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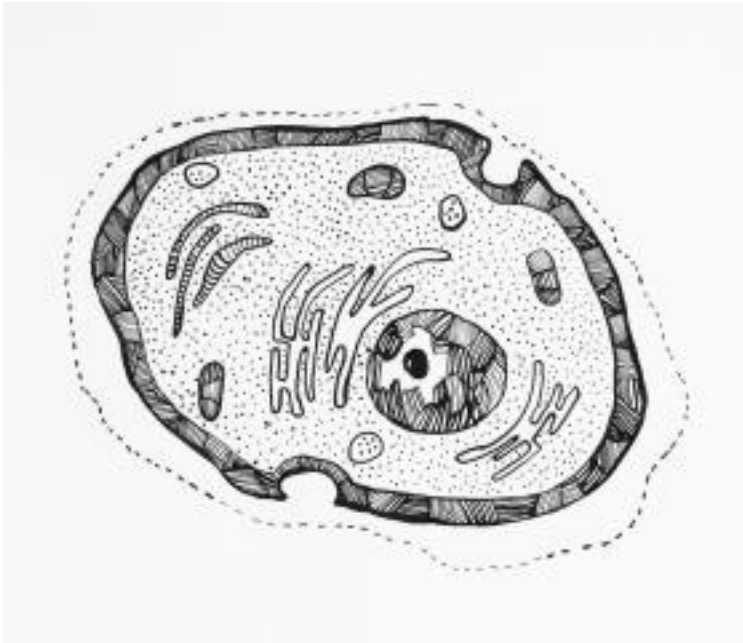
# **Perspectives**

We put together some theoretical ideas, metaphors and definitions to explain what we mean when we say creative activism.

# PERSPECTIVES



# The cell of creative activism



There are a thousand ways to explain and transmit how creative activism operates, lives and breathes. In this book, we have chosen the metaphor of the "cell" to explore and approach the creative activism ecosystem.

The cell is the smallest unit of life. It has a dynamic structure and a membership base. The cell basically builds us as we are. Furthermore it is the main element in the processes of growth and transformation.

The main function of the cell is the

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**"To dismantle and reinvent institutions or systems we have to start at the roots, with the culture that supports them.**

**Culture is the material substratum of politics, the muddy foundations upon which they are**

metabolism. Metabolism comes from a Greek word which means change. This is also the main function of Creative Activism: change.

Our body is composed by million of cells that support a variety of life processes: neurons, adipocytes, epithelial cells, spermatozoons and egg cells and many more...

Also inside us there are small cells that run through our body, waiting to be activated. These cells are responsible to make us aware, and make us act. They provoke in us the necessity of finding an answer to what surrounds us. They encourage us to combine our ideas with others. These are creative activism cells

Creative activism cells share the same general components than other type of cells: membrane, cytoplasm and nucleus; but with a different meaning. Each component of this concrete type of cell reflects upon a part of the creative activism process. Let us take a look at the structure.

built, but these foundations can't be changed in the same way that you can undo a law - they are transformed by infiltrating them at the molecular level, through the fault lines, pores and gaps, burrowing away like an old mole opening up millions of potential north-west passages"

Gavin Grindon & John Jordan "A users guide to demand the imposible"

## **1. The membrane - Critical thinking**

Despite the many differences in appearance and function, all cells are wrapped in a membrane, semipermeable or selective. The membrane regulates the passage of substances into the cell and vice versa. In the case of the creative activism cell, this part is the critical consciousness, that helps us to analyze our reality. The critical thinking also select and filter the information that reaches us, letting through what we consider important and to affect us.

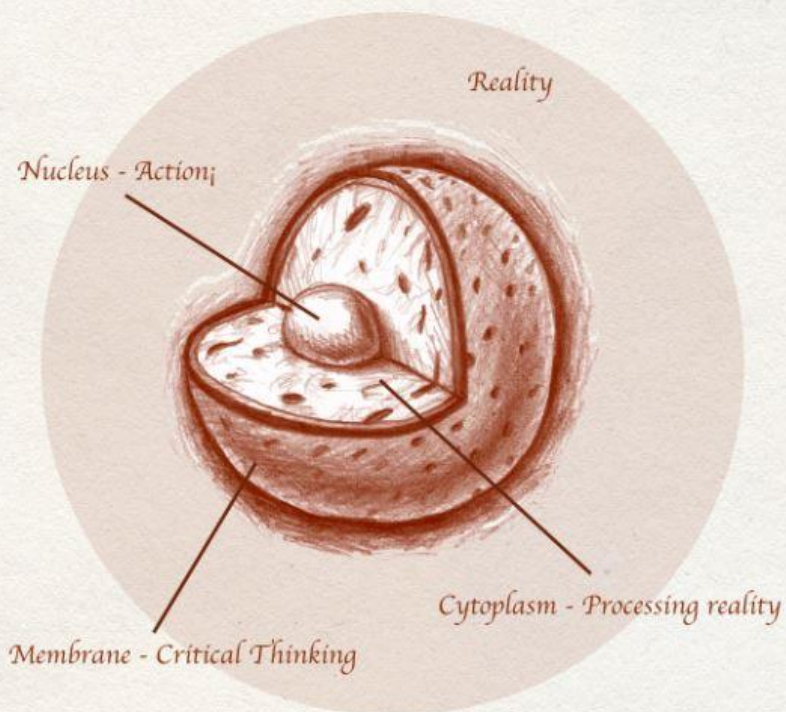
## **2. Cytoplasm - Processing reality**

