



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO

Department of Social and Political Sciences

The #OCCUPY network on Twitter and the challenges to social movements theory and research

DEL Research Network

International Symposium “Online Participation and its Critics”

Paris, June 19th-20th 2013



Davide Beraldo

Ph.D. Student in Sociology

Graduate School of Social & Political Sciences

The Occupy Movement/s

- Interaction between physical and digital squares
 - From Zuccotti Park to encampments worldwide
 - Wide exploitation of social media platforms
- “We are the 99%” slogan
 - Minimal master frame
 - Identification criteria flattened to an unspecified dimension
- Lack of unified demands
 - Vague claim against financial capitalism, but a range of heterogeneous issues covered
 - Explicit refusal to formulate a list of demands



From Occupy Wall Street to Occupy Everywhere

- Which scale for this movement?
 - Local movement with minor spill-overs?
 - National movement?
 - Transnational / global movement?

United States	367	Ireland	5	Serbia	2	Pakistan	1
Canada	55	Sweden	5	Bangladesh	1	Poland	1
UK	24	Brazil	4	Belgium	1	Portugal	1
Netherlands	11	Israel	3	Brasil	1	Slovakia	1
New Zealand	10	Mexico	3	Colombia	1	Taiwan	1
Australia	8	Puerto Rico	3	Cyprus	1	Tunisia	1
Germany	8	Slovenia	3	Iran	1	Turkey	1
Spain	8	Switzerland	3	Italy	1	Uruguay	1
France	6	Denmark	2	Japan	1	Total	558
South Africa	6	Finland	2	Norway	1		

Tab.1: stable occupations by country, self-reported (elab. Rogers 2011)



#OccupyTwitter

- Tweets sample
 - 879'994 tweets through Streaming + Search API
 - From October 7th to the 20th 2011
 - Keyword “#occupy”
 - Retained users who emitted 4+ tweets involved in retweet interactions
 - Retweet network of 33070 users and 229609 edges
- Geographical provenience
 - Self-reported info from Rest API + manual check + Yahoo PlaceFinder API
- Geospatial Retweet network
 - Nodes = cities; Links = retweet interactions
 - Geospatial network of 2544 cities and 20659 links
- Co-occurrence Hashtag network
 - Nodes = hashtags; Links = co-occurrence in a tweet



#OCCUPY goes viral

- Instantaneous mutation
 - (October 7th-20th) 8356 variations
 - 122 with more than 500 occurrences



- Dimensions of resemantization

- “Local” (e.g. #OCCUPYBOSTON, #OCCUPYSYDNEY, #OCCUPYLSX)
- “Global” (e.g. #OCCUPYEVERYWHERE, #OCCUPYALLSTREETS, #OCCUPYTOGETHER)
- “Target” (e.g. #OCCUPYCONGRESS, #OCCUPYBANKOFAMERICA, #OCCUPYTHEFED)
- “Issues” (e.g. #OCCUPYSTUDENTDEBTS, #OCCUPYWALMART, #OCCUPYMONSANTO)
- “Task” (e.g. #OCCUPYMEDIA, #OCCUPYARRESTS, #OCCUPYADVICE)
- “Event” (e.g. #OCCUPYTHESUPERBOWL, #OCCUPYMAYDAY, #OCCUPYCHICAGO)
- “Identity” (e.g. #OCCUPYWOMEN, #OCCUPYTHEHOOD, #OCCUPYVETERANS)
- “Reflexive” (e.g. #OCCUPYYOURMIND, #OCCUPYRESEARCH, #OCCUPYKNOWLEDGE)
- “Parodistic” (e.g. #OCCUPYSESAMESTREET; #OCCUPYAJOB; #OCCUPYMORDOR)

Crucial Episodes and Rethorics

- Tweet rates and crucial events
 - Raid on Boston camp (October 11th)
 - New media for reporting repressive episodes
 - Rethoric of a worldwide public judging police
 ✂ → “The whole world is watching”
 - Worldwide mobilizations (October 15th)
 - Simultaneous action in 80+ countries
 - Rethoric of a global scale
 ✂ → “This is a global revolution”

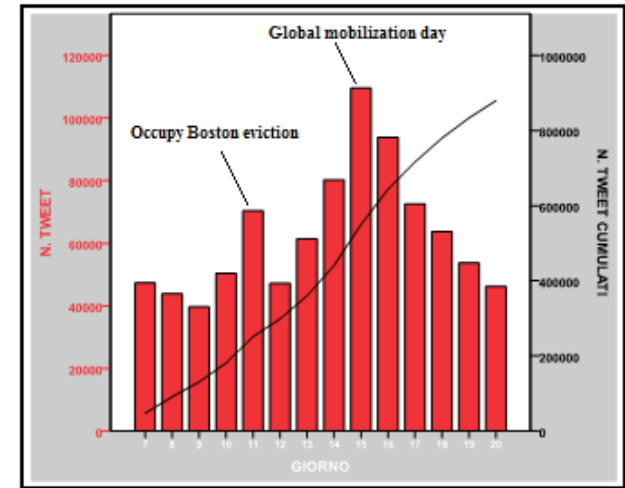


Fig. 4: occurrence and cumulative occurrence of #occupy-tweets; October 7th-20th.

