

# OCCUPY EVERYTHING.

Anarchists in the  
Occupy Movement  
**2009-2011**



**edited by Aragorn!**

WASHAWAS



Occupy Everything:  
Anarchists in the Occupy Movement  
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Most of the material in this book has been written by anonymous anarchists and posted to the Internet. Anarchists write anonymously because they don't believe in singular authorship. They write anonymously because in many contexts what they are saying is illegal.

We write anonymously because we are conspiring to take apart everything in this world.

Occupy has been as energizing of a moment for anarchists in North America as we have had since the events in Quebec City in 2001 and Seattle in 1999. This book is about this moment in the context of past anarchist occupations and of future anarchist actions. It is an expression of anarchist hope, anger, and energy.

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# Introduction

This is a book about anarchists in the Occupy Movement. The Occupy Movement is a broader category of activity than the Occupy Wall Street movement but is inclusive of it. The Occupy Movement also includes the student occupation movement of 2009, the so-called Arab Spring that swept the central plazas of North Africa, the Indignados of Europe in the summer of 2011, the work of the NYC general assemblies prior to September, and the wave of home reclamation projects that have happened in late 2011. The Occupy Movement includes actions against austerity measures, against legacy dictatorships, and against capitalism as a whole.

Anarchists have been involved in every aspect of this phase of the movement<sup>1</sup>. We raised our flag from the top of the New School for Social Research during the occupation in early 2009 and are still occupying new buildings at the end of 2011. We have brought people, ideas, and methodologies that have infused the Occupy Movement with a potent energy.

We hope that this energy continues beyond the Fall 2011 period of “camping occupations” and actions into a series of new approaches toward occupation. We hope that the imagination of the past two years isn't suffocated by the monied political machine of representative politics that will dominate the public imagination in 2012. We leave 2011 filled with wonder at what has been accomplished in the past three years, and prepared for anything to happen in 2012.

Too  
Much  
In a Single  
Word

The terms *Anarchism*, *Anarchy*, and *Anarchistic* are central to the relationship between a (nearly) two hundred year old political philosophy that comes out of the foment of the French Revolution, and a digitally fueled movement called Occupy.

Anarchism is the term used for both the history of that political philosophy and the philosophy itself. The debates of how to interpret this history and this philosophy are anarchism. They are vital, heated, and often gurgle out of

anarchist circles into larger contexts in a way that can be entirely confusing. Anarchism is the section of the library where Anarchy lives but it is also where the ideas of anarchists are stored.

Anarchy is the stuff being done, often times in the name of anarchism, usually by people who are called anarchists. The smashing of windows at various Occupies, the serving of food, the workshops, the writing of this text, are anarchy. They are doing, being, acting. One of the most potent disagreements among anarchists is about whether anarchists' goal should be anarchism or anarchy. Should we live this potent idea now or should we concern ourselves with defining the right moment to begin? Should we be historical subjects or ahistorical actors?

Anarchistic is the broader category that does not necessarily call itself anarchist or have self-knowledge about the history of anarchism. When Anonymous strikes out on behalf of Bradley Manning, the IWW organizes service workers, or Food Not Bombs serves food they are acting anarchistically.

The reason that these words (and the associated nuanced definitions) matter enough to define is because the broad perspectives that anarchists align themselves with (prefiguration, attack, and DIY) live in the different emphases they give to these terms. Understanding these emphases begins by seeing the seams between the different positions.

## Occupy Wall Street vs the Occupy Movement

In most of the country it has been difficult, if not impossible, to see the anarchy in the Occupy Wall Street movement. Mainstream coverage has focused on the protests seeing Wall Street™ as an evil Hegemon, on the media savvy actions of Anonymous, on the heart breaking stories of The 99%<sup>2</sup>, on the abuses of the NYPD or UCD (or other) police. The media does what the media does: it tells a story that isn't true but that is calming, aimed at someone who feels powerless and needs to be assured that there is indeed "nothing to see here, move along."

The Occupy Wall Street movement has its own mythology: a story about how the middle class has lost their leaders in Washington and their way in the halls of finance capitalism. It is a timely story but not a particularly anarchist one. It is a story about economic injustice rather than about rejection of the dominant social order. It begs to be bought off by a politician willing to play rhetorical ball or whatever celebrity is in town. (That said, the main Occupy Wall Street site does use hyperbolic language that is uncommon outside of anarchist circles.<sup>3</sup>)

The Occupy Movement exceeds the Occupy Wall Street movement. It predates it by years and will live beyond it. The Occupy Movement has a

much more explicitly anarchist composition and disposition. The idea of occupation as an expression of a particular political perspective is as old as politics<sup>4</sup> itself. Taking space is powerful when it is the mass of workers taking their factory back from the owners, citizens taking civic space for a rally, or the squatter taking an unused building to live.

In a world with more than seven billion people the occupation of space couldn't be a more political act. But what does it mean? Does it mean that we are running out of space or that taking space isn't about physical space at all, but about power?

*People have often reproached me for these spatial obsessions, which have indeed been obsessions for me. But I think through them I did come to what I had basically been looking for: the relations that are possible between power and knowledge.* -Foucault<sup>5</sup>

Biopower, or the management of human bodies, is what is being exerted when fences are put up around a formerly occupied public park or when a police officer looks into a camera and offers soundbites about how “the police are not violent but expressing the will of the people” when they beat them. The Occupy Movement is a rejection of biopower in social life.

The Occupy Movement is about a tactic that is also an expression of a position. It says “I am here, deal with it” in a way that is different from reasoned arguments about wanting this or that. So-called demands will never be as direct or open-ended because in occupation the expression is done with one's own body. Anarchism (as the politics of the impossible) has always exceeded demands.

The Occupy Movement joined us!<sup>6</sup>

## Are We the 99%?

Anarchists are both part of The 99% and not part of it at all. To the extent that The 99% is a populist category that includes nearly everyone, especially everyone who has never even met a member of the 1%, of course anarchists are included. To the extent to which The 99% is a political identity that will be organized (likely on behalf of the Democratic Party) in 2012, anarchists are absolutely not members.

We will explore this issue more in the section on the different strategic outlooks that anarchists bring to The Occupy Movement. For now, the general question is whether anarchists are for or against recruiting large numbers of people. Is this recruitment a precondition for anarchism? The question of our relationship to a broader movement can often be confused with the question of how broad we think the movement itself is. If your perspective is that the movement is called Occupy Wall Street and

should be framed by the issues and concerns of the General Assembly of Zuccotti Park, you have a very different view than seeing The Occupy Movement as something that extends back years and will continue beyond the tented occupations of 2011.

**The Occupy Movement is Anarchist**      The Occupy Movement is anarchist because in response to common challenges to social life—representation, legitimacy, and hierarchy—it chooses opposition.

*Occupy Wall Street is a people's movement. It is party-less, leaderless, by the people and for the people. It is not a business, a political party, an advertising campaign, or a brand. It is not for sale.*

*We wish to clarify that Occupy Wall Street is not and never has been affiliated with any established political party, candidate, or organization. Our only affiliation is with the people.*

*The people who are working together to create this movement are its sole and mutual caretakers. If you have chosen to devote resources to building this movement, especially your time and labor, then it is yours.*

**SPEAK WITH US, NOT FOR US.**

-Statement of Autonomy  
(abridged), General Assembly at Occupy Wall Street

While opposition is simple in theory the practice is more nuanced. Anarchists, for instance, can allow representation but it is usually highly contingent, immediately revocable, and accountable to an attentive population. An example of this can be seen in the spokescouncils of the Anti-Globalization Movement. Anarchists also usually allow “leadership of skills” where shoe makers (for example) are advisors—but not assumed to be infallible—in affairs of shoes.

One of the confusing things about anarchism is that anarchists disagree with each other so strenuously and vociferously. The disagreements generally fall into the categories of emphasizing history (what has anarchism meant in the past, what have anarchists done to prove themselves in history), present (how are anarchists doing things today, both failures and successes), or future (what would anarchism look like in a world that allowed it to flower?).

Naturally these three perspectives aren't the only ones. Additionally individuals are more complicated than any classification of them. We mention these disagreements because while reading this book, it's important to remember that anarchism is a term of tension. Most anarchists disagree with each other to such an extent that it would be easy to think that we don't agree at all. But we do. We agree that Anarchy, *the*

*beautiful idea*, is one we would like to put into practice and so we do.

This has been a boon to The Occupy Movement, because it is also about a beautiful, impossible idea that people yearn for and put time and energy into trying out.

## A Brief Primer on Anarchist Political Strategies

The Occupy Movement has provided anarchists an opportunity to engage the world. This question of engagement, of strategy, comes with certain ambivalences and tensions but also with high energy. The past few years have been rich for anarchist ideas. The Occupy Movement has been a trial run for some of these ideas and a further demonstration of the validity of some of the others.

### *Intervention in social struggles*

*The secret is to really begin.*

*The present social organisation is not just delaying, it is also preventing and corrupting any practice of freedom. The only way to learn what freedom is, is to experiment with it, and to do so you must have the necessary time and space.*

*-At Daggers Drawn*

The most visible anarchist practice of the past decade has been inspired by the idea that anarchists should directly intervene in social struggles with the intention of increasing the tension of those struggles. Another way to put this is that the best way to practice anarchy is to do it in places where there are social, political, and existential pressures. In this way, anarchist desire for freedom can turn a situation—that would otherwise be a political opportunity for some or a place for compromise for others—into a break. This break may be a personal cognitive break, a social break from convention, or a complete break from politics or business as usual.

This general perspective could be called insurrectionary anarchism, and it is not a strategic one. It doesn't say that the Revolution (or Insurrection) require such and such elements (and then rewrite history to confirm the assertion). Instead this is an attitude that attack should be anarchists' generalized activity, not a step-by-step plan, political development, or strategic activity at all.

*The State of capital will not "wither away," as it seems many anarchists have come to believe—not only entrenched in abstract positions of "waiting," but some even openly condemning the acts of those for whom the creation of the new world depends on the destruction of the old. At-*



*tack is the refusal of mediation, pacification, sacrifice, accommodation, and compromise.* —“Some Notes on Insurrectionary Anarchism”<sup>7</sup>

In the Occupy Movement this interventionist perspective can be seen most clearly in the West Coast actions around the port closures in December and the General Strike of Oakland November 2. It can also be seen in the general motion towards occupying buildings as an obvious “next step” in the movement as a whole.

### **Prefiguration**

*For anarchists, this boils down to engaging in prefigurative politics: the idea that there should be an ethically consistent relationship between the means and ends. Means and ends aren't the same, but anarchists utilize means that point in the direction of their ends. They choose actions or projects based on how these fit into longer-term aims. Anarchists participate in the present in the ways that they would like to participate, much more fully and with much more self-determination, in the future – and encourage others to do so as well. Prefigurative politics thus aligns one's values to one's practice and practices the new society before it is fully in place.*

—Anarchism and Its Aspirations<sup>8</sup>

A consistent anarchist strategy has been the idea that a better world can be built “in the shell of the old.” This idea is particularly appealing because it gives one a task to do now (build the new world), a goal (the new world to be built), and allows one to imagine that the necessary conflict<sup>9</sup> will not happen until the new world, and its creators, are prepared for it.

The Occupy Movement has been a rich environment for this thinking along a couple different lines. First, the practice of using General Assemblies and consensus, or near-consensus, decision making is itself a model of how disparate groups of people could work together. Moreover this decision making, along with the work around self-organization, can be described positively as direct democracy<sup>10</sup>. If a small amount of direct democracy is good, and makes those involved feel like they are experiencing a functioning kind of freedom, isn't bad logic to think that more would be better. This is the argument for prefiguring a better world by practicing it today. It is similar to t'ai chi. Move slowly and deliberately today when you are just learning the moves so that when the time is right you are ready to move swiftly and smoothly.

### **Class Struggle**

*The strength of certain anarchist critiques of capital is to be found in their location of diffuse and complex power relations as being the mate-*

*rial sinews of this society. The world is not miserable simply because 1% of the population owns this or that amount of property. Misery is our condition specifically because the beloved 99% acts to reproduce this arrangement in and through their daily activity.* —Bay of Rage<sup>11</sup>

Class-struggle anarchism has been the most visible and articulate anarchist strategic perspective for the past hundred years. Class-struggle anarchists believe that a rupture of the existing order will only occur as a conflict, perhaps even a war, between workers (as a class) and owners. By and large, class-struggle anarchists have been ambivalent towards the Occupy Movement as a whole and particularly towards the sloppy class rhetoric of The 99%. The criticism of this term is that The 99% do not have a workplace from which to strike nor the ability to self-organize in any meaningful way. As a result, it is just a populist notion, one that works well as a bumper-sticker or as a humanist cheer, but not as an effective way to organize a movement against the existing capitalist system.

As indicated by the above, class-struggle anarchists, whether they be anarcho-communists<sup>12</sup>, anarcho-syndicalists, or platformists, tend to do the most strategic thinking of all anarchists, and if events do not reflect that strategic thinking, then the time must not be right. So they have largely continued struggles and work that they were doing prior to the Fall of 2011, in lieu of getting involved in The Occupy Movement.

That said, the class-struggle analysis has been influential to all anarchist involvement in the Occupy Movement. It is fair to say that much of the popular support of the Occupy Movement has been due to how it expresses the rage that people feel towards austerity measures that have been implemented since the economic downturn of 2008, along with the frustration that many people feel about their future as workers.

You cannot be at an occupation event without recognizing the severity of the economic situation from two directions: first, the middle class is being violently dismantled, but has been so existentially compromised over the past sixty years that it doesn't have the tools to imagine what “another world” or even what effective action would look like, and secondly, all of the people who are victims of second and third generation poverty have no resources and little power to do anything but survive. The Occupy Movement has given a new vocabulary to the experience of what Marxists call the unorganized working class, the lumpenproletariat or the precariat.

### ***Practical Anarchism***

While perhaps not a strategic perspective, it is likely that a preponderance of self-identified anarchists believe that anarchism is synony-

mous with doing anarchism. These are the anarchists who cook, serve, and clean. The ones who sit in the meetings, coordinate trainings, and ensure that all the disparate and under-represented voices are heard. They may not see the Occupy Movement as a way to transform society, because for them transforming society is indistinguishable from their daily activities of doing anarchy.

*I'm here to help create a better world free of authoritarian structures, government, capitalism, etc.*

*I am an anarchist. I believe the system is not working for the 99% not on the top and that there is no simple quick fix. It's not about bad apples or legislation. We need to create a new way of living to ensure significant lasting change.*

—New York anarchist Occupier<sup>13</sup>

Practical anarchism is not ideological. It accepts the basic premises of anarchist theory, but quickly moves on (in classic American style) to doing stuff. From the start of the Occupy Movement practical anarchists have been on the ground—notably in Zuccotti Park and Oscar Grant Plaza, but also at nearly every camping Occupy event—doing the work. While they are not the writers of essays and manifestos nor the creators of photo ops, they demonstrate the essence of anarchist non-hierarchical and decentralized practice, of anarchy. Practical anarchist projects have served thousands of meals, built hundreds of shelters (at least), found thousands of dollars' worth of supplies, organized child care and health care, done conflict resolution, and in various other ways turned what could have been the health and human disaster of public camping into real successes (at least until police forces shut things down).

The different strategic outlooks of the anarchist participants of The Occupy Movement will be further developed in their own words throughout the book.

## Criticism

This is a book about anarchist involvement in the Occupy Movement. It is about the ways that anarchists have engaged with the movement, on its terms and on ours. It should come as no surprise that there are additional categories of anarchist involvement with the Occupies, which are either none (neutrality), or explicit hostility. A primary concern that anarchists had, from day one, was the disconcerting attitude that many people in the Occupy Wall Street movement had toward the police. This was best demonstrated by the phrase “The police are part of The 99%,” a phrase also problematic for the way it simplifies the conflicts in society (between an undifferentiated mass—the 99%—on the one side and

a faceless elite—the 1%—on the other). This has made it impossible to differentiate targets and goals for Occupy. Anarchists tend not to care much for the middle class worried about losing their privilege, and also don't identify with right-wing concerns about the Federal Reserve, 9/11, or other sensational mythologies.

Other anarchist criticisms of Occupy movement have to do with its specifically liberal, white, and mass movement orientation. These raise a central question for anarchists: how do we establish criteria for our involvement in mainstream society?

On the one hand we have the masters of this world who dictate the terms of our survival and on the other we have real human needs that aren't being met. There is a certain ahistorical realpolitik to this perspective. The masters of this world were not dropped here by aliens. The people who rule the world, whether they are called the owning class, the bosses, the rulers, or the 1%, took the things (land, money, resources) that they have and control. They took the land and resources on this continent from the 500 nations who shared it before they were here. They take from the rest of us every day. This taking is called profit, ownership, and Manifest Destiny. It is also the name, no matter what term you use, of the central violence at the heart of society, of civilization.

Terms like “occupation” and “colonization” have a rich, unsavory, history. The movement we call Occupy is an attempt to rewrite that history in the name of the people who live on and work the land. It would be a shame if the Occupy Movement didn't have the space to understand the history of these terms and how the problems we are talking about today were by and large founded on the colonization of yesterday.

The problem with arguing terminology is that it can easily become the central point of disagreement rather than a place of struggle within broader struggles of land, body, and society.

## How to Read This Book

This is a book that can be read in one of two ways. It is intended to be read from front to back; from history through the events of 2011 and on to criticism. But it can also be read in pieces, from one entertaining moment to the next. A surreal reading may be a more honest one, since a set of writings that includes Wolfi Landstreicher and Cindy Milstein (only two of the included writers who come from dramatically different perspectives on anarchy) cannot be taken too seriously.

This is a book that could be read entirely as voices from the void—as a sizable portion is either attributed to anonymous authorship or to obvious noms de plume. Anarchists have a critique of hierarchy, authority,

and specialization. Authorship can be seen as all three.

The Occupy Movement has been a milestone for anarchist involvement in the popular consciousness. Yes, anarchism is still a boogeyman in the mainstream news and popular imagination but it also has a face and more-or-less positive reputation for thousands of people: a human face at a meeting, at a protest, and on the front lines of this time.

If we have succeeded, then this book will demonstrate that beyond the protests or the camping occupations anarchists are seriously engaged with every aspect of the Occupy Movement and the society that requires it. Anarchists are engaging with the theory, tactics, and social consequences of this movement and want this discussion to be open. We want everyone to be participating in it. This book is an attempt to bring this discussion to everyone and not just keep it on our websites and our journals.

Join us!

## End Notes

1. Like many other terms used in this book, the term “movement” is a coded and complicated one. If the term is read in a positive light it implies that people have found a voice, that that voice is against the existing order of things, and that it is shouting from a discernible direction. This is not true as there are more than competing factions involved in the activities of the past few years. In fact most people involved likely do not see themselves as part of the same chorus at all—or even singing a song. Their participation is contingent on survival, on boredom, on the fashion of the moment, on what they will get out of winning, on what they will lose by losing.

To put this another way many anarchists reject the term “movement” as representing the kind of business as usual thinking and energy that the term pretends to contest.

2. <http://wearethe99percent.tumblr.com/>

3. To quote from <http://occupywallst.org/> as of December 2011:

Occupy Wall Street is a leaderless resistance movement with people of many colors, genders and political persuasions. The one thing we all have in common is that We Are The 99% that will no longer tolerate the greed and corruption of the 1%. We are using the revolutionary Arab Spring tactic to achieve our ends and encourage the use of nonviolence to maximize the safety of all participants.

This #Occupy Wall Street movement empowers real people to create real change from the bottom up. We want to see a general assembly in every backyard, on every street corner because we don't need Wall Street and we don't need politicians to build a better society.

4. “Politics” is another term of tension. On the one hand it is a general term that should be a useful way to talk about the practice of taking power in our lives but

in fact tends to refer to a social practice that is perhaps best defined as... what politicians do. The first term can be a positive term for anarchists. The second one is never positive.

5. Foucault, "Questions on Geography", 69 in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*

6. <http://pugetsoundanarchists.org/node/1153>

7. "Some notes on Insurrectionary Anarchism" by sasha k [http://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/sasha\\_k\\_\\_Some\\_notes\\_on\\_Insurrectionary\\_Anarchism.html](http://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/sasha_k__Some_notes_on_Insurrectionary_Anarchism.html)

8. Cindy Milstein, *Anarchism and Its Aspirations* (Oakland: AK Press, 2010), 68

9. There are some who resist anarchist strategic thinking along this line, arguing that this conflict need never occur, that either humans are going to evolve into anarchists or anarchy will never occur.

10. "Democracy" is yet another term of contention between anarchists. The vast preponderance of anarchists believe that decisions should be made by the people who are affected by them. There is strong disagreement about whether democracy is a useful term to describe this kind of decision making. The pro-democracy anarchists (PDA) spend a great deal of energy trying to reclaim a term that most non-anarchists understand, while also trying to redefine it. They usually argue for it using the term "direct democracy." The not-democracy or anti-democracy anarchists spend a commensurate amount of energy defining "autonomy" in ways that they hope non-anarchists can make sense of.

11. <http://www.bayofrage.com/from-the-bay/the-anti-capitalist-march-and-the-black-bloc/>

12. Almost all anarchists who identify anarchism as being opposed to the State and capitalism could be described as anarcho-communists, but the term is usually used much more narrowly to name a tendency of anarchists who envision a future society of collectives that use direct democracy and relate through federative principles.

13. Thadeaus from NYC: <http://www.99facesofoccupywallst.org/2276303/>  
Thadeaus



The pieces chosen for this section tell a story about the origins of the Occupation Movement through its anarchist pedigree. It starts in the 19th century with Jewish immigrants in NYC, passes through the squatters of Amsterdam in the 1980s, the student occupation movement of 2009, and then a snapshot of the Indignados movement of the Summer of 2011: from Syntagma square in Athens, Greece, and from Barcelona, Spain.

# History



# From Tsarist Russia to Zuccotti Park: *the Paradox of Anarchism* by Thai Jones

At the end of a long day of peaceful demonstrations in Oakland this past November, a few hundred protesters—many wearing masks or covering their faces with bandanas—massed for a night of rage, smashing windows, chucking rocks and sparking bonfires. In the aftermath, the city’s police chief described the perpetrators as “generally anarchists and provocateurs.”

Across the continent, in New York City, I joined more than 1,000 protesters in a march from Zuccotti Park to police headquarters to express our solidarity with the people of Oakland. In front of the grim, brick facade of 1 Police Plaza, we created a human microphone, relaying speeches, sentence by sentence, to those crowded behind us. When audience members agreed with a speaker’s sentiments, they performed a gesture of approval, wagging their fingers above their heads. For disagreement, there was an even simpler expedient: We just refused to repeat the words, shutting off the microphone.

These two rituals of protest have largely defined the national Occupy Wall Street movements: on the one hand, tetchy and often violent confrontations with the police; on the other, a democratic commitment to true consensus. These also happen to be the hallmarks of anarchism, a political philosophy with roots dating to the 18th century, which is currently experiencing its widest florescence in the United States in nearly 100 years.

Jews were deeply involved in the movement’s previous heyday. In the 1880s and ’90s, immigrants from Russia or Eastern Europe carried their anarchist beliefs with them to New York City. “Among Jewish radicals,” Vivian Gornick writes in a recent biography of Emma Goldman, “none were more dynamic than the anarchists, who in their unaccommodating view of capitalist reality often struck the note most emotionally satisfying.” In 1890, the anarchist periodical *Freie Arbeiter Stimme*—the Free

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as of 01.11.2012 under the headline “Occupy Protests Show Radical Potential Through Decades, Confrontation and Consensus Can Coexist”. Published here under its original title.

Voice of Labor—began publishing in Yiddish. (In 1898, this newspaper’s forebear, the *Forverts*, was referred to by *The New York Times* as “the Anarchistic organ.”) And by the turn of the 20th century, New York City’s Lower East Side was an international center of the movement, boasting such world-renowned Jewish anarchist leaders as Goldman, Alexander Berkman, and a host of others. “They were revolted by the entire ethic of capitalism that they found here in the United States,” historian Paul Avrich has said. “So what they did was to replace this world with a counter world—American culture with a counter culture—and they began to establish their whole anarchist culture.”

But for most Americans, anarchy was—and remains—just a synonym for chaos. “Bombs and anarchists are inseparable in the minds of most of us,” a journalist wrote 100 years ago. “Mysterious destroyers of life and of property, merciless men [sic] who have pledged their lives or their knives or their guns to some nefarious cause or another.”

From the 1880s until the Russian Revolution, the anarchist assassin was a cultural archetype that could be found in the pages of the penny press or the novels of Joseph Conrad, Henry James, and Fyodor Dostoevsky. Responsible for the deaths of tsars, prime ministers, and presidents, these radicals posed a terrifying threat to established authority. In societies such as tsarist Russia, where civil rights hardly existed, they turned to violence as the only possible form of protest. When they imported these tactics to the West, American and European leaders reacted in panic. “When compared with the suppression of anarchy, every other question sinks into insignificance,” Theodore Roosevelt warned Congress during his presidency. “The anarchist is the enemy of humanity, the enemy of all mankind.”

As the great majority of the Occupy Wall Street participants will attest, however, anarchism is no more inherently violent than any other political idea. From the Greek root *an-arkhos*—without a leader—the idea merely poses the ideal that self-government is government enough. Of all the many philosophies that emerged from the Enlightenment, it is the purest and most hopeful. Its tenets rest on the assumption that humanity is perfectible, that all can prosper, that each is worthy of trust.

It is a tradition that found a comfortable home in America, where Henry David Thoreau was an anarchist *avant la lettre*, as were so many other pioneering and self-sufficient citizens in the nation’s history.

The heyday of American anarchism began in 1886, when four practitioners of the philosophy were executed after a bomb had killed eight police officers during a rally in Chicago’s Haymarket Square. In 1901, President McKinley was assassinated by a disturbed young anarchist. Immigration from Eastern Europe and Russia brought a generation of notorious anarchist leaders, many of whom were Jewish: Johann Most, Berkman and—

most notorious of all—Goldman. Together they built a mass following, traveling the country and speaking to crowds of thousands.

But the Russian Revolution rendered the movement largely irrelevant. The Bolsheviks' success was a triumph of hierarchy that seemed to discredit anarchist notions of consensus and debate. Within a few years, communism had supplanted anarchism as the font of all American political paranoia. During the succeeding decades, the conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States largely divided left and right into two opposing camps. But the end of the Cold War brought a final disillusionment with Soviet-style state socialism, and opened a new possibility for anarchist organizing and practice. This was first seen in this country during the anti-globalization movement of the 1990s.

Historically, anarchism has been most appealing to those who, like Jewish radicals in Russia, found themselves without any representation. Unskilled laborers shunned by the organized trade union movement, the homeless and unemployed—these were the constituency for the ideas of its orators. If today's participants in the Occupation movement feel themselves to be politically unrepresented, if they find that their concerns and ideas do not get voiced within the two-party system, then it is little surprise that they are participating in that same tradition.

The past two months of the Occupy Wall Street movement have revealed the exhilarating potential of anarchism as a practical form of governance. At Zuccotti Park, and in the other encampments nationwide, discussions as picayune as the proper management of laundry and as significant as the philosophical implications of civil disobedience were conducted through improvised methods of participatory democracy.

Yet, this time has also been marked repeatedly by violence. As in the past, the preponderance of force has been used by the police—most spectacularly in their military-style raids on Zuccotti Park and the encampment in Oakland. The movement has moved into a new phase now, but confrontations between authorities and occupiers may continue. The likelihood of further bloodshed rises as a chilling possibility.

This generation of anarchists again faces a dilemma that challenged their predecessors. It is a question that puzzled Jack London, the novelist, a century ago. "Of all paradoxes," he wrote then, "is there one that will exceed the paradox of our anarchists—men and women who are so temperamentally opposed to violence that they are moved to deeds of violence in order to bring about, in the way they conceive it, the reign of love and cosmic brotherhood?"

# Squatting in the Beginning

by ADILKNO

In the middle of the city, amid the concrete shapes of the daily tedium, you stepped into a space of unlimited possibilities. The point was not to create something new, but to use the old to depart for somewhere else:

“Oscar, Wouter, Bear and I knew each other from the Stuttel Bar, where we spent the evening when we had nothing better to do. We were all looking for a place to live and squatting seemed like fun. Oscar had seen an empty house in the Spuistraat. That was nearby, so after an evening in the Stuttel we went to have a look. We looked at the corner building after I'd kicked in the door and were enthusiastic about the space. The next day we got hold of some mattresses and blankets. We slept in the building next door, which we'd also found empty when we entered this house on the roof via the window and gutter.

After further exploration over the roof, the four of us found out we had a gigantic complex at our disposal, with all kinds of weird-looking rooms where here and there the lights were still on. We intended to keep it among friends, so that you'd always meet people in the building who you knew and who had the same attitude—I mean we four thought living was something subordinate; that you have fun is much more important. We picked out the best rooms and bombarded the NRC into a general gaming den.” The former NRC Handelsblad building, now legalized, rent-paying and renovated, is still a landmark, and an empty section of it was resquatted in 1991 after sitting empty for too long.

That was the squat experience: that behind a kicked-open door an incredibly large complex could be found, with here and there “the lights still on.” Even stronger, it was the only thing the assembled squatters had in common. Squatting formed not a historical mission, but an extra-historic space with as fourth dimension the play. It offered sensory sensations. Entry into it was of a violence which could only be conjured up through a fixed series of actions.

The first thing done after the squat was to repair the door, put in your own lock; a prefab cardboard renovation door was immediately replaced by its massive, solid wood predecessor. This replacement of the door was a consequence of the fact that breaking open the door was the only prosecutable action, but it was also the confirmation of the building's being

put into use. The key to the new lock made the house, which initially had only been broken into, into your own home.

The door was in short not only part of a rite of passage, but also of the protection of your own existence. Even if the space to be squatted was full of drafty holes, if the window was open, the door was the magic point around which the squat proper organized itself. While the house often remained minimally furnished for weeks, the door was equipped with the most elaborate accessories, from builders' props to armorplate. Even if the building was legalized, a strict door ritual might be observed for years after. The door, which in open society was declared trash, was rediscovered, and even when squatters went breaking through walls and tearing down portals, they stayed friendly with the door. It did multi-functional service as tabletop, bed, back wall, barricade material, shield, or was put away for awhile in the meantime.

Everyone places the beginning and end of "the squat movement" somewhere else. This is because everyone stepped into the collective space at a different place. For one this happened with the breaking open of the door to his or her own flat, for the other while wandering around in the immeasurable emptinesses of the complexes which were squatted city-wide. Every squatter can point to the place where she or he personally crossed the threshold and stepped inside a collective space. Something happened which was qualitatively different from "standing up for your housing rights" or "resistance against the repression of the state," something other too than the unleashing of the rage built up over the years over speculation and failing policy.

[...]

Inside the space of squatting there was no talk of historical development; as it wandered it only cropped up in more and more places, to the strangest out-of-the-way corners of the city. After entry came the surprise that there were so many more people in the same place, just as crazy as you, just as radical, just as amateurish. Surprise over the cool pragmatism with which the most burning urge for action was carried out.

The space was to be found literally in and outside the "dominant system." "The city is ours," because it's assimilated into an inside topology with secret beacons: houses, cafes, leaders of the packs, bicycle routes, streets and bridges, symbols, signals, posters, style of dress and coiffure. The smell of clammy leather jackets and showerless houses, cat piss, plastic bags with car mirrors, ripped-loose traffic signs, meetings, demos, "manis," advance meeting points, alarm lists and gangs of thugs, incomprehensible and long-winded phone calls, first names and alarm entry numbers. A spiderweb of back gardens, landings, coffee and drinking sessions, joints and trips, flyers, stolen books, press lists, radio and TV break-ins, helmets and clubs, breaking tiles, vans and wagon-bikes, posts and visits to the neigh-

bors. But also the pathetic state of the TV news, of city council members and concerned critics (“They still don't understand.”). The swiftness with which you changed from student to rioter, from rioter to passerby, from passerby to brick-thrower and then braggart, nurse, or lover.

It was the space of the continual metamorphosis. The forms assumed could be classic (and thus be parasitized) or different and never before seen (and thus experimental): someone who because of his “Labor Party face” managed to get inside a committee meeting went afterward to go find Breeze blocks; today's heavy was tomorrow's super nerd. Standing there plastering, all thumbs, throw on a raincoat to go to a riot. Everyone unexpectedly turned out to be able to do or be anything, especially what or who you had never been. Your own life was made into fiction and instantly converted again into reality. You could assume any appearance without deriving an identity from it.

This was the freedom in which people who barely knew each other flung themselves into actions based on a blind mutual trust: tough, vague, friendly, disturbing, disturbed. It didn't matter that there were no plans for the middle distance; the journey counted, the expanding space of your own life rhythm - where it was going wasn't even of later concern (no future). An explosion, caused by the savory consumption of the here and now.

Historic conditions? Causes? Result? Just yell. “No one had a house and that was really mean!” Unused spaces were, through a small forgetfulness in the law, there for the using, without the owner being able to start anything with the law in hand against the anonymous users. Fortunate too was that owners and city planners, through their naive belief in property rights and authority, let their houses endlessly sit vacant, even when plenty had already been squatted: “Homes for the homeless!”

The first group, mostly students who grouped around the handymen, had originally taken a look around in leftist circles, but these turned out to speak a language you couldn't do anything with. Analyses of society, self-realization, future planning, changing the world and yourself, strategic debates, marching through institutions or lecture notes, social responsibility, conscious security, relationship discussions, ideals, big stories: it had become unbearable...

They couldn't find the energy anymore to wait any longer for the change in the other's mentality and the fruits of working on yourself. “The crisis of Marxism is not ours.” The taboo on the immediate realization of the democratized desires had created a discussion culture around emancipation and integration. University council work had become the training ground for the meeting culture in the institutions of the future. When you refused to march any longer on this prescribed route, it was a question of logic that political business as a whole was written off. The aversion against the left, of whom something was still expected, became

as great as that against the right, which you wanted nothing to do with anyway. The terms began to lose their meaning.

The handymen had another view of things. The ex-democrats among them saw from their political viewpoint the squat wave as an opposition to the vacancy law, which had to be averted or changed. That was their trip. A second group, unconscious Leninists, brought the banner down from the attic: "The worst of all are the rightists disguised as leftists. They're worse than the rest—avoid them like the plague." That slogan too fell outside the space experience of the fresh squatters; every political current was, when push came to shove, part of "their" parliamentary democracy. Making social conflicts manageable wasn't our problem. No one dreamed of revolution or strove for the general good. One's own housing problem was much simpler to solve.

The term "politics" had been denied its monopoly on the public sphere by feminist criticism and since then penetrated to the most intimate places. Everything quickly became political and the word thereby lost its action-inspiring charm. The squat contribution to the waning political culture limited itself to screaming, smoke bombs, stolen documents and scale models set ablaze. The "primacy of politics" would be replaced by the robust term "power," but by that time the squatters had already abandoned the intellectual atmosphere in order to explore, in place of French theory, their own space.

The idea of politics as goal-oriented action, as feasibility research, was also held at a distance. Social opponents were not addressed; there was no realistic ideal over which to negotiate. "Parking garages = war." This anarchism born of practice fused with that narcissism that belongs to everyone who takes a place that cannot be found inside society. Without realizing it, the inalienable right to one's own local experience was discovered. This anarchism, a combination of rage, self-pity, and being right ("They can tear down our house, but not our ideals") turned out to be the fuel with which local space travel could be driven.

Squatting's appeal was that it offered no alternative, no view of a better world that had to legitimize and argue itself. No one spoke for anyone. "We won't leave" was not a demand but an announcement. No consensus, no compromise, no discussion. Anyone could step into the noncommittal atmosphere to do their thing. You lived amid the remnants and ruins of an order that had become alien in one fell swoop. It was no accident that preference went to ramshackle houses, scrap autos, war-era leather jackets, furniture found on the street. Everything that had been cast off and thus ended up outside the traffic of society existed, as it were, by definition in the "outside system" to which the squats granted shelter. And everything which defined itself within respectable efficiency stood outside it.

No one thought in strategies, principles. Abstract theoretical terms were taboo. The ideas were not words but things: steel planking, rocks, actions. “They” were thought of in terms of interiors to dismantle, destroyable riot vans, outposts, and whatever else came along. There was also no ideology. The question was *how?* and never *why?*

*We've begun already to live how it's good, and let their laws disturb us as little as possible. And we fight against injustice. And that they don't like! It's okay to talk in the meantime. But living by the old Dutch saying, 'Not words but deeds!' isn't allowed.*

# We are the Crisis:

## *a Report on the California Occupation Movement*

by anonymous

### I. Like A Winter With A Thousand Decembers

In Greece, they throw molotovs in the street. For every reason under the sun: in defense of their friends, to burn down the state, for old time's sake, for the hell of it, to mark the death of a kid the cops killed for no reason. *For no reason.* They light Christmas trees on fire. *December is the new May.* They smash windows, they turn up paving stones, they fight the cops because their future went missing, along with the economy, a few years ago. They occupy buildings to find one another, to be together in the same place, to have a base from which to carry out raids, to drink and fuck, to talk philosophy. The cops smash into packs of their friends on motorbikes. They hold down the heads of their friends on the pavement and kick them in the face.

