

chapter thirteen

THE ART(S) OF NONVIOLENCE

13.1 INTRODUCTION

As many authors (eg Wilson 1999:326) point out, the environmental crisis is so enormous that averting it relies not just on governmental or corporate action,- it requires the engagement of all of society. Yet the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme is reported as saying that environmentalism's dull but worthy image is not working and that its often negative message is not reaching the hearts of people (Peatling 2003:3). This chapter summarises my findings that the arts provide ways of engaging all of society through their inclusivity, efficient conversionary/educative properties, emotiveness, flamboyance and positive creativity.

As I have argued in the journal *Social Alternatives* (Branagan 2003b), and elsewhere (Branagan 2002b, 2003a, 2003d, 2003e, 2005), the arts are an important but largely unrecognised part of nonviolent praxis, contributing to campaigns in a myriad of ways. This chapter discusses, in the context of theoretical nonviolence and, to a lesser degree, educational theory, what effects protest art-forms had on audiences they were directed at and on those using them. In section 5.5, I discussed the benefits of art in the fields of education, conflict resolution, psychotherapy, and community development as well as activism, and hypothesised that the arts would have considerable benefits for nonviolence praxis. In this chapter I confirm that hypothesis, describing the ability of the arts to attract attention, efficiently communicate ideas and emotions, and impact effectively on a number of levels. I examine how protest arts have been used by activists and non-aligned artists to create social change, through their ability to engage the mass media, reach wide audiences, educate people about particular issues or philosophies, and convert them to supportive positions. As we saw in section 4.6.2, this conversion of third parties and opponents to the role of supporter enables movements to grow, and withdraws consent from unjust, violent

The Art(s) of Nonviolence

or ecologically unsustainable practices, and those who perpetrate them. Art-forms such as film-making and journalism are important elements of conversion, and new technology has assisted activists to work more professionally, and to find alternative outlets to the mass media. All of these benefits relate to the movement's attempts to proselytise to audiences *outside* the movement.

Other benefits to the eco-pax movement from different art-forms are categorised into three main areas. The first area involves holistic benefits such as the maintenance of a balance of protest and positive, creative action, and ensuring that a campaign's means remain compatible with its ends, through remaining true to its stated commitment to nonviolence even under duress. These benefits relate to conversion; they also assist activists' safety and morale. The second area of benefits of the arts are primarily felt *within* the movement, assisting people to act, helping the movement to grow and develop, and making the movement sustainable. A third benefit of the arts may be regarded as tactical, in that they assist civil disobedience to be more effective in achieving specific short-term objectives, such as stopping work at a mining or logging operation.

13.2 CONVERSIONARY BENEFITS OF THE ARTS

Just as many art-forms are used in nonviolence (see Chapter Five), their purposes are equally varied. Among the most important are their use in attracting the attention of the general public and the media, and then communicating to, educating and converting these groups. This is not merely a case of an enlightened clique lecturing to the rest of society:- the communication and educational aspects of the arts also impact on fellow protesters.

As the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci argued, using the concept of *hegemony*, powerful groups often do not require force to impose their values on the less powerful; rather, the latter come to accept that differences in power and wealth are natural and just, and so they consent to the rule of their 'betters' (cited in Danaher 2000:48). Thus, although hegemony affects material and social practices, it works largely at the level of people's minds¹, often

¹ As Summy (1995:166) writes: "... for the oppressed to gain unity of purpose and sustain a commitment of nonviolence, they may first not only have to liberate themselves from a

The Art(s) of Nonviolence

involving subtle mind control such as wartime propaganda (see Clark 1997:103-123) or media editorial policies that favour corporate interests. Therefore, violence is not needed (indeed, it is counterproductive) to change people's minds so they refuse to accept unjust conditions. Instead, what aids this process of withdrawing their consent is anything that can liberate people from debilitating mindsets such as the paralysis of fear experienced during the 'Mutually Assured Destruction' doctrines of the Cold War (see Macy and Seed 1983), and the later widespread belief that globalisation (in the sense of unchecked global capitalism) is unstoppable. The latter part of this chapter will show that the arts provide powerful tools of empowerment, inspiring people to act, fortifying and bonding them, and helping them build strong, sustainable movements. This section concentrates on showing how the arts also provide important conversionary/educative tools to change debilitating mindsets,- utilising many elements to undermine and subvert conditioned responses, occasioning significant and deep-seated learning.

13.2.1 Conversion

Section 4.6.2 introduced the important nonviolent process of conversion. Conversion involves bringing third parties and even opponents around to a particular point of view through persuasive reasoning, thereby helping the movement grow and eroding the bases of opponents. The arts are an extremely useful tool of conversion, for a number of reasons. Initially, they help to 'build bridges' with opponents, finding commonalities such as humour or love of music, and initiating dialogue which may lead to conversion. The arts are also used more directly in trying to convert, through conveying emotion, couching persuasive arguments in artistic modes, through the enhancement of communication and attracting of attention, and through the creation of an atmosphere conducive to dialogue and 'emancipatory' learning.

Street-theatre is an important medium, because at best it is moving, informative and subtle, gently converting audiences. Through it, eco-pax messages can be imparted in colourful scenes with clever or humorous dialogue, and satirical themes. A policeman I befriended at

series of structural impediments, but also overcome deeply-rooted cultural, even subconscious, forces.”

The Art(s) of Nonviolence

Roxby Downs in 1984 responded warmly to our theatre there, and gave valuable feedback, telling me which performance he had preferred. As well as creating conversation, the satire enabled him to see us as passionate individuals rather than a sociopathic mob. He also heard our message, and may have been influenced to change his mind about uranium mining, particularly if such actions recurred.

Music is another way of imparting messages and educating in an enjoyable and 'catchy' way. Another policeman told me some time after a forest blockade that it had actually been an enjoyable action for him to police, but added: "I couldn't get that damned song out of my head for weeks"! Similarly, a policewoman I encountered in Perth police station in 1989 remembered a song from a protest, and proceeded to sing it in the station. Clearly, these songs entered their respective psyches despite their resistance, and resonated deeply there for a significant period. In addition to any impact the lyrics made on them, the police were affected through the art-form of music long after the protest ended by the collective spirit of the protesters and the mood of their songs - joyful, sad, angry, brave or determined.

Attempts to convert police are important because such conversions can be a pivotal point in nonviolent campaigns, for example in the overthrow of Slobadan Milosevic, when police and the army largely ignored the order to disperse protesters (Ackermann & Duvall 2000:488; Branagan 2004b:13). As section 10.4.6 showed, the Jabiluka blockade was assisted by good relations between many police and protesters.