Within the cell there are different components that react and become active as soon as the information is passed into the cell. What is the function of these components? To analyze information and reduce it into smaller parts in order to understand it better. Something similar occurs during the creative process of creating an action, where each person becomes an element which analyzes reality differently.

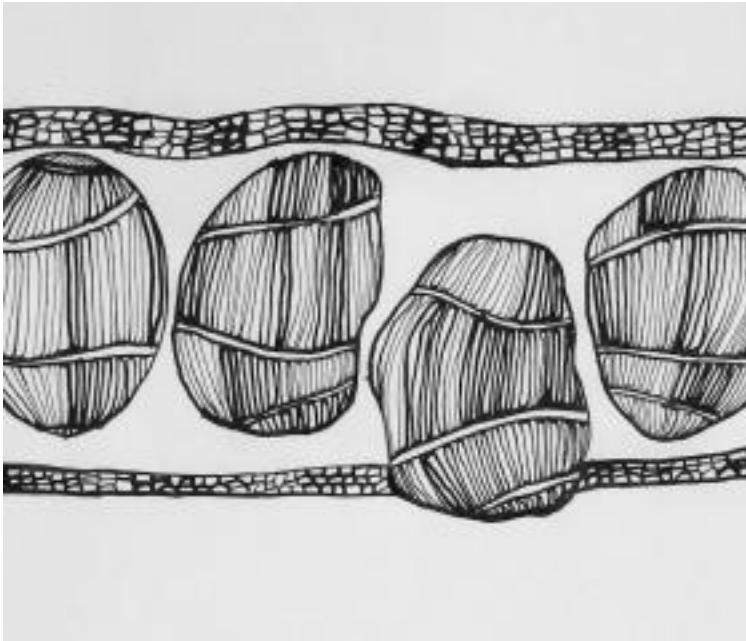
### **3. Nucleus - Generate action**

The nucleus is the most important part of the cell. It controls and synthesizes the information. It organizes everything and then sends the "molecular message". This "molecular message" is composed of the information we want to convey and the way in which we will pass it on.

## *Structure of the Creative Activism Cell.*



# Cell membrane - critical thinking



Understanding the reality and giving a meaning to what surround us is a long learning process influenced by our past experiences and culture assimilation. As we grow up, we acquired our own frames of reference; structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. Their function are to selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings.

Due to that, when we evaluate or respond to a new situation, we tend to follow the same learned patterns, the habits of our mind, such as “the chairs are for sitting down, the floor is meant for walking, a glass is there to be filled with liquid, you can not scream in public” etc. and quite often, we repeat our habitual way of thinking and acting.

This type of thinking is called "habitual" thinking, or vertical thinking if we



follow the de Bono theory. Even though in daily life situations, it helps us simplify, function and understand the world around us, sometimes it limits our possible solutions to the new situations we encounter.

In order to break these patterns and generate creative solutions to issues, we have to develop, in words of Edward de Bono, our lateral thinking. For this author lateral thinking is concerned with breaking out the presence of old ideas. This leads to changes in attitude and approach; to looking in a different way at things which have always been looked at in the same way. So liberation from old ideas and the stimulation of new ones are twin aspects of lateral thinking.

Through breaking the rigid pattern of habitual thinking, we can create creative and innovative ideas, and come across solutions which are alternative or unusual. The theory aims to allow to solve problems indirectly and by using a creative approach.

In practice the techniques of lateral thinking are based on provocation, as a tool to break the route of the habitual thinking. Some of the Lateral thinking tools will be more specific explained in the Method Chapter of this book. This implementation of lateral thinking is one of the paths to the creative activism. Creativity is the WOW factor, the quality of the unexpected that opens new possibilities.