In Ssangyong, one thousand laid-off workers occupy an auto factory. They line up in formation with metal pipes, white helmets, red bandanas. Three thousand riot cops can't get them out of their factory for seventy-seven days. They say they're ready to die if they have to, and in the meantime they live on balls of rice and boiled rain. Besieged by helicopters, toxic tear gas, 50,000 volt guns, they fortify positions on the roof, constructing catapults to fire the bolts with which they use to build cars.

In Santiago, insurrectionary students mark the 40th anniversary of Pinochet's coup by attacking police stations and shutting down the Universidad Académica de Humanismo Cristiano for ten days. *No more deaths*



*will be accepted, all will be avenged.* In France, a couple of “agitators” dump a bucket of shit over the President of Université Rennes 2, as he commemorates the riots of the 2006 anti-CPE struggle with a two-minute public service announcement for corporate education. The video goes up on the web. It drops into slow motion as they flee the mezzanine after the action, not even masked. It’s easy, it’s light, it’s obvious. How else could one respond? What more is there to say? *We know your quality policy.* A cloud of thrown paper breaks like confetti in the space above the crowd below—a celebratory flourish. The video cuts to the outside of a building, scrawled with huge letters: *Vive la Commune.*

In Vienna, in Zagreb, in Freiburg—in hundreds of universities across central and eastern Europe—students gather in the auditoriums of occupied buildings, holding general assemblies, discussing modalities of self-determination. They didn’t used to pay fees. Now they do. Before the vacuum of standardization called the Bologna Process, their education wasn’t read off a pan-European fast food menu. Now it is. Fuck that, they say. They call themselves *The Academy of Refusal.* They draw lines in the sand. We will stay in these spaces as long as we can, and we will talk amongst ourselves, learn what we can learn from one another, on our own, together. We will take back the time they have stolen from us, that they’ll continue to steal, and we’ll take it back all at once, here and now. In the time that we have thus spared, one of the things we will do is make videos in which we exhibit our wit, our beauty, our sovereign intelligence, and our collective loveliness, and we’ll send them to our comrades in California.

In California, the kids write *Occupy Everything* on the walls. *Demand Nothing*, they write. They turn over dumpsters and wedge them into the doorways of buildings with their friends locked inside. Outside, they throw massive Electro Communist dance parties. They crowd by the thousands around occupied buildings, and one of them rests her hand upon the police barriers. A cop tells her to move her hand. She says: “no.” He obliterates her finger with a baton. She has reconstructive surgery in the morning and returns to defend the occupation in the afternoon. *We Are the Crisis*, they say. They start blogs called Anti-Capital Projects; We Want Everything; Like Lost Children, the better to distribute their communiqués and insurrectionary pamphlets. Ergo, really living communism must be our goal, they write. *We Have Decided Not to Die*, they whisper. Students in Okinawa send them letters of solidarity signed Project Disagree. Wheeler, Kerr, Mrak, Dutton, Campbell, Kresge, Humanities 2....the names of the buildings they take become codewords. They relay, resonate, communicate. Those who take them gather and consolidate their forces by taking more. They gauge the measure of their common power. They know, immediately, that if they do not throw down, that if they do not scatter their rage throughout the stolid corridors of their

universities, that if they do not prove their powers of negation, if they do not affirm their powers of construction, they will have failed their generation, failed the collective, failed history.

But why wouldn't they throw down, and scatter, and prove, and negate, and affirm? After all, *what the fuck else is there to do?*

## II. September, October, November

A particular political sequence is always at once discrete and continuous, at once a singularity and a relay. And the series of militant occupations that would sweep the state in November both emerged from and exploded the limits of a political conjuncture with parameters that were established in September.

On September 24, the first day of the fall quarter at most UC campuses, a faculty-organized walkout over the handling of the budget crisis during the summer erupted into the largest coordinated protest in the history of the University of California. At UC Berkeley, over five thousand people flooded Sproul Plaza. On the same day, two occupation attempts at UC Santa Cruz and UC Berkeley would result in markedly different outcomes. At UCSC, a group of over twenty students successfully locked down and occupied the Graduate Student Commons for a full week, throwing massive Electro Communist dance parties in the open space of Covell Commons below the balcony, issuing online communiqués that would circulate internationally, and putting the incipient California “student movement” on the map of radical circles around the world. The slogans on their banners resonated because the collective “we” in whose name they spoke recognized itself therein, saw itself captured, concretized, enacted, redistributed in their terse formulae, their unabashed desire for totality, their articulation of an urgency at once symptomatic and prescriptive: “We Want Everything”; “*We Are The Crisis.*”

At UC Berkeley, a more ambitious occupation attempt would fail on the same night that UCSC succeeded. Having arrived with equipment to lock down the doors, a group called for the Berkeley General Assembly—a mass gathering of some 300 people on the evening after the walkout—to occupy Wheeler Hall. Despite drawing wide spontaneous support from the assembly when they read the occupation statement from Santa Cruz, any effort to bring their proposed action to a vote was interminably stalled, and a subsequent decision to force the issue by locking down the majority of doors in the building resulted in a tense and protracted conflict between those who viewed the occupation attempt as a “vanguardist” affront to procedural consensus and those who viewed it as an effort to seize an important opportunity for collective direct action. The standoff continued until police walked into the building and cut through the locks some ninety minutes later.

The split within the Wheeler auditorium that night, and the split within the broader UC movement as to how the occupation at Santa Cruz was regarded, would largely shape both the discourse and the practical possibilities of the mobilization over the next month and a half. While a second, brief occupation at UCSC on October 14 would establish the tactic as a constant threat on UC campuses, partisans of slow and steady movement building decried such actions as irresponsible adventurism. This was an antagonism that would persist throughout the fall—a familiar split between “Trotskyist” and “ultra-leftist” orientations within the movement, the former holding fast to the supposedly democratic framework of General Assemblies while the second insisted that actions themselves were the means through which the movement was both organized and pushed forward.

While a massive organizing conference on October 24 would call for a statewide “Day of Action” on March 4, a small group of UC Berkeley grad students—not content to wait until the spring semester to act—launched a website and signature page calling for an indefinite student, staff, faculty strike beginning on Nov. 18, when the UC Regents would meet in UCLA to vote on a proposed 32% student fee increase. It’s notable that although this call for mass action was most actively pushed forward by many of the same people who had attempted the occupation of Wheeler on Sept. 24, it was also supported by representatives of the same groups that had most vocally opposed it. But even if the antagonisms within the movement that had emerged through October and early November would not be entirely displaced by the events that unfolded during the week of the strike, at least the tedium of ideological playfighting would be.

On Nov. 18 and 19, thousands of protesters from across the state clashed with riot cops outside the Regents meetings at UCLA, chasing the Regents back to their cars as they were escorted from the building. The protests were met with a repressive police response, including taser attacks and eighteen arrests over two days. On the evening of Nov. 18, an occupation attempt at Berkeley would be foiled for the second time, when a team of about forty attempted to lock down the Architects and Engineers building—home of Capital Projects, Real Estate Services, and the Office of Sustainability. Forced to abandon their attempt when administrators locked themselves in their offices, the group nonetheless succeeded in drawing strong support from a crowd that gathered outside the building, and the aftershocks of that spontaneous solidarity would make themselves felt two days later. Later that night at UCLA, a group of forty students occupied Campbell Hall, successfully locking down the doors with impressive barricades and holding the building for over twenty-four hours before abandoning the occupation on the morning of the 20th. On the afternoon of the 19th, UC Santa Cruz students, already hold-

ing down Kresge Townhall, escalated their occupation by storming the main administration building. They held Kerr Hall for three days, locking it down after their demands were rejected on the night of the 21<sup>st</sup>, and vacating the building without charges after it was raided by police the following morning. At UC Davis, about fifty students marched into Mrak Hall on the afternoon of the 19<sup>th</sup>, their numbers rising to one hundred fifty through the afternoon, with dozens of supporters outside the doors. Eight hours and sixty riot cops later, fifty-two arrests ensued when those inside refused police orders to disperse. After spending the night at Yolo County Jail, they drove back to campus and occupied another building the next day, taking Dutton Hall for eight hours with a group of over one hundred, forcing the administration to call in riot police again before walking away.

In a word: between Nov 18 and Nov. 22 a “movement” became an occupation movement. But even in the midst of this explosive sequence, with its clear affirmation of tactical solidarity across campuses, no one could have anticipated the rupture that occurred at Wheeler Hall on Nov. 20.

### III. Vortex: Wheeler

At 6:38 am on Friday morning, a post went up on Facebook:

*UC Berkeley is Occupied. Wheeler Hall has been taken by students after Thursday’s vote by the UC Regents to increase fees by over 32%. After two days of marches, protests and rallies, students have locked down the doors against campus police while supporters have surrounded the building.*

At 6:38 am, the last item of this report was an effort at self-fulfilling prophecy. In fact, only a few dozen supporters clustered around one side of the huge neo-classical building at the center of the Berkeley campus, watching the windows. But twelve hours later, when police finally broke through the occupiers’ barricades, citing forty people for misdemeanor trespassing and then releasing them without cuffs, they were greeted by a cheering, lamplit crowd of some two thousand people who had packed around police barriers all day.

In between, everything swirled in and around the still edifice of Wheeler. *An occupation is a vortex, not a protest.* Shortly after it had been locked down in the morning, police broke into the basement floor, beating and arresting three students on trumped-up felony charges. Occupiers then retreated to the second floor, barricading hallway doors with chairs, tables, truck tie-downs, U-locks, and ropes, and tirelessly defending the doors against the cops throughout the day. Outside, students pulled fire alarms, cancelling classes and vacating most of the buildings on campus. Support flowed to the occupation, drawn in part by the massive and disproportional police presence that gathered throughout the morning and swelled to hundreds of riot cops by the afternoon. Inside the building, police snarled threats at those on the other side—*get ready*

for your beat-down—and pounded against the doors in a frustrated effort to break through the interior blockade. Outside—holding their ground against police attacks as the cops set up metal barriers around the building—thousands of students effectively *laid siege* to the building. Or rather, they laid siege to the besiegers.

There were various powers of resistance. Across the pedestrian corridor on the west side of the building, students and workers formed a hard blockade, sometimes a dozen rows deep, preventing any passage throughout much of the afternoon. On the hour, many students attempted to organize rushes against police lines around the perimeter, timed by the tolling of the bell-tower and organized by runners between corners of the building. At around 4:00pm, a column of sixteen riot police lined up at the southeast corner of Wheeler, marching toward the backs of the students and workers amassed at the barriers. A gathering crowd, drawn by cell phone communications and twitter feeds, fanned out to surround the advancing column, blockading a path along the east side of the building and locking arms around the cops until they charged a weak point in the chain, beating one student on the ground with batons and shooting another in the stomach with a rubber bullet. When later in the afternoon it became clear that the police would eventually break down the barricades on the second floor, self-organizing groups took up tactical positions at all possible points of exit—even those reportedly accessible by underground tunnels—blockading the loading bays of an adjacent building with dumpsters and forming a human barricade across the doors of Doe Library to the north of Wheeler.

To turn the campus into a militarized warzone was the choice of the administration and the police; but it was also an implicit taunt, a challenge from which students and workers refused to back down, making it obvious that they would not allow the occupiers to be spirited away to jail in handcuffs without a potentially explosive confrontation. As Berkeley grad student George Ciccariello-Mahler’s particularly canny account of the day put it: “Let this be clear: if the students were arrested and carried out, *there was going to be a fight*. A riot? Perhaps (this much depended on the police). A fight? *Mos def.*”

This commitment of the crowd outside the occupation entailed a slight displacement that was audible in the chants of the crowd: from “Whose University?! Our University!” to “Who owns Wheeler?! We own Wheeler!” “Wheeler” is the proper name of this displacement, because the building that it designates became—in an unexpected instant stretched out through a morning, an afternoon, an evening—the site of a displacement of the opposition between a mass movement and the supposedly vanguardist tactic hitherto perceived as the fetish of a few ultra-left adventurers. A displacement, not a fusion. These poles persisted in pockets

among the crowd, but their conflict was simply not what mattered on that day. Whether or not all interested parties might choose to describe the event in these terms, what happened was that a “we” numbering two thousand, surrounding the perimeter of Wheeler Hall, declared collective ownership not just of the “University” (an abstraction), but of a particular building, a concrete instantiation of university property. And when this happened the priority of factionalist politics that had defined the movement for the previous two months was shattered by the immediacy of an objective situation. A movement to “Save Public Education” had become indiscernible, within an unquantifiable *durée*, from a militant desire to communize private property.

Several of the occupiers would later refer to the “medieval” character of the tactical maneuvers that day: having retreated to an inner chamber, after their outer defenses collapsed, they ceded most of the building to the police. But the police were themselves enclosed by the barricades they had established to keep the crowd outside at bay. The space was constituted by a double barricade—by the barricades of the occupiers and the barricades of the police. This was the convoluted topology of the occupation: the space inside was opened up by being locked down (a refusal to let anyone in); the space outside was closed off by a state of siege (a refusal to let anyone out). There was an intimacy at a distance between these two spaces—the affective bond of a shared struggle—that communicated itself through the walls and through the windows, that crackled through the air around campus, that carried through a rainstorm in the early afternoon, that enabled the occupation to persist. *That it was possible* to hold the space inside, despite the immediate efforts of the cops to take it back: it was the concrete realization of this power that activated the energy and resistance of the crowd outside. That the material support of the crowd outside was unyielding, that it refused to be pacified or exhausted: it was this collective determination that empowered those inside to hold the doors throughout the afternoon. It became increasingly evident that the police—functioning in this case as the repressive apparatus of the administration—were effectively trapped between two zones over which they had no real control: the area outside their own barricades and the area inside the second floor doors defended by the occupiers.

This essentially powerless position—the reactive and isolated position of the police, and by extension the administration—was never more evident than at the end of the night, after the occupiers had been cited and released, after they had addressed their supporters through a megaphone, after the crowd began to disperse of their own accord. The barriers cordoning off the plaza outside Wheeler were withdrawn and the majority of the police began to file away, until two weak rows remained, guarding the building at the top of the steps, under the lights cast across

the neo-classical façade. A languid crowd began to assemble at the bottom of the steps, just standing there, aimlessly, calmly staring across the unimpeded space between them and the cops. A parent walked up with two children, perhaps four and six years old, casually pointing up toward the stationary soldiers of property. Everyone might have whispered the same thing at the same time: look how small they look, how sad and out of place and ridiculous.

The illusory power of the police throughout the day was in fact the power of the contradiction of which their presence was merely an index. It was the power of the people inside, the power of the people outside—the power of people, that is—to suspend the rule of property.

#### IV. Collateral Damage

Property is one of the knots that ties together multiple levels of the UC crisis, and that binds it with the larger crisis of the state and the global economy. Citing a 20% cut in state funding for the University, UC President Mark Yudof declared a state of “extreme fiscal emergency” in July 2009—a measure intended to legitimate and expedite a slash-and-burn approach of the administration to dealing with the budget shortfall. It has been the mantra of the UC administration over the past few years that the state is an “unreliable partner,” that the crisis of the California economy coupled with the refusal of the state government to prioritize support for public education necessitates a program of increasingly draconian cuts and austerity measures. And indeed, many within the university have accepted some version of this argument, urging students to direct blame for the crisis toward Sacramento and to acknowledge the economic “realities” of the moment: Proposition 13 has handicapped the capacity of the state to draw revenue from property taxes since 1978, and money for public services has dried up accordingly; the crisis of the university budget is part and parcel of a larger economic crisis effecting every sector in the state and taking its toll across the country. Why should the University of California claim any exceptional status?

It has become increasingly clear that such narratives don’t add up; both their credibility and plausible justifications for their acceptance slip away rapidly as one looks into the structure of the UC budget. A recent report on administrative growth by the UCLA Faculty Association “estimated that UC would have \$800 million more each year if senior management had grown at the same rate as the rest of the university since 1997, instead of four times faster.” In other words, while UCOP continues to point to economic necessities and legislative priorities as the root causes of the crisis, it is a plain fact that the excessive and inexplicable growth of the administrative class itself accounts for the same amount of money—this year alone—as the budget shortfall.



Even more resonant, particularly for the occupation movement, has been the role of capital projects in the UC crisis. On August 6, the *SF Chronicle* reported that despite a supposed fiscal emergency that had forced layoffs, furloughs, and increased class sizes, UC had agreed to lend the state \$200 million, money that would be paid back over three years at 3.2 percent interest and allocated to stalled capital projects. Money for construction projects, it seemed, was readily available where money for the educational mission of the university was not. In mid-October, Bob Meister, a UCSC Professor and President of the Council of UC Faculty Associations, published an exposé making clear the link between proposed fee increases and capital projects: since 2004, all student fees have been pledged by UC as collateral for bonds used to fund construction projects. UC retains an excellent bond rating, superior to the state of California's, in part because that rating is guaranteed by rising student fees. Thus, reductions to state funding actually help the UC to improve its bond rating, because while state "education funds" cannot be used as bond collateral, private student fees can—and cuts to state funding provide a pretext for increased fees. On the list of priorities driving the substitution of private for public funding, "construction," as Meister put it, "comes ahead of instruction."

In light of such revelations, to hold that "Sacramento" is the primary source of the UC's woes amounts to either naiveté or willful obscurantism. Not only are current reductions in state funding a drop in the bucket of UC's total endowment—and nothing compared to the growing revenue of the university's profit-generating wings—it is also the case that UC administration has powerful motives to both collaborate with the continuing divestment of state funding and to divert its own resources from spending on instruction. For many, this state of affairs is both obvious and unsurprising, and perhaps no one has articulated its stakes more plainly than Berkeley graduate student Annie McClanahan in an address to the UC Regents prior to their November 19 decision to pass the proposed fee increases. "I'm here today to tell you," said McClanahan, "that when students and their parents have to borrow at 8 or 10 or 14% interest so that the UC can maintain its credit rating and its ability to borrow at a .2% lower rate of interest, we the students are not only collateral, we are collateral damage."

## V. Communization

The collateralization of student fees thus puts into question the very future of the university and the class relations it is called upon to maintain. As elsewhere in our post-industrial economy, the massive personal debt required to keep the university and its building projects churning along indicate the unsustainability of current class relations over the long-term. Something has to break. If the weakness of the American economy was, in the years leading up to the financial collapse of 2008,



exacerbated by the securitization of household debt via all kinds of exotic instruments, the situation is little different with students. UC's bondholders bear nearly the same relationship to student borrowing as an investment bank bears to the homeowner underwater on her subprime mortgage. In both cases, the fiction of a "sound investment," of a present sacrifice which will pay off in the future, occludes what is essentially a form of plunder, occludes a present and future immiseration which will, eventually, undermine the foundations of our consumer-driven society.

Given the UC's propensity to favor construction over instruction, or more bluntly, buildings over people, it is hardly surprising that student activists would target those buildings as sites of resistance. The failed Berkeley occupation of Nov.18—the first day of the strike—targeted the Capital Projects and Real-Estate services offices, departments responsible for the construction and administration of all campus buildings. The statements which the occupiers released via a blog entitled Anti-Capital Projects clarify the terms of the struggle, suggesting that what is broadly at stake are two different visions of the use of space, and by extension, two different regimes of property. Or rather, property and its negation.

These texts fall in line with the broadly anarchist or anti-state communist perspective of the earlier occupations, in which the horizon of occupation, its project so to speak, leads far beyond the university. To the extent that occupation offers, hypothetically, the opportunity to remove a building from the regime of property—in other words, to abolish its status as "capital" and to cancel one's subordination to owners and ownership—it forms a tactic little different than "seizure of the means of production," one with a venerable history and a wide extension beyond the university. In particular, one thinks of workplace occupations and expropriations and housing occupations. With unemployment reaching staggering proportions and with millions of bank-owned and foreclosed homes standing empty, occupation seems like a tactic that is itself a strategy – a form of militancy that is not a means to an end but an end in and of itself.

But any such threat to property relations immediately invites conflict with the police. One also risks conflict with the larger mass of the student-worker movement and activist faculty, who are loath to extend the struggle beyond reform of the university. The radical stream within the student movement, on the other hand, sees the fight for increased access to the university as futile without situating that fight within a much broader critique of political economy. Even if achieved, present reforms of the UC will merely slow its eventual privatization, and the crisis of the university remains connected to a much larger crisis of employment and, in turn, a crisis of capitalism that permits no viable solution. In other words, the jobs for which the university ostensibly prepares its students no longer exist, even as they are asked to pony up more and more money

for a devalued diploma. The pamphlet which has become a key reference for the occupation movement—*Communiqué from an Absent Future*—signals these positions with its title. The prospective future of the college graduate is erased by the crisis of the economy, even as any alternative future made possible through insurrection is rendered invisible by capitalist cynicism. The future is doubly absent.

The radical or anti-reformist position within the movement has often insisted upon a refusal of *demands* as the rationale for occupation—upon a refusal to negotiate one’s departure from the occupied building on the basis of concessions won. If any winnings are likely to be mooted, in the long-term, by overwhelming economic forces, then occupation is less potent as leverage for negotiation than as a practical attempt to remove oneself, to whatever degree possible, from existing regimes of *relation*: to others and to the use of space. The occupiers, in this sense, refuse to “take what they can get.” They would rather “get what they can take.” (This is how some fellow travelers in New York, participants in a series of inspiring occupations last year, have put it). An occupation is not a token illegalism to be bargained away in exchange for whatever modest demands the authorities are willing to grant, since this only legitimates the existing authorities in exchange for whatever modest demands those authorities are willing to grant. Demands are always either too small or too large; too “rational” or too incoherent. Occupations themselves, however, occur as material interventions into the space and time of capitalism. They are attempts to “live communism; spread anarchy,” as the Tiqqun pamphlet *Call* (an influential text for the occupation movement) puts it. This slogan was written on all of the chalkboards during the Nov. 20th occupation of Wheeler.

The communiqué and some of the other texts associated with the autumn occupations link up with what is often referred to as the “communization current”—a species of ultraleftism and insurrectionary anarchism that refuses all talk of a transition to communism; insisting, instead, upon the immediate formation of “communes,” of zones of activity removed from exchange, money, compulsory labor, and the impersonal domination of the commodity form. Communism, in this sense, is neither an endpoint nor a goal but a process. Not a noun but a verb. There is nothing toward which one transitions, only the transition itself, only a long process of metabolizing existing goods and capitals and removing them from the regimes of property and value. Judged in relation to such a project, the occupations of the fall are modest achievements—experiments with a practice that might find a fuller implementation in the future. There is an exemplary character to the actions—they are attempts to generalize a tactic that is also a strategy, a means that is also an end. But can the tactics elaborated within the university escape its confines and become

generalized in the kinds of places—apartment buildings, factories—where they would become part of an extensive process of communization? In a sense, the byline of the movement—*occupy everything, demand nothing*—is prospective; it imagines itself as occurring in an insurrectionary moment which has not yet materialized. This is its strength; its ability to make an actual, material intervention in the present that fast-forwards us to an insurrectionary future. Beyond such a conflagration, there is really no escaping one’s reinscription within a series of reforms and demands, regardless of the stance one takes. Only by passing into a moment of open insurrection can demands be truly and finally escaped.

The prospective dimension of the earlier positions is confirmed by the fact that both the Nov. 20th Berkeley occupation and the Santa Cruz Kerr Hall occupation, the successor occupations, did have a list of demands—demands that had a certain tactical logic in developing solidarity and expanding the action, but that also suffered from the problems of scale, coherence, and “achievability” that plague the demand as form. Nonetheless, what happened in both those instances was a massive radicalization of the student body, a massive escalation, one that was hardly countered by its superscription inside this or that call for reform. At Kerr Hall, the fact that the occupiers asked the administration for this or that concession was superseded, in material practice, by the fact that they had, for the moment, displaced their partners in negotiation: while they negotiated, they were at the same time in the Chancellor’s office, eating his food, and watching videos on his television. They did in fact *get what they could take*, and when the moment came, they didn’t hesitate to convert the sacrosanct property—the copy machines and refrigerators—into barricades.

## VI. We are the Crisis

Some writers have concluded that the sweep of the fall’s events presents a dialectic between the “adventurist” action of small groups, and the back-footed, reactive discourse of those who want to build a “mass democratic” movement, the final synthesis of which can be found in the “mass actions” undertaken by hundreds in November. This seems false to us since, in retrospect, the smaller actions resolve into the many facets and eruptions of a singular “mass movement” dispersed in time and place. The smaller actions were what it took to build up to something larger. Again: it is not a question of choosing between these two sides, nor of synthesizing them, but rather of displacing the priority of this opposition. The real dialectic is between negation and experimentation: acts of resistance and refusal which also enable an exploration of new social relations, new uses of space and time.

These two poles can’t be separated out, since the one passes into the other with surprising swiftness. Without confrontation, experimenta-

tion risks collapsing back into the existing social relations that form their backdrop—they risk becoming mere lifestyle or culture, recuperated as one more aestheticized museum exhibit of liberal tolerance toward student radicals. But to the extent that any experiment really attempts to take control of space and time and social relations, it will necessarily entail an antagonistic relation to power. This was evident when, during the week before exams reserved for studying (Dec. 7-11), Berkeley students marched back into Wheeler and held an open, unlocked occupation of the unused parts of the building, negotiating an informal agreement with the police and administrators, plastering the walls with slogans, turning classrooms into organizing spaces, study spaces, sleeping spaces, distributing food and literature in the lobby, and holding meetings, dance parties, and movie-screenings in the lecture hall. This attempt to put the building under student-led control turned out to be too much for the administration, and early in the morning of Dec. 11, the last day of the occupation, sixty-six people were arrested without warning as they slept. That same evening, in response, a group marched on the Chancellor's house carrying torches, destroying planters, windows, and lamps. What was originally conceived as a largely non-confrontational action quickly became highly confrontational. There is nothing new without a negation of the old. By the same measure, even if the people occupying Wheeler on Nov. 20th had little time to reinvent their relations, inasmuch as they spent most of their time fighting the cops for control of the doors, what emerged was a structure of solidarity, of spontaneous, self-organized resistance that obliterated any distinction between those inside and those outside, and that passed, by way of political determination, through the police lines meant to enforce this barrier. *There is no negation of the old which does not provoke the emergence of something new.*

# The Characteristics of the Occupation (Barcelona)

by anonymous

The first day I set foot in the plaza, I knew I was experiencing something unique. No one here had ever seen anything like this. Thousands of people, friends and strangers, crowding together, announcing their indignation, defying the law, calling for revolution. I had hardly ever spent time before in Plaça Catalunya. It was just a place for tourists and pigeons. Now I could pass hours here and have conversations with all sorts of people. A Pakistani man asks me to help translate what's going on. A young student comments on a flyer I'm handing out. Two grandparents argue about democracy and the best way to go about the struggle.

Once people saw that I was handing out flyers, they lined up to take them and soon I was all out. During the first week, everyone was excited, everyone was desperate for new ideas and perspectives. In a matter of days we distributed thousands of flyers, many of them new texts written just for this situation. On the other side of the city and in the metro, I often saw people reading our texts—not just glancing at them, but poring over them. That first week, I could go into any bakery or copy shop in town and request free bread or cheap copies “for the plaza” and receive at least a sympathetic response, and often a lot of free materials.

What we have experienced in Barcelona is a rupture—not so much in State control, in view of the democratic forms chosen by the occupation movement, but most definitely in people's affective reality. Society left its isolation cells and physically manifested itself in the middle of the plaza, and many people were feeling its presence for the very first time. They were recognizing how isolated they had been until now, in the plaza, where they encountered a force, a collective power, waiting to be reborn. In these unprecedented circumstances, people could begin to believe in the possibility of situations that were entirely new.

Before, when you handed someone an anarchist flyer, they might think about it for a while, it might improve their understanding of you, it might annoy them, but in any case they would only digest it at the level of opinions—because you were talking about something hypothetical, something unreal. But in the plaza, hearing our conversations or reading the literature we had on our table, people would really begin to debate: “But if we get rid of all the politicians, new ones will just come replace them.” “No, these kids are right! We need to get rid of all of them. If we're able to get rid of the first batch, we can get rid of the next ones too!”

People's aesthetics no longer marked their political niche. The most important thing was their bravery and sincerity. Many times I saw grand-

parents berating young punks for being too passive, or people dressed for work taking a more radical position than activist hippies. And everyone was talking about real possibilities. For at least the first week, these people meant it when they chanted “*Aquí comença la revolució!*” “The revolution begins here!”

So where did the so-called Spanish Revolution end up?

I remember yelling to a friend, high on the mass excitement of those first days, “This is our revolution! No barricades, nothing romantic like that, but what do we expect? It’s a piece of shit, but we already knew this is the world we live in. We have a lot of work to do!”

Within the complexity of the Spanish Revolution, one could find plenty to denounce. For a critical anarchist, it would be easier to reject the whole thing than embrace it. Fortunately, on the whole, Barcelona anarchists refused to take the easy road.

Most noteworthy in its long list of faults were its disappointed pretensions of being revolutionary. The Democracia Real Ya (DRY) activists did their best to place the whole movement in an ideological straight-jacket from the beginning. In Barcelona in particular, these activists were joined by a legion of minor league politicians, particularly Catalan *indepes*, as well as Trotskyists and dogmatic pacifists, all trying to get a piece of the pie. These in turn were aided by a great mass of well-meaning people who were simply reproducing the values of democracy and non-violence taught to them by the system, and no small number of highly skilled and no less well-meaning activists of the anti-globalization or student variety—including some anarchists—who cherished the processes of consensus and direct democracy.

This complex agglomeration of people formed a powerful recuperation machine that could not be neutralized with any simple approach. But I’m getting ahead of myself.

The preamble of the DRY manifesto gives a good impression of their political brand:

*We are ordinary people. We are like you: people who get up every morning to study, work or find a job, people who have family and friends. People, who work hard every day to provide a better future for those around us. Some of us consider ourselves progressive, others conservative. Some of us are believers, some not. Some of us have clearly defined ideologies, others are apolitical, but we are all concerned and angry about the political, economic, and social outlook which we see around us: corruption among politicians, businessmen, bankers, leaving us helpless, without a voice.*

DRY did an excellent job of formulating a mediocre politics defined by its populism, victimism, reformism, and moralism. By using common,

value-laden terms such as “democracy” (good) and “corruption” (bad), they created a discursive trap that garnered overwhelming support for all their proposals while deflecting or falsely including proposals that went further. Their stated minimums included revolutionary language and the highly popular sentiment that “we’re going to change everything,” while offering a ladder of demands that basically signaled the prices, from cheap to expensive, at which they would sell out. It started with reform of the electoral law, passed through laws for increased oversight of the bankers, and reached, at its most radical extreme, a refusal to pay back the bailout loans. Everything was structured around demands communicated to the existing government, but prettied up in populist language. Thus, the popular, anarchist slogan *Ningú ens representa*, “No one represents us,” was distorted within their program to mean, “None of the politicians currently in power represent us: we want better ones who will.”

However, to carry out this balancing act, they did have to adopt vaguely antiauthoritarian organizing principles inherited from the anti-globalization movement, such as open assemblies, no spokespersons, and no political parties.

Proposals centered on direct action or sentiments containing a rejection of government and capitalism were easily neutralized within this ideological framework. The former would be paternalistically tolerated as cute little side projects eclipsed by the major projects of reformist demands, and the latter would be applauded, linked back to the popular rhetoric already in use, and corrupted to mean an opposition to current politicians or specific bankers.

The only way to challenge this co-optation of popular rage was to focus critique on democracy itself. We quickly discovered that the idea of direct democracy was the major theoretical barrier that protected the existing representative democracy, and direct democracy activists, including anarchists, were the critical bridge between the parasitic grassroots politicians and their social host body.

By the fourth or fifth day of the occupation in Barcelona, it became apparent in practice what we had already argued in theory: that direct democracy recreates representative democracy; that it is not the features that can be reformed (campaign finance, term limits, popular referendums), but the most central ideals of democracy that are inherently authoritarian. The beautiful thing about the encampment in the plaza was that it had multiple centers for creation and initiative-taking. The central assembly functioned to suppress this; had it succeeded, the occupation would have died much sooner. It did not succeed, thanks in part to anarchist intervention.

The central assembly did not give birth to one single initiative. What it did, rather, was to grant legitimacy to initiatives worked out in the com-

missions; but this process must not be portrayed in positive terms. This granting of legitimacy was in fact a robbing of the legitimacy of all the decisions made in the multiple spaces throughout the plaza not incorporated into an official commission. Multiple times, self-appointed representatives of this or that commission tried to suppress spontaneous initiatives that did not bear their stamp of legitimacy. At other times, commissions, moderators, and internal politicians specifically contravened decisions made in the central assembly, when doing so would favor further centralization. This is not a question of corruption or bad form; *democracy always subverts its own mechanisms in the interests of power.*

Again and again in the plaza, we saw a correlation between democracy and the paranoia of control: the need for all decisions and initiatives to pass through a central point, the need to make the chaotic activity of a multitudinous occupation legible from a single vantage point—the control room, as it were. This is a statist impulse. The need to impose legibility on a social situation—and social situations are always chaotic—is shared by the democracy activist, who wishes to impose a brilliant new organizational structure; the tax collector, who needs all economic activity to be visible so it can be reappropriated; and the policeman, who desires a panopticon in order to control and punish. I also found that numerous anarchists of various ideological stripes were unable to see the crucial theoretical difference between the oppositions *representational democracy vs direct democracy/consensus* and *centralization vs decentralization*, because the first and second terms of both pairs have been turned into synonyms through misuse. For this reason, I have decided to rehabilitate the term “chaos” in my personal usage, as it is a frightening term no populist in the current context would use and abuse, and it relates directly to mathematical theories that directly express the kind of shifting, conflictual, constantly regenerating, acephalous organization anarchists are calling for.

After visiting another city where the encampment had basically killed itself through boredom, I realized that these antiauthoritarian consensus activists had also partially saved the day in Barcelona. Because radical anarchists are so extreme in our critique, we often lack social intuition; we have a hard time viewing the world from the perspective of “normalized” citizens. And while the #Spanish Revolution took everyone by surprise, it especially took us by surprise. Only a few of us had arrived by Wednesday, the third day of the occupation, and most did not come until Thursday or Friday. However, the consensus activists tended to be at the heart of it from early on. Many of them were experienced moderators, thanks to their participation in the great mobilizations of the antiglobalization movement, so they were often the ones facilitating the central assembly. And because they functioned as a bridge between the parasitic grassroots politicians and the masses, they also functioned as a shield for anarchist



ideals, because they were actors in their own right who had their own goals, quite distinct from the goals of the DRY activists or the Trotskyists.

In cities where this activist core did not exist, DRY activists or Trotskyists quickly homogenized the encampments and vigorously suppressed radical ideas. These encampments soon shrank like a desiccated corpse, with more parasites than host body. In Barcelona, on the other hand, anarchists enjoyed legitimacy and presence from the get-go, and the grassroots politicians generally had to pay lip service to anarchist organizational ideals, giving radical anarchists more room to work in.

One of the most repugnant features of the occupation, which ultimately caused many anarchists to stop participating, was the imposition of non-violence. Nonviolence was one of the original principles of the DRY platform, and in Barcelona the first antiauthoritarian participants either did not try to or were not able to reject it. Nonviolence was never debated, but always included in every action proposal, so the choice before the central assembly was always nonviolence or nothing. In the beginning, activists carried out a few peaceful sit-ins. For May 30, DRY announced an action to be carried out throughout the entire Spanish state: that day, everyone should withdraw 155 euros from their bank accounts (155 = 15-5, or 15 May), “a peaceful and subtle act, but sufficiently contentious and attention-grabbing to clearly demonstrate the indignation we feel, and also our strength and commitment to take this through to the end,” in their words.

But generally, their action plan was to do nothing, to stay in the plazas, to prevent people from seizing or blocking the surrounding streets, and to talk about another protest on the fifteenth day of the following month. When anarchists in Barcelona distributed flyers on the third day of the occupation, they quickly released a statement, not approved by any assembly, saying that the occupation was strictly pacifist, and that the police were trying to infiltrate and encourage violence; therefore all the good citizens should bring their cameras and take pictures of everybody and everything.

