

**#OCCUPY LOS ANGELES
READER
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le's Collective
-Education as a human right-
next class → 4pm
Racism &
Privilege
WELCOME TO

Class Schedule:
SUNDAY 16 October
11k-12p History of the Union - David
12p-1p Critical Theory - 90s to 2000s
1p-2p Copwatch history & Training
2p-3p Workers Rights & Education
3p-4p MOVEMENT
4p-6p Training in Nonviolence
6p-7p Historical Movement
8p-10p

Judith Butler
Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street

In the last months there have been, time and again, mass demonstrations on the street, in the square, and though these are very often motivated by different political purposes, something similar happens: bodies congregate, they move and speak together, and they lay claim to a certain space as public space. Now, it would be easier to say that these demonstrations or, indeed, these movements, are characterized by bodies that come together to make a claim in public space, but that formulation presumes that public space is given, that it is already public, and recognized as such. We miss something of the point of public demonstrations, if we fail to see that the very public character of the space is being disputed and even fought over when these crowds gather. So though these movements have depended on the prior existence of pavement, street, and square, and have often enough gathered in squares, like Tahrir, whose political history is potent, it is equally true that the collective actions collect the space itself, gather the pavement, and animate and organize the architecture. As much as we must insist on there being material conditions for public assembly and public speech, we have also to ask how it is that assembly and speech reconfigure the materiality of public space, and produce, or reproduce, the public character of that material environment. And when crowds move outside the square, to the side street or the back alley, to the neighborhoods where streets are not yet paved, then something more happens. At such a moment, politics is no longer defined as the exclusive business of public sphere distinct from a private one, but it crosses that line again and again, bringing attention to the way that politics is already in the home, or on the street, or in the neighborhood, or indeed in those virtual spaces that are unbound by the architecture of the public square. So when we think about what it means to assemble in a crowd, a growing crowd, and what it means to move through public space in a way that contests the distinction between public and private, we see some way that bodies in their plurality lay claim to the public, find and produce the public through seizing and reconfiguring the matter of material environments; at the same time, those material environments are part of the action, and they themselves act when they become the support for action. In the same way, when trucks or tanks suddenly become platforms for speakers, then the material environment is actively reconfigured and re-functioned, to use the Brechtian term. And our ideas of action then, need to be rethought. In the first instance, no one mobilizes a claim to move and assemble freely without moving and assembling together with others. In the second instance, the square and the street are not only the material supports for action, but they themselves are part of any theory of public and corporeal action that we might propose. Human action depends upon all sorts of supports – it is always supported action. But in the case of public assemblies, we see quite clearly not only that there is a struggle over what will be public space, but a struggle as well over those basic ways in which we are, as bodies, supported in the world – a struggle against disenfranchisement, effacement, and abandonment.

Of course, this produces a quandary. We cannot act without supports, and yet we must struggle for the supports that allow us to act. Of course, it was the Roman idea of the public square that formed the background for understanding the rights of assembly and free speech, to the deliberate forms of participatory democracy. Hannah Arendt surely had the Roman Republic in mind when she claimed that all political action requires the “space of appearance.” She writes, for instance, “the Polis, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be.” The “true” space then lies “between the people” which means that as much as any action takes place somewhere located, it also establishes a space which belongs properly to alliance itself. For Arendt, this alliance is not tied to its location. In fact, alliance brings about its own location, highly transposable. She writes: “action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost anywhere and anytime.” (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 198). So how do we understand this highly transposable conception of political space? Whereas Arendt maintains that politics requires the space of appearance, she also claims that space is precisely what politics brings about: “it is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men (sic) exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly.” Something of what she says here is clearly true. Space and location are created through plural action. And yet, her view suggests that action, in its freedom and its power, has the exclusive power to create location. And such a view forgets or refuses that action is always supported, and that it is invariably bodily, even in its virtual forms. The material supports for action are not only part of action, but they are also what is being fought about, especially in those cases when the political struggle is about food, employment, mobility, and access to institutions. To rethink the space of appearance in order to understand the power and effect of public demonstrations for our time, we will need to understand the bodily

dimensions of action, what the body requires, and what the body can do, especially when we must think about bodies together, what holds them there, their conditions of persistence and of power.

This evening I would like to think about this space of appearance and to ask what itinerary must we travel to move from the space of appearance to the contemporary politics of the street? Even as I say this, I cannot hope to gather together all the forms of demonstration we have seen, some of which are episodic, some of which are part of ongoing and recurrent social and political movements, and some of which are revolutionary. I hope to think about what might gather together these gatherings, these public demonstrations during the winter of 2011 against tyrannical regimes in North Africa and the Middle East, but also against the escalating precarization of working peoples in Europe and in the Southern hemisphere, the struggles for public education throughout the US and Europe, and those struggles to make the street safe for women, gender and sexual minorities, including trans people, whose public appearance is too often punishable by legal and illegal violence. Very often the claim that is being made is that the streets must be made safe from the police who are complicit in criminality, especially on those occasions when the police support criminal regimes, or when, for instance, the police commit the very crimes against sexual and gender minorities that they are supposed to stop. Demonstrations are one of the few ways that police power is overcome, especially when they become too large and too mobile to be contained by police power, and when they have the resources to regenerate themselves. Perhaps these are anarchist moments or anarchist passages, when the legitimacy of a regime is called into question, but when no new regime has yet come to take its place. This time of the interval is the time of the popular will, not a single will, not a unitary will, but one that is characterized by an alliance with the performative power to lay claim to the public in a way that is not yet codified into law, and that can never be fully codified into law. How do we understand this acting together that opens up time and space outside and against the temporality and established architecture of the regime, one that lays claim to materiality, leans into its supports, draws from its supports, in order to rework their functions? Such an action reconfigures what will be public, and what will be the space of politics.

Arendt's view is confounded by its own gender politics, relying as it does on a distinction between the public and private domain that leaves the sphere of politics to men, and reproductive labour to women. If there is a body in the public sphere, it is masculine and unsupported, presumptively free to create, but not itself created. And the body in the private sphere is female, ageing, foreign, or childish, and pre-political. Although she was, as we know from the important work of Adriana Cavarero, a philosopher of natality, Arendt understood this capacity to bring something into being as a function of political speech and action. Indeed, when male citizens enter into the public square to debate questions of justice, revenge, war, and emancipation, they take the illuminated public square for granted as the architecturally bounded theatre of their speech. Their speech becomes the paradigmatic form of action, physically cut off from the private domicile, itself shrouded in darkness and reproduced through activities that are not quite action in the proper and public senses. Men make the passage from that private darkness to that public light and, once illuminated, they speak, and their speech interrogates the principles of justice it articulates, becoming itself a form of critical inquiry and democratic participation. For Arendt, rethinking this scene within political modernity, their speech is understood as the bodily and linguistic exercise of rights. Bodily and linguistic – how are we to understand these terms and their intertwining here?

For politics to take place, the body must appear. I appear to others, and they appear to me, which means that some space between us allows each to appear. We are not simply visual phenomena for each other – our voices must be registered, and so we must be heard; rather, who we are, bodily, is already a way of being “for” the other, appearing in ways that we cannot see, being a body for another in a way that I cannot be for myself, and so dispossessed, perspectively, by our very sociality. I must appear to others in ways for which I cannot give an account, and in this way my body establishes a perspective that I cannot inhabit. This is an important point because it is not the case that the body only establishes my own perspective; it is also that which displaces that perspective, and makes that displacement into a necessity. This happens most clearly when we think about bodies that act together. No one body establishes the space of appearance, but this action, this performative exercise happens only “between” bodies, in a space that constitutes the gap between my own body and another's. In this way, my body does not act alone, when it acts politically. Indeed, the action emerged from the “between.”

For Arendt, the body is not primarily located in space, but with others, brings about a new space. And the space that is created is precisely between those who act together. The space of appearance is not for her only an architectural given: “the space of appearance comes into being” she writes, “wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organized.” (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 199) In other words, this space of appearance is not a location that can be separated from the plural action that brings it about. And yet, if we are to accept this view, we have to understand how the plurality that acts is itself constituted. How does a plurality form, and what material supports are necessary for that formation? Who enters this plurality, and who does not, and how are such matters decided? Can anyone and everyone act in such a way that this space is brought about? She makes clear that “this space does not always exist” and acknowledges that in the classical Polis, the slave, the foreigner, and the barbarian were excluded from such a space, which means that they could not become part of a plurality that brought this space into being. This means that part of the population did not appear, did not emerge into the space of appearance. And here we can see that the space of appearance was already divided, already apportioned, if the space of appearance was precisely that which was defined, in part, by their exclusion. This is no small problem since it means that one must already be in the space in order to bring the space of appearance into being – which means that a power operates prior to any performative power exercised by a plurality. Further, in her view, to be deprived of the space of appearance is to be deprived of reality. In other words, we must appear to others in ways that we ourselves cannot know, that we must become available to a perspective that established by a body that is not our own. And if we ask, where do we appear? Or where are we when we appear? It will be over there, between us, in a space that exists only because we are more than one, more than two, plural and embodied. The body, defined politically, is precisely organized by a perspective that is not one’s own and is, in that sense, already elsewhere, for another, and so in departure from oneself.

On this account of the body in political space, how do we make sense of those who can never be part of that concerted action, who remain outside the plurality that acts? How do we describe their action and their status as beings disaggregated from the plural; what political language do we have in reserve for describing that exclusion? Are they the de-animated “givens” of political life, mere life or bare life? Are we to say that those who are excluded are simply unreal, or that they have no being at all - the socially dead, the spectral? Do such formulations denote a state of having been made destitute by existing political arrangements, or is this the destitution that is revealed outside the political sphere itself? In other words, are the destitute outside of politics and power, or are they in fact living out a specific form of political destitution? How we answer that question seems important since if we claim that the destitute are outside of the sphere of politics – reduced to depoliticized forms of being – then we implicitly accept that the dominant ways of establishing the political are right. In some ways, this follows from the Arendtian position which adopts the internal point of view of the Greek Polis on what politics should be, who should gain entry into the public square and who should remain in the private sphere. Such a view disregards and devalues those forms of political agency that emerge precisely in those domains deemed pre-political or extra-political. So one reason we cannot let the political body that produces such exclusions furnish the conception of politics itself, setting the parameters for what counts as political - is that within the purview established by the Polis those outside its defining plurality are considered as unreal or unrealized and, hence, outside the political as such.

The impetus for Giorgio Agamben’s notion of “bare life” derives from this very conception of the polis in Arendt’s political philosophy and, I would suggest, runs the risk of this very problem: if we seek to take account of exclusion itself as a political problem, as part of politics itself, then it will not do to say that once excluded, those beings lack appearance or “reality” in political terms, that they have no social or political standing, or are cast out and reduced to mere being (forms of givenness precluded from the sphere of action). Nothing so metaphysically extravagant has to happen if we agree that one reason the sphere of the political cannot be defined by the classic conception of the Polis, is that we are then deprived of having and using a language for those forms of agency and resistance that focus on the politics of exclusion itself or, indeed, against those regimes of power that maintain the stateless and disenfranchised in conditions of destitution. Few matters could be more politically consequential.

Although Agamben borrows from Foucault to articulate a conception of the biopolitical, the thesis of “bare life” remains untouched by that conception. As a result, we cannot within that vocabulary describe the modes of agency and action undertaken by the stateless, the occupied, and the disenfranchised, since even the life stripped

of rights is still within the sphere of the political, and is thus not reduced to mere being, but is, more often than not, angered, indignant, rising up and resisting. To be outside established and legitimate political structures is still to be saturated in power relations, and this saturation is the point of departure for a theory of the political that includes dominant and subjugated forms, modes of inclusion and legitimation as well as modes of delegitimation and effacement.

Luckily, I think Arendt does not consistently follow this model from *The Human Condition*, which is why, for instance, in the early 1960s she turns her attention to the fate of refugees and the stateless, and comes to assert in that context the right to have rights. The right to have rights is one that depends on no existing particular political organization for its legitimacy. In her words, the right to have rights predates and precedes any political institution that might codify or seek to guarantee that right; at the same time, it is derived from no natural set of laws. The right comes into being when it is exercised, and exercised by those who act in concert, in alliance. Those who are excluded from existing polities, who belong to no nation-state or other contemporary state formation may be “unreal” only by those who seek to monopolize the terms of reality. And yet even after the public sphere has been defined through their exclusion, they act. Whether abandoned to precarity or left to die through systematic negligence, concerted action still emerges from such sites. And this is what we see, for instance, when undocumented workers amass on the street without the legal right to do so, when populations lay claim to a public square that has belonged to the military, or when the refugees take place in collective uprisings demanding shelter, food, and rights of mobility, when populations amass, without the protection of the law and without permits to demonstrate, to bring down an unjust or criminal regime of law or to protest austerity measures that destroy the possibility of employment and education for many.

Indeed, in the public demonstrations that often follow from acts of public mourning, especially in Syria in recent months where crowds of mourners become targets of military destruction, we can see how the existing public space is seized by those who have no existing right to gather there, and whose lives are exposed to violence and death in the course of gathering as they do. Indeed, it is their right to gather free of intimidation and threat of violence that is systematically attacked by the police or by the army or by mercenaries on hire by both the state and corporate powers. To attack the body is to attack the right itself, since the right is precisely what is exercised by the body on the street. Although the bodies on the street are vocalizing their opposition to the legitimacy of the state, they are also, by virtue of occupying that space, repeating that occupation of space, and persisting in that occupation of space, posing the challenge in corporeal terms, which means that when the body “speaks” politically, it is not only in vocal or written language. The persistence of the body calls that legitimacy into question, and does so precisely through a performativity of the body that crosses language without ever quite reducing to language. In other words, it is not that bodily action and gesture have to be translated into language, but that both action and gesture signify and speak, as action and claim, and that the one is not finally extricable from the other. Where the legitimacy of the state is brought into question precisely by that way of appearing in public, the body itself exercises a right that is no right; in other words, it exercises a right that is being actively contested and destroyed by military force, and which, in its resistance to force, articulates its persistence, and its right to persistence. This right is codified nowhere. It is not granted from elsewhere or by existing law, even if it sometimes finds support precisely there. It is, in fact, the right to have rights, not as natural law or metaphysical stipulation, but as the persistence of the body against those forces that seek to monopolize legitimacy. A persistence that requires the mobilization of space, and that cannot happen without a set of material supports mobilized and mobilizing.

Just to be clear: I am not referring to a vitalism or a right to life as such. Rather, I am suggesting that political claims are made by bodies as they appear and act, as they refuse and as they persist under conditions in which that fact alone is taken to be an act of delegitimation of the state. It is not that bodies are simply mute life-forces that counter existing modalities of power. Rather, they are themselves modalities of power, embodied interpretations, engaging in allied action. On the one hand, these bodies are productive and performative. On the other hand, they can only persist and act when they are supported, by environments, by nutrition, by work, by modes of sociality and belonging. And when these supports fall away, they are mobilized in another way, seizing upon the supports that exist in order to make a claim that there can be no embodied life without social and institutional support, without ongoing employment, without networks of interdependency and care. They struggle not only for the idea of social support and political enfranchisement, but their struggle takes on a social form of its own. And so, in the most ideal instances, an alliance enacts the social order it seeks to bring about, but when this happens,

and it does happen, we have to be mindful of two important caveats. The first is that the alliance is not reducible to individuals, and it is not individuals who act. The second is that action in alliance happens precisely between those who participate, and this is not an ideal or empty space – it is the space of support itself – of durable and liveable material environments and of interdependency among living beings. I will move toward this last idea toward the end of my remarks this evening. But let us return to the demonstrations, in their logic and in their instances.

It is not only that many of the massive demonstrations and modes of resistance we have seen in the last months produce a space of appearance, they also seize upon an already established space permeated by existing power, seeking to sever the relation between the public space, the public square, and the existing regime. So the limits of the political are exposed, and the link between the theatre of legitimacy and public space is severed; that theatre is no longer unproblematically housed in public space, since public space now occurs in the midst of another action, one that displaces the power that claims legitimacy precisely by taking over the field of its effects. Simply put, the bodies on the street redeploy the space of appearance in order to contest and negate the existing forms of political legitimacy – and just as they sometimes fill or take over public space, the material history of those structures also work on them, and become part of their very action, remaking a history in the midst of its most concrete and sedimented artifices. These are subjugated and empowered actors who seek to wrest legitimacy from an existing state apparatus that depends upon the public space of appearance for its theatrical self-constitution. In wresting that power, a new space is created, a new “between” of bodies, as it were, that lays claim to existing space through the action of a new alliance, and those bodies are seized and animated by those existing spaces in the very acts by which they reclaim and resignify their meanings.

For this contestation to work, there has to be a hegemonic struggle over what we are calling the space of appearance. Such a struggle intervenes in the spatial organization of power, which includes the allocation and restriction of spatial locations in which and by which any population may appear, which means that there is a spatial restriction on when and how the “popular will” may appear. This view of the spatial restriction and allocation of who may appear, in effect, who may become a subject of appearance, suggests an operation of power that works through both foreclosure and differential allocation. How is such an idea of power, and its corollary idea of politics, to be reconciled with the Arendtian proposition that politics requires not only entering into a space of appearance, but an active participation in the making of the space of appearance itself. And further, I would add, it requires a way of acting in the midst of being formed by that history and its material structures.

One can see the operation of a strong performative in Arendt’s work – in acting, we bring the space of politics into being, understood as the space of appearance. It is a divine performative allocated to the human form. But as a result, she cannot account for the ways in which the established architecture and topographies of power act upon us, and enter into our very action sometimes foreclosing our entry into the political sphere, or making us differentially apparent within that sphere. And yet, to work within these two forms of power, we have to think about bodies in ways that Arendt does not do, and we have to think about space as acting on us, even as we act within it, or even when sometimes our actions, considered as plural or collective, bring it into being.

If we consider what it is to appear, it follows that we appear to someone, and that our appearance has to be registered by the senses, not only our own, but someone else’s, or some larger group. For the Arendtian position, it follows that to act and speak politically we must “appear” to one another in some way, that is to say, that to appear is always to appear for another, which means that for the body to exist politically, it has to assume a social dimension – it is comported outside itself and toward others in ways that cannot and do not ratify individualism. Assuming that we are living and embodied organisms when we speak and act, the organism assumes social and political form in the space of appearance. This does not mean that we overcome or negate some biological status to assume a social one; on the contrary, the organic bodies that we are require a sustaining social world in order to persist. And this means that as biological creatures who seek to persist, we are necessarily dependent on social relations and institutions that address the basic needs for food, shelter, and protection from violence, to name a few. No monadic body simply persists on its own, but if it persists, it is in the context of a sustaining set of relations. So if we approach the question of the bio-political in this way, we can see that the space of appearance does not belong to a sphere of politics separate from a sphere of survival and of need. When the question of the survival not only of individuals, but whole populations, is at issue, then the political issue has to do with whether and how a social and political formation addresses the demand to provide for basic needs such as shelter, and

food, and protection against violence. And the question for a critical and contesting politics has to do with how basic goods are distributed, how life itself is allocated, and how the unequal distribution of the value and grievability of life is instituted by targeted warfare as well as systematic forms of exploitation or negligence, which render populations differentially precarious and disposable.

A quite problematic division of labor is at work in Arendt's position, which is why we must rethink her position for our times. If we appear, we must be seen, which means that our bodies must be viewed and their vocalized sounds must be heard: the body must enter the visual and audible field. But we have to ask why, if this is so, the body is itself divided into the one that appears publically to speak and act, and another, sexual and laboring, feminine, foreign and mute, that generally relegated to the private and pre-political sphere. That latter body operates as a precondition for appearance, and so becomes the structuring absence that governs and makes possible the public sphere. If we are living organisms who speak and act, then we are clearly related to a vast continuum or network of living beings; we not only live among them, but our persistence as living organisms depends on that matrix of sustaining interdependent relations. And yet, if our speaking and acting distinguishes us as something separate from that corporeal realm (raised earlier by the question of whether our capacity to think politically depends on one sort of physei or another), we have to ask how such a duality between action and body can be preserved if and when the "living" word and "actual" deed – both clearly political – so clearly presuppose the presence and action of a living human body, one whose life is bound up with other living processes. It may be that two senses of the body are at work for Arendt – one that appears in public, and another that is "sequestered" in private –, and that the public body is one that makes itself known as the figure of the speaking subject, one whose speech is also action. The private body never appears as such, since it is preoccupied with the repetitive labor of reproducing the material conditions of life. The private body thus conditions the public body, and even though they are the same body, the bifurcation is crucial to maintaining the public and private distinction. Perhaps this is a kind of fantasy that one dimension of bodily life can and must remain out of sight, and yet another, fully distinct, appears in public? But is there no trace of the biological that appears as such, and could we not argue, with Bruno Latour and Isabelle Stengers, that negotiating the sphere of appearance is a biological thing to do, since there is no way of navigating an environment or procuring food without appearing bodily in the world, and there is no escape from the vulnerability and mobility that appearing in the world implies? In other words, is appearance not a necessarily morphological moment where the body appears, and not only in order to speak and act, but also to suffer and to move, to engage others bodies, to negotiate an environment on which one depends? Indeed, the body can appear and signify in ways that contest the way it speaks, or even contest speaking as its paradigmatic instance. Indeed, could we still understand action, gesture, stillness, touch, and moving together, if they were all reducible to the vocalization of thought through speech?

Indeed, this act of public speaking, even within that problematic division of labour, depends upon a dimension of bodily life that is given, passive, opaque and so excluded from the realm of the political. Hence, we can ask, what regulation keeps the given body from spilling over into the active body? Are these two different bodies and what politics is required to keep them apart? Are these two different dimensions of the same body, or are these, in fact, the effect of a certain regulation of bodily appearance that is actively contested by new social movements, struggles against sexual violence, for reproductive freedom, against precarity, for the freedom of mobility? Here we can see that a certain topographical or even architectural regulation of the body happens at the level of theory. Significantly, it is precisely this operation of power – foreclosure and differential allocation of whether and how the body may appear – which is excluded from Arendt's explicit account of the political. Indeed, her explicit account of the political depends upon that very operation of power that it fails to consider as part of politics itself.

So what I accept is the following: Freedom does not come from me or from you; it can and does happen as a relation between us or, indeed, among us. So this is not a matter of finding the human dignity within each person, but rather of understanding the human as a relational and social being, one whose action depends upon equality and articulates the principle of equality. Indeed, there is no human on her view if there is no equality. No human can be human alone. And no human can be human without acting in concert with others and on conditions of equality. I would add the following: The claim of equality is not only spoken or written, but is made precisely when bodies appear together or, rather, when, through their action, they bring the space of appearance into being. This space is a feature and effect of action, and it only works, according to Arendt, when relations of equality are maintained.

Of course, there are many reasons to be suspicious of idealized moments, but there are also reasons to be wary of any analysis that is fully guarded against idealization. There are two aspects of the revolutionary demonstrations in Tahrir square that I would like to underscore. The first has to do with the way a certain sociability was established within the square, a division of labor that broke down gender difference, that involved rotating who would speak and who would clean the areas where people slept and ate, developing a work schedule for everyone to maintain the environment and to clean the toilets. In short, what some would call “horizontal relations” among the protestors formed easily and methodically, and quickly it seemed that relations of equality, which included an equal division of labour between the sexes, became part of the very resistance to Mubarek’s regime and its entrenched hierarchies, including the extraordinary differentials of wealth between the military and corporate sponsors of the regime, and the working people. So the social form of the resistance began to incorporate principles of equality that governed not only how and when people spoke and acted for the media and against the regime, but how people cared for their various quarters within the square, the beds on pavement, the makeshift medical stations and bathrooms, the places where people ate, and the places where people were exposed to violence from the outside. These actions were all political in the simple sense that they were breaking down a conventional distinction between public and private in order to establish relations of equality; in this sense, they were incorporating into the very social form of resistance the principles for which they were struggling on the street.

Secondly, when up against violent attack or extreme threats, many people chanted the word “silmiyya” which comes from the root verb (salima) which means to be safe and sound, unharmed, unimpaired, intact, safe, and secure; but also, to be unobjectionable, blameless, faultless; and yet also, to be certain, established, clearly proven^[1]. The term comes from the noun “silm” which means “peace” but also, interchangeably and significantly, “the religion of Islam.” One variant of the term is “Hubb as-silm” which is Arabic for “pacifism.” Most usually, the chanting of “Silmiyya” comes across as a gentle exhortation: “peaceful, peaceful.” Although the revolution was for the most part non-violent, it was not necessarily led by a principled opposition to violence. Rather, the collective chant was a way of encouraging people to resist the mimetic pull of military aggression – and the aggression of the gangs – by keeping in mind the larger goal – radical democratic change. To be swept into a violent exchange of the moment was to lose the patience needed to realize the revolution. What interests me here is the chant, the way in which language worked not to incite an action, but to restrain one. A restraint in the name of an emerging community of equals whose primary way of doing politics would not be violence.

Of course, Tahrir Square is a place, and we can locate it quite precisely on the map of Cairo. At the same time, we find questions posed throughout the media: will the Palestinians have their Tahrir square? Where is the Tahrir Square in India? To name but a few. So it is located, and it is transposable; indeed, it seemed to be transposable from the start, though never completely. And, of course, we cannot think the transposability of those bodies in the square without the media. In some ways, the media images from Tunisia prepared the way for the media events in Tahrir, and then those that followed in Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, and Libya, all of which took different trajectories, and take them still. As you know many of the public demonstrations of these last months have not been against military dictatorships or tyrannical regimes. They have also been against the monopoly capitalism, neo-liberalism, and the suppression of political rights, and in the name of those who are abandoned by neo-liberal reforms that seek to dismantle forms of social democracy and socialism, that eradicate jobs, expose populations to poverty, and undermine the basic right to a public education.

The street scenes become politically potent only when and if we have a visual and audible version of the scene communicated in live time, so that the media does not merely report the scene, but is part of the scene and the action; indeed, the media is the scene or the space in its extended and replicable visual and audible dimensions. One way of stating this is simply that the media extends the scene visually and audibly and participates in the delimitation and transposability of the scene. Put differently, the media constitutes the scene in a time and place that includes and exceeds its local instantiation. Although the scene is surely and emphatically local, and those who are elsewhere have the sense that they are getting some direct access through the images and sounds they receive. That is true, but they do not know how the editing takes place, which scene conveys and travels, and which scenes remain obdurately outside the frame.