13.2.1.1 Art's holism aids conversion

Art in the case studies also helped create diverse, holistic protests, wherein the whole range of human expression – such as the Franklin's music, the theatre at Roxby, CANC's fire-twirling, and the rapping at Jabiluka - became available as media for dissent, not just a limited range such as making speeches. By using the arts, activists could impact on audiences at a greater number of levels,- emotional and physical as well as intellectual, whereas activities such as speech-making and pamphleteering, while valid, do not utilise so many levels. The arts make more use of nonverbal communication, which is "an extraordinarily powerful form of communication" (Andersen 1999:1), and one which is

more likely to be believed than verbal communication, according to education researcher Betty Haslett (1976:8). Much of this nonverbal communication is universal (Stefani 2004, online) and thus transcends language barriers. June Boyce-Tillman, who uses music to assist conflict resolution, claims that whereas words separate and classify, music brings together, and both poles are needed for the balance which has been lacking since music became marginalised and trivialised, its healing powers no longer recognised (1996:209-214).

Art's emotive and visual content is also important in creating events that are memorable. Recent research by the Hamburg-based Gewis Institute indicates that most television viewers completely forget what they have seen on the news the previous evening, with the news items best remembered being those with an emotional content or which were accompanied by strong pictures (*Courier Mail* 30 July 2004:16). As one protester commented to me, you often forget what the speeches were about, but some protest scenes are so extraordinary and spectacular you never forget them (Westhorpe, Doug 2004, pers.comm., 2 July; see also Cooke et al 2000:108-9). Social critic Ralston Saul opines:

We all know the uncontrollable, liberating or inspiring effects music can have on us. As can images in a more direct way. These are effects that language can only very rarely accomplish, not higher or lower arts, but different balances, different functions (1997:65)²

The arts used thus can be seen as what Peavey (2000) describes as *heart politics*, where politics is not viewed dualistically as an intellectual exercise divorced from emotional life: rather the two are intimately connected, – and 'being emotional' is a normal state of affairs rather than an insinuation of irrationality.

Even on the intellectual level, arts can provoke different types of thought and responses. Arts can engage areas of the brain which think in symbols or archetypes rather than words, or holistically rather than linearly, or intuitively rather than rationally, employing 'right brain' rather than 'left brain' mental activity (Edwards, 1999:xii). The arts can thus

² Zen practitioner Charlotte Joko Beck goes further, stating that the deepest experiences of life are ultimately nonverbal (1989:69).

The Art(s) of Nonviolence

complement 'left brain' activities such as speech-making, increasing the likelihood of conversion.

13.2.2 Liminal atmosphere

'Liminal' is a term derived by anthropologist Victor Turner to describe times when the usual norms and roles in social life are momentarily suspended, and replaced with an overwhelming – even sacred - sense of community or collective camaraderie (1969:94-130; 1982:20-59). Such times are characterised by playfulness, experimentation, diversity, freedom, ambiguity and lessened obedience to authority:- behaviour out of the ordinary is allowed to occur. There is "fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities ... a striving after new forms and structures", as Somerville experienced at the 1983 Pine Gap protest (1995:18-19).

The creation of a liminal atmosphere is a key function of the arts, as such an atmosphere is extremely conducive to conversion. In the blockades discussed here, music, theatre, poetry, sculpture, fire-stick twirling and juggling entertained crowds of police, workers and protesters, usually creating events that were celebratory rather than threatening. In tandem, a plethora of artistic actions created a carnival atmosphere which *enthralled* and *included* audiences, whereas crowds with minimal or violent art (such as racist songs) can be frightening and alienating (see Bambery 1996).

As noted in previous chapters, many protesters felt that their involvement in musical, flamboyant demonstrations were extremely significant moments in their lives, often changing them forever (eg Waud 1984:260; Parkes in Ricketts 2003:125; Nano, Louise pers. comm., 12 May 2004). Those observing or policing the action are also liable to be affected, both by the emotions and spectacle of the moment, and by the arguments of those responsible for the spectacle. The usual barriers to social intercourse have been broken down and individuals with widely differing world-views are able to converse (see Figure 111).



Figure 111: Conversion in action: opponents fraternise at Terania Creek, 1979.

Additionally, there are *tactical* advantages to the creation of a liminal atmosphere, because, with unusual behaviour condoned at such times, civil disobedience actions such as blockading a road are liable to succeed for longer before the authorities take action to stop them. As with the games played on the road during the forest blockades, **good-humoured chaos was deliberately engineered to further tactical objectives**. Many artistic activists I have worked with have been influenced by the Dadaists (see Aronson, 1998:57-69) and their successors, the Yippies and Situationists; the latter having devised the “headiest mix of the main ingredients of sixties activism, - protest, art, counter-culture and fun” (Marwick 1998:32). Modern activists have continued to use and indeed to develop these ingredients, adding them to active resistance to create an effective form of nonviolent action.

13.2.3 Attracting media attention

For a movement to grow and impart its ethos widely and quickly, an important strategy is to engage with the mass media. As we saw with the coverage of the Roxby Downs

blockades (section 7.6.8.1), there are constant problems of editorial bias by many operators³ (see also Chomsky 1977:32-35; Windschuttle & Windschuttle 1981; Saul 1997:63-67). Nevertheless, the mass media has a wide audience and great influence, and can be a valuable ally in a campaign. As we saw in the Franklin, CANC and Jabiluka actions particularly, many activists planned artistic or theatrical protests to achieve maximum media attention. The size of a rally can be one factor in getting attention. However, a small but sensational action can be just as effective, as rallies are now relatively commonplace and are not always considered newsworthy⁴. The most likely to be effective is a large action which is also creative, humorous and imaginative, as evidenced by the front page coverage of the 2003 peace rallies (see Figure 7). Photographs in such coverage can greatly increase the newspaper space devoted to the action; strong visual images also increase television coverage.

At the Franklin, protest actions often involved an element of *theatricality* in order to attract media attention:

With the backdrop of river and ocean, police blue and forest green, gaudy boat and technicolour bulldozer, one has an exceptional setting for theatre. Theatre of the environment *uses* the vulture of the media (usually a tool of the establishment) to present the story; we dangle and perform, often in precarious circumstances, making ourselves and our act irresistible to the press. It is a play, an irreverent game, yet at the same time it provides a vital conduit for messages otherwise unable to be transmitted into a monopolistic realm. Lacking financial resources, we penetrate this powerful field as if by magic and in doing so create an alchemy for change (Cohen 1997:29).

