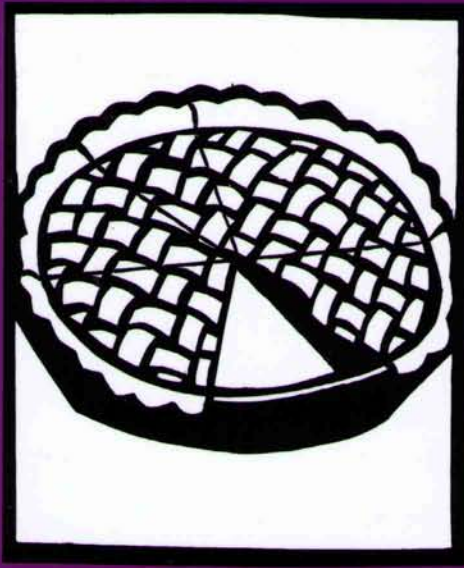


THE ACTIVIST COOKBOOK

CREATIVE ACTIONS FOR A FAIR ECONOMY



A HANDS-ON MANUAL FOR ORGANIZERS, ARTISTS AND EDUCATORS
WHO WANT TO GET THEIR MESSAGE ACROSS IN POWERFUL, CREATIVE WAYS.

© UNITED FOR A FAIR ECONOMY

FOREWORD BY JIM HIGHTOWER

WRITTEN BY ANDREW BOYD

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Page v

FOREWORD

by Jim Hightower

Page vi

THE JOY OF COOKING

Stories from four cooks and how they got into the kitchen.

Page 1

1. INTRODUCTION

A cookbook for the rest of us.

Page 4

2. CUISINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

A survey of styles and modes of creative action.

Page 11

3. SOUP TO NUTS

A soup to nuts guide for producing your own creative actions.

Page 26

4. 3-MINUTE MEALS

A buffet of quick and dirty actions and simple ways to spice up routine events.

Table of Contents

Page 28

5. A LA CARTE FROM SCRATCH

A banquet of creative action ideas you can cook up yourself.

Page 34

6. TRENDS IN AMERICAN DINING

Background information on economic inequality in the US.

Page 42

7. THE AMERICAN PALATE

A survey of common mindsets around wealth and poverty and some strategies for "talkin' equality."

Page 51

8. COMPLETE RECIPES

Complete do-it-yourself kits for producing a few of our pre-designed creative actions.

Page 89

9. SHOPPING FOR FRESH FOODS

Additional resources for the curious.

Page 92

10. KEEPING THE KITCHEN STOCKED

How to stay involved with UFE and Art for a Fair Economy.

Table of Contents

In the spring of 1993, the Communication Workers of America were in the final stages of a five year effort to organize 1700 clerical and technical workers on the campus of Indiana University. Although nearly half the full-time staff qualified for food stamps and other forms of public assistance, a large share of workers were not responding. Organizers needed a creative way to juice up the energy of the election, appeal to disinterested workers, and turn out the vote in big numbers.

Their answer: Elvis Presley. Organizers hired a professional Elvis impersonator and rewrote a series of Elvis songs to carry the union message, including "Heartbreak Payroll" and the Vegas crooning song, "Now or Never," which became the theme of the campaign.

The pro-union Elvis was featured on billboards and radio ads and went along on work site visits.

Workers who wouldn't look up from their desks in the past would chase him down the hall to sign their union literature. The campus was a buzz with "Elvis sightings." On election eve, he was also the featured guest at a huge get out the vote rally. The union won by a landslide, 1005 to 250.

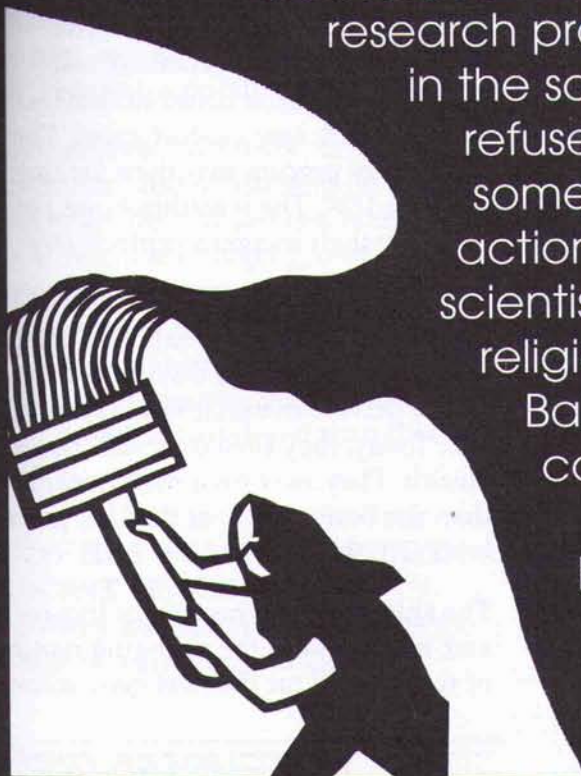
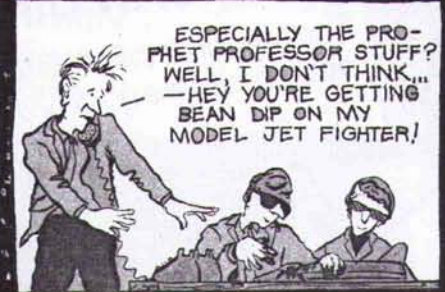


In 1983 a big fight was brewing at the University of Michigan. Student peace groups were holding vigils and sit-ins, trying to ban military research from campus. Scientists were claiming, with considerable success, that their work was civilian in nature. One group of students decided it was time to try a different approach.

They disguised themselves in dark sunglasses, Walkman™ head sets, and white lab coats. Claiming to be members of the Nuclear Saints of America, a right-wing religious cult, they took over a military research lab.

Each student brought along their own military research project (knitting a nose cone warmer in the school colors, for example) and refused to leave the lab until they got some research done. Mistaking the action for a show of support, the lead scientist enthusiastically joined in a religious ceremony in which Atomic Fire Ball candy was given out as communion.

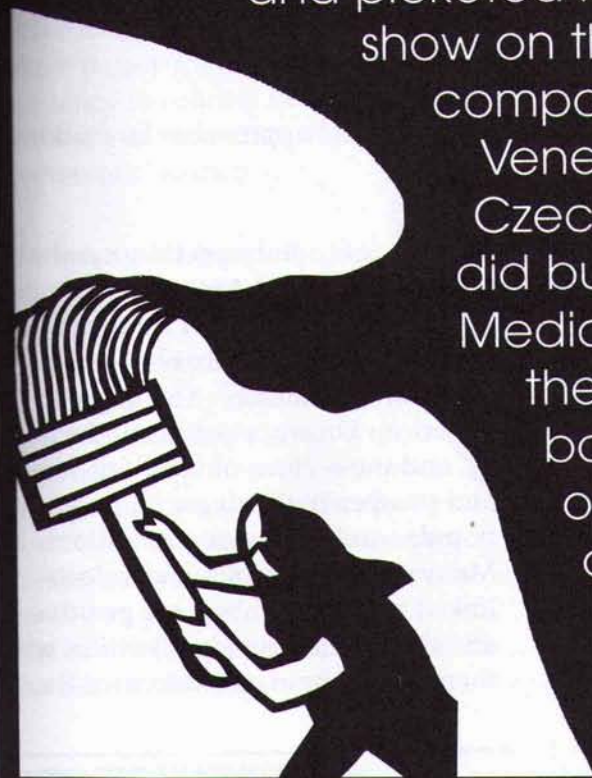
He eventually realized his mistake, but it was too late. The story, complete with telling photos, was all over the next morning's papers.



In 1990, 1700 steelworkers in Ravenswood, WV were locked out of the factory where they had worked for years. Union organizers traced control of the plant back to Mark Rich, a multi-billionaire commodities trader wanted by the US government for tax evasion, and currently hiding out in Zug, Switzerland. Organizers created several huge puppets, including one of Mark Rich himself as well as a 20ft tall puppet of Mother Jones, the gutsy 19th century union activist.



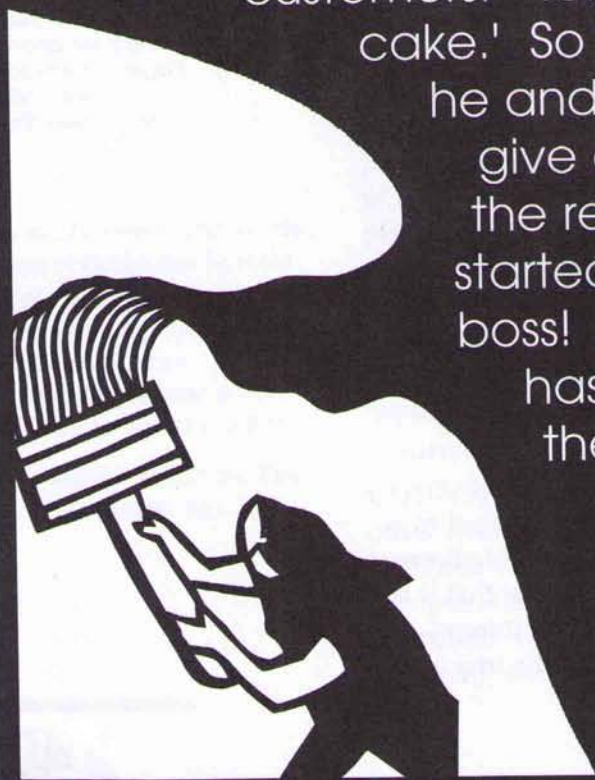
With the puppets in tow, activists flew to Switzerland and picketed his office. Then they took the show on the road, picketing his trading companies in the Netherlands, the UK, Venezuela, Romania, and Czechoslovakia. Wherever Mark Rich did business, the puppets were there. Media on three continents covered the controversy. Eventually he backed down, the plant was re-opened and workers got their contract. Who says you can't do international guerrilla theater?



In 1996 Tony Roma, founder of the rib restaurant chain of the same name, was actively lobbying against a living wage campaign in Oregon. Just before lunch rush at the Portland franchise, Jobs with Justice supporters trickled in by two's and three's until, unknown to management, they had filled many of the seats in the restaurant.

At this point a 6 foot 2 organizer from the letter carrier's union, sauntered in, dressed as Marie Antoinette, in full costume, with an 18th century style powdered wig and a couple of attendants in waiting.

He walked right past the shocked managers to the center of the restaurant and addressed the hushed customers: "Tony Roma is saying, 'let them eat cake.' So let's have some cake." And then he and his attendants proceeded to give out slices of cake to everyone in the restaurant. Supporters then started chanting, "Lousy sauce! Lousy boss! Don't eat here!" Oregon now has the highest minimum wage in the country.



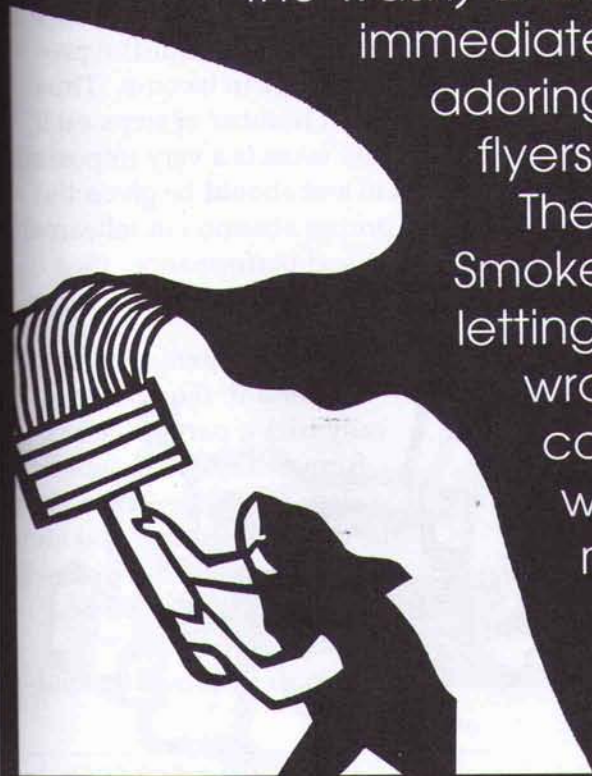
In 1985, in Corvallis Oregon, the Forest Service had reserved an auditorium for a huge Smokey the Bear birthday party for elementary school children. Earth First! decided to crash the party. They printed a leaflet (in big letters so a child could read it) saying that it was 10 times more likely that Smokey's favorite forest would be destroyed by logging than by a forest fire.

One Earth First! member dressed up in a Smokey the Bear costume (the Forest Service's own Smokey the Bear costume had been destroyed in the wash) and walked into the party. He was immediately surrounded by a sea of adoring kids and started giving out flyers.

The rangers tried to forcibly eject Smokey from the premises without letting on to the kids that anything was wrong, eventually knocking his costume head off. The next day it was logging, not careless use of matches, that dominated the front page of the paper.