When the scene does travel, it is both there and here, and if it were not spanning both locations – indeed, multiple locations – it would not be the scene that it is. Its locality is not denied by the fact that the scene is communicated beyond itself, and so constituted in a global media; it depends on that mediation to take place as the event that it is. This means that the local must be recast outside itself in order to be established as local, and this means that it is only through a certain globalizing media that the local can be established, and that something can really happen there. Of course, many things do happen outside the frame of the camera or other digital media devices, and the media can just as easily implement censorship as oppose it. There are many local events that are never recorded and broadcast, and some important reasons why. But when the event does travel and manages to summon and sustain global outrage and pressure, which includes the power to stop markets or to sever diplomatic relations, then the local will have to be established time and again in a circuitry that exceeds the local at every instant. And yet, there remains something localized that cannot and does not travel in that way; and the scene could not be the scene if we did not understand that some people are at risk, and the risk is run precisely by those bodies on the street. If they are transported in one way, they are surely left in place in another, holding the camera or the cell phone, face to face with those they oppose, unprotected, injurable, injured, persistent, if not insurgent. It matters that those bodies carry cell phones, relaying messages and images, and so when they are attacked, it is more often than not in some relation to the camera or the video recorder. It can be an effort to destroy the camera and its user, or it can be a spectacle of destruction for the camera, a media event produced as a warning or a threat. Or it can be a way to stop any more organizing. Is the action of the body separable from its technology, and how does the technology determine new forms of political action? And when censorship or violence are directed against those bodies, are they not also directed against its access to media, and in order to establish hegemonic control over which images travel, and which do not?

Of course, the dominant media is corporately owned, exercising its own kinds of censorship and incitement. And yet, it still seems important to affirm that the freedom of the media to broadcast from these sites is itself an exercise of freedom, and so a mode of exercising rights, especially when it is rogue media, from the street, evading the censor, where the activation of the instrument is part of the bodily action itself. So the media not only reports on social and political movements that are laying claim to freedom and justice in various ways; the media is also exercising one of those freedoms for which the social movement struggles. I do not mean by this claim to suggest that all media is involved in the struggle for political freedom and social justice (we know, of course, that it is not). Of course, it matters which global media does the reporting and how. My point is that sometimes private media devices become global precisely at the moment in which they overcome modes of censorship to report protests and, in that way, become part of the protest itself.

What bodies are doing on the street when they are demonstrating, is linked fundamentally to what communication devices and technologies are doing when they “report” on what is happening in the street. These are different actions, but they both require bodily actions. The one exercise of freedom is linked to the other exercise, which means that both are ways of exercising rights, and that jointly they bring a space of appearance into being and secure its transposability. Although some may wager that the exercise of rights now takes place quite at the expense of bodies on the street, that twitter and other virtual technologies have led to a disembodiment of the public sphere, I disagree. The media requires those bodies on the street to have an event, even as the street requires the media to exist in a global arena. But under conditions when those with cameras or internet capacities are imprisoned or tortured or deported, then the use of the technology effectively implicates the body. Not only must someone’s hand tap and send, but someone’s body is on the line if that tapping and sending gets traced. In other words, localization is hardly overcome through the use of a media that potentially transmits globally. And if this conjuncture of street and media constitutes a very contemporary version of the public sphere, then bodies on the line have to be thought as both there and here, now and then, transported and stationery, with very different political consequences following from those two modalities of space and time.

It matters that it is public squares that are filled to the brim, that people eat and sleep there, sing and refuse to cede that space, as we saw in Tahrir Square, and continue to see on a daily basis. It matters as well that it is public educational buildings that have been seized in Athens, London, and Berkeley.

At Berkeley, buildings were seized, and trespassing fines were handed out. In some cases, students were accused of destroying private property. But these very allegations raised the question of whether the university is public or private. The stated aim of the protest – to seize the building and to sequester themselves there – was a way to gain a platform, indeed, a way to secure the material conditions for appearing in public. Such actions generally do not take place when effective platforms are already available. The students there, but also at Goldsmiths College in the UK more recently were seizing buildings as a way to lay claim to buildings that ought properly, now and in the future, to belong to public education. That doesn't mean that every time these buildings are seized it is justifiable, but let us be alert to what is at stake here: the symbolic meaning of seizing these buildings is that these buildings belong to the public, to public education; it is precisely the access to public education which is being undermined by fee and tuition hikes and budget cuts; we should not be surprised that the protest took the form of seizing the buildings, performatively laying claim to public education, insisting on gaining literal access to the buildings of public education precisely at a moment, historically, when that access is being shut down. In other words, no positive law justifies these actions that oppose the institutionalization of unjust or exclusionary forms of power. So can we say that these actions are nevertheless an exercise of a right and, if so, what kind?

Modes of Alliance and the Police Function

Let me offer you an anecdote to make my point more concrete. Last year, I was asked to visit Turkey on the occasion of the International Conference against Homophobia and Transphobia. This was an especially important event in Ankara, the capital of Turkey, where transgendered people are often served fines for appearing in public, are often beaten, sometimes by the police, and where murders of transgendered women in particular happen nearly once a month in recent years. If I offer you this example of Turkey, it is not to point out that Turkey is “behind” – something that the embassy representative from Denmark was quick to point out to me, and which I refused with equal speed. I assure you that there are equally brutal murders outside of Los Angeles and Detroit, in Wyoming and Louisiana, or even New York. It is rather because what is astonishing about the alliances there is that several feminist organizations have worked with queer, gay/lesbian and transgendered people against police violence, but also against militarism, against nationalism, and against the forms of masculinity by which they are supported. So on the street, after the conference, the feminist lined up with the drag queens, the genderqueer with the human rights activists, and the lipstick lesbians with their bisexual and heterosexual friends – the march included secularists and muslims. They chanted, “we will not be soldiers, and we will not kill.” To oppose the police violence against trans people is thus to be openly against military violence and the nationalist escalation of militarism; it is also to be against the military aggression against the Kurds, but also, to act in the memory of the Armenian genocide and against the various ways that violence is disavowed by the state and the media.

This alliance was compelling for me for all kinds of reasons, but mainly because in most Northern European countries, there are now serious divisions among feminists, queers, lesbian and gay human rights workers, anti-racist movements, freedom of religion movements, and anti-poverty and anti-war mobilizations. In Lyon, France last year, one of the established feminists had written a book on the “illusion” of transsexuality, and her public lectures had been “zapped” by many trans activists and their queer allies. She defended herself by saying that to call transsexuality psychotic was not the same as pathologizing transsexuality. It is, she said, a descriptive term, and makes no judgment or prescription. Under what conditions can calling a population “psychotic” for the particular embodied life they live not be pathologizing? This feminist called herself a materialist, a radical, but she pitted herself against the transgendered community in order to maintain certain norms of masculinity and femininity as pre-requisites to a non-psychotic life. These are arguments that would be swiftly countered in Istanbul or Johannesburg, and yet, these same feminists seek recourse to a form of universalism that would make France, and their version of French feminism, into the beacon of progressive thought.

Not all French feminists who call themselves universalists would oppose the public rights of transgendered people, or contribute to their pathologization. And yet, if the streets are open to transgendered people, they are not open to those who wear signs of their religious belonging openly. Hence, we are left to fathom the many universalist French feminists who call upon the police to arrest, detain, fine, and sometimes deport

women wearing the Niqab or the Burka in the public sphere in France. What sort of politics is this that recruits the police function of the state to monitor and restrict women from religious minorities in the public sphere? Why would the same universalists (Elisabeth Badinter) openly affirm the rights of transgendered people to freely appear in public while restricting that very right to women who happen to wear religious clothing that offends the sensibilities of die-hard secularists? If the right to appear is to be honored “universally” it would not be able to survive such an obvious and insupportable contradiction.[2]

To walk on the street without police interference is something other than assembling there en masse. And yet, when a transgendered person walks there, the right that is exercised in a bodily form does not only belong to that one person. There is a group, if not an alliance, walking there, too, whether or not they are seen. Perhaps we can call “performative” both this exercise of gender and the embodied political claim to equal treatment, to be protected from violence, and to be able to move with and within this social category in public space. To walk is to say that this is a public space in which transgendered people walk, that this is a public space where people with various forms of clothing, no matter how they are gendered or what religion they signify, are free to move without threat of violence. But this performativity applies more broadly to the conditions by which any of us emerge as bodily creatures in the world.

How, finally, do we understand this body? Is it a distinctively human body, a gendered body, and is it finally possible to distinguish between that domain of the body that is given and that which is made? If we invest in humans the power to make the body into a political signifier, then do we assume that in becoming political, the body distinguishes itself from its own animality and the sphere of animals? In other words, how do we think this idea of the exercise of freedom and rights within the space of appearance that takes us beyond anthropocentrism? Here again, I think the conception of the living body is key. After all, the life that is worth preserving, even when considered exclusively human, is connected to non-human life in essential ways; this follows from the idea of the human animal. Thus, if we are thinking well, and our thinking commits us to the preservation of life in some form, then the life to be preserved takes a bodily form. In turn, this means that the life of the body – its hunger, its need for shelter and protection from violence – would all become major issues of politics. Even the most given or non-chosen features of our lives are not simply given; they are given in history and in language, in vectors of power that none of us chose. Equally true is that a given property of the body or a set of defining characteristics depend upon the continuing persistence of the body. Those social categories we never chose traverse this body that is given in some ways rather than in others, and gender, for instance, names that traversal as well as the trajectory of its transformations. In this sense, those most urgent and non-volitional dimensions of our lives, which include hunger and the need for shelter, medical care, and protection from violence, natural or humanly imposed, are crucial to politics. We cannot presume the enclosed and well-fed space of the Polis where all the material needs are somehow being taken care of elsewhere by beings whose gender, race, or status render them ineligible for public recognition. Rather, we have to not only bring the material urgencies of the body into the square, but make those needs central to the demands of politics.

In my view, a different social ontology would have to start from the presumption that there is a shared condition of precarity that situates our political lives. And some of us, as Ruthie Gilmore has made very clear, are disproportionately disposed to injury and early death than others, and racial difference can be tracked precisely through looking at statistics on infant mortality; this means, in brief, that precarity is unequally distributed and that lives are not considered equally grievable or equally valuable. If, as Adriana Cavarero has argued, the exposure of our bodies in public space constitutes us fundamentally, and establishes our thinking as social and embodied, vulnerable and passionate, then our thinking gets nowhere without the presupposition of that very corporeal interdependency and entwinement. The body is constituted through perspectives it cannot inhabit; someone else sees our face in a way that none of us can. We are in this way, even as located, always elsewhere, constituted in a sociality that exceeds us. This establishes our exposure and our precarity, the ways in which we depend on political and social institutions to persist.

After all, in Cairo, it was not just that people amassed in the square: they were there; they slept there; they dispensed medicine and food, they assembled and sang, and they spoke. Can we distinguish those vocalizations from the body from those other expressions of material need and urgency? They were, after all, sleeping and eating in the public square, constructing toilets and various systems for sharing the space, and so not only refusing to be privatized – refusing to go or stay home – and not only claiming the public domain for themselves- acting

in concert on conditions of equality – but also maintaining themselves as persisting bodies with needs, desires, and requirements. Arendtian and counter-Arendtian, to be sure. Since these bodies who were organizing their most basic needs in public were also petitioning the world to register what was happening there, to make its support known, and in that way to enter into revolutionary action itself. The bodies acted in concert, but they also slept in public, and in both these modalities, they were both vulnerable and demanding, giving political and spatial organization to elementary bodily needs. In this way, they formed themselves into images to be projected to all of who watched, petitioning us to receive and respond, and so to enlist media coverage that would refuse to let the event be covered over or to slip away. Sleeping on that pavement was not only a way to lay claim to the public, to contest the legitimacy of the state, but also quite clearly, a way to put the body on the line in its insistence, obduracy and precarity, overcoming the distinction between public and private for the time of revolution. In other words, it was only when those needs that are supposed to remain private came out into the day and night of the square, formed into image and discourse for the media, did it finally become possible to extend the space and time of the event with such tenacity to bring the regime down. After all, the cameras never stopped, bodies were there and here, they never stopped speaking, not even in sleep, and so could not be silenced, sequestered or denied – revolution happened because everyone refused to go home, cleaving to the pavement, acting in concert.

Lecture held in Venice, 7 September 2011, in the framework of the series The State of Things, organized by the Office for Contemporary Art Norway (OCA)

[1] from Hans Wehr's Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic.

[2] Perhaps there are modalities of violence that we need to think about in order to understand the police functions in operation here. After all, those who insist that gender must always appear in one way or in one clothed version rather than another, who seek either to criminalize or to pathologize those who live their gender or their sexuality in non-normative ways, are themselves acting as the police for the sphere of appearance whether or not they belong to any police force. As we know, it is sometimes the police force of the state that does violence to sexual and gendered minorities, and sometimes it is the police who fail to investigate, fail to prosecute as criminal the murder of transgendered women, or fail to prevent violence against transgendered members of the population. If gender or sexual minorities are criminalized or pathologized for how they appear, how they lay claim to public space, the language through which they understand themselves, the means by which they express love or desire, those with whom they openly ally, choose to be near, engage sexually, or how they exercise their bodily freedom, what clothes they wear or fail to wear, then those acts of criminalization are themselves violent; and in that sense, they are also unjust and criminal. In Arendtian terms, we can say that to be precluded from the space of appearance, to be precluded from being part of the plurality that brings the space of appearance into being, is to be deprived of the right to have rights. Plural and public action is the exercise of the right to place and belonging, and this exercise is the means by which the space of appearance is presupposed and brought into being.

Let me return to the notion of gender with which I began, both to draw upon Arendt and to resist Arendt. In my view, gender is an exercise of freedom, which is not to say that everything that constitutes gender is freely chosen, but only that even what is considered unfree can and must be claimed and exercised in some way. I have, with this formulation, taken a certain distance from the Arendtian formulation. This exercise of freedom must be accorded the same equal treatment as any other exercise of freedom under the law. And politically, we must call for the expansion of our conceptions of equality to include this form of embodied freedom. So what do we mean when we say that sexuality or gender is an exercise of freedom? To repeat: I do not mean to say that all of us choose our gender or our sexuality. We are surely formed by language and culture, by history, by the social struggles in which we participate, by forces both psychological and historical – in interaction, by the way with biological situations that have their own history and efficacy. Indeed, we may well feel that what and how we desire are quite fixed, indelible or irreversible features of who we are. But regardless of whether we understand our gender or our sexuality as chosen or given, we each have a right to claim that gender and to claim that sexuality. And it makes a difference whether we can claim them at all. When we exercise the right to appear as the gender we already are – even when we feel we have no other choice – we are still exercising a certain freedom, but we are also doing something more. When one freely exercises the right to be who one already is, and one asserts a social category for the purposes of describing that mode of being, then one is, in fact, making freedom part of that very social category, discursively changing the very ontology in question. It is not possible to separate the genders that we claim to be and the sexualities that we engage from the right that any of us has to assert those realities in public or in private, or in the many thresholds that exist between the two, freely, that is, without threat of violence. When, long ago, one said that gender is performative, that meant that it is a certain kind of enactment, which means that one is not first one's gender and then one decides how and when to enact it. The enactment is part of its very ontology, is a way of rethinking the ontological mode of gender, and so it matters how and when and with what consequences that enactment takes place, because all that changes the very gender that one "is."

Regarding the Fourth Night of Occupy LA and General Viewpoints

Alberto Moreno

Wednesday, October 5, 2011, 4:34am

While up to this point, no list of specific demands and goals has been made by the Occupy LA protesters, it is clear that what drove us as a people to this movement is the belief that together, we can come up with solutions of achieving social justice. While it may be true that the majority of those suffering social inequalities, due to avarice and lack of compassion, may not be able to articulate the causes and exactly pinpoint the root(s) of their injustice (mainstream media is focusing on this to discredit the legitimacy of the movements), It does not mean that we as a people, should keep accepting the social ills that are depriving us of our inalienable rights. We have to understand why we are where we are. This can only be accomplished via dialogue and the sharing of distinct cultural and personal narratives. No matter how small or large, the narratives must interact and see the light of day among all the people involved in a given protest or act(s) of civil disobedience, if not the movement will stagnate and lose its moral validity as a progressive social movement.

Keeping this in mind, I want to address the events that unfolded regarding the “End Police Brutality” committee. A lot of people seemed antagonistic towards this idea from its very beginning. They seemed to be caught up with the semantics and word choice of the committee’s name, claiming that in Occupy LA, there has been no police brutality. To a certain extent, albeit a short extent, I agree. Perhaps the Committee should name itself “Police Brutality Awareness.” Let me be clear though, police brutality does not necessarily have to come in the form physical violence. Far more effective, are the Machiavellian tactics of psychological violence, the LAPD has a long history of this with minority groups. Most white people, not all, are completely alien to this reality, simply because they don’t live in barrios, in the hood or the projects. More importantly, these people either ignore or forget the fact that when it comes to economic and social inequality, the minority are the majority. They have to listen to the narratives of these people that have seen what the LAPD is capable of. Some people of the General Assembly have this notion that the LAPD are on our side because they have not intervened. Well, maybe the police are not doing anything, because up to this point, Occupy LA has done nothing. The general assembly must include and listen, truly listen to the narratives of those that have always gotten the short end of the straw, if not, all is lost.

And to those skeptical of the power of psychological warfare, just look at what an 8 by 12 sheet of paper with the pictures of those involved in the “End Police Brutality” committee managed to do. Be not mistaken, this is the heart of the Empire, the strategies to halt and impede protests that oppose the interests of the government are far more sophisticated in America than anywhere else in the world. Furthermore, these strategies are facilitated due to the complacent nature of most Americans. Perhaps the artist Banksy had it right when he labeled America the Mild Mild West. Perhaps we are bringing a knife to a gunfight. What would an Egyptian protester say if (s)he came and saw what was going in Occupy LA?

**The Mighty Big and Hilarious List of Possible Names of the Group Temporarily Known as ARTBLOC
Sorted in Alphabetical Order**

October 8, 2011

(A Clockwork RAY)

(the birthers)

@#\$%

99 plateaus

99 Red Balloons

A Clockwork Orange County

A Clockwork Red And Yellow

A Million Plateaus

AAAAAA = art and aesthetics activist affinity association

ActivoLA

AD HOC

Amatuers

art bloc LA

ART WORKERS WON'T KISS ASS

ATM

AvanzarLA

AWA (Artists with Attitude)

Azintuzi

Bad vibes

bees

Black Plague

Black, Orange, Silver and Yellow

Blank Canvas

Bloom

Borderless

Brainstorm

Branches

Broccoli

Buddy Council

CALIFORNIA POPPY ORANGE!

Capital

CBAE = creative beings affinity ensemble

CBU = creative beings united

CBUF = creative beings united front

CCCP

CF = creative front

change monthly/weekly to the title of the billboard top 100 song, this week/month we'd be SOMEONE LIKE YOU...

change our title monthly to the title of the highest selling work of art at sotheby's: this month we would be MYTH

Chaparral

Citizen Stain

CKYLA (Camp Kill Yourself Los Angeles)

Coconut palms

Collective Guilt

Days of Whine and Roses
Dead Getties (after rob's DK reference last night)
Designer Handbags
Dilitantes
DOG
Down in the Basement
Drawing Board
e platinum bookum (cousin of e pluribus unum)
EarthBloc
Emergent Coalition
Emergent Collective
F.O.E. - Foundation for Orgasmic Exuberance
FART = furry artists and retired teachers (sorry, honeycrawf, i tried!)
FDIC
Flow
for "Money Stinks"
Free the Rich
Full Metal Junket
Fuse
generally assembling
Glass
Gold bars ain't gonna cut it
Gralizago
Guilt Collective
Gulp Diction
Gutter Heroes
Ha Ha Ha
horizon
Hot Mess
I also love the idea of making up a name to which meaning can be assigned - or not. Come on - join in... it's fun!
I Can See Gold From My Porch
I See You, Stranger
Infinite Energy Council
Interrobang
Jews and Pals
Jobs
KAPOW!
Kind Woman Walking
Kiss My Art
kiss My Bliss
LA
Lamestream Media
Libertarian Assholes
Lick My Dollar
Lonely Hearts Artist Club
Loose Cannons
Los Angeles Mime Troupe
Lost in Frustration
MAAMA
MART
meeting occasionally

Minestrone

MOCA

MoveLA or MoverLA

MovimentoLA

Mutual Aid

No Name

No Socialism - Hands Off My Unemployment Benefits!

NoBanza (Resettle the West - turn Bonanza on its head)

NRA (Nerdy retarded* artists)

Occupy Action

Occupy Colors

Occupy LA ArtBloc

occupyART

OHLA

one letter instead of a combination, like: O, L, or T

Oregano

Origin(art) or Origin(art) LA

P.A.R.T.Y. = Performers and Artists Ready To Yell!

Palindrones

Palm Fronds

Parachute

parallel worlds

Paypal

People for Change

plankton

Presencia or PresenciaLA

Psylent pspring

psylent psychos

public address

puss Gold bars ain't gonna cut it

put all the proposed names in alphabetical order and make that the name. every time the name needs to be mentioned
pick a random one from the list of proposals

Ratatat

rats and roaches

ReDraft

ReDraw

Sage Scrub

Sarah Palin

Seamless

Season of Discontent

Secret Group

Shadow Puppets

Show Me The GoldBars

Shwing = So Hot When I'm Not Greedy, Super Hedonistic Wallstreet Infiltrators Needta Go

Sleep Deprived

Spark

Spellers

Stank Studio

Steve Jobs

Stinky Money Money Poo Money Dey Smell --- Nigerian pidgin English

Style Council

Subject to Change
Surplus puss
Tagless
Talking Mimes
TBA = temporary band of artists, tasty buns and art
TBD
The cultural report on the no-income hypothesis Capital Surplus
The Cunning Linguists
The Flounders
The Future
the Getty
the group formerly known as art bloc tbd
The Jackals
The no thanks
The Occupandas
The Occupyartistssssssssssssssssssssssss
The Occupysh
the option not to have a name
the perpendicular world
The Right Wing
The Right Wingnut
The Stink Stink Stinky
The worders
The Working Name
The Yum Yum Coalition
There Will Be Crud
There Will Be Crud Kind Woman Walking
There's (no) Gold in California
THEY
To Be Confused
To Be Considered
to be continued
To be Determined
Trade Runner
Trans Local collective (TLC)
transit
trojan pony
Ungracious Basterds
UNS
UNTITLED
US Postal Service
USSR
WHEEL
White Plague
Who's Down?
WIFE
WTFDTM (What The Fuck Does This Mean)
XXXXXXX
yes capitalism is the problem and we are artists
YumLA

Vote here! <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/DCTG7GB>

Reflections on Occupy LA, Wall St. and Bel Air

Paulina Gonzalez

Sunday, October 9, 2011, 10:52pm

I pushed my way to the center of the circle; at 5'1 this was the only chance I would have to see and hear and to be seen and be heard. I took a deep breath added my name to the stack and waited for my turn to speak among this group of mostly men. The group had formed from the Occupy LA General Assembly, it consisted of people who had blocked a proposal to endorse a civil disobedience action by dozens of hotel workers. These workers had planned a protest with their union because they had been fired by a hotel in Bel Air. This small group now held this proposal in the palm of their hands. The group also consisted of anybody else from the General Assembly who wished to join in on the discussion.

The people they were talking about are hotel workers, most of them immigrants and women, they are veterans of the fight against corporate power. I know this because my father, who was fired from his union job as a hotel dishwasher a couple of years ago, is also one of these veterans. The fight of these veterans of struggle is a fight for dignity and respect, but also a fight for their livelihoods, and in this fight they stand toe to toe, immigrant workers against corporations. While waiting my turn to speak, I thought of these workers, the housekeepers with their aching backs from lifting heavy beds. I thought of the dishwashers with their aching knees and fungus in their nails from working in water all day. I thought of the women hotel workers who go home to their children with worn bodies from catering to the 1%. As I stood among this group of men, I wondered quietly to myself what these workers would think of this conversation.

At times the conversation turned into a shouting match, the loudest person often won control of the floor. The men in the circle demanded to know why these workers hadn't joined Occupy LA. "Where is their union!?!?!?", they asked. "When is their union going to bring 35,000 people down HERE!?!?!?", they shouted. I felt my anger and frustration boiling and at times I shouted too, but as impatient as I was growing I decided against battling the maleness of the group on their terms. So as others yelled louder than me, I again waited. It was getting late, and behind us 200 people were still taking part in the General Assembly discussing other proposals that had been brought to the group. In between us and them another small group had broken off from our discussion and formed around a young man who carried a sign denouncing non violent tactics. I turned my attention back to the group and listened as a man around my age spoke, he told us that he is a union member and that he was here despite the fact that he had a young daughter waiting for him at home. I felt a connection to him, after all, I'm a single mother and I have two children at home.

When it was my turn to speak I stepped right into the center of the circle and I spoke from where my spirit comes. "I speak to you today as the daughter of a hotel dishwasher, who walked the picket line with her father in his fight for dignity and respect on the job, for his right to be treated as a human instead of a dog." What would my father think about this discussion? Although he can understand some English and could hear and understand the comments being made about people like him, he would need to ask for a translator to be understood by everybody else. I imagine that he would leave frustrated and angry.

Last night, my point to that group was this: What would it mean to this movement of the 99% if women housekeepers were to march up here to join us? How powerful would that be? But the question is not why are they not here, the question is what would it require to make this space more diverse and broad? What would it require from us? What would it mean if we joined them that day, in bel air the heart of the 1% , and marched with them in their struggle against corporate America. What would it mean if we made it clear to them that this is also their space and that we are fighting for them, because they are the 99%. There is a reason why they are not here and it has nothing to do with whether or not they believe in the fight. As I spoke, dozens of hands waved their fingers in the air signaling

agreement. I stopped speaking after I felt that I had taken up too much space. Two minutes later what I had said was forgotten among the discussions about process and another rant from the man who blocked the proposal. A short while later I left because after 8 hours of Occupy LA I had to get home and help my daughter with her essay that was due Monday morning. The man with the daughter, whom I had felt the connection with earlier, he was gone too.

