

“Share the ad with your neighbour and tell us what you see.”

Professor Guetter gave Chuck his one-browed *You're late!*, but refused to let go of a good roll.

“This isn't a trap. Just verbalize what you see. What kind of object is it? An alarm clock, right. See how easy this is? Very quotidian. What assumptions are made by this clock? No, Todd, not 'Time exists.' Simple assumptions.... What two main functions does the clock perform? Forget about its soup-can radio. Tells the time, yes. Wakes people up, there we are. What kind of people does it wake up? We've got—Sarah—exactly: 'His' and 'Hers' alarms. Not 'Alarm 1' and 'Alarm 2,' 'His' and 'Hers.' According to this monkey-shit brown alarm clock, beds are shared by a man and a woman, not by a man and a man, not by a woman and a woman. His and hers. This is power. True power is invisible. Invisibility is the power of power. Ten days from now, when the RCMP get a'clubbing in Quebec City, that's only the tip of the iceberg. My pay stub's a better manifestation of power. I look at my pay stub, and I see that I'm *paying* the RCMP to beat me. See you next week.”

“Affinity Groups. Spokes Councils. Art and Resistance. That should be enough for tonight.”

Chuck looked around the common room, relieved that dread locks and unravelling second-hand clothes weren't absolutely mandatory. Deodorant and razor blades obviously didn't see much of the protestor set, but, physically at least, he might just pass. (Mental note: more hemp jewellery). Surprised to have come, and surprised not to be kicked out, Chuck concentrated on not blowing these Audible Capital Letters.

“Kir, you want to start us off with Affinity Groups.”

“Yeah, but won’t that take me right into Spokes Councils? Do you want to come in at the end of that Dave? Great. Let’s start with The Grid.”

Hairy people without shoes began laying masking tape onto the blue carpet to form abrupt, angular letters.

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|------------|-------------|
| V | V |
| OK | N OK |
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| OK | N OK |

“The people you like to go for beers with are not the same people you should go into Confrontation with in Quebec. You must be part of a unit to be strong, and these units will break apart if the members don’t share the same attitudes about Direct Action. Let’s all step over to The Grid and run through a couple of Scenarios.”

This isn’t so bad, Twister for revolutionaries.

“In my top—which is it again?—left, we have ‘Violent But I’m OK With It.’ To its right is ‘Violent But I’m Not OK With It.’ Bottom left it’s ‘Non-Violent And I’m OK With it,’ then ‘Non-Violent, Not OK.’ ... Let’s say we’re walking down one of the march streets and someone shatters a McDonald’s window. Find your place on The Grid. Do you think breaking the window is violent or not, and is that OK with you?”

Chuck shuffled with the big group into Violent and OK. The remaining third filled out the Violent and Not OK square, leaving Kir free to strut between both bottom quadrants.

“So, why do you think it’s violent and what makes you OK with that?” Kir asked, pointing at someone far too close to Chuck.

Chuck panicked as he tried to think of a slogan, of anything. What did any of this mean? What’s Non-Violent and I’m Not OK With It? What is that?

Fortunately, his neighbour had a crowd-stopping answer. “They’re fucking McDonald’s.”

Laughter broke through the dense crowd. Shoulders, especially Chuck’s, jerked up and down.

Until now Chuck could stand in a kitchen (in his shoes) and let a pot boil over, accurately arguing “It wasn’t mine” if pressed and suffering no risk of contradiction as he never cooked for himself. If your girlfriend dumped you, hurling abuse at your friends as she left, Chuck wouldn’t wait an hour before asking what, exactly, she said about him. He had too many jeans and paid a laundromat to wash them. That knit-eyebrow look female classmates gave him went right on by, that determined effort to fuse his smug lips.

Toys, trips, clothes, computers—Chuck learned to counterfeit the word *need* when his dad Henry moved out of their house and into his cellphone. I need a tent and some stuff for Labour Day Weekend. For the moguls, it’s gotta be the new Salomons. A portable CD player with *better* memory. Not until the following September, when Chuck moved with what remained of his expensive things into a low-ceilinged, blue-carpeted student hovel, did he realize that he could think of almost no thing that was his father’s. Certainly not a house. The phones changed more often than the cars. Disposable coffee cups, natch. The camera was always someone else’s, here’s a twenty, send me a set of doubles. If Henry flew Chuck to meet him for a week of skiing, Henry had gear. Should Chuck happen to meet his dad in an apartment or a suite or at Karen’s or

Susan's, there'd be no skis, no hiking boots, no bike. Wait, his luggage. Henry definitely had luggage.

Despite his nervousness, Chuck was relieved his dad's phone still worked.

"Dad, I'm going to go—"

"—right, Chuck, listen. Put anything you need on the Am-Ex and I mean yesterday. Go get groceries, clothes, pester your dentist for a cancellation appointment. Take out only, don't risk a restaurant."

"Dad. I'm going to Quebec City on the 20th."

"You can't visit while—"

"—I'm not visiting. I'm protesting the Free Trade Area—"

"What about it?"

"Well, ... how other corporations can force us to accept chemicals or drugs we don't feel are safe."

"You're worried about safety, so you're going to the largest assembly of riot police in Canadian history? Slow down, Chuck, what's it going to solve if you get your skull cracked?"