I believe it was the first Wednesday or Thursday when a group of activists dropped a huge banner from a major building alongside the plaza, reading “Politicians, Bosses, Bankers, CCOO UGT [the major trade unions] Fuck Off.” The crowds cheered exultantly. Two days later, another group blocked a street and cut open a section of the giant billboard covering another building, to reveal a large spray-painted slogan beneath; if I remember correctly, it said “No one represents us!” On this second occasion, some people cheered, but self-appointed leaders tried to stop the action and denounced it as violent.

When police carried out their hygienic operation on Friday, May 26, pacifists verbally or physically obliged everyone to sit down and to hold signs with the words “nonviolent resistance.” The police beat the pro-

testors with glee, opening heads and breaking arms. On a few occasions when people attempted to snatch away police batons, pacifists ran towards them to bring their message of peace. As thousands more people arrived to liberate the plaza, they overwhelmed police lines and surged towards the cops in the middle, shouting and starting to throw things. Pacifists formed a human chain to protect them. Police were eventually pushed back, not without completing their cleaning operation and allowing the sanitation trucks to depart with all the materials they had stolen. Even though the crowds generally pushed past the limits set forward by the pacifists—and they certainly didn't do it sitting down waiting for the legal team, as the pacifists had advised—the ideologues of nonviolence still claimed it as a victory. They also falsely stated that the police attempted to evict the plaza and were defeated. All this should come as no surprise, as pacifists have done the same thing with the Arab revolts—emboldening statist like Obama to do the same.

The following Saturday was the worst day, when the pacifists formed human chains to keep football fans out of the plaza and cheered police as they arrested hooligans. When there were still comrades in critical condition in the hospital, injured from rubber bullets shot by police officers, these same pacifists proposed going to support a rally the police were holding to protest their upcoming wage cuts.

There were other problems as well. Senegalese immigrants selling sunglasses and Pakistani immigrants selling beer and sandwiches moved into the autonomous zone we had created in the plaza. Selling things on the street, if you're not rich enough to have your own store or kiosk, is illegal in Barcelona, and the cops often amuse themselves chasing immigrant street vendors. Enter the *Convivencia* (coexistence, living-together) Commission. The CC formed with the explicit objective of not allowing *antisistema* to come and take over the plaza. *Antisistema* is a media term originally used to refer to anarchists in a depoliticized and delegitimizing way; it has since been extended to squatters and anyone else who falls outside the range of acceptable democratic opinion. In popular usage it is almost a synonym for hoodlum or hooligan. Consequently, the proposal to form the CC won popular approval in the assembly before any debate could be had, and despite the fact that many non-anarchist participants in the plaza had signs criticizing the media use of the term “antisistema.”

The CC police set themselves the task of kicking out the Pakistani *late-ros* (beer vendors). Their justification was that “they bothered people” by offering beers for sale every few minutes, and that they “created a bad image” for the encampment (in the media). Multiple times, anarchists confronted CC members, who often went around with name-tags and walkie-talkies, but to no avail. Despite accusations of hypocrisy and racism, they specifically refused to talk to the people who had the money to

buy the beer, and only focused on pushing out the people whose livelihood was based on selling it.

There was a heavy dose of legalism as well among the leading organizers. They attempted to get us to take down our signs against voting, claiming it could be used as a justification for a police eviction, even though the whole occupation was blatantly illegal. At another point they raised a stink when some people started an urban garden in the plaza; they complained that replacing the mulch beds around the fountain with plants was “uncivic.” For context, the *civisme* laws in Barcelona have been an aggressive tool to kill street culture and make things more comfortable for tourists. Anarchists in the plaza often had to argue against legalist mentalities; it helped that the occupation in itself sprang from illegality. On this front, we gained some ground; the garden, for example, was not suppressed.

There were also problems with certain junkies and drunkards who had taken up residence in the plaza and constantly harassed or even assaulted women. Pacifist organizers and the Convivencia Commission tried to prevent the feminist assembly in the plaza from organizing self-defense classes and taking care of the problem on their own, instead paternalistically offering to protect them. Anarchists had a hard time dealing with the junkies and drunkards who were being jerks. On the one hand, we were glad they were taking advantage of the autonomous zone to live without police harassment for a few weeks. On the other hand, some of them acted in ways we wouldn’t tolerate from anybody; in another context, only residual liberal guilt would have kept us from knocking them on their asses. Unfortunately, the situation was extremely complicated: any use of violence could have provoked a major confrontation with the pacifists, with totally unforeseen consequences. Worse still, it could have a conservative backlash that would have vindicated and demanded more of the CC’s policing activities.

On the whole, however, there was much in the plaza to value. It was an extensive, chaotic space of self-organization where people met their logistical needs—sometimes going through the official channels, sometimes not. There was a library, a garden, an international translation center, a kitchen with big stoves and solar cookers, and at any time there were a couple concerts, workshops, debates, and massage parlors taking place, along with innumerable smaller conversations and encounters.

And it was amazing to encounter a wider anarchist community there, to find that most comrades had the same idea to come down to the plaza even though the most visible discourses emanating therefrom were staunchly social-democratic. The comrades we met there were not always members of our pre-existing affinity groups, but also libertarians we had never worked with before. On the whole, comrades demonstrated an impressive commitment, agility of action, and a nuanced and incisive cri-

tique. It became clear again that the old stereotype of the anarchist ghetto is at best only partially true. At the first chance to join a collectivity and communicate with others, most of us were there, even though it was often an uncomfortable or even hostile environment. The very fact that we can speak of an “anarchist ghetto” indicates that we are less isolated than most people. This communality that we carry with us makes us stand out; the “ghetto” is formed less by attitudes on the interior and more by the imposition of a general social isolation on everybody else. In Barcelona, this has become truer in the last few years, now that many anarchists have distanced themselves from the tradition of squatting for the sake of squatting.

Not exactly on the turn of a dime, but within the space of a couple days, many dozens of us dropped our routines and threw ourselves wholeheartedly into the occupation—staffing the literature table, writing or finding texts and photocopying them, having conversations and arguments, joining the commissions, and organizing debates, talks, and concerts. It was an incredible feeling to find so many accomplices in the middle of a social singularity, to spend the night conversing, arguing, and analyzing the day’s events, to spend the following morning writing the next round of announcements and critiques, to pass the siesta printing, and then to go back down to the anarchist tent for an afternoon and evening of distribution, meetings, and the assembly.

Inevitably, we exhausted ourselves. Talking with comrades who took part in the December 2008 insurrection in Greece, it sounded like people reached their physical limits in three weeks. Evidently, debates and meetings are more taxing than riots and tear gas: most of us started to burn out after a week or two. Many of those who were most active in the first week were gradually replaced by a sort of second shift of those who had taken longer to be convinced of the need to participate.

### A Note on Technology

A reader might notice that from the vantage point of the internet, it seems like the “#Spanish Revolution” was based almost entirely around Twitter and Facebook, virtual communication that doesn’t feature at all in my account. In reality, except for the occasional tech geek wandering by suggesting that we could solve all the world’s problems with virtual simultaneous internet democracy, that part of the revolution simply didn’t exist for me. Perhaps this is not surprising, in that I don’t have a cellphone and don’t use Facebook. In the end, these are just tools for spreading the word, and while they do change the terrain, from a certain point of view they are superfluous. I found it easy to be in the center of important happenings and to stay informed. Toting a cellphone around would have just wasted my time and left logs of all my movements and communications for the police to browse at their leisure. For the past

millennia, there have been occasions in which people gather together spontaneously in surprising numbers. As social isolation increases, networking technology helps overcome the growing distances, but it also plays a role in creating them in the first place.

I recall a talk in a Barcelona anarchist social center, in which we called an Egyptian anarchist in Tahrir Square via Skype. She laughed about the whole Twitter and Facebook obsession, explaining that those tools were useful but that their importance had been exaggerated by Western media.

### Anarchist Strategies

After debating the matter with comrades nearly every day for weeks, I think those of us who chose to participate in the occupation with an anarchist critique made the right strategic choices. Our only errors come down to a question of finding the right balance between the various forms of activity.

The few anarchists who were there at the beginning were instrumental in blocking the signing of the DRY manifesto and in approving the decision not to produce any unitary manifestos. This allowed the Barcelona occupation to take on an independent character and develop according to its own needs, which endowed it with more vivacity. In Sevilla, by contrast, the occupation in Las Setas signed on to the Madrid platform from the beginning, never developed as much diversity or strength, and quickly lost what it had. And in Madrid, the assembly passed a law early on to allow no ideological symbols or ideological groups in the occupation, which was a decisive factor in preventing the anarchists there from ever setting up their own table to distribute propaganda. Accordingly, they had far less visibility, though they made a major effort to participate in the various commissions. We owe what we achieved in Barcelona in part to the fact that some anarchists went to the protest and occupation at the very beginning, despite the odious democratic rhetoric that predominated; and that they did not go as warm bodies only, but as fighters or activists with their own specific critique.

After more anarchists arrived on Wednesday and Thursday, there was a debate that ended in an impasse: do we participate in the assembly and the commissions, or do we stay at the margins? A couple of us argued that the place of the anarchists is always in the margins, and our role is to subvert the center and make sure the margins are more alive, more creative, and more interesting than the center. Fortunately, we did not win that debate, although subsequent events vindicated our position. In the end, most “radical” anarchists participated in various commissions, especially Content, where minimum demands and political programs were formulated. Anarchist participation basically made this commission explode, as the Trotskyists and social-democrats who previously dominated it found

it impossible, with us involved, to get approval for their populist programs. Subsequently, the commission broke up into about a dozen sub-commissions: these included labor, ecological, and other themed ones, and also “Self-Organization and Direct Democracy.” This did not prevent the Trots from subsequently speaking in the name of Content and trying to delegitimize the decisions of the sub-commissions.

Those favoring self-organization (anarchists and autonomists) and those favoring direct democracy (radical liberals) were lumped in the same sub-commission; the latter found this appropriate, while the former considered the two terms to be diametrically opposed. Of course, the former were right, but it was a good thing the two groups were lumped together because this allowed the two camps to debate, spreading a critique of direct democracy beyond anarchist circles and giving anarchists good practice in communicating. Not to sound arrogant, but the partisans of self-organization tended to win the debates, as the democrats had superficial ideas and generally less experience in any kind of struggle.

By participating in the commissions, anarchists achieved multiple victories. In a few instances, we changed the form of the occupation; in many instances, we held effective debates, crystallized our analysis, and gained contact with a broader antiauthoritarian community. We also blocked several attempts to pacify or neutralize the most beautiful aspects of the occupation.

However, within a couple weeks most of us realized that we had made a mistake by putting so much energy into the commissions. We had effectively sequestered anarchist ideas in a few useful but relatively small spaces; we had exhausted ourselves with daily meetings; and we had allowed ourselves to be seduced by the official organizational structures, which generally proved themselves impervious to decentralization from the inside. Meanwhile, we had only realized a tiny fraction of the occupation’s potential for self-organization. This is ironic, in that most of us were busy talking about self-organization in the appropriate commissions.

On a few occasions, we defied the central assembly and the commissions by organizing things on our own, starting projects in small affinity groups and working out conflicts with other projects on a case-by-case basis. We set up the literature tent, organized two or three talks, two or three debates, helped organize a concert, and helped organize an “es-crache” protest at a nearby workplace that had just fired a worker for being pregnant. If we had only put half as much energy into the commissions, those valuable debates still would have happened, but we could have organized ten times as many informal events in the plaza, making it a reality that the margins were stronger than the center.

As it happened, within a week the anarchist tent had become a place where people rested between meetings—this meant that we weren’t hav-

ing as many spontaneous conversations with random passersby. The margins, I should clarify, were not a lifeless place waiting for anarchist leadership. There was already a great deal of activity there, much organized by hippies, but little of it had any explicit political content; thus it was less contentious, and more easily delegitimized within a dichotomy of work/leisure or culture/politics.

On the first Friday of the occupation, the day we set up the anarchist tent with the literature table, a vital strategic decision had to be made unexpectedly. Someone from some commission came up to tell us that the plaza was reserved for commission tents, so we had to move to the edge, basically a sidewalk area outside the entrances to the inner plaza. The guy was very clever, and used a convincing argument: if we stayed there, then the Trotskyists and Stalinists and all these other parties could also set up their tents, and we didn't want to be responsible for that, did we?

At the time, there were only about six of us there. I don't want to make myself too much of a protagonist; everyone telling the story from their own perspective will remember analogous episodes, because we have all made heroic efforts in these days. But the fact of the matter is, I soon found there were only two of us who opposed moving the tent, and the other one was willing to accept the majority position. I argued forcibly: who cares if all the little Marxist-Leninist parties in the world move in? The commissions and the official structures are far more dangerous. Furthermore, we were fully legitimate in setting up this tent, because we were not a pre-existing political party but a spontaneous initiative that arose from the plaza itself. Most of the people in the tent at that point had never worked together on any project before, and a couple of us had met for the first time in the plaza. *Not only was it our responsibility as anarchists to defy the commissions and open up the plaza for all sorts of initiatives, but it was a good thing if they subsequently tried to kick us out in the general assembly. As anarchists, we want to make existing conflicts visible, not avoid them.* Let them try to kick us out, and then see where this democratic revolution goes.

We argued face to face with various commissiocrats, sometimes being nice, sometimes being outraged, until they were convinced or exhausted. We also built some common ground with another tent they were trying to kick out, one that had been set up by some performance kids from a circus squat. If we had not won that little battle and realized the need to seek conflict *not only with the State but also in the social movements, which also contain the State*, we would have been at a severe disadvantage in everything that followed.

Other strategic decisions were easier. We all agreed it was important to confront the keepers of order, such as the people from the Convivencia Commission. We started arguments where necessary, but remained willing to reconcile and be friendly if they stopped acting like cops or



politicians; this actually happened on a couple occasions.

Our propaganda efforts also didn't need any discussion, and they were modestly Herculean. It's impossible to say how many flyers we handed out, but it may well have exceeded 30,000, plus hundreds of pamphlets and posters. Surprisingly, it was all self-financed via a donation jar at our table. Especially in the first week, passersby tossed in huge quantities of coins and even bills so we could keep printing our supposedly extremist and alienating propaganda.

The final strategic conflict I'll detail involved criticizing allies who were involved in the centralization of the meetings. Our criticisms were harsh at times, and they strained more than a few friendships, but I think it was absolutely necessary. By widely posting the accusation that the assembly was being manipulated by Trotskyists and left Catalan politicians, we put these people on the defensive and limited their activity. The same approach was harder with the DRY activists, unfortunately, because they were previously unknown and they were in the middle of the whole thing from the beginning.

Meanwhile, by strongly criticizing the consensus activists for facilitating this manipulation and recreating the State, we made visible an absolutely vital line of conflict, deflating the various excuses that hid authoritarianism within questions of process and inefficiency. This latter group, the consensus activists, mostly had good intentions, and some were in fact comrades, so they were genuinely sensitive to criticism. The results of our attempts to criticize them will surface in the coming months as they evaluate their own intervention in this phenomenon and we continue criticizing them. It is necessary that as soon as possible, everyone who honestly desires freedom recognize that democracy must be destroyed in all its forms.

### What We Learned

We can derive a number of lessons from this experience, many of which are still being digested.

For me, the first is this: *there can be no more excuses for mass assemblies moderated by consensus specialists.* It is important for collectivities to come together; when this happens, it is important. But the only mass organizational form that can exist without being imposed is that of an *encuentro*, an encounter, where people speak their minds or share ideas or ask for help on initiatives that they are starting without needing anyone's permission. Within this encounter, there can be individuals and affinity groups, people involved in formal (nonparty) organizations or informal federations, or whatever. The whole question of formality or informality is a distraction—it doesn't matter, it only comes down to personal taste. From an anarchist viewpoint, the only necessity is that there be no



decision-making body that has more legitimacy than all the others. A social movement is essentially an attempt by society to be reborn out of the void of capitalist alienation. We should not have to adhere to any single organizational form in order to fully participate in the social movement, because every single one will exclude certain kinds of people.

In the past, the CNT played this role. To participate in the struggle in Barcelona, you practically had to work within the CNT, and they screwed it up something awful. It would be a similar mistake to grant legitimacy to a mass assembly, regardless of whether it uses consensus or voting, because depending on the time and location of the meetings, how long they last, whether there are chairs to sit in or whether the space can be accessed by handicapped people, some people will be excluded. Even if you could design the perfect meeting form and rewind capitalist development to recreate a proletariat that all went to work and went to bed at the same time, there would still be exclusion, because some people just don't do meetings, while others have large crowds and speechmaking in their blood. The only answer to this is to recognize a web of decision-making structures and organizing forms with equal legitimacy, destroying once and for all the divide between public and private.

Secondly, we learned again what makes a good intervention: *presence plus critique*. Presence means being there, but it also means participating, becoming a material and integral part of what is going on. Critique means not leaving your brain at home because you think you're going to scare people off with your anarchist ideas; it means expressing yourself, and also listening, and evaluating your own behavior.

I had a chance to compare our experiences with a failed anarchist intervention in another city that confirms this point. Some comrades went to the encampment there just as warm bodies, without criticism. Others went provocatively, snubbing everything and everyone and leaving when they got a bad reaction, deciding not to come back because it wasn't a comfortable space for them. It strikes me that these two opposite approaches are complementary. Both are based on avoiding personal discomfort.

#### Some Further Lessons:

*People are situational, not sovereign.* This same idea seemed to be confirmed by the Greek experience. With the possible exception of a few Nietzschean superbeings, people are not sovereign individuals who live according to their opinions. Rather, people respond to their situations. Accordingly, the same person who has little time for an anarchist text on a normal day of the week will stop and read it and fantasize with you about overthrowing the State if you happen to meet them in the unexpected terrain of a spontaneous collectivity. The next question to explore is to what extent we can plant seeds, in the boring moments, that

will stay with people and have the chance to sprout when those people enter the unpredictable terrain of a rupture.

*Collaboration between the various sects of libertarians was vital.* Perhaps affinity groups are overrated: in the end it did not matter so much whether a fellow anarchist agreed with you on the question of the existence or nonexistence of the proletariat; it mattered more whether we could get along and communicate. It was a great advantage to have many different perspectives mixing, different strategies being developed, and different people being drawn to participate in different ways. The anarcho-sindicalists made a great effort to be present in many of the commissions, and it was funny and instructive seeing them participating in the same popular debates with nihilist and insurrectionary anarchists. They also brought with them the important tradition of the CNT, which granted legitimacy to anarchist participation on the whole.

*Decentralization is not the same as dispersal.* A mass gathering point such as Plaça Catalunya can give us a sense of collective strength, which dispersal would dissipate. Decentralization means not utilizing a unitary organizational structure with central nodes. It is a question of mode, not scale. Many people, including some anarchists, misunderstood the anarchist proposal for decentralization as a proposal to shift activity to the neighborhoods. While this was in fact part of what most anarchists were proposing, it is equally possible to transplant centralized structures at a smaller scale to all the neighborhood assemblies. Fortunately, the Barcelona neighborhood assemblies, which formed around the September general strike, had already defeated an attempt to centralize them within the umbrella organizing structure that arose around the strike. They preferred their autonomy. As such, they were a favorable terrain for anarchists, especially where we had already been participating in our neighborhood assembly. It was harder for grassroots politicians to take them over, and harder to impose an ideological unity, because we already had a point of unity: we lived in the neighborhood together, and we had no pretensions of all thinking the same way.

*When we express anarchist ideas honestly, humbly, and passionately, it can reveal that many of those who remain silent are already partially on our side.* Inertia and common values work against us and favor the populists and democrats, but anarchist ideas almost always win a debate because they speak to an inalienable impulse towards freedom that exists in everyone who still has a heart. The important thing, then, is to participate in the debate, as long as that debate does not legitimize official political channels but takes place between ordinary people. It is no coincidence that the dogmatic pacifists boycotted the debate we organized about nonviolence. They're not interested in a debate, but in imposing their practice.

*Nonviolence is not a cultural peculiarity, but a real danger everywhere de-*

*mocracy exists.* I thought that with its Mediterranean culture and its long, living history of forceful struggles, Spain would never have a problem with nonviolence. But in a period of a few years, it has appeared with a strength that could rival the pacifism in the UK or US. And these pacifists do not generally emerge from a trajectory of the historical nonviolent struggles in Spain, such as the antimilitarist movement. Rather, they have been created out of whole cloth by the democratic context itself; the ground was prepared, in my mind, by the tolerance of leftist, democratic, rights-based discourses in the antagonistic social movements of the last couple decades. People who identify as peaceful should be heartily encouraged to make themselves at home within our struggles. Nonviolence, on the other hand, must be treated with contempt until it is made synonymous with cowardice and snitching, and decent pacifists abandon ship to never again be confused with cop-lovers. By continuing to use the dichotomy of nonviolence and violence, and arguing whether or not our actions qualify as violent, we are only empowering them. Violence does not exist: it is a vague and moralistic category. Only nonviolence exists, and it means selling out, running away, and censoring other people's struggles.

*Direct democracy is just representative democracy on a smaller scale.* It inevitably recreates the specialists, centralization, and exclusion we associate with existing democracies. Within four days, once the crowds exceeded 5,000, the experiment in direct democracy was already rife with false and manipulated consensus, silenced minorities, increasing abstention from voting, and domination by specialists and internal politicians.

In a story worthy of Kafka, we were trying to schedule a debate and we wanted to let those at the Activity Commission know. The kid at the table looked down at his form, a crappy little piece of paper written up in ballpoint pen, and told us we couldn't have our event in the spot where we wanted. "Why?" I asked, getting ready to go ballistic. The response was far more pathetic than I had expected. "Because our forms are divided into different columns, see, one column for each space in the plaza, but that space over by the staircase, well that's not an official space." "That's okay, we don't mind, just write it down." "But, but, I can't. There isn't a column for it." "Well, make a column." "Um, I can't." "Oh Christ, look, which one's open—look, here, 'Pink Space,' just write our event down for the 'Pink Space' and when the time comes we'll just move it." Within two weeks, without any prior training, the Spanish Revolution had created perfect bureaucrats!

Some radical anarchists put too much trust in the commissions. They were only useful as spaces for debate and as spaces to subvert. For example, in the beginning, the assembly decided not to release unitary manifestos speaking for everyone. Subsequently, in the commissions, anarchists had to fight proposals for minimum demands and manifestos

every single night. Finally, there was a commission meeting with no anarchists present, and the minimums were passed through the commission and subsequently ratified by the general assembly, which ratified nearly every proposal passed before it. On the other hand, the anarchist proposal to decentralize the assembly was voted on twice, and each time achieved overwhelming support, but curiously was defeated on technicalities both times. This action demonstrated that we were right, we had lots of support, and the assembly was a sham—that, in itself, was a victory. But direct democracy cannot be reformed from within. It has to be destroyed.

In another example of the unsuitability of these organizational forms, the attempt to organize a simple debate about nonviolence almost failed because the Self-Organization and Direct Democracy Sub-Commission needed days to debate and consense on exactly how they wanted to do it. In the end, two people decided to ignore the commission, and joining with another anarchist who was not participating in Self-Organization, the three of them organized a successful talk and debate in just a day, accomplishing what a group of fifty people had failed at over the course of a week.

Finally, we learned our own limits. After two weeks of meetings, debates, and grassroots bureaucracy, some of us were ready to shoot ourselves. We were exhausted, and we had made the grave error of dropping all our other projects and actions. This demonstrated a necessary flexibility, but it also meant that during these most critical moments, radical anarchist actions weren't happening in the streets. It always felt vital to be in the meetings, in case something should go wrong, but we could have moderated our participation and devoted some energy elsewhere.

In this respect, it became obvious that we lack people who are comfortable with public speaking. This is a vital skill we need to develop collectively. Often, people with antiauthoritarian critiques made up a large proportion of a meeting, but we just sat through it all and listened to bullshit because none of us wanted to take the microphone. In the second open assembly in the Clot neighborhood, I started to get depressed because it was exhibiting none of the antiauthoritarian sentiment of the first one. Populist inertia was steamrolling us. Finally, I took the mic and launched into a ten-minute speech urging a focus on long-term revolutionary goals and self-organization, and slamming reformism, pacifism, and attempts at a homogenous unity. A huge part of the crowd cheered, and afterwards more people were motivated to get up and express similar sentiments, shifting the direction of the whole meeting. At the end, half a dozen people, from grandmothers to students, thanked me for my contribution, while others came over to start arguments that ended with them either convinced of or at least respecting the anarchist position. I didn't enjoy speaking or receiving compliments—it made me feel nervous and self-conscious—but I wonder: if I hadn't, would the meeting have run

its course with the uninterrupted illusion of a reformist majority?

Now that the Plaça Catalunya occupation is disappearing, the struggle will continue in the neighborhoods, in the radical unions, in preexisting affinity groups, and in the new relationships that have been formed during these days. Time will tell, but I suspect we have made a great leap forward by participating in the neighborhood assemblies, meeting new accomplices, and winning ourselves a great social visibility in spite of a hostile democratic environment. The real revolution is a long time in coming, but its sputtering attempts to come to life are plainly visible in these surprising, pathetic, exhausting, beautiful moments, as long as we have the fortitude to be there.

## Resolution by the Popular Assembly of Syntagma Square – May 28 2011

*From an assembly attended by 3,000 people*

For a long time now, decisions are taken for us, without us.

We are workers, unemployed, pensioners, youth who came to Syntagma to struggle for our lives and our futures.

We are here because we know that the solution to our problems can only come from us.

We invite all Athenians, the workers, the unemployed, and the youth to Syntagma, and the entire society to fill up the squares and to take life into its hands.

There, in the squares, we shall co-shape all our demands.

We call all workers who will be striking in the coming period to end up and to remain at Syntagma.

We will not leave the squares before those who lead us here leave first: Governments, the Troika, Banks, Memorandums and everyone who exploits us.

We tell them that the debt is not ours.

**DIRECT DEMOCRACY NOW!**

**EQUALITY – JUSTICE – DIGNITY!**

The only defeated struggle is the one that was never fought!

Anarchism is a series of developing theories about how best to inhabit anarchy. This section demonstrates some of the specific approaches that have informed the Occupation Movement.

Wolfi Landstreicher is a well-known writer whose lengthy pamphlet *Autonomous Organization and Anarchist Intervention* argues for an approach to engagement that couples self-organization with direct action. He gives particular insight into what this means in the context of the United States. David Graeber (unfairly credited with a central, rather than supporting, role in the events of Occupy Wall Street) offers a concise statement on how anarchist principles have informed the Occupation Movement. Cindy Milstein, an anarchist activist based in Philadelphia, argues for a directly democratic approach in the tradition of Murray Bookchin's *Libertarian Municipalism*. Finally, Phoenix Insurgent offers a more explicit class analysis of anarchist participation.

Ideas



# Autonomous Self-Organization and Anarchist Intervention: *A Tension in Practice*

by Wolfi Landstreicher

## Introduction: a few definitions and explanations

Any potentially liberatory struggle among the exploited and dispossessed must be based on autonomous self-organization. As anarchists, who are also usually among the exploited, we have every reason to participate in and encourage these struggles. But since we have specific ideas of how we want to go about our struggles and a specifically revolutionary aim, our participation takes the form of an intervention seeking to move the struggles in a specific direction. Having no desire to be any sort of vanguard or leadership or to be caught up in the joyless game of politicking, we find ourselves in a tension of trying to live our conception of struggle and freedom within the context of an unfree reality, of trying to confront the real daily problems we face with our own refusal to play by the rules of this world. Thus, the question of autonomous self-organization and anarchist intervention is an ongoing problem with which to grapple, refusing to fall into easy answers and faith in organizational panaceas. To begin exploring this question let's start with a few definitions and explanations.

## Autonomous self-organization

When I speak of autonomous self-organization, I am speaking of a specific phenomenon that tends to arise whenever people, angered by their conditions and having lost faith in those delegated to act for them, decide to act for themselves. Autonomous self-organization therefore never manifests in the form of a political party, a union, or any other sort of representative organization. All of these forms of organization claim to represent the people in struggle, to act in their name. And what defines autonomous self-organization is precisely the rejection of all representation. Parties, unions, and other representative organizations tend to interact with autonomous organization only in the form of recuperators of the struggle, striving to take over leadership and impose themselves as spokespeople of the struggle—usually with the aim of negotiating with the rulers. Thus, they can only be viewed as potential usurpers wherever real self-organized revolt is occurring.



Autonomous self-organization has certain essential traits that define it. First of all it is non-hierarchical. There is no institutional or permanent leadership or authority. While someone who proves particularly knowledgeable with regards to specific matters relating to the struggle at hand will be given the attention she deserves for such knowledge, this cannot be allowed to become the basis for any permanent leadership role, because that would undermine another essential trait of autonomous self-organization: horizontal communication and relationships. This is a matter of people talking with each other, interacting with each other, expressing needs and desires openly, actually discussing the problems they face together and in practical terms, without any leadership to conform this expression to a set line. This brings us to another trait, one that may be controversial to collectivist ideologues, but that is the only way of guaranteeing the first two traits: the basic unit of autonomous self-organization is the individual. Otherwise, it could be argued that all states and businesses are autonomous self-organization, because on the institutional and collective level they do organize themselves, but the individuals who comprise their human component are defined by these institutions and placed in accordance with the institutional needs. So autonomous self-organization is first of all the individual organizing his struggle against the conditions this world forces upon her on her own terms, finding the means necessary for carrying out that struggle. But among the means necessary are relations with other people, so autonomous self-organization is also a collective practice. But that collective practice is not based upon conforming individuals to an organization imposed on them, but rather on the development of relationships of mutuality between them in which they discover the areas of commonality in their struggles and need, affinity in their dreams and desires. One could say that autonomous self-organization is the development of a shared struggle based on mutuality for the full realization of each individual involved. To further clarify this point (and to quickly counter a false dichotomy often made in revolutionary milieus), one can look at it in terms of revolutionary class struggle. While the details vary, anti-state, anti-capitalist revolutionaries generally agree that the “revolutionary task” of the exploited class is to abolish itself as a class as it abolishes class society. What does this mean and when does it happen in the course of struggle? It seems to me, that this means precisely the rediscovery of oneself as an individual with one’s own desires, needs and dreams which have no relation to what capital has to offer, desires, needs and dreams best fulfilled in free association with others based on mutuality and affinity. When, in the course of struggle, the exploited begin to find the methods of organizing their own activity together, this process of abolishing themselves as a class has already

begun since they are beginning precisely to talk and act with each other as individuals. Finally, autonomous self-organization is practical. It is not the setting up of any formal organization to represent anything. It is rather the bringing together of the elements necessary for accomplishing the various tasks and activities necessary to the particular struggle. This will tend to include the development of ways to communicate, ways to coordinate actions, ways to gather necessary tools and so on. As will be seen below, in large-scale struggles, assemblies tend to develop for discussing what is necessary; these are not formalized structures, but rather specific methods for dealing with the problems at hand.

## Anarchist intervention

We anarchists are ourselves often among the exploited and dispossessed. Thus, we have an immediate need to struggle against this social order. At the same time, we come to these daily struggles with a conscious revolutionary perspective and with specific ideas about how to go about these struggles. Thus, it is inevitable that our participation as anarchists will take the form of intervention. So it is worthwhile to consider what makes our participation an intervention.

First of all, as anarchists, we come to every struggle with a conscious revolutionary perspective. Whatever the specific cause that provokes a struggle, we recognize it as an aspect of the social order that must be destroyed in order to open the possibilities for a free and self-determined existence. Struggles and revolts are generally provoked by specific circumstances, not by mass recognition of the need to destroy the state, capital and all the institutions through which domination and exploitation are carried out. Anarchist intervention, therefore, attempts to expand the struggle beyond the circumscribed cause that provokes it, to point out, not just in words, but through action the connection of the specific problem at hand to the larger reality of the social order that surrounds us. This would include finding and exposing the commonalities between various struggles as well as the differences that can enhance a broader struggle of revolt.

Because we anarchists come to any struggle with a specific revolutionary perspective, it is in our interest to propose a methodology of struggle which carries this perspective in it, a principled methodology which provides a basis for our complicity in any struggle. The methodology of which I speak is not just a methodology for struggle, but something to apply to all of life as far as possible. First of all, the struggle must be carried out with complete autonomy from all representative organizations. We need to recognize unions and parties as usurpers and determine our specific activities in any struggle for ourselves, without regard for their demands.

Secondly, our practice needs to be that of true direct action—figuring out how to accomplish the specific tasks we pose ourselves on our own, not demanding any authority or any “representative” of the struggle to act for us. Thirdly, we need to remain in permanent conflict with the social order we oppose with regard to the specific matter at hand, keeping our attacks up in order to make it clear that we have no intention of being recuperated. Fourthly, we need to be on the attack, refusing to negotiate or compromise with those in power. This methodology carries within it both the principle of self-organization and the revolutionary necessity to destroy the present ruling order.

Because of the nature of our anarchist aspirations, our intervention in struggles will always express itself as a tension on several levels. First of all, as I said most of us are ourselves among the exploited and dispossessed of the current social order, not part of the ruling or managing classes. Thus, we face the same immediate realities as those around us, with the same desire for immediate relief. But we also have a desire for a new world and want to bring this desire into all of our struggles not just in words, but in the way we go about our practice. Thus, there is the tension of willfully moving toward autonomy and freedom under oppressive conditions. In addition, we have specific ways in which we desire to go about our struggles and live our lives. These methods are based upon horizontal relationships and the refusal of hierarchy and vanguardism. So there is the tension of striving to find ways of putting forth our conceptions of how to go about struggle that encourage already existing tendencies toward self-organization and direct action that do not fall into the methods of political evangelism. We are, after all, seeking to relate as comrades and accomplices, not leaders. And then there is the tension of wanting to act immediately against the impositions of this society upon our lives regardless of the current level of struggle while again avoiding any tendency toward vanguardism. In a sense, anarchist intervention is the tightrope between living our own struggle in our daily lives and finding the ways to connect this struggle with the struggles of all the exploited most of whom do not share our conscious perspectives, a connection that is necessary if we are to move in the direction of social insurrection and revolution. A misstep in one direction turns our struggle in on itself, transforming it into an individual radical hedonism without any social relevance. A misstep in the other direction turns it into just another political party (whatever name one might give it to hide this fact) vying for control of social struggle. This is why we have to keep in mind that we are not seeking followers or adherents, but accomplices in the crime of freedom.

Anarchist intervention can occur under two circumstances: where a self-organized struggle of the exploited is in course, or where specific situation calls for an immediate response and anarchists strive to encourage

self-organized methods of responding. An example of the first situation would be a wildcat strike movement in course in which anarchists could express solidarity, encourage the spread of the strike, expose the betrayals by the union, share a broader critique of the union as institution and share visions of a different way of encountering life and the world than that of working to maintain a certain level of survival. We will look at a variety of other examples below. The second sort of intervention would be something such as the building of a nuclear missile base in the area where one lives or police murder of poor and minority people. These call for an immediate response, and anarchists facing such situations will want to carry out and encourage autonomous responses using direct action rather than making demands of those in power. The precise way in which anarchists might intervene in such situations would vary depending on circumstances. But the point is always to encourage the tendency toward autonomy, self-organization, and direct action rather than to push a political perspective.

[In original, ten pages of examples follow.—Ed.]

## A few significant features

There are a few significant features that stand out in these situations:

I. Riots, uprisings, and insurrections are not generally inspired by grand ideas, utopian dreams, or total theoretical critiques of the social order. Often the spark that sets them off is quite banal: economic instability, bad working conditions, betrayal by those who claim to represent one's rights, police brutality. These seemingly minor details spark revolt when rage combines with a distrust in both the ruling and oppositional institutions. This fact calls for anarchists to avoid an ideological purity that calls for participation only in total struggles. It also calls for a keen theoretical development capable of immediately understanding specific situations in terms of the totality of domination, exploitation, and alienation, and at the same time capable of making a practical application of this theory. This requires a willingness to constantly examine the developing realities around us, making connections that show the necessity for a revolutionary rupture, while at the same time singling out appropriate areas for intervention and appropriate targets for attack.

II. When an uprising or spontaneous struggle moves beyond the initial stages, the exploited recognize the need for horizontal communication. Assemblies or something similar are spontaneously developed. The rejection of politics and representation express themselves in these methods. At the same time, there are always party and union hacks, along with other predators, looking for the weak spot where they can "offer their assistance." Here again, anarchists and anti-political revolutionaries need to have their shit together to keep an ongoing attack against these recu-

perative tendencies in play, as well as constantly pushing the struggle in a plainly anti-political direction in which negotiations and, thus, representation have no place.

