

BEAUTIFUL TROUBLE

A TOOLBOX FOR REVOLUTION

ASSEMBLED BY ANDREW BOYD
WITH DAVE OSWALD MITCHELL



OR BOOKS

New York • London

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TACTIC: Flash Mob

COMMON USES

To organize a show of dissent on short notice; to quickly replicate a successful tactic in a dispersed yet coordinated way; to create a shared moment of random kindness and senseless beauty.

PRACTITIONERS

Improv Everywhere
Critical Mass
April 6th Movement
Newmindspace
Adbusters
Revolution through the Social Network
Allan Kaprow
UK Uncut

FURTHER INSIGHT

Know Your Meme, "Flash Mob"
<http://trb.la/ybFWol>

End the Occupation, "B.D.S. Song/ Dance
Flash Mob: Step-by-Step How-To Kit"
<http://trb.la/zXeGst>

Mondoweiss, "Mondo Award Winner,
First Runner-Up: Rae Abileah and
Colleen Kelly for Flashmob"
<http://trb.la/yRnZdb>

CONTRIBUTED BY

Dave Oswald Mitchell
Andrew Boyd



Pillow fight on Wall Street, organized by Newmindspace in 2009. The widely circulated invitation read simply: "Bring a pillow to Wall St & Broad St at 3:00pm. Dress in business suits, demand your bailout."

A flash mob is an unrehearsed, spontaneous, contagious, and dispersed mass action. Flash mobs first emerged in 2003 as a form of participatory performance art, with groups of people using email, blogs, text messages, and Twitter to arrange to meet and perform some kind of playful activity in a public location.¹ More recently, activists have begun to harness the political potential of flash mobs for organizing spontaneous mass actions on short notice.

Flash mobs have recently become a powerful tactic for political protest, particularly under repressive conditions. In the midst of a harsh crackdown on protests in Belarus in 2011, for instance, dissidents calling themselves "Revolution through the Social Network" began organizing impromptu demonstrations where protesters would simply gather in public spaces and clap their hands in unison.² The result was the bewildering sight of secret police **brutally arresting people** for the simple act of clapping their hands — a powerful challenge to the legitimacy of an increasingly irrational regime.

The overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt also involved flash-mob-like tactics, with organizers calling for protesters to gather initially in alleys and other protected spaces for safety before moving into the streets in larger and larger numbers. Blogger Patrick Meier explains the thinking behind this approach:

Starting small and away from the main protests is a safe way to pool protesters together. It's also about creating an

iterative approach to a “strength in numbers” dynamic. As more people crowd the smaller streets, this gives a sense of momentum and confidence. Starting in alleyways localizes the initiative. People are likely neighbors and join because they see their friend or sister out in the street.³

Another example of effective use of the flash mob tactic is UK Uncut. In October 2010, one week after the British government announced massive cuts to public services, seventy people occupied a Vodafone store in London to draw attention to the company’s record of unpaid taxes. The idea quickly went viral: within three days, over thirty Vodafone stores had been shut down around the country by flash mobs organizing over Twitter using the hashtag #ukuncut.

The revolutionary potential for dispersed, coordinated action using flash mob tactics has only begun to be realized. As Micah White wrote in *Adbusters*:

Fun, easy to organize, and resistant to both infiltration and preemption because of their friend-to-friend network topology, flash mobs are positioned to be the next popular tactic with revolutionary potential. . . . With flash mobs, activists have the potential to swarm capitalism globally.⁴

Related:

TACTICS

Creative disruption p. 18
Guerrilla musical web
Invisible theater p. 66
Carnival protest web
Mass street action p. 68
Distributed action p. 26

THEORIES

The social cure p. 264
Movement as network web
The tactics of everyday life p. 268
Expressive and instrumental actions p. 232

CASE STUDIES

Orange Alternative web
UK/US Uncut web

SIMPLE RULES CAN HAVE GRAND RESULTS: Whether it’s a mass pillow fight (bring a pillow, hit anyone else carrying a pillow), or a bank shut-down (get in line, ask the teller for your entire account balance in pennies, and be disarmingly polite), the invitation to participate in a flash mob is easy to share, but when multiplied by tens or hundreds of people, can lead to complex, dispersed and powerfully effective actions.

