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ON THE GROUND

Sunaura Taylor

Oakland Raid

October 27, 2011

Early Tuesday morning, Occupy Oakland encampments at Oscar Grant Plaza and Snow Park were raided and destroyed by police. There were numerous reports of excessive use of force and violence. Nearly 100 people were arrested and held on \$10,000 bail. The emergency text alert system, which apparently had over 1,000 people signed on, failed to go off for many people, and so occupiers were left alone to defend the camps in the early hours of the morning. The police blocked off streets, rerouted buses, and shut down the closest BART stop. Because of the police blockade, it was reportedly next to impossible for media or legal observers to see the raid. Photos from the raided Oscar Grant Plaza show an utterly destroyed encampment, with tents cut up and intentionally destroyed.

At 4 PM that day, people who had not been arrested, as well as supporters of Occupy Oakland, rallied at the Oakland public library to show support of those arrested and outrage over the destruction of the camps. What began as a rally and march of about 500 people turned into a march of thousands. We marched through Oakland reclaiming our streets and demanding that our parks be returned to us. Over and over again, we were met with tear gas and extreme police force. Many people were injured, including Scott Olsen, a 24-year-old veteran who survived two deployments to Iraq. He was hit in the head with a police projectile (either a tear gas canister or a flash bang grenade) and was temporarily in critical condition. Videos show that as protesters rushed in to help him, police tossed in another tear-gas canister or flash bang grenade. One photo shows a woman in a wheelchair in a cloud of tear gas. The energy, although often very scary, was amazing—passionate and brave and dedicated. The protesters vowed to be out there every evening at 6 PM until our parks were reclaimed.

As the world turned its attention to Oakland, my partner and I had to leave, taking the red-eye out that night to New York for a family engagement. We are both glued to the reports that have been flooding in of the amazing rally that took place last night. People reclaimed Oscar Grant Plaza, tearing down (and neatly stacking) the fence the police had encircled the plaza with. There seems to have been very little police presence. The gathering held a general assembly where nearly 1,600 people voted on proposals of what to do next. The general assembly passed a decision to have a general strike and mass day of action next Wednesday, November 2.

As the website for Occupy Oakland says, “The whole world is watching Oakland. Let’s show them what’s possible.”

Astra Taylor and Sarah Resnick RUMORS

If an American was condemned to confine his activity to his own affairs, he would be robbed of one half of his existence; he would feel an immense void in the life which he is accustomed to lead, and his wretchedness would be unbearable.

—Alexis de Tocqueville

October 17, 2011, Astra Taylor

Right before midnight I tuned in to the Zuccotti Park livestream. I had been down there earlier but still I felt compelled to check in. Though the encampment, with the help of a couple thousand early-rising allies, had successfully resisted the city’s eviction attempt days before, I had a lingering sense that the occupation was something precious that may dissipate or be destroyed as quickly as it had emerged. And when the video finally buffered and began to play, my concerns were validated. I couldn’t quite tell what was happening—the image was dark and blurry, the audio disjointed—but the police were definitely moving in. They were angry about a tent, and a confrontation was brewing. Tents had been a point of contention since the beginning, with any semblance of a semi-permanent structure serving as a pretext for officers to march into the park, tear it down, and arrest a few people in the process. “The Constitution doesn’t protect tents,” Mayor Bloomberg had declared. “It protects speech and assembly.”

While protesters seemed to be reconciled to camping out wrapped in blankets and tarps, the medical tent was different. I had heard that the National Nurses United, already providing training and support to demonstrators at occupations across the country, had petitioned Bloomberg to make an exception for the cause of public health. A tent was erected

to serve this purpose. I braced myself for a fight as I watched a human chain form around its periphery, sick at the prospect of watching people get clobbered in real-time. But it didn’t happen. Instead, Jesse Jackson waltzed into the park and seamlessly linked arms with the demonstrators to defend against the dismantling. “Jesse Jackson!” people screamed, and the scene suddenly shifted from anxious to exuberant. Faced with a celebrity-endorsed blockade, the police backed down, and in the ensuing days I noticed more and more tents popping up.

On Mon, Oct 21, 2011 at 3:23 PM, Astra Taylor wrote:

Sarah, I just got this forwarded by a friend. Should we investigate? I want to know what the hell is going on. The idea that the encampment may implode over drumming would be laughable if it weren’t so depressing, and an actual possibility. So many movements and groups have destroyed themselves from the inside out. Will this happen to OWS too? I hope not.

X says a woman who’s been very disruptive . . . managed to get folks on board with the idea that the oppression of the drummers is a civil rights issue. She’s rallying POC folks to meet at 5:45 at the red tripod sculpture with the drummers, to march from there to the community board meeting playing drums as loudly as they can.

October 21, Sarah Resnick

A group of rogue drummers planned to march to a meeting with Community Board One to let them hear what they thought of the “Good Neighbor Policy.” Posted throughout the park, the policy

asked (among other things) that drumming be limited to two hours a day so the neighbors—not to mention the demonstrators—could have some quiet. Yet for the drummers, two hours would not suffice—it was a quelling of free expression. And as of earlier that week, various listservs and social media were sounding the alarm: Our under-recognized allies at the community board had grown tired of all that banging. They had supported the occupation and their endorsement was not trivial. We could thank them, for instance, for their part in thwarting the plans for “cleaning” the park. It’s true, apparently. At a wedding, a state senator had shown my friend his text messages with some higher-up at Brookfield. But that was last week and now, we were told, the neighbors were mad. If they turned against the movement, another eviction attempt would surely follow.

I met up with Astra at the park at 5:30 PM and we lingered by the di Suvero sculpture. We were curious; concerned, too. And we wanted to see what would happen. But no group amassed. And over at the west end of the park, the drums were still pounding and the dancers erupting and there was no indication it would ever let up. We grew sure that our lead was a nonevent. And we were pleased! Perhaps the community meeting would end well, after all. And we found out later it did. Better, at least, than expected. The neighbors voted to give OWS another chance, though they pleaded for the drumming to be curtailed.

On the train platform, we discussed what else to occupy—past failures (at 38 Greene), future possibilities. Rumors. We deliberated over strategy, and contemplated symbolic resonance. We put forth suggestions—places we’d like to see taken. I prattled on until I realized Astra was no longer listening. She had turned toward a short, forty-something woman in a navy suit, and loafer flats, standing not three feet away. The woman stared right past us, still and unblinking. And it was clear that she was trying to look natural, ordinary, casual. But she was holding up her cell



ILLUSTRATION BY ERIN SCHELL. POLICE PHOTO BY MICHAEL GOULD-WARTOFSKY

phone in the least natural way, her elbow bent, her arm straight up—it's not how gravity would have liked it. She's filming us, we said.

The woman stepped forward; she was at a different angle now. And her arm was still up! Astra, much taller than the woman, maybe even by a whole foot, bent down and leaned in close. Are you filming us? Is your camera on? I peered at the ID card on a lanyard around her neck. She works at Deloitte, the accounting firm. But her eyes stayed straight out in front, and if she saw or heard (and she must have!), there was no sign of recognition. And her arm still up and her phone pointed toward us. The train finally came and we walked down the platform, bewildered and laughing. We joked of how the FBI would be admiring our sweet faces within the hour. Though without saying so we knew there were things less likely. She'd mistaken us for figures of import, radicals of influence, though we were not.

I moved to the backdoor window, hoping to catch a glimpse of her in the next car. Maybe she's just one of those people who films everything, I mused. Like that artist, Wafaa Bilal. Unlikely, we agreed.

The doors opened at the next station. "Slavoj!" Astra called, through the rush-hour pack. And Žižek maneuvered his way to where we were standing. We recounted our tale of citizen surveillance, and he complained of the hippies at Occupy San Francisco. At Union Square, we exited the train, and he called after Astra: "I hear you are married. Don't you know that's a sin!"

October 23, Astra Taylor

Back at Zuccotti, this time to meet Judith Butler who has agreed to come and give a short speech, an "open forum," as these events are called. A few dozen people gather round her, sitting on steps and crouched on concrete. "It matters that as bodies we arrive together in public, that we are assembling in public; we are coming together as bodies in alliance in the street and in the square," she says, every few words repeated by the human microphone—our bodies, our voices, her amplification. "As bodies we suffer, we require shelter and food, and as bodies we require one another and desire one another. So this is a politics of the public body, the requirements of the body, its movement and voice."

October 25, Astra Taylor

Today I went to Penn Station to pick up my sister, Tara, visiting from Georgia. We went straight to Zuccotti Park, arriving around 8:30 to watch the General Assembly. A woman, who looked to be in her early thirties, was submitting a proposal to buy fifteen walkie-talkies to be used by the people who watch over the occupation at night. She was requesting \$800. She explained that there had been some bad stuff going on when people were asleep and the community watch group needed to be able to communicate to keep things safe for everyone. "Like what kind of bad stuff?" a skeptical guy asked. The women replied that there had been reports of fights, drug dealing, theft, and, finally, sexual harassment. Over the last few days I had heard from friends, in person or over email, that security was a growing concern; here it was being publicly discussed. The crowd, however, seemed reluctant to believe these were serious issues until

a young fellow from sanitation stepped forward. "We see these things when we clean up," he said. "It's happening. We need to deal with it." After a few clarifying questions—How will the walkie talkies be charged? Would they accept a smaller number or walkie talkies? What brand do they plan to purchase?—the proposal finally passed, my sister and I enthusiastically casting a vote to approve the budget. As we strolled around the park, admiring the bicycle-powered generator in the kitchen, the ever-expanding library, the media team, heads bowed over their computers hard at work, it was hard to imagine feeling unsafe. It was getting late and the park was not well lit, but it was full of people and buzzed with energy.

When we returned to my apartment a couple hours later a message from our other sister, Sunaura, awaited us. She had been occupying Oakland and was supposed to be heading to the airport to catch a red-eye and join us for a family visit. But instead she and her partner were caught up in protest, in a large spontaneous march against the raid on Occupy Oakland the day before. The community, outraged, was fighting back. "I don't know if you can hear me," Sunaura shouted over drumming and chanting into her phone, exultant. "This is amazing! We want to stay! Can you see if you can change our tickets?" Tara and I went online and found our way to a livestream expecting some rousing spectacle, but what we saw looked disturbingly like a war zone. We found footage of Oakland police shooting tear gas canisters into the crowd and read reports of rubber bullets being used against demonstrators. Multiple people emailed me a photo of a woman in a wheelchair trapped in a haze of mace and I started to panic. After a moment of calm reflection, though, we realized it wasn't our sister—Sunaura wouldn't wear that hat. But she's still not picking up her phone. Half an hour later we finally get a text. She and her partner got out just as the cops were closing in and will make their flight. The woman from the photos, I learn the next day, is her friend, a talented dancer and dedicated civil disobedient with a long arrest record.

October 26, Sarah Resnick

A. had texted: "meet 8:30 or 8:45." And I didn't have to ask—he meant the Police Brutality Solidarity march with Oakland. I was already at the GA: we were debating twenty thousand for bail plus one hundred tents plus shipping. We've got plenty in the bank, can't we spare some for Oakland? Yes.

It's almost 9 PM now and I see A. and C. and we hasten down the sidewalk, we're already lagging. We catch up on Church, but A. sprints to the front of the march and I don't see him again that night. After a clash with police, we splinter into two groups. And later I hear that he and some others had stolen orange netting and run through Tribeca, up Church and onto Sixth Ave, and onto the set of *Gossip Girl* on MacDougall.

But I'm still with C. and we're headed up Broadway. At Prince we veer left. To Washington Square! Then we hear it's surrounded, so right on Mercer. More arrests now but we press on, returning to Broadway and up toward Union Square. We've taken the street now and we're walking through traffic. A truck driver honks and gives us a wave. A couple exits their cab to



PHOTO BY JEREMY AYERS

join us. New York is Oakland. Oakland is New York.

October 30, Sarah Resnick

It's more and more difficult to spend time at the park. Turns out, the revolution is but a series of meetings held at far-flung locations, and I sat in on three today. Four if you count the one in the bar. As the afternoon progressed, the anecdotes amassed, echoing an email I'd received earlier that week: "H. said people were really burning out, getting tired, bad things happening, etc. H.—not a paranoid person at all—said he's seen police cars dropping off schizophrenics at the park, and I believed him."

The story varied each time I heard it. That cops were encouraging the chronically-intoxicated and the longtime homeless to head over to Zuccotti. That buses from Rikers were dropping off the recently-bailed two blocks from the park. That protesters in search of police assistance found officers unwilling to help. That the kitchen had cut back on hours to discourage freeloading. Some (the Rikers buses) left me skeptical; others (police encouragement), less so. And while the veracity or falsity of each was impossible to determine with any certainty—they were all hearsay, all third-party accounts—surely there was some truth in what was being said.

I returned home late that evening to see yet another variation reported in the *Daily News* by Harry Siegel:

"He's got a right to express himself, you've got a right to express yourself," I heard three cops repeat in recent days, using nearly identical language, when asked to intervene with troublemakers

inside the park, including a clearly disturbed man screaming and singing wildly at 3 AM for the second straight night."

Life in the park was undoubtedly becoming more complicated.

On Mon, Oct 31, 2011 at 9:31 PM, Astra Taylor wrote:

Sarah, did you see these? Tweets from a Mother Jones reporter—mention of rape at Zuccotti. I've heard about incidents of sexual harassment, but still I find this hard to believe. But maybe I just don't want to. It's just too awful.

What do you think? And is it responsible for reporters to tweet this kind of speculation, to broadcast gossip?

JoshHarkinson

A trustworthy #OWS activist tells me that an influx of homeless and hardened criminals is causing major issues for Zuccotti campers

JoshHarkinson

She cites reports of cops dumping inmates a few blocks away. There are also rumors of NYC's City Homeless Services sending homeless there.

JoshHarkinson

Most disturbingly, she says there have been reports of rapes at Zuccotti. People are

now locking their tents at night.

Josh Harkinson

If the rogue elements at the park can't be tamed, she thinks #OWS will relocate to a new site that is more easily defended.

On Mon, Oct 31, 2011 at 9:47 PM, Sarah Resnick wrote:

It's hard to imagine with everyone living in such close proximity and the community affairs people up all night, keeping watch. But anything is possible. I hope it's not true!

And I agree these tweets are irresponsible. That's the danger of twitter and the reporters who use it as if they are no longer reporters. Especially in sensitive situations such as this one. His followers may retell this information as if it is fact. And if it doesn't turn out to be true, then . . .

November 2nd, Astra Taylor

I went down to Wall Street just after 11 hoping to catch the veterans march from the Vietnam memorial, but was running

a bit late and couldn't find them. No wonder. I later learn they marched in dignified silence and were, for the most part, free of a conspicuous police escort. There were no barricades, no plastic handcuffs, no orange netting, no authorities with bullhorns. Only as they approached Zuccotti Park did the brigade begin to shout, in military cadence: "Corporate profits on the rise, but soldiers have to bleed and die! Sound off, one, two. . ." Many carried signs that read, "I am still serving my country." Later, when I spot a few servicemen lingering on Broadway, I am reminded of a federal report on homeless veterans that had been released only days before, which I read about in the newspaper. There are 144,000 of them, the experts determined, and they make up a disproportionate percentage of the homeless population (young veterans are twice as likely to be homeless as their nonveteran peers) in part because many have disabilities—both physical and psychological—as a consequence of their military service.

Not just in New York City, but at occupations around the country, mental health and homelessness have manifested as interconnected issues, with members of both groups increasingly scapegoated. At Zuccotti Park the homeless are said to be "occupying the occupation" and are portrayed as freeloaders and "loonies," a danger to the community, a threat to "health and safety" and "quality of life." The homeless are unfairly lumped in with the dangerous, drug-addicted, and, to quote

the NY Post, "deranged." But housing status and personal conduct aren't the same thing (if nothing else, the elaborate fraud and theft of Wall Street executives should remind us that those who have multiple homes and who appear perfectly sane can be criminal). More importantly, the presence of homeless people at encampments should not be seen as a liability for the movement, but a reminder of why the protest exists, since their condition is directly linked to the unjust and corrupt economic policies OWS is rallying against. Recession-induced homelessness is set to skyrocket over the next five years and shelters across the country are already filled to capacity with people whose homes have been foreclosed on (in the Midwest foreclosures are accounted for 15 percent of the newly homeless).

Meanwhile, funding for social programs is being chipped away at: earlier this year Bloomberg's budget called for a six percent cut in homeless services. People who should be getting help from the city, in other words, are seeking aid at Zuccotti Park.

Later in the afternoon I introduce two friends so they can talk about bolstering efforts to provide mental health support for people who come to Occupy Wall Street, which has become a veritable tent city. Protesting, especially occupying, entails real strain. It's cold and noisy on the street, which means many occupiers are suffering from sleep deprivation, which compounds other problems. Though it's not just the people who are visibly troubled—the ones who are attracting negative press—that my one friend

it conducts itself. All it took was showing up at a working group meeting to get involved.

OG: Is it still as open as it was a month ago?

LE: It certainly is. Or, we're trying. We're having difficulties with outreach and with people volunteering to facilitate general assemblies. Facilitating seems like a daunting task because we haven't done a good enough job codifying what the job is, so it seems like an art you have to master, or at least have experience with. There are certainly better and worse facilitators, more experienced and less experienced, but I think more people could do this than have been willing to.

It's the most visible role, and people tend to conflate visibility with leadership, seeing the facilitators as leaders. As a result we want as many different faces as possible to be in that role to drive home the point that facilitators are not the leaders, and that anyone who wants to can step up and be the facilitator.

More specifically, there are a lot of issues about who the facilitators are. They're white dudes who, given the privilege in their lives, are more inclined, or feel more comfortable, stepping up into these visible positions. So we're trying very hard to outreach to the women's caucus and to the people of color caucus so that other people take part in this process.

OG: Is it widely understood in the working group that a facilitator is not necessarily a leader and vice versa?

LE: Yes. Do you know about the Structure Working Group?

OG: Explain it to me.

LE: The Structure group is people who've been involved from the beginning who started out as facilitators. The general assembly, as it was originally conceived, was never imagined to have to make decisions on the scale that it has been making decisions.

For example, no one ever expected that the GA would have to distribute any funds, let alone half a million dollars. So a group of facilitators who got burnt out—and identified several big problems with the GA as the deliberative and decision-making model for the movement—formed the Structure group. It's indicative of their awareness of the possibility of facilitators overstepping their bounds that they said, "What we're doing now goes beyond the scope of the Facilitation Working Group," and broke off and created a separate working group called Structure, to develop this idea of a new model, which they then presented to the GA, and after some difficulty and controversy, got passed.

So we're now transitioning this week to a model in which the general assembly and the spokes council are operating

PROCESS

FACILITATION SITUATION

I spoke to my friend Leo Eisenstein in the palm-tree-studded lobby of 60 Wall Street, a privately owned public space (like Zuccotti Park) in the Financial District where many OWS working groups now meet. Leo had just finished a meeting with the Facilitation Working Group, of which he has been a member since a week or so after the first OWS rally. —Eli Schmitt

Gazette: What is the Facilitation Working Group?

Leo Eisenstein: The Facilitation Working Group is the working group that facilitates the nightly general assembly meetings [in Zuccotti Park].

OG: How did you end up working for this working group as opposed to another?

LE: When I was getting involved I was most taken with general assembly, as a spectacle, and as both a symbolic and real decision-making body, so I was interested to learn about how

is worried about, but regular protesters. "Let's face it," she says, "people with emotional issues end up at this kind of thing." That's not meant to disparage the movement or detract from the cause, she says, clarifying. It's just to acknowledge that many activists are wounded, broken, and want to fix the world that perhaps made them that way. It's a kind of sublimation. There's something beautiful about it, but maybe they need help too.

November 2nd, Sarah Resnick

Oakland general strike today. They've shut down the port. Twitter is going crazy.

JeffSharlet

Any firm sources on twitter buzz that @occupyoakland protester hit and killed by car, driver released by police? Seems unlikely.

JeffSharlet

Merc News, MSM, says Mercedes ran red light bcause driver pissed at protesters. Onlookers believe deliberate and acceleration post-impact.

JeffSharlet

Looking worse. MT @XXX WARNING GRAPHIC! photo of #Occu-

pyOakland protester after hit by car is.gd/x2pNHp

JeffSharlet

I've been thinking that an Occupy fatality was possible. I thought it would be an overzealous blow w/ a nightstick. Appears it's road rage.

JeffSharlet

@XXX @XXX @XXX No, I haven't "reported" anything; I'm not there. Trying to sift thru accounts. No death confirmed.

JeffSharlet

@XXX No deaths. Those rumors were false.

On Thurs, Nov 3, 2011 at 5:45 PM, Astra Taylor wrote:

Reading the news today and talking to people and it appears the stories of sexual assault are true. Ugh. My fear is that things will become worthy of a Joan Didion style essay, a tale of decline and darkness, of dreams turning into nightmares. It's terrible that this happened, but the mayor

is making it sound like this sort of shit only goes down at Zuccotti Park (which it doesn't) and, more laughably, that it only goes unreported there when A) these incidents were reported to the police multiple times and B) lots of women don't report attacks out of fear of stigma and shame. I have to admit, I was really hoping this was a fabrication by OWS's enemies, a deception engineered by the rightwing media.

On Thurs, Nov 3, 2011 at 6:33 PM, Sarah Resnick wrote:

This is deeply disturbing at best, and I worry for the victims. I am also concerned for the broader movement,

too—I hope the press does not blow this up and out of proportion. The individuals responsible for these crimes are not representative of OWS, nor are these crimes particular to the park. We're in New York, and like everywhere else in the world, there is crime throughout this city, everyday. In the first three months of 2011 alone, the NYPD reported 340 forcible rapes (which does not include statutory rape and other forms of sexual assault) and it's unlikely that most, if any, of these were covered by the media. To suddenly give attention to an otherwise unacknowledged criminal act because of its location is to ignore the pervasive normalization and

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But when you have individuals and working groups working every single day in the brass tacks operations of the movement, a hierarchy does develop of who's more informed and who is in a better position to speak on an issue. So, the spokes council identifies what decisions need informed deliberation and links those up with a model more tailored to those who are in working groups and therefore informed about the daily operations of the movement.

A lot of people feel very wedded to the general assembly as this beautiful, symbolic spectacle of everyone having a voice, this very rough and tumble direct democracy process. That's why there will still be general assemblies. But the spokes council will deal with things like budget proposals. If a working group has a project that it wants to go forward with, but it feels like it needs the support of the movement, or if it feels like it needs collaboration, the spokes council will be an opportunity for those working groups to collaborate in an efficient way. It doesn't need to come to the general assembly for those sorts of decisions.

There were a lot of pretty maddening instances in which the GA was talking about thing which it just had no—in which it was just the wrong model to be talking about things like that.

OG: What are some examples, besides money?

LE: The real problem is that working groups stopped consistently showing up to the general assembly. Without those informed voices it was largely spectators who were being given an opportunity to participate in a discussion. And that's not for nothing, but it's not an efficient way to be making decisions.

One example is that one day at the GA, someone brings a proposal of getting a biodiesel generator. The biodiesel will be donated, there will be an agreement for consistent donation of biodiesel, all it takes is the upfront cost of buying a generator. That was passed. And then a week later, the sustainability working group started talking about having stationary bicycle-powered generators. And so both of those proposals were passed, which leaves the GA and the movement as a whole in a funny position where there's just blatant redundancy and no one knows what to do about it.

So the spokes council is in large part a way to ensure that the people who are making decisions are showing up to

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hand in hand to address all the decision-making needs of the movement.

OG: Can you explain the spokes council model?

LE: The working groups form clusters, and coming from each cluster is one individual representative. Like the spokes of a wheel, you have a circle of these clusters, and inward from them is a circle of their spokespeople. So once a proposal is put to the spokes council, the representative will turn around and have a conversation with their working group about the proposal. Once that group comes to consensus on the given proposal, their spoke turns around and represents that decision at the spokes council meeting, and they'll be able to voice concerns, questions, or friendly amendments coming from the cluster, to the bringer of the proposal.

One reason the Structure Working Group came to this model is that the question of who has a voice in these decisions, and in this process, is a loaded one. On the one hand, we're saying that it's an all inclusive movement, and a lot of people feel strongly about that and can really get behind it.

tolerance of sexual violence against women that happens everyday.

And with respect to Bloomberg: As if sexual misconduct is never swept under the rug in the halls of great wealth! We need only look as far back as the coverage of the Dominic Strauss-Kahn case, for instance, which, irrespective of his guilt or innocence, revealed a culture of condonation around sexual predation. Friends like Bernard Henri-Lévy call him “charming, and seductive,” while the French essayist Pascal Bruckner pilloried the incident as evidence of our “twisted puritanism” here in the US.

November 4th, Astra Taylor

Today I heard from folks in Georgia that the little Occupy Athens—which is sometime only a tent strong—has its share of problems. Last week, when she was visiting, my sister Tara had been distressed because the organizers shooed away a homeless man from the first meeting. Sure, the guy is a notorious alcoholic, she told me, but he’s also a sweetheart who has been around for years. She thinks they should have tried to recruit him. Today our houseguests, also from Georgia, tell me about the mini-occupation’s tribulations. Supposedly the encampment keeps getting ransacked by homeless men getting up off their benches in the middle of the night and drunkenly rustling through all the coolers and boxes in the food area, making a huge mess while on a hopeful hunt for donuts. Not only that, but the protest also attracts a good number

of counter-demonstrators. For example, two straight-looking fellows were standing around the other day with “Invade Mexico” signs. My friend claims that Rush Limbaugh has been advising his listeners to infiltrate OWS and show up with off-message signs to confuse and turn off passersby. “Are you guys here because of Limbaugh?” my houseguest asked the interlopers. They wouldn’t respond to the question, she told me, but one of them broke into a wide and mischievous grin. But when I look for evidence that this conspiracy is true—how great it would be if the crazy signs at Zuccotti Park could be blamed on conservative radio cranks!—I can’t find any.

Down at Wall Street I run into an ex-coworker, D., now working for the business press. We trade notes on the events of the last six weeks and discuss actions that are being planned. Everyone is gearing up for November 17, the occupation’s two month anniversary. Things need to escalate, we agree, or the media may lose interest; D.’s editors are already saying the protests are old news. D. is excited but also frustrated; so many scoops but he can’t write about them, at least not yet. Right now they are just whispers, designs only beginning to take shape, too premature to make fully public. Things need to stay under the radar a bit longer. Meanwhile, he wants me to call his great uncle and help organize a field trip for a bunch of geriatric radicals since he can’t—his job demands the appearance of neutrality. A lot of the residents at his uncle’s nursing home are eager to join the protest and they have vans and drivers to bring them to the park. Since it’s New York City there must be tons of wizened leftists who would want to join them. Old people want to occupy. Could I help make it happen?

A few feet away a man is speaking, a lawyer, an author, but I don’t catch his name. “It’s cold down here today,” he

begins. “It’s so cold I saw a bunch of Bank of America lawyers on the corner with their hands in their own pockets.”

On Fri, Nov 4, 2011 at 9:07 PM, On November 4, Astra Taylor wrote:

Sarah, Are you out and about? I hear that community watch has a meeting at 10pm at the west side of the park and that some important news is being announced. I hear progress is being made on the security front and I’m curious to know more about how the community is handling conflicts.

November 4, Sarah Resnick

Friday night at the Tree of Life. The stories around Zuccotti had grown progressively worse that week, though it seemed we’d weathered through it. At the very least, park safety issues were being addressed, and well at that: “safe spaces,” including group tents, would be created for people who identified as female; the victims were receiving needed support; and there were trainings around consent and other forms of assault awareness. A security team (a group that prefers to be called “community alliance”), avowedly nonviolent and trained in de-escalation techniques, now patrols the park round the clock, while empowering occupiers to stand up for each other and work with police when need be.

The wind was bitter cold and we stood with our heads bowed and waited. Occupy

LE: I hesitate to make a judgement on that because it hasn’t happened yet. I think people’s initial response to the proposal of a spokes council was that it looked on its surface like representative democracy and they were really troubled by the idea of moving away from a directly democratic process. The structure working group has had to educate people about the fact that it isn’t just representative democracy.

People feel very committed to the general assembly as this painstakingly, excruciatingly slow process that needs to be slow. It’s amazing to me on how small a time-scale that happens, that people as a movement are interested in new ways of organizing people and making decisions on different scales of population, and then once a habit formed, of the general assembly, people feel very resistant to a change.

OG: Is the anxiety about the spokes council coming from people in a specific position, or in specific working groups, or is it hard to generalize?

LE: It’s a little hard to generalize where the anxiety is coming from. I feel more comfortable generalizing that the working groups, say a dozen to twenty, whose operation is crucial to the everyday working of the organization, are in support of the spokes council. The people who are expressing anxiety about it, that’s a little less clear to me.

One person who expressed strong concern was from the Internet Working Group. He said that this is a way of consolidating the power of financial decision-making. He read a [Mayer Amschel] Rothschild quote saying, roughly, “If you show me who controls the money, I care not who makes the laws.” And that I think was one of the key concerns, is that this seems like a way to reduce the number of people who had control of the purse strings.

In a way, that is what it is. But there is a considered reason for that.

For example, on October 26, the direct action working group came to the GA with a proposal to send \$20,000 to Occupy Oakland, to get people out of jail and pay for medical fees, and there was a long discussion about that in the GA, and people saying, “We aren’t going to be able to give \$20,000 every time there’s a big raid of an occupation.” That’s a legitimate issue to bring up at the GA and really important to the discussion. What’s not is when someone says, “I think we should be even more supportive of Occupy Oakland, I propose we send them \$40,000.” Now, of course, the direct action committee working group is going to say “Yeah, uh, \$40,000 sounds good too,” but at that point you’re throwing

meetings where those decisions are getting made and contributing to striking a balance between working groups as autonomous, empowered groups, and the wider consensus-founded power of the GA or of the whole movement.

OG: Will the spokes council meetings be open to the public?

LE: Yes. As far I understand, there will be a place for observers, and then also anyone is welcome to sit in on one of the clusters. So, if people show up on Monday, Wednesday, or Friday to a spokes council meeting they can say, “I’m interested in getting involved with the internet working group.” You’ll have a time and a place where every working group is accountable to show up.

