

“From the Burkha to the Thong” street theater We did this and so can you!

In the dead of winter on campus, in parks and major congregations of people, on train platforms, in the student lounges and cafeterias people paused, they saw something they never see: People acting out and bringing to the surface the brutality, degradation and scorn heaped on the women of this planet in different but equally perverse and outmoded forms.

But it wasn't only that. When people stopped to listen to these voices, when they paused and made the decision to take a flier from the frozen hands of the women still like statues in the flurry of class change, they heard, they saw, they read, of the revolution. The global systemic nature of this, the fact that it doesn't have to be this way and Sunsara Taylor is coming to recruit a new generation into the movement for total revolution, a revolution that takes the liberation of women as a cornerstone. To change things now and to dedicate our lives to the emancipation of all humanity.

The street theater is not a gimmick or dressed up flyering. It's a form of saturating the campus with Sunsara Taylor's tour and a part of meaningful revolutionary work that many people from different perspectives can appreciate and participate in. A student from a city college came out with us one day and then the next week she grabbed a friend and performed it herself for 60 people at the start of an event on campus. One professor who saw us doing a silent procession through the halls of an art department on campus stopped us and said, "I saw you on campus; this is incredible advertising. It's really fantastic that you're doing this. Thank you." He's right. It is incredible advertising and more than a few people who came to hear Sunsara said they had seen it and it's what motivated them to come to the event.

So here's how you do it...

You'll find the script along with other tour organizing materials at revcom.us. The actors held up an 11" x 17" black signs with white lettering which read:

**OBJECT
SHROUDED
OWNED**

and

**OBJECT
STRIPPED
FOR SALE**

You need a burkha or some kind of head covering, this can be purchased online or at boutiques which carry Islamic clothing. You could even just use a black scarf if you need to. Thongs, as we know, are readily available. We taped one to the sign that said "OBJECT: STRIPPED, FOR SALE." We wrestled some with how the woman who portrayed the "modern" capitalist form of objectification could do this in a way which was not degrading. Anyone can do this by holding the thongs up, posting it on a sign or finding some other creative way of presenting this.

We had someone with some ability to dramatize this and develop it and they wore all black with the thong over their clothes and they also posed in a way which mimicked the contorted and constricted poses that we see women in every day and at the same time their facial expressions conveyed discomfort, pain, and being frozen or negated. This was one way it was developed and this had the desired effect of people seeing the thong and the burkha being equated, and that this was a condemnation of what both of these things represent. But this is not the only way it could be done. The main thing is to present a dramatic image and having two people dressed in black helped to do that. We used bright red thongs and also a white lace one which was particularly repelling in that it evoked the kind of "virgin whore" role which has been so promoted and forced onto young women by the mass media today.

Just to emphasize the point, you don't have to be an actor, or look a certain way to do this. It's about presenting a dramatic symbol and embodying that in some form while challenging it. If you have two people that want to go out and spread the word and make an impact, you don't have to wait or do tons of rehearsing and planning. If you have more people to flier and talk with those who are impacted, that's great, if not then you can hold the fliers in one hand and people will come up and take them, or you can do the skit and then get out flyers afterward. Then go back and tell all your friends about it and invite them out. Also, men can and should be a part of this! Here's what a young man wrote after donning the burkha and being part of the skit a number of times:

"Is that a guy? Why is a man under there?" This was one of the most frequent questions we heard. Mainly this was inspiring to both women and men, to see a man uniting with and struggling for women's liberation. The revolution we're talking about cannot take place unless men, just as much as women, are fighting for women's liberation. When people see men and women together involved in the street theater, promoting the Tour, and struggling for total revolution with the masses, they get a glimpse of what's not just necessary but possible, as well. It is a meaningful and concrete way our revolutionary movement is expressed."