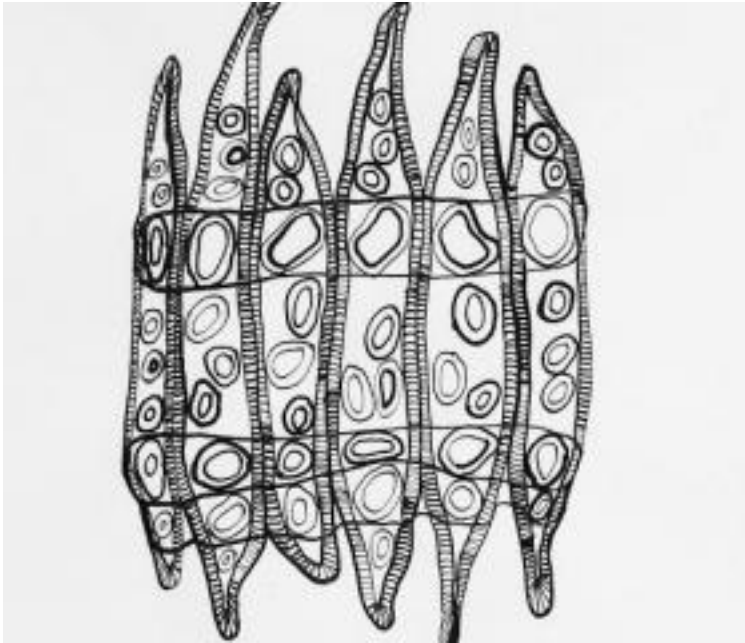
Connecting it with creative activism, it seems clear for us that among the forms of protest we have, there are some that have been absorbed by the system, and have become the expected responses. They are not able to generate change and they have been disabled. They belong to the usual cycle of oppression - protest. The creative activism seeks to break habitual patterns of protest creating that provocative spoken of lateral thinking.

Creative, spontaneous and unexpected.

**Visuals by:**

Anna-Lena Schroers

# Cytoplasm - processing reality



Living in the "information overload age" has challenged the classical civic engagement, in the process of reaching and engaging members. We are receiving millions of visual, audio and kinesthetic signals every day are quite likely to lose focus, or feel overwhelmed. We find that using proper tools to analyze the context of the society and one's place is a great help to the messenger to deliver his or her story.

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**"The function of creative activism is to facilitate change in an unexpected way"**

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Already in the 1940's the first ideas about upcoming problematic to systemize and process the information in human time and with human brain appeared; but now it's our daily struggle - either it's getting through the email, following up all the

social contacts on- and off-line or training the media literacy skills. The human brain has extensive opportunities to perceive information, especially visual impulses but its the mind that buffers the processing of all the input.

The overload of information guides and builds our way of life (protocols, social norms, roles, power relations, mass control strategies, emotional manipulation, consumerist behavior etc...). We are constantly transmitting information via the way we walk and speak, with our bodily expressions or in our social and habitual behavior. In summary, we are micro-political entities in our daily actions.

Despite on that overload, there is always a piece of reality that gets through and manages to reach us and somehow affect us. The information stays with us. This is the moment when something starts to grow inside us, is the necessity to interact and react, the creative activism cell is activated and growing inside us.

We claim the responsible facilitation of change in an unexpected way being the core function of the creative activism. Therefore orientating well in the context, knowing your place in it and reaching the right ears and eyes is directly affected by the classical problematic of the information overload. To activate the cells in society, we see it essential to make information processing tools and methods open and accessible for the people.

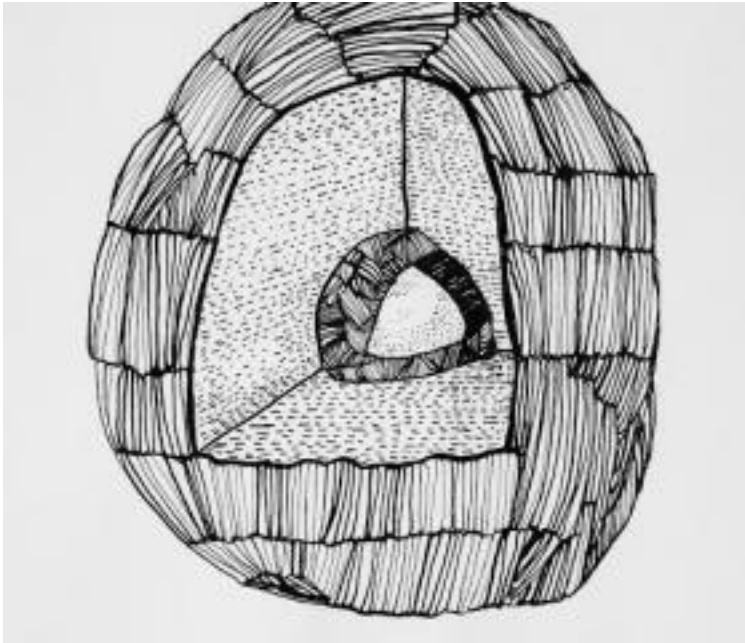
As social beings we have the power to modify and improve our environment: the personal context, life story and personal history makes up the basis of the field in which we operate. Analyzing the kind of world that surrounds one is the first step in opening ones mind to new processes of understanding of the environment. The second step is to research the target group, knowing exactly whom we are sending the message - not only people who might be interested but mainly the ones that must know that. The ones who will keep our message, process and react on it.