It’s going to be a bit of a shit show, in that there are currently seventy or seventy-five registered working groups, so it’s unclear to me, how, going forward, the spokes council is going to recognize working groups or not. That’s an ongoing problem, because being a working group has been an important qualification, but what it takes to be a working group has not been fleshed out. The plan for the first spokes council is to spend time acknowledging or “ratifying” each working group based on a charter or description that each group is putting forward.

OG: Earlier you said about the general assembly that it was both a symbolic and real mode of decision-making. Do you feel like the spokes council moves away from the symbolic and more toward the real?

Shabbat had just finished a service and we chatted some with those who lingered. We'd either missed the meeting or it wasn't happening. I thought of Much Ado About Nothing: Had we become Shakespeare characters, steered by rumor and intrigue?

Astra suggested we do a quick tour of the park. At the northeast end, a large group had gathered. Someone was filming and there was a bright light. Before we could hear anything, a large placard:

Poetry Assembly. We stood on the edge of the crowd for a bit unsure where to go next and then decided to stop and listen: "We can fill each other with ourselves . . . Smother my face with your pussy." The words made us cringe; given what had happened in the park, they seemed particularly ill chosen. But as they were earnestly repeated by the crowd, echoing through the people's microphone, we laughed.

around random numbers. The initial proposal, one hopes, had included a specific amount of money based on calculations of what was needed. And when there's space to just throw out arbitrary numbers, because we should be giving "more" or "less" support, and when those numbers gain any traction within that body—that strikes me as irresponsible decision-making. It was a little reassuring to me that people in the GA said, "Just doubling it doesn't make much sense," and it's necessary to trust the general assembly in those situations, especially as a facilitator, but it's troubling to me that that kind of interaction can even proceed at all.

And often times, those kinds of contributions are coming from people who . . . maybe it's their first time at the general assembly or whatever. It's a slow process when anyone who wants to show up immediately has a voice—

OG: —Without necessarily having thought about the issues beforehand, or necessarily having a stake in dealing with them in an efficient way.

LE: Exactly.

OG: Do you feel like some frustrations with the GA have to do with the human microphone?

LE: The human mic sets up a dynamic of mutual respect between the speaker and the rest of the GA: the GA respects the speaker's voice by providing the human mic, and in turn, the speaker (one hopes) respects the time and attention of the GA by staying on process and by speaking as concisely as possible.

With this dynamic in mind, I'd say that the human mic can have an exacerbating effect on people's frustrations with the GA. That is, when people are being disruptive, or are not following process, it's especially frustrating because it's abusing the human mic, and thereby spitting in the face of that dynamic of mutual respect.

OG: Do you feel like the formation of the spokes council is a response to a feeling of slowed momentum in OWS?

LE: No. I think that it's an acknowledgement of permanence. Which could very well coincide with a slowing of momentum in the sense of, we got an unbelievable initial burst of media attention and public approval and response. The media attention is still there, though it's nationalized, and the public approval is still there too.

The operations of the Liberty Park movement are taking a turn towards permanence. It's scary and fascinating to make that transition from provisional to permanent in a movement that has no clear end goal or structure. We are just building as we go, and it feels sometimes like we are building without a blueprint.

And the transition towards permanence is a big deal when you're talking about how decisions are going to get made because a lot of the substance of the movement is: "How do decisions get made in this country?"

OG: Whereas in national politics they're fairly permanent, and it's very problematic?

SHEILA HETI

General Assembly at Washington Square Park

It takes more than one person in a country to turn mud into clean water. That's why we all had to be there, and why we all needed a chance to speak.

But we had to leave the park by twelve. There wasn't enough time for everyone to speak.

The people who ended up speaking—their voices echoing through the park—were the people who had the biggest voices and the least fear.

That's not me. I had many thoughts and ideas, but not one of them was about how I was going to become one of the people speaking. I knew I'd never be one of the ones speaking—not in a million years.

So what makes this movement different from the rest of life, where we each take for ourselves the position we know, in our heart, is our own? It's not different—it's the same. And you can't find me one person in that crowd or on earth who can change that about people.

LE: Yeah. That's why it's such an interesting problem for the movement to have.

OG: What do you see as the work for both the facilitation working group, but also OWS as a whole, in the next three months?

LE: In the next one to three months, we will see a significant transition in dealing with indoor and outdoor space.

And we are building toward articulating something. It's cool that the question of demands has been going since day one. It's an asset to hold out and refuse to buy into an interaction between us and some institution we could be asking things of, or demanding things of—holding out is an asset that we have. And I think it will continue to be an asset. I don't think we have some sort of time limit on the media attention we get or the positive feelings we're getting from the rest of the country.

But we should be building toward something. And in that way, there's been a sort of split, at Liberty Park, in terms of people's focus. Some people spend their time and energy on, "How can we maintain this space?" and that's a full-time job. And living outdoors is itself a full-time job, as it gets colder. And yet another group of people is figuring out, "What is this movement going to start articulating outwardly?" All three of those are necessary.

MICHELLE TY

This is an edited version of a letter that circulated among Berkeley graduate students.

October 31, 2011

Dear Fellow Graduate Students,

As someone who rarely likes to make an imposition on people's time, I am writing this letter to entreat you to consider setting aside some of your hours this Wednesday—and with these hours to support the general strike that was called for by Occupy Oakland.

As you have undoubtedly heard, the Oakland police raided the peaceful encampment at Frank Ogawa Plaza last Tuesday—at five a.m. Dressed in riot gear, the police destroyed tents and confiscated property, including medical supplies. Ninety-seven people were arrested. When, that evening, people gathered at the library and decided to reclaim the plaza, the police reacted with an even greater show of force. Against a crowd of unarmed civilians, they deployed rubber bullets, flash grenades, and fired not one, but six rounds of tear gas. In the fray, a projectile fired by an officer hit an Iraq War veteran, Scott Olson, resulting in a fractured skull and the impairment of his faculty of speech.

What does it mean to enclose public space in order to prohibit *public* space from being publicly used? This question was posed by the fences that were erected downtown, to prevent people from reclaiming a plaza that is ostensibly accessible to all.

The evening following the confrontation with police, over three thousand people congregated for a general assembly, during which the general strike was first proposed.

On occasion, concrete experience can bring unprecedented clarity to abstract contradictions. When, on Tuesday night, a police sergeant announced that he was “declaring this to be an unlawful assembly in the name of the people of California,” one woman in the crowd retorted, with some fervor, *We are the people of California.*

I am willing to admit the possibility that the strong impression made on me by all these events could have to do in part with historical myopia. But I do think something remarkable is happening here.

The immediate international response to local events is noteworthy. Within a day of the OPD’s show of police brutality, activists in Egypt announced their solidarity with California and organized a march on Tahrir square, issuing a statement that “Oakland and Tahrir are one hand.” New York responded quickly, too, with donations and a solidarity protest. Yesterday, the Philippine Airlines Employee’s Association issued a statement of support and are now planning to occupy airports in Cebu and Manila as a sign that they stand “shoulder to shoulder with the Occupy Oakland Protesters.”

A chant that has recently grown popular draws together two places with a copula: “Oakland is Tahrir,” “Oakland is

Greece,” “Oakland is New York,” “Oakland is Denver.” Of course one should take careful note of where comparisons illuminate and where they only obfuscate important differences. The assertion of an unequivocal parallel between Egypt and Oakland fails almost instantly in that there is an unmistakable difference between the occupations here and the struggle against dictatorial regimes in the Middle East. That said, such international alignments do draw attention to some shared economic conditions—and speak to the notion that the most pressing problems extend well beyond the borders of the nation-state and have much to do with the workings of global finance and uneven economic development across the world.

So then, we might say that the copula keeps distinct what it draws together.

Among the several reasons for supporting the general strike, I have left out the one that, to the addressees of this letter, may hit home most closely—that is, the insistence on the importance of accessible education.

Although the defense of public education may seem a remote or peripheral concern of the occupy movement, the connection between the two is indisputable. There is a financial pipeline that travels from public universities directly to

Wall Street, and what is trafficked through this pipeline is not anything positive—rather it is debt.

Those who lack resources are forced to take out loans in order to provide for basic needs, like education, all while the cost of these basic needs becomes increasingly prohibitive; as a result of this unwise, but necessary borrowing, bodies are put on the line (the working body that can never seem to catch up to the interest that it owes; the sleeping body that is displaced from its shelter).

In response to speculative finance’s guise of being wholly immaterial, the form of political action called for by the general strike—the congregation of bodies—gives corporeal expression to what would otherwise remain abstract and therefore remote.

Since its announcement, the general strike has been endorsed by the UAW, the union that represents Berkeley staff and graduate students. The Berkeley Federation of Teachers has also invited members to participate. And, as of yesterday, the Oakland Teachers Association endorsed the strike, after the board came to a unanimous vote.

Among the most trenchant objections to participating in the strike is that it would seem imprudent to insist on the priority of education by encouraging students and teachers to abandon their schools. Though the point is well taken, it does seem to reveal some short-sightedness in that the worry about missing one day of school is incommensurate with the very possible

OG: Do you feel like there is a tension between people at 60 Wall St. in working groups and people in Zuccotti Park sleeping there?

LE: One of the other big reasons that the Structure Working Group put forward the spokes council model, is that the occupiers, also, weren’t showing up to GAs, and the GAs were making decisions that affected the lives of the occupiers.

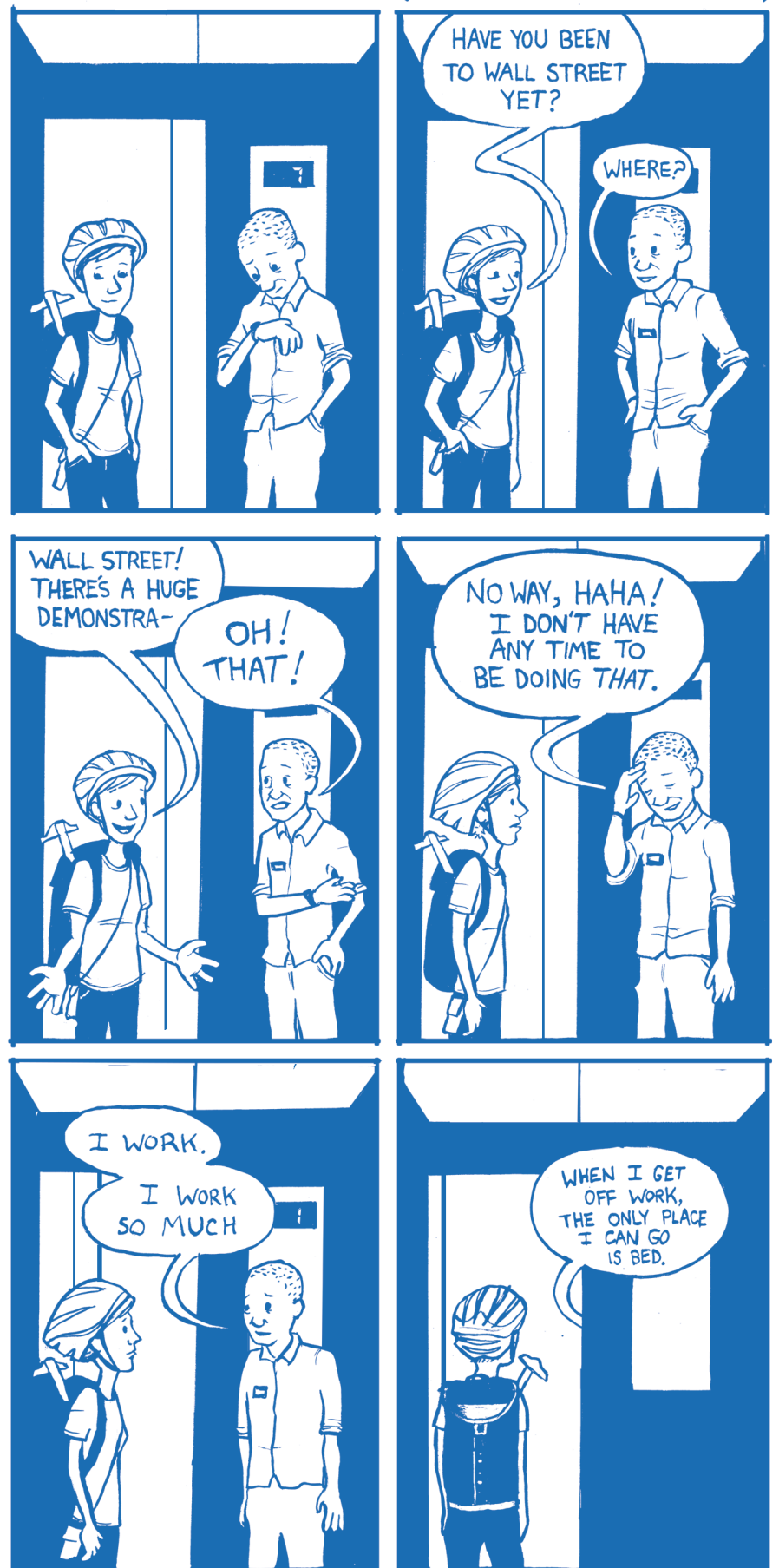
Any crossover that does happen between the two groups is a huge asset to both, and the biggest thing that we have to remember is to develop and maintain open lines of communication between those two groups.

OG: But there isn’t any sort of general perception of a hierarchy of working groups over occupiers or vice versa?

LE: I think it can go in either direction. Credibility requires someone to be listening. I think that the only people that would be listening to that kind of hierarchy would be outside observers, mostly in the form of media. People have tried to put forth some divisive ideas. One can say people are occupying to occupy, or they’re occupying because this is a safe space to live, and is there any distinction between those two things?

That’s something that’s come up recently, there was a big article in the *New York Times* about the homeless populations in these occupations . . . on the one hand, I think it’s excellent, that a homeless population would flock in any number, to an occupation, because they are part and parcel of the discussion. On the other hand, I worry that those occupations are doing a disservice to those homeless, because no occupation is equipped to really provide for a homeless population. Like, we’re acting irresponsibly if we’re saying we can provide what a soup kitchen can provide, or what a real shelter can provide. This is a safer space maybe to live outside than a street corner, but beyond that, I do worry. Still, the homeless are an important part of OWS. This movement is a meeting place for people with resources and people in need.

TOO OCCUPIED TO OCCUPY (TOO OVERWORKED TO OBJECT.)



10/6/11

HILARY ALLISON

loss of the whole prospect of affordable education.

And, of course, there is also that old objection about the inefficacy of protest, the possibility that the lion's roar may turn into little more than the paper tiger's whimper. To the repeated question, "What will a strike actually do?" we might recall the wisdom of Rosa Luxemburg, who writes, "After every foaming wave of political action a fructifying deposit remains behind from which a thousand stalks of economic struggle shoot forth."

So yes, there is a real possibility that your hours ultimately may be of little consequence. That said, it does seem that to live by entangling heart and mind only with those things that are sure successes would guarantee little more than the very atrophy of life. And though I'm perfectly aware of how odd and rather perverse it is to close with the words of Wordsworth, I ventriloquize him in order to issue a different sort of call: "Up! up! my friend, and quit your books!"

Fondly,
Michelle Ty

Liza Featherstone

Occupy DOE

We don't get as much attention as the drummers or the cops. We don't have interesting names like Ketchup, and we tend to keep our shirts on even when the weather is nice. We mostly don't sleep outside, although we're all immeasurably grateful for the fortitude and freedom of those who do. But we're nonetheless a growing presence in Zuccotti Park and related protests. We're parents whose children attend public schools.

New York State's failure to tax the super-rich to fund public education might have moved even legendary one percenter Andrew Carnegie to take up residence in Liberty Square. The 19th-century steel magnate, often described as the second-richest person in history, had some views that would now be considered far right, yet he wrote in 1886, as evidence of America's "triumphant

democracy," that "no tax is so willingly paid as the 'school tax.'"

How things have changed! Now parents are incensed by the unwillingness of the one percent to pay their fair share. They have been bringing their kids to Occupy Wall Street and organizing groups like the 99 Percent School, Parents for Occupy Wall Street, Occupy DOE, and an Occupy Wall Street families working group. Yesterday in the park, amid the boisterous din of a Reverend Billy-led procession to Goldman Sachs, I met a married couple from Westchester, both pediatricians, with three kids, who complained that the mansions in their town keep expanding while class sizes keep going up. They spent their only "date night" this year at Zuccotti Park.

Others inspired by the encampment are taking their indignation further uptown. Governor Cuomo has thus far distinguished himself by comparing his bold opposition to taxing the rich to his father's (also unpopular) opposition to the death penalty. Parents are gathering to occupy Cuomo's New York City offices on Election Day to protest the governor's insistence on protecting the hedge fund set instead of our kids.

But it is not only the one percent that compels public school parents to action. In New York City, we're also enraged about the lack of democracy in education policy. While most school boards elsewhere—including in New York State—are elected by the public, our Panel on Education Policy (PEP) functions purely as performance art. Parents, teachers, and even children regularly take the mike at its meetings, which are open to the public, and make

impassioned speeches about the matters on the agenda: whether a schools should close, share space with a charter school, expand, or shrink. Yet nothing they say ever makes a difference. The bureaucrats are only pretending to listen. Mayor Bloomberg appoints a majority of the PEP's members, and they must rubber stamp his policies if they want to keep their seats. The one time the panel rebelled and planned to vote against a plan to end "social promotion" for third graders, citing research that showed holding kids back is more likely to hurt than help their academic performance, Bloomberg fired most of the dissenters and appointed even more spineless lackeys.

That's why the PEP is a clear target for a social movement deeply in love with democracy. On October 25, teachers, parents, children, and activists used the people's mic to take over a PEP meeting and drove Chancellor Dennis M. Walcott from the stage. A video circulating on the internet shows an 8-year-old girl reading a statement to the panel with more composure than many college professors and seasoned activists have. It also catches Walcott in an expression of utter disdain for those affected by his policies. His sneering demeanor reveals him to be not a public servant but an arrogant personal assistant to Mayor One Percent.

The PEP disruption marked the launch of Occupy DOE, and much more disruption at the PEP is expected in the coming months. The next PEP meeting is November 17, the same day as a massive planned OWS action. It couldn't happen to a more deserving schools chancellor.

Brook Muse

FROM GA TO SPOKES COUNCIL

At the heart of the Occupy Movement is the general assembly. It is what brings countless New Yorkers back to the Liberty Square night after night and what has kept the occupation so vitally alive. The GA speaks directly to the alienation that so many of us experience in our daily lives, which has only been heightened by the economic crisis.

If capitalism is what disenfranchises us from our potential to live with connection, mutual respect, and self-determination, the GA serves as our antidote. It allows us to step into the world as beings with voices and the potential to make democratic decisions together. This potential to come together to make decisions with empathy and wisdom is central to our humanity—and it is what the capitalist state works so tirelessly to rob from us.

The modern capitalist state has successfully manufactured a world in which few of us ever come together to discuss what we care most about in our lives, let alone make decisions together. We have become so alienated from our potential as political beings that most of us acquiesce to being consumers in an unethical economic system and constituents of a broken government. We are so used to being treated like children—incapable of making decisions for ourselves—that we no longer trust in our own capacity. Thus we are complicit in allowing the powers that be to decimate our economy, steal our homes, and foreclose on the future of the planet.

The Occupy Movement, however, has found a way to grab hold of our collective complicity and throw it by the wayside. No longer can the newly foreclosed upon and the pension-less be allowed to suffer in quiet isolation. The Occupy movement calls us into the streets, toward public engagement, and to the modern day polis that is the general assembly. It calls us with a single unspoken but implicit demand: participate!

While the GA does not offer us real political power, it does offer a fundamental precursor—the power to trust again in each other and our collective humanity, and this trust is fundamental to a functioning democracy. Without it, democracy is but a futile experiment in the limits of patience. And while the GA tests the limits of patience for sure—many simple decisions (like how

to transport laundry) can take well over an hour—it is also an experience that feels so essential and actualizing that it has brought many of us to tears.

One of the most extraordinary aspects of the GA is the people's mic. Born out of the city's unwillingness to allow us amplified sound, it has taken on a life and power all its own. Well beyond simple amplification, the people's mic allows speakers to know that they are actually being heard, which, in the age of dinner-table texting, is a rarity. On the flip side, by repeating other peoples' words, we are forced to actively engage with them—to actually hear them. It is an extraordinary tool for opening channels of empathy and solidarity. The people's mic also saves the facilitator from having to cut off grandstanders and disrupters, as the assembly will organically stop amplifying them. It infuses the already directly democratic GA with a democracy of the moment.

The GA offers us a glimpse of what is possible. It is an exercise in prefiguring the world we are all struggling to create. It awakens us to our potential as political beings and reignites our faith in humanity. And yet those most intimately involved with the day-to-day realities of the occupation find the functionality of the GA as the sole decision-making structure to be severely limited.

Direct Democracy Beyond the GA

I joined the Occupy movement on day three. Having staged unpermitted actions on Wall Street in the past with little success, the idea of an *Adbusters*-prompted Wall Street occupation at first seemed ridiculous to me. So I entered both late in the game and with the humility of knowing that my cynical sense of the possible had been totally obliterated by people with less organizing experience. It was with these eyes that I first encountered the general assembly.

I immediately got involved with the facilitation working group and began helping teach the ad hoc classes in direct democracy. I hoped to broaden people's perspectives on what direct democracy can look like. During the

SUNAURA TAYLOR

OAKLAND RISES, OAKLAND STRIKES

In the past two weeks Occupy Oakland has undergone massive change. On October 25th, Oscar Grant Plaza was raided and destroyed by riot cops. Only a week and a half later and you never would have known it had gone. The tent city was resurrected only one day after being brutally torn down. That same night Occupy Oakland held a General Assembly of 3,000 people.

I had no idea a movement could grow so quickly. Occupy Oakland is not even a month old and yet it has become an incredible force in this city. Occupy Oakland held the nation's first General Strike in over sixty-five years (the last general strike was also held in Oakland in 1946). Thousands of people came out to participate. The exact numbers are unclear, but it seems likely it was between 5,000 and 10,000 people, although some estimates put it anywhere from 20,000 to 40,000. The day was glorious and peaceful (even the mayor and the city council members had to admit it was remarkable). Unfortunately, it ended in the yellow fog of nighttime tear gas and police violence.

The strike was a huge success, with a sustained energy from the early morning hours until the late hours of the night. Multiple banks were forced to close throughout the day and a massive march and sit-in during the evening hours shut down the Port of Oakland. For the whole day and into the night, protesters occupied 14th and Broadway, the main intersection beside the encampment. Huge handmade banners hung across roads and in front of banks declaring things like, "Banks Got Bailed Out, We

Anti-Globalization Movement, many people presumed that the open GA-like structures we had created for mass action organizing were the only way to do direct democracy. They then tried to apply these structures to other purposes, got frustrated, and gave up on direct democracy altogether. My fear was that this history would repeat itself in the Occupy Movement.

What I tried to impart to those squatting with me on the cobbled ground of Liberty Square was that there are many ways to do direct democracy. During these hour long sessions, I would yell (over the drums) about the range of factors and principles that you might consider in choosing one structure over another. One of the main principles I highlighted was the importance of balancing rights and responsibilities—a principle intentionally absent in the GA.

Balancing rights and responsibilities is about creating a dynamic relationship between the degree to which one is actively involved in an organization and the power one has over decision-making. In the GA, the people who have been sleeping in the park and keeping it clean for over a month have no more say over decision-making than an individual that happens into the GA for the first time. While this reality is great for making the new person feel welcomed, empowered, and inspired, it can feel frustrating, disempowering, and unfair to the resident sanitation volunteers.

Got Sold Out," and "Death to Capitalism." The intersection and the camp itself was the central hub of the protest, but throughout the day groups of hundreds or thousands would leave, march across Oakland to a bank or to participate in an action or event, while thousands of others stayed at Oscar Grant Plaza, to dance, make political signs, and celebrate. Hot food was provided and cooked by local businesses, union representatives, firefighters, Occupy campers and countless others. The atmosphere was festival like, but only better, as everyone seemed to be talking about changing the world—and actually believing in it. Even by night, after sitting at the port in the cold for many hours, people still seemed overjoyed. One person told me it was the best day of his life.

People had been urged throughout the days leading up to the event to self organize their own actions, and that's clearly what happened. Everywhere you went you'd find different pockets of people self-organizing. From the children's brigade to the disability action brigade, to a flash mob singing "I will Survive (Capitalism)," to a 99 percent storytelling tent, countless groups of people organized creative and powerful moments of resistance.

At the port we split up into groups, each blocking a separate entrance. It is hard to say how many people were there, but some estimate that at its peak there were 20,000 people marching to the port. At 7 PM a new work shift was going to begin and we were to block the workers from entering by creating massive community picket lines. This action had largely been developed to show Solidarity with the Longshore workers in Longview, WA who have been battling EGT (Export Grain Terminal) for months over anti-union practices. The port closure was also a way of directly stopping capitalist trade. Many Longshore workers announced solidarity with the strike, even as the International Longshore and Warehouse Union was unable to officially authorize it. Although, there were reports of some frustrated truckers (and two marchers were injured by an angry driver), the vast majority honked their horns enthusiastically in support of us and some

even let protesters climb atop their containers for a better view of the seemingly endless parade of people. Spontaneous general assemblies were held at each gate using the human microphone, where a lot of conversation seemed to focus on the importance of occupying foreclosed spaces, especially as winter nears. After many hours it was announced that we had successfully shutdown the Port of Oakland! My partner and I cheered and then began the long march back.

During the day the cops were absent, despite a few incidences of property damage to a handful of banks and a Whole Foods grocery store. A small number of protesters smashed windows, broke ATMs, and spray-painted messages on the outside of banks. YouTube videos show other protesters trying to stop the vandalism, sometimes with force. People debated the vandalism throughout the day—with many staunchly opposed to it, and others arguing that property damage isn't violence (what the banks do is violence). Still others argued that regardless, these tactics are unhelpful and turn people away from the movement.

After the police violence of the week before, which drew international attention and which left people hurt, it was clear that the City of Oakland did not want anymore bad press. However, as the night wore on things began to change.



ERIN SCHELL. "HANDS AND TENTS"

On one occasion, faced with increasing pressure by the city, the Sanitation Working Group requested money to purchase storage bins for the park. The decision took well over an hour and only passed with the adoption of a friendly amendment requiring sanitation to first attempt to find "fair trade" bins. What might have been a fair request if the person proposing the amendment had also volunteered to take on the responsibility of locating these fair trade bins ended up just wasting sanitation's time. As a result of experiences like this one, many of those taking on the most responsibility for the occupation have stopped attending GAs altogether. Even with half a million dollars in the bank, many find it easier to raise their own funds than to contend with the GA.

Another key principle is transparency, and how it relates to hierarchies and power in particular. A well-known fallacy in democratic organizing is the idea that if hierarchies are not formalized, they will not exist. The most famous writing on this fallacy is called "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," written by Jo Freeman in the early '70s. Freeman writes: "Contrary to what we would like to believe, there is no such thing as a structureless group . . . the idea becomes a smokescreen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over others . . . because the idea of "structurelessness" does not prevent the formation of informal structures, only formal ones."

As has been well established in the press, the Occupy Movement claims to be a leaderless movement. While there is no "central leadership," due to the lack of effective formal decision-making structures, many informal structures have arisen. While well-intentioned and simply based on emerging friendships, they are informal hierarchies.

Many are also critical of the fact that while OWS purports to be a movement concerned with economic justice, the GA grants large sums of money without any mechanism to evaluate the prudence of each grant. One such example was the \$1,600 that the GA granted to a working group to purchase thirty flags, which turned out to be nothing more than large pieces of hemmed nylon fabric. With a half a million in the bank, \$1,600 may have sounded like a drop in the bucket to the GA of that particular evening, yet given the ability to have a more holistic discussion of funding priorities, we may not have made such a decision.

A final principle that is also poorly actualized in the GA is that of empowerment. While everyone is free to speak, those of us who hold more privilege in our society consistently dominate the GA. White people and men are far more likely to speak in the GA and far more likely to block proposals based on personal opinions than people of color or women. Many experience the GA as a disempowering space for marginalized voices.

As my partner and I arrived back to Oscar Grant Plaza, exhausted and ready for our second night at the new camp, we were told that a group of protesters had occupied a nearby foreclosed building and that the police were coming. It is hard to know what exactly happened before or after the police raid, but within twenty minutes hundreds of cops in full riot gear had descended on Occupy Oakland and were blasting the crowds with tear gas. I felt confused by what was going on, as I had left the port with no knowledge that a building occupation had been planned. Later large fires were lit by some of the protesters (supposedly to combat tear gas), and some projectiles were hurled at the cops.

I have been preoccupied since that night with the debate that has ensued over the use of “violent” tactics by some of the protesters. I myself had certainly felt frustrated by the atmosphere of that night. Besides being disheartened once again by the brutality of the cops (who, along with tear gas, shot rubber bullets at people, one of which hit a homeless man), I also personally felt dismayed by some of the protest activity itself. As I watched from a distance it seemed to me that the crowd was largely very young and very able-bodied. It is easy for me to assume they were also predominantly white and male—but as I was not on the frontlines, I’m not sure. I do know though, that as a disabled woman and wheelchair user, I felt little of the diversity of people that makes this movement so beautiful and so revolutionary to me—and that makes it a safe place for me.

Destruction of property has held an important place even within many non-violent movements, but it is a tactic that too often is used rashly and dangerously. After all, the 1 percent were not the ones out in the streets of Oakland the next morning cleaning up the shattered glass, or picking up the burned debris. As I’ve watched the debate over tactics unfold, one of the most common things I’ve heard in defense of property damage is that destruction of property is not actually violence. However, I think there needs to be a more nuanced examination of what violence is. To me, the physical act of property damage is not necessarily where the violence of such tactics lie. I think where violence comes in is when a small group of people make decisions that not only affect but put in danger a larger group of people (who they are supposedly in solidarity

with). A few rowdy individuals breaking things and lighting fires not only risks the whole movement’s reputation, but it engenders fear in many people who should feel safe to participate. A few people making decisions that affect everyone else is not what revolution looks like, it’s what capitalism looks like. It’s also what violence looks like.

