

GAY SHAME

is there room for direct action divas?

In our current moment of political struggle in San Francisco—and probably everywhere—our interventions are not simply being ignored as they once were. Our deviant reads are being co-opted, turned inside out and used against us. Left critiques become justification for ravenous profiteering with a rainbow CIA escort. Struggles against police violence are used to justify why the cops need tasers AND guns, demands for public space turn sidewalks into “public” land (for customers only) and the battle for housing is flipped into building more luxury condos. The violence of assimilation is everywhere.

Former San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown might be one of the original masterminds behind this tactic. He “revitalized” the Fillmore’s Black jazz culture by emptying out the neighborhood of Black people and filling it up with roped-off live piano entertainment. Years later, Supervisor Jane Kim (along with her BFF Twiffer) pronounced a commitment to the ARTS! (and by commitment she meant the liquidation of the mid-Market district, one of the last holdouts of Black public culture in SF). This new “arts district” evicts artists to make it safer for Twitter employees to rush past the Black Lives Matter mural to their Uber; in UN Plaza where Food Not Bombs (free food) was once served, “Off the Grid” food trucks coral—complete with armed security guards. The City turned a dead-end street in the Mission where houseless people could sleep into a #PublicPark, which legally closes at 10pm, criminalizing those who are there overnight. We protested the Google Buses that shuttle hordes of precious unsullied pristine 20-somethings to their jobs in Silicon Valley—yet instead of stopping the further privatization of public transit, our actions resulted in the legalization of the Google Bus. What will be the future of direct action if the nightmare and the dream are now lived as one?

This is where radically queer creativity comes in. Just as urban planner\$, corporate consultants, programmers, Burning Men, and our boys-in-blue learn from earlier dissident histories in SF, we as direct action divas must take account of the ideas and tactics that work against our desire for another world. This requires doing everything we can to resist what often feels like an inevitable cooption.

More than ever we have to keep our actions unpredictably disruptive. Dance parties are thrown with posters reading “THIS IS QUEER SAFE SPACE,” while the police designate “hate-free zones,” mimicking our strategies in order to dispose of our trans/queer bodies. Militancy must remain different from militarism and there has to be more than death or inclusion. GAY SHAME’s direct action intervention strives towards shattering norm-bore into a disorienting clusterfuck of radical possibilities. We don’t sell shit. We don’t endorse people. We don’t have funders. We don’t permit our marches, but we do try to have free snacks and foreground accessibility. We don’t have all the answers, but we have plenty of questions. We have continued to agitate, instigate and build cultures of direct action in San Francisco for the last 15 years and we are still here.

DIRECT ACTION

utilizes hands-on intervention to directly challenge hierarchies. By using spectacle to expose hypocrisies, direct action terrorizes status quo and revives public space. In the process, it builds a delicious and defiant culture of resistance. Direct action encourages people to push the boundaries of acceptable behavior in order to create new possibilities for organizing, self-determination and activism.

WHY NON-HIERARCHICAL ORGANIZING?

In the US we are encouraged to think that voting is a participatory act of “democratic” choice, when in reality it means that a majority controls the agenda. Non-hierarchical organizing means that everyone participates in the process. Though there may be other models for non-hierarchical organizing, we have found consensus to be the most effective.

CONSENSUS

Consensus means everyone comes to agreement before any decision can be made. In order for meetings to run as smoothly as possible, at the beginning of each meeting, organizers volunteer to facilitate. The facilitator compiles a list of agenda items at the start of the meeting, keeps track of who wants to speak, calls on speakers, makes sure speakers stay on topic and keeps the agenda moving. After a proposal for action and a discussion of this proposal, the facilitator calls for consensus when a decision seems imminent; this involves asking who is in favor, who has objections and who abstains. If there are any objections, the group formulates alternative proposals until consensus can be reached. Some groups have a formal process for tallying abstentions in order to decide if a proposal should be revisited. In the case of GAY SHAME we have found that consensus occurs remarkably easily, since we have worked through our common politics and we discuss issues extensively prior to calling for consensus. We only use the more formal consensus process in the case of extreme disagreement.

If someone believes that a decision close to consensus is contradictory to the goals of the action group, that person abstains. Consensus. Of course, consensus decisions may always be revisited in the future. We usually throw all flower power and SSRIs here at GAY SHAME.

There are many different effective models for creating consensus—feel free to share your strategies with us.

WORKING IT OUT

if you know people who share common goals, politics and strategies then contact them to arrange a time/place to meet and brainstorm

ideas for a call to plan an action. If you don’t know anyone else who shares your politics, skip to step 2.

Make a call to plan an action, including a purpose/target for the action. For example, GAY SHAME started to challenge the radical capitalist monster that is corporate pride).

