

Global Occupy: methods and strategies: by Dr

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Thanks firstly for inviting me here. Like everybody else, I've been following the events on social media. One of the things that I think is really striking about what's been happening around the world over the last few years is that we've been seeing this kind of political turbulence in Turkey, in Venezuela, in Greece, in Spain, in Brazil, in India, in the United States, yes, even in Britain. It's come to Taiwan perhaps a bit later than some other places, but it's in Taiwan now, like a virus.

I'm currently doing research on Occupy, particularly the camps that were created in London and Hong Kong. One of the most interesting things for me when I was first involved in the London stuff as a participant as well as somebody trying to think in a scholarly way about what was happening was – we weren't marching anywhere, we were protesting in a different way, we went to a space, and we just sat there. And no one had really done that in that kind of way before. And, moreover, we didn't do it at Parliament. We went to the centre of London's financial heart. Fundamental to the London Occupy Movement was just occupying that space outside St Paul's Cathedral. It was also doing something called 'teaching out', doing 'teach outs'. There was a tent city university in the space, and that's the image of 'teach out'. There was a 'teach out' in Russell Square with people you may have heard of, David Graeber, Polly Toynbee were participants in that 'teach out'. One of the things that Occupy was trying to do was basically create new connectivities between publics and protestors through these kinds of actions, and using social media to promote these. This one (Slide 1) is after the London camp was disbanded. This was a protest against the G8 last year, again in a financial part of London, in Canary Wharf. What was interesting about this one (Slide 1?) was it included general assemblies, music, poetry, speeches by relevant academics, such as David Graeber again. I don't know if any of you have been to Canary Wharf before, it's an intensely banal space, there's basically nothing there, just offices. There's quite a lot of money. That seems to be looked after much more carefully than human beings, but that's the choice we've made. So this event was an attempt to totally transform that banal space to something a little more enchanted, a little bit more lively, a little bit more interesting.

These events don't just happen in the UK, they also happen in Asia. So these (Slide 2) are images taken and given to me by people who participated in Occupy Hong Kong. They also occupied the financial centre, they were in the foot of the HSBC building in Hong Kong

Central. And, again, the idea was to draw attention not just to the banks, but also to increasing inequality between the rich and the poor, as it was in the UK and elsewhere, and also the increasing politicisation of space. Any of you who know Hong Kong will know space is at a premium because there doesn't seem to be very much of it. And one of the things they did was to project images and messages on to political and financial centres. There's this one (Slide 3) and this one (Slide 4), and this was part of a politics of absolute performance, of subversion. And one of the things I was reminded of was the importance of performance to Occupy. And we've just seen a little bit of performance here earlier with the turning off of the lights. I think there is a performative dimension to this form of politics. It's very, very important to it. This (Slide 5) is quite a provocative image from Occupy Taiwan. We've heard a lot about police violence, and obviously the way the policing of protests is conducted is critical. One of the things that went viral from the Occupy protest in America was the pepper spraying of female protestors in the face.

So I wanted to try and draw some conclusions about Occupy. I think that there are a couple of things we can say. One of the first features of the Occupy Movement is the rejection of conventional forms of demonstration. We're used to protesting by marching from point A to point B, and being represented by political leaders who take our demands to a party or a Parliament, and try to articulate them there, or maybe achieve some kind of legislative change. The various Occupy protests, the various forms of turbulence, going on in various parts of the world appear to me to be at least a partial if not complete rejection of that kind of protesting. When you occupy a space and change the use of space, something happens to that space. As one activist put it to me, 'When you change the use of space, you change the relationships of people.' So, for example, if we think about a place like the financial heart of Hong Kong or the financial heart of London or Canary Wharf, when you set up an Occupy space in those kinds of places, you try to create an alternative economy, at least for the short time that you're there. For example, you privilege sharing over transactions.

So one of the other things that's happening is a rejection of conventional forms of political organisation, a rejection of conventional forms of political identity. And what comes to the fore in the Occupy groups was horizontal decision making, what they call 'horizontal process'. And one of the interesting videos that I saw about Occupy Taiwan, retweeted by somebody called Sky Lee, was about somebody saying, 'There are no leaders in this movement, there are no leaders.' And that struck a chord in me because it very much echoed things that were being said about Occupy groups in different parts of the world in 2011, 2012.

I think importantly the third feature we need to reflect on is the very direct and confrontational form of protest. What is Occupy? It's a method. You put yourself in a space,

you put your body on the line. So even though it's non-violent, and you see protestors at Occupy Taiwan and elsewhere in the world keeping their hands raised like this to indicate that they are not using violence – but they still get hit of course - nevertheless, this is quite a confrontational form of being disobedient. It's interesting to see these methods being developed, being perfected, and they're very powerful. But it's risky, let's not pretend it isn't.

So I want to draw a couple of inferences. I think what we're seeing is relations between traditional elites and traditional publics in different countries in the world breaking down. I think what we need to understand is this is a comparative methodology. Hence my first line on this one (Slide 6), 'Dear Taiwan, welcome to Europe'. That probably needs a bit of unpacking. What I mean is the consequences of the trade agreement that are being signed but the students are protesting against, are effectively job insecurity, lowering of wages, disappearance of pensions if you've got them, higher graduate unemployment, and increasing social stratification. One of the great things that Occupy pointed to in its slogan 'the 99%', was that the rich 1% have communism, I mean real communism. When they screw things up, we pay for them to get going again. When we screw up, we have to pay. So we've got capitalism, and they've got communism. And it's not Chinese communism they've got, they've got the real thing.

So what does Occupy Taiwan need? I'm not expert on Taiwan, but I know a little bit about the history of the late 1980s and later on, and I think what is needed is more democracy, more assemblies, more occupations. And these need to be discussed, and chatted, debated with in social media, with your international friends and colleagues, and you need to talk to them as much as you can, and make the links that you can, because the only way to keep up the pressure is to have friends all around the world. And a lot of conflict in Taiwan has been framed around *benshengren* (provincial insiders, Taiwanese) and *waishengren* (provincial outsiders, mainlanders). This is the wrong way to think about the problem. The problem is a class problem. It's between the people with money, and the people without money. Bill Clinton said, 'It's the economy, stupid,' and he's right. It always comes down to the economy.

I think I've said enough, thanks a lot.