

**THE**  
**ART**  
**OF**  
**ACTIVISM**  
**WORKBOOK**



**YOUR ALL-PURPOSE GUIDE TO MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE**

From the Founders of the Center for Artistic Activism

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**STEVE**  
**DUNCOMBE** + **STEVE**  
**LAMBERT**

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# INTRODUCTION

## Artistic Activism Is a Practice

Artistic activism isn't meant to be just a set of ideas, it's meant to be a practice. This workbook is a place for you to practice the skills necessary to becoming the most effective artistic activist you can be. It was developed as a companion to *The Art of Activism*, and we recommend doing the following exercises alongside reading the book; but we've included enough explanatory notes so that the workbook can also stand on its own.

We all come to this practice with different histories and experiences that inform our approach as artistic activists. We will start with some foundational exercises in self-reflection to prepare you for what's ahead, encouraging you to learn a little about yourself and what you bring to this work. Soon, you'll be moving through the workbook exercises and building skills that will take you forward as an artistic activist, no matter what you brought with you or left behind.

## How to Use This Workbook

To make your experience more productive and enjoyable you may want to pick an issue to use as your case study for the exercises throughout the book — something like climate change or police violence, rights for sex workers or reforming your local town council, or perhaps challenging the stupid and oppressive rules at your High School. It can be an issue you have worked on or are planning to work on, or just one you are passionate about. Sticking with one issue throughout the book will be more fruitful because you will see your creative ideas develop as you move through exercises. If there are multiple issues you want to work on, you can always do a second pass later.

Create a schedule for yourself to work through this book. Commit to doing a few exercises each week, or every other week. Be reasonable — an exercise a day might be too much (though some are pretty short) — but don't let too much time pass between each chapter or you will lose the momentum you've built.

While you can work through the book by yourself, we also encourage you to do it with others. It can be used by a group that is collectively working on an issue, or by a group of individuals who want to share the process but aren't necessarily working on one issue together, like in a book club or study group. There really is no right way to use this workbook (although we'd prefer that you didn't just use it as a doorstep). There is also no right way to be an artistic activist, and we didn't create this workbook to prescribe a set doctrine. Use what's useful to you and put aside the rest. And when you revisit the workbook later, you may find that what you initially passed over is now useful. The only thing required of you right now is to be open to learning and experimenting.

# PREPARATION

## 1. Making Your Mark

Time: 1 minute

What you will need to proceed:

- This workbook
- A pen or pencil that you love

1) Start by taking your favorite pen or pencil and quickly draw a connecting line from point A to point B below:



2) You're done.

You've made a mark. This workbook is now yours.

This exercise appears simple, but there is much more below the surface. Making a mark is important because the first step of committing to any endeavor, including becoming an artistic activist, is the hardest. In taking this first step, however small, you've made the move from thinking about doing something to actually doing it. You've begun the journey from just reading this book, to writing in it, and to then using the lessons learned here to make a better world. In activist circles what you just did is called "stepping off the curb." It's the step that moves us from being passive spectators into active participants. It's the step from the sidewalk into the street to join a demonstration, or from the couch into the studio to create and communicate what's inside our heads. It's a step we need to convince other people to take with us to overcome their habitual reservations about taking a risk and making a stand. It's also an action we need to rehearse ourselves.

The wonderfully creative activist Abbie Hoffman once wrote that, "When you come to challenge the powers that be, inevitably you find yourself on the curbstone of indifference, wondering: 'Should I play it safe and stay on the sidewalks, or should I go into the street?'"

Stepping off the curb, and moving from interest and intent to commitment, can be very scary. Stepping off the curb of noble interests and good intentions into the street of demonstrable action *is* risky and *will* make you feel uncomfortable. That's good. Get comfortable with the fear. As time goes on you will welcome that discomfort like

a familiar friend. We've all been trained to read and absorb knowledge, yet not to make a mark. Now that you've made a mark here, it's time to practice some skills so that you can make your mark beyond the pages of this book.

## 2. Unpacking Your Baggage

Time: 5 minutes

Artistic activism is a powerful hybrid of arts and activism, but there's a lot of baggage—not all of it good—that comes with the words “art” and “artist,” “activism” and “activist.” What images come to mind when we think about the kind of person who does art? What kind of person does activism? Here's a place to explore this . . . and begin unpacking.

### 1) Make a list of words you associate with activism.

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### 2) Make a list of the words you associate with art.

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### 3) Look at your list.

Nearly everyone has baggage associated with art and activism. This is yours. It's baggage that you have been carrying around from past experiences. It may be out of date. It may never have been accurate. It may be a form of resistance that allows you to avoid taking risks and doing unfamiliar things. It may be standing in the way of what your activism could be and what your art could do.

### 4) Take a look at your list again.

Know that this baggage is not so easily dropped. As you read this book, this resistance will re-appear. This baggage will weigh you down. Start to unpack. But there may be words here that are empowering or helpful for you. Circle those. Keep what's good. Leave the rest here.

# THE ART OF ACTIVISM

## 3. Become a Superhero

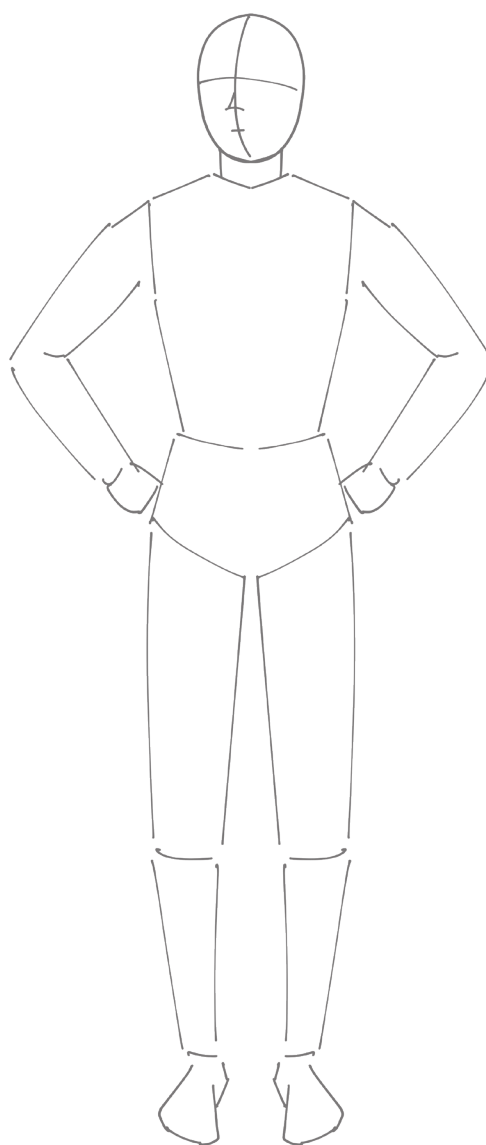
Time: 5 minutes

You might think of superheroes as a bit silly. Silly is good. Allowing ourselves to be silly opens up a space to do things, feel things, and imagine things we would not have permitted ourselves to do otherwise.

- 1) **Imagine that you are a superhero. Like all superheroes, you have superpowers—we'll get to that soon. You also have an outfit. You are very strong and powerful. The wind is blowing through your hair as you look off into the distance like superheroes do. Close your eyes for a moment and imagine what you look like.**

As a superhero, you have superpowers. Your superpower is that you can transmit your thoughts. You can put your thoughts and ideas into people's minds. But all superheroes have weaknesses, and your weakness is that you can only transmit thoughts three times before you have to leave the planet to recharge. So . . .

- 2) **Imagine the three thoughts you would communicate, and to what group of people. These thoughts can be personal and intimate, or public and political, or someplace in between. You can transmit thoughts to a small group of people, a whole nation, or the entire world. You can't make anyone do anything, but you can plant ideas in their minds which persuade them to act. What thoughts would you transmit? Who would you transmit them to? Write these down.**



PLEASE MODIFY TO SUIT!

YOUR THOUGHTS:

AUDIENCES:

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Done? Good. Here's your superpower: artistic activism.

Artistic activism allows you to communicate thoughts, feelings, and ideas to audiences through the events, actions, and objects you produce. You can aim these thoughts at small or large groups. It is a powerful ability. And it doesn't require a genetic mutation or radioactive event... even the outfit is optional.

Look at what you have written. You have a valuable piece of paper in front of you. These are ideas you want to communicate to the world. If you're ever stuck or unsure what to make an artistic activist "piece" about, you can return to these ideas.

## 4. Your Origin Story

Time: 15 minutes

This exercise encourages you to explore what made you interested in changing the world — what made you “step off the curb” — as well as how artistic activism can help others step off the curb.

All superheroes have an origin story. For Batman it was seeing his parents killed in a robbery, for Spider-Man it was being bit by a radioactive spider, for the Black Panther it was a mystical herb native to Wakanda, and for Wonder Woman it was simply being born as who and what she was: a warrior princess of the Amazon. In this exercise you are going to discover the story of what led you to become an artistic activist.

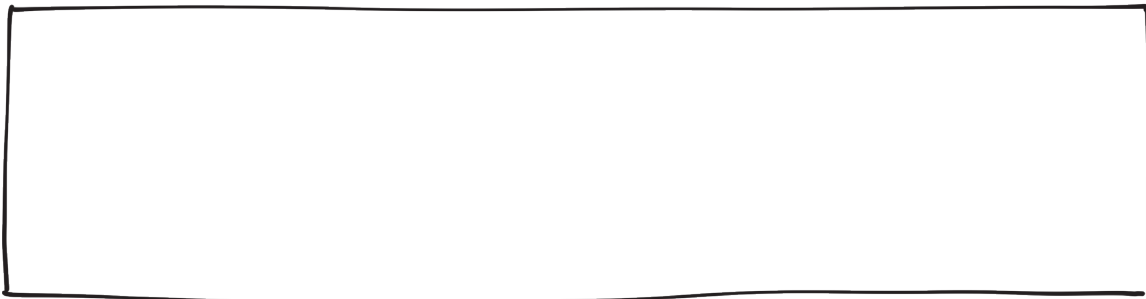
1) Go back in your mind to the first time you realized that the world wasn't just, that it needed changing, and you felt stirrings within you to be part of that change—that moment when you decided to step off the curb and into the street. We don't mean the moment that you literally stepped off the curb to join your first protest march, but something earlier that led you to even thinking about political participation in the first place. It may have happened years before, when you were much younger, and you may not have realized the importance of it until much later. Maybe there was never a singular, defining, “ah-ha” moment for you. That's OK. Just transport yourself back to a time when you felt that something was just not right and you needed to do something about it.

- Where were you?
- What were you doing?
- What was going on around you?

2) Close your eyes and remember, giving yourself a few minutes to really get back to that place and time.

3) Take a moment and ask yourself: Is this even the origin? Or is there an earlier experience or event that led you there? If so, close your eyes again and allow yourself to remember that experience. The experience you remember may be something you treasure; it could be something mildly challenging or deeply traumatic. But the experience is uniquely yours. Take this opportunity to reframe that story from the past in terms of the story of who you are now and who you aim to be.

4) Once you've opened your eyes, get out your pen or pencil, and draw that scene below. Stick figures are fine, and if you really don't want to draw you can always cut and paste images from magazines or online. There's no right or wrong way to do this, just record your experience.



We all have our own activist origin stories, our moments of deciding to step off the curb of indifference, but we're guessing that yours was not the moment someone handed you a pamphlet, asked you to sign a petition, or shared a social media post with you. If you are like the thousands of people we have done this exercise with in our Center for Artistic Activism workshops, your origin story is a powerful, emotional experience. If we want to motivate others, we need to speak to their emotions as well. Art can do this. Artistic activism—like all artforms—can tap into these emotions, creating an affective experience and mobilizing people to take action. This is its superpower.

## 5. Knowing Is Not Enough

Time: 5 minutes

This is a little thought experiment to help illustrate how knowing “the truth” is usually not enough to inspire action.

- 1) Think of a behavior you know is good, yet you don’t do it (like exercise, eating right, engaging people on social media) or one that you know is bad, yet you continue to do it (smoking, eating too much cookie dough, engaging people on social media). Write that behavior down.

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- 2) Write down your reasons and rationalizations for why you persist in doing, or avoiding, these behaviors in spite of what you know to be best.

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- 3) Now write down a behavior that you did change at some point in your life; say stopping smoking, giving up social media, or eating more whole grains and vegetables.

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- 4) What made you “step off the curb” and change your behavior? Write this down.

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Look over what you’ve written. You may find that knowing something is very different than acting upon something. And when we do act upon something it’s often not because we’ve amassed all the facts and figures to convince ourselves to do so, but because we’ve had some sort of an experience that convinced us we needed to act.

This is not to say that facts and action are not connected. Reading the facts about the health effects of long-term smoking can help you to make the decision to quit. But give this a bit more thought: is it really the facts, or what the facts are connected to — our fear of illness or a premature death, our responsibility to our loved ones — that prompts our change?

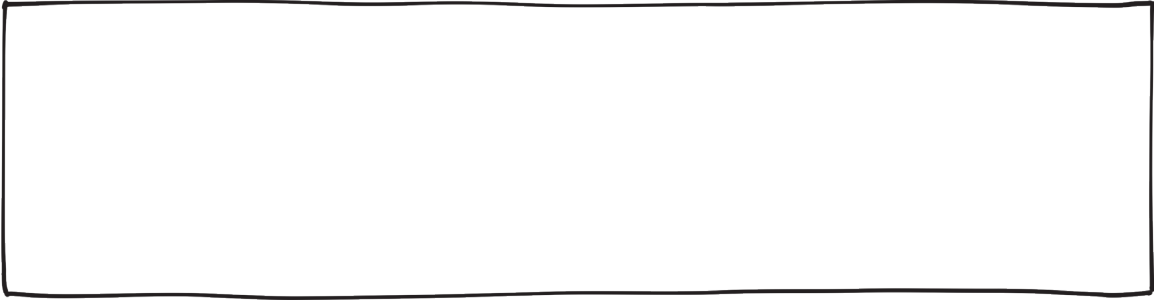
What we do as artistic activists is try to create the sorts of experiences that have the urgency necessary to prompt people to act upon the facts.

## 6. How Art Works

Time: 10 minutes

Here's another thought experiment. This one will help us think about how art works.

- 1) Recall a piece of art you really like (or really hate). It doesn't need to be a painting on a wall or a dance performance, it can just as easily be a Bollywood movie or a well-prepared meal. Make a quick sketch of it — remember, it doesn't have to be "good" as no one will see this but you.



- 2) Take a couple of minutes and write down all the reasons why you love, (or hate) it. Include any relevant details of the work in your explanation.

Two horizontal lines, one above the other, for writing down reasons for loving or hating the art.