However, the violence perpetrated by the protesters was minimal compared to the violence perpetrated by the police in response. Yet another person was seriously injured, and bizarrely, it was another young Iraq war veteran. According to an interview with the *Guardian*, Kayvan Sabehgi was walking alone when he was stopped by a group of cops who proceeded to beat him with batons. Sabehgi was in jail for eighteen hours calling for help and in excruciating pain. When he finally got to the hospital it was found his spleen had been ruptured.

I awoke at my home November 3 and was incredibly relieved to hear that the camp had not been destroyed; I was also relieved to see that the media coverage of the violence had not completely overshadowed all the spectacular moments of the day.

What has ensued since November 2 is a deeply important debate among protesters and community members over nonviolent versus violent tactics. The day of the General Strike proved that there are thousands, if not tens of thousands, of people who support Occupy Oakland. To me, the only thing the broken windows, spray paint, and fires have done thus far, is make some groups, small businesses and unions now more hesitant to support us, and it has made many individuals feel less safe and afraid to participate.

The evening after the strike, Occupy Oakland held a forum on violence and nonviolence. Occupy Oakland supports a diversity of tactics, but as one woman said at the forum, respecting a diversity of tactics must go both ways. When a few people choose violence, they need to be aware of how their tactics can trump the tactics of those who choose nonviolence. I would hate to see this movement slowed down or destroyed by infighting. I’d also hate to see it fall apart because of violence. To me, it’s essential that we really think complexly about what respecting a diversity of tactics—and a diversity of people—really means. Our future depends on it.

This is all to say that while the GA is an incredibly necessary body for movement building, it is insufficient for ongoing operational coordination and empowered decision-making. To address these concerns, a number of us began to look into other structures to compliment the GA. The structure that we felt best fit both the needs of the Operations Groups and the directly democratic principles of the Occupy Movement is the spokes council.

History of Spokes Council

The spokes council is a form of direct democracy that has been used widely in many movements of the past, including the anti-globalization, women’s, and anti-nuke movements in the US and globally. It draws inspiration from the Iroquois Nation, the Quakers, the Iberian Anarchist Federation of the Spanish Civil War, and the Zapatistas. A number of us in the Occupy Movement had experience using spokes councils, so this is the structure that we felt most equipped to develop for Occupy Wall Street.

The spokes council is named for its physical structure, which resembles the spokes of a wagon wheel. It is a confederated direct democracy, in which

SVETLANA KITTO AND
CELESTE DUPUY-SPENCER

STOP AND FRISK

SVETLANA KITTO:

The first Stop and Frisk action was in Harlem. Thirty-four community members, including Cornel West, blocked the 28th precinct’s entrance and were arrested. The second was to take place at the 73rd precinct in Brownsville, Brooklyn. The NYPD policy of Stop and Frisk has been called illegal and unconstitutional by the Center for Constitutional Rights and the New York Civil Liberties Union. It overwhelmingly targets black and Latino men, and only results in arrests one percent of the time. In 2010, there were 600,000 stop and frisks in New York. In Brownsville, there are more stop and frisks than anywhere else in the city.

On the day of the second action, M. and I walked to the 3 train at Franklin Avenue. It’s sunny and cold and there’s no evidence of last weekend’s snowstorm. M. is planning on getting arrested. When we get to the corner of Rockaway and Livonia, we see a reporter from News 12 setting up her camera in front of the Tilden Projects, also known as the pink houses, according to my neighbor who has a niece and nephew who live there. I cross the street to hand out flyers. People stop in their tracks

when I explain to them what we’re doing.

“The rally is right across the street,” I say. “Then we’re marching to the 73rd precinct.”

“Oh no, they don’t like me over at the 73rd,” a young man with a shaved head says.

One of the organizers is frustrated that more people from the neighborhood aren’t coming out. “These people need to stand up. It’s their lives being threatened, the people who live here are the ones who need to come forward.”

My friend Ramdasha disagrees. “People who don’t have criminal records, who aren’t targeted, are the ones who need to stand up. What would happen if thirty white people blocked a precinct?”

“Maybe this train’s the one with all the people,” G. says. From the top of the station stairs we can hear drums beating and people chanting, “We won’t stop until they stop Stop and Frisk.”

Some of the kids getting off the train are high schoolers who have volunteered to be arrested today. They have on heavy eyeliner and one is wearing a fur hat.

“You guys look great,” I say.

“You gotta go out in style,” one replies.

It’s a little after four and the rally is starting.

“Mic check.”

Carl Dix is speaking.

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subgroups each empower one “spoke” to sit in a circle with other spokes in the center of the room. The rest of each subgroup sits directly behind their spoke, fanning out like the negative space between two spokes of a wheel. Spokes are not representatives, as they are not empowered to make their own decisions and can be recalled at anytime. Rather, they are empowered to be mouthpieces for their subgroup for particular meetings. When an agenda item is up for discussion, the spokes confer with their subgroups, then do their best to reflect the sentiments of their subgroups back to the spokes council. This type of organization allows very large numbers of people to actively participate in decision-making.

One particularly powerful example of a spokes council took place inside the Philadelphia “Round House” jail following the 2000 RNC. During our confinement we convened a number of spokes council meetings in which each cell picked a spoke and we were then able to make decisions by calling out to each spoke, one cell at a time. If we had tried to hold a regular meeting without being able to see each other, we would have talked over one another and never would have been able to organize for our needs to be met.

The Occupy Wall Street spokes council proposal was first introduced in the facilitation working group. This was followed by a number of well-attended feedback sessions, a conversation in the GA, and a few weeks of afternoon teach-ins. Out of this process, a structure working group was formed, which twice brought the proposal to the GA for more feedback. All of this preliminary work was essential to building consensus for the spokes council within the OWS community.

It is notable that, in most circles, a spokes council proposal would be met mainly with concerns about its decentralized nature and potential for inefficiency. Most of the fears expressed in the GAs were about losing hold of the decentralized nature of our movement. While we were clear that the

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“Stop and Frisk is unconstitutional, illegal, and racist. Allow me to introduce this generation’s Freedom Riders. And some older folks too. Will everyone who is doing civil disobedience please come up?”

The twenty-seven people who are going to be arrested come forward as the crowd falls silent. They look strong, intent but also scared, like they need our support.

A priest takes the people’s mic. “If you think praying to God is going to change this system, you’re wrong. Change only happens when the people take it to the streets. Get out of the churches, into the streets.”

We begin marching.

CELESTE DUPUY-SPENCER:

Halfway through the march, Svetlana passes me the corner of the sign she’s holding: “From Up Against the Wall to Up in Their Faces.” It’s five feet tall, the only one of its size, and I feel as though I have suddenly landed a star role in the protest. Quickly, I pass it on. Someone uses a bullhorn but the batteries are low, so it’s not very loud.

“We say no to the new Jim Crow! Stop and Frisk has got to go!” On Pitkin Avenue, old people sit in chairs under trees and look on as we march past them. Some seem bewildered but others are cheering. A couple cops of walk in the road to keep us on

the sidewalk, but we are staying on the sidewalk anyway. I march alongside a young girl and her mother. The girl is obviously excited to be holding her sign, which is almost as tall as she is and reads, “This System Has No Future for the Youth, Revolution Does!” Her mother smiles in encouragement as the girl joins the chant. “Stop and Frisk Don’t Stop the Crime, Stop and Frisk is the Crime.”

On Bristol Street a young protester points to the building on our right. “There’s the juvenile jail. That place is like hell, I know!” He signals to the building to our left: “Here’s the 73rd Precinct.”

Until now there has been a steady run of conversation. We have been taking note of our comrades and making small talk with people who are, for this moment, friends. But as we approach the precinct, the conversations peter out and together we chant louder than before, over and over, “Cease and desist! Stop Stop and Frisk!”

At Thomas S. Boyland Street and E. New York Avenue, rows of NYPD and Community Affairs officers stand in formation waiting for us. They look ready but not worried. They know the procedure. In front of them metal barricades are arranged into a pen. One of the march organizers cries, “Mic check. Those of you who do not want to be arrested, please stand

adoption of a spokes council would actually safeguard decentralization by creating mechanisms for transparency and accountability, this was not immediately apparent to others. It was a challenge not to lose heart during this monthlong listening process, but we needed only to remind ourselves how incredibly rare it was to be standing before hundreds of newly politicized New Yorkers vigilantly guarding their direct democracy.

The spokes council proposal ultimately did pass, 228 to 19, which given our 90 percent required majority was uncomfortably close. Three nights a week the GA will be replaced by a spokes council, composed of operations groups and caucuses with the jurisdiction to make decisions related to the operations and finances of Occupy Wall Street. Participation in the spokes council is limited to members of these (open) groups. Anyone is free to observe, and the physical structure of the spokes will help new people locate the groups they want to join. Our hope is that, freed from mundane operational proposals, the GA will be able to experiment with even more meaningful forms of collective dialogue and movement building—amplifying what is still so central to the heart of our growing movement.

Like the GA, the spokes council is a tool for decision-making. It is a structure within a movement and should not be confused with the movement itself. How we choose to organize ourselves will continue to be a core decision for our movement, but if we are to grow into something capable of moving beyond the confines of Liberty Square and into everyday realities, we will need a multiplicity of dynamic and thoughtful structures to meet our growing needs while maintaining our democratic commitments.

The spokes council is not anticipated to inspire the deeply visceral experience of human connection that has been so present for us in the general assembly, yet by allowing those most vested in the day-to-day operations of the occupation the means to effectively support each other, we all take a collective step forward in building a movement that prioritizes meaningful democratic participation for all of us.

This is what democracy looks like.

over there!” He points inside the pen. “Those of you who do plan on being arrested will be walking over to the line of police!” I stand in the pen next to the mother and daughter. A small, older woman with gray hair under her beret grins up at me: “Call me old-fashioned but I have a very hard time believing that it’s a good idea to walk into a police pen! This, in my experience, is what I call a trap!” She

leaves the pen and scolds the officers as they try to deter her from standing on the sidewalk. The little girl, now perched atop the barricade, drops her mouth wide open as she watches twenty-seven protesters square off with the police. A mass of protesters crowds in from behind, chanting, “We won’t stop until we stop stop and frisk!” The paddy wagon pulls up. As the chanting continues, the



L. A. KAUFFMAN

THE THEOLOGY OF CONSENSUS

Occupy Wall Street from the start has embraced consensus decision-making, a process in which groups come to agreement without voting. Instead of voting a controversial plan up or down, groups that make decisions by consensus work to refine the plan until everyone finds it acceptable. A primer on the NYC General Assembly website explains, “Consensus is a creative thinking process: When we vote, we decide between two alternatives. With consensus, we take an issue, hear the range of enthusiasm, ideas and concerns about it, and synthesize a proposal that best serves everybody’s vision.”

Consensus has been adopted by a wide array of social movements over the last thirty-five years, and proponents make broad claims for it. They argue that it is intrinsically more democratic than other methods, and that it fosters radical transformation, both within movements and in their relations with the wider world. As described in the action handbook of an Earth Day 1990 action to shut down Wall Street, which included a blockade of the entrances to the Stock Exchange and led to some 200 arrests, “Consensus

twenty-seven protesters stand in line as, one by one, each is turned around, handcuffed, and escorted to and taken away in a wagon.

We reconvene on the corner. Some guy—possibly hired—agitates and is arrested. The police ask if we need accompaniment to wherever we are marching next. “No! You got to be kidding!” a woman replies. And did I hear a Community Affairs officer call “Mic Check”? I did! We march back the way we came.

TRAVIS MORALES:

“The sit-ins started in the early sixties down South at the lunch counters with about six people. The Freedom Rides that went down South to register people to vote started with less than fifteen people. But the actions of a few caught the imagination, the inspiration, and support of millions, and Jim Crow segregation and open discrimination, legal discrimination were done away with. And now, though they may tell us that blacks and Latinos are equal before the law, and Commissioner Ray Kelley might tell us that Stop and Frisk is not racial profiling, we have to ask Ray Kelley,

“If you say it’s not racial profiling, what you been smokin’?” What we have done today is something very special. And our comrades who have gone to jail and put themselves on the line are our heroes. And we need to tell people that! People need to know that there’s a new generation of Freedom Riders who are not gonna tolerate 700,000 people being illegally, immorally, unconstitutionally stopped and frisked! Eighty-five percent black and Latino, 90 percent not even charged with anything! You tell me that this is not racial profiling! So what’s our stand today? We are going to stop Stop and Frisk! Mic Check! I’d like to ask, please raise your hand if you can go back to Occupy Wall Street and spread the word and announce what happened here today.”

All twenty-seven arrested protesters were charged with misdemeanors for obstructing government agency, finger printed and given violations for disorderly conduct. This is a far more serious response than previous arrests, which have either brought no charges or only a violation.

at its best offers a cooperative model of reaching group unity, an essential step in creating a culture that values cooperation over competition.”

Few know the origins of the process, though, and they shed an interesting and surprising light on its workings. Consensus decision-making first entered the world of grassroots activism in the summer of 1976, when a group of activists calling themselves the Clamshell Alliance began a direct action campaign against the planned Seabrook Nuclear Plant.

Many activists at the time were well aware of what feminist writer Jo Freeman famously called “the tyranny of structurelessness.” The tendency in some early 1970s movements to abandon all structure in the name of spontaneity and informality had proven to be not just unworkable but undemocratic. Decisions still happened, but without an agreed-upon process, there was no accountability.

The organizers of “the Clam,” as it was often called, were eager to find a process that could prevent the pitfalls of structurelessness without resorting to hierarchy. Two staff people from the American Friends Service Committee, the longstanding and widely admired peace and justice organization affiliated with the Society of Friends, or Quakers, suggested consensus.

As historian A. Paul Hare has written, “For over 300 years the members of the Society of Friends (Quakers) have been making group decisions without voting. Their method is to find a “sense of the meeting” which represents a consensus of those involved. Ideally this consensus is not simply “unanimity” or an opinion on which all members happen to agree, but a “unity”: a higher truth which grows from the consideration of divergent opinions and unites them all.”

The process, adherents believe, is in effect a manifestation of the divine. A 1943 “Guide to Quaker Practice” explained, “The principle of corporate guidance, according to which the Spirit can inspire the group as

FIONA MAAZEL

At OWS

My sign says: I can’t pay my health insurance. Can you? **I wrote it on the back of a pizza box I picked up off the street. Some guy has given me a lavender scarf, which feels like silk, but isn’t, and which is supposed to mean something if enough of us wear them. Pinned to my lapel is a button I just got, which says:** The rich get bailed out; the poor get sold out. **At the foot of the stairs: a landscape painter who’s been drawing Zuccotti Park, and who’s also kind of hot, though it turns out he’s got a wife and a child in kindergarten. On my left: a woman up from Mexico. She’s got a melanoma behind one eye**

and is wearing opaque sunglasses, which has me thinking whatever’s behind there is memorable. She can’t pay her health insurance either, or maybe her grief is that her HMO won’t pay her—which ever the case, she is mad. She’s written her story on a piece of cardboard, in miniature, so that anyone interested has to get right up close to her chest. It’s a come-hither approach to reform that generally means: dialogue. People give me the thumbs up, then go get a burger. But they have to stay and talk to her. On my right: a guy in a gray suit whose sign tells people to watch their wallets, this area is full of crooks, Wall Street is just three blocks away. He’s driven in from Pittsburgh, he says. Used to be in finance, then switched to graphic design, not that it matters since he’s out of a job. He’s engaged in debate with a pedestrian who insists we all voted for Obama because we thought Obama was cool. He actually uses



a whole, is central. Since there is but one Truth, its Spirit, if followed will produce unity.”

Quakers do not, as a rule, proselytize their faith, and the two AFSC organizers working on the Seabrook anti-nuclear campaign were no exception. They introduced the decision-making method without any theological content. As one of the activists, Sukie Rice, told me in a 2002 interview, “Friends consider [consensus] a waiting upon the Spirit, that you pray that you will do God’s will, and that wasn’t there in the Clam. The Clam used it as a decision-making process that was consistent with nonviolence.”

Rice continued, “[The activists of the Clam] had no idea that Clamshell would be the prototype for all the other groups that took off from there, they had no inkling of that.” But indeed it was. After the Clam, consensus became the accepted decision-making process among many segments of the activist left, especially those that embraced direct action as central to their strategy, up to and including today’s Occupy movements. And though Rice and her colleague were careful to exclude any explicit theology from their trainings on consensus, something of that religious origin arguably adheres to it up to the present day.

Perhaps it’s something about the reverence with which consensus is sometimes discussed in activist circles, leaving those who find it unwieldy to feel like apostates. Perhaps it’s the assumption embedded in the process that division results from differing views (which can be reconciled) rather than competing interests (which often cannot).

Perhaps it’s the way it sometimes seems to be, well, an article of faith that consensus is intrinsically more democratic and more radical than other forms of decision-making.

Consensus process has considerable virtues, but it also has flaws. It favors those with lots of time to spend in meetings; unless practiced with unusual skill, it can lavish excessive attention on the stubborn or disruptive. Occupy Wall Street has opened up for questioning so much that was previously taken as given. May it do the same with its own methods.

these words; it's hard not to laugh. A policeman tells us to clear the sidewalk since people have to get to work, the implication being that the rest of us are bums. Someone gives us ice cream because Ben and Jerry's has ponied up. I mention this on Facebook and some investor guy I went to college with points out that Ben and Jerry's gets a sweet tax write-off for looking noble. And it's the first time all day I am enraged. I want to smack this guy because cynicism is unwelcome here. Cynicism is exactly what's been sidelined by the effort

at Occupy Wall Street. Cynicism is the opposite of spirit, which is what this movement has in abundance. It's true that no one knows how to leverage its energy. How to consolidate the mood under more than a banner of disgust with the economic disparity that's turning the country into a banana republic. And this is a problem for sure. But at least there's energy to leverage. At least there is spirit. At least the guy on my right and the woman on my left are doing something to show their discontent, and at least I get to stand among them. Eating

ice cream. Holding a sign. Is that ersatz unrest? Should we belittle the enterprise for its messy outfit and unclear future? Or should we agree that reform has to start somewhere. Sometimes it's a fruit

seller who sets himself on fire. And sometimes it's a lot of people with a lot of problems eating Ben and Jerry's in the park.

VIOLENCE

Alex Vitale

THE NYPD AND OWS: A CLASH OF STYLES

Occupy Wall Street's defiant style of nonviolent protest has consistently clashed with the NYPD's obsession with order maintenance policing, resulting in hundreds of mostly unnecessary arrests and a significant infringement on the basic rights of free speech and assembly. The origins of this conflict can be found in the rise of public disorder in the 1980s and NYPD's embracing of order maintenance policing in the 1990s.

During the 1980s there was an explosion in public disorder on New York's streets. The fallout from the city's fiscal crisis combined with federal cut-backs and the reorienting of the city's economy away from manufacturing and towards high finance meant major increases in homelessness, prostitution, graffiti, and street-level drug dealing. In response to these growing "quality of life" concerns, many business leaders and community activists began to demand that the NYPD be more responsive. This was a challenge to the NYPD's professional crime fighter ethos, which had hitherto prioritized making felony arrests that lead to convictions. In their position as the front end of the criminal justice system, the NYPD emphasized strict adherence to the legal necessities of the court system; alleviating the seemingly more mundane nuisance issues raised by residents was something many police viewed as beyond or even beneath their area of expertise.

By the early 1990s, however, a new paradigm of policing emerged as a result of the pressure from below of community groups and business associations and innovation from above in the form of the "broken windows"

theory and its emphasis on fighting serious crime and restoring communities by controlling low level disorder—a kind of moral imperative to restore middle-class values to the city's public spaces. Extensive research has called into question the basic linkage between disorder and serious crime and highlighted the essentially conservative nature of this theory, which calls on more aggressive policing to restore communities as an alternative to additional city services, new investment, or improved economic opportunities for the poor.

Broken windows-based policing emphasizes the aggressive "zero tolerance" control of minor disorderly activity such as drinking in public, aggressive panhandling, graffiti, street prostitution, and drug dealing. This new approach, associated with Mayor Giuliani, was actually already well underway during the Dinkins Administration. But it was Police Commissioner William Bratton, who institutionalized it throughout the NYPD. Previously ignored problems like turnstile jumping, public intoxication, squeegee men, and aggressive panhandling were moved to the top of the enforcement agenda.

One of the most pervasive and pernicious forms of this new style of policing is the ubiquitous use of "stop and frisk" tactics in communities of color. Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers are routinely stopped each year with little legal basis in hopes of preempting criminal behavior through an aggressive intrusion into people's private activities. The NYPD strongly believes that this kind of aggressive, proactive order maintenance policing is responsible for the city's remarkable crime drop over the last twenty years, though similar drops across the country belie the distinctive contribution of broken windows policing.

Increasingly, black and Latino community leaders and progressive politicians have turned against this style of policing, labeling it as either a form of racial profiling or a violation of the basic constitutional right to be free from unreasonable police searches. Combined with growing challenges to the heavy-handed and at times unlawful enforcement of marijuana laws, serious questions have been raised about the appropriateness of this intrusive style of policing. In the past year, several new coalitions have emerged to challenge this form of policing and direct actions targeting local police precincts have occurred in Harlem and central Brooklyn in recent weeks.

There continues, however, to be a less well-known adaptation of order maintenance policing—the policing of demonstrations. In 1991, then First Deputy Commissioner Ray Kelly devised a system for controlling the Crown Heights riots through the aggressive use of arrest teams. The area of disturbance was divided up into zones and each was assigned an arrest team, which was instructed to make as many arrests as possible for any type of legal violation in an attempt to proactively and preemptively set a tone of police control on the streets.

In 1996 there was a large public celebration of a Yankee World Series Victory at City Hall Park. Then Manhattan South Bureau Chief Allan Hoehl was concerned that there might be a crushing incident in the park and devised a system of controlling access through choke points, subdividing the crowd, and creating intermittent "frozen zones" to allow access to the area by police and EMS.

Interestingly, these two main precursors of today's system of micromanaging demonstrations were not themselves protests, which raises significant issues about the appropriateness of these control measures for dealing with essentially peaceful demonstrations.

In addition to the use of barriers and arrest teams, this system limits the issuing of permits for marches and rallies and uses force against people for minor violations of the law in an attempt to preempt further trouble down the road. In most cases this merely hinders protests, leaving them isolated from the public and disempowered. In a few cases, though, these restrictions have led to serious escalations of conflict as police tried to micromanage large crowds.

The most dramatic example of this was in 2003, when the NYPD denied a march permit to United For Peace and Justice on the eve of the US invasion of Iraq. UFPJ was forced to hold a stationary rally that attracted at least a quarter of a million people. The police deployed tens of thousands of steel barriers

Zuccotti Diary

Laundry

A young man, maybe 30 years old, clearly from Brooklyn, in a nice fall jacket and hat, gets up to address the general assembly. “The other day it rained!” he calls out. It’s a Sunday in early autumn, a beautiful night, and the GA is packed. The young man has a terrific people’s mic delivery; he calls out each sentence dramatically; he has come back from a dark place and needs to tell us his tale.

“The other day it rained!” he says, and everyone repeats it after him.

“A terrible rain!” he emphasizes.

“Many things became wet!”

“And dirty!”

“They were thrown—into a pile—
or discarded.

“And now we have a gigantic
mountain!”

“Of laundry!”

“Maybe you’ve seen it!”

“On the north side of the park!”

An emergency laundry committee has been deputized, he goes on, and it is now asking the general assembly for funds to truck the mountain of laundry to a laundromat. The young man adds that there will be no

exploitation of laundry personnel: the laundry committee will do the laundry themselves, that is, they will put quarters in the machines themselves. They are asking for \$3,000.

I look around. By this point I’ve been to a couple of GAs but have yet to see the question of money come up. And I know OWS is flush with cash—the figure I’ve heard is around \$400,000.

But three thousand dollars? For laundry?

No one comes right out and says so, but it seems like an awful lot of money, and the questions, and the clarifying questions, hint at this concern. Where was the laundry being done? (In Inwood, in northern Manhattan, cheaper than the Financial District.) What would the money be used for? (Mostly quarters, but also a truck to ferry the laundry uptown.) Which truck company was being used, and was it the most economical option? (“I don’t know which company is being used. In any case,” the young man from the laundry committee adds, a little cryptically, “we have no choice!”) Why wasn’t this brought up earlier so people could ponder it? (It was an emergency.) At this point the facilitator steps in, perhaps sensing that the crowd is turning against the young man and his proposal, and says he was present at the laundry committee’s deliberations. This is the best option, he says, even though it’s not ideal.

Someone asks the young man to elaborate about the truck; he does so, the young man has nothing to hide. The truck and its driver have been recommended by a sympathetic labor union and will cost \$500. Now we’re getting somewhere: the unions are screwing us. Five hundred dollars for a one-day local truck rental? Suddenly a man named Arturo stands up. Arturo has a truck, he declares, and he would be happy to donate it to the occupation for a day. A cheer goes up. Now how much will it cost, the people ask, since the truck and its driver are free?

It will cost the same, says the young man.

How is that possible, he is asked, when Arturo has just knocked \$500 off the price?

Arturo’s truck is greatly appreciated, says the young man, and it will be useful in the future, but cannot be used in this instance.

Why not?

Because, the young man finally admits, the truck and its driver are already here; the laundry is already being loaded; it was an emergency, and measures have been taken.

The GA takes this in—why have we been arguing about this for an hour if it was already a done deal?—and then goes ahead and votes, though without any particular enthusiasm, to release \$3K to the emergency laundry committee.

Race

While the great laundry debate is going on, someone circulates a printed sheet describing the proposal for a new spokes council model to replace the general assembly. They could not have picked a better moment. Clearly the process of taking every single household question before 300 people for discussion is time-consuming and at times counterproductive. But before the new proposal has even been proposed, a

beautiful South Asian woman stands up and asks what guarantees there are that the new arrangement would not simply be dominated by white males?

The facilitator, not exactly a white male himself (I learn later that he’s Palestinian), takes a long time explaining that this question will need to be addressed in order, through the discussion process, although he recognizes how important it is, in our society, given its history, and so on.

I leave the GA to see if I can get a glimpse of the pile of laundry before it disappears. I make a circle of the park but it is gone.

When I get back to the GA, it is discussing whether to buy storage bins. A man named Bobby, a former sailor who’s on the sanitation crew, stands up in favor of the proposal, and delivers a short speech.

“Last week,” he says, “we put forward a proposal to buy storage bins. The proposal passed, but with amendments. First, the bins had to be fair trade. Second, they had to be bought on Craigslist.

“This turned out to be impossible.”

Bobby sits down.

So I miss the discussion on race. But I have caught some others. Oh they are tedious, these discussions of race. And if you’ve been around any kind of activism, you have heard them many, many times before. And yet there’s something different this time around, or so it seems to me. People raise the issue; the issue is discussed. Sometimes it gets “dealt” with, sometimes it gets delayed or papered over or whatever. People walk out; people come back. It just somehow doesn’t feel as toxic, as destructive, as I remember it feeling the last time I really ran into it, in college in the mid-’90s. And I want to say: Good. They’ve moved on. *They’re* not going to scuttle everything just so that we can acknowledge some old

→ **all disorderly conduct, and in keeping with the Broken Windows theory, they require swift and harsh police enforcement actions.**

Unfortunately for the police, it is exactly this disorderliness that has energized this movement. For years think tanks, labor unions, and progressive politicians have railed against the corrupt marriage between financial and political elites to no avail. Millions of Facebook posts, Tweets, and policy white papers have failed to galvanize a mass movement. Instead, it was the occupation of public spaces, marching without permits, and disruption of daily life in the financial district signaled an open ended defiance lacking in previous efforts.

As a result of this clash of styles, demonstrators continue to resist the tight controls of the NYPD by refusing to move onto the sidewalk or attempting to go over or around barriers, and the police have responded with high levels of force. And this use of force has not been the uncontrolled acts of rank and file officers lacking supervision or training. The violence has almost entirely come from high-ranking command staff, so called “white shirts,”

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grievance that happened many years before any of us were born, that we can do nothing about, that we are not in a position to apologize for, for which there is no way for us to make amends.

But—that’s not what happened, is it? What’s happened is that we changed. Or we’ve begun to. We—white males, I mean—have made the necessary adjustments. Twenty years ago, *they were right and we were wrong*. We were wrong. It might be useful to keep saying that for a while.

Kirill Medvedev

It’s easy to forget, if you live in New York, just how terrifying the city can be—especially the Financial District, with its narrow streets, and towers leaning monstrously over them, and the ominous Ground Zero construction, literally across the street from the park, digging into the earth.

“Kostya,” the Russian poet Kirill Medvedev says to me when we finally cross Chambers and enter the District, “where on earth are we?”

We have walked down from Penn Station, visiting the sites a Russian poet would most enjoy—the Chelsea Hotel, the Stonewall Inn, Joseph Brodsky’s old house on Morton Street. Finally we’ve arrived at the Revolution.

An ordinary Russian poet may scoff, but Kirill is no ordinary Russian poet. He is very active in the

nascent (or re-nascent) Russian socialist movement; he and his small Trotskyist group are always holding protests—small, but resonant—against the government and its nasty neoliberal, anti-human policies, and against art galleries that host pro-government or neo-fascistic art, and (once) against a theater company that supported the Kremlin but was also staging Brecht. Hypocrites!

I leave Kirill alone once we get to Zuccotti so he can walk around. On the way he’s been telling me how the Russian government recently fenced off a giant section of Moscow’s historic central district for government housing, essentially making that part of the city inaccessible to everyone else. He’s been trying to think of a potential Occupy response—though Russian OMON troops can be pretty nasty, and, more to the point, there is a lot of distrust on the side of Moscow’s anarchists, who consider the socialists too hierarchical. Among the socialists too there are many arguments about hierarchy. Kirill, in addition to being a poet and activist, is also the founder of a small publishing house, The Free Marxist Press, which prints original Russian works and translations of Western Marxists like Terry Eagleton and Isaac Deutscher. He tells me a very sad story about a book they’d planned to do earlier this year about the Arab Spring. They were going to write some things on their own and

who are lieutenants or higher. The use of these supervising officers in the front lines may have been an attempt to reduce police violence in the thinking that more experienced officers would show better judgment. Instead, it suggests that a culture of control, violence, and impunity pervades the entire department.

