



Activism: Guerrilla Gardening

• Dr Eloise Govier

Art 'Soft Guerrilla'

- Kyle Bean's 'Soft Guerrilla' is a collection of photographs inspired by guerrilla gardening which is described as a 'soft form of protest',
- "Kyle's work is usually characterised by a whimsical and meticulous reappropriation of everyday materials and handcrafted techniques".



Artist Kyle Bean

- “A series of weapons made from harmless materials for a feature article centred around the topic of ‘Guerilla Gardening’ and ‘Yarn Bombing’. Photography: Sam Hofman
- Source:
kylebean.co.uk/portfolio/cutmagazin
esoftguerrilla





Govier (forthcoming)

- “images include a stylized photograph of a bomb where milky pink ice lollies are used to insinuate dynamite sticks, the translucent wobbling of an apple green jelly makes up the shell of a grenade, and slices of toast are shaped into knuckle dusters, the art is in the incongruity between the substance and symbol whilst using language that evokes warfare, as seen in ‘seed bombing’”.



'Soft' Protest

- Bean's collection becomes a commentary on the public perception of the guerilla movement, the idea that is a 'soft' form of protest is embodied in the drip of the lolly and the wobble of the jelly, the artist - along with public perception - renders these actions as playful and non-threatening.

Guerrilla movements

- Within the field of participatory arts there is a convincing argument for such artworks to be about creating prototypes for new types of social relations, similarly the intentions behind the guerrilla movement in gardening.

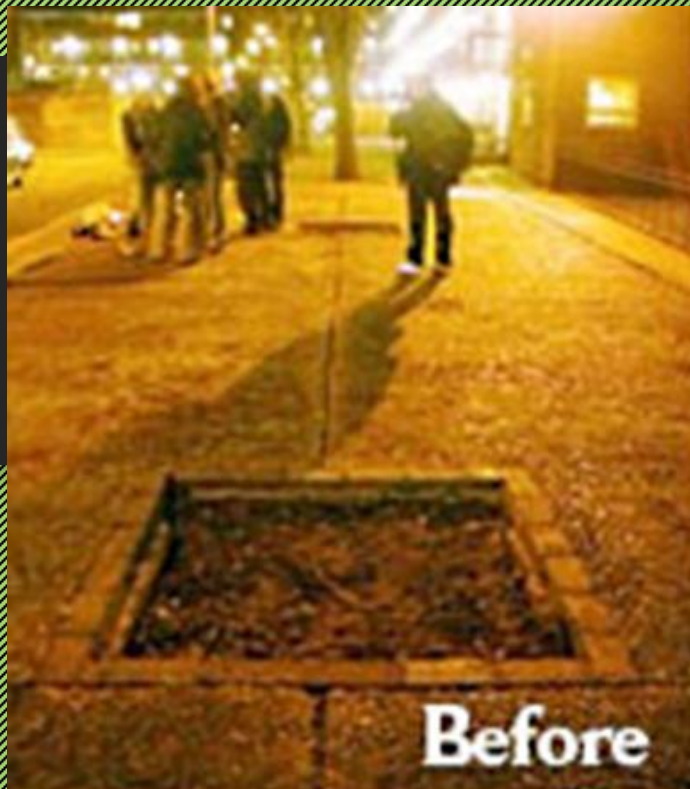
Innocent drinks

Seeing as it's now spring it's the perfect time to be thinking about gardening. If you don't have a garden/window box/allotment/terracotta pot then why not try some guerrilla gardening*? Described as 'a floral assault on neglected public spaces', it's definitely got something going for it. Read more [here](https://www.innocentdrinks.co.uk/blog/2007/march/guerrilla_garde)...

Source:

https://www.innocentdrinks.co.uk/blog/2007/march/guerrilla_garde





Before



After



Before



After

***innocent in no way condones illicit acts of horticulture.
(Mar 8, 2007)**

Source:

https://www.innocentdrinks.co.uk/blog/2007/march/guerrilla_garde

Global Movement (Hardman et al 2018)

- “Guerrilla gardening is a broad term which is associated with actors occupying space for the growing of vegetables or plants without permission ([McKay, 2011](#))”.
- “The perception that guerrilla gardening is merely small-scale is incorrect, with the global Incredible Edible movement and many more formal projects owing their success to the informal practice ([Scott et al., 2013](#))”.