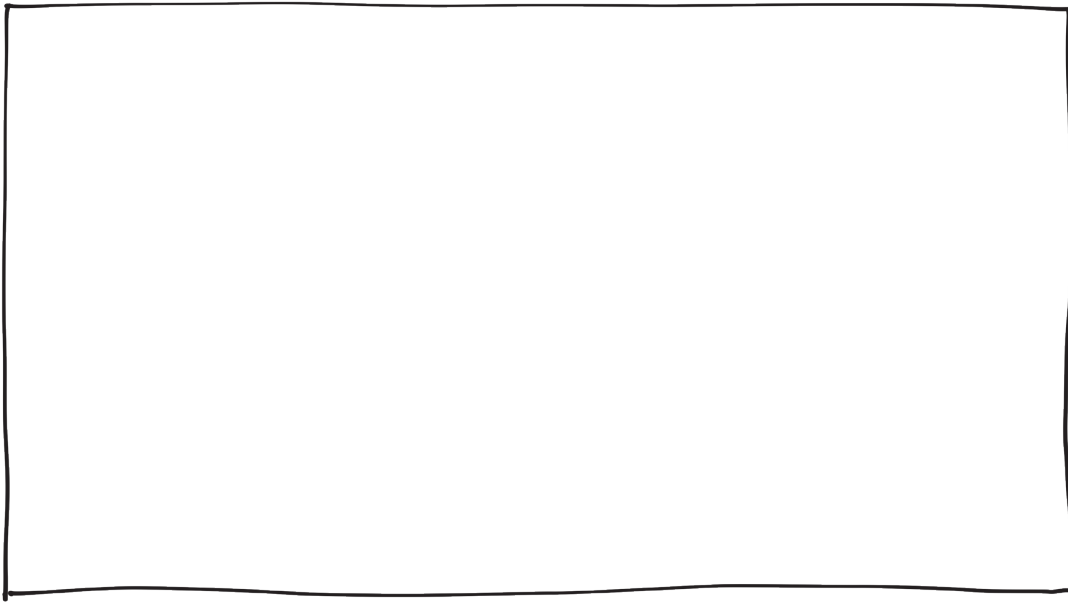
- 3) Read over what you've just written. We're guessing you came up with a list of things you like about the work, such as how the artist uses color or sound, or things you don't like, like the way the director depicts women. But we're also guessing that your explanation is incomplete. These observations likely just scratch the surface, and probably don't completely capture the depth of your attraction or repulsion.

- 4) Try again. Recall the work again, but this time describe only how it makes you feel.

Two horizontal lines, one above the other, for writing down how the art makes the person feel.

A bit easier, right? But it's still hard because art, if it is any good, doesn't translate easily into words—it evokes rather than explains. This is one of the powers of art.

5) Try once more. This time draw how you feel (abstraction encouraged).



Maybe you found this even easier. Maybe not. The point of this exercise is not to be able to accurately communicate how art moves us, but to demonstrate exactly how hard it is to do.

## 7. Stirring Emotions into Actions

Time: 30 minutes

People are often moved to act by their emotions. In this exercise, we are going to practice infusing our actions with emotions, in order to move others to act.

**1) Take the issue you are working on: for example, raising the minimum wage in your town, or creating a community policing panel in your city.**

A traditional activist campaign addressing your issue might include objectives for an audience like:

- Attending a meeting
- Reading a flyer
- Signing a petition
- Joining a coalition
- Attend a demonstration
- Visiting a politician's office

If you are an experienced activist you will probably come up with a list far longer and more detailed than this one. The list above is just an example, so feel free to substitute your campaign's actual objectives to make the exercise more practical.

2) Now here's a list of possible emotions that might motivate your audiences to take these actions:

- Curiosity
- Comfort
- Grief
- Humiliation
- Desire
- Surprise
- Compassion
- Hope
- Pride
- Shame
- Outrage
- Wonder
- Confusion
- Joy
- Belonging
- Schadenfreude (pleasure in the misfortune of others)

3) Now mash-up the two lists. How can efforts toward achieving your practical outcomes be imbued with these emotions? How can a demonstration provide people with an experience of comfort? How can a petition convey the pain and shame of domestic violence? How can a visit to a politician help that politician understand the pride of an agricultural laborer organizing with their fellow laborers? Write down at least three ideas that come from different combinations of objectives and emotions.

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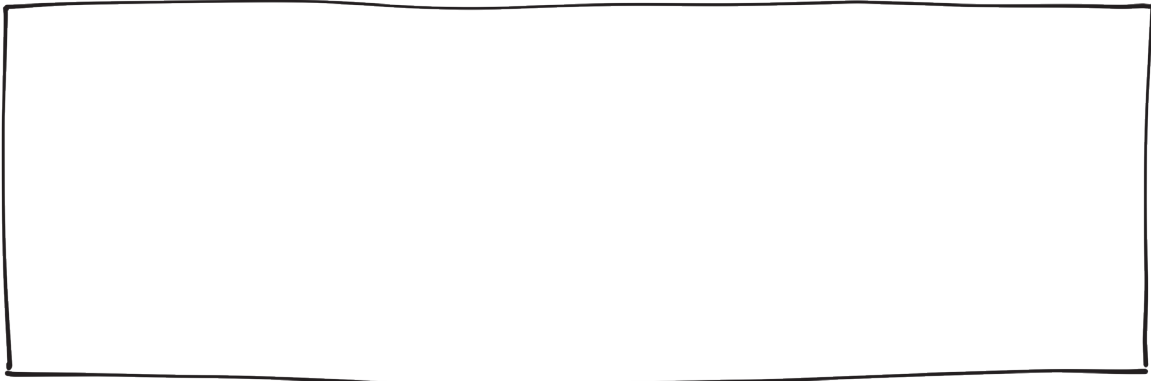
As you create artistic activist pieces in the years to come, remember there is real value in traditional activist tactics and objectives. But make sure you're also including the emotional experiences that make people want to do these things. Artistic activism comes from these combinations.

## 8. Artistic Activism is All Around Us

Time: 15 minutes

Artistic activism is all around us. Once you start looking for it you'll see examples in all sorts of political actions and social movements from the past and the present. These examples are good places to look for inspiration that you can apply to your own practice. This exercise will help you to look and learn.

- 1) Think of your favorite social movement. It needn't be artistic, just one you admire. It might be one you are part of, one you know a bit about, or one you know very little about but have always respected.
- 2) Identify a particularly effective or provocative action used by that movement—one that captured a lot of attention, or simply one that moves you. Study it. You may want to spend a few minutes online doing research. How did it work? Draw an image of that action.



- 3) Look at your drawing. What did you choose to include in the image? This might give clues as to how the activists employed what we call the “art of activism.” Were there striking visuals? Was there an element of performance? Music and sound? Did they use story and myth? Did they tap into popular culture? Was there some innovation? Something done for the first time? Other creative concepts? Write down at least three ways this movement used artistic activism:

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Most successful activism uses some element of artistry, whether consciously or not. It's there for us to learn and draw from, we just have to begin looking for it.

# PROCESS

## 9. Your Sketchbook of Questionable Ideas

Time: 1–2 hours

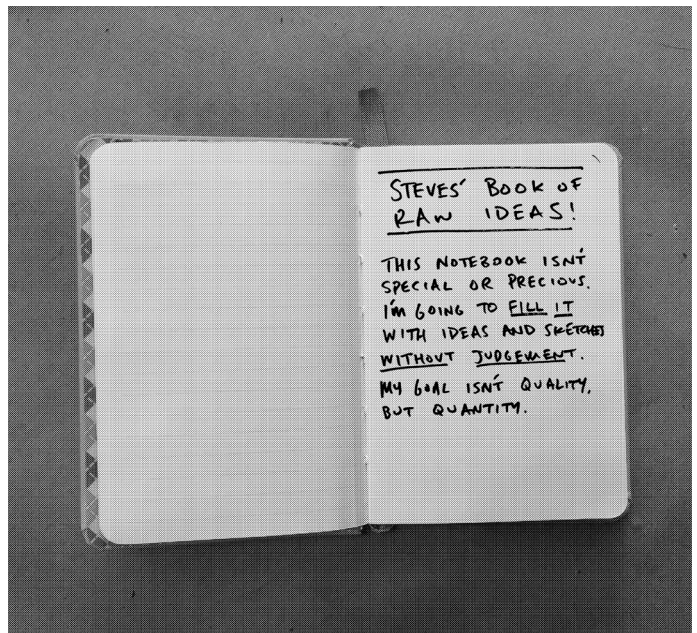
So far we've had you making your mark in the pages of this book. Now it's time to branch out. There are times when you'll need more space in which to brainstorm, jot down ideas, sketch, or cut and paste than can fit in this workbook. You also need a place where you can put all those ideas that pop into your head that have nothing to do with the exercises in these pages. These ideas might be really brilliant or really stupid. Your sketchbook is for unfiltered ideas: musings that might cause someone else to question your creativity, intelligence, or seriousness. Or ideas that arise from questions you have, and go on to stimulate other questions. Questionable ideas.

This is why you need a Sketchbook of Questionable Ideas.

Get a special book of your own. The pages can be lined, graphed, or blank—whatever you like. Make sure it has plenty of pages, pockets to collect loose papers, and that it's big enough to sketch in but small enough to carry around with you. You're going to need to be able to use this at a moment's notice—you can't plan when questionable ideas strike.

On the inside front cover of the sketchbook, include your contact details in case you lose it. Maybe offer a reward of money or karma. And if you feel embarrassed at the thought of a stranger finding your questionable ideas, write a disclaimer in the first few pages. Lambert's disclaimers are different each time, but usually go something like this:

*I am going to fill this book with all kinds of ideas, many of them are not going to be good, but the point is to fill it. So if you find this and you are thinking, "these notes are ridiculous," well, I already know that. That was the plan.*



Fill one page of your sketchbook. Use words, sketches, doodles, images, or technical drawings... These can be plans for a piece or your thoughts about penguins, you decide.

Remember, this is just for you. If you can't draw, don't worry: stick figures are fine, as are cut-and-paste illustrations. If you can't write, don't worry: there's no one reading it. This sketchbook is the foundation of your creative process. Trust yourself.



## 10. Creating Your Habitat

Time: 15 minutes

To be an artistic activist it helps to have a creative habitat. This habitat is a place of your own design where you can cultivate, grow, and replenish your creativity. To create a habitat, we need physical and mental space.

Creating your habitat will take time. Like any creative process, it entails a lot of trial and error, discovery and rediscovery. But in this exercise we want you to start thinking through, and trying on for size, the conditions necessary for creative work.

- 1) **Find a place.** Someplace where you feel free to draw and write and think and dream. Someplace where no one will disturb you or look over your shoulder. What Virginia Woolf called “a room of one’s own.” It can be a closet, it can be a crowded cafe, it can be under a tree, it can be anyplace where you are at ease. In order to create freely you need to create a comfortable, non-judgmental space where you can work with abandon.

Where is this place for you? Write it down here:

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- 2) **Carve out time.** How and when do you work best? Is it over small, regular intervals? Or do you need large chunks of time to sit and ruminate? Given the other responsibilities in your life, what's possible? Come up with your creative schedule for a week:

Monday \_\_\_\_\_

Tuesday \_\_\_\_\_

Wednesday \_\_\_\_\_

Thursday \_\_\_\_\_

Friday \_\_\_\_\_

Saturday \_\_\_\_\_

Sunday \_\_\_\_\_

- 3) **Create a routine.** Now that you have a chunk of time carved out, what is your ideal creative routine? What do you need to put yourself in that creative place, and repeat it day after day? This may take a bit of practice to figure out, but take your best shot:

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- 4) **Turn down the pressure.** You need a way to remind yourself that creativity only comes when we free ourselves from the pressure of being smart, creative, and, most of all, correct. What are some ways you can ease the pressure on yourself?

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- 5) **Bring the love.** What is going to allow you to show up for your creative work full of love? What can you do to take care of yourself?

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Once you've created a physical, mental, and emotional space for creativity, you'll need to do the daily work to cultivate and maintain your creative habit. This may seem easy, but it's really, really hard. Distractions arise, external and internal, real and imagined. Prepare for a challenge. Things that are worth doing are rarely easy, and this is part of your creative discipline. Find what works for you, keep at it, and eventually creative work will become a habit.

## 11. The Artistic Activist Process Model

**Time:** A few hours, repeat when needed

The Artistic Activism Process Model is our version of the many “design thinking” methods for creativity. To help you navigate what can be a terrifying creative abyss we broke the process up into four steps:

- Research
- Sketch
- Evaluate
- Produce

In this exercise you'll try out the steps and see how they work together.

- 1) **Go to your creative place, in the time that you've set aside, and pull out your favorite pen or pencil and your sketchbook.**
- 2) **Think back to Exercise 3 where you imagined you were a superhero. Pick one thing you wanted to say to the world and use that topic as a starting point.**
- 3) **Start up the AAPM.**

**Research:** Spend some time on your computer, interviewing someone, flipping through magazines, looking at the books on your shelves, channel-grazing on your TV, or staring out the window. Allow your mind to roam freely, but keep that thing you want to tell the world in the back of your mind.

**Sketch:** Start playing with ideas and combinations of ideas that might make an interesting artistic activist piece. Maybe that “something” you came up with in step two is the problem of police violence and you spent some of your research time watching a reality TV show about home renovations. How might you put these pieces together? What could that look like? Jot down ideas in your sketchbook as they come to you. No pressure. Allow yourself to explore these odd combinations; be unrealistic, silly, and absurd. If you haven't started moving from writing words to sketching images already, do so now.

**Evaluate:** Time to bring in the Critic. Do any of your sketches excite you? Does one of them convey the message you want to communicate in a unique and provocative way? If so, good; work with it. Probe it, ask critical questions. Maybe you don't have just one good idea. Are there two that seem promising? You may need to go back to the sketch phase to figure out how to combine these. As you work, you'll probably need to bounce back into the Research and Sketch stages a few times in order to get your idea to pass muster. That's how it works.

**Produce:** Imagine your task is to now complete your project. Write out an action plan for how you will do it. Write down the steps you'd take to get it done if you had a year and a thousand dollars. Then think about how you could do it if you only had a month, or a day, or only fifty dollars. Remember, you are thinking of ways it could be done. If you're coming up with blanks when faced with some of the real logistics, bounce back to the earlier stages—do some research, revise your sketches, and evaluate the new plans.

This exercise may take some time at first. Later you'll have more skills and knowledge and when you return to this process it will be easier and more fruitful. This is just an exercise to get you practicing the creative process. Remember to turn down the pressure.

## 12. Practice Until It's Imperfect

Time: 10 minutes

Because we often strive toward a standard of perfection which can impede our creativity, and even stop us in our tracks, we sometimes need to force ourselves to be imperfect. That's the point of this exercise.