Create a regular, free, public, accessible meeting time and space in order to create new possibilities for organizing, self-determination and activism.

IN-SECURITY

Always assume that all meetings are being surveilled by law enforcement and concerned citizens and plan separate spaces for organizing covert aspects of actions. There’s no reason to enforce the clique-ish informational boundaries between inside and outside because the state is always already doing it for you. Putting phones in the freezer or on silent is a sure way of not getting to keep you safe when there is a cop in the room. Insecurity culture creates an inflated sense of grandiosity. Yes, the police infiltrate our movements but the real threat to our existence is the persistence in the face of the 666 Leviathan.

SARCASM

It’s important to not sacrifice the life and lives of your group to the expediency of an opportunistic stunt. Consensus should not be overturned just because one person is really pushy.

NON-LUXURY

People are often confused by the name “GAY SHAME.” The more we state our intentions, the more we realize it’s working. People think that sarcasm is for people who are too scared to speak up to power. But Bayard doesn’t know how bad it is now. No matter how outrageous our messaging for our actions is, it pales in comparison to the genocidal realities that we’re up against. Activists who are always about 8,000 steps behind one bad thing that actually is. We don’t feel it’s worth starting a conversation with Power™. We don’t want to work with a shitty system that is already stacked against us. We complain. After all, our purpose is to not propose policy; we find community through expressing resistance. ALL ARE WELCOME.

RUNRAISING IS

True, the world is run on money and that does not exclude your direct action, but it is important to figure out ways to avoid spending money in order to further your critique of capitalism. Many people have boring day jobs and have very little access to financial resources, such as: paint, paper, markers, copies, food, etc. Borrowing, stealing and sharing can build

relationships that grant writing, silent auctions and walk-a-thons never can. As a last resort, if you must shell out money then try to figure out ways to best distribute the costs.

SHOULD YOU APPROACH THE MEDIA?

The mainstream media will probably not be on your side, especially when you’re doing something that actually challenges the existing power structure that controls mainstream media outlets. Always remember that the mainstream media consists of corporate entities and ghoulis all vying for a chance to exploit you into your own media at all, and if so, how to ensure that your message gets across, if at all possible. Also, discuss alternative media such as “progressive” newspapers, pirate radio, independent film, zines, television, indymedia or any other options that may or may not be where the capitalist media is. Of course, you can also make your own media (take this zine, for example).

SHOULD YOU INTERFERE WITH LEGAL OFFICIALS?

Don’t ever hand an elected official the mic. Politicians are for blackballing not inspiring our communities. Their job is always to bring you into the use of equal opportunity by extracting your labor and crediting themselves for it to further their careers. They are probably why you had to resort to direct action in the first place.

PLANNING THE ACTION

Start with an issue/target/theme, develop appropriate tactics to make action as effective as possible. Of course, each of these tactics requires advanced planning and a clearly understood logistical structure (see list of suggested roles below). Different types of actions may include propaganda distribution, redecoration and public demonstration. Tactics include the following:

WHEATPASTING The act of gluing over public spaces such as street poles, abandoned buildings, etc. This is useful for getting the word out about demonstrations as well as creating a message of political critique. This could also be used as a tool for organizing mass demonstrations where hordes of liberals can serve as users of the wheatpaste. The recipe for wheatpaste is 2 cups of water, 1 cup of white glue, 1 cup of sugar. Stir on low heat until it takes on the texture of glue. When ready to use, spread the wheatpaste, take into account how well the wheatpaste will adhere to the surface, visibility and traffic around the location to get more viewers

passing by, and the risk of having the posters quickly cleaned up by public cleaning departments.

YSTENCILING The act of spray painting messages through hand-made cutouts made of cardboard, folder-paper or plastic. This is useful for longer term messages in public spaces such as sidewalks, abandoned buildings, trashcans, etc.

RE, redecoration in general, be advised that urban planners are continually devising new attempts to eradicate street culture. These are merely two tactics; future resistance will need to be constant innovation and new ideas to spread dissent.

TAKING THE STREETS This is a confrontational, fun and participatory way to take space and gather attention. Processions are useful for drawing people’s attention to the spectacle, and usually work best when there are large numbers of participants. Emphasis on number means that participants are crucial to make sure that your street-taking is as accessible to the largest variety of mobility needs (bans that are able-bodied, experience, etc.). This means a key component of dissent must involve questions around how accessibility can be collaborative. Whenever possible, avoid taking the streets and not the side streets in order to avoid being outed and aggravate as much as possible.

BLOCKING TRAFFIC/PREVENTING ENTRANCE INTO BUILDINGS We can block the flow of traffic (human and vehicle) increases the disruptive potential of an action and can be a dreary commute so much more effective. Of course, this requires advanced planning and a clearly understood logistical structure (see list of suggested roles below).