There are plenty of theories researching on what activates the cells in society, our approach is to observe, learn the context and get to know the people involved to deliver the message of activism in the right hands and right moment.

**Visuals by:**

Anna-Lena Schroers

# The nucleus of the cell - action



With your head full of thoughts and your body full of energy you can create your own recipe for creative activism. The way is open: experiment, find your own rhythm, your own way of operating, visualize the action and do it. There are some factors to consider before performing the action. These small details help the action to work and avoid getting lost into the mass of daily information or not reaching people.

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**"Art is not a mirror to reflect reality but a hammer to shape it"**  
**Bertolt Brecht**

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**Planning vs. No planning**

Some people come up with an idea and the next moment it's already done. Acting spontaneously from the instant spot, improvising with what you have around you can work out really great. If planning makes you feel like it takes forever before anything happens and you'd rather not do anything at all if you have to plan it too much, then you'd better stop reading right now and get on with it!

However, thinking through your actions and making detailed preparations will not only prepare you for a range of different situations and outcomes but also possibly develop your actions and make them more powerful.

## **Planning & Preparation**

There are a few simple questions you can ask yourself and your team to help solidify your idea and ensure that it works well.

### **Why**

First of all, make sure you know why you are doing the action. Whatever action you plan on doing, it must make sense to you first. If you are convinced about what you are doing and how you will do it, it will work. If you cannot understand why you would do this action when you think about it a bit longer, it is probably a good idea to find a friend with whom you can discuss it or look for another idea which makes more sense. When doing actions you have to be prepared to receive criticism and if you have not thought of your motivation before, you can get lost when passersby approach you with arguments you did not think of beforehand. Also take a moment to think about what your aim is and what you would like this action to achieve, so that you will recognize your own success.

### **What**

What is the essence of the action? If you formulate your action in a simple way, it makes it easier for others to understand and for you to explain. If you can find a positive angle or interesting ways to formulate your message, you will more likely find a good result. *A nice example is an action from the Notankers, a non-profit organization dedicated to banning oil tankers from Canada's Pacific North Coast. To raise awareness for their cause, they printed posters using an environmentally friendly, water-soluble ink and placed them around the streets. When it rained, the posters served as a reminder that oil spills affect everyone - driving people to "Notankers.ca" to take action. <http://vimeo.com/23338793>*

## **Who**

Who do you want to be affected by the action? To know your target is important when thinking about how to design your action and your means of communication. Different targets will be reached by different channels. Some actions might be aimed at the staff of a corporation, others might be aimed directly at members of the public or at the media.

## **Where & When**

Choose the place and time of the action. You can look for a symbolic place where it will be easy to do the action, where it will reach your audience or where it will get a lot of attention. The action might be perceived totally differently if it is takes place in a bus stop, a supermarket, in a museum or the main square. Pretty much the same goes for the timing: you might want to choose a symbolic date, same time as the visit of a prominent person or when there are a lot of people shopping or on the contrary - none at all. *Pussy riot's performance "Punk Prayer - Mother of God, Chase Putin Away!" in Cathedral of Christ the Savior, Moscow, is an example of using a controversial location to amplify your message.*

