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DIARY OF A COMPOST TOILET QUEEN

Starhawk

JUNE 8 2005

'The problem is the solution' is a permaculture principle, but today the problem just seems like a problem. I was hoping to start out these updates for the Scotland G8 organizing with something upbeat and optimistic, but it hasn't been that kind of a day. Yesterday I was climbing a beautiful mountain above a clear, calm loch where misty blue mountains rolled away toward the horizon. Today I was sweeping pigeon shit off the floor of a warehouse in inner-city Glasgow. That was actually a good part of the day – it is just these little contrasts, after all, that keep life interesting. The frustrating part was coming back into cell phone range last night to all the messages telling us that the site for the rural convergence space had once again fallen through at the last minute. The farmer who had been very keen on the deal had backed out, unexpectedly, for mysterious reasons.

I was climbing that mountain to recover from the effort of teaching forty-odd students a ten-day crash course in permaculture and ecological design, aimed at creating a resource pool of knowledgeable people who could turn that rural convergence site into a model eco-village. For ten days we wallowed in compost toilets and greywater systems – okay, I'm being metaphorical here – we wallowed in discussion of these things, conceiving of ways in which problems might become solutions, waste be transformed to resources, physical structures support directly democratic social structures and people might be encouraged to wash their

hands. How many shits does it take to fill a 55 gallon drum, and what is that in liters? What could you do with it afterwards? How many liters of greywater would 5,000 people produce in a week, and where could it go if the clay soil doesn't drain? And just how did I become the Queen of Compost Toilets at this point in my life, anyway?

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Overall, I'm phenomenally impressed by the level of care and thought and preparation going into every aspect of the mobilization. Dissent!, the broad network of direct-action oriented groups, has been organizing up and down the land for over a year, and has managed to bring together a wide spectrum of groups. There are convergence spaces in Edinburgh and Glasgow that have been rented and will provide facilities for meetings, trainings, housing and feeding people. There are medics in training and kitchen collectives coming to cook and a two-week long training for trauma workers who will provide counselling and support for anyone suffering post-traumatic stress. A network of nonviolent direct action trainers has been offering trainings for over a year in several regions of England and Scotland. A group of Pagans, the Tribe of Brigid, is coming with a geodesic dome to offer spiritual healing during the actions. Watching this all come together, I feel confident that if we do some day run the world – or rather, facilitate the world's autonomous running of itself – we'll all be fed, housed, educated, and all our physical and emotional needs will be well looked after.

And meanwhile, there's the Cre8 Summat about to happen, an effort of a coalition of local groups here in Glasgow who are resisting the building of a motorway through a low-income community. The plan is to plant a garden, designed by the community, in a vacant lot in the motorway's path, and hold a week of activities, workshops, cultural presentations and celebrations that bring alive something of the world we keep saying is possible. Everyone involved is deeply committed to strengthening the local, long-term organizing around this issue and I'm very excited and honored to be involved – it's just the kind of organizing and strategy that I think can be effective, tying the local issues to the global, planting a garden in the path of the bulldozers, opposing power-over and destruction with creativity and life.

JUNE 10 2005

I feel like a bride jilted twice at the altar who gets a new proposal. We have a site for the rural convergence – maybe! Stirling Council, who to their credit do seem to really want to work with us, have found a big field next to the football stadium, in a bend of the River Forth. Because it is close to an old rubbish dump, they need to test it for methane emissions – so we won't know one hundred per cent for sure until next week sometime at the earliest, which is making us all nervous. However, aside from that it looks good, big enough, on the edge of town so we're looking at fields and a couple of picturesque ruins, with access to the river, and

with a faerie hawthorne in its midst. If we really get it, we can create a beautiful eco-village, and because it is slated for development, some of our problems around impact on the land will be much more easily solved.

Yesterday I worked on informational materials as an act of faith that we would eventually need them, then went down to the warehouse to sweep up more pigeon-shit with the masked anarchists – dust-masked, that is. It's really sweet to see how hard everyone is working just to get the space clean enough to use without being a health hazard...

