



BEAUTIFUL TROUBLE

A TOOLBOX FOR REVOLUTION

FROM THE PEOPLE WHO BROUGHT YOU THE
YES MEN, BILLIONAIRES FOR BUSH, ETC.

ASSEMBLED BY ANDREW BOYD



PRINCIPLE:

Team up with experts (but don't become "the expert")

IN SUM

Cultivating a fluid, symbiotic relationship between activists and experts is key to organizing effective interventions into complex issues.

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CONTRIBUTED BY

Brooke Singer

Experts can be terribly helpful co-conspirators and there are plenty of them out there to befriend. So go ask one for help. Why? An expert can be a great source of powerful, actionable information or can save you much embarrassment by pointing out flaws in your approach. An expert can help you do something you don't know how to do or gain access to something that requires credentials. An expert can put you in contact with even more experts. And an expert can introduce new audiences to your work.

Choose an expert whose work is aligned with your mission to increase your chance of a positive response. If the response is *no*, then simply move on to the next. (Remember: there are many experts in this world!). Experts often respond favorably because they secretly wish they could act like independent artists and activists like you. Experts tend to work within established institutions and are beholden to power structures that typically limit speech and action. For that reason, it's important to be respectful of the limits of what they can say, do, or sign their name to.

As you continue to work on your project or campaign, you might find that people start treating you like the expert. People, you notice, are really listening to what you have to say. You might be invited to give a talk or a journalist calls for a quote. A "mediagenic" project propels your cause, bringing your message to the widest possible audience. Fantastic! Use the attention to your advantage.

But beware of getting too comfortable in the role of expert. Remain tactical. Construct your environment and apply pressure as needed. If your job is done or the project has run its course, then don't linger at the mic. Reap the benefits of acting fast and freely, then disappear. Experts have made a long-term commitment and are good at sustainability; they choose their territory and stick it out, for better or worse. Activists and experts are simpatico but not interchangeable.

As a tactician, your job is to take risks. Generate a lot of ideas, prototypes or situations to see what works. Don't worry, good ideas have the tendency to stick, whether you see them through or others pick up where you left off.

Otpor

Otpor — “resistance” in Serbian — was a civic youth movement started by a small group of student activists at Belgrade University that was active from 1998 until 2003. Otpor played a key role in overthrowing Slobodan Milošević’s government and in Serbia’s transition to democracy. In just two years of struggle against Milošević, Otpor’s numbers grew from eleven to 60,000. Otpor used street theater, dilemma actions, poster propagation and pranks to satirize, embarrass and undermine the legitimacy of the government. For example, activists in Nis held a “birthday party” for Milošević with prank gifts like a one-way ticket to the Hague, a prison uniform and a cake in the shape of a red star. Even the group’s iconic clenched fist logo lampooned the WWII Serb Partisans’ symbol. Although the group was provocative, they maintained a staunch and disciplined commitment to non-violence which ultimately dissuaded security forces from attacking them, regardless of orders. Since Milošević’s ouster in 2000, the group has disseminated the lessons and tactics of their movement through trainings and consultations. Most recently, Egypt’s April 6 Movement received training from Otpor on how to conduct peaceful demonstrations, how to respond to the threat of state violence and how to mobilize people.

Preemptive Media

Founded in 2002, Preemptive Media (PM) is a group of artists, activists and technologists that produces projects drawing attention to the ubiquity and invisibility of consumer data. PM’s goal is to make their audiences more aware of the information they unknowingly divulge to governments and corporations and the ways in which the collection of that data often occurs without consent. One of PM’s most famous projects, the “Swipe Bar,” was a mobile installation designed to look like a local watering hole. When customers showed their IDs and swiped their Visas, Preemptive Media served them not only beer but also a report of all the data stored on those cards. PM thinks of its projects as “beta tests,” and some of them — like a website to aggregate short news reports sent from hundreds of cell phones — resemble pared-down precursors of more popular technologies (like Twitter). But the “beta” quality of their actions, and the willingness to experiment, is very much the point.

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THEORY

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SOURCES

Foreign Policy, “Revolution U,” February 16, 2011
<http://trb.la/yqbSKx>
A Force More Powerful (film)
<http://www.aforcemore-powerful.org>

TACTIC

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Make the invisible visible p. 152
By any media necessary web

SOURCES

Preemptive Media website
<http://preemptivemedia.net>
ArtSlant, “Preemptive Media”
<http://trb.la/zhOXnz>

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realpolitik, both elegant and incendiary."*

—Naomi Klein

BEAUTIFUL TROUBLE

A TOOLBOX FOR REVOLUTION | EDITED BY ANDREW BOYD WITH DAVE OSWALD MITCHELL

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