Urban Food Growing Movement

- Guerrilla gardening at the 'informal end of the urban food growing movement' (Hardman et al 2018)
- Hardman et al (2018) conducted research on the practice using the following method: ethnographic and interview data
 - focused on the actors involved
 - their relationship with authority
 - the wider impact of their activities
 - explored their motives, aspirations, values and beliefs. (Hardman et al 2018)

Why do people do guerrilla gardening?

- Regenerates 'forgotten' spaces
- Brings communities together
- Social
- Joy of gardening
- Cross-generational appeal

Why do people do it?

- People want to garden but don't have a garden
- Richard Reynolds:
 - 'right to the city'
- Positive impact on the surrounding environment
- Beautifying neglected space
- Bringing production into the center of the City.



Urban Agriculture

- Tackling food chain ‘disconnects’ and creating productive ‘urban landscapes’ (see Wiskerke and Viljoen 2012)
- Urban agriculture could bring production closer to consumers (urban consumers)
 - This would cut food supply chains
 - Tackle carbon footprint/air miles

Urban Agriculture

- Urban Agriculture has the potential to 'enable' people
- Particularly people who are suffering from food poverty
- Urban Agriculture could provide people with access to fresh produce

What is Food Poverty?

Food Poverty



- Defined by Public Health Network Cymru
- “Food poverty means that an individual or household isn’t able to obtain healthy, nutritious food, or can’t access the food they would like to eat. Despite increasing choice and affordability of food in the UK, many people eat what they can afford, not what they want”.
- Different factors to consider: affordability, availability, cooking skills and education.
- Source: <https://www.publichealthnetwork.cymru/en/social-determinants/poverty/food/>

Food Poverty

- “There are several definitions of food poverty, which makes it difficult to accurately assess [...], but what they all have in common is that if people have a poor quality diet, do not have the resources or access to sufficient and/or appropriately nutritious food necessary for a healthy life then they are experiencing food poverty”.

Urban Growing

- Allotments
- Urban farms
- Community gardens
- Rooftop developments



Urban Farm

- ‘An urban farm is an intentional effort by an individual or a community to grow its capacity for self-sufficiency and well-being through the cultivation of plants/animals’ (Hanson, Marty and Hanson 2012, 5)



Urban Agriculture

- Proponents of UA often cite Detroit (USA) and Havana (Cuba) as exemplars in which the practice has made significant impacts in cities:
 - regenerating space
 - feeding residents in deprived areas
 - helping to create more sustainable economies (Giorda, 2012; Ioannou et al 2016).

“Cuba’s Urban Farming Revolution: How to Create Self-Sufficient Cities”



Nearly 8,000
parcelas, or
small lot
gardens, are
found in
Havana today.
Photo: Andy
Cook

Source Andy Cook





An urban farmer in Havana makes the most of salvaged objects, reusing a soda bottle for sowing and roofing tiles as planter bed material. Photo: Andy Cook



Reusing soda bottles for watering devices, and using permaculture techniques for animal husbandry on his rooftop, this El Cerro farmer tends to more than one hundred rabbits. Photo: Andy Cook

Source:
<https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/cuba-s-urban-farming-revolution-how-to-create-self-sufficient-cities/8660204.article>



Havana's urban farms have varying levels of infrastructure and investment, but much of the labour is done by hand. Photo: Andy Cook

ILLEGAL OR INFORMAL? (Hardman et al 2018)

- “Guerrilla gardening is a militaristic term and is often stigmatised as an activity of younger radicals with a deep political agenda (see for instance [McKay, 2011](#)). Furthermore, there is often a perception that those practising guerrilla gardening are adopting an illegal rather than merely an informal approach (Adams, Scott, & Hardman, 2013; [Hung, 2017](#))”.

