop in Nullity: Protest Aesthetics and the New 'Situationism,'" in *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 29:239-260, 2007; 254.

⁵⁰ *Days of War, Nights of Love* 9

⁵¹ From the booklet accompanying the CrimethInc. Guerilla Film Series, Volume 1.

⁵² *Recipes for Disaster* 12

⁵³ There is a workplace-focused website that shares many stylistic and political tendencies with CrimethInc. literature, at <http://www.prole.info>

⁵⁴ An exception to this is the chapter on squatting. However, openly squatting large buildings in 2007 in North America is simply not feasible for 99% of all cases. I have never engaged in a public squat before, but others who do have experience with this action confirm this unfortunate reality.

⁵⁵ Infoshop discussion on a published chapter of the book, obtained from the internet archive:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20031207060348/www.infoshop.org/inews/stories.php?story=03/09/06/9662148>

⁵⁶ CrimethInc. Worker's Collective. "CrimethInc Worker Bulletins 47 & 74" (no date). Olympia:

CrimethInc.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ *Anarchy in the Age of Dinosaurs* 132

⁵⁹ Ibid 7

⁶⁰ Ibid 73

⁶¹ Ibid 78-83

⁶² Writers on this topic include *DesertEgo* and Richard J.F. Day.