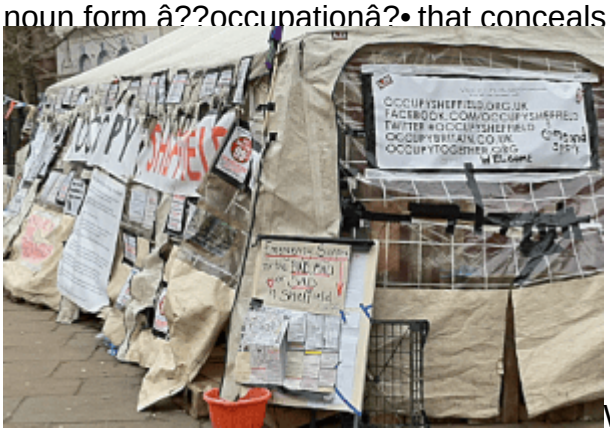


Urban occupy

Description

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The term â??*Occupy* Movementâ?• is more powerful than â??*Occupation* Movement,â?• even though itâ??s less grammatical. Some text editors have automatic proof-reading functions that warn writers against using â??hidden verbs.â?• The verb â??to occupyâ?• is more direct and active than the softer noun form â??occupationâ?• that conceals the verb. Verbs simply expressed are the language of



Words, language, and signs are crucial armaments in any protest. Demonstrators in Cairo during the uprising last year apparently worded some of their placards in well-chosen English so that Western tv viewers were sure to get the message. Among the plethora of signs in Arabic were â??Game over,â?• â??People demand removal of the regime,â?• â??Out,â?• and â??Exitâ?• in clear English.

Tactics (with or without words) are vital. According to the *Activistâ??s Handbook*, â??todayâ??s activists use strategy and tactics to triumph in their campaign for changeâ?• (Shaw, 2001, p.2). Activists often use the instruments they seek to reform, such as advertising campaigns, to their own ends. â??Culture jammingâ?• is the use of commercial advertising strategies against capitalism itself.

In her influential book *No Logo*, Naomi Klein asserts: â??The most sophisticated culture jams are not stand-alone parodies but interceptions â?? counter-messages that hack into a corporationâ??s own method of communication to send a message starkly at odds with the one that was intended.â?• This is

a process that forces the target company to pay to eject the activistâ??s intrusion, in other words the company has to â??foot the bill for its own subversionâ?• (Klein, 2005, p.281).



e culture of subversion: â??there are no rebels who cannot
et promoter who really speaks to themâ?• (p.300).

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Activism at its most advanced is aware of its place in a spiral of moves and counter moves, deploying the resources of the media, news reporting, as well as â??viralâ?• techniques, events, and flash mobs, for spreading action and opinion through online social networks and whatever media are to hand.

Architectural activism

Architecture has long thought it has a role in bringing about social change. Think of Hannes Meyer (1889-1954) and the social ambitions of the Bauhaus, and the user-participation social housing projects of the architect Ralph Erskine (1914-2005) among others.

The book *Urban Act* revives and radicalizes the theme by articulating how urban activism â??can take different forms: from radical opposition and criticism to a more constructive and propositional acting, embedded in everyday lifeâ?• (PEPRAV, 2008, p.11). The participatory and community-oriented design projects outlined in the book (and website) seek to challenge â??both academic, professional, artistic, and political practiceâ?• by addressing â??the creativity and criticality of a new approach to the city.â?• This approach is necessarily heterogeneous, and â??reflects a multiplicity of viewpoints and ways of doing.â?•

So such radical practices involve bringing together artists, media activists, neighbourhood organisations, and software designers. Such confederations seem to disarm professional ability by showing architects, urbanists and educators as participants in diverse teams and not privileged experts with organised roles in a hierarchy.