It was Deputy Inspector Anthony Bologna, who has decades of experience as both a precinct commander and in managing demonstrations, who pepper-sprayed several young women peacefully standing behind orange netting on the sidewalk on September 24. In fact, he is a defendant in some of the litigation stemming from illegal preemptive arrests during the 2004 RNC and recently received a loss of ten vacation days for the pepper-spraying incident. Another high ranking officer was recorded wildly swinging his baton at demonstrators and reporters during a standoff at Wall and Broadway on October 5. And more recently, Deputy Inspector Johnny Cardona was caught on camera on October 14 grabbing a young man from behind, twisting him around and punching him in the face, causing serious injury.

Since the mayor’s failed attempt to clear out Liberty Plaza on October 14, the police seem to have taken a step back from their zero tolerance approach. People are now able to use tents and tarps in the park and no one is being arrested for the heinous crime of writing with chalk on the sidewalk, though arrests continue to occur at sit-ins and street marches.

The NYPD is facing a major challenge. Their attempts at using mass arrests on the Brooklyn Bridge on October 1 to intimidate the demonstrators was unsuccessful; their efforts to corral them into protest pens and keep them on the sidewalks has not worked either; and police violence has only helped fuel the movement and brought disrepute and political trouble for the NYPD. A long, tense standoff may be in the offing with frequent arrests and occasional outbursts of police violence as demonstrators’ defiance comes up against police intolerance. Hopefully, calmer heads will prevail. If not, more lawsuits and negative publicity will be forthcoming for the NYPD.

translate pieces on Egypt by Zizek and Badiou. They were also going to add some essays that Foucault had written about the 1979 Revolution in Iran. The texts were all ready to go when Kirill noticed a footnote in one of the Foucault essays about a Trotskyist group in France. The footnote called the group a student movement; Kirill happened to know that they had begun as a student movement but then turned into a large, influential party. He changed the footnote. The translator of the

Foucault essay saw this and objected: You can’t change the author’s text! Kirill said that, first of all, it wasn’t even clear if the footnote was Foucault’s, not his editor’s, and, second, of course you can change something if it’s factually inaccurate!

A terrible email battle ensued on the Free Marxist list. Kirill was accused of authoritarian tendencies. The translator pulled the Foucault essay. The book never happened.

Kirill likes Zuccotti Park, though I can tell he was put off by its

REBECCA SOLNIT

Throwing Out The Master’s Tools And Building a Better House

Violence Is Conventional

Violence is what the police use. It’s what the state uses. If we want a revolution, it’s because we want a better world, because we think we have a bigger imagination, a more beautiful vision. So we’re not violent; we’re not like them in crucial ways. When I see a New York City policeman pepper-spray already captive young women in the face, I am disgusted; I want things to be different. And that pepper-spraying incident, terrible though it was for the individuals, did not succeed in any larger way.



PHOTO BY JEREMY AYERS

In fact, seen on YouTube (704,737 times for one posted version) and widely disseminated, it helped make Occupy Wall Street visible and sympathetic to mainstream viewers. The movement grew tremendously after that. The incident demonstrated the moral failure of the police and demonstrated that violence is also weak. It can injure, damage, destroy, kill, but it can’t coerce the will of the people, whether it’s a policeman assaulting unarmed young women or the US Army in Vietnam or Iraq.

Imagine that some Occupy activists had then beaten up the cop. That would have seemed to justify him in the eyes of many; it would’ve undermined the moral standing of our side. And then what? Moral authority was also that young Marine veteran, Shamar Thomas, chewing out thirty or so New York cops in what became a YouTube clip viewed 2,652,037 times so far. He didn’t fight them; he told them that what they were doing is wrong and dishonorable. And brought the nation along with him. Which violence wouldn’t do.

Violence Is Weak

As Jonathan Schell points out in his magnificent book *The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and the Will of the People*, violence is what the state uses when its other powers have failed, when it is already losing. In using violence the state often loses its moral authority and its popular support.

chaos. “They need to come up with demands,” he says. “Demands are the key.”

That evening I have somewhere to be, and Kirill has to go back to Pennsylvania, to the poetry festival that flew him out here, but before he goes he is able to take in a GA. This is the evening after Oakland is raided by police using tear gas, injuring numerous people, and putting an Iraq War veteran in the hospital with a fractured skull. In solidarity, after the GA, a large contingent of OWS-ers marches north from Zuccotti to Union Square, shutting down traffic on Broadway and defying the police.

The next day I email Kirill to make sure he caught his train, and also to wonder whether he’d managed to be in the march. He caught his train, he says, and missed the march. “But I did manage to catch the entire discussion”—at the GA—“about whether they should buy some shelves.”

Laundry, Part 2

I find myself in Manhattan with a car and 700 copies of the reprinted *Occupy!* gazette in my trunk, so off I go to Zuccotti. It’s past midnight and a big friendly guy named Haywood is manning the Info booth. Haywood

is from North Carolina; he’s named after Big Bill Haywood of the Wobblies. He loves *n+1!* He’s been living at the park for three weeks now, and he is tired. People show up to help, work awhile, then disappear. The park has become less safe in recent weeks, and Haywood has helped to organize a Community Watch; it can’t do much, but it can keep an eye on the park and call the police if something really bad happens.

Haywood says he enjoys the gazette.

“There were a lot of typos in the first printing,” I say, “but we fixed most of them.”

“A lot of typos is better than a lot of lies,” says another guy at the Info desk, “and that’s all we get from Wall Street.”

“True,” says Haywood, mediating. “But a typo does tear at the heart.”

Haywood and his girlfriend Christine and I walk over to the McDonald’s on Broadway so she can use the bathroom. This McDonald’s is occupied! I have never seen such a thing. It is full of people of every possible description, with ragged coats, crazy hair, a certain number of laptops. Christine uses the restroom; Haywood, meanwhile, competent and gregarious, addresses a security

concern with a broad-shouldered black kid holding a walkie-talkie. The black kid points out an older black guy whose beard is partly dyed blond: “That guy is either a great actor, or he’s nuts,” says the kid. Haywood takes this under advisement; he then talks with an Asian woman whose purse has been stolen. “We’re all burning out,” Haywood tells her. She should take a few days off.

Eventually we walk back to the park; Haywood seems as informed about the inner workings of the occupation as anyone I’ve met, so naturally I ask him what’s going on with the laundry. He says the laundry is in some disarray. I say, only half lying, that I have experience handling complex logistical operations. Haywood, diplomatic, says he will keep this in mind.

Graeber

I read David Graeber’s piece on *NakedCapitalism*. He appears to be haunted by a question: Why, after thirty years of organizing protests, meetings, occupations, has one finally taken off? His answer: This is how desperate people now are; this is how bad things have become. For Graeber, though he won’t say so, the worse, the better. For the rest of us, not so much. But of course he’s right.

Working Group

While handing out gazettes in the park I meet a young man named Dale. He’s tall, 24, polite, grew up in Indiana and emigrated to Austin a few years ago because he’d heard it was a cool place and there was plenty of work. This turned out to be false. It wasn’t that cool—for the most part it was just people getting drunk all the time—and there wasn’t that much work: Dale, who hadn’t gone to college, ended up working at a call center that raised money for the Democratic Party. After a while he became a supervisor, so he wasn’t cold-calling people all the time, and he’d found it pretty interesting work. “The Democrats are actually more interested in the data than in the money, it seemed to me. You have this huge database of people’s responses. Last year, during the healthcare debate, we couldn’t raise any money.”

“Because people thought Obama was a socialist?”

“No! They thought he wasn’t pushing hard enough. There wasn’t a public option. People felt betrayed.”

Dale has driven up from Austin in a 1978 Mercedes that he outfitted so that it ran on grease. He says when he first made the transition to grease he’d get it directly from restaurants, but after a while he found this too

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We Are Already Winning

The powers that be are already scared of the Occupy Movement and not because of tiny acts of violence. They are scared because right now we speak pretty well for the 99 percent. And because we set out to change the world and it’s working. The president of Russia warned at the G20 Summit a week or so ago, “The reward system of shareholders and managers of financial institution should be changed step by step. Otherwise the ‘Occupy Wall street’ slogan will become fashionable in all developed countries.” That’s fear. And capitulation. And *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman opened a recent column thus: “Inequality is back in the news, largely thanks to Occupy Wall Street . . .” We have set the agenda and framed the terms, and that’s already a huge victory.

This movement is winning. It’s winning by being broad and inclusive, by emphasizing what we have in common and bridging differences between the homeless, the poor, those in freefall, the fiscally thriving but outraged, between generations, races and nationalities and between longtime activists and never-demonstrated-before newcomers. It’s winning by keeping its eyes on the prize, which is economic justice and direct democracy, and by living out that direct democracy through assemblies and other means right now.

It’s winning through people power direct-action tactics, from global marches to blockades to many hundreds of Occupations. It’s winning through the creativity of the young, from the 22-year-old who launched Move Your Money Day to the 26-year-old who started the We Are the 99 Percent website. And by tactics learned from Argentina’s 2001 revolution of general assemblies and *politica afectiva*, the politics of affection. It’s winning by becoming the space in which we are civil society: of human beings in the aggregate, living in public and with trust and love for one another. Violence is not going to be one of the tools that works in this movement.

Violence Is Authoritarian

Bodily violence is a means of coercing others against their will by causing pain, injury, or death. It steals another’s bodily integrity or very life as property to dispose of as the violator wishes. Since the majority in our movement

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time-consuming, and also the grease wasn't very high-quality. Now he buys it on the internet for a dollar a pound. His Mercedes is currently parked in Brooklyn; once a week he takes the subway out and moves it to the other side of the street.

By this point I've figured out that, press and tourists aside, there are three kinds of people in the park at any given time. There are the homeless or lawless who've come for the food and the freedom from police harassment; there are the organizers, both experienced and novice, who are mostly from New York, highly educated, mostly in their late 20s and 30s, and mostly not living in the park. And then there are the kids who actually do live in the park. There's a small overlap of organizers who are also living in the park—Haywood is one; a tall, redheaded guy with a beard named Daniel Zetah is another—but for the most part this split obtains. It's problematic, to a

certain extent, but the fact is it's vital that the park continue to be occupied, and the other fact is it's hard to get too much done when you're living there. It's hard enough just to avoid hypothermia. I mean, do you live in a park?.

But what you think of this split arrangement also depends on what you make of the kids. They're described, even by sympathetic writers, as "anarchists," which I suppose is technically true, but another equally true description would be "20-year-olds." What 20-year-old is not an anarchist? And so are these 20-year-olds, also. But they're much more than that, it seems to me. When you say "anarchist," I hear "nihilist"—like the Black Bloc kids who used to come to the anti-globalization protests just to smash shit. None of the young people I've met at Zuccotti want to smash shit just to smash shit, though they do enjoy smashing shit—or at least taking

over the streets—to make a point. They are the opposite of cynical. They actually think that coming to a faraway city and living in a concrete park could lead to political change. And they may be right!

Dale introduced himself to me because of the gazette, not because he wants to write for it but because he is trying to set up an OWS print shop workers' co-op, and he wonders if we'd consider printing with him. He's read a lot about workers' co-ops, he says, and it seems like there is a great demand for printing work at OWS. I tell him we'd be happy to print the gazette with him if he can offer a reasonable rate. Dale asks more questions about printing, and when I run into him a few days later, he asks more questions still—he is about to go off to the Alternative Economies Working Group, and wants to give a full report. I offer to come with him and help give the report.

The Alternative Economies Working Group turns out to be quite small—three guys, including Dale, who've been occupying the park, and two other guys from a small NGO called The Working World, which is committed to setting up workers' co-ops around the world. The two guys, college-educated and barely thirty, if that, have spent most of the past decade in Argentina and Nicaragua, but now they are here.

"It's a very different situation," one of them admits.

And it is an interesting meeting. None of the members of the potential print shop has any experience with printing, but they are going to try. There is a space in downtown Brooklyn whose owner is sympathetic to the movement, and willing to give them a good price; and one member of the future coop, Julio, has talked with some OWS organizers to learn where they print, what they are printing, and for how much. The OWS organizer, it turns out, knew what they were printing, but not how much it cost; he just goes to Staples and pays whatever Staples asks. So Julio marched down to Staples. "The guy there got annoyed with all the questions, so he just gave me a bunch of receipts," says Julio, producing a stack of receipts for every imaginable print job—from black and white two-sided sheets (7 cents a page) to large full-color glossy posters (a whopping \$84 a poster, at least according to the receipts). The OWS organizer also told Julio that they wanted to print stickers, pins, and magnets, but didn't know how—if Julio could figure it out, there'd be some work for the co-op right there.

It's a little puzzling, this meeting. In Argentina and Nicaragua, The Working World presumably deals

would never consent to violent actions, such actions are also imposed on our body politic against our will. This is the very antithesis of anarchy as an ideal in which no one is coerced. If you wish to do something the great majority of us oppose, do it on your own. But these small violent bands attach themselves to large nonviolent movements, perhaps because there aren't any large violent movements around.

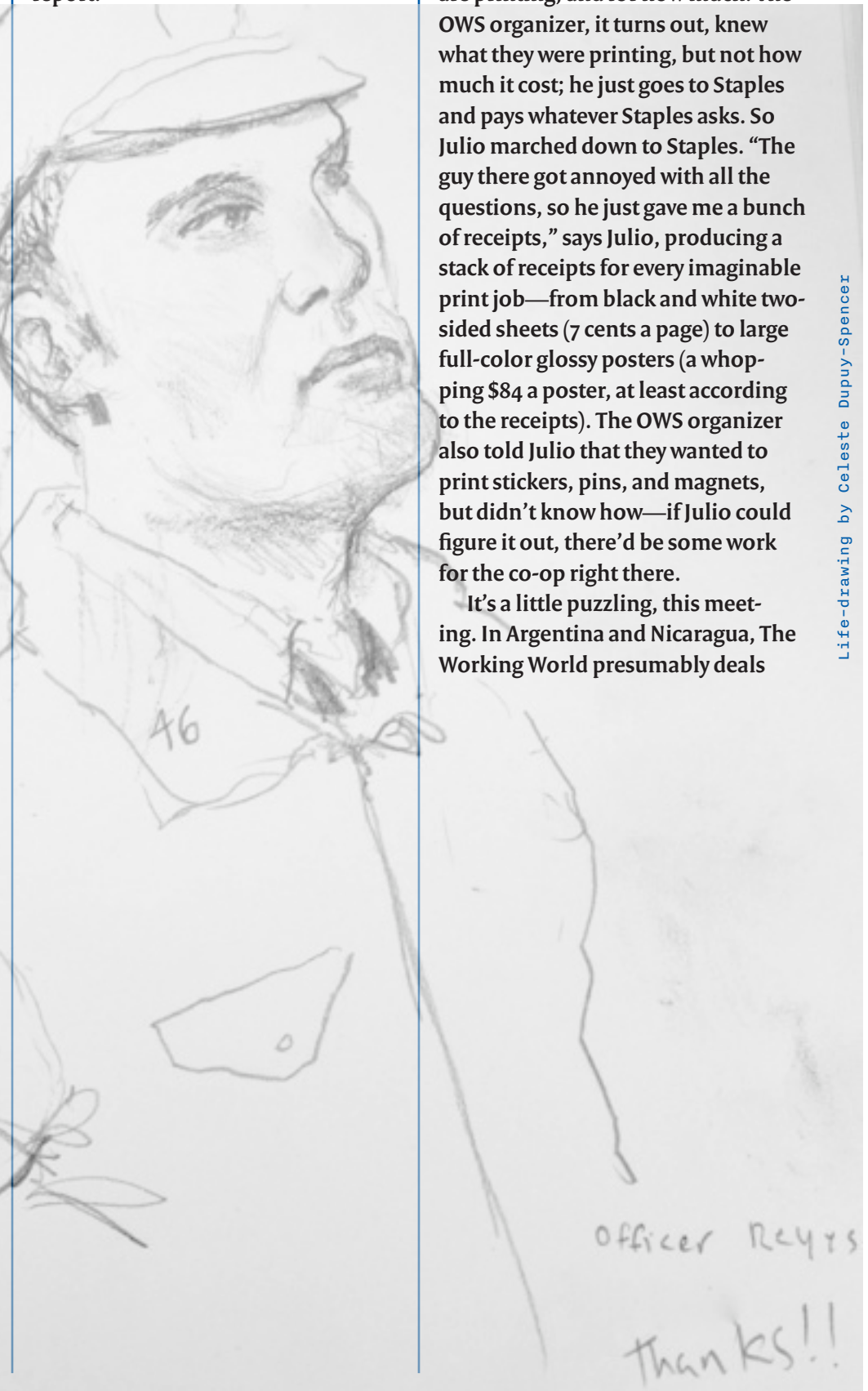
As Peter Marshall writes in his history of anarchism, *Demanding the Impossible*, "the word violence comes from the Latin *violare* and etymologically means violation. Strictly speaking, to act violently means to treat others without respect. . . . A violent revolution is therefore unlikely to bring about any fundamental change in human relations. Given the anarchists' respect for the sovereignty of the individual, in the long run it is non-violence and not violence which is implied by anarchist values." Many of us anarchists are not ideological pacifists; I'm more than fine with the ways the Zapatista rebels in southern Mexico have defended themselves and notice how sadly necessary it sometimes is, and I sure wouldn't dictate what Syrians or Tibetans may or may not do. But petty violence in public in this country doesn't achieve anything useful.

Snatching Defeat from the Jaws of Victory

In downtown Oakland, late on the evening of November 2 after a triumphant and mostly nonviolent day of mass actions, a building near Occupy Oakland's encampment was seized, debris was piled up as if to make barricades that were only show barricades to set afire, not defend, trash cans were set on fire, windows broken, rocks thrown, and then there were altercations with the police. If the goal was to seize a building, one witness pointed out, then seize it secretly, not flamboyantly. The activity around the seizure seemed intended to bait the police into action. Which worked; police are not hard to bait. Activists and police were injured. What was achieved?

Many other activists yelled at the brawlers because they felt that the violence-tinged actions did not represent them or the Occupy movement and put them in danger. It was appalling that the city of Oakland began, a week earlier, by sending in stormtrooper police before dawn rather than negotiating about the fate of the Occupy Oakland encampment. But it was ridiculous that some people tried to get the police to be violent all over again. And it was tragic that others bore the brunt of that foray, including the grievously injured veteran Kayvan Sabeghi—another veteran, a week after Scott Olsen.

Earlier this fall, the publishing group Crimethinc issued a screed in justification of violence that's circulated widely in the Occupy movement. It's titled "Dear Occupiers: A Letter from Anarchists," though most anarchists I know would disagree with almost everything that follows. Midway through it declares, "Not everyone is resigned to legalistic pacifism; some people still



with workers who have a trade of some kind—carpentry, say—but don't know how to organize themselves, and incorporate, and do marketing—with workers, in short, who have a trade but don't know what a workers' co-op is. Whereas here they are dealing with young people who know all about workers' co-ops, but have no trade. When I tell this to Emily, my girlfriend, she says that the solution is for Dale and Julio to go work for The Working World. When I tell it to Kirill, he's more sanguine: "It's all right," he says. "We used to not know anything either."

I have to leave the Working Group early to catch the big Community Board meeting; it's been rumored that they may pass a resolution condemning the occupation. As I'm getting up, Julio looks at me. "So," he says, quietly, looking down at his receipts and smiling a little into his Che Guevara beard, "how do you think we're doing?"

I tell them what I think, which is that they're doing everything right. They're checking prices, doing research, asking questions. And if Dale can figure out how to make a Mercedes run on grease, he can figure out how to run a printing press.

Community

But of course it's not easy to set up a small business when you're living in a park.

The Community Board meeting is at a high school at the northern edge of the Financial District, and I'm

a little late walking into the school auditorium, a school auditorium like any other (and what did I think, that it'd be made of gold?). "I find this resolution shocking," a man is saying. "This is a perversion of the First Amendment. The First Amendment does not protect making noise and urinating and defecating all over our neighborhood. I say, not in our backyard!"

Some people cheer. I take a seat and figure that one after another, concerned neighbors will get up and say something similar. And a number of them do. So do small business owners: A restaurant owner says that occupiers have been coming in with pots and pans and filling them up with water in his bathroom (and he pays good money for that water); he also says his employees don't feel safe walking home at night. But it turns out that anyone is allowed to get up and speak, including people with only a tangential relationship to the neighborhood. A woman who lives nearby and often bikes through the neighborhood gives a moving speech about taking her daughter by the protests and explaining to her that "sometimes, in America, people do things that are illegal because they believe them to be necessary. Rosa Parks, for example, who refused to give up her seat on a bus." The woman, who is in her forties, says she too was once part of an illegal encampment: at Yale, in the early '80s, to pressure the university to divest from South Africa.

remember how to stand up for themselves. Assuming that those at the front of clashes with the authorities are somehow in league with the authorities is not only illogical . . . It is typical of privileged people who have been taught to trust the authorities and fear everyone who disobeys them."

If nonviolence/people power is privilege, explain this eyewitness account from Oakland last Wednesday, posted on the Occupy Oakland site by Kallista Patridge: "By the time we got to the University building, a brave man was blocking the door screaming "Peaceful Protest! This is my city, and I don't want to destroy it!" He cracked his knuckles, ready to take on an attack, his face splattered in paint from the Whole Foods fiasco [in which downtown Oakland's branch of the chain store was spraypainted and smashed up based on a rumor that workers were told they'd be fired if they took the day off for the General Strike]. Behind the doors were men in badges. I was now watching a black man shield cops from a protest. The black flag group began pointing out those attempting to stop them, chanting 'The peace police must be stopped,' and I was, personally, rather disgusted by the strategy of comparing peacefully pissed people to police."

This account is by a protester who also noted in downtown Oakland that day a couple of men with military-style haircuts and brand new clothes put bandannas over their faces and began to smash stuff. She thinks that infiltrators were part of the property destruction and maybe instigated it, and Copwatch's posted video seems to document police infiltrators at Occupy Oakland. One way to be impossible to sabotage is to be clearly committed to tactics that the state can't coopt. If an infiltrator wants to nonviolently blockade or march or take out the garbage, well, that's one more of us. If an infiltrator sabotages us by recruiting for mayhem, that's a comment on what those tactics are good for.

There has been a great deal of fear at OWS about this meeting—negotiations with the drummers, to get them to ease up, had apparently broken down, with at least one of the Dans from the Info desk telling me that he'd gone over there one evening to ask them to quiet down and been physically attacked. An email has circulated saying that the drummers are about to destroy the entire movement—that the neighbors are going to withdraw their support. And of course who cares about the bourgeois neighbors, but, as any guerrilla movement can tell you, the sympathy of the local population is crucial. Last night, in response to the email, I went down to the park to see if I could help, and witnessed instead a very moving general assembly at which the newly formed working group Pulse, representing the drummers, put forth a proposal to limit drumming to four hours a day, 12 PM to 2 PM and then 4 PM to 6 PM, a proposal that made people happier than I'd seen them at any moment since the morning that Bloomberg backed down on the park clean-up. "We have consensus!" the facilitator said, and people actually cheered.

The next day it isn't at all clear that the Community Board is swayed by this decision, or even that they know about it. There are other forces at work. In addition to the neighborhood residents (mostly there to voice their complaints), the non-residents (there to voice their support), and the actual occupiers (there mostly to introduce themselves—"I sympathize about the noise," says one, "it's

even louder where I am, believe me"; "I got a library card," says another, "I'm part of your community now"), there are the representatives of various New York politicians. Each and every one of them is here to praise the Community Board for its wise resolution, which does ask the protesters to keep the drumming to a minimum, and to stop pissing and shitting on the streets and in the stairwells of the neighborhood, but also asks police to remove barricades throughout the neighborhood and generally to chill out. What is clearest in that school auditorium is that no Democratic politician wants to be on the wrong side of Occupy Wall Street. They are afraid of the consequences. Will they stay afraid? I don't know. And I don't know if the meeting of a Community Board in a neighborhood where the average apartment probably costs a million dollars is what democracy looks like. But it does give some clue as to what political power looks like, and what it requires (people on the streets), and what it can, at least temporarily, do.

The resolution, to continue to welcome the protesters, overwhelmingly passes.

NPR

I turn on NPR for the first time in weeks; it's their weekly news quiz show, "Wait Wait . . . Don't Tell Me!" Lately, like in the past year, I've been finding show, along with just about every other NPR show, irritating to the point of distraction—I wish they

What Actually Works

The language of Crimethinc is empty machismo peppered with insults. And just in this tiny snippet, incoherent. People who don't like violence are not necessarily fearful or obedient; people power and nonviolence are strategies that are not the same as the ideology pacifism. To shut down the whole central city of Seattle and the World Trade Organization ministerial meeting on November 30, 1999, or the business district of San Francisco for three days in March of 2003, or the Port of Oakland on November 2, 2011—through people power—is one hell of a great way to stand up. It works. And it brings great joy and sense of power to those who do it. It's how the world gets changed these days.

Crimethinc, whose logo is its name inside a bullet, doesn't actually cite examples of violence achieving anything in our recent history. Can you name any? The anonymous writers don't seem prepared to act, just tell others to (as do the two most high-profile advocates of violence on the left). And despite the smear quoted above that privileged people oppose them, theirs is the language of privilege. White kids can do crazy shit and get slapped on the wrist or maybe slapped around for it; I have for a quarter century walked through police lines like they were tall grass; people of color face far more dire consequences. When white youth try to bring the police down on a racially diverse movement—well, it's not exactly what the word solidarity means to most of us.

Another Occupy Oakland witness, a female street medic, wrote of the ill-conceived November 2 late-night antics, "watching black bloc-ers run from the cops and not protect the camp their actions had endangered, an action

Over tea, Ray tells me a little more about his life. He is from a small family; after his parents died a few years ago, he and his sister drifted apart. His parents were themselves from a small town in the Midwest, they had come to the big city and started a small business. So Ray never knew his extended family, and what's more both he and his sister had been adopted. In recent years, he says, as work had dried up, he'd become something of a hermit, mostly reaching out to the world through social media and his blog.

The next day, I read through Ray's blog. It's a pretty typical blog, at first. Ray has some TV shows he likes, *Breaking Bad* in particular, and he says clever things about them. He's also increasingly angry about the political direction of the country; his favorite pundit is Rachel Maddow.

People Power Shapes the World

Left violence failed miserably in the 1970s: the squalid and futile violence in Germany and Italy, the delusional Symbionese Liberation Army murdering Marcus Foster, Oakland's first black school superintendent, and later gunning down a bystander mother of four in a bank, the bumbling Weather Underground accidentally blowing three of its members up and turning the rest into fugitives for a decade; all of them giving us a bad name we've worked hard to escape.

Think of that excruciating footage in Sam Green's Weather Underground documentary of the "days of rage," when a handful of delusions-of-grandeur young white radicals thought they'd do literal battle with the Chicago police and thus inspire the working class to rise up. The police clobbered them; the working class was so not impressed. If you want to address a larger issue, getting overly entangled with local police is a great way to lose focus and support.

In fact, the powerful and effective movements of the past sixty years have been almost entirely nonviolent. The Civil Rights Movement included the Deacons for Defense, but the focus of that smaller group was actually defense—the prevention of violence against nonviolent activists and the movement, not offensive forays. Schell points out that even the French and Russian Revolutions were largely nonviolent when it came to overthrowing the old regime; seizing a monopoly of power to form a new regime is when the blood really began to flow.

I think of the Sandinista Revolution of 1979 as the last great armed revolution, and it succeeded because the guerrillas with guns who came down from the mountains had wide popular support. People power. People power overthrew the Shah of Iran that year, in a revolution that was hijacked by authoritarians fond of violence. In 1986 the Marcos regime of the Philippines was overthrown by nonviolent means, means so compelling the army switched sides and refused to support the Marcos regime.

Armies don't do that if you shoot at them, generally (and if you really defeated the police in battle—all the police, nationwide?—you'd face the army). Since then dozens of regimes, from South Africa to Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland to Nepal to Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil and Tunisia have been profoundly changed through largely nonviolent means. There was self-defense in the Deacons for Defense mode in the Egyptian uprising this year, but people power was the grand strategy that brought out the millions and changed the country. Armed struggle was part of the ongoing resistance in South Africa, but in the end people power and international solidarity were the fulcrum of change. The Zapatistas used violence sparingly as a last resort, but "our word is our weapon," they say, and they used other tools in preference, often and exquisitely.

The powerful and effective movements of the past sixty years have used the strategy of people power. It works. It changes the world. It's changing the world now. Join us. Or don't join us. But please don't try to have it both ways.

There aren't very many entries, and the focus of a lot of them is Ray's frustration that he's not keeping up regular blog entries. This sounds a little funny, maybe, because who cares, but not being able to do something you want to do, whether or not it's objectively important, suggests that there's something else going wrong. Then there is a long gap between entries; then an entry indicating, for the first time, that Ray may be in financial trouble; and then:

About to board a bus to NYC. Not sure if I'll ever come back to Seattle.

As a notoriously unsentimental person I can't feel bad about leaving. I've loved living here, was born here. Lived within a few miles from where I was born almost all of my life. That kinda makes me sad. I had opportunities to explore but chose to remain comfortably here.

Now I must leave.

New York is someplace I've always wanted to see. I'm sure I'm thoroughly unprepared for it which makes me want to go there all the more.

I was asked why I would choose to be homeless somewhere like New York rather than stay here. I honestly would find being homeless in Seattle far too depressing. At least by going to New York I'm going somewhere I've always wanted to see.

I have had some moments of panic, asking myself if I've completely lost my mind. That's entirely possible. But those moments pass quickly and my sense of adventure takes over and I'm ready to hit the road all the more.

This may sound strange but the people I'm really going to miss are the baristas at the Tully's on 47th, the checkout clerks at the Safeway on 15th, and the counter people at Dick's Drive-In on Queen Anne. There are lots of others but I frequented those places more than any others and was always treated as a welcome regular and friend.

I'm going to try to update my status as often as possible though it's impossible to say when or where I'll have free wi-fi and my cell is not a very capable conduit to the outside world.

Time to get on the bus soon.

See ya Seattle!

And then there's nothing for three and a half weeks (Ray's laptop was stolen, or simply lost, pretty much as soon as he showed up in the park—"although it may still be there," he says, "sometimes people just move stuff and then you don't know where it is"), until Ray checks in.

