

Public Agenda (30)



At any given time, there are a few issues that are receiving "public attention." These change dramatically from day to day giving us little time to actually think about an issue, before another one takes its place. The stories offer little real information, especially about alternatives or opportunities for public involvement. Even the "news" is entertainment. Who decides what issues are important, what issues are on the public agenda? If the public agenda is simply the set of issues that people happen to have in their heads at any given time then we can say that a "public agenda" exists. If the public agenda consists of issues that ought to be considered in a public way, particularly how does society use our limited resources and what is truly important, then the public agenda is a far cry from it could be. We need to think about what belongs on the public agenda and what we can do to put it there and keep it there. This may mean working in opposition to — and in cooperation with — existing media systems. It must certainly involve developing diverse and specialized "public agendas."

Written by Douglas Schuler

Strategic Capacity (34)



Occasionally, a small group with meager resources fighting a powerful foe, actually wins. One of the most famous is David vanquishing Goliath. A thousand other struggles, against poverty, against oppression, against environmental degradation, retell the story with equally improbable outcomes. What's the secret to these unlikely successes? Resources don't tell the whole story: the powerful group sometimes fails while the impoverished group succeeds. Neither does the idea of "political opportunity." And characteristics such as dedication, drive, emotional commitment don't always portend success or failure of activist struggles or social movements. According to Ganz, "Leaders devise strategy in interaction with their environments." He stresses that leadership teams are more likely to have effective strategic capacity when they include "insiders" and "outsiders", have strong and weak "ties" (connections) to a variety of networks, and have "knowledge of diverse collective action repertoires." Based on Ganz's reading (2004) of Bruner (1990), "Strategic thinking is reflexive and imaginative, based on ways leaders learn to reflect on the past, attend to the present, and anticipate the future."

Written by Douglas Schuler

Public Domain Characters (115)



Humankind has generated a magnificent pantheon of fictional and not-so-fictional characters over the millennia of its existence. Unbelievably enough, this rich legacy may be stopped cold through a transfer of the ownership of humankind's stories and images to corporate rather than shared "commons" ownership. The natural processes of creating, sharing, and building on stories has been subverted into a process of "claiming" the world of stories as private property. This limits artistic creativity and stunts the growth of collective wisdom.

We must encourage the open source creation and use of "characters." This will enable artists to build richly on each other's work. Characters are not only an aspect of stories for entertainment; they also serve as sources of inspiration, community coherence devices, and tools of thought for creative problem solving. The development and sharing of open source characters can help reclaim these timeless functions.

Written by John Thomas and Douglas Schuler

Tactical Media (131)



Many actions by political and social organizations go unnoticed. Sometimes they are ignored by the media, sometimes their lines of argument are unintelligible to non-activist audiences. Nevertheless, the circulation of information about social struggles is a fundamental aspect of successful political interventions and deserves careful planning.

Tactical Media (TM) are practices that engage with the production of counter-information and with its modes and possibilities of dissemination. They are marked by an ongoing attempt to experiment with the dynamics of information dissemination, searching for the most effective ways to reach an audience. Examples of TM range from Do-It-Yourself radio shows to humorous pranks used to spark up discussions about social issues. TM actions can help activists attract the attention of the mainstream media, as well as enable them to convey their message in a way that is intelligible to the audience.

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