NOISE I Pump up the volume! Noise amplifies the mood and tone of a protest. Some tools for noise may include but are not limited to: whistles, air horns, hand-made drums, screaming, loud comments or whatever you have at your disposal.

PROPERTY REDEcoration This is usually works best when you use property store fronts, billboards, police cars and other capitalist enterprises by cover of night. This can be done from the confines of selected windows or frames of view to create transparency and free speech. Use your imagination!

BUILDING OR OFFICE TAKE-OVER This involves occupying a hostile work environment in order to disrupt business as usual. This take-over requires an outside action/meditation plan that is open to the spectacle. Building take-over or squatting involves a prolonged stay in an undesignated space in order to take the space an aggressive resource for community building activities, such as sex, gardening, cooking, art, folkloping, shitting, sleeping, etc. (inspired from parents or other abusers).

HARASSING PUBLIC FIGURES Is something we would never do. Just kidding—this is a tactic to sue, intimidate and impact the people in power. Try your local public defender for updating your bridal registry.

GETTING ARRESTED TO MAKE A POLITICAL POINT This must be planned well in advance, with all support roles listed below.

After the discussion of tactics is completed, it is time to make some gorgeous propaganda.

CREATING PROPAGANDA

When we say propaganda, we mean written materials that clearly represent the group’s consensus agenda. Propaganda distribution can be its own action, as with wheatpasting. It can also be used to address a particular issue. Propaganda is useful for getting people to a public demonstration or disseminating information. Propaganda may include:

ZINES Put as much information as you have on a zine as interesting and concise and glamorous way as possible.

TZINES Derived from “magazine,” these are a form of handmade self-publishing and are often photocopied. They can be printed, painted, handwritten, etc. and may involve mixed media. This is not a zine!

STICKERS Fun to hand out at demos or stick them in places where the capitalist or stenciling are not viable options.

PATCHES People love free art.

WEBSITE Great for disseminating information, but never rely on it.

PRESS RELEASE To get those horrible media monsters to cover your brilliant, courageous action or intervention. A press release should be prepared in advance and ready to send out before deadline (call each outlet for specifics) and always include phone number for the designated media liaison.

STRATEGIES

Start planning as far ahead as possible. Discuss how best to confront the planned action, target the desired outcome to make the action as direct as possible. Create a plan of action, including: meeting place/destination, route to take, time and date, timing specifics and plans for alternate options. It is important to visualize the action in your mind ahead of time (take note of traffic, pedestrians, visibility, police presence, etc.). The latest greatest Harry Potter pajama party, the most elaborate and effective, communicate the plan and objectives of the action to the crowd. Figure out what to do in case of an emergency. Do not get too far apart from the plan or unnecessarily endanger other protesters or bystanders. Have a backup strategy multiple times, devising pre-scouted alternate plans in case the original plan is not working or dangerous to pull off.

After initial difficulties with the law, GAY SHAME decided to plan each action in the most direct scenario possible in case of the likely event that the cops get violent. Therefore, we produced a list of the nature of the action, we may include the following roles:

MARSHALS are the front line between the crowd and the police—

sometimes we arrange for front, back and side marshals. By marshals we do not mean “peace police” but people make sure nobody left behind and keeping an eye on the police. Marshals are not necessarily jobs in direct actions and there are so many ways one can do it. We use the word “marshals” as a description to come, this is just one model. Marshals can be arranged in groups, we’ve too often ended up outside/in inside 650 Bryant at midnight. Marshals are there to make sure that people what to do. Front marshals are the surest, they are the most and moves slowly enough that there are no gaps and that people do not get lost. Marshals can be arranged by traffic, stoplights, cops, vigilantes, etc. Back marshals are there to make the crowd keeps moving and that nobody gets left behind. Side marshals stand between the crowd and the cops, make sure no one gets singled out for arrest or police violence and facilitate route maneuvering. Marshals are the first people to take the street and encourage the crowd to join in. They facilitate the flow of the crowd along the planned route. Sometimes the electricity of “action day” inspires people to try nonconformist, but the crowd is the most effective of the action and the crowd is the most effective. The original plan becomes too risky to execute. It is good to have a reliable system of communication in order to decide when to use one of the pre-planned strategies. For example, if the police are blocking your route and arrests are not part of your strategy.

POLICE NEGOTIATORS talk to the cops in charge in order to make sure they stay calm. Designated police negotiators communicate with the cops. They don’t get out of wavy of sudden shifts in the action. Police negotiators never leave the front plan of the action. They try to make the cops comfortable enough to negotiate progress. Tactics may include pretending to be law-abiding, or claiming not to know who the cops are, or saying “I don’t know who’s in charge, but let me know who is.”