My situation? I'm homeless, jobless, pretty much penniless and have lost pretty much everything I brought with me. Even with all that life occupying wall street couldn't be more of an adventure. An adventure I'm (but for the occasionally icky weather) enjoying a great deal.

We eat breakfast, do a quick load of Ray's laundry, and then he heads back to the park.

A few days later, I go there with the hope of helping out with the laundry, only to become embroiled in a multi-hour episode involving a methadone addict who is attacked in the park and spirited, for his own safety, to South Ferry Terminal, where Michael, a young stage actor from Chicago, and I have to go looking for him, because the person escorting him is our laundry partner. As all this is going on Michael tells me he's become increasingly frustrated with the occupation, which he's been watching grow more violent and unsafe, and which is spending so much time simply maintaining itself ("bare life," one friend later complains) that it can't even think

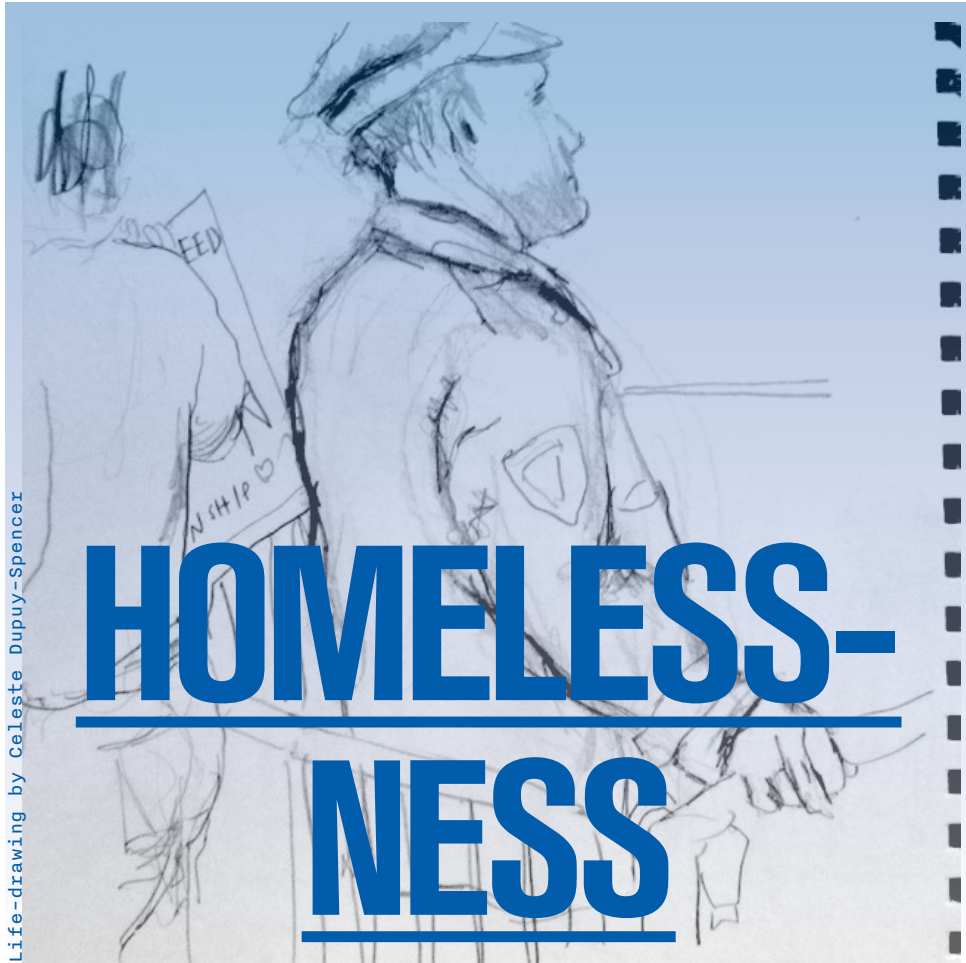
of effecting political change. "The Super Committee is meeting right now!" he says—meaning, it takes me a second to realize, the Congressional committee on cutting the debt—and meanwhile he's driving a giant truck filled with dirty laundry to northern Manhattan. Because, I discover, that's the way they're doing laundry now: renting a U-Haul, driving it up to Inwood, then spending as many hours as it takes to wash it all. As Michael tells me this, Russell Simmons shows up in the park. "Let's see if I can get a high five," Michael says, moving in his direction. He does not manage a high five. Michael returns and says he's hoping to organize a 10-day march to Washington, DC, to arrive at Congress at the conclusion of the Super Committee deliberations. "Good luck!" I think. About a week later, I will watch TV footage online of Michael carrying an American flag as he leads a group of other protesters onto a ferry bound for New Jersey, to start their long march.

In the meantime, back in Zucotti, there is a new mountain of dirty laundry. I run into Haywood after the South Ferry debacle and tell him the story. "Typical," he says. But, I add, the Inwood method is not as crazy as I had initially thought. "Also typical," says Haywood.

There must be a better way of doing the laundry, I think. We have not found it yet. But we will.

ILLUSTRATION BY JOANNA NEBORSKY





HOMELESS- NESS

Christopher Herring and Zoltan Gluck

THE HOMELESS QUESTION

We were sitting on the raised flowerbed along the southern perimeter of Liberty Plaza, chatting while we finished our meals. The din of the general assembly meeting could be heard in the background and Harris was telling me about the punk band he'd been in during the '80s when three men came over and interrupted. "This is the guy I was telling you about, who the police told to come here." Bob, an old timer who I've seen around at a number of marches and OWS events, had been talking with us earlier about being homeless in New York. Now he was back with these two men, one of them apparently from "legal." They were all eager to hear Harris's story about how he'd been sleeping uptown when two police officers woke him up, told him that there had been a complaint, and suggested that he "go down to Zuccotti":

Bob: Hey, Harris, tell them about what happened with the police.

Harris: Well, I've been sleeping in the same place for the last ten years and I have never been bothered by any "complaints." But these two police officers come over and wake me up . . . They made sure that I got up to leave, but I didn't come down here. I just went to another one of my spots.

Harris talked about how he knew everyone in the neighborhood and has never caused any trouble, and how it seemed impossible that someone would all of a sudden raise a complaint. The man from legal then interjected: "So, then it's confirmed. The police are actually doing this." There was a pause and then he looked directly at Harris and said sternly: "Go back uptown."

"ECON"

JULIA OTT

We Are Our Demands

It only takes a glance at protesters' placards and online posts to understand the broad contours of what the Occupy movement and "the 99 percent" want to correct: The pernicious effects of corporate lobbying on American democracy and global ecology. The failure to hold those responsible for the financial crisis accountable. Thirty years of corporate compensation and federal tax policies that funneled the fruits of economic growth to the wealthiest. The stagnation of income for the 99 percent; the explosion in their indebtedness; the disintegration of their social safety net.

In sum, the protesters are rejecting the reigning political-economic assumptions of the last thirty-odd years,

in place since the election of Ronald Reagan. As a historian of American economic and political history, I have put some thought into how best to describe this specific constellation of beliefs and policies that have harmed the 99 percent. Some call this set of beliefs neoliberalism. Others speak of "supply-sideism," "Reaganomics," or "post-Fordism." I think, for the 99 percent's purposes, the essential complex is "shareholder capitalism."

The late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed the resuscitation of beliefs (dating from the 1910s and 1920s) arguing for the primacy of financial securities markets and institutions in American life, and the desirability of mass financial investment. Since 1980s, the practices of investment and the figure of "the investor"—especially "the shareholder"—have occupied a position of highest honor in economic policy, corporate governance, and the business media.

According to the logic of shareholder capitalism, government and corporate policy must favor the accumulation of wealth by maximizing returns to shareholders and reducing taxes on corporate profits, on investment income, and on

It took a moment to register that this was an act of banishment. The silence was broken by Bob, supplicating awkwardly, "But wait, no, Harris is actually a good guy. Like I was saying . . ." But Harris was quick with a response that dissolved the tension. "I'm not sleeping here." He went on to talk about how he had been distributing chocolate throughout the day. Having momentarily placated his adversary, he continued, "The problem with these other homeless people who are coming down here is that they are not contributing."

Now reconciled, the conversation turned to why "contributing" should be the basic criteria for whether the homeless should be allowed to stay. The legal attaché waxed political about how freeloaders were bad for the movement, but that homeless who are willing to contribute could be an asset. Then the two men asked Harris if he would make a proposal to the general assembly summing up their conversation. Harris declined, but they persuaded him to dictate a message that they could read on his behalf. I was appointed scribe and wrote down his declaration:

If you are not contributing to the movement, then why are you here? If you do not go on marches, why are you here? This is a society of people who have come together to protest. If you are not protesting, why are you here? This is not a place for free food or free cigarettes. If you live in New York, go home. If you are homeless in New York, there are plenty of places to be homeless. Go there. Feel free to visit, maybe even eat some free food, occasionally. But don't stay here. Don't cause trouble. This society gives us enough trouble.

This encounter conveys the challenges that lie ahead in relations between the Occupy Movement and chronically homeless, who have been present since its inception. Based on our observations, it appears that the general exclusion of the homeless from public life has already begun to take root in the Occupy Movement as a way of establishing legitimate occupation

the richest people. It insists that these concentrations of wealth will re-invest their returns-on-capital in new enterprises and productivity-enhancing technologies—and do so more efficiently than any other way. Despite the inequitable means employed, champions of shareholder capitalism promise more production, lower prices, more jobs, and a higher standard of living for all in the end. The cake may be divided inequitably, they argue, but it will be enormous.

Financial securities markets and institutions are supposed to pilot the investment process, directing capital to those best situated to use it and distributing risk to those best able to bear it. Stock and bond investments liberate individuals to take responsibility for themselves, in contrast to the distortions of sharing risk in welfare capitalism and the welfare state. Finally, it is purported that financial markets and institutions—like *all* markets and economic institutions—will do all these things most, and best, when unencumbered by regulatory government.

The financial crisis that began in 2007 brought home the actual effects of adherence to the tenets of shareholder capitalism. The principle of maximizing shareholder value oriented corporate leadership toward keeping stock price high. It compelled them to “downsize and redistribute” their profits to shareholders. Corporate boards granted an ever-increasing proportion of pay to executives in the form of stock and stock options, attempting to align the interests of executives with those of shareholders. As a result, the pocketbooks of corporate executives, and their consultants, and investment bankers, swelled, especially relative to increasingly downsizable workers. The long-term resources and health of these corporations suffered. The highly profitable financing divisions of corporations like General

Electric and General Motors overtook the manufacturing divisions, exposing those corporations to a new world of global financial risk. Even for “financial services” corporations, as William Lazonick points out, many of the ultimately bailed-out banks might have weathered their subprime storm (instead of raiding the US Treasury) if they hadn’t already redistributed billions of dollars to stockholders in the form of stock buy-backs in the early years of the twenty-first century.

To say that the actual economic results of the ideology of “shareholder capitalism” have fallen short of expectations would be a colossal understatement. Corporations, financial institutions, and the super-rich largely did *not* re-invest their exponentially increasing returns in new productive and employing enterprises. Rather, outsized wealth (turbo-charged with borrowed money, called “leverage”) chased much quicker, temporarily higher returns in housing, stock, mortgage, collateralized debt obligation, repo, and currency markets—also gambling in ever-more esoteric and opaque derivative instruments based upon those markets. The results: asset bubbles; a systemically dangerous shadow banking system; hedge-fund managers’ gated monstrosities in the Connecticut suburbs; and the collapse of the financial system beginning in 2007.

To make it clear: the perceptions of the superior economic performance of shareholder capitalism is not borne out by historical reality. During the three decades following World War II, when corporate managers cared more about the growth of their companies than the value of their stock options and policymakers cared more about the purchasing power of the middle class than stock indexes and Treasury yields, annualized rates of growth for real GDP and for the S&P composite index approximately equaled those of the post-1980 “golden

age” of shareholder capitalism (3.0 percent and 10.06 percent between 1945 and 1975 vs. 2.73 percent and 10.98 percent between 1980 and 2010). But in the last thirty years, tax and corporate policy has redistributed wealth upward, while social goods have plummeted. Between 1945 and 1975, the top 1 percent of earners never paid back anything less than a 70 percent income tax rate, and sometimes paid as much as 91 percent—with higher economic growth, more evenly distributed. In contrast, since Reagan’s inauguration, the top 1 percent of earners have never paid any more than 50 percent income tax, and have paid as little as 29 percent. And more than double the percentage of all US income has been redistributed to them. Between 1945 and 1975, the top 1 percent never earned more than 14 percent of all pre-tax income. In 2007, they took 23.5 percent.

The unregulated financial markets and institutions favored under shareholder capitalism proved to be a rather faulty technology for managing ever more complex and intertwined economic risks. The recent bankruptcy of former Democratic Congressman Jon Corzine’s MF Global—and the frightening realization that, still, no one seems to be able to anticipate the ripple-effects of that failure—demonstrates once again just how well self-regulation works, years after you’d think earlier collapses would have taught a lesson about over-leveraging and reckless risk on this scale. Still, if the Republican primary

race is any indication, shareholder capitalism keeps kicking. Herman Cain has pulled ahead with his sharply regressive “9-9-9” plan. It would lighten the tax burden of the wealthy even further and eliminate taxes on investment gains. Rick Perry has also announced plans for a flat tax on income from all sources to “create jobs, create growth, and create growth and *create investor confidence*.” Even the economically most “moderate” Mitt Romney favors still more tax cuts on investment income and corporate profits. *All* the Republican candidates finger financial reform (namely Dodd-Frank) as the primary culprit stifling the financial sector’s natural tendency to facilitate economic recovery. In Congress, Republican elected officials continue to sacrifice government revenues on the altar of a rigid anti-tax ideology, even though polls indicate that roughly two-thirds of Americans favor increasing taxes on the highest tax brackets to pay for jobs creation.

If we do want a mass investment society, we should choose—together, as citizens—what to make it. It doesn’t dictate deregulation or the elimination of social protections. It doesn’t demand a level of inequality that fundamentally compromises our democratic political traditions, going back to the Founding. Since 1929, elected representatives who have appreciated the proper role of financial securities markets, institutions, and investors in our economy have put in place plenty of successful rules and safeguards: the Securities Act

movement as vagrant and lawless, putting pressure on municipal authorities to crack down. Indeed, the largest risk seems to lie in this politics of representation, through which municipal governments might convert the question of occupation from a political right of protest to a question of “public health and safety”—the classic premise used against homeless encampments for decades.

Reframing the Homeless Question

Through these representations of the homeless, both in the media and at times within the movement itself, *the homeless question has become framed as an informal calculus of the costs and benefits of including or excluding the most brutally impoverished*. At this critical moment in the progress of the movement, the homeless question has become a question of exclusion, legitimacy, and belonging.

There are a series of problems involved in conflating the right to camp with a responsibility to contribute. First, the question of “contribution” and demanding proof of support for the cause is discriminatory; it is a burden faced only by those who “appear homeless.” Those who can pass for “real protesters” in their dress, disposition, and discussion are considered assets in their mere presence and rarely questioned. Second, it is important to remember that many of the occupy camps have co-opted public spaces that had long been occupied by the homeless, and in some cases have even displaced these populations. In some cases, the protests have even inadvertently drawn violence towards these rough sleepers.

against mere homelessness. When these troubling discourses lead us to a roughshod political calculus of whether the homeless “deserve” to be a part of the movement, they threaten to reproduce existing forms of structural violence and exclusion within the heart of the movement. They also prevent us from answering the question that Occupy has already raised for many: “Why are they here?”

An Asset or a Risk?

Not just a few protesters have invoked a distinction, analogous to the one Harris made, between active contributors and freeloading parasites. Such was the prevailing frame of the homeless question presented in last week’s *New York Times* article on homelessness and the movement. On one side of the equation, the homeless were portrayed as instrumental allies: bringing numbers to the cause, helping to hold down sparser occupations as winter hardens, sharing tactics about sleeping rough, and proving powerful symbols of the economic system’s casualties. More frequently, though, the homeless have been portrayed as a detriment and a risk: diverting energy away from fighting the real issues, exacerbating the problems of cleanliness within the camp, offending the sensibilities of middle-class campers, verbally or physically assaulting passersby and participants, and polluting the image of an orderly protest. Especially in the last week, negative representations of a nefarious underclass co-opting the occupations has made it easier for Occupy’s opponents to belittle the



ILLUSTRATION BY JOANNA NEBORSKY

of 1933, the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, ERISA, the SEC-ordered competitive pricing of brokerage commissions in 1975, the Securities Acts Amendments of 1975 (which ordered the creation of a national market system, over industry objections), the SIPC, and Sarbanes-Oxley. Many seemed inconvenient to entrenched, elite interests, so they were painted as bad for investment—which is not at all the same thing.

Displacing the wider ideology of shareholder capitalism in Americans' economic vernacular, in mainstream economists' foundational assumptions, and in elected officials' inherited biases, will require sustained popular effort on the part of the 99 percent. Occupy Wall Street nationwide—not to mention Occupy Economics 10, at Harvard, last week—are a good start. The next stop for refreshed ideas should be those sites where the little foot-soldiers of shareholder capitalism reside: business schools, consulting firms, libertarian think tanks, and private equity and hedge fund offices.

One homeless woman we spoke to in Oakland, who had been sleeping around Oscar Grant Plaza long before the occupation, complained of being tear-gassed and robbed in the wake of a protest. Third, the dichotomy of “contributing” and “freeloader” mirrors the more general divisive distinctions between the deserving and undeserving poor.

We must therefore reframe the homeless question beyond the division into those “dissenting or seeking shelter” (as the *New York Times* headline had it). Although some homeless people may be converted to the goals of dissent, many will not or cannot, and the movement must take special care not to instrumentalize this precarious group in the way it seems the NYPD has. At the same time, opposing the survival goals of the homeless and the political goals of the occupiers has led to discriminatory practices at OWS and elsewhere, such as those of the Zuccotti kitchen staff who were recently embroiled in accusations of discrimination against those who appeared to be “professionally homeless.”

The “homeless problem” of OWS is not a problem of the movement, but rather of the economic system at which it is aimed. It is a problem that society ignores or treats through punishment and exclusion, but the movement cannot afford to respond to it in this way. The “homeless question” should be reframed as a question of how dissenters should treat those seeking food and a safe place to sleep. Rather than supporting a politics of exclusion towards the homeless, some occupations have explicitly taken up their cause. The kitchens at Occupy Oakland and Occupy Philadelphia openly aim to feed the city's homeless. In Atlanta, protesters are working to save a shelter that is at risk of shutting down, and in Austin the movement has mobilized to push for more affordable housing and legalizing tent cities for the homeless. These efforts point to what new forms of solidarity and alliance could look like. Although protesters and the homeless may differ in their use of occupied spaces, the movement cannot afford to let this difference mask the more relevant question of why both groups have come to share the same ground.

“Why Are You Here?”

The way Harris used the rhetorical question “Why are you here?” to shame the “undeserving” resonates with the homeless question currently posed in both in the media and sadly within parts of the movement itself. It is important for the movement to take Harris' question seriously and articulate why it is that scores of homeless have flocked to occupations for relief. Why are the homeless at these occupations rather than other public places? In our discussions with the homeless in New York and Oakland it became apparent that they are simultaneously being pushed by the punitive edge of the state, directed to the park by the police, and pulled in by the failure of miserly welfare policies, prefer-

Mike Konczal

Student Debt History and Some Solutions

[This piece originally appeared in a slightly different form at rorty-bomb.wordpress.com.]

Put on your monocle and top hat and pretend you are part of the 1% for a minute. Your first task is to write a set of legal codes about the collection of debt in this country, specifically student debt. And you want to be kind of a jerk about it.

What's the one thing you could do for student debt that you don't do for any other type of debt, one that would radically shift the relationship between student loan creditors and debtors both practically and symbolically?

How about this, from the Debt Collection Improvement Act of 1996: “Notwithstanding any other provision of law . . . all payments due to an individual under . . . the Social Security Act . . . shall be subject to offset under this section.”

What this means is that when it comes to collecting on student loans, the government can take funds from your Social Security check. There are rules to the offset: the first \$750 a month can't be touched, and only 15 percent of benefits above that can be taken to pay back student loans. But this is still a radical break in the social contract with no equivalent for private debts.

If you look at the original text of the 1935 Social Security Act, you can see that Social Security payments were not “subject to execution, levy, attachment, garnishment, or other legal process, or to the operation of any bankruptcy or insolvency law.” Franklin Delano Roosevelt understood that basic economic freedom, one part of which is freedom from utter poverty in old age, would come under assault from creditors and debt, and that it was important to clear a space that provides a baseline of income that clever debt collectors can't get to. Social Security is supposed to be one leg of a three-legged stool for retirement, the amount necessary to keep poverty at bay, and it is crucial that it be protected.

Yet we are willing to snap this leg off the stool as payment for, of all things, loans people take out to educate themselves. In a dynamic economy, education should be risky—whole occupations and industries come and go with technology, and what was a wise investment at one point is a bad one later on. But precisely because a

high degree of riskiness is healthy in this sphere, there need to be rules for what happens when these risks go bad. Instead, over the last 35 years, we have removed every last rule on this kind of debt.

It happened gradually. Lyndon B. Johnson created the government student-loan program in 1965. In 1976, in part supposedly because recent medical school graduates were declaring bankruptcy to get out of paying their loans back, a five-year rule was established, stating that student loans would not be dischargeable by bankruptcy within five years of graduation. In 1990, five years was changed to seven; in 1996, as we've said, Social Security payments became eligible for deduction to pay loans; in 1998, nondischargeability went from seven years to never on all government, nonprofit student loans. And in 2005, bankruptcy “reform” extended that nondischargeability to for-profit loans as well. These reforms were sold, when anyone bothered to sell them, as widening protections for lenders so that they would increase access to loans. In fact there's little evidence these reforms increased access for anyone; instead they functioned more as an easily captured subsidy. These laws come from the rich wanting to pay a little bit less, well-connected lobbyists pushing at the margin to make these loans more profitable for themselves, and a wholesale abandonment of the idea of public goods.

And here we are.

According to the Project on Student Debt, the average debt load for graduating seniors in 1996, when the Debt Collection law was passed, was \$12,750. Now it is over \$23,200. Combine this with a large increase in the number of students and you get how this debt load has skyrocketed past total credit card debt. We've moved from funding higher education through taxes and grants to funding it through debt. This in turn pushes tuition up, with private universities taking advantage of what the government

ring to eat in an environment without the demeaning rituals of shelters and soup kitchens.

Jane, an African-American woman in her forties who has only recently become homeless, was staying at a shelter in Richmond until Occupy Oakland set up camp in Frank Ogawa Plaza. Although she complains about the colder weather, she prefers her outdoor campsite to the shelter bed. “That shelter is dangerous, dirty, and the staff treats you like shit. Here, I feel like I have a voice, and people treat you like a real person. I can weather this cold for a bit of dignity.” Jim, a homeless man who has lived on the streets for over a decade and is sympathetic but not

is trying to provide as a subsidy to students.

This debt is the kind that stays with people. Post-1991 and upheld by the Supreme Court in 2005 as it regards Social Security payments, student loan collection has no statute of limitations. This is one of the very few kinds of debts without such limitations; most credit card debts have a statute of limitations of between three and ten years. Student loans are forever.

The issue is sometimes painted as a “college kid” issue. In fact it’s the opposite. Student loan default rates are more than double at for-profit schools—your local tech institute, for example—which target students at the margin. According to Demos’s *The State of Young America Databook*, African-American and Hispanic students are more likely than the average student to take out student loans. Rather than an issue that impacts the privileged, this is an issue for those most at risk of not being able to attend or complete college, and gets to the core of issues of mobility and inequality.

So it is impossible to discharge bad debts in this system under our normal mechanism for handling bad debts—bankruptcy. When delinquencies happen—say when you graduate into a recession that elites refuse to fix—you get thrown into the world of private debt collection. Your fees increase; there’s no date after which creditors can no longer go after you; the loans weigh the heaviest on those most at risk; and they can even go

after the baseline measure society has created to prevent poverty in old age.

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It is good to see President Obama, as part of his “We Can’t Wait” campaign, pushing to get some fencing around the rules for future student loan debtors through an executive order. According to this press release, the government will accelerate the implementation of laws “to limit loan payments to 10 percent of their discretionary income starting in 2012 [instead of 2014]. In addition, the debt would be forgiven after 20 years instead of 25, as current law allows.” However, according to one early analysis of this move, “Borrowers with loans from 2007 and earlier will not be eligible. Likewise, borrowers who don’t have at least one loan from 2012 or later, like students who graduated in 2011 or earlier, also won’t be eligible. Borrowers who are already in repayment will not be eligible.”

So the problem remains. What’s the solution? There’s a short-term and a long-term problem. The long-term problem, in my opinion, can only be solved by unapologetically embracing the promise of a “public option”—free public universities that are capable of constraining cost inflation. This requires us to also face and resist the corporatization and privatization of our existing public universities.

But that doesn’t get us out of the current problem. What can

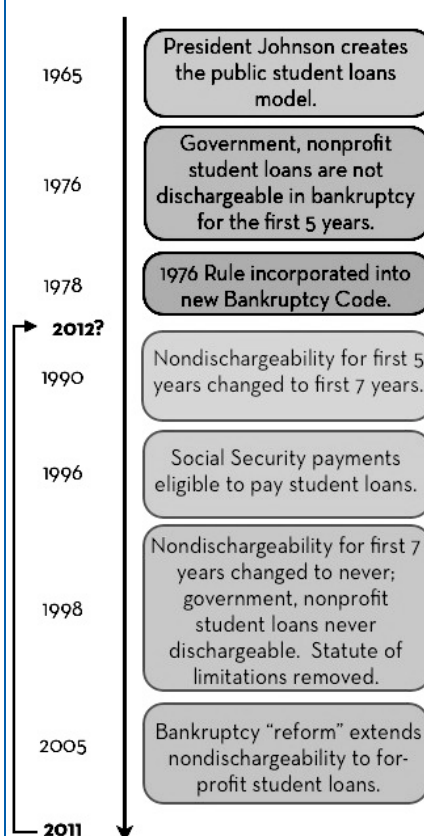
be done right now? I’m going to propose two things.

1. Party Like It’s 1989.

Instead of being so bold as to ask that people trying to invest in themselves, and ultimately the country, are treated as fairly by our legal code as someone who negligently ran over a child, I’m going to suggest we just do a mulligan on the student loan “reforms” of the 90s and oos.

We can keep nondischargeability for 5 years if people are very concerned about moral hazard. This will at least stabilize and formalize the system of indenture that is required for people to fully develop their talents and abilities in our country, instead of the system that currently keeps people for life. Let’s look at a graph of the student loan timeline and what it looks like when we go back to 1989:

Why Not Go Back to 1989?



That’s a lot better. But how do we deal with the current affordability crisis? Getting unemployment down and incomes up are an obvious solution. Some people suggest mass debt forgiveness—a jubilee, with mostly the government picking up a trillion dollar tab at the end; others disagree. I have a proposal to split the difference.

2. Deathbed Convert the American People into a Bank, Open the Discount Window.

A miraculous thing happened in late September 2008. Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley were reborn from investment banks into bank holding companies by a decree of the Federal Reserve. Normally getting a license like this takes a year and a half and requires following extensive regulatory rules. The Federal Reserve did it over a weekend for Goldman, Morgan Stanley, and a host of other financial firms.

This allowed them many banking privileges that helped them during the crisis, including access to the discount window—but none of the scrutiny that normally comes with that. As Alan Grayson and others noted, Goldman’s CFO bragged that “our model never really changed”—they got to escape normal banking regulatory rules during the subsequent time period. These “deathbed conversions” from investment bank to bank holding company were yet another part of the extensive way the bailouts worked beyond TARP, and they were proof that the firms were Too Big To Fail.

Since regular Americans are also in crisis mode and Too Big To Fail, why not symbolically declare regular Americans a bank too? Why not

contributing to the movement, has been spending more and more time around Oakland’s encampment. “Cops and businesses give you a hard time around this city, telling you to move on, it’s nice to have a space where you don’t feel threatened.”

In this respect, many occupations are incubating a movement against the punitive practices of banishment towards the chronically homeless. These practices are also inherent in what’s left of our degrading welfare provisions, which observe—with parsimonious strictness—distinctions between the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor. At the same time, those in the movement are understandably concerned that such a strategy might overwhelm the camps’ capacities and, in becoming the primary function of the site, obfuscate a cause whose goals are much broader. As we move forward, grappling with both immediate and long-term questions about the place of the homeless in this movement, it is essential that we remember the systemic and historical connections that bind us together. That the history of capitalism is also the history of systemic social and economic exclusion. And that today we are all at risk of becoming part of the *relative surplus population*.

Moments of expulsion and economic relegation have occurred in fits and spurts throughout modern history, but they are most acute during periods of general economic crisis. It is therefore to this logic of exclusion and crisis that we should look to in posing the question, “Why are you here?” What is important is that the answer actually encompasses both the homeless and the broader OWS movement—both have been

brought into existence by economic relegation, crisis, and expulsion. We must understand that a common logic underlies the mass foreclosures, the expulsion of low and middle-income earners from their homes, the emergence of an indebted and seemingly economically redundant generation of students, the growth of mass incarceration as a tool for containing impoverished populations, the widespread and growing homelessness of the past forty years, and the racial dynamics that play out in these processes. It is no simple coincidence that street homelessness reemerged in America at the same historical moment that the top 1 percent began its rapid ascent, in the early 1970s. It is only when we take our common predicament seriously that we can answer the question of why we are here. We each have our own story, but ultimately we have arrived together at this juncture of precariousness, insecurity, and exclusion. This common predicament must become a source of solidarity and a foundation for the difficult task of building a new politics of inclusion.

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also do a “deathbed conversion” on those who are suffering under the burden of heavy student debts and low incomes and let them immediately refinance all their student loan rates at the current ultra-low discount window rate? Mass refinance all student loans into the current low rates the financial sector enjoys. This would give the 99 percent of Americans just a hint of the kind of total government support places like Goldman Sachs have gotten.

We’ve thrown open the floodgates for the financial sector—why not for regular Americans? There have been past congressional efforts to lower the interest rate, ones that passed the House, so this can be done. And this would be the logical conclusion of what we’ve just gone through, crisis-wise, delivering stimulus to the economy and reducing the burden of debts on those trying to rebuild the economy. Open the discount window.

