## **Culture Jamming & Climate Change**

### **BRENT STURLAUGSON**

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While much of the field of architecture claims to be concerned with the mounting effects of climate change, its tools for combating it are limited. Important gains have been made in raising minimum performance standards, developing alternative materials, and voicing support of progressive policies, but these gains are insufficient. In the face of unprecedented warming and its demonstrated spillover effects, architecture must leverage every possible angle in pursuit of a viable future, including those that capture the imagination. This project seeks to forge new relationships between architecture and climate change by using activist techniques collected under the umbrella of culture jamming.

For this project, the culture jamming process involves three actions. First, research into the supply chain of building products contributes to a narrative that describes the web of human and nonhuman relations involved in material production. Second, collages are created from found imagery in a workshop setting. Third, the culture jam concludes with an exhibition of the supply chain narratives and collages at industry-sponsored events. Allied with concurrent efforts in related fields, the goal of this project is to fundamentally alter the relationship between architecture and climate change by tracing the supply chain of building materials and attending to their manifold effects, both tangible and intangible. Instead of reducing the number of system variables, as is customary in sustainability rubrics, it seeks to increase the number of entanglements in the process of design and construction as a way of politicizing practice and increasing the relevance of architecture in the fight against climate change.

### INTRODUCTION

While much of the field of architecture claims to be concerned with the mounting effects of climate change, its tools for combating it are limited. Important gains have been made in raising minimum performance standards, developing alternative materials, and voicing support of progressive policies, but these gains are insufficient. In the face of unprecedented warming and its demonstrated spillover effects, architecture must leverage every possible angle in pursuit of a viable future, including those that capture the imagination. This project seeks to forge new relationships between architecture and climate change by using activist techniques collected under the umbrella of culture jamming.

In their introduction to the book, Culture Jamming: Activism and the Art of Cultural Resistance, editors Marilyn DeLaure and Moritz Fink define culture jamming as "scrambling the signal, injecting the unexpected, jarring audiences, provoking critical thinking, inviting play and public participation." They also outline eight characteristics common to many culture jamming practices. For DeLaure and Fink, culture jamming is appropriative, artful, playful, anonymous, participatory, political, serial, and transgressive. And while they admittedly do not see culture jamming as a panacea, they find it relevant as a "creative and inventive mode of public engagement."4 Drawing on these descriptions, this paper outlines a process for culture jamming architecture with media that show the broader impacts of design on climate change. Specifically, it highlights the hidden costs of producing and consuming everyday building materials.5

For this project, the culture jamming process involves three actions. First, research into the supply chain of building products contributes to a narrative that describes the web of human and nonhuman relations involved in material production. Second, collages are created from found imagery in a workshop setting. Third, the culture jam concludes with an exhibition of the supply chain narratives and collages at industry-sponsored events. (Figure 1) Allied with concurrent efforts in related fields, the goal of this project is to fundamentally alter the relationship between architecture and climate change by tracing the supply chain of building materials and attending to their manifold effects, both tangible and intangible. Instead of reducing the number of system variables, as is customary in sustainability rubrics, it seeks to increase the number of entanglements in the process of design and construction as a way of politicizing practice and increasing the relevance of architecture in the fight against climate change.

### **ACTION 1: NARRATE**

Architecture is a material practice, par excellence. In addition to the myriad building products that constitute its physical presence, architecture mobilizes an enormous quantity of human labor, which at its core is also material. From the social reproduction that underwrites capitalism to the coal mines that power the server farms that host building information modeling, the materiality of architecture is inseparable from its practice. Broadly conceived, materiality also offers a

# Introduction

Title: Culture Jamming & Climate Change Creator: Brent Sturlaugson Affiliation: Assistant Professor, University of Kentucky Location: Palo Alto, CA Date: September 13, 2019

In a 1990 article for the New York Timer, Mark Derry describes the emerging scene among colluser jamming artists. In began by describing, Art Farmi 1975 performance, Media Bum, in which a speeding vehicle coables into a carefully constructed aggrant of thereivision. Responding to the film' prompt, "Haven't you ever vanied to put your foot through your teler on scene" Deep reposeds, "The amenew, [3 years law, a a secondary artist of the contraction of the proper position of the position of the proper position of the position of the proper position of the position of th

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This project outlines a process for culture jamming architecture with media that show the hidden cost to amental production. The goal of "Culture Jamming & Climate Change" is to radically after the relationship between architecture and climate change by tracog the surpely chain of building materials and attending to their manifold effects, both trapples and intrapplile. Instact of reducing the number of system vasibles, as is custurately in sustainability rubries, it seeks to increase the number of enter tomary in sustainability rubries, it seeks to increase the number of enter tomary in sustainability rubries, it seeks to increase the number of enter tomary in sustainability rubries, it seeks to increase the number of enter tomary in sustainability rubries, it seeks to increase the number of enter tomary of politicising practice. What follows is a boil explanation of the project in a series of serious contractions are supposed to frequently asked questions.

