

# A is for Action

A glossary for art  
& activism





**A is for  
Action**



**DESPAIR**





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# A

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## **Action, Art, Activism**

'Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it'

Bertold Brecht

'Art makes culture and culture makes life'

The Vacuum Cleaner

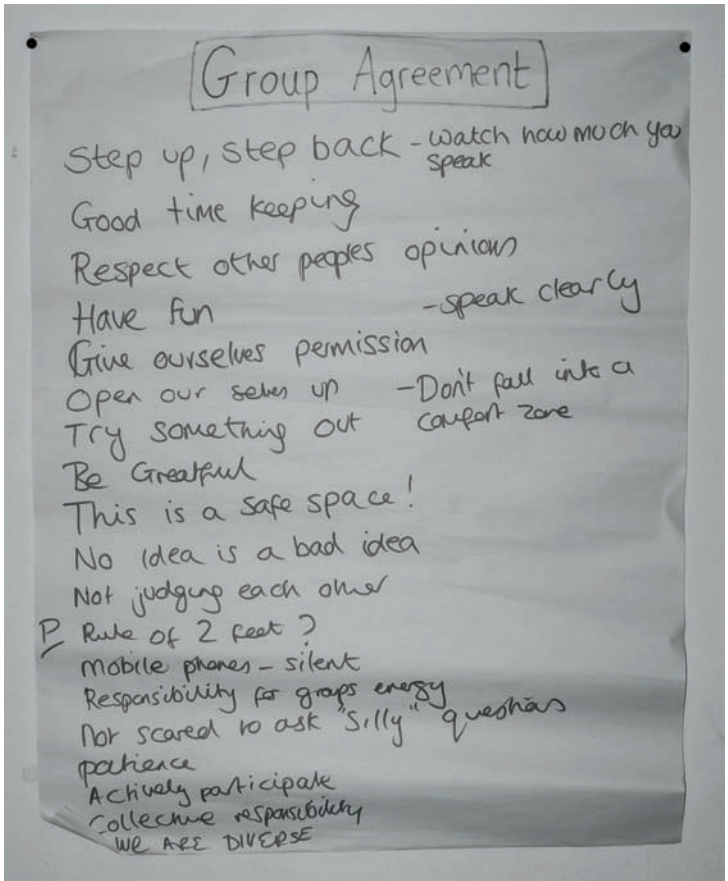
'Art is not a notion but a motion. It's not important what art is but what art does'

Gilles Deleuze

'Art runs away as soon as one says its name; it loves to be incognito. Its best moments are when it forgets what it is called'

Jean Dubuffet

## Agreement:



The group agreement we made together at the beginning of the week.

# B

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## **Blags and scams**

Q. What's the economics of this project? How are you financing it?

A. "Blags and scams"

Paddy at GrowHeathrow, <http://www.transitionheathrow.com/>

If you're gonna get by in the grimy underworld of resistance, you're gonna have to break some rules and think clever.

Need rehearsal/storage/play space/free entrance? "Yes, we're from the Luton Institute of Environmental Studies (LIES) - didn't my supervisor call ahead?"

Got caught? If in doubt, just call it art - artists get away with anything.

Hungry? Who said there isn't such thing as a free lunch, try skipping, urban foraging, table-diving at posh conferences and drifting in for complimentary breakfasts in hotels.

There's often hidden ways to get around the system, from squatting to barefaced lies, you'll need unfading confidence, a big smile and a lot of cheek.

# C

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**C** is when we **come together, co-operatively**, to **create** a **communal** space that **celebrates** the **confusion** of **change**: a **carnival**.

‘We don’t know how old the carnival is, or when it started, but we do know that it seems to have been happening for as long as we’ve written things down. The carnival has always been opposed by grumps and sceptics, both those in authority who fear its crazy power, and those in resistance who insist always on activism as a deadly serious and uninspiring war. But ‘those who believe in carnival say it is about rehearsing what it is like to be free, a time when power is inverted and the world is turned upside-down.’