Grizzly being read his rights. Earth First! Yellowstone Park action. July, 1985. photo David Cross





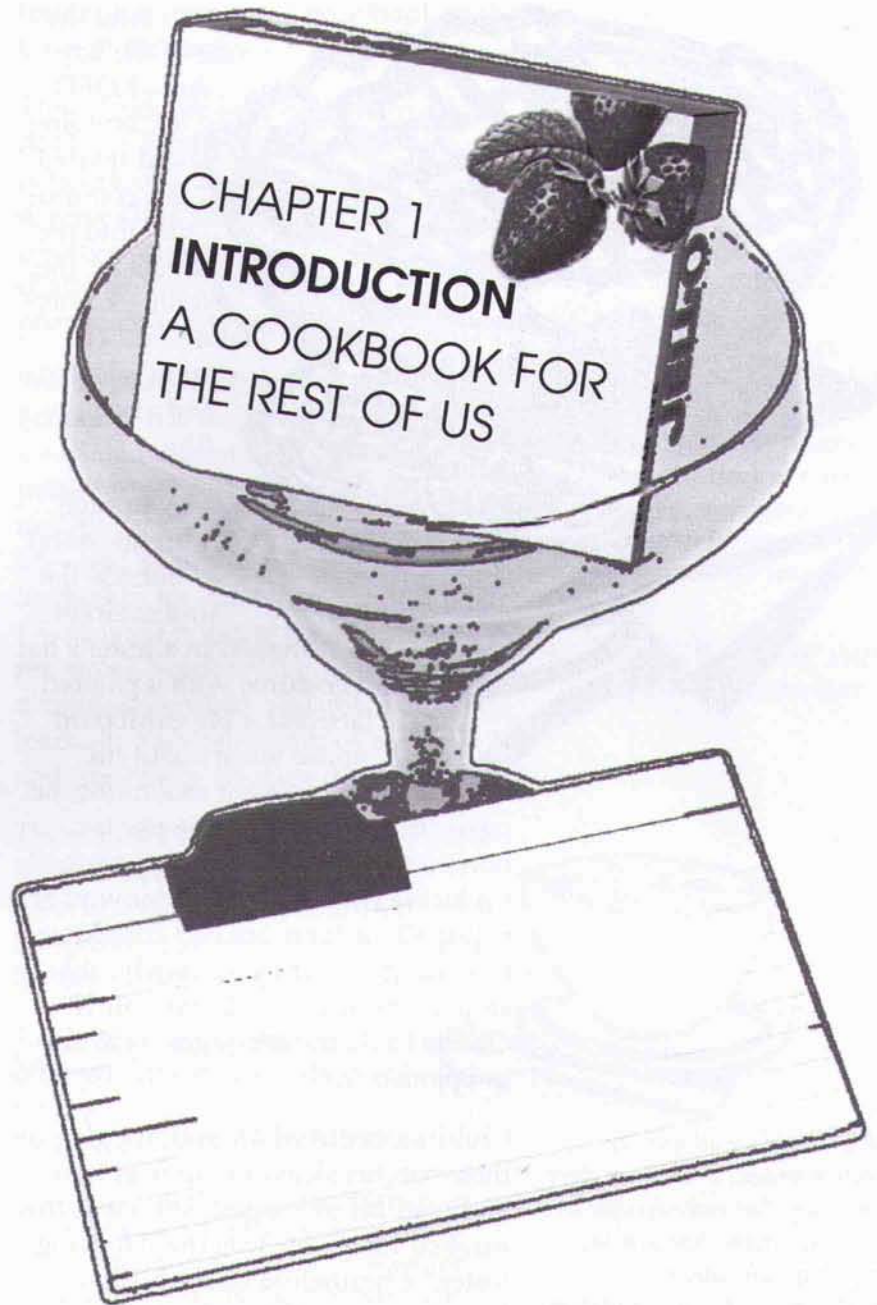
In the early 80's, to help sell the idea of "trickle-down" economics to the public, the American Conservative Union

held a gala dinner featuring the world's largest pie. Over 17 feet across, the pie was to be sliced and distributed to all in attendance as a way of demonstrating that "everyone will get a piece of the pie."

Five members of the Community for Creative Non-Violence, wearing over-size business suits and name tags of Reagan's wealthy friends, walked into the party and jumped into the pie. With the TV cameras rolling, they slopped around in the pie goop, slinging it around at each other, screaming, "It's all for me! It's all for me!" To get them out, security guards had to wade into the pie themselves. The event was ruined, and that night an incredible image of greed run amok was beamed out to living rooms across America.

In the early 90's, labor activists in Baltimore were outraged at the huge government subsidies that downtown corporations had received. Activists organized a "sightseeing tour" of the worst offenders and invited the community and media along. At each stop, with the target site in the background, folks held up huge dollar signs and numbers on placards, making it very clear who was getting welfare and exactly how much. The media loved it.

In 1994, TV stations all across the country were refusing to air *Deadly Deception*, the Academy Award winning film exposing GE's involvement in the nuclear weapons industry. To protest this censorship, activists from Paper Tiger and FAIR projected the





entire film onto the side of the Bay Area KQED

TV building and invited the community into the streets for the evening's entertainment. The station relented and aired the film.

A strange figure stood outside the supermarket, dressed in a jester's hat and costume with a painted face and a big cardboard house worn about his torso. Silent as a mime, he gave out leaflets and little plastic houses with a tiny message wrapped up inside each, such as: "Know your rights #3. If there are bad conditions in your apartment you may be able to stop a rent increase. Collect all 17!" On the back, the messages were also in Spanish.

Children gathered around, tugging on their parents sleeves to look at him and read his messages. Who was this masked man? He was the "Housing Jester," a brainchild of the Boston housing group, City Life, and the mascot of their upcoming Affordable Housing Festival. The word got out, local media picked up the image, attendance at the event was high.

Woody Allen says that "90% of life is just showing up." What he forgets is that the other 10% makes all the difference. Okay, so you've shown up. Now what do you do? That's the question this cookbook tries to answer. If the pie-wreckers had

crashed the party with the standard placards and slogans, they would have been discreetly escorted out the door. If the housing jester hadn't changed costume on his way to the supermarket, sure, people would have taken the leaflets but they wouldn't have been charmed or intrigued. If the film activists had held a private protest screening or if the tour organizers had held a standard rally, there would have been no direct dramatic challenge to the target, no media spectacle, and consequently, a lot less pressure.

This cookbook is full of action ideas like the ones above that will help you creatively fight back against corporate greed.

For the last twenty years, there has been an all out "class war" against the economic security of working people in this country. Workers are losing ground and poor people are being scapegoated for these bad economic policies.

A movement is building for greater economic fairness. Workers are building alliances with communities and forming worker centers to stand up for their rights. The organized labor movement is newly energized and putting more resources into organizing and economics education. Grassroots political groups are focusing on economic justice. Immigrant groups and welfare recipients are standing up to say they will not be scapegoated.

At the heart of any movement, any *moving* of people, is art and culture. Imagine the civil rights movement without song. Imagine the labor movement without murals and creative street actions. Imagine the peace movement without giant Bread

Why should we all use our creative power...? Because there is nothing that makes people so generous, joyful, lively, bold, and compassionate, so indifferent to...the accumulation of objects and money.

BRENDA UELAND

and Puppet figures floating above a rally. Imagine the populist farm movements without weekend encampments, song and theater. Imagine the movement for gay and lesbian rights without creative posters, graphics and "A Day Without Art" events.

This cookbook is for people engaged in these struggles. It is overflowing with ideas for creative action—ideas that can stir up the brainstorm already percolating in your own imaginations. Like a real cookbook, sometimes just seeing a recipe makes your mouth water. The mere suggestion gets you thinking about something you want to cook and eat, even if you don't follow the recipe.

And for those of you who are saying, *...this isn't for me, I'm not an artist, I get stage fright, I can't draw, I can't sing, I'm not creative, I have no talent...*, think about this: if you have ever been to a demonstration or carried a placard or raised your arms or voice in protest, you've already done political theater, you've already done a creative action in public. Talent is not some elusive quality that some have and others don't. Everybody has something to offer. Being creative means being resourceful, open to alternatives and possibilities. It means being committed to your inner vision. Art isn't something rich people do with their leisure time—it's something working people do with their lives.

This manual is designed to help you put on creative actions around issues of growing inequality in the US. It is written in a modular fashion: you can read it straight through or dip in anywhere. We suggest you approach it in the same spirit you might approach a cookbook: as an inventory of possibilities, an introduction to

unfamiliar cuisines, a handbook of the tools of the trade.

This cookbook is brought to you by Art for a Fair Economy, a growing network of artists and activists from diverse class backgrounds seeking creative ways to reach people and challenge the cultural myths that support economic inequality.

We are part of United for a Fair Economy (formerly Share the Wealth), a national organization that draws public attention to the growth of income and wealth inequality in the US—and to the implications of this inequality for American life and labor. We provide popular education resources, work with grassroots organizations, conduct research, support legislative action to reduce inequality and undertake creative direct actions.

There's a lot in this cookbook—something for everyone. Use it; play with it; cook up trouble with it; pass it around—and please, make a little history with it wherever you can.

To whet your appetite, we offer you our tiny manifesto:

ART IS FOR THE REST OF US

ART IS NOT A COMMODITY OR A PLAYTHING OF CORPORATE POWER • ART IS FOR THE REST OF US • art for the rest of us TRANSFORMS THE WORLD • art for the rest of us CAN BE MADE BY "NON-ARTISTS" • art for the rest of us IS POLITICAL WITHOUT BEING HEAVY-HANDED • art for the rest of us CAN LIVEN UP DRY ECONOMIC DATA AND TELL A STORY • art for the rest of us CAN REACH PEOPLE WHO WOULD OTHERWISE BE TURNED OFF • art for the rest of us IS EMPOWERING • art for the rest of us BUILDS COMMUNITY • art for the rest of us IS FUN, PROVOCATIVE, AND ACCESSIBLE • art for the rest of us IS BY, FOR AND OF THE REST OF US

No revolutionary movement is complete without its poetic expression. If such a movement has caught hold of the imagination of the masses they will seek a vent in song for the aspirations, fears, and hopes, the loves and hatreds engendered by the struggle. Until the movement is marked by the joyous, defiant singing of revolutionary songs, it lacks one of the most distinctive marks of a popular revolutionary movement: it is the dogma of the few and not the faith of the multitude.

—JAMES CONNOLLY, 1907
IRISH REVOLUTIONARY



Art is not a mirror to reflect reality but a hammer with which to change it.

—BERTOLT BRECHT



Creative actions come in all shapes, sizes and flavors, from street theater skits to guerrilla leafleting, to media hoaxes. Here

we present a sampling of some of the major cuisines, arranged in order from most familiar to most exotic.

Think of this list as a menu of possibilities. Use it to stretch your imagination.

Popular Theater

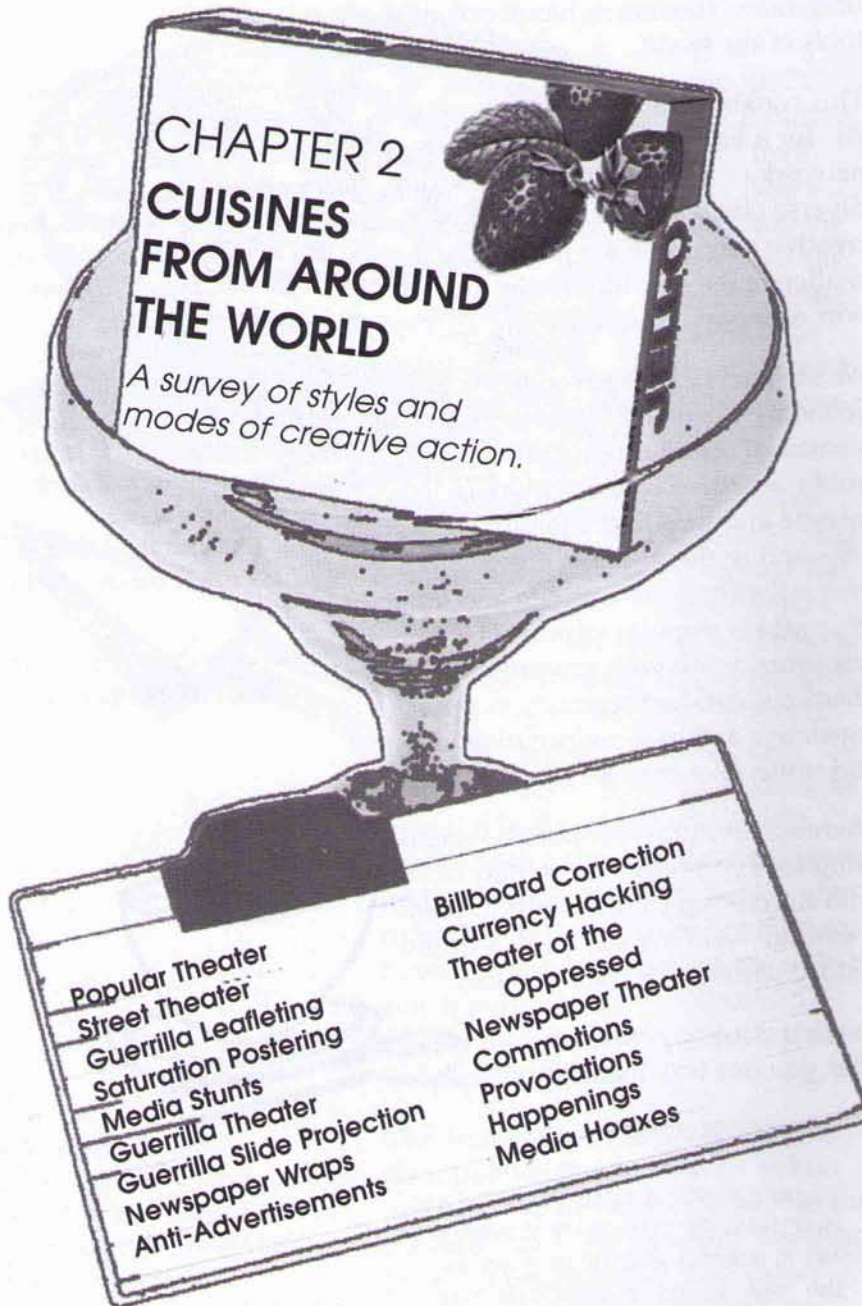
People all over the world are taking back theater to explore issues that are relevant to them and their communities. Popular theater encompasses a range of forms and movements. In general, it is non-commercial, rooted in community and struggle, and often done on the cheap, using local materials. It often challenges the boundaries between actor and non-actor, and performer and audience. the Bread and Puppet Theater, the San Francisco Mime Troupe, In the Heart of the Beast, The Los Angeles Poverty Department, and the work of Augusto Boal and his Theater of the Oppressed are all part of this broader movement.