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What is to be gained by understanding the materiality of architecture through its



interconnected lanks. If the links hold, the supply chain works and a product is delivered, but it is single link breaks, the supply chain collapses. Moreover supply chains often of discriminate between tangble and intengible relation ships. As much as a supply chain relies on on the availability of row materia and working production facilities, it also relies on handshake agreement policy decisions, electricity rates, and minimum wages. For this reason, supply chains offer a famework for critically commining the relationship of

Why is allige the shows representational noteinages. The making of a build in ginvolves spatial and temporal dispinations, which person challenges to visualizing its social political, and environmental impacts. Rather than set to capture the entire web of relations, which would be a finish extensy tany way, this project seeks to depict the disjunctions themselves, and to do so; it uses collage as method. In this case, college has the advantage of delivering fragments of prepackaged narratives that intermingle to create new relationships and renders.

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Why is the workshop component important to this project? To be an effective agent of change, culture jamming must operate at scale, and to reach the maximum number of participants, the workshop intends to teach students, educators, and professional how to jam. All documentation is freely available and professional p

The workshop consists of two phases. The first phase involves the centarion of voltal and visual assarsives that descable the usene forces of material production in architecture. Beginning with a specific architectural metarial and traveling up the napply chain of its production, the written portion describes the precise transactions that constitute its custome. For the centarion of the constitute is customer, which is a superior of the constitute in the constitute is customer. The constitute is customer in the constitute in the constitute is customer in the constitute in the constitute in the constitute is customer in the constitute in the constitute in the constitute is customer in the constitute in the

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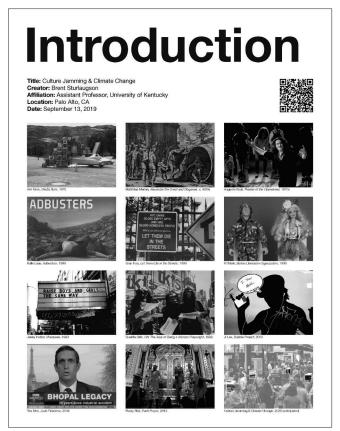


Figure 1. An introduction to the project and accompanying culture jamming examples.

framework for considering the ramifying effects of design, particularly through the supply chain of its production. In effect, supply chains are characterized by their relationality and exist only as interconnected links. When the links hold, the supply chain successfully delivers a commodity, but if a link is broken, the system collapses. Moreover, supply chains do not discriminate between tangible and intangible relationships. As much as a supply chain relies on the availability of raw material and working production facilities, it also relies on backroom deals, thinktank recommendations, labor markets, and legal regimes. Consequently, supply chains offer a framework for critically examining the relationality of architecture as a material practice of both seen and unseen forces.

For this culture jam, the first action is to construct a narrative describing the forces of production that participate in the supply chain of an everyday building material. Organizationally, the narrative begins with an exposé of the various aspects involved in the manufacturing stage of the material, followed by a tour through its consumption phase, and concluding with a description of its end-of-life stage. In addition to building a coherent storyline of these various processes, the narrative seeks to invoke vivid images of these territories, landscapes, and actors. Rather than a general overview, it privileges specific accounts and contexts. The narrative provides the basis

for understanding the cascading effects of design decisions on the material world, and it serves as context for subsequent collages.

### **ACTION 2: COLLAGE**

The second action unfolds as a workshop in which collages are created from found imagery in popular magazines. These collages seek to disrupt the flow of uncritical consumerism in professional design circles by creating counternarratives that challenge prevailing assumptions of material production. The making of a building involves significant spatial and temporal disjunctions, which often present challenges to visualizing its social, political, and environmental impacts, and rather than seeking to capture the entire network of its relations, the collages seek to depict the disjunctions themselves.