Local versus global action

The concerns and strategies of urban activism are also local and not universal, dealing with specifics rather than global solutions to problems. The strength of such groupings is that they â??are highly specific and have the quality of reinventing uses and practices in ways that traditional professional structures cannot afford (due to their generic functioning).â?• Activists think of expertise that is not ready to hand in the local context as â??extra-localâ?• rather than global or international.

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Such an approach contrasts with that of the well-meaning but over-scaled, systems approaches of the founders of the 1970s think tank, the Club of Rome, tackling population growth as â??the Predicament of Mankindâ?•.

The emphasis in contemporary activism is of course on the urban, and urban interventions, rather than just buildings and architecture. The design and construction of a building may or may not be the best outcome of an activist analysis. The claim is that such urban practices are â??â??tacticalâ??, â??situationalâ?? and â??activeâ??, based on soft professional and artistic skills and civic informal structures, which can adapt themselves to changing urban situations that are critical, reactive and



Such projects might include establishing farms in inner urban areas, creating community centres and events, public artworks, systems for recycling materials to create new urban facilities. But itâ??s the processes that are of most interest, the way marginal groups might be empowered to have a say in the way their environments are formed, bringing together diverse stakeholders, and interacting with authority structures.

Contemporary activism builds on the demonstrations of the 1960s against â??the repressive and coercive order of the transnational corporations and institutionsâ?• in the words of theorist and activist Brian Holmes (Holmes, 2008, p.302).

The mood is that of the subversive carnival aided by Internet communications. So the carnival is able to orchestrate on a global scale, a â??do-it-yourself geopolitics,â?• as in the case of radical protests scheduled to coincide with meetings of world leaders (the G8 Summits).

The intellectual authority for such tactics draws substantially on the urban practices of the Situationists, and the sociologist Michel de Certeau in â??The Practice of Everyday Life,â?• as well as the writings of Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Giles Deleuze and Felix Guaratti. As well as their advocacy of rhizomic interventions, Deleuze and Guattari champion the singular and specific against the universal, and present such tactics through disruptive metaphors of nomads, frictions between tectonic plates, runaway machines, bodies without organs, parasitism and schizophrenia.

Radical hermeneutics

In so far as urban activism seeks to reverse certain privileged oppositions and hierarchies, it engages in a game that is linguistic, and therefore subject to explanation and critique through Derrida-style analysis â?? displacing the sole expert by the group, top-down command by grass-roots empowerment, universals by specifics.

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Such linguistic tactics, that also correlate with certain bold actions, fall prey to the privileging of which Derrida speaks. Grass-roots activism already alludes to an authentic core, a tribal and somewhat natural order of immediacy and engagement. Problems arise in activism in the insistence on â??real changeâ?• (PEPRAV, 2008, p.11), as if people can know or agree on what it is they are seeking to change, and what they want to change it to. This is arguably one of the problems many people have in accepting the propositions of the Occupy Movement. Apart from giving vent to a widespread mood of frustration, what plan are they offering?

In so far as activism perpetuates its own restlessness then it garners approval from Derridean analysis. As soon as it becomes complacent about its own motives, or the obviousness of its causes, then it gives up its claim to radicality, at least in Derridaâ??s terms.



This post is adapted from Coyne, Richard. 2011. *Derrida for Architects*. London: Routledge, pp.86-98. Also see Snodgrass, Adrian, and Richard Coyne. 2006. *Interpretation in Architecture: Design as a Way of Thinking*. London: Routledge, pp.92-101, and Coyne, Richard. 1996. Deconstructing the curriculum: Radical hermeneutics and professional education. *Edinburgh Architectural Research (EAR)*, (23) PDF. Also see

- Khosharay, Sevi. 2011. *Civil Resistance and Contentious Politics: Creating Opportunities through Information and Communication Technologies (MSc Dissertation)*. Edinburgh: MSc by Research in Digital Media and Culture, The University of Edinburgh, PDF.
- Related posts: No-way logo, Wicked problems revisited, Transilience, Network notion
- Sites of digital activism: Ushahidi, Tactical Technology Collective.

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