KEY PRINCIPLE

at work

OTHER PRINCIPLES AT WORK:

No one wants to watch a drum circle p. 156
Enable, don’t command p. 132
If protest is illegal, make daily life a protest p. 138
Make your actions both concrete and communicative p. 154

¹ The understanding of “flash mobs” that has filtered into popular culture is generally limited to surprise choreographed dance routines performed in public. But for organizing purposes, those carefully choreographed stunts are better described as “guerrilla” than “flash.” see *TACTIC: Guerrilla Musicals*. The distinct characteristics of a flash mob – an unrehearsed, spontaneous, contagious, and dispersed mass action – has its own unique advantages, and requires a different set of organizing principles than a surprise choreographed dance routine requires.

² “Dozens Arrested in Belarus ‘Clapping’ Protest,” *Al Jazeera English*, July 3, 2011.

³ “Civil Resistance Tactics Used in Egypt’s Revolution,” *irevolution*, Feb. 7, 2011. <http://irevolution.net/2011/02/27/tactics-egypt-revolution-jan25>.

⁴ Micah White, “To the Barricades,” *Adbusters* 94 (March/April 2011).



PRINCIPLE :

Use the Jedi mind trick (a.k.a Confidence is contagious)

IN SUM

The Jedi mind trick worked for Luke Skywalker, and it can work for you, too.

You just have to believe in yourself, and others will, too.

EPIGRAPH

“Whether you think you can, or you think you can’t – you’re right.”

– Henry Ford

PRACTITIONERS

Abbie Hoffman

FURTHER INSIGHT

Wookieepedia, “Mind Trick”

http://starwars.wikia.com/wiki/Mind_trick

Video: “Kid Gives Inspiring Speech to All Children Learning to Ride a Bike”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c47otcg13Z8>

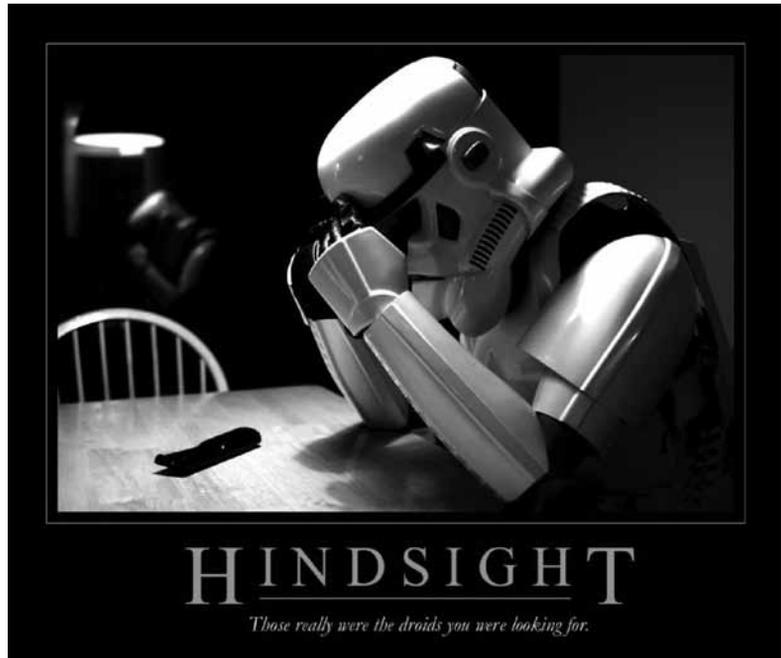
Destructables, “Evasion”

<http://destructables.org/node/62>

CONTRIBUTED BY

Samantha Corbin

Aside from being able to move objects with your mind and having a retractable sword made out of freaking light (how cool is that??), the best thing about being a Jedi has got to be the mind trick. The ability to persuade with a calm voice and a finger wave, “These aren’t the droids you’re looking for,” could prove indispensable in any number of beautiful trouble-making situations.