- 1) **Think about the issue you're interested in working on.**
- 2) **Set a strict time limit: ten minutes.**
- 3) **Come up with ten (yes, ten!) ideas for artistic activist pieces that address your issue. Write them down in your sketchbook.**

Look closely at what you have written down. It is impossible to come up with ten perfect ideas in ten minutes... which is why we had you try. Now, let's work with your imperfect ideas. We bet a couple of them contain at least a kernel of something good. Try developing one or two toward completion. This is one of the ways creativity works.

## 13. Thinking Inside the Box

Time: 30 minutes

The goal of this exercise is to get you thinking inside the box—figuratively and literally. It's about creating within constraints in order to generate new ideas.

- 1) **Take out your sketchbook and something to draw with.**
- 2) **Think of an artistic activist piece that you would like to do, that you have done in the past, or that someone else has done and you've admired.**
- 3) **In your sketchbook, draw a picture of what that piece would be like if:**
  - It had to happen with one person, or one hundred people.
  - It took place on a busy street, a silent meadow, or at sea.

- You were forced to work with your adversary.
- You only had one-tenth of the budget you were counting on.
- It had to take place within a large cardboard box.

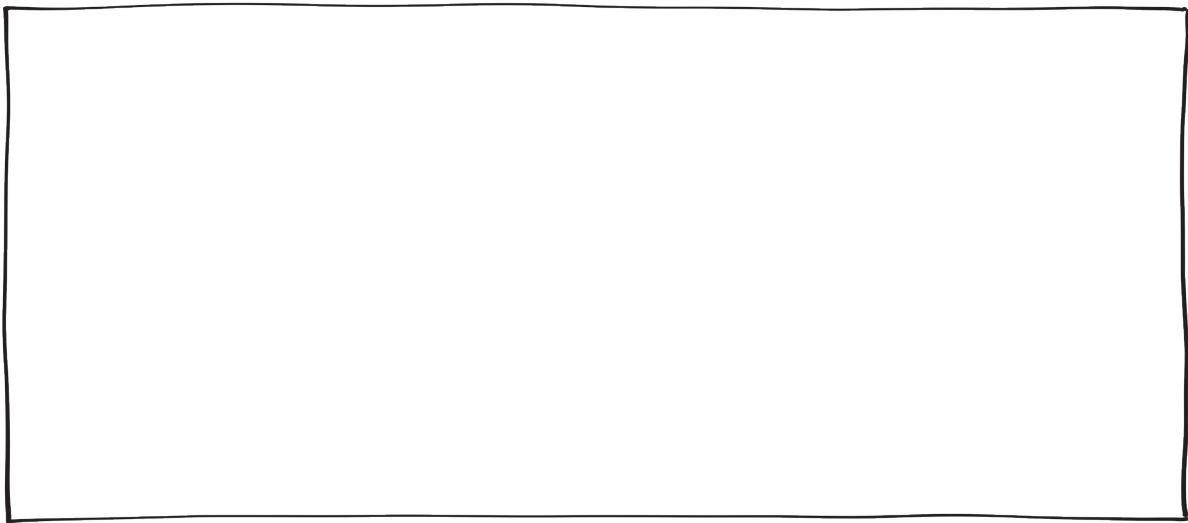
You can draw more than one image for each prompt. The more the better, actually. None of these pieces will be perfect, many may not work at all, but that's the point. Working within constraints forces us to think in novel ways in order to escape the boxes we are placed within.

## 14. Exercise Your Demon

Time: 5 minutes

This is a simple exercise to practice anytime you hear a voice telling you that what you are doing will never work, that it's stupid, you are stupid, and this whole artistic activism thing is just a waste of time and you'd be better off painting watercolors alone, handing out informational pamphlets on the street, or going back to bed to binge-watch episodes of your favorite shows while eating ice cream from the carton.

- 1) **Home in on the voice that tells you to give up and picture it. Who is it exactly? What do they look like? Give this voice a form. Draw them.**



- 2) **Look at your drawing and say, in a friendly but firm way, “thanks for the critical input, but I need you to stop now.”**
- 3) **Then imagine giving this creature a big hug and letting them join your side. Why? Because this voice is part of you. We can't deny this voice, because we can't deny a part of ourselves, but we can put it in perspective. If there's something useful in the demon's criticism, take note and use it. Otherwise, quickly move on to step four.**
- 4) **Thank the demon again for their comments, then ask them to go away.**

Repeat as often as necessary.

## 15. Track Your Progress

Time: A few minutes, every day

Major milestones are few and far between on our creative journeys. Weeks can go by where it feels like you've done nothing and aren't going anywhere. Being able to refer back to where you were a week, a month, or years earlier will make it easier to identify and celebrate your progress. Try this exercise for a month. If it works for you it can become part of your practice. If not, well, you will have a better idea of what you accomplished in this short period of time.

- 1) **Start a daily log of the work you do as an artistic activist. It can be in your sketchbook, or you can use a special book or diary just for this.**

Each day write brief entries on what you've done, no matter how insignificant it seems. If you went out and created or performed a piece, or organized a creative brainstorming meeting with friends, great, write it down. But if you did research by watching Home and Garden TV, write that down too. If you did absolutely nothing related to artistic activism that's OK too. Again, turn down the pressure.

- 2) **Every once in a while, look back at what you've written. Look back at a particular week or month and see where you were. When you have enough entries, look back at a year or more.**

It's often only by looking back in time, and seeing what we were doing and thinking then, that we realize how far we've come and what we've accomplished. One year later, you may be able to recognize how a Home and Garden TV show sparked an idea for your current, fabulously successful piece. No matter what you've done, it's time to celebrate how far you've come.

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
JIMMY NOISE CONCERT	DESIGN RESEARCH	LUNCH AT CHAIN RESTAURANT	BRAINSTORM WITH COHORT	RESEARCHED AFRICAN HERO RATS AMAZING!!	1 hr of HGTV!!	COFFEE WITH PARTNER ORG
NEPHEW'S LITTLE LEAGUE GAME	HANG OUT AT RETIREMENT HOME	ALI-6 VIDEOS	30s DANCE CLASS	VISIT WE ACT COMMUNITY RADIO	HANG OUT AT SAM'S MAGIC GAME	ORGANIZING MEETING WATCHED 2 LATIN AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY FILMS

# HISTORY

## 16. Discover Your Own Histories

Time: 45 minutes to a few hours, depending upon research

History is full of examples of artistic activism. In this exercise, we want you to tap into some of these examples to see what creative lessons you can learn from them. The historical examples you choose don't need to be ones that you have any personal connection with, or ones that you particularly like. They don't even have to be literally true — like the myth of the young George Washington arbitrarily chopping down a cherry tree and declaring, "I cannot tell a lie." There's something we can learn from any of these histories.

### 1) What historical social movements have inspired you?

Is it the Cuban revolution of 1959 or the Spartacus rebellion in 100 BC? The British suffragettes at the turn of the last century or the Mau Mau uprising against the British in Kenya in the 1950s? These inspirational examples don't need to be big, well-known, or even entirely successful. The struggle of Stephen Biko, Nelson Mandela, and the African National Congress against apartheid in South Africa certainly has a lot to teach us about effective use of creativity, but something your grandmother once did to gain more respect in her family is equally valid, and also has valuable lessons to teach. And don't just look for an example of a "creative" movement, the point here is to find the creativity that is part of any effective struggle. What is "historical" is, of course, relative. But try and use an example at least twenty or so years old.

Write it down here:

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### 2) Take some time and revisit that struggle.

Do some background research if you need to. Go to the library, use Wikipedia and Actipedia.org, or interview your grandmother. Take notes in your sketchbook. Learn as much as you can. Start asking these questions:

How did the activists in these movements...

- Demonstrate their politics through their actions?
- Tell a story?
- Stage a spectacle?

- Use symbols?
- Use humor?
- Use style and costume?
- Use songs or music?
- Use popular culture?
- Appropriate traditions?
- Transform traditions?
- Turn audiences into participants?
- Make the invisible visible?
- Present a new perspective on the present or past?
- Perform the future?

**3) With as much specific detail as you can, write down the techniques they used and how they did this.**

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**4) Were there other creative techniques not mentioned in the list above? What were they and how were they used? Remember, what is now commonplace was once innovative, and vice versa, so be sure to think about why a certain action was creative within that movement's historical context. Write these other creative techniques down too.**

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## 17. Making History

Time: 15 minutes

Now you're ready to ask yourself this key question: What can I learn from history that can help me today?

- 1) **Think about the issue you are working on.**
- 2) **Go back to the list of creative techniques you've uncovered in your own historical research, and pick three.**
- 3) **Think about how you might apply those techniques to what you are working on now.**

For example, if I am working on police violence and accountability, and I use the creative technique of “making the invisible visible,” I might perform stop and frisks in a highly public place to demonstrate how humiliating and brutal they are. If I use “staging the future,” I might want to create a community mural of what ideal community policing might look like.

- 4) **Write down your issue, the three creative techniques you learned from your historical example, and how you might apply these in a creative ways to whatever issue or cause you are interested in working on today, like this:**

Issue:

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Technique then:

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Applications now:

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Technique then:

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Applications now:

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Technique then:

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Applications now:

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*Now go make history!*

# CULTURE

## 18. Approaching Activism as an Artist

Time: 30 minutes

Whether you're new to this "artist" thing, or you are a well-established professional, in this exercise we're going to expand and re-examine what we consider creative in our lives. Then we'll apply it to your activist practice.

### 1) Start by asking yourself: What is my artistic outlet?

If you already identify as an artist this will be easy. For those who don't, this may take a little thinking. Some advice: don't get hung up on the word "art." Art isn't only paintings and poems, it's also a well-thought-out flower bed, a tasty dish, or a beautiful outfit that you put together before walking out the door in the morning. Playing with kids and holding their attention is a profoundly creative act. Think about how you express your creativity.

Write it down here:

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### 2) Reflect upon your creativity. Ask yourself questions like:

- How do you create?
- What steps do you take?
- How do you prepare yourself?
- If you create with other people, how do you prepare them?
- What do you want your creations to do for other people? What do you want them to think, feel, or do? (If your art is just something you do for yourself, then turn these questions back on yourself.)
- How do you know if your creativity "works"? What, to you, marks success? How do you know this?

Jot down notes in your sketchbook, or in the margins of this workbook.

### 3) OK, now the leap across the divide: What sort of things do you do, should you do, or would you like to do, as an activist?

- |                           |                                       |                         |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Host a meeting?         | • Throw a press conference?           | • Organize a community? |
| • Lobby a politician?     | • Have a demonstration?               | • Plan a campaign?      |
| • Put together a leaflet? | • Occupy a public space?              | • Fill in the blank     |
| • Create online content?  | • Stage an act of civil disobedience? |                         |
-

4) Now bring the art and the activism back together: How might you apply what you've learned through your art to these activist practices? Pick a few things you do, or would like to do, as an activist and jot them down below. Then, under each, write a few sentences about how the creative approaches you listed above might complement your activist ambitions in a new, artistic, way.

Activist practice:

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Creative approach:

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Activist practice:

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Creative approach:

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Activist practice:

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Creative approach:

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Approaching activism as an artist, like approaching art as an activist, is what makes us artistic activists.

## 19. Museum Field Trip

Time: A morning or afternoon

Culture is a slippery word. Stuart Hall, a founder of the academic field of cultural studies, usefully distinguishes between Culture with a big C, or what we think of as art, and culture with a small c, or the patterns of everyday life. Culture and culture are interrelated and artistic activism uses both. In this exercise you are going to go to a museum—either physically or virtually—and look for how culture influences Culture and how Culture influences culture.

- 1) **Grab your sketchbook and take yourself on a trip to a museum. If you don't have a museum nearby, find an art history book or visit a museum's website. The Met, Louvre, British Museum, and Rijksmuseum have some of the largest online collections, but most museums these days have at least some of their collection online.**
- 2) **Wander around the galleries and stop in front of an artwork that interests you. It doesn't have to be one that you like, it could be one that really irks you, or just puzzles you. What matters most is that it holds your attention. Ask yourself: what sort of culture produced this Culture?**

Here's an example: a nineteenth-century European oil painting of a white man, dressed in fine clothes, sitting in a regal chair in his beautiful oak-paneled study, with a leather-bound book open on his lap. You've probably seen a portrait like this a hundred times before in a museum. By looking at this painting, what can we say about the culture of the artist, and more importantly, the culture of the person who commissioned the artist? One could say that it was a culture that valued men, individuals, wealth, whiteness, material goods, and education, in other words: the culture of the Western, white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist bourgeoisie.

Now try it yourself. Take a long look at the artwork in front of you. What does it say about the cultural values of the society that valued it? Write some of these thoughts down in a notebook.

- 3) **Let's reverse direction, looking for how Culture might influence culture. Position yourself again in front of an artwork (you can stay with the one you were looking at before, or take a different one). Take a long hard look at it, and ask yourself: What ideas and ideals is the artist communicating to their audience?**

Let's go back to our oil painting. The artwork might be a simple representation and reinforcement of regressive values: Look at this great white man! Look at what he owns! Look at the knowledge that he embodies! We should all aspire to be like him! But it may not be so simple. Maybe the artist paints the scene in such a way that it looks lifeless and flat. Perhaps some of the objects surrounding the man evoke contradictory meanings (an hourglass running out of sand). Maybe what the artist intends to convey is: This man's world is dying and a new one must take its place! Viewed in this way, this work of Culture is a critique of the culture from which it came.

Now you try. What are all the possible messages being communicated to the audience by the art and the artist? Write these down too.

Don't be discouraged if what you notice is complex and even contradictory. Good art usually doesn't have simple messages.

## 20. Using Culture to Transform culture

Time: 30 minutes

To use Culture (artistic expression) to help transform culture (patterns of lived experience), it helps to know what sort of culture we're working toward. The dominant C/culture can dominate our imagination as well, so it takes a bit of effort to imagine the culture we want and to then imagine a Cultural intervention that might lead us there. This exercise will help.

- 1) **Imagine your ideal society. We'll do some extensive work on this imagining process later; for now, just conjure up a quick vision.**
- 2) **Write down some bare details of this ideal society in your sketchbook. These questions might help:**
  - What activities would people be doing in a public square in your town?
  - What topics would they talk about?
  - What would they see in art museums? History museums?
  - In what ways would they dress?
  - In such an ideal world, what would their "escape" be?
  - How would they brush their teeth?
- 3) **Think up a Cultural intervention — an image, a performance, a soundscape, a public event, a party — that might nudge us from the reality we live in toward the ideal society you imagined. Or, if that is too overwhelming, think of an intervention that might nudge us toward just one aspect of the ideal society you imagined. What would it be? How would it challenge the culture of today? How would it suggest the culture you want to create?**
- 4) **Make a drawing of what this intervention might look like in your sketchbook.**

## 21. Pop Culture Interview

Time: A morning, afternoon, or evening

Popular culture is popular because people like it. To reach people and speak in a language they will understand so that we have maximum impact, we need our artistic activism to be popular as well. In this exercise you will interview a "fan" in order understand why popular culture is popular so you can apply this insight to your own artistic activism work.