III. Spaces which have tended to bring people together for purposes that are not their own are transformed to the extent possible into spaces for people's own projects. This aspect is of major importance, because the ruling order is doing all it can to shut down or control public spaces. In the 1970's factories could actually provide space for assemblies and other insurgent activities. With changes in the ways production is carried out, this is not a real option any more. Other public spaces are being designed to extend surveillance and limit the possibilities of gathering. This is an area where immediate resistance is necessary and where imagination needs to be focused.

IV. Where there are traditions and known histories of self-organization, these can often provide a basis for the self-organization of revolt. Indigenous traditions in particular often provide such structures. On the other hand, where no such traditions exist, imagination and the capacity to be able to create from nothing are essential. This points to another area where immediate resistance is necessary: the increasing degradation of the capacity for creative thought needs to be fought tooth and nail. The standardization of thought into mere calculation and the rote recital of commonplaces must be rejected and countered, so that the capacity to really grapple with situations continues.

## The Situation in the US: the absence of a social movement

None of the examples that I have used come from the United States. This is not because there have been no examples of self-organized struggles and revolt in this country, but most of them are more distant in time and didn't go nearly as far as the events above. There was the wildcat movement among coal-miners in the '60s. Although there were plenty of political hacks around, the anti-war, black liberation, and other movements of the '60s also had significant self-organized aspects. The mutinies among American military personnel in Vietnam were self-organized revolts. And in more recent times, apparently in one or two of the cities to which rioting spread after the Rodney King verdict in 1992, spontaneous assemblies actually took place to decide how to go about the rioting and looting effectively.

But in significant ways the situation in the United States now is not the same as it was in the 1960s (and even then different movements and struggles seemed to have trouble connecting), nor is it like Italy or Spain (where, even now, wildcat strikers get support from others, including revolutionaries), Algeria, or Bolivia.

Perhaps, the first thing we have to face as revolutionary anarchists in the US is that presently there is no social movement in this country. Collective social revolt only occurs in sudden explosions in response to immediate situations and quickly dissipates as repression and recuperation move in to defuse the situation.

The illusion that there is a movement in this country (to the extent the illusion exists) is the result of specialized activism, the myriad of groups, organizations, and networks that publicize this, that or the other cause, issue, or ideology. But specialized activism is in fact the very opposite of a social movement for a variety of reasons. First of all, it is essentially political rather than social in nature. The various activist groups represent the cause, issue, or ideology that is their specialty. This representation can only occur through the reification of whatever reality stands behind the cause of the group, its transformation into a spectacular image (the clear-cut forest, the dead Iraqi baby, the cat with the electrode in its head, ...). And this process of spectacularization guarantees that these matters will continue to be perceived in a fragmented manner which maintains the specialized role of the activist groups and prevents any revolutionary analysis or practice in relation to the particular matter they specialize in. The protests of these activist groups can give the image of resistance, but they do not spring from the daily lives and lived experiences of those involved, and so do not constitute real social resistance.

The specialization of activism around spectacular causes also transforms those involved, at least potentially, into representatives of struggle. In the US, this is not a minor matter. The number of times that activist groups and religious leaders have quelled a riotous situation by playing the role of “representatives” of the oppressed before the authorities is truly telling. With cries of “justice” and “rights”, they move an immediate response of rage against this society away from the area of social rebellion and into the area of politics and petition to the authorities. Those who play this role have to be recognized as the enemies of any social movement of rebellion, the guarantee that every immediate rebellion will remain a mere fragment, an event without past or future and without any relationship to rebellions elsewhere — the endless now of the media in which meaningful activity becomes impossible. We can't let some ridiculous politically correct morality prevent us from exposing their role fiercely.

Specialized activism is itself a symptom of deeper problems. In all of the situations described above, there were levels of social cohesion that do not currently exist in the United States. Without trying to trace all the reasons here, it is necessary to recognize that ours is one of the most atomized societies in existence. Although there have been some significant workers' struggles in this country since World War 2, these have tended to be isolated, because class consciousness has nearly disappeared in

America. To a large extent, workers in this country have acquired “middle class” values of consumption: the desire for the single family house, at least two cars, fancy home entertainment centers, a personal stereo, etc, etc. So many of the products that are deemed desirable, in fact, act in a practical manner to separate people, to prevent communication with those around us. In addition, the well-paid union worker has been so ingrained with the bourgeois work ethic as to see anyone without a job, even the homeless street person, as a leech “living off his taxes”.

In the United States, the question of race cannot be ignored in dealing with this problem. The way this question is often dealt with in anarchist circles, with mental self-flagellation, PC moralizing, and guilt, is useless from a revolutionary point of view. It is essential rather to note that, on the one hand, the social creation of race was developed through the use of very different methods of exploitation and oppression on people of different skin colors and cultural backgrounds, and, on the other hand, that the rulers have used these differences in experience to create and maintain deep separations between those of different backgrounds, to guarantee that the exploited continue to be blind to the need to interweave their various struggles in order to more strongly attack the ruling class. It is not a matter of a melting pot, but of a weaving together of different strands of struggle. But as it stands now, in the United States, consciousness of race tends to be far stronger than class consciousness and this plays a major role in enforcing atomization and preventing significant struggles from coming together in a way that could be the basis for a real social movement.

Another factor enforcing alienation and preventing the development of a social movement here is the use of a propaganda of fear as a major factor in social control. Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, the rhetoric of fear has greatly expanded, but it has always been an important tool of the ruling class. The specter of crime is constantly raised in the media—before September 11, lightly spiced with terrorism, since then heavily spiced. The various modes of policing and real or (more often) apparent surveillance help to reinforce this message of fear. Others are not to be trusted. This is the basic message. The “never talk to strangers” of our mothers or teachers turns into the standard for adult behavior as well. This is reinforced by the various technological apparatuses that make communication between strangers difficult: personal stereos, cell phones, handheld computer games, and the like. In the midst of the crowd, we each remain in our own little world, afraid to come out. Even within the anarchist milieu, the rule of fear finds its place. The very real need for security is often transformed into a paranoid distrust of anyone who doesn’t have the right appearance, thus reinforcing ghettoization in a subculture. If we have any desire for social transformation, it is safer to

stay within the confines of the specialized activist milieu. Of course this will guarantee no such transformation occurs.

It would be easy to despair in the face of American social reality. It is difficult to see how any social movement can be revived out of such extensive atomization. And yet, there has been some evidence that among those at the bottom some awareness of a need to actually communicate is developing. The recent economic decline has pushed more people into precarious positions, opening some, at least, to examining deeper questions. Nonetheless, the creation of any real social movement here will have to involve a real and concrete practical rejection of activist politics, and exposure and fierce confrontation with the recuperators it fosters. Since we desire a radical social transformation, one of our tasks as anarchists is precisely to encourage those who are becoming outraged at the conditions of their existence in this society to think and act for themselves rather than relying on the various ideologies and organization that will offer to represent their rage and resistance.

## Two examples of the problem

When the Bush administration started to talk of the “necessity” of the current war in Iraq, there was some protest immediately. As the claims of the administration about the reasons for the war became increasingly suspect, the questioning of the war moved far beyond any activist milieu. From January 2003 through the beginning of the war, one saw huge demonstrations in which the vast majority of those involved were not activists. But most of the marches and demonstrations were organized by specialists in activism, petty politicians of the left with their own agendas. In L. A., the activist coalition that organized the demos was dominated by ANSWER (a front group for one of the multitude of ABC-socialist parties) and Not In Our Name (a front group for the Revolutionary Communist Party). The demonstrations were well regulated marches ending in rallies with the typical boring rhetorical speakers — the preachers to the crowd that activists love. Perhaps the most absurd thing was the competition between ANSWER and Not In Our Name for the attention of the crowd. ANSWER would call for a more reserved approach to the protest, while Not In Our Name would call for a more militant approach, but both were obviously seeking to establish their leadership over the movement. I would not be surprised if there were similar dynamics in many other cities. So it comes as no surprise that the anti-war movement has dwindled back down to a mainly activist movement, and not a particular energetic one. Undoubtedly, with the increasing exposure of the extent of the dishonesty of the administration, there is still a great deal of questioning, but no outlet. Since the morale of American soldiers in Iraq is extremely low



and the desertion rate high, it is clear that there is potential for resistance among soldiers, but without a social movement of resistance to the war effort, soldiers may feel that they would have no support if they rebelled.

Another example of what can happen when the representatives of struggle take control happened in the neighborhood where I live. In May 2003, three blocks from the house where I was living, a cop murdered a woman who had been in a car they pulled over. There was an immediate response of outrage throughout the neighborhood, with a spontaneous memorial at the place she was killed, and demonstrations and rallies. The woman was an African-American, and in this area religious leaders play a central political role in the African-American “community.” So religious leaders immediately imposed themselves as representatives of the outrage, and immediately directed any potential struggle into the “proper channels,” calling for nonviolence. A few anarchists wrote and distributed flyers about the nature of the police, but got little response. The trajectory of this particular “struggle” had already been set by the religious leaders who had set themselves up as its representatives, and that direction was toward appeal to the ruling powers to reform their practices, an appeal that proved worthless, since the murdering officer is back on the streets with the authorities and the media protecting his identity.

## Conclusion

Autonomous self-organization would have to be the basis both of a truly free existence and of the struggle to achieve that existence. It is the very opposite of politics and in practice either rejects it or is destroyed by it. The practice of self-organization seems to develop spontaneously when people rise up in revolt. What distinguishes it from politics is its opposition to representation and compromise—not just with the ruling order, but within the self-organized movement itself. Thus, rather than seeking to impose collective decisions involving compromise, it seeks to find a method for interweaving the desires, interests and needs of all involved in a way that is actually pleasing to each. This is not just a minor aspect, but is essential. Once the aim of organizing our struggles and our lives together ceases to be that of finding the ways for interweaving our differing desires, interests and needs so that all find fulfillment and instead becomes that of finding compromises, positions, programs and platforms start to take the place of desires, dreams and aspirations. Then, the representatives of the various positions, programs and platforms can find their place in the situation and transform self-organization into politics. It has happened before in revolutionary situations with horrible results.

This gives an indication of the way anarchist intervention is best carried out. We do not need to create any sort of political organization to repre-

sent anarchy. To do so would, in fact, be to work against self-organization. Instead we should start from ourselves, our own condition as individuals who have had our lives stolen from us, our struggle against that condition and our desire to be the creators of our own existence. From this basis, anarchist intervention would not be evangelism for a political program or for true revolutionary consciousness. It would rather be the search for accomplices, the development of relationships of affinity, the intertwining of our desires and passions, of our destructive rage, our ideas and our dreams with those of others in their struggles and revolts. Such a search can find its way in the midst of social movements of revolt, discovering the spreading affinities that offer an informal federation of complicity. It can also find its way where no social movement seems to exist, discovering the hidden veins of other individual revolts seeking complicity, and in these hidden veins perhaps finding the embryo of a new social movement.

In any case, this intervention, in refusing politics and its methods, becomes a tension toward revolution and freedom in life and struggle, perpetually pushing against the grain for the destruction of all domination and exploitation, for the end of every practice of specialization and representation including that of specialized activism. It is the tension that springs from knowing what one desires and at the same time knowing that one is facing a world that is designed to prevent one from realizing that desire—knowing, in other words, that one's life is a battle. It is, at the same time, the tension of the complicity of desires in which the differences between individuals create the interweaving harmonies of affinity that indicate the direction for a new truly free way of living. It is in this tension that the specific self-organization of consciously anarchist revolt can find the way to intertwine with the daily struggles of all the exploited at the points where those struggles begin to experiment with direct action and self-organization. A new world based on joy and the exploration of our desires is possible; it will begin to grow wherever the self-organization of revolt against this world flows into the self-organization of life itself.

# Occupy Wall Street's Anarchist Roots

by David Graeber

Almost every time I'm interviewed by a mainstream journalist about Occupy Wall Street I get some variation of the same lecture:

“How are you going to get anywhere if you refuse to create a leadership structure or make a practical list of demands? And what's with all this anarchist nonsense—the consensus, the sparkly fingers? Don't you realise all this radical language is going to alienate people? You're never going to be able to reach regular, mainstream Americans with this sort of thing!”

If one were compiling a scrapbook of worst advice ever given, this sort of thing might well merit an honourable place. After all, since the financial crash of 2007, there have been dozens of attempts to kick-off a national movement against the depredations of the United States' financial elites taking the approach such journalists recommended. All failed. It was only on August 2, when a small group of anarchists and other anti-authoritarians showed up at a meeting called by one such group and effectively wooed everyone away from the planned march and rally to create a genuine democratic assembly, on basically anarchist principles, that the stage was set for a movement that Americans from Portland to Tuscaloosa were willing to embrace.

I should be clear here what I mean by “anarchist principles.” The easiest way to explain anarchism is to say that it is a political movement that aims to bring about a genuinely free society—that is, one where humans only enter those kinds of relations with one another that would not have to be enforced by the constant threat of violence. History has shown that vast inequalities of wealth, institutions like slavery, debt peonage or wage labour, can only exist if backed up by armies, prisons, and police. Anarchists wish to see human relations that would not have to be backed up by armies, prisons, and police. Anarchism envisions a society based on equality and solidarity, which could exist solely on the free consent of participants.

## Anarchism versus Marxism

Traditional Marxism, of course, aspired to the same ultimate goal but there was a key difference. Most Marxists insisted that it was necessary first to seize state power, and all the mechanisms of bureaucratic violence

that come with it, and use them to transform society—to the point where they argued such mechanisms would, ultimately, become redundant and fade away. Even back in the 19th century, anarchists argued that this was a pipe dream. One cannot, they argued, create peace by training for war, equality by creating top-down chains of command, or, for that matter, human happiness by becoming grim joyless revolutionaries who sacrifice all personal self-realisation or self-fulfillment to the cause.

It's not just that the ends do not justify the means (though they don't), you will never achieve the ends at all unless the means are themselves a model for the world you wish to create. Hence the famous anarchist call to begin “building the new society in the shell of the old” with egalitarian experiments ranging from free schools to radical labour unions to rural communes.

Anarchism was also a revolutionary ideology, and its emphasis on individual conscience and individual initiative meant that during the first heyday of revolutionary anarchism between roughly 1875 and 1914, many took the fight directly to heads of state and capitalists, with bombings and assassinations. Hence the popular image of the anarchist bomb-thrower. It's worthy of note that anarchists were perhaps the first political movement to realise that terrorism, even if not directed at innocents, doesn't work. For nearly a century now, in fact, anarchism has been one of the very few political philosophies whose exponents never blow anyone up (indeed, the 20th-century political leader who drew most from the anarchist tradition was Mohandas K Gandhi).

Yet for the period of roughly 1914 to 1989, a period during which the world was continually either fighting or preparing for world wars, anarchism went into something of an eclipse for precisely that reason: to seem “realistic”, in such violent times, a political movement had to be capable of organising armies, navies, and ballistic missile systems, and that was one thing at which Marxists could often excel. But everyone recognised that anarchists—rather to their credit—would never be able to pull it off. It was only after 1989, when the age of great war mobilisations seemed to have ended, that a global revolutionary movement based on anarchist principles—the global justice movement—promptly reappeared.

How, then, did OWS embody anarchist principles? It might be helpful to go over this point by point:

### *1) The refusal to recognise the legitimacy of existing political institutions*

One reason for the much-discussed refusal to issue demands is because issuing demands means recognising the legitimacy—or at least, the power—of those of whom the demands are made. Anarchists often note that this is the difference between protest and direct action: Protest, however militant, is an appeal to the authorities to behave differently;

direct action, whether it's a matter of a community building a well or making salt in defiance of the law (Gandhi's example again), trying to shut down a meeting or occupy a factory, is a matter of acting as if the existing structure of power does not even exist. Direct action is, ultimately, the defiant insistence on acting as if one is already free.

### *2) The refusal to accept the legitimacy of the existing legal order*

The second principle, obviously, follows from the first. From the very beginning, when we first started holding planning meetings in Tompkins Square Park in New York, organisers knowingly ignored local ordinances that insisted that any gathering of more than twelve people in a public park is illegal without police permission—simply on the grounds that such laws should not exist. On the same grounds, of course, we chose to occupy a park, inspired by examples from the Middle East and southern Europe, on the grounds that, as the public, we should not need permission to occupy public space. This might have been a very minor form of civil disobedience but it was crucial that we began with a commitment to answer only to a moral order, not a legal one.

### *3) The refusal to create an internal hierarchy, but instead to create a form of consensus-based direct democracy*

From the very beginning, too, organisers made the audacious decision to operate not only by direct democracy, without leaders, but by consensus. The first decision ensured that there would be no formal leadership structure that could be co-opted or coerced; the second, that no majority could bend a minority to its will, but that all crucial decisions had to be made by general consent. American anarchists have long considered consensus process (a tradition that has emerged from a confluence of feminism, anarchism, and spiritual traditions like the Quakers) crucial for the reason that it is the only form of decision-making that could operate without coercive enforcement—since if a majority does not have the means to compel a minority to obey its dictates, all decisions will, of necessity, have to be made by general consent.

### *4) The embrace of prefigurative politics*

As a result, Zuccotti Park, and all subsequent encampments, became spaces of experiment with creating the institutions of a new society—not only democratic General Assemblies but kitchens, libraries, clinics, media centres, and a host of other institutions, all operating on anarchist principles of mutual aid and self-organisation—a genuine attempt to create the institutions of a new society in the shell of the old.

Why did it work? Why did it catch on? One reason is, clearly, because most Americans are far more willing to embrace radical ideas than any-

one in the established media is willing to admit. The basic message - that the American political order is absolutely and irredeemably corrupt, that both parties have been bought and sold by the wealthiest 1% of the population, and that if we are to live in any sort of genuinely democratic society, we're going to have to start from scratch—clearly struck a profound chord in the American psyche.

Perhaps this is not surprising: We are facing conditions that rival those of the 1930s, the main difference being that the media seems stubbornly unwilling to acknowledge it. It raises intriguing questions about the role of the media itself in American society. Radical critics usually assume the “corporate media”, as they call it, mainly exists to convince the public that existing institutions are healthy, legitimate, and just. It is becoming increasingly apparent that at the moment the media do not really see this is possible; rather, their role is simply to convince members of an increasingly angry public that no one else has come to the same conclusions they have. The result is an ideology that no one really believes, but most people at least suspect that everybody else does.

Nowhere is this disjunction between what ordinary Americans really think, and what the media and political establishment tells them they think, more clear than when we talk about democracy.

#### Democracy in America?

According to the official version, of course, “democracy” is a system created by the Founding Fathers, based on checks and balances between president, congress, and judiciary. In fact, nowhere in the Declaration of Independence or Constitution does it say anything about the US being a “democracy”. The authors of those documents, almost to a man, defined “democracy” as a matter of collective self-governance by popular assemblies, and as such they were dead-set against it.

Democracy meant the madness of crowds: bloody, tumultuous, and untenable. “There was never a democracy that didn't commit suicide,” wrote Adams; Hamilton justified the system of checks and balances by insisting that it was necessary to create a permanent body of the “rich and well-born” to check the “imprudence” of democracy, or even that limited form that would be allowed in the lower house of representatives.

The result was a republic—modelled not on Athens, but on Rome. It only came to be redefined as a “democracy” in the early 19th century because ordinary Americans had very different views, and persistently tended to vote—those who were allowed to vote—for candidates who called themselves “democrats”. But what did—and what do—ordinary Americans mean by the word? Did they really just mean a system where they get to weigh in on which politicians will run the government? It seems implausible. After all, most Americans loathe politicians, and tend

to be skeptical about the very idea of government. If they universally hold out “democracy” as their political ideal, it can only be because they still see it, however vaguely, as self-governance—as what the Founding Fathers tended to denounce as either “democracy” or, as they sometimes also put it, “anarchy”.

If nothing else, this would help explain the enthusiasm with which Americans have embraced a movement based on directly democratic principles, despite the uniformly contemptuous dismissal of the United States' media and political class.

In fact, this is not the first time a movement based on fundamentally anarchist principles—direct action, direct democracy, a rejection of existing political institutions and an attempt to create alternative ones—has cropped up in the US. The civil rights movement (at least its more radical branches), the anti-nuclear movement, and the global justice movement all took similar directions. Never, however, has one grown so startlingly quickly. But in part, this is because this time around, the organisers went straight for the central contradiction. They directly challenged the pretenses of the ruling elite that they are presiding over a democracy.

When it comes to their most basic political sensibilities, most Americans are deeply conflicted. Most combine a deep reverence for individual freedom with a near-worshipful identification with institutions like the army and police. Most combine an enthusiasm for markets with a hatred of capitalists. Most are simultaneously profoundly egalitarian and deeply racist. Few are actual anarchists; few even know what “anarchism” means; it's not clear how many, if they did learn, would ultimately wish to discard the state and capitalism entirely. Anarchism is much more than simply grassroots democracy: it ultimately aims to eliminate all social relations, from wage labour to patriarchy, that can only be maintained by the systematic threat of force.

But one thing overwhelming numbers of Americans do feel is that something is terribly wrong with their country, that its key institutions are controlled by an arrogant elite, that radical change of some kind is long since overdue. They're right. It's hard to imagine a political system so systematically corrupt—one where bribery, on every level, has not only been made legal, but soliciting and dispensing bribes has become the full-time occupation of every American politician. The outrage is appropriate. The problem is that up until September 17, the only side of the spectrum willing to propose radical solutions of any sort was the Right.

As the history of the past movements all make clear, nothing terrifies those running the US more than the danger of democracy breaking out. The immediate response to even a modest spark of democratically organised civil disobedience is a panicked combination of concessions and brutality. How else can one explain the recent national mobilisation of

thousands of riot cops, the beatings, chemical attacks, and mass arrests of citizens engaged in precisely the kind of democratic assemblies the Bill of Rights was designed to protect, and whose only crime—if any—was the violation of local camping regulations?

Our media pundits might insist that if average Americans ever realised the anarchist role in Occupy Wall Street, they would turn away in shock and horror; but our rulers seem, rather, to labour under a lingering fear that if any significant number of Americans do find out what anarchism really is, they might well decide that rulers of any sort are unnecessary.

## Reclaim the Cities:

### *From Protest to Popular Power*

by Cindy Milstein

“Direct action gets the goods,” proclaimed the Industrial Workers of the World nearly a century ago. And in the relatively short time since Seattle, this has certainly proven to be the case. Indeed, “the goods” reaped by the direct action movement here in North America have included creating doubt as to the nature of globalization, shedding light on the nearly unknown workings of international trade and supranational governance bodies, and making anarchism and anticapitalism almost household words<sup>1</sup>. As if that weren’t enough, we find ourselves on the streets of twenty-first-century metropolises demonstrating our power to resist in a way that models the good society we envision: a truly democratic one.

But is this *really* what democracy looks like?

The impulse to “reclaim the streets” is an understandable one. When



industrial capitalism first started to emerge in the early nineteenth century, its machinations were relatively visible. Take, for instance, the enclosures. Pasturelands that had been used in common for centuries to provide villages with their very sustenance were systematically fenced off—enclosed—in order to graze sheep, whose wool was needed for the burgeoning textile industry. Communal life was briskly thrust aside in favor of privatization, forcing people into harsh factories and crowded cities.

Advanced capitalism, as it pushes past the fetters of even nation-states in its insatiable quest for growth, encloses life in a much more expansive yet generally invisible way: fences are replaced by consumer culture. We are raised in an almost totally commodified world where nothing comes for free, not even futile attempts to remove oneself from the market economy. This commodification seeps into not only what we eat, wear, or do for fun but also into our language, relationships, and even our very biology and minds. We have lost not only our communities and public spaces but control over our own lives; we have lost the ability to define ourselves outside capitalism's grip, and thus genuine meaning itself begins to dissolve.

"Whose Streets? Our Streets!" then, is a legitimate emotional response to the feeling that even the most minimal of public, noncommodified spheres has been taken from us. Yet in the end, it is simply a frantic cry from our cage. We have become so confined, so thoroughly damaged, by capitalism as well as state control, that crumbs appear to make a nourishing meal.

Temporarily closing off the streets during direct actions does provide momentary spaces in which to practice democratic process, and even offers a sense of empowerment, but such events leave power for power's sake, like the very pavement beneath our feet, unchanged. Only when the serial protest mode is escalated into a struggle for popular or horizontal power can we create cracks in the figurative concrete, thereby opening up ways to challenge capitalism, nation-states, and other systems of domination.

This is not to denigrate the contemporary direct action movement in the United States and elsewhere; just the opposite. Besides a long overdue and necessary critique of numerous institutions of command and obedience, it is quietly yet crucially supplying the outlines of a freer society. This prefigurative politics is, in fact, the very strength and vision of direct action, where the means themselves are understood to intimately relate to the ends. We're not putting off the good society until some distant future but attempting to carve out room for it in the here and now, however tentative and contorted under the given social order. In turn, this consistency of means and ends implies an ethical approach to politics. How we act now is how we want others to begin to act, too. We try to model a notion of goodness even as we fight for it.

This can implicitly be seen in the affinity group and spokescouncil structures for decision making at direct actions. Both supply much needed spaces in which to school ourselves in direct democracy. Here, in the best of cases, we can proactively set the agenda, carefully deliberate together over questions, and come to decisions that strive to take everyone's needs and desires into account. Substantive discussion replaces checking boxes on a ballot; face-to-face participation replaces handing over our lives to so-called representatives; nuanced and reasoned solutions replace lesser-of-two-(or-three-)evils thinking. The democratic process utilized during demonstrations decentralizes power even as it offers tangible solidarity; for example, affinity groups afford greater and more diverse numbers of people a real share in decision making, while spokescouncils allow for intricate coordination—even on a global level. This is, as 1960s activists put it, the power to create rather than to destroy.

The beauty of the direct action movement, it could be said, is that it strives to take its own ideals to heart. In doing so, it has perhaps unwittingly created the demand for such directly democratic practices on a permanent basis. Yet the perplexing question underlying episodic “street democracy” remains unaddressed: how can *everyone* come together to make decisions that affect *society as a whole* in participatory, mutualistic, and ethical ways? In other words, how can each and every one of us—not just a counterculture or a protest movement—really transform and ultimately control our lives and that of our communities?

This is, in essence, a question of power—who has it, how it is used, and to what ends. To varying degrees, we all know the answer in relation to current institutions and systems. We can generally explain what we are *against*. That is exactly why we are protesting, whether it is against capitalism or climate change, summits or war. What we have largely failed to articulate, however, is any sort of response in relation to liberatory institutions and systems. We often can't express, especially in any coherent and utopian manner, what we are *for*. Even as we prefigure a way of making power horizontal, equitable, and hence, we hope an essential part of a free society, we ignore the reconstructive vision that a directly democratic process holds up right in front of our noses.

For all intents and purposes, direct action protests remain trapped. On the one hand, they reveal and confront domination and exploitation. The political pressure exerted by such widespread agitation may even be able to influence current power structures to amend some of the worst excesses of their ways; the powers-that-be have to listen, and respond to some extent, when the voices become too numerous and too loud. Nevertheless, most people are still shut out of the decision-making process itself, and consequently, have little tangible power over their lives at all. Without this ability to self-govern, street actions translate into nothing

more than a countercultural version of interest group lobbying, albeit far more radical than most and generally unpaid.

What gets forgotten in relation to direct action mobilizations is the promise implicit in their own structure: that power not only needs to be contested; it must also be constituted anew in liberatory and egalitarian forms. This entails taking directly democratic processes seriously—not simply as a tactic to organize protests but as the very way we organize society, specifically the political realm. The issue then becomes: how do we begin to shift the strategy, structure, and values of direct action in the streets, to the most grassroots level of public policy making?

The most fundamental level of decision making in a demonstration is the affinity group. Here, we come together as friends or because of a common identity, or a combination of the two. We share something in particular; indeed, this common identity is often reflected in the name we choose for our groups. We may not always agree with each other, but there is a fair amount of *homogeneity* precisely because we've consciously chosen to come together for a specific reason—usually having little to do with mere geography. This sense of a shared identity allows for the smooth functioning of a consensus decision-making process, since we start from a place of commonality. In an affinity group, almost by definition, our unity needs to take precedence over our diversity, or our supposed affinity breaks down altogether.

Compare this to what could be the most fundamental level of decision making in a society: a neighborhood or town. Now, geography plays a much larger role. Out of historic, economic, cultural, religious, and other reasons, we may find ourselves living side by side with a wide range of individuals and their various identities. Most of these people are not our friends *per se*. Still, the very diversity we encounter is the life of a vibrant city itself. The accidents and/or numerous personal decisions that have brought us together frequently create a fair amount of *heterogeneity* precisely because we haven't all chosen to come together for a specific reason. In this context, where we start from a place of difference, decision-making mechanisms need to be much more capable of allowing for dissent; that is, diversity needs to be clearly retained within any notions of unity. As such, majoritarian decision-making processes begin to make more sense.

Then, too, there is the question of scale. It is hard to imagine being friends with thousands, or even hundreds, of people, nor maintaining a single-issue identity with that many individuals. But we can share a feeling of community and a striving toward some common good that allows each of us to flourish. In turn, when greater numbers of people come together on a face-to-face basis to reshape their neighborhoods and towns, the issues as well as the viewpoints will multiply, and alliances will no

doubt change depending on the specific topic under discussion. Thus the need for a place where we can meet as human beings at the most face-to-face level—that is, an assembly of active political beings—to share our many identities and interests in hopes of balancing both the individual and community in all we do.

As well, trust and accountability function differently at the affinity group versus civic level. We generally reveal more of ourselves to friends; and such unwritten bonds of love and affection hold us more closely together, or at least give us added impetus to work things out. Underlying this is a higher-than-average degree of trust, which serves to make us accountable to each other.

On a community-wide level, the reverse is more often true: accountability allows us to trust each other. It is to be hoped that we share bonds of solidarity and respect; yet since we can't all know each other well, such bonds only make sense if we first determine them together, and then record them, write them down, for all to refer back to in the future, and even revisit if need be. Accountable, democratic structures of our own making, in short, provide the foundation for trust, since the power to decide is both transparent and ever-amenable to scrutiny.

There are also issues of time and space. Affinity groups, in the scheme of things, are generally temporary configurations—they may last a few months, or a few years, but often not much longer. Once the particular reasons why we've come together have less of an immediate imperative, or as our friendships falter, such groups frequently fall by the wayside. And even during a group's life span, in the interim between direct actions, there is frequently no fixed place or face to decision making, nor any regularity, nor much of a record of who decided what and how. Moreover, affinity groups are not open to everyone but only those who share a specific identity or attachment. As such, although an affinity group can certainly choose to shut down a street, there is ultimately something slightly authoritarian in small groups taking matters into their own hands, no matter what their political persuasion.

Deciding what to do with streets in general—say, how to organize transportation, encourage street life, or provide green space—should be a matter open to everyone interested if it is to be truly participatory and nonhierarchical. This implies ongoing and open institutions of direct democracy, for everything from decision making to conflict resolution. We need to be able to know when and where popular assemblies are meeting; we need to meet regularly and make use of nonarbitrary procedures; we need to keep track of what decisions have been made. But more important, if we so choose, we all need to have access to the power to discuss, deliberate, and make decisions about matters that affect our communities and beyond.

Indeed, many decisions have a much wider impact than on just one city; transforming streets, for example, would probably entail coordination on a regional, continental, or even global level. Radicals have long understood such mutualistic self-reliance as a “commune of communes,” or confederation. The spokescouncil model used during direct actions hints at such an alternative view of globalization. During a spokescouncil meeting, mandated delegates from our affinity groups gather for the purpose of coordination, the sharing of resources/skills, the building of solidarity, and so forth, always returning to the grassroots level as the ultimate arbiter. If popular assemblies were our basic unit of decision making, confederations of communities could serve as a way to both transcend parochialism and create interdependence where desirable. For instance, rather than global capitalism and international regulatory bodies (where trade is top-down and profit-oriented), confederations could coordinate distribution between regions in ecological and humane ways, while allowing policy in regard to production, say, to remain at the grassroots.

This more expansive understanding of a prefigurative politics would necessarily involve creating institutions that could potentially replace capitalism and nation-states. Such directly democratic institutions are compatible with, and could certainly grow out of, the ones we use during demonstrations, but they very likely won't be mirror images once we reach the level of society. This does not mean abandoning the principles and ideals underpinning direct action mobilizations (such as freedom, cooperation, decentralism, solidarity, diversity, and face-to-face participation); it merely means recognizing the limits of direct democracy as it is practiced in the context of an anticapitalist convergence.

The Zapatistas, along with other revolutionaries before them, have already shown that declarations of freedom “touch the hearts of humble and simple people like ourselves, but people who are also, like ourselves, dignified and rebel.” Yet starting in 2001, they have proved as well that municipalities can strive to become autonomous from statecraft and capital, to put human and ecological concerns first, while retaining regional and global links of solidarity and mutual aid. “This method of autonomous government was not simply invented by the EZLN [Zapatista Army of National Liberation], but rather it comes from several centuries of indigenous resistance and from the Zapatistas' own experience. It is the self-governance of the communities. In other words, no one from outside comes to govern, but the peoples themselves decide, among themselves, who governs and how... And, also through the Good Government Juntas, coordination has been improved between the Autonomous Municipalities.” Among other achievements, these self-governments also facilitated “much improvement in the projects in the communities. Health and education have improved, although there is still a good deal lacking for it

to be what it should be. The same is true for housing and food.”<sup>2</sup>

Another recent example was the neighborhood assembly movement that sprang up in Argentina in 2001–2, in response to an economic crisis that simultaneously delegitimized parliamentary politics. In late December 2001, a spiraling sense of desperation and powerlessness combined to force people not only out onto the streets to loudly protest by banging on pots and pans (and destroying ATMs) but also into an empowering dialogue with their neighbors about what to do next—on the local, national, and global levels. Some fifty neighborhoods in Buenos Aires began holding weekly meetings and sending delegates every Sunday to an interneighborhood general coordinating gathering. The anarchist Argentine Libertarian Federation Local Council explains that the assemblies were “formed by the unemployed, the underemployed, and people marginalized and excluded from capitalist society: including professionals, workers, small retailers, artists, craftspeople, all of them also neighbors.” As the Libertarian Federation notes, “The meetings are open and anyone who wishes can participate,” and common to all assemblies was the “non-delegation of power, self-management, [and a] horizontal structure.” While these assemblies didn’t end up replacing the state structure, they did supply Argentineans with a glimpse of their own ability to make public policy together. “The fear in our society has turned into courage,” the Libertarian Federation reports. “There is reason to hope that all Argentineans now know for certain who has been blocking our freedoms.”<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, such innovative efforts, even when they fall short of social transformation, end up inspiring other attempts. The current series of building occupations on college campuses across the state of California, sparked by dramatic tuition increases and budget cuts to public education in fall 2009, draws on the recent Oaxacan rebellion of 2006. As *La Ventana* Collective, made up of students at San Francisco State University, writes,

*The APPO (the Popular People’s Assembly of Oaxaca) organized large general assemblies held in the midst of the occupation of the zocalo of the capital city of the state of Oaxaca. The ‘plantón’—or occupation—was a space where meetings took up to three days in many cases due to the horizontal nature and directly democratic principles of the APPO, which functioned as guidelines and principles of the movement.*

These students assert in relation to their own ongoing resistance that “a general assembly is, for us, a large gathering of people willing to talk about the issues through discussion in order to formulate plans for moving forward.” Looking ahead as students, faculty, staff, workers, and community supporters around California gear up for further contestation, including a “Strike and Day of Action in Defense of Public Education” called for March 4, 2010, *La Ventana* points to the significance of “the communization of the struggle... This is a philosophy that was stressed

during the 2001 horizontalist movement in Argentina after the collapse of the economy. Once again, during the actions that followed the collapse of the government, the people self-organized.”<sup>4</sup> For the San Francisco State University students, the lived reality of directly democratic processes during their own struggle is just as important as winning that struggle; it is, in fact, part and parcel of winning.

Such instantiations of self-governance don’t appear out of thin air. They take, among other things, patience, deliberation, self-reflection, and imagination. They take courage. The Zapatistas spent ten years “talking with and listening to other people like us,” joining “forces in silence,” learning and getting “organized in order to defend ourselves and to fight for justice.” Then, “when the rich were throwing their New Year’s Eve parties, we fell upon their cities and just took them over” on December 31, 1993. “And then the people from the cities went out into the streets and began shouting for an end to the war. And then we stopped our war, and we listened to those brothers and sisters... And so we set aside the fire and took up the word.” Still, it would take another seven years, until 2001, before the EZLN would begin “encouraging the autonomous rebel Zapatista municipalities—which is how the peoples are organized in order to govern and to govern themselves—in order to make themselves stronger.”<sup>5</sup>

At worst, such fragile yet exceedingly beautiful experiments will forever change those people who participate in them, for the better, by “self-mentoring” a new generation of rebels through the lived practice of freely constituting one’s community collectively. They will provide material and moral support, and serve as the continuity between other similar efforts, in other parts of the world. And they will also supply messages in bottles to future generations that directly democratic, confederated ways of making social, economic, political, and cultural decisions are a tangible alternative. This is a pretty good “worst-case scenario,” as the horizontal movement of movements of the past couple decades attests to—from Chiapas to Buenos Aires to Oaxaca, from Greece to North America. At best, though, such forms of freedom will widen into dual powers that can contest and ultimately replace forms of domination. They will become the basis for a new politics of self-legislation, self-management, and self-adjudication, forever shattering the bleak world of states, capital, and prisons.