As I went home after this experience, and as I thought about the potential that this movement holds, I realized that it is not held by me or anybody else occupying city hall, or Wall St., or any other city around the country. It is held by the 99%, and the 99% is much bigger than all the aforementioned people. The 99% includes the hotel housekeeper, it includes my father, it includes my neighbor in working class Montebello, it includes working class white Americans who may not yet believe in protest but do believe that they should be heard much more than any corporation, it includes my son's 2nd grade teacher, it includes my 17 year old daughter who hopes to go to college, it includes the people I work with on a daily basis who struggle to put food on their table and whose community was in an economic crisis long before the rest of America. The movement of the 99% also includes all the struggles that my father, that hotel housekeeper, the resident of South Central LA are embroiled in. This movement is not contained by Wall St, or Main St., or City Hall, or Portland, or Las Vegas, or any other physical space. If we try to contain it, we will kill it. We must grow it, we must link arms, we must lift all these struggles up, we must come up with new ideas and new forms of resistance and organize for them. If we do, we will take this momentum, this moment, this movement and we will win.

Heriberto Yopez
ON 'HYBRID'

An entry for Cross Cultural Poetics' "Dictionary"

HYBRID.

Postmodernism's key notion, maybe the notion that sustains most postmodernism's quackery. Through the illusion of hybridism contradiction is obscured, turned commodity. Not able to recognize and accept the other in its complete otherness, we turn it into hybrid, i.e., half me, similar to Us. (Not Other). Not Either/Or but always proper. Property.

Not completely stranger. 'Mixed'. In denial of otherness we constructed 'hybrid'. We have naturalized the 'hybrid' category so much, that the mere mention of this category as purely cultural, artificial, contextualized (in imperialistic epistemology) seems a 'menace', an evil return to 'Nationalism' or 'Pure'. Using the 'hybrid' category we have remained Hegelian. We arrive to syntheses. (Isn't that wonderful, daddy?)

We prevent radical dialectics to take place. 'Hybrid' has taken control of cultural industries, such as music where fusion has become institutionalized. Such happens also in the arts and writing communities, where being 'hybrid' is the key to enter. And become "trend".

In the same way, 'activism' is replacing 'revolution', 'hybrid' replaced 'contradiction'— and denies the real relationship between One and the Other. Otherness.

Hybrid is sameness. Hybrid tends to become Happy Hybrid. That's why the hybrid category plays so well in 'postmodern' discourse. A capitalistic notion to kill rupture. No negation anymore! Let settle down with hybridism, ok? Don't even talk about resistance.

But resistance is what really takes place where hybridism is now used.

Resistance doesn't mean borders or 'essences' are not transgressed. To the contrary. It means participants enter into a strong relationship. A magnetic field where attraction and repulsion both take place. Resistance is all about magnetism.

And the hybrid category is all about denying resistance.

Traité du Savoir-Vivre for the Occupy Wall Street Generations

Al Giordano

October 8, 2011, 10:22 pm

Once upon a time, twenty thousand people descended on Wall Street, the capitol of capital, occupied it nonviolently, and won exactly what they demanded.

This is not a fairy tale. It really happened.

This is the story of how it happened. And it is also the story of one of those 20,000 occupiers and how immersing himself in those events at a young age changed the direction of his life. These words are dedicated and addressed to people not so unlike him: any and every individual who is currently occupying Wall Street, or anywhere else, or anyone else who is thinking about doing so.

The truth is that there are two “occupations” going on simultaneously; that which the media is reporting, often badly, which is now a societal spectacle, and the more private and personal occupation by every individual involved. The spectacular protest may not know, or be able to coherently articulate, its own demand or demands as anything other than a shopping list of disembodied causes and issues. But that should not stop any individual involved in it to get to know, embrace and advance upon his and her own more personal demands that brought him and her to occupy Wall Street in the first place.

Wall Street, ahem, isn't just in your wallet: It's in everything you own, rent, use, borrow, find or steal. It's also in the “identities” and roles we put on and take off in each department of our daily lives. And one should never worry as much about the police on the street – there are time-honored tactics for working around them, developed by pioneers in nonviolence, available to every person who wants to learn them – as much as one should be very concerned about the cop in one's head. There are also tactics available to make that police force – the invading army in our innermost thoughts and fears that polices our very behavior, officers of the psyche that we all have, through unspoken fears, invited into our brains and hearts – retreat and even disappear.

About the Wall Street within each of us and the quest to free ourselves from it: In the years leading up to the general strike that shook Paris and much of France in 1968, the Situationist Raoul Vaneigem published *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations* (Treatise on Living for the Younger Generations), which when translated to English was titled *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. It was written for a generation that had been schooled in the Hegelian dialectics of Marxist writings, and plays considerably with that writing style in ways that don't always make it easy for generations that grew up with cable television and the Internet to read. Vaneigem and others in the Situationist International developed strategies and tactics to take back the terrain and pleasures of daily life while simultaneously destroying the illusion created by “the spectacle” (what might, in Twitterspeak, be called “the media,” today) that propped up a destructive economic system.

If we were to try to put some of the key concepts into Twitterspeak (that is, into phrases of 144 characters or less), we might say:

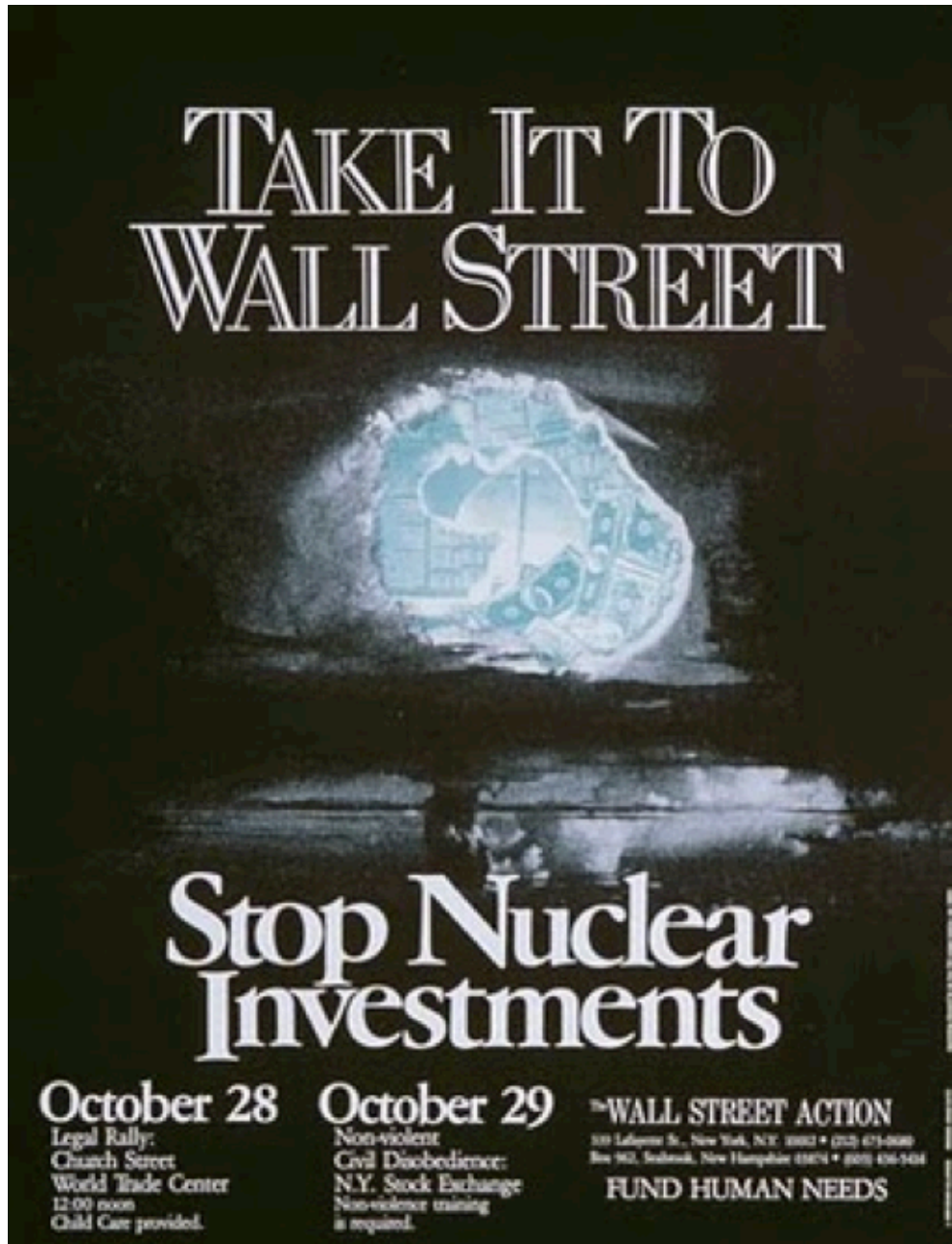
Occupy your daily life. Occupy your body. Occupy your home. Occupy your building. Occupy your neighborhood. Occupy YOUR STREET. Occupy your own head! Occupy your own media. Occupy your own school. Occupy your own workplace. Occupy your own time. Occupy your own space. Occupy your own life story! Yes, it requires collaboration with others to win those terrains back. But they're not the people already protesting. They're the authentic 99 percent. The ones right next to you already.

Or maybe they're not right next to you. In a world where the advertising industry shouts that “everybody is connected,” that's really to distract from the alienation imposed by an over-mediated technological society. Maybe your family, your relationship, your classroom, your workplace, your home, your building, your neighbors are so caught up in dysfunction and the food chain of domination of one person over another that everything within you screams for an EXIT sign and that you must go out and find that place where you can see a path to begin to drive Wall Street out of your body, the cop out of your head, and the imposed loneliness of residing in a technological

“paradise” out of your aching heart. Maybe, just maybe, that’s what brings you to occupy Wall Street. Let me tell you about the kid who once did occupy Wall Street. Some of my friends know him. And, no, his name is not Steve Jobs.

The Wall Street Occupation that Won

The Wall Street occupation that won happened on October 28 and 29 of 1979, and in case you don’t believe it, here is the poster that called them there:



This poster was made before there was such a thing called Photoshop. You can see that the letters are uneven. They were pasted onto a 23 x 17 inch layout board with hot wax. There were only two colors, black and green, on the white poster paper, in order to save on costs. There were no color photocopiers then. It had to be produced at a print shop. The event had no Facebook page and no Twitter account. How did they get 20,000 occupiers to Wall Street, then? To spread the call, community organizers visited each other, made telephone calls from landlines, put stamps on envelopes, and passed the poster and other materials printed on paper from hand to hand.

Community organizing? What was that? “It was kind of like social networking, except there was no Internet,” notes Renny Cushing, organizer and theorist of the 1979 Take It to Wall Street occupation. “You went to people’s homes, sat around their kitchen tables. You listened to their concerns and ideas. You were able to correct bad information they had gotten from the media.”

Cushing had done this organizing in his hometown of Seabrook, New Hampshire, where construction began on a twin nuclear power plant in 1976. He and the other organizers in fact used the word “occupation” to describe a series of escalating nonviolent actions in which, first, 18 people, later 180, and later 1,414 people were arrested for trespassing on the nuke construction site. From that local movement, sprang a regional movement, and soon, a national movement against nuclear power that had local organized bases wherever nuclear facilities existed or had been proposed.

That poster made its way up a country road in the Berkshire mountains of Western Massachusetts. A 19-year-old community organizer who had recently launched a campaign to close the Yankee Atomic plant in the town of Rowe was learning to chop firewood to prepare for the winter ahead. He wasn’t from there. He was a city kid from New York who had dropped out of school to throw himself into the anti-nuke movement. So, this wood-chopping thing wasn’t easy. It was one of the skills outside of his own experience that he had to learn, among others, not only to heat his \$25-a-month rented cabin, but also to live as the local people he wanted to organize lived, another thing that organizers did.

What did he learn from that poster? That on Sunday, October 28, there would be a “legal rally.” And that on Monday, October 29, there would be “Nonviolent Civil Disobedience” at the NY Stock Exchange, and that “Non-violence training is required.”

The story of this kid is just one of 20,000 stories of that Wall Street occupation more than three decades ago.

The Capitol of Capital

He saw the two addresses on the poster: that of the original P.O. Box of the former Clamshell Alliance, and that of the War Resisters League in New York. He really liked the idea for this protest and occupation: It combined his experiences as a Big Apple youth and as a rural organizer, and drew a common cause from the two. The problems he’d seen and known in both places each had economic causes. The buck stopped where it began: at Wall Street. And when the sun went down and he came inside in to fire up the woodstove, he picked up his guitar and started to write lyrics on a yellow legal pad and compose a song to promote that action: “Take it to Wall Street/In New York Town/Just pull up in your limousine and sit yourself right down/Take a seat on the exchange with the bulls and the bears/It’s the capitol of capital/The buck stops there...”

He penned the first verse about the struggle he was in, to organize a popular civil resistance to an operating nuclear plant in the Berkshires. He wrote the second verse about how banks redlined his old Bronx neighborhood (a process by which speculators starve a neighborhood of building improvement loans, creating slums, forcing down property values, and then buy up the real estate at a lower cost before gentrifying the neighborhood in a way that displaces the old residents with newer, wealthier ones who pay top dollar). And he made the third verse out of oral history; about the Great Depression he had heard of from his grandparents, and their suffering after the October 29, 1929 crash of the stock exchange...

*Where do we draw the line/Against this kind of violence?/It’s where the Berkshires
and the Bronx draw our alli-ance... Take it to Wall Street!*

For the 19-year-old, these were not things he had learned in school or from books. They had been part of his lived experience. And each of them had their roots in a financial system that helped a greedy few take from a hardworking many. “Take it to Wall Street” made perfect sense to him. Why didn’t we think of it sooner!

And so a day or two before that October rally he took a Greyhound bus back to the city of his birth to participate in that Wall Street occupation. From the Port Authority bus terminal he took the subway to the West Village and

practically ran down Bleeker Street with his guitar case in hand and then up the stairs at 339 Lafayette Street. The people there, organizing the protest, were mostly older than him. Some had trained him in nonviolent civil disobedience. Others had been arrested with him at the gates of nuclear facilities in Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire and Connecticut. A few had heard him sing at small coffeehouses throughout New England, a habit which didn't pay the bills as much as dishwashing, restaurant cooking, or silkscreen printing did, but was nonetheless part of how this kid had cobbled together enough rent and food money to be able to follow his passion for organizing. There were "movement heavies" there, who had written books or worked at desks in peace organizations. There were also people, typically of the "sixties generation" whom he felt he rubbed the wrong way. They would show up at anti-nuke rallies waving tie-dye banners, trying to relive, he supposed, the Summer of Love, while he was of the punk rock generation that didn't believe in any of that shit. He'd show up at those same marches, fresh from the barber shop, in a lumberjack jacket with an American flag lapel pin, and try to talk with them about "getting real people involved." Their eyes would glaze over. He believed that their cause was his cause, but he did not yet feel a sense of agency in their meetings, or that their movement was really his movement, too.

I can imagine that there are individuals occupying Wall Street right now that might feel much the same: You believe in the cause. Maybe you're camping out in Zuccotti Park, participating in work groups, have found some small role to play in this larger thing. But maybe you find some of the language, or preconceptions, or ways of doing things, of the activists a little off-putting or alienating. Maybe the long consensus process meetings look similar to the floor of the stock exchange to you: "Unsafe space, sell!" "Ideology, buy!" "Watch what you say, sell!" "Drumming circle, buy!" "Wearing a shirt, sell!" "New identity for sale, buy!" "Look at ME! Buy, buy, BUY!" There are Wall Streets and markets within every protest, too.

Anyway, back to the kid who had come up the stairs at 339 Lafayette Street. He mentioned to those organizers of the Wall Street protests that he had written a song to promote the protest. Some of them expressed zero interest at all. But some others from New England who had known him and his music or his organizing said, "let's hear it" and so he played it for them. When he finished, the group applauded and invited him to sing it on stage during the rally, where Pete Seeger and other topical singers were also going to perform. This was all, of course, very exciting for the youth. To have piece of it, a role to play, a big one!, in a movement much larger than himself: he would have been happy just to attend the rally and join the sit-in at the stock exchange and go to jail if need be. To be able to return to his city and share his own song with many people brought almost too much ecstasy to contain. He worked off all that bouncing-off-the-walls energy that night with an open guitar case on MacDougal Street, singing for coins, and encouraging all who would stop and listen to attend Sunday's rally.

Sunday arrived and by noon 20,000 people had arrived for the Take It to Wall Street rally. (The NY Times had reported that it was only 2,000 people; some things never change.) He sang his song and people really seemed to like it. They paid attention. They sang along. They applauded. (After all, getting a few minutes on stage at a political event isn't by itself a guarantee that people won't talk through your song or speech. When you have a chance at people's attention, you'd better make it entertaining and fun for them. Otherwise you're wasting their time.) He felt enfranchised, more part of "the movement" than he had before.

The next day, as trading was about to open at the New York Stock Exchange building, an army of NYPD officers surrounded each of the entrances. "Affinity groups" of a dozen or a half-dozen participants – the organizing cell groups of these actions – chose their entrance and sat down, as they were trained. Some sang freedom songs from the Civil Rights movements. Others held hands in silence. Our 19-year-old kid had another plan. He wanted to get himself arrested inside the stock exchange, where twelve years earlier the first Wall Street occupation took place, in 1967, when Abbie Hoffman brought some news reporters with him on what was then tours of the building, for tourists and grade school classes. There, from the balcony, Abbie dumped bags of dollar bills down onto the floor and trading came to a stop as runners and brokers fought each other to collect the bills. Newsweek and other media reported on the spectacle, which not only exposed the institution's innate greed, but more importantly, ridiculed it, stripping away its mythical power.

Our youngster came to the main entrance and saw an affinity group of people seated on the steps, some whom were people he knew. He had put on a three-piece suit that morning with a tie and came up to them and loudly asked them to move so he could "go to work." But the theater was snuffed out when they simply laughed and somebody said his name aloud and he was exposed before the police as another protester. So he went to another

entrance, around the corner, looked for and found an affinity group that didn't have anyone he recognized. He walked up to them and looked across them at the line of police. "Officer! Officer! Will you please get these hippies out of my way? I need to go to work!"

These protesters were horrified. They began chanting at him, now a symbol of the enemy. And some police officers actually helped him step across and over them into the building. In the lobby of the building, however, there were security guards who asked to see his stock exchange ID. His goose was evidently cooked. So he turned around to the other NYSE employees in line and said, "You have to stop investing in nuclear power! Every dollar you invest in a nuclear plant will be lost! We will stop you in Seabrook! We will stop you at Shoreham! We will stop you at Indian Point!" At which point NYPD officers were ushered in and placed the kid in the suit under arrest. As trained, he fell limp and made the police carry him out of the building where the people he had just called "hippies" suddenly realized he was one of them. And he joined many of the one thousand-plus civilly disobedient occupiers – a smaller group than the 20,000 legal rally participants – in jamming up the New York City night courts by refusing to provide his name to authorities until all the "John and Jane Does" were released. Others who did give their names faced trials for "disorderly conduct" that would bring something like a \$100 fine.

Within months the financial industry did indeed begin to question the profitability of investing in nuclear power. Demonstrations, occupations, citizen lawsuits and increasing public awareness about nuclear accidents (the Three Mile Island accident had happened in March 1979) and nuclear waste were bringing Congressional hearings and bad publicity. It would be too much of a stretch to say that the 1979 Wall Street occupation had any direct cause on that effect. Its influence came through another route altogether: By, for the first time, focusing the anti-nuke movement's attention and learning on the economic problems with nuclear power, the local and grassroots sectors of the movement increasingly began to organize on that front: They challenged rate increases by utility companies, blaming them on nuclear plant construction cost overruns. In that they found new allies among labor and consumer organizations, including some that had very advanced door-to-door canvassing operations going. The nuclear issue quickly turned from one of morality or environment or averting disaster to, also, a bread-and-butter pocketbook issue for working people struggling to pay power bills.

The 1979 Wall Street occupation – it only lasted for two days! – is historic not because of the occupation itself, but, rather, because it inspired a change in the movement's direction and language, bringing it more coherently in line with everyday people's daily life concerns and worries, which are not about the environment or the morality of what we do as a society to future generations, but about next month's bills and making ends meet. This helped shift public opinion more solidly against nuclear power, and many opportunistic state Attorneys General began filing lawsuits against utility rate increases. That nearly bankrupted some public utilities. The great economic "ratings" houses began to tick down their grades on the nuclear industry's health as an investment. And dozens of nukes that had been proposed were cancelled.

And I would like to be able to say that this is a fairy tale where everyone "lived happily ever after." But movements, even those that win, like life, are not like that. The truth is that the Wall Street occupation in 1979 was also the regional anti-nuclear movement's last gasp.

Yes, it destroyed the nuclear industry in the United States. But, like a mother who dies in childbirth, it gave its own life to do so.

Death by Consensus Process

Every heroic story, by law, should disclose the messy and depressing process by which the heroes only became heroes because their first strategy or tactics had failed miserably and they were forced to change course. After all, really, isn't that what turns an everyday person into a hero? It's the wisdom to cease repeating what didn't work over and over again, learn from those mistakes, and try something else.

Do you want to know the real reason why the anti-nuclear movement went to occupy Wall Street? It happened because others who sought to coopt and seize that movement toward different goals chased that movement and those who built it out of the very terrain they had created.

Think about the aforementioned occupations, in New Hampshire, of the Seabrook nuke site: 18 arrests in 1976, 180 later in 1976 and 1,414 in May 1977. This is a good example of the term “sequencing of tactics.” These actions were organized by a group called the Clamshell Alliance, a coalition of local anti-nuclear organizations throughout the six states of New England, each of which had grievances with nuclear facilities near them. The Seabrook nuke project was the industry’s new kid on the block: the one that hadn’t been built yet. Environmental groups had sued in courts to stop the Seabrook construction, and had failed in those courts. They spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on that tactic, and it didn’t work.

A then 20-something Renny Cushing and other Seabrook residents decided to try a different approach: Community organizing. And through a vote in the New England style “Town Meeting” form of government (in which the voters of a municipality assemble in public and vote, not by secret ballot, but in open view), the people of Seabrook had voted to oppose the construction of the nuke. Then it was no longer just an environmental issue. It was a matter of democracy itself. The people had voted, fair and square, the American way, and rejected the proposal for their town. From that point on, public opinion kept moving their way. They made their cause, thus, also a pro-democracy one.

The strong and organized local base of the movement was the foundation that allowed all the rest to happen. The organizers were smart about that. Why were only 18 people arrested in the first occupation? Because the Clamshell Alliance decided that action would be limited only to New Hampshire residents. Everyone who participated in that and the subsequent occupations was required to go through a full day nonviolence training session. This requirement not only helped the encounters with the police and courts happen more effectively from a public relations standpoint. It also helped create a shared culture of resistance among all participants. The same was true of the southern Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Nonviolence training was key to fomenting self-discipline and teamwork among the participants, two qualities of movements that win.

In recent years, most protests in the United States have had no such requirement. Perhaps the organizations that call on people to join protests feel their numbers will be less if everyone had to spend an additional day, prior to the action, being trained. Maybe others feel it is too “authoritarian” or “exclusive” to require training, or require anything at all. Still others who fetishize violent conflict or rhetoric loathe the very word nonviolence. And so, since the 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle, activist protests in the US have been plagued by parasitical grouposcules that hide under the skirt of the larger action to act out tactics that put every other participant at greater risk of arrest and harm. They smash store windows by throwing garbage cans at them and taunt cops with the cowardly knowledge that if things get rough they can simply run and hide among the rest of the crowd, letting somebody else receive the brunt of the police response.

Thankfully, the most extreme grouposcules of that nature have not – yet – latched themselves onto the Wall Street occupation. Still, the protests have been marked by a lack of discipline. A September 23 report by Nathan Schneider in *Waging Nonviolence*, four days into the protest, illuminated this dynamic:

“A terrific storm gathers around the phalanx of police, who shove protesters with hands and sticks, then grab one or two out of the crowd, throw them to the ground, bind their hands in plastic cuffs, and take them away. You can tell who has had nonviolence training before—they go limp, they make no sign of resistance. But others, especially the youngest, will squirm and cry out in pain, inviting the police to push more, hit harder, drag more ruthlessly. There’s the feeling—surely intentional—that anyone could be next. This escalation only reinforces what the police seem to have been told: that what they’re seeing is the beginnings of a riot.”

Almost two weeks later, on October 5, it was evident that the protest’s “general assembly” decision-making body hasn’t seen this as a problem or priority. After the largest march to date – 15,000 union members joined the protest for a day – a white-shirted member of the NYPD brass was captured on video maliciously swinging his nightstick at defenseless protesters. For some reason many of the protesters seem to think that a video of police violence automatically brings public support to a cause. At least one leader of the post-Seattle genre of protests has written so much in a *NY Times* column: “when police attack peaceful occupiers (and the protesters catch it on camera), it generates tremendous sympathy for the cause.”

That is truly awful advice. It would doom any movement that followed it to abject failure. Entire swathes of the American (and New York) public in fact are prone to cheering the police when they beat up on certain kinds of protesters. Hey, everyone knows that America is a violence-loving society. Why is it such a stretch to understand that much of “the 99 percent” that many protesters claim to speak for actually like to see the cops bust the heads of people they see as different from them? Anybody who has knocked on doors and gotten to know the public beyond their own demographic niches understands that very well already.

If the YouTube video of the October 5 confrontation were widely seen, that would indeed be the response from much of the public. Why? Because the way the protesters responded to the situation – yelling hysterically at the cops in the most visibly disorganized way possible – does not endear the protesters to public opinion. It does quite the opposite. A few chanted “the whole world is watching” while dozens of people with cameras and cell phones elbowed each other for the best shot of the moment. Mainly a lot of screaming and whistleblowing drowned out any sound of substance or meaning from the video. More than 430,000 people have watched that video in just a few days and while the police behaved badly, to many observers the protesters would seem like an unruly and dangerous mob, too.

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, no slouch at pandering to public opinion, “gets” this, which is why he does not hesitate to posture against the protesters at every chance the media provides him. Police violence only creates public sympathy when the people they are beating are themselves viewed sympathetically. Any movement has to work very hard to make that happen. It doesn’t come simply because it is deserved. People trained in nonviolence would understand what to do at a moment like that: protesters would sit down, silently, or maybe while seated they’d all sing the same song, and then anything the police do would become magnified and seen as bullying by the wider public. Instead of practicing this easy and basic political ju-jitsu, many Wall Street occupiers seem to think it serves their cause by escalating any conflict with the cops, by fighting stupidity with buffoonery. It’s like getting into a pissing contest with a skunk: everybody ends up smelling badly.

