



Locking on against climate change. Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam

Disobedient Bodies

“With our bodies, with what we are, we came to defend the rights of millions – dignity and justice – even with our lives. In the face of the total control of the world which the owners of money are exercising, we have only our bodies for protesting and rebelling against injustice.”
– Italian priest Don Vitaliano, participating in a *Tute Bianche* action.

To engage in direct action means literally embodying our feelings – performing our politics with our whole body. Placing ourselves directly in the cogs of the mega-machine transforms the body into both weapon and statement of resistance – whether it’s to delay a bulldozer that’s destroying woodland or to enter a corporate HQ. Here are just three techniques, all of which are best done by affinity groups.

Locking on

Locking on is the technique of attaching your body to something so that it’s difficult for anyone to remove you. Locking on has been used for delaying evictions, saving ecosystems, preventing delegates from attending summits, and much more. Since time equals money, every minute it takes them to remove you hits them where it hurts – in their pockets. Always remember to go to the toilet – or wear a nappy – before you lock-on to anything!

One of the best tools for locking on are bicycle D-locks or U-locks. They fit neatly around your neck and can attach you to pieces of machinery, gates, etc. Work in pairs when locking on. One person locks themselves down and their buddy keeps the key, and stays nearby to provide food, extra blankets, and other support

to the person locked down. If locking on to a machine, someone **MUST** let the driver know that operating it will break someone's neck. You should also be prepared for the lock to be cut off – a pair of safety goggles and ear plugs are essential for this.

Padding up

Developed by the Italian *Tute Bianche* movement as a nonviolent but confrontational tactic, padding up is a method of self defence. Turning the detritus of consumer society – cardboard, old mattresses, inner tubes – into body armour transforms you into a hilarious hybrid of Michelin-man/woman, clown, and gladiator, but most importantly it protects you from police who, you mustn't forget, have been trained to hurt you.

The basic idea is to protect your most exposed and vulnerable parts: your head, neck, and face, lower back, ribs, groin, abdomen, and all of your joints.

The best materials are foam (which can be found in old sofas), cardboard, and bubble wrap. Cut the materials to fit parts of your body, and layer them. Ideally cardboard goes on the outside, as it will disperse the pressure from a blow. Use duct/gaffer tape to attach the pieces to yourself. You might want to run, or rapidly remove the armour at some point, so don't wrap yourself up too tightly. Protective head gear is essential, and unfortunately is the only thing you can't really make yourself. There are several options: motorcycle or bicycle helmets, hard hats, or military helmets. And don't forget a gas mask (for tear gas) and ear plugs (for concussion grenades).

Shields

Watching a phalanx of padded-up *Tute Bianche* attempt to nonviolently push through a police line, using their 'tortoise' formation of shields, evokes Roman army scenes from Hollywood epics – with the

addition of jovial singing and coloured balloons. Not only is it great theatre, it also makes for a whole new way of looking at street actions. When a whole group with shields works together, they create the ultimate in mobile barricades. The shield becomes not only a way to defend our bodies, but a way to demand and claim our rights to move freely.

Shields can be made of anything – trash can lids, tarp, foam, plywood, cardboard. The material choice depends on many factors: speed of construction, concealment from police or border guards, type of action, number of users. The most high-tech ones are made of tall sheets of clear Plexiglas on wheels; lower-tech shields can be made from large rubber inner tubes, which are fun and bouncy – and make the police look like they are busting up a beach party.

All of these techniques are incredibly effective, and to do them safely, require further research and planning. Police responses vary from bemusement and befuddlement to attack and outright torture, so having a solid support group is really crucial. Have fun, and remember the proverb, "If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito."

Resources:

- » **Download BODYHAMMER, a full-colour booklet with tactical info and great tips on making gear for cheap:** www.devo.com/sarin/shieldbook.pdf
- » **Thorough UK site with good links and a broad spectrum of information:** www.wombles.org.uk
- » **Supply lists and where to get gear from New York Ya Basta:** www.free.freespeech.org/yabasta/protection.html
- » **For more on locking-on:** www.eco-action.org/rr/index.html