Street Theater

Throughout history and in many cultures, the medium of "the street," or common public space, has served as a venue for creatively voicing concerns. It is both immediate and affordable. Some common forms of street theater include:

Sidewalk skits. Short skits performed on a sidewalk, street-corner or public square.

Processions. Pageants, parades and costumed processions down the street, often with music and big pup-



pets, sometimes festive, sometimes somber.

Spectacles. Large-scale performances such as the outdoor version of the 100 Chairs (see Chapter 8: Complete Recipes).

Ritual performances. Deeply symbolic performances with ritual-like rhythms and atmosphere. Can also be punchy adaptations of standard ritual formats, such as alternative shrines or mock exorcisms, funerals, incantations, etc.

Guerrilla Leafleting

Using theater to leaflet is a fun and effective way to distribute information. In the 80's, activists opposed to US military intervention in Central America dressed up as waiters and carried maps of the war in Central America on serving trays. They went up to people in the street and said, "Excuse me, did you order this war?" and then followed up with an itemized bill and the line, "Well, you paid for it."

Saturation Postering ("Sniping")

Pasting up posters or stenciling graffiti late at night in public spaces is known as sniping. Saturation Postering takes sniping to a whole new level. A good example of this is Poster Nation, a coordinated nationwide postering campaign begun by students at Wesleyan University and now organized by United for a Fair Economy.

On a few key days each year (Tax Day, Labor Day, Election Day, etc.), activists post a similar set of posters in public places all over the country. The campaign is coordinated in an open-ended, decentralized fashion over the Internet. The Poster Nation

web page (www.stw.org/posters) allows you to join the campaign, view and download any of the current posters, offer new posters of your own invention, as well as locate other people in your area who are active in the campaign.

This kind of structure can achieve a strong, nationally coordinated message focus and at the same time, provide a great degree of freedom and creativity to local artists and activists. With the web address and a tiny explanation on every poster, the campaign can grow like a virus. (For more information on Poster Nation, see Chapter 10: Keeping the Kitchen Stocked.)



If you don't like the news, go out and make some of your own.

—WES "SCOOP" NISKER

Media Stunts

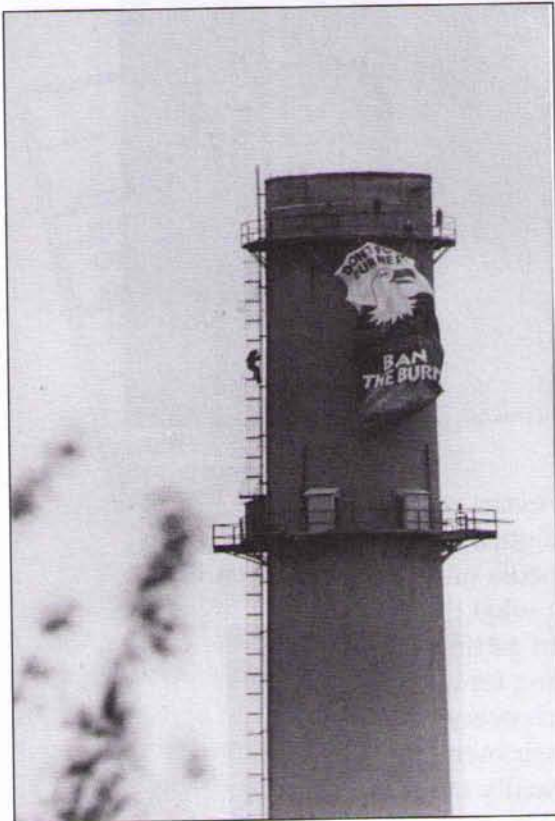
A media stunt is a creative event with a strong symbolic hook designed to focus the attention of the media on your issue. Understanding what the media wants is important in getting coverage. Editors are looking for a short punchy event in which everyday people, who are like their own audience, do something visually interesting. This doesn't have to be a funny gimmick—it can also be a dramatic way of showing the seriousness of the problem. Here are a some of

Death gives Phillip Morris some bad press, New York City, 1996. photo Karla Capers, INFACT.

To move the media, you must communicate as responsible extremists, not as reasonable moderates.

—PUBLIC MEDIA CENTER

"Ban the Burn."
Greenpeace hangs a banner on a Michigan smoke stack to protest acid rain in the Great Lakes region, 1994.
photo Marc PoKempener,
Impact Visuals



the kinds of stunts that have worked for activists in the past:

Dramatize a phrase. One candidate held a press conference outside a waffle house to dramatize how his opponent was "waffling" on the issues; clean government activists in Maine held an event with over 25 kites in the air, telling big money lobbyists to "go fly a kite."

Hand out symbols not just leaflets. Handing out flyers rarely attracts the media. AIDS activists have handed out condoms and environmental activists, gas masks.

Do a real stunt. Sometimes, just doing a real stunt at the right time and place can draw a story: one activist got his picture and his issue in the paper by climbing a tree and talking to

reporters on his cell phone, others have parachuted into outdoor events, dangled from buildings, immersed themselves in tubs of jello, etc.

Send a unique message. Instead of sending just letters to a target, send a symbolic item such as a container of contaminated water or a chunk of government cheese.

Hold a contest or an art show. Put out a call to local artists for "Art for a Fair Economy" and hold a show. Or ask kids to draw images of fair and unfair worlds or economies.

Drop a banner. An ordinary banner in an extraordinary place can draw the media. Greenpeace has hung a "Next

Time Try Recycling" banner on a toxic barge in New York harbor, and a "World Bankenstein" banner on the World Bank building in DC. Try hanging a "Cut Corporate Welfare" banner off a corporate skyscraper after a major round of downsizing. Highway overpasses are also good sites and much easier.

Create a symbol or replica of the problem. The 100 Chairs (see Chapter 8: Complete Recipes) is only one of many great examples. In the 80's students erected South African shantytowns on campuses all across the US. Environmental activists dumped a 20 foot high inflatable toxic waste barrel outside the Utah State Capitol to protest a proposed toxic waste dump. With each person adding one pair, the citizens of Paris assembled a tragically huge pile of shoes to commemorate all the victims of land mines. Ceramic artist Barbara Dornachy made a sculpture of 34,000 miniature bombers and missiles to dramatize the size of the US nuclear arsenal.

Guerrilla Theater

Peace and AIDS activists have staged mass "die-in's" which blocked street traffic or forced officials to pick their way through piles of "bodies" to get into their offices. Guerrilla theater intrudes into everyday public spaces, creatively interfering with business as usual. Guerrilla theater often uses a "stage" that is already charged with meaning and attention. Members of Border Arts in San Diego draw attention to immigration issues by trespassing onto Federal property to perform in the No Man's Land on the US-Mexico border.

In guerrilla theater, as in guerrilla warfare, combatants use small, quick, mobile actions to engage the public.

Or they appear by surprise, seize a strategic stage and hold it just long enough to accomplish their mission.

Guerrilla Projection

With a high-powered slide or movie projector, you can turn the side of a building into a huge advertisement for your cause. On the eve of the Great American Smokeout in 1994, INFACT hit the Philip Morris building in New York with images two stories tall and a running count of the number of kids addicted to cigarettes. The kind of slide projector you need is called a Xenon 750 and can be rented for \$150 and up.

Newspaper Wraps & Inserts

Imagine opening up a street corner newspaper box, pulling out the local daily, sleepily looking it over and suddenly realizing that someone has switched the front page! Wraps and inserts are direct interventions into other publications. A wrap is a front (and back) page of your own invention that wraps around the target publication. An insert, maybe disguised as an extra section, slips inside.

By closely mimicking typeface and layout, wraps and inserts should seem, at least at first glance, like the real thing. After that there are two strategies: 1) blaring headlines with

strongly worded information that a reader will very quickly realize is alien to the target publication or 2) a more subtle approach in which the reader only slowly begins to suspect that something is amiss. Often wraps and inserts are used to raise concerns about how the target publication is covering the issues.

Remember: the target publication will interpret any wrap or insert as a

hostile action, trespassing, a violation of free speech, etc. So don't get caught or reveal your identity.

Anti-Advertisement

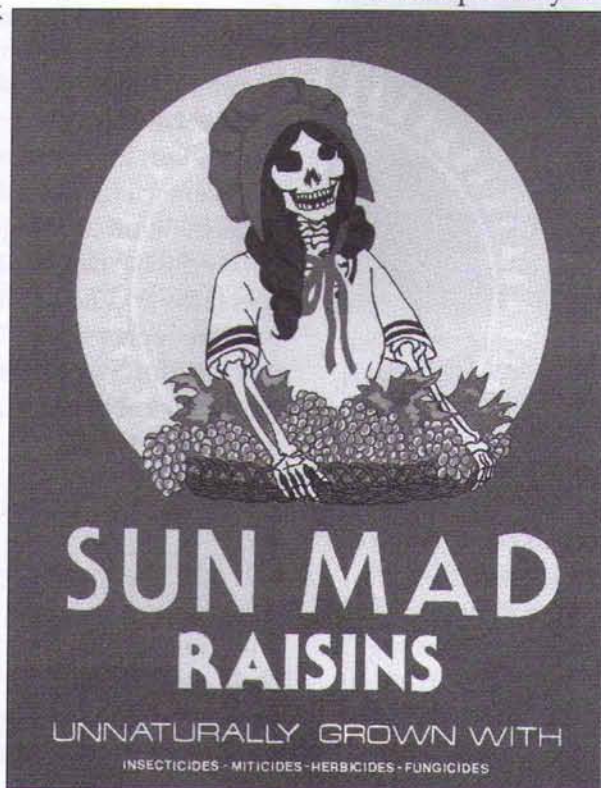
Imagine walking past a wall of poster ads in the subway and coming across one with a riderless horse grazing in a cemetery accompanied by the slogan, "Welcome to

Marlboro Country." An anti-advertisement is an alternative advertisement that mocks and parodies a real ad. It can take any form a real ad takes: TV spot, magazine ad, poster, direct mail piece, etc. The idea is to very closely mimic the texture and components of the real ad but in some way twist the message around into a new and opposing meaning. The final product is either placed and paid for exactly as if it were a real ad or it can be circulated more informally, say as a postcard.

Free speech is the right to shout "theater" in a crowded fire.

—YIPPIE PROVERB

"Sun Mad." Anti-advertisement attacking agricultural pesticide practices. 1981 serigraph Ester Hernandez



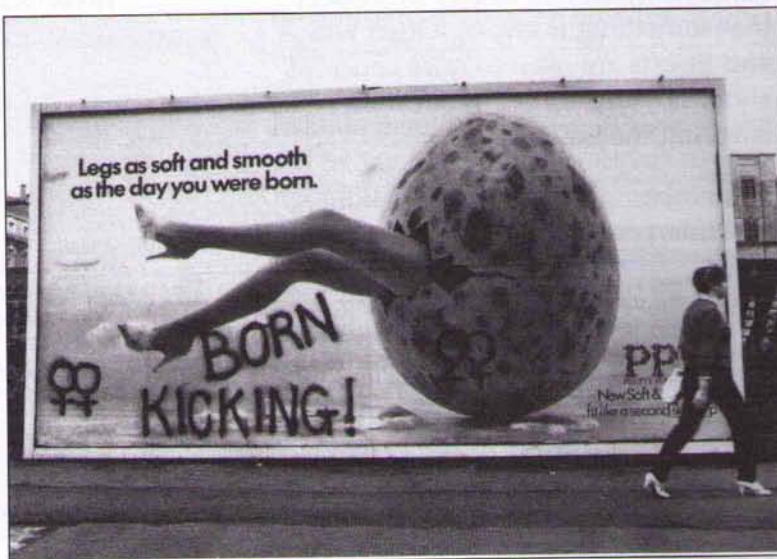
...social movements...bring people together to name their experience and share stories. A sound bite is merely an extremely abbreviated form of story-telling.

—CHARLOTTE RYAN

Billboard Correction

Imagine driving down the highway and seeing a huge billboard for Kool cigarettes but the "K" has been craftily

"A can of spray paint, a blithe spirit, and a balmy night ..." photo Jill Posener



changed to an "F," to spell "Fool." These "roadside advertising enhancements" have the advantage of simple tools (spray paint and a ladder), high-visibility, and a big public prank for all to see. According to the Billboard Liberation Front, "the most effective alterations are often the simplest. If you can totally change the meaning of an advert by changing one or two letters, you'll save a lot of time and trouble." Billboards are considered private property and altering them illegal. Proper attention should be given to security and avoiding arrest.