“Hindsight: Those really were the droids you were looking for.” The Jedi mind trick can work not just on the Empire’s storm troopers, but also on security guards, journalists and yourself.

Good news: this hypnotic power of persuasion is actually within your reach. It springs from an innate authority, an irrational confidence that mystically bends the world to your will. Though this may not work on your bill collector (“I’m not the deadbeat you’re looking for”), it may work in convincing the mainstream media to cover your event or the police to leave you alone. You might even pass unchallenged through the front gate of a nuclear power plant, or take charge of a closed-door

meeting to which you weren't invited. With the right attitude, much more becomes possible than you might have thought.

With nothing more than confidence, an activist adept at the Jedi mind trick can make a security guard look the other way, or convince thousands of people, including a BBC news anchor, that he is a DOW chemical spokesperson, or that it's perfectly normal to wear a climbing helmet in the middle of a convention center and start climbing the scaffolding.

Here are a couple of things to keep in mind as you prepare to break out the Jedi mind trick on an unsuspecting low-level functionary:

Know the rules, suspend the rules. The ability to transgress, trespass, or otherwise do what you shouldn't with complete self-assurance, especially if challenged, carries its own power.

Act like you belong (a.k.a. fake it 'till you get kicked out). Authority is more performed than innate. We constantly interact with, and respond to, coded indicators of status and authority, making assumptions based on attitude, manner, dress, accent, friendliness, sexiness, and other cues. By understanding and playing on these indicators we can also co-opt the authority attached to them.

POTENTIAL PITFALLS: Beware the backlash. The Jedi mind trick wears off quickly, and tends to leave the unsuspecting dupe it was used on angry and embarrassed. No one likes to feel like they got tricked. Use this tactic only with people you're unlikely to see again. To avoid unnecessary backlash, tell the truth as much as possible and let other people fill in their own assumptions.

“With nothing more than confidence, an activist adept at the Jedi mind trick can make a security guard look the other way, or convince thousands of people, including a BBC news anchor, that he is a DOW chemical spokesperson.”

Related:

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Banner hang p. 12
Hoax p. 54
Direct action p. 32

PRINCIPLES

Use other people's prejudices against them p. 192
Anyone can act p. 98
Everyone has balls/ovaries of steel p. 136
Use the law, don't be afraid of it p. 196
Don't dress like a protester p. 126

THEORIES

The tactics of everyday life p. 268

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Streets into gardens p. 368
Barbie Liberation Organization p. 282
Dow Chemical apologizes for Bhopal p. 318



THEORY:

Ethical spectacle

IN SUM

To be politically effective, activists need to engage in spectacle. By keeping to certain principles, our spectacles can be ethical, emancipatory, and faithful to reality.

EPIGRAPH

“Boredom is always counter-revolutionary. Always.”

—Guy Debord

ORIGINS

Andrew Boyd
Stephen Duncombe

PRACTITIONERS

The Situationists
Abbie Hoffman/Yippies
The Zapatistas
Insurgent Rebel Clown Army
Yes Men
Greenpeace
Billionaires for Bush
Deconstructionist
Institute for Surreal Topology
Iraq Veterans Against the War

FURTHER INSIGHT

Duncombe, Stephen. *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*. New York: New Press, 2007.

Boyd, Andrew, and Stephen Duncombe. “The Manufacture of Dissent: What the Left Can Learn from Las Vegas.” *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* 1, no. 3 (2004).