JUNE 14 2005

Cre8 Summat has begun, the community garden built on land where a much-contested motorway is planned through the Gorbals, an historic, low income community in Glasgow. The actions are finally underway. And it went beautifully!

At first the beginning seemed inauspicious. Saturday night the van carrying the kitchen for the garden got stopped by the police south of Glasgow. The driver got into the back of the police car to answer some questions and was whisked off without a word, leaving the van with no one to drive it. Sunday morning, June 12, dawned grey and drizzling. I declined to be on the team that got up at 5am to put up tents, but made my way down around 9.30, wondering what I would find.

The tents were up, and a few people were venturing out into the rain to continue to pick up garbage. The police had come by, and simply wished everybody luck. A seating circle of old tires had been made in a central area – a continuation of an area the neighborhood drinkers had already pioneered informally. Plants had been delivered, and a truckload of soil. We spent some time wandering around, trying to decide what should go where, while Rob drew up a map. We had advertised a 10am time for a community design process, but no one showed up, which didn't actually surprise me. The organizers of the project deeply want to involve the community in the overall design, but my experience with such things has been that people get involved in actually doing things. An overall design seems very conceptual and overwhelming – building a raised bed or planting a flowerbed is fun and creative and that's how people feel a sense of agency and ownership. But around noon we all gathered, looked at the map and what was already on the ground, and came up with a plan that built on what was already there – paths that dog walkers had made, the seating circle, a small beginning of a community garden in a few bathtubs up front. These things were, in fact, the input of the community, writ upon the ground.

As the afternoon wore on, the sun came out, and more people joined in. The bike ride arrived at 2pm, with the JAM74 group who are organizing to stop the motorway scheduled to go through this vacant lot. A reporter from a local paper came out, and a local artist arrived to lead a mosaic workshop. Two young women built an herb spiral out of 'urbanite' – broken up concrete. We filled tires with gravel and planted a few with ornamentals. We made a small vegetable garden

in a big tub. A group of energetic men, joined by some of the neighborhood boys, attacked the high bank around the site with pickaxes and spades, and made a flat entranceway. Other neighbors came by to plant things or just to see what was going on.

The mood got brighter and brighter as the sun poked out of the clouds, then scurried back in periodically to let a few bursts of showers rain down. The garden grew! Abi from Talamh came by and showed me how to weave a living willow lattice arch – a skill I’ve been longing to acquire! And by the end of the day, the missing kitchen had arrived. The piece of barren, toxic, trashed ground we started with had been transformed into the beginnings of the community gathering place the organizers had dreamed of creating. After all their hard work, frustration, overwhelm, and fears, they had done it! And the best news – we got word that the motorway construction has been put back to at least 2007! That gives the community more time to organize, and more time we can be assured that our garden will remain. It’s a partial but important victory that contributes to the joyful mood as we continue to plant and beautify the waste ground.

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JUNE 20 2005

Friday, June 17 was the last formal day of work at the Cre8 Summat... All week long, activists and a steady stream of locals had been building the garden, collecting rubble and building new beds, filling tires with topsoil and planting hazels, berries, fruit trees. The atmosphere was relaxed and happy, the police unobtrusive. We even got some good press.

When anarchist organizing works, it’s a beautiful process to behold. Work and play blur, and everyone chips in and does what needs to be done without anyone giving orders or directions. The garden consistently had that feel. People were doing hard, sometimes unpleasant physical work: hauling rubble, digging out banks, picking up garbage – but all of it joyfully, with something of the feeling of kids building a clubhouse or digging a snow fort out of a bank. Addi, the slender, smiling woman from Ao Tearoa (New Zealand), who had been at our training, decided to build a labyrinth, and soon had devoted young men carting bricks. Jo, the magenta-haired videographer I was staying with, along with Flee and others built a Sensory Garden, with raised beds accessible by wheelchair devoted to Smell, Taste, Touch and Sight, with tripods hung with chimes for Hearing. I had offered to lead a cob session, but one day it rained, and the next day the clay was too wet. Finally, on my birthday we had two tons of topsoil delivered, which proved to be a perfect consistency for cob – which is a kind of adobe made of clay, sand and straw. We mixed up a batch by dancing on the clay until it defloculates – loses its molecular structure and becomes a kind of glue holding the sand particles together in a natural form of concrete. We added straw and rolled up big balls, or ‘cobs’ then punched and pummelled them into a bench on a base made of chunks of concrete.