Scalmer (2002) also uses an extended metaphor of protests as ‘theatre’ on public and quasi-public stages. Although he inexplicably categorises sophisticated artistic protests as ‘gimmicks’, a term that implies artifice and lack of substance, he shows them to be “historically coherent, intriguing and politically powerful ... [with] an incalculable impact on social movements, social change and political culture” (2002:175). Concentrating on the

³ Andreas (2004:56-60) exposes the militaristic agenda of major media corporations, and their links with weapons manufacturers such as General Electric.

⁴ For example, a global justice protest of 500 people, including seven arrests, at the Sydney Opera House on 30 August 2005, gained minimal coverage by the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian* on the following day.

The Art(s) of Nonviolence

1960s and 1970s, his work describes the inception, growth and changing nature of such ‘gimmicks’ or ‘dissent events’, and relates their theatricality to the mass media’s insatiable desire for novelty and entertainment.



Figure 112: Chaelundi protesters atop tripod, in front-page *Sydney Morning Herald* coverage.

Amidst the seriousness of civil disobedience, theatre’s humour and flamboyance averts hostility and engages the media. The arts generally are invaluable in gaining the attention of the media, but in marked contrast to violent protests, much of this attention is positive. This creation of a spectacle rather than an angry mob helps the process of conversion. The more spectacular the action, the more widespread it is broadcast by the media, as different news agencies seek newsworthy items. This process garners support from opponents and neutral parties, and also inspires other activists to be similarly outspoken and creative.

The symbolism of active resistance was also useful in attracting media attention during the forest blockades. Despite fears that such actions would alienate onlookers, burials and tripod occupations created powerful and dramatic images for media, imbuing protesters’

actions with connotations of audacity and determination (Figures 112 and 128). Thus NEFA's move towards effective physical blockading and away from TWS' emphasis on symbolic acts aimed at conversion still managed to achieve publicity, and in fact increased this:

Ironically, it was this feature of NEFA's blockades that sustained media interest the most (Ricketts 2003:138).

It is important to note that I have heard a number of protesters complain that many actions are organised primarily for television cameras⁵. Such an attitude can lead to conservatism of tactics, as organisers endlessly weigh up the potential of any action to be viewed badly by media. I felt the frustration of having an occupation of the National Association of Forest Industries (NAFI) offices and several innocuous actions banned by TWS, such as when the NAFI were flying journalists to Tasmania to enlist their support for further logging. I intended to greet their return at Melbourne airport with boxes containing cow manure, labelled 'NAFI Information Kits'. This was banned because it might have reflected badly on TWS⁶, yet a similar action in Tasmania involving underpants⁷ received widespread and good-humoured radio publicity, precisely because of its irreverent and slightly vulgar nature. As Chapter Eleven showed, the development of active resistance was a backlash against such TWS conservatism.

It should also be noted that even if ignored by the media, flamboyant or colourful actions impact *directly* on onlookers, possibly leading to conversions. Although the number of these observers is smaller, they may be more affected by an interesting performance/action than someone who views it through the filter of a television broadcast, and the biases of television commentators.

⁵ Several songs by the 1980s Australian protest band *Redgum* also make this complaint.

⁶ As a rural permaculturalist who regularly works with manure, I considered this squeamishness further evidence of the middle-class and urbanised nature of the TWS hierarchy.

⁷ As part of the campaign to save Exit Cave, a colleague from TWS Hobart and I sent then prime minister Keating, who had just visited the 'Holeproof' underwear factory, a pair of underpants and a request for him to "keep Exit Cave hole-proof".

13.2.4 Communicating messages

Once the media's attention has been gained, art-forms can help communicate the movement's messages and ideas to a wide audience, as well as to people who directly observe the action. As environmental activist/artist and researcher David Curtis has noted, art-forms can encapsulate complex information and communicate it in a simple way (2005:15). This is an important advantage over, for example, purely text-based communication, as few people in this age of 'information overload'⁸ have time to read and assimilate long tracts involving complex issues. Similarly, traditional news sources and modes are losing their primacy. Recent research shows that young people in the United States, bored and disillusioned by mainstream media, are increasingly getting information and formulating their political views from satirical shows and fake news comedy (Seriously Funny Politics (audio recording) 2004). Just as a picture supposedly paints a thousand words, so too can art-forms such as satire or cartoons convey a complex argument, and - just as importantly - its emotional content, in a popular and easily digestible form.

Banners too can assist in this respect, as protests are often filmed by the media without many (or any) people being interviewed as to their grievances. Banners are thus vital in imparting messages and indicating the plethora of groups involved (as well as making crowds look bigger). During the 2003 peace rallies, one newspaper interviewed and photographed banner painters for its front page (see Figure 129). Another printed satirical song lyrics and slogans (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 February 2003:3), this being an encouraging sign that mainstream journalists are beginning to give protestors some credence. The wit of those messages, many spread globally via the internet, likely contributed to this coverage.

13.2.5 Arts exposure of repression and hidden agendas

Returning to Gramsci's concept of *hegemony*, states and their institutions try to maintain popular consent for their authority through a variety of processes that disguise their position

⁸ According to Ralston Saul, clouds of information emanate largely as rhetoric and propaganda from elites, obscuring the real power of corporate interests and acting as a steam-release device for the masses (1997:45-6; see also discussion of 'data smog' in Heylighen 2000).

The Art(s) of Nonviolence

of dominance (Danaher et al 2000:86-7). According to this conceptualisation, the processes of government and law are largely an empty performance designed to draw attention away from their real work, which is to establish the rule of one group and maintain their wealth and privilege. Although this has been somewhat challenged as overly simplistic by Foucault's argument that power is in fact a complex, ever-changing flow, with relations between different groups changing with circumstances and time (cited in Danaher et al 2000:86-7), it still has a strong element of truth, with large corporations and governments often working in a covert manner to support each other to the detriment of most people and the environment (Barnet and Muller 1974; Cocksedge et al 1982; George 1990; Moore 2002).



Figure 113: Jacqui Katona (on left) and radiation-suited activists display 'Wanted' and 'Convicted' posters of Liberal politicians.