While collage can be as sophisticated as other representational forms, it can also be deployed quickly and improvisationally, using readily available supplies that require little expertise. Collage also enjoys an affinity with culture jamming, both of which seek to alter the meaning of prepackaged narratives through juxtaposition. Moreover, collage has a special capacity to represent climate change by enabling multiscalar readings. Reflecting on the representational challenge of climate change, Emily Eliza Scott writes, "it is representations

that engage multiple, ultimately incommensurable scales and registers (e.g., the molecular, bacterial, geopolitical, geological, and architecture, visible, invisible, material, speculative, and so on) that best suit our present moment."8 To facilitate collaging in a workshop setting, a rudimentary toolkit is provided, which includes bare blades and adhesive dots. (Figure 2) These supplies are intended to be used by participants familiar with basic architectural and design skills, as well as a basic understanding of material provenance, although this intention is not meant to foreclose participation by others. In fact, an undisciplined perspective might offer greater insight than one trained in habitual ways.

Creating the collages also requires a supply of images from contemporary architecture publications, which are readily available in trade magazines and professional journals. Specifically, the methodology outlined in this project relies on images of architectural materials, often found in product advertisements. Since its aim is to highlight the unseen effects of architecture and design, the materiality represented in these images is imperative. As Meredith Miller has articulated, "The physical and aesthetic qualities of architecture can create visceral cues, sensible reminders of the elsewheres and elsewhens that encompass and support that architecture's

existence (and our own)." In addition to the representation of architectural materiality, the collages seek to showcase the "elsewheres and elsewhens" of material production. These can include zones of extraction, sources of electrical energy generation, laborers in assembly plants, politicians brokering deals, lobbyists greasing palms, activists in protest, or interns clicking through virtual space. In short, the collages aim to broaden our understanding of how architecture is made, the forces governing its production, its tangible and intangible effects, and the impacts of accepting an uncritical stance on sustainability. The completed collages, along with their accompanying verbal narratives, are to be distributed in exhibition halls at industry conferences, which is described in the third action.

### **ACTION 3: EXHIBIT**

An important distinction among culture jamming practices involves method. How a jam is structured depends on many variables, and in turn, affects is potential impact. To jam effectively is to enlist the same nuance and grace associated with other forms of cultural production, and far from a monolithic activity, culture jamming is as heterogenous as the publics it seeks to represent. Despite frequent associations with freewheeling resistance, it is a practice that demands thorough engagement and disciplined deployment.



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oting an uncritical stance on sustainability.

Of course, creating the collages is only the first part of this project.



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modification. At Del aure and Flad point out, culture jamming often relies on scrality. Access to digital source files enables students, clustators, and practitioners to lost workshops and jun events. In addition to the physical supplies listed above, the only remaining material is cashtock paper and envelopes, not which these pages are to be paristed. The digital Indiker is also intended to be an archive of jun activities, including photographs of installations, derivation on the theme, and digital reproductions of collages

- Maelyn DeLaure, Moeirs Fink, "Introduction," in Colour Javaning Activities and the Art of Calubral Resistance, Maclyn DeLaure, Moeirs Fink, eds. (New York: New York: University Press, 2017): 6
   Biol, 25
- Bristy Eliza Scott, "Narchives of the Present-Pointer On Climate Change and Representational Benderows," in Climate. Architecture and Relatery Insegings, James Graham, ed., (b\*ew Yorks Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2016): 136
   Messedish Militer, "Vivers from the Flastisphere: A Predict to Post-Rock Architecture," in Climate. Architecture and the Plantery Inagency, James Ciaham, ed., (b\*ew Yorks Columbia

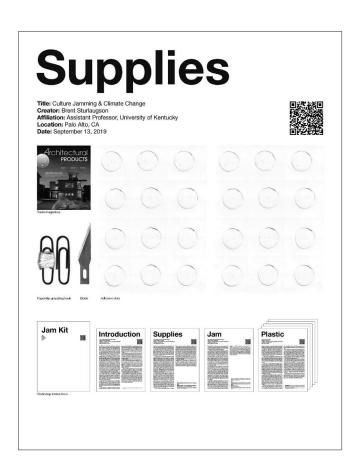


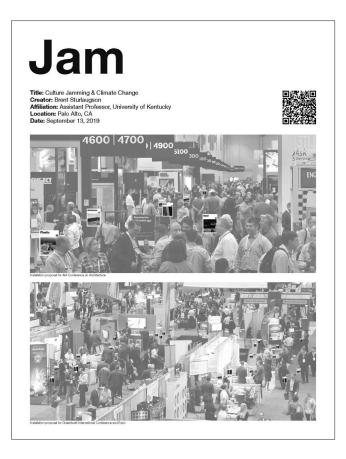
Figure 2. Inventory of supplies and instructions for use.