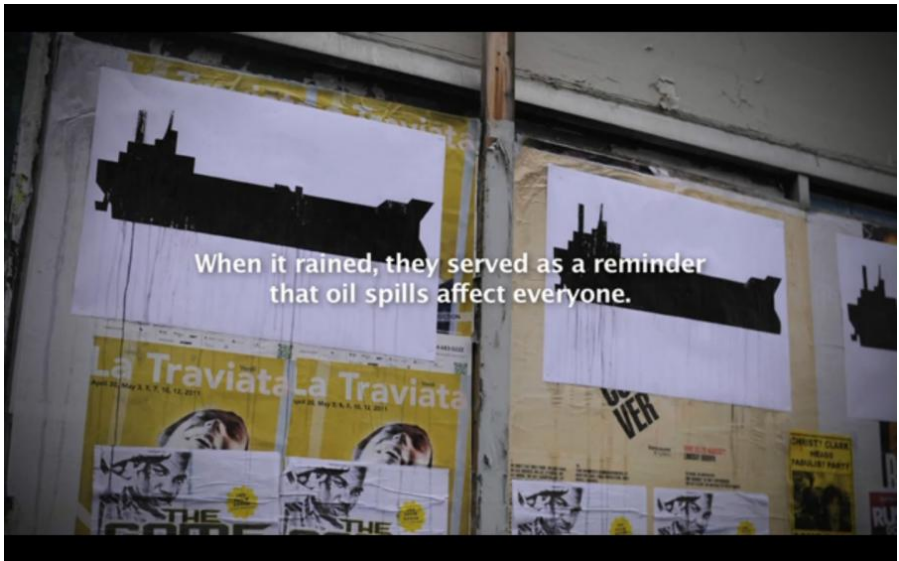
## **How**

Think about how you act. There are infinite possibilities and many tactics you can employ. The purpose of using tactics is to find a critical perspective far from standard models of perception, facts and events.

## **After the action**

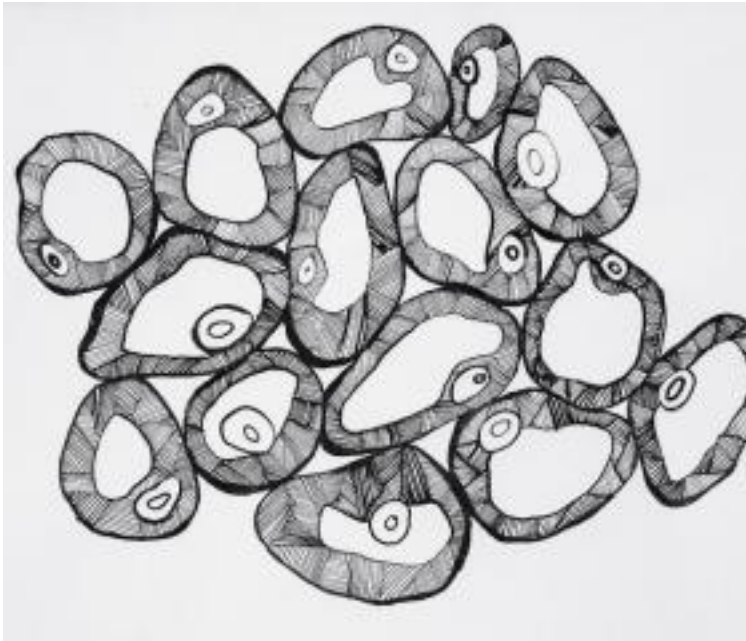
Looking through the documentation, speaking with your team, talking about unexpected reactions from the public and the things that went wrong and right, will hopefully give you a good laugh and help you to be more prepared for future actions.

Concrete methods that helps to plan and evaluate actions can be found in the method chapter.



**Visuals by:**  
Notankers.ca

# Cells become tissue - engage the community



As cells organize themselves to create body tissues, people gather in different groups and become part of diverse communities that form our social fabric. For us community is something more than a group of individuals that share space, it is not the same as neighbors who live together in a flat or a neighborhood who decide about issues together related to the space they share. In our understanding, community is a group of people in a dynamic and transformation relationship with each other. A community share common interests and concerns at determinate time and space. Through this dynamic interrelationship, the individuals build a sense of belonging, a common social identity and a consciousness of themselves as a community. In a community their members organize, cooperate and collaborate between themselves to achieve common goals.

The idea of working together to achieve a common goal it's not new. Historically



people have been collaborating to be able to survive: managing the commons, in villages helping each other harvesting, organizing themselves to achieve working rights creating workers organizations, etc... With the start of the industrialization, the rise of patriarchy and systems of egoistic control and empowerment, the idea of community has been step by step replaced by a more individualistic approach.