Currency Hacking

Currency hacking is a way to circulate a message by putting it on cash. Generally this is done by stamping phrases in ink right across the face of the bills. For example, members of the gay rights movement have stamped "gay money" and "lesbian money" in bright pinks on bills to gain visibility and demonstrate the consumer clout of the gay community. For obvious reasons, currency hack-

ing might be a particularly suitable way to carry a message about economic injustice. The stamp design could play off of icons and text already on the bill. Again, remember, any alteration of US currency is a Federal offense and we unswervingly plead with you not to do anything that even remotely resembles it.

Theater of the Oppressed

Described by its founder, Augusto Boal, as a "rehearsal for revolution," Theater of the Oppressed is a set of interactive theater games and techniques that allow an audience to intervene in open-ended performances. One of the goals is to break down the barrier between actor and spectator and have all participants become "spect-actors." Typically, the work is done in community, school or workplace settings and can take a number of forms:

Forum Theater. Performers act out a scene of oppression but leave it unresolved. The audience is invited to suggest and enact solutions. In this way the community can confront their oppression and test out ways of overcoming it. Theater becomes a medium in which to explore solutions to social problems.

Image Theater. Participants make still images of their lives, feelings, experiences and oppressions; groups suggest titles or themes, and individuals "sculpt" images under these titles, using their own and others' bodies as "clay."

Invisible Theater. Invisible Theater occurs in an everyday public space but remains "invisible" to the public only the performers know a performance is taking place.

Theater is a vocation for all human beings: it is the true nature of humanity.

—AUGUSTO BOAL

For example, a performer enters a grocery store, picks up some basic food items (rice, bread, beans, milk) but when it comes time to pay, tells the cashier she has no money. She insists she needs the food to feed herself and her family. The cashier responds; the scene evolves. Another performer joins in, saying she should be allowed to have the food. The manager arrives. Another performer goes off on a rant, saying she should be thrown out of the store.

Other performers, farther from the center of action, turn to their neighbors and remark upon the goings-on. The scene continues to evolve; real issues are confronted, yet the performance remains invisible to the public. Good invisible theater requires a detailed script and enough rehearsals to cover the many possible directions a performance might take.

Newspaper Theater

Newspaper Theater is a set of simple techniques for turning average news items into theatrical performances with a political edge.

Crossed reading. Two news items are read, alternating back and forth, each giving critical friction to the other.

Rhythmic reading. News is read to the rhythm of rock, rap, country, or Gregorian chant in such a way that the rhythm contradicts the story, revealing the news item's true agenda.

Parallel action: Actors mime actions while the news is read, showing the context in which the news really occurred. One hears the news but sees something else that complements it visually.

Text out of context: The news is presented out of the context in which it

was published. For example, an actor gives the speech about austerity measures previously delivered by the Minister of Economics while he devours an enormous sandwich.

Commotions

In the mid 1960's, Abbie Hoffman and a few friends dumped a flurry of \$1 dollar bills on the New York Stock Exchange. The ensuing commotion, with stock brokers scrambling and fighting each other all over the floor, brought trading to a halt and became an icon of what was wrong with American culture and how easily it could be fingered.

A commotion is powerful and dangerous for the same reason: other people are doing the performing. When your target makes your point for you, it can be very convincing. However, your target may not play the way you hope, so you need to be both crafty and responsible.

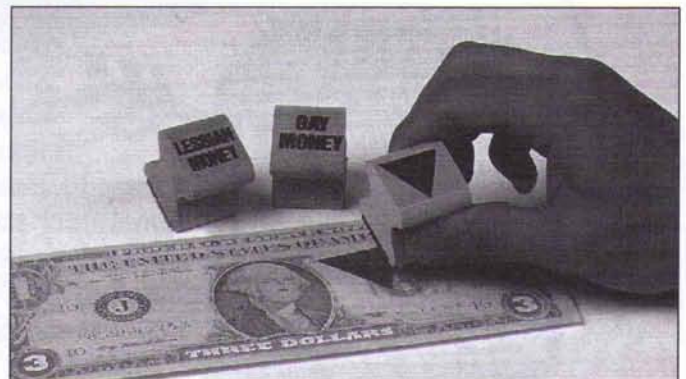
Provocations

In the 1960's the Provos, a group of Amsterdam radicals, disrupted the local automobile culture by blocking traffic. They also began to fill Amsterdam with "White Bicycles"—old bicycles, fixed up, painted white, and left on the streets for everybody to use. Their idea was that nobody owned the bicycles; people just rode them wherever they needed and left them for the next person.

A provocation always has two parts: a negative, direct attack on the target and a positive, playful "White Action"

Instead of waging an all-out assault on the Castle, the prankster slips through the gates wearing a fool's outfit...

—ART TINNITUS



Pride Stamps. Money talks—but what should it say? photo Dan Kaufman Graphics

that offers a glimpse of a working alternative. The two work hand in hand.

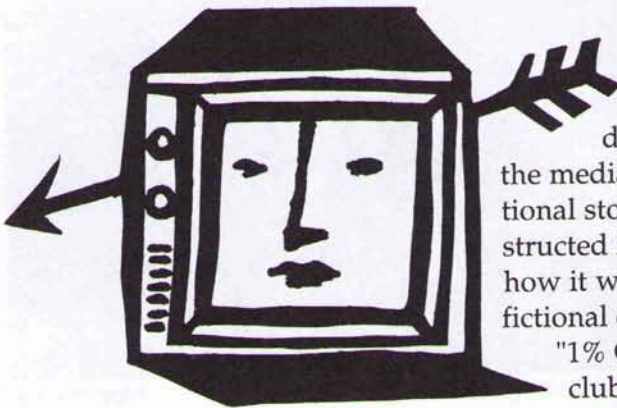
Happenings

In 1967 Abbie Hoffman and 25,000 other protesters, many dressed as witches and warlocks and chanting incantations, encircled the Pentagon and tried to levitate it. National Guard units were given explicit instructions to at no time permit the protesters to make a complete linking of hands around the building.

An action-oriented Happening is an absurd event that disarms and ridicules the target—almost by association. In Poland members of the Orange Alternative would gather at the Warsaw Zoo, hold hands around the Orangutan cage and sing Stalinist hymns. What could the Polish police do? Arrest them? For what?

Pranks are symbolic warfare.

—ABBIE HOFFMAN



Media Hoax

A media hoax is an elaborate ruse designed to entrap the media into covering a fictional story carefully constructed for them. Here's how it works: you invent a fictional entity, such as the "1% Club," an exclusive club for the very

wealthy that meets in different places every Friday night for a "feast of destruction" at which each member tries to outdo the other by burning a greater amount of their own money.

By producing "evidence" that such a club exists: staged photos, an invitation on letterhead, an answering message, etc., you get an out of town paper to cover it sight unseen.

Now, with this clip, you "really" exist and you can go on to generate more substantial media. Maybe the story snowballs. At some point before the ruse is uncovered by others, you hold a press conference, reveal the deception, and draw attention both to the issue itself (in this example, the reality of obscene wealth) as well as cultural biases revealed in the process of the media's gullibility.

If this sounds far fetched, take inspiration from Joey Skaggs, a New York conceptual con artist, who invented a fictional pet brothel (yes, a pet brothel), which culminated in a prime-time ABC news segment that received an Emmy nomination for best news program of the year.



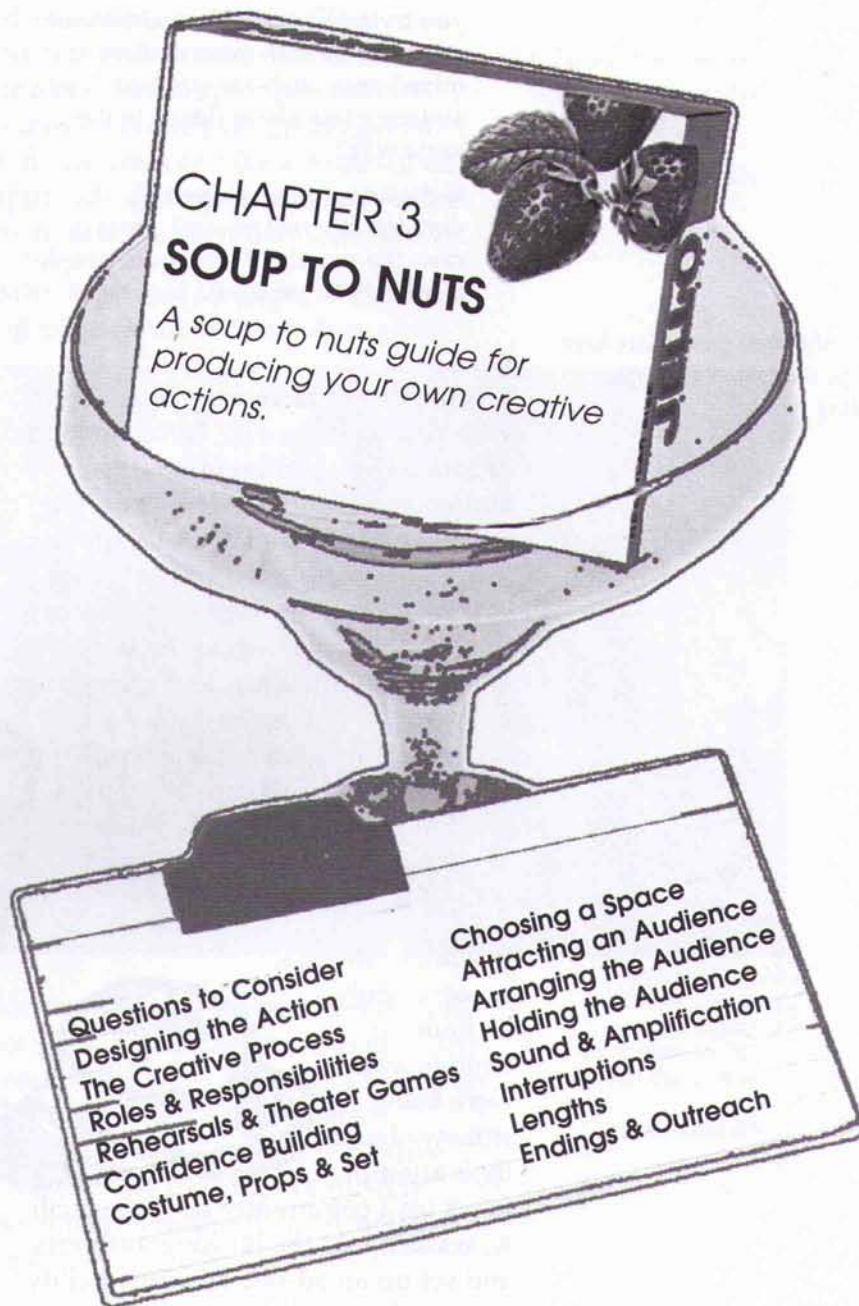
This chapter presents tactics and techniques that will help you devise, produce and perform your own creative actions.

PLANNING THE MENU

When you're putting together your own actions it really pays off to take a couple steps back and think through your goals and options. Consider how your action fits into the larger strategy or campaign you are involved in. Try to get clear on what are you trying to communicate and to whom. Think about what has and hasn't worked in the past. We offer the following questions as a guide.

Questions to Consider when Planning a Creative Action

1. Is there a political target? If so, what do they want? What are your goals? What pressure can you bring to bear?
2. Who's your audience? Is it the general population or a particular constituency?
3. Where does your audience gather? Union conferences, churches, public squares, rush hour subway stations, parades, cultural events? Indoors or outdoors?
4. What does your audience care about? Health care, daycare, job cuts, welfare?
5. What message, style and mode of delivery will be most effective at reaching your audience (given who they are, where they are and what they care about)? Will it be direct (live) or indirect (via the media)? Subtle and sophisticated or more straightforward? Aggressive and challenging or more gentle? Straight or satirical?
6. Are you attempting to nourish and reinforce an audience that already substantially agrees with you or are



you trying to persuade and educate an audience with more neutral or mixed opinions? Do you and your audience talk about things in the same way?

7. Is the action fun? Does it demonstrate real power? Does it raise the morale of your own people? Is it likely to get media coverage?

Not only must great ideas have wings, they must also have landing gears.

—UNKNOWN

It is important to be very clear about who your audience is. Different kinds of actions have different kinds of audiences. If you are demonstrating outside a corporate HQ or disrupting the office of an elected official, then you've got to consider two audiences: the political target whose behavior you want to influence, and the regular audience (onlookers and observers via the media), whose understanding and support you want to gain. You need to think about how your action will affect both of these audiences.

In Rhode Island, a group of public housing tenants who were being stonewalled in their attempt to set up a community day care facility, walked into the housing authority and set up an ad-hoc day care facility right in the middle of the director's office—complete with children, caretakers, and toys. The organizers of this action understood that they had two audiences and devised an action that spoke powerfully to both by fusing symbolism with political pressure.

Actions like the ones above, are called *direct* actions because they *directly* challenge a political target. On the other hand, a street theater skit in the park or an indoor performance at a

union hall is not a direct action. There is no confrontation with a political target and the only audience is right there in front of you, watching. Here your primary purpose is to bring a message before the public, and to educate and inspire.

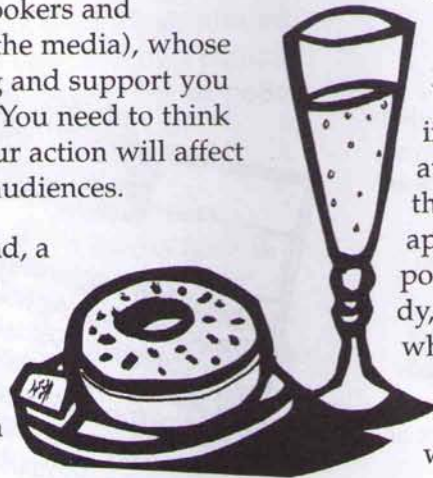
In spite of the differences between these two kinds of actions, you will find that many of the tactics and techniques described in the next sections apply to both, though maybe in different ways. Keep this in mind as you read through the next sections.

