Kicking Big Oil out of the arts

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*BP or not BP?*
Prologue:

In 2012, BP sponsors the Royal Shakespeare Company!
This gives it:

• Cheape PR
• False legitimacy
• Social licence
• Self-censorship of artists

We decide to respond...
Act 1: The rise of *BP or not BP?* (2012)

A season of on-stage interventions at the RSC:

- support from audiences
- membership and online support grew rapidly
- coverage in national and theatre media
- private and public support from actors and staff
Act 2: New spaces, styles, members (2013-14)

1) Macbeth in Tate Britain
   • Invisible theatre, site-specific
   • playing with familiar text/stories
   • advantages of using performance
2) Vikings in British Museum
• DIY approach
• Media breakthrough – C4
• “Flash-horde” and the challenges of public announcement
Act 3: Culture Wars (2015)

15 performances in 2015:

- Creativity, experimentation, and ambition
- Solidarity and linking issues, wider institutional critique
- Collaboration and coalition
- Research and media work
- BM becomes stage where wider battle is playing out
Act 4: Starting to win (2016)

Turning up the heat on the BM

• challenges of representation

Two huge wins

• Tate and EIF

• role of artists speaking out

But British Museum, RSC and others renew their BP deals

• We respond with more ambitious performances...
Act 5: Cracks appear (2017/8)

**Fewer but more targeted:**

- Focus on RSC and BM
- Rebel Mischief Festival
- Bigger and bolder British Museum interventions
- Building support behind the scenes
Act 6:
Out, damned logo! (2019)

Important new allies
• collaboration with Iraqi activists at BM
• big theatre and arts names speak out
• school strikers threaten RSC boycott

The theatre world acts!
• RSC drops BP, NT drops Shell
• BP deal broken partway through
  • Dominoes starting to fall?
Key learning points:

• The right form of action for the right time and place

• Balance between disrupting status quo and engaging key players

• Persistence – and the role creativity plays in that
Creative challenge

Talk to the person next to you.

1) Each come up with one example of how you’ve seen art and creativity used well in a project for positive change.

2) Each come up with a new suggestion for how art and creativity could be used in something you are working on.
A culture beyond oil is possible!

bp-or-not-bp.org/troy   artnotoil.org.uk   fossilfundsfree.org