

Thinking through logics of 'occupation' in education, politics and everyday life

WORKSHOP MATERIAL

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'The current movements of rebellion, especially those of youth, while they necessarily reflect the peculiarities of their respective settings, manifest in their essence this preoccupation with people as beings in the world – preoccupation with what and how they are "being". As they place consumer civilization in judgment, denounce bureaucracies of all types, demand the transformation of the universities (changing the rigid nature of the teacher-student relationship and placing that relationship within the context of reality), propose the transformation of reality itself so that universities can be renewed, attack old orders and established institutions in the attempt to affirm human beings as Subjects of decision, all these movements reflect the style of our age, which is more anthropological than anthropocentric.' (Freire 1970/2000, 53)

Why talk about 'occupation'?

The recent movement of student-led university occupations, as well as other forms of spatial reclamation, occupation and refunctioning – such as in public buildings like museums, town halls and libraries and the more ephemeral occupations of commercial spaces by UKUncut activists and the University for Strategic Optimism – raise important questions about the significance of logics of occupation for education, as a political tactic and/or strategy, and for deepening our conceptions of how to inhabit the world in everyday life. This workshop is offered as an experimental space to collectively think through the logics of occupation, a time to reflect critically on personal experiences or encounters with these logics and practices, and an invitation to play with the ideas creatively in ways that might inspire our wider projects to re-invent our domin(ant)ating ways of being both in the university and elsewhere. Because we will not be 'in occupation', and if we follow a certain logic that the act of occupying is itself is a condition of transformative learning, this workshop itself is situated in an awkward interstice between theory and practice. But given that this is one of the contradictory spaces we do often inhabit (whether by choice or force of circumstance), the hope is that we can work to 'find methods and strategies of how to most effectively use the space we find ourselves in to find higher positions of subversiveness in struggle' (Shukaitis, Graeber and Biddle 2007, 31).

The workshop is also a more direct response to the Really Open University's recent invitation/challenge to 'understand what it would mean to "strike, occupy, transform" every bit of the world [we] live in'. This is most immediately a question of political action – what is an occupation of space and time, when is it a tactic or a strategy, when is it efficacious, how does it fit into the broader conditions of political power and resistance and wider histories of direct action, what are its internal politics, and etc. However, as much of the knowledge being produced by those participating in explicitly activist occupations suggests, the complexities of the logics of occupation, and their potential implications for informing the recreation of social forms more generally, are significant. They reach far into questions about (at least) the transformation of subjectivity, forms of collective life, the meaning of autonomy, social inclusion and exclusion, the critical attitude, existential dwelling and inhabitation, and institutionalised power. They also beg questions about the possible (even if remote) connections to other meanings of occupation: as a profession or craft, as a marker of status or class, as a military tactic. The theoretical implications are profound. The texts

recommended as pre-reading for this workshop are intended to focus thinking on these sorts of questions; they are plurivocal and in some cases contradictory. I suspect the logics of occupation have serious potential for helping us conceptualise new forms of both political struggle and re-imagined ways of life, and I suspect that the logics of occupation are themselves deeply complex. I suspect they may also be increasingly vital for resistance to domination at all levels in our present situation, in which so many spaces, times and languages are so pre-occupied by other logics, practices and powers.

Questions

- What specific work might we do with the ideas, logics and practices of occupation in projects to re-imagine/re-recreate 'the university', ourselves and our collective futures?
- What are some of the complexities or questions arising from these logics in practice?
- Are there etymological relations between certain forms of occupation as transformative political tactic and/or strategy and occupation as job, craft, process of activity, social position, form of military domination? (See, e.g., alternative usages of the concept in a call for papers on 'Preoccupations' at <http://www.h-net.org/announce/show.cgi?ID=180769>)
- What other factors – emotional, corporeal, psychological, relational – may impact upon different people's abilities to imagine or practice acts of occupation in their own lives?

Texts

- (1) For a statement on the onto-political significance of the logic of occupation, see The Really Open University, entitled '[What do we mean by "strike, occupy, transform"?](#)' (2010) (emphasis on the alternative definitions of the terms as both transformative ethos and political practice).
- (2) Jean-François Lyotard's essay on the student occupation of Nanterre in 1968, '[Nanterre, here, now](#)' (1970).
- (3) On occupation as political tactic and its relationship to political movement strategy, see Inoperative Committee of the New York New School for Social Research, '[Preoccupation: the logic of occupation](#)' (2009) and California-focused Adam Dylan Hefty, '[Questions for a new movement](#)' (April 2010); for a discussion of occupation as territorialisation, see 'The occupations in perspective' <http://thegreatunrest.net/2010/12/20/889/> (20/12/2010) and a critique via the Deterritorial Support Group's '[Occupation/blockade](#)' (18/01/2011).
- (4) Essays on the '[occupation of the political](#)' (with specific reference to tensions around power and organisation in the Leeds occupation, autumn 2010).
- (5) Reflections from [queer-feminist occupations in Europe](#) from the 1980s to the present (Erika Doucette and Marty Huber, 6/2008)
- (6) Reflections on the aesthetics and affective politics of occupation, including Paolo Plotegher's '[London – beauty, anger, joy](#)' (6/2/2011), 'sarahg's '[The beauty of occupation](#)' (31/12/2010).
- (7) For further (mainly affirmative) reflections on recent UK education-related occupations, there is also a series of essays in a new collection edited by Dan Hancox, '[Fightback: A reader on the winter of protest](#)' (2011), pp. 96-124. Nathan Coombs has an article, '[Faint signal](#)', on the recent

California university occupations in Radical Philosophy (#159, January/February 2010). See also news on the recent [occupation of the New Cross Library](#) by family and community activists.