The consensus decision-making process used by the protest’s governing body, a “general assembly” that meets for hours each day, into which anybody can walk in or out at any time at will, may seem like a cute and harmless form of peaceful action. But it actually contributes greatly to the lack of discipline of the revolt. Consensus process is by definition exclusionary to most of “the 99 percent” of the public in whose name these protests are held. That’s because most people are working at jobs or taking care of children all day and don’t have the time, or the interest, in trying to write a declaration by committee-of-hundreds.

Within any venture, there are “doers” and there are “talkers.” Typically, the talkers spend a lot of time discussing and debating what the doers should do. Perhaps this is not the kindest way to say it, but here goes: The world is filled with terribly boring people who can put even bartenders and psychologists to sleep. They’re lonely and we feel bad for them, but nor do we want to spend our days and nights listening to them drone on and on with their inner monologues. Consensus meetings attract this kind of person like flies to shit. They also attract ideologues – the proverbial “socialist with a shopping bag of his own press clippings,” as Lower East Side performance artist Penny Arcade has observed – and also people who love to debate the semantics of language and identity politics ad nauseum.

Meanwhile, what kinds of people don’t like to go to long meetings? Almost everybody in “the 99 percent” hates meetings, but especially community organizers and people with skills who are busy using them to advance the cause. Paradoxically, these are the folks most experienced at doing things and therefore have real lived experience to aid in the development of strategy and tactics. Consensus decision-making processes, however, screen too many of these people out of the game. They wouldn’t be caught dead there. They’re too busy wielding their talents to while away their hours in processes that they already know go on too long.

Those who romanticize “general assemblies” often site their use among many indigenous communities. And there is truth to that: In 35 years of participating and reporting on social movements, the only places I’ve seen it work effectively have been in rural indigenous communities where all the participants share the same language, culture, socio-economic level and line of work, typically, subsistence level farming. (For similar reasons it might also function in a workplace, where everyone is paid for the time and labor spent in meetings.) Among homogeneous groups, it can work.

The inverse observation to be made about Occupy Wall Street is that the consensus process has survived for three weeks now only because it maintains and encourages the demographic homogeneity of the core participants: college educated Americans. Its use may in fact reflect a subconscious desire by many participants that the protest remain homogeneous and narrow, a kind of defense mechanism against having to open the cause up to the real 99 percent.

The experience of the Clamshell Alliance and the anti-nuclear movement with consensus process is instructive. Once that movement had brought nonviolent civil disobedience back into popular use, other ideological and political sectors sought to wrestle it away and take power over the movement. Indeed, a kind of coup d'état occurred in 1979, months before the Wall Street occupation that year, the result of a series of long consensus-seeking meetings on what the next action by the Clamshell would be. A group calling themselves "direct action" advocates ("direct action," to them, was distinct from "nonviolence" most specifically because those people wanted the movement to bring wire cutters to the next protest to cut the fences around the Seabrook nuke construction site) obsessed on this proposed tactic to the point of fetish. This, despite the fact that the local residents of Seabrook who had provided the farmland and staging areas for previous occupations warned that this escalation of tactics would lose significant public support for the movement at its most local geographic base.

The "direct action" faction – overwhelmingly they were activists, students and ideologues from metropolitan Boston – found, in the consensus process, its wedge to blow up and then take over the name of the Clamshell Alliance, even if it meant losing most of the organized bases that had created and built it. At first they used the power of any person to "block" consensus on any decision (and therefore block any taking of action at all) on any and every proposal that did not include fence cutting. This went on for weeks. It was frustrating for many movement organizers, so much so that, one by one, they walked away and stopped attending the long meetings where the same point got debated over and over again. After almost everybody who had organized the movement had been worn down, the last few adherents to the idea that this fence-cutting nonsense would destroy a lot more than mere fences (it would also wreck the cohesion, unity and public support enjoyed by the movement) eventually "stepped aside." In consensus-speak, that means they expressed their objection but agreed not to block consensus. It was on that day, in the Marigold Ballroom of Salisbury, Massachusetts, across the state border from Seabrook, that the Clamshell Alliance shattered into splinters and for all practical purposes, was no more.

Eventually the fence-cutters had their day, and it proved a public relations disaster for the movement. Their efforts quickly petered out after that and vanished into nothing at all. The rest of the movement went home. Many participants organized local movements against the nuclear facilities nearest to them.

And what about our 19-year-old kid? What happened with him? The Wall Street occupation of 1979 breathed new inspiration into him. He went back to Western Massachusetts and organized the campaign to close the Rowe nuke. Eight years later it would become the only commercial nuclear plant to be closed before its life expectancy. The plant's gigantic metal dome and turbine building were taken apart, and all of it except the high level nuclear waste spent fuel rods were carted off to a low-level nuclear waste dump. Where the nuke once stood there is now a grassy field alongside a lake and a hydroelectric dam.

Some say that kid – the one who would play guitar on one day and wear a suit to get arrested on the next, who had to learn to chop wood to be able to organize a rural community – eventually moved to Mexico and today walks alongside social movements, studies their strategies and tactics, and writes about what he sees and hears. He might correct that he only does those things between composing and playing his next song and otherwise serving his daily pleasure. (A California professor who was also part of the 1979 Wall Street occupation recently remembered his experience aloud, and our kid and his song appear there, too.)

I like to think that kid is every kid. And he or she might be sitting on a bench in Zuccotti Park right now, maybe writing a song to promote the cause, maybe strategizing in his or her head about how to occupy his or her own life, win his and her own freedom, drive Wall Street out of his and her own heart and the cop out of his and her own head, and organize somewhere that the real 99 percent live and work to make authentic and victorious movements possible.

You know what was the most inspiring and empowering thing of all about the 1979 Wall Street occupation? It wasn't the good times (although they were good). It wasn't even, for that 19-year-old kid, getting to sing his song to the crowd, or having it appreciated and remembered. It wasn't skirmishing with cops or breaking the NY criminal court system for a night. None of those things would have mattered a whit except for the most important part of the story: It was that the movement won.

"There is no greater high than challenging the system, giving it your all, and winning," wrote Abbie Hoffman, architect of the first Wall Street occupation in 1967, which had maybe a half-dozen participants. There are so many causes and protests that fought the good fight but lost. And they went into the annals of "youthful indiscretions" of participants who later became politicians and Wall Street stock brokers. The most disempowering thing on earth is losing. But to take on an attainable goal – in 1979 it was "stop nuclear investment" – launch a strategy and sequenced tactics, organize and mobilize people to implement it, and then win: that is the small victory that makes larger ones possible because it empowers and inspires everybody involved.

The last Wall Street occupation didn't end Wall Street, or capitalism, or greed, or injustice. Even its major advance, stopping a new generation of nuclear plants, was a victory that is today having to be defended all over again (as our friends in Egypt learned, too, this year when they toppled the dictator Mubarak; no victory is permanent, nor in an authentic democracy should anything ever be engraved permanently in stone; all battles entered are, authentically, struggles for life). Yet it is the small victories that lay the groundwork for larger and larger ones, whereas struggling and losing wrecks cynicism, apathy and surrender. Winning a civil resistance, a social movement, a non-violent struggle, a community organizing campaign profoundly changes the participants. It turns them into winners and transforms them into people who can never, ever be conquered by fear or despair ever again. That is why it is called revolution. It turns everything around, upside-down, and inside, out. It is the motor that evolves the species.

Nobody knows how long the current Wall Street occupation will last or how exactly the media virus that has sprung from it will mutate and spread. It seems that its own core organizers have set up a cumbersome and easily coopted consensus process by which not even they can steer the ship. And has there been any strategic forethought whatsoever about timing this thing in harmony with the seasons and the weather? As Ezra Pound knew: "Winter is icumin in Lhude sing Goddamn. Raineth drop and staineth slop, And how the wind doth ramm!" By November or December, Lower Manhattan becomes an icy wind tunnel. "We're staying here and we're not leaving" therefore isn't the sort of declaration that inspires public confidence among the 99 percent. Making promises that one can't keep: Isn't that what caused us all to lose faith in Wall Street and the rest of today's institutions in the first place? Still, every individual involved has immensely more power than a consensus assembly could ever provide to determine how he and she will proceed from here, if and when it seems that everybody else scatters and goes home.

That's the revolution: the one that lives in the hearts of those who immerse themselves in struggles larger than them. The revolution belongs to those who simultaneously develop their own tactics and strategies, and figure out how to sequence them. The revolution comes to those who study what has worked and what hasn't worked for others who have gone before them, and who organize others into collaborating in that quest, on the most local scale, to win back the terrain of daily life. Occupy that, and the revolution is yours.

Naomi Klein
Occupy Wall Street
The Most Important Thing in the World Now
October 6th, 2011

I was honored to be invited to speak at Occupy Wall Street on Thursday night. Since amplification is (disgracefully) banned, and everything I say will have to be repeated by hundreds of people so others can hear (a.k.a. “the human microphone”), what I actually say at Liberty Plaza will have to be very short. With that in mind, here is the longer, uncut version of the speech.

I love you.

And I didn't just say that so that hundreds of you would shout “I love you” back, though that is obviously a bonus feature of the human microphone. Say unto others what you would have them say unto you, only way louder.

Yesterday, one of the speakers at the labor rally said: “We found each other.” That sentiment captures the beauty of what is being created here. A wide-open space (as well as an idea so big it can't be contained by any space) for all the people who want a better world to find each other. We are so grateful.

If there is one thing I know, it is that the 1 percent loves a crisis. When people are panicked and desperate and no one seems to know what to do, that is the ideal time to push through their wish list of pro-corporate policies: privatizing education and social security, slashing public services, getting rid of the last constraints on corporate power. Amidst the economic crisis, this is happening the world over.

And there is only one thing that can block this tactic, and fortunately, it's a very big thing: the 99 percent. And that 99 percent is taking to the streets from Madison to Madrid to say “No. We will not pay for your crisis.” That slogan began in Italy in 2008. It ricocheted to Greece and France and Ireland and finally it has made its way to the square mile where the crisis began.

“Why are they protesting?” ask the baffled pundits on TV. Meanwhile, the rest of the world asks: “What took you so long?” “We've been wondering when you were going to show up.” And most of all: “Welcome.”

Many people have drawn parallels between Occupy Wall Street and the so-called anti-globalization protests that came to world attention in Seattle in 1999. That was the last time a global, youth-led, decentralized movement took direct aim at corporate power. And I am proud to have been part of what we called “the movement of movements.”

But there are important differences too. For instance, we chose summits as our targets: the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the G8. Summits are transient by their nature, they only last a week. That made us transient too. We'd appear, grab world headlines, then disappear. And in the frenzy of hyper patriotism and militarism that followed the 9/11 attacks, it was easy to sweep us away completely, at least in North America.

Occupy Wall Street, on the other hand, has chosen a fixed target. And you have put no end date on your presence here. This is wise. Only when you stay put can you grow roots. This is crucial. It is a fact of the information age that too many movements spring up like beautiful flowers but quickly die off. It's because they don't have roots.

And they don't have long term plans for how they are going to sustain themselves. So when storms come, they get washed away.

Being horizontal and deeply democratic is wonderful. But these principles are compatible with the hard work of building structures and institutions that are sturdy enough to weather the storms ahead. I have great faith that this will happen.

Something else this movement is doing right: You have committed yourselves to non-violence. You have refused to give the media the images of broken windows and street fights it craves so desperately.

And that tremendous discipline has meant that, again and again, the story has been the disgraceful and unprovoked police brutality. Which we saw more of just last night. Meanwhile, support for this movement grows and grows. More wisdom.

But the biggest difference a decade makes is that in 1999, we were taking on capitalism at the peak of a frenzied economic boom. Unemployment was low, stock portfolios were bulging. The media was drunk on easy money. Back then it was all about start-ups, not shutdowns.

We pointed out that the deregulation behind the frenzy came at a price. It was damaging to labor standards. It was damaging to environmental standards. Corporations were becoming more powerful than governments and that was damaging to our democracies. But to be honest with you, while the good times rolled, taking on an economic system based on greed was a tough sell, at least in rich countries.

Ten years later, it seems as if there aren't any more rich countries. Just a whole lot of rich people. People who got rich looting the public wealth and exhausting natural resources around the world.

The point is, today everyone can see that the system is deeply unjust and careening out of control. Unfettered greed has trashed the global economy. And it is trashing the natural world as well. We are overfishing our oceans, polluting our water with fracking and deepwater drilling, turning to the dirtiest forms of energy on the planet, like the Alberta tar sands. And the atmosphere cannot absorb the amount of carbon we are putting into it, creating dangerous warming. The new normal is serial disasters: economic and ecological.

These are the facts on the ground. They are so blatant, so obvious, that it is a lot easier to connect with the public than it was in 1999, and to build the movement quickly.

We all know, or at least sense, that the world is upside down: we act as if there is no end to what is actually finite—fossil fuels and the atmospheric space to absorb their emissions. And we act as if there are strict and immovable limits to what is actually bountiful—the financial resources to build the kind of society we need.

The task of our time is to turn this around: to challenge this false scarcity. To insist that we can afford to build a decent, inclusive society—while at the same time, respect the real limits to what the earth can take.

What climate change means is that we have to do this on a deadline. This time our movement cannot get distracted, divided, burned out or swept away by events. This time we have to succeed. And I'm not talking about regulating the banks and increasing taxes on the rich, though that's important.

I am talking about changing the underlying values that govern our society. That is hard to fit into a single media-friendly demand, and it's also hard to figure out how to do it. But it is no less urgent for being difficult.

That is what I see happening in this square. In the way you are feeding each other, keeping each other warm, sharing information freely and proving health care, meditation classes and empowerment training. My favorite sign here says, "I care about you." In a culture that trains people to avoid each other's gaze, to say, "Let them die," that is a deeply radical statement.

A few final thoughts. In this great struggle, here are some things that don't matter:

What we wear.

Whether we shake our fists or make peace signs.

Whether we can fit our dreams for a better world into a media soundbite.

And here are a few things that do matter.

Our courage.

Our moral compass.

How we treat each other.

We have picked a fight with the most powerful economic and political forces on the planet. That's frightening. And as this movement grows from strength to strength, it will get more frightening. Always be aware that there will be a temptation to shift to smaller targets—like, say, the person sitting next to you at this meeting. After all, that is a battle that's easier to win.

Don't give in to the temptation. I'm not saying don't call each other on shit. But this time, let's treat each other as if we plan to work side by side in struggle for many, many years to come. Because the task before will demand nothing less.

Let's treat this beautiful movement as if it is most important thing in the world. Because it is. It really is.

Occupy LA Poems
Zen Dochterman

South Florida, Q4.

In evening ruins the confluent
metal vines of freefall, currency downgrade
our subtle and broken hearths,
the worldless rooms,
where shopping carts take out loans,
among the heaps of lumber.

Under untethered skies, houses unbought
make track marks on the beaches' arms
for miles. The slow roofs in denigration,
sinking homeless now,
are unsmelted clay in the thunder.

Aching among the window frames,
old tropical nail piles and concrete,
this lost decade of trash collectors on the shores,
the avalanche that was accumulating,
pours out the rubble of Ativan, the doldrums
migrating across shipping lines and jet lag,
panic attacks among the warehouses,
where all flowers go to be frozen,
awaiting their fifteen dollars of fame,
as ice vendors hawk the meat.

Names are numbers forming
lines of hungry ghosts, wandering
winds ready to blow leaves,
hammer boards together,
clean the halls of empty bardos.
They flow through the blood
of tick marks on the clock,
parasite to the metronome
of unreachable percentages,
unnneeded,
still, here.

Utopia #17

Take a second story walk up drunk off its breeches with sunset's switchblade
where the roof tar paints your shirt the void, and hideout from the frontlines
to stitch together the ghost's tongue in a dripping dog night,
so crackle the stars for once like radio transmitters from the future
where steel plants scribble away in millenarian otiosity their epitaphs of dynamite,
and pile up the Rubix cubes and lava lamps, anti-aging video games and glow in the dark tampons,
all fit for the pyre, an overaccumulated rocket shuttle hyper-explosion
of post-industrial everything ever mishmash on the dead and unlamented front lawns.

Those days, sweet summers, will be a Ferris wheel of burning rags,
Molotov hickies with the teenage alley swarming in a heatwave of colliding tongues,
through ruin-clamoring block parties, orchid-blooming tenements and eroded towers
unworking. bricks and flowers will move between hands the way the Pacific shivers,
or snow trembles, as if the common world was made of lips
drenched in bedsheets and blue light.

Barbarians

Positivist empire of plastic:
here come the barbarians
towards your tindery sidewalks.

Ashes, ashes, we all fall up,
like the sky is made of quicksand,
siphoning away our Ziplocked futures.

Broken colosseum of oil,
there are Rubicons still to uncross:
paradise has flammable nerves.

Prophecy Now

The hammerhead moonlight
washes over the death throes
of this urban bathysphere,
its T.V. wires and C.O.D.s,
invalid actors for a time,
rounded with a sleep.

You had enough cash
to fend off the earthquake
the seismographs efface,
but bought a timeshare instead.

Don't look now,
everything's melting all at once,
just like 1848 wrote,
on the severed head
of the Sphinx of Egypt.

Mojave Cities

I'm ill motherfucker I'm ill. A sore throat
scratches the desert, one toppled outlet mall
at a time. The coughing backroad pawnshop
that can't get a loan and barbers away its doors,
searches for Nyquil and Coors among the aisles
of neon cash advances.

Spitting up unsold track homes,
teenagers twirl arrows on street corners instead
of belching spray paint. This swarming malady
unto inflation, a bronchial infection of freeways
without offramps. Take the first train west
to bankruptcy. No one believes in the cure.

Day Traders

I have no money and my friend checked into the psych ward today. No one's convinced that therapy will do a thing for schizophrenia among the tissues of debt. There are never enough drugs on loan. Time to write chapter eleven.

But I have get rich quick scheme, and so do the voices in my friend's head. Exchanging dollars for currencies that don't yet exist. Delusion is our intellectual property, copyright, birthright.

Clonozepam overdoses will put this recession to sleep. The future has no future. We day trade in desire.

Nancy Popp
Scores for the City
Llano del Rio Guides, Winter 2011

*Along a busy stretch of Hollywood Boulevard,
find two palm trees strategically planted in close proximity to the sidewalk.
Hang a hammock between the two trees.
Rest.*

*Locate a tree, large bush, or patch of grass along a city street.
Place your body in close proximity to this plant and breathe deeply.
Offer your exhalation of carbon dioxide to the plant; inhale it's off-gassing of oxygen.
Continue until you and the plant are refreshed and invigorated.*

*Gather a group of no less than five adventurous friends.
Bring warm clothes and food and drink of your choice.
Locate a currently unused billboard along a main vehicular thoroughfare.
Using the extension ladder underneath,
climb up onto the billboard and sit in a line with your backs to its display surface.
Engage in merriment - eat, drink, converse, watch traffic and observe the topography of the city.
After your fête is complete, descend in the manner of your ascent.*

*Identify a neighborhood that you feel you are a part of, your local area
where you spend a good portion of your time and identify with the other inhabitants.
Walk the boundaries of this neighborhood, singing a song you feel relates
to the unique persona of the neighborhood- its history, its residents, its identity.
If you cross the boundary of your neighborhood, you must sing another song.*

Stencil the anonymous Facebook profile picture placeholder on the walls of shopping malls around Los Angeles.

Hamdy El-Gazzar
Writings from the Revolution
Cairo, Egypt
2011

Dawn

Dawn on Saturday, January 29th, the world around us a vacuum, an emptiness steeped in solitude and silence after yesterday's volcano.

Yesterday—day, evening, and night—the day of resurrection, everywhere ablaze, the voice of horror rising, and the pointless beast of death, all across the country. And today dawns, Ash Saturday.

The sky above us is still black, without a punctuation of light—darkness in the alleys, the boulevards, the streets, the thresholds of houses, the entrances of buildings, above the courtyards and the squares. The country's air is black smoke, the oxygen we breathe like iron filings. The hearts of men are full of dread and terror.

Everything is ugly and empty to our watchful eyes—even sleeping eyes, if any of our eyes had slept.

One person walks in the streets, under the fog and the blurred dawn, indifferent to the fear and cold. He is dressed in white. Around his neck, a wool scarf in three colors: red and white and black. He carries on his shoulder a metal ladder, a small folding one, balanced by his left hand, and in his right hand a leather bag with its zipper open, long spray cans protruding from it.

The man walks leisurely with his load in the biting cold, moving from one main street to the next. Sometimes he slows down to reflect on the front of a shop or café, the entrance to a Metro station, a traincar, the iron beam of a bridge, or the wall around a school or factory. Sometimes he stops in front of a building, takes the ladder from his shoulder, and examines the façade. Not satisfied, he shakes his head, hesitates, and after a moment changes his mind. He picks up his ladder and goes in search of a better place, where he stops again.

Slowly and carefully, he reflects on a building, and when he makes his decision he begins to work. He opens the folded ladder and climbs to the highest step, takes from his bag a spray can, and shakes it firmly. His face beaming, he sprays the wall white. On top, he writes with a fine red line. Then he gets down, and leaves the scene.

He carries the ladder over his shoulder and back, and the bag in his hand, walking a long distance. He wanders from one neighborhood to another in the neighborhoods of the city, stopping dozens of times. When he likes the wall of an office building or bakery or cinema, he unfolds his small ladder and climbs. Smiling, he writes.

He has worked this way since dawn, in earnest, his face bright as the sun.

He writes until people begin to emerge in the streets, covering most of the walls of the city with two words: "Egypt's Revolution."

This man proclaimed hope.

ر-ج ف

سمأنا ك رب بقع ،تمصلوا ةشحو لاي قراغ ،ءاوخ ،غارف انلوح نم ملال ،رياني 29 ،تبسلال رجب
دالبال لوطب ،تومل شحو ثبعو ،بعرللا توص عف تراو ،ناكم لك يفي نارينلا تلعتشا ،ءمايقلل تماق سمأ ةليلو برغم و راهن
دامرلا تبس مويلا رجب و ،اهضرو
قوف و ،تارامل لخدم ،تويبال تابتع ،عراوشلا ،يراو حلا ،ءقزألا يفي مالظ ،دعب رون اهللختي مل ،ءادوس لازت ام انقوف نم ءامسل
ءفئاخو ،ءعزف ،ءشحو تسم قلخلل ةئفأ و ،ديدح ةداربك بلص انسفن نني جوسكأ ،دوسأ ناخذ دالبال ءاوه .ني دايملا و ،تاحاسلا
نويي تماق دنك ن! ،ءمئانلا يتح ،ءرهاسلا اننويي ع يفي غارفو ةشحو ءيش لك
لوح فلوي ،ضي بأ ابوئ سبلي .دربلاب و ،فوخلاب ئباعر يغي ،رچفال شبغو ،بابضلال تحت ،عراوشلا يفي ريسي ديحو صخش
،ارسبي هدنسي ،ارغص اچودزم ،ايندعم ام لس هفتك لىل ل م ح ي .دوسألا و ضيبألا و رمألا :ءثالئ ناولأب ،فوص ةيفوك هتبقر
ءليوط ياربسا بلع اهنم زربت ،ءتسوسلا ةحوتفم ،ءيدلج ةببيقح هني ميب قلعم و
ءهجو لمأتل ،هتكرح أطابتت انايحأ .رخأ لىل ايسئىر عراش نم لقتني ،صراقلا دربالا يفي ،هلو م ح ب ،لهم لىل ع يشمي لجرلا
قوف نم هم لس لزنني ،ينبم مامأ فقوتني انايحأ .عنصم وأ سر دم روس وأ يربوك ديح ،تاراطق وأ ورتم ةطحم لخدم ،ناكد وأ ،يهقم
يتح ،لضفأ ناكم نع اثحب يضمي و هم لس لم ح يفي ،هيار ريغي تقو دعب ،ددرتي ،ضار ريغ سار زهي ،ءهجال نياعي و ،هيفتك
يرخأ ةرم فقوتني
هتببيقح نم بحسي ،هتارجد لىل ءال دعصوي و ،چودزملا هم لس حتفي .لمغال أدبي رارق هل رقي ام دنعو ،ءيانب لمأتي ةقدو ءطبب
مئ ،لميج طخب ،رمجال نوللاب بتكي هقوف مئ ،ضي بألاب الوأ طئال شري و هو ،ههجو قرشي ،ءوقب اهجري و ياربسا ةبلع
ءرداغم لاب مهيو ،طبه ي
تارشعل .ءني دملا ءايحأ نم رخأ لىل ايج نم لوجتي ،دعبأ ةفاسم ليشمي و ،هدي يفي هتببيقحو ،ههظو هفتك قوف هم لس لم ح ي
بتكي امستبمو ،دعصوي و ريغصلال ايندعملا هم لس حتفي ،امنيس وأ ،نرف وأ ،ءكرش طئال هبجعي ام دنعو ،فقوتني س تارملا
قرشم هجوبو ،داهتاجو دجب لمغي ناك رچفال دنم اذكه
”رصم ةروئ“ :نيتم لكب ةني دملا طئال او ح مظعم يطغي ،بتكي ناك عراوشلا يفي سانلا روهظ ةيادب يتح
لمألا ثببي لجرلا ناك
ليرب 15 ،ءيرصملا قورشلا ةديرج*

Quoth the Grandmother
May 9th, 2011
Translated by Alex Ortiz

This piece is from Hamdy El-Gazzar's current writing project entitled 'Our Revolution: Stories To Fit in the Palm of Your Hand'

The lady is old. Elderly, timeworn. Nearly 92. Long years old. One of the wonders of the world...

Look — do you see her small, round dark-brown pita loaf of a face? Can you see how wrinkled it is? The creases are deep, the lines run north and south, east and west. Notice what tens of thousands of nights and days have done to those lines? The cruel scalpel of time carves into every part of this face. It cuts at the brow, cheeks, and nose. It scratches at the ears and neck, around the mouth and around her little eyes.

Grandma's ancient. Antique like your great-grandfather's ancestral home. But you know what? She's got the tongue of a teenager and the mature and lively mind of a philosopher. Her bright eyes are young.

The worst thing of all is to see her here in the middle of the night, sitting cross-legged on the ground. Beneath her wet palms flickers a small camp fire. Young men lit it to give a bit of warmth in this cold night. As you can see, Tahrir Square is huge. Gusts of wind fly in from every direction.

Despite the chill, fatigue and letdown, the warmth of grandma's smile never wavers. Nothing shakes her, nothing's is going to beat her, nothing is going to make her feel old!

"Things are serious now," she begins to explain.