Designing the Action-Performance

There are no hard and fast rules on how to design an effective creative action. By nature, creativity is open-ended and experimental. An action is a unique encounter between your group's style and imagination and an issue and audience. However, in spite of this great variety, creative approaches draw upon a common pool of possibilities—humor, parody, surprise, hidden identity—which have political uses and limits. With this in mind, we offer some general guidelines which we find broadly useful.

Less Is More. Everyone forgets this one, newcomers and veterans alike. It's called "message discipline" and the key word here is discipline. You've got a lot to say, sure. The world needs to hear it, sure. But figure out what is the ONE thing you need to say, then say it well and repeat it over and over. You can say the next one thing next time.

Keep text to a minimum. Nothing is more deadly than lots of text without interruption. Whatever it is—performance, pamphlet, or vigil—make it visual or physical or musical. If



The truth is more important than the facts.

—FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

there's data, illustrate it. Remember, in today's TV world, image is king. This is doubly good advice outdoors, where spoken words are often lost in other noise.

Maintain a consistent look and feel. All parts of the action should present a single theme in a consistent way. The design of any slogans, phrases, flyer graphics, banners, theatrical props, press releases should all be coordinated to develop a single message and visual identity.

Use powerful metaphors. Portray the economy as a game with unfair rules. Use a fashion show to expose sweatshops. Use metaphors and motifs that are common in the culture and rework them to carry your message.

Don't Laundry List. Be inclusive, yes, but don't feel like you have to mention every identity constituency in each and every performance. You are telling a story, not an agenda. People will find a way to connect. Likewise, when talking about the future, don't feel compelled to mention every item on the progressive wish list. You are sharing a vision, not a platform.

Offer vision not complaints. Convey hope and offer doable alternatives. Show people that it *can* be done and how. When appropriate, offer specific and tangible proposals for change. Think of yourself more as a messenger of hope than a conveyor of information.

Don't Preach. Everyone knows the unpleasantness of being preached at. Try to embed the important information right in the performance. Avoid lecturing. Avoid having characters that feel like they are being set up and fed speechifying words. Try to show more and tell less—the audience will teach themselves.

Make it Subtle or Make it Clear? You can use melodrama, oversized caricatures, and labels pinned onto costumes, to bluntly pit good against evil. Or you can take a more subtle approach, giving the audience more room to draw their own conclusions.

Balance Art and Message. When creating political art there is often a ten-



If I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point in dancing it.

—ISADORA DUNCAN

sion between the art part and the politics part. The art wants to explore the deep questions. The politics insists on a clear direction and message. Sometimes quick and dirty creative gimmicks are the order of the day. But sometimes it pays to try and go deeper.

The highest challenge for the cultural activist is to create a powerful work of art that still conveys a clear political message. To do this you need to get past the surface conversation and into the deeper human concerns that lie at the heart of the issue. This means that the person creating the art has to find a way into that deeper place inside them that is connected to the issue—and then find a way to carry that back to the world.

Bread & Puppet Theater brings its special brand of symbolism to DC to protest the Gulf War, 1991
photo Ellen Shub

The unconscious wants truth. It ceases to speak to those who want something else more than truth.

—ADRIENNE RICH

Life comes before politics and politics is rooted in and arises out of life. In order to find and speak our truths, each of us needs to seek out the life sources of our politics. If we want to touch our audience, we must first get in touch with ourselves.

(The theater games showcased later in this chapter are one way to help this process along.)

Combine Serious and Satirical Approaches. Two anti-sweatshop organizers were invited onto a radio talk show. One played it straight, the other impersonated a character: U. R. Conned, President & CEO of Sweat Gear International. The serious, principled challenge from

one direction combined well with the exaggerated, satirical challenge from the other direction.

Use the power of ritual. Imagine a military general and a politician, slowly and with exaggerated affect, tossing huge bags of money to each other across a wide expanse. Nearby, a support person hands out a fact sheet that tells the rest of the story. Often this kind of non-verbal performance, similar to a ritual, which repeats a simple but visually arresting motion, is more powerful and effective than a

full length skit, crammed with facts and figures.

Anchor your story to an image. In an outdoor setting, some people will watch your performance from beginning to end, but others will drop in mid-performance or check you out from afar while passing by. A long plot-driven story doesn't work well for such a shifting audience. To touch everyone, go ahead and tell your

story, but anchor it to a strong visual image that people can grasp immediately.

We try to do this with the 10 Musical Chairs (see Chapter 8: Complete Recipes). The whole story happens within a visual scene that conveys the essence of the story.



Publicize by creating a mystery. Activists at the University of Michigan needed a creative way to publicize a ceremony at which they planned to give green-painted bicycles away to the community. They put up stickers all over town that said "The Green Bike is not Locked." They also put up posters which announced that an unusual ceremony would take place at the center of campus at a certain date and time. Nobody knew what this meant or what to expect but everyone talked about it.

A mock funeral procession outside the Department of Energy dramatizes the dangers of nuclear policy. Washington, DC, April, 1980. photo Ellen Shub

If you are going to tell people the truth, you had better make them laugh or they will kill you.

—OSCAR WILDE

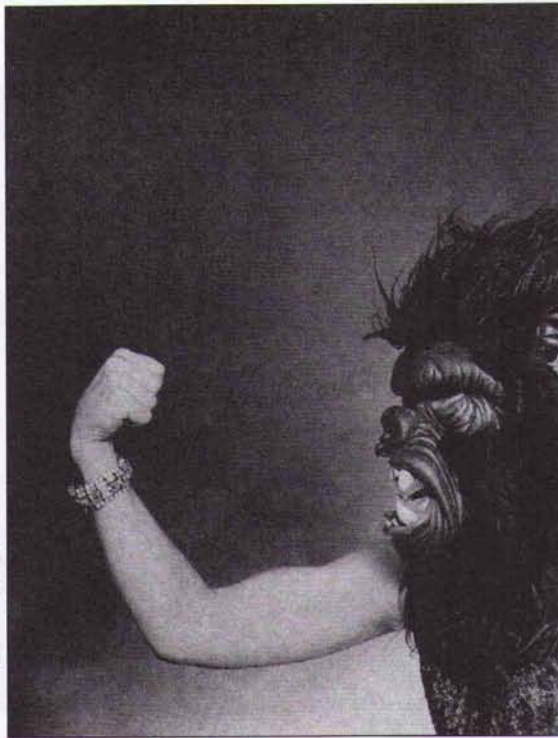
In the end over a thousand students showed up to see the performance. By giving the public only half the message, you can sometimes create a curious buzz that very effectively publicizes your action.

Make your group comfortable; Make your target uncomfortable.

Control the agenda of the action. Where possible, even write your target into the script. If you have control over the physical setting of the action, arrange chairs, props, audience, entrances and exits, etc. so that participants feel powerful vis a vis the target. Choose settings and actions that are within the experience of participants but outside the experience of the target. Try to surprise your target. Make sure participants are well-rehearsed and prepared.

Involve your Audience. Choral chants, mass sound effects such as roars or murmurs, or simple physical movements are all ways to get an audience participating. Involve the entire audience or involve individual volunteers. Design the plot so that decisions they make, or the volume of their enthusiasm for one option or another, determine the direction of the piece. Try splitting the audience into sections with different roles.

Use Humor to Undermine Authority. Imagine a labor action where the cor-



porate target has to arrest Barney or escort Santa off the property.

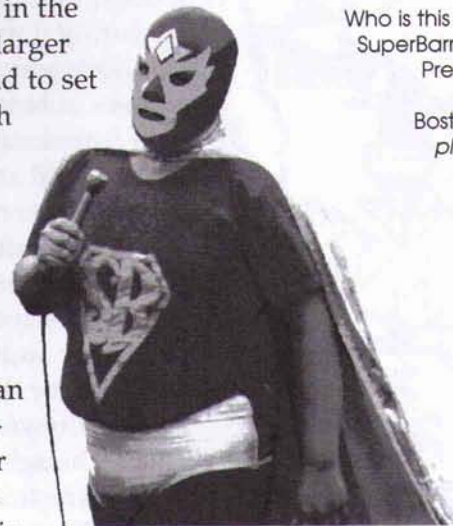
Authority requires respect and an aura of formality and seriousness. Humor can disrupt this aura and undermine a target's authority.

Use Hidden Identity. Super Barrio (Super Neighborhood Man, in English) is a real-life people's super hero from Mexico. Throughout the 80's and 90's he would show up in mask and cape to block evictions of poor tenants or wrestle evil corpo-

rate and government characters at huge outdoor wrestling matches. To this day, no one knows who lies behind the mask, but Super Barrio is a hero to people all over Mexico. You can use hidden identity in a number of ways: to generate mystery, curiosity and interest in the public; to build up a larger than life character; and to set up situations in which your target is unsure how to respond.

Use the Aura of Theater. Theater, especially ritual theater with masks and mythical costumes, can inspire awe and command attention. Your target may be unsure how to respond, traffic cops may be unwilling to interrupt you, bystanders might clear out of

Describing themselves as "The Conscience of the Art World," the Guerrilla Girls challenge sexism and racism within the nation's museums and galleries through a combustible blend of guerrilla theater, performance art and hard hitting graphics. The Girls remain anonymous, each adopting the name of a great woman artist. Guerrilla Girl with diamonds. publicity photo 1987



Who is this masked man? SuperBarrio—running for President of North America. Boston, April, 1996. photo John May

your way, the curious might follow you. Create and use this aura.

Stay in Character. In order to preserve the theatrical impact and effect, performers should never break character during direct actions. Where possible,

Doing it in the New York City subway.
photo Meryl Levin,
Impact Visuals



Strong opening and closing. Open strong to attract and hold the audience. Close strong to inspire and mobilize.

non-performers should handle all supporting tasks, including: outreach, press relations, logistics, set-up and break-down, etc.

Shock Carefully and Constructively. In the 1980's campus solidarity groups conducted mock death squad kidnappings during university lectures, hoping to shock people into a deeper awareness of human rights abuses in Central America. Carrying confrontational art directly into people's everyday spaces is a powerful but unilateral tactic, requiring extra responsibility and self-discipline. Respect your audience. Don't shock for the sake of it. Know why you are doing it. Thoughtfully gauge the fine line between shocking and harassing or alienating. Give your audience a way to respond or to have some power in the situation.

Expand your Venues. Perform in places you might not think of: art fairs, county fairs, inside malls, outside malls, wherever there are long lines (sporting events, movie theaters, etc.), silently in libraries, in train or subway stations, etc.



Use Music. Almost any theater action is enhanced by music. Music adds life and energy. It sets the event apart from its surroundings and helps draw a crowd. If you can't

find musicians, don't let that stop you—do it yourself. Drumming, clanging, rhythmic chanting, etc. are all easy and effective.

Art is a verb.

—LOWERY SIMS

PREPARING THE MEAL

No one can tell you how to make a work of art. No one can tell you what is the best creative process for you or your group. You will need to discover that for yourself. (And that's half the joy of the whole thing.) What we can offer you here are some issues to think about, some roles and responsibilities that every creative project needs to cover, and some tools for helping you to invent and solidify your ideas.



Roles & Responsibilities

Whatever your creative process, here are some ways to give it structure:

Producer. The producer is responsible for overall logistics and organizational matters, including: recruiting participants, scheduling performances and rehearsals, arranging props, publicity, media, etc. Some of these responsibilities can be delegated but one person should coordinate all these aspects of production.

The process of thinking, planning and creating together gives us resonance with one another, with the environment around us, the natural world and all its textures, meaning and mysteries. The process provides clues, links and means of realizing a richer, fairer, finer way of living our lives, in tune with our becoming.

—JOSEPH BEUYS

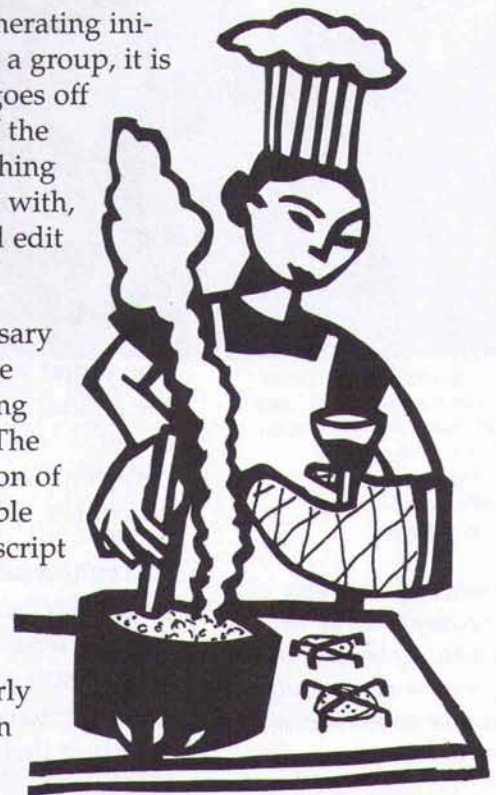
The Creative Process

Just as there are many learning styles, there are also many creative styles. Some people are most at home with words, others with images, feelings, body movement, or rhythm. Some people work more from their head: they begin with an idea, and almost like a mental architect, build up systematically from there. Others like to jump into the middle of things, mess about, see what comes up and take it from there. Some people like to go off on their own, write up a script and bring it back to the group. Others have a more social process; they like to talk and play out an idea with others from scratch.

