

BEAUTIFUL TROUBLE: A Toolkit for Artists and Activists

by Andrew Boyd

A Project of Agit-Pop and the Yes Men.

Proposal for a book and accompanying website.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prank websites. Militant carnivals. Flash Mobs. Virtual sit-ins. Guerrilla musicals. Crowd-sourced Facebook actions. Social activism has a creative new edge that is melding prank and PR, and blurring the boundaries between artist and activist, direct action protest and pop art. Until recently these audacious actions were the preserve of a bold and zany few, but the “beautiful trouble” of creative activism is spreading.

There's no shortage of books and blogs anthologizing these happenings. There's also no shortage of how-to manuals and DIY kits telling us how to roll our own creative hi-jinks. *Beautiful Trouble* is not another how-to manual; it's a **how-to-think manual**. It doesn't re-anthologize the same old campaigns and movement moments; rather, it passes them through a very specific filter, with a specific purpose: to tease out a core set of design principles—what the design field calls a “pattern language”—that creative activists can adapt for almost any situation.

A pattern language is a network of interlocking design rules. Each pattern describes a perennial problem and its core solution in such a way that one can apply the solution a million times over without ever doing things the same way twice. Patterns help us remember insights and knowledge and can be used in combination to create new solutions to evolving problems. Patterns and pattern languages originated in the field of architecture, but have since been applied to other fields, including social change. We'll be developing a pattern language specifically for creative activism.

The compendium of patterns will make up the heart of the project. Additional content will complement the patterns, including: capsule case studies showcasing the patterns in action, an inventory of artistic forms, essential theoretical concepts, key practitioner profiles, a glossary of terms, and links to more how-to-ish resources. These sections will be structured in a modular style. A narrative introduction will lead off the book, providing historical background on culture jamming and the creative trends in recent social movements.

Audience: Though potentially amusing and/or inspiring to a generic curious reader, the project is mostly a resource for activists with a sense of humor, artists with a passion for social justice, and other creative dissidents looking to deepen their practice. Seasoned activists will consult it as a reference or to spark “aha!” breakthrough

moments; greenhorn activists will use it as an introduction to a host of new forms as well as a more systematic way of applying them.

Business model: We are considering several book publishers (Norton, Penguin, NYU Press), but don't want to be beholden to the marketplace or to an editor who might not sufficiently share our values and vision. This is a targeted and very valuable addition to progressive movement infrastructure—thus we are pitching movement funders first. The Canadian Labour Congress has promised some initial seed money, and we have already starting writing and researching.

If, down the road, the version of the book we think would be most valuable to the movement is not of interest to major publishers, we're happy to consider several self-publishing options: e-book, limited runs using digital press technology, or simply make it available as a PDF and ask for a donation when downloaded. If there's any residual revenue from book sales, we would put it towards modest staffing of the companion website so we can keep it updated and curated.

We hope to be able to translate the book into Spanish and French (essential in Canada) to broaden its reach, and are actively seeking trade union in-kind support to help with this effort.

We aim to have the book done and a beta of the website up by December 2011.

Companion website: The book will provide the core/starter content for a companion website, which will (under strong curatorial direction) evolve beyond it. The web is a logical home for this project, given how modular and cross-linked the core content is, and also given our non-commercial mission. The website would be searchable, have video & other rich media, and have hot-links to more-in-depth outside info. Content could cross-link in interesting and powerful ways (e.g. case studies linked to all the patterns they showcase as well as all the practitioners involved). If we develop smart intake forms and/or cultivate a few wikipedia-esque-level volunteers, the site could evolve in a 2.0-ish kind of way. The possibilities for the website are considerable. The above is only a sketch.

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If you want **more info**, or are interested in contributing to, volunteering on or funding the project, please **contact**:

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BOOK CONTENTS

Intro

Define creative activism. Place in historical context (Yippies, Greenpeace, ACT-UP, etc. through to the present). Why this book is needed. How to use it. This section will also have a personal touch.

Ethics

Core ethical & philosophical beliefs about the world. Example: Hope is a verb, Be the change you want to see in the world, Practice your theory & theorize your practice, etc.

