

What Group Are You With?

A stylized illustration of a lizard, possibly a spiny-tailed lizard, with a body covered in yellow and teal stripes. The lizard is coiled on a cracked, light-colored surface. The background is a solid light blue.

or,
Going It
Alone

by
m

I'm just a normal and occasionally insane woman who loves having fun and doing whatever she wants. But sometimes people get the impression that I know what I'm doing. I have written this to dispel that myth.

What group are you with?

I only did it because I wanted to.
—Kaneko Fumiko on her attempted
assassination of the emperor of Japan

People ask me all the time what group I'm with. I appreciate their interest, and I know it comes from a desire to do something meaningful and real. But every time I'm asked, it depresses me! Why are so many of us convinced we need to be part of an Official Organized Group to do anything?

A question I would prefer to start with is "Why aren't you with a group?" Now that's a question brimming with fun and provocative answers! For one, I'm bad at being in groups. I can never get a word in, I let other people take the lead on things even when I know better, I get frustrated too easily with other people. But more importantly, being an Officially Organized Group can be so stifling. What if someone in the group doesn't like that I'm freely giving away needles that could be used for all sorts of unsavory purposes? What if someone doesn't like that I help people learn about taking hormones without a doctor? What if someone doesn't like that I don't pay for anything I don't have to?

Working alone or with a small group of people you trust gives you the freedom and flexibility to move quickly when opportunities or needs present themselves. When rioting happens, large official groups are not only too slow to respond, they're too ossified to even think of responding! In those moments of rupture the field of possibilities greatly expands and you should take your chance to act! Large official groups can struggle in the same way in times of disaster, and there too you must take your chance to act! Whether you're helping an individual or striking a blow against capital, working outside the lanes of traditional organizing gives you the flexibility to make

the most of a situation.

One of the great strategical weaknesses of large group organizing is that such a concentration of power becomes a tempting treasure trove for some of our most annoying foes. We hear it again and again: Just as a group is gaining steam, the DSA or the PSL or the Democrats or some other idiotic group has decided it's their divine right to control this group and suddenly you find yourself no longer doing what you care about, but instead locked in some struggle for whatever scraps of power you've accumulated. Group after group gets destroyed like that! It fucking sucks! There's things you can do to try to avoid it, but if you work by yourself or in a small and relatively closed group, it simply doesn't happen.

It's never been easier

It's easy. You can do it yourself. Alone or with a few trusted comrades.

—Alfredo Bonanno, Armed Joy

So how do you start working alone? The truth is, a lot of this shit is just plain easy to do. You can get a few friends together and cook vegan food for people. You can ask homeless people what they need, walk into any store, and steal it for them. You can buy abortion pills online and find people who need them. You can get injection supplies in bulk and give them out for free. You can learn how to buy estradiol enanthate powder online and compound it into injectable medicine. You can do things I'd prefer not to suggest in writing! These are all things that ordinary people do, by themselves or with a small group of people they trust. All throughout history people have done more impressive things with small-scale organizing than anything I've listed here. Don't underestimate what you're capable of!

A great advantage of working alone is that it lets you do what you're actually good at, but another wonderful (but intimidating!) part of this is that it means learning new things. Maybe learning new technical skills, new artistic skills, or new ways of interacting with other people. Every time you run into an obstacle in achieving your goals, think seriously about what you per-

sonally can do about it. A lot of times, it's easier than you think. And when it's not easy, maybe it's worth learning? No one was born an expert.

It's hopeless :)

Sentient beings are innumerable; I vow to save them all.

—The Bodhisattva Vow

No one can tell you what needs to be done. This is something that's so beautiful and so depressing about embracing our autonomy. There is an endless amount of things that need to be done in this world, and I'm sure that you notice them. And if you don't, ask other people! If you agree with them, act on it! It's that simple. You don't have to go through a middleman. We all live in this world and we all need to do what we can to make it better.

But the truth is, there's always more we could do. I've helped people clean debris from their flood-ravaged homes and as soon as I was done I sobbed in my bed thinking about how little I had been able to do to really improve the circumstances of their lives. There are times doing this shit is so discouraging in so many ways, but that's a price I'm willing to pay to [try to] live a real life.

On top of struggling with all of this, there's a good chance people will get upset with you. At least, I hope what you're doing pushes back against people's preconceptions of how the world works enough that they get upset with you! Still, it sucks! People who basically agree with you will probably get very upset with you and it will probably feel very discouraging. Maybe they even have some points about things you're doing wrong. That feels worst of all. It's tempting to say "At least I'm doing something!", but we know it's not enough to be merely doing "something". Do something meaningful and try not to make too many mistakes. Beyond that, ignore people and consider whether it might be valuable to act more anonymously.

