

OUT OF THE TOOLBOX Tactics That Take Space

Taking space disrupts business as usual and catches the attention of those nearby. It sends our message powerfully, in words and in actions.

HUMAN BILLBOARDS. I love what I call human billboards! These are big signs that two or more people hold up at intersections or in front of doors. They are incredibly effective at getting people's attention and even motivating them to take action if you amplify the message by adding a hashtag. They are one of the most effective visibility actions because they pair a human face with the message on the billboard.

DELEGATIONS are a great tactic that allow people to enter the space of power and engage with the actual decision maker or their minions. If the decision maker won't engage, they for sure will know you were there! It's good to have something to leave behind, like a notice, memo, petition, or letter. If they threaten to call the police, you can say, "Please do! There is criminal activity by your office!" You can leave before or when the police arrive. This is a great tactic in banks, politicians' offices, corporate offices, and embassies.

OCCUPATIONS are a very old tactic where people who are fighting for a cause take land or space and occupy it. The tactic itself requires additional layers of planning and preparation: If you want to take something for the long haul, you have to be prepared with food, water, sanitation, and protection from the elements as well as the police.

STRIKES are one of the ultimate direct-action tactics, and you know they are powerful because we see the lengths people in power go to stop them! Strikes are clear acts of non-cooperation as people withdraw participation from the machine that oppresses them. They often use picket lines to block access. General strikes have been extremely effective at creating a crisis, and we could sure use more of them today.

PICKETS are a great tactic for almost any action in front of buildings or entrances. Pickets are very visible and a powerful way to take space near doorways. They can also make it hard to enter the building or establishment. Whether they are silent, chanting, or bursting with song, a strong picket can really shake things up.

TAKING INTERSECTIONS. I have spent a lot of my life in intersections, not just walking through to get here or there, but sitting in, dancing in, and occupying them. At a tactical level, taking intersections can be complex and might involve planning for teams, timing, points of entry, the tactic itself, support with attention to safety, getting your message out, and legal/jail support if there are arrests. It can also be as simple as walking out into the street as a group and blocking traffic by sitting, standing, or holding a banner.

BLOCKING BRIDGES AND HIGHWAYS is a powerful yet dangerous tactic. You need to make sure you have enough people and good signage or flyers to pass out so that people understand the plan. Using props that are hard to move can help, as can designated drivers that stop in front of you. If you don't intend arrest, you need an exit strategy. I've learned that blocking exit ramps can be a safer way to block a freeway with less risk and equal impact.