CULTUREWORK
A Periodic Broadside for Culture Workers

So, what's a broadside?
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We Want Your Life Back:
How You Can Go Guerrilla!

by marc moscato

"Go Guerrilla is a non-elitist network of alienated wage slaves, community organizers, and media activists who seek to creatively promote social awareness and initiate social change. Our tools of revolution consist of multimedia events and spontaneous acts of silliness that serve as a forum for the open exchange of ideas and self-expression. We want your ideas. We want your sense of humor. We want your life back. We invite you to Go Guerrilla and save yourself."
--Go Guerrilla mission statement

In 1998, I graduated from the University of Buffalo with a media studies degree. I set out to face the "real world" armed only with the "practical" knowledge of how to make experimental film collages. Grudgingly, I worked at Blockbuster Video, freelanced at an ad agency, and occasionally videotaped weddings to make ends meet. Eventually I landed a job at WUTV, the local Fox TV affiliate, where I aired bad sitcom reruns. Many of my college friends were also grudgingly employed by coffeehouses, record shops, offices, and factories for menial wages. It seemed we were all doomed to a life of misery and artistic burnout.

Dreading this world of monotonous and franchised toil, I enlisted the help of several friends to plan, promote, and host an art event entitled Go Guerrilla (GG) that would serve as an open forum for disgruntled wage earners. The event incorporated poetry, music, visual and interactive art, video, spoken word, and street theatre. We held this event at Squeaky Wheel, a not-for-profit media arts center that had just acquired a screening and performance space. The event, which brought in approximately 75 attendees, created a great deal of excitement, and unbeknown to any of us, wound up shaping our creative lives for the next couple years.

Go Guerrilla continues to promote a revolution in everyday life by realizing the artist inherent in all of us. We believe artistry is not just recognized by formal institutions such as the National Endowment for the Arts or museums, but also by family members, friends, and neighbors coming together around issues of common concern. GG knows that art is something breathing, living, and manifesting within each and every one of us. GG can happen anywhere at anytime and demands space and attention through feelings of passion, love, joy, resistance, liberation, and revolution.

GG follows in the wake of several art movements. Dada performances, counter-cultural happenings, the Youth International Party, the Situationists, punk rock, and hip-hop culture are all influences. We take from many of these currents and rewire them to present issues of current importance.

Many events have sought to unify the national political scene with localized issues. In the past, we have worked with numerous local not-for-profits tackling issues such as environmental deregulation, housing discrimination, privatization of public space, labor struggles, U.S. foreign policy, poverty and hunger issues, corporate exploitation, trade issues, and human rights. Our events have been held at local art not-for-profits, community centers, schools, nightclubs, and coffee shops. Many of us have collaborated on several political rallies and campaigns, including the formation of Buffalo Critical Mass, the Save Our Libraries campaign, and the evolution of the Buffalo Activist Network.

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CultureWork is an electronic publication of the University of Oregon <u>Institute for Community Arts Studies</u>. Its mission is to provide timely workplace-oriented information on culture, the arts, education, and community. For links to other sites of interest, see the <u>ICAS links page</u>. For previous issues of CultureWork, visit the <u>Previous Issues</u> page. Prospective authors and illustrators please see the <u>Guidelines</u>.

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<u>Arts and Administration</u> | <u>The Institute for Community Arts Studies (I.C.A.S.)</u>

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Editor: <u>Richard Bear</u>. Advisor: <u>Dr. Douglas Blandy</u>.
Comments to: <u>mfinison@darkwing.uoregon.edu</u>

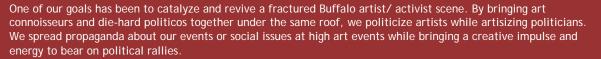# CULTUREꓘꓤOM
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To date GG has hosted over 15 events that have varied widely in theme, content, and location. GG has been interviewed on local radio, performed shows in Toronto, Chicago, and throughout Western New York, and started a number of offshoot projects. GG has also published three magazines (circulation 1,500) and produced and distributed a compilation of locally produced activist videos.