Paradoxes live in actual "democratic" societies; our societies provide spaces for people to self-organize and spend time and energy to promote active citizenship at the same time that they develop new laws and social control mechanisms that paralyzes participation. *One recent example of this is the Spanish evictions where the PAH (platform of people affected by the mortgage) with the help of thousands of volunteers collected 5 millions of signatures to bring a popular initiative to change the actual eviction law. After collecting the signatures the proposal went to the parliament and there the parties turned down the proposal.*

The actual system in which we are living, promotes individualism but our lives are dependent on others. It is in relation with others how we grow and develop as an individual, so our life and our social needs collaborate in order to achieve common goals. How life would have been possible if the cells that build us would not have been able to group themselves to create tissue and organs?

From Paulo Freire to feminist theories going through Saul Alinsky, Augusto Boal or Open source has been trying to concretize different methods how to engage communities. We are borrowing some of their concepts, mixing them together and creating a list of essential aspects that for us are part of the process that leads social activation and empowerment.

## **Education for freedom**

We share Freire ideas about education. Education must lead toward liberation of students in opposition of "banking" concept of education- where students are empty vessels to be filled. For him and for us education processes centers on critical consciousness, where the oppressed recognize the causes of their oppression

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**"There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an**

“so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, on which makes possible the pursuit of fuller humanity.”

### **Inclusion**

“Everybody has something to share”, It may sound a bit hippie but inclusion is an important aspect to take into account when we talk about communities and groups. People engage themselves when they feel active part of the process and when they feel they have something to give: to the community, to the issue, to the development of a specific action. Starting from people potentials, things they feel comfortable to do will attract people to participate and encourage them to stay.

instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the ‘practice of freedom’, the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.” Paulo Freire

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### **Analyze the collective reality**

The process of building power and engaging community goes through including the members in the analysis of their reality which will help them to identify and define the problems that they wish to address, the solutions they wish to pursue and the methods they will use to accomplish their solutions. This type of analysis occurs in local settings and focus in a local level, in concrete and specific problems to overcome: for example, the closing of a neighborhood social Centre, dismantling a local park, etc.

### **Action and reflection**

“It is not enough for people to come together in dialog in order to gain knowledge of their social reality”. People in a community must act together upon their environment in order to reflect critically about their reality and to transform it through further action and critical reflection. In this sense action is fundamental because it is the process of changing the reality. Through action and reflection process another different process arises: “conscietización”. Paulo

Freire defines conscientización as the process of developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action. He says that during our development as individuals, we all acquire social myths which have a dominant tendency and so learning is a critical process which depends upon uncovering real problems and actual needs.

## **Free knowledge, sharing knowledge and tools**

"Free software is software that respects your freedom and the social solidarity of your community. So it's free as in freedom", - Richard Stallman. Inspired by the principles of free software the free knowledge movement affirms that all knowledge should be accessible, sharable and interpreted freely for community benefit. Actual communities and societies are built on the deconstruction and reconstruction of past knowledge. We couldn't be how we are without sharing it!

## **Celebration of success**

"If I can't dance is not my revolution", - Emma Goldman

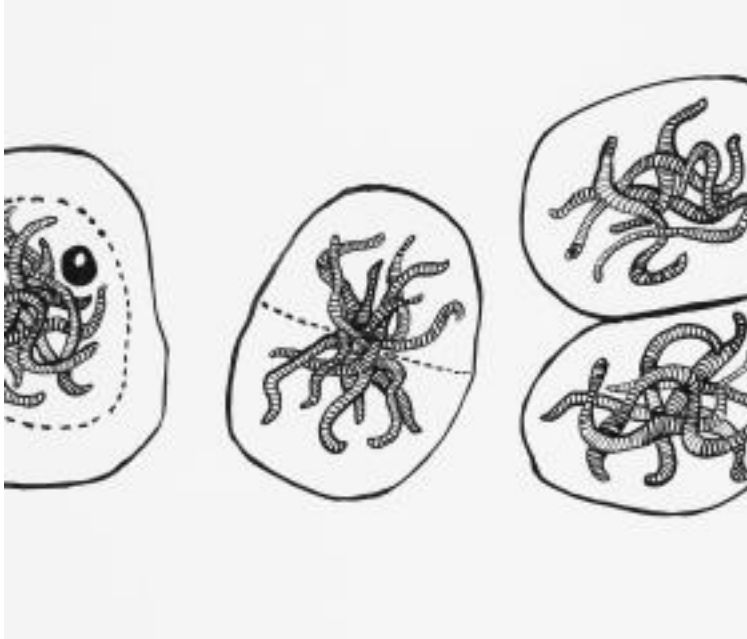
Even if the final result of our action is not what we expected, never forget to celebrate. Celebrating brings people together, developing community and concretize a sense of accomplishment by unifying our stories and common goals.