Any vision of a free society, if it is to be truly democratic, must of course be worked out by all of us—first in movements, and later, in our communities and federations. Even so, we will probably discover that newly defined understandings of what it means to be a politically engaged person are needed in place of affinity groups; hybrid consensus-seeking and majoritarian methods of decision making that strive to retain diversity are preferable to simple consensus and informal models; written compacts articulating rights and duties are crucial to fill out the

unspoken culture of protests; and institutionalized spaces for policymaking are key to guaranteeing that our freedom to make decisions doesn't disappear with a line of riot police.

It is time to push beyond the oppositional character of the direct action movement by infusing it with a reconstructive vision. That means beginning, right now, to translate movement structures into institutions that embody the good society; in short, cultivating direct democracy in the places we call home. This will involve the harder work of reinvigorating or initiating civic gatherings, town meetings, neighborhood assemblies, community mediation boards, any and all forums where we can come together to decide our lives, even if only in extralegal institutions at first. Then, too, it will mean reclaiming globalization, not as a new phase of capitalism, but as its replacement by confederated, directly democratic communities coordinated for mutual benefit.

It is time to move from protest to politics, from shutting down streets to opening up public space, from demanding scraps from those few in power to holding power firmly in all our hands. Ultimately, this means moving beyond the question of "Whose Streets?" We should ask instead "Whose Cities?" Then, and only then, will we be able to remake them as our own.

#### Footnotes

1. Throughout this chapter, the "direct action movement" refers to the time period ranging, approximately, from the Zapatista uprising in January 1994 and the subsequent global anticapitalist movement of movements, to today's climate justice movement, Greek rebellion, and wave of occupations.
2. Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona (June 2005), introduction and "II. Where We Are Now," available at <http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/SixthDeclaration.html>.
3. Argentine Libertarian Federation Local Council, "Argentina: Between Poverty and Protest," translated from the Spanish original by Robby Barnes and Sylvie Kashdan, available at <http://news.infoshop.org/article.php?story=02/02/26/0963155>.
4. *La Ventana* Collective, "On the Actions of December 10<sup>th</sup> and in Defense of the SFSU Occupation" (December 12, 2009), available at <http://ventanacollective.blogspot.com/>.
5. Sixth Declaration, "I. – What We Are" and "II. – Where We Are Now,"



# Occupied with Class:

## *The Middle Class in the Occupy Movement*

by Phoenix Insurgent

By any measure—unemployment, foreclosures, the rise in food stamp dependency, homelessness, etc—the US middle class has taken a beating over the last several years. And although I’m always hesitant to start an essay off by quoting Žižek, I haven’t heard a better metaphor for both the current economic situation and the shock many Americans feel at what they see as the death of the “American Dream” than the iconic scene recounted by Žižek of a cartoon cat walking over a cliff who proceeds confidently for several paces into thin air before pausing and looking down. Seeing the gaping chasm beneath him, it is only then that he begins to fall.

After three decades of neo-liberal attacks, much of what we consider middle class life is really debt. That is, it is a fantasy, a placeholder filling in for the stagnation of wages that happened in the ’80s, ’90s, and ’00s. Many other anarchist and Marxist authors have pointed this out (David Graeber and David Harvey come to mind) but it’s interesting how the entire language of debt and crisis has shifted over the years of the Great Recession. While today the media discusses it in terms of austerity, sovereign debt, and debt to GDP ratios, early on there was a lot of talk of underwater mortgages and massive credit card debt owed by individuals to financial institutions. Briefly this popped into the media consciousness, as the sheer scale of resistance forced the media to pay attention to the rapidly spreading underground debt refusal. People walked away from houses, mailed the keys back to the bank, and stopped paying on their credit cards. Just as now the occupy movement routinely violates capitalist notions of public and private property, then there was a similar rejection of commonly held relationships and debt culpability. Whereas before default and bankruptcy had been shameful in the popular consciousness—with bankruptcy services ads run late at night or sandwiched between afternoon talk shows—all of a sudden everyone was doing it.

In 2009 the *New York Times* reported that 6% of credit card debt had been written off by banks. Faced with a population in revolt, banks and collection agencies were offering large discounts to customers willing to pay something—anything—of their outstanding balance. Many of my friends and I participated in this silent strike, netting massive discounts

on the debts we had run up over many cash-strapped years. For most of us, it wasn't just that the debts had gotten too high to maintain, but also that credit card companies had engaged in a series of interest rate increases, often for petty reasons or no reason at all. Just like the balloon payments and interest rate hikes on millions of mortgages, our credit cards were designed to encourage us to miss payments, to accrue fees, and, when it came down to it, to keep us paying large payments for life on even modest debts.

In my own case my interest rate jumped from around 10% to 34.9% for no reason at all. It was at that moment that I joined the millions of Americans who had come to the obvious conclusion that, even if we wanted to, we couldn't repay our debts. That decision, for the first time, put us and the banks on the same page. In an odd congruence, we couldn't pay them off and, given the jacked up interest rates, the banks obviously didn't want us to either. Interviewed in that same *Times* article, Don Siler, chief marketing officer at a major collection firm said, "You can't squeeze blood out of a turnip. The big settlements just aren't there anymore."

In September of 2009, Ann Minch of Red Bluff, California posted a video to Youtube announcing her debt strike as a call to action nationally. "There comes a time when a person must be willing to sacrifice in order to take a stand for what's right," she said. "Now, this is one of those times, and if I'm successful this will be the proverbial first shot fired in an American debtors' revolution against the usury and plunder perpetrated by the banking elite, the Federal Reserve, and the federal government." Many have forgotten, but Bank of America interceded directly in her case, fearing the implications of the debt revolt breaking out into the open.

This was a time when the first bailout was fresh in everyone's minds. In 2008, following the collapse of the banks and a popular revolt that scuttled the first attempt at a bailout, the ruling class suspended politics during the height of the presidential campaign in order to flood the financial institutions with taxpayer money. John McCain and Barack Obama put both their campaigns on hold and flew in a panic to Washington, forcing a highly unpopular recapitalization bill through Congress, complete with threats of martial law, collapse, and social upheaval. It was at the peak of a historic election in which the first black president stood on the verge of victory, riding on promises—believed by many very fervently—of Hope and Change, that the American ruling class revealed itself for all to see as a monolith, united in its objectives, and willing to dispel the mirage of partisanship in defense of its wealth and power. This lesson was not lost on people, emerging later in the occupy movement's denunciation of party politics.

In many ways, as I look back on those early years of the crisis, it seems to me like those quiet, often individual and isolated acts, perhaps mentioned briefly to friends and family, and negotiated through a tactic of re-

fusal, were the true precursors to the occupy movement. Millions participated, even as they held onto the fading hope that Obama would deliver the change they thought he promised. These people—middle class people primarily—had believed with some justification that the system would respond to them. Indeed, even though power clearly resides with a very small capitalist and political elite, the middle class in America is the foundation of almost all political and economic argumentation. All mainstream political arguments must refer back to this mythical and broadly-defined group at some point. The American ruling class depends on this fecund soil of middle class identity and ideology to reproduce the mythology and propaganda that maintains the system overall, and of course the economy and the profits that go with it. It is the middle class that votes and consumes.

But for thirty years the middle class had been reduced to a photo-shopped image quite unlike its former robust self. Debt had replaced wage growth. Home prices and credit card debt rather than real assets made up its balance sheet. The suburbs, once a vast retreat to safety and “normalcy” for the mostly white middle class, began to show signs of collapse. Like mushrooms, one after another “for sale” signs and foreclosure stickers spread through the car-friendly neighborhoods. The official unemployment rate (always under-counted), doubled in the eleven months between April 2008 and March of 2009. Overnight the foundations of the middle class vanished for tens of millions of people. What once seemed like a solid foundation was revealed to have been rotting for some time, as Americans found themselves crashing towards the basement in what had seemed like an impossible reversal of fortune.

It is in these conditions of 2008 and 2009, when the dream of Obama’s Hope and Change had ended and the crushing reality that politics would not respond to the drowning-not-waving middle class, awash in a sea of red, that we see the formation of what would become the occupy movement. While anarchists are right to point to predecessors in the student occupations of 2009, and in the anti-globalization movement before that, these are merely the origins of the form of the movement, not the origins of the movement itself. In those movements the general assemblies, spokescouncils, occupations, and horizontalism have their origins, and the points of cross pollination between the young occupy movement and those movements are obvious. But the occupy movement itself had its birth in the crisis, in the moment of the cartoon cat looking down after walking off the cliff. It is a movement with a varied composition, which ranges from homeless folks to students to anarchists to workers, but more than anything else it is a movement of a middle class that is rapidly re-proletarianizing, with a collapsing standard of living and failing job prospects. In the process, it is finding itself in unfamiliar territory surrounded by unfamiliar landmarks and neighbors.

Nevertheless, vestiges remain of the many biases and privileges that came with middle class status in the US, and these contradictions play out in the occupy movement in ways that we can identify. In particular we see these assumptions—primarily reflected in the bourgeois belief that the system ought to respond to middle class people—play out in arguments around nonviolence, the police, and questions of perception and imagery. Right now, as we enter what may be the end of the beginning of the occupy movement, we see the formerly middle class working out its new identity in public for all to see, contradictions and all. It appears schizophrenic, asserting at the same time both what it sees as its fundamental right to protest, to be heard, and to have its grievances ameliorated, and at the same time finding itself open to new radical ideas and tactics. All this while also facing down a system that clearly not only no longer responds to them but actually sends against them the very same jack-booted thugs that the middle class supported as they cast their ballots for one law-and-order president after another in the last three decades.

We can lay out a few significant features of this middle class state of mind that have come into play in the occupy movement, at least as I encountered it in Phoenix (OPhx). First, as I said above, is a real sense that the system ought to respond to their demands. That, when it doesn't, the system is broken. Obviously, this simplistic view ignores the process of exclusion and dislocation central to the functioning of the system. Nevertheless, this is the view. Likewise, there is a desire for respectability, for conformity to normal bourgeois conventions, for example politeness, and a particular kind of attire. This desire also often manifests as a rejection of certain affiliations, and an insistence on maintaining or creating a particular image. Another feature of this ideology is a desire for order and an adoration of the police. Finally, one of the most important elements of the middle class view is the tendency to treat its view of the world and its experiences as normal, and to impose hegemony on the movement based on this view.

These are points of conflict in the movement not just because of the ideas that form “middle class-ness”, but also because likewise participating in the broader movement are poor people, homeless people, and political militants—primarily anarchists—who have quite different experiences with cops and politics, and who envision different constituencies as the optimal target audience for occupy actions and propaganda. Beyond this, “middle class-ness” in the US is anchored to whiteness, and this has caused conflicts whenever white middle class occupiers have attempted to treat their experience as normative rather than specific and exclusionary, especially around questions of policing, incarceration, and justice. This makes the occupy movement not only contested terrain, but one in which the formerly middle class participants seek to impose

their dominance over the rest of it. Always lurking in the dark recesses of the middle class consciousness is the idea that politics ought to be the property of the responsible classes, and rubbing up against these other populations has been the root of many of the conflicts in the early days of this movement.

All in all, middle class occupiers are in conflict with themselves. They operate generally within the safe confines of middle class ideology, but their class position has collapsed. The question is how this conflicted identity will play out. With no recovery in jobs or incomes on the horizon, and therefore no way to reconstitute itself, is the emergence of a working class or other non-middle class identity inevitable? Will interaction with radicals, anarchists, poor and working class people, as well as people of color (who may challenge many of the basic values of whiteness that constitute middle class-ness) lead to a radicalization, or a rush to defend the formerly privileged class position? Obviously many downwardly mobile occupiers long for a return to the good old days of the American dream. Meanwhile, the system and all likely political candidates seem wedded to austerity in one form or another. A political response that would satisfy them all seems improbable.

Within the occupy movement, at least its Phoenix derivation, the middle class tendencies played out in a variety of interesting ways. Nonviolence, for instance, was always deployed ideologically and never defined. Most people who used the term “nonviolence” with regard to the movement seemed to move interchangeably between “nonviolence,” “nonviolent,” “peaceful,” “pacifist,” and various other terms, treating them as if they all referred to the same thing. Some did this consciously (politically) and some seemed to be operating out of the generally privileged and anti-historical narratives of political movements that middle class people use to mythologize struggle. Cartoon versions of Gandhi and King got trotted out regularly, stripped of historical context or even political content.

Given its lack of definition, the demand for nonviolence was therefore applied almost exclusively to militants, and never to police. Militants are considered to be dangerous because they do not adhere to the ideological and poorly-defined nonviolence of the middle class occupiers. As a result of our refusal to toe the line, we are treated as if violence is our preferred method of struggle, or even our default setting. Our presence is perceived as dangerous. Indeed, the participation of anarchists in OPhx was and continues to be a source of much fear and debate, something police have exploited on several occasions.

The debate about the importance of nonviolence has a few main elements. One is the false history of social change that is so important to the middle class (people who value stability and predictability above all else). The collapse of their class position has turned them into disturbers

of public order, and yet at the same time, they value order and civility as hallmarks (or psychoses) of their suburban lives and democracy. Tied into this is the belief that the system would and should pay attention to them if only they could make their case clearly and non-offensively. For this reason, violence is not only perceived by the middle class as disruptive and ineffective, but also as poor strategy. This is reflected in almost every discussion about nonviolence, as the most common refrain “it looks bad on TV.” We are not to appear like thugs, like criminals, like we are out of control or not respectable; all loaded language that points to middle class perceptions and fears.

At one point during the first mass arrest at OPhx, occupiers (sitting on the ground as riot cops encircled them) began to chant “We love you!” and “We are peaceful!”, “We are nonviolent!” at the cops, as if invoking an incantation of middle class desperation. In a real way what they were saying was, we are not a threat and we are playing by the rules. This is the old identity expressing itself. But it’s coming up against a hard new reality. Many of these people had likely never been on the business end of a riot suit, much less been arrested.

Imagery and perception played out along the terrain of class as well, with many middle class occupiers exhibiting a near obsession with how their fellow occupiers portrayed themselves. In the days before the actual attempt to take over the park that was initially targeted for occupation, a Reddit post circulated online which caught the attention of the middle class elements within OPhx. The post advocated that occupiers dress well, in suits and other office- or church-appropriate attire. Supporters of this position claimed that if we looked good, we would attract more people and that we would also look sympathetic in the media. In this way, form was valued over content, which probably isn’t surprising for a class that has had the foundations of its ideology yanked out from under it.

In the same way that it was alleged that if we appeared respectable we would be successful, the assumption was that if we looked bad (like poor people or unemployed people or like people who had been foreclosed on) then we would lose the support of the media and therefore of the American people. Dirty clothes and torn t-shirts, attire (including signs) that evoked anarchism, radicalism, or homelessness, or a down-trodden or downward trajectory were repeatedly singled out for being inappropriate.

At the same time, middle class occupiers treated their assumptions about who was being appealed to and who would be offended or attracted by certain attire or messaging as a given, a natural fact beyond dispute. In a real sense, they were talking about their former selves, or perhaps their former employers. The idea that perhaps a movement of the excluded and disempowered might not want primarily to target middle class people made absolutely no sense to these middle class occupiers, and their

ideal presentation bore a striking resemblance to a job interview.

In a media world, driven by the consumption of the middle class, the middle class naturally has its own image reflected back to them over and over all day. Middle class-ness is treated as normal and correct and even as large sections of the middle class found itself abruptly and increasingly poor or working class, the ideology continued, like sensations from a phantom limb. Likewise, the point that the media itself was owned by the 1% and as such had no class interest in portraying the movement positively (a fact that had been clearly borne out up to that time by the coverage), was rejected wholesale by middle class participants, despite the fact that they themselves broadly felt disappointed and disillusioned by the media. For the current and former middle class occupiers, the movement was as much an appeal to conscience as anything else and the main vehicle for that appeal, initially, was the media.

Beyond this was the attempt by occupiers to impose on the movement a rigid, heterosexual, anti-subcultural, and white suburban set of standards, mimicking not so much the promise of the consensus-based general assemblies that had excited them from far-off Zucotti Square, but instead functioning more like the neighborhood or homeowners associations that stifle all threats of diversity or difference in the far-flung outer developments, now collapsing and emptying at an astounding rate. This even though their class position had changed drastically, even if they no longer lived in those suburbs or had that good job and access to the easy credit that had made it all possible. This raised the inevitable question of just what kind of change these people wanted? Was it a break with the old order—the failure of which had been the motivating factor for so many participants in the first place—or was it to replicate or shore up and reconstitute the old middle class life so many had believed they enjoyed in the decades before the crisis? Was the occupy movement to be the gravedigger or the defibrillator of the current order? How deeply had middle class occupiers interrogated the realities of middle class suburban life?

Whatever the answer to that question, OPhx inevitably came into conflict with the police, who were another point of extremely heated debate. At the beginning and to this day (though less so now than then), a large majority of people have clung to the notion that cops were part of the 99%.

In order to discuss OPhx and the cops we have to temporarily accept the idea of the 99%, which I think most anarchists believe is a clumsy and inaccurate way to approach class composition of society. Many in the occupy movement are in serious danger of reifying what is merely a sometimes useful, albeit limited, tool, and this comes out nowhere more obviously than how they talk about cops. In a way, however, it makes sense that in the US, where almost everyone thinks of themselves as middle class, when a class analysis finally broke through to popular conscious-



ness it would be ridiculously broad, almost uselessly so. Either way, since “the 99%” was the terminology being used, the discussion remained largely stuck within it and vulnerable to its many limitations.

Early on those political militants, working class people, and people of color who had altogether different experiences and perspectives on the police, came into direct conflict with those largely middle class people who asserted that “cops are part of the 99%.” In an echo of the conversation about image and perception, middle class occupiers asserted that if we looked respectable, the cops would treat us that way. Or if we were polite, the cops would have no reason to attack us. Indeed, looking good, using good language, and mouthing the movement’s poorly-defined mantra of “nonviolence” were used not only as some talisman of protection, but also repeatedly deployed as criteria for singling out the dreaded “violent provocateurs” who haunted the dreams of middle class participants, agitators they believed were always ready to infiltrate and disrupt, thus making the movement “look bad” and leading inevitably to failure. The further one strayed from these core values, the more likely it was that one would be attacked as an infiltrator. Thus, these three criteria were used to reinforce middle class hegemony over the movement.

People who pointed out that the cops themselves were violent, and that our relationship to the police was dictated not by our behavior, appearance, or language but by our relationships to power and capital, or that police were generally right wing reactionaries who would dislike us no matter what we did or acted like, got attacked themselves for being violent. That is, opponents or even mild critics of the police were labeled violent for maligning the police or remarking on police violence. This bizarre reaction was perhaps natural given the fact that most middle class people’s contact with cops up until their participation in the occupy movement was limited to getting tickets, asking for directions at public events, getting directed in traffic, getting help after a crime, and generally being made to feel safe and protected.

Therefore, police were not perceived at all as violent, but rather as well-meaning members of the 99%, just doing their jobs, and only prone to violence when provoked by people who deserved it. With seven million people in prisons or jails or under state supervision at any particular moment in the US, only the head-in-the-sand NIMBYism of the middle class could insist to a movement of the formerly middle class that a small armed gang that puts so many 99%ers in jail every year was part of the 99%. And, naturally their weak analysis of the police led to consternation and surprise amongst middle class occupiers each time the police broke with the presumed social contract and resorted to violence and arrests against those perceived socially as undeserving of such treatment.

So the question remains. What will become of the formerly middle



class occupier? Many contradictions have yet to work themselves out. It seems natural that a shift out of the comfy middle class wouldn't come without its problems. Will the second phase of occupy, with the election looming ever closer, display a more nuanced and advanced understanding of American capitalism, politics, power, class and resistance? One of the most inspiring things about the occupy movement is its willingness to transgress conventional protest tactics in surprising ways (even as it reinforces others), its willingness to be disruptive and take over public and private space, and its (so far) rejection of the dominant politics. It shows a lot of potential to be a creative, critical, and confrontational movement moving in a general trajectory that ought to make anarchists happy. But will the former middle class occupiers, ejected so summarily from their positions of privilege, find a new identity that reflects their new conditions, or having wakened from the dream briefly, will they instead seek to roll back over and recapture the comforting fantasies of days gone by? Right now they are in a sense doing anarchism without anarchism. But is that good enough?

The most striking thing to a reader who has learned about Occupy Wall Street from the nightly news is that this book doesn't include a notable section on anarchist activity in NYC proper. While there have been anarchists on the ground in NY and Zuccotti Park since day one of the occupation, there they have mostly served in a support role: providing experience with consensus, with group process, and with propaganda. By the account I heard anarchists provided tens of thousands of pieces of literature from an anarchist perspective in Zuccotti.

The locations that are highlighted in this book have two characteristics. One, anarchists actively participated in the Occupies in these towns and two, anarchists wrote publicly about this participation. There is perhaps too much information from Denver, Oakland, and Seattle but that is because anarchists in these towns dedicated themselves to "getting the word out" about their participation.

# Location

Like anarchism itself much of the excitement of occupy has been how it has flowered in the smaller towns and cities around the country. The idea that there are still standing political occupations in a variety of cities across the country is one of the untold stories by the mainstream media. The idea that this new (old) tactic has such an energizing impact on the people who participate should come as no surprise. The face-to-face still matters, more now than ever.

Anarchists have participated and taken this creative space to do things they perhaps would not have dared to do in other towns. This includes occupying unused space in highly public ways, attacking placidity, and being involved, critical, and analytical of the Occupy Movement. This section highlights the best of anarchist involvement in lower profile cities around North America.

various

*Chicago, Illinois*

# Open Letter to Occupy Chicago

by some potential friends/enemies

We approach you today from a curious position on the margins of your activity, lingering here because we don't quite know what to make of you in many respects. We have friends who have been maced and kidnapped by the New York Police Department, and in many ways we are excited about the creation of new spaces in which bonds might be formed in struggle that will take us places further than just a symbolic encampment in the financial district. We have skills, ideas, and energy to make Occupy Chicago a greater force to be reckoned with. We also recognize that those who are a part of Occupy movements around the country are a part of the middle class that is being dismantled by austerity measures being put into place around the country, and have had little experience with conflict. Many want a return to the middle class, for it to be saved. But no such salvation can be delivered to the middle class by an economy in crisis. Instead, as some who have inhabited this dispossession most of our lives, we say: welcome home, but we still have a long way to travel together.

While we see potential in this activity, your general assemblies have drawn lines in the sand that make us reticent to open lines of communication, and others that have made us cringe. In some respect, there is a good element in things we have heard: recognizing that economic crisis is the work of government as a whole and not just one administration or party, that it is not necessarily just a class of greedy capitalists that want our money but rather a whole system that maintains our shitty living conditions, that it is not ideology that matters as much as it is activity. And we agree. Yet, this should not be a rally cry for Occupy Chicago to take a neutral position in what is a global war between those who want to manage economic crisis for their own ends and those of us, more and more every day, who have no future in this economic system known as capitalism, no matter how many reforms others call for. Occupy Chicago's lines, however, do not reflect this struggle. They say, "We are saving America, and all Americans will benefit from restoring economic security and the freedom that America is based on." For the descendants of the slaves who worked the fields to grow the wealth of this nation-state, for the trans women locked up and trying to survive in men's prison, for the indigenous people who have survived our long-running genocide against the people who lived on this continent, for the undocumented people who risk deportation every day to survive, for all of the abandoned chil-

dren of a society and economy that never cared about our lives in the first place, these words are empty. They only reinforce that you will stand to preserve this system of benefit for yourself even if it means the continued dispossession of all lives that the democracy and capitalism never cared about unless they could be used for profit.

Worse than this patriotism, however, is the clear line that you've drawn in supporting the police. Despite much of the rhetoric about "blue-collar" and "white collar" police, there is no difference in the function of the police in relation to our lives. Whatever collar you may see, there is surely a brownshirt underneath. The police serve to keep those without power in line on a day-to-day basis, and especially when they rise up against systems that keep them in chains. We've smelled the tear gas in the air, watched our friends and families thrown to the ground and beaten. This is not police brutality, it is the cold fact that policing as a system defends the wealthy and will use deadly force to do so. And no apologies from police will make this any different. The Chicago Police Department, to whom your General Assembly has decided to extend olive branch, have held guns to our heads since time immemorial. In the first seven months of this year, they murdered 42 people. Between 1972 and 1991, they tortured more than 130 black men in secret jails with impunity. They break up all our fun parties. They turn over our friends to ICE. The CPD do not "make sacrifices" and "take risks" every day to "keep Chicago a safe community," they risk their lives to murder, imprison, and torture those who refuse to be content with the poverty that this system has given us, and there is no room for friendship with those who seek cordial relations with those who terrorize us to keep us in line.

We know that these statements do not represent everyone currently occupying Chicago. We've seen the glazed-over look in many participants' eyes at the General Assemblies and the general lack of enthusiasm about this experiment in democracy. To those participants we say: perhaps we share something in common. The truth of this of course lies in whether or not you choose to break the tyranny of silent consensus, the democracy that has so quickly taken the power from those who dare to dissent. Refuse to be silent about how this moment which could challenge so much oppression is being taken away from us, just like everything else has. Refuse the orders of the police. Challenge those who are limiting your ability to act within the occupation, for they also act as police. Occupy space that disrupts that normal flow of life. Find those friends who dare to act with you, and do the same. We will be there for you if you choose to take your lives and your participation into your own hands. Are you occupying to become powerful or to give away your power to the systems that have gotten us into this mess?

Portland, Oregon

# An Anarchist Account of Occupy Portland: “Whose Sidewalks?”

by A Former Occupier

I write this because I see many of the same problems occurring at occupations around the country and I hope to share a perspective that may be of use to other anarchists trying to understand the dynamics of the Occupation Movement and how to engage with it.

I was excited by the potential of Occupy Wall Street, and thought that horizontal organizing would be conducive to anarchist participation. In Portland, there seemed to be a commitment to organize the march and occupation without seeking permits, which to me signaled a positive development in Portland’s protest culture.

However, leading up to the 3rd General Assembly (GA) a number of troubling issues began to surface. A self-appointed and unaccountable leadership, later nicknamed the ghost committee, established plans for peacekeepers and police liaisons in the face of clear objections and without discussion or agreement in the GA. Once their existence was a *fait accompli*, the GA insisted that police liaisons only convey information in one direction, from police to occupiers. Police liaisons were not empowered to negotiate on behalf of the GA, yet they repeatedly did. Some of the same people also tried (and failed) to keep the opening march on the sidewalk and blocked a proposal to keep the march route secret from the police. A Green Party organizer even attempted to obtain a march permit on behalf of Occupy Portland in defiance of the GA. The fact that the march was unpermitted, despite heavy pressure from the city, was in my opinion one of the chief reasons for the incredible estimated turnout of 10,000 people.

Controversial and unaccountable decision-making on the part of the ghost committee continued. Initial plans to use Terry Schruck Plaza as the occupation site, due to legal precedent protecting freedom of speech on federal property, were suddenly reversed at the last minute when a ghost committee member, Gina R., announced on a bullhorn that she had negotiated an agreement with the police and that’s why riot cops weren’t storming us right now. The agreement was that we could stay at Lownsdale and Chapman Squares, but not Terry Schruck. This was not brought forward for discussion either at Lownsdale/Chapman or at Terry Schruck—it was decided for us. There should have been intervention at that point, but ev-

everyone was so exhausted and confused that it wasn't openly challenged.

Soon we learned that while the city had offered Lownsdale/Chapman for the night, they threatened our arrest and removal the following morning due to a contract with the Portland Marathon to use the area as the staging ground for their event the following Sunday. We demanded to negotiate directly with the Marathon, a small victory. The Marathon stipulated that they would agree to some of us staying in Chapman Square behind the chain link fence and black curtain traditionally used at the end of the Marathon route. No one would be allowed in or out between 4am-5pm Sunday except for medical emergencies. This was presented by the Marathon as non-negotiable due to security concerns.

The GA agreed that a skeleton crew would remain behind while others would leave the park before 4am, regrouping to march from PSU on a route to be determined. At the Saturday evening GA, a man announced that he had met with the city, the police, and the Marathon, and negotiated to allow Occupy Portland to march at 2:30pm with the mayor and police along the marathon route. He also said, wouldn't it be great if we all sang "Imagine" by John Lennon because the march date coincided with John Lennon's birthday. This was met with immediate opposition for not going through the GA process. It was stated by the facilitator that this had been organized autonomously and that whoever wanted to go should go; the man wasn't asking for the endorsement of Occupy Portland. However, the information for the PSU march was then changed to reflect the information for the "John Lennon march" on the Occupy Portland website.

At the PSU march the next day, police liaisons negotiated with the police, in violation of their mandate from the GA to only convey information one-way, that the march would take the streets initially and return to the sidewalk at Yamhill. The police desire for us to stay on the sidewalk was announced to the crowd via megaphone. There were impassioned pleas to take the streets, as well as a couple of confused arguments against. Thousands began marching—most people staying on the sidewalk through the park blocks. I helped to lead a small determined group of people in the street. It was a miracle, the cops weren't attacking us! Despite pleas from the peacekeepers to stay on the sidewalk, eventually the whole march ended up in the streets and headed to Pioneer Courthouse Square, the central public forum in the city. It was clear to me at that point that the police had orders to stand down because we were operating with too much public support. Being heavy handed would surely backfire at this stage.

From Pioneer Courthouse Square, those of us who didn't want to march with the cops and mayor began to march to O'Bryant Square to meet and rally. Someone with a megaphone began directing people away from us, telling them we were not the "official" march. People be-

gan shouting and eventually everyone agreed to a facilitated consensus. Many people spoke passionately about not marching with the police, including a young African American woman, an elderly white woman, and a disabled man on crutches. A consensus to continue to O'Bryant Square was assumed, with only the man with the megaphone blocking, and his objection was dismissed due to the fact that the John Lennon march was not a GA-endorsed event. Subsequently, there were two more efforts made to reroute marchers to the John Lennon march and these were more successful. In the end, about twenty of us marched down Broadway with an escort of ten or so motorcycle cops. We marched all the way to city hall, across from the still temporarily enclosed occupation site. That night at the GA, we agreed to retake Lownsdale Square and Main Street.

On Monday, we began to receive pressure from the city about Main St., which runs between Chapman and Lownsdale Squares. This one block had been closed up until this point. In fact, the police had closed it for us, and it was their barricades that were blocking the street for us. Through liaisons, it was communicated that the city was concerned about emergency vehicles and Trimet bus access. Multiple people pointed out that they had been operating fine with detours for the previous four days, that streets are routinely closed for corporate-sponsored events, and that what we were doing was worth accommodating. There was also a concern for safety of pedestrians, especially children, crossing between the two camps. People were also concerned about giving up our primary meeting spot—a fountain stands in the middle and it is a large, well-lit, highly visible place for General Assemblies. On Tuesday night, a proposal was put forward by Gina R. to open the streets unconditionally and it did not achieve consensus.

On Wednesday morning, I awoke to find that someone had taken down the barricades. No one would take ownership—I heard only vague references to autonomous individuals. We began to receive word that the city was going to take the street back, with or without our cooperation. In the afternoon, Sam Adams, Portland's mayor, approached a remaining hay bale that was serving as a barricade, where a young woman sat. He addressed the larger crowd and group of reporters following him, stating that as mayor he had the power to open Main St. and that he was now doing so.

I chimed in and asked if that meant he was going to bring the police in to forcefully remove us, he said no—he didn't need to bring in the police because he was the mayor and could open the street himself. He asked the young woman sitting down to get up. She refused. I sat down behind her. She gave an impassioned plea for him to respect our humanity and what we were trying to do. He asked her again to get up. She began to cry and I put my hand on her knee. I told him we weren't going anywhere and that per the previous GA decision we would continue to hold the street and



negotiate with interested parties on finding ways that all of our needs could be addressed. He smugly dismissed it as “process”, and walked away.

From that point onward, things took a bizarre turn. Four of us remained in the street after the peacekeepers announced that anyone who didn't want to be arrested should move on to the sidewalk. At this point the cops were nowhere to be seen, but apparently some people were being advised that the police would be moving in to make arrests and open up the street. As the four of us sat there, people began shouting for us to get out of the street. I can't remember everything that was said; I stopped paying attention after awhile. I do remember one man yelling that we were committing passive aggressive violence by sitting in the street. Another said that we weren't really members of the occupation—implying that we were plants or provocateurs. Another shouted that those on the sidewalk should turn their backs to those of us in the street—and some did. The person who donated the hay came to tell us they wanted the bale back because they didn't support us being in the streets. One of the armband people came by to tell us that we weren't allowed to use the megaphones because the people who donated them didn't support us being in the street.

It was the most appalling lack of solidarity I had ever seen—and our reason for being there was to uphold the decisions made by the GA. Eventually more people began milling in the street after hours passed and the cops never showed. Hundreds of riot and mounted police were spotted at the ready, however. The order was just never given. During the day the barricades were rebuilt, and finally it was clear that the street was ours for at least a little longer.

That night, two proposals were brought before the GA: one to open the street immediately and unconditionally and attempt to negotiate with the city for limited use, another to keep the street closed except to emergency vehicles, bicycles, and an antiwar march, and to continue to negotiate with the Trimet Union and any other concerned parties about ways that their needs could be addressed. Support for each proposal at this point was so equal that the decision on which to discuss first was decided by a coin toss: the “open the street” proposal went first. About two to three hours of discussion and evolution of the proposal ensued. After a first round of evolution, the vote was perhaps 50-50 and after another round of evolution it achieved perhaps 60% in favor, not the 90% agreement required.

The first proposal was dropped and we moved to the second proposal, to keep the street mostly closed, which went through a similar process of concerns, amendments, and evolution. It came for a vote and clearly achieved the 90% agreement required for a time-sensitive proposal, with about 13 stand-asides and about 7 against (those in favor were not counted because they were visually clearly more than 90%). The person who presented this proposal asked that those who voted in favor commit to

remaining in the street to hold it, as she intended to do.

Immediately after the GA, we received word that one of the ghost committee members, Julio G., had plans to take down the barricades unilaterally at 1:30am. He was confronted by a group and defensively denied knowledge of the plan, refusing to engage us. Later conversations have affirmed that there was in fact a plan to take the barricades down. By then, only a handful of folks remained in the street, committed to holding it. The barricades stayed up, though police had driven a motorcycle past them in the middle of the night, probably a probing to see if the camp would come out to defend the street. They didn't. At 6am perhaps a hundred or so cops descended and arrested eight of us, with no legal observers or cameras present except for one man with an iphone. The media, however, were there in full force, likely tipped off that arrests would happen that morning. Before getting arrested, one of the arrestees ran through camp yelling, "The cops are here! Into the street!", to which a peacekeeper responded, "Shhhh. People are trying to sleep!"

We were each released that afternoon, after 8 to 12 hours in custody, with misdemeanor charges of disorderly conduct and interfering with a police officer, both of which were later reduced to violations. The radical caucus greeted us outside with chants of *Solidarity Forever*. The ghost committee were nowhere to be seen. The next day at our arraignment it was a media circus and there was a large rally outside. Our supporters were prevented from entering the courtroom by a line of cops at the courthouse door. Inside, our lawyers were determined. They suggested we enter not guilty pleas and seek trial dates.

Media coverage of our arrests proclaimed that everyone was happy that Main St. was finally open, even members of the occupation. One person was quoted as calling those of us who were arrested "extremists." On OccupyPortland.org, it was initially reported that one of us was resisting arrest, which was a total fabrication as evidenced by the fact that none of us were charged with resisting. It was also stated there that the police gave us an opportunity to leave and that we chose to be arrested, again, total fabrication. That night, Occupy Portland Facebook admins restricted the ability for people to post. Then an admin went on to comment: "I don't know about you guys, but I'm glad Main St. is open...."

The following day, Saturday, was the anti-war march. A feeder march began at Occupy Portland, unfortunately led by a huge American flag, and joined the permitted anti-war march. Again, peacekeepers led people onto the sidewalks, but I helped to encourage people into the streets after seeing that the police were not acting aggressively. The entire march later occupied Main St. where a rally was held for about ten minutes, before continuing on. Eventually the march went to the waterfront, still hundreds strong marching through the streets. There I heard one

of the ghost committee members confer with police and then announce that we would march on the sidewalk back to Pioneer Courthouse Square. It was never brought forward for discussion.