"If we don't protest now, it will be too late."

"Says who? It's never too late to keep your head in one piece. Start smaller. Go to local protests. Write your MP. Don't dive in to the deep end."

"I'm going."

"That's not going to be easy on your mother."

"Da-ad, nice one."

"I need to defer my exam, so I can go to the FTAA protests in Quebec."

“Sit down Chuck, sit down.” Professor Guetter rolled his chair away from a desk and turned towards Chuck. Though thin, the tall, rectangular window let enough light past a few spindly plants to flood the floor beneath their feet. Only at this time of day, at this moment of Chuck’s stroll-by meeting, could this seem like an office of sunlight and not an office of books.

“We can do that, right? Defer the exam for Quebec?”

“You can do anything. That’s done. You go. We trust you’re there. You write when you get back. I’m surprised, though—“ Chuck saw every inch of Guetter’s slow stretch back in his chair “—pleasantly surprised that the administration went for our proposal. Let’s hope other ears are as attentive. So what takes you to Quebec?”

“Well, the whole thing, really.”

“The fence?”

“That’s crazy.”

“Democracy for the rich.”

“And, uh, now there are bylaws forbidding scarves around your face.”

“Oh, they’ve been quashed already.”

“Well, still.”

“Yeah. And hey, Chapter 13.”

“I know. I can’t believe that.”

“Issues as important as the legality and safety of industrial chemicals will be decided by closed council and not by government. Is this possible?”

“Where are the people?”

Only when Guetter leaned all the way forward in his chair did Chuck stop nodding his head. For a moment, Guetter just looked at him from a box of sunlight.

“Take that question with you Chuck. I doubt you could name a single FTAA proposal, and I don’t care. Chapter 13, Chapter 11, MMT, I shrug. You’ve never once *had* to write my exam, have you?”

Names and phone numbers had been written and rewritten on three-ring paper, and buses finally got chartered. Pooling together with another university three hours distant (Henry would approve), students could make the round trip for \$35.

Waiting for the ambitiously late bus, Chuck stood in one spot, then another as day turned to cool night. These—what? comrades?—looked more like Phish fans than social agitators. Surrounded by body piercing and expensive camping gear, Chuck hoped the police didn’t have magnets and saw the reach of other paying dads. Only one guy had a sign (share, just share), and it was an obvious pain to carry, hold or load.

Quickly enough, though, the bus had its own highway glow. A scraggle-bearded guy across from Chuck took bus money, scrunching bills into his crowded fist and scratching at a crumpled sheet of paper stretched across one thigh. He was a classmate who didn’t show, a frisbee guy, and suddenly he was playing accountant while rowing metal down the night to stop child labour and pesticide expansion and rule by the few. A chartered bus full of protestors—canned democracy laced with hockey team spirit. Chuck could see two people reading Talking Pig Orwell. A couple snuggled under a blanket. A woman in her fifties wore good walking shoes and passed around bags of dried fruit. A clipboard guy straight from the teacher’s college assembly line leaned over the back of Chuck’s seat to hand him a tube of silicone. “Plug any ports on your goggles and pass it on.”

In Non-Violent and Not OK, efficiency must clarify desire. Who lives without this mode?

Road signs were not needed to tell them they were approaching Quebec City. Police cars began to slow and tail the bus. They just made it to the college where they would sleep before it closed. A proudly irresponsible kid who looked like he wore his pyjamas all day long tried to whine his way past volunteer door monitors impatient with this, the third entrance card he had lost in two days.

Walking up to one of the second-floor classrooms cum bunkrooms assigned to their bus, Chuck noticed two things. Handbills were posted everywhere advertising recurrent workshops on **How To Speak To The MEDIA**. Climbing the metal stairs of a still escalator, he also thought of what an easy target they'd make. Shut off the escalator power from a locked cabinet somewhere else in the building, shut off speed and routine, and they were just sleepy kids with expensive knapsacks hiking single-file up a narrow metal staircase.

Sun and singing and drums. Tens of thousands of protestors flooded the train station and port. The people were so thick it took hours to move from one end of the compound to the street. Throughout this marching city, duct tape, binder twine and knapsack straps were bent and stretched to lash bongos, water cooler jugs and the occasional real drum around skinny chests. Ecstatic, corduroy dancers swarmed the drummers. Chants rose and fell, rippling over the tectonic plates of bodies. FTdoubleA, it ain't gonna stay. Avec nous, dans la rue. Avec nous. Shrill whistles zipped and pierced. The monotone voices of union leaders squeezed out of rented megaphones to rally troops in bulging denim and raise the lines of professionally printed signs. The talk and cry of forty, fifty, sixty-thousand people vibrated somewhere between a purr and a growl.

Capes, scarves, banners, pinwheels, the occasional skateboard—gear to defend, gear to amuse. In fear of gas, the pimply trenchcoat set preferred to go all the way back to WW I for the full elephant canister while others wore nothing more than a painter's dust mask or the highly vented ski goggles even Chuck knew to avoid. The hippies were out with their paunches and canes and white beards, strolling with death in the afternoon. Here, pre-police, collars were opened and sleeves were rolled up in the sun. The full revolutionaries had phone numbers (Legal Aid? an Un-Arrestable?) written down their scrawny forearms.