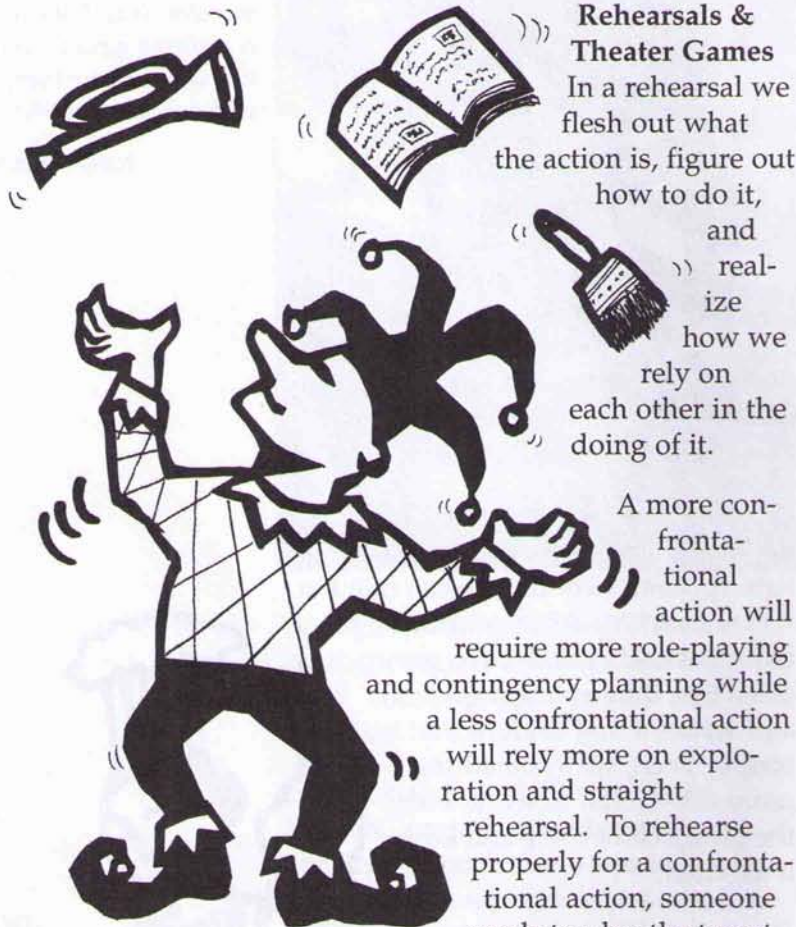
The creative process can be haphazard, obsessive, sudden, personal, and full of trial and error. Some people are put off or intimidated by this. For others, this is exactly what makes it exciting. Stay open to all these possibilities. Honor the creative process. Experiment. Discover what works for you.

One Author; Many Editors. For actions which involve a lot of text, the classic rule applies: a committee can edit but it cannot write. After generating initial ideas and material as a group, it is often best if one person goes off and writes a first draft of the script. Then, with something more substantial to work with, the group can evolve and edit it together.

Director. It is often necessary to have one person whose artistic judgment is driving and unifying the work. The director has a strong vision of the work and is responsible for turning the idea and script into a whole and coherent performance. Early in the process, participants might want to clearly assign some final decision making authority to this person.



Scribe. When the group is improvising or brainstorming, ideas, images and pieces of dialogue come up fast and furious. The group might want to designate a scribe to write these down for the whole group to use.



Rehearsals & Theater Games

In a rehearsal we flesh out what the action is, figure out how to do it, and realize how we rely on each other in the doing of it.

A more confrontational action will require more role-playing and contingency planning while a less confrontational action will rely more on exploration and straight rehearsal. To rehearse properly for a confrontational action, someone needs to play the target (the target will play himself during the action). Rehearse with a "hostile" target, a "nice" target and variations in between. Explore the many possible outcomes. Be prepared.

In a rehearsal we don't just learn parts from a script. We invent, improvise, and explore. We figure out who we are, what we're doing and why. By getting into our characters and understanding their motivations, we can create a performance that rings true to ourselves and our audience.

The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves.

—C. G. JUNG

Theater games and exercises are a great way to do all of the above. They can be used to loosen up, build trust, generate material, or deepen a performer's connection with her character. Countless games and exercises have been developed and you can easily devise your own.

Improvisations for the Theater by Viola Spolin and *Playing Boal: Theater Games for Actors and Non-Actors* by Augusto Boal (see Chapter 9: Shopping for Fresh Food) alone contain hundreds. Here, are a few which we find useful:

Names, Sounds and Movements. Group gathers in a circle. One volunteer shares some unique movement and sound. Then the whole group repeats it back. This continues around the circle. Instead of a sound, people can say their name in an unusual way. Great as an ice breaker and a wake up.

Fear and Protection. Each person secretly identifies one person as their fear and another person as their protector. Then everyone moves about the space, trying to keep their protector between them and their prey (but nobody knows who anybody else has chosen!). Good for a few laughs and getting people moving around physically.

Mirrors. People pair off and face each other. The first person in the pair leads and the second person tries to follow every move. Then they switch. Then they move together, trying to erase the boundary between leader and follower. Movements should be fluid. Good for focusing the body and building trust.

World. One person begins with a simple action, say, begging for money. Another joins in, walking a dog. A

third steps into the scene, trying to hail a cab. A fourth enters as a policeman, trying to move the beggar along. In this way a world is built up. Participants should not know ahead of time what the first person is doing. Good for improvising scenes. Try variations with frozen poses or movement, silence or speaking, etc.

Machine. Someone begins by acting out one part of a larger machine. When someone else decides they understand what kind of machine it is, they join in, and play another part of the machine. This continues until all are participating in the machine as a coordinated whole. Discussion at end of exercise might focus on how people were or weren't able to work together when they had similar and different notions of what the machine was doing. Good for developing group process and teamwork.

Spoof Commercials. In small groups develop 30-60 second spoof TV commercial, for products like "Blando White Bread", "Trickle downers," or "Time Strife books." Good quick way to warm up the verbal and conceptual part of our brains. And lots of fun.

Art for a Fair Economy has also developed several theater games that specifically address issues of social class and economic inequality:

Engines of Inequality. Similar to the "Machine" exercise described above. Participants build machines that illustrate the workings of economic inequality. Participants should be specific and decide up front what economic mechanism to illustrate. Could add two machines together to show economic impact on larger society. Could build another machine that corrects injustices of first machine.

Economic Characters. In this exercise, participants build up characters based on economic archetypes. Everyone is assigned an archetype such as greed, charity, abundance, poverty and sufficiency. Then, milling about in a space together, participants elaborate their character through various stages. Begin with physical, ritual movements. Then add sound and repeating phrases. Then interaction with other characters.

Economic Images. Using a simple chair to represent wealth, each participant composes a series of frozen poses that

Play, fantasy, imaging, free exploration of possibilities: these are the central powers of human beings..

—BRIAN SWIMME



express key moments in their own economic life. Begin by first exploring all the physical arrangements and relationships you can have with the chair. And end by sharing the story behind one or two of the economic poses with other members in the group. Great for generating powerful images and getting people in touch with their own stories.

Class Spectogram. Arrange yourselves in a line according to where you fall along an economic spectrum and use

Bosco So in "Dance of the 10 Chairs," a movement piece built upon images drawn from the economic lives of the participants. Somerville, 1996. photo Laura Wulf

this as a frame for theatrical and personal exploration.

To find your place in the line, go to where you think you belong and then



photo Ellen Shub

hash it out with your neighbors. Once everyone is in line, take a moment to look up and down the line and then one at a time, speak about why you put yourself where you did. As people speak, you can reconsider and adjust your location in the line.

Once the spectogram framework is established, the group can use it to improvise dialogues and scenes.

This exercise can be used to build trust and understanding as well as generate material. But because class issues are often linked to personal and painful feelings, it should be conducted by a sensitive facilitator in an emotionally safe atmosphere. Participants should be given the option of passing whenever they feel uncomfortable.

Ideologies separate us. Dreams and anguish bring us together.

—EUGENE IONESCO

Confidence Building

Taking creative risks, performing in public, revealing yourself during rehearsal—all of these things can be scary or embarrassing. Most of us have a deep fear of being seen acting foolish. This is OK. The theater games described above can help people feel more comfortable working together. The exercises below can help build confidence for performing in public.

Pre-performance. Before taking the piece to the public, practice in front of a small, friendly audience who can give you valuable criticisms and suggestions. You may also find it helpful to role-play various audience reactions such as indifference, hostility, and enthusiasm.

Street-speaking. The entire group goes out to a city park or square, with a soap box in hand. Each person takes a turn getting on the soap box and speaking out about a social issue that concerns them, while the rest of the group circles around and listens supportively. This exercise is a nice bridge between a safe and supportive situation and a less predictable public one.

Goofing in public. One really fun way to build your confidence for performing in public is to walk into lamp posts and fall down. Yep, you heard it right. In groups of 3-5, walk along any street or through any mall, and pretend to walk into a pole and fall down—but make it look real. The rest of the group comes quickly over, feigning concern, and helps you to your feet. Continue and repeat. This exercise is great for jarring loose what you allow yourself to do in public.

SERVING THE MEAL

Costume, Props & Set

Although props and costumes will vary greatly with each show, your overriding goal can be usefully summed up as follows: to simply and inexpensively create a striking and unified visual look. To this end a few general suggestions are offered here:

Color. Choose one or two unifying colors for everyone to wear, probably bright but not light.

Hats. Hats are one of the best props: they are strong symbols, easy to manage, visible, and often squishable for transport. Santa hats, bowler hats, hard hats, and baseball caps are all good props and easy to come by.

Where to get stuff. Hunt and peck through scrappy second hand stores for individual items. Or go to big discount or surplus stores to buy cheap, commercial items in bulk (like Santa hats or feather dusters). Or have a set of T-shirts or baseball caps custom printed with the same color and design. Or ask your neighborhood theater if you can borrow some items on a one-time basis. Costume stores are often too expensive, but at party or novelty stores you can get plastic stuff real cheap, especially on the day after Halloween.

Changing costume. Since there is rarely any backstage, it is best to limit costume changes during the show. If necessary, it is best to wear the second costume underneath the first and dramatically strip from one to the other as part of the performance. This is

faster, does not distract the audience and reveals the new costume in the best possible way: filled out by a body and immediately in action.

Multiple Functions. To save space and cost, props should have multiple functions. We have used feather dusters as flowers, cheerleader pom-poms, hand-held mustaches, as well as the international symbol of workers in the service economy.

Masks. If you are performing at a distance from your audience, full-face masks combined with large bodily gestures work well.

Backdrops. Backdrops made out of canvas are much easier to transport and handle than those made of wood or cardboard, especially outside in the wind.

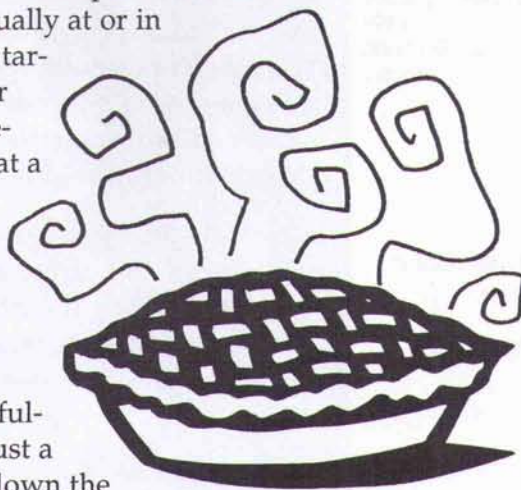
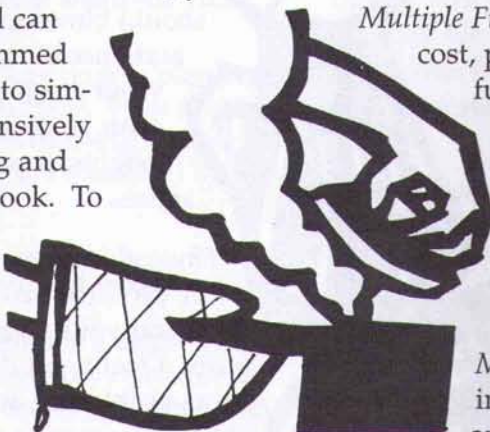
For more detailed information on prop making, refer to *Wise Fool Basics* or *The Art of Demonstration* in Chapter 9: Shopping for Fresh Food.

Choosing a Space

The performance space for a direct action is usually at or in front of the target site. For outdoor theater aimed at a passerby audience, you're free to choose almost any space. But choose carefully—going just a few doors down the block or turning the corner can make all the difference. Scope out

The job of the artist is always to deepen the mystery.

—FRANCIS BACON



possible sites prior to the performance.

forcing the audience to squint. Look for light that comes from one side or another.



Weather. If there is wind, it should blow from you to your audience to carry sound.

Wind can also wreak havoc with your props—bring weights, rope and tent stakes.

Physical Location. Avoid placing any physical barriers between you and your audience—this causes a feeling of distancing. To be as visible and audible as possible, either you or your audience should be raised up. Ideal is the amphitheater situation with you

below and your audience on a series of raised levels. This encloses the sound and makes for a more intimate space. Such arrangements can be found in the city on the side of a mound in a city park, inside a non-working fountain. The other alternative is to raise yourself up, above your audience—on the steps of a public building, or atop a wall, or a line of benches, or...