Sunday night, the two main proposals put forth before the GA were to empower the peacekeepers to call the police and to endorse instant run-off elections, a proposal brought forth by the same Green Party opportunist who tried to obtain a permit for the original march. I saw no allies there that night—both proposals passed—and I decided it was time to suspend my participation in Occupy Portland.

There are very serious issues of transparency and accountability in Occupy Portland right now. I had been working to address those, with very limited support, but that effort was derailed during the fight over the street and the subsequent arrests. I know that there are some people still dedicated to achieving those goals who still see OP as having potential for a real movement of resistance. Other commitments have brought me home for the time being, and so I wish them the best of luck. I still believe that this moment in time has so much potential. I don't know if Occupy Portland is capable of acting on it. They either fear or don't recognize their own power.

Due to the appalling lack of solidarity and the co-opting of this movement by forces that want to tame and pacify it, I'm beginning to feel that it would be in anarchists' best interest to organize openly and independently. Through the strength of our analysis, people will be drawn to our position. What seems like extremism now will look more reasonable once the city and police begin to increase the pressure. We cannot allow our voices to be silenced out of a fear of being labeled divisive. Our goals aren't the same as liberals and the authoritarian Left. That much should be clear. Given that members of Occupy Portland are openly collaborating with the city and police with impunity, I also feel it isn't a safe environment for anarchists to operate in. Suggestions for a registration list have been floated. Until it's made clear that collaboration won't be tolerated, security is compromised.

It has been suggested that our efforts might be better directed by following DeColonize LA's example and calling for dispersed popular assemblies throughout neighborhoods in Portland. I would also suggest that anarchists in Portland begin meeting regularly so that we can discuss how to best achieve our goals in this charged environment. Our time is now: we don't need to ride on the coat tails of back stabbing liberals in order to gain legitimacy. They discredit themselves as they go along; let them take ownership of their failures and let us organize on our own, while still looking for ways to engage the Occupy movement and help it reach its revolutionary potential.

*Southern Ontario, Canada*

## Why are Anarchists Involved in the Occupy Movement?

by Some Southern Ontario Anarchists

At the base of the Occupy Movement, is the fact that capitalism isn't working. This is a global movement against a system that sees a wealthy few controlling the majority of money, resources and land.

These same few people control politics on parliament hill, decisions made in our communities and have vested interests in continuing wars abroad and the war here against the poor.

The Occupy movements overarching goals of challenging the class divisions in this society can never be negotiated without a revolution.

In the streets and squares, the Occupations are organized horizontally so that everyone can speak for themselves, without appointing leaders.

The Occupations around the world have liberated space for us to organize autonomously against capitalism. They have created a space for us to help each other out for our mutual interests, sometimes known as "Mutual Aid".

With 1500 occupations across the world, each one expresses solidarity with those attempting to occupy the major financial districts where all the countries wealth is exchanged. These are also places for us to start conversations about addressing issues face us in our communities too.

The Occupy Movement is already ripe with anarchist ideas in action, and we want to do our part to see this through to its inevitable conclusion...

### **Revolution**

from [gettotheroots.wordpress.com](http://gettotheroots.wordpress.com)

*Vancouver, Canada*

## Occupation is a Fuckin Freak Show: ALL POWER TO THE FREAKS!!

by d.

What a fuckin freak show! Down here, We don't need a weatherman to tell Us which way the winds blow. Down here, Freaks Rule—Yippie! The Occupation is a commune: ALL POWER TO THE COMMUNES! Dig the library, where comrades are playing chess and reading *The Art of War*, Dig

from [momentofinsurrection.wordpress.com](http://momentofinsurrection.wordpress.com)

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the kitchen where We feed each other and wash our own dishes, Dig the healing tent, jam space, art tent, dig the vibe which is a dagger in the ribs of empire. The freaks are rising and bringing the shit down!

~ ~ ~

This is a war for peace, a war for territory, a war for deterritorialization, class war, social war, anti-imperial resistance. We are a fuckin WARMA-CHINE! The Occupation is centrifugal,—in its dispersal of Popular Power in the Streets; We are a new society at war against the old state, We commit class suicide & exodus from history: *“those who have a history—it’s one of violent class war. Those without a history—it’s one of war against the state.”*

~ ~ ~

We melt into a vagueness of runaway kids smoking weed with tripped-out hippies, chewed-up-and-spat-out. Tents erected in barricades of pallets, from the back a freak calls for a: *“Mic Check”*... *“FUCK THE POLICE”*. It is in the midst of vagueness, affinities starved for survival—who want to eat on the flesh of capital, come into contact with one another and grow more confident; Clandestine cells take secret oaths to defend the camp around candle light, smoking butts and drinking herbal tea.

~ ~ ~

Outside the Pharos forces amasses against Us—white trash rednecks working for the man—these union card-carrying city workers circling for a fight. The pigs itch to crack skulls. These are the errand boys of Command, which idles patiently on the curb. Configurations of hostility evoke occultist predictions of doom, ranging from Suzan Anton to Chemtrails; the sorcery of Spectacle wishes to render Us invisible. Fools! Our life force is that of negation. This is CIVIL WAR of Us against all those lackey pigs. Any which way you wrap your head around it, this is a State of Emergency and We will each call our own tune and dance in the sludge of paranoia and conspiracy theories, cause *“not even the dogs that piss on the walls of Babylon shall be saved.”*

~ ~ ~

Ask a freak why We are here: *“all We can say when asked, is what We each feel,”* such is the poem of We freaks becoming a new form of life welcoming the coming community. A rebel commune where the Man can’t put his finger on Us. Those who appear closest to a leader speak with a corpse in their mouth. We swirl and dance and drum and beat box and rant and fuck and get high. We mistrust, and snitch and provoke and incite; what the fuck are the pigs gonna do!? Provocateurism would be cheered for its enthusiasm! The only way sneaky-dick can establish himself is through false leaders—but that pig-piñata would be strung up.

~ ~ ~

We are not a parallel society—we are a COUNTERPOWER. We will resist invasion while digging deeper into the guts of the Beast. We are

a metaphysical charter of the phantasmagoric planetary-offensive. This site is Occupied by the Cosmopolitan Indians—Tahrir Square Faction, bringin’ the fuckin ruckus straight outta the streets of Syria. We are the COUNTERPOWER PARTY FOR SELF DEFENCE and our program is infinite; We choose these words the Black Panthers Speak and We Mic-check their style: “We draw pictures that show Standard Oil in milk bottles launched at Rockefeller with wicks made of cloth from I Magnin and J Magnin—pictures of Chinese fire works in gunpowder form aimed at the heart of the enemy—Bank of America—pictures of pigs hanging by their tongues wrapped with barbed wire connected to your local power plant.”

~ ~ ~

So listen up, not all the hippies went to the coastal islands to die; We reappear to avenge the ages that rose in defeat. All the partisans and run-away slaves, maroons and ghost dances, free kitchens and health clinics, squats and tree houses, converge as phantoms in this specter of GLOBAL INTIFADA that haunts empire. These occupations are the grave of civilization, the stronger Our relations are autonomous from the state, the quickening emergence of whatever this is becoming.

## Notes for *We, antagonists*

The on-going occupation of social space is heavily contested, from within and without, and throughout us all. There exists in Occupy Vancouver’s every moment and every relation a complexity of contradictions, which startlingly reflect those shared between us. What makes this occupation a real event of thinking and acting is the engagement with these complexities within an open political space. In these rendezvous of various forms of life and ideas, a plane of consistency is constructed. This plane is the site where relations are intensified between a common, and our differences are developed. The reproduction of these relations transverse the idiotic notion of 99% and engage in civil war against the state and its citizens. (The ease with which the main slogan was subverted into “Decolonize the 99%” is inspiring.)

Given that this civil war is declared amongst us all, it is powerful to have a site from which to gather and further wage war. The occupation is not a totality and any allegation that it is immediately shatters against the occupation’s corals and sinks back into cynicism. The cartography of the occupation is that of multiple ridges of antagonisms. Each ridge acts as a dispersal of forces in the site—that keep antagonisms circulating through the space. Each antagonism can be intensified so as to exceed its limits. The occupation as a free space is expanded by the agitation of antagonists—who should seize this opportunity.

Although righteously dismayed by the operational construction of

the occupation, antagonists are now face-to-face with the multitude of potentialities that exist and continue to combine. The theatre of war is an open stage. Of course there are the attempts at territorializing the space into political camps, each with their unique codification, but the space continues to swirl without any definitive separations. Perhaps the greatest potential achieved thus far is the un-potentiality taken by so many—the refusal to participate in any structure (outside a tent!).

The pressing challenge for any antagonist who desires to participate, is the sovereignty of the General Assembly. As the critiques of this failed effort are obvious to any observer and have been echoed, I will do as the GA should do and save my breath. The threat though, that is seeping down from this martian colony which seems to have crashed-landed onto the steps of the occupation, is that with enough persistence this alien(ating) language will reproduce itself as a template which is then adapted across the means of communication. Already the Tyranny of Time has crested; squandering the spontaneity of discussion and manufacturing a timetable that makes interaction feel a lot like Work. That for the most part these shifts are rejected can be seen as a general refusal of Work and should be encouraged by the increased creation of free spaces for belligerent pluralism—with coffee and smokes.

Circling the peripherals of the occupation looms the threat of state repression. No one at the site disputes this reality. What does seem confused is the perception people have of the police—and I don't mean the argument that 'the cops are of the 99%', but rather the notion that a police invasion is imminent. No doubt an attack is coming, but the recent histories of tent cities dispute the hunch that the invaders will be the police. The state agents that are now amassed wear numerous emblems and share the same oath as the cops but operate much more deviously. The firefighters, paramedics, welfare workers, city workers, and other badged citizens, with the police (and the military forces and secret services) operate as the Apparatus of the State, with a unified command, which has crystallized over the various tent cities, olympics, and riots. The policing operations under Empire are deployed as such an apparatus, which in turn must be fought by an assemblage of anti-imperial resistance.

Such assemblage is the constitutive force of the occupation. It can be seen as a barricade, whose qualities are active defense and a dispersal of struggle. So long as the occupation asserts its openness to circulation and movement-in-action and does not institutionalize itself with a constitution for its being, it will serve as a barricade in flux. It is when barricades come into contact with one another that we can speak of insurrection. Already, all around us, the barricades grow.

*Chapel Hill, North Carolina*

# This Building is Ours!

## *Chapel Hill Anarchists Occupy Downtown Building*

by Anonymous

In the midst of the first general strike to hit the US since 1946, a group of comrades occupied a vacant building in downtown Oakland, CA. Before being brutally evicted and attacked by cops, they taped up in the window a large banner declaring, “Occupy Everything..”

Last night, at about 8pm, a group of about 50–75 people occupied the 10,000 square foot Chrysler Building on the main street of downtown Chapel Hill. Notorious for having an owner who hates the city and has bad relations with the City Council, the giant building has sat empty for ten years. It is empty no longer.

Following the Carrboro Anarchist Bookfair, a group “in solidarity with occupations everywhere” marched to the building, amassing outside while banners reading “Occupy Everything” and “Capitalism left this building for DEAD, we brought it back to LIFE” were raised in the windows and lowered down the steep roof. Much of the crowd soon filed in through one of the garage door entrances to find a short film playing on the wall and dance music blasting.

People explored the gigantic building, and danced in the front room to images of comrades shattering the glass of bank windows 3,000 miles away in Oakland. Others continued to stay outside, shouting chants, giving speeches, and passing out hundreds of “Welcome” packets (complete with one among many possible future blueprints for the building—see below for text) to passersby. The text declared the initial occupation to be the work of “autonomous anti-capitalist occupiers,” rather than Occupy Chapel Hill, but last evening’s events have already drawn the involvement of many Occupy Chapel Hill participants, who are camped just several blocks down the street.

Soon several police showed up, perhaps confused and waiting for orders. Three briefly entered the building, and were met with chants of “ACAB!” Strangely, the cops seem to have been called off, because they left as quick as they came. For the rest of the night they were conspicuously absent, leaving us free to conduct a short assembly as to what to do with the space and how to hold it for the near future. The group also decided to move a nearby noise and experimental art show into the building. As some folks began to arrange the show, others began filtering across town seeking things we needed for the night.

Within 30 minutes of the assembly ending, trucks began returning with everything from wooden pallets, doors, water jugs, and a desk, to



a massive display case for an already growing distro and pots and trays of food donated by a nearby Indian restaurant. Others began spreading the word to the nearby Occupy Chapel Hill campsite, and bringing their camping gear into the building.

Over the next few hours more and more community members heard about the occupation and stopped by, some to bring food or other items, others just to soak it all in. All the while dozens of conversations were happening outside with people on the street. The show began eventually, and abrasive noise shook the walls of the building, interspersed with dance music and conversations, and ending with a beautiful a capella performance, and of course more dancing.

More events are to follow tomorrow in our new space, with two assemblies from the anarchist bookfair being moved to the new location, and a yoga teacher offering to teach a free class later in the afternoon.

As of the early hours this Sunday morning, the building remains in our hands, with a small black flag hanging over the front door. The first 48 hours will be extremely touch and go, but with a little luck, and a lot of public support, we aim to hold it in perpetuity. Regardless, we hope that this occupation can inspire others around the country. Strikes like the one in Oakland present one way forward; long term building occupations may present another.

Text from the "Welcome" Handout:

We would like to welcome you to an experiment.

For the past month and a half, thousands of people all over the US have been occupying public space in protest of economic inequality and hopelessness. This itself began as an experiment in a small park in New York City, though it did not emerge out of a vacuum: Occupy Wall St. "made sense" because of the rebels of Cairo, because of the indignados of Madrid and Barcelona and Athens. All of these rebellions were experiments in self-organization which emerged out of their own specific contexts, their own histories of struggle and revolution. Each was unique, but also united by the shared reality of the failure and decline of late global capitalism, and the futility of electoral politics.

Recently, this "Occupy" phenomenon has expanded beyond merely "providing a space for dialogue" to become a diverse movement actively seeking to shift the social terrain. From strikes and building occupations to marches and port blockades, this looks different in different places, as it should, but one thing is clear: many are no longer content with "speaking truth to power," for they understand that power does not listen.

Toward that end, we offer this building occupation as an experi-

ment, as a possible way forward. For decades, occupied buildings have been a foundation for social movements around the world. In places as diverse as Brazil, South Africa, Spain, Mexico, and Germany, just to mention a few, they offer free spaces for everything from health clinics and daycare to urban gardening, theaters, and radical libraries. They are reclaimed spaces, taken back from wealthy landowners or slumlords, offered to the community as liberated space.

All across the US thousands upon thousands of commercial and residential spaces sit empty while more and more people are forced to sleep in the streets, or driven deep into poverty while trying to pay rent that increases without end. Chapel Hill is no different: this building has sat empty for years, gathering dust and equity for a lazy landlord hundreds of miles away, while rents in our town skyrocket beyond any service workers' ability to pay them, while the homeless spend their nights in the cold, while gentrification makes profits for developers right up the street.

For these reasons, we see this occupation as a logical next step, both specific to the rent crisis in this city as well as generally for occupations nationwide. This is not an action orchestrated by Occupy Chapel Hill, but we invite any and all occupiers, workers, unemployed, or homeless folks to join us in figuring out what this space could be. We offer this "tour guide" merely as one possible blueprint among many, for the purpose of brainstorming the hundreds of uses to which such a building could be put, once freed from the stranglehold of rent.

In Love and Rage,  
for liberty and equality,

some autonomous anti-capitalist occupiers

*Santa Cruz, California*

## 75 Hours in #75River

by Anonymous

*Hopefully this group isn't representative of a new aggressive movement.*

Zach Friend, SCPD Spokesman

The march was called only a few days before, billed on fliers as a march to picket banks and then to occupy a building (in some places it was a "foreclosed home," in other it was merely a "vacant property").

from Serf City Revolt

The day of the march, November 30th, people began gathering at 2pm near the Occupy Santa Cruz camp. By 2:45, when the march left, about 75 people had assembled. A mobile sound system arrived, playing, among other things, a lot of Lady Gaga. The march left towards Chase bank on Water and Ocean for a brief picket and speeches. The picket felt a bit tense, with a strong sense of anticipation for the announced occupation.

After the picket, the group moved back down Water, past the Occupy camp, and over the Water Street bridge. In the intersection of Water and River, the group paused. Then, instead of continuing down Water along the announced route, the group turned left on River. All of the sudden the doors of 75 River were open; people began elatedly yelling “We’re in!” and a flier was distributed within the group to announce the new occupation.

Immediately, office furniture was re-purposed into barricades. A group of individuals had gained roof access from the outside and began hanging banners. One read: “Reclaim space. Reclaim Our Lives.” The other: “Occupy Everything” (sic and *siiiiick*). Soon, roof access was gained from the inside out to let these people down into the building. The building itself is fairly labyrinthine and people immediately began exploring. A group of people took over the vault to smoke a celebratory blunt while others opened up a candy machine, netting about 50 dollars in quarters. The majority of the group began organizing the space, putting up signs and moving in furniture.

One person was arrested for allegedly moving a traffic cone.

Hours later, at about 6:30, the police showed up in force. They immediately attempted to gain entry to the building, but were repelled at the barricades. Twenty or so people were inside with about 150 on the outside. The sound system from the march was still present, providing the soundtrack for the confrontation. People linked arms against the police, three or so lines deep. The cops fiddled with the barricade, trying to gain entry. They were unsuccessful. After much verbal harassment on the part of the protestors, the police left—nominally to protect against human harm. After this, the occupation took the form it would take every night for the next three nights: one part organizing, one part festival, and constant anxiety regarding a police attack. Shifts were organized to patrol the area for police, some making forays to areas that the police might be staging in. Organization and destruction of the space happened simultaneously, racing each other at about a dead heat.

The sound of traffic starting up again Thursday morning was the first sign that the occupation might have survived the night.

#### Thursday

The next day, which wasn’t really demarcated from the previous day, started (continued?) with a clean up from the night before. Plans were

made mid-day for a social gathering that evening. The idea was to have a potluck with small group discussions, followed by dancing. What actually happened that night was a bit different. DJs started spinning at around ten with the dubstep scene out in full force. More blunts in the vault, more moderately destructive exploration of the space. A community atmosphere prevailed, if only in a vague sense. A repeat sexual assaulter was ejected from the space. A favorite new activity was discovered: pretending to rob the bank. Groups of sometimes up to twenty people would play through different scenarios. Other individuals practiced jumping over the teller counters.

Late in the night, between 2 and 5am, the windows along River Street were barricaded with sheets of plywood nailed to each other, backed with pallets and filing cabinets. After the first altercation at the barricades, people were fairly confident that they could hold the barricades at the doors. So the emphasis shifted to the bottom floor windows and a contingency plan for an attack from the roof. Barring extreme measures by the police, occupiers felt confident they could hold the space. Those who didn't sleep at the space trickled out at around 5am, sure the space had survived another night. At least one occupier had work as soon as 8am.

#### Friday

Meetings were organized to clean the space (“keeping the space clean felt like carrying water with a sieve” one occupier offered). The entire space was re-organized. Shifts were drawn up for scouting and copwatch. Mid-evening, the property owner shut off power, plumbing, and gas to the building. A call-out for flashlights went out over Twitter. Later that night, a scare happened when cherry-pickers were seen assembled on Ocean Street, but it was later determined that they were there to repair power poles from the last few days of heavy wind. Occupiers slept soundly—the occupied bank had a feeling of home and, counter-intuitively, safety.

#### Saturday

At the mid-day meeting people decided, less than unanimously, that it was time to leave the bank. The decision was multi-faceted and a bit controversial. A fear that a small group of peripheral (or just plain not-involved) individuals were going to be blamed for the whole of the occupation was central to the discussion. The incompatibility of the space with people's desires for the space seemed to underpin much of the dissonance in the discussion.

Mid-evening, one last blunt was passed in the vault. A circle of twenty or so people who hadn't already left sat in a circle and shared their feelings about the end of the space. A Plains Indian who was present sung a song and shared a prayer. Then, little by little, folks trickled out. Leaving

wasn't at all climactic. Some people, upon leaving, would see others still within the building and go back in. By 9 or so, everyone was out.

### Uncontrollability

The old Coast Commercial bank at 75 River is a fucking beast. The vision of an orderly community center was completely at odds with the unmanageably large space. The same unmanageability was also one of the most beautiful attributes of the space. Almost immediately, every person in the space felt an ownership of the occupation. Every day, one could hear others calling their friends and referring to “our occupation” or “the bank that we took over.” The sense of ownership over the space was contagious and took many forms, many of which were directly contradictory. Some felt the best thing to do was to hold meetings, some wanted to party, or to expropriate, or to vandalize. The root of many of the conflicts within the space was that everyone felt like the space was theirs to use as they wanted. Some people flipped out when others asked them not to smoke (cigarettes) in the main space, some flipped out when people didn't come to their meetings. An occasional individual showed amazing sangfroid amidst these conflicts.

### Self-Management

An occupier activity that was fairly unpopular but overly vocal was the management of other occupiers' activities. Obviously, it would be sophomoric to call every conversation about the boundaries or shape of the space “management.” Moreso, it was the tendency of some occupiers to loudly judge the activity of others in some vague moral terms of “rightness”, “wrongness”, or, worst of all, “down-ness.” This sort of behavior peaked early and had disappeared almost entirely by Friday.

### Vandalism

One occupier activity that was widely popular and loudly condemned was vandalizing the space. Many people didn't want their future community center vandalized. Other people had a quite natural reaction to a bank (the most common interface with the violence of capitalism)--the urge to fucking destroy it. If people ever chose to occupy a vacant prison, it would be a travesty if people didn't rip out all the bars and write slogans on the walls. Of course, in a nonviolent political sense, vandalism might be bad strategy. In a human sense, it is one of many beautiful reactions to the misery of the world. Also, it's fun.

### Forward!

The significance of the occupation is mostly unclear and individual analyses are widely divergent. Everyone, though, wanted 75River to in-

spire occupations in other locations. Some participants never wanted to set foot inside an occupied space again, many wanted to re-occupy immediately. Differences like this shouldn't be seen as frustrating to future occupations. Future occupations, here and elsewhere, will depend on the autonomous actions of committed individuals.

*Find a space. Find your friends. Do the damn thing.*

Philadelphia has a long history of political counter-culture with a sizable anarchist incursion beginning in the eighties. Many anarchist group houses were turned into owned houses over the next decade. West Philly has a reputation for having a culture of coops and coffee shops that predates by years the entry of these things in other towns. Philly is still affordable and has an activist culture but doesn't have a tremendous national presence in the anarchist space. It does have a long-running paper (*The Defenestrator*), a long-running anarchist bookshop (The Wooden Shoe), and anarchist spaces (the A-Space and LAVA).

The articles here include the first of several articles by Ben Webster from *Viewpoint* magazine, giving a great contextualization of the Occupy Philadelphia environment, a statement from the anarchists of Philadelphia to the General Assembly, and a declaration by Cindy Milstein (who we met in the history section), "We Are Our Own Demand."

# Philadelphia

# We are Anarchists

The following brief statement was read by a bunch of anarchists, with big smiles on their faces and a red & black flag in hand, at the general assembly (GA) on Thursday, October 13, 2011, at the occupation in Philly, using the “call and repeat” technique of the people’s mic. Several anarchists—who like hundreds of other people of diverse political persuasions, have been participating in numerous wonderful ways in the do-it-ourselves Philly occupation—took the initiative to craft this statement. The words were motivated by an electronic firestorm of derogatory attacks against anarchists—including specific anarchists by name—that same day, largely initiated by one person who had admin privileges on the Occupy Philly Web site, Facebook page, and Twitter account, and basically booted off all the other admin people. Fortunately, both online and especially in person, the divide-and-conquer tactic not only failed but instead actually backfired. The vast majority of folks at the occupation stood solidly behind anarchists and solidly behind the direct democracy that we’ve created together; if anything, the assault seemed to bring people together a bit more, and many folks said it made them curious to learn more about anarchism! Still, many anarchists at the Philly occupation also felt the need to proudly, loudly, fabulously, and strongly offer a public statement that evening. Here’s a text, culled from handwritten notes, so while it’s not exactly what was said, it’s a close approximation.

We are anarchists. We don’t speak for anyone else, just ourselves.

You’re right. We have an agenda: Freedom  
Solidarity  
Mutual aid  
Direct democracy

We’re people just like you. We’re parents, teachers, we walk your dog, we serve your coffee (etc).

We are not violent. *In fact, we’re critical of the most violent people here: the police.*

The kind of divisive tactics of fearmongering that took place today through rumors will shut down what all of us are doing! Groups will be targeted as bad people versus good occupiers on the basis of ideology, race, and so on.

*Anarchism is inherently against all forms of domination, so no, we’re not hijacking the Occupy Philly movement.*

We’re here talking about and trying to practice what it means to be anti-racist, anti-sexist, pro-labor, queer friendly, anti-classist, anti-ableist, anti-ageist, and so on.

We’re here with everyone else, practicing power-with not power-over.



And lastly, we really respect the directly democratic process. We use consensus-based decision making in many, if not all, of our own spaces and projects.

# Who Threw the Can of Green Paint?

by Ben Webster

## The First Two Weeks of Occupy Philadelphia

On the morning of October 14, one week into Occupy Philadelphia's encampment beside City Hall, someone emptied the contents of a paint can on the building's southwestern entrance. The unknown painter fled the scene, leaving behind a decidedly unsymbolic smear. Not of angry black or bloody red, but a smear of bland mint green. Police cordoned off the entrance, dismissing eager Occupy volunteers offering their assistance. A pressure cleaner quickly removed all traces of the deed.

This bizarre incident suggests much about Philadelphia's iteration of the Occupy phenomenon. Like other occupations, its porous boundaries integrate the protest site with the flows of the city. Participants, passers-by, police, and provocateurs move freely throughout, with the possibility of enriching or destabilizing the action; was our painter a police provocateur or a well-intentioned but strategically challenged participant? Both were considered in the aftermath.

This incident also suggests the ambiguity and contradiction in the political imagination of Occupy Philadelphia (OP). What constitutes meaningful action—a spectacular act of vandalism, the peaceful occupation of public property, or direct action on the horizon more confrontational and radical? There has been no shortage of activity—daily marches strike out to the usual targets—but as of yet no dramatic confrontations like those of Occupy Wall Street have occurred. This is the real significance of the green paint incident. That such a blatant act of vandalism against the seat of municipal power was shrugged off so quickly by occupiers and police alike indicates both the power and impotence of OP. On the one hand, there was no police advance under the pretext of this or any other number of small provocations—surely an index of our power. On the other hand, the incident is an index of the limited threat to capital's power

that OP poses, which is, as of yet, not enough to move the heavy hand of the state, a hand whose ruthless power has been amply shown in recent Philadelphia history, from the 1985 bombing of the MOVE house to the repression of protests against the 2000 Republican National Convention.

To use two familiar political concepts, Occupy Philadelphia is at once animated by both the spirit of the commons and of the strike. I do not wish to argue for the primacy of either approach or assert their incompatibility, but rather to frame the young history of OP as a state of tension between these two poles. As a participant in the occupation, I hope to describe from both experience and analysis the distinct character of the Occupy X movement in post-industrial, working-class Philadelphia, and its significance for the contemporary class struggle.

## Fighting City Hall

Occupy Philadelphia feels like a march, a strike, a commune, and a carnival. This variety of forms derives from the peculiarity of the tactic. One can participate in OP just by moving ordinary human activities—like sleeping, eating, socializing—to the occupation site. But “extraordinary” human activities—demonstrations, assemblies, teach-ins, movie screenings—have taken place there as well, creating a charged but uneven topography. The personal and the political do not yet coincide here, but they rub shoulders. A reading group on Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James’s *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community* next to campers drying their soggy socks on a clothes line; a college dude testing out pickup lines in earshot of the people of color caucus.

Philly’s unique Occupy identity has developed in large part due to a détente with the city and its police. Over one thousand people attended a raucous planning meeting two days before the occupation’s inauguration, a sizable show of force well covered by the local press. Of the two options available to the Philadelphia police—massive and very public repression or tacit cooperation—they opted for the latter. At 9am on October 6, hundreds assembled on the west side of City Hall and began constructing an encampment with relatively little interference. Although police are stationed visibly around the occupation and conduct walk-throughs both uniformed and plain-clothed, so far they’ve acted with restraint.

Activity in violation of city codes, including the construction of pallet structures for the homeless, has been permitted, emboldening some occupiers but creating an acrimonious internal debate. The hands-off approach thus far by the police confirms the liberal naiveté of some who, using the movement’s vocabulary, identify the police and city brass as part of “the 99%,” and therefore our allies. Indeed, Mayor Michael Nutter and Chief of Police Charles Ramsey made very public, very genial appear-

ances at OP in its first days. Others, from political acumen or personal experience, view the city's overtures with skepticism or overt antagonism. This debate came to a head with the early question posed to the general assembly of acquiring a permit, and has persisted to current discussions on how to respond to the city's evolving position. The GA voted for a permit after much discussion. Although unprecedented in modern Philadelphia history for the liberties and exemptions it grants to the occupation, the permit does bind OP in a legalistic stasis—official, even granted a welcome by the powers that be, but neutered of antagonism. To the outlaw, relations of power are crystal clear.

This Philly compromise distinguishes OP from its Occupy Wall Street (OWS) template. Freed from both the glare of the international media and the menace of overt police activity, OP turns inward. Freedom from repression in a far larger physical space than OWS offers opportunities to strengthen our position but also deepens the contradictions latent within the Occupy movement. And although the police aren't yet using pepper-spray and batons as they have against our New York comrades, this doesn't indicate a lack of police tactics to crush OP. Two strategies must be anticipated from our enemies in City Hall. One, the strategy of patience, in which the police bide their time and wait for either winter weather or the "tragedy of the commons" to disperse OP. Two, the exploitation of incidents of non-passivity at OP-associated direct actions to crack down on the encampment. Both approaches can be anticipated, and, with proper foresight, made to backfire as the attempts at repression in New York have.

## Strike and Commons

Philadelphia City Hall is monumental, the symbolic and geographical center of a battered but tenacious city. It is the second-tallest masonry building in the world, and in its heyday was a wonder of architectural achievement. The city's two subway lines intersect underneath it, sending continuous rumblings up to its cold stone plazas. Along its west side is Dilworth Plaza, a two block long concrete plaza cast in the austere style of 60s urban renewal. It is the habitual dwelling of a large homeless population, and is scheduled to be handed over shortly to a private development group for the building of a cafe, skating rink, and conceptual fountains. In autumn, the plaza is perpetually in the shadow of City Hall and the surrounding office buildings, and whipped by intense winds.

OP has adapted many organizational features of the Occupy movement. The general assembly, which meets daily at 7pm, is the primary forum for communication and decision-making. Working groups assure the daily reproduction of the occupation (food, medic, education, safety, facilitation, etc.) and its strategic thrust (direct action, media, messaging,

etc.). Over 300 tents have been erected across Dilworth Plaza, populated by various “tribes” of the political and non-political (“do you go to the general assembly?”), young and old, white and black, counter-cultural and normies. Things are typically quiet before noon, and afterwards through the evening swell with part-time participants who sleep at home, curiosity-seekers, representatives of various political organizations, cops, passers-by, and the media. OP benefits greatly from its location literally on top of the city’s busiest transit hub. High school students and commuters contribute to its open vitality; there is strength in numbers, even if they are anonymous and temporary. Despite its proximity to Philadelphia’s central business district, OP does not have the belly-of-the-beast feel of OWS; this is not a global city, and a proletarian mien contaminates even those quarters fashioned in the mold of neoliberal finance capital.

OP, like its peers, strives for horizontal organization—ideally all participants have an equal right to determine the course of the occupation. The space created at OP for experimentation in egalitarian decision-making should be applauded; the proliferation of such spaces is essential for the project of proletarian autonomy. However, since thus far participation in decision-making and execution is encouraged but not compulsory, I would suggest that in practice, power at OP is functioning along the lines of a kind of primitive syndicalism. Proposals submitted for approval at the general assembly must first pass through a daily co-committee meeting (“co-co”), composed of representatives of the various working groups. In effect, access to power at OP is streamlined by participation in a working group: in the micro-society of OP, the workers in the working groups that constitute its infrastructure constitute its sovereign power. Is this a positive model to acknowledge and propagate, or a model that will tend to produce a division among occupiers between more active participants and those who participate by simply showing up and remaining in the encampment? It should be noted that groups such as caucuses of anarchists and people of color, by dint of their organizational capacity or moral power, readily move to the center of OP’s sovereign power at parity with the working groups. The ambiguity of the situation lies in the question of access to power: should this be determined by capacity for organization or objective position within existing social hierarchies? How can the reproduction of these hierarchies be actively combated within the occupations?

Confusion, overlap, and frustration are tolerated out of necessity at OP by the proliferating working groups. Good faith and movement momentum—for the time—paper over the considerable challenges of constituting a micro-society from a milieu of strangers with varying experiences and backgrounds, excepting the occasional raised voices and scuffles.

How long can the momentum last? OP has passed through three overlapping stages: spectacle, organization, and critique/action. In the early

days in which spectacle dominated, everyone seemed to be filming everyone else with cellphone cameras, and the media swarmed over it all. When people gathered on the morning of October 6, they seemed uncertain what to do, which protest rituals to follow—who do I show my sign to? Is this a rally, a sit-in, or what? Who'll be the first to set up their tent, and where? The proliferation of image production coincided with a nervous amorphous mass, only vaguely aware of its commonality and power.

In the second stage, organization, the encampment's infrastructure was established. With the formation of working groups and procedures for communication and decision-making, the potential of the mass was harnessed. Dilworth Plaza was spatially delineated and mapped. Subgroups such as the people of color caucus and the wheelchair-dependent self-organized to identify and correct patterns of exclusion. Brief struggles for control of media and outreach efforts finally expelled a narcissistic individual who treated OP's Facebook page as a personal fiefdom. Internal organization is an ongoing process involving considerable experimentation, but the day to day reproduction of OP is secured for now, clearing the way for a deepening focus on critique and action.

In this current stage of critique and action, the conceptual parameters of commons and strike assume their power. Two questions, of demands and of acceptable direct action, predominate. It is widely accepted that OP can only maintain its momentum with a constant schedule of marches, teach-ins, and speakers. In this laboratory of praxis, in which the tactic of maintaining the occupation and the proliferation of collective critique are mutually reinforcing, the only thing lacking is a catalyst of true resistance. Marches have set out from OP to harass banks, visit predatory student loan sharks, tour shitty hospitals, and, arguably most successfully, chase Eric Cantor from a speaking engagement at the University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia PD dutifully block off intersections and escort the marchers to their target and back to the occupation. OP now ironically possesses the power to march unobstructed anywhere in the city it chooses, but seems to be running out of symbolically potent destinations. All dressed up with nowhere to go, obscure political differences take on a new importance. What if the police are our enemies precisely by acting like our most obliging friends? If the "1%" can so easily neutralize our efforts, why will they bother listening to our demands?

OP recasts Dilworth Plaza as a commons, shifting it from a nominally public space to an actively common one, collectively owned by those who rule to the extent that they actively participate. It is a space striving towards decommodification, where human relationships have more value than the exchange of money. Yet it also bears a resemblance to a strike, a collective suspension of normal activity leading to a confrontational moment of decision. As the weather turns, the quotidian quality of OP tends

towards the grim resolve of a picket line in the dead of winter. The two forms are not mutually exclusive; every commons must be defended, and every strike relies on a shared territory of experience, spatial or otherwise. The tendencies towards commons or strike do not neatly coincide with reformist or revolutionary perspectives. Yet the intersection of the forms makes for an unhappy tension, unable to develop with confidence in either direction. To expand and deepen the commons would be to hit too deeply and radically at the relations of private property and social reproduction for some participants. To adopt the antagonistic solidarity of the strike would be to abandon all pretenses of cooperation with the state and its agents, unacceptable for some. The project of OP, and the Occupy movement more broadly, is to synthesize the commons and the strike in a form appropriate to current relations of power and production.

## Recomposition

Proletarian combativeness in Philadelphia, the site of many proud clashes in the history of American class struggle, still exists, evidenced by a variety of expressions ranging from the victorious PASNAP [Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals—ed.] strike at Temple Hospital in 2010 to the auto-reduction action organized by teens at a local Sears store this past summer. OP is potentially a site of encounter and recomposition for a metropolitan working class changed by decades of deindustrialization, a swelling population of recent immigrants, and the combative youth subcultures of the flash mob and debt-ridden college grad variety. Although the process remains vague and preliminary, the occupation movement in Philly is a promising indicator of the working class's political recomposition.