Rob and Uri and Harry, some of the Earth Activist Training organizers and former students, joined in and we rolled up balls and discussed anarchist theory.

When we broke for dinner, a young Quebecois woman named Miriam asked me for advice. She'd painted a faerie on the mural at the front of the garden, and wanted it to say something. 'I want a faerie army,' she said, 'for the actions. Like the clown army.'

'Do you realize that, on this land, if you call for a faerie army you will get a real faerie army?' I asked her.

'Yes, that's what I want!'

'A faerie army - let's be a faerie army!' Others started taking up the cry, and suddenly I realized that a faerie army is, of course, exactly what I want to see marching up the road on July 6, bringing alive all the powers of the land and the raging earth to confront the power of the G8. On Miriam's mural, someone had painted, 'Beneath the concrete... the garden!' (A revision of an old Situationist slogan from the sixties: 'Beneath the concrete...the beach!') Miriam added: 'The faerie army rises, Hidden power of earth.'

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JUNE 23 2005

I spent most of today in Stirling talking to Council members about greywater and compost toilets. We're coming down the home stretch - tomorrow is the final

transformation of something hated, feared, and considered a disgusting waste into a valuable resource, a source of fertility? When does it get better than that?

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JUNE 29 2005

Yes, we have a rural convergence centre for the actions. Finally, after all the setbacks and last-minute disappointments. It's in a bend of the River Forth, with views of Stirling Castle, the Wallace Monument, and the Ochil Hills. We're camping onsite, setting up. I got there Monday, after a weekend of travel so insane I won't even describe it or you will be calling the trauma team to do an intervention. Monday was one of those horrible days when everything falls apart. Sunday night a visitor in some altered state of consciousness tried to swim in the treacherous river and nearly drowned. The Rescue Squad and police had to come out – fortunately, he was saved. Monday morning, the metal tracking for the road didn't come. The big tents, marquees in the language they speak over here, fell through due to storm damage at last weekend's festival in Glastonbury. So did the biodiesel generators, big water tanks, and compost toilet barrels. We lost about a third of the camping area to methane emissions from the former dump. Basically just about everything that could go wrong did. A whole lot of people were standing around eager to do jobs that couldn't be done. Nonetheless, people mostly remained civil to each other, and tried to solve the problems. Emma Magenta, a magical forester woman from the Highlands, came up with the idea of using scrap wood, the half-rounds and shaved-off pieces from milling, to lay a track. Other people with road and truck experience contributed ideas and everyone pitched in to carry wood and lay the track, about two hundred meters of it, lovingly and carefully placed, and eventually covered with chicken wire. It was exhausting carrying heavy batches of wood, but satisfying, and nice to do something that required no thought or analysis. We had a meeting, got organized, and Tuesday was much better. We now have two compost toilets almost built, plus the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency gave permission for pit toilets to one of the local activists, a man named Jim, who has great experience setting up these systems and excellent designs. We have chemical toilets required by the Council as well, giving us a true diversity of toilets. In a day or two, perhaps I can stop obsessing about toilets and start thinking about something else. As important as toilets are, there is more to life, I vaguely recall.

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JULY 2 2005

Our eco-village is a reality. Those lines that Beth drew on paper weeks ago are now a meandering roadway of boards and chicken wire. Those endless discussions about composting toilets have been translated into small structures complete with curtains and informative signs. The weeks of pondering greywater systems have

SHUT THEM DOWN!

led to two intense days of building them, one after another after another. I had a moment of realization yesterday – that normally in a two-week permaculture course we might build one demonstration greywater system – in the last few days we've done over a dozen!