‘Do It Yourself: A Handbook for Changing the World’, Trapese Collective, 2007, available at <http://hbfc.clearerchannel.org/>

**C** is also for **courage**, the courage to break the laws, to speak truth to power, to approach each other openly and directly as human beings, and to connect to the world to ask what it requires of us. Courage multiplies itself: when you give another all your courage, you have twice as much as you did before.

# D

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‘Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man’s original virtue. It is through disobedience and through rebellion.’

The Soul of Man in the Age of Socialism, Oscar Wilde; available at <http://wilde.thefreelibrary.com/Soul-of-Man-under-Socialism>

And **D** is also for **drawing** inspiration from our **disobedient** ancestors: **Dadaism**, **Duchamp**, **Debord’s Détournement**, or from daily instances of kindness, such as a grocer who **donated** baskets to some interfering artists in Tower Hamlets.



Food Does Grow on Trees, near Bishops Quare, Spitalfields

# E

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E is for **enthusiasm**: finding it in ourselves and inspiring it in others, for getting **energised** and out of our boxes, for self **expression**, for getting **excited** and **empowered**, in ourselves and inspiring it in others – spreading like a Mexican wave in a crowd – passing it on, making interference positive, **electric**! Turn yourself into an **eco-ref** and show the red card to carbon traitors, **educate** on local food growing ...

Stride out from **embarrassment**, slip into **eloquence** and **engage** with the world with art and action!

But how do we interfere with **enthusiasm**? By definition – in interfering – we are taking ourselves out of our own immediate spheres and making our presence felt in someone else's, something else. This is not always an easy thing to do. So how do we do this with enthusiasm? – placing ourselves outside of our comfort zone – often engaging with big subjects, heavy subjects, grappling with political hot cookies or straying from the social status quo. Climate change, political corruption, social inequality, emotional cruelty, hope & despair. How do we keep enthusiastic, excited, empowered?

# F

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Interference 2010 has its core on making activism **fun**, relevant and engaging through art. The best example of this was the afternoon in Spitalfields with the Space Hijackers. After all, moving white rabbits is always fun. And there may have been a stolen cardboard Corgi we named Rover, tied up outside The White Stuff shop ... What was also extremely **fun** was engaging the bored office workers of Spitalfields by playing noughts and crosses and hangman through their glass window.

Then there's **food**. A regular feature during Interference was potluck lunch, when we all brought in food for everyone to share. This has led to several happy meals outside in the sunshine. Wednesday at Grow Heathrow had us cooking in their communal kitchen, using food grown on site and locally sourced vegetables to create a fantastic meal for everyone.\*



Eating Strawberries at Grow Heathrow

# G

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**Guerilla Art:** a white cube's alternative.

**Guerilla Gardening:** on public, private or unclaimed land. [www.guerrillagardening.org](http://www.guerrillagardening.org)\*

**Grow:** ideas, veggies, enthusiasm, solidarity, hope, community, empathy ...



Public art bunnies re-placed near Bishops Quare, Spitalfields

\* See **S** for Seed Bomb

# H

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**Hope:** We spoke to tourists, commuters and wanderers as they crossed London Bridge and asked them where they stood on the 'Spectrum of Hope & Despair.' How do we feel when we're faced with inequality, ecocide and a system that chains us down? Some see hope as the only way forward, the only thing that keeps them going, others are fed up of hoping:



Spectrum Line of Hope & Despair, London Bridge

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‘When we stop hoping for external assistance, when we stop hoping that the awful situation we’re in will somehow resolve itself, when we stop hoping the situation will somehow not get worse, then we are finally free—truly free—to honestly start working to resolve it. I would say that when hope dies, action begins.’

Beyond Hope, Derrick Jensen, available at <http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/170/>