For the economics people, this two-step helps with the liquidity problem (cheaper refinancing), the solvency problem (bankruptcy), and the balance-sheet problem (lower rates, more purchasing power)—the three problems one needs to deal with in the aftermath of a financial crisis. Wins all around. So what are the problems?

Doug Henwood

Fleshing out the Corporate Person

There was a witticism circulating—it embarrasses me a bit to say—on Facebook recently that went something like: “I’ll believe that corporations are people when Texas executes one.” I’m no fan of capital punishment, but that was the best argument in favor of corporate personhood I’ve ever heard. Because while corporations have the rights of actual living people—more, maybe—they have none of the responsibilities. Corporations routinely get away with murder. Is the problem that they’re legally persons, or that they’re not consistently treated as such?

I first came across the critique of corporate personhood almost twenty years ago, when Richard Grossman and Frank Adams published their snazzy little pamphlet *Taking Care of Business: Citizenship and the Charter of Incorporation*. At the time, I was struck by the legalism of the approach. Grossman and Adams showed little or no interest in the economic reasons for the corporate form—why, for example, industrial development made the sole proprietorships and small partnerships that dominated the pre-Civil War landscape so unwieldy and unstable.

Making complicated stuff requires organizational stability across time and space; a single capitalist, or even a small gaggle of capitalists, all very mortal, couldn’t run a transcontinental railroad that was expected to last decades. The

late 19th century was a time of tremendous economic volatility with wild booms and busts. Almost half of its last three decades were spent in depression. One reason was that small firms didn’t have the resilience to stand up to shocks. Another was the absence of a central bank (about which see my contribution to the previous *Gazette*). I recall meeting Grossman shortly after the pamphlet was published and bringing these issues up with him. He didn’t seem very interested in the economic arguments.

I’m getting similar feelings now that corporate personhood has exploded onto the scene—first in the wake of the *Citizens United* decision, and more recently with OWS. There’s a fixation on the legal status of the corporation at the expense of some other, more important things.

Back in a moment to the economic angle, but *Citizens United* deserves a few words on its own. The reasoning is this: corporations are people. Money is a form of speech. So restrictions on corporate political spending are unconstitutional restrictions on political speech.

Which is the more serious problem with that chain of reasoning: That corporations are people, or that money is a form of speech? I’m uncomfortable with the urge to treat the Koch brothers as the focus of evil in the modern world, to steal a phrase from Ronald Reagan, but they could spend tons of their personal money spreading their poison and the issue of corporate personhood wouldn’t figure at all. Rich people have a long history in this country of buying elections and politicians. They didn’t, and still don’t, need the dodge of corporate personhood to do that nasty work.

Some of the Occupy Wall Street encampments now spreading across the US have access to Porta-Potties (Freedom Plaza in Washington, D.C.) or, better yet, restrooms with sinks and running water (Fort Wayne, Indiana). Others require their residents to forage on their own. At Zuccotti Park, just blocks from Wall Street, this means long waits for the restroom at a nearby McDonald’s or somewhat shorter ones at a Starbucks a block away. At McPherson Square in D.C., a twenty-something occupier showed me the pizza parlor where she can cop a pee during the hours it’s open, as well as the alley where she crouches late at night. Anyone with restroom-related issues—arising from age, pregnancy, prostate problems, or irritable bowel syndrome—should prepare to join the revolution in diapers.

Of course, political protesters do not face the challenges of urban camping alone. Homeless people confront the same issues every day: how to scrape together meals, keep warm at night by covering themselves with cardboard or tarp, and relieve themselves without committing a crime. Public restrooms are sparse in American cities—“as if the need to go to the bathroom does not exist,” travel expert Arthur Frommer once observed. And yet to yield to bladder pressure is to risk arrest. A report entitled “Criminalizing Crisis,” to be released later this month by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, recounts the following story from Wenatchee, Washington:

Toward the end of 2010, a family of two parents and three children that had been experiencing homelessness for a year and a half applied for a two-bedroom apartment. The day before a scheduled meeting with the apartment manager during the final stages of acquiring the lease, the father of the family was arrested for public urination. The arrest occurred at an hour when no public restrooms were available for use. Due to the arrest, the father was unable to make the appointment with the apartment manager and the property was rented out to another person. As of March 2011, the family was still homeless and searching for housing.

What the Occupy Wall Streeters are beginning to discover, and homeless people have known all along, is that most ordinary, biologically necessary

Barbara Ehrenreich

THROW THEM OUT WITH THE TRASH

[From TomDispatch, October 23, 2011]

As anyone knows who has ever had to set up a military encampment or build a village from the ground up, occupations pose staggering logistical problems. Large numbers of people must be fed and kept reasonably warm and dry. Trash has to be removed; medical care and rudimentary security provided—to which ends a dozen or more committees may toil night and day. But for the individual occupier, one problem often overshadows everything else, including job loss, the destruction of the middle class, and the reign of the 1 percent. And that is the single question: *Where am I going to pee?*

MARK GREIF

OCCUPY THE BOARDROOM

On the night that police attacked the Occupy protesters in Oakland, Tuesday, October 25, “non-lethally” fired on them and gassed them and threw stun grenades, and shot in the head an Iraq veteran named Scott Olsen, it looked like our Cub Scout stormtroopers were out to murder American citizens. They aimed high with shotguns at soft-looking Californians in T-shirts and shorts. The organized violence was carried live on KCBS. In the black ant farm chambers of YouTube, I tunneled from one protester video to the next, following morbid links, lying awake in bed in New York. If they were going to destroy the encampments, as was happening simultaneously in Atlanta, and be brutal, as also in Denver and Chicago, then there needed to be new fields opening to

occupy. Powerlessness and rage arise from watching suffering at a distance, as in the Age of Television. In an age of the internet, links led me back to Occupy the Boardroom, a site that had launched twelve days earlier, and I started writing letters.

The website lists the names of executives and trustees for the big six banks in America: Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, Citigroup, Bank of America, JPMorgan Chase, and Wells Fargo. There are no addresses, not even mailing addresses. But the site is organized to allow you to type a long letter to an individual by name. The service routes your letter to the addressee’s email address. It also posts it to a roll of previous letters—more than 6,000, when I first visited—so you learn what other letter-writers know and believe.

To: John G Stumpf, Wells Fargo

Thank you for the years of service, But, I am now going to move my money to a Credit Union until I see an effort by the 1 percent to help the country that gave them their chance.

Mr. & Mrs. Anthony Zayas
75234 [Dallas, TX]

Occupy the Boardroom represents bourgeois protest. I say that as a compliment. I think it’s a necessity now, and will be in months to come as mayors try to paint the occupations in the colors of homelessness. Bourgeois protest uses the values of people who hold a stake, who are part of the vast middle class, who are small property owners, or were. The best of America, since Jefferson’s vision of yeoman democracy, includes a society of equals in which everyone is an owner of a little bit of the earth to stand on. Occupy Wall Street has, very often, courageously spoken for have-nots, immigrants, and the dispossessed. They’re part of America, too. Occupy the Boardroom allows 99 percent of us to speak from principles from which we can never be dispossessed, and from those

that, peculiarly, the executives and trustees of banks supposedly share: honesty, probity, contract, politeness, property, savings, professionalism, “customer service,” responsibility, citizenship, patriotism. It also lets us speak from everywhere.

To: William R Rhodes, Citigroup

Hello Mr. Rhodes,

I am not poor. In fact, I own a sizeable piece of real estate on the border of Tribeca and the Financial District. I have even paid my mortgage off already.

I am fiscally very conservative. That is why I have no patience for your company’s shenanigans.

I have been wanting to leave Citibank for years now. Moving my account from Citi on Nov. 4th is my message to you, and the the U.S. Government (1 year out from the election) along with this message here and now.

I am not alone, by the way.

Here’s hoping you develop a sense of balance, fairness and a conscience.

Fair thee well,

Heide

[New York, NY]

This matches a new technology to one of the oldest forms enabled by widespread literacy. The individual letter, person to person, secret and intimate or public and formal, but to be read by the recipient in the place appropriate to that communication, on his or her own time, is one of our most protected forms of direct address. Because it is there for the addressee to encounter in calm and security, it is

never a trespass if it is a polite. Every one of us is entitled to be heard in this way by anyone else. It may be a legal offense to tamper with the mail, but it’s equally a moral crime to read somebody else’s sealed missive or tear open an envelope not addressed to you. What goes unsaid, too, is that *not* reading a personal letter written directly to you is a trespass that leaves us uneasy, an offense against everyone as uncomfortable as tearing up paper money. It suggests fear, or contempt. To do that, you are putting yourself in the wrong.

To: Heidi Miller, JPMorgan Chase

Dear Ms. Miller,

I selected your name from the list of Chase executives listed by the Occupy Wall Street movement because my oldest daughter shares her first name with you and also because I have an account with Chase.

You could say that my wife and I are the lucky ones who are financially secure because we are both retired, have secure retirement Social Security, pensions, and have nest eggs that will survive us both. Our children are also lucky to have relatively secure jobs. But if the decline of our country continues, I am afraid for my grandchildren, perhaps yours too.

But what about the rest of the other 99%? What about our country? Isn’t our People the nation for whom our heroes died?

I hope you could be one of the small voices who could also help turn our country around.

Sin cera,

Enrique C. Cubarrubia

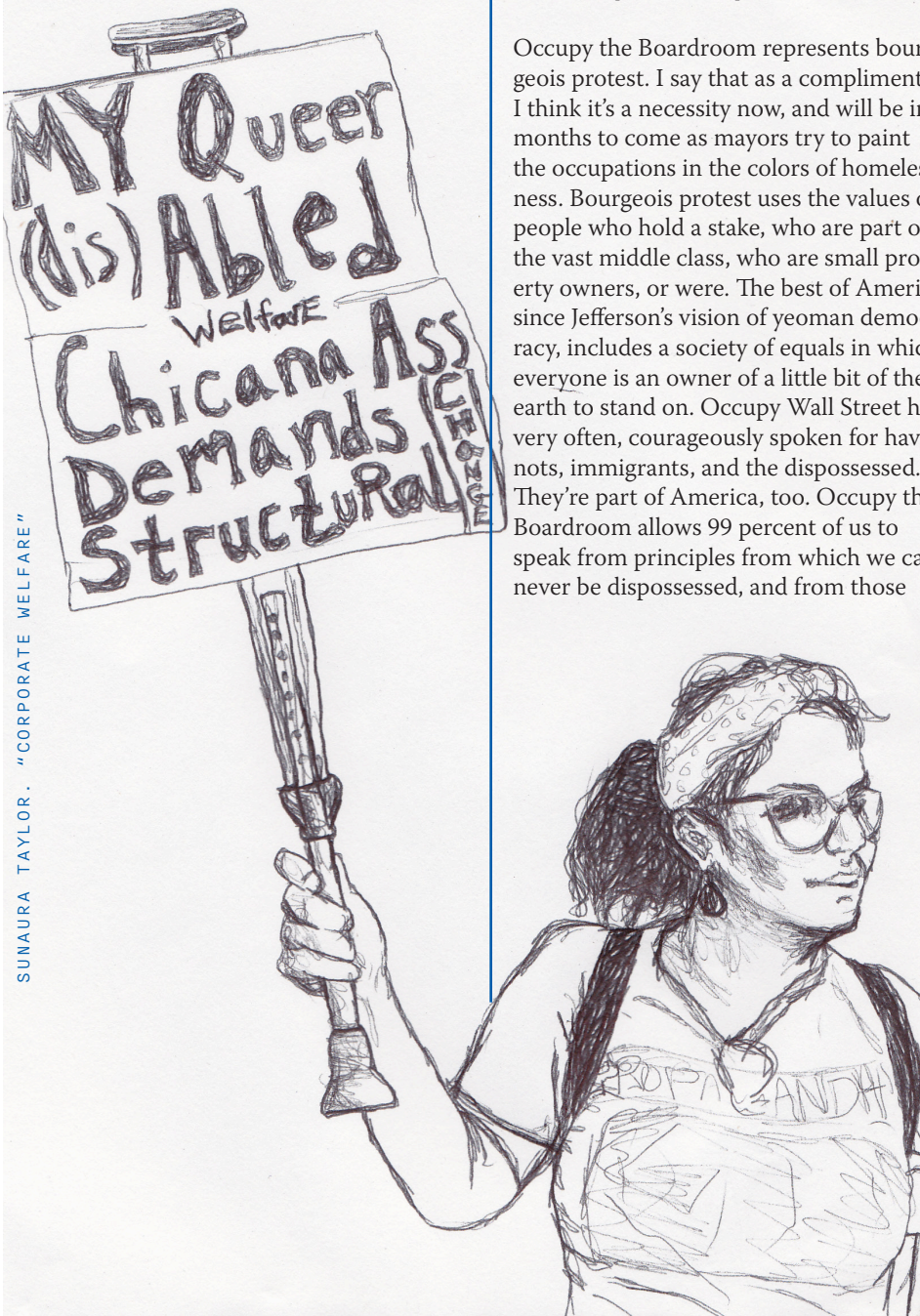
The current prohibition on homelessness began to take shape in the 1980s, along with the ferocious growth of the financial industry (Wall Street and all its tributaries throughout the nation). That was also the era in which we stopped being a nation that manufactured much beyond weightless, invisible “financial products,” leaving the old industrial working class to carve out a livelihood at places like Wal-Mart.

As it turned out, the captains of the new “casino economy”—the stock brokers and investment bankers—were highly sensitive, one might say finicky, individuals, easily offended by hawking to step over the homeless in the streets or bypass them in commuter train stations. In an economy where a centimillionaire could turn into a billionaire overnight, the poor and unwashed were a major buzzkill. Starting with Mayor Rudy Giuliani’s New York, city after city passed “broken windows” or “quality of life” ordinances making it dangerous for the homeless to loiter or, in some cases, even look “indigent,” in public spaces.

No one has yet tallied all the suffering occasioned by this crackdown—the deaths from cold and exposure—but “Criminalizing Crisis” offers this story about a homeless, pregnant woman in Columbia, South Carolina: “During daytime hours, when she could not be inside of a shelter, she attempted to spend time in a museum and was told to leave. She then attempted to sit on a bench outside the museum and was again told to relocate. In several other instances, still during her pregnancy, the woman was told that she could not sit in a local park during the day because she would be ‘squatting.’ In early 2011, about six months into her pregnancy, the homeless woman began to feel unwell, went to a hospital, and delivered a stillborn child.”

Well before Tahrir Square was a twinkle in anyone’s eye, and even before the recent recession, homeless Americans had begun to act in their own defense, creating organized encampments, usually tent cities, in vacant lots or wooded areas. These communities often feature various elementary forms of self-governance: food from local charities has to be distributed, latrines dug, rules—such as no drugs, weapons, or violence—enforced. With all due credit to the Egyptian democracy movement, the Spanish indignados, and rebels all over the world, tent cities are the domestic progenitors of the American occupation movement.

There is nothing “political” about these settlements of the homeless—no signs denouncing greed or visits from leftwing luminaries—but they have



activities are illegal when performed in American streets—not just peeing, but sitting, lying down, and sleeping. While the laws vary from city to city, one of the harshest is in Sarasota, Florida, which passed an ordinance in 2005 that makes it illegal to “engage in digging or earth-breaking activities”—that is, to build a latrine—cook, make a fire, or be asleep and “when awakened state that he or she has no other place to live.”

It is illegal, in other words, to be homeless or live outdoors for any other reason. It should be noted, though, that there are no laws requiring cities to provide food, shelter, or restrooms for their indigent citizens.

It becomes a way to draw the 1 percent into the movement, odd as that sounds. It neither tries to coopt them or vilify them. It addresses them. Politeness may be the most essential thing. “Remember, be polite!” are the words you find in the text box when you type your letter. “Be sure to” write “in a constructive manner that helps build the movement for a better world. . . . Think funny!” Not many letters are funny. But they are extraordinarily articulate. The politeness is key not because of subservience, and not to charm, but because it assumes community.

To: Ellen V Futter, JPMorgan Chase

*I'm a carpenter, work has been very light since the crash, my wife works in a small factory earning 17 an hour, no insurance. We signed up for "make your home affordable" They reduced our mortgage buy 400 a month[,] why we went th[r]ough the process[,] we were not behind in our payments, we just had a hard time making ends meet. 9 months into the process they said we were not eligible, that they were going to start foreclose if we could not come up with the 400 that we did not pay or we could refi[n]ance at a lower rate saving us from losing our house and in the process taking all the interest we had paid up to that point....10 years 120,000 dollars
i know that no one will read this letter but [it] makes me feel better what make[s] you feel better madame*

Michael G Anderson
98070 [Vashon, WA]

I confess that I hate it when people's letters are just insults, as some are. Or prom-

ises of justice. I do respect it, though—I admire the notes of defiance.

To: Diana Taylor, Citigroup
Hi Ms. Taylor:

I have an MBA and work for a large non-profit on the west coast. I'm involved only recently in politics, and I have learned a bit since 2008.

Consider what you could do instead with all the money your company currently contributes to various political campaigns & lobbying groups.

You could make more small business loans, and create jobs and help local economies. You could maintain your profits without having to layoff people.

You could take your chances competing without stacking the deck by influencing favorable legislation.

Flavia Franco
94403 [San Mateo, CA]

“But none of the bankers are going to read the letters!” one of my family members said. I'm reading them, I said. Other letter-writers are reading mine. Now we all see each other. “But the letters are never even going to be opened by the people to whom they're written!” I'm not sure of that, I said. Mightn't they be?

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Needless to say, I was pretty excited when I read that Occupy the Boardroom would be rallying on the steps of the New York Public Library on Friday, October 28 to deliver the letters to banks. On Fridays I don't teach, either.

The familiar techniques of the people's mic were used to let people tell stories about debt to school, hospital bills, and tiny loans that ballooned as jobs were lost. I went with the group that marched to Bank of America, since that's my bank. I have been with them for more than a decade, ever since they bought the bank that bought the bank that sits on a corner in my hometown.

We marched down 42nd Street. The plan was to go to Wells Fargo, after we had a media moment at the Bank of America headquarters on Sixth Avenue, and then Chase. The organizers had asked if anyone wanted to carry the letters personally, and I did—hoping this would mean I'd get to go inside, and see how they planned to get these to people's desks. I had a box filled with several hundred printed letters. I wondered if I'd get to say something noble as I handed them over. I imagined myself like one of the Founders, in a periwig, and I was mentally rehearsing: “You, sir—” and polite but Jacobin remarks, and appeals to humility. We were encouraged to hand out individual letters to people who passed by, and I had to stop to explain what was happening, first to an oddball with a microphone and then to a schoolkid doing a report.

That made me late, crossing the avenue, and left out. There were pirates

up front—representing corporate pirates?—and group chanting. The avalanche of police, a hundred or more, for protesters who didn't number more than 300, and then the fact that the police had set up inside the Bank of America Tower perimeter, behind barriers they had set out on the pavement, such that they had made themselves the house security of the bank, seemed to mean we wouldn't be hand-delivering letters, nor even leaving them all in a sack in the lobby. Bank employees stared from inside the glass. It was a sunny day, cold, and very peaceful.

Because I was at the back, I saw that close to where I was standing was an opening in the barricade, where the NYPD was talking to folks in a line. I thought I'd give them letters. My logic was that standers on line are more likely to accept reading material than folks you interrupt as they're moving. My patter was: “Can I offer you a letter from an individual American citizen to employees of Bank of America?” starting at the end of the line.

“No,” said my first try.

“OK,” I said. Moving on, “Can I offer you a letter?” From an individual American citizen, etc.

This man was completely silent. He and I were standing still, at a distance of social comfort, had calm voices, relaxed postures. He was avoiding my eye. An

been treated with far less official forbearance than the occupation encampments of the “American autumn.” LA's Skid Row endures constant police harassment, for example, but when it rained, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa had ponchos distributed to nearby Occupy LA.

All over the country in the last few years, police have moved in on the tent cities of the homeless, one by one, from Seattle to Wooster, Sacramento to Providence, in raids that often leave the former occupants without even their minimal possessions. In Chattanooga, Tennessee last summer, a charity outreach worker explained the forcible dispersion of a local tent city by saying, “The city will not tolerate a tent city. That's been made very clear to us. The camps have to be out of sight.”

What occupiers from all walks of life are discovering, at least every time they contemplate taking a leak, is that to be homeless in America is to live like a fugitive. The destitute are our own native-born “illegals,” facing prohibitions on the most basic activities of survival. They are not supposed to soil public space with their urine, their feces, or their exhausted bodies. Nor are they supposed to spoil the landscape with their unusual wardrobe choices or body odors. They are, in fact, supposed to die, and preferably to do so without leaving a corpse for the dwindling public sector to transport, process, and burn.

But the occupiers are not from all walks of life, just from those walks that slope downwards—from debt, joblessness, and foreclosure—leading eventually to pauperism and the streets. Some of the present occupiers were homeless to start with, attracted to the occupation encampments by the prospect of free food and at least temporary shelter from police harassment. Many others are drawn from the borderline homeless “nouveau poor,” and normally camp on friends' couches or parents' folding beds.

In Portland, Austin, and Philadelphia, the Occupy Wall Street movement is taking up the cause of the homeless as its own, which of course it is. Homelessness is not a side issue unconnected to plutocracy and greed. It's where we're all eventually headed—the 99 percent, or at least the 70 percent, of us, every debt-loaded college grad, out-of-work schoolteacher, and impoverished senior—unless this revolution succeeds.

ROY SNYDER

The Homeless in the Law

Since the early 1990s, there has been a series of court challenges to new or newly enforced municipal laws that disproportionately affect the homeless. One of the most active issues in these cases has been whether laws that ban sleeping, sitting, lying, or “camping” in public areas are cruel and unusual, and thus unconstitutional, as applied to people who can't sleep, sit, or lie anywhere else.

The crux of the issue lies in the interpretation of a 1962 Supreme Court case, *Robinson v. California*, which was prompted by the arrest and imprisonment of a Los Angeles man, Lawrence Robinson, for having tracks on his arm from heroin use. The initial judge cited a California law that made it a crime to “be addicted to the use of narcotics”; Robinson's lawyers appealed, and appealed again, until their case reached the top. At that point the ruling was overturned. The Court said the law was no different from one that made it a crime to, say, be “mentally ill, or a leper, or to be afflicted with a venereal disease.” As a result of this criminalization of “status,” the law was held cruel and unusual under the Eighth Amendment, and the Court struck it down.

The Court had a chance to elaborate on this holding six years later in *Powell v. Texas*, where the law at issue made it a crime “to get drunk or be found in a state of intoxication in any public place.” Unfortunately for the lower courts, the Court split 4-1-4 on the question of how to interpret *Robinson*. Four justices drew a hard line, concluding that *Robinson* applies strictly to statutes that criminalize status, and never to those that criminalize conduct. Four other justices were subtler, framing the Texas law as criminalizing the “condition of being intoxicated in public”; since Powell was a chronic alcoholic, the law in effect criminalized “a condition [the person] is powerless to change” and was thus unconstitutional as applied to him. Justice White (the 1 in 4-1-4) agreed narrowly with the conclusion of the four justices who drew a hard line (that Powell could be convicted) but refused to join their constitutional reasoning. As a result, no proposition from *Powell* enjoys the precedential weight of a majority opinion of the Supreme Court, and lower courts have been left to handle *Robinson's* gray area on their own.

offer in that situation just about always dictates a spoken “no,” unless there’s some reason to perceive a threat.

Oh! A dim light dawned. “Are you guys by any chance employees of Bank of America?”

“No,” the first man said. Which provoked a reaction like a slap in the face of the second one, because it meant that his comrade had outright lied.

They were all employees, reentering the bank. At the head of the line were uniformed NYPD, working for the in-house B. of A. security, checking ID. So I started working the line. “Sir, can I offer you these letters from fellow American citizens? *They’re addressed to you.*”

The people waiting reflected the usual breakdown of decency, shyness, and bad personalities. The surprise was a knot of eager Columbia Business School students. They refused to take letters, until one did, and then they all did.

Meanwhile, I missed the formal protest. On the other side of the police barrier stood a line of thirty or forty blue-uniformed police, backs against the glass front of the Bank of America Tower as if guarding a jewelry exhibit, with thirty

feet of barricaded-off open pavement . . . which the protest now filled with a flotilla of paper planes. The original idea had been to write new letters and launch them as a publicity stunt. Absent time to write these, and with no way now to deliver the real letters, people had started using the printouts to make the planes. Everyone then picked up the ones that had blown back onto their side, brushed off any dirt, and moved down 42nd Street to head for Wells Fargo, where the next round of boxes was due for delivery. My trouble was, I still had so many letters. So I went back quickly to try to hand them out to people at the police gate.

With most people gone, I saw that in-house security called out a team of janitors, to sweep up the letters, lying there in the form of paper planes, and dump them in a big gray trash can. I went to the security—five men in suits, who were not bankers—and leaned over the barricade for the one was giving orders. “Hey, these are letters, from individual American citizens, and you’re treating them like trash.” Nothing doing. “Listen, let me pick up the letters, I’ll do it for your guys. Then I’ll

have the letters, and nobody’s letter has to be thrown out.”

“YOU CAN’T COME IN HERE!” So he heard me.

“How about this—you have your guys, can they just give them to me—I’ll stay on this side—dump them with me, instead of the trash, and I’ll clean them up?” Back to pretending. “How come you can’t talk to me?” I said. “Is it a legal thing, or are you afraid to? Or do you just not like me?”

“I don’t like you!” a banker jeered as he passed through the barricade.

“That’s OK, I’m your customer,” I said.

It was depressing. The janitors came and did the public sidewalk around me, all three Latino, workers for sub-contracting companies, by the patches on their shirts, presumably so the bank wouldn’t have to employ them and pay benefits.

“I’m with you, man, hey, sorry, man. I got to keep my job, if I was off work, I’d be out here with you.”

I felt fake, because, in class and privileges, I have plenty in common with those people standing in line to go to their jobs in the bank. I’m a college teacher, well-employed. Any of us employed has it easier than the unemployed, whose stories

were in these letters that I kept glancing down at, each one different. My father works for a bank, in Boston, developing their computer systems. I have health benefits, and also the arrogance that comes from fancy degrees, the feeling of comfort and ownership at the library and the museum, that nobody ranks above me except the super-rich (and great artists and writers).

And surely I know how we think—and how the people who work in banks, like my father and his coworkers, think—and school friends, and friends’ spouses, who work in the banks, in finance, how they think, and, yes, some of us are assholes, but mostly it’s still people with a moral core. The agenda of normalcy and reputation just happens to be what’s current with the folks around us. If you spend all your time with bankers, you will think that some things that are wrong are actually OK. We live in bubbles. If a message can get across that barrier, just to say *what is coming from your work is not what you believe in, it’s a national horror*, people will surely change. Won’t they?

Anti-sleeping and similar ordinances fall into this gray area. On their face, what they criminalize is definitely “conduct” and not “status”: they make it illegal to *lie down* on the sidewalk, or *set up a tent* at the park, or *sleep* on the city bench, or *leave your stuff* on the corner for an hour. But some of this proscribed conduct is necessarily incident to the condition—or, one might say, the status—of being homeless. Some argue that tolerating these laws is like forbidding the criminalization of being sick while allowing the criminalization of running a fever (Justice White used this hypothetical in his Powell concurrence). A few courts have endorsed this reasoning and overturned anti-sleeping laws and related policies, including a lower federal court in Miami in 1992 (*Pottinger v. Miami*) and one in Dallas in 1994 (*Johnson v. Dallas*, overturned on separate grounds on appeal). Most recently, in *Jones v. City of Los Angeles*, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals struck down—as applied to the homeless—an LA ordinance that banned all sleeping, lying, or sitting on sidewalks. The court deemed these acts “universal and unavoidable consequences of being human” and further found that due to a shortage of shelter beds, LA homeless could only do them in public. As a result, arresting homeless people who had no other choice but to lie down in public was cruel and unusual under the Eighth Amendment.

Somewhat unusually, the Ninth Circuit’s opinion was later vacated at the request of both parties to the case (six homeless people, represented by the ACLU of Southern California, and the city of Los Angeles). The request to vacate was part of a settlement between the parties in which the city promised not to enforce its law between 9:00 PM and 6:00 AM, subject to a few small exceptions, and further promised not to issue any citations or arrests until the police have given various warnings to offenders, and the offenders have failed to comply. So, although the reasoning is out there, the Ninth Circuit’s opinion can’t bind any courts, and, perhaps more importantly, it can’t be tested by the Supreme Court. An important thing to remember about the *Robinson* reasoning in the Los Angeles case and its few sibling cases is that they rest completely on *necessity*. Courts emphasize that the homeless are almost never homeless by choice, and that, given the simple arithmetic of bodies and available beds, they often have no choice but to sleep in public. These decisions do not say that to sleep in public is a fundamental right. In fact, these decisions don’t even fully strike down the ordinances at issue (to the extent that an ordinance, rather than a more abstract policy, is at issue)—rather, they narrowly hold that the ordinance cannot be constitutionally be applied to homeless people without alternatives. In this way, a case like *Jones* has limited utility to those who would challenge anti-sleeping laws on broader grounds.

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Two recent cases in New York have confronted police action toward sleeping homeless people. Neither of them addressed Eighth Amendment issues, so both are somewhat on the periphery of anti-homelessness jurisprudence.

On the night of February 28, 1997, homeless New Yorker Augustine Betancourt went down to Collect Pond Park, in lower Manhattan, with a few personal possessions, three cardboard boxes, and some loose cardboard. He assembled a makeshift “tube” out of the cardboard and went to bed in it. A few hours later, the police woke Betancourt up, arrested him, and brought him to the police station. A few hours after that, they released him without further obligations. He had been strip searched and charged with a violation of NY Admin. Code §16-122, entitled “Vehicles and other movable property.” The ordinance, passed into law in 1969, says, in the relevant part, “It shall be unlawful for any person . . . to leave . . . any box, barrel, bale of merchandise or other movable property . . . upon any marginal or public street or public place, or to erect . . . any shed, building or other obstruction” (emphasis added).