LAWYERS can help you break the law. Before your action, it is good to find an attorney who is ready and willing to represent you in case of arrest. Make sure to distribute a legal contact number to everyone at the action—this could be a lawyer or a legal support team. It is a good idea to hand out permanent numbers so that everyone can write the legal number on their bodies. Legal support can be useful in a scuffle or confiscated after detention or arrest. Lawyers often know how harsh police can act and may be punished, and can offer advice as to how to handle the situation. They speak as if you have no real intention of getting involved in the action. They are likely to be under surveillance.

LEGAL OBSERVERS stand outside the action to document what the police are behaving. Designated legal observers wear an item of clothing that indicates their status—police are not supposed to arrest or detain anyone without a warrant. Legal observers should preferably be lawyers or those who’ve been through legal observation. Legal observers communicate directly with the media. This person volunteers to come along and makes sure to familiarize them with the action, the group’s issues and message of the group, and agrees to talk primarily along the lines of the group’s agenda. A good idea to think of catchy soundbites ahead of time. Legal observers probably all that will be reported. Media liaison directly approaches any identified individuals who are in the press packet if available. Since the media is not a good idea for them to get arrested. Other participants are approached to be interviewed by the media liaison.

FOOD SERVICE Everybody loves free food. In order to discreetly provide it. We like to serve vegan food. Arrange for people to help with a cooking plan, serving arrangement, and a way to keep track of the food during the action.

MEDICS provide first-aid in case of emergency, and generally wear red clothing. They should be trained in their duties.

SCOUTS generally dress relatively ahead on the route and look for unexpected changes and communicate this information to the marshals.

COMMUNICATION SPECIALISTS run from front to back and side to side of the demonstration in order to assess the situation and communicate with the group and the crowd. If possible, it is good to designate one communication specialist to deliver messages and information between marshals and one to communicate messages from marshals to the crowd. Communication specialists should always attempt to avoid arrest and wear comfortable shoes.

DOCUMENTATION SPECIALISTS make sure that everyone is being watched so that everyone stays safe. They are also responsible for a good idea to have several video cameras, still cameras and other equipment. They are also responsible to document the action for public relations. The media is not going to do it for us. It is always a good idea to make our own media and to make sure it is widely distributed from history.

WHO’S THE BOSS?

EVERYONE/NO ONE. Direct action can often become hierarchical. Sometimes the group of activists who have planned the action ahead of time and are familiar with the goals, tactics and strategy. Therefore, at the action it is important to remain conscious of things that are important in the participatory environment and break down the hierarchy between organizers and participants. In spite of much work around this issue, we have not found a way to avoid this divide—we would love to hear your ideas.

Always make sure to talk to everyone at the action. Make sure that people are aware of the goals and strategies of the action. Distribute information in a way that is able and engage people in conversation about the issues. Move through the crowd in a way that would like to wield a theatrical accessory, sign or prop. Share tasks whenever possible and make new friends.

MAKING PROPS

Permitted marches are ineffective. Black Blocs are boring. Speak-outs are tedious. Make your action props. It’s a powerful, ridiculous and fierce by developing themes that engage the issue in the most direct manner possible. The group decides upon a strategy, then it is time to develop visual aids to emphasize the intended message of the action. These may include:

VSIGNS should be clear, clever and concise.

BANNERS are good for blocking traffic and hanging off buildings.

VEFFIGIES are replicas of people made from flammable materials that are set on fire to make a statement against the person in question.

COSTUMES: dump out grandma’s wardrobe, we’re going to church, Mary!

VART OBJECTS: These are not just for the museum, darling. Always bring assorted theatrical toys to illustrate the theme and devastate the scene.

KEEP TRACK of banners, props, etc. for retrieval after action. We always forget this part and have to procure our props and banners better to save them for use in the future, unless this involves risk of arrest.

EMOTION Marginalized people (including many of us) are often involved in the most pivotal and radical actions. It’s also a fact that police are inclined to pick us out of the crowd at protests for our radicalism and level of risk present for different people at the action. This is especially true for people who are often in the position of (or wielding some kind of) greater privilege or capacity than those with and around you, by all means be fully present, engaged, excited, and emboldened by what’s going on around you—and also take in the difference in the levels of risk present for different people at the action. This is especially true for people who are often in the position of (or wielding some kind of) greater privilege or capacity than those with and around you, by all means be fully present, engaged, excited, and emboldened by what’s going on around you—and also take in the difference in the levels of risk present for different people at the action. 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GAYSHAME

A VIRUS IN THE SYSTEM

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