Creative activism

Creativity is an important part of campaigning. Not only can it help get a message across, engage new people and attract media attention; but it’s often fun too! It can be a clever way of carrying out an action as it is often unexpected and can surprise your campaign target.

Everyone can be creative. You just need to find a way of facilitating creative thinking and sparking ideas. There are different ways of doing this like meeting in a different or unusual location, using props, music or food during a brainstorm and being inspired by past actions.

If you have any tips or creative actions you would like to share, contact activism@wdm.org.uk

Why be creative?

• **Get your message across more clearly.** You can spell out your message using visuals, props or music which can be more effective than a simple placard or leaflet.

• **Set a tone for an action and change people’s perceptions of you.** Campaigners can find themselves in confrontational or hostile situations, and creativity can help lighten the mood of an action or engage people who may otherwise have disregarded you.

• **Outfox your target.** Creativity often involves the unexpected, and so can surprise your campaign target. This can mean you are able to carry out a successful action, or are able to engage with them when they weren’t expecting it.

• **Attract new members to your group.** Creativity can make an action look more fun so more people are likely to want to be involved

‘Principles’ for creative thinking

• **No idea is a bad idea**

• **Think big!** Even if you don’t think something is feasible, don’t be afraid to say it as it could be adapted or it might spark an idea in someone else’s head.

• **Have fun!** If you’re tired or bored you’re unlikely to come up with creative ideas.

• **Don’t underestimate what you can get away with.** Creative actions are often unexpected and can bemuse your target making it harder for them to stop you.
You can surprise people by not being a ‘usual suspect’ taking action. For example, in Madrid, as part of the Indignados movement, a group of pensioners formed a group called Iaioflautas (playing on the pejorative term often used to describe hippies - ‘perroflautas’) to take direct action against austerity and the financial system. www.iaioflautas.org

In Bristol, a group of grandparents and pensioners have formed ‘Grandparents for a safe earth’ and have been taking action against climate change. network23.org/gfase

**TOP TIPS**
- Use props – these can be easy to make and effective.
- Incorporate street theatre into your action.
- Location – for example you could hold a discussion about food sovereignty in a supermarket which is often a source of exploitation.
- Music – you can re-write song lyrics, use musical instruments or hold a noise demonstration.
- Try a different way of organising an event – you could organise a ‘cafe-style’ meeting or incorporate music and food into your event.
- Have an art space on your action – it gives people something to do (children love it; and adults do too!).
- Subvert your target. For example, you could dress up as bankers for an AGM and do some ‘invisible theatre’.
**FURTHER READING**

**Beautiful Trouble**  
A great book and website written by a network of artist-activist trainers aiming to make grassroots movements more creative and effective.  
www.beautifultrouble.org

**Enmedio collective**  
A creative art and activist collective based in Barcelona. Has lots of interesting actions on their website, as well as a short video with a talk about creative activism called *How to disrupt the financial order with humor, creativity and a dash of mischief.*  
www.enmedio.info/en

**The Ruckus Society**  
The website of a US collective who provide creative direct action training. The website has lots of useful resources including a guide to creative direct action.  
www.ruckus.org

**Film: The Yes Men Fix the World**  
A film about two political activists who pose as top executives of big corporations and get into big business conference to pull off outrageous pranks.  
www.theyesmenfixtheworld.com

**Actipedia**  
A database of creative activism which anyone can add to. Set up by ‘The Yes Lab’ (who brought us The Yes Men) and the Center for Artistic Activism  
www.actipedia.org

**The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination**  
‘The Lab of II’ merges art and resistance and is infamous for touring the UK recruiting a rebel clown army, running courses in postcapitalist culture, and launching a rebel raft regatta to shut down a coal fired power station.  
For examples of past actions see www.labofii.net

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*WDM staff dressed as representatives of big corporations and tried to deliver a cake of Africa to the Department for International Development to say ‘thank you’ for helping to carve up Africa*
Creativity has often played a big role in direct action and occupations. It’s used as a way of getting a message across in an interesting way, making an action more media-worthy and more accessible but also enabling the action to take place (as it’s often unexpected).

A good example of how creativity can be used to carry out ‘edgier’ actions in a fun and inclusive way is UK Uncut.

UK Uncut was formed in 2010 in response to the UK government’s austerity measures. People across the UK organised actions on coordinated days of actions which involved occupying target shops or banks and transforming them into a service which the government was cutting. It was a very effective way of getting across the message that the government’s cuts were a political choice, as opposed to a necessity as it claimed – because while the government carried out severe cuts to public services like health and education; it continued to allow companies like Starbucks, Vodafone and Boots to avoid taxes.

UK Uncut was extremely successful in getting the issue of tax avoidance in the media, and succeeded in getting corporations like Starbucks to voluntarily pay more tax (albeit much less than it should have paid in the first place). It was also really successful at getting people who were new to activism to take action and organise locally. It was a very simple idea that went viral – both with the number of actions organised across the UK, and on social media.