Art can play an important role in exposing these covert processes, and promoting open, factual debate. Although the notion of truth has been derided as false by some post-modernists (parodied by Watt 2003:10-11), it is probably more helpful to see it, following Foucault, as a valid but relative concept. That is, truth is neither absolute nor essential, but dependent on discourses and institutions, and is complex, layered, changing and overlapping rather than simple (Danaher et al 2000:42). Arts can expose truths about hidden agendas in a fashion more accessible to the public than can academic analyses -

The Art(s) of Nonviolence

such as ‘critical discourse analysis’ (see Wodak & Meyer 2002) - which employ difficult terminology and concepts, and thus speak only to the initiated. Art, however, with its simple form and complex content, employs what art critic Martin Heidegger has described as the “creative preserving of truth” (quoted in Grishin 2001:182). Heidegger, like the Marxist Ernst Fischer, believes there is something in the creation of art which “intervenes and transfers it into a higher spiritual realm, where truth is beauty and beauty is truth” (cited in Grishin 2001:182).⁹ Through the arts, activists such as Kevin Gilbert (1994) and Oodgeroo Noonuccal have employed both truth and beauty to challenge the silence on issues such as the *stolen generations*, while Linda Jaivin (author of novels and the play ‘Seeking Djira’) and Arnold Zable¹⁰ (2001) have exposed the fallacies surrounding the imprisonment of asylum seekers.

The arts were used in this fashion at Jabiluka. Street-theatre, placards and writings brought into sharp contrast the oppressive treatment of activists by the state apparatus allied with the mine’s owners, compared with the nonviolence (for the most part) of the activists. Figure 113 shows Jacqui Katona and others carrying placards designed like ‘Wanted posters’, with the wanted criminal being Robert Hill, then ‘Minister for the Environment’.¹¹ Such actions exposed the inconsistencies of the state’s tolerance of massive long-term violence towards the Mirrar people and the environment (and potential violence through possible creation of nuclear weapons) created by the mine. At the same time, minor acts of dissent, such as writing chalk slogans on a footpath, were criminalised. By exposing such inconsistencies, these nonviolent artistic acts can help reduce in the public’s mind the legitimacy of the mine and the state’s support of it. Perceived persecution of such activists can create public sympathy and increased support for the campaign against the mine.

By seeking to reveal and promote what they see as the truth about certain issues, these artist/activists are employing a version of Gandhi’s *satyagraha* or ‘truth force’, an important part of nonviolence. While still seeing the truth as relative, they are articulating

⁹ If we accept this, then art can supply the missing spiritual component which Cameron (1996) argues is needed to transform violence into peace.

¹⁰ Arnold is the brother of performance protester Benny Zable.

¹¹ He was colloquially known as the ‘Minister *against* the Environment’!

The Art(s) of Nonviolence

in a nonviolent manner their perception of the truth, as part of a dialogue aimed at reaching consensus, or finding the truth together. They can say the unsayable, because artists such as cartoonists or actors, like court jesters, have traditionally been given greater licence to speak more frankly than others. As with the aphorism ‘many a true word spake in jest’, artists can use comedy to ‘get away with’ speaking unpalatable truths. They can even distort the truth, blowing it into ridiculous misrepresentation as satire, in order to maintain an overall truth or redress an imbalance created by powerful groups promulgating furbies. As one of the 20th century’s greatest satirists, George Orwell, said:

Every joke is a tiny revolution ... [W]hatever destroys dignity and brings down the mighty from their seats, preferably with a bump, is funny. And the bigger they fall, the bigger the joke (Seriously Funny Politics (audio recording) 2004).

13.2.6 Conversion and education

Education in social movements was raised in section 2.3.3, and the close relationship between education and conversion was noted in section 4.6.2. The arts are an important part of these educative/conversionary processes. As we saw in Chapter Five, educators have noted how using the arts – particularly multi-arts – significantly aid educational outcomes, assisting in multi-skilling, enhancing the grasp of difficult concepts, aiding memory retention, extending attention spans, and increasing concentration and enjoyment of learning. In a related vein, Chapter Five showed how conflict resolution practitioners and therapists also find the arts important and inherently radical. The arts provide powerful, often non-verbal, tools to resolve long-standing conflicts and to heal deep traumas, and assist people to develop better communication skills and to release their creative potential. They encourage collaborative exploration, are “inherently positive and disarming” (Starr 2001:36), raise self-esteem and facilitate cooperation and problem-solving (Callaghan 1996). Community development workers also found the arts useful in regenerating communities, with music in particular working “at the deepest level in the individual and in the community” (Boyce-Tillman 1996:210).

The arts have similarly benefited protest movements, dealing, as they do, with educational processes, and engaging in conflictive, stressful, even traumatic work. As shown above, the arts are extremely efficacious as a medium for conversion and nonviolent social change.

The Art(s) of Nonviolence

They can help communicate complex information in a simple way, and can facilitate the transfer of information by associating it with enjoyable art-forms, and by doing this in a liminal atmosphere. The diverse, holistic and grassroots aspects of arts-based activism, as well as further aspects discussed below all facilitate the *instrumental* and *communicative processes* of education. At the *emancipatory* level, a liminal atmosphere and a plethora of art-forms impacting holistically in a variety of emotional and intellectual ways can be life-changing to participants, and can trigger the beginnings of deep philosophical change in audiences. These are important, deep-seated learnings occasioned by artistic activism.

The changes in people's philosophies that occur through emancipatory learnings as a consequence of artistic actions are difficult to quantify with any statistical exactitude, as is the effectiveness of the arts in building, maintaining and spreading a movement (see below). These changes are rarely immediately apparent, and may initially impact largely at a subconscious level. However, if widespread, they could lead to significant social change through a radicalised population. This too is difficult to quantify, as it is some time before altered community attitudes manifest obviously as change, especially if this is aimed as much at transforming the nature of power relations as it is about short-term political reform. Further research, including quantitative studies, is needed to determine how much of this learning occurs, and how this affects wider social change. Recent research by David Curtis, however, which uses both qualitative and quantitative methods, indicates that art has considerable benefits for educating people about environmental issues:

... helping increase understanding and knowledge, aiding in communication and enabling people to be more engaged, provoking changes in individuals, communities or society, affirming beliefs, evoking an emotional response, and providing a spiritual dimension that makes people more connected with the natural environment (Curtis & Curtis 2005:3).

13.2.7 Art in the wider campaign: inclusive, grassroots

The direct actions catalogued earlier were often accompanied by cultural activity in the wider community. This is another example of inclusivity, where anyone could help the protest in whatever capacity or arts they felt comfortable, and where ideally there was no hierarchy putting those chaining themselves to bulldozers above people organising art exhibitions. Artwork in the wider campaign also addressed the nonviolence tenet of

The Art(s) of Nonviolence

conversion:- as with other nonviolent activists, artists sought to persuade rather than coerce. For the Franklin River campaign, *Redgum* toured, and *Goanna* recorded a song. A number of exhibitions were organised for the Jabiluka campaign, including in Darwin and Wagga Wagga (see Figure 114). Concerts and ‘Brackets and Jams’ nights (open microphone performance evenings) contributed to raising awareness and fund-raising, and they were able to reach hitherto unaffected members of the community, disseminate information, and acquire recruits for blockades. During the mingling at such grassroots events and away from the clashes of blockades, people could be informed and affected on a one-to-one basis by activists and their ideas. This contrasts with seeing protestors as an (often frightening or even violent) mob, which is a typical portrayal by the mass media, who tend to seek out violence and sensationalism. Thus such cultural events were at least as effective at conversion as direct actions, and perhaps more so.

