

THEORY ACTION LOGIC

Your action should speak for itself. Its inner logic should be obvious to the outside eye. When a protest has good action logic, its dramatic challenge to power tells a clear and compelling story.

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“Actions speak louder than words.”
—Ruckus Society motto

Have you ever looked at a protest and wondered what the heck these people were so angry about? Perhaps it was a bunch of kids blockading an intersection. Who are they? What do they want?

With good action logic, nobody needs to ask those questions; an outsider can look at what you’re doing and immediately understand why you’re doing it. For example, people doing a tree-sit so the forest cannot be cut down — the logic is clear and obvious. The action speaks for itself.

Action logic creates powerful stories that move hearts and change minds. Not only is it true that actions speak louder than words, but, particularly in a hostile media climate where activists are often flagrantly misrepresented, it’s important that our actions speak for themselves. It may sound paradoxical, but it often requires lots of thought and care to design actions that make intuitive sense.

Civil disobedience actions — for example the lunch counter sit-ins of the American civil rights movement — tend to have inherent action logic because their purpose is to violate an unjust law in order to highlight exactly that injustice. However, other forms of direct action, which sometimes break laws unrelated to their goal, often need to do some extra work to achieve clear action logic.

Communicative actions (see: THEORY: Expressive and instrumental actions) also need to foster action logic. The pedestrian death puppets action, in which student activists hung full-sized human foam core cut-outs over a dangerous highway in Beirut to draw

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Stories

- Battle in Seattle
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- Billionaires for Bush
- Brazil’s Free Fare Movement
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- Couple in the Cage
- Daycare Centre Sit-In
- Dhawili (turn on the lights)
- Disrupting Obama’s town hall in Myanmar
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- #GambiaHasDecided
- Honk at Parliament
- Kisangani Demands Electric Power
- Lysistrata Project
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- Pedestrian death puppets
- Public Option Annie
- Pyramid of Shoes
- Round Dance Revolution
- Schools of Struggle
- Standing Man
- Stolen Beauty

attention to pedestrian fatalities, had powerful action logic. So did the single moms in Rhode Island, US, who pressured a public housing official for a day care centre by not just sitting-in at his office, but bringing their kids with them and, for a few hours, turning his office into the daycare centre they needed (see: [STORY: Daycare Centre Sit-In](#)).

Most successful actions have this kind of inherent, transparent logic. They speak for themselves. When your action has this kind of clarity at its core, then no matter how the target responds or how things play out, the action will continue to make your point and make sense to observers.

Most famous application:

The lunch counter sit-ins during the civil rights movement had remarkable action logic. When legal segregation was enforced, black and white students violated the law by sitting at lunch counters and waiting to be served. Any outsider looking at the act immediately knew why they were there. They didn't need to carry signs. In fact, their action foreshadowed victory and prefigured the world they wanted to live in: They were living the integration they wanted.

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- Stripping Power in Uganda
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- The Teddy Bear Catapult
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- Who Would Accept?
- Whose Tea Party?
- Yellow Pigs in Parliament
- Yomango

Tactics

- Artistic vigil
- Banner hang
- Blockade
- Citizen's arrest
- Civil disobedience
- Creative disruption
- Creative petition delivery
- Cultural disobedience
- Eviction blockade
- Flotilla
- Guerrilla projection
- Human banner
- Hunger strike
- Identity correction
- Infiltration
- Inflatables
- Jail solidarity
- Mass street action
- Media-jacking
- Nonviolent search and seizure
- Occupation
- Phone blockade
- Public filibuster
- Storytelling
- Subversive travel
- Trek

Principles

- Be the change you want to see in the world
- Breakfast is persuasive
- Bring the issue home
- Choose your target wisely
- Consider your audience
- Don't expect a concrete outcome from a symbolic action
- Don't fall in love with your tactics
- Expose inequality with a viral

gesture

- Focus on basic needs
- If protest is made illegal, make daily life a protest
- Make the invisible visible
- No one wants to watch a drum circle
- Put your target in a decision dilemma
- Shame the authorities by doing their job
- Show, don't tell
- Stay on message
- Take risks, but take care
- The real action is your target's reaction
- The threat is usually more terrifying than the thing itself
- Think narratively
- Use humour to undermine authority
- Use others' prejudices against them
- Use the power of ritual

Theories

- Al faza'a (a surge of solidarity)
- Alienation effect
- Artivism
- Direct action
- Ethical spectacle
- Expressive and instrumental actions
- Framing
- Hamoq and hamas
- Memes
- Prefigurative politics
- Strategic nonviolence

Methodologies

- Action star
- Battle of the story
- Points of intervention
- Power mapping
- SMART objectives
- Story of self, us, and now

TAGS

Action design, Art,
Communications, Direct action,

Media, Social media, Street
protest