#occupyboston the whole world IS watching: <http://t.co/hBfILf2D> #ows Solidarity!
Keep the peace! Stay strong. You are loved!

Situation at #OccupyBoston getting tense. Riot cops gearing up.
Live feed: <http://t.co/joZw0y5R> Stay peaceful, the world is watching! #OWS

#OWS Note @Boston_Police remember the world is watching #OccupyBoston on live stream,
Do you want to increase support? <http://t.co/PzBcM2o6>

Over 3500 watching #occupyboston livestream. BPD, the world is watching.
Don't be on the wrong side of history. #OWS

@boston_police #ows #occupy_boston The whole world is watching and listening
to your actions tonight, Live. Please stand with the 99%

This is why I know humanity is going to make it! #ows #occupywallstreet
#occupychi #occupyboston #globalrevolution

Has something like this ever happened before? A world wide mass protest for a common cause
or are we writing history? #ows

Protests in over 600 cities in 80+ countries today. #Oct15 #GlobalChange
#OWS #OccupyTogether #Occupy

Today is #Oct15 the day we #OccupyTheWorld. Get out and occupy your town..
If one hasn't started... grab some friends ...

Shhhh...hear that? That's the sound of the People waking up all over the world.
Join us. #OccupyTogether #OccupyWorld #Occupy



Geo-spatial retweet networks



Fig. 13: geospatial network of trans-local flows on October 11th.

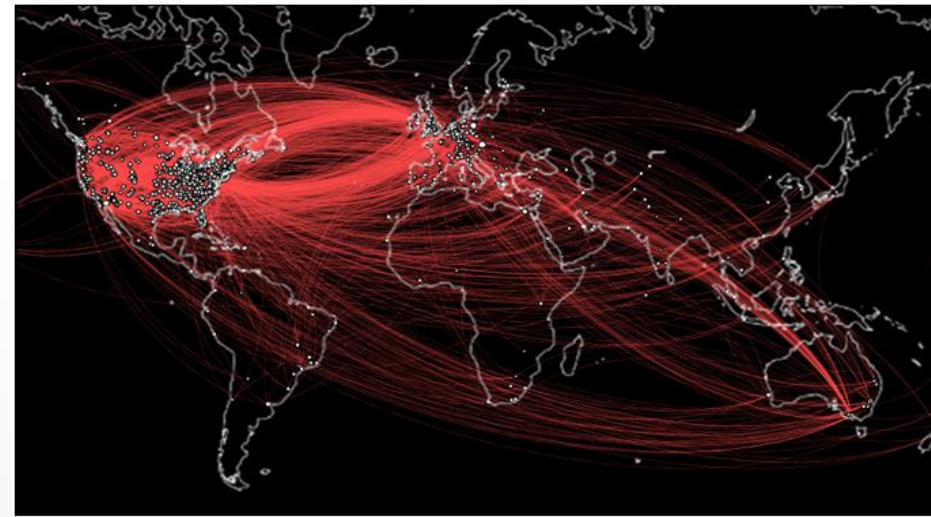


Fig. 3: geospatial network of trans-local flows on October 15th.

- % of trans-local interactions
 - 83.85% across cities
 - 23.37% across nations
- Sensibility to episodes
 - Local and global real-world events affect interactional patterns in the network

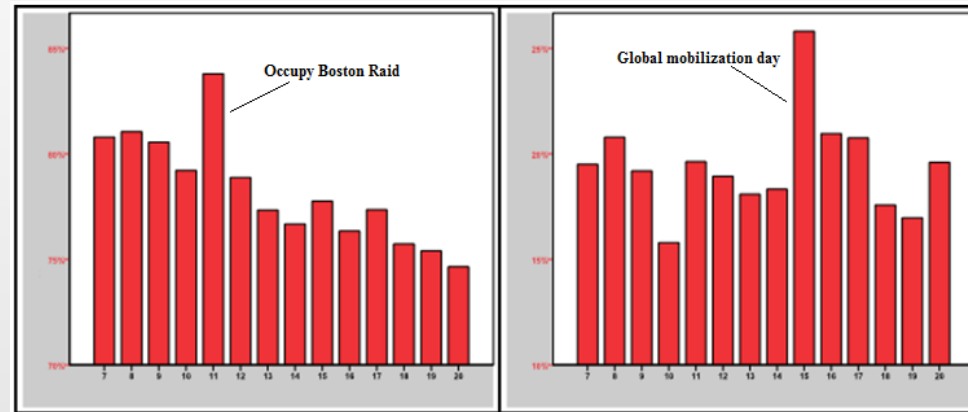


Fig. 2: percentage of trans-local and trans-national retweets per day.