"We're not going to move from here. We're never going to leave the Square. We're here till the end of time. Even if they kill us all, people will be profoundly changed when they get home, no longer the people they were when they went out. There's no going halfway in revolution. No going back. Listen: half a revolution means you die. It means everyone dies. You will die and I will die..."

"It's strange. Despite the fact that not much time has passed, and despite the fact that we might get killed here and there, you begin to stop thinking about who has fallen. You begin to forget who died and sacrificed their blood. Let me remind you children that no doubt there will be others who might fall at any moment. Do you understand me?"

The magnificent woman fell silent for a few moments. She gazed into the faces around her. At the faces of grandchildren and the great-great-grandchildren. At her children, at the people around her.

“I see only intelligent eyes here. Eyes that see and understand even if they do not speak.

My children, do you know how much I have lived? How much life I’ve outlived — beyond the many long ages I’ve passed through? Do you know many difficulties I’ve seen? How many men I’ve buried? I’ve struggled and resisted more than you’ll ever know. But all my life I’ve never seen anyone better or more beautiful than all of you, or braver. You are hope. You are tomorrow. You are this land. You are this sky, and the fire that warms the bitter cold. There is no tomorrow but you.

“I’m your grandmother. I am thirsty, children, and you are water. I don’t hope for another day of life. I’ve lived so long I’ve grown bored. But I won’t die without seeing you take your house back and making it your home. This is your home, children. This is a nation to proud of. It’s a great country, and its people are most beautiful. Everyone, but those brainless murderers.

“My children — I want to die here. A martyr. I won’t give up my place until you bring me the promise. Until you bring me tomorrow. If you can’t do it, then let me bring it to you with these two hands of mine.”

The old woman said that, and then rose to her feet. A small and frail body, bent and short. Yet she gripped her beautiful wooden cane with all her strength. She walked four steps then bent down. Crawling on all fours, she entered her small tent on the rise.

Someone called out, “We won’t let grandma die before we bring her tomorrow.”

..ايندلا بئاجع نم ةبيجعو ،ديدملا اهرمع نم نيستلاو ةيناثلا نم برتقت ،أدج نسل اىف ةنعاط ،ةنسُم ،زوجع ةديسل

..رظنُ

ةيلوطلل خورشلاو ،ةقيمعلل دياخألاو ،نوضغلاب ءىلم ،ققشتتم وه مك ،رمسأ زبخ فيغرك رُودملا ،ريغصلا اهجوو ىرتأ
نُيدخللاو ،ةيصاللا ،هجو لا لك ىف لغوت ىساقلا نمزلا طرشم .ىلايلاو مايألا فالآ تارشع اهبُت عنص ام رصبتأ ،ةيضرعللاو
نيتريغصلا نينيعللا لوجو ،ةريصقلا ةبقرلا ىف ،مفلل لوجو ،نُيذألاو ،فألاو
اهانيعو ،ىجو حضان ،فوسليلي لقعو ،باش ناسل اهل نأ ،ىبحاص اى ،بجعللا نأ لا ،كدج دلاو تيب لثم أدج ةميدق ةدجللا
..ضغ حور امهيف رهظي ،ناتعمل

،ران ةرئاد ،نُيتقورعملل اهيدو ،اهيفك تحت .ةعبرتم ضرألا ىلع ،انه سلجت ليلا فصتتم ىف اهارت نأ ءىش لك نم ىهدألاو
نم ءاوللا تارايت هيتأتو ،ريكبو عساو ىرت امك ريرحتلا ناديم ،دربلا ليلا اذه ىف ءفدلا ضع بنم تك بابشلا اهل عشا
هاجتاو ،بوص لك

!طق مرهت مل ،ءىش اهرهقي ،اهزلزلي مل اهنأ كلذ ،ةيناح ةمئاد ةمستبا اهل ،نزللاو ،بعتلاو ،دربلا مغر ةدجللا
”دجللا تقو تقولا“

.. حرشتو ،ةديسل لوقت

،جرخ امك دوعى ال تويبلا نم جرخ نم ،انلك انلتقُ ولو ،رهذلا ةيانه تحت انه نحن ،أدبأ ناديملا رداغن نل ،انه نم ىضمن نل “
.. ىدالوا اى ىلو مك ،عيچللل توملا ىنعى ،فتحللا ىنعى ةروثلا فصن ،قلخ اى ،أعجارت الو ،أفاصنأ فرعت ال ةروثلا
ىحضو ،لتقُي نمو ،طقس نم نوسنتو نولهاجتت ،ناكم لك ىفو ،كانهو انه لَتَقُنْ اننأ مغرو ،تقولا ىضُم مدع مغر مكارُت وأ
”ىدالوا اى نومهفتأ ..عبطلاب ةظحل لك نورخأ طقسيس ،مك رُكُذُ ..مدلاب

. سانلا اهلوح ،ءانبالاو ،دافحألا دافحأو ،دافحألا نس ىف .هوجولا اهلوح نعنمتت ،تاظحل ةليجللا ةديسللا تمصت
تربع ةليوط نينس قوف ،تيفنفاو تشع مك نوفرعت ىدالوا اى .تمصلاب مهفتو ىرت ،ةيكذ نوي ع ىوس ىلوح ىرأ ال “
متنأ ،عجشأو ،لضفأو مك نم لمجأ ىرمع ةليوط رأ مل ىنكل ،تلضانو تدهاج مك ،تيفنفا لاجر نم مكو ،تيفأر باعص نم مكو ،تيررمو
..دغلا لك متنأ ،دربلا ريره مزجالعل رانلا ىذه ،ءامسلا هذو ،ضرألا ىذه متنأ ،دغلا متنأ ،لمألا
نأ نود تومأ نل ىنكل ،تللم ىتح ال يوط تشع دقف ،ةايحللا ىف لو طأ موي ىف عمطأ ال ،ءاملا متنأ ةناشطع ىلوا اى ةدجللا انأ
ةلتقلا لاهُجالا الول ،بعش لمجأو ،نطوو دلب مظعأ ،رخفلا نطو اذه ،ىدالوا اى مك تيب اذه ،تيفبلا نورمعت ،لزنملا نوذخت مكارأ

..

ىنوعدق ،نوعيطتست ال متنك نل ..دغلاب ،دعولاب ىل اوتأت ىتح ىناكم حرابأ نل ،ةديهش انه تومأ نأ ديرأ انأ ىدالوا اى
.. هب مك ل ىتآ نينتا ه ىدي

عبرأ تشم ،ةليمجللا ةيبشخللا اهتاصع ىلع ةوقب ةضباق اهنكل ،ةريصقو ةينحم ،ريغص ليئض دسج ،تماقو ،كلذ تلاق
لطللا ىف ةريغصلا اهتيميخ تلخدو ،تفحز ،تنحنا مث ،تاوطخ
ىتأن نأ لبق تومت نل ةدجللا“ انم دحاو لاق

From Peter Kropotkin, Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets
Roger N. Baldwin, editor
Vanguard Press, Inc.
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Prisons and Their Moral Influence on Prisoners

After the economic problem and after the problem of the State, perhaps the most important of all is that concerning the control of anti-social acts. The meting out of justice was always the principal instrument for creating rights and privilege, since it was based on solid foundations of constituted rights; the problem of what is to be done with those who commit anti-social acts therefore contains within itself the great problem of government and the State.

It is time to ask if condemnation to death or to prison is just. Does it attain the dual end it has as its goal—that of preventing the repetition of the anti-social deed, and (as regards prisons) that of reforming the offender?

They are grave questions. On their answers depend not only the happiness of thousands of prisoners, not only the fate of miserable women and children, whose husbands and fathers are helpless to aid them from behind their bars, but also the happiness of humanity. Every injustice committed against one individual is, in the end, experienced by humanity as a whole.

Having had occasion to become acquainted with two prisons in France and several in Russia, having been led by various circumstances in my life to return to the study of penal questions, I think it is my duty to state openly what prisons are,—to relate my observations and my beliefs as a result of these observations.

The Prison as a School of Crime

Once a man has been in prison, he will return. It is inevitable, and statistics prove it. The annual reports of the administration of criminal justice in France show that one-half of all those tried by juries and two-fifths of all those who yearly get into the police courts for minor offenses received their education in prisons. Nearly half of all those tried for murder and three-fourths of those tried for burglary are repeaters. As for the central prisons, more than one-third of the prisoners released from these supposedly correctional institutions are reimprisoned in the course of twelve months after their liberation.

Another significant angle is that the offense for which a man returns to prison is always more serious than his first. If, before, it was petty thieving, he returns now for some daring burglary, if he was imprisoned for the first time for some act of violence, often he will return as a murderer. All writers on criminology are in accord with this observation. Former offenders have become a great problem in Europe. And you know how France has solved it; she ordains their wholesale destruction by the fevers of Cayenne, an extermination which begins on the voyage.

The Futility of Prisons

In spite of all the reforms made up to the present, in spite of all the experiments of different prison systems, the results are always the same. On the one hand, the number of offenses against existing laws neither increases nor diminishes, no matter what the system of punishments is—the knout has been abolished in Russia and the death penalty in Italy, and the number of murders there has remained the same. The cruelty of the judges grows or lessens, the cruelty of the Jesuitical penal system changes, but the number of acts designated as crimes remains constant. It is affected only by other causes which I shall shortly mention. On the other hand, no matter what changes are introduced in the prison régime, the problem of second offenders does not decrease.

That is inevitable; it must be so; the prison kills all the qualities in a man which make him best adapted to community life. It makes him the kind of a person who will inevitably return to prison to end his days in one of those stone tombs over which is engraved—"House of Detention and Correction." There is only one answer to the question, "What can be done to better this penal system?" Nothing. A prison cannot be improved. With the exception of a few unimportant little improvements, there is absolutely nothing to do but demolish it.

I might propose that a Pestalozzi be placed at the head of each prison. I refer to the great Swiss pedagogue who used to take in abandoned children and make good citizens of them. I might also propose that in the place of the present guards, ex-soldiers and expolicemen, sixty Pestalozzis be substituted. But, you will ask, "Where are we to find them?"—a pertinent question. The great Swiss teacher would certainly refuse to be a prison guard, for, basically, the principle of all prisons is wrong because it deprives man of liberty. So long as you deprive a man of his liberty, you will not make him better. You will cultivate habitual criminals: that is what I shall now prove.

The Criminals in Prison and Outside

To begin with, there is the fact that none of the prisoners recognize the justice of the punishment inflicted on them. This is in itself a condemnation of our whole judicial system. Speak to an imprisoned man or to some great swindler. He will say, "The little swindlers are here but the big ones are free and enjoy public respect." What can you answer, knowing the existence of great financial companies expressly designed to take the last pennies of the savings of the poor, with the founders retiring in time to make good legal hauls out of these small fortunes? We all know these great stock issuing companies with their lying circulars and their huge swindles. What can we answer the prisoner except that he is right?

Or this man, imprisoned for robbing a till, will tell you, "I simply wasn't clever enough; that's all." And what can you answer, knowing what goes on in important places, and how, following terrible scandals, the verdict "not guilty" is handed out to these great robbers? How many times have you heard prisoners say, "It's the big thieves who are holding us here; we are the little ones." Who can dispute this when he knows the incredible swindles perpetrated in the realm of high finance and commerce; when he knows that the thirst for riches, acquired by every possible means, is the very essence of bourgeois society. When he has examined this immense quantity of suspicious transactions divided between the honest man (according to bourgeois standards) and the criminal, when he has seen all this, he must be convinced that jails are made for the unskillful, not for criminals. This is the standard on the outside. As for the standard in the prison itself, it is needless to dwell on it long. We know well enough what it is. Whether in regard to food or the distribution of favors, in the words of the prisoners, from San Francisco to Kamchatka, "The biggest thieves are those who hold us here, not ourselves."

Prison Labor

Everyone knows the evil influence of laziness. Work relieves a man. But there is work and work. There is the work of the free individual which makes him feel a part of the immense whole. And there is that of the slave which degrades. Convict labor is unwillingly done, done only through fear of worse punishment. The work, which has no attraction in itself because it does not exercise any of the mental faculties of the worker, is so badly paid that it is looked upon as a punishment.

When my anarchist friends at Clairvaux made corsets or mother of pearl buttons and received twelve cents for ten hours labor, of which four cents were retained by the State, we can understand very well the disgust which this work aroused in a man condemned to it. When he receives thirty-six cents at the end of a week, he is right to say, "Those who keep us here are thieves, not we."

The Effect of Cutting Off Social Contacts

And what inspiration can a prisoner get to work for the common good, deprived as he is of all connections with life outside? By a refinement of cruelty, those who planned our prisons did everything they could to break all relationships of the prisoner with society. In England the prisoner's wife and children can see him only once every three months, and the letters he is allowed to write are really preposterous. The philanthropists have even at times carried defiance of human nature so far as to restrict a prisoner from writing anything but his signature on a printed circular.appears.

The best influence to which a prisoner could be subjected, the only one which could bring him a ray of light, a softer element in his life,-the relationship with his kin, is systematically prevented.

In the sombre life of the prisoner which flows by without passion or emotion, all the finer sentiments rapidly become atrophied. The skilled workers who loved their trade lose their taste for work. Bodily energy slowly disappears. The mind no longer has the energy for sustained attention; thought is less rapid, and in any case less persistent. It loses depth. It seems to me that the lowering of nervous energy in prisons is due, above all, to the lack of varied impressions. In ordinary life a thousand sounds and colors strike our senses daily, a thousand little facts come to our consciousness and stimulate the activity of our brains. No such things strike the prisoners' senses. Their impressions are few and always the same.

The Theory of Will Power

There is another important cause of demoralization in prisons. All transgressions of accepted moral standards may be ascribed to lack of a strong will. The majority of the inmates of prisons are people who did not have sufficient strength to resist the temptations surrounding them or to control a passion which momentarily carried them away. In prisons as in monasteries, everything is done to kill a man's will. He generally has no choice between one of two acts. The rare occasions on which he can exercise his will are very brief. His whole life is regulated and ordered in advance. He has only to swim with the current, to obey under pain of severe punishment.

Under these conditions all the will power that he may have had on entering disappears. And where will he find the strength with which to resist the temptations which will arise before him, as if by magic, when he is free-of the prison walls? Where will he find the strength to resist the first impulse to a passionate outbreak, if during several years everything was done to kill this inner strength, to make him a docile tool in the hands of those who control him? This fact is, according to my mind, the most terrible condemnation of the whole penal system based on the deprivation of individual liberty.

The origin of this suppression of individual will, which is the essence of all prisons, is easy to see. It springs from the desire of guarding the greatest number of prisoners with the fewest possible guards. The ideal of prison officials would be thousands of automatons, arising, working, eating and going to sleep by means of electric currents switched on by one of the guards. Economies might then be made in the budget, but no astonishment should be expressed that men, reduced to machines, are not, on their release, the type which society wants. As soon as a prisoner is released, his old companions await him. He is fraternally received and once again engulfed by the current which once swept him to prison.

Protective organizations can do nothing. All that they can do to combat the evil influence of the prison is to counterbalance some of those results in the liberated men.

And what a contrast between the reception by his old companions and that of the people in philanthropic work for released prisoners" Who of them will invite him to his home and say to him simply, "Here is a room, here is work, sit down at this table, and become part of the family"? The released man is only looking for the outstretched hand of warm friendship. But society, after having done everything it could to make an enemy of him, having inoculated him with the vices of the prison, rejects him. He is condemned to become a "repeater."

The Effect of Prison Clothes and Discipline

Everyone knows the influence of decent clothing. Even an animal is ashamed to appear before his fellow creatures if something makes him look ridiculous. A cat whom somebody has painted black and yellow will not dare mingle with other cats. But men begin by giving the clothes of a lunatic to those whom they profess to want to reform.

During all his prison life the prisoner is subjected to treatment which shows the greatest contempt of his feelings. A prisoner is not accorded the single respect due a human being. He is a thing, a number, and he is treated like a numbered thing. If he yields to the most human of all desires, that of communicating with a comrade, he is guilty of a breach of discipline. Before entering prison he may not have lied or deceived, but in prison he will learn to lie and deceive so that it will become second nature to him.

And it goes hard with those who do not submit. If being searched is humiliating, if a man finds the food distasteful, if he shows disgust in the keeper's trafficking in tobacco, if he divides his bread with his neighbor, if he still has enough dignity to be irritated by an insult, if he is honest enough to be revolted by the petty intrigues, prison will be a hell for him.

He will be overburdened with work unless he is sent to rot in solitary confinement. The slightest infraction of discipline will bring down the severest punishment. And each punishment will lead to another. He will be driven to madness through persecution. He can consider himself lucky to leave prison otherwise than in a coffin.

Prison Guards

It is easy to write in the newspapers that the guards must be carefully watched, that the wardens must be chosen from good men. Nothing is easier than to build administrative utopias. But man will remain man—guard as well as prisoner. And when these guards are condemned to spend the rest of their lives in these false positions, they suffer the consequences. They become fussy. Nowhere, save in monasteries or convents, does such a spirit of petty intrigue reign. Nowhere are scandal and tale-bearing so well developed as among prison guards.

You cannot give an individual any authority without corrupting him. He will abuse it. He will be less scrupulous and feel his authority even more when his sphere of action is limited. Forced to live in any enemy's camp, the guards cannot become models of kindness. To the league of prisoners there is opposed the league of jailers. It is the institution which makes them what they are—petty, mean persecutors. Put a Pestalozzi in their place and he will soon become a prison guard.

Quickly rancor against society gets into the prisoner's heart. He becomes accustomed to detesting those who oppress him. He divides the world into two parts,—one in which he and his comrades belong, the other, the external world, represented by the guards and their superiors. A league is formed by the prisoners against all those who do not wear prison garb. These are their enemies and everything that can be done to deceive them is right.

As soon as he is freed, the prisoner puts this code into practice. Before going to prison he could commit his offenses unthinkingly. Now he has a philosophy, which can be summed up in the words of Zola, "What rascals these honest men are." If we take into consideration all the different influences of the prison on the prisoner, we will be convinced that they make a man less and less fitted for life in society. On the other hand, none of these influences raises the intellectual and moral faculties of the prisoner, or leads him to a higher conception of life. Prison does not improve the prisoner. And furthermore, we have seen that it does not prevent him from committing other crimes. It does not then achieve any of the ends which it has set itself.

How Shall We Deal with Offenders?

That is why the question must be asked, "What should be done with those who break the laws?" I do not mean the written laws—they are a sad heritage of a sad past—but the principles of morality which are engraved on the hearts of each one of us.

There was a time when medicine was the art of administering some drugs, gropingly discovered through experiment. But our times have attacked the medical problem from a new angle. Instead of curing diseases medicine now seeks primarily to prevent them. Hygiene is the best of all medicines.

We have yet to do the same thing for this great social phenomenon which we still call "crime" but which our children will call a "social disease." To prevent this illness will be the best of cures. And this conclusion has already become the watchword of a whole school of modern thinkers concerned with "crime." In the works published by these innovators we have all the elements necessary for taking a new stand towards those whom society, until now, has in cowardly fashion decapitated, hanged, or imprisoned.

Causes of Crime

Three great categories of causes produce these anti-social acts called crimes. They are social, physiological, and physical. I shall begin with the last-named causes. They are less well known, but their influence is indisputable.

Physical Causes

When one sees a friend mail a letter which he has forgotten to address, one says this is an accident—it is unforeseen. These accidents, these unexpected events, occur in human societies with the same regularity as those which can be foreseen. The number of unaddressed letters which will be mailed continues from year to year with astounding regularity. Their number may vary slightly each year, but only slightly.

Here we have so capricious a factor as absentmindedness. However, this factor is subject to laws that are just as rigorous as those governing the movements of the planets. The same is true for the number of murders committed from year to year. With the statistics for previous years in hand, anyone can predict in advance, with striking exactitude, the approximate number of murders that will be committed in the course of the year in every country of Europe.

The influence of physical causes on our actions is still far from being completely analyzed. It is, however, known that acts of violence predominate in summer whereas in winter acts against property take the lead. When one examines the curves traced by Prof. Enrico Ferri and when one observes the curve for acts of violence rise and fall with the curve for temperature, one is vividly impressed by the similarity of the two curves and one understands how much of a machine man is. Man who boasts of his free will is as dependent on the temperature, the winds, and the rain as any other organism. Who will doubt these influences? When the weather is fine and the harvest good, and when the villagers feel at their ease, certainly they will be less likely to end their petty squabbles with knife thrusts. When the weather is bad and the harvest poor, the villagers become morose and their quarrels will take on a more violent character.

Physiological Causes

The physiological causes, those which depend on the brain structure, the digestive organs, and the nervous system, are certainly more important than the physical causes. The influence of inherited capacities as well as of physical organization on our acts has been the object of such searching investigation that we can form a fairly correct idea of its importance. When Cesare Lombroso maintains that the majority of our prison inmates have some defect of their brain structure, we can accept this declaration on condition that we compare the brains of those who died in prison with those who died outside under generally bad living conditions. When he demonstrates that the most brutal murders are perpetrated by individuals who have some serious mental defect, we agree because this statement has been confirmed by observation. But when Lombroso declares that society has the right to take measures against the defectives, we refuse to follow him. Society has no right to exterminate those who have diseased brains. We admit that many of those who commit these atrocious acts are almost idiots. But not all idiots become murderers.

In many families, in palaces as well as insane asylums, idiots were found with the same traits which Lombroso considers characteristic of “criminal insanity.” The only difference between them and those sent to the gallows is the environment in which they lived. Cerebral diseases can certainly stimulate the development of an inclination to murder, but it is not inevitable. Everything depends on the circumstances in which the individual suffering from a mental disease is placed.

Every intelligent person can see from the accumulated facts that the majority of those now treated as criminals are people suffering from some malady, and that, consequently, it is necessary to cure them by the best of care instead of sending them to prison where the disease will only be aggravated.

If each one of us subjects himself to a severe analysis, he will see that at times there pass through his mind the germs of ideas, quick as a flash, which constitute the foundations for evil deeds. We repudiated these ideas, but if they had found a favorable response in our circumstances, or, if other sentiments, such as love, pity and the sense of brotherhood had not counteracted these flashes of egoistic and brutal thoughts, they would have ended by leading to an evil act. In brief, the physiological causes play an important part in leading men to prison, but they are not the causes of “criminality” properly speaking. These affections of the mind, the cerebrospinal system, etc., might be found in their incipience among us all. The great majority of us have some one of these maladies. But they do not lead a person to commit an anti-social act unless external circumstances give them a morbid turn.

The Social Causes

But if physical causes have so strong an influence on our actions, if our physiology so often becomes the cause of the anti-social deeds we commit, how much more potent are the social causes. The most forward-looking and intelligent minds of our time proclaim that society as a whole is responsible for every anti-social act committed. We have our part in the glory of our heroes and geniuses; we also share in the acts of our assassins.

It is we who have made them what they are,—the one as well as the other.

Year in and year out thousands of children grow up in the midst of the moral and material filth of our great cities, in the midst of a population demoralized by hand to mouth living. These children do not know a real home. Their home is a wretched lodging today, the streets tomorrow. They grow up without any decent outlets for their young energies. When we see the child population of large cities grow up in this fashion, we can only be astonished that so few of them become highwaymen and murderers. What surprises me is the depth of the social sentiments among humanity, the warm friendliness of even the worst neighborhoods. Without it, the number of these that would declare open warfare on society would be even greater. Without this friendliness, this aversion to violence, not a stone would be left of our sumptuous city palaces.

And at the other end of the ladder, what does the child growing up on the streets see? Luxury, stupid and insensate, smart shops, reading matter devoted to exhibiting wealth, a money-worshipping cult developing a thirst for riches, a passion for living at the expense of others. The watchword is: "Get rich. Destroy everything that stands in your way, and do it by any means save those that will land you in jail." Manual labor is despised to a point where our ruling classes prefer to indulge in gymnastics than handle a spade or a saw. A calloused hand is considered a sign of inferiority and a silk dress of superiority.

Society itself daily creates these people incapable of leading a life of honest labor, and filled with anti-social desires. She glorifies them when their crimes are crowned with financial success. She sends them to prison when they have not "succeeded." We will no longer have any use for prisons, executioners, or judges when the social revolution will have wholly changed the relations between capital and labor, when there are no more idlers, when each can work according to his inclination for the common good, when every child will be taught to work with his hands at the same time that his mind and soul get normal development.

Man is the result of the environment in which he grows up and spends his life. If he is accustomed to work from childhood, to being considered as a part of society as a whole, to understanding that he cannot injure anyone without finally feeling the effects himself, then there will be found few cases of violation of moral laws.

Two-thirds of the acts condemned as crimes today are acts against property. They will disappear along with private property. As for acts of violence against people, they already decrease in proportion to the growth of the social sense and they will disappear when we attack the causes instead of the effects.

How Shall Offenders Be Cured?

Until now, penal institutions, so dear to the lawyers, were a compromise between the Biblical idea of vengeance, the belief of the middle ages in the devil, the modern lawyers' idea of terrorization, and the idea of the prevention of crime by punishment.

It is not insane asylums that must be built instead of prisons. Such an execrable idea is far from my mind. The insane asylum is always a prison. Far from my mind also is the idea, launched from time to time by the philanthropists, that the prison be kept but entrusted to physicians and teachers. What prisoners have not found today in society is a helping hand, simple and friendly, which would aid them from childhood to develop the higher faculties of their minds and souls; faculties whose natural development has been impeded either by an organic defect or by the evil social conditions which society itself creates for millions of people. But these superior faculties of the mind and heart cannot be exercised by a person deprived of his liberty, if he never has choice of action. The physicians' prison, the insane asylum, would be much worse than our present jails. Human fraternity and liberty are the only correctives to apply to those diseases of the human organism which lead to so-called crime.

Of course in every society, no matter how well organized, people will be found with easily aroused passions, who may, from time to time, commit anti-social deeds. But what is necessary to prevent this is to give their passions a healthy direction, another outlet.

Today we live too isolated. Private property has led us to an egoistic individualism in all our mutual relations. We know one another only slightly; our points of contact are too rare. But we have seen in history examples of a communal life which is more intimately bound together,—the “composite family” in China, the agrarian communes, for example. These people really know one another. By force of circumstances they must aid one another materially and morally. Family life, based on the original community, has disappeared. A new family, based on community of aspirations, will take its place. In this family people will be obliged to know one another, to aid one another and to lean on one another for moral support on every occasion. And this mutual prop will prevent the great number of anti-social acts which we see today.