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People are pouring in, tents are going up, some of them amazing structures like the double-hooped, canted I-don't-know-what-to-call-it that looks like a giant covered wagon hoop. Barrios are filling up, kitchens are setting up. Everyone has been working for days, like a happy beehive humming with activity. We've managed to overcome the chaotic moments of panic and a thousand disasters and now it seems that every project attracts the workers that it needs. I have a great crew of people putting in greywater systems and helping with the compost loos. Every morning we check in on the day's work, split into groups and go off and do it. Some skilled carpenters have helped build the structures for the loos, and some less skilled carpenters have gained more skill completing them. We have designed a greywater system to fit the needs and sites of each kitchen. ... We even provided the medics with a biofilter using straw inoculated weeks ago with mushroom mycelium that break down toxins. We've brewed up lactobacillus inoculant to help the compost toilets break down. I think I've found a local community garden – called an allotment over here – to take our kitchen scraps. I've personally tested the composting toilet, and found it very comfortable (although I realized at a crucial moment that it desperately needed screening from the back, which has now been provided).

There have been a thousand frustrating moments and a million irritations, but right now I'm just enjoying the satisfaction of seeing this all come together. There's a hundred times I've asked myself, 'Why do I put up with this?' The answer is the sheer beauty of seeing how this work happens when it happens well: everyone working together for the sheer joy of it, everyone looking for what contribution they can make, what job they can do. For every job, however gruelling or hard – carrying heavy boards or staffing the gate at 3am, there's a willing volunteer. There are people who hold more information and help figure out what to do – Elanor takes on the job of coordinating jobs, for example. If we need workers for something, we tell her. If someone wants to help out, they ask her. But there is no one issuing orders or telling people what to do, no coercion, no bosses. And so, where only a week ago we finally got permission to use the site, today we have a small city in progress that seems to spring magically into being.

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JULY 3 2005

Yesterday was the big march in Edinburgh. We grabbed a ride on the transport van from the convergence. It's an aspect of this mobilization that someone has thought about every possible support feature – even down to hiring minivans to

transport demonstrators. Mark, who has led climbs in the Himalayas, was our driver. 'How long will you be picking people up,' we asked. 'Until everyone gets home,' he replied. I was thinking about how bus driving is one of those unglamorous jobs that aren't high status in ordinary life, and how missing the action in order to drive other people to it is the kind of thing that a hierarchical society reserves for some lesser class – but here it's a job that has plenty of volunteers, because it needs to be done. And how we appreciate it!

Edinburgh was packed with people, and full of the energy of a city when a big demonstration is happening. The organizers of the Make Poverty History march asked everyone to dress in white, and most people did. Not the clowns, the faerie army or the anarchists of course, but the overall impression was a sea of white and those of us who had neglected to pack any white clothes stood out like little dark blots. Lisa, Juniper, Geneva and I cruised through the rally area, then ran directly into a small group of the local Pagans with whom we had a date to have a ritual later. Niall, Louise and Victoria were carrying a banner for the combined Dragon Network – a Pagan activist network in the British Isles – and Scotland Reclaiming. 'Now is the day, Now is the hour, Ours is the Magic, Ours is the Power!' it read.

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JULY 5 2005

Tonight the camp was all abuzz, people coming in, lots of people going out to avoid the possibility of all being blocked in tomorrow morning. It was full of the excited energy of masses of people preparing for action – once again another tactical nightmare, a few thousand of us up against fifteen thousand police. No one naïvely expects this to be easy – it may not even be possible, but we have to try. So the day is spent in meetings and trainings. The meetings are finally running more smoothly. We have a small collective of direct action trainers and facilitators who have taken on the task of making the meetings happen and finding good facilitators for them. They are also offering trainings and helping affinity groups get together. All over camp, circles of people are meeting, small affinity groups deciding their plans, bigger clumps of people working on action plans. The odds are against us but the energy is sweet.