CONTRIBUTED BY

Stephen Duncombe

The concept of ethical spectacle offers a way of thinking about the tactical and strategic use of signs, symbols, myths, and fantasies to advance progressive, democratic goals. First introduced in a 2004 article by Andrew Boyd and Stephen Duncombe and later expanded in Duncombe’s 2007 book *Dream*, the theory’s premises are: (1) that politics is as much an affair of desire and fantasy as it is reason and rationality, (2) that we live in an intensely mediated age (what Situationist Guy Debord called the Society of the Spectacle), (3) that in order to be politically effective, activists need to enter the realm of spectacle, and (4) that spectacular interventions have the potential to be both ethical and emancipatory.

An ethical spectacle is a symbolic action that seeks to shift the political culture toward more progressive values. An ethical spectacle should strive to be:

Participatory: Seeking to empower participants and spectators alike, with organizers acting as facilitators.

Open: Responsive and adaptive to shifting contexts and the ideas of participants.

Transparent: Engaging the imagination of spectators without seeking to trick or deceive.

Realistic: Using fantasy to illuminate and dramatize real-world power dynamics and social relations that otherwise tend to remain hidden in plain sight.

Utopian: Celebrating the impossible — and therefore helping to make the impossible possible.



This mashup of two iconic images captures the tensions and contradictions of the ethical spectacle.



The Yippies used the symbolic power of flowers in this emancipatory spectacle. *Flower Power*, 1967, *The Washington Evening Star* photo by Bernie Boston.

Progressives tend to distrust anything that smacks of propaganda or marketing — that’s what the other side does. We tend to believe that proclaiming the naked Truth is enough: “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.” But waiting for the truth to set us free is lazy politics. The truth does not reveal itself by virtue of being the truth: it must be told, and told well. It must have stories woven around it, works of art made about it; it must be communicated in new and compelling ways that can be passed from person to person, even if this requires flights of fancy and new mythologies. The argument here is not for a progressive movement that deceives or cheapens its message but rather for a propaganda of the truth. This is the work of ethical spectacle.

Related:

TACTICS

Détournement/Culture jamming p. 28

Flash mob p. 46

PRINCIPLES

Be an ethical prankster web

Make the invisible visible p. 152

THEORIES

Society of the Spectacle p. 266

Be both expressive and instrumental p. 232

CASE STUDIES

Santa Claus army p. 358

The Big Donor Show p. 294

Dow Chemical apologizes for Bhopal p. 318



CASE STUDY:

Modern-Day Slavery Museum

WHEN

2010–Present

WHERE

Exhibit has toured from Florida to Massachusetts

PRACTITIONERS

*Coalition of Immokalee Workers
Student/Farmworker Alliance
Interfaith Action of Southwest Florida
Just Harvest USA*

FURTHER INSIGHT

*Modern-Day Slavery Museum website
<http://ciw-online.org/museum/index.html>*

CONTRIBUTED BY

Coalition of Immokalee Workers

In December 2008, farm labor contractors Cesar and Geovanni Navarrete were each sentenced to twelve years in prison for their part in what U.S. Attorney Doug Molloy called “slavery, plain and simple.” According to the Justice Department, the employers “pleaded guilty to beating, threatening, restraining, and locking workers in trucks to force them to work as agricultural laborers... [They] were accused of paying the workers minimal wages and driving the workers into debt, while simultaneously threatening physical harm if the workers left their employment before their debts had been repaid to the Navarrete family.”

Although shocking in its details, the Navarrete case was simply the latest link in a long, unbroken chain of exploitation — including forced labor — in Florida’s fields. It was the seventh farm labor operation to be prosecuted for servitude in the state in the past decade, cases involving well over 1,000 workers and more than a dozen employers in total. The federal government has since initiated two additional prosecutions, bringing the total to nine as of 2011.

Even setting aside forced labor, farm work in the U.S. still offers the worst combination of sub-poverty wages, dangerous, backbreaking working conditions, and lack of fundamental labor protections. In this context of structural poverty and powerlessness, extreme forms of abuse such as forced labor are able to take root and flourish. However these cases are reflective of the impunity and exploitation that is rampant throughout the agricultural sector. In other words, modern-day slavery does not take place in a vacuum, nor is it an inevitable feature of our food system.