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Figure 3. Description and illustration of the culture jamming process.

Among the many methods for subverting meaning in dominant discourse are sabotage, parody, and pranking. For communications theorist Christine Harold, these forms are unequal in their effect. Sabotage, for Harold, "does little to address the rhetoric of contemporary marketing—a mode of power that is quite happy to oblige subversive rhetoric and shocking imagery," while parody "perpetuates a commitment to rhetorical binaries—the hierarchical form it supposedly wants to upset."10 Moreover, "parody, as negative critique, is not up to the task of undermining the parodist's own purchase on the Truth as it maintains both a hierarchy of language and the protestor's role as revealer. Parody derides the content of what it sees as oppressive rhetoric, but fails to attend to its patterns."11 Pranking, on the other hand, offers a method of culture jamming that, for Harold, "resists less through negating and opposing dominant rhetorics than by playfully and provocatively folding existing cultural forms in on themselves."12 "Pranking," she continues, "addresses the patterns of power rather than its contents." <sup>13</sup>

Another important distinction among culture jams concerns tone. Like method, the specific tone of a jam inevitably affects its reception, and like other aesthetic variables in the hands of culture jammers, the tone must be properly calibrated. Analyzing the context surrounding Pussy Riot's 2012 *Punk Prayer* at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, Anna Baranchuk compares the tone of what might be considered grotesque and burlesque practices. For Baranchuk, "Pussy



Riot's tragic grotesque rhetoric turned out to be too coherent," resulting in inflamed and retaliatory actions against them, including imprisonment by the Putin regime. If Instead, Baranchuk speculates that a more "comically driven burlesque" tone may have been more effective. "The burlesque," she writes, "as the fantasy-frame of radical ambiguity is a more suitable protest tactic to counter a cynical authoritarian state, as it verges toward what Lacan calls symbolic stupidity and invites a wide range of unexpected interpretations and reactions." Whereas tragedy "always requires killing the enemy," comedy "reinvents the evil villain as a mistaken fool and reminds us that being mistaken is a necessary human condition."

Drawing on these distinctions, this project enlists methods specific to pranking and seeks to achieve tones resembling the burlesque. The prank, in this case, involves a material narrative that exceeds those commonly told in industry circles. The argument, however, remains ambiguous, as the collages invite multiple readings. For Harold, "attaching an explicit argument, making a prank make sense, may undermine what is unique about pranking's signifying rhetoric." Similarly, the tone aims to communicate fuzziness surrounding the relations of a material's supply chain. Channeling Baranchuk's "radical ambiguity," the burlesque tone "disturbs previously established meanings, or the Imaginary, exposing the very Symbolic meaninglessness that is foundational of any identity."

After the collages are complete, the third action is to spatialize the jam. (Figure 3) This, too, might be considered a burlesque prank in which the point is abundantly clear, if not precisely articulated. To stage an impromptu exhibition of the collages, additional supplies are required. These include more adhesive dots for wall mounting, thread for hanging, and paper clips for building grappling hooks and anchors, all of which lies flat and fits in a standard envelope. Since the audience for this project is design professionals, the occasion to jam is marked by any large gathering of design professionals. While this project could proceed virtually ad infinitum through social media channels, the initial scope is limited to physical presence, of bodies, of collages, of encounters with actual material.

Finally, as DeLaure and Fink point out, culture jamming relies on seriality. To expand its scope and encourage its replication, this project provides access to digital source files through a shared folder, which enables students, educators, and practitioners to independently host workshops and jam events. (Figure 4) The shared folder is also an archive of jam activities, including photographs of installations, derivations on the theme, and digital reproductions of collages.

### **CONCLUSION**

In a 1990 article for the New York Times, Mark Dery describes the emerging scene among culture jamming artists. He begins by narrating Ant Farm's 1975 performance, Media Burn, in which a speeding vehicle crashes into a carefully constructed ziggurat of televisions. Responding to the film's prompt, "Haven't you ever wanted to put your foot through your television screen?" Dery emphatically responds, "Yes!" He continues, "Some of today's most incendiary artists derive the structure, style and subject matter of their art from mass media. Mordantly funny, frighteningly Orwellian and very much a product of the times, their work challenges the image merchants. Moreover, it constitutes a search for truth in the technetronic age, where, increasingly, perception is reality."20 For Dery, culture jamming bends the imagination by subverting popular media in service of radically different ends, and as an adaptable method, it is capable of accommodating shifting cultural concerns.<sup>21</sup> Culture jammers are the first to admit that their tactics are insufficient in bringing about substantive change on their own, but the activity can create momentum in ways other modes of operating cannot. As a creative practice seeking to enact meaningful change in the world, architecture might learn from these examples of culture jamming to expand its repertoire of engagement, specifically concerning climate change.