While this may sound like a lot, it wasn't hard, in fact if GG could manage to pull it off, anyone can. We live in our emotions, often unaware of the "proper" ways to run an organization. We have no board, rarely a budget, lack a clear mission, and have no physical permanent location for our operations.

What we have and operate on is energy and idealism. Meetings are laid back and creative. They are often potlucks or involve some type of collaborative art project. For example, one meeting involved assembling 50 handmade collage posters promoting an upcoming GG event. Our requirements for involvement are minimal: an open mind and the values of mutual love and respect. Participants are also strongly encouraged to have a sense of humor, as pleasure is a cornerstone of the GG critique.

GG serves as a creative outlet for those who are either unrecognized for their talents or who have not performed in front of an audience before. One of my fondest GG memories is of an outdoor poetry slam where neighborhood youth dropped in to read their poetry for the first time.

One of our goals has been to catalyze and revive a fractured Buffalo artist/ activist scene. By bringing art connoisseurs and die-hard politicos together under the same roof, we politicize artists while artisizing politicians. We spread propaganda about our events or social issues at high art events while bringing a creative impulse and energy to bear on political rallies.

On a personal level, GG provides me with a much-needed break from straightforward political type work. Many GG participants were simultaneously involved in the formation of the Buffalo Activist Network (BAN), a coalition of student, environmental, and labor groups formed in the wake of the WTO protests in Seattle. BAN meetings tended to be dreadfully tedious, last for hours on end, be fraught with personality conflicts, and in the end really didn't make me feel particularly energized or uplifted about working on campaigns.

While BAN talked abstractly about freedom of expression and realistically about tactics (structure without regard for culture), GG talked abstractly about strategy and realistically about community (ideas without regard for function). BAN and GG members drifted between these two viewpoints, and, in collaboration, we were able to work towards realizable goals. Many GG events have been benefits for BAN rallies, or raise money for other local grassroots causes. Similarly, BAN teach-ins about trade issues and corporate exploitation began to resemble GG events by incorporating political theatre, music, visual art, and audience interaction.

After some 15 plus shows over a two-year span, several GG organizers have left town or lost interest in the group. Consequently, GG ceased its informal formal organization in September of 2001. However, because GG was never institutionalized it continues in its fragmentation. To see this fragmentation as the end of GG is to miss the GG critique. Go Guerrilla was an organization, but it is also an action word. GG is spontaneous, subversive, and sometimes unexplainable. To view the demise of Go Guerrilla is to not understand its unpredictable nature. True to its subversive tactics, rumors circulate of future collaborations or reunion events.

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"Make your own damn ...!"

One of the slogans that appeared repeatedly in GG's propaganda was the moniker, "Make your own damn (fill in the blank)!". So I say unto you now, "Organize Your Own Damn Events!" You too can build your own GG movement. It will provide you with meaningful and lasting friendships and certainly plenty of things to do. What follows is an overview of how GG functions and tips on how to stage your own GG event.

Much of the GG mission is defined by what we are not. Aversion to already established organizations provided the main impetus for the group. We are not a pretentious art scene philosophizing in abstract terms. We are not a political group separated from working class people. We don't have assigned leaders or media spokespeople. Instead, we remain decentralized, participatory, and flexible to all.

GG has no board or formal rules. This arose out of fear of assigned leaders. GG believes that inspired coincidences result from meetings without an agenda. While this method is certainly not as efficient as board or consensus models, GG manages to accomplish quite a bit. GG allows unrestricted artistic liberty for members to take the GG idea and make it theirs.

We also rotate responsibilities. For example, the person who books the show for one event will trade off with the person who makes the posters for the next event. This practice promotes community education and organizational flexibility. By keeping the organization flexible to new ideas, GG encourages newcomers to join in. Newcomers facilitate new growth and continuing coincidences.

Money, while never a huge issue at GG meetings, was accounted for. For most projects, it was up to the individual to assume fiscal responsibility. We had no method of official bookkeeping. Fiscally, we were quite inept and inefficient. I have learned that even for a group of flaky artist revolutionaries, income and expenses should be well documented. In retrospect, our efforts could have been much more successful and we could have financed many more individual projects had we had a more sound financial approach. Many radical groups and community spaces falter because of a lack of proper financial management.