13.2.8 Art inspired by direct action

A related use of the arts is by those who may be inspired by a campaign, but not have any official part in it, or even see themselves as part of any movement. There is a large number of people in all facets of the arts who create with particular messages or themes underlying their work, be they ecofeminist, indigenous, environmental, lesbian and gay rights, disability advocates, animal liberationist, pacifist or to do with justice for prisoners, such as the theatre company *Somebody’s Daughter*. Other examples include the *Bangarra Dance Troupe*, *Circus Oz*, the music of *Yothu Yindi*, *Tiddas* and John Butler (see Murphy 2004:4-5), novels such as ‘The Monkey Wrench Gang’ (Abbey 2000), ‘Pemulwuy’ (Wilmot 1987), ‘Hook’s Mountain’ (McQueen 1982), the poetry of Judith Wright, children’s books (eg Wild & Argent 1998), and the paintings of Gordon Bennett (see Croft 2001:41) and George Gittoes (see Hart 1995).

Scalmer notes that anti-Hansonites in the 1990s moved increasingly from direct contestation of the racist *One Nation* party to parody and to autonomous celebrations of multiculturalism, in an effort to get better media coverage (2002:166-170). After my early exhibitions on The Bike Ride, my activism slowly moved in a similar direction,- from reactive blockading to autonomous painting. Increasingly, my work included painting for

and organising exhibitions with social justice, environment and peace themes, such as 'Ippeltye Irreme (Sorry)' in Alice Springs 1999, and the multi-media Armidale exhibition 'A Peace of Black Earth', which featured some forty-five painters, musicians, sculptors and poets (see Branagan & Spence 2002). Figure 130 shows my 2003 painting 'Gorge, Yourself', which celebrates Gumbainggeri country (near Bellingen, NSW) and criticises the impact that sheep have had on it. It also criticises over-consumption, and the sheeplike way many Australians let the country be dragged into war with Iraq. This work was less stressful and marginally better paid than blockading (though more solitary), yet still involved social change work in which I could engage while raising a family. It could thus be seen as principled nonviolence in that it involved work and lifestyle, and not just occasional bouts of activism (see also *Constructive programme*, below). I also continued to present programmes on community and student radio stations, blending satire and social comment with music¹². Performances with puppets complemented this work (see Appendix 9; Figures 118 and 131).

Chapter Five detailed some of the numerous artists working for social change (see also Appendix 10; Scarce 1990:241-258; Hayward 1992; Clark 1997:125-161). These artists may work individually or in groups; they all contribute to social change by expressing challenges to the dominant paradigms and affecting the cultural and intellectual bases of human actions. Again, despite the lack of attention paid to the arts by writers within the movement, artistic actions are just as valid as those 'on the front-line'; indeed, it may take more bravery for an individual artist to express an unpopular opinion, than to march as part of a large group of like-minded protestors. Furthermore, imparting a message or *zeitgeist* from a variety of sources contributes to its acceptance by the community, and is an example of decentralised grassroots activism. Figure 125 shows the range of artists involved in large campaigns.

¹² In 2005 Doug Westhorpe and I survived an attempt by the ultra-conservative University of New England Students Association to remove us from our TUNE-FM radio programme.

One important art-form used to influence opinion during the blockades described herein was cartooning¹³. This includes John Edmunds's cartoons featured in Chapters Seven and Nine, Ray Nowland's cartoons about the Bulga (NSW) forest campaign in the 1990s (Figure 132), and an anonymous cartoon in *Rainforest Action Group News* involving a post-modern appropriation of a romantic cartoon to humorously glamourise the act of tree-sitting (Figure 29).

Turner (2000) details the work of more high-profile Australian cartoonists, many of whom have a profound influence on the Australian psyche, since they are allocated a large and prominent space in popular and influential newspapers, and their analysis is often clever, succinct, humorous, and unorthodox. They have a licence to be radical within conservative publications, to express counter-cultural or controversial views, and thus shift public opinion. As *Sydney Morning Herald* cartoonist Alan Moir comments, cartoonists have more influence than many politicians, and their career lasts longer (cited in Turner 2000:114). These cartoonists often appear to be inspired by and sympathetic to protest events. Figures 133 to 135 show cartoons about the Franklin and Roxby Downs inspired by the protests there. These protests elevated the issues to newsworthy status, making them suitable for a cartoonist to feature. Figure 136 demonstrates how Australia's most renowned cartoonist, Michael Leunig, reacts to contemporary actions such as the nude protest shown in Figure 20. Such art raises the profile of an issue, and may draw people to campaigns.

It can be seen that there is a dynamic two-way process occurring, as direct actions influence art, and art inspires more actions. Two important elements of society - art and activism - both of which can create significant social change individually, are even more effective if they operate in tandem. As they continue to produce interesting, often unexpected synergies and challenge each other's boundaries, they have a two-fold effect. Firstly, they produce the constant novelty and strong imagery that the mass media demands if it is to report dissent.

¹³ Internationally, Evan's (1998) book is a masterpiece in its genre, describing UK anti-road protests in a humorous, interesting and moving fashion.

The Art(s) of Nonviolence

Secondly, they help activists to stay one step ahead of the oft-repressive apparatus of the state, and the appropriation of protests by corporations (see below). As section 7.4.2 showed, the police at the Roxby Downs protests, having learnt from their Tasmanian colleagues following the Franklin, were well-prepared for the civil disobedience tactics of the activists, and were able to reduce dramatically the blockade's effectiveness. More innovative protest methods, such as those afforded by well-prepared street-theatre along with active resistance, may have produced a more successful blockade there.