You can also turn this exercise into a Pop Culture fieldtrip for yourself by attending a pop music concert, reading a fashion magazine, going to a sports match, playing a video game, or watching a blockbuster movie. As long as it's popular, it's fair game. Immerse yourself in the experience, observe those around you if it's a public activity, then treat yourself as the interviewee: asking yourself the same sorts of probing questions you might ask another person.

- 1) **Set up an interview with someone who is passionate about some form of pop culture which you don't understand, care about, or frankly don't like.**

- 2) In preparation for your interview, read/watch/listen/experience a bit of the pop culture that the person you're interviewing is a fan of. If this is too difficult — say your subject is a fan of skydiving — check out videos of the practice online.
- 3) Interview your subject. Be curious and nonjudgmental. Talk with them for at least twenty minutes, making sure they speak far more than you do. Ask questions until their passion begins to make sense to you.

Let's say the person you interview loves reading celebrity magazines. You might start by asking them to describe what a celebrity magazine is. In their description you may find that they are seeing something you are not. You might then ask them why they enjoy reading celebrity magazines. Maybe what they get out of them is something you never thought of. Ask them what their favorite part of the magazine is, then ask them their least favorite part. Then ask them to tell you why. This will help you hone in on what exactly they get out of the pop culture they like so much. Assume little, ask a lot. Listen to what they say, and follow up on their answers with new questions.

Since most of us are not used to thinking too deeply about pop culture, you might have to push people a little. When you ask why they read celebrity magazines, they might answer with something like: "They help me relax." This is useful information — make note of it — but don't be afraid to go further and ask them why they use celebrity magazines to relax as opposed to, say, sports or news magazines, and what they need relaxation from. Stay open and curious.

At this point your new friend will probably be overflowing with thoughts and insights about their favorite pop culture. You will have a better understanding of why they like what they do, and what needs and desires, dreams and fears, that culture taps into.

- 4) Document your interview in photos, notes, video, sound, or whatever works best for you.

In the next exercise you will put this knowledge to work in your artistic activism.

## 22. An Artistic Activist Equivalent to Pop Culture

Time: 45 minutes

All the information gleaned from your pop culture interview in the last exercise can be used to inspire more effective artistic activism. Pop culture, whatever one may think of it, meets needs for people. So our job as artistic activists is to find creative adaptations and equivalents for our actions that can meet those needs in other ways. For example, attending a community meeting can feel like a chore for many people, so how can we make it feel more like the best parts of going to a sports event or watching a rom-com movie?

- 1) Look through your research notes. What needs and desires is pop culture fulfilling for the person you interviewed? Take a few minutes and make a list in your sketchbook.
- 2) Now, put a star next to the needs and desires you think you can work with as an artistic activist, and a line through the ones you can't, or don't want to. Just leave the ones you aren't sure about as they are.

**3) Start with items you've starred. Ask yourself:**

- What do they tell me about the person's needs and desires, dreams and fears, about the world they live in?
- How could they be addressed in a different way, and lead to different outcomes than those produced by pop culture?
- How might I create an alternative means of expression for these needs and desires that might lead to a better world?

Put your answers down in your sketchbook.

**4) Now that you've warmed up on the easier needs and desires, it's time to move on to the items on the list that you didn't mark. Look them over. Do any of these provide material you could work with?**

**5) How about the needs and desires you crossed out? Can you figure out a way to work with any of these? Go back, look closely, and see if you can work with any of them to create a moral equivalent to pop culture.**

**6) Finally, look over all your notes. What are some ways an artistic activist piece could adopt and adapt some of the features of popular culture? Take fifteen minutes and brainstorm five pieces that might tap into these needs and desires and creatively address the issue you are working on.**

Dig deep. The point is not to replicate popular culture, but to learn from it. Just because superheroes wear tights, and people like superheroes, this does not necessarily mean we should wear superhero costumes to our next action (though we could). What we want to tap into are the basic human needs and desires that superhero comics and movies speak to, and we then want to create artistic activist pieces that speak to these things as well.

# COGNITION

## 23. Tell a Better Story

Time: 30–45 minutes

This exercise will help you become a more engaging storyteller. It's adapted from a worksheet that our good friends over at the Center for Story-Based Strategy use in order to analyze stories already being told, and create new stories to counter the old ones. They call this the “Battle of the Story.”

All stories have certain components—conflict, characters, imagery, and resolution—and all stories have underlying, taken-for-granted assumptions. In this exercise, you are going to jot down how each of these components works in “their” story: the story the other side is telling about the issue we are concerned with, or the story most commonly told about it. And you are then going to do the same for “our” story: the story we want people to hear and to tell others.

Put on your dressing-gown and slippers, pull your chair up to the fire, open your story book (aka this book), and get ready to start crafting your story.

### 1) Conflict

Most stories revolve around some sort of conflict, a problem that needs to be resolved. In a romance novel it's the heart of a pirate or prince that needs to be tamed and won; in a detective story it's a crime that needs to be solved. In activist stories the problem is often a social, political, economic, or ecological one. Let's take an example from a Center for Artistic Activism workshop we held in Texas, where we worked with activists on the incarceration of Black and Brown youth. Here, the largely white opposition framed the problem as one of public safety and protecting society from lawless minority youth. This was their story. The workshop participants, on the other hand, were telling a story about a heartless, rigid, and racist penal system that did not account for mistakes, families, and second chances. This was our story.

Take the issue you are working on: what is the conflict and how is it framed? Who or what is the conflict between? What is at stake?



THEIR STORY



OUR STORY

## 2) Characters

Stories also have characters; they are the people who act out the story. There are almost always victims, villains, and heroes. In the example above, their story cast the public as the victims, the kids as the villains, and the prison system as the hero. In our story, the kids were victims, the prison system was the villain, and intact families were the heroes.

Your turn. With your issue, who are their victims, villains, and heroes? And who are yours?



## 3) Imagery

Do you remember your high-school composition teacher harping on about “showing, not telling”? Well, they were right. Stories, like all forms of artistic activism, are more powerful when we don’t just lecture but use signs, symbols, metaphors, and vivid examples to convey our messages. To return to our above example, the imagery frequently associated with Black and Brown youth in Texas was that of crime and disorder: a mugged old lady or a wall tagged with gang signs. In place of this, we wanted to use the image of the family table, a place where people could come together and healing could begin.

What are the images that communicate the story told about your issue?



## 4) Resolution

Stories have beginnings, and they have endings. The ending is usually where the conflict gets resolved: the pirate declares their love; the detective unmasks the suspect. And everyone lives happily ever after. Frequently, the resolution is foreshadowed earlier in the story with a hint of the possible ending (or endings) to come. In their story about the imprisonment of Black and Brown youth, the resolution — their “happy ending” — was a return to a mythic, safe, white America (Make America Great Again!) and if these kids were not locked up, the only alternative ending was a stark dystopia of crime and fear. Our story resolved itself with the return of children back to their families and a happy ending describing vibrant lives that would be lived because of another chance.

How are the stories around your issue resolved? What are the visions of the future that are told?

THEIR STORY	OUR STORY

### 5) Assumptions

In order for any story to work, there must be basic, agreed upon, and usually unstated assumptions held by the audience. Romance novels and detective stories don't make much sense if you don't believe that crimes should be solved and falling in love is a good thing (or that pirates are sexy). In Texas, one of the underlying assumptions of their story was that Black and Brown youth were not "our" children and therefore could be locked up without a second thought. Our story, on the other hand, assumed that all children, regardless of color or circumstance, are "our" children and that they and their families deserve our sympathy and concern.

What are the unstated assumptions, the ideas and values, that people need to believe in order to accept the story told about your issue?

THEIR STORY	OUR STORY

It is important to understand these assumptions because, as we know from cognitive research, working against people's deep-seated beliefs is very hard, but, as we will see in the next exercise, we can sometimes play into people's assumptions and use them to help our story.

## 24. Story Subversion

Time: 30 minutes

Even once we've learned to become good storytellers, we also need to teach ourselves to be really good listeners. By listening to the stories that people already tell themselves, we can begin to figure out how to fit our facts into their stories. This exercise will help you do this.

- 1) **Think about the people you are trying to reach with your message. What sorts of stories do they tell themselves? (If you're not sure, this is a good opportunity to do some research, whether online or through interviews or observation). Write down as many of them as you can.**

These stories don't need to be about the issue at hand; the most potent ones usually aren't. They can be stories about love and life, about what it means to be a good person, or what gives one a sense of pride. They can even be about what's shameful and what it means to go against the community. Don't get hung up on what constitutes a "story." Remember, here we think of a story as any string of associations that allow us to make meanings. "America is the land of opportunity" is a mini-story.

Story 1:

Story 2:

Story 3:

Story 4:

Story 5:

Story 6:

Story 7:

Story 8:

Story 9:

Story 10:

You should have at least ten “stories” written down. You could have many more.

- 2) Take a look at that list and choose one of these stories to write your issue into.
- 3) Here comes the difficult—and creative—part: in your sketchbook, write your issue into that story so that it concludes in a way that is favorable to your cause.

Here’s another example from Texas, this time from a group we worked with outside of Austin that was concerned with creating an equitable state budget. When we asked the activists what sorts of stories Texans told themselves, they responded: “Anything to do with God, pickup trucks, and football.” From these “stories” we came up with our own: the story of a famous pro footballer recalling his time playing high-school ball in Texas and connecting that to the value of public funding for education.

You are not working on winning the Booker Prize here, and you are not Toni Morrison. Keep it brief: just the sort of story you might be able to tell someone if you had a few minutes with them. Write it out as a paragraph, or plot a performance or sketch an image that conveys your/their story.

## 25. Talk to a Stranger

Time: A morning, afternoon, or evening

It’s fine to theorize about tapping into people’s stories and understanding their mental ambiguities, but to make these theories work we need to leave the comfort of our homes and go out and do some field research. If we are serious about reaching people other than those who already agree with us we need to get to know them, and one of the best ways to do this is simply by talking to them. If we don’t, we’ll make assumptions about what they think that can lead us down the wrong path.

This exercise might make you a bit uncomfortable if you’re shy, but it’s a critical step. Step off the curb.

- 1) Identify the audience you want to reach. Is it people who live in a certain community? Policy makers and politicians who have the power to draft and pass legislation? Members of certain civic or religious institutions? Disenfranchised young people?

Who I want to understand and reach:

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- 2) Find out where these people hang out. Where do they go for lunch? Where do they go after work? What do they do to relax? This site might be a mall, a bar, or even someplace exotic like a golf course.

Where I can find them:

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- 3) Leave your creative habitat, grab your sketchbook, and go to where your audience is.

Strike up a conversation with someone. Keep it casual. Don’t ask them point blank about what they think about your issue—you’ll just freak them out and are likely to get a stock answer in response. Instead, talk to them about

everything but your issue: their life, job, and families; what TV shows they like, or their favorite movies. Ease into how they feel about politics, business, religion, and maybe even arts and activism — but remember, this is a research mission, not recruitment. Discover their values and beliefs. Find out what sorts of stories they tell themselves. Toward the end of your “interview” you might want to sidle around to the issue you are working on and get their thoughts on it.

In this situation, what you think is not important. Changing the person’s mind or correcting them about the issue is not what you should be doing here — you’ll do that later. Right now, you’re talking to this person in an attempt to understand how they think.

- 4) Find someplace quiet and write up your research notes in your sketchbook.
- 5) Identify those ideas, experiences, and stories you might be able to work with in order to have a productive engagement with this person. Write these down in your sketchbook.

## 26. Surprise!

Time: 30 minutes

When something happens that violates our expectations, something that we can’t immediately make sense of, there is an opportunity for increased cognition, remapping of associations, and a reconsideration of assumptions. In short: thinking differently. In this exercise you will build surprise into a piece of artistic activism.

- 1) Decide on a piece to work with. You can use an idea you sketched out in an earlier exercise, an action you’ve done in the past, or something that’s entirely new. Don’t worry if the original piece was not very “creative.” For this exercise it’s even better if the piece you work with wouldn’t raise eyebrows in a gallery or at a staff meeting in a nonprofit organization.
- 2) In your sketchbook, write a brief description and draw a picture of it.
- 3) What could you do to your action or piece to make it really surprising? What could you do to take what was ordinary about the piece and make it extra-ordinary? Write down as many ideas in your sketchbook as you think of — focus on quantity, not quality. Spend at least five minutes.

You may want to consider:

- An atypical time, date, or setting
- Unexpected guests or participants
- Bizarre costumes
- Odd materials
- Unusual allies or partners
- Strange sights, sounds, or movements
- Unanticipated entrance or exits, beginnings or ends
- Uncommon boundaries

- 4) **Examine your list and group your ideas. Figure out which are most aligned with your original message, intentions, and objectives. Choose one to move forward with.**
- 5) **Add the surprising elements to your description and picture from step two.**

Take a look at what you've created. Put yourself in the place of a passerby. Would you be surprised if you came across this? What might you think? What would you learn? What questions might you ask? Would you feel intrigued, or just confused?

## 27. Boundaries of Legibility

Time: 30 minutes

When people encounter events that are surprising, they pay attention and there's an opportunity to learn. But when things are too surprising, people get confused. To find that sweet spot in the middle we need to push the boundaries of legibility. In order to locate this point, you'll need to find the outer edges and then calibrate accordingly—go too far and then roll back. This exercise will help.

- 1) **Open your sketchbook and go back to the surprising piece you created in the last exercise. If you created multiple iterations, pick your favorite one. Now you're going to play with it.**
- 2) **Take the element you introduced that made your piece a surprise and ramp it up to the point where it is likely illegible. Take what was surprising and make it absurd. Take what stretched the sensible and make it nonsensical. Go all out!**

Describe and sketch what this would look like in your sketchbook.

- 3) **Next, put the process in reverse: scale things back so that your surprise recedes into the background; so it's no longer surprising. Make your piece so legible that it risks not even being noticed.**

Describe and sketch.

- 4) **Finally, take what you've learned and go back and re-sketch your original "surprising" piece so that it hits the right spot in the range between legibility and illegibility. It should be surprising enough to get noticed and stimulate thought, but not surprising that it's impossible to understand and people pass it by.**

Describe and sketch.

Keep tweaking till you find your sweet spot.

# PERSUASION

## 28. Ideals to Behaviors

Time: 20 minutes

As artistic activists we aim to generate affect, but if that's all we do we risk leaving people frustrated, overwhelmed, and hopeless — without effect. Touching hearts and influencing minds is important. But it is also important to remember that the point of getting people to feel and think a different way is to get them to act a different way. This is why envisioning behavioral change is so important, and the next two exercises will help you do this. This first one helps us think about moving from general ideals to specific behavioral changes.