In *Betancourt v. Bloomberg* (2006), Betancourt brought a variety of claims based on his prosecution. Most relevant here was his charge that §16-122 was unconstitutionally vague as applied to him. Under the Fourteenth Amendment, penal statutes must be precise enough that ordinary people can understand what they prohibit, and that law enforcement can understand what they’re meant to enforce without being discriminatory or arbitrary. On appeal, a divided Second Circuit Court of Appeals found the law precise enough as applied to Betancourt. The majority opinion’s analysis focused on the dictionary definitions of “erect” and “obstruction,” reasoning that Betancourt’s actions constituted erection, and his sleeping tube constituted an obstruction. It rejected Betancourt’s argument that “obstruction” should be interpreted as some sort of permanent structure, in light of its statutory companions “shed” and “building.” Judge Calabresi filed a dissent, noting that the majority entirely ignored that the purpose of combating abandoned vehicles—not men in cardboard tubes—pervaded the law and its legislative history.

In *Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church v. City of New York*, the City unsuccessfully attempted to expand its reach over the sleeping homeless to private property. Fifth Avenue Presbyterian, in Midtown, had been allowing the homeless to sleep on their steps for years. In 1999, the church made their practice official, designating two areas on its outdoor property as open to the homeless for sleeping at night, subject to a few rules (e.g. no swearing). In November 2001, the city told Presbyterian that it would not allow the homeless to sleep on the church’s property, and in December the police began “dispersals” of the homeless who were gathered there at

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LABOR

NIKIL SAVAL

LABOR, AGAIN

Among the endless, nearly bureaucratic proliferation of working groups at Occupy Wall Street and elsewhere—people of color, sanitation, media, alternative banking, sustainability, anti-racism allies, disability—one stands out for its simultaneous universality and total narrowness. The labor working group, in any occupation, has a very clear and dully unobjectionable task: to help get material support from trade unions for the protests. Usually it consists of people who are union members, who have real but limited ways of getting in touch with their union

leadership to encourage them to endorse the various occupations. In this modest task, the labor working groups have been successful: most trade unions, as well as the largest national labor federation, have serviced the occupations in ways that have helped them sustain themselves over the long haul.

But “labor” means—or should mean—much more than the parlous remainder of American trade unionism. It means “work,” and it means “jobs.” From Locke, we retain the notion that labor is the source of property, what you put your hands into; from Smith, Ricardo, and Marx, that it is the source of the value of commodities. Labor is the thing one does to sustain life, and thing that one hates for that very reason; it creates wealth, and it takes wealth away from the wealthiest. Everything we make for our wants and want to make is labor.

night. The church moved for a preliminary injunction against the city eight days before Christmas, claiming that the city’s actions violated, among other things, the First Amendment’s Free Exercise clause.

Because the dispute was framed in constitutional terms, the court applied a constitutional framework, one that wouldn’t be relevant if Fifth Avenue Presbyterian weren’t practicing religion. Nevertheless: under this framework, if government action “substantially burdens” religious activity, the government must satisfy the “strict scrutiny” test, showing that its interest in taking that action was compelling and that its actions were narrowly tailored to achieve that interest. Relatively recently, the Supreme Court modified this framework so that a “neutral law of general applicability” which just so happens to burden a religion need only pass “rational basis scrutiny,” being rationally related to a “legitimate” (i.e. conceivable rather than compelling) government interest.

Looking to Fifth Avenue Presbyterian, the Second Circuit held that New York had pointed to no such neutral law that it was enforcing through its raids, and as such needed to satisfy strict scrutiny. Accordingly, the city argued that “preventing the Church from providing inadequate shelter nightly and encouraging homeless persons to avoid a safer, more civilized alternative” was a compelling interest, and their raids were narrowly tailored toward achieving that end. The court rejected this argument, noting that the city had made no “attempt to show that police dispersal in the middle of the night is the least restrictive means of accomplishing its goal of ensuring that the homeless have appropriate sleeping quarters.” After the Second Circuit affirmed the lower court’s preliminary injunction, the lower court went on to issue a permanent injunction against the city.

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Anti-homeless ordinances vary from city to city, depending on how effective advocates for the homeless were able to be in resisting them, though many of them prohibit sitting or lying in public spaces. But the Philadelphia law, for example, includes a host of limitations on enforcement. Before taking “any coercive action” against a violator of the ordinance, the police must first issue an oral warning; after the oral warning, they must issue a written warning in both English and Spanish. If the violator appears to be “in need of medical assistance or social service assistance,” the police officer must contact one of various “Outreach Team[s],” who must come to the violator’s locations, assess the person’s needs, and take “reasonable efforts to place the person voluntarily in an appropriate social service facility.” Also due to advocacy efforts, the pen-

In the more material sense, campaigns for higher wages, employment, sounder trade policies, and a fairer economy have always come from the traditional labor movement. Yet it fell not to labor but the short-lived and controversial demands working group to argue that Occupy Wall Street should number full employment among its chief demands. The renegade methods of the group garnered more discussion than the fact that a (parsimonious) full employment bill already passed as legislation in the 1970s—the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Act—whose impetus and traces of radicalism (mostly expunged by the Chamber of Commerce, which helped to water down the bill) come from the American labor movement, which pushed the hardest for its victory.

I mean to say that the occupations are in danger of treating labor the same way the Democratic Party treats it: as a source of bodies and money, a mere service that tends to be thanked and repudiated in the same breath. Labor, in this way, is like the homeless: it lends legitimacy to but also threatens the burgeoning movement.

In a recent *New York Times* article, one protester is quoted as saying, “We’re glad to have unions endorse us, but we can’t formally endorse them. We’re an autonomous group and it’s important to keep our autonomy.” The protester, like all occupiers, speaks for himself, but for anyone who has heard the discourse on labor coming out of the protests, the comment is emblematic. At a panel hosted by the magazine *Jacobin* in early October, one of the participants, speaking in the cavalier language of Italian autonomism, derided the efficacy of “union marches.” The message is rather clear: Labor unions are welcome to assist the occupations, but they shouldn’t expect any help in return. Of course, despite the usual reservations that people have about labor unions and the relegation of issues that should be central to a single, largely unheralded working group, a substantial handful of occupiers have turned out for actions in support of “union marches”—at Sotheby’s, Verizon, and elsewhere—much as students in the supposedly hostile New Left did. The same *New York Times* article notes that labor unions have been inspired by the

alty for a violation of the anti-sitting/sleeping/lying provisions is limited to a fine of twenty dollars.

In Atlanta the prohibition on sitting and lying is suspended if you are “sitting or lying down while waiting in an orderly line awaiting entry to any building, including shelters, or awaiting social services, such as provision of meals.” In Boston there is no sitting or lying down or standing or even walking “on the grass” of public grounds, and no sleeping on a public bench—“except that the Mayor may from time to time by proclamation” permit such walking, standing, lying, and sleeping “for such days . . . as he shall specify.”

Meanwhile, these laws are changing. Although perhaps less frequently than during the 90s, advocacy groups and *pro bono* lawyers continue to bring challenges against them, with mixed results. Western cities have been especially active. In 2009, a federal court in Sacramento upheld one of the country’s most stringent anti-camping ordinances, parting ways with *Jones* after an extended disquisition on *Robinson* and *Powell*. In Portland, a federal court, relying on *Jones*, denied the city’s motion to dismiss an action against its own anti-camping ordinance. And this July, in Boise, a federal court upheld the city’s anti-camping and anti-sleeping ordinances as applied to the homeless. The Idaho court relied on the fact that unlike LA in *Jones*, Boise has “devised a procedure that reasonably ensures that the homeless will not be cited for simply being present in public places when shelter space is unavailable.”

The jurisprudence of anti-homeless laws is thus both highly fact-sensitive and highly unsettled. Though not as powerful as, say, a Supreme Court affirmation of the reasoning in *Jones* would be, this uncertainty is a powerful tool in the hands of homelessness advocates. Even before *Jones*, litigation or the threat of it was effective in bringing cities to the bargaining table. In 1997, a suit against Atlanta’s “urban camping” ordinance resulted in a settlement that modified the city law, limiting its scope, requiring more transparency, and providing for police training on homelessness issues. In 2003, two months after a suit was filed challenging New Orleans’ police actions toward the homeless, the city overhauled its homelessness policy, increasing the use of its homeless assistance unit and ceasing mass arrests. And recall that in *Jones* itself, the Ninth Circuit’s opinion was used as a bargaining chip to get LA to voluntarily and immediately change its rules. Three years after *Jones*, the ACLU of Southern California was able to get Laguna Beach to repeal its anti-sleeping ordinance just by filing suit. Going forward, then, it’s unlikely that the jurisprudence of homelessness will firm up. Instead, the courts will continue to function as part of the machinery of the political process, rather than as the inspector of its results.

occupations to turn to civil disobedience—a tactic that the labor movement pioneered in the face of much worse violence than flash bombs and tear gas, and which they have in fact practiced to this very day. Even the form of the occupation derives in large part, despite or perhaps because of the left's dim memory bank, from the sit-down strike.

In keeping labor unions at a safe distance, the occupations are also in danger of evacuating the concept they have done the most to revive: “solidarity.” At a recent *n+1* panel on Occupy Wall Street, the term came up in a discussion of unions that supported the XL Keystone Pipeline (construction unions, predictably). One panelist argued that we could have “solidarity” with certain institutions without supporting everything they do. But that form of solidarity is just genial condescension. Solidarity—a term that

came out of the nascent French labor movement of the 1840s—isn't the same as coalition building: it entails an entire way of life and being in the world, of cementing ties between equals, not a grudging respect between interest groups. In the case of the pipeline, there are several unions (Transit Workers United, Amalgamated Transit Union, Canada's Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union) that have come out against it. As for the unions that support it, the task of solidarity is not mourning their failure to be as smart as us, but organizing them to be true to shared ideals. Occupiers and those of us who are fellow-travelers cannot act as if we have no obligation to change labor unions to help their goals—as if the one existing institution that has more or less consistently fought for every economic goal they espouse isn't worth transforming, enlarging, and moving.

ITALY

The “demolishers” of October 15 and the future of the movement

Interview with Emiliano Brancaccio by Emilio Carnevali

[translated and edited from *MicroMega*, October 17, 2011]

From the plazas of Madrid, where everything began May 15, the protest has extended to the rest of the world. On Saturday, October 15 the indignados marched through the streets of 950 cities—from Hong Kong to Boston, São Paulo to Kuala Lumpur, Sidney to Tokyo—denouncing the dramatic social effects of the economic crisis that exploded in 2007–08, and the failure of the political classes to respond to a situation of the highest gravity. There wasn't a single march that wasn't composed mostly of youth—the ones most hurt by mass unemployment tied to the brutal contraction of production and revenues when the real economy registered the impact of the financial crisis.

In Rome, however, a huge protest of over 100,000 people degenerated into violent fighting. The early estimate is seventy injured (three critically), twelve arrested, a city ravaged for many hours and the usual, inevitable flurry of polemics. Once again these arguments have obscured the reasons for a protest that, as Guido Rossi wrote in *Il Sole 24 Ore*, was “born of thousands living in poverty and which deserves to be explored in an analytic spirit.” We spoke with Emiliano Brancaccio, economist at the University of Sannio, a harsh critic of the politics of austerity launched by the European countries which, together with the European Central Bank and the world of finance, were the privileged target of the demonstrations on Saturday. Brancaccio has been following the movement for years and in 2002 he proposed a popular referendum, promoted by ATTAC, for the institution of a Tobin Tax.

Emiliano Carnevali: Let's start with Saturday. What's your opinion of what happened in Rome?

It's worth asking ourselves, on the occupying left, how we plan to reduce inequality without increasing wages; foster employment without cementing the protections against unemployment; ensure that the old retire with dignity without protecting pensions. If there is a single force that has successfully fought for these things besides the labor movement, I'd like to see it. As for their much-despised “bureaucratic” nature, it's hard to see how the occupations—with their teams of lawyers and their masses of committees—have a higher soapbox to stand on.

Recent polls suggest that a majority of Americans would, if given the chance, join a labor union; the same polls suggest that a majority of Americans have an unfavorable view of labor unions. Americans want to have more control over the way they work, but they don't like the form that control tends to take. They like labor, but they hate Labor. This is precisely the paradox that the occupiers face within their own ranks; it indicates a real hostility to an actual problem but it also suggests that the only way forward is to change that perception. People can endlessly rehearse to themselves the failures of traditional trade unionism, or they can try to change the one available form of organization that promises to deliver the things they want. It has already become customary to speak of the “Occupy Movement.” But most movements of the past have been clearly for or against something. The antiwar movement. The civil rights movement. The women's liberation movement. The “Occupy Movement,” which, when it lets its guard down, admits that it wants equality, might do worse than submitting to a name that represents the struggle for it in the past, and call itself a “labor movement.”

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When I volunteered for the local of the hotel workers' union in San Francisco, something I've done on and off for the last two years, there was a contract fight going on, and my job was to get big hotel customers—academic conferences,

corporate meetings—not to cross a picket line. Doing so meant first appealing to their sense of solidarity, and then, when that inevitably failed, suggesting that their conference could potentially be ruined by bullhorns and screaming picketers. I had frustrating phone calls with junior academics, who were usually paralyzed by inaction, who wanted to do the right thing that they'd read about in books, but at the crucial moment found themselves constitutionally unable to do the right thing in real life; it was hard for them to see the relationship between their adjunct, benefitless status and the health-care issues facing a hotel worker. On the line outside a hotel, handing out leaflets, I struggled to impress upon a German visitor the fact that a worker's struggle here had relevance to his situation as a worker in Germany. *Genosse*, I started, taking his hand, but he walked promptly into the hotel.

The young radicals of Silicon Valley were the most disturbing: startup hackers skateboarding through picket lines, covered in piercings and tattoos, praying that tonight would be the night that they would get bought out by Microsoft, before investors would realize their company had no actual revenue and lay them off. They took our leaflets, crumpled them, and threw them back at us. A tourist from Indiana stopped me for a long conversation about how his furniture company was able to compete with China because it didn't have unions. It paid minimum wage and no benefits. As soon as I began to respond with what I knew about China—how badly workers were treated there, how violently the number of labor protests had skyrocketed this year—he shook my hand and walked into the hotel. I pondered the meaning of that handshake as I looked over to see a young man, who looked barely out of college, stopping at the line. He raised his fist and joined the chants; then he asked for some leaflets and started to hand them out. When we asked him why he had joined us, he said, ruefully, that he had just lost his job.



PHOTO BY JEREMY AYERS

Maureen Miller

Check Up

In 1970, Stephen Bergman, then a Harvard medical student, missed his renal block exam to protest Kent State. He was one of many medical students who were transformed by the antiwar movement, and he went on to ask if we could transform physician training. In 1978, Bergman published the satire *The House of God*, loosely based on his experience as an internal medicine intern at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, under the pseudonym Samuel Shem.

The *House of God* is best known for popularizing medical students' passive-aggressive argot. ("Gomer" is short for "get out of my emergency room"; "NAD" means "no acute distress.") But its enduring accomplishment is that it brought to light an attitudinal shift among

American physicians. While doctors have been perfecting their gallows humor for centuries, Bergman concluded that his colleagues used theirs as a defense against the depersonalization they experienced as part of what is now often described as the "medical-industrial complex."

The first authors to use the term "medical-industrial complex," John and Barbara Ehrenreich, were with Health-PAC, a universal healthcare advocacy group. Their *American Health Empire: Power, Profits, and Politics* (1971) came to the attention of physicians nationwide after Arnold Relman, editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, wrote about it in 1980. The Ehrenreichs argued that structural inequalities in healthcare undermine medical professionalism, and that healthcare corporations and consulting groups cannot exist without these inequalities—and that therefore we cannot work with them. The Ehrenreichs and others continue to

Emiliano Brancaccio: To be totally frank, I don't intend to enter the usual ethico-normative discussion about "violence" and "nonviolence." It's happened plenty in the past, and I don't think it's ever been important in the real course of events. I prefer to analyze the dynamics of the historic process, of which the conflicts in Rome, like those in Athens, undoubtedly are a part, whether we like it or not. With the "demolishers" in Piazza San Giovanni I find a superficial quality, a limited depth. This quality lies in their speed. The wave of a destructive revolt in Europe grows every day, with sudden accelerations. It's interesting to note that, on a strictly visible level, these "riots" [*in English in the original—trans.*], these rebellious actions, appear to be the only ones positioned to strike with the velocity of those notorious financial markets. In purely symbolic terms, the rapid actions of the urban guerillas give them illusion of being the only ones capable of keeping their heads at the mad rhythm of financial speculation, which batters share prices, raises interest rates, and offers an alibi to the governments that destroy welfare and labor. We might say, in short, that at first glance the "demolishers" appear to be the only ones positioned to "strike quickly," as the speculators do.

EC: But also aside from considerations of an "ethico-normative" character (as you've defined it), it doesn't seem that these actions have any political efficacy beyond the outburst of an afternoon . . .

EB: In fact the quality that I've described is totally illusory, purely choreographic. Still, we also need to recognize that it stands out from the anxiety of traditional mass movements and even more so that of political institutions. When the "demolishers" declare: "they wanted to do the usual, a useless rally, and instead they got a lovely surprise [*una bella sorpresa*]," it's clear that they intend to challenge a traditional politics that hobbles along frightened, which always arrives late to the burning political crime scenes of our time. And it's this appalling lateness that explains the sympathy, more or less hidden, that a not negligible number of people, and of workers, express today with the confrontations of the "demolishers" in Piazza San Giovanni.

insist that we have trouble relating to our patients because we are ambivalent about our own roles as guardians (or gatekeepers) of an unjust distribution system. So the rise of the medical-industrial complex has been paralleled by the rise of a consciousness movement, "mindful medicine," which encourages physicians to pursue activities such as narrative medicine, meditation practice, and exercise in order to cultivate a more introspective medical practice even within the complex.

At the same time, real political reforms have taken place. Student-driven curriculum reform has brought HIV-AIDS prevention, global health internships and electives, healthcare disparities, topics in LGBTQ healthcare, and primary care recruitments to medical schools. A more outward-looking movement, the American Medical Student Association's PharmFree campaign, which aims to diminish the pharmaceutical industry's influence on medical practice, has been featured in the *New York Times*,

EC: And what would be the limit of the "demolishers"?

EB: The limit is gigantic. They are clearly incapable of grasping the deep meaning of the dynamics under way, and they are for this reason totally deprived of a political platform. Even on the best hypothesis, without even being aware of it the "demolishers" are drawing from a mix of old watchwords of the most naive Proudhonism, and from an apologia for action in itself which has many spiritual fathers, for example in Dadaism but also in the earliest forms of fascism. To call them "anarchists" is already to flatter them a bit. The problem is that History's verdict on these types of movements is unequivocal. The naive forms of rebellion can lead to the destruction of machines and symbols—religious and otherwise—they can send some unlucky police officer to the hospital, and they can also get people killed in the street. Thus they succeed easily at conquering the scenes of a mediatized world. But, staying with the ephemeral confines of choreography, even though bloodied, the results are politically insane. Mere revolt, the so-called "riot" [*in English in original—trans.*], if it remains as such, de facto classifiable as a harmless event, which occurs more often than one imagines and which never scratch power. On the contrary, in general such events create the typical conditions for the easiest reactions on the part of the repressive state apparatus, and provide the occasion for a more or less surreptitiously authoritarian turn.

EC: And it's that very authoritarian turn that we're helping at this moment. Moreover, the polemics over the conflicts have completely obscured everything else, including the debate over the political platform of the movement in its entirety. But is it possible at least to define the politics coming from the "peaceful faction" of the movement?

EB: We need to admit that, on the level of analysis and political proposals, even the so-called "peaceful" faction of the movement appears to be in enormous difficulties. Let's consider for example the declaimed category of the "commons," which might be characterized as the ability to be managed collectively without mediation from either the market or the state. In the original social scientific definition the concept describes a precise form of organization of economic relations, but with decisively limited applicability. On the other hand, in the sense in which it has come to be adopted within the movement, the expression "commons" is an equivocal expression, which means everything and nothing. Its ambiguity, mind you, isn't casual. It derives from the fact that some leading thinkers of the movement are deluded into believing they can promote the birth of a general mode of social production that is immediately "other" with respect to the state and the market. Read through this lens, "the commons" risks assuming the traits of a useless and misleading chimera. It's not the case that the Marxists and the true protagonists of the 20th-century labor movement ever let themselves be seduced by similar illusions: for them, the primary problem always consisted in the capture—gradual or revolutionary—of state power, in the use of the levers of the state for the socialization of production and in the progressive democratization of economic decisions. And even today, the capture of the "bunkers" [*casematte*] of the state remains the key question. The rest is mere fluff [*fuffa*].

EC: The movement however also calls for "debt cancellation."

Newsweek, and CNN. Harvard Medical School even invited Bergman to address students at its commencement in 2009. He told them, “You are about to enter a disaster area: the healthcare industry. The system is broken. It is worse for doctors, worse for patients, and better only for the insurance industry.” As a medical student, I get to ask tons of stupid and naïve questions, so here’s one: What if we tried to change the system?

A 2011 study by the American Medical Students Association found that about 95 percent of medical students believe their patients are underinsured, and that 80 percent don’t think the Affordable Care Act went far enough in narrowing that gap. Their elders tend to agree. A 2009 study by the New England Journal found that 78 percent of physicians believe they have a professional obligation to address societal health policy issues, and 67 percent are willing to accept limits on their

reimbursements in order to expand access to basic healthcare.

Although we may not seem like likely protesters, medical residents and many doctors with decades of practice behind them are the 99 percent, and we treat the 99 percent. We are part of the same system as our patients, and it also causes us distress. And when we speak, people listen. An October 23 speak-out at Zuccotti Park by Healthcare for the 99 percent, a coalition of healthcare professionals, attracted more attention than any other teach-in so far.

What would it take to recruit more medical students and physicians to try to collectively change American healthcare? The challenge will be overcoming a decades-long tradition of isolation and resignation within a

dysfunctional system. Half a decade ago, the New England Journal published an article called “White Coat, Mood Indigo,” which noted that medical students become depressed as they enter their clinical training. These years are the first time most students interact with the American healthcare system as physicians, and what we see can be deeply discouraging. We begin to infer that the best way to manage patients is to answer their questions on a need-to-know basis. We learn to order tests in sequences that are not always evidence-based or clinically sound partly because these tests can be expensive. Everyone in the industry is constantly working around the cost problem, and the complexity and dysfunction of these efforts makes

EB: Here the question is a little different. Contrary to what one thinks, this isn’t a utopian proposal: the history of capitalism itself is filled with the collapse of sovereign states. The problem is that one then would need to bear in mind the consequences of a similar act.

EC: In fact the most common objection is that “debt cancellation” would entail a collapse of the entire financial system with worse social repercussions than one can yet imagine.

EB: In reality the preliminary question is different. To refuse unilaterally to pay the debt implies the capacity, on the part of a country or an aggregate of countries, to reduce dependence on foreign loans for a long time. It’s clear in fact that if one cancels the debt with one hand and then asks for a new loan with the other, one will submit logically to the reprisal of a ferocious rise in interest rates and a fatal rationing of funds on the part of foreign creditors. To reduce loans, then, one would need to lay out a political-economic strategy that consents to diminish the importance, and more generally, which seeks the objective of reducing the dependence of the country on the international movement of capital and goods. One is dealing clearly with a position that would entrust a new, stronger role to the state, or to a community of states, which points to a more autonomous political economy with respect to the impersonal laws of so-called “capitalist globalization.” In this scenario even financial instability that follows a default could be managed, subjecting the monetary policy of the central bank to the power of elected organs, and at least nationalizing part of the banking system. These are the solutions which in general have typically followed a sovereign default.

EC: It doesn’t seem to me that this is the horizon in which the callers for “debt cancellation” move.

EB: Some promoters of “debt cancellation” are embarrassed when facing the logical consequences of their slogan. The reason is that they have proclaimed for years the death of the state; they had even proclaimed it with more vehemence than the so-called “free traders” [liberisti]. For this reason representatives of the movement today are not in position to deduce from the slogan of unilateral debt repudiation a precise consequence on the political level: reestablishing the idea of the sovereignty of the state, or of a cohesive group of states, with respect to global market mechanisms. It might seem as if I’m speaking in too high of a discourse, but I’m not: people sense it in the air, they understand immediately if a proposal is logical and means something, or if it is intrinsically contradictory and leads down a blind alley. With these uncertainties too—because of this inherent fragility in the slogans of the so-called “peaceful” faction of the movement—the “demolishers” easily take the upper hand.

EC: Beyond the “technical” actionability of the course you’ve just outlined, there’s still another political point one can’t neglect: who would be the allies of such a project? Debt cancellation is at present only a slogan of few marginal fringe groups on the extreme left. And in order to do something like “subject central bank monetary policy to the power of elected organs” one would need to create a “continental revolutionary government.” This does not seem to be a realistic proposition.

EB: Frankly, I wouldn’t bother with the word “revolution,” which seems to be a bit abused these days. As for the rest: first the notorious “divorce” of

ILLUSTRATION BY JOANNA NEBORSKY



the Treasury, even the Bank of Italy was subjected to this type of control, and we didn’t witness the horses of the Cossacks drinking at St. Peter’s. Besides, here we need to understand a fact: the current political agenda with which European institutions, governments, and the opposition is concerned, is self-contradictory. If in Europe we continue to persist with the so-called politics of “austerity,” the demand for goods, production, employment, income and revenues will decrease even further, making it increasingly more difficult to pay back the debt. Thus, rather than opposing financial speculation, one will come to feed on it. We have a situation where, thanks to such policies, Greece is already technically bankrupt. Continuing along this path Italy, Portugal and Spain will also end in an inexorable default. But that’s not all: repudiating the debt as such could even reveal itself as insufficient. In fact the countries in default could see themselves constrained to exit the Eurozone and their currencies devalued, in order to attempt to increase competition against foreign goods and to break the fall in demand and production. In short, events could at a certain point move faster than both the program of institutional politics and the slogans of the movement itself. It wouldn’t be the first time.

—Translated from the Italian by Nikil Saval

us increasingly depressed as we go about our first rounds.

Yet medical students do have an opportunity to learn another way. We learn it from colleagues who speak out. In my experience, most medical student advocates come into the healthcare reform movement after some nudging from a clinical or academic mentor. Many students I know (I'm a third-year medical student at NYU) have gotten into global health activism after reading *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, Tracy Kidder's book about Partners in Health founder Paul Farmer. More broadly, one of the best-known medical activist organizations is Physicians for Human Rights, which organizes medical professionals against violations of the Hippocratic Oath, such as torture. There is also a national organization specifically devoted to improving healthcare insurance, Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP), which has over 18,000 members across the country. For us to have a real impact, a large proportion of practicing physicians will have to coalesce behind groups like this one. We need organization almost on the scale of the global health projects.

Medicare-for-All is essentially shorthand for a single-payer American healthcare system that would cover every citizen under a federal insurance program. It is analogous to the universal health care legislation Vermont passed in May 2011, which will guarantee every resident state-financed health insurance, and it is a more expansive vision of the public option that multiple

polls found the majority of Americans supported during the 2009 healthcare reform debate. The public option, which would have allowed the federal government to provide Medicare-like insurance coverage to all Americans as a price competitor to private insurers, was viewed by many as a stepping stone to a federal single-payer program. Right now there is some internal debate within PNHP about whether we should promote reform on a state-by-state level, as in Vermont, or continue to advocate for reforms on the national level. In any case, we believe that single-payer is "ambitious but feasible" for America.

And there is a lot we can learn from the ambitious project going on right now in Zuccotti Park. Medics attend to the occupiers around the clock; full-time practitioners moonlight with them. The time I spend at the park is what I can offer between clinical commitments—which, granted, is not much. But I am hoping to pick up some habits from the Occupy Movement to take to my classmates. The last time I went to the park, on October 23, I put it this way on a dorm-style dry erase board:

I am a med student.

I support Medicare-for-All.

I am studying for my surgery clerkship, yet I am here.

Do I need a CT scan?

I was standing next to a Yippie pie-thrower who saw my sign. He asked me about how better to manage his myriad chronic medical conditions, and I had to tell him I didn't know.

Soon I was no longer alone, and I felt more comfortable in the crowd. I was standing with my medical school classmate Josh Klindienst. Josh and I have been in school together for three years, but I can't remember us having a conversation about healthcare reform before then. I talk about healthcare reform a fair amount at my medical school—I am the campus contact for Physicians for a National Health Program—but everyone always tells me they don't know enough about healthcare reform to join. Perhaps with the question of knowing enough, Josh suggested I simplify my message. I tried:

Medical Students for Medicare-for-All: Healthcare is a Human Right!

The new iteration got a better response than my previous sign. Flavio Casoy, a psychiatry resident from San Francisco, approached us.

"Why Medicare-for-All?"

"It makes more sense to most people than 'VA-for-All.'"

He wanted us to make sure we knew why we believed it. Casoy was in town to attend a national conference of the Committee of Interns and Residents (CIR), a member organization of the SEIU. I'd never heard of it, but apparently Bellevue

Hospital, the public teaching hospital where I train, has had a CIR chapter for twenty years. Within two days I noticed two CIR flyers in one of the hospital call rooms. What do we need to do, to for lack of a better expression, put our colleagues on call?

Introspection is critical to thoughtful medical practice, but an outward turn, to the advancement of healthcare as a human right, is essential if we are to defend our professionalism and retain our peace of mind. Turning outward is a habit of mind to which we devote much of our training. If you work in a healthcare system, you must learn how to work well in teams. An embrace of the communal work ethic—coordinated care, collaborative interviews with family members, and faculty consults—is really the only way for us to get anything done. The Occupy Movement reminds us that simply talking to one another about our problems with the system would at least make us feel less isolated. Whatever our ideological or strategic differences about the best way to change the system, being willing to participate in these conversations would remove the barrier of feeling that we're each in this alone.

But civil disobedience typically addresses unjust laws and practices, not the systems that underlie them. Civil rights movements were masterful at it, but they didn't address the problem of capitalism (though King did try towards the end of his life). I'd like to see OWS use some of its grassroots clout, and the opening of political space that civil disobedience (or even the threat of it) appears to be creating, to make its own noncommodified institutions and structures. In the alter-globalization movement we called this "reinventing the commons."