Yesterday Juniper, Lisa and I went out to Faslane to support the blockade there. There's a longstanding campaign against the nuclear weapons that the British Government keeps in Scotland, the Trident missiles on submarines at the Faslane base. The peace camp at Faslane has been there for something like 25 years, and the annual blockade is something of a ritual, very nonviolent, well-organized and quite peaceful. We went to the south gate, alongside a beautiful sea loch, where a happy crowd was dancing in front of the locked gates. A small group of people were locked down on the road, lying down with their arms in big tubes. Inside, their hands are tied to carabiners clipped to a metal pin, so that the

police can't pull them apart. They would have to be carefully cut out of the tubes, taking much time and prolonging the blockade. But no police are trying to evict them: they've closed the base for the day, and people are dancing and celebrating. A group of women dressed in white kimonos, perhaps commemorating Hiroshima and Nagasaki, walk up and stand before the police. Clowns in army fatigues, part of the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, dust the shoes of the cops. We move on to the north gate, where a similar crowd is dancing and drumming.

But we can't stay, because we have responsibilities back at the camp. We're still putting in greywater systems and fixing ones that have gone wrong. The clay soil we're on is clay but no soil and does not drain at all. Every soakaway pit becomes a pond. Juniper, fortunately, is an engineer and hydrologist. Patrick, another engineer, offers to help. We manage to relocate some of the kitchen soakaways to places where they can be piped or drained away, but others need to be redug or enlarged. We've got a digger machine, basically a mini-bulldozer, for a second day, and one of the high points for me was taking a turn on it and learning to work the thing. I can see why every boy in the camp was following the machine and its driver around, begging for a turn. It's a real sense of power. We've got a couple of systems working well; others will become storage ponds and I call a friend to bring down duckweed to float in them! Even the problems have their educational side. I call a small meeting, asking for a representative from each barrio, each neighborhood, to take on responsibility for maintaining the compost toilets and greywater in their area. Because the ditches fill up, people have to watch how much water they use. Because we've built compost toilets, we have to actually think about what happens to our shit, and who is going to deal with it. 'We're spoiled, normally,' a young woman says. 'We don't usually have to think about any of this.' 'It's anarchism in practice,' I tell them. 'Being self-responsible at a very, very basic level.' In that moment, watching the realization dawn on them that water has to go somewhere, and shit has to be dealt with somehow, I feel that all the work and stress of this project has been worth it.

Meanwhile we're getting horrible reports from the Carnival for Full Enjoyment in Edinburgh. Police have attacked demonstrators with horses, people have been injured, there's a riot going on. Finally our friends return and we get the full story. Some of these reports later prove to be rumors, but there have been altercations and injuries, and a few arrests. But the clowns, I'm told by a friend, shifted the energy and helped calm the crowd.

At the end of the day, Catherine and I do a training for an Irish group who are protesting a Shell oil refinery to be built in County Mayo. Five local farmers have refused to sell their land, and been jailed by the Irish government. Some of the contingent has stayed home to support them. The others, who are here, organize a demonstration and possible occupation of the company headquarters. They are a mix of ages – lots of youth but a good sprinkling of the middle-aged. One of



the pleasures of this particular mobilization is that it does span the generations – the average age is probably late twenties and there are many people in their thirties, forties, and even a few of us older than that!

But there's all along been a chaotic, slippery quality to the energy of this project, something that resists plans and timetables and logical organization. Maybe it's the fairies, hanging around the hawthorne tree. By the end of the day, we have plans, multiple plans, plans so complex and overlaid with fallbacks that even if we're infiltrated, I doubt the cops can understand them. We barely do. There are small affinity groups off on secret missions. There are others who want to plan an open blockade, something that everyone can join on to: but they can't quite bring themselves to announce when and where it will be, as the police will undoubtedly shut it down. The mass action sort of devolves into an action of small groups, and someone else plans a truly mass action but still can't bring themselves to announce exactly when and where it is. There are times when I love the camp and everyone in it: it has a sweet energy and is truly a glimpse of a world we could create. There are other moments when I swear I'll never do this or anything like it again. Like late at night when we're all having our pre-action meltdowns. Suddenly all the plans seem completely chaotic – but then, chaos is what we're trying to create, and when chaos is your goal, you've got all the forces of the universe with you. I'm just going to put my trust in some other kind of order, some forces that are working with us, and hope.

JULY 10 2005

... let me back up and describe our day of action. Because I haven't written much fiction in a while, I'm going to write this as a story, about Greywater, 50-ish, grey-haired veteran blockader, and her friends.