- 1) For every general ideal for social change below, we need to think of accompanying physical, visible, behavioral objectives that exemplify that ideal, and move us closer to its realization. There's not one correct answer to any of these, but we've filled out the first three to give you an idea of how this might be done:

**Ideal:** *Cycling as a viable form of transportation*

**Behavior:** *My neighbor rides his bike to work instead of driving his SUV*

**Ideal:** *Black Lives Matter!*

**Behavior:** *City council acting to create a powerful Civilian Review Board of policing practices*

**Ideal:** *Raise awareness about X*

**Behavior:** *People sign pledge to do something about X in the coming week*

- 2) You fill in the rest:

**Ideal:** *End the prison-industrial complex*

**Behavior:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Ideal:** *Stop high-stakes testing in our public schools*

**Behavior:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Ideal:** *More diversity in your workplace*

**Behavior:**

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**Ideal:** *Save the environment*

**Behavior:**

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**Ideal:** *Make love, not war*

**Behavior:**

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## 29. What Change Looks Like

**Time:** 15 minutes

Now that you have had practice turning political ideals into physical, visible, behaviors, it's time to make it more personal and think about your ideals and what they might look like in practice.

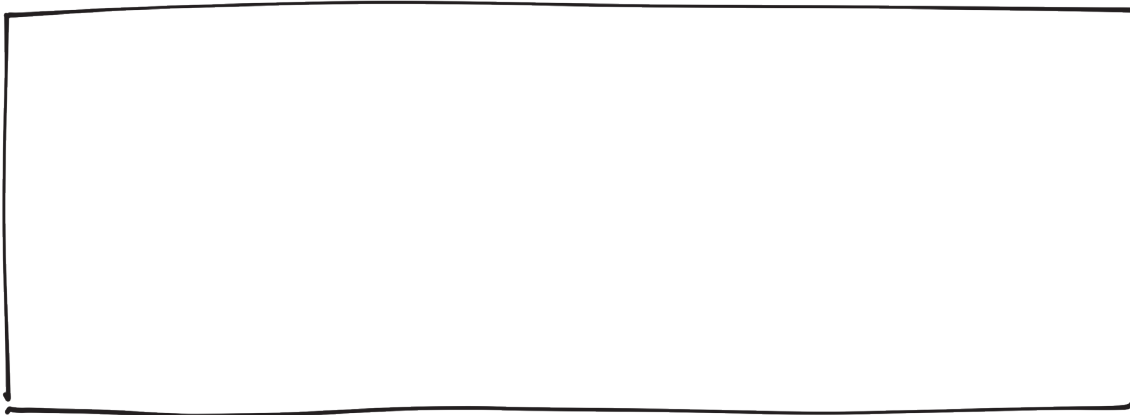
1) Think of the issue you are working on and what ideal change you would like to bring about. Write it down below:

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2) If you are successful, what is the desired behavioral action? Remember, behaviors are things people physically do, actions we can see. Write this down:

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3) Now, ask yourself "what does it look like?" Draw that physical, visible action below.



These are the actions you'll want to make happen as an artistic activist.

## 30. Awaken Your Inner Advertiser

Time: 25 minutes

We don't particularly like marketing and advertising, but we have a tremendous respect for the intelligence and artistry of the people in these industries. It's like so much else about commercial culture: we don't need to like it, but as artistic activists we do need to learn from it. That's what this exercise will help you do.

Imagine yourself in a big conference room, high above Madison Avenue. People are seated in tufted wool and chrome office chairs around a large, oval table of blonde wood. Everyone is looking at you. It's time for you to pitch your campaign to change the world.

Your tool is the five Ps.

### 1) **Product:** In this case, the behavioral action you'd like to see.

Time: 5 minutes

What is the behavior? You can use the physical, visible action you described in the previous exercise earlier or come up with a new one.

Behavior:

---

Draw your audience doing this behavior in your sketchbook. (It's important to sketch because if you can't visualize it then it's not a concrete action.)

### 2) **Price:** the "cost" to people of doing this new action.

Time: 5 minutes

What's the price of change? List the costs associated with the new behavior you're hoping to inspire. Consider personal, economic, social, environmental, and maintenance costs to your audience, among others.

1.

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2.

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3.

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4.

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5.

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You can draw these too in your sketchbook.

### 3) Placement: the location of this activity.

Time: 5 minutes

Where can the new behavior take place? In your sketchbook draw a map of the key place or places where your campaign will take place. Imagine you're creating a play. What would the stage set where one could perform this behavior look like? Draw this in your sketchbook.

### 4) Promotion: how people find out about the issue and desired activity.

Time: 5 minutes

How will people find out about your campaign? Draw or list in your sketchbook various forms of promotion and media sources you could use in your campaign. Social media, radio, TV, the street, community groups . . .

### 5) Positioning: other “competing” activities.

Time: 5 minutes

What are the competing behaviors for your desired behavior? In other words, what could people be doing instead of what you want them to do? Draw your competition, then consider how you can make your behavior the most attractive of all the options.

Look at your answers above and the five drawings you made in your sketchbook. You now have an analysis of the “market” your desired behavior exists within and possibly a few leverage points you can use to “beat” the competition, and this will help you better articulate your aims and create better artistic activist pieces.

## 31. Mapping Benefits and Costs

Time: 1 hour

When people choose to change their behavior, they weigh their options. They give up something—time, effort, maybe money—and they get something in return. It might not be the “right thing to do” from our perspective, but it won't happen unless it's the right thing to do for *them*. Marketers have developed a powerful tool to account for why people might, and might not, want to change what they think and do. It's called a cost-benefit analysis, and this exercise will help you to create one.

- 1) **Choose a behavior you'd like to see changed. You can use one from an earlier exercise, a new one, or, best, a behavior that relates to whatever issue you have been working on. It can be a behavior in others, or in yourself.**

In the table below, write the behavior you'd like to change in the “old behavior” block.

- 2) **Think of how you'd like to see this behavior changed. What would the new behavior look like? Remember: behaviors are physical and visible, something people can do. Write this in the “new behavior” block.**

- 3) **Come up with some possible benefits associated with continuing the old behavior. Write these in the table.**

Remember, what is “beneficial” depends on the perception of the person doing the behavior. Do interviews and research if you can, but you can also put yourself in another’s place and imagine what the benefits might be.

4) Now, turn to the costs associated with continuing the old behavior. Write these in the table.

5) Now switch over to the new behavior and come up with a list of benefits.

6) Staying with the new behavior, list its costs.

	BENEFITS	COSTS
OLD BEHAVIOR		
NEW BEHAVIOR		

Look over your map. You should have a clearer and more detailed idea of what you need to address when generating ideas for actions or strategies for communicating to audiences, when planning a campaign, and anytime you want to persuade people to do something different from what they are doing now. Mapping out benefits and costs also helps us understand why people do the things they do even when they “ought to know better.” In this way it helps us better understand the people we want to reach.

## 32. Make an Infomercial

Time: 1 hour

Infomercials are a visual performance of a benefit and cost analysis. They try to persuade an audience by playing down the benefits and highlighting the costs of an existing behavior, while exaggerating the benefits and minimizing the costs of the new behavior they promote. In this exercise you will play the role of an infomercial director, storyboarding an imaginary infomercial based upon the benefit–cost analysis map you completed in the previous exercise.

Don't worry about accounting for all the costs and benefits of the old behavior and the new behavior. That's too much information and will likely result in frustration for you and a confusing message for your audience. For this exercise we'll focus on a few costs of the old behavior and a few benefits of the new behavior, though being mindful of the entire map can make your infomercial even more persuasive.

Remember, because of loss aversion, we need to overplay the costs of the old behavior and hammer home the benefits of the new behavior. And if you've ever seen an infomercial, you'll know there is no way you can overdo it.

Ready to direct your infomercial?

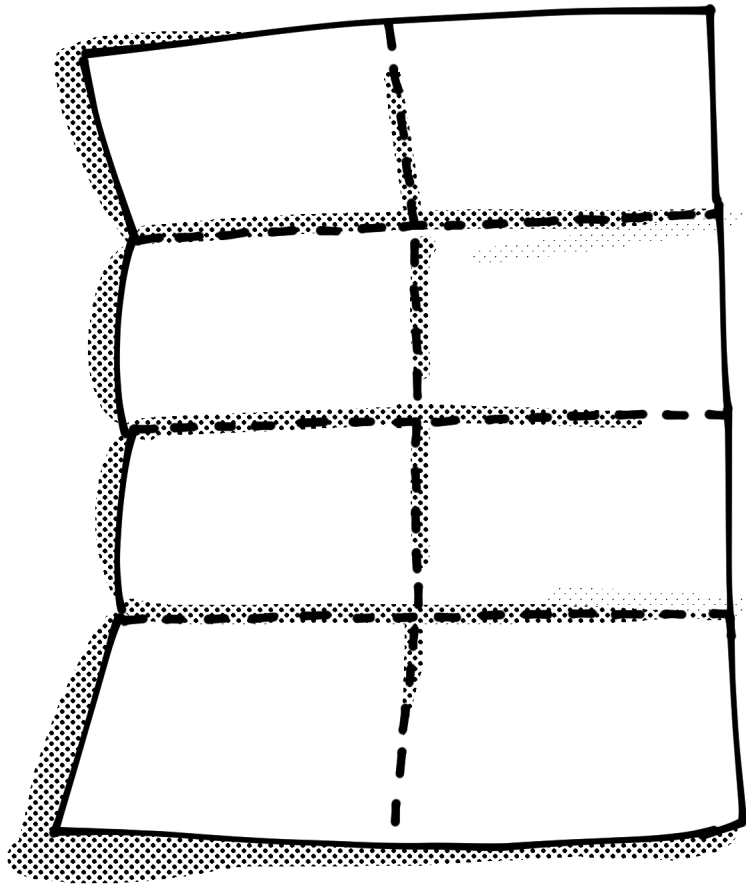
- 1) Look over your benefit–cost table, starting with the costs of the old behavior. Draw scenes of what these costs might look like in your sketchbook. You can use stick figures, or you can cut-and-paste pictures from magazines or online.**

If it helps, infomercials often show these behaviors in black-and-white with dreary music, as the actors become enraged with the most simple tasks, like wearing a blanket to keep warm while trying to use their hands to eat snacks or handle a TV remote. Your sketches will be the basis for the first part of your infomercial — the dismal black and white world.

- 2) Looking back over your benefit–cost table, identify benefits associated with the new behavior, and sketch out scenes of some of these in your sketchbook. This is the basis for the second part of your infomercial — where purchasing the product delivers a world of joy and happiness.**

In a standard infomercial, the new behavior is shown in vivid color, with magical sparkle effects and energetic announcements and music. Unlike the previous scenes, the actors are smiling, their hands and arms now liberated by a sleeved blanket so they can easily hold snacks and a remote control while staying cozy and warm on the couch.

- 3) Now you are going to move from these illustrations to storyboarding scenes for your infomercial. Take a piece of paper and fold it into eighths as shown below. Or, if you want more room, you can use multiple pages. Each rectangle is a shot in your infomercial. This is your storyboard.**



- 4) Return to the sketches you made of the costs of the old behavior you want to change and the benefits of the new behavior you are trying to promote. Look over your sketches and, in the first four frames of your storyboard, draw in shots for part one, the black-and-white section. These scenes should illustrate the costs of the old behavior you want to change. Have your drawings touch all four edges of each frame. You can write in dialogue below the frame.
- 5) Caption the transition from part one into part two with the phrase “There has to be a better way!”
- 6) Then storyboard part two, where everything turns to color. Working off your sketches, fill the remaining four frames with scenes depicting the benefits of the new behavior you want to promote.
- 7) You have your infomercial!

Visualizing costs and benefits, and putting them into story form, can help you to imagine and craft persuasive pieces that address people’s fears surrounding what they stand to lose as well as speaking to their desires for all there is to be gained in changing their behaviors, their lives, and the world.

Once you understand the fundamentals, you don’t have to keep making infomercials; you can apply these lessons to your artistic activism.

## 33. Steps Toward Change

Time: 45 minutes

Our goal is not merely to get people to think differently but to act differently. As important as awareness is, without action the world will never change. As you'll remember from our accompanying book, *The Art of Activism*, audiences move through multiple steps on their path from awareness to action. Researchers have developed models for charting the steps one needs to take, and the one that we like to use has twelve stages. They are:

- Exposure
- Attention
- Interest
- Comprehension
- Skills
- Agreement
- Memory
- Recall
- Decision
- Behavior
- Reinforcement
- Identity

Now it's time to get creative with this analytic tool. In this exercise you'll design a piece that addresses one stage in this process. Later you can return to this exercise and design multiple pieces to address other stages, but for now you'll just pick one.

- 1) **Think of your issue in terms of an action you want your audience to take.**
- 2) **Take out a pair of dice. Or, if you don't have dice, write the numbers 1 to 12 on small pieces of paper and put them in a hat. Now, throw the die or pick a number. Whatever number you get, this is the stage you will work on moving your audience through.**

You can imagine that every stage prior to the one you're working on has already been taken care of, masterfully, by a team of brilliant collaborators. Your job now is to move your audience through the next one. Sometimes, one piece might work for a couple of stages. What will aid with Memory can also serve for Recall, and work that addresses Reinforcement can sometimes also help with Identity. These are just analytic categories and in the real world there's always slippage. But whatever number you draw, that is the stage you should concentrate on.

- 3) **Consult *The Art of Activism* and review the stage you are working on. What does your audience need during this stage and what can you do to encourage their movement to the next stage? Now open your sketchbook and sketch out a piece that addresses this stage.**

In the real world you'll be more strategic in choosing which stages to work on, but this is an exercise to build your creative muscles. If you have the time, get a real workout and throw the dice again.

# EFFICACY

## 34. Planning a Campaign

Time: 2–3 hours

Activists plan campaigns all the time, but popular understandings of political activism tend to downplay their importance, focusing on just the tactics and overlooking concrete objectives and overall goals. In this exercise we want you to practice planning a simple campaign.

- 1) **Take out your sketchbook and turn to a blank page (or, better yet, if you have a large sheet of paper available, tape it up on a wall or spread it out in front of you).**
- 2) **Think about the issue that you are working on. In the lower left corner of your paper, draw a picture of where the issue stands now.**

If we were working on racist police violence, for example, we might draw some stick-figure police stopping and frisking young people, or even police shooting an unarmed man.

- 3) **Go to the opposite corner of the paper, the upper right, and draw a picture of your ultimate goal.**

Maybe it's a nationwide shift in consciousness toward the understanding that "Black Lives Matter," maybe it's re-allocating budgets for policing, or the dismantling of the whole prison-industrial system, or maybe it's visualizing the end of racism and poverty. Think big.