Local hashtags co-occurrence network

- Hashtags VS. users locality

- Divergence between user provenience and hashtag locality
 - min 21,6% - max 79,4%
 - average per hashtag 53,3%

- Bias VS. Despatialization

- Twitter publics are not movements?
- Trans-local flows / identities?

- Dense co-occurrence network

- Recurrent practice of multi-local framing
- High degree of communicative integration

#OCCUPYWALLSTREET	77,7	#OCCUPYPHILLY	50,2	#OCCUPYLASVEGAS	36,3	#OCCUPYNOLA	42,0
#OCCUPYBOSTON	79,4	#OCCUPYPHOENIX	53,3	#OCCUPY TOKYO	46,5	#OCCUPYPITTSBURGH	52,2
#OCCUPYLSX	65,2	#OCCUPYBERLIN	59,0	#OCCUPYDENHAAG	73,0	#OCCUPYINDY	47,3
#OCCUPYSF	56,3	#OCCUPYMN	60,2	#OCCUPYFRANKFURT	80,5	#OCCUPYBALTIMORE	55,0
#OCCUPYLA	54,3	#OCCUPYDAMESTREET	49,0	#OCCUPYSACRAMENTO	72,9	#OCCUPYEG	21,4
#OCCUPYSEATTLE	59,5	#OCCUPYAMSTERDAM	69,1	#OCCUPYOTTAWA	43,3	#OCCUPYDSM	64,9
#OCCUPYDC	74,2	#OCCUPY OAKLAND	79,1	#OCCUPY MONTREAL	33,2	#OCCUPYKC	43,9
#OCCUPYDENVER	69,5	#OCCUPYSYDNEY	46,1	#OCCUPYCLEVELAND	69,3	#OCCUPYNS	27,2
#OCCUPYCHICAGO	53,7	#OCCUPY AUSTIN	53,5	#OCCUPYTAMPA	72,5	#OCCUPYMILWAUKEE	66,9
#OCCUPYPORTLAND	38,8	#OCCUPY MELBOURNE	60,6	#OCCUPYCLT	27,6	#OCCUPYBURQUE	46,5
#OCCUPYTORONTO	38,6	#OCCUPYHOUSTON	47,5	#OCCUPYTUCSON	47,1	#OCCUPYSLC	32,7
#OCCUPYDALLAS	68,4	#OCCUPY MADISON	59,0	#OCCUPYSTL	54,2	#OCCUPY CALGARY	37,9
#OCCUPYATLANTA	60,0	#OCCUPYORLANDO	40,6	#OCCUPY RALEIGH	57,3	#OCCUPYVICTORIA	32,3
#OCCUPYVANCOUVER	39,1	#OCCUPYDETROIT	51,1	#OCCUPYBUFFALO	65,0	#OCCUPYLOUISVILLE	21,6
#OCCUPYSD	50,3	#OCCUPY CINCY	50,7	#OCCUPYMIAMI	59,3	AVERAGE	53,3

Tab. 2: local hashtags and percentage of users tweeting from a different city.



Fig. 1: co-occurrence network of local hashtags.



Toward a semiotic of contention

- Occupy as a floating signifier widely resemantified
 - shapeless semantic (the 99%-related imaginary, the heterogeneity of claims)
 - clear-cut syntax (the #occupy logo, the practice of occupation)
- Alternative interpretations:
 - (pessimistic) Movements as simulacra (Baudrillard 1981) deprived of an authentic content
 - (optimistic) Real virtualities and networked identities (Castells 1997) overcoming fragmentation of experience
 - (neutral) Importance of brands in contemporary culture (Arvidsson 2006) extended to the field of social movements
- New means, new meanings?
 - digital entities as crucial mediators (Latour 2005) in movements' trajectories
 - new combinatory logic in the assemblage of social and semantic networks
 - from the role of collective identities (Melucci 1996; Polletta and Jasper 2001) to the rise of social movement brands?



Pros&Cons of a digital methodology

- Risks

- “Data-laden” theories (see boyd and Crawford 2011)
- Misunderstand the **boundaries** of a movement
- Not all movements are massively **represented** in the digital environment

- Opportunities

- Track **trends** and detect crucial **episodes** (see Baipaj and Jaiswal 2010)
- Map and follow complex phenomena emerging at **differential scales**
- Merge **quanti/quali** and **micro/macro** in the same corpus (see Latour et al. 2012)



Merci!

Contacts:

E-mail: davide.beraldo@unimi.it

Twitter: [@david_berra](https://twitter.com/david_berra)