WEDNESDAY: THE DAY OF ACTION

Tuesday night most groups headed out from camp, either early to stay elsewhere or in the middle of the night to camp for a while by the highways and be in position to blockade. Greywater's affinity group, however, organized a car caravan to meet at the civilized hour of 6.00am and support the blockades. They were due to meet at an Esso station near Stirling but the scout car who left early called back and said it was full of cops. They got up, dressed, and jumped in the car and went out there anyway. Sure enough, it was full of cops but it takes more than that to daunt their driver Kira, who had been through so many actions that it would take a tank at least to set her back. She drove in, got gas, drove out, and somehow collected most of the caravan. After a slight delay, a caravan of about seven cars headed out to the stretch of road agreed upon for the mass blockades.

When they approached the area, they got a call that there were groups blockading and needing support. The two head cars in the caravan drew up next to each other, taking up both lanes, and slowed down. They drove very, very slowly down the road, slowing all the traffic behind them, and sure enough far ahead they could see a small knot of blockaders on the road. They heard sirens behind them, and held a short conference on the wisdom of blocking the cops, which was interrupted by the cops pulling up beside them on the shoulder of the road, ordering them off, opening doors and reaching through windows and roughly pushing the cars off the road. They did not arrest anyone, however, just pushed the blockade off the road and ordered the cars to move on.

The caravan went on, only to be met by a new blockade up ahead. And so went the day. Every time the police cleared off a small blockade, another appeared somewhere else. The road was blocked, opened up, got blocked again. Larger groups of blockaders were corralled by police and detained, but mostly not arrested. Smaller groups were let go, to walk up and down the roadside and try to regroup. The advantage of the car caravan was mobility – although Greywater's friends had organized many blockades, they themselves actually hate to sit still, and Kira especially likes to move around and see what's happening. They were now getting word that in Edinburgh a hotel had been blockaded and also the M9 motorway, that the early morning walk-out from camp had gotten out and had a battle with the cops, that other roads were blockaded along with the train tracks. What only became apparent after the blockades were over and all the stories were collected was the extent of the action: every route into or around Gleneagles was disrupted with small or large blockades. A critical mass of bicyclists rode very, very slowly from Edinburgh to Gleneagles, delaying all the journalists set to cover the

meetings. Independent affinity groups did lockdowns on the smaller roads. None of the blockades lasted terribly long – maybe half an hour at most and some just for a few minutes. ‘If you’d blinked, you would have missed our blockade,’ one activist said. But as soon as one was cleared, another popped up, and the cumulative effect was to delay and disrupt the beginning of the summit.

After an hour or two, Greywater found herself wanting a change. Hawthorne was riding shotgun and navigating, her daughter Foxglove was crammed into the back seat between Greywater and Lily of the West, the medic from Montana, both big women. Foxglove was getting carsick and Greywater wanted to dance. The police were blocking the road and Kira attempted a U-turn to go back. They stopped her, said the road back was blocked. She argued with them, said we were going to the legal march planned to start at Auchterarder, near Gleneagles, but they kept us halted. Across the road, a busload of marchers was also stopped, and so was the entire line of traffic coming to Gleneagles from the west. A small side road ahead of us led into a village. They all jumped out of the car and Kira parked in the turnaround in the middle of the road. Other demonstrators were hovering nearby when they all noticed a Mercedes full of delegates at the head of the line of cars about to turn into the village. A French affinity group jumped out and sat in the road, blocking them. They gathered around, drumming and dancing and singing. The delegates got out of their car, looking disgusted. The police stood around and radioed for backup. For a good half an hour, they carried on and the carload of delegates eventually gave up and turned around. They tried hard to get the busload of marchers to come out and join us, but they wouldn’t. Finally, more police arrived, and the French linked arms, held tight, and made the police drag them away. They used some scary looking pain holds on some of them, but did not arrest them.