- 4) **Now that you have these points on opposite corners of the page, come up with three objectives. They need to be doable objectives, so here's the place to scale back your ambitions. What is a demonstrable, achievable objective that would move you closer to your goal?**

For the example above, our objectives might be outcomes like a successful meeting with the mayor to create a Civilian Review Board for Police, passing a bill through city council to create this board, and the first actual meeting of the board, with each of these objectives leading to the next.

List your objectives in your sketchbook like so:

- Objective 1:
- Objective 2:
- Objective 3:

- 5) Draw these objectives—as pictures—on your campaign map, on an imaginary line that leads from the picture of where your issue is now to the picture of where you want it to be.**

Now, *and only now*, are we ready for the fun part of how to make these outcomes happen; i.e., tactics. Because we are pursuing a creative strategy, our tactics will be artistic activist pieces: images, performances, sounds, games, interventions, and so on. It's time to get creative.

- 6) For each objective, design two artistic activist pieces that address the issue and can help accomplish the objective at hand. This means six tactics in total. Do this quickly; this is only an exercise to help you think about artistic activism in terms of campaigns. It's not the time to be brilliant. You'll do that later, on your own.**

Here's an outline you can use in your sketchbook. Note your ideas down in words (you'll draw them in the next step).

- Objective 1
  - Tactic A:
  - Tactic B:
- Objective 2
  - Tactic C:
  - Tactic D:
- Objective 3
  - Tactic E:
  - Tactic F:

While you are doing this, keep asking yourself these questions:

- Are each of these tactics directed toward achieving the objective?
- Is there a coherence between them that allows people to understand they are a part of an overall campaign?
- Does each of them point toward your goal, and incorporate a bit of your vision?

- 7) On your map, interspersed between your objectives, draw rough sketches of each tactical piece.**

By articulating where your issue is at now and where you want it to be, mapping out objectives in between, and developing creative tactics that help you reach those objectives, you have mapped out the draft for an artistic activist campaign. Congratulations!

While the component parts of this exercise are fairly simple, the cumulative effect is profound. Developing clever creative tactics is relatively easy, but fitting them into a campaign aimed toward concrete objectives and larger goals is the science behind the sorcery that makes artistic activism a powerful force for change.

## 35. Directing Your Efforts

Time: 15 minutes

Changing the world is a pretty big ambition, so how do we concentrate our efforts so they are most effective? It is essential to have a good idea of what sort of change we want to bring about, and at what level. Once we know where to focus we can be more efficient and effective. In this exercise you will practice directing your efforts toward three levels of change: individual, policy, and advocacy.

- 1) Think of the issue you are working on and what your ultimate goal is.
- 2) What could you persuade individuals to do in order to move them closer to your goal? That is: What is your objective for individuals?

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- 3) What policies could be passed or structures put in place in order to move society people closer to your goal? What is your policy objective?

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- 4) What shift in public opinion needs to happen or order to move people closer to your goal? Is there a larger public pressure campaign that needs to happen? What is your advocacy objective?

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- 5) With all three possibilities before you, imagine you only have one week to work on this campaign. Which of the three would give you the best results: working on individual change, working at the policy level, or working on advocacy? Write it down and explain why.

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Again, in an ideal campaign you would have time to take on individual, policy, and advocacy objectives. But you need to start somewhere and this exercise can identify where best to direct your efforts.

## 36. Intention

Time: 15 minutes

In order to know if what we are doing is working, we need to start by asking: What do we want to have happen? This exercise is going to help you evaluate the success of your piece by exploring what you want your piece to do.

- 1) Go back over the exercises you've done so far and select three tactical pieces you want to work with. They can be ones you're proud of, but it may be more educational to work with ones you feel are weaker.
- 2) In your sketchbook, draw three circles and in the center of each describe or sketch your piece. Draw lines radiating out from each circle and on each line write what you want your piece to do. Be as specific as you can here, not "cultural change," but the particular impact you are looking to have. Think best case scenario: if everything worked as you wanted it to, what would happen as a result?

Some outcome examples:

- Delighted looks from people passing by
- The mayor issues a press release in response
- Ten people commit to testifying at the next city council meeting
- At least fifty-three people film the piece and share it with friends



Articulating what we want to accomplish with our artistic activism is the first necessary step to achieving what we set out to do.

## 37. Does It Work?

Time: 30 minutes

Now that you have an idea of what you want your piece to do, it's time to think seriously about how you can know if what you are doing works. You can do this by asking yourself this set of questions:

- 1) What do I want to have happen? Be specific here: What change do you envision happening because of your intervention?

For example, if you were working on the issue of public gardens, you might want to aim to have more people in the neighborhood become aware of the public gardens in the community, start using them, and then become involved in maintaining them.

Now ask yourself the evaluation question:

**2) How will I know if this has happened? What discernible impact will you likely see, measure, or even sense if your piece succeeds as you'd like it to?**

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For example, more people visiting the gardens, all plots being used, and more people signing up to help maintain them.

Sometimes it is easy to see success, for instance, when an increased number of people become engaged in a particular action, but most of the time it's more complex, involving longer-term shifts in perception that result in behavioral change. The goal here is not to reduce your aspirations to a number which can be plugged into a mathematical equation, but to come up with creative ways to concretely measure your success. Here are some ideas to help you think through what success looks like for you:

- Draw a cartoon of people before and after they experience your piece. Use thought bubbles to explain what they are thinking and feeling, and be sure to also show what they are doing as a result.
- Write a headline, imagine a photo, or draft a newspaper article that illustrates the success of your piece.
- Imagine a documentary, made in the future, that tells the story of this success. What might we see?
- Create a fictional report that shows graphs and charts about the success of your project.
- Cut images out of the newspaper or print images you find online, then modify them to show what is different after the success of your piece.

Try playing with some of these in your sketchbook.

Once you've asked yourself the questions above, you'll have what you need to assess the impact of your piece after you've put it out into the world. Once you've done this you can ask:

- What worked as I wanted?
- What didn't work so well?
- What surprised me?

And the most important question of all:

- Knowing what I know now, what might I do differently next time?

You won't be able to answer these questions until after you've done your piece, but they are good to keep in mind now because reflecting on what you wanted to have happen, what actually happened, and what you learned as a result, is the essence of all evaluation.

## 38. What Moves You Can Move Others

Time: 5 minutes

When doing all the rational planning and measuring and evaluating that comes with an æffective artistic activist practice, it's important not to lose sight of the magic of artistic activism.

- 1) **Think about an art experience you've had that has really moved you. It could be any medium, at any point in your life, but it should be something that made you feel something positive, interesting, and remarkable.**
- 2) **Now, write in your sketchbook what you remember about the piece and what it felt like. As we've experienced previously, it's *very* difficult to put these *affective* experiences into words on a page. Still, try and capture what it made you feel.**

Reflecting on examples of art that we love, even if the medium and message seem completely different to that involved in an artistic activism piece, helps to remind us that we have a particular aesthetic and intellectual point of view, and that we want to create things in the world that are transcendent and transformative for people. The things and experiences that have moved you hold the keys to creating impactful creative work that will move others.

# ETHICS

## 39. Your Ethical Code

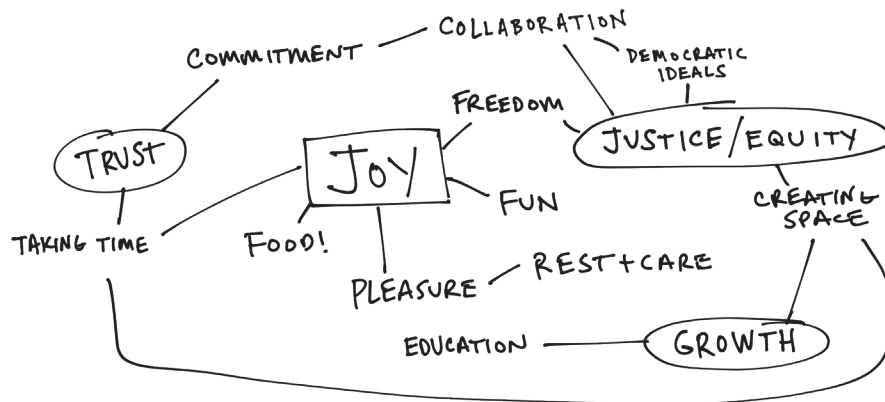
Time: 15 minutes

Ethics are a set of moral principles that shape, guide, and, hopefully, determine how we behave.

To design an ethical piece we need to have an ethical code to follow. This exercise is about designing yours.

- 1) **Begin by asking yourself: What are the core values I believe in? Create a mind-map in your sketchbook and jot down all your ideas.**

A mind map might look like this:



One way to spur your thinking about these core values is to imagine the qualities of your ideal society; the world you are working toward. Would people be truthful? Would your world be sustainable? Would your society reward kindness? If so, then start your list with: truth, sustainability, kindness. Another way to clarify what you value is by considering the things you see in the world today that you don't like. For example: politicians lie, we are destroying the environment, and people are encouraged to only look out for themselves. Flip these things on their head, turning the negatives into positives, and you have the values of telling the truth, fostering sustainability, and caring for others. These are just examples. What is important here is spending some time figuring out what values are important to you.

2) Drawing from the mind-map you created in step one, list the core values that are important to you and the world you want to bring into being:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

This is your code of ethics.

## 40. Question Yourself

Time: 30 minutes

An ethical code is good to have, but ethics—if they are to have an impact—need to be put into practice. In this exercise you'll come up with a list of questions that reflect your values. These are the questions you will ask yourself—over and over again—when you are planning, executing, and reflecting upon your piece.

For example, if one of your values is “transparency” then you might pose the question: Does my piece state clearly who I am, what I believe, and what is my intent?

Or, if “collaboration” is one of the values in your ethical code, you might ask: Did my creative process include and recognize the contributions of others?

1) Look back at your code of ethics and come up with five questions that correspond to your five values:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

If you have more than five questions, bravo! Write them down in your sketchbook.

- 2) There is one more thing to do: copy your ethical code and questions into one document, make it look nice, and hang it up somewhere you will see it. Then you can refer back to your code and ask yourself these questions at every stage in your creative process.

## 41. Friends Close, Enemies Closer

Time: 1 hour

This exercise will help you work with examples of artistic activist tactics which you have found compelling, but which have been carried out in ways which do not necessarily align with your ethics. We will work to adapt these tactics to make pieces that are both effective and ethical.

### **PART I: LEARN FROM YOUR FRIENDS.**

- 1) Think of an activist intervention or artistic piece whose politics you admire, but whose practice rubbed you the wrong way. Identify what it was that made you feel queasy. What ethical lines did it cross for you?
- 2) Describe it in detail in your sketchbook, if it's something visual then draw a picture of it. Make a list of what works and why, and what is unethical about its current use.
- 3) Now, make it ethical! Recreate the action or piece so it conveys the same message and uses the same medium. (e.g. if it's a sit-in make sure it includes blocking access; if it's protesting a pharmaceutical company then make sure the issue is drug related) but this time make it meet your ethical standards.

Describe your refashioned piece in your sketchbook, drawing a picture of it if you can.

### **PART II: LEARN FROM YOUR ENEMY.**

- 1) Think of an advertisement, a marketing campaign, or piece of political propaganda whose technique you admire, even though you may hate the product or the politics being pushed.
- 2) Describe this piece in detail in your sketchbook. If it's something visual, draw a picture of it. Make a list of what works and why, and what is unethical about its current use.
- 3) Here's the hard part: make it ethical! Transform it so that it conforms to your values and promotes your issue or cause.

Describe your transformed piece in your sketchbook, again drawing a picture of it if you can.

This exercise aims at more than just adapting ethically questionable practices. The ability to be critical *and* offer creative solutions will not only help you develop ideas for better work, but makes you a valuable player when collaborating with others.

# UTOPIA

## 42. Imagine Winning

Time: 30 minutes

This is one of the key exercises in our workshops, intended to get participants to tap into their utopian dreams of success:

- 1) **Think of the issue you've been working on, or one you'd like to be working on.**
- 2) **Now *imagine winning*.** Imagine what would happen if you had limitless funding, countless volunteers to help you, popular and political support, and everything goes your way. Picture the best case scenario. What would success look like?
- 3) **Take out your sketchbook and sketch a picture—in words or images—of that win.**

Done?

- 4) **Now we're going to challenge your imaginative skills. Picture this:** your authors have the ability to time-travel. We've seen the future and, guess what? We've come back with good news for you: **You Did It!** Everything you described above has happened. Take a moment and bask in the win. Hold a glass aloft. Put your feet up. Set aside the voices that tell you this is all silly and just allow yourself to dream for a moment. Relax and breathe in the sweet air of victory. It feels good... And—you can do more. Your vision of success may be too modest.
- 5) **Go back to your imaginary win, and now that you have that success under your belt, ask yourself, *What would I do next?***

In our workshops, we've noticed that this is a moment when people tend to tense up, draw a blank, or get embarrassed. It's to be expected: tapping into our dreams of success makes us vulnerable. It's often easier to dwell on what stands in our way than to imagine succeeding. Acknowledge your feelings and move on, because this is a time to be creative and explore your dreams. Just think about your next challenge and in your sketchbook draw a picture of what this would be.

Guess what? You accomplished it. You won, again. Congratulations!

Now... ask yourself, again, *What would I do next?*

- 6) Repeat the step above at least *five* times and continue until you reach a place where no further wins are possible, and there is nothing more to do. Work toward a world in which everything you've wanted to do has been achieved. A world in which you can—if you wish—retire from being an artistic activist and spend the rest of your life fishing, traveling the world in a solar powered RV, or painting pictures of thatch-covered cabins in the woods. Travel toward the world of your dreams.
- 7) You have had success after success. You've made seemingly impossible gains in transforming society for the better. Now, take a moment to imagine living in this world you've won. See it in your mind and picture it vividly. Imagine walking around this world. If it helps, pretend that we've come to visit you from another dimension (we can travel in space as well as time) and you are taking us on a tour, showing us this amazing world that you've been able to bring into being.

Spend a few minutes thinking about these questions:

- When you step outside your house or flat, what do you see?
- What are people doing? How are they living?
- As you walk around, what do you hear, smell, and feel?

Describe this amazing place in your sketchbook. Draw pictures of it.

*This is what winning looks like.*

*This* is what you are fighting for. This is what gets you out of bed every morning to face the hard work that being an artistic activist calls for. And *this* is what is going to motivate others to join you. Remember this win.

This is your utopia.