Commons involves both life-after- and life-despite-capitalism. They are not subject to the dominant system of private property or mediated by competitive market relations. They're the material manifestations of an anti-capitalist politics, including squats, indie media, subway parties, zines, and other efforts to counter privatization and build noncommodified communities and countercultural forms. In the glob movement days in New York, we made "Temporary Autonomous Zones" (as Hakim Bey called them)—parties and disruptive acts of disobedience in places like Grand Central—but really struggled with maintaining long-term efforts. Community centers like Charas/El Bohio, in the East Village, which housed various social and political activities, were shut down because we did not have the requisite popular support to withstand the city's firepower.

A more continuous tradition of such zones emerged in the 1970s in Italy, with the rise of *autonomia*, manifested in their *centri sociali*, or social centers. These centers—their faults and suc-

Heather Gautney

Occupy The Commons

What's next for Occupy Wall Street? It's the burning question on everybody's mind. Crappy weather and the constant threat of police eviction aside, how is Occupy going to use its tremendous momentum?

Some think civil disobedience—shutting down banks or meetings, like we used to do with the WTO—is the way to go. Others think that OWS should use its popular support to issue demands or sponsor large-scale marches around specific policies, like the Robin Hood tax on financial transactions. All these are promising.

DISABLED PEOPLE OCCUPY

AMERICA!

Disabled people are most commonly viewed as people who “suffer” from medical problems, rather than members of a disenfranchised community whose suffering largely stems from inequality, prejudice, stereotypes, and limited access to basic necessities like housing, health care, education, and jobs. Because of this, disabled people are far too often left out of political movements. This is often still the case with the OWS movement, but increasingly disabled people have taken the matter into our own hands and are loudly declared: “We are here!”

I’ve been really excited by the ways in which disabled people have been participating in the OWS movement, coming together to build community, raise awareness, and make the movement accessible. From the Occupy at Home movement, which gives a space to those who can’t be physically present at protests, to the disabled individuals who put themselves on the frontlines risking arrest, disabled people are showing that they are an important force in this movement. What follows are the voices of just a few of the disabled people occupying America.

—Sunaura Taylor

OWS and CUIDO

Jean Stewart and Marg Hall
We were born in an occupation. Communities United in Defense of Olmstead (CUIDO) grew out of a 2010 month-long disability protest encampment in Berkeley, California. We oppose budget cuts to programs serving people with disabilities, elders, and poor people. These brutal austerity measures threaten the right of people with disabilities to live in our homes and communities—a right affirmed by the Supreme Court’s Olmstead decision of 1999.

Disability often ushers in poverty, which in turn can lead to homelessness, hunger, pain, illness, institutionalization in nursing homes and jails, and death. CUIDO engages in nonviolent direct action to effect both immediate and systemic change. Through sit-ins,

occupations, street theater, propaganda, and letter writing, we demand our human rights, in alliance with the 99 percent, especially poor people.

CUIDO is a diverse movement; we encompass a rainbow of disabilities. We ride wheelchairs, we’re deaf, we’re blind, we have learning disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, chemical sensitivities, and a host of other hidden whatnot.

Why does the Occupy movement thrill us? Because, like CUIDO, it does the unexpected, challenging legitimacy and encouraging resistance. The corporate stranglehold on government threatens our very lives. (Headline of yesterday’s flyer, which we handed out as we marched with tens of thousands toward the Port of Oakland, successfully shutting it down: MEMO TO GOVERNMENT: GET YER FILTHY MITTS OFF OUR SAFETY NET!)

We who resist, who civilly disobey, are our only hope.

Krips Occupy Wall Street (KOWS) or Disabled (Un)Occupy Wall Street

Akemi Nishida
KOWS started with a growing desire of disabled people to have collective and supportive presence at Occupy Wall Street. With DIA (Disabled In Action), disabled people and their allies, from multiple generations, gather at OWS every Sunday at noon. Our presence there has been powerful and ever growing.

We go to OWS to represent our community, especially those who cannot be there physically for various reasons; to show diversity within the 99 percent; to inform and educate people about ableism; to welcome disabled people who do not

know about the community; and to be with one another.

Even though OWS has a wheelchair accessible entrance, this does not mean that it is an accessible and safe space for all. The OWS is often too crowded to maneuver, and it is overwhelming. Its lack of disability politics makes some feel unsafe. Also its fast-paced organizing is inaccessible and unsustainable to many. Therefore, the next agenda item for KOWS is to develop a web space where those who do not or cannot join KOWS physically can still participate.

KOWS is in the middle of learning and practicing more collective, interdependent, accessible, safe, and sustainable organizing and protesting.

Come join us at OWS every Sunday at noon or through web-based space.

Doing Radical Psych at Occupy Rachel Liebert

Occupy weaves together communities that refuse to go on carrying the burdens of an unjust economic structure—burdens that land especially on communities that are poor, of color, queer, trans, and/or disabled.

And burdens that can manifest themselves as madness.

Backed by a medical industrial complex that profits from turning injustice into sickness, these mad expressions are by and large framed as an individual’s “mental illness,” diverting critical attention from our crazy-making world. Such mainstream approaches are both products and tools of imperialism, capitalism, neoliberalism, and securitization: the very systems that Occupy is striving to undo.

It follows that madness connects deeply with Occupy. Yet, conflated with aggression and disturbance, it is increasingly seen as a threat that needs to be eliminated. This point of view ignores that the vast majority of madness is not violent (in fact, madness is more closely affiliated with surviving violence) and that the vast majority of violence is considered “rational” (the violent actions of the state, corporations, white supremacy, and patriarchy, for example). It can also be drawn into disturbing assumptions of blackness and homelessness, distracts from the ever-present threat of policy brutality, and supports depictions of Occupy as divided and unstable.

Violence of all kinds is clearly not OK within Occupy, a site of solidarity; there needs to be a process of accountability for harmful words and actions. However, violence does not have to be diagnosed as “mental illness,” and would benefit from being addressed in consultations with the communities that are being blamed.

We are working hard to create a space within Occupy for diverse connections, particularly as mad voices

disproportionately represent bodies already marginalized and policed by society. We have been organizing for mad justice and offering social and emotional support to all protesters, no matter what form their protest takes, through written materials, teach-ins, counseling, peer support, and community building.

Using a lens of diversity, protest, and community, radical psych sees madness as containing seeds of expertise, imagination, and revolution. It offers learning and growth to Occupy, and deserves to be actively included (not just tolerated) within the 99 percent.

For we all desire and require revolution.

Thoughts on Occupy from a Disabled Community Organizer Jessica Lehman

Disability activists have been participating in Occupy protests all over the country. While the Occupy movement appeals to many white, non-disabled people who have lost their jobs and homes and are feeling oppression for the first time, people with disabilities were already in the middle of a horrendous years-long fight to protect and maintain basic survival services like personal attendant services and healthcare. As one disability activist said recently, “We have been working hard and doing a great job, but we just don’t have enough people.” Maybe the Occupy movement provides a chance to fight with a large enough group that we can win.

Access has been a problem in every city. Camping out is challenging for many people with disabilities. Occupy sites need ASL interpreters, captioning, accessible Porta-Potties, ramps not blocked by bikes, and air not contaminated with smoke. Ensuring access is challenging given the nature of a “leaderless” movement. It has been pointed out, however, that rather than saying that none of us are leaders, we must say that all of us are leaders. Rather than fighting for someone in power to provide access, as we are used to, people with and without disabilities are taking it upon themselves to provide access and educate one another. It is a transformative experience for us to have the opportunity and the responsibility of creating the access we wish to see in our community.

Some disability groups have pointed out that the Occupy movement gives the disability community a chance to educate other activists about the threats facing people with disabilities, a chance to bring others into our fight. For others, the Occupy movement is an opportunity to transform our own movement, a chance to connect the fight for healthcare and access with a broader fight for social and economic justice. We have an opportunity to educate our own community about how our fight is linked to the fight of all oppressed people, all people who are fighting to have power in their own lives and communities.



PHOTO BY JEREMY AYERS

LOVE AFFAIR

Being in OWS is like being in passionate, volatile love. You want so badly for it to work, but somehow your attempts at communicating always seem inadequate. There is always some kind of imbalance, which is never insurmountable, although it often feels that way. In this love affair we call OWS, one of us is more articulate, probably college-educated, and more experienced with consensus building and “horizontality,” whether through progressive organizing or

cesses—offer instructive examples for the Occupy protests as they move forward.

The initial wave of social centers came out of the shift from industrial to flexible forms of production that left vacant large stretches of cityscape in urban centers around the world. Many centers emerged in Milan, where industrial production was giving way to an economy based on the finance, fashion, and service industries that brought high rents and low wages, as well as high rates of unemployment: between 1971 and 1989, 280,000 of the city’s workers joined the ranks of the unemployed. The first social center, Leoncavallo, was occupied in Milan in 1975, but over time, the centers decisively coalesced into autonomous communities that have persisted over generations.

I entered into the Italian social center scene after the Genoa anti-G8 protests. By then the *tute bianche*, known for wearing heavy padding in clashes with police, had reinvented themselves as the *disobbedienti*, abandoning civil disobedience for a broader, anti-authoritarian project of social disobedience. I was hanging out with Luca, one of their key spokespeople, who lived in the squats around the Rivolta, one of the largest social centers in the country. Rivolta is located in the industrial town of Marghera near Venice. Venice was, and is, a thriving tourist site, but Marghera was an old industrial town also left behind by the neoliberal advance from manufacturing to service. Luca was a grandson of Antonio Negri, one of the founding theorists of *autonomia*, which infused the center with a rich intellectual and militant history.

Before arriving in Italy, I was turned off from squat living, having been a punk in West Philly in the ’80s. The squats near Osage Avenue were filthy and volatile, and a bunch of the people in them were pretty strung out. In Italy, the situation was quite the opposite: houses were clean, with running water and electricity, and some even had herb gardens in the back. With Cheshire smiles, we’d throw electric and phone bills in the trash, and when utilities were shut off, the ingenious electricians and plumbers in the movement simply turned them back on. I met some South African activists who were doing that same sort of stuff in the townships but never witnessed that sort of direct action in New York. It was really right on.

The social center Rivolta encompasses a giant compound, with a concert hall, two or three full bars, and a big kitchen. Across the courtyard, which was large enough to accommodate full-scale

nonprofit work. The other one has not had this privilege. I belong to the first.

Several weeks into OWS, a meeting of the People of Color caucus degenerated into a shouting match, and it made me want to leave for good. Three black men had jumped to their feet, pointing fingers and yelling over everyone else that now was a good time for us to talk about racial and economic oppression in their communities. I roused from my subcommittee report induced sleep.

One of them, clearly an instigator, had been keeping a running commentary on how OWS was some kind of white conspiracy, launching into a tirade about the

hand signals—“those goddam hand signals!”—when the facilitator diplomatically asked him to respect stack. The facilitator, an articulate Asian-American woman adept at being simultaneously kind and firm, began telling him that we could vote to change the agenda if a proposal was made, when the second man jumped into the fray. “People in my community are evicted from their homes every day!” he yelled.

Now the facilitator was fully on defense. “We can add these to the agenda and talk about them, but let’s do it in a non-hostile way,” she said—when the third man, wearing a red argyle sweater and black frames, sprang to his feet. He had been sitting with his hands folded neatly in his lap, like the Queen.

“I’ve sat through three meetings now!” he said. “I’ve even brought apples to share!”

(They sat on the floor, like roses but more wholesome).

“I have been coming to these meetings because I support the movement and want to get involved, but we never get anything done!” he yelled. “I’m a philosophy of language student, and I don’t usually get worked up like this, but I’ve sat through three meetings

where we do nothing. So we are going to talk about this stuff right now!”

He shook a little. He was practically emitting steam. The first two men burst out again, piling onto one another’s shouts as the facilitator attempted to referee. How I pitied her as the cacophony grew. My stomach grumbled, and I remembered all the things I still had to do that night, so under the cover of chaos I quietly crept out. A few minutes later, Argyle Sweater left too.

Later that night, I complained about it to friends over drinks. “I don’t have time for this!” I said, the quintessential New York objection. I was annoyed with the instigator (“Was he a provocateur?”), annoyed with the marathon meetings (two-and-a-half hours, twice a week!), and annoyed that we spent more time explaining hand signals than our mission and the work already underway, so that some minor instigation pushed Argyle Sweater to explode in frustration and leave. “I never want to go back,” I wailed hopelessly.

My friends listened patiently. “The thing most people don’t realize about OWS is that the majority of the work doesn’t

soccer matches, was another set of houses that the movement donated to illegal immigrant families. There was also an office, a radio station, and a TV station being set up as part of an initiative called Global Project. Other centers I visited—in Padua, Venice proper, Rome, Calabria—did not have such an impressive set up, but they too were highly functional. Rome’s center was attached to the well-known Communist dissident newspaper *Il Manifesto*, and *Global Magazine*, a *disobbedienti* rag, was published there in addition to all sort of other public programs, including conferences, film screenings, and so on. In Padua, the center was behind the month-long Sherwood festival, which still draws tens of thousands of people from around the country and Europe each year. Social centers also offered an assortment of public services, including documentation for immigrants, condom distribution for prostitutes, daycare and housing for homeless children, counseling and care giving for battered women, and much more. They also provide spaces for free concerts by popular bands (I saw Public Enemy there), art installations, theater, political meetings and conferences.

Despite their long and confrontational history, about half of the social centers in Italy have acquired a degree of legal status. Rivolta is one of them. Occupied in 1996, it was owned privately and slated to be sold and transformed into a large commercial area. After the space was squatted, the municipality decided, at the urging of sympathetic government officials, to designate most of the space for “social use.” Here “sympathetic officials” refers to the people within the *disobbedienti* movement who ran for office and won. The vice-mayor of Venice, now on the city council, was a longtime militant in this movement. That’s how large it was,

happen in general assemblies or working group meetings but in subcommittees,” one of them said. “But people who are new to the movement often jump in at the general meetings and don’t see how the work really happens until later on.”

“I think OWS can be hard to understand, because the demands-less slogan of ‘the 99 percent’ is meant to include almost everyone,” the other one said. “It encourages communities to push for their own demands, rather than having demands handed down from the central committee, and that’s its drawing force.”

That’s when I realized that the showdown at the caucus was a failure to communicate how OWS works on the ground, and also what it actually means. What is it about anyway? The slogans

have immediate resonance, but their meanings are not obvious. Economic justice isn’t just about the lack of financial oversight and bankers who’ve skimmed off the fat (and most of the milk). Chinese restaurant staff making less than minimum wage, Honduran workers in low-wage jobs that few white Americans would ever touch, or lifelong residents of Bed-Stuy being evicted from their homes are part of it as well. OWS is also about true democracy, and the power that people actually have to transform their lives. But how do we communicate all of these things without collapsing them into a series of single-issue demands? How do we communicate the whole?

OWS does have a symbol, of course: Zuccotti Park is our anti-consumer-capitalist vision of how we can feed ourselves, build our

and how expansive its popular support. This is also an illustrative case of how some movement activists can interact with politicians without necessarily dissipating the original force of the movement.

The other half of the centers were unsanctioned and as such subject to foreclosure. Legal status tends to be more difficult for those located in areas like Venice proper with higher-priced real estate. Squatters who live and work in those spaces are constantly on guard for police infiltration. It’s like what we’re seeing with the occupy encampments—some are constantly under fire while others have legal status through agreements with their municipalities. In Italy, however, the difference in status caused problems because legal social centers were viewed, mostly by anarchists, as less authentic and in contradiction to the autonomist ethic. The disobedienti shared the anarchist antipathy to conventional politics but decided they could do more within a legal space as long as it was under their control.

As OWS considers its next steps, it should group-think ways in which we can utilize the open political spaces created through civil disobedience and public outreach to realize more sustainable communities. Social centers are a model of what’s possible. My friend Mike Menser refers to efforts like Rivolta as attempts to “disarticulate the state.” Instead of issuing formal demands on public officials and reinforcing their power, movements like Occupy could take over state functions and assume the decision-making power that comes with them. Mike and Josh Lerner are already doing this with participatory budgeting in NYC, which is a terrific start, but why not use the force of the movement to acquire spaces for social use and manage them ourselves?

Zuccotti and other Occupy camps are not sustainable formations. Rather, they are frontlines of a war on social inequality and the Wall Street crooks behind it. I’m not suggesting that OWS surrender. But I think we can start considering parallel “disarticulate the state” projects that ride the momentum of the movement and make good use of its resources. The cat and mouse with the police will always be there. But for me the magic’s in the social work, cultural forms, and communities crafted by this movement—newspapers, homeless services, art forms, concerts, teach-ins, open mike, and the like—that are part and parcel of reinventing a commons.

own media, secure our communities and structure our world—without resorting to credit cards. But behind it are nearly a hundred working groups fighting to keep it alive and broaden its reach, and within each of these, there are numerous subcommittees where work really gets done. It’s as unwieldy as it sounds, despite pretty organized, and newcomers who show up at meetings wanting to get involved can find it frustratingly bureaucratic. “Everyone takes at least two weeks to learn to think this way,” my friend said—and in fact, those of us in the college-educated category have had years to learn to think and act “horizontally.” Despite what we might think, it is not immediately obvious why we need hand signals, progressive stack and near-militant adherence to the agenda to actually reach consensus between fifty people, in under three hours, and to do so democratically.

As the movement draws in people with different backgrounds and reaches out to new communities, we will have to do a better job of explaining its practices, and what its slogans really mean. We in OWS need to explain why evictions and withheld pay are symptoms of a system that never worked, and not just the fault of a few. We also need to explain why meetings are run the way they are; otherwise, our practices will just be alienating. The 99 percent includes many communities of color who have been systematically marginalized and excluded because of class, status, and race, but reaching them will require better communication about the meaning of OWS and how it works.

Over the next few days, I spoke with several friends in the caucus about the showdown. We were all frustrated—everyone was frustrated. Could we just walk away from the caucus?

But in the end, most of us returned. A few days later, I attended the next caucus meeting, and the situation had improved. Orientations for newcomers had been set up. We hashed out meeting protocol and (somewhat) streamlined our agenda. We have begun to clarify, through some

exceptionally tortuous debates, why we are here, who we are as a group, and what we want to achieve. Also, in a truly heroic effort, the facilitator sat down with the original instigator in an attempt to work out a solution. This vastly renewed my hope. Like every other group in the movement, we are slowly but surely figuring things out.

Also, I can see that the message is beginning to broaden, and that we are not the only ones who recognize how deeply racial inequality is embedded in economic injustice in the US. Others in the movement see it too, and this makes it much easier to bear the horrific process of consensus building with people I find insufferable.

Maybe we will drop out of the caucus next week in total frustration. Maybe we will shift our energies to other groups. Maybe we’ll just decide to attend fewer meetings (an option I have bumped to the top of my list). But we haven’t left yet. I think we have stayed because we know that if we leave, the movement won’t be ours.

ILLUSTRATION BY ERIN SCHELL · POLICE PHOTO BY MICHAEL GOULD-WARTOFESKY



Mark Greif

DRUM CIRCLE HISTORY & CONFLICT

Where do drum circles come from? If ever there were a topic you'd expect graduate students in anthropology to write dissertations on, this would be it. It combines all the favorite elements of contemporary ethnography: a genuinely popular practice that bubbles up within tiny communities that still constitute themselves by name and often geographical affiliation (Venice Beach Drum Circle, Congo Square Drum Circle [in Prospect Park], Earth Drum Council), and self-regulate like utopian scale-models of the larger society. A partly imaginary, partly historic attempt to live out suppressed anti-colonial traditions, of Native American spirituality and survival, and the African diaspora in the Americas and Caribbean. Contemporary intermingling of Deadheads and transplanted Californians, African-American b-boys, African immigrant drumming with its public virtuosity; plus immediate continuity, for Latinos, with the live performance and communal participation of dance music, throughout Latin America and the islands. Hippie counterculture from the 1960s forward, originating in enclaves like Santa Cruz and the Bay; hip hop counterculture, from the mid-1970s forward, in the Bronx. Finally, amazingly, the increasing appearance of these cultures in leaderless, spontaneously coordinated, polyrhythmic and pluralist drum circles at the heart of new social movements—as a standard feature of them, along with the affinity groups and puppets, somehow manifesting forty years of alternative organization, from radical feminism and eco-anarchism, not just as entertainment, or spiritual practice, or a clarion sound (like 21st-century hip hop bagpipes), but an action and practice that itself seems to cross-pollinate with, and manifest, the new political and deliberative structures culminating in Occupation—without words. With drums.

MIC CHECK!



ILLUSTRATION BY JOANNA NEBORSKY

From this, the paradox: the drums drive talkers crazy! Insofar as the consensus model of assembly requires speech, speech, speech, but even more listening, in quiet and calm, to hear and take in another voice, in a way even parliamentary democracy (structured on antagonistic debate) does not; insofar as the drum circle, though also rooted in listening, depends on a kinetic and continual, unbroken out loud bodily manifestation of the rhythm, an experience of others' moves within a generality of constant movement, sound, and rhythm; and insofar as the essence of Occupation is to exist in a common space, where authority is not used to overrule anyone's form of life-giving expression—consensus and drumming seem put into jeopardy of mutual incomprehension. They're the same, somehow, and they make each other apeshit.

And yet the scholarly literature does not seem to be up to date. References are incredibly sparse. One of the best, by far, is an introduction by the musicologist Eric Charry to the autobiography of the musician and cultural diplomat Babatunde Olatunji—a Nigerian grad student in public administration at NYU in the early 1950s who, out of funds and frustrated with American ignorance of African tradition and vile Southern racism (he took his BA at Morehouse), introduced Yoruba drumming to jazz circles. His bestselling album *Drums of Passion*, from 1961, set the standard and expectations for “authentic” African drumming for the nation—even though it was actually recorded entirely with African American and Afro Caribbean drummers who lived in New York.

Cuban rhythms were central, and directly continuous with African inheritances, as was true for Brazil and Haiti. African American music, however, was really a new creation of the polyglot nation. While John Coltrane, Max Roach, and others took up Olatunji for some of the great civil rights-era masterpieces of American music, both Olatunji and others were building schools in Harlem and the Bronx to stimulate Black Pride (and Puerto Rican pride) and then Black Power, as African American students reconnected to Africa. “The Congo Square drummers,” Charry notes, “have been playing in what is called Drummer's Grove in Prospect Park, Brooklyn, since the late 1960s.” (Congo Square was the famous field in New Orleans where African slaves and refugees of the Haitian and Santo Domingo revolts drummed and danced, one of the—if not the—only such open sites in the 19th century.)

On the hippie West Coast in the late sixties, on beaches and in countercultural retreats like Esalen, hand drums were being taken up as a means of communal ecstasy and bonding. Arthur Hull, in Santa Cruz, published books and ran workshops to conceive of the drum circle for therapy, medical relief, and organization building. The hills and woods above UC Santa Cruz still house their share of drum circles on full moons, as do beaches from Marin County down to Venice in LA. Mickey Hart, second drummer for the Grateful Dead, expanded the length and range of percussion in the band's “Drums” interludes, which tens of thousands heard through tape culture, and parking lot drum circle jams became a feature at Dead shows both among those who did and didn't have tickets to let them inside. When Mickey Hart brought Olatunji and his band to open for the Dead on New Year's Eve, 1985 in Oakland, the two post-sixties traditions merged again. Olatunji toured with the Dead and, by the early 1990s, the Remo corporation started mass manufacturing a variety of environmentally-conscious, recycled-material African hand drums for the US market. Drum circles became a focus of communal gatherings like the Rainbow Gathering, held every year since 1972. Presumably hand-drumming moved into activist circles through environmental channels first, traveling up and down the West Coast and crossing-over with a Chicano and Latino. It never really returned to mesh with the African-American and East Coast protest cultures until, maybe, now.

In the anthropologist David Graeber's book documenting the protests at the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in 2001, *Direct Action: An Ethnography*, the ethnographer-activist is briefly captivated by the mysterious appearance of drummers. “There was a sizeable band of drummers and other musicians a little bit up the slope, playing slow rhythmic music—actually, it was extremely good, with all sorts of intricate syncopation—and people dancing in hypnotic style. Occasionally someone would leave the human wall and join the dancing, or vice versa. Entranced, I fell away from the Bloc for a moment, promising I'd rendezvous later.”

The only contemporary ethnography I've seen where an anthropologist did participant observation within a drum circle comes from a Turkish researcher, Hande Turgut Okan, who came from the Graduate Institute of Social Sciences to Venice Beach in 2007. The first thing that strikes you is who the “informants,” when she interviews the circle, turn out to be:

My first informant was an African-American male. He was 71 years old. He was a retired Civil Engineer . . . He was married and had four daughters.

My second informant was a 38 years old white male. He was working as a machinist. . . . He was single but had an 18 year old daughter. He was living on a boat.

My third informant was 67 years old. He said his family had a blend of Polish, French, and German origins. He was a retired illustrator and a painter. . . . He used to design and create his musical instruments. His answer to my question about his inspiration of building his instruments was: 'I am inspired by poverty.'

My fourth informant was a 28 years old African-American male. He was working as a paralegal . . . but he was also a musician."

My fifth informant was a 24 years old male. His father was Moroccan and his mother was Spanish. He was still a student and wanted to transfer to UCLA to study Islamic Studies.

My sixth informant was originally German. He was 65 years old and had come to [the] USA 42 years ago.

In other words, in background and age and racial or ethnic categorization, just about anybody, and not conforming to a class grouping. But also, conspicuously, all male—only one of the depth-interview sample of twelve was female. This was from a female anthropologist, who was not selecting for men. Zuccotti Park, similarly, has often seemed to have a preponderance of male drummers.

Turgut Okan's informants sound a bit like OWS participants when she asks about leaders, rules, and motivations for gathering with anonymous strangers to drum at the beach.

Everybody is doing what they wanna do, but I would say any one leader? No, everybody is a potential leader and depending on how much they wanna step up, anybody can start a song.

I don't think there are any [rules]. I think it's a self-regulatory unit. Everybody [has] to walk their own path and their own journey, make their own mistakes. So . . . I would say that it's more 'free will regulatory.'

If you would have to have a party and you had to invite 200 people to your private paradise island, I mean who would you invite? Would you invite some people from the Venice Beach Drum Circle or would you invite CEOs and people who would find their power in money?

Drumming is a part of my soul. That's how I look at it. It's part of my soul and it's a way of expressing myself creatively. I used to write poetry, but I haven't written poetry in a while.

Those of us on the outside of Zuccotti Park were pretty amazed, and sort of stupefied, when it looked as if, in the week or ten days leading up to October 25, a rift between drummers and the other constituencies of OWS were going to scuttle the New York occupation. The drum circles were stretching to performances that ran all day long and into the night. Local residents, represented by a Community Board, were sympathetic to the encampment but wanted enforcement of only two hours of daylight drumming per day. This seemed reasonable to the General Assembly but not to drummers.

What made this so gruesome was partly that it seemed to reproduce a classic pairing within the dominant ideology. Domination loves to split mind and body, and this was being mapped onto assembly and circle: the drums became "ethnic," race-coded; the assembly, "white." The drums become male; the assembly, female. This didn't square with the racial and gendered realities of either group, but it grabbed hold of whatever reality it did seem to reflect. All of these polar division are things the Occupation seeks to disenchant. They're pushed so deeply into our minds by power, though, and are hard to root out. And whereas in the first two weeks of occupation, the drummers were at the center of a shared space used by the assembly and everyone, playing by the stairs on Broadway, at the east, once the occupation grew, the drums moved, by agreement, to the west end of the park. The single group became two. This also meant the steadily growing community of drummers no longer had to stop for the nightly general assembly. The GA began to notice that it was hard, on smaller-group nights, even to hear the human mic. Organizers talking in the park felt they couldn't hear themselves think. The circle of drummers started to feel that what they were doing wasn't ever recognized: couldn't anyone see that they were doing the movement, in effect; supporting it from the start, bringing in visitors and donations, but also doing it?

Yet the general assembly got through this, too—largely, apparently, by talking, and listening, and listening, and talking, and refusing to act on a partial authority, at any key point, rather than getting the consensus

of the whole. In a sense, the GA had already prepared themselves for being more like a drum circle, with the accidental innovation of the human mic or People's mic. Hearers do reply other people's particular cadences, in repeating them, on their own bodies. It doesn't seem accidental that the invocation that gets it going and recovers its rhythms—"Mic check! Mic check!"—irresistibly frames all discussion with a phrasing adopted from hip hop, the great American art form of our time that still feels like a secret from the authorities. (Or that Russell Simmons, Kanye West, and Talib Kweli were among the first high-profile visitors and supporters.)

And the drum circle, for their part, formed a working group, thus ruling themselves in to the peculiar way of talking (and meeting, and more meeting) of the general assembly and its developing spokes council structure. The choice of name for the working group was symbolically ingenious: PULSE, which not only speaks of the essential, but humble, guiding tempo around which a drum circle shifts and builds, but knits together the bodily metaphor, ending the mind/body split, in this measure of the vivacity of a person, something that races and slows with new thoughts and experiences, as well as with joy and fear.

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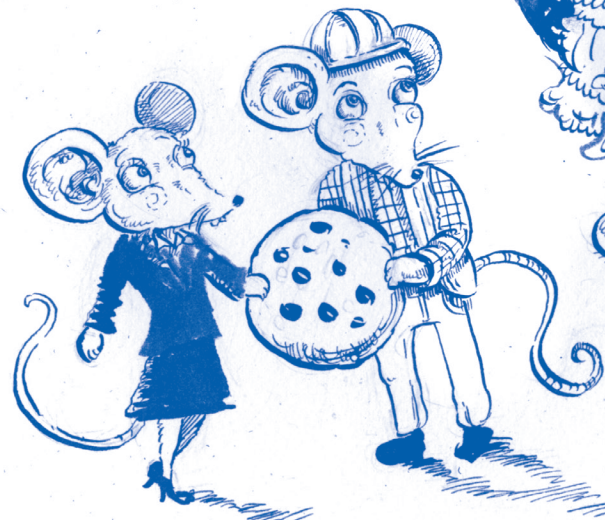
"I can hire one half of the working class to kill the other" - Jay Gould

BY MOLLY CRABAPPLE AND

JOHN LEAVITT



ARE YOU GOING TO LET THAT UNION GUY STEAL YOUR COOKIE?



WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