One of the qualities of this action is that, while the overall whole was tremendously effective, no one part felt very effective or dramatic in the moment. Some people spent the whole day being followed or corralled by cops. Only later did they realize that, by distracting the cops, they might have opened the road for others to blockade. The action was like an African drum ensemble, where each instrument is playing a simple beat, but the overlays and interactions create a complex and exciting whole. An emergent system, like a beehive or anthill or a flock of birds.

They carried on. There were groups of clowns roaming the side of the road, adding a surreal touch to events. They de-escalate violence by the use of mirth and humor, and they look great, in clown makeup and army fatigues. We never quite found the time or ability to organize a Faery Army as a complement, but we did see a few Faeries appear in the actions, with wings and streamers and bright colors. At one point, the car caravan got blocked by the kids’ blockade, which the police had let through the lines only to have them block the bridge to the Gleneagles road. There were kids and clowns and a samba band all drumming and



dancing on the bridge while a big bubble machine spewed rainbow bubbles, and even the cops seemed mostly amused.

Around midday, most of the groups were heading to Gleneagles for the legal march organized by G8Alternatives, which had been called off, on and off again several times that morning. The car caravan joined them, but by the time they were rerouted around Auchterarder, parked and headed toward the march, it was twenty minutes ahead of them. They were cold, wet and tired, so they had lunch. Later they regretted it, as the tail end of the march found a weak spot in the fence around Gleneagles and tore it down, and they would like to have seen that.

Okay, enough of fiction. We got back to camp to find people in a mixed mood – restrained jubilation alternating with attacks of rampant panic. People were very afraid that the camp would be raided by cops in retaliation – for the success of the day, or for the acts of property damage committed during the early morning mass walkout, when a group ran through an industrial estate in Stirling and through the High Street in Bannockburn and smashed up a Pizza Hut and some other businesses. I was personally really saddened to get that news. Whatever the justifications might be for those tactics, doing it right next door to the safe space we had labored so long and hard to create, and antagonizing the community we had worked so hard to establish good relations with, makes as much sense as shitting in your own bed.

In any case, people were afraid of the cops coming in, although many of us thought that highly unlikely. The Scottish police force is simply not like the Italian police in Genoa, who did raid the sleeping quarters of some of the protesters and the Indymedia centre after the 2001 G8 protests and brutally beat demonstrators. But it was clear to me and many others that this situation was politically and tactically very different. Nevertheless, rumors were rampant. They were going to raid. They were going to come in in the middle of the night. They were going to parachute in from helicopters. We eventually agreed on a plan and an approach – that our first response would be to try and de-escalate police violence. We formed a team of de-escalators who took shifts at the gate, and I went to sleep in a friend’s van near the front gate to be on call.

The call came at 2.30am, when the police arrived and did exactly what some of the cooler heads expected them to do – they took up a position at the point where our road met the roundabout, and blocked us in. I and about twenty other people spent most of the night de-escalating the drunks and sprinkling of outright psychotics from our own camp who seemed magnetically drawn to the police lines, trying to prevent any incidents that could flare up and spark a larger confrontation. I caught a couple of hours of sleep at the end of the night, and woke up in time for the meeting where we got the news of the London bombings.

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JULY 11 2005

‘Tat’ is a word I’d never heard until a few weeks ago, that has dominated my life throughout this action. ‘Tat’ means ‘stuff’, material resources, generally of a low but useful quality, and often acquired from ‘skips’, which at home we call ‘dumpsters’, by a process known as ‘skipping’ (tr. ‘dumpster diving’) or sometimes by ‘blagging’, which means talking people into or out of something. Hopefully not by ‘nicking’, that is, stealing, although ‘getting nicked’ also means ‘getting arrested.’ We spent weeks tatting, or acquiring tat, in order to create the eco-village – from old bathtubs to plumbing parts to wood, and now we are ‘tatting down’, or taking the eco-village apart. It’s sad to see it go, sad to see all the social fabric deconstruct itself, the coaches turn back into pumpkins. Before it goes away entirely, I want to write something about the last few days.