## 43. Overcoming “Realistic”

Time: 45 minutes

The demand to be “realistic” about what can—or *cannot*—be done puts limits on our imagination and the possibilities for change. It can lead us to be conservative when we should be ambitious, or repeat old tactics in a time that requires innovation. Sometimes this demand appears in the form of another person shooting down ideas in a meeting, but sometimes the voice comes from inside ourselves. In this exercise you'll overcome the limits of being “realistic.” We need to acknowledge, and then circumvent, these limits if we are to create goals that inspire others, as well as ourselves.

- 1) Think to yourself for a moment about the issue you are working on and how you'd like things to change...and then why this can't happen. Be “practical.” Be “realistic.” What can't we do? Write the reasons down on the “we can't” lines below, leaving the “because” and “we can” lines blank for now.

For example, our issue could be local budget cuts to public schools. If we're being "realistic" and "practical" we might write...

*We can't* raise enough money to replace the funds.

*We can't* organize a teacher or student strike.

*We can't* get the school board to listen to us.

Now you try with your issue.

*We can't*

*Because*

*We can*

*We can't*

*Because*

*We can*

*We can't*

*Because*

*We can*

**2) For each of the things you can't do, go back and give the reason why you can't do them on the "because" line.**

For example:

*We can't* raise enough money to replace the funds,

*Because* it's too much money, we're just a few people, and we're not rich.

*We can't* organize a teacher or student strike,

*Because* we don't have the support, the teachers are not united, and the students need to stay in class to learn.

*We can't* get the school board to listen to us,

*Because* they are too hard-headed and politically partisan.

**3) Now it's time to brush the limits of realism off your shoulders. For each of these reasons, write down what we *can* do that might circumvent the reasons we can't.**

Continuing with our example:

*We can* "act as if" and hold a bake sale to replace the funds. We'll call it the 2.3 Million Dollar Bake Sale and hold it outside each school board meeting.

*We can* organize a different kind of strike that creates visibility, but also makes sure students learn and decreases risk for teachers. Perhaps a hand-drawn paper picket line outside the school with life-size students and teachers. It would be low risk and a great photo-op for local media.

*We can* get school board members to listen to students. We could help organize students to talk to the board about how cuts will affect them.

These are simple solutions, and you'll be able to think of better ones. But they undermine what we originally thought were realistic boundaries. Now write in what you can do.

**4) Finally, go back and cross a line through everything you “can’t” do, because there is always a way to do it.**

## 44. Finding Your Utopia

**Time: 1–2 hours**

You are ready to create your own utopia! It can be based on your ultimate win from exercise 42, or it can be something new, but just so you aren't working on this for days, here's a focus: make your utopia issue-oriented. If you are working on prison reform, for example, sketch a vision of a world without prisons, without the need for prisons, and in which prison buildings become something else entirely and everyday life is transformed. Get the picture?

- 1) Take out your sketchbook. Draw pictures, or cut-and-paste pictures from magazines or printed from the internet, of what *your* utopia might look like. Fill the page with as much vivid detail as possible. You're drafting a utopia, a no-place, and no one else ever needs to see it. Remember, this is just an exercise. You're practicing a creative process. This will be the first of many utopias you'll envision. It can be fantastical—and highly flawed. It's OK. Turn down the pressure. Have fun with it.**
- 2) As you plan out the details of your utopia, also reflect on, and write down ideas for, how your utopia might:**
  - Inspire: demonstrate another world is possible.
  - Critique: encourage us to look back at our own society critically.
  - Generate: spawn ideas of other utopias.
  - Direct: give us a direction to go in.
  - Motivate: move you . . . and others.
- 3) Take your utopian sketch from step one, and your critical exploration from step two, and work it all into an artistic activist piece that can exist in the here and now: an installation, performance, or mural. Maybe even a song or a poem. Write and draw what your piece would look and sound like. Again, don't sweat the details, it doesn't have to be presented to anyone. It can be impossible, scary, silly. It can be whatever you want. It just has to take form as something.**

Congratulations, you've found your utopia!

## 45. Write the Sequel

Time: 30 minutes

Dystopian stories usually don't only describe a miserable reality — who would pay to watch that? They involve hope and a struggle to overcome that reality. In fact, most end with the hero or heroine striking a final, fatal blow against the evil empire. But then they stop. Maybe some Ewoks dance around in the woods for a while, but soon the credits roll. Why? Because it's much easier to think about what we don't want than what we do want. This exercise will help you break free from this. Because we're using popular media as a starting point, this is a great exercise to do with friends and comrades — drinks are optional.

- 1) **Think of your favorite dystopian film, TV series, or book.**
- 2) **Take out your sketchbook and write (or outline, or draw a scene from) an imaginary sequel. Now that we've defeated the evil empire, and the credits have rolled, *what comes next*? It's easy to imagine the next conflict, but for the purposes of this exercise imagine the everyday experience in a world where the conflict is resolved. Play with it. Write scenes in which Princess Leia is hosting a dinner party for her friends. Imagine what Obi Wan Kenobi does to unwind after a hard day fighting the Dark Side.**
- 3) **Is there anything in your sequel that you might draw upon to help you in your artistic activist work? Are there aspects you can incorporate into the everyday ways your group works together? Or inspiring visions of a new world to attract others to your cause?**

It's often hard to do, but we need to do the work of pushing past the dystopian and into the utopian if we are ever going to imagine and create a world worth living in. But we don't have to wait for it to arrive, because we can bring parts of it into being now.

## 46. Replacing Problems with Outcomes

Time: 30 minutes

We need to solve problems in order to arrive at our desired outcome. And we need to have a desired outcome in order to know what problems may lie in our way. Outcomes and problems are interconnected. In our experience, however, we've found that artists and activists tend to focus more on the problems they face and less on the outcomes they desire. This exercise will help train you to prioritize outcomes, and think of problems as simply things that need to be overcome, or even sidestepped, on your way.

- 1) **Divide a sheet of paper into three columns. In the first column, draw yourself or your team.**
- 2) **In the second column, list three problems you have, or are concerned with. These can be political, or personal or professional.**

For example:

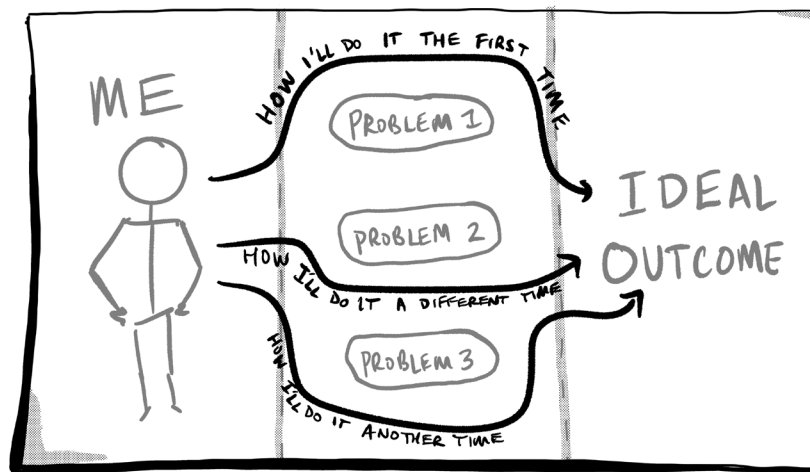
- My supervisor is a misogynistic jerk.
- Police harassing sex workers.

3) In the third column, write your ideal outcome for each of these problems.

For example:

- I get promoted above my supervisor.
- Sex work is legalized.

4) Draw lines that connect you directly to the outcomes, navigating around the problems in the way. On the lines, write ways you can imagine overcoming these problems in order to get to your ideal outcome.



The problems haven't disappeared—they never will—but this arrangement puts them into proper perspective on paper. Problems are not blockades, just obstacles to navigate on the way to our goals.

## 47. Paths to Utopia

Time: 2–3 hours

Utopian dreaming not only inspires, motivates, and orients us toward our goal, but also helps us think imaginatively about the tactics and objectives we'll need to make the journey. When we have an Emerald City on the horizon, old obstacles retreat and new pathways appear, and things which seemed impossible all of a sudden become possible: talking lions, tin men, and scarecrows, and, of course, magical slippers. However, there is not one, singular and brightly colored road laid out before us to simply follow; we need to make our own paths. For this we'll need to make a map.

For this mapping exercise you will need:

- Large sheets of paper, at least two-by-three feet, or a whiteboard or chalkboard.
- Multicolored pens, pencils, or chalk. Nothing fancy—use what you have. We use large children’s markers.
- Space to spread out. A large table will work, or even the floor.

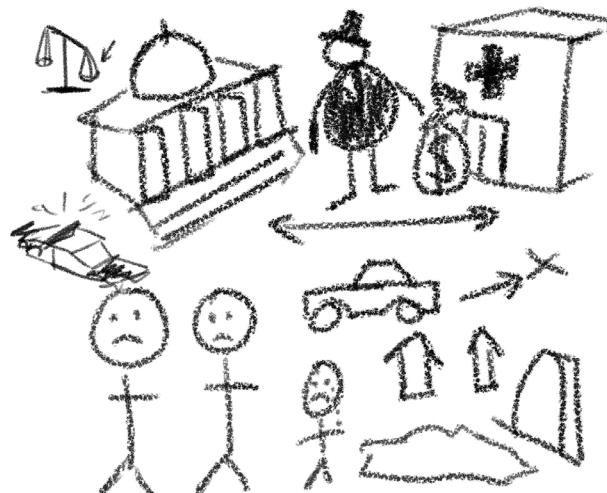
Although it’s not required, we recommend doing this work with another person or a group you’re working with. It helps if they are also reading this book, but, if not, you can lead them through it.

**1) Think about the issue you are working on.**

**2) Starting in the lower left-hand corner of your medium, draw a picture that illustrates the issue as it stands now.**

If your issue is police violence, for instance, you might draw a picture of young people getting stopped on the street and frisked by the police, someone shot by a cop and lying on the ground, and politicians looking away.

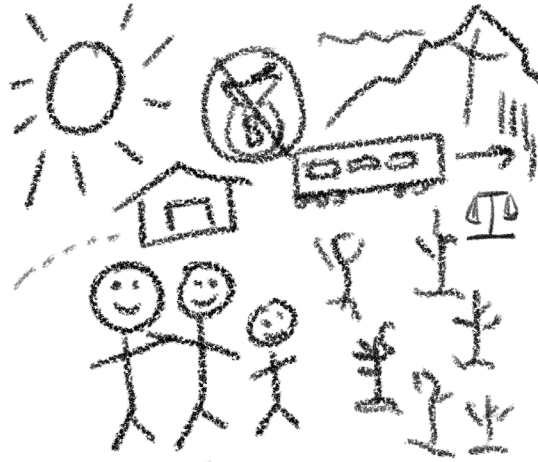
Something like this:



Remember, the quality of the drawings is not important, it’s just capturing the vision and ideas. Using stick figures and symbols is fine, but make sure to use a lot of color and include the setting and context. Most importantly, draw *as you think*. Avoid staring at the page, considering how to represent problems, just start making marks on the page and trust it will come together—it will.

**3) Move to the opposite corner, on the upper right-hand side of your medium, and draw a picture that illustrates the world you are working toward: your utopia.**

In our example, it might be pictures of prisons that have been turned into schools and community centers, or a world where there is no crime, no criminals, and no police. And, of course, it is always sunny.

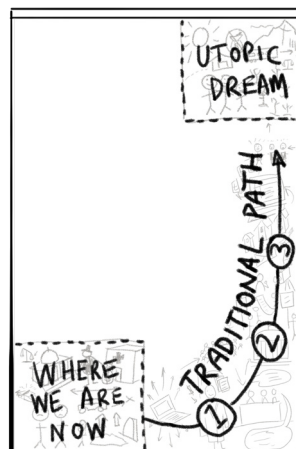


In your utopia sketch, make sure you have addressed all the problems you laid out in your first sketch. If cops aren't frisking kids, then what are the cops and kids doing now? If politicians were looking away, where are they looking now?

Now that you have the two ends of your map complete we can fill in the space between. Looking at where we are and where we want to go, we can chart out our paths to get from here to there. We are going to make *three* paths, so plan ahead and leave room for each step.

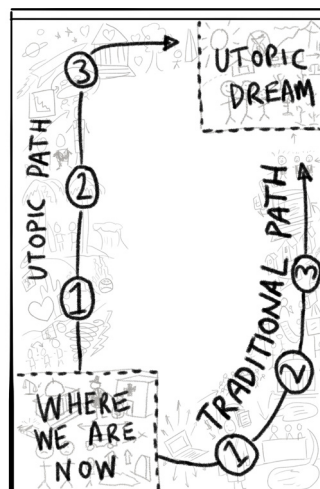
- For example, the first step we might take as either an artist or an activist would be to research the problem. Our second step might be to set up an information table and start educating others, or to work on an infographic. Then we might circulate a petition, make a public presentation, or build a group online so we can show how many people support us. After this we might organize a rally, demonstration, or exhibition to get onto the news. And so on. These tactics might not be the most innovative or creative but they are real steps working toward real objectives.

Draw pictures of at least three traditional tactics you could use to get closer to your ultimate goal, and string them along a path that traces up the right side of the paper like this:



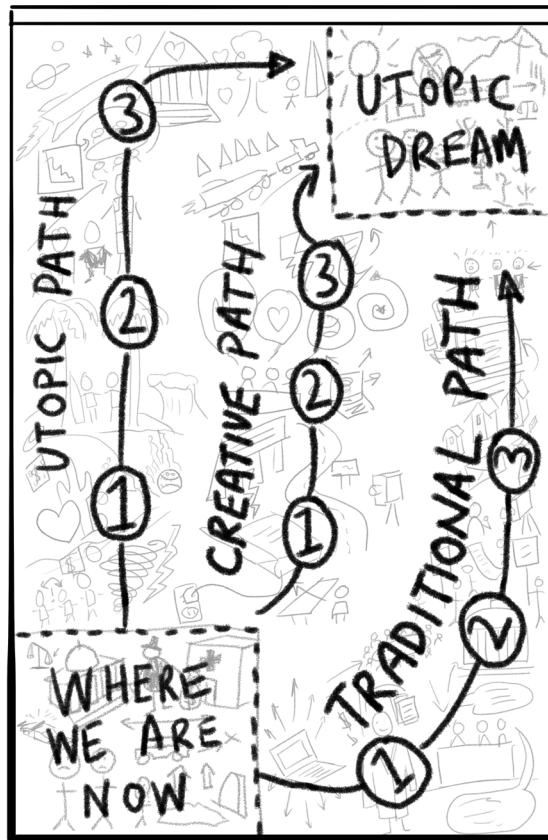
Traditional steps may not be able to get you all the way to your utopia. That's OK. Get as far as you can.