Theories

Core conceptual toolset. Examples: the ethical spectacle, memes, media virus, framing, "movement as network", etc. These are big-picture lenses to see how the world/art/power works, rather than focused tools to act on it.

Design Rules

Tried and true approaches to creative action design. Framed as a design rule: "Less is more," or as a design instruction: "Flip between the real and the symbolic (and be OK with it)," "Design your action so it speaks for itself," "Use your enemy's weaknesses to confound your enemy's strengths," etc.

Case Studies

Capsule stories of successful (and unsuccessful) creative actions. Examples: Camp Casey, Flying Spaghetti Monster, Public Option Annie, etc. Pair of facing pages matching narrative & visuals with analysis.

Practitioners

Profiles of key action-eers, whether groups (Code Pink, Yes Men), lone artists (Banksy), mini-movements (Raging Grannies, Radical Cheerleaders) or companies (Agit-Pop, SmartMeme).

Methods

Common modalities of creative action like billboard correction, invisible theater, flash mobs and guerrilla video projection. Include links to how-to nuts & bolts.

Debates

Unresolved (and maybe irresolvable) debates that activists need to think about when choosing tactics. We present facing pages pro & con, and we don't take sides. Examples: flag burning, "mainstreaming," violence against property, is culture jamming impotent?, etc.

Resources & Glossary of Terms

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Primary author **Andrew Boyd** has three books to his name: *Daily Afflictions* (Norton, 2002), *Life's Little Deconstruction Book* (Norton, 1998), and the *Activist Cookbook* (UFE, 1997). The *Cookbook*, a precursor to the proposed book, established Andrew within the progressive community as an authority on the art and science of culture jamming.

Andrew's creative activism has made big waves via his work with Billionaires for Bush, Agit-Pop, The Other 98% and other projects.

Much of the groundwork for the proposed book has already been done. The *Cookbook* was a first step at systematizing guidelines for creative action design and collecting a broad set of cases. Since then Andrew has contributed articles on the subject to several anthologies and has covered the creative dimension of the new movements for the *Village Voice*, *The Nation* and other publications.

For the last several years, Andrew has conducted trainings all over the US and Canada under the heading "Culture Jamming 101: Pranks with a Purpose." He has recently been appointed a Fellow of the Center for Artistic Activism at NYU.

In sum, Andrew's experience as a writer, practitioner, theorist, researcher, trainer and teacher all converge to ideally prepare him to write *Beautiful Trouble*.

Collaborators

Web 2.0 campaign pioneer **Phillip Smith** is a dedicated convener, educator, and digital craftsperson. For more than ten years he has focused on growing the online capacity of progressive advocacy campaigns and "movement media." Phillip and Andrew have been co-conspirators since 2002.

Writer, editor, researcher, communications strategist, activist and organizer, **Dave Oswald Mitchell** has been getting into beautiful trouble all of his adult life. As editor of the social justice magazine *Briarpatch* (2005-2010), Mitchell has worked closely with some of North America's foremost radical thinkers, including Naomi Klein, Derrick Jensen, Ward Churchill and Richard Heinberg.

ROUGH BUDGET for Beautiful Trouble

Staff

<i>Writer / Project Manager</i>	\$15,000
<i>Researcher / Editorial Assistant</i>	\$10,000
<i>Interns</i>	\$2,000

Expenses

<i>Materials Acquisition</i>	\$2,000
<i>Website Development</i>	\$5,000
<i>Web Hosting</i>	\$400
<i>Design</i>	\$5,000
<i>Office supplies</i>	\$150
<i>Postage</i>	\$200
<i>Printing/Xeroxing</i>	\$250

Total Costs **\$40,000**

Projected Income

<i>On-line fundraising</i>	\$5,000
<i>Merchandise sales</i>	\$1,000

Funders

<i>Canadian Labor Movement</i>	\$10,000
<i>US Labor Movement</i>	\$10,000
<i>US Foundations</i>	\$10,000
<i>Other</i>	\$4,000

Total Revenue **\$40,000**