Two of the largest populations in the OP encampment are the long-term homeless and the college student milieu. That they sleep willingly side by side for weeks at a time speaks to the novelty of the Occupy movement. The close, extended contact of occupiers tends to cut through prejudice and ideological mystification, even though the egalitarian ideal of the movement remains distant. Individuals and groups who may never have otherwise encountered each other in the huge city now find themselves sharing both an economic critique and a tent. Should a major work stoppage occur in the city soon—both the Verizon negotiations and a number of public sector contract negotiations remain unsettled—an encounter on a far larger scale is possible. The city's major unions have issued statements of support for the occupation, but a material mingling has the potential to change the constitution of both movements for the better and expand momentum beyond the focal encampment. OP, however, may in the long run be a better producer of subjectivities than of concrete demands, and this would not be a fault.

An important subjectivity crystallizing in the Occupy movement is similar to the driving force behind the global originators of the occupation concept in Spain, Egypt, and Tunisia: young, educated, and downwardly mobile workers. Many recent graduates or dropouts of local universities like Temple and the University of Pennsylvania provide a motive force behind OP's working groups, experiencing a mode of collective struggle quite different from managed, predictable, campus "activism." As comrades in California noted during the university occupations there in fall 2009, the practice of occupying tends to dissolve outdated distinctions like that between "workers" and "students." A tantalizing possibility begging more research is the connection between OP's site above a transit hub, and the highly mobile nature of this sector, moving around the city at odd hours between multiple part-time jobs, casual work, and classes. Earlier cycles of struggles in Philly, from the post-New Left Movement for a New Society in the 1970s to the clashes at the 2000 RNC, bequeathed long-lasting infrastructures of radical institutions and experience. Will OP be the coming-out party for a new cycle or just a flash in the pan?

## Think Locally?

OP clearly owes its inspiration to Occupy Wall Street, encamped just two hours up the New Jersey Turnpike. The proximity of the two cities allowed many Philly organizers to visit OWS before launching OP, taking note of its organizational model and learning from its miscues. As one of the largest occupations in the country as of yet spared overt police repression, OP is both a significant model for the national movement and something of an aberration. Among occupiers, the relationship of OP to the movement remains uncertain, bespeaking a larger ambiguity towards the global, national, and local contexts of the crisis. Material efforts have been made to share resources with OWS, and solidarity actions with comrades attacked by police in Oakland and Atlanta are under discussion.

The political imaginary of OP remains largely stuck at the national level. Rhetoric of the 99%, Wall Street, and corporate taxes implicitly locates the current social and economic crises within national borders. Yet these crises have international causes and implications, and resistance in the form of occupations has likewise been a global phenomenon. As the calls for unified Occupy X demands increases, a real danger exists both in ignoring the global character of capital and our struggles, and in failing to connect Occupy's critiques with local conditions and local grievances.

A faction within OP seized an early opportunity to advance long-standing local grievances and make demands of the city. After receiving a letter from the city government which made several demands of OP (dismantle fire hazards, control open urination, etc.), they refused a paternalistic relationship and in turn advanced several demands at the GA that OP should



make in response. One of these included a repeal of Philadelphia's racist youth curfew law. Conveniently up for a vote of extension steps away in City Hall, the law was initially passed to kill off the flash mobs that once rocked the city. Fighting a law that intentionally seeks to fracture, discipline, and manage specific layers of the working class would go a long way to reconnecting with those sectors that are still underrepresented at OP.

This general effort was accompanied by distribution of an excellent summary of recent local struggles, entitled "The Mayor and Police Are not Our Friends!" Spearheaded largely by anarchists (who have been the convenient targets of an ongoing red-baiting campaign), this effort has brilliantly changed the inflection of OP, focusing attention on local communities already in struggle. A predictable backlash followed, with many claiming that linking the occupation with struggles around the curfew and police brutality diluted our message and weakened public support.

This backlash escalated when fifteen occupiers were arrested in front of Philadelphia PD headquarters on the national October 22 day of protest against police brutality. Although the efficacy of their non-violent civil disobedience tactics is debatable (all blocked a street overnight, refusing repeated police orders to disperse), the reality of police brutality in Philly is not. The first arrests of OP were denounced by many who sought to distance the activities at City Hall from those which, pushed outward by the occupation's momentum, occurred elsewhere in the city. Should this failure of solidarity and centrifugal political imagination continue, OP will likely die a wintry death shivering in the shadows of Center City.

The October 22 arrests and the emergence of a new ultimatum from the city throw the future of OP into question. After granting an open-ended permit to the occupation, with no stated end date, the city announced November 15 as the first day of the renovation of Dilworth Plaza. This renovation includes the total reconstruction of the plaza by a private company bearing a 30-year lease, which will install an ice-skating rink and chic cafe, obviously inspired by Manhattan tourist geographies. Of course, the renovation will entail fencing off the plaza, expelling not only the occupation, but also the homeless who use it as a long-term home. So the date has been set for confrontation. Whether the city backs down, OP relocates, or is forcibly expelled, is uncertain. How OP decides to act against this threat will be a major indicator of the movement's resolve and potential.

A far larger challenge, however, is the winter weather. The last two Philadelphia winters have been among the harshest on record. Simply put, OP cannot withstand a northeastern winter at its current size, and should not try to. Discouraged dispersion when the temperature dips is the worst possible outcome, and providing a spectacle of personal suffering to the media through it all is a terrible tactic. Occupations have captured the imagination of the world, but fetishizing the tactic is a strategic blunder.



The only limit to continuing and growing this nascent movement is our imagination. Our conversations and GAs must move, and quickly, to the discussion of new tactics—occupying abandoned buildings (of no short supply in Philly), subversive organizing in our schools and workplaces, strengthening of the local struggles our anarchist comrades have drawn attention to—action, education, and theorizing without a central encampment if need be. GAs can continue indoors, marches and direct action can expand throughout the city, and of course hardcore occupiers can continue outside if they wish. This strategic retreat is actually an advance across the entirety of the social terrain—but one that will require defying the logic of media representation and the spectacle of contemporary politics.

In one form or the other, we can be optimistic that Occupy Philadelphia will inspire a winter of discontent in the City of Brotherly Love. Come spring, we can reoccupy not only Dilworth Plaza, but Rittenhouse Square, Love Park, Franklin Parkway, and—why not—Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell, too.

## We Are Our Own Demand

by Cindy Milstein

*Occupation in Philly, Day 16 (October 21)*

Over the past few days, numerous people from across the political spectrum, at this and other occupations, have basically told me the same thing: “I’m feeling more alive than I have in years.” They nearly all remarked that they became disillusioned with politics at some point and stopped doing much of anything. They “disappeared” into private life, zoning out, often grappling with depression and/or isolation, becoming cranky, or misdirecting their anger toward friends. Or, alternatively, they had never done much of anything political at all; they had never cared one whit about politics. In every case, each person’s story of becoming reengaged had nothing to do with the messages, slogans, protests, or marches of this occupation movement; instead, it had everything to do with moments of self-activity with others. And maybe even more striking to me is that among those long experienced in collective projects and processes, the reawakening seems especially strong, as if they’d forgotten or almost never really believed in the power of their own ideals.

Right after Mubarak stepped down in Egypt, after a mere eighteen days of people building their own city in a square—a city within a city—I wrote a piece called “Waking to Revolution” for a collaboration picture-essay book project I’m working on with Erik Ruin. A few of the lines seem to fit here:

*I've long believed that self-organization works—better than  
any other form.  
That people, all of us, can and want to self-determine.  
That we can and want to self-govern, guided by dignity and  
even love.  
But what I realized that morning was, deep down,  
I had also come not to believe it.  
Since utopian notions are negated by almost everything to-  
day,  
I had unconsciously lost that trust.  
The uprising began with a surprise.  
As if from nowhere, overnight, people discovered their collec-  
tive strength.  
A euphoric self-confidence took hold.  
This jolted other people—like me—to recall that possibility  
begets possibility.*

There is something wholly different here in this “occupy everything, together” experience, which began with the surprise of Occupy Wall Street and its near-contentless, carnivalesque spectacle. The lack of a message or coherent messages, and/or sheer volume of utterly contradictory messages, along with the relatively vacuous and even problematic “occupy” and especially “99%” slogans, and the often-absurd hodgepodge of political (and sometimes nonpolitical) participants coupled with a widespread newness to politics and way-too-friendly attitude toward police all appeared antithetical to a movement, much less one with demands, dreams, or solutions. And as usual, those with massive platforms to shape public discourse toss out the annoying and predictable “But what do they want?” This, in turn, has thrown some occupiers into a frenzy of wanting or needing to find “the message”—so far to little avail. Frequently, those who want to hammer out a message most are those who are used to either trying to control circumstances (these seem to be few in number, since at least in Philly, most efforts at containing this chaotic encampment meet with kind resistance), or those who are used to bringing their ideologies, party or organizational line, or ethical imperatives to bear on every situation or movement. This includes those of us who identify, as I do, as anarchists, and in many cities, anarchists were either latecomers because of this (tossing out the standard dis, “They’re just liberals”) or are largely uninterested in the occupations, because they aren’t leading with a distinctly radical (or distinctly anything) politics.

I admit to being just as skeptical, just as perplexed, and indeed just as thrown off guard by Occupy Wall Street and the rolling waves of occupa-

tions soon after. But from the first minute I stepped foot on that plaza a couple blocks from the actual Wall Street, what oddly compelled me was that I didn't get it. No one there seemed to get it. I asked person after person why they were there, why they had come, and most could only find the vaguest of words—an intuition, something just brought them, they simply decided to check it out. This isn't the stuff of grand revolutions, much less movements. I guess I'm so used to leading with ideas, with aspirations, as part of the politics I do with others, that I couldn't see—nor seemingly, could the occupiers understand it either—why the hell people were occupying, were sleeping on concrete, through rain, without tents. This occupy everything business, that seems to be everyone and anyone's business, has humbled me; has changed the way I understand social transformation to happen, by and with whom, and from what demands or principles. No manifesto here—and thank goodness; just messiness, misfits, and mayhem, and out of it all a meaning of such depth that, well, I continue to marvel at it, even if it still seems so schizophrenic and fragile.

Two and even three years ago, a relatively small band of anarchist insurrection, too, wanted to occupy everything and “demand nothing,” but their lack of demands emerged out of a critique of hierarchy in general and capitalism in particular: we won't ask power-from-above to give us anything, whether demands or what we choose to occupy; we'll occupy spaces, sans permission, and sans demands, we'll negate everything, and see what people fill these spaces with; find your friends; build your commune; communize!

But the anarchist insurrectionists had it wrong, much as I also hold to a critique of hierarchy and capitalism, and much as I think “anarchism” as a way to describe a new form of social organization based on nonhierarchical relations and structures is right. It wasn't about finding your like-minded friends and building a commune with them from a particular critique. It is, it seems, about being tossed together willy-nilly with all manner of folks, most of whom don't have a critique of hierarchy or capitalism, on a corporate-owned plaza (with the owner's permission!) or, in Philly's case, a municipal plaza (with the city begging us to accept its permit!). Within this panoply of people, there are tales galore of hardship, loss, suffering, oppression, and underlying them all is a sense of being utterly alone and powerless, like the walking dead, unseen and unheard and unacknowledged.

Lately, as I noted above, the story I keep hearing, again and again, isn't one of loss. It's one of what we've found: “I feel alive for the first time in years.” Or more poignantly, “I feel alive for the first time ever.” Each tale begins with the experience of participating in a general assembly or a working group for the first time. It isn't always a picture-perfect experience. Invariably, though, the narratives involve a tumble of words—

far more articulate, animated, and inspiring than those used to convey that same person's "message" or "demand"—describing that moment of awakening, that instance of qualitative engagement in shaping, building, indeed constituting this do-it-ourselves encampment roughly stitched together like some crazy quilt of humanity with things like cardboard, tarps, pallets, duct tape, and string. It's the intense aliveness that seems to be demanding the impossible, more than any revolutionary ever could.

Without anyone putting it into words, or crafting something like a sound bite, status update, or slogan, our occupations have birthed what no one saw coming, in all its rich potential: our doing is our demand; our demand is in the doing. We've constituted this space of possibility out of necessity. Suddenly, many diverse and seemingly mismatched people are stuck together, for better and worse, to wait out the pundits, politicians, and police, or even more mundane, without quite knowing why, to wait. Because things have gotten so untenable, so unlivable, for so many of us—in our varied, differentiated ways—that waiting somehow seems preferable to standing still in the deadness of this present historical moment. But we didn't wait. We couldn't. We needed food, shelter, a sense of safety, fun, media, spaces for kids, art, education, health care—everything we increasingly need and can't get in the world as it is. We had to self-organize in this commons that we found ourselves in, and we had to suddenly start negotiating a way forward, together, almost without a shared "forward" in mind. A critique, a vision, messages, principles, and maybe even forethought and aims—much as this goes against all I believe—all would have offered the same deadness and disempowerment of daily life. The fact that we are collectively discovering how to birth possibilities, with an openness forced on us all by our differences, coupled with a strange "waiting for Godot" air about the occupations, perhaps has allowed for an experimentation that no one could have predicted. That can't fit on a banner or a leftover-pizza-box sign or Facebook page.

People, inside and outside our occupations, keep repeating that we don't have anything unifying us, that we don't have a message. But we're living our message—the forms of living life that we're daily expanding, daily deciding for ourselves, are pointing beyond capitalism, beyond states, beyond hierarchy, even if most people still have no language for that. Words—and again, this too goes against what I believe—almost don't matter. It's how we're behaving, together and toward each other. Badly at times. With much difficulty. Stumbling and hurting and falling over each other. But also good at many other times. With many successes and innovations, supporting and caring for and sticking by each other.

This evening, a bunch of well-heeled, smug, condescending elites gathered in City Hall to show a fancy PowerPoint presentation of a \$50 million renovation of the very plaza that we're occupying—a symbolic

slap in the face to most Philly residents. We weren't supposed to be there, but we crashed the party. A whole bunch of us. More of us than them. They talked about how they were dramatically enhancing the city center with this hefty price-tag of a privatized public-space project, with things like a cafe, free movies, and architecture that—by law—had to contrast with the historic structure of City Hall. Right where their cafe is supposed to go now sits our food tents, providing three meals a day and snacks for free to hundreds of people, including many without homes. We air free movies, and sometimes two at a time, many nights. And our architecture of encampment is a beautiful contrast to City Hall! One after another, occupiers spoke with eloquence—frequently, I suspect, a newfound eloquence, from the practice we're getting in our general assembly—about all the absurdities of this project, especially its many-million-dollar fountain with lights and smoke—the smoke and mirrors of capital gone mad.

We then trooped outside, past security guards and police and barriers, walking back around to our side of City Hall plaza, to join our fellow assortment of occupiers for our evening's general assembly, already in progress, and this night, it felt like an exuberant celebration of our self-empowerment, our bringing this space, this place, and ourselves to life.

There's no better demand! And no better way of us demanding the impossible than doing what seemed impossible a little over two weeks ago at this occupation in Philly: "That we can and want to self-govern, guided by dignity and even love."

Denver has a recently active anarchist community with a multi-use space (27 Social Centre), a very active Anarchist Black Cross (a prisoner support group), and a street medic group. The articles selected include one from the Ignite! newspaper (a monthly anarchist paper from Denver) on the origins of the local Occupy, another article from the local Indymedia about the police violence that occurred during the eviction of the occupation, and finally an article from the Denver ABC explaining why they can no longer support the local Occupy. This explains why the Occupy Movement has been so complicated and exhilarating for anarchists everywhere.

# Denver

# #OccupyWallStreet Begets #OccupyDenver

by Ignite! Collective

The reports from New York City are exciting. A loosely organized coalition of leftists, hackers, and anti-capitalists calling themselves the “99%ers” have literally occupied parts of the financial district, the heart of globalized capitalism. The protest has been going for days at the time of this writing.

More than a hundred arrests have been reported and police used mace during scuffles. Many of the demonstrators are participating in a mass action for the first time, and evidently were caught off guard by the standardized brutality of crowd control police. The hivemind hacker collective Anonymous identified a police officer that dispensed mace on a peaceful crowd as Anthony Bologna, an officer who was named in a wrongful arrest lawsuit after the 2004 RNC demonstrations. Many participants are lamenting a block in communications from Twitter, which is keeping the hashtags #occupywallstreet, #takewallstreet and others from “trending.”

The protest has spawned numerous solidarity demonstrations in other cities, including Chicago, Portland, Seattle, San Francisco, Tulsa, and now it has spread to Denver. Protesters have gathered in front of the capitol building since Saturday the 24<sup>th</sup>, although so far a camp has not been set up. Largely due to concerns that a “peaceful” climate from the police would change once demonstrators violated Denver’s city code for sleeping outdoors, the protest has so far not emulated other cities’ examples of an occupation.

According to information sent to Ignite!’s twitter feed on the 24<sup>th</sup>, nearly forty protesters showed up on Saturday. A general assembly was due to be held on Tuesday the 27<sup>th</sup> at 7pm.

Online proponents of the protest claiming to be on the ground stated that more people need to show up and that donations are appreciated. We will bring more coverage of the protest as we hear news. Be sure to follow us on twitter @ignite\_denver.

# Eyewitness Testimony from Police Aggression in Denver (Oct 29th)

by anonymous

## What REALLY Happened:

Much of what has been said and written about the police crack down of Saturday night has been speculation, misinterpretation, patently false, and/or abject lies. For this reason I offer this first hand account of the initial escalation at the park. It should be said that I do not identify as a member of Occupy Denver, nor do I agree with many of its goals, nor its constant self policing and paranoia. I am merely an individual who resides in and loves the city of Denver, a city slipping rapidly into a police state, home of the most brutal police force in the states, who regularly murder and assault members of this community, yet who are so actively and shamelessly welcomed into Occupy Denver's "99%". I do not strictly agree with or adhere to an explicitly nonviolent philosophy, but I am well versed in its principles. To stand by passively and watch one's friends or community members be brutalized by a pile of state sanctioned maniacs without intervening is not nonviolent. Nor is it violent to attempt to stop such an assault by physically restraining the attacking cop for long enough for the victim to get out of harm's way. And all over a few tents. You've referred to us as violent, as provocateurs, and as agent plants for getting beat up trying to get one another out of the police melee. We've been apologized for and called "marginal at best," simply for dreaming of holding our ground in a public space against a fascist state apparatus. Everyone has their own perspective, their own experience, and their own version of what went down that afternoon; this one is mine.

As a witness in the thick of the initial onslaught, what happened was this (this is how things got crazy, and got crazy fast): after an invigorating march through the streets of downtown Denver, during which some took the opportunity to throw a kickass roving dance party, the crowd of over one thousand arrived at the capitol building feeling empowered. Many groups of marchers argued over slogans viewed by some as overly inflammatory, gradually the crowd lost steam, and occupying the capitol steps seemed less and less important as riot cops flooded the scene heavily armed with high powered rifles. Some danced their way down the steps, across the street, and back into the park. After standing around for some time, wondering what comes next, some took the initiative to set up tents on the lawn, the temporary structures having been a potent point of symbolic contention during the weeks-long "occupation".

Moments into the setting up of tents, a mass of over a dozen riot cops,



led by a uniformed officer named Henning, approached a young woman dressed in all black setting up a tent. Henning grabbed one end of the tent and pulled, but at the other end of the tent the woman's wrist became entangled with a tent strap, unable to let go. Henning viewed this as resistance and quickly tackled the woman. Henning and at least two riot cops began applying pain compliance holds and beating the woman with clubs, Henning eventually wrapping a tent around the woman's head and wrenching back on it. At this point, an individual who appeared to share deep affinity with this woman dove through a line of riot cops and tackled one of the attacking officers in a clear attempt to stop the relentless assault. The intervening individual was maced and beaten, but appeared to have narrowly evaded arrest.

Several people attempted to get this woman out of harm's way, at which point Henning and other officers began to brutalize her more intensely. The crowd was outraged, and at least one other person was on the ground undergoing similar abuse, and the situation continued to escalate. At this point, the DPD unloaded countless clips of rubber bullets and/or pepper spray bullets, and cans of mace into the crowd of shocked onlookers. A few people acted upon an understandable reflex to defend themselves—albeit mildly—but most concentrated on getting themselves and others out of the line of fire of the rampaging police. Several people were shot in the face with rubber bullets and/or pepper bullets, dozens were maced, one man attempting to video was shot out of a tree, one had his feet or ankles run over by a motorcycle cop while being treated by a medic, and several were restrained and arrested.

All of these individuals were rejected by Occupy Denver as violent provocateurs. At this point, perhaps an hour into the initial police drive, the observer had been maced several times and clubbed, and was unable to continue observation. Most of those rejected by the movement in Denver are pooled into the box of the poorly understood label of “anarchist” by a confused and privileged few, who at the same time actively perpetuate a movement originally catalyzed by anarchists, and who unconsciously (attempt to) employ organizational methods like consensus that could, to some degree, be accurately labeled as “anarchist”.

Despite this, in Denver, anarchists have unwillingly taken on the role of scapegoat, while simultaneously providing the only legal support infrastructure for Occupy Denver arrestees to date. I remain unamused in the face of such irony. Crack downs of this variety are occurring from coast to coast, yet in Denver some manage to still view these assaults as a result of provocation, rather than clear and unprovoked aggression of the state.

Police continually crack down against an unruly population which is actively claiming and defining its own rights, rather than acquiescing to those few rights awarded to us for staying in line amid the exploitation of

our everyday lives. Many of us fail to see these instances of state aggression as the acts of war they are. This economic depression is not merely a product of greed; it is a worldwide systemic failure. The state understands this, and has been mobilizing its troops. This is not just paranoid rhetoric; political discourse for security (not what they show you on the news, but the academic papers they read and write) has revolved around the transformation of police units into an urban warfare-ready outfit for at least the last decade. One day, this broad scale collapse will affect Denver as much as it affects most other post-industrial cities, beyond just the price of a gallon of gas. Sooner or later, the fall of this economic paradigm will reach a critical point of public outrage, and when it does, we'll take the streets and we'll keep them. Perhaps it already has. The state is preparing for Civil War, each escalation on their part is further preparation, though what they fail to realize is that in their preparations, they will only trigger the very thing they anticipate. These are the seeds of insurrection. Very few people actually want to be engaged in this kind of conflict, in all honesty this level of police violence is horrifying. What we have to understand, however, is that if we succeed in threatening real systemic change to any extent, they'll come for us again, harder and harder every time. Who of us will be around until victory?

# Denver ABC Statement on Occupy Denver

by Denver ABC

Over the past few months, Denver ABC has devoted a tremendous amount of resources and energy to Occupy Denver. Our collective has staffed a 24/7 legal line, coordinated the bailing out of almost one hundred demonstrators arrested over the last two months, and been onsite CopWatch and Street Medics. We've made an earnest and largely successful effort to get supporters into the courtrooms for nearly every hearing and court appearance featuring our arrested comrades. All this has been juggled with attending the weekly marches and adding our spirit to the marches and General Assemblies as one portion of the 99%.

As of December 4, our collective has decided to no longer support Occupy Denver. This means we will not be providing our legal line for Occupy actions; fundraising for the movement; encouraging our members, friends and allies to get involved; or serving roles such as CopWatch and Medics. This is in solidarity and coordination with other ally formations such as West Denver CopWatch and the Colorado Street Medics.

We want to be clear that our decision is not based on a generalized, absolute rejection of everyone involved in Occupy Denver. We are grateful for many relationships of solidarity that we have made through our work with OD and are confident those relationships will continue to blossom. Our commitments to the OD arrestees that we have been supporting still remain as well.

Our decision is based on festering frustrations with a small sector of OD who continue to marginalize, silence, and threaten our communities and ally communities. Despite the hard work of many involved in OD, its political platform continues to be framed by and for economically privileged, hyper-nationalist white heterosexual males. Experiences of race, gender, class, nationality, immigration status, and a multitude of other identities continue to be buried underneath the dominant “We are the 99%” narrative.

Attempts to dislodge the monopolizing of space in OD have been consistently met with threats, slander, snitch-jacketing, and other tactics of intimidation. From the start, despite our un-flinching support, our collective and other allies have been called everything from agent provocateurs to femi-nazis to pedophiles. The culminating event for us took place during a recent march. A collective member spoke up during an open mic time to challenge the assumption of a unified “99%” by bringing attention to the marginalization of reproductive rights taking place at the same time open racism was being accepted in the crowd. The response of We Are Change was to instigate a chant that drowned out the only woman to speak at the open mic and insinuate she was a CIA agent. As a collective committed to grassroots organizing in Denver and reminded daily of the horrors of the FBI’s COINTEL Program through our support of political prisoners, we cannot take such behavior lightly.

On top of the concerns listed above, our work with OD has been a tremendous resource drain. Exacerbating this has been a recent wave of arrestees failing to appear in court, essentially hemorrhaging the tremendous amount of fundraising that has taken place and putting our collective in a precarious financial state. After much difficult reflection we came to the realization that we can and must use our limited resources in more radical, effective ways.

There is a lot about the Occupy movement that we find inspiring. The Oakland General Strike had many of us smiling for days. In New York, peo-

ple are taking over foreclosed houses, resisting evictions and defending them from police aggression. In DC, a house was built in a park and fought for. Chapel Hill, Seattle, and Santa Cruz saw temporary autonomous zones established within long-abandoned structures. We hope that our decision is able to open up more room to support movements we are proud of, such as these.

In revolutionary spirit, the Denver Anarchist Black Cross

Below is breakdown of our legal support fund

Funds received: \$16,531

Funds used:        Bonds – \$14,210  
                          Jail Phone Fund – \$1660  
                          Food/supplies for released arrestees, legal line – \$237  
                          Commissary for long term arrestees – \$315  
                          Total – \$16512  
                          Remainder: +\$19

Debt:                Cancelled bonds (Failure to appears, etc) – \$8100  
                          Loans – \$460  
                          Total – \$8560  
                          Total DEBT – \$8541

The anarchist scene in St Louis has some similarities to the one in Philadelphia, in that it's mostly based out of houses where people live together; rather than community social spaces or music scenes (although St Louis trails Philly by a couple of decades). Many anarchists live in Saint Louis but are by and large under the radar. There aren't nearly as many long-time institutions (publications, etc) as there are on the coasts. There is a bakery and a social center—neither exclusively anarchist.

# St Louis

# Introduction

by anonymous

Both of the following texts were written and distributed at the St. Louis occupation in early October. "Are We an Occupation or Just a Gathering" came on the heels of several situations where anarchists and anti-authoritarians found themselves defending, in both heated debate and calm dialogue, their ideologies from other occupiers. These conversations were both informal and structured and were mainly centered around concepts of violence and non-violence.

It was a sudden burst of energy that brought about the "are we an occupation" text. At the time, there wasn't the overwhelming amount of pieces written by and about the occupation movement that we see now. Finding something written from an anarchist perspective for other occupiers was not as easy as it is today. It was purposely written from the idea that anarchists were in fact occupiers as well and did not need to see themselves as outside of this growing movement. Using the term "we" was both an inclusive literary device and was true for the moment, some of us really felt that it was "we." A lot has happened since those first weeks and the terms of our engagement have become more problematic. Differences in tactics and critique have made the idea of a body moving as one unit much less palpable. The gestures towards "a movement of movements" hit blocks (pun!) along the way as the encampment became more administrated and officious.

This idea of inclusion was also written into the "Police are the tool of the 1%" text. This was a smaller handbill also written with the intention of being handed out to other occupiers. At the time this was written, few occupations had had major clashes with law enforcement. New York was the main exception to this: they had already become media sensations because of pepper spray and a failed attempt to cross the Brooklyn Bridge. The St. Louis police department had taken, and in many ways continues to take a "we're your friends and we're on your side" stance with the occupation. Because of this, there was little to no room for critical dialogue about police and policing. This handout was written in hopes of sparking some debate between those who would call the police a part of "us" and those who see their true brutality. It directly references terms and ideology that could be heard daily at the encampment, in the hopes of breaking down some of the rhetoric clouding more intense realities regarding the SLPD and law enforcement everywhere.

The direct effect of these or any other texts is difficult to discern. There is also a danger in trying to synthesize results out of a situation

that has not yet ended. Social movements, which these occupations are a part of, rarely cease to exist in some form. Therefore reflecting on our role as anarchists is somewhat premature. However, there are certainly momentary notes that could be taken about the usefulness of these two pieces in particular.

A possible failing of both these texts was their lack of critique around the 99% ideology. Both use the term in an effort to continue a catchall tone. The ideas brought forward in these writings were somewhat controversial, and could have been easily dismissed as negative anarchist propaganda or as people trying to “highjack” a movement. While those accusations are and were outlandish, they could have easily stymied conversations. It was out of these concerns that the 99% rhetoric slipped in. At the time, it was unclear how pervasive and damaging the furtherance of that ideology would be.

Texts in general would have been nothing if it weren't for the direct participation in the occupation by anarchists. Our successes in the streets or in the long term friendships we have made can be mainly attributed to our visibility at the occupation. Through our involvement in assemblies, planning of events, and actions, as well as our help with infrastructure, we remained active participants in that location up until the evictions in November.

# Are We An Occupation or Just a Gathering

by anonymous

*Wall Street Protesters, Occupying Till Whenever — NYT headline*

The “Occupy Wall St.” model has done what many have tried and failed at, it has pushed past the apathy and created a venue for possibility. In cities and towns across the country people are finding one another in situations few ever dared to venture into before. Meetings are being held, food shared and ideas discussed. But as one participant put it: “The fuzzy ultra-left ideal about forging new kinds of relationships through struggle and finding each other and such can't just be about meeting in space and time, otherwise we could start a bowling league and be done with it.” What the gatherings themselves lack is a coherent substance, a sense of self-understanding. Towards this end, we raise the following questions.

### Are We An Occupation or Just a Gathering

The term occupation is often associated with a few things, namely the idea of disruption of or interference with the flow of goods or capital. When you ask for permission, when you seek a permit, the “occupations” become camping and the term becomes a catch phrase.

The original encampment, which has spawned many franchises in its wake, has been likened to other movements from around the globe, most notably the Tahrir Square occupations this past January. The major differences between the movement currently emerging in the US and those of the square occupations throughout Northern Africa and Europe is strength. It was not merely the fact that 50,000 people took over Tahrir Square, it was the fact that they would not be forced to leave that made the difference. As a movement they were ready to physically defend the areas they had liberated and attack those trying to destroy it. By deciding on a strategy of “non-violence,” we have cut our legs out from under ourselves. In New York City, they do not hold Zuccotti Park—it is given to them under police supervision, and it will be taken away just as easily when the moment is deemed appropriate, i.e. when the police and the mayor have had enough.

When the Occupy Wall St. protesters took their message outside of the NYPD-contained area they were attacked. Over eighty arrests occurred when the crowd marched near Union Square. When they tried to cross the Brooklyn Bridge hundreds were detained and received citations. While the numbers swelled after those attacks, we missed a chance to sway the balance of power for just a moment.

That could change if the parameters of conflict were widened, if new avenues were opened to the possibility of physically holding space, not negotiating for its rental. Our individual refusals are small but collectively they are one of the last and strongest weapons we can wield together.

### Are We Anti-Capitalists or Just Anti-Corporations

There is a difference between being anti-capitalist and being against corporations, or “corporate greed” as some have chosen to describe it. Anti-capitalists reach for a world free of the kinds of social relationships that require domination. Landlords and tenants; bosses and workers; police and prisoners. These are relationships inherent to a capitalist system and to the democracy we live under. It is not indicative of a “broken” system for unemployment rates to soar, inflation to reign, and wages to continually drop. The money cannot balance out, congress cannot legislate its way to equality. From where we all sit now, the accumulation of wealth or personal freedom is done on the back of someone else or at our own expense.

Though it may have acquired new forms, none of the poverty or exploitation we are protesting is unique to our modern age of corporate



dominance. Regulating or taxing corporations will not come close to solving these problems, because these institutions are only one part of the vast structure of social relationships called State and Capital.

The future is wretched and marked with the poverty we all feel today. This in and of itself is a cause for indignation. When that rage turns towards petitioning congress for a brighter tomorrow or demanding accountability of corporations, we have already lost.

### The Police are Not Our Friends!

Capitalism, as a system, is based on a series of relationships between those who have power and those who do not. The police, whether they are a beat cop, a detective, or the Chief act as the enforcers of this economic system. They stand between us and the food we need to survive. They evict us from the homes we can no longer afford. Their job is to enforce the laws of capital, the ones created not to keep us safe but to protect capital and ensure the system works as smoothly as it can.

The police who enter our liberated zones, our occupations, are doing so as agents of the State. As individuals they may have families and problems. They may hate their jobs just like the rest of us, but that does not mean they will not do them. If we are to stand together as the proposed 99% we can not allow the thugs and mercenaries of the 1% to pierce our spaces.

### “Police Are the Tool of the 1%”

The Police might just be doing their job when they eventually evict us from the plaza, but they do in fact have a choice, just like we have a choice in, say, whether to call in sick for work or not. A question we should ask is: if the Police really were part of the 99%, if they were really with us, then why would they evict us? Why would they continue to just “do their job”?

The Police help the banks evict us from our foreclosed homes every day; if they really are with us in this struggle, then why don't they stop? This struggle against corporate greed requires people giving up roles (such as the police) that are needed to lubricate the nuts and bolts that keep the status quo. This would mean for them to not follow orders from their superiors, this would mean no longer being police.

The Police might be blue-collar or part of the “99%,” but they enforce the laws that keep the divide between the rich and the poor intact. The police are the protectors of the 1%. The police are the ones firing tear gas and rubber bullets whenever a demonstration gets out of hand. They are the ones who stand between every hungry person and the grocery shelves stocked with food, between every homeless person and the buildings standing empty, between every immigrant and her family. The police are the ones who beat Occupy Wall St. protesters, who gunned down Sean Bell and Oscar Grant, and who murdered Fred Hampton in his bed.

They are the ones who once enforced segregation in the United States and who back the bosses and the 1% in every strike.

The Police as an institution, that is an extension of the 1%, are fundamentally and very concretely in the way of what we really want: the end of a society based on class divisions. The downtown police officers might be the nicest people in the world, but they will still be the ones evicting us from the plaza. They are still part of that same extension.

This means they're not to be trusted by any of us involved in the occupation.

## NI17

by anonymous

November 17<sup>th</sup> holds as a special place in the international fight against domination and exploitation. It's not just a single day of action against austerity or even simply a reference to Mohamed Bouazizi's dramatic act of self-immolation.

In 1973, Greece was rocked by a revolt against the military dictatorship then in power. The rebellion, which centered around the occupation of the Athens Polytechnic campus, involved thousands of students, workers, and young people. On November 17, 1973 the military junta invaded the occupation with tanks and soldiers resulting in the deaths of 24 rebels including one five-year-old child. Although Greece was still ruled by dictatorship until 1974, November 17<sup>th</sup> remains as a reference point to remember the Athens Polytechnic Uprising and the resistance against the dictatorship. In Greece, the day is a recognized holiday for all students and a focal point for resistance to the dictatorship of capitalism.

It should be clear that long before the current #Occupy movement, people around the world have waged a fierce struggle against capitalism and all those who seek to exploit and rule over us. Occupy Wall Street and Occupy STL do not occupy new terrain when it comes to struggle. They take much of their steam from the past and we should recognize this fact, but also critically learn from the experience of these historical movements. There have always been those who suffer the onslaught of a society based on class struggle. There have always been those who have resisted and they have a story that we can draw from.

In St. Louis, Missouri on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011 there was an unpermitted march through the streets to an abandoned municipal court building, empty since 2002. This took place after a scheduled union march earlier in the day, which had left many people frustrated by its tameness.

Especially troubling was the presence of protest marshals in green neon vests comprised of SEIU (Service Employees International Union), #Occupy and Communist Party USA members. Without much provocation, these “peace police” pointed out individuals within the march to the real police whenever they attempted to step outside the corral formed by the neon vests. When confronted on this, some marshals attempted to use the tactic of Non-Violent Communication<sup>(tm)</sup> as a way to quell any perfectly justifiable anger and rage. Other marshals resorted to dramatic outbursts when their self-assumed authority was ignored.

The reported goal of the union march was to blockade the MLK Bridge, a high traffic thoroughfare which crosses the Mississippi River, to protest its derelict state and the unfulfilled potential of creating jobs through its repair. The obvious problem with actually blockading this particular bridge was that the action was widely advertised on Facebook and on fliers. Inevitably, the proposed blockade became a purely symbolic action due to the fact that the police knew of the plan a week or more in advance. When the crowd arrived at the bridge, there was already a line of police and a row of paddy wagons waiting. Many people in the march were unaware that the union's call to blockade a bridge was just a media stunt and wasn't actually going to happen. This left many participants feeling like they were being led on and used by the march organizers to fulfill a planned spectacle.

