

PRINCIPLE

PLAY TO THE AUDIENCE THAT ISN'T THERE

In a media-saturated world, the audience you care about is rarely the one witnessing your action, but rather the one you'll reach through mass media and social media. Design your action with them in mind.

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Andy Bichlbaum

Andy Bichlbaum (AKA Jacques Servin) got his start as an activist when, as a computer programmer, he inserted a swarm of kissing boys in a shoot-'em-up video game just before it shipped to store shelves, and found himself fired, famous, and hugely amused. Now, Andy helps run the Yes Lab for Creative Activism as part of his job as professor of subversion at New York University.

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When you're pulling off a prank or staging some kind of media spectacle, it's important to keep in mind that those you're directly confronting are often not your main audience. When Occupy Wall Street activists swarm Manhattan's financial district or Bhopal activists camp out on the lawn of the CEO of Union Carbide, there's no reason to think that the *immediate* audience will change their minds based on what they're observing. Rather, the idea is to use the immediate audience as unwitting actors in a theatre piece that is being performed for a secondary audience. That secondary audience consists of filmgoers or YouTube viewers or TV watchers or press-release readers — and they're the ones you care most about. Design your intervention with them in mind.

If reporters are going to be present, consider how things will look through their eyes. Regardless, however, make sure to document your own action (see: PRINCIPLE: Do the media's work for them). Choreograph the action so you create and capture the moments you need to tell the story you want to tell. When Agit-Pop pulled off their Public Option Annie guerrilla musical, they snuck more videographers into the conference than singers.

Obviously, the secondary audience is not always your focus. At a rally, say, the key audience might actually be the participants themselves. With most strikes or sit-ins, the key audience is the actual target — a CEO or public official — and your aim is to

POTENTIAL RISKS

Sometimes this principle does not apply. Sometimes the media and the public will see right through an action that is too heavy-handedly crafted for TV. Sometimes the best way to connect with the indirect audience is just to be your unvarnished, authentic self, warts and all (see: STORY: Occupy Wall Street).

RELATED TOOLS

Stories

- Barbie Liberation Organization
- Bidder 70 (Tim DeChristopher)
- Dow Chemical Apologizes for Bhopal
- Manich Msamah
- Occupy Wall Street
- Public Option Annie
- Santa Claus Army

disrupt business as usual and exact a cost that will pressure your target to accede to your demands.

But even with some of these more disruptive actions, the key audience is not in the room. When Tim DeChristopher disrupted a Utah oil and gas auction in 2008, he was not tempted to address the other bidders directly. His action was for a much larger audience — as well as for the land itself that he helped to save.

Sometimes activists think they're out to change the minds of the bankers, CEOs, or others they're ostensibly targeting. It's one thing to *pretend* you're out to change their minds — in order to stage a theatrically effective action, that is often necessary — but it's another thing to believe it yourself. The idea that you can change evildoers' minds by gathering en masse outside their stronghold is not exactly supported by the historical record. Instead, think of your target and your immediate audience as unwitting actors in the theatre piece you're concocting for another audience they're not even aware of.

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LEARN MORE

Making the News: A Guide for Activists and Nonprofits

Jason Salzman, 2003

https://books.google.com/books/about/Making_the_News.html?id=jDhHAAAAMAAJ

Strategic Communications Planning

The SPIN Project, 2005

<http://www.panna.org/sites/default/files/StrategicCommunicationsSPIN.pdf>

How To Live Tweet A Direct Action

CounterAct, 2015

<http://counteract.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Live-tweeting-some-simple-tips-CounterAct-short-version.pdf>

- The Teddy Bear Catapult
- Welcome to Palestine
- Whose Tea Party?
- "You'll never have a home in your f***ing life!"
- Zapatista Caravan

Tactics

- Creative disruption
- Creative petition delivery
- Cultural disobedience
- Electoral guerrilla theatre
- Guerrilla theatre
- Hoax
- Human banner
- Identity correction
- Infiltration
- Media-jacking
- Nonviolent search and seizure
- Occupation
- Public filibuster
- Spoof website
- Subversive travel

Principles

- Anger works best when you have the moral high ground
- Consider your audience
- Do the media's work for them
- Don't dress like a protester
- Kill them with kindness
- Lead with sympathetic characters
- Put your target in a decision dilemma
- Show, don't tell
- Stay on message
- The real action is your target's reaction

Methodologies

- Perception box

TAGS

Action design, Communications, Media, Social media