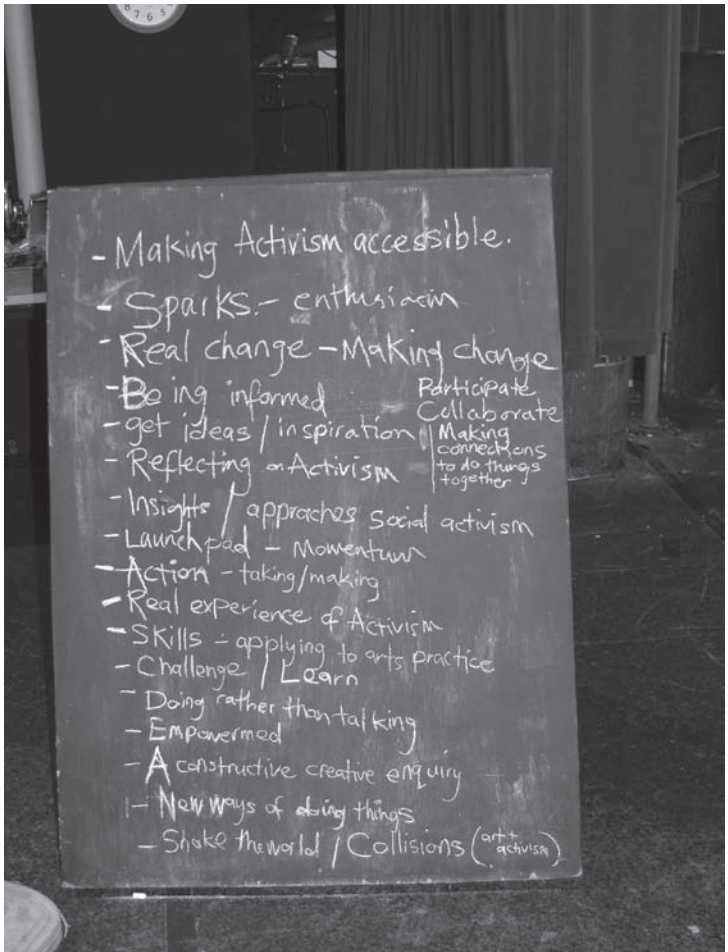
**Horizontal Organizing:** working together without leaders to overcome apathy and engage directly with our lives. It takes a lot of work to challenge existing hierarchical power structures but there are simple things you can do to make a start. Find out about Consensus Decision Making here: <http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/>

# I

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**Interference:** the week of workshops, actions and sharing at Artsadmin in June 2010 in which two dozen artists, activists and human beings came together to share in beautiful ideals and direct action. We are the interferers, and this glossary of action is both a reflection on our time together and an invitation to you to become an interferer too.

**Interactions:** during Interference, we planned three interactive public performances designed to claim public (and privatised) spaces as sites for protest and reflection. As interferers, we aim not just to shout in people's faces, but to interact with them, to discover and create new worlds together. Worlds are made through the interactions of many, many parts.\*



Group ambitions recorded at the beginning of the week

# J

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**Jargon:** like you might find in this glossary, like permaculture, globalisation, and consensus.

**Just fucking do it:** which is what to say when the jargon is getting in the way. <http://just-do-it.org.uk/>



Pleasure Hunt challenge on day one.

# K

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**Knowledge:** Share your skills with others and, guaranteed, they will have something valuable to teach you. Share your skills, and the knowledge will grow.

We shared: language, bumble-bee housing, sprout-growing, bike repair, meditation, music, yoga, art, book-making, dance, pirate-radio making, origami, cooking, self-defence, sleep, and some bad jokes.

.....  
**Arrange a skillshare with your friends or colleagues and find out about their hidden talents and resources.**  
.....

**Klimat:** means climate in Swedish – so climate change ... what to say on this most monumental issue this human species has ever created and encountered ...

‘I believe people are sensing, as Ivan Illich called it, “the shadows our future throws: Once you grasp the full significance of runaway climate change, and the exhaustion of virtually all our natural resource under the pressure of human consumption, you go through a change in your personal outlook. History becomes nearly irrelevant in these circumstances, as do most of the plans our parents made for us. We will not be colonizing mars. In the centuries to come, we can speak of success if there are still human colonies on Earth.”’

# L

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**Location:** During the week of 21-25 of June we have been based at the Artsadmin offices in Toynbee Studios. Situated in the borough of Tower Hamlets it has an illustrious history and association concerning performance, politics, inclusivity and artistic freedom.

**Love:** 'The absence of a sustained focus on love in progressive circles arises from a collective failure to acknowledge the needs of the spirit and the over determined emphasis on material concerns. Without love, our efforts to liberate ourselves and our world community from oppression and exploitation are doomed.'