It will be said, however, there will always remain some people, the sick, if you wish to call them that, who constitute a danger to society. Will it not be necessary somehow to rid ourselves of them, or at least prevent their harming others? No society, no matter how little intelligent, will need such an absurd solution, and this is why. Formerly the insane were looked upon as possessed by demons and were treated accordingly. They were kept in chains in places like stables, riveted to the walls like wild beasts. But along came Pinel, a man of the Great Revolution, who dared to remove their chains and tried treating them as brothers. “You will be devoured by them,” cried the keepers. But Pinel dared. Those who were believed to be wild beasts gathered around Pinel and proved by their attitude that he was right in believing in the better side of human nature even when the intelligence is clouded by disease. Then the cause was won. They stopped chaining the insane.

Then the peasants of the little Belgian village, Gheel, found something better. They said: “Send us your insane. We will give them absolute freedom.” They adopted them into their families, they gave them places at their tables, chance alongside them to cultivate their fields and a place among their young people at their country balls. “Eat, drink, and dance with us. Work, run about the fields, and be free.” That was the system, that was all the science the Belgian peasant had. (I am speaking of the early days. Today the treatment of the insane at Gheel has become a profession and where it is a profession for profit, what significance can there be in it?) And liberty worked a miracle. The insane became cured. Even those who had incurable, organic lesions became sweet, tractable members of the family like the rest. The diseased mind would always work in an abnormal fashion but the heart was in the right place. They cried that it was a miracle. The cures were attributed to a saint and a virgin. But this virgin was liberty and the saint was work in the fields and fraternal treatment.

At one of the extremes of the immense “space between mental disease and crime” of which Maudsley speaks, liberty and fraternal treatment have worked their miracle. They will do the same at the other extreme.

To Sum Up

The prison does not prevent anti-social acts from taking place. It increases their numbers. It does not improve those who enter its walls. However it is reformed it will always remain a place of restraint, an artificial environment, like a monastery, which will make the prisoner less and less fit for life in the community. It does not achieve its end. It degrades society. It must disappear. It is a survival of barbarism mixed with Jesuitical philanthropy.

The first duty of the revolution will be to abolish prisons,—those monuments of human hypocrisy and cowardice. Anti-social acts need not be feared in a society of equals, in the midst of a free people, all of whom have acquired a healthy education and the habit of mutually aiding one another. The greater number of these acts will no longer have any *raison d'être*. The others will be nipped in the bud. As for those individuals with evil tendencies whom existing society will pass on to us after the revolution, it will be our task to prevent their exercising these tendencies. This is already accomplished quite efficiently by the solidarity of all the members of the community against such aggressors. If we do not succeed in all cases, the only practical corrective still will be fraternal treatment and moral support. This is not Utopia. It is already done by isolated individuals and it will become the general practice. And such means will be far more powerful to protect society from anti-social acts than the existing system of punishment which is an ever-fertile source of new crimes.

**Proposal for the United States to pass its own Law of Mother Earth
As inspired by Bolivia, which acknowledges:**

any rich mineral deposits as “blessings”

the right of the natural world to life and existence

the right to continue vital cycles and processes free from human alteration

the right to pure water and clean air

the right to balance

the right not to be polluted

the right not to have cellular structure modified or genetically altered

the right of nature not to be affected by mega-infrastructure and development projects that affect the balance of ecosystems and the local inhabitant communities

that Earth is the “mother of all” [a Being] and gives an indigenous definition of Earth that states, “She is sacred, fertile and the source of life that feeds and cares for all living beings in her womb. She is in permanent balance, harmony and communication with the cosmos. She is comprised of all ecosystems and living beings, and their self-organisation.” [Therefore nature is not abstract nor an edenic projection. It is interrelated, contingent beings in constant flux.]

the need to establish a new relationship between human and nature, the harmony of which must be preserved as a guarantee of Earth’s regeneration [and humankind’s wellbeing]

the acknowledgement that humans are considered equal to all other entities

the establishment of a ministry of mother earth to develop how new laws and relationship to industry will be implemented, and to clarify further terms [acknowledging that the term “equality” can be tonally vague; such a committee would, for example, determine which actual protections these new rights will give in court to insects (because peoples tend to think their lives are more important than a single insect’s) and ecosystems]

ways and means to give communities new legal power to monitor and control polluting industries [and acknowledges, as unacceptable, that areas of low-income, non-white, or indigenous communities are disproportionately affected by pollution and depletion].

[acknowledges that these rights are not ours to give, and additionally that any granting of rights implies a narcissistic and hierarchical fallacy, and one too contingent on the jurisdiction of nationhood and the state; however, tragically, we must officially grant these rights.]

These rights are not abstract.
These rights are not art nor literature.
The #occupation must be trans-human.

John Barlow
John Burtle

Budget cuts made my job redundant, which made my apartment too expensive. With just over a month's rent left in my bank account, I needed to find something cheap fast. I tried squatting buildings and foreclosed houses, but that just lead to way too many problems... like being handcuffed and dragged out by cops and fined, beaten up by a landlord's cronies, crackheads busting in and jacking all my good shit.

I knew that this just wasn't working. I decided to move to a cuttier spot somewhere. Looking around the city, I notice a shit-ton of two-sided billboards, and I got to thinking that with a couple of structural additions, I could set up residence in there pretty easily.

A billboard might not seem like a cutty spot, but there are so many of them that most of us just end up ignoring the structure and just focus on ignoring the ads. I ended up finding a two sided billboard that was 60 feet by 20' raised only about 20 feet off the ground. The key is a grappling hook.

My original pad featured a platform made of a bunch of palettes and scrap wood from a construction site, the top covered with a tarp. Six months in, my dwelling is a little plusher, with two floors made of nicer 4'X8" panels and a tin sheet covering the top. My stuff is on the second level, and I've got some bean bags in the bottom. My favorite part of my structure is the hammock I sleep in. I hung it from the supports of the billboard, and damn is it comfy.

All this comfiness made me want to start a public service of putting hammocks up around the city. I can hang the things from just about anything where there is two uprights close enough together. Like between two lampposts, or between lamppost and a telephone pole, or between two telephone poles or other billboard supports, using two tree trunks... you get the drift. I've seen kids and adults and just about any type of person on the hammocks taking some quite time around the city.

There's hardly any place for relaxation in public, besides for a park, so I'm happy to help out.

Plus, me and my friends use them all the time.

Slavoj Žižek
Speaks At Occupy Wall Street
October 9th, 2011

In mid-April 2011, the Chinese government prohibited on TV, films, and novels all stories that contain alternate reality or time travel. This is a good sign for China. These people still dream about alternatives, so you have to prohibit this dreaming. Here, we don't need a prohibition because the ruling system has even oppressed our capacity to dream. Look at the movies that we see all the time. It's easy to imagine the end of the world. An asteroid destroying all life and so on. But you cannot imagine the end of capitalism.

They are saying we are all losers, but the true losers are down there on Wall Street. They were bailed out by billions of our money. We are called socialists, but here there is always socialism for the rich. They say we don't respect private property, but in the 2008 financial crash-down more hard-earned private property was destroyed than if all of us here were to be destroying it night and day for weeks. They tell you we are dreamers. The true dreamers are those who think things can go on indefinitely the way they are. We are not dreamers. We are the awakening from a dream that is turning into a nightmare.

We are not destroying anything. We are only witnessing how the system is destroying itself. We all know the classic scene from cartoons. The cat reaches a precipice but it goes on walking, ignoring the fact that there is nothing beneath this ground. Only when it looks down and notices it, it falls down. This is what we are doing here. We are telling the guys there on Wall Street, "Hey, look down!"

So what are we doing here? Let me tell you a wonderful, old joke from Communist times. A guy was sent from East Germany to work in Siberia. He knew his mail would be read by censors, so he told his friends: "Let's establish a code. If a letter you get from me is written in blue ink, it is true what I say. If it is written in red ink, it is false." After a month, his friends get the first letter. Everything is in blue. It says, this letter: "Everything is wonderful here. Stores are full of good food. Movie theatres show good films from the west. Apartments are large and luxurious. The only thing you cannot buy is red ink." This is how we live. We have all the freedoms we want. But what we are missing is red ink: the language to articulate our non-freedom. The way we are taught to speak about freedom— war on terror and so on—falsifies freedom. And this is what you are doing here. You are giving all of us red ink.

There is a danger. Don't fall in love with yourselves. We have a nice time here. But remember, carnivals come cheap. What matters is the day after, when we will have to return to normal lives. Will there be any changes then? I don't want you to remember these days, you know, like "Oh, we were young and it was beautiful." Remember that our basic message is "We are allowed to think about alternatives." If the rule is broken, we do not live in the best possible world. But there is a long road ahead. There are truly difficult questions that confront us. We know what we do not want. But what do we want? What social organization can replace capitalism? What type of new leaders do we want?

Remember, the problem is not corruption or greed. The problem is the system. It forces you to be corrupt. Beware not only of the enemies, but also of false friends who are already working to dilute this process. In the same way you get coffee without caffeine, beer without alcohol, ice cream without fat, they will try to make this into a harmless, moral protest. A decaffienated process. But the reason we are here is that we have had enough of a world where, to recycle Coke cans, to give a couple of dollars for charity, or to buy a Starbucks cappuccino where 1% goes to third world starving children is enough to make us feel good. After outsourcing work and torture, after marriage agencies are now outsourcing our love life, we can see that for a long time, we allow our political engagement also to be outsourced. We want it back.

We are not Communists if Communism means a system which collapsed in 1990. Remember that today those Communists are the most efficient, ruthless Capitalists. In China today, we have Capitalism which is even more dynamic than your American Capitalism, but doesn't need democracy. Which means when you criticize Capitalism, don't allow yourself to be blackmailed that you are against democracy. The marriage between democracy and Capitalism is over. The change is possible.

What do we perceive today as possible? Just follow the media. On the one hand, in technology and sexuality, everything seems to be possible. You can travel to the moon, you can become immortal by biogenetics, you can have sex with animals or whatever, but look at the field of society and economy. There, almost everything is considered impossible. You want to raise taxes by little bit for the rich. They tell you it's impossible. We lose competitiveness. You want more money for health care, they tell you, "Impossible, this means totalitarian state." There's something wrong in the world, where you are promised to be immortal but cannot spend a little bit more for healthcare. Maybe we need to set our priorities straight here. We don't want higher standard of living. We want a better standard of living. The only sense in which we are Communists is that we care for the commons. The commons of nature. The commons of privatized by intellectual property. The commons of biogenetics. For this, and only for this, we should fight.

Communism failed absolutely, but the problems of the commons are here. They are telling you we are not American here. But the conservatives fundamentalists who claim they really are American have to be reminded of something: What is Christianity? It's the holy spirit. What is the holy spirit? It's an egalitarian community of believers who are linked by love for each other, and who only have their own freedom and responsibility to do it. In this sense, the holy spirit is here now. And down there on Wall Street, there are pagans who are worshipping blasphemous idols. So all we need is patience. The only thing I'm afraid of is that we will someday just go home and then we will meet once a year, drinking beer, and nostalgically remembering "What a nice time we had here." Promise yourselves that this will not be the case. We know that people often desire something but do not really want it. Don't be afraid to really want what you desire. Thank you very much.

Danielle Adair

behold handmade urgency: this is a poem: pass it on
(from *mrs. porter's salocuppation sunday october 9, 2011*)

be-hold
between too close and far away
hairy territory
counter clockwise
uncountable responsibility
would you hire her if she has hairy legs
homegrown & hand-done
for freedom for what for what
are we clockwise
no blinders, wear them not
we are the millions
our night shall come to light
countering clockwise
behold homemade urgency
responsibility far away
you behold what's come from far away
you have the right to take off your blinders hairy territory
beauty
homemade tonight
behold our demands
would you?
sing it everywhere close & far away
the farthest responsibility

*

behold
demands
responsible
homemade
handmade
homegrown
hairy
legs
no blinders
beauty
neighbor
no job to do yet
not there must be a reason
please add
pass it on

hire hairy
billions eye
clock
wise count
we yet

*

blindness
us
hire her
would you
our night
should
behold
responsibility
counter clockwise
behold our demands
my neighbor
beauty

*

demands no demands
would you hire
to light
responsibility far away
you have the right to
counterclockwise
style
your neighbor
a rehearsal
yet

*

counter
fluid
rehearse
object
control
rehearsed
holding responses
reason

week
objections
homemade
handmade
hairy
legs

reason
counter clockwise
behold
neighbor
job
to do
we
not said

*

homegrown
hand-done
counter-clockwise
hire her
night! light!
unconditional
hurrah
the right to
you'll choose
the I is extra
hospitality
would you
homemade style
here's one
job to do

*

powers
done
be
territory
demands
no
clock
fluid
ability
hospitable
millions
light
faraway
homemade
violence
choose
responsible
unknown
objections
tonight
would you
choices

*

On #OWS, Co-Optation, and the Growth Phases of a Social Movement
by Beka Economopoulos
Wednesday, October 12, 2011 at 11:35am

PART 1: On #OWS, Co-Optation, and the Growth Phases of a Social Movement

Here's the thing: our messaging, our strategy, and our tactics must change based on the external landscape. When we become embraced by the Democratic Party and its allies, we must go further than what makes them comfortable. That's if we want to win more than concessions and easy reforms (that currently exist within the realm of possibility), and achieve game-changing substantive/structural reforms (that currently live in the realm of impossibility, that we didn't imagine we ever could see in our lifetimes).

We should aim for nothing less -- why aim for closing up shop soon when we have no idea what we're capable of?

Phase 1 = vanguard moves in, initiates occupation, largely dismissed, but staying power piques curiosity, and police misconduct/violence draws attention and wins sympathy.

Phase 2 = vanguards in other cities recognize potential, initiate occupations. At the same time, initial occupation gathers steam, grows, large membership orgs endorse and give legitimacy that wasn't present before, now the mainstream media start to change tune. Focus of coverage is human interest story of life in the park; and what do they want?

Phase 3 = mainstream media interest explodes, NGOs, labor, community, and establishment orgs engage supporters, connect existing campaigns to #occupy frame, amplify visibility and suggestion of social movement. Democratic leadership embrace movement, as do party-related and electorally focused orgs. Media coverage attributes power to movement, queries whether it's a Tea Party for the left, whether it will gain electoral power and legislative victories.

Phase 4 = ?

We currently find ourselves in Phase 3. Senior members of the White House administration, and the President himself, have expressed support for OWS. Democracy for America, a Howard Dean initiated group just sent an email blast to more than a million members tonight selling yard signs that say "We Are the 99%" with co-branded urls: OccupyWallSt.org and DemocracyforAmerica.org/occupy. OWS is embraced by the establishment as a means to amplify existing agenda.

Bloomberg gives tacit "permission" for our occupation, effectively rendering it non-threatening and normalizing it. Result is rise in media coverage of occupation as nuisance to neighbors.

This is a natural and necessary phase. So now what?

We're in this for the long haul. There are no "solutions" that can be presented quickly to make us go away. And so there will be moments where our presence is no longer an uncomfortable and unknown variable, but rather is normalized and integrated. It's in those moments that we have to push the envelop, pry open the space of possibility even farther. We go as far as we can to destabilize, but maintain momentum. And when that's the new "normal" then we go farther. That's how change happens, how we shift the terrain and the terms of the game.

From an actions perspective, that means getting tactical, and mobile, activating the rest of the city, executing higher-risk actions, civil disobedience and arrests.

From a media perspective, we have to get ahead of the game. We no longer need to legitimize. Or articulate the problem. Both are clearly established. So, given this new moment how can we use media strategically?

We must draw a line, disavow the Democrats explicitly, make our messaging a little uncomfortable. Yes, perhaps, split the support, lest we not be co-opted. This will be painful, internally, as it won't always achieve comfortable consensus. But to hold this space and expand the realm of possibility, we have to go farther than others are ready to go. It's how this started and we can't be too shy to be bold.

-Beka Economopoulos

PART 2: RESPONSES

Oct 12, 2011, at 8:17 AM

Bailey Xxxxxx (name stricken) <bailey.xxxxxx> wrote:</bailey.xxxxxx>

It would seem that one of the most obvious ways to create the dividing line between OWS and groups like the DFA is to point out that they're seeking to profit off the movement. (AKA business as usual) I haven't seen anything saying that they'll be giving back any of that \$14 to OWS or better yet, to any groups working with the disadvantaged.

I think if we just pointed this out, and highlighted the other orgs like MoveOn who are riding the wave without actually doing any heavy lifting, people are going to key into that. If we go further and force them to answer why they thought it was ok to profiteer off a campaign going after greed, that would be an interesting moment.

The moment you blanketly say we hate democrats, that becomes a divisive message and not really what everyone seems to be working at here. However, forcing the establishment democrats to answer why their go-to reaction was profiteering, that has some credibility.

Bailey

Wed, Oct 12, 2011 at 9:44 AM

Will Xxxxxx <willxxxxxx> wrote:</willxxxxxx>

+1001 (to Bailey's post)

Sent from my iPhone

PART 3: On Emphasis on Democracy and Pluralism (99%) VS. Neoliberalism and Capitalism

Actually, many mainstream orgs, including MoveOn, have been doing heavy lifting to support this thing, and they truly don't want to co-opt the movement. But the reality is the movement has gone mainstream now, and it will get sucked in to establishment politics.

Astra Taylor, journalist and filmmaker said it concisely: "the Democrats would benefit from nothing more than the whole social and political playing field tilting left -- but that ain't gonna happen if they co-opt OWS! let them benefit inadvertently but that's it...we must push further".

I don't think saying publicly "DFA and other groups are profiting from the movement without giving back" gets us where we need to go. Quite the opposite: that's an invitation for more mainstream participation at

the same time that internally we're watering our message down (being descriptive and reactive and celebrating OWS as being about a diversity of voices, democratic process, empowering the 99%), without maintaining the radical orientation this started with.

This occupation was initiated by, and remains largely organized by anticapitalists. We don't need to say the "c" word, or the "n" word (neoliberalism - the agenda of the past 40 years: privatization, deregulation, financialization, and globalization, which has led to the concentration of wealth, corruption of the political process, and accelerated the destruction of all we hold dear.). But file in the back of our heads that after the 2008 economic crash, even mainstream media headlines did go there. And outlets like the Wall Street Journal / Market Watch, Crains, IBT, and other finance industry rags are going there now.

We can use softer, gentler terms: the free market, etc. But if we want accountability, regulation and restructuring of Wall Street and the finance industry we need to figure this out, and it has to play a much bigger role in OWS messaging. And an impending Eurozone crash if Greece defaults could result in a major economic crash here in the US, potentially soon. So there is an opening to push further.

This isn't a denunciation of establishment orgs, there are good people within them and they all want to see this succeed. But they can't lead us there. Now that we're in a new phase (of media coverage, of participation), we owe it to everyone to radicalize our message, go beyond what these groups can publicly say.

The Tea Party and radical right have always played this role. They make the establishment right uncomfortable, they divide and provoke, and they've been winning. The center moved to the right, and the republican party tows a much harder line, wielding greater influence in D.C. than they did before.

OWS needs to tow a harder line. Being more explicit about the finance industry, making clear that we're not calling for easy reforms, that both parties are the problem, our political process is poisoned by the influence of money, that this is an international movement, that Egypt, Tunisia, Greece, Italy, Spain and the UK are all popular uprisings, like ours, in response to the economic crisis, the cutting of social safety nets, budget cuts and privatization. That our economic system is broken. And we'll settle for nothing less than fundamental and structural change.

I just ask that we be as radical as the mainstream finance publications that understand this movement better than the rest of the mainstream press. Start saying what they are saying.

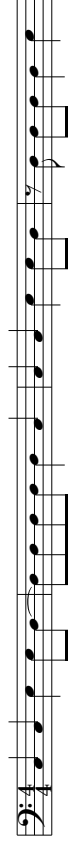
Enough focus on democracy. Talk about capitalism (*/insert euphemism here*).

-Beka Economopoulos

Do You Have a Radical Proposal?

(traditional, arranged by D. Tucker; C. Thornton, R. Woo)

Do you have a radical proposal? Do you have a radical proposal?
(chorus)



repeat until:

Yes I do! - individual

What say you?" - chorus

(proposal is made...) - individual

That's a (good/bad/new/old) idea! We'll put it on the list!
(chorus)



Coda:

Do we have some radical proposals? x2

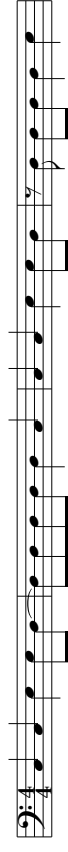
(....)

Those are (good/bad/varied) ideas!
We'll put them on the list!

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What say you?" - chorus

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(chorus)



Coda:

Do we have some radical proposals? x2

(....)

Those are (good/bad/varied) ideas!
We'll put them on the list!

THE OCCUPATION MOVEMENT: ON GREED, UNITY & VIOLENCE

Posted by OaklandCommune

Monday, October 10 2011

Corporate Greed is the Wrong Target

Being “greedy” is what good corporations and businesses are supposed to do in capitalism. In this system, individuals can only get ahead by acting greedy, in their own self-interest. So while many recent city occupations in the USA have built themselves against “corporate greed”, “big business,” and “financiers on Wall Street”, we cannot forget that the most greedy corporations also donate the most to charity, that small business is just as much part of the system as big business, that productive industry cannot exist without finance. We must challenge the entire system. If we are really against “corporate greed” then we are against capitalism itself.

The 99%?

Yes, the 1% have been screwing us, for a long ass time. The 99% are reduced to working, serving and maintaining a system that makes us miserable and prevents us from realizing our potential. A growing number of us have been completely expelled from ‘society’ altogether—through homelessness, joblessness, an inability to get adequate healthcare, lack of access to education and other miserable conditions.

But the idea that there is something called society that we should all work together to defend is an illusion. Society is rife with divisions, conflicts and wars. Some of these wars are manufactured and waged by the 1%. Other wars, such as the wars conducted by indigenous peoples and people of color against racist colonization and the war conducted by women and trans people against patriarchal gender violence, are hidden and suppressed in the false name of society. Every year for these last decades, the casualties of society have piled up as the revolutionaries have been killed or jailed.

In recent years, many of the 99% have appeared to follow the rules. Many of us have been caught in the cycle of working and borrowing in order to continue working and borrowing, we have been terrified of speaking out against daily injustices and humiliations for fear of losing the tiny foothold we hope to protect, or for fear of getting jailed or beaten by the cops, or getting ostracized and criminalized by the obeyers (even though they know the rules are unjust). Many people who have recently lost their social standing are figuring out that the promises capitalism holds out to them are hollow. What the 99% faces, at best, is a life of debt, chained to shitty jobs and to shitty commodities.

The Occupy Movement is awakening to the fact that if we continue to follow their rules, they, the 1%, will win. The Occupy movement is a wake-up call to disobey their rules and to create new ways of living together.

But the call for unity of the 99% is empty. There is no unity between those who seek to uphold the system of domination and those of us who seek to destroy it as we create a new world. What section of the 99% will join us, and what part will seek to defend the powers that exist, playing on fear of chaos or disruption? What part of that 99% will work with us to expropriate, destroy and transform what the 1% controls? Most immediately: the cops may well be part of that 99%, but they are directly in opposition to us as long as they continue to do their job as cops. (The Tea Party minions, the rapists, racists, gay bashers and sexual abusers are all part of the 99%, but they are definitely not with us).

Violence is Not Something We Can Choose or Not Choose



The Occupy Movement quickly comes up against the pepper spray and baton blows of the cops. What is violence? Ask the friends and family of all those who have been killed or sexually assaulted by cops or shot in the back for not paying a transit fare. Ask the prisoners who are on hunger strike across California, the homeless who try to find a place to sleep or a place to pee, the thousands who have gotten beaten up for protesting injustices, the young people of color who are constantly harassed and attacked by anti-gang task forces, the sex workers abused and exploited by the cops.

Destroying and expropriating the property of the 1% is not violence. Violence is the shooting of Oscar Grant, of Charles Hill, of Kenneth Harding, and countless others. Violence is more than 1/3 of women who suffer sexual assault. In fact, violence is a normal, constant condition of capitalism. For the occupation movement, the first clear violence will come from the cops and resistance to these agents of repression is absolutely necessary. As someone said in Tahrir Square, “when the cops come to take your shit, you have to try to stop them.”

The square occupations in North Africa unleashed revolutions that toppled dictators and those in Europe brought global stock markets to the brink of collapse. The difference here is obviously in the numbers; 50,000+ in Tahrir Square, 20,000 in Syntagma. Yet there was also something more. The strength of these occupations lied in their refusal to be removed, their commitment to physically resist any attempts to evict them from their liberated spaces. Remember the barricades around Tahrir? Non-violence made no sense during those long nights of fighting to protect the revolution. Here in the usa, we will also need to resist, in our own ways. By limiting the scope of that resistance right from the start, we undermine our potential strength and we let the state decide when we will be removed, when this explosion of resistance has gone too far and needs to be extinguished.

We need tens of thousands to take to the streets and build this movement into something greater. But if the past weeks have taught us anything it is that clashes with the state do not scare people away. In fact it is the opposite. The numbers on Wall Street have clearly grown after each round of escalation and scuffles with police.

The Potential of This Movement-What Do We Really Want?

We don't want shitty jobs. We don't want to vote for politicians who promise to change things. We don't want to waste our energies trying to change the constitution. We don't want a few new rules for Wall Street. We don't believe we can “affect the system” by just “being together.”

The 1% controls the wealth of the society. We need to take it back, and remake it in the process. But what comes after occupying the city squares? City Hall? Foreclosed homes? Supermarkets? And then—Liberating public transit? Free health clinics? Free education? Collective food production?

Everything is possible.

Postscript: Occupy Oakland

As we write this, we have no way of knowing whether the city-controlled Frank Ogawa Plaza will become occupied Oscar Grant Plaza, with all of the possibilities that entails. But we do know that if this occupation is to last and continue to grow beyond the first night, and if this movement is to bring any fundamental change in the quality of our lives, it must be drastically different than any of the other Occupations around the country.

Oakland is currently under occupation by the police. The form of this occupation varies; the situation is much different in Temescal than in deep East Oakland. We live in a militarized space. Whether it's police executions of Black youth, police harassment of sex workers along International Boulevard, or the city council's racist legislation in the form of anti-loitering laws, gang injunctions or the suggested youth curfew, this paramilitary occupation is a project of local government to pacify and contain the city so capitalism can go about it's business uninterrupted.