To highlight these abuses and to identify their causes and solution, in 2010 the Coalition of Immokalee Workers — a community-based farmworker organization — decided to create the Florida Modern-Day Slavery Museum. The mobile museum consists of a cargo truck carefully outfitted as a replica of the trucks involved in the Navarrete case and a collection of displays on the history and evolution of slavery in Florida over the past four hundred years. The multimedia exhibits were developed in consultation with workers who have escaped from forced labor operations, as well as leading



The Florida Modern Slavery Museum is exhibited on the National Mall, Washington, D.C., June 2010. Photo by Fritz Myer

academic authorities on slavery and labor history in Florida.

With a team of farmworker and ally docents, the museum toured Florida intensively, visiting churches, schools, universities and community centers for six weeks in the lead-up to the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' three-day Farmworker Freedom March in 2010.

People's reactions to the museum were so overwhelmingly positive and such a buzz was generated that the CIW later decided to tour outside Florida to cities throughout the Southeast and Northeast, including a stop on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. In March 2011, former President Jimmy Carter visited the museum in Atlanta, Georgia. Approximately 10,000 people have toured the museum since its creation.

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers closely links education and action in its work. The last panel of the museum highlighted the ongoing Campaign for Fair Food as a systemic solution to the problem of farmworker exploitation. And since the Florida tour occurred during the lead-up to a major mobilization, docents were able to extend countless personal invitations for museum-goers (i.e., grocery shoppers) to join the three-day march to the corporate headquarters of Publix Super Markets, one of the CIW's main campaign targets. The museum was both an educational and an organizing

Related:

CASE STUDIES

Taco Bell boycott p. 372

WHY IT WORKED

tool, reminding attendees of their own capacity for social change and the indispensable role they could play alongside farmworkers in transforming the food system.



A man tours the inside of the box truck that houses the Florida Modern-Day Slavery Museum. Photo by Fritz Myer

KEY TACTIC used

ART INTERVENTION: The museum was not a “work of art” in the conventional sense of the term, but it did transform both the public spaces it inhabited and the people who viewed it. Through a host of different media and creative displays — the highlight of which was the careful re-creation of the Naverrete operation inside the truck itself — the museum was able to reach viewers at a visceral level.

KEY PRINCIPLE at work

OTHER PRINCIPLES AT WORK:

Take leadership from the most impacted p. 180

Make the invisible visible p. 152

Lead with sympathetic characters p. 146

Reframe p. 168

SHOW, DON'T TELL: It is often difficult for people to accept that modern-day slavery is a systemic problem facing U.S. agriculture. The thought that the tomato topping your hamburger or tossed in your salad may have been picked by a slave — and was certainly picked by someone receiving very low wages for very difficult work — can trigger a denial impulse that is difficult to break through. But the museum, by using actual historical artifacts, presented a tight and irrefutable indictment of the status quo that was able to pierce this veil and open peoples’ minds to dialogue and possibly collective action.

TAKE THE SHOW ON THE ROAD: Instead of waiting for people to come to Immokalee to visit the museum, the CIW brought the museum to the people. With the museum as Exhibit A of an old-fashioned speaking tour, the museum crew toured across Florida and the Eastern U.S., often parking the exhibit right in the center of town. There's nothing like a museum on wheels to draw people's attention, not to mention a museum on wheels that addresses such a pressing and controversial topic as modern-day slavery. It was an effective conversation starter.

TEAM UP WITH EXPERT ADVISERS: A key factor that lent the museum credibility was the support garnered for the project from leading academic authorities on modern-day slavery and Florida's labor history. Several academics had the opportunity to offer crucial feedback on organizers' draft research brief. Others contributed "blurbs" similar to the advance praise you might read on the back of a book jacket, which were included in the museum booklet (which was itself a polished version of the research brief) so that attendees would know that the museum's content had been independently vetted.