Figure 4. Workshop participants creating collages from magazines using the provided culture jamming kit.

### **ENDNOTES**

- For examples of these gains, see: General Services Administration, "High-Performance Building Certification System Review," https://www.gsa.gov/gbcertificationreview (accessed November 1, 2019); American Wood Council, "Tall Mass Timber Code Changes Get Final Approval," December 19, 2018, https://awc.org/news/2018/12/19/awc-tall-mass-timber-code-changes-get-final-approval (accessed November 1, 2019); American Institute of Architects, "AIA Supports Green New Deal Framework," February 8, 2019, https://www.aia.org/press-releases/6105450-aia-supports-green-new-deal-framework-(accessed November 1, 2019);
- 2. For example, see David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2019)
- Marilyn DeLaure, Moritz Fink, "Introduction," in Culture Jamming: Activism and the Art of Cultural Resistance, Marilyn DeLaure, Moritz Fink, eds. (New York: New York University Press, 2017): 6
- 4. Ibid. 25
- A recent essay by Mark Jarzombek invites speculation into the untold stories of common architectural materials; Mark Jarzombek, "The Quadrivium Industrial Complex," e-flux architecture (November 11, 2019) https://www.e-flux.com/ architecture/overgrowth/296508/the-quadrivium-industrial-complex/ (accessed November 12, 2019)
- Examples of these narratives derive from a seminar I teach called "Supply Chain Materialism."
- Examples of these collages emerged from a series of workshops I hosted for the American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS), the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA), and my students in "Supply Chain Materialism."
- Emily Eliza Scott, "Archives of the Present-Future: On Climate Change and Representational Breakdown," in Climates: Architecture and the Planetary Imaginary, James Graham, ed., (New York: Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2016): 136
- Meredith Miller, "Views from the Plastisphere: A Preface to Post-Rock Architecture," in Climates: Architecture and the Planetary Imaginary, James Graham, ed., (New York: Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2016): 72
- Christine Harold, "Pranking Rhetoric: 'Culture Jamming' as Media Activism," in Culture Jamming: Activism and the Art of Cultural Resistance, Marilyn DeLaure, Moritz Fink, eds. (New York: New York University Press, 2017): 64
- 11. Ibid, 65
- 12. Ibid, 65
- 13. Ibid, 89
- Anna Baranchuk, "Balaclavas and Putin: Pussy Riot, Carnivalesque Protest, and Political Culture Jamming in Russia," in Culture Jamming: Activism and the Art of Cultural Resistance, Marilyn DeLaure, Moritz Fink, eds. (New York: New York University Press, 2017): 366
- 15. Ibid, 366
- 16. Ibid, 368
- 17. Harold, "Pranking Rhetoric," 85
- 18. Baranchuk, "Balaclavas and Putin," 383
- In the United States, these gatherings include the American Institute of Architects Conference on Architecture, the Greenbuild International Conference and Expo, and the International Builders' Show, among others.
- Mark Dery, "The Merry Pranksters and the Art of the Hoax," New York Times, December 23, 1990
- 21. Nearly twenty years on, Dery's impulse remains, as demonstrated by an expanding archive of culture jamming projects. Among these are Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed*, which tackled political issues by enlisting audience participation in performance art; Kalle Lasn's founding of *Adbusters* in 1989; Gran Fury's 1980s and 1990s interventions on behalf of ACTUP that sought to bring visibility and awareness around AIDS; RTMark's famous *Barbie Liberation Organization* stunt from 1993 that swapped the prerecorded speech from G.I. Joe and Barbie; Jenny Holzer's 1993 *Marquees*, which appropriated theater marquees to display her word art; Guerilla Girls' catalogue of gender inequality awareness, including *Oh! The Joys of Being a Woman Playwright* from 1999; Ji Lee's 2002 *Bubble Project*, which consisted of blank speech bubble stickers applied to existing urban signage; the Yes Men's infamous prank on Dow, which sent its stock plummeting; and, Pussy Riot's *Punk Prayer* from 2012, which resulted in highly controversial prison sentences.