'Love as the Practice of Freedom', bell hooks

# M

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**Media:** During this week we have attended a Twitter workshop and learnt about the ways your actions can suddenly become accessible to millions of people through knowing the right methods and having the confidence to speak out on the issues you believe in. Pirate radio is easier than you may first imagine: using free software from the internet and a microphone you can broadcast your views to the world. \* And hey, this is self-published using Print on Demand. \* With lots of ingenuity it's super-easy to create vessels for your messages.



# O

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At the beginning, we dedicated ourselves to **openness**: to each other's **opinions**, to the **opportunity** to experience new things, to fear, to flux, and to friendship. This created the most constructive possible space for action and decision-making. Obviously.

**Observation:** if we want the world to change, and we want people to change, then we are asking them to be open to our ideas and to those changes. How can we ask that of them, if we are not ourselves open to other people, to the world?

# P

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**Pocket definitions:** here are a few:

**Permaculture:** an approach to designing human settlements and systems that mimics natural ones. Check out [www.labofii.net/docs/13attitudes.pdf](http://www.labofii.net/docs/13attitudes.pdf) for a pocket guide.



Nettle feed and Comfrey for Permaculture techniques

**Pirate Radio:** illegal or unauthorised radio transmission. All you need is a laptop, a sound recording/editing programme such as Audacity (free) and an internet connection. [www.dissidentisland.org](http://www.dissidentisland.org)

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**Print-on-demand:** Printing technology that allows copies to be printed as they are ordered, therefore eliminating unnecessary printing and storage costs and waste. Try Lulu.com, Blurb.com or Bookleteer.com.

**Private space:** space that invites playful protest and public reclamation, possibly in the form of pleasure hunts.

# Q

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**Questioning:** questioning everything!

And Q is the art question. What is art? What is action? What is interference? Is interference art?

‘The question of art is no longer one of aesthetics but of the survival of the planet.’

Platform, [www.platformlondon.org](http://www.platformlondon.org)

**Quality over quantity:** a quality that is an eye for detail, an anal obsession with sculpting and creating beautiful things that are about impact and visual messaging ... interfering through art.

# R

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Interference 2010 has been an exercise in **resistance** of the status quo and the thick cloak of capitalism and climate damage, **reclaiming** public/private spaces and **re-imagining** how activism can work and be effective for all of us on all issues.

It's also been a week to be **responsible** for ourselves and each other to ensure a positive experience to take with us into the future.

# S

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**Sage flavour popcorn:** grow your own Sage and give this recipe a try:

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons fresh Sage, chopped

2 tablespoons oil

Half a cup popcorn kernels (preferably organic)

Salt

A large, preferably heavy, pot with lid

Preparation:

1. Add the oil to the pot over medium heat. Lightly salt the oil. You can add more salt to taste after the corn is popped.
2. Toss 3-4 kernels of corn into the pot and cover it. When the kernels of corn have popped, the oil is heated enough to start.
3. Add the rest of your popcorn in an even layer, plus the sage. Cover the pot and shake it to coat the popcorn with oil.
4. Continue to cook, covered, and shake the pot every 20-30 seconds until the popping slows to several seconds between pops. Remove the pot from the heat and immediately pour the popcorn into a wide bowl.
5. If you are adding butter, melt it in the microwave; then toss over kernels to coat.

**Seed bomb:** A Guerilla Gardening technique where you gather some unused seeds, bundle them together and throw them into a public or private space which could do with some greenery. [www.guerrillagardening.org/ggseedbombs.html](http://www.guerrillagardening.org/ggseedbombs.html).\*

**SPARKS** fly when people come together and make things happen. **SPARKS** come from freedom to play, to excite, to

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learn and to make mistakes without judgment or prejudice. Make **SPARKS** happen!

**Subversion:** is taking power and leading against oppressors, small and large. Leading revolutions, overthrowing governments, defeating common enemies. Take arms, your friend's arms and rise up against the establishment.