Cells need other cells in order to function together as an organism. The same should be happening with communities so, for the sake of sustainable and integrated results of any activities, the single member needs to have the potential to share its intentions, opinions and information.

### **Visuals by:**

Anna-Lena Schroers

# Perpetuating the species - spreading the message



Cells need other cells in order to function together as an organism. The same should happen with communities: whether you have a concrete message that you want humanity to know or not— for the sake of sustainable and integrated results of any activities, the single member needs to have the potential to document somehow and share the intentions, results and reflections of the actions performed.

In the Information Society where we live in, seems quite necessary to report on what we do, providing others with the channels and opportunities to make of our action a useful food for thought, piece of knowledge or inspiration for being replicated, adapted or responded. Therefore, the need of assuming the documentation stage as part of our action plan is as important and necessary as the ones mentioned on the previous chapters.

The point is: with your action you probably want to explain something or, if not, just to say *I don't have anything to say*. However, encouraging or critical, encrypted or obvious, the multi-layered message is there waiting for its receiver. Here are some simplified contemplation on the complex topic of communication; without any ambition of setting up a theory on social action communication or underlying concepts of the nature of Communication, we do want to share some of the reflections that have motivated *Masta* Collective since its origins to create this platform for sharing knowledge and experience on creative activism. And most of all, to give some hints on how to approach the documentation process of an action.

## **Who are you?**

Maybe we should have started with this earlier. But it felt necessary to talk about You in the chapter on "Spreading the Message". Even though nowadays, in the open-source-copy-paste-cut-copy century, actual authorship tends to dissolve in between the fragmented eternity of the message itself, there are still opportunities to play with the image of the sender. It might be that nobody believes anything but here are some questions that arise

- Do you want to undersign the action or do it anonymously?
- If You want to sign it, will you do it with your real name (the one written in your passport, if you have such, or the one that your community knows) or invent a pseudonym?
- Will the pseudonym be used for something else, or does it have a disposable function?
- What is the purpose and function of the constructed identity?
- What do you want the receivers to know about it? What don't you want to share?
- If you do want to choose your role, you can take time to answer these questions, or some diligent media worker can do it first and then the game can take some unexpected turns. Unless that is what you wanted.

## **Whom are you talking to?**

In the world of creative activism the targeting of the message varies from a "I don't care" attitude to very carefully planned actions; the very famous snowball effect can happen as well even if it was only an action conceived for your backyard. An old activist proverb says that "it's useful to know with whom you are aiming to speak: nobody, neighbors, your Twitter followers, government, the textile industry, or The Economist".

- Know their language - there are always better ways to approach newspapers than sending a press release, or for talking to neighbors by sticking notes on top of the other. It's good to know what kind of information channels the targeted receivers use as well as the most appropriate approach, tone and chosen language.
- Predict their agenda - even if you have to send that press release, it's better that it falls in the mailbox of the newspaper editor before he/ she has determined the tasks for the following day/week/month. A bit of rethinking and your action pops up in front of the receiver exactly at the place and time they are available for new input and looking for something.
- Have a Plan B - what if the wind blows away your beautiful banner, nobody re-tweets your revolutionary tweets or there is a sudden construction project at the announced "reclaim the street" intervention spot? Without getting paranoid, it's worth it to reconsider the scenario for error cases before getting there.

## **What do you want?**

This is easy - asking yourself "Why am I doing this? How does it make sense? What do I want to change/ not change with this?" Isn't necessarily wasted time spent on rhetorical moaning. Formulating an answer might be helpful in cases such as:

- Recruiting new collaborators and supporters.
- Confusing the representatives of some more serious institutions with tackling the human side of their personality.
- The sudden appearance of paparazzi.
- Gaining understanding and support from your own people.
- Fixing up your own motivation.
- Simply, documenting your working process for analyzing the experimented tactics, tools and methods.