Create your own Stage. Sometimes it is possible to create your own stage. On one action, the United Brotherhood of Electrical Workers found that the downtown sidewalks outside their target were too narrow, so they rented a flatbed truck, parked it right outside, and did the whole performance on top of it!

Attracting an Audience

There are many ways to attract an audience:

Loud, Large and Colorful:

Barker. A loud "Ladies and gentlemen..." type speech which entices the

Backdrop.

Try to set up the performance with a plain wall immediately behind. It bounces sound back to the audience, provides a neutral visual background and helps prevent props from being stolen.

Noise. As much as possible, avoid having to compete with other sounds. (Or find a way to integrate them in.) Consider noise from traffic, construction sites, children at play, etc.

Obstruction. Set up in such a way that your audience can gather around without obstructing the street traffic, sidewalk pedestrian flow, or access to a building (unless this is your goal, of course).

Lighting. Be aware that if daytime sun or nighttime streetlight comes from behind you, you will be silhouetted,

I begin with an idea and then it becomes something else.

—PABLO PICASSO

audience in through sheer volume and promises of a good show.

Music. Loud music, drum roll, trumpet, fanfare. Play it in a way that entices instead of alienating your audience.

Spectacle. A huge prop or puppet. An outrageous costume. Feats of skill: juggling, acrobatics, stilt walking, etc. Doing anything (or nothing) up on a tall ladder.

Subtle, Mysterious, and Intimate:

One-on-one. Engage a single onlooker with a pantomime or antic, then as people stop to watch, do same with another, till a critical mass has built.

Frozen pose. Hold a silent frozen pose that buzzes with tension and expectation.

Set up. Consciously make setting up for the show a show in itself (e.g. physical warm-ups, setting out props, etc.).

Hoax. With a big enough camera and the right attitude, pretend you are the media.

Choose an approach appropriate for the situation. Is your potential audience hanging out leisurely in a park or walking by intent on their destination? Are you performing in a city square where street performers are common or in a shopping mall where a performance is unexpected?

Arranging the Audience and the Performance Area

Once you have drawn an audience it is important to have the performance area clearly marked out. This can be done in a number of ways:

Rope. put a rope on the ground

Chairs. strategically place a few chairs to indicate the front row

Ushering. actually usher initial audience members into place

An audience will naturally form in a circle. However, it is often difficult to perform to a full circle. We recommend that you put your props to the back, establish a front, and have the

...to make the experience of art part of the street scene ...to make the making and the commissioning of art a possibility in any street anywhere, propelled by anyone, thereby bringing art, celebration and activism into a convergent path.

—SUE CLIFFORD &
ANGELA KING

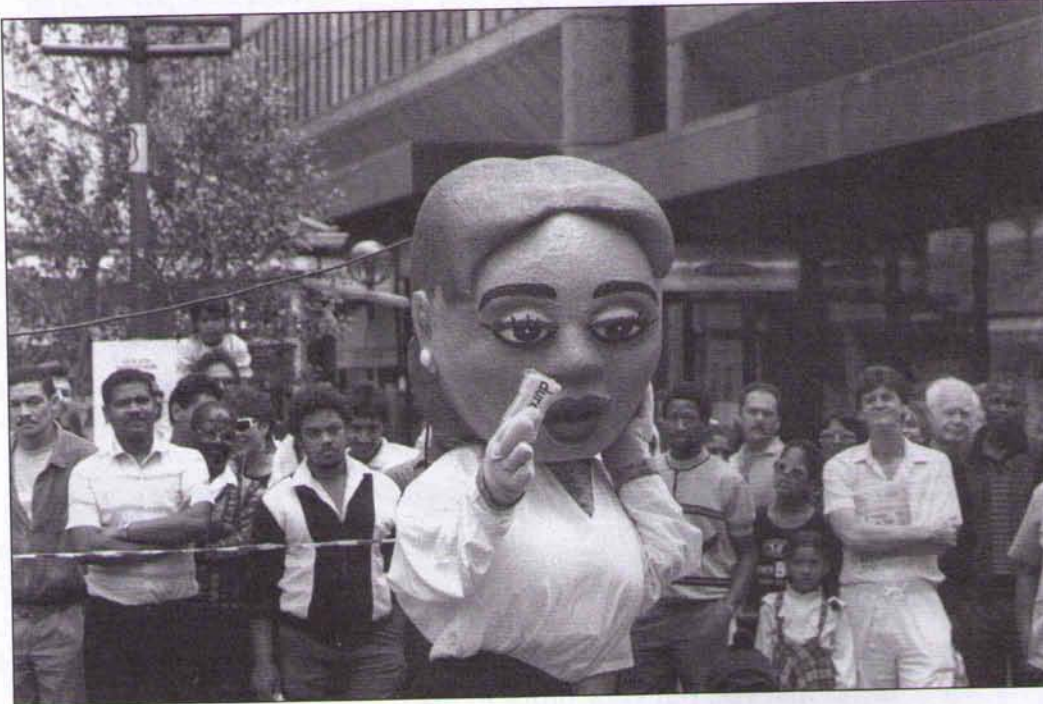


Posing as "Pataki's Prisoners," SUNY students protest proposed cuts in education spending. State Capitol Building, Albany NY, March, 1996. photo Kirk Condyles, Impact Visuals

audience fall in around a one-half or three-quarter circle.

Holding the Audience

We got stuff! At the beginning you may want to do something striking



"She won't sleep with Joe unless he uses a condom." Puppets Against AIDS. photo Gisele Wulfsohn, Impact Visuals

that announces to the audience, "We got stuff! Stick around for more." Similarly, doing something surprising early is a great help because after one surprise, the audience will be wondering what others may be in store.

Tension. Also key to holding an audience is creating a sense of tension and expectation—if possible, in each part as well as the whole. You want them wondering what's going to happen next? How will it end?

Participation. An audience will also stick around if they are involved. (See suggestions earlier in this chapter.)

Sound and Amplification

When you are performing outdoors it is often hard to be heard. Inevitably,

one weighs the advantages of higher volume against the complications of using amplification, including: extra cost, logistical headaches, the emotional distance it can put between you and your audience, the awkwardness of passing a mike back and forth among performers. One compromise solution is to have a narrator read all the lines into a mike while the actors physically perform their parts.

Interruptions

It is in the nature of street theater to risk interruption: hecklers, dogs, toddlers, drunks, police, rain, acts of nature, etc. Some interruptions cause problems, others provide opportunities. Once again, it all depends.

Minor interruptions. Many minor interruptions, such as a dog wandering through

the show or a comment from a passing heckler, can be well handled simply by acknowledging it (ideally without stepping out of character) and carrying on.

Major interruptions. With a major interruption—one that threatens to disrupt the whole flow of the show—such as a persistent drunk, a rabid heckler or a downpour, it is better to stop and sort it out.

Respond creatively. An interruption presents a situation that could not be rehearsed and thus may be fascinating to the audience. Where possible, try to approach the interruption creatively. The more open-ended the performance, the easier this will be.

Lengths

The appropriate length for a piece depends on a number of factors. If your audience has come deliberately to see you, then your performance can afford to be longer. If your piece is short and your audience comes and goes, it may make sense to perform continuously, with little or no break between shows. An effective piece can be as short as three minutes.

Remember, the audience has no idea how long your piece will take and those who arrive while the piece is under way, don't know how far into the piece they are.

Endings and Outreach

Every action should have a few support people who are not involved in the performance, including:

1) a spokesperson to represent your cause to the press and/or make a pitch to the audience at the close of each show;

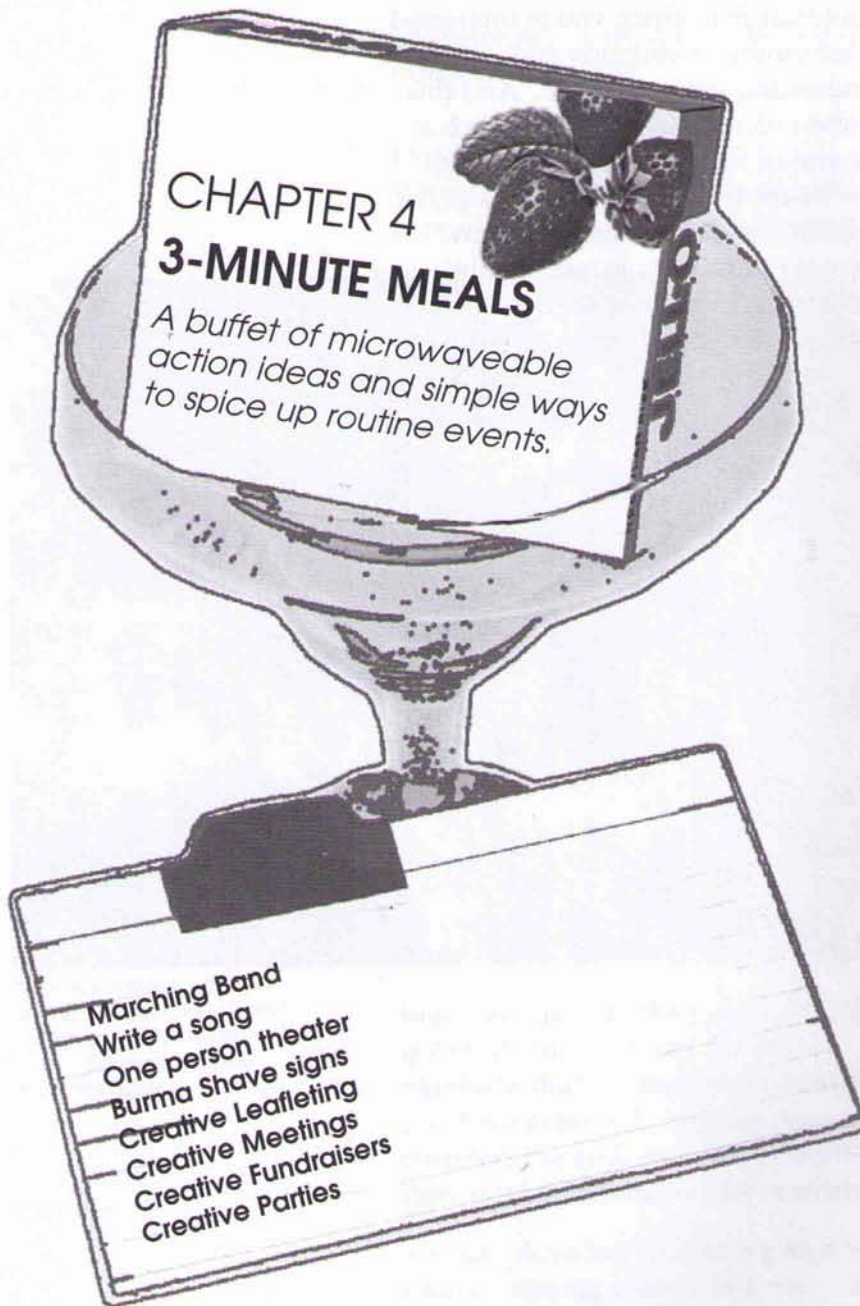
2) an information person to give out literature, sign up new members, take donations, etc.; and

3) a photographer or videographer to document the action. (Video cameras can be easily rented from your local cable access station. These stations will also broadcast your uncut footage—just give them the tape.)

Maybe you want to explain your art and maybe you don't. Either way, as

a political performer, you're interested in informing, mobilizing and fundraising your audience. And this is often accomplished with a pitch at the end of the piece. However, you don't have to wait until the end of the performance to give out literature. Try not to lose people because the piece ends and you're scurrying around with leaflets as people leave *en masse*.





A little creativity can go a long way. Imagine turning the usual meeting, protest or informational tabling into something unusual, creative, and memorable. Would you do it? Probably. If only you had the time. Well, you've got the time to add these creative twists—some of them take as little as 10 minutes.

Marching band. Liven up a march with a marching band. Identify the musicians among those who are already coming and make sure they bring their instruments (drums, trumpets, bagpipes, flutes, etc.). Let them figure out what to play and how to play together when they arrive.

Write a song. Take a popular tune that everyone knows and rewrite the lyrics to address your issue. (You'd be surprised how little time this takes.) Copy and hand out at event. Have one person lead the group. Everyone will join in and have fun at the target's expense.

If you want musical accompaniment but don't have your own musicians, check out your local record store for an "extended mix" dance tape which contains a version of the song with instruments alone. Pop the tape in the boom box and sing your own lyrics, Karaoke style.

Another helpful tool for prospective song-writers is a rhyming dictionary. There is a pocket edition is available for \$3.

One person theater. Even the quickest and dirtiest theater can create a strong photo-op for an outdoor event. All you need is one person dressed in character, or one person on stilts with an appropriate hat or mask. Think

about what setting to place them in (usually in front of the target, if there is one) to get the event's message across with a single snapshot. If you have a little more time, add another character—now you can portray a relationship.



"Tell Ron (Reagan) it Won't Play." Burma Shave signs in action, Peoria, IL. photo courtesy of Midwest Academy

Burma Shave Signs. Instead of putting your whole slogan on one sign, spread it out across a series of signs, putting one word or one letter on each sign. Then you can have a series of people, each holding one part of the slogan, positioned along a road or pedestrian flow. Passing motorists as well as the media, may find this visually interesting. It also has a nice touch of united effort. (In a similar way, you can set up a series of rhyming slogans, one on each sign, staggered down the road.)

Creative leafleting. Instead of straightforward leafleting, do something creative: do it with one person on another's shoulders; do it in a simple costume; hand out something symbolic with the leaflet.