Working the door at events should be a major priority. Do not leave this up to the venue! Have one of your volunteers take this job on. GG experienced venue staff not working or not giving us the agreed upon financial breakdown on several occasions. As for cover charges, people appreciate a sliding scale, but make sure everyone donates a reasonable amount.

Don't be afraid to ask for money. I was shocked that area mainstream businesses such as bookshops, video stores, music shops, clothing boutiques, and art organizations enthusiastically took out ads in our radical espousing magazines. Several individuals also donated up to $100.00 each to pay for printing costs for the magazine.

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Promote yourself. This is one of GG's strong suits. GG hits hundreds of telephone poles in Buffalo with fliers (including six variations of posters for our first event), posts stickers, and distributes handbills for events. GG members write newspaper articles, mass e-mail people, give talks to anyone willing to listen, and produce and air cable access programs. Having a (free) hookup with a place with a photocopier is essential. This will save a bundle on promotions.

Another tip is to get to know the people at the local papers. Instead of preparing extensive press kits, ask if you can just submit a blurb for them to run (and save them the time of having someone review your materials to write a story). GG writes the copy for most of the promotional material printed in the arts papers.

Network with as many people and organizations as possible. The more people who know about you, the more people will show up at your events. Ask similar organizations to collaborate or at least set up an information table at your event.

Make sure you get to the venue far enough in advance to set up. Get volunteers to work the door and clean up. Selling merchandise is a great way to fundraise, so make sure you have someone to work a table! GG merchandizes T-shirts, magazines, videos, and stickers at both events and at local stores. Don't forget to have a sign up list to get new people involved.

Follow up the event with a letter of thanks to the venue; they like to be appreciated! A post self-evaluation of an event is always a good idea, yet we rarely spent time on how to make events better. Evaluation usually consisted of an informal regrouping to discuss the last event while planning for the next.

Most importantly, don't forget to have fun while organizing. Organizing is a sometimes stressful and taxing endeavor. Take time to keep yourself healthy and party afterwards to celebrate your accomplishments.

Below are several websites that will aid in setting up a show and starting a similar organization:

http://www.videoactivism.org/resource.html
This is the website of the Video Activist Network. It includes a directory of great activist documentaries and resources on distribution, booking, interviewing, and even a crash course in video editing.

http://www.thisisdemocracy.org/3_howto.html
This is a resource for how to set up a screening of the film This Is What Democracy Looks Like, but can be used as a rough guideline for any event.

http://www.processedworld.com/History/history.html
Processed World was a similar organization active in the 1980s in San
Francisco. This link provides an interesting overview of the group.
Be sure to check out the extensive on-line archive of Processed World magazines.

http://www.crimethinc.com, http://www.crimethinc.org, http://www.crimethinc.net
The Crimethinc Workers Collective, international propaganda makers, offers resources and a broad range of media for your enjoyment and education.

Conclusion
GG has created life-long friendships and eternal memories. It has given many the opportunity to expand their artistic and political visions by fostering a creative and vibrant arts/ activist community. On a personal level, it has shaped my artistic interests and career path. GG has in fact changed my life, leading me to a life-long commitment to organizing and promoting community art.

You can still order Go Guerrilla goods:

Issues 1-3 of Go Guerrilla magazine are $2 each. Our video compilation, Go Guerrilla In Your Living Room, a tape of activist shorts, is available for $10. All prices include postage. Go Guerrilla resides at P.O. Box 995. Buffalo, NY 14213.

To view the demise of GG is to view the demise of life itself.

Marc Moscato is a first year Arts and Administration student at the University of Oregon. He is a co-founder of Go Guerrilla, written for numerous marginal and underground magazines, is an independent video maker, and has been involved with many activist causes. He hates writing about himself in the third person, so he'll end this bio here.

His email is mmoscato@darkwing.uoregon.edu

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