If the artworks are professionally created - a constant difficulty in resource-poor and/or nomadic activist communities - or demonstrate imaginative dedication to the craft, they can impress audiences. These audiences might then view protestors for the first time as thoughtful, hard-working people. Often, the better resourced an artwork is, the more professional it is and the greater the impact it has. If it reaches a large audience, so much the better. Activist art need not be fringe to be radical - it may be more effective in the mainstream. However, some pitfalls include compromise of one's ideals through engaging with institutions who may seek to promote arts or actions to camouflage their own less-than-ethical or ecological activities, a process known as 'Greenwash' (see Burgmann 1993:239-243). An example is multinational McDonalds' sponsorship of Clean-up Australia Day, while continuing to use disposable over-packaging. If one produces radical cartoons for a conservative newspaper, does it help legitimise and sell that newspaper, and reinforce a conservative paradigm overall? Or is it worth that compromise to reach a large and conservative audience? Similarly, if a socially progressive film is shown on commercial television, does it attract viewers who may then be influenced by advertisements for cars and junk food? Activists cannot avoid some engagement with structural violence, but they can minimise it. Such decisions need to be made on an individual basis, weighing up the 'pros' and 'cons' of funding (and financial survival) versus remaining ethical. These are questions worthy of further research.

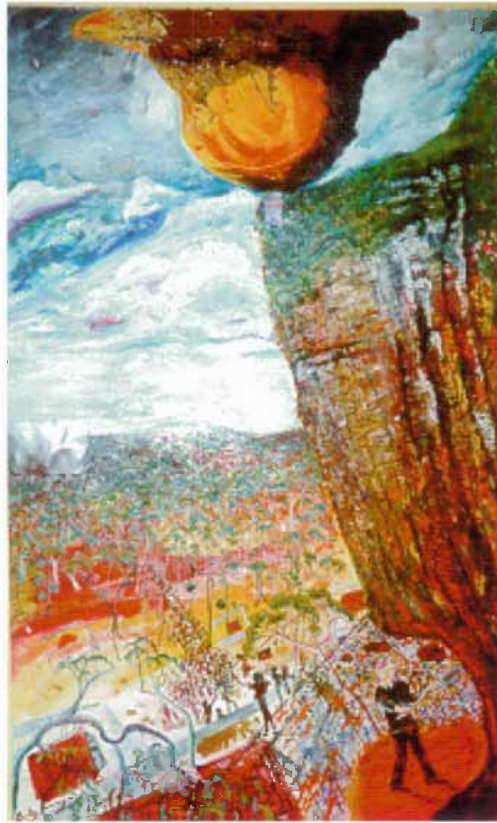


Figure 114: My 2000 painting about the Jabiluka issue.

13.2.9 Recording and reporting: independent media

I have shown above how there is a close relationship between artistic activism and the mass media, as activists use the arts to attract media attention, in order to influence wide audiences. As discussed in section 5.3.8, major protests are also often recorded through artistic means by cartoonists, photographers, film-makers, sound recordist/musicians, and writers. An important use of these recordings is when they are sent to mass media outlets. Video footage by activists is regularly used by mainstream news outlets, such as images of blockaders being assaulted by loggers in the South-East forests of NSW (see Bita 1995:4). However, I have also noted significant biases against protests by the mass media. It is worth hearing further from Roxby blockaders who were the focus of media distortions and omissions:

The Art(s) of Nonviolence

...Political activism has in the past been denied legitimacy, by representing the protagonists as a bunch of 'radical ratbags', 'hooligans', 'vandals', etc. Roxby Downs Blockade provided fodder for people to continue believing in this. By concentrating on the stereotypes ... and filming selectively ... the media denies the general public the ability to relate to blockaders, seeing them instead as aberrations from mainstream society. The blockaders are only 'arrested' in the papers, there is no follow-up as to why they trespassed, or indeed, why the blockade occurred.... [I]t is implied that the protesters' actions are wrong and irrational. This leaves no room for the possibility that it may be the laws protecting such an unsafe industry that should be questioned.... Furthermore, the media does not question whether the blockaders may have had to face a personal dilemma in making a decision to break the laws, which they, like every other member of society, have been conditioned into accepting. The effectiveness of the media is indeed a problem for any sort of radical activism that dares to go against the mainstream of society. We are caught in trying to educate the public via the media, yet the public have to be educated to get the truth out of the selective and stereotypic reporting of the media (Berrier and Worsoe 1984:16).



Figure 115: Emailed image satirising media power.

These are valid criticisms of the mass media, and represent an ongoing dilemma¹⁴. How much effort should activists expend on trying to achieve favourable attention from the mass media. Ultimately, the aims of the two groups are often fundamentally opposed, with activists seeking justice, sustainability and peace, while the commercial media is a voice for the corporate world and its insatiable drive for profits. As I have suggested earlier, artistic and disciplined nonviolence can be effective in gaining favourable coverage. On a more

¹⁴ See Scalmer (2002:149-160) for a discussion of media coverage of the One Nation party and protests against them.

grassroots level, seeking to convert audiences directly rather than through the media can also help the movement grow slowly.

A third strategy for the movement is to develop its own **independent media**. This has been, as Martin and Ellis (2003) show, useful for the 'alternative' or intentional communities in gaining acceptance by the wider community. It is also increasingly used by the movement, particularly since the development of the internet, highly-portable and relatively cheap technical equipment such as digital video cameras and mini-disc audio recorders, and computer editing programmes. In stark contrast with the Franklin and Roxby campaigns, a plethora of films were made about the Jabiluka struggle, two of which featured on SBS television. Film-making was also used frequently in the forest blockades. The rise of community radio and television, alternative newspapers such as *Green Left Weekly* and the *Byron Echo*, and more recently websites and emails, have given the community even greater opportunities to organise, lobby and disseminate information and art (see Scalmer 2002:160-6). Through digital cameras and websites, protests can now be 'online' and international in scope. These are important artistic and journalistic developments occasioned by technology, so it is worth examining technology further.

13.2.10 Technology

The availability of word processors was a valuable development early in the period studied. It significantly aided my work at the Rainforest Information Centre and in subsequent campaigns such as the old-growth forest and Jabiluka ones. I found that press releases, newsletters, letters to politicians and newspapers, and my novel about the Penan rainforests could be much more easily created and worked on than with typewriters. The development of 'laptop' computers further added convenience. Better and cheaper photocopiers assisted the reproduction of these materials, and later included the use of recycled paper and double-sided copying to reduce environmental costs. Later, the internet exponentially assisted the dissemination of writings, as well as art-forms such as photographs, movies and music. Actions - and their images and sounds - could be reported on-line and to mass international audiences, who were often encouraged to sign a petition or 'jam' a corporation website. The internet also enabled peace movements to share globally their best slogans, graphics

and songs for the 2003 peace rallies, increasing the quality of such protests (see Figures 116 and 137).

