

TACTIC IMAGE THEATRE

A theatre exercise in which participants form statues that represent an oppressive situation, followed by group reflection to better understand the situation and try out possible solutions.

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"WHILE IMAGE THEATRE STARTS WITH A FROZEN IMAGE, IT QUICKLY MOVES TOWARD INTERVENTIONS BY PARTICIPANTS."

Image theatre, a social change tool developed by Augusto Boal, is one of the more widely used forms of Theatre of the Oppressed, in which activists, students, or any group are invited to form statues that represent a moment in time of an oppressive situation. The image can then serve as a springboard for critical group reflection in order to both understand the situation better and to try out possible solutions. Through the process of creating and working with the image, participants can decode the situation, dissecting each character's personality, motivation, and range of possible actions. To the extent that the participants identify with the characters, they can explore possible actions that they themselves could take in their lives.

Image theatre is similar to forum theatre in every way, except that everyone is holding still. This allows for faster use of the process: While forum theatre often involves a small team that develops and rehearses a skit for months, image theatre can be created on the spot, collaboratively. In this way, image theatre is an incredibly accessible tool to use in trainings, strategy development, and even direct actions.

For example, at a 2005 rally to support a disruption of a Chevron shareholder meeting in San Rafael, California, all demonstrators present were invited to form an image to depict the entire oil industry, including the characters who benefit from it, are oppressed by it, or are bystanders of it. Portrayed in the image were drivers,

POTENTIAL RISKS

When creating an image that involves representing people who are not present, stereotypes of those people commonly surface. This can cause problems when participants begin manipulating the image and the actor tries to imagine what is going on in that person's head. With oppressor characters, this makes for an unrealistic laboratory in which to experiment with actions. With oppressed characters, it can perpetuate the dehumanizing stereotypes that fuel their oppression in the first place. This pitfall can be avoided by directing the action toward the people in the room, which image theatre is specifically designed to do.

RELATED TOOLS

oil tycoons, media, and impacted communities (people from Nigeria and Ecuador were present to represent themselves). Even water and the Earth were included as characters. Once people were satisfied that the image represented reality, they shared their character's thoughts and motivations. The few people left in the rally who were not part of the image were then asked to take ten seconds each to intervene in the image in an attempt to transform the oil industry by reshaping the characters whom they believed were the critical agents of change. Everyone could see plainly what actions could or could not get us to the "ideal image." Within twenty-five minutes, the group had arrived at goals, possible tactics, and next steps.

While image theatre starts with a frozen image, it quickly moves toward interventions by participants, acting in character, to collaboratively and spontaneously name their oppression and its source, and then explore courses of action. The final stage is to reflect on what happened with participants and, if appropriate, write up the actions that seem most viable.

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LEARN MORE

Games for Actors and Non-Actors

Augusto Boal, 2002

https://books.google.com/books/about/Games_for_Actors_and_Non_actors.html?id=AE2aBAQZKKYC

Theatre of the Oppressed

Augusto Boal, 1979

<https://books.google.com/books?id=2PrIAQAACAAJ&dq>

Image Theatre

David Farmer, 2014

<https://dramaresource.com/image-theatre/>

Stories

- Replacing Cops with Mimes

Tactics

- Artistic vigil
- Forum theatre
- Hoax
- Invisible theatre
- Legislative theatre
- Storytelling

Principles

- Anyone can act
- Balance art and message
- Praxis makes perfect
- Use the power of ritual

Theories

- Alienation effect
- Anti-oppression
- Critical multiculturalism
- Direct action
- Framing
- Pedagogy of the Oppressed
- Theatre of the Oppressed

Methodologies

- Artstorm
- Peel the onion

TAGS

Action design, Art, Campaign strategy, Community building, Direct action, Education, Movement building, Street protest