“Everybody is trying to compete to convert people to their ideology. But it seems like the revolutionary thing would be to get people to look at ideologies differently.”

—Anonymous CrimethInc. Ex-Worker
This zine is an excerpt from the book Mythmakers & Lawbreakers, published in 2009 by AK Press. The book consists of a series of interviews with various anarchist fiction writers, as well as extensive appendices with biographies and reading lists of anarchist writers. We are making the work available in zine format, in the spirit of creative commons, but are of course indebted to AK Press for publishing the book in the first place.

The rest of the book can be downloaded in zine form from us at www.tangledwilderness.org or bought from AK Press at www.akpress.org

Mythmakers and Lawbreakers: Anarchist Writers on Fiction
Edited by Margaret Killjoy, 2009

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A CRIMETHINC. EX-WORKER

CrimethInc. is a collective entity that invites open participation: anyone can write, organize, and publish under the name. For the past decade or so they have turned out an incredible body of books, in many ways revitalizing the world of anarchist publishing. Their books are high quality, available quite cheaply, well-designed, and speak to a different audience than a lot of other anarchist literature. While much of the “history” in Days of War, Nights of Love might be considered fiction, I was also deeply interested in their two children’s books: The Secret World of Duvbo and The Secret World of Terijian. Since this interview, they’ve also released Expect Resistance, a unique book that moves between fictional narrative and theoretical essay quite fluidly.

After a brief email correspondence, I had the pleasure of interviewing an anonymous author who, along with many others, writes under the CrimethInc. moniker. We climbed up into a dusty belfry while a radical bookfair bustled beneath our feet. And contrary to the way most interviews go, this one started with the author asking me a question:

CrimethInc.: What did you think the main differences between The Secret World of Terijian and The Secret World of Duvbo were?

Margaret: Well, they were both trying to get a political point across, but the Duvbo book had a lot more subtlety to it; it wasn’t as much about fighting as it was...
**Margaret:** Why did CrimethInc. choose to self-publish?

**CrimethInc.:** Self-management. CrimethInc. is just a name that a small group of people initially started sticking on self-published projects, with the critique that it is best to have control of what you're doing. This is a long-running question that goes back much further than the Clash signing with a major label. Let's say you're trying to get to know people in your town. Do you go to their parties or throw your own parties? If you only throw your own parties, maybe you'll only meet the people you can persuade to come to them, but you can create an environment that brings what you want out of those interactions—that's good for you, and hopefully will be good for the people who choose to come. If you only go to other people's parties, you'll always have a limited agency in framing the interactions you have with others.

I remember when they killed Brad Will in Oaxaca, a year ago now, it was right before Halloween. We went to someone's Halloween party to try to turn people out to come occupy the Mexican consulate with us. We were trying to explain to people that our friend had just been killed, at some fucking party where everybody was just there to drink. It's sort of a stretch, as metaphors go, but that is why we have our own dinner parties, right, so we can have a space in which the dialogue is about the things that are important to us. I was at some else's fancy vegan bourgeois Halloween party where everyone's in costumes and they don't give a fuck about my friend who got killed, you know what I'm saying? They care about me, but it's not a space in which we can discuss that, let alone discuss what to do.

So first of all, we're creating a space that is self-organized and controlled by everyone who participates in it. CrimethInc. isn't necessarily the most radical experiment in this direction, but it's significant that the name itself, if not all of the structures that exist under it, is open and freely accessible to all. The *Terijian* book was published by a totally different group of people than the people who are involved in crimethinc.com. That particular website is still an exclusive and difficult-to-participate-in structure, but the CrimethInc. myth itself is open and accessible to the public.

Why do things ourselves? I mean, fuck capitalism, you know? The initial projects that I was aware of were ones in which people were committing small-scale crime, taking the money, and making free things out of it, saying, “Here's some free things funded by anti-capitalist crime—can we have some more of this please?” When you first got a copy of *Evasion* in zine form, and you're reading the zine, you're some 16-year-old kid, it dawns on you that obviously, that zine was stolen and is a sign of an entire underground community of people who believe in anti-corporate theft as a ethical way of life. The zine is the message, however repetitive and dumb the text in it may be.

I think the content of self-organization is worth 1000 times whatever you can say. I'm sure Verso [largest English language radical book publisher] or someone might publish an amazing anarchist text that lots of people would then read, but the question isn't how to get everyone to read anarchist texts, the question is how we can interact in anarchic ways. You can assign Bakunin at Columbia University and the world won't be any more anarchist.

**Margaret:** What are you attempting to accomplish when you write fiction? Do you think you have accomplished anything with your fiction writing?

**CrimethInc.:** There are writers whose whole project is to express themselves: “This really expresses me, these are my innermost feelings.” Personally, I’m not interested in that. I think that writing is an attempt to... if I say the word “communicate,” it sounds like there is some sort of object that is in one place that I’m attempting to convey to another place, and I would rather use a word that emphasizes that you’re trying to create a dynamic between people by introducing some new force, which is the words. So for me, writing isn’t about expressing myself, like I have some thing inside of me that I have to bring out and I’ll give it to people and they’ll be different or richer or something. It’s more like it’s a way to exert a lever on social situations. So I’m not possessive of my work per se; I try to contribute to the social milieu, or to the ongoing dialogue, in such a way that things happen.