Getting started we had a performer lend some of her knowledge and sense of drama to figure out how to do this. But, you don't have to have this, you can learn from our experience here! We figured out that what you do in the first 10 seconds to grab your audience and command a stage in a way, makes all the difference. For example if we were performing in a cafeteria we would go in holding our costumes and sit down at opposite ends, put them on and then stand up and walk towards one another, stopping with a stomp of our foot and freezing in a stand off position. Often times the cafeteria would hush and then we would hold this position silently looking at each other for about 10 more seconds to make sure we have everyone's attention. When we did this outside as a "tableau" we had different poses and got better at having really expressive body language, it was particularly dramatic when we would pose literally in a mirror image to one another in different poses and then turn and face each other with curiosity, sadness, anger in our body language and in the facial expressions of the woman in the thong. This kind of developed spontaneously as we got more into it, but one could try different things. Then every five minutes or so we would do the scene. You could also intersperse reading quotes from the Sunsara Taylor tour announcement or "A Declaration: For Women's Liberation and the Emancipation

of All Humanity.” (link)

In general, when we were doing the skit and also outside on the street when we stand on a ledge in a populated square or in the center of the library quad at class change, we would try to stay “in character” and maintain the “fourth wall” as they say in theater. Meaning you act as if there's an invisible separation between you and your audience, like you are in one level of reality - the dramatic one you are creating to tell a story- and they are in another (the “real” reality), watching you. When someone approached and said “what is this?” we wouldn't start telling them all about the campus tour, we would either turn towards them silently and hold out the flyer in our hands, or sometimes we would start up the skit so they could hear for themselves.

This can be hard to do when you are used to doing lots of flyering and talking to people and getting their emails and phone numbers, which should be done lots! But for this particular thing you have to remember this is a different form of saturation (getting the word out broadly so everyone knows about this in a discrete area or section of people), which is part of the whole thing you are doing. When we stood outside doing this thousands of students could see us from at least a block away in four directions. If they had seen two people in costume flyering and chatting with people it might be interesting but not nearly the eye-catching dramatic impact of seeing these stark images through the crowds of people and hearing as you come closer the powerful words of the skit. This can also be very hard to do when people come up and have strong views and emotional reactions, and sometimes when there was an individual that was really interested we would quickly ask them to jot down their info—but with people who came up with questions and wanting to debate, it did make a difference in this case to have another 1 or 2 people who could engage them. Either way we still stayed in the scene and started up the lines and then sometimes other people would stop and then talk to each other, and at times we would have people lined up to take flyers from our hands! Then on the day of the event we did do more of going around just in the costumes, because a lot of people had seen us, and instead of our “OBJECT” signs we had white signs with big black visible letters that had the title of the event with “a talk by Sunsara Taylor” and time and place, and—in all caps—“TONIGHT“

We walked through the halls of various academic buildings, got invited into classes on the spot, and even did a silent procession through the library! A student who was with us had her own style that worked really well. She would let people take in the image and then she would go up to them and start telling them about the tour and why she thought they should be involved. The disconnect of the jarring image that took them out of their comfort zone, and then her being a confident peer of theirs inviting them in a friendly manner to come to this talk, worked in its own way to generate interest (see students correspondence on doing street theater.)

ALSO: Fundraising is essential. This tour cannot happen without the support of the people, and with their support it can really spread all over in the way it needs to. People need to know that they are needed and that they can help and really be a part of something that can change things now. After the skit we would tell people “Donate to support Sunsara Taylor's national campus tour, she's going all over the country recruiting a new generation into a movement for revolution, be a part of making this happen, donate \$1, \$10 or \$50.” People gave not just \$1 but \$2 or \$5 dollars, especially young women, but not only. Be prepared with collection baskets or cans---clearly marked with the name of the tour. Because there was such a great response to this skit and a desire to support what we are doing, and because funds are really needed, we also made up another flyer with a short fund raising appeal and a form that could be filled out to make a larger donation or write a check on the spot, especially for when we attended cultural events or the outdoor market on the weekend.

So that's it. Grab some costumes and get yourself to the cafeteria, lounge, cafe, train platform, park and other areas of mass congregation. Again, you can practice this for about a half hour and then go out, or make your first time out the practice! Just tape the lines to the back of your sign and hit it. There's basically three exchanges between the women and then the announcement. Some of us had it memorized after one day out. No one memorized word for word the skit, people put the lines in their own words that were comfortable, other than the title of the talk of course which we stuck to word for word because, like Sunsara says, "It sounds so good and it is so true!!" Have fun!!

— New York Organizers for Sunsara Taylor's speaking tour