But this hopelessness isn't all doom and gloom and pessimism about other people. In fact, working alone will give you a completely new perspective on what it means to work with other people, even large groups of people

you don't trust! I don't think those things are worthless! When you're forced to confront both how powerful and powerless you are as an individual, your actions with others will take on a new potency.

The discomfort of possibility

*Where I'm from, doing dirt is a part of living
I got mouths to feed dog, I got to get it.*
—dead prez, Hell Yeah (Pimp the System)

To embrace the richness of what I'm trying to tell you, you might have to do things that make you uncomfortable. You might find yourself in situations where you can't achieve what you want within the bounds of the law. I can't tell you what to do in these situations. There may be risks involved! But I want you to understand that the status quo of the world is already full of risk. People targeted by ICE experience plenty of risk just living their daily lives. Maybe you feel insulated from risk in your life, or maybe you feel like you have a responsibility to avoid risk to take care of other people in your life. But every one of us faces the risks from ecocide and the risks from having every last possibility of autonomy torn from our grasp. To be blunt, I wouldn't have decided to transition if I wanted to avoid all risk in my life, and I hope you can take the same attitude towards whatever political actions you feel are important and meaningful.

This doesn't mean you should be stupid. This doesn't mean you should purposely get arrested. You should accept risk *so that* you can take steps to be as safe as possible while still accomplishing your goals. This is another amazing thing about working by yourself or with a small trusted group. You are responsible for your own safety. Please take it seriously and don't let your resistance end up merely symbolic.

Despite the risks, it's best to think of this discomfort as a blessing. The boundaries of our society, whether they're legal or social are hopefully not exactly accepted by you. Every time you push yourself past them, you become more capable. And whether you're concerned about the current political situation, or merely the thousands of years of ecocide, we all need to be

more capable of meaningful actions.

We're all scared

*Every angel is terrifying. And yet, alas,
I invoke you, almost deadly birds of the soul,
knowing about you.*

—Rainer Maria Rilke, Duino Elegies

None of us are brave. All of this scary. We're not just scared of doing things that get us arrested, we're scared of doing things that will get other people mad at us! We're scared of making mistakes. If you're taking meaningful political action, you will find yourself in situations where your mistakes can have serious consequences! Even if you're just just doing something as basic as cooking food for people you can make mistakes that make people sick.

It's scary to take action without some official group backing you up. It's scary to really live your life! There might not be someone to fall back on when things get bad. This is of course the most difficult thing to deal with in embracing our autonomy. I don't have a solution. The best advice I can offer is to accept and be honest about the fears you have. Other people around you probably have similar fears. Sometimes you can address the fears directly, and sometimes all you can do is accept the fear and act anyway. And hey, at least you don't have to be afraid you're going to get kicked out of some group!

It might be easy for some of you to dwell on how you've been privileged to avoid facing these fears for so long, and to spiral into feeling guilty. Avoiding the fears of taking meaningful action isn't a privilege. It's a delusion. We should all be much more afraid of doing nothing and continuing to live such meaningless imitations of life, stripped of all autonomy.

Where do we go from here?

If this is your path, as it is mine, let me offer whatever solace you may find in this monstrous benediction: May you discover the enlivening power of darkness within yourself. May it nourish your rage. May your rage inform your actions, and your actions transform you as you struggle to transform your world.

—Susan Stryker, *My Words to Victor Frankenstein*

Think! Think hard! Think of anything meaningful you could do to make this world better, more free, more full of possibilities for everyone in it. Rescue a chicken from an egg farm! Block an ICE van! Plant a garden on a golf course! Steal everything that's not bolted down and get boltcutters for the rest! Do things more daring and inventive than I've ever thought of! Go forth and be free!

Further reading

- **Armed Joy** by Alfredo Bonnano
- **My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage** by Susan Stryker
- **Blessed is the Flame: An introduction to concentration camp resistance and anarcho-nihilism** by Serafini
- **The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia** by Ursula K. Le Guin
- **Abortion Beyond the Law: Building a Global Feminist Movement for Self-Managed Abortion** by Naomi Braine
- **The History of the Animal Liberation Front** by Warzone Distro
- **Addicted to Losing** by Athena

The New Mexico whiptail is a female-only species of lizard capable of parthenogenesis (asexual reproduction).

What might we
give birth to by
ourselves?

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