Thursday was a muted day. The bombings in London and the fact that we were blocked in by lines of riot cops made it impossible to mount any major actions. We focused on cleaning up the camp and on prisoner support. By Friday, the last day of the G8 meetings, the police presence was lessened and many people went off to Glasgow to take over a bridge and protest the extension of the M74 motorway through a low-income neighborhood, where earlier in the month we had built the Cre8 Summat Community Garden. Others went to petrol stations and did climate change actions, the clowns bringing swimming pools and setting up tropical beaches.

In camp, we had an emergency meeting to deal with the toilet crisis. Our diversity of toilets included nine composting toilets built around wheelee bins (wheeled garbage cans) which would be sealed and stored for two years, and the resulting compost then used on trees and ornamentals. It also included many trench toilets dug along the edges of the field, which would simply be filled in and left to compost in peace. And it was supposed to include forty porta-loos (porta-potties, honey huts, chemical toilets), required by the Council for the licence and which we were counting on for capacity. Due to many circumstances beyond anyone's control, we never had more than fifteen, and for days the company had been unable to come in and clean them. First this was due to the police lines, but by Friday, a truck had managed to come through, only to be mounted by an exuberant and possibly drunk crowd who danced on top of it and reputedly threatened the driver. When his boss phoned for help, someone on the phone allegedly swore at him, and now the company was refusing to come back.

The incident illustrated some of the wild contradictions in the camp. While the vast majority of people were there to mount and support actions against the G8, there was a small but significant group of the festival/party crowd, who drank heavily, ingested, I'm sure, other consciousness-altering substances, and caused an immense amount of trouble to the rest of us. Overall Scottish and British culture is much more alcohol-focused than us US puritans are used to, at least in action situations, and even the most serious activists like their beer and some loud disco music to unwind with at night. There were multiple sound systems in camp, and the thundering bass vied with the thrum of helicopters to disturb any possibility of sleeping.

By setting up an encampment, where we all had to live together for a week, we were constantly faced with the real life, practical implications of our politics. Does anarchism simply mean that no one can ever tell me what to do, whatever state of consciousness I'm in or however I'm affecting the good of the whole? How do we respect the individual freedom of those who are in no state to make rational decisions or listen to the needs of others, and who gets to decide? And at what point does the good of the whole override the absolute freedom of the individual? It's one thing to consider these issues in the abstract, another to spend half an hour at 2.30am trying to get a drunk to move back from the police lines.

And there were also many moments of wondrous beauty. At night, before the disco music started, groups would gather in the eddies of the meandering path through camp and play African drums or Scottish pipes. The Irish barrio, each night, would be gathered around the campfire, playing fiddle, singing songs, or listening to each others' poetry as their ancestors have done for centuries. One night the Infernal Noise Brigade, a radical marching band from Seattle, led us all in a procession around camp, joined by a samba band and challenged by the disco bloc. Another night, a midnight candlelit vigil walked from the gate to the police lines, carrying with it a palpable blanket of silence, and placed its candles at the

feet of the riot cops. We had rituals around the faerie hawthorne tree at the edge of camp, and deep conversations around the kitchens and campfires. We had meetings where people listened to each other and let their opinions change, where we brought our best collective thinking to a problem and went away heartened by the experience.

Saturday night, we were taking apart our improvised road, made of soft-board laid over sticks that were milling waste from a local timber company. There was no practical way to re-use or recycle the sticks, so we pulled the boards off, piled up the sticks into pyramids, and burned them. One by one, bonfires came alight: five, eight, thirteen, seventeen, dancing beacons of flame under a new moon. A woman told me that this was one of the fields where William Wallace, Scotland's great hero, had called people to fight against the English invaders by lighting beacons in the field. We were all feeling sad at the ending of the camp, but the fires cheered our hearts and seemed to burn away any stuck or negative energies. We stood in the centre, playing music, singing, and drumming, with an abundance of fire all around us, beacons calling us all to the ongoing fights for freedom. The faeries were very pleased. And now the camp is gone, the field is bare again, the experiment is done. But because it existed for a short time, in some realm of being it exists for all time, complete with all its problems and promise, a seed of what is possible.

This is an edited version of Starhawk's G8 2005 Journals. The unabridged diaries are available at http://starhawk.org/activism/activism-writings/G8__2005__journals.html

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