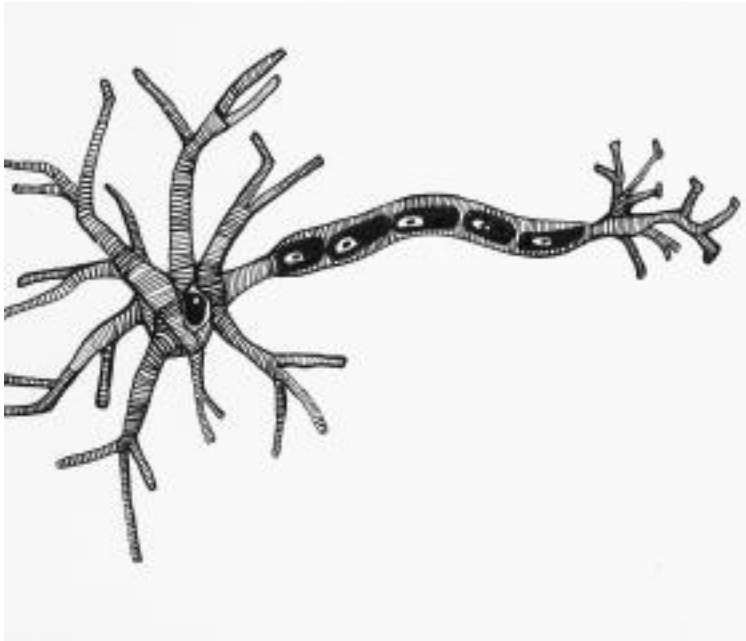
Knowing your role, audience and purpose, makes it way more fun to choose from the various opportunities and communication tools available, be it a giant guerrilla moss graffiti on the wall opposite the headquarters of a forestry company, your face on a breaking news broadcast or the viral hysteria of sharing the pictures of activist avatars.

Till here we have compiled some ideas and posed some questions that may help you on creating your own documentation methodology and identifying your main communication needs in order to find the media tools you want to use. But what happens when you feel you don't fit in the established media universe? What if the media are not mere tools and can actually become spaces for action on itself? Then is when you are called to join the Media (Re)Conquest

**Visuals by:**

Anna-Lena Schroers

# The neurons - Inspiration from outside



Cells communicate with others and take information from outside. Our neurons got some input from these inspirators.

## **Paulo Freire and Pedagogy of the oppressed**

Paulo Freire is a Brazilian educator and philosopher who is a leading advocate of critical pedagogy. He is well known for his influential work, 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' which is considered one of the foundational texts of the critical pedagogy movement. While working, Freire became aware of the economic, political, and

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**"Education could be a subversive force", - Paulo Freire**

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social domination resulting from paternalism. Paternalism leads to a culture of silence, which keeps people from confronting their oppression. He turned this philosophy to pedagogy because "the whole education system was one of the major instruments for the maintenance of this culture of silence." One of Freire's central tenets was that "education is freedom" that leads toward true liberation and that the "banking" concept of education - where students are empty vessels to be filled, acts as an instrument of oppression.

His philosophy on education centers on critical consciousness, where the oppressed recognize the causes of their oppression "so that through transformative action they can create a new situation, which makes possible the pursuit of fuller humanity." He introduced problem-posing education; this type of education, in opposition to banking education, involves "listening, dialogue and action" and is an instrument that leads people to grow their consciousness and to social transformation.

His work, theory and concepts have influenced lots of people to action and social transformation.

If you want to know more:

<http://www.freire.org/>

<http://www.pedagogyoftheoppressed.com/>

## **Saul Alinsky's community organizing model**

Saul Alinsky began community organising career in the late 1930s. As a part of his field research job as a graduate student in criminology at the University of Chicago he was to develop a juvenile delinquency program in Chicago's "Back of the Yards," neighborhood downwind of the Chicago Stockyards--a foul-smelling and crime-ridden slum. When Alinsky arrived, the

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**"My critics are right when they call me an outside agitator. When a community, any kind of community, is hopeless and helpless,**

Congress of Industrial Organizations was organising the stockyard workers living there. Expanding the CIO model beyond workplace issues, Alinsky organized the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (BYNC) from local neighborhood groups, ethnic clubs, union locals, bowling leagues and an American Legion Post. The success of BYNC in getting expanded city services and political power started Alinsky off on a long career of organizing poor urban communities around the country.

His theory said that behind every successful social movement there is a community or a network of communities. These communities don't just happen. They must be organized. Someone has to build strong enough relationships between people so they can support each other through long and sometimes dangerous social change struggles. Or, if the community already exists, someone has to help transform it to support political action. Sometimes that requires reorganizing the community by identifying individuals who can move the community to action.

This process of building a mobilisable community is called "community organizing." It involves "the craft" of building an enduring network of people, who identify with common ideals and who can engage in social action on the basis of those ideals. Community organizing is the process of building power that includes people with a problem in defining their community, defining the problems that they wish to address, the solutions they wish to pursue and the methods they will use to accomplish their solutions. In general, community organizing is the work that occurs in local settings to empower individuals, build relationships and create action for social change.

**Visuals by:**

it requires somebody from outside to come in and stir things up. That's my job -- to unsettle them, to make them start asking questions, to teach them to stop talking and start acting, because the fat cats in charge never hear with their ears, only through their rears", - Saul Alinsky.

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Anna-Lena Schroers

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