- 5) Now the fun begins. It's time to chart your "utopian" path. As with the path before, you'll come up with at least three different tactical steps that will help you get from where things are now to your ideal world. But here's the difference: all these steps can — and should — be *impossible*. Remember, in utopia, money is not an object, time is not a concern, and the physical laws of the universe do not apply. Anything you can dream up you can do. So, right now, raise your freak flag high and draw *your* utopian path along the left side of the paper. Here anything can happen. Something like this:



- 6) It's time now for your final path. We call this path the "creative" path, and you may have already figured out what we are going to ask you to do. We want you to chart a path in the space between your traditional and utopian paths, merging the two. For this creative path, sketch out three or more original tactics that draw upon the outlandish ideas you came up with above, and incorporate the practical steps that are sure to move you forward. By combining the two we make the impossible possible.

Here's what this might look like:



Now it's your turn. Merge the traditional and the utopian and draw your creative path.

- 7) Step back and look at your map. You have shown the world as it is, and a better way it could be. You've mapped out a range of pathways to get there and generated a multitude of creative, and workable, tactics.

Since this is a lot, here are the steps in this exercise again:

- 1) Identify your issue.
- 2) Draw the reality of the situation in the lower left corner.
- 3) Draw your utopian goal in top right corner.
- 4) Chart a "traditional" path, with at least three tactics.
- 5) Chart a "utopian" path, with at least three tactics.
- 6) Chart a "creative" path that merges the two, with at least three hybrid tactics.

Effective artistic activism entails a modulation between the possible and the impossible, between the traditional and the utopian. Sometimes you have to rely on what you know will work, and sometimes you have to dream wild dreams. And sometimes those conventional tactics and utopian visions can be made to work beautifully together.

## 48. The Exam

**Time: 3–4 hours**

At the Center for Artistic Activism we run training schools, and like most schools we have a final exam. It's not really an exam. We just call it that. It's an exercise that takes all you've learned from this book and puts it into action by planning a long-term creative campaign. Here's where it all comes together.

In this exercise, we'll be moving through the first three stages of the Artistic Activist Process Model:

- Research: mapping the terrain and organizing our resources.
- Sketch: imagining tactics, objectives, and strategy.
- Evaluation: verifying and improving the ideas we come up with.

Once you have a plan, you'll be ready to move it into the Production phase.

We know that this “exam” demands a significant amount of time, and there are a lot of directions to follow. We would not ask you to do this if we were not confident that you are ready. And you are ready, so take out your blue books and sharpened No. 2 pencils, and... begin!

### 1) Prepare yourself.

You'll want to do a few things to get ready for this exercise. For one, you should set aside several hours to focus on this. If you can gather some trusted friends, you'll have a group of people that can help. (If they're working through this book with you, that's even better.) Have some snacks and drinks around so you can stay fresh and alert. Use a location where you won't be interrupted or distracted, and that allows you to hang your giant notes on the walls. Have this workbook and your sketchbook handy. You'll want to be able to draw upon your notes and exercises.

You'll also need these materials:

- Large sheets of paper, at least two-by-three feet.
- Colorful markers.
- Tape or tacks to hang the paper on the wall.
- A timer.

Last, assign one or two people the job of taking notes. You'll be making a lot of notes on those big sheets of paper.

Once you've got yourselves together, you can put on your Explorer cap and begin your research.

### 2) Map your terrain.

**Time: 30–60 minutes**

Just as all good artistic activism is local, so too with artistic activist campaigns. We need to outline the context within which we are working and the resources we have at our disposal. The prompts below will help. As you go through them, you'll notice that you've explored many of these before in previous exercises; here they all come together.

Write your answers to the prompts below on one of your giant sheets of paper — one category per sheet. When done, hang each sheet on the wall around the room. This way you can get everything out of your heads and on paper, from the seemingly obvious to the overlooked assets. When you're done you will have, close at hand and top of mind, an informational map of the local terrain for your pieces and your campaign.

Spend only five to ten minutes on each category.

## **GENERAL GOALS**

*Where are we now and where do you want to go?*

- What is the issue you are working on?
- Where do things stand now? Where are you starting from?
- Where do you want to go? What is your utopia?

## **POWER MAP**

*Who has the most decision making power when it comes to your issue?*

- Are there specific people who hold this power, be it the mayor, police commissioner, or board of directors of a corporation?
- Are there offices and institutions that wield this power, like the City Planning Commission, Parks Department, or UN Security Council?
- Who or what are these individuals and institutions accountable to, for example: voters, customers, workers, bosses, public opinion, peer pressure?

## **AUDIENCE**

*Who are we speaking to?*

- Who is our primary audience?
- Who is our secondary audiences?
- Who might be unintended audiences?

*With each of these audiences:*

- What are their beliefs about your issue?
- What are the benefits and costs for this audience?
- What stage are they at between awareness and action?
- What do we want them to think, feel, and do?

## MATERIAL SETTING

*What is the material setting in which you'll be operating?*

- Physical: Nation or neighborhood? Dense urban concentration or suburban sprawl? What is the geography of the region?
- Demographic: What is the ethnic, gender, age, educational, occupational, religious, national, fill-in-the-relevant-blank composition of the people who live in the area you are targeting?
- Political: What are the commonly held political beliefs? Do most people lean Left or Right? Are people engaged or apathetic? Does political preference divide according to demographics or physical location?

## CULTURAL CONTEXT

*What signs, symbols, stories, and media are part of the terrain?*

- Big C culture: What are the artistic representations and expressions, from museums to street murals to folk tales?
- Little c culture: What are the languages, patterns, and myths of everyday life?
- Pop culture: What are popular forms of entertainment that people enjoy?
- Alt culture: Are there alternative forms of culture that people create?
- Media: Culture is transmitted through media, so what media — whether mainstream or alternative — do people rely upon for information, including print, radio, TV, internet, word-of-mouth, etc?

## CREATIVE RESOURCES

*What creative resources can you draw upon for help in your campaign?*

- What creative individuals: painters, musicians, DJs, costume designers, carpenters and so on do you know?
- What arts organizations, social justice institutions, or other groups might lend a hand?
- Who do you know in the media who might be sympathetic and willing to work with you?

Brainstorm ideas from these prompts and put *all* your ideas up onto those big sheets of paper.

You may have to move back and forth a bit between the categories. Once you know your audience, for example, it'll help focus the material setting and cultural context. The important part is to get all this data out there as a rich pool you can draw from for the next steps in building your campaign.

Now you've collected your research, gathering what you know, what you needed to be reminded of, and hopefully a few helpful new items. You'll be able to refer back to this Research when you move into the Sketch phase.

### 3) Set your objectives.

Time: 10 minutes

You know what your goal is and you know the terrain you are operating upon, so now you need concrete objectives that will let you know if you are moving in the right direction and getting closer to your utopia. Objectives, as you'll recall, are our demonstrable, measurable milestones — mini-goals like holding a public meeting or changing a policy. Now you are going to come up with three to five of them. You can use the ones you came up with in exercise 33, or you may have new ones.

Take ten minutes and brainstorm objectives. Think about what — *concretely* — can be accomplished to move forward to your ultimate goal. Don't sweat these too much; at this point you are an Inventor, sketching out ideas. The most important thing is to get them down on paper quickly. You can edit, improve, and organize them later.

Got three to five objectives down? Good, you are ready to . . .

### 4) Refine your objectives.

Time: 30 minutes

Now, for the next thirty minutes, move into the Evaluation phase. Put on your Critic's hat, and work on the following questions:

Are your objectives S.M.A.R.T.?

- **Specific**: Does each objective identify a particular thing you want to do, change or impact?
- **Measurable**: When you meet each objective, will you be able to determine, with a certain degree of surety, whether you've accomplished what you set out to do, or made progress toward it?
- **Achievable**: Is each objective doable; something you can realistically hope to attain?
- **Relevant**: Does each objective make sense given your overall goal; is it in alignment with what you have accomplished before and what you hope to accomplish after?
- **Timed**: Do you have a timeframe for accomplishing each objective, answering the question of "when will it be done?"

Order your objectives logically. Which one needs to happen first in order to pave the way for the next? Does your second objective build from the first and lead to the third? And so on, until you have a string of objectives that hold together in a sequence that makes sense. It's an old rule of activism to start with an easy win, which builds momentum and morale, and then to progress to more ambitious objectives throughout a campaign. Is your first objective an easy win? Is your last objective ambitious enough?

If any of your answers to these questions reveal that you need to do more work, you can practice slipping, with grace and kindness, back and forth between the Evaluation to Sketch phases until you're happy with your objectives. Once you've settled upon your objectives, devote a large sheet of paper for each and hang these on the walls around you.

## 5) Design your creative tactics.

Time: 30 minutes

This is where you are going to draft the artistic activist pieces in your campaign — the creative tactics that will help you achieve your objectives.

To create effective pieces you should reference back to the terrain you mapped out in step three, making sure that whatever pieces you create take into account the material and cultural setting, leverage the creative resources at your disposal, engage those with power, and speak to the most relevant audiences. You will also want to make sure that your tactical pieces help achieve a particular concrete objective, yet also resonate with the utopian dream you set out as your goal.

All the brainstorming you did earlier will now make what could be a difficult process run much more smoothly and naturally. You've primed yourself to come up with some great, creative, ideas.

And that's what you are going to do now by sketching out ten ideas for artistic activist pieces for *each* objective.

If you are working with a group, break into smaller groups and assign each sub-group one objective to work on. It works best for brainstorming purposes if each sub-group has no less than three and no more than five people. If you are working alone or in a smaller group, pick only one of the objectives you came up with and plan ten pieces for that objective. (You can then repeat this process for the others.) Using the sheets of paper with your objectives, sketch out your ideas for pieces — in words, or better yet: as drawings.

Constraints make creativity easier, so here's two *mandatory* conditions to help you along.

- You have only fifteen minutes to come up with all ten ideas for artistic activist pieces. Yes, only *fifteen* minutes.
- Seven of the ten ideas have to be *impossible*. Yes, impossible, meaning they cannot be done. These are pieces which would be too expensive, take too long, require too many people, or require a suspension of laws of nature or nations.
- You must come up with the seven impossible ideas *before* the three possible ones.

When your timer runs out, come back as a group (even if that group is yourself) and share your ideas for tactics.

We had you start with the impossible ideas first because, having done this exercise for years, we've learned it can be done wrong. At one workshop, we asked the participants to come up with seven impossible and three possible tactical pieces, but we forgot to mention the order. At the end of the fifteen minutes, the ones who had started with impossible ones came up with ten (and sometimes more) pieces quickly and easily, while those who started with the possible ones were still stuck with no more than one. As you hopefully noticed, starting with the impossible gets ideas flowing and frees up your creativity.

By starting with the impossible we also discovered something else: in coming up with impossible pieces first, people then found ways to make their impossible pieces possible. Maybe this happened to you too.

Can you make your “impossible” ideas possible? Can you stretch your “possible” ones so they are more creative? Spend an additional fifteen minutes exploring the possibilities.

## 6) Chart your campaign.

Time: 30 – 60 minutes

Now you are ready to put all this together in a longterm creative campaign that includes tactical pieces, objectives, and goals. It's going to follow the model we laid out in the section on campaigns in the *Æfficacy* chapter, and incorporate all the work you've done above.

This plan isn't committed to stone—you can, *and should*, adapt and change as new information becomes available and you test these ideas in the field. The results can be imperfect and flawed, but you need something to improve—you can't make a second draft without a first. So it's time to get a first draft of your campaign down on paper:

- A) Take out a new sheet of paper. In the lower left corner, sketch where you are now and, on the top right, your final goal.
- B) In a horizontal line between these two poles, lay out and order your objectives, starting with the easy win first and progressing to the most ambitious. While you may be working on multiple objectives simultaneously, aim to have each follow logically from what came before. For example, you can't repeal a law before you've planned and carried out an organizing meeting of people who are going to work with you.
- C) Clustered in proximity to each of these objectives, put down two or three of your *best* tactical pieces for that specific objective. What makes it the best? It should be creative enough to do all the things we've laid out in *The Art of Activism*, but also realistic enough so you can get it done. It should speak directly to the objective at hand, yet carry within it a kernel of your ultimate utopian dream. No one piece can likely do all of this, and that's OK.
- D) Add in times in your campaign to have formal evaluations of your progress. While you'll likely have frequent, short, informal evaluations, you'll need to set aside time within your campaign—especially as you move into *Production*—to check-in and reflect upon your progress and *æffectiveness*. In the process, you may find you need to do additional research and sketches in order to improve your campaign, and then re-evaluate these.

Done?

Pencils down!

You now have a complete plan for a creative campaign.

## 49. Deadlines

Time: 30 minutes

In the Exam exercise above, we made it through Research, Sketch, and even some Evaluation of a creative campaign. But all this work means nothing if we don't move into action. We need to put our plan into *Production*.

Production is all about deadlines and deliverables. Here's a way to start:

- 1) Set a date to stage the *first* tactical piece in your creative campaign. Write down this deadline.

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This is by far the most important step in making your plans a reality. This comes *before* you've worked out the details, *before* you think you have enough friends to help you, *before* you are even sure you really want to do this. Why? There will always be reasons to delay. Setting a date will put your plans in motion. Once a date is set, everything will fall into place around it. Your friends will work with you when you have a date set. The resources will come when you have a date set. Everything will work out because it has to—even if it doesn't always work out the way you planned.

- 2) With a plan and deadline for your first piece, you can make some deadlines and deliverables for the whole campaign. These dates will be looser than those for your first action, but it's just as important to build an initial timeline for your entire campaign. Set an approximate date for launching each of your pieces and the realization of each objective.
- 3) Once you have deadlines and deliverables in hand, you need to come up with a schedule to keep yourself moving forward, starting with today. What you plan to do doesn't need to be huge. Turn down the pressure. But do commit to doing something.

By the end of the day I will:

---

By the end of the week I will:

---

By the end of the month I will:

---

By the end of the year I will:

---

- 4) Publicly announce your deadlines and deliverables. Make some kind of declaration or announcement that on X day, at Y time your piece will happen. Send emails, make phone calls, work it into your daily conversation. Public proclamations are important because when people know your goals, objectives, and timeline, they may step in to help. And, if nothing else, the risk of embarrassment of *not* doing it on the date you have publicly announced can be enough to keep you on target.

## 50. Do It!

Time: The rest of your life

You are an artistic activist. You have the knowledge, you have the practice, and you have a plan.

**Now step off the curb, make your mark, and create a new world!**



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Designed by Andy Outis

# THE ART OF ACTIVISM WORKBOOK

Artistic activism isn't just a set of ideas, it's a practice. This companion to *The Art of Activism* is designed to help you develop the skills necessary to become the most effective artistic activist you can be. For over a decade, the Center for Artistic Activism has been researching and creating training materials to help artists and activists *make the impossible possible*. In 50 easy-to-follow exercises, you'll practice the techniques, perspectives, and approaches that we've seen lead to creative and impactful actions and campaigns.

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