# T

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**Transition Justice:** We need to change and it needs to be fair. A lot of the problems caused by climate change hit the poor and those least responsible for causing it. Through creating local small-scale energy solutions, new occupations, skills or ways of life for those dependent on the industries that need to go, as well as through a thousand other solutions, transition is about treating change as an ongoing process of learning how to build a new world. <http://www.transitionnetwork.org/>

# U

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**Urban foraging and mining:** We live in a culture of waste: walking through the city in the evening, we can see food for hundreds being thrown into bins and tied up in plastic bags, and the materials to build and furnish a thousand houses thrown into skips. Most of this ends up in landfill or burnt in polluting incinerators. With a little courage\* a certain disregard for the rules,\* we can fill our bellies and shelter ourselves with all this so-called waste.

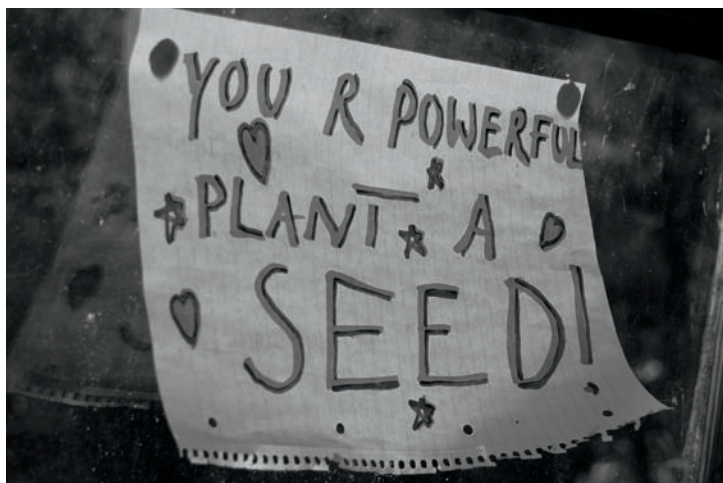
This evening, pop into your local sandwich shops and ask if they have any wastage they're willing to give away. You'll be refused often, but when you see just how much food you can get you'll be astonished. And you can more than double that quantity if you pop round the back of shops at night and rifle through the bins: wear gloves, and learn to feel the bags for likely food piles. Then check out those big skips on building sites with a few friends, and carry away the wood, bricks, furniture (and occasionally books, clothes, stereos ...) you find there.

To reduce both consumption and waste, we need to become the hunter-gatherers of the urban jungle. To become sophisticated parasites on capitalist society, feeding off its energy as we sap its strength and change its behaviour, until it is entirely ours.

# V

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**Vision:** Have a vision, for example: **Village** – grow one, live in it, love it.



Message pinned up in the greenhouse at Grow Heathrow

# W

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**Where are we going?** The world seems divided by many problems, but perhaps we now have a picture of the whole. Climate change, poverty, the struggle for human rights, endemic disease, peak oil, waste-based society, the destruction of indigenous cultures ... where is it all taking us? Questions lead to change! 'Where are we going?' is a useful question with which to start a meeting of fellow activists and an important one for every individual with a desire to change the status quo.

# X

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**Xtra time:** This might a good point to take time out and reflect on this book – ponder about your own potential for activism and direct action within all of us. How inspired do you feel?

**X marks the spot:** ‘Here be dragons’ used to be on incomplete maps, where ‘dragons’ would preside over uncharted territories. If this is how activism feels to you, there’s no need to feel you may get burned by the experience. Consider the challenges in this book and the groups mentioned and know that we all started off from scratch with our own anxieties, and feel empowered to explore direct action yourself.



# Z

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**Zzzzzz:** As well as all that action, you've got to look after yourself – get sleep, eat well and take care not to push yourself too far. [www.activist-trauma.net/](http://www.activist-trauma.net/)



Eco-Ref at work in the City





This book was produced as part of 'Interference', a weeklong series of collaborative workshops, actions and events exploring art and activism, Artsadmin, 21-25 June 2010.

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Cover image: Eco-Ref's give red cards to workers outside RBS  
P. 2-3: Spectrum line of Hope & Despair on London Bridge  
P. 38-39: Food Does Grow on Trees, Spitalfields.  
Photo credit: Immo Klink

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