

TACTIC

CREATIVE DISRUPTION

You *could* disrupt an illegitimate event by shouting or throwing things, but this might not help your cause. To outshine your target's message, it's often better to disrupt creatively: song, glitter, theatrics.

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"YOU CAN OFTEN BE MORE EFFECTIVE IF YOU STEP OUT OF THE "COMBATIVE SPEECH BOX" AND CONSIDER VISUALS, SONG, THEATRE, AND HUMOUR."

"Human salvation lies in the hands of the creatively maladjusted."
—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

If a war criminal, white supremacist, or corporate greenwasher comes to town, what's the best way to challenge their ideas and the spin they'll put on their misdeeds? Often, the scale of the misdeeds and the imbalance of power are so great that activists will forgo dialogue and move straight to disruption, attempting to shut down or seriously disrupt the event. Disruption can be an effective tactic, and has been used successfully by small groups of people, often with little advance notice or planning.

The problem, of course, is that not only does the target control the mic, the stage, and the venue, but even more importantly, as an invited guest or the official speaker, s/he has the audience's sympathy. A poorly thought-out disruption can easily backfire. The target can portray themselves as a victim of anti-free speech harassment, thus gaining public sympathy and a larger platform. The challenge is to disrupt the event without handing your target that opportunity.

Sometimes an oblique intervention that reframes the target's remarks (see: PRINCIPLE: Reframe the issue) or forces a response to your issues without literally preventing anyone from speaking can be more effective than just shouting down someone. When House Speaker Nancy Pelosi held a rare town hall meeting in San Francisco in 2006 during the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, CODEPINK demonstrators — angry that Pelosi was not pushing for a cut-off in war funding — waited until the question and answer session, then surrounded the stage with their "Stop Funding War"

RELATED TOOLS

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Tactics

banners and stood there, silently, for the remainder of the meeting.

The creative use of a sign or banner can help you avoid the “it’s an attack on free speech” trap. In effect, you’re adding an additional “layer” of speech; you’re engaging in *more* free speech, not less. Song can also be used in this way. A 2011 foreclosure auction in Brooklyn, for instance, was movingly disrupted by protesters breaking into song. Song creates sympathy.

A creative disruption needn’t be passive. When Newt Gingrich came to the Minnesota Family Council conference for a book signing, a queer activist dutifully waited in line and when it came to his turn, dumped rainbow glitter over Gingrich, shouting, “Feel the rainbow, Newt! Stop the hate, stop anti-gay policies” as he was escorted out of the room. The video documenting the event (see: PRINCIPLE: Do the media’s work for them) went viral and the disruption gained international press attention, sparking a wave of LGBT activism. The tactic of “glitter-bombing” even made it into an episode of the TV show *Glee*.

Theatre is another way to “disrupt without disrupting.” When Jeane Kirkpatrick (Reagan’s Ambassador to the UN) came to UC Berkeley in the 1980’s, activists staged a mock death-squad kidnapping. “Soldiers” (students) in irregular fatigues marched down the main aisle barking orders in Spanish and dragged off a few students kicking and screaming from the audience. Others then scattered leaflets detailing the US’s and Kirkpatrick’s support for El Salvador’s death-squad government from the balcony onto the stunned audience.

As these examples show, it’s critical to tailor your disruption to the specific target and situation. Often, you can be more effective if you step out of the “combative speech box” and consider alternate modalities, like visuals, song, theatre, and humour.

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College Students Should Resist – Not Silence – Their Political Foes
Bill McKibben, *The Guardian*, 2017

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/mar/10/college-students-resist-not-silence-political-foes>

Newt Gingrich Gets Glittered at the Minnesota Family Council

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8OZsJokBB0>

Auctioneer: Stop All the Sales Right Now!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u3X89iViAlw>

- App flooding
- Cacerolazo (noise-making protest)
- Citizen’s arrest
- Civil disobedience
- Clandestine leafleting
- Electoral guerrilla theatre
- Flash mob
- Flotilla
- Graffiti drone
- Guerrilla theatre
- Infiltration
- Jail solidarity
- Media-jacking
- Public filibuster

Principles

- Anger works best when you have the moral high ground
- Bring the issue home
- Choose your target wisely
- Consider your audience
- Do the media’s work for them
- Everyone has balls/ovaries of steel
- Joy is a revolutionary force
- Kill them with kindness
- Personalize and polarize
- Play to the audience that isn’t there
- Put your target in a decision dilemma
- Reframe the issue
- Show, don’t tell
- The price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative
- The real action is your target’s reaction
- Think narratively
- Use humour to undermine authority
- Use others’ prejudices against them
- Use the Jedi mind trick

Theories

- Action logic
- Alienation effect
- Direct action
- Ethical spectacle
- Postcolonialism

- The tactics of everyday life

Methodologies

- Action star
- Battle of the story
- Story of self, us, and now

TAGS

Action design, Communications,
Democracy, Student activism