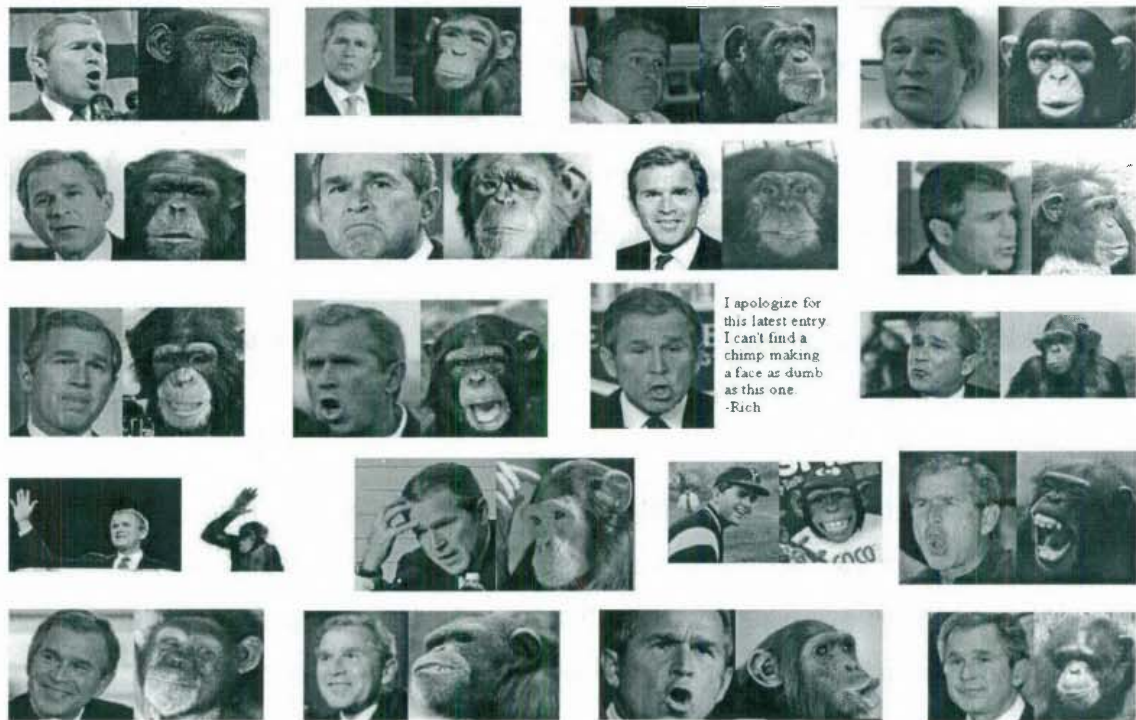


Figure 116: Widely-circulated email poking fun at and eroding the legitimacy of US president George W. Bush.

Section 9.3 described the documentary about the Cycle Against the Nuclear Cycle's epic ride, made by the riders themselves. This was an important advance for a mobile activist group, partly aided by the availability of (relatively) cheap, light, high quality cameras. It was produced to such a standard that a national broadcaster (SBS) accepted it. Technology gave the activists more control over how they were depicted, rather than having their story distorted by the biases of the mass media. The riders were able to portray their ride and associated actions in a favourable light, and to directly convey their anti-nuclear arguments to a large audience.

Technology also aided NEFA's policy of talking to the media from the blockades themselves. This policy can be partly attributed to the (usually) egalitarian nature of the

blockades, with many organisers ‘getting their hands dirty’ erecting tripods and getting arrested and wanting to talk to the media themselves, rather than leaving the media appearances to city-based activists. It was also a clever media strategy, since dramatic radio interviews could occur via mobile phones and radio relays while people were up tripods or ‘locked-on’, and the most up-to-date reports on actions could be relayed, portraying the drama of the blockade rather than more staid information from city headquarters. With the Jabiluka blockades, high quality audio recording on mini-discs had become possible and affordable. This was used to record speeches, ‘sound bites’ and songs performed at the blockade, some of them impromptu. These recordings were invaluable in the creation of the compact discs ‘Uranium: Don’t dig it!’ and ‘Filthy Jabilucre’ which show the urgency, passion and the humour of the blockade.

The previous two sections have raised a number of issues about the use of media and technology in artistic activism. Although Brian Martin’s (2001) ‘Technology for Nonviolent Struggle’ is a valuable contribution to the latter area, the relationship between media, technology and nonviolence is worthy of more detailed research.

13.3 FURTHER BENEFITS OF THE ARTS

This chapter so far has documented how the arts are an important tool of conversion. The following section, which requires a brief introduction, details further benefits of the arts to nonviolence praxis. These benefits are summarised here, categorised under three headings: **holistic benefits, movement development and sustainability**, and **tactical benefits** (see Table Five).

Holistic benefits include the balancing of protest with positive, creative actions, and the maintenance of nonviolence even under duress, so that a campaign’s means remain compatible with its ends. These benefits relate to the conversionary *extra-movement* benefits discussed above, because well-balanced nonviolent protests are more likely to lead to conversions than simplistic or violent ones. These benefits also assist *within* the movement, since they contribute to the safety and morale of the activists. The second type of benefits of the arts is primarily felt *within* the movement, assisting people to act, helping

The Art(s) of Nonviolence

the movement to grow and develop, and making the movement sustainable. The third benefit of the arts is tactical, in that they assist civil disobedience to be more effective in achieving specific short-term objectives, such as blockading a mining or logging operation.

Table Five

HOLISTIC BENEFITS: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Balance achieved through creation of <i>constructive programme</i>, and contribution to society's culture• inhibition of violence.
MOVEMENT DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• inspiration• fortification of civil disobedience activists• tangible results of work• creation of solidarity and enjoyable/sustainable movements• inclusivity• avoiding burnout• assistance in court-cases• assistance in nonviolence training• learning in the movement.
TACTICAL BENEFITS: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• diversion of authorities• creation of multiple foci.

Before discussing these benefits of the arts in more detail, it is worth observing that the boundaries of these categories are not rigid. There is certain overlap, for example, where the inhibition of violence assists tactical objectives as well as holistic ones. Often, art-forms perform multiple roles simultaneously, such as when colourful banners are placed on physical barriers blockading roads to warn vehicles, impart messages, and intimate that the blockade is a nonviolent community action rather than an aggressive act.