But Oakland doesn't just have a violent, repressive contemporary situation; we have a vibrant history of struggle and resistance. From the 1946 General Strike to the formation of the Black Panther party in 1966 to the anti-police rebellion following the execution of Oscar Grant in 2009, Oakland has long been a city full of people that refuse to sit down and shut up. Despite every attempt by the state to kill that spirit, it lives on and will be out in full force over the coming days.



Nagat Ali
Poems & Writings

From 'The Road to Tahrir Square'

Like someone writing on water. That was the situation for anyone who criticized corruption in the last years of Mubarak's regime.

We were in one valley and the ruling regime was in another, boasting with confidence that Egypt was living one of the most splendid ages of democracy and freedom of expression. Many of us knew full well that Mubarak had given the people freedom of speech in the manner of "let them have a good time," and in return deprived them of their right to live a dignified life.

I had started waking up each day with a fright. The fear came from my anticipation that a great eruption was about to happen, but I didn't know where the fuse of the revolution would be lit. Would it come for example from the hungry people filling Cairo's streets or from the intellectual elite, divided amongst themselves, the majority of whom were content to theorize inside air-conditioned rooms?

I thought perhaps the revolution would come from the youth, as they are always the vanguard of the nation, especially university students—but where was the university? It had collapsed like all the country's other institutions.

Hope edged me forward a little, while following the well-known Egyptian Kefaya ("Enough!") movement that began in the summer of 2004 and shook up the stagnant waters of political life at that time.

I was optimistic despite the elite character of the movement, as it was formed of a group of intellectuals, university professors and lawyers that opposed the principle of extending Mubarak's term. They also stood firmly against attempts that were in full swing inside the palace for the president's son to inherit his rule. At the time Mubarak came out with a comic statement when asked in an interview about his opinion of this movement: "Look... I could just as well get people to come out saying "Not Enough!" The response of his adherents was even funnier: they sought to make another opposing collective called "Permanence for the sake of Prosperity."

Anyone walking in the streets of Cairo a few months before the revolution would have been convinced that hunger had driven many poor Egyptians mad and their patience had run out. Workers that had been laid off by some companies started to carpet the sidewalk outside the buildings of the People's Assembly and the Shura Council for many days in January, at the height of the cold, while the honorable representatives in the People's Assembly passed beside them in their luxury cars without even taxing themselves with the burden of glancing in their direction.

The successive protest movements that had become common in Egypt became messages of hope to everyone who loves Egypt and feared its collapse. There were the Ghazl el-Mahalla workers striking in 2008, whose successive actions and strikes cleared the way for other workers to find ways to protect their rights—later the April 7 Youth Movement joined their strike in solidarity. I said to myself at the time, maybe this is the beginning of a larger revolt. Maybe it's the beginning of the road.

The Tunisian revolution came to give us Egyptians hope in the possibility of changing the ruling regime in Egypt. The people's anger had reached the point of no return and was about to erupt, especially after the rigging of the last parliamentary elections in 2010 and the removal of every semblance of the opposition from Parliament.

The calls to demonstrate on January 25 started on the "We are All Khaled Said" Facebook page set up by Egyptian activist Wael Ghonem as well as from the April 7 Youth Movement page.

My Egyptian friends spread the news of the announcement on their pages. Some commented that the choice of this day as the date of the revolution coincided with Egyptian Police Day and would be a form of protest against the brutal practices of the police apparatus against Egyptian protestors. Others rallied around the day enthusiastically saying: We're not less than Tunisia. But we also had those who laughed at the whole thing, saying there was no such thing as a revolution by prior appointment. It would be no more than a day where the traffic in Cairo's streets was held up.

January 25th

I woke up in the afternoon under the pressure of a headache and high temperature. It seemed to be the first signs of a cold. Before eating anything I called a friend working as a journalist to ask her: Are there demonstrations in Tahrir Square? She told me that demonstrations had left from various neighborhoods in Cairo, and they were all going to meet in Tahrir Square. I said to her, ill and embarrassed, "You mean everyone went and I'm still at home? I must come immediately!" I ended the call with her and called another friend, an activist living in Shubra near our old house to find out where the demonstration leaving from Shubra heading to Tahrir had reached, in order to join them. She told me they were now at the edge of the Tahrir Square. I said goodbye quickly saying, "I'm on my way!"

I put my clothes on and got on the metro at the Hadaiq Maadi station bound for the Sadat stop to join the demonstrations there.

When I reached Tahrir Square I was astounded. I found that the numbers of demonstrators were very large, larger than I had expected, nearly filling the square completely, and increasing as the time went by.

I walked with crowds that were repeating out loud in one voice: "The people want to topple the regime!" Repeating with them in spontaneous enthusiasm, I tried to find something that would indicate something about the demonstrators' ideology, but the people were very diverse. Most of them were young, belonging to different social strata; that's what I guessed from their clothes, but most of their faces were not familiar to me. They weren't the political activists I was used to seeing in demonstrations nor did they belong to some of the cartoonish parties that called themselves the opposition. In some of their faces there was a touch of innocence, a purity that stunned me. I spoke with some of them and discovered that many were students at the American University in Cairo.

Abruptly, smaller groups broke away and returned a little later, bringing back bottles of water, sandwiches and containers of koshary. They began distributing them to those standing around insisting, "You have to eat. The day is still long."

From time to time, skirmishes broke out between the Central Security Forces and the demonstrators. Each time security sensed that the demonstrators had almost broken the security cordon they had placed tightly around us, they threw enormous quantities of tear gas, causing me to choke.

Time went by and I spotted some fellow writers in the distance.

I kept marching and the chants of the demonstrators—"Revolution til victory! There in Tunisia, here in Egypt!"—then I spotted in the crowd, from a distance, some well-known individuals such as Ayman Nour, Chairman of the El-Ghad party and the journalist Ibrahim Eissa. The writer Mohammad Shoair appeared suddenly. He said hello to me as he pondered the square. Then he showed his pleasure at the large numbers of demonstrators and said confidently, "If the demonstrations continue with these numbers for three days the regime might fall." I smiled, agreeing with his words despite my conviction that the regime wouldn't submit that simply and would use every dirty means at its disposal.

I spotted from a distance my friend the activist Viola Fahmy with some journalists. She called out to me and urged me to go with her to her office near Isaaf Station to get something from it. I went with her giving in to her wish, and on our way toward Talat Harb Street we saw a group of Central Security forces,

carrying large quantities of weapons and going towards Tahrir Square. I guessed that they were planning to attack the demonstrators and perhaps they were waiting for the numbers of demonstrators to go down as it got later, and thus they would be able to arrest and squash those that remained.

An hour later I returned to the square with my friend and told her I wouldn't be able to stay the night like she was, with the demonstrators who had decided at the end of the day to hold a sit in, perhaps due to their sense that they and their demands were not taken seriously. The Mubarak regime had looked on the Tahrir demonstrations of January 25 as if they were child's play and would be over at the end of the day. For that reason it didn't bother to reply to their demands, the most prominent of which was, as it appeared in the slogan that we raised in Tahrir Square: Freedom, Dignity and Social Justice.

I had to leave Tahrir and go home when it was after midnight, because I had gone out without informing anyone that I was going to the demonstrations. My younger brother might have gone out and left my sick mother alone.

I reached the house close to 1 am and called one of my friends who had decided to remain at the sit-in to check on their situation, but he didn't answer. I was stricken with worry and decided to call another friend. He told me what the security forces had done. They had arrested a large number of demonstrators after shooting rubber bullets and tear gas and beating them with clubs. He was now hiding in one of the side streets downtown.

*This is an excerpt from the book *The Road to Tahrir Square* by the Egyptian writer and poet Nagat Ali, narrating her daily life during the January 25th revolution.*

From Like the Blade of a Knife

The Competition

She did not curse her, never; on the contrary, she recognized her misery. Her beautiful adversary, who watches from centimeters away, with a sharp gaze, and prepares for the next round to win back the precious prey. She was like her in everything; the deep eyes, the senses damaged by love, the body blinded. But anyway, she, her adversary, was more innocent and wrote no poetry.

Electra

He was not as bad
as she thought
he was.

More likely that
he loved no one
in the first place.

His work as executioner
meant he loved nothing
but the sight of his hands
stained with them
even after the show
had ended.

She too did not fully
play the victim
-as was required -
but fled whenever

he confidently pulled her
towards the final scene
and mocked him
when he spoke to her of Electra
her ancient double,
she who gave her
deep scars

in the head
and taught her how to live
with disabled parts.

The Beggar

for Naguib Mahfouz

Mad she must be
to let him pass
not moved
by his indifference
the teenage vagabond
whose scrawny fingers
unintentionally scratched
the wound that runs
between her flesh
and her bones.

He told stories
passing his hand over
her long locks
about the history he lost
among buildings
that mostly burnt down
in the centre of the town.

He saw her as nothing
but a child
whose confused eyes
dig relentlessly
into every being

she encounters,
she who trembles at
her own name
if called
too loudly
and resents the boys
for telling of the beauty
of her breasts.
She stood still
as a lame statue
and observed him.

In her eyes he was nothing
but a wretched man
drooling over the breasts
of plump women,
stumbling in their midst and asking
half-consciously
about the meaning of a truth
without head or tail,
about the necessity to stay alive,
he who is no longer capable
of wonder

or weeping.
He wished for nothing every night,
walking alone
in the company of stray
dogs,
but to stone
all the lampposts
in all the streets
so that he fails to find
the way home.

Glass Tombs

(1)

I like these tombs dark and noiseless, where I can roam at leisure,
covering distances and killing time in my own way. I can, for instance,
enjoy the company of the dead, my father's good neighbours.

They – only they – do not interrupt when I talk about him, when I dig
their graves in search of his body, for often I tried to guess the spot where
I had buried him, to see what remained, when I came to visit him on
Saturdays in the winter, the winter that he too had loved – although he
died without telling me anything about the purpose of my existence in
this filthy place. He in fact gave no clear answers whenever I pressed
him about anything, and I inherited nothing but a handful of
obsessions, and a few old commandments that my brothers – with
amazing consistency – keep hanging next to his big portrait on the
walls of the house. For years I confidently awaited the fall
of the commandments and his picture and the walls.

Would you believe: one wish only occupies me . . . do you want to know what it is?

To lose consciousness – if only for a few minutes – then to wake up
and find the boy who betrayed me – shamelessly – a decomposing
body beneath my feet, the bones of his skull devoured by these
hordes of ants that crawl after me to devour me too; and to forget that
old man after whom I ran tirelessly for five long years – in the hope
that he would love me. He really did resemble my father, the scratch
marks he left on my breast confirmed it.

I know I have ruined your solitude with useless disturbing chatter,
but we could still talk about better things, a less painful subject. We
could talk for instance about the spiders that swarm around me,
whose dreary caves I shall enter to discover why they have eluded
me for so long, to watch the ruins of ancient skeletons and the
snakes ringing their bells in my head. Talking about spiders has
great advantages that the likes of you do not appreciate, known only
to my friends, who are fools and poets all.

I follow their movements with mounting enthusiasm now; they are predominantly triangular and black, and never look at me when I call them.

I am happy when I sense the movement of the fallen in the battlefield of life or when I see the ones lying still in glass-covered coffins. Poor spiders indeed. They are honoured by no one so far, not even me.

It is enough for me then to observe – in ecstasy – those scorpions taking their time to sting me. Naked of everything but this whiteness that surrounds me, I observe, and receive the successive stings with an open mind that you envy me for. Although you, like me, wake up to this nothingness with no beginning and no end, and to these indolent eyes, and this body stretched out alone in the dark, and this silence weighing on the chest.

(2)

Maybe I have now become a ghost capable of moving lightly in the dark and avoiding the old furniture that filled the house and made a great graveyard of it.

I will be content with the virtue of lies that I have earned and will praise my sitting here among the bats that drop from neighbouring ruins, and strive towards the much-discussed inferno, and eavesdrop suspiciously on those who say If you learn too much you lose all your intense passions. Maybe because I no longer trust anyone.

I will try then to wipe away this dust accumulating on the walls and caress the snakes that ring their loud bells, then inscribe my name on water and fake things to make them more beautiful. And naturally I will rise above all the red stains that made a bloody creature of me, and I will pity no one, not because pity is linked to nihilism – as they say – or because it leads nowhere, but because I don't see it as a virtue in the first place.

I will go back to my solitude and become more ferocious and cruel, even though the light in my room has dimmed considerably. I will listen only to heavy hammer blows while wiping away the painful stories that flow from my head. No sense in talking about them now; they will turn into pitiful jokes and take us nowhere.

So I will entertain myself by watching – just watching – these coffins after failing to become even a cemetery guard. You will see with your eyes my real features and know that words are the least deceptive of mirrors.

With you I will be released from my body, this moveable grave.

Believe me when I tell you openly that I am like you,
I have sharp fingernails that will soon deface you.

I will scream as I remove my lover's picture, now a terrifying skeleton, and then destroy my senses as I must do to become all-seeing and all-knowing.

I will see my hanging body half-Christ and half-Judas and, like you, will mock all the tragedies of life and confidently repeat,
'What doesn't kill me makes me stronger'.

I will laugh contemptuously at that drunkard – who is rarely awake – when he calls to me from the next room, and will proudly tell him how I have become like grave worms that turn on each other after feeding off a lifeless corpse.

What Does Occupy Wall Street Mean For Art?

Martha Schwendener

October 19, 2011

What can art learn from Occupy Wall Street? I speak only for myself, but I'll tell you what I've learned. Several days into the occupation, I went to a panel discussion on the Lower East Side titled "Manifestations of Resistance." Shortly into the discussion, a woman stood up and asked why, instead of sitting there, we didn't head down to Wall Street. So a bunch of us did, and as we sat in a circle in Liberty Plaza, the idea of a biennial—or anti-biennial, really—began to form. The next week saw an accelerated exchange of e-mail, creation of The Wall Street Occupennial website (wallstreetoccupennial.tumblr.com), a mission statement, a call to artists, a Facebook page, a database, and then: Nothing. Or, almost nothing.

What happened? For one thing, the occupation itself was gathering strength. Liberty Plaza was filling up with people and receiving media attention. It didn't need art for publicity or legitimacy. Now it had unions, Marines, and Cornel West. Plus, we were told, Occupy Wall Street was "started by artists." But what did this mean?

It seems more accurate to say that OWS was organized by a coalition of artists, activists, and students. Liberty Plaza, however, became a kind of art object: a living installation or social sculpture made of bodies, animals, alternative barter stations for food, clothes, and books, a kitchen with composting, literature tables, public lectures, assemblies, a "community sacred space," drum circles, protesters, media center, press team, visiting journalists, walkways taped off for tourists, and lots and lots of text—painted, written, scrawled, and printed on every conceivable surface.

How could art—that is, the stuff made in the art world—compare with this? Artists and curators might have embraced "social practice" in recent decades. But, along with the more biennial-friendly "relational aesthetics," social practice generally consists of symbolic actions or events. OWS actually collapsed, if not the hackneyed divide between art and life, the micro-divide between art and creative activism.

The "organized by artists" claim is telling. A century ago, "social scientists" would've been preferred; now "social artists" fits. But the critiques offered by the OWS General Assembly overlap heavily with the art world: corporate domination of museums; art-school debt; a 1 percent system (less, really) of funding and canonization. The '70s and '80s saw an accelerated process of art being absorbed into institutions, and artists tried to resist it. But Institutional Critique, as it came to be called, only reinforced the fact that "liberal" institutions can absorb just about anything, including "critique."

In April, omni-theorist Slavoj Žižek—who also took the people's mic at Liberty Plaza—asked whether "it's time to start questioning: Is the system our ultimate horizon?" The good news, as Žižek saw it, was that "This is the moment when utopias emerge. You invent utopias when you're in deep shit and cannot do otherwise." Art was, for a long time, a utopian model. But with bohemianism eroded by gentrification and the 1 percent end of the art spectrum devoted primarily to vapid, overfunded gestures, you wonder if a recent Columbia University symposium, which described art as "a catalyst and platform heralding justice, solidarity, and a peaceful future" is nostalgia—or just wishful thinking.

Down at Liberty Plaza, Naomi Klein observed: "We have picked a fight with the most powerful economic and political forces on the planet. That's frightening." But the art world has always had a weird proximity to power. Wealthy patrons and collectors mix with artists. Clement Greenberg called this "an umbilical cord of gold," attaching artists to the rich, and Nelson Rockefeller once joked that the only reason he bought art was to keep artists from becoming revolutionaries. (And yet government funding in the '30s was partially responsible for the "triumph" of American painting in the '40s and '50s.) Contemporary art is steeped in revolutionary discourse. But there's a major disconnect between theory and praxis. For me, the Occupennial, named in reaction to biennials, the primary vehicles for creating global markets and transcultural taste, seemed like a step toward fusing the two.

So, what happens now? As a working group of the arts and culture committee of the General Assembly, the Occupennial is just one art group among several. Maybe it's a platform. Maybe it's an idea. Maybe it's a call to artists: If you haven't plugged into this movement yet, there's still time. It's waiting for you.

THREE PIECES FOR NOW AND NEVER

Dedicated to Linda Pollack

Adam Overton, December 2005

...

IMAGINE A REVOLUTION

for John Lennon

Adam Overton, November 2005

...

To be performed

All, some or one

...

Imagine a revolution where nothing happens
Imagine a relvolution that destroys nothing
Imagine a revolution with no shouting
Imagine a revolution that affects no one but yourself
Imagine a revolution that occurs without your knowing it
Imagine a revolution with no beginning
Imagine a revolution with no end
Imagine a revolution that cannot be imagined
Imagine a revolution where imagining is revolutionary

...

HOW TO IMPROVE THE WORLD (YOU'LL ONLY MAKE MATTERS WORSE)

for John Cage (*the title is a saying/title of John Cage's*)

Adam Overton, November 2005

...

To be performed

All, some or one

...

[Refuse to] Write a word that will [not] improve the world
[Refuse to] Make a sound that will [not] improve the world
[Refuse to] Perform an action that will [not] improve the world
[Refuse to] Do nothing in order to [not] improve the world
[Refuse to] Realize that what you doe does [not] make a difference

...

YOU ARE WHAT YOU PRETEND TO BE

for Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (*this is a quote from Kurt Vonnegut's book, Mother Night*)
Adam Overton, November 2005

...

To be performed
All, some or one

...

Pretend to be revolutionary
Pretend to be a revolutionary
Pretend to be a revolution

Pretend that going to sleep is revolutionary
Pretend that sleeping is revolutionary
Pretend that waking up is revolutionary
Pretend that living is revolutionary

Pretend that breathing is revolutionary
Pretend that a single breath is revolutionary
Pretend that holding your breath is revolutionary
Pretend that a revolution will begin after you stop holding your breath
Pretend that resuming normal breathing is revolutionary

Pretend that thinking is revolutionary
Pretend that ceasing that thought is revolutionary

Pretend that reading is revolutionary
Pretend that reading something you don't understand is revolutionary
Pretend that reading this line is revolutionary
Pretend that closing this book is revolutionary

...

WHAT DO WE DO NOW? PERFORMANCE
For Ensemble

Dedicated to the Journal of Aesthetics & Protest
Adam Overton, May 2007

...

consciously, or unconsciously, meaningful

...

Ensemble:

Ponder together the question:
So, what do we do now?

Then, if desired, choose to enact one or several solutions

...

Variation:

Ponder together the question:
So, who are "we" now?

FOR WOODWINDS
(Tonglen Variations)
Adam Overton, June 2008

...

*together, at your own pace
through your instrument, sounding or breathing
for quite some time, perhaps until ...?
one, maybe more, of the following*

...

- . breathe in light, breathe out love
- . breathe in impurity and suffering, breathe out love and compassion
- . breathe in the pain and terror of those murdered, breathe out love and peace
- . breathe in the anger and ignorance of the violent, breathe out understanding and reconciliation
- . breathe in any resentments and problems, breathe out your happiness, your pleasure
- . breathe in that which feels bad, breathe out that which feels good
- . breathe in that which is poisonous, breathe out that which heals
- . breathe in that which is fearful, breathe out that which is courageous
- . breathe in that which is black, heavy and hot, breathe out that which is white, light and cool
- . breathe in for all of us, breathe out for all of us

or your own variation on taking in and giving out ...

...

SILENT PROTEST (dirty pants)
Adam Overton, December 2010

...

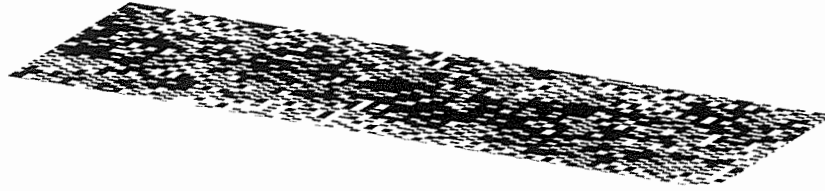
while anywhere you'd rather not be:

...

dirty pants

...

BIFO: AFTER THE FUTURE



The uncertainty principle, first asserted by Heisenberg in the field of microphysics, frames the new social consciousness.

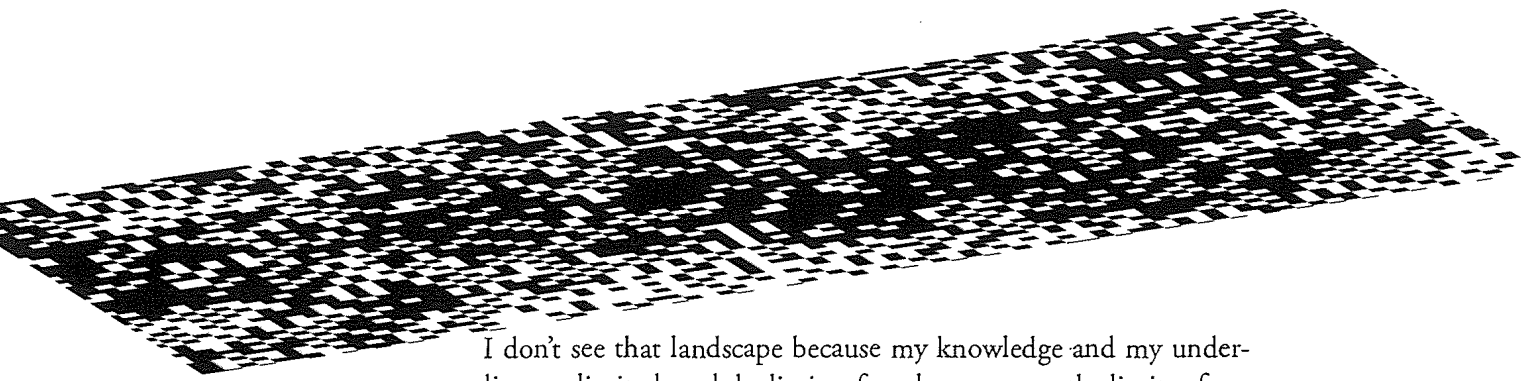
Just as in microphysics you cannot determine the moment and the speed of a particle, because the presence of the observer alters the picture, so too in sociology you cannot determine the relation between the present and the future, because the subjective factor is too complex to be understood and described.

At the present moment, the predictive power of knowledge is at stake. The global mind's complexity is beyond the understanding of the situated mind of any individual, group, party, or state.

Marxism has long been understood as a form of predictive science. Being able to analyze the relationship between different social actors (bourgeoisie and working class), being able to predict the dynamics of economic crises (overproduction, fall of the profit rate, breakdown of the capitalist economy), the scholastic vision of Marxism claimed to also predict the outcome of the story: the final victory of communism, the abolition of classes, and the realization of reason. In the official version of dialectical materialism (Diamat), inherited from Hegel and reformulated by Engels, the relationship between the present condition and the future was explained in terms of a deterministic reduction. The future was imagined as the unfurling of a tendency inscribed in the present. Repetition prevailed, and difference was ignored. The faith in a progressive future was based on this deterministic reduction, and it evaporated as soon as that conceptual framework was abandoned.

The event is not predictable because it is not the development of what we presently know. The event is a creative gesture creating a new *refrain*.

So, I answer the question: why resist, why persist in seeking autonomy from power? Where is the hope? The hope is in the limits of my knowledge and understanding. My knowledge and understanding don't see how any development of the social catastrophe could cultivate social well-being. But the catastrophe (in the etymology of *kata* and *strophein*) is exactly the point where a new landscape is going to be revealed.



I don't see that landscape because my knowledge and my understanding are limited, and the limits of my language are the limits of my world. My knowledge and understanding miss the event, the singularity. So I must act "as if." As if the forces of labor and knowledge might overcome the forces of greed and of proprietary obsession. As if the cognitive workers might overcome the fractalization of their life and intelligence, and give birth to the self-organization of collective knowledge. I must resist simply because I cannot know what will happen after the future, and I must preserve the consciousness and sensibility of social solidarity, of human empathy, of gratuitous activity—of freedom, equality, and fraternity. Just in case, right? Just because we don't know what is going to happen next, in the empty space that comes after the future of modernity. I must resist because this is the only way to be in peace with myself. In the name of self-love, we must resist. And self-love is the basic ethical rule that an anarchist prizes.

The present ignorance has to be seen as the space of a possibility. We have to start from the ignorance of the general intellect. The force of collective intelligence is boundless. Theoretically. But it currently lacks any consciousness of itself. Intelligence without self-consciousness.

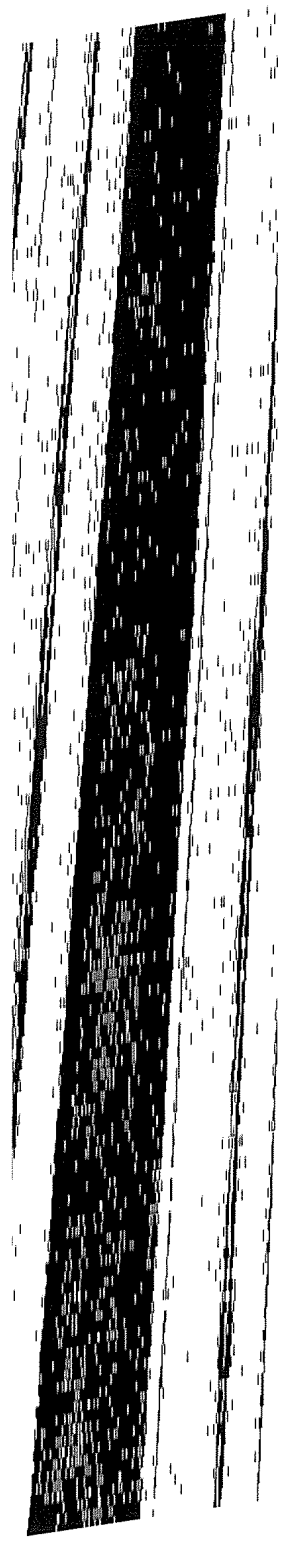
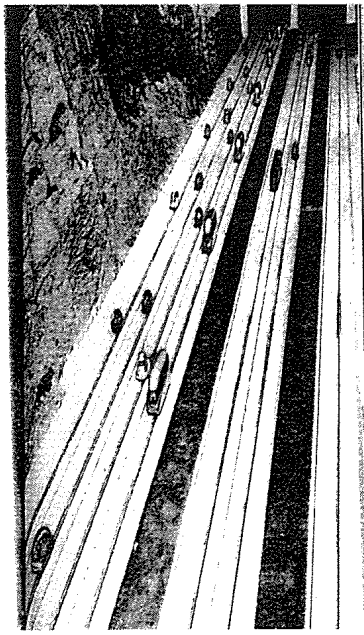
I am talking about the self-consciousness of the general intellect, millions and millions of people worldwide producing the infloow that makes the planet go around. Creating a form of self-consciousness of the general intellect is the political task of the future. And it is not only political, but philosophical, epistemological, and, in the end, therapeutic.