I think non-fiction is overrated in terms of how non-fiction it is. Everything that you write is going to be a construct; when you're writing history you're choosing to leave out 99.9% of everything. You're basically making up a story by choosing what to include. You could tell the story of the Spanish civil war by...
writing about what everyone had for breakfast every morning. The fact that we throw out the breakfasts and focus only on the military engagements or what was mentioned in the newspapers, that’s not totally true to reality. But how could you be true to reality?

So writing fiction is just a way to let yourself off the hook: “I’m telling a story.” Maybe it’s a way to be more accountable, because you’re actually telling a story and that’s the focus, the story, as opposed to, “Oh, this is the truth,” which is debatable in every case, be it a historical truth or a philosophical truth.

**Margaret:** CrimethInc. is both famous and notorious for blurring history and fiction anyway. In *Days of War, Nights of Love*, there are all the references to fictional historical events or a certain spin on historical events. What led CrimethInc. to do that?

**CrimethInc.:** I’m not sure that I can answer for everything in *Days of War*. You can sort of tell that *Days of War* was put together by enthusiastic young people who were saying to themselves, “Fuck it! Let’s just say this! Let’s see what happens!” That can have bad results or good results. The exciting thing about *Days of War* is the vitality; you can tell that the people who put it together weren’t thinking about it as a book that a lot of people were going to read. And that’s the kind of fearlessness that you can only have once as a publisher; once everything you put out under that name is going to receive attention, your actions are whole lot heavier. It’s a lot harder to move that freely.

One of the aspects of free motion in that book is the devil-may-care approach to history: “Oh, we’ll just say this, maybe it happened, maybe it didn’t.” One of the points of that, presumably, is to cast into doubt all the other books that say, “This happened, and this was the truth.” *Days of War* seems to proclaim, “Don’t believe us, obviously we’re making things up; maybe you shouldn’t believe them either, maybe they’re making things up.” Maybe all the other books you can get are also fabrications, constructions, or at least should be treated as such.

One might say the traditional way to approach activism or radical literature is to ask, “How do we get people to believe our new idea? How do we get people to believe this new ideology?” That’s not actually particularly useful. Everybody is trying to compete to convert people to their ideology. It seems like the revolutionary thing would be to get people to look at ideologies and reality differently. That would be a part of moving to another phase of revolutionary struggle. So how do you write a book that simultaneously calls itself and all other books into question, in such a way that it has a dynamic effect on the readership rather than persuading people to your opinion? In the regard you mention, *Days of War* is a clumsy but audacious attempt to answer that question.

**Margaret:** Why do you choose to be anonymous under the CrimethInc. moniker?

**CrimethInc.:** As I mentioned, I’m not convinced by the myth of authorship. “These are my thoughts, I came up with them, they’re under my name.” That whole copyright thing? That’s all about private property. Folk songs—before so-called “riot” folk I mean—there are songs that nobody knows who wrote them, everybody sings them. They’re collective property. Everybody adjusts them to their specific situations. I think that that’s a much more sensible format. All sorts of CrimethInc. material has been published about the question of authorship, so maybe I’d better focus on my own choices, rather than the ideological ones.

First of all, I want to emphasize that language and all the stories inside of it are collectively produced. That is not to say that they are horizontally produced, but they are collectively produced. Capitalism is collectively produced: it’s a collective relation that we all participate in, in some ways, but a hierarchical one. We collectively produce language, we collectively produce our ideas. They come out of the conversations we’re all having. One person takes some ideas that have been gestating for hundreds of years, writes a book about them, puts his name on it, and makes a whole lot of money or a whole lot of intellectual capital, wins a whole lot of respect, for being the person who’s basically privatized this previously wild rainforest of ideas. I think that’s bullshit.

Authorship can be useful for accountability, if you’re making a claim that you need to be personally answerable for. But if you’re testing out an idea on other people, I think removing the authorship can be a pretty good thing. “Don’t worry about me and how exciting my biography is—how does this idea affect you? Does it just bounce off of you? Is it useless to you? Is it exciting?”

I’m interested in seeing language play out as a dynamic between people. Not as an expression of one person’s personal reality, but as a collective construction. And personally, in addition to finding that critique compelling, I’m just not interested in being some John Zerzan or Ernest Hemingway or something, who has to contend with more people knowing my shadow self than my real self. I enjoy working collectively on writing projects with other people; I think that I’m more intelligent contributing to a collective process of writing, just as people are generally more articulate in conversation than they are when they have to compose a monologue extemporaneously. I don’t think anybody deserves, in the good sense or the bad sense, the positives that Hemingway gets. Nobody deserves the misery of being a famous public figure, upon whom everybody else can project their personal psychodramas and resentments.

**Margaret:** I feel like that happens to a certain degree with the moniker CrimethInc.

**CrimethInc.:** Well, CrimethInc.’s not important. Everybody can hate CrimethInc. and that’s not a problem. It’s like a false front to absorb all the projections, all the good and bad associations, so that the people involved in it can still be the real individuals they are in their communities, doing the things they care about, without being crippled by people walking up to them on the street and being like, “Oh my god, it’s really you, sign my blah blah blah.”

Since a lot of the attitudes around authors tend toward mythologizing, better to present something that is explicitly a myth for people to mythologize and leave the people who are involved with the project free to go about their real lives.