Hardman et al (2018)

- No documented prosecutions
- “More appropriately conceptualised as an informal act as opposed to an illegal act ([Adams, Hardman, & Larkham, 2015](#); [Reynolds, 2008](#))”
- “The very notion of formalised guerrilla gardening is an oxymoron; many pursue the activity predominantly due to its informal nature ([McKay, 2011](#))”.

Grey Issues

- Taking plants
- Putting in plants
 - Weeding and tidying can be interpreted differently



Issues

- Planning permission
- Risk assessments
- Insurance

Why do it?

- Actors who are confused about permission
- How to get permission through the planning system
- For the ‘thrill’ of it
 - Challenging authority (see Adams and Hardman 2014)

Richard Reynolds

- “I’ve learned that the world is not such a bad place. I’ve learned you can get away with amazing stuff, that people won’t steal it — they will sometimes, but you can put something precious and valuable in a vulnerable place and it can thrive, and that’s a good feeling.” He’s also discovered that “neglect attracts neglect”. Like a child or a garden, “the more you love it, the more it will give you pleasure.”



Hardman et al 2018

- “With regards to obtaining planning permission, a considerable amount of UK-based UA advisory bodies stipulate that groups and individuals must seek guidance on whether they require such consent before creating spaces for food cultivation, regardless of whether it is eventually required ([Community Land Advisory Service, 2012](#), [PlanLocal, 2012](#))”.



The informal approach

- “A considerable number of sites analysed in this Welsh Rural Observatory report were of an urban origin and a core issue identified was the lack of contact with the planning system. Such a barrier resonates well with the guerrilla gardening literature which identifies similar issues, resulting in many actors adopting the informal approach as a last resort in an attempt to enable the activity to take place” (Hardman et al 2018).

Diversity

- Diversity Our findings highlighted a diversity of individuals involved in the informal movement; from teachers to planners, students and the elderly.

Hardman et al 2018

- Adds character and diversity
- Actors not restricted to spatial norms
- Enabled to act outside of restrictions
- Is a practice which brings creativity and innovation to our urban landscapes.

- Liz Christy Gardens
- Seeding bombing
- key figure



Adams and Hardman 2014

- Focus attention on the micro politics of garden activism, arguing that the social backgrounds and motivations of those involved in guerrilla gardening and their relationship with other users of the space surrounding the dig site are also important—but largely under acknowledged—aspects of guerrilla gardening

Permission to plant

- “Guerrilla gardening in the new millennium is a variant on this theme, revolving less around the claiming of particular spaces for parks, gardens or ecological habitat on a permanent basis (Hardman, 2011). Instead, it focuses more on anonymous insurgent activities that involve night-time or covert planting by individuals or groups on public or private land perceived to be neglected, underutilised (Reynolds, 2006) or yet to be brought forward in the development process (Kitchin, 2012). The principal ‘rule’ of guerrilla gardening is that permission to plant should not be sought beforehand” (Adams and Hardman 2014)

Critique: Romanticization

- “Hardman (2011) has argued that dominant representations of guerrilla gardening are strongly inclined to overplay or romanticise the celebratory aspects associated with illegal cultivation from a somewhat ‘abstracted’ position. The first criticism we raise, therefore, is in relation to how guerrilla gardening has been represented. Differences such as geographical location (and sensitivity to different public spaces), the inspiration for being involved in such an activity, and social background/occupation have, for the most part, been underexplored (for example, McKay, 2011)”
- See Adams and Hardman 2014

Essentialised Construction

- “It could also be argued that existing literature on guerrilla gardening veers towards an essentialised construction of guerrilla identity; as something that is both ontologically separate from ‘mainstream culture’ and, as Reynolds (2008) points out, internally cohesive and unified around a common purpose of beautifying underused urban space” (Adams and Hardman 2014)

Essential Reading: Hardman et al (2018)

- ‘Guerrilla gardening and green activism: Rethinking the informal urban growing movement’. Landscape and Urban Planning. 170:6-14.