Poetry and therapy (thera-poetry) will be the forces leading to the creation of a cognitarian self-consciousness: not a political party, not the organization of interests, but the reactivation of the cognitarian sensibility.

The ignorance of the general intellect is the starting point, after the future.

Why are the cognitariat weak and disunited and unable to assert their rights as laborers, their knowledge as researchers? Because they live in a bifurcated form, because their brain is detached from their body, because their communication communicates less and less, while more and more freezing sensitivity to life. The new space of activism is here, in the connection of poetry, therapy, and the creation of new paradigms.

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**Visible Progress:
Short Stories of Billboards, Octopi and Los Angeles
Janet Owen Driggs, 2010**

I have some land on a major highway and wanted to use some wasted space for a billboard placement.¹

Message board post, Real Estate Investing Club, February 8, 2006

On the one hand, the history of billboards is a heroic tale in which technology and commerce advance the conjoined states of prosperity and democracy. For the Outdoor Advertising Association of America (OAAA)² the story starts circa 1450, when Johannes Gutenberg invented movable type and launched “advertising in the modern sense ... in the form of the handbill”³.

Articulated thus, it continues with the 1796 invention of lithography, which made sophisticated illustration possible and – when aggressive posting led to the development of purpose-built hoardings – birthed the billboard industry. The bills were freed from their small scale in 1835, when printer Jared Bell achieved circus posters of over fifty square feet; and released from their local focus in 1900, when the industry adopted standardized hoardings that encouraged nationwide campaigns.

Lawsuits arose when boards toppled⁴. Public health and safety concerns circled the spaces behind, where germs and rats might lurk. City Beautiful proponents condemned willy-nilly erection as a threat to public virtue. But the industry overcame such vicissitudes with national organization and a consistent stick and carrot approach to regulation.

Attempts to impose external controls were met in court with allegations that landowners and advertisers were being unconstitutionally deprived of their private property rights. At the same time the OAAA urged its members to secure goodwill by pursuing design excellence, “voluntary censorship”, and active cooperation with “civic representatives and local officials”⁵.

Looking back from the summit of 1928 an OAAA member stated that “the Outdoor Medium has been attacked from the beginning of its existence,” but all that has done is “improve the medium”⁶. As the twentieth century dawned, the billboard seemed only to await the arrival of the mass-produced automobile to reach its full persuasive and economic potential.

But – and here comes the ‘other hand’ – there are less heroic and more compelling ways to consider billboard history, especially if one is interested in the forces that built and continue to shape Los Angeles. Rather than rats and germs these spaces behind contain, among others, an Octopus, an orange, some non-human persons, and, in the shadowy back, the momentum of “Manifest Destiny”.

In an 1889 photograph of Los Angeles a boxed palm tree leans toward the image center (image 1). Forty-feet tall perhaps, it dwarfs both workers posing at its base and a building in the bottom right corner, where a rooftop billboard⁷ reads: “WOLFSKILL LOTS For Sale”.

By 2010 there will be a moratorium on new billboard erection in L.A. and this land will be the Fifth Street/Central Avenue intersection in Skid Row. But shortly before the picture was taken the area supported two thousand citrus trees planted by William Wolfskill, originator of the Valencia orange.

Within a decade L.A.’s population will double⁸ and all of the primary growth-drivers are here: the railroad, real estate, the conjuring that Kevin Starr describes as “studied self-invention and exotic possibilities”⁹ and – though invisibly - the oranges with which the boosters and their admen will conjure.

Wolfskill's grove has been cleared for the new Southern Pacific Rail Road (SPRR) passenger station that is visible bottom left. The palm is being transplanted from the nearby home of a future County Sheriff. Intended to substantiate the "Semi-Tropic California"¹⁰ propaganda that is luring visitors to L.A., the tree will be the first thing that passengers see as they step into the city (image 2).

Wolfskill and SPRR fortunes have entwined since at least 1877, when oranges transported via SPRR's transcontinental line became a profitable Midwest sensation. Ten years later – having undoubtedly noted both the railway/urban expansion/increased land prices trifecta, and SPRR's 'Octopus' reputation – the Wolfskill family donated part of their orange grove to SPRR and subdivided the rest for sale.



Image 1. The palm tree en route to its new home in front of the Southern Pacific Arcade Station, 1889

She saw...the galloping terror of steam and steel...its single eye, cyclopean, red, shooting from horizon to horizon...with tentacles of steel...the Octopus.¹¹

While a murderous land dispute inspired Frank Norris to pen these words about SPRR, "the Octopus" rarely erupted into open violence. Instead, its grip was maintained by thousands of daily choices – moments of corruption, collusion, self-serving, favor and litigation – made in the Octopus's favor.

A case in point: when California denied the railways certain tax rights that were bestowed on individuals, SPRR refused to pay taxes. The ensuing legal case wound to the Supreme Court, where an 1886 decision found in SPRR's favor¹². It is notable that Justice Stephen J. Field was a crony of SPRR owner and ex-Governor of California Leland Stanford, while Judge Lorenzo Sawyer had received his first judgeship from Stanford and remained a firm friend.¹³

They include not only the 2010 Supreme Court decision to remove restrictions on corporate campaign spending, but also L.A.'s ongoing embargo on new billboard structures and new murals. In both cases the ruling looks to 1886. Not to the judges' official decision however, but to a "headnote": an interpretation of the case written by Court Reporter (and former railroad owner) Bancroft Davis, which states that corporations enjoy the same rights as natural persons.¹⁴

Two years before our photograph was taken a price war between SPRR and the Santa Fe Railway had driven transcontinental travel costs down to \$8; even briefly \$1. As a result, 120 000 people traveled to L.A. via SPRR alone in 1887 (the town only had a population of around 50,000 at this time) and property values doubled.

SPRR profited from the influx via both ticket and land sales. (The railroads were gifted a billion acres of public land during the construction of America's railroads and SPRR owned ten million acres of California.) Unfortunately for the corporation however, by 1889 the real estate bubble had burst.



Image 2. *The Southern Pacific Arcade Station, ca.1895-1900*

While SPRR had advertised Southern California before the crash, its post-crash activity suggests that only one tentacle had actually been waving. Trimming the "defiant luxuriance"¹⁵ of the palm tree's "Semi-Tropic" metaphor, SPRR took a garden discourse "to the nation and the world"¹⁶. In their own magazines and others, at World's Fairs, in trams, on hoardings, on orange crates, in and outside of their trains, SPRR and its citrus growing partners portrayed Southern California as an Edenic "Land of Sunshine" with a "climate for health and wealth"¹⁷, where grew the edible essence of life-giving sunshine itself - the orange.

Forty million crates of Californian oranges were sold in 1900, by which time L.A.'s population had once again doubled. For a city that "needed the adrenaline of boosterism to make the future seem plausible"¹⁸ however, the waving could not stop. Instead, with growers cooperative Sunkist taking up the booster baton from SPRR, advertising continued through the boom/bust cycles of the twentieth century.

For a 1932 campaign for example, a thousand Sunkist billboards hit thirty-five million imaginations every day, while in Coney Island a neon Sunkist sign stayed on around the clock for a year, drawing one hundred million eyes and minds to its 10-foot high orange glow. Demonstrating that "sign boards are so placed that everyone must...absorb the advertiser's lesson willingly or unwillingly"¹⁹, this was truly a case of the Sun that never sets.

On the one hand, the story of human progress is a heroic tale in which the products of human reason – science, technology and democracy – continue to better the human condition. Set inside a religious context, as it was for nineteenth century America, this story begins when humanity's fall from grace makes betterment (i.e. the return to Eden) necessary.

A tale of loss and possible redemption, the story thus articulated involves a divine plan and an invisible but not unknowable map back to grace. In 1845, when John L. O'Sullivan wrote that the U.S. had a "manifest destiny to overspread...the continent which Providence has given us for...the great experiment of liberty",²⁰ his words seemed to light the route, while his timely conflation of spiritual and literal progression gave U.S. territorial expansionism the force of moral obligation.

Confirming divine approval, the Great American Desert appeared to retreat before the advance. Between 1865 and 1880 a humid cycle turned the arid plains green. Explaining that human action impacts the atmosphere – trains emit steam, tilled soil releases moisture, etc. – scientists asserted: "Rain Follows the Plow"²¹.

A crypto-scientific version of "God helps those who help themselves"²², this motto pulled 'human industry', 'productivity', 'cultivation' and 'the West' into a drawstring bag of righteousness that continues to position unused land as a wasteful, almost diabolical, affront.

In addition to providing the redemptive context of American progress, the umbrella of manifest destiny also sheltered some lesser "redemptions" than the return to grace. Specifically, the climate-induced return to good health and fortune with which railroad companies sold the west. They did it with a flurry of advertising. An image comes to mind: a track stretches west. Billowing in its wake, like smoke from the engine or the skirts of a woman in a hurry, advertising ephemera powers on the forward rush and renders it visible.

Los Angeles is indebted to billboards in at least two ways. First, they were among the plethora of advertising tools that turned L.A. into "America's Eden"²³ and increased its population by almost 20,000% in the sixty years before 1910. Second, in a car centric city that is now home to almost four million people, billboards might well be described as the tools by which Los Angeles propagandized itself to itself and conjured the future into being.

Take a literal example, an early photograph of Los Feliz Boulevard (image 3). One billboard announces "LOS FELIZ HILLS." Others are visible but illegible. At right an advertising frame with trellis skirt, columns and angled lighting – L.A.'s standard billboard style for the period – awaits artwork. The boards are there to sell tracts, yes; and to promote specific goods to passing motorists. But consider the terrain. Undeveloped, unpaved and largely, it appears, untraveled. The boards aren't meant to catch a million eyes; nor even, it seems, to promote an illusion of development. Instead they represent potential.

Rather as SPRR's palm tree intimates semi-tropic abundance controlled, Caliban-like, for the greater human good, so these billboards intimate progress. Their content hardly matters. In the grand narrative of improvement in which progress/progression actively create the future and "labor restores to man the Eden

he has lost”, their erection alone asserts the possibility of redemption. Most particularly, the empty advertising frame on the right suggests, redemption via a combination of the domestic (the trellis), classical democracy (the columns), and modern technology (the lights).

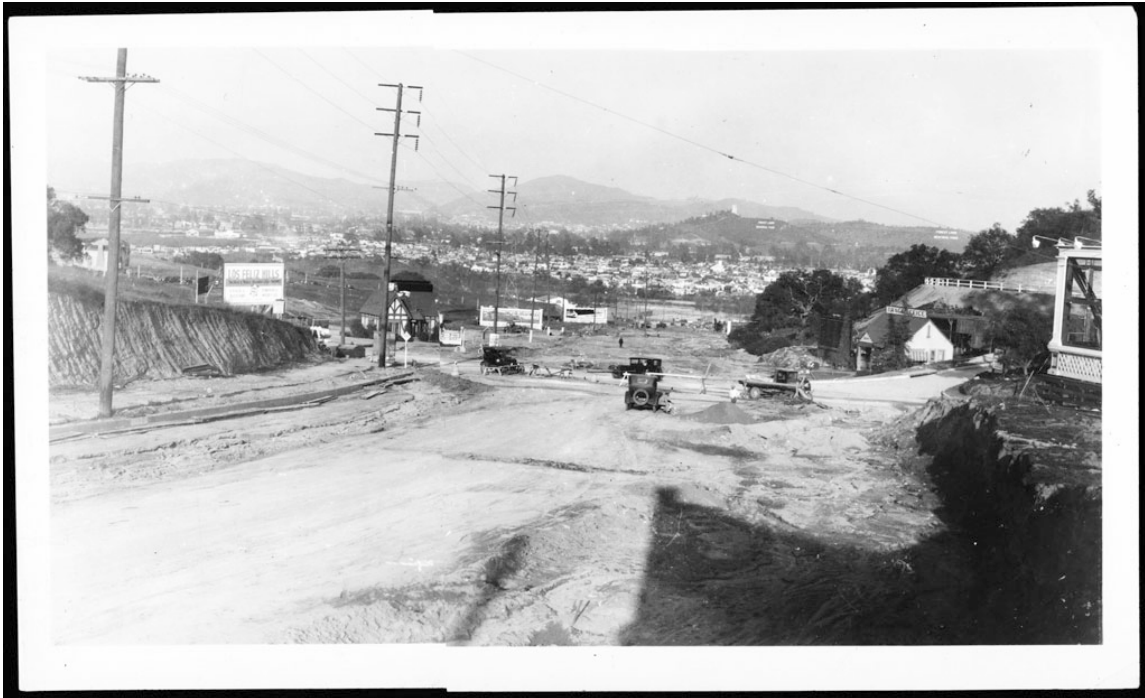


Image 3. *Construction on Los Feliz Boulevard, ca.1920-1929*

In other words, business as usual for a story of progress in which the products of reason continue to better the human condition. The question arises: are all billboards, regardless of their content, visible manifestations of a continued allegiance to manifest destiny and its grand narratives of redemption and progress?

Advertising arouses desire by promising redemption – imagined states of grace (health, wealth, security, virility, beauty etc.) restored. And perhaps, as such lesser redemptions fractal Christianity’s grand redemption, so the trip from desire to consumption to betterment mimics the journey toward Eden. In other words, with each act of consumption a step is taken to grace. But of course we can never arrive. Instead, the machinery of consumerism reawakens desire and the attempt to arrive must be made again, and again, and so on.

In effect, the conflation of spiritual and literal journeys that gave such moral thrust to nineteenth century territorial expansion has itself been conflated with the process, or rather the progress, of consumption. The land has run out, but the thrust continues. Internalized as consumption for its own sake, it continues to work – self-evidently, unstoppably – to release the potential of wasted space.

In this context billboards, along with their supergraphic and electronic grandchildren, are multiple agents of redemption. Not only do they work to arouse desire and turn otherwise unused walls, skies and alleyways into productive real estate, they tirelessly activate such apparently idling spaces as the memory, the imagination and the peripheral vision of passers-by.

“So placed that everyone must absorb the advertiser’s lesson, willingly or unwillingly”, billboards turn the visual field into real estate and colonize the senses to “maximize leisure potential”²⁴. Those eyes, these daydreams, that subconscious – work it! Regardless of their content, the ongoing proliferation of billboards must beg the question: what kind of future are we conjuring? As the old saying goes, there can be no rest for the wicked.

Endnotes

1. <http://www.reiclub.com/forums/index.php?topic=12558.0> (Retrieved February 14, 2010)
2. The International Bill Posters Association formed in 1872, which merged with other industry associations in 1891 to become the Outdoor Advertising Association of America, was founded to "promote, protect, and advance...outdoor advertising".
3. 2010: <http://www.oaaa.org/about/historyofoutdoor.aspx> (retrieved 02.26.2010)
4. Cason v. City of Ottumwa, Iowa 1897, found the city liable for injury from a falling billboard
5. Michelle H. Bogart: *Artists, Advertising and the Borders of Art*, The University of Chicago Press, 1995
6. Minutes of Representatives Meeting, June 13, 1928 J. Walter Thompson Company archives, quoted in Bogart, endnote 93, p.336
7. Strictly speaking billboards advertize goods and services that are available some distance away, while signs mark places at which the goods and services are actually available. It could be argued therefore that this is a sign, because land can be bought in the office concerned. However, because the land being sold is not inside but at some distance from the office, I have chosen to name it 'billboard'.
8. Between 1880 and 1890 L.A.'s population quadrupled from 11,183 to 50,395. It would reach 102,479 by 1900, and attain one million before 1930. Statistics: Riley Moffatt: *Population History of Western U.S. Cities & Towns, 1850-1990*. Scarecrow Press, 1996
9. Kevin Starr: *Inventing the Dream: California through the Progressive Era*; Oxford University Press USA, 1986
10. "In 1874, Major Ben C. Truman, who would go on to head the literary bureau of the Southern Pacific, called the region 'Semi-Tropical California.' A magazine called *Semi-Tropic California* pictured a verdant landscape of palms". Douglas Cazaux Sackman: *Orange Empire*, University of California Press, 2005. P.29
11. Frank Norris: *The Octopus: A California Story*, Doubleday, Page & Co., 1903. P.180
12. *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad Company*, 118 U.S. 394 (1886)
13. Richard Rayner: *The Associates*, W. W. Norton, 2008. P.146, p.164.
14. "The court does not wish to hear argument on the question whether the provision in the to the Constitution, which forbids a State to deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws, applies to these corporations. We are all of the opinion that it does." Headnote quoted in Doug Hammerstrom: *The Hijacking of the Fourteenth Amendment*. <http://www.reclaimdemocracy.org/> (retrieved 2.25.10)
15. Starr: P. 45
16. Douglas Cazaux Sackman: *Orange Empire*, University of California Press, 2005. Pp. 29-39
17. *ibid.*
18. Kevin Starr: *Material Dreams: Southern California through the 1920s*, Oxford University Press, 1990. P. 104
19. Sackman: P. 97
20. John L. O'Sullivan: *New York Morning News*, December 27, 1845
21. Marc Reisner: *Cadillac Desert*, Penguin, 1986. P. 35
22. Not a biblical quotation, this saying is often attributed to Benjamin Franklin, writing in *Poor Richard's 1757 Almanac*.
23. Sackman: P. 18
24. *The Yes Men dir.* Dan Olman, Sarah Price, Chris Smith

Letter from an Anonymous Friend
The Morning After the Attack on the Oakland Commune
October 25, 2011, 10:44 pm

We knew that it would happen.

If you live with others in a public space in a city, if you set up shelters in which people can live without owning or renting property, if you set up an outdoor kitchen with which to feed anyone who wants food, if you establish a free school at which anyone can read and learn, if you set up bathroom facilities provided by organizations supporting your activities, if you show solidarity with struggles against police killings and police violence against people of color, against the poor, against women, against queers and transpeople, if you state your determination to defend the space you have created against the threat of eviction, in short—if you work toward organizing ways of living and relating to one another that might challenge those mandated by capitalism, your efforts will eventually be crushed by the police.

We know this because we know that the question is not whether the police are “part of the 99%,” on the basis of their salary. What is called the 99% is ruptured by many divisions. Among these is the dividing line that runs between those who want to change the world and those who uphold the status quo, between those who work to undermine the brutal order of property and those who work to enforce it. For those who transform the world by challenging capitalist economic and social relations, working to displace and overturn them, the police are one among many enemies. We know it is their job to destroy what we create, and it is no surprise when they do that.

At 4:30 am on October 25, Occupy Oakland was raided by more than 500 police from multiple counties. From a comrade who was there:

At the time of this writing I am filled with rage. Occupy Oakland, on its second week, was raided by an overwhelming force of approximately 800 police in riot gear. I was there, ready to defend when police from all entrances to Oscar Grant Plaza rushed in with sticks and began beating people. Their tactics were simple but effective: rush in with overwhelming numbers and push out those that intended to stay for a fight, slowly crush resilience of those who took up the tactic of civil disobedience by linking arms and protecting the camp. They beat people with sticks, shot people with rubber bullets, obliterated ear-drums with flash-bang grenades, and choked them with tear gas.

What wrenches on these mornings (so many, for so many of us), what presses out on our temples, constricts our chests, fills our throats so that it can't be properly spoken is a contradiction: we knew that this would happen; we can't accept that it has happened. We know, insofar as we struggle, that our struggle will be repressed. But no amount of knowing can fortify against the sickness that we feel every time an army of cops rolls in to brutalize and arrest our friends and comrades.

All the tents are down, pots are strewn everywhere, the library scattered, the garden stomped, the Commune is in ruins. “Though it fed thousands for free and welcomed the city's desperately poor homeless population, this public park can hopefully now return to its natural state of being completely empty.” Dozens of smug assholes and their batons surround the emptiness they prefer to the fragile possibilities that were created, getting paid overtime to chat across their barricades with idiots who think the cops are on the same side as those they just attacked and threw in jail, while others hurl insults against dead ears.

The Oakland Commune matters not because it could have lasted any longer than it did and not because of how many cops it took to tear it down. It matters because for as long as it was there it was evidence that the impossible resides in the heart of our cities, amongst those who already live together on the streets, amongst those willing to live with them. It isn't that this is “Round One” of a longer fight.

It isn't that those who lived and worked there all day and all night "will be back." It isn't that this is "just the beginning." It isn't just the beginning because it's been going on for a long time, because the history of struggle is the history of capitalism. Because the history of capitalism, in its unfolding, in the movement of its contradiction with itself, is the coming into being of communism.

If we won't be back in Oscar Grant Plaza, if the Oakland Commune won't be there as it was for two weeks, that is because we are everywhere, and the substance of history articulates itself unceasingly across the movement of what it creates. That is not an abstraction; it's a letter of solidarity from Cairo, arriving the afternoon before the tents are torn down: "An entire generation across the globe has grown up realizing, rationally and emotionally, that we have no future in the current order of things....So we stand with you not just in your attempts to bring down the old but to experiment with the new." Our true loves are everywhere, a friend replies. We won't be back because we're not going anywhere.

For a long time we have dreamed the end of capitalism. The twenty-first century is the time in which that dream will come true. We are waking up, and we are learning again, among one another, how to use our tired bodies. This is what it feels like to wake in a tent on the grass of Oscar Grant Plaza. Comrades in Baltimore write, "this occupation is inevitable, but we have to make it." Nothing of that dialectic can be displaced by the police.

Angela Davis
Occupy Philidelphia
October 28, 2011

We talked about the importance of building a movement that is inclusive, but recognising that the unity of the 99% must be a complex unity. Movements in the past have primarily appealed to specific communities. Whether workers, students, black communities, Latino communities, women, LGBT communities, indigenous people, or these movements have been organised around specific issues. Like the environment, food, water, war, the prison-industrial complex. Speaking of the prison-industrial complex.

This is the movement I have been personally associated with. We have tried to call attention to the inoperable damage prison and the prison-industrial system has inflicted on our community. So we have called for a reduction of the prison population. Decarceration - decarcerate Pennsylvania. And we have called for the eventual abolition of prisons as the dominant mode of punishment. But we have also called for the revitalisation of all our communities. We have called for education, health care, housing, jobs, hope, justice, creativity, equality, freedom! We move from the particular to the general. We have come together as the 99%.

There are major responsibilities linked to your decision to assemble here in communities. How can you be together? I evoke once more Audre Lorde. Differences must not be merely tolerated but seen as a fund of polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Finally, let me say a few words about my home town, Oakland, California. You have heard about the police assault. Scott Olsen remains in the hospital. Oakland General Assembly met in the renamed park Oscar Grant Park and responded by calling for a general strike on November 2nd. Many unions have already supported the call. I end by sharing the language of the poster: decolonise Oakland. We are the 99%. We stand united.

“November 2nd, 2011, general strike, no work, no school, occupy everywhere. Occupy everywhere.”

We who struggle to put food on their table and whose community was in an economic crisis long before the rest of America. The movement of the 99% also includes all the struggles that my father, that hotel housekeeper, the resident of South Central LA are embroiled in. This movement is not contained by Wall St, or Main St., or City Hall, or Portland, or Las Vegas, or any other physical space. If we try to contain it, we will kill it. We must grow it, we must link arms, we must lift all these struggles up, we must come up with new ideas and new forms of resistance and organize for them. If we do, we will take this momentum, this moment, this movement and we will win.

Judith Butler
Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Washington Square
Composite Remarks
October 23, 2011

I came here to lend support and offer my solidarity for this unprecedented display of popular and democratic will.

People have asked, so what are the demands that all these people are making? Either, they say, there are no demands, and that leaves your critics confused. Or they say: that demands for social equality and economic justice are impossible demands. And impossible demands are just not “practical.”

But we disagree. If hope is an impossible demand, then we demand the impossible. If the right to shelter, food, and employment are impossible demands, then we demand the impossible. If it is impossible to demand that those who profit from the recession redistribute their wealth and cease their greed, then yes, we demand the impossible.

Of course the list of demands is long. We object to the monopolization of wealth, we object to making working populations disposable, we object to the privatization of education when education is a public good, when we support the right to education. We oppose the billions spent on wars, we oppose the expanding number of the poor, we rage against the banks that push people out of their homes, the lack of health care for increasing numbers of people; we object to economic racism, and call for its end. None of these demands are up for arbitration.

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. 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.

We would not be here if elected officials were representing the popular will. We stand apart from the electoral process and its complicities with exploitation. We sit and stand and move and speak, as we can, as the popular will, the one that electoral democracy has forgotten and abandoned. But we are here, and remain here, enacting the phrase, “we the people.”

WITH WORKS BY

Alberto Moreno
Zen Dochterman
Anonymous
Judith Butler
Adam Overton
Jacques Ranciere
John Burtle
John Barlow
Angela Davis
Naomi Klein
Slavoj Zizek
Michas Cardenas
Nancy Popp
Janet Owen-Driggs
Franco Berardi
Martha Schwendener
Nagat Ali
Oakland Commune
Beka Economopoulos
Rodger N. Baldwin
Paulina Gonzalez
Rosten Woo
AAAAAA(rtBloc)
Naomi Klein
Hamdy El-Gazzar
Heriberto Yopez
Al Giordano
Danielle Adair

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Compiled by AAAAAA
<http://a-a-a-a-a.org/>

Produced by Mathew Timmons, Amanda Ackerman, Harold Abramowitz, Tommy Gear and Nancy Popp