Creative meetings. Combine the meeting with a potluck. Plan to go out together after the meeting and have fun (this will also provide strong incentive to end on time). Do something at the beginning of the meeting to laugh, and get everybody's juices flowing. In the popular movement in El Salvador there is a tradition of

breaking up meetings with little energetic exercises called "dinamicas." In one of them, everyone stamped their foot three times, spun round, and said, "Yaaaaaaah!" Come up with new ones every meeting. Or try using

one of the theater games suggested in Chapter 3: Soup to Nuts.

Creative fundraisers. Make it fun for people to give away their money. Use your imagination. At one event an activist group created various installations that mocked fundraising technologies: a clothesline with trousers hanging from it (put your donation in one of the pockets); an ATM machine that dispensed poetry fragments instead of receipts; a huge direct mail letter and envelope; and a desk with a tape recorder and a hilarious message buffooning a computer automated telemarketer.

Creative parties. Come up with an engaging theme, eye-catching flyer and some fun interactive social activities: an economic fortune telling booth, a poetry wall, a piñata of the political figure you love to hate—whatever your imagination can dream up. Have a media room with videos and printed information. Have the activities off to the side, so that people can do them when and as they see fit and it doesn't require the whole party to switch gears.

When the artist is alive in any person, whatever his kind of work may be, he becomes an inventive, searching, daring, self-expressive creature. He becomes interesting to other people. He disturbs, upsets, enlightens, and opens ways for a better understanding. Where those who are not artists are trying to close the book, he opens it and show there are still more pages possible.

—ROBERT HENRI,
THE ART SPIRIT



Resources of various kinds that will keep you cooking for a long time to come.

Manuals & Guidebooks

Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of Signs, Mark Dery, Open Magazine Pamphlet Series, Open Media, 1993. \$4. P.O. Box 2726 Westfield, NJ 07091. 908/789-9608. Excellent pamphlet. *The manifesto for culture jammers.*

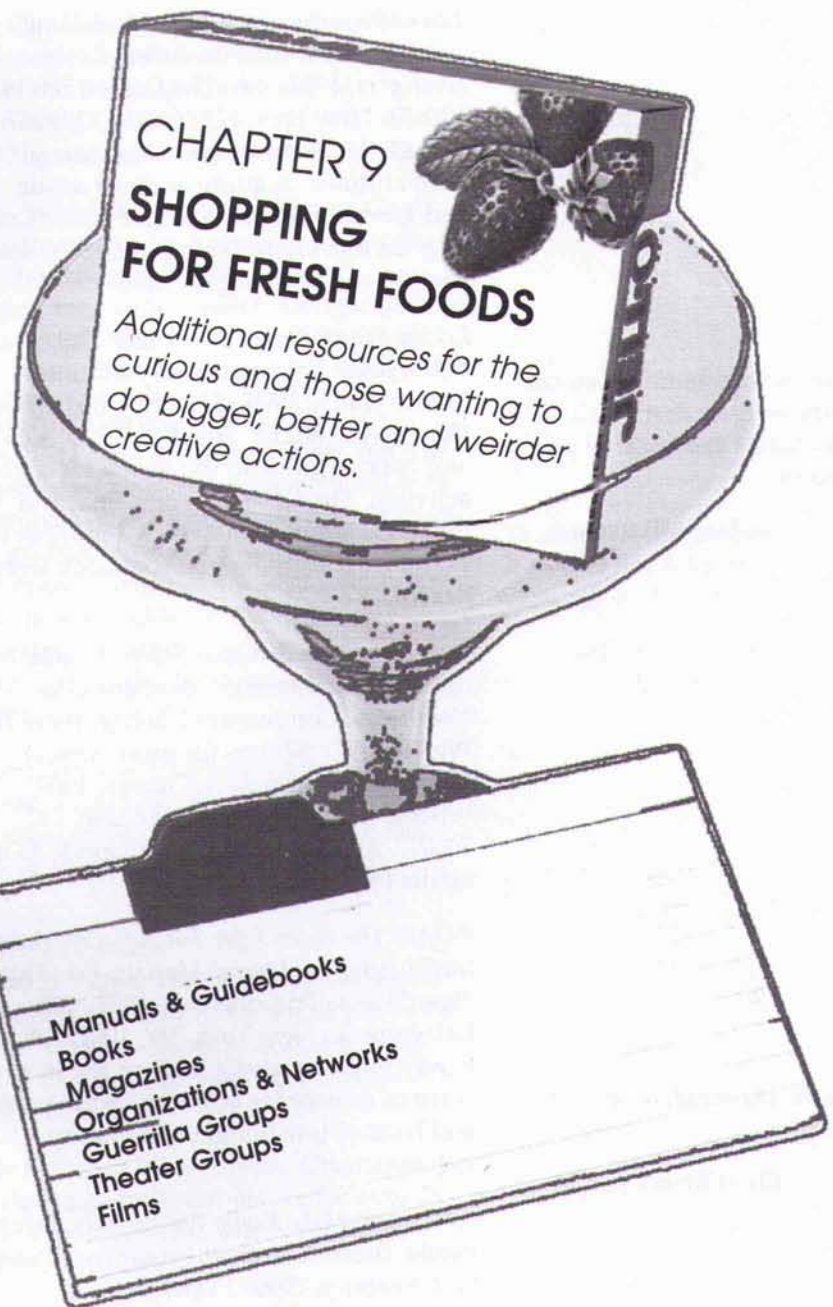
A Troublemaker's Handbook: How to Fight Back Where You Work—and Win!, Dan LaBotz. 350pgs. \$17 + \$3 shipping. Labor Notes. 7435 Michigan Ave. Detroit, MI 48210. 313/842-6262. A wide ranging compendium of stories of workers fighting back creatively in their workplaces.

Billboard Liberation Front Manual (excerpt from *Processed World* #25, Summer/Fall 1990, pps 22-6, San Francisco, CA). A basic guide to the art and science of billboard correcting—by the experts.

Playing Boal: Games for Actors and Non-Actors, Augusto Boal, Routledge Press, London, 1992. A comprehensive resource packed with hundreds of theater games to stimulate the senses and the imagination. Each game described in full.

Organizing for Social Change: A Manual for Activists in the 1990's, Kim Bobo, Midwest Academy, 1991. \$19.95. 225 W. Ohio, Suite 250, Chicago, IL 60610. 312/645-6010. Comprehensive organizer's manual in the Alinsky tradition. Good sections on designing actions and using the media. Strong focus on direct action tactics and how they serve strategic campaigns—provides a helpful balancing for the cookbook in this area.

War Resisters League Organizer's Manual, Ed Hedemann, Ed., War Resisters League, 1981. \$6. War Resisters League, 339 Lafayette St., New York, NY, 10012. A comprehensive organizers manual. Useful chapters on street theater, street fairs, and designing leaflets.



...art is not something you can carry up to an East Side Manhattan apartment in an elevator.

—JAMES TURRELL

Poetry, like bread, is for everyone.

—OTTO RENE CASTILLO

The Lesbian Avenger Handbook: A Handy Guide to Homemade Revolution, Lesbian Avengers, 1993. c/o The Center, 208 W. 13th St. New York, NY, 10011. 212/967-7711x3204. A cut to the chase manual with attitude. A guide to direct action and guerrilla media, Avenger-style. Lots of good tips on designing leaflets, wheat-pasting and working the media.

Let the World Know: Make Your Cause News, Jason Salzman, Rocky Mountain Media Watch, 1995. \$10. P.O. Box 18858, Denver, CO 80218. 303/832-7558. A clear and concise guide to the media for social activists. Strong section on visual and theatrical stunts from which a number of examples featured in the cookbook were drawn.

How to Tell and Sell your Story: A Guide to Media for Community Groups and Other NonProfits, Community Change, Issue 18, Winter 1997. \$7 (less for more copies). Center for Community Change, 1000 Wisconsin Ave., NW, Washington, DC, 20007. 202/342-0567. Handy guide to the media for social activists.

ROAR: The Paper Tiger Television Guide to Media Activism, Daniel Marcus, Ed., Paper Tiger Television Collective, 1991. 339 Lafayette St., New York, NY, 10012. A handy guide to media literacy, the new wave of camcorder activism and the nuts and bolts of low-budget community video.

68 Ways to Make Really Big Puppets, Sarah Peatie, Bread & Puppet Press/Troll Press, St. Johnsbury, 1996. Puppeteers Cooperative, 181 Tremont, Somerville MA, 02143. The nuts and bolts of spectacle. Everything from how to attach cloth to a pole to how to build a multi-articulated dragon a city-block long. Probably, the ultimate resource on large puppet making.

Wise Fool Basics: A Handbook of Our Core Techniques, K. Ruby, Wise Fool Puppets, San Francisco, 1992. Easy to follow technical instructions on how to construct puppets, masks, stilts, etc.

Books

But is it Art? : The Spirit of Art as Activism, Nina Felshin, Ed., Bay Press, Seattle, 1995. \$18.95. 206/284-5913. A superb series of essays about activist art and artful action that chronicle the history of WAC, Guerrilla Girls, Gran Fury, and ACT-UP, among others. Excellent companion to the cookbook.

Reimaging America: The Arts of Social Change, Mark O'Brien & Craig Little, Eds., New Society Publishers, Philadelphia, 1990. An interesting survey of political artists and community oriented cultural projects. Maybe out of print—politely call editor at 718/789-4407 to locate a copy.

Street Theater and Other Outdoor Performance, Bim Mason, Routededge, London and New York, 1992. Great exploration of the contemporary street theater scene in Europe. Section on "Ways and means," was a great help in writing parts of Chapter 3: Soup to Nuts in the cookbook.

Disturbing the Peace: 20th Century Radical Street Performance, Jan Cohen-Cruz, Ed. forthcoming from Routledge Press, London & New York, Spring, 1998. A deep exploration of how radical movements have creatively used public space throughout the century and throughout the world.

AIDS Demo Graphics, Douglas Crimp with Adam Rolston, Bay Press, Seattle, 1990. \$13.95. 206/284-5913. A collection of ACT-UP's best graphics and a chronicle of its major actions. Great visuals.

Pranks! : Devious Deeds and Mischievous Mirth, RE/Search #11, RE/Search Publications, 1987. \$17.99. 20 Romolo #B, San Francisco, CA 94133. 415/771-7117. Truly a one of a kind resource: A compendium of the most outrageous political and artistic pranks of the last three decades.

Magazines

AdBusters Magazine / The Media Foundation. Quarterly magazine of culture jamming, anti-advertising, and "the mental environment." Superb graphics. Great website. If you hate advertising sleaze, you must get AdBusters. Call for free "Culture Jamming on Campus" action kit. To order, call 800/663-1243. Check out web site at www.adbusters.com.

High Performance Magazine / Art in the Public Interest. Monthly magazine of community performance and socially engaged art. API also provides resources, workshops, support, and networking for cultural workers and groups. P.O. Box 68, Saxapahaw, NC 27340. 910/376-8404. Well organized web site: www.artswire.org/highperf

Organizations & Networks

Labor Heritage Foundation. The central hub in an extensive labor cultural network of musicians, storytellers, muralists, etc. Well organized; great people. Organizes inspiring and delightful national labor arts exchange every June (3rd weekend). Suite 301, 815 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20006. 202/842-7880.

Northland Poster Collective. A graphic production collective in Minneapolis that custom produces posters, buttons, bumperstickers, etc. for the national labor movement for more than a decade.

Alliance for Cultural Democracy. National network of cultural activists. 415/437-2721.

Cultural Workers Action Committee. CWAC (logo is a duck brandishing a paint brush), is a group of cultural workers linked to the new Labor Party. Contact Mike Alewitz at: 908/220-1472. email: lamp@igc.apc.org.

Labor Action Mural Project. Like what the name says, organized by muralist extraordinaire, Mike Alewitz. 908/220-1472. email: lamp@igc.apc.org.

Center for the Theater of the Oppressed in Omaha. The central hub of the Theater of

the Oppressed in the US. Contact: Doug Paterson, Department of Dramatic Arts, Fine Arts Building, University of Nebraska, Omaha NE 68182. 402/554-2422. paterson@fa-cpacs.unomaha.edu

The Applied and Interactive Theater Guide. A gateway to a vast range of interactive theater resources on the web. <http://csep.suny-it.edu/~joel/guide.html> (that's right, no "www" in this address).

Guerrilla Groups

Guerrilla Media Collective. Check out this superb and inspiring website, filled with examples of a few of the most sophisticated guerrilla media exploits in North America. Particularly useful is an extensive how to guide for doing your own newspaper wraps. <http://mindlink.bc.ca/gmedia> (that's right, no "www").

Guerrilla Girls. The "conscience of the art world" is on line. Check out the website of these media savvy guerrilla gorillas. www.voyagerco.com/gg/gg.html

Theater Groups

Bread & Puppet Theater. Puppets, spectacles, and processions for social justice for over 30 years. Sublime and elemental. RD2, P.O. Box 153, Glover, VT 05839. 802/525-3031.

San Francisco Mime Troupe. Great campy melodrama for social justice for over 30 years. 855 Treat St., San Francisco, CA 94110. 415/285-1717.

Films

Yippie! Showcases some of the guerrilla theater techniques developed by Abbie Hoffman and friends during the 60's. Available from 3rd World Newsreel in New York. 212/947-9277.

Sonic Outlaws. Craig Baldwin. Explores creative resistance to the mass media in the 90's. Looks at pirate radio, camcorder activism, collage, billboard correction, and fair use law. Includes footage of the Barbie Liberation Front in action.

To search for the good and make it matter: this is the real challenge for the artist.

—ESTRELLA CONWILL
MÁJOZO