13.3.1 HOLISTIC BENEFITS

13.3.1.1 Constructive programme

Making artworks can be the ‘flipside’ of protest, balancing negativity with a positive element as activists work creatively and productively as well as being critical. This accords well with Gandhi’s advocacy of a constructive programme,¹⁵ where activists try to create through positive action a model alternative society, as well as protest against problems in the mainstream one. The Situationist’s approach mentioned above has continued to develop in Australian protests, with ingredients such as *art* and *fun* being important components in creating alternate movements that people actually want to join. As a sticker proclaimed about the 1994 Fraser Island ‘Great Walk’ for conservation and social justice: “Happy therefore successful”.

Having a well-balanced, enjoyable movement also aids its sustainability. Writing of the global justice protests against the World Trade Organisation in Seattle, 1999, activist Starhawk states that:

The action included art, dance, celebration, song, ritual, and magic. It was more than a protest; it was the uprising of a vision of true abundance, a celebration of life and creativity and connectedness, which remained joyful in the face of brutality and brought alive the creative forces that can truly counter those of injustice and control (2002:55).

In a related vein, protest artists are creating a body of work that has *cultural value* in addition to value as *dissent*. A culture of peaceful protest has developed in Australia,

¹⁵ This was introduced in section 4.6.4.

The Art(s) of Nonviolence

memorable to participants and engaging to onlookers and media. Increasingly, museums such as the Justice and Police Museum in Sydney, with its 1998-1999 exhibition 'Protest', and Canberra's National Museum with its 2002 video featuring Benny Zable, are focusing on this cultural contribution. This too contributes to long-term social change, as the original works of then-fringe artists make their way into well-patronised institutions.

13.3.1.2 Prevention of violence

The arts play another extremely valuable role in ensuring adherence to nonviolent principles:- **art-forms used in Australian protests have repeatedly diffused tensions and prevented violence.** A clear example of this was described in the Roxby chapter, when a Maori activist strolled down the space between the tense, opposing lines of police and protesters, playing his guitar and singing. He was followed by a somersaulting acrobat. The unorthodoxy of these two brave activists defused the tension, and no violence ensued that day.

Perhaps the most valuable art-form for reducing violence is music. It often provides a channel for anger and nervous energy, so that rather than a group degenerating into a shouting match with opponents, they can sing about their concerns, anger and frustration, as happened at the 1983 ALP conference. Music can also be introduced to calm an angry crowd, as I witnessed during a 2002 rally by Kooris and supporters over police brutality at Armidale Police Station, where a woman Elder began a soothing song which effectively prevented a riot.

The videoing and still photography and audio recording that activists often use to record protests also influences it. In my experience, the very presence of photographers can reduce violence, because most people are reluctant to be depicted acting brutally (see Figure 117). Other art-forms can also be useful in channelling nervous tension. A woman who carried the John Howard puppet (Figure 19) in the 2003 peace march in Armidale commented that it helped quell her nervousness by giving her something to do with her hands and an activity on which to focus (Ovenden, Cathy 2003, pers. comm., 16 March).



Figure 117: US media activist films dramatic arrest.

This prevention of violence has been categorised as holistic, because it maintains the integrity of a nonviolent movement. It is also conversionary as it aids the dissemination of the group's message, whereas any eruption of violence would likely detract from the message, focus attention on law and order issues, and damage the campaign's reputation for nonviolence. Remaining nonviolent also helps achieve tactical objectives,- by retaining a liminal rather than violent atmosphere, physical blockades are liable to last longer.

The previous chapter discussed the need for nonviolence to be committed rather than half-hearted. The role of arts in violence prevention is thus an important benefit, crucial to the development of the movement. It should be taken into account by nonviolence trainers and theorists, as a further tool in the drive to create well-disciplined rather than *ad hoc* protests.

13.3.2 MOVEMENT DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

13.3.2.1 Inspire, fortify, encourage activists

In modern Western society, many people feel helpless and disempowered for a number of reasons, such as its tremendous pace of change (Heylighen 1999). Art-forms such as music, therefore, have another important role to play in inspiring people to overcome their fears and take action (see Spencer 1990:84). Music can also **encourage and fortify** at moments requiring courage, such as prior to acts of civil disobedience. As discussed in section 7.4.3, recorded music worked in this manner at a Roxby protest in 1983, when a car stereo playing a *Midnight Oil* album, led to mass dancing at - and an effective blockade of - the mine's gates. Some felt so impassioned we refused to leave and were arrested, thereby slowing work and gaining media coverage. The case studies also showed how music has been prominently used by jailed activists, fortifying us to endure the ordeal of jail. It also facilitated communication between women's and men's sections, and between arrestees and supporters, and inspired some to refuse bail and remain in jail. In another example of internationalisation, Australian protest songs have been adopted by forest blockaders in the United States (Cohen 1997:27).

Since 2000, 'the Banned' (Michael Evans and I along with others such as Koori musician L.J.Hill have regularly played at Armidale rallies for peace, reconciliation and refugee rights, and been thanked by other participants for contributing to the protest. One woman commented that a rally in the mall was "made by the music", and that it would have ended much earlier if we had not been playing ('Julia' 2003, pers.comm., 19 May). This suggests that music can provide a focal point for a protest, diverting attention away from other supporters who may be feeling self-conscious for displaying dissent in a public space. In the case of street-theatre, activists can use masks, make-up and costume to help them find the courage to speak out in hostile settings, with large crowds and many police and cameras.

Through art, one can also see tangible results of one's work, for example, banners, sculpture, puppets or paintings. This can be empowering when other work such as initiating

The Art(s) of Nonviolence

and sending off petitions, writing articles and submissions and doing radio-shows often seems to disappear into a black hole – there is little feedback, economic reward or recognition, and one’s effectiveness is uncertain. This aspect of the arts can encourage activists to maintain the struggle during difficult periods. It also produces resources which can be used repeatedly (see Figures 118 and 131).



A familiar figure threw his support behind UNE's radio station TUNEFM at yesterday's protest.

Figure 118: Puppet of John Howard at student radio protest, Armidale 2005.

13.3.2.2 Aid group dynamics

Art-forms can be invaluable in introducing activists to each other- ‘breaking the ice’- and helping us to **bond** and build **solidarity and trust**. Music at the Franklin blockade filled this role admirably, as did singing at the Lakeside protest, and the creation of the puppet show at Jabiluka. Arts can also help deal with group dynamics issues such as sexism, homophobia or passive smoking, as on the 1995 Fraser Island ‘Great Walk’, where theatre and poetry performances by Jarrah Schmah, Belinda O’Dwyer, Ariadne Kenny and myself aimed at encouraging participants to examine their racial, sexual and gender politics and smoking habits. Among the many skits Schmah and I wrote and performed (with others) for community radio was one influenced by the writings of Australian feminist Dale Spender,