The protest marshals seemingly knew that this march was meant to be symbolic and restrained, and therefore they tried to stifle the energy of those who actually wanted to blockade. By the time the demonstration arrived at the bridge, there were at least 500 people taking part. As the marshals attempted to stop the advance towards the police and the bridge, individuals within the crowd would ignore them or stop for a second and then creep forward a little more. Eventually marchers made it within a couple of feet of the police line, much further than the marshals wanted. Many in the crowd seemed to want to go further still, around the police line and onto the bridge, but the marshals succeeded in draining the energy of the crowd. And like so many moments in this world, potentially rebellious people were stopped short and transformed into spectators in some grand organizer's scheme. It's clear that things will never change as long as those who voluntarily take on the role of police succeed in stifling the spontaneity and wild energy of those who want a world without police and capitalism.

After the frustrating and humiliating union march, the peace police left and the real fun began. An impromptu march was called for to the Justice Center, a building which houses the main city jail and is quite near to the abandoned Municipal Court building. The march was not officially endorsed by Occupy STL but everyone was invited to come along.

As this new, smaller, yet more energetic crowd advanced through the streets, music was blaring from a mobile sound system and people were dancing. A St. Louis Blues hockey game was just about to start, so there were lots of people out on the street, many of them giving fist pumps and dancing with the marching crowd.

Turning the corner, and coming up to the front of the abandoned municipal courts, the mobile street party found that two banners had been unfurled which read "Occupy Everything." Confetti and fliers were thrown from the roof and the front door of this huge building was wide open. In that moment, dozens of people ran up the steps with pure joy. Inside were Christmas lights and wheat pasted proclamations. A banner declaring, "Everything for everyone and nothing for ourselves," was taped over the "Municipal Court" sign on the front above the doors. The police who had been trailing the march immediately left to regroup, leaving people the time to get acquainted with the building. A dance party ensued and a statement was read outside at the top of the steps. Some jokingly called the building "our new home." Others explored the labyrinthine three-story building.

The cops finally came after an hour and evicted the occupation. People willingly left the building and regrouped on the sidewalk where some yelled and taunted the police. Dancing continued and eventually the crowd left and marched through the streets to the city jail. As the group was leaving the building a fire truck was extending its ladder towards the banners to cut them down. Ridiculously, instead of gaining access from the roof, the police could only imagine using the massive fire ladder to remove the banners from the building. The cops followed the demonstration and showed up at the jail in force: three or four paddy wagons and lots of rapid response SUVs and regular cruisers. Seeing this as a good time to leave, demonstrators continued back to the Plaza where everything began.

What was inspiring about this march was that it enabled people to take something, if only for a brief time, without asking permission. It also redefined the concepts of private property and legality in many people's minds. This contrasted with the union march, an event that had predetermined parameters and stifled so many peoples' desires, where if you refused to follow the leadership you would be pointed out to the police or even physically stopped by protest marshals. The impromptu march was in the streets the whole time. There were no demands, there were no appeals to higher powers. It was only us acting together.

What happened was illegal, and sometimes it's intimidating to publicly break the law. But for most at the occupation, the law no longer mattered when we were all together. It was irrelevant for a time. Everyone was invited inside of the building and if anyone felt uncomfortable, they had the ability to safely leave. The building, formerly being a place where the rul-

ing class judged and locked poor people up was mocked by the presence of those who want nothing less than the complete demise of judges and jails.

So many buildings stand empty in this city only because capitalism has no use for them as of yet. It is not profitable for these buildings to be put to use. Capitalism cares nothing for our well being. So many of us outside stare at these buildings and wonder why they sit there, why we are evicted when there is so much space unoccupied, why we are thrown in jail for being poor or marginalized when there is so much wealth in the world.

Capitalism creates a false scarcity of space when in fact there is plenty. Capitalism takes physical space—as well as our time, our ability to survive and our labor power—and makes it into a commodity that we have to work and struggle for. Space is only scarce because it is locked up by money that so many of us don't have. If, like any other commodity, we take it without paying, the State will use repression (police, judges, prisons, etc.) to try and stop us. We will never have the economic or political means to own these buildings, and that is why we must build the social power to *take them directly*.

*So many stand outside dreaming of ways to use these buildings, to use them as places of joy or a place to call home. We want to re-appropriate them, to take them and turn them into sites of contestation. We want to make them ours without asking.*

There are some (in particular some within Occupy STL) who have condemned the breakaway march and the building occupation as the work of violent anarchists, provocateurs, or adventurists, claiming that such actions are damaging to the movement. There are some who are trying to dictate what is associated with the #Occupy movement because they feel like they have ownership over a supposedly leaderless movement.

It is extremely dangerous to claim that people are provocateurs, agents of the state, just because of a disagreement with their opinions or their actions. Especially when there is absolutely no evidence to back it up. This is very divisive. It also displays a sort of tunnel vision that seeks to keep every thing controlled and rigid for the sole benefit of those who want to lead a leaderless movement. And it forgets that there are many different ways to act in concert with one another. We should embrace this principle. It is worth debating strategy and tactics, but we should not fall prey to false dichotomies and divisions (non-violence vs. violence, symbolic vs. non-symbolic, etc.) that leave no room for fluidity.

For others who participated in the occupation, some of whom are very active in the local #Occupy movement, the attempted building takeover was a wonderful moment of collective joy. The events of November 17<sup>th</sup> proved that an action which pushes the movement forward does not necessarily have to be officially endorsed by a General Assembly. It can be as simple as a group of autonomous individuals planning it and inviting

others to come. These others can choose whether or not to participate. There does not need to be an official decision or an Action Committee-approved plan for something to happen. One can, if one wants, call for an action and see if the GA will consent upon endorsing it. If it does not get endorsed, it doesn't mean others can't take it upon themselves to join in.

*Strike! Strike! Occupy!*

*Like Vox Populi, the Blocs Multiply!*

Text from a flier that was thrown from the roof  
of the occupied Municipal Courts building:

***As winter approaches, we need a space to stay dry and healthy.*** We need a place to have a stable kitchen to feed our collective self. We need a space where we can better share our ideas and experiences—rooms for discussions, a library, space for workshops and casual conversations—all of which have become harder and harder to have in the plaza.

***The occupation of this building is an act against the structural violence entrenched in our political, economic and social systems.*** As we move into the space, our intention is to collectively re-invent its use. We're trying to discover ways of interacting with each other as equals. How to talk so everyone is heard; how to make decisions so everyone's considered and included; how to feed and maintain a shared space; how to make sure work, responsibility, pleasure and ownership don't fall on some more than others. It's a hard process in itself, but it's made even harder by the fact that it flies in the face of how almost everything in this city (the whole world practically) is run.

***We know our ideas and actions, while currently small, have already proven to be contagious.*** They have the power to expose the explicit violence that we see in the police department and the jails. That violence also exists in work-related deaths and injuries, in deportation camps, and in communities that have been promised so much only to be left to rot in poverty and addiction. Our very homes and bodies are pushed to the limit by laws and workloads. Wilderness, which has the chance to exist outside of this madness, is, like the County Parks, slowly being sold off to those who want to drown it in this misery.

***What would our world look like if we decided how our communities and neighborhoods functioned?*** What would this self-directed process be like, without a handful of people in charge of it all? What would our workplaces look like if those who actually did the work got to control them, too? What if schools were run by those who learned and taught in them, not

by the dictates of careers or the economy? What if your own household, whether shared with friends or family, ran the same way?

**So much of our lives are decided without our say.** It's made all the more degrading and humiliating by the fact that those who make the decisions claim to do so for our benefit or in our name. We no longer want to continue the farce. If the word of the handful of people who run this city and our lives is to be taken at face value, this is hardly an unreasonable request. They've left this building to rot. It isn't the site of spectacular sporting events or corporate Christmas tree lightings. The city officials have long-since abandoned the building—much in the way they have abandoned us.

**We have no intentions of reforming capitalism or improving democracy.** We know there is no golden era to harken back to and restore—this country (like so many others) was founded on genocide, slavery, and exploitation, and it continues this tradition today. We have only each other to have hope in.

**We occupy in solidarity with those who struggle, but will not look towards the empty promises of politicians.** We need to think beyond the Downtown Partnership and the Mayor's ideas about creating condominiums for the elite, and start thinking about using these buildings for collective purposes. As long as we continue to look to politicians to solve our problems and the ruling class to have a conscience, things will only get worse. Power concentrated in the hands of a few will only bring more oppression and exploitation. We want to make decisions horizontally, and to share the little we have. Who knows, we might even surprise ourselves by what we're capable of.

**Come join us if you're interested in getting to know each other, treating each other with genuine respect, and plotting ways out of this mess. We carry a new world in our hearts, one much more fantastic, more empowering, and more just than the current one.**

Seattle has had one of the more exciting anarchist spaces in recent years. They report on this with their bi-monthly paper Tides of Flame and local anarchist web news outlet Puget Sound Anarchists. They have been actively involved in the anti-police protests of early 2011 and central to the occupy events.

Last year Seattle lost its social center Autonomia but it maintains one of the oldest anarchist bookstores in North America, Left Bank Books. Seattle also benefits by being the largest town in the Pacific Northwest, which means that it is fed by people and energy coming from the strong local anarchist communities in places like Tacoma and Olympia.

# Seattle



# Capital Hell Commune

by anonymous

On the night of October 29, the Occupy Seattle group moved to the campus of Seattle Central Community College. The idea of moving to the college had been circulating for over two weeks with the administration getting wind of the rumors. They immediately issued a statement saying that the occupiers would be neither welcome nor allowed to set up an encampment. However, after the General Assembly voted to officially move, it became clear that hundreds of people would swarm the college. With the occupiers being supported by the faculty union, members of student government, and hundreds of students, the administration found itself in a bind. Just a few days before the 29<sup>th</sup>, the president of the college “officially” allowed a move that would have happened anyway.

By 9pm, a kitchen and over forty tents were set up in the tree-shrouded plaza on the corner of Broadway and Pine, one of the busiest intersections in the most densely populated neighborhood in Seattle. There was a carnivalesque, celebratory atmosphere with campers indulging in all manner of merriment and debauchery.

Sometime around bar closing, three nazis came into the camp after being told to leave. One of them had “Sieg Heil” written on his chin. The three were surrounded and still refused to leave. But very soon punches and cracks with sticks began to land on their heads and the nazis were pushed out by a crowd of arguing people, bloodied and bruised. This should have been a simple matter, but soon all of the pathologies and contradictions of liberal thought exploded into a two-hour marathon of yelling, fighting, and discussion. By 5am, everyone went to bed and the rain chilled everyone out.

Despite the rough start to the occupation, there is much promise in this new base camp. Unlike Westlake Park, people will finally be able to sleep and build a village.

A sense of community does not exist because we declare it so. The communities we desire come through shared experiences of struggle. Living in an alienated capitalist society, we have no real sense of community that isn't mediated by an institution or state apparatus. The disagreements brought to the surface by Occupy Seattle's encounter with fascists is an example of people learning how to become a community. Growing pains are often uncomfortable and tumultuous, but the confrontation that took place reveals the potential for forming an anti-fascist, anti-racist, autonomous space. This potential is worth nurturing and defending.

The president and the administration of the college will face severe

political consequences should anything resembling the violent police assaults on the occupations in Oakland or Denver take place at the occupation here in Seattle. Not only is a large segment of the faculty supportive, but the school is facing budget cuts and many students are finding much resonance with the anarchist ideas that have been saturating Capitol Hill. It will not be very long before Seattle Central Community College is a teeming bed of rebellion.

# The Port Shutdown was a Wild Success!

by anonymous

Building off of the success of the November 2 Oakland General Strike, elements within the Occupy Movement planned a shutdown of all major west coast ports on Monday, December 12. Just as the General Strike showed the world what people in the movement are capable of, the Port Shutdown served as another example of this movement's power and potential. In the span of a month, the movement has re-energized itself and focused its energy on a specific target: the central nodes of capitalist distribution.

The Port of Seattle, specifically Terminal 18 on Harbor Island, is largely run by a corporation called SSA Marine. Goldman Sachs owns 51% of this company and extracts massive profits from the constant flow of commodities entering the ports run by SSA Marine.

And if that wasn't enough, SSA has also been accused of union-busting by immigrant port truckers working in Los Angeles and is a major player behind the ecologically disastrous Gateway Pacific Coal Terminal project in Bellingham, WA. For all of these reasons, Harbor Island was chosen as the first priority of the Port of Seattle shutdown.

The march to the port left Westlake Plaza and proceeded down 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. The Seattle Police Museum was paint-bombed as the march passed it. Further along, after the march had turned onto 4<sup>th</sup>, a Bank of America and a Wells Fargo were paint-bombed and tagged. After arriving at the fishing pier near the entrances to Harbor Island, the mass of people split up and began blocking the strategic choke points into the port. At the entrance of Klickitat Avenue, the main road into the island, people erected a large barricade made of assorted construction and industrial debris from nearby lots. There was no argument about such an effort, and everyone threw themselves into the objective of stopping all incoming workers and cargo. It was extremely refreshing to see hundreds of people intentionally

and actively blocking a central node in the capitalist network.

The media has tried to make a big deal of the objects thrown at the police, but those things were inevitable, being nothing more than the defensive instincts of people who are losing their fear of capitalism and its police. The crowd held their ground for as long as possible, given their massive tactical disadvantages: being in the middle of nowhere, facing off against people with guns, not having horses, etc. The police threw two flash-bang grenades into the crowd, effectively dispersing it. As you may remember from a previous *Tides of Flame* article, the company that originally gave the SPD the money to keep the horse units active is Expeditors International, a company that takes care of the logistics that facilitate the flow of commodities from across the world through the Port of Seattle. It is not a coincidence that these same horses trampled several blockaders when the police rode them into the crowd that evening.

While this fight was going on, another group of two hundred people had moved into West Seattle to blockade Terminal 5. By the end of the night, ILWU had instructed its workers to go home due to unsafe working conditions, and the normal night shift of the two terminals was canceled. However, SSA Marine and Eagle Marine Services have decided not to pay the workers, utilizing loopholes in their contracts with ILWU. In response to this, a small group of people picketed in front of Terminal 5 on the morning of the 13th. They were met with a warm and grateful response from the workers who had lost a day's pay, defying the narrative of those who would like to present the port shutdown as a failure and an attack on the mythical 99%. Despite being dependent on the port for their wages, these workers could not help but see an attack on their contracted bosses as something worthy of support.

December 12 was the birth of a new autonomous force against the global capitalist system. Independent of unions, political parties and central leadership, this force is now ready to move forward and continue to articulate itself. After a period of gestation, what was once confined to the tactics of public camping and symbolic actions has now begun to blossom. In the sixth issue of *Tides of Flame*, we pledged our solidarity to the workers of the ILWU. There were a great many anarchists on the streets on December 12, and they all helped achieve the modest objective of a shutdown and picket.

Again, this movement is fluid, autonomous, wild, and full of folks ready to join with others who want to see the demise of capitalism and hierarchical authority. The only way to end this global system is to bring it down, together. We'll see you at the barricades we'll all be standing behind one day, facing down the capitalists and fighting off their police.

Text from a demo flyer:

*Historically, the strike has been the purview of the working class,*

*the sector of society which is both dutifully employed and over-worked, hanging by the thread of the boss's favor. The power of the strike lay in the industrial workers' ability to stop production dead in its tracks. But we all know that the traditional blue collar job is a rarity these days and that the US economy has lost much of its industrial production to the whims of global capitalism. Now the working class exists most predominately as the underbelly of its former self, as the excluded class—the unemployed, underemployed, illegally employed. It no longer holds the same power as it once did to shut down the economy from the workplace. Some of our potential comrades still work in the old world of production: longshoremen, port truck workers, and others. The rest of us exist outside of that world, and indeed, some of us always have. Our workplace has become the place of precarity—we occupy the streets because we have no workplace to occupy. We are the face of the crisis of capitalism. When we blockade the ports and staunch the flow of capital, we do it from the outside, as displaced people, no longer as workers but as those excluded from this system, as those who have no hope in the economy, no hope in capitalism. When we shut down the port, we dream of the day we shut down the entire system with its jobs and its economy of suffering.*

## Becoming Uncontrollable: *an Anarchist Reflection on Occupy Seattle*

by anonymous

*Now we only have two options: allow this crack to close up, losing a unique opportunity for a veritable social change, or open it as much as we can, widening it until it reaches the very foundations of our misery and exploitation.*

— Excerpt from Catalan anarchist  
flier distributed at Occupy Seattle

Our struggle is social not political. We will not martyr ourselves as the urban guerilla nor compromise as the reformist. We make no demands and see our struggle reflected in the struggles of many others. It is from these beliefs that anarchists engaged with Occupy Seattle.

The beginning of Occupy Seattle was drenched in the misery of what  
from [pugetsoundanarchists.org](http://pugetsoundanarchists.org)

it means to live in a place that has known so little recent struggle and in which the people have forgotten what it means to rebel. The first days were marred by sidewalk marches around the perimeter of an occupied Westlake Park, the serious consideration of constructing demands, and attempts to work with the City and the police. This trajectory continued persistently until the first break with politics was reached.

Seattle is known for its liberalism and passivity. Mayor McGinn continued this strong tradition by supporting Occupy Seattle. His strategy as a politician was clear to few but later learned by many. For the first several days he let the occupiers have their camp and sidewalk protests. The City's acceptance of a tent city in downtown's premier shopping district was never meant to last. McGinn made a backhanded deal with self-appointed managerial occupiers for the camp move to City Hall, an irrelevant and isolated location.

His order was rejected after intense debate. People chose to fight for Westlake Park and against the recuperation of their emerging movement. Those who conspired with McGinn were revealed as traitors and were among the few to camp at City Hall. From the disposal of these self-appointed leaders and the refusal to heed to the Mayor's demands, the first lines were drawn at Occupy Seattle.

The weeks to come taught the next lesson: the role of the police. The police were present every day and night at the park. They chatted with occupiers during the day and at night they would shine their headlights as the delirious campers tried to sleep. They would rip blankets off people and then crack jokes with protesters the next day. Their humanity tempted many occupiers. Forced into a battle against power and social control that we will likely never truly win, there are some among this society who prefer to let that fear infest them. They are those who whisper their deepest scorn against the police but smile and wave as Officer Friendly strolls by. At the camp they insisted upon negotiation and manners toward the police and chastised those who did otherwise.

As the days wore on the hypocrisy of people who would only obey orders from someone outside their own groups was exposed to many. Open hostilities grew as the police became the clear obstacle to a very simple thing the occupiers wanted: a camp. An anti-police and "cop free zone" proposal was brought to a General Assembly during this period. It passed with flying colors. Yet with no way to enforce this newly collectivized contempt, Occupy remained a pig-ridden area. As the small battles over tents, sleeping, blankets, and even sitting down ensued, the tensions multiplied. People who had never screamed were losing their voices from yelling at the police, several people were arrested, and many witnessed with tears in their eyes the brutality that is the Seattle Police Department.

In response to the harassment and repression of the camp hundreds

of people returned with tents to reoccupy Westlake Park on October 15. The evening was festive with the joys of our first collective act of refusal. Although it lasted only for the weekend, the memory became a reference point in the weeks to come. After the eviction, the camp continued as it had before, negatively as a place for the police's passive-aggressive invasion, and positively as the meeting point for occupiers.

After many nights of debate, on Halloween weekend, the Occupy camp decided to move to Seattle Central Community College (SCCC). As anarchists, we viewed SCCC as a place to implement the lessons learned at Westlake Park. Over and over again we had insisted that without the clear intention of occupying and defending a space in defiance of the law and the police, any attempt at occupation would fail. The failure we spoke of was not limited to the material gain or loss of space but the struggle that is lost to power when we work within (and therefore for) the forces of domination.

The first night at SCCC introduced the next lesson which is the biggest and most misunderstood of all: the failure of democracy. Three Nazis entered the camp walking with their arms to the air. They were quickly attacked by anarchists and other anti-fascists and almost as quickly defended by those who were either pacifists or Nazi sympathizers. Once the Nazis were finally pushed to the street, bloodied and all, the internal fight commenced. Many spoke in favor of a policy that is nonviolent but still exclusive to fascists and racists, while a small group spoke for the inclusion of all members of the 99%. Still others, anarchists and anti-authoritarians, spoke for resisting all dialog or inclusion of any oppressive individuals—whether fascist, racist, cop, or rapist—by any means necessary. The experience of facing real tangible enemies confronted occupiers with the reality of their own vulnerability, which in turn shifted the views that many of them had about pacifism and encouraging the tool of violence. It also revealed the less-palatable side of their beloved democracy: unconditional inclusion and tolerance. This lesson is yet to be fully learned. The issues raised that night were reflected in the anti-fascist group that patrolled the perimeter of the camp (with black flags as weapons) for weeks after.

A few days later the passivity of the Seattle occupiers proved to be losing ground. On the day of the November 2 General Strike in Oakland, people locked down at a Chase Bank. This action was an unexpected catalyst for the tensions that boiled within every occupier. After the police had come and arrested many occupiers, after each bank occupier was placed inside the police van, those of us outside the bank lost our restraint. Chaos ensued as cops launched pepper spray and occupiers pushed back: some threw themselves in front of the police vehicles and others landed several strikes on police bodies. We de-arrested our new comrades and pushed

the police off the street. A small victory was felt amongst the hundred of us, one that was built from the lessons of the past month.

Like most Occupies, the camp quickly deteriorated into a cesspool of drugs and interpersonal violence. The reality of the camp was only a reflection of society; that which produces these conditions and then rejects or hides its own creation. By the middle of November the anarchist and communist presence at the actual camp lessened, likely due to its condition. This came with little regret on my part as the intention of occupying public space as a tent city is certainly not the best tactic nor strongest attribute of Occupy. We moved to focus more on street demonstrations and targets of our discontent.

On November 19 a demonstration was organized from the camp to an abandoned house in the Central District, which is an historically poor black neighborhood undergoing mass gentrification. It was unclear what the response from the crowd would be when they reached the occupied house nor were we sure what the police response would entail. Both were surprising. The occupiers immediately rushed inside the house and began plans of what to do with it. The police stood by unable to act without the owner's consent. This was the first manifestation of the next lesson: private property is not sacrosanct.

Two weeks later the law of private property was again defiled under the Occupy banner. A huge warehouse on Capitol Hill was taken over at the end of a small march entitled, "You can't evict an idea!". A short write up from that night described the moment:

*We have all dreamed of it. Some of have even seen it before, but never here, never in Seattle. They say it's too liberal, too clean, that our time has passed, that the city is theirs. Last night we shattered their mirage. We all felt the specter of our own possibilities as we ran through that empty vast building. What before was dead, we made alive. Those who entered acquaintances, left comrades.*

During only ten hours hundreds of people came and went from the occupied warehouse. The SWAT team destroyed the physical space we had gained yet they could not destroy the ideas that were won – of individual and collective agency against the normality of all that capitalism deems sacred. This is a considerable feat when the innate values of private property within American society are considered. Revolutionary critics disregard these gains as miniscule and point to Europe's somewhat recuperated squatting movements as an example. They are correct to say that the occupation of property is not inherently revolutionary but they fall short when they disregard the mental barriers which are broken in these moments.

Those moments were built upon as occupiers were confronted with the December 12 shutdown. Occupy Seattle voted to unanimously support the shutdown. The ILWU heads and other representatives of unionized

workers unanimously opposed the shutdown. Here I will speak for myself as an anarchist who is against the romanticism of the worker, work, and unions. Motivated by their effort to maintain their salaries and their careers in the politics of work, union bureaucrats stifle and recuperate the budding struggles of many workers they claim to protect. The concept of an “other” amassing to effectively stop the circulation of capital at the Port (and therefore the workplace of many) is a concept that does not fit within the union framework. Union workers are allowed concessions for better conditions but their demands can never be that of the destruction of work or the elimination of their position in society. While individuals within unions can always act as their own agents of revolt, their union will never be that force. One lesson learned from the Port of Seattle shutdown is that we must act as individuals against power, and not as the roles power forces upon us if we wish to destroy those same roles.

This idea manifested in the actions of the day. Hundreds, including union workers, showed up to Westlake Park for the start of the march regardless of the media's dramatic Union vs Occupy dichotomy. The shutdown for occupiers was always about standing up for the movement and pushing it forward into a momentum that encourages diverse action and the connection of diverse struggles. In Seattle it was made clear that when we shut down capital at the port we were not acting simply in solidarity with the struggles in Longview and Los Angeles but also with the struggles that we choose to fight that are imposed on us by the same forces of capital that manifest materially at the Port.

When we built that barricade in the middle of the street, we were blocking the terminal but we were also demonstrating our ability to adapt. We did not form a simple picket line as the manuscript instructs us to. We assessed the situation for the most effective and inspiring tactic. The property of the Port was not viewed as sacred but as a tool, the police were not viewed as “us” but as a clear enemy, the politics of the unions were disregarded, and the methods of self-organization and small affinities were preferred over the democratic values of mass organization and representation.

From the lessons that we learned in October, November, and early December we created a momentum for future revolts. No longer marching in circles, we await, ready for the potential of our recent history of refusal and collective rebellion. Challenges also await us in the forms of recuperation, the largely unchallenged love of democracy, and the American psyche, which so values the return of normality and which so fears power.

*It is not easy, but it is possible. The path is long and as long as our dream of liberty remains alive, we will be more alive than ever.*

—Anarchist flier distributed at  
Plaça Catalunya



The Bay Area has one of the largest, oldest, and most complicated anarchist spaces in North America. For anarchist living spaces, Oakland is the Brooklyn to San Francisco's Manhattan. Similar to Brooklyn there are large pockets of poverty next to "urban hipness" and Occupy Oakland has reflected this. While it is possible that Occupy Oakland was more racially diverse than the Occupy Movement as a whole it was still whiter than the town itself. Unlike many towns there was not a sizable faction of anti-Fed or Ron Paul fans here; instead, there was a serious incursion by grass roots social justice activists who attempted to shape the agenda of Occupy Oakland. The consequences and repercussions remain to be seen.

As for anarchist participation, they were there and involved from day one. When the camp was broken up after two weeks on October 25, there were large protests, police violence, and a reversal from the Mayor: Along with the reoccupation of Oscar Grant Plaza (aka Frank Ogawa Plaza) was the call for a General Strike on November 2. A General Strike is an event that, while unusual in North America, is a common expression of workers' power in Europe. By linking the Occupy Movement to the history of workers' power OO succeeded, in an instant, at building bridges that would have taken months to form in other circumstances.

The General Strike was, by most accounts, a day of affirmation for anarchists: attacks against high profile targets, a closure of the Port of Oakland, and an attempted occupation of an unused building near Oscar

# Oakland

Grant Plaza. This was a day when anarchists made national headlines.

After the dust had settled on the General Strike, occupation was on everyone's lips. (This included the politicians who slowly constricted around the camping occupation, ending it again almost two weeks after the General Strike.) The last major action of Occupy Oakland in 2011 was a three shift closure of the Port of Oakland on December 12, coinciding with similar attempts along the entire west coast.

One of the primary anarchist\* sources of information regarding Occupy Oakland has been Bay of Rage. Their pieces here include an initial report back on the camping occupation, the police raid of October 25, the anti-capitalist march of the General Strike, and an analysis of the economics of port closures and other constraints to capital flow. Further pieces include a cheerleading piece prior to the occupation from local blog Applied Nonexistence, a critical analysis of the camping occupation, a statement by those who attempted to occupy the Travelers Building on the night of the General Strike, and a history of General Strikes in Oakland, which contextualizes the events of 2011.

\* The term anarchist here isn't entirely accurate. The composition of this site, and the group that edits it, includes anarchists along with anti-state communists who follow a rich tradition of anti-leninist, councilist, situationist, bordigist, and dauvéist tendencies far too complicated to go into here.

# Open Letter to the Anarchists of Occupy Oakland

by TEOAN

Dear Anarchist Friends and Frienemies,

On the eve of tomorrow's occupation of Frank Ogawa/Oscar Grant Plaza we'd like to express a few sentiments of support and caution—all with our tired, insistent clamoring to keeping negation at the forefront of everything. You are agreeing to enter into a material discourse which has already been defined—both by its actors and by its detractors, so be careful. That said, props to the heavy anarchist presence in the organizing around this event (don't shy away from being anarchists in this event's larger context). Some thoughts, for you to entirely dismiss as disconnected from the material reality we find ourselves in...

1. The impulse to demand is a strong one which needs to be challenged, out of the fear of having energy recuperated into representational politics. At the risk of reducing complexities down to slogans, the old “occupy everything, demand nothing” of the 2009-2010 student occupations/movements, seems to be appropriate here. An antipolitics of negation, one which refuses to enter and function according to the rules/delineations of political discourse (ie demanding shit within the political sphere) is elusive and much more difficult to co-opt, recuperate, and quite frankly, render completely ineffective in praxis. When the progressive, liberal, leftist, element (of what will essentially be a non-coalition's coalition of political organizations, groups, perspectives, and yearnings) attempt to authoritatively define a collective (yet oddly unified) voice of demands (greater fiscal regulation, auditing the fed, etc) negate that shit without feeling the obligation to articulate what you, as anarchists, are for.

2. Maneuvering sympathetic political landscapes here in the Bay Area is almost as indicative of the contextual *hostis* we find ourselves engaged in, in the US as it is in dealing with explicitly hostile political machinations. Coalitions (either in their explicit forms or more generally as loose, grassroots, “mass” movements) are dangerous terrains to navigate. While it is entirely admirable to make this event more “accessible” and “representative” of Oakland's disparate “communities”—hearing calls at Occupy Oakland General Assembly meetings to “reach out” to churches and their parishioners sadly show how anarchists in the US still refuse to break with the left. Remember that while greater numbers often have a cathartic pull that is unde-

niable, fixing and assigning cohesive meaning to “resistance” is an impossibility and as such, sometimes drawing lines between political sympathies is more conducive to effectively challenging anything. If we tactically view the larger sociopolitical and hyper-spectaclized events that have happened in the Bay Area the last few years (the Oscar Grant Rebellions, the various incarnations of the “student” movement, etc) we learn, as anarchists, that it is not recuperation by more expansive hostile political forces (as our mythology seems to like to suggest), but rather it is recuperation by our seemingly sympathetic co-conspirators that is often the most damning thing that can happen on the field of engagement. When individuals or political groups attempt to define what is happening at Frank Ogawa/Oscar Grant Plaza, draw lines, and negate any such aspirations towards meaning-making (this includes the dogmatic drivel of the OWS calls to hegemonic “nonviolence”).

3. Utilize Oakland’s symbolic political signification to your advantage. Real talk: compared to other locales in the Bay Area, shit pops off in The Town. Thus, as is the case with most “actions” in Oakland loosely signified as possessing some sort of radical/fringe/militant elements or potential, counter-action response is usually heavy, repressive, and overtly excessive. If one acknowledges that civil war is both an ontological and material reality of our collective existence, one must also acknowledge that there is no “wrong” or “right” context for direct contestation as existence effectively becomes the permanent presence of continuous contestation. Thus, any sympathetic calls to quell any radical potentiality should be dismissed—there is no temporal future, *hostis* is the norm. Like any laceration inflicted on the skin of Empire, no matter how superficial, the platelet-like institutions of control centralize in hopes of clotting the rupture. This centralization of counter-action forces the creation of gaps within their fabric of control—use this to your advantage and explore sites of contestation on the margins. Tactically, sleight-of-hand is so simple, yet extremely under-utilized. Read between the lines.

4. Do not reproduce the same sorts of one-dimensional political representational positions that we are ostensibly trying to contest. Consensus around unified, “official” statements to media outlets made by such bodies (no matter how “plural” and “non-hierarchical” they may actually be) as the Occupy Oakland General Assembly—the adherence to/reproduction of OWS’s “declaration” statement calling for “peaceably” assembling and the formation of “groups in the spirit of direct democracy” (democracy and anarchy are incompatible)—or the complete planning and “agenda-izing” of the first day of the oc-

cupation itself—all contribute to a coalescing mass of implicit representations which eschew any space for potentiality and spontaneity, which are integral to insurrectionary ruptures. Our detractors will pause here and say, you pretentious fucks, the Occupy “Movement” isn’t about insurrectionary ruptures, but rather it’s about building social relations of resistance positioned against the domination of late-capitalist institutions. Yet we’d like to preemptively counter by saying this lack of any semblance of insurrectionary impetus is precisely why the Occupy “Movement” is an incredibly effective pressure-valve release, allowing for psychological projections of efficacy, agency, and “authentic” moments of individuals collectively coming together in spaces of social organization that somehow exist outside of the totality of Empire, and as such it is merely indicative of the way in which our most radical desires (individual and collective) are still socially and hegemonically mediated.

Even with our deep reservations, here’s to hoping ya’ll do the damn thing. Keep it hella stupid doo doo dumb, yadadamean?

From Oakland with Love,  
TEOAN

## #OCCUPLYOAKLAND:

### *One Week Strong at Oscar Grant Plaza*

by Autonomous Individuals

Social rebels from around Oakland have descended upon Oscar Grant Plaza and have created a genuine, autonomous space free of police and unwelcoming to politicians. Whereas other occupations have invited the police and politicians, or have negotiated with them, Occupy Oakland has carved a line in the cement. That line of demarcation says: if you pass this, if you try and break up or over shadow this autonomous space, you are well aware—as observed over the last couple of years—what we are capable of.

This article is a report back on the first week at Occupy Oakland, a reflection on problems we have been facing and some thoughts on moving the occupation forward—onto some next level shit.

#### Report Back

After much organizing, logistical coordination, joy, sweat, and tears, we’ve managed to hold down the first week of the occupation of Oscar Grant Plaza (conservatively known as Frank Ogawa Plaza). The police

have not set foot inside the parameter of the occupation without an impassioned, hostile response. Likewise, the people who do enter the space have not left without an inspired and rebellious spirit—a fever.

On the first night, there was concern about how many people would show up or if any of them would feel empowered enough to stay the night. Despite the rain, at least 1,000 attended the rally and about two dozen tents were erected. After food was served, the first general assembly took place in the amphitheater of City Hall. In the form of a speak-out, an amplified sound system and an open floor made way for those in attendance to passionately talk about why they were there—why they hate capitalism, its pigs, and its prisons. Here, people could speak their minds without the obstacles of an agenda or decision-making.

Different from many other occupations in the occupation movement, organizing took place for a week prior to the plaza takeover. On the very first day, the camp had a fully functional kitchen, an info-tent and a supply tent. By the end of this week there was a medic tent, art supply tent, an insurrectionary library, a free store, the Raheim Brown Free School, a media tent, a POC tent, a sukkah, a DJ booth, not to mention hundreds of sleeping-space tents. In addition, the rotating kitchen crew has been feeding everyone consistently from 8am until midnight and throwing spontaneous BBQs. Despite a few hiccups, these designated areas and tents have been beautifully maintained and non-exclusive—functioning to attract new-comers, leaving little prospect for anyone to feel like a spectator.

Immediately, different logistical issues that had to be dealt with spawned various working groups, or committees. These committees are in constant rotation. This “beauty in chaos” allows for a loose, flexible structure. Simultaneously, people are freely organizing and interacting with the camp however they desire. A few crucial sub-committees that the occupation hasn’t necessitated until recently, but have since been created (and experimented with) are: security (dealing with outside forces such as police, who from the beginning were not welcome), mediation (dealing with internal conflicts and dynamics), a facilitation working group (which organizes the agenda and shapes the process of the general assembly), a POC caucus that has been meeting every day, and finally, a newly formed anti-authoritarian/anti-capitalist caucus and a queer working group. People are no longer spectating the increasingly rapid destruction of their everyday life, instead they are actively participating in breaching normalized boundaries—how people relate to one another in a way that empowers everyone involved.

The General Assemblies, or “GAs,” are places where the people of the occupation can get updates, have debates, plan for actions, and decide on proposals. The GA Facilitation Working Group came up with a modified consensus process where a 90% majority—instead of 100%—is sufficient

to pass a proposal. However illusory or “democratic” this process may be, its strategic implementation strips power away from potentially authoritative individuals who might hijack or otherwise sabotage our ability to make decisions and move forward. Because there is a specific group working on the facilitation process, the GAs operate smoothly and are usually quite exciting. Additionally, a lot of people that speak at the GA are really fucking on point. Thus far the general assemblies (of 200-300 people nightly) have passed decisions to never endorse political parties or politicians, to send a solidarity statement to comrades at Occupy Wall Street and another to those on hunger strike in the Pelican Bay state prison. This is also a space where anti-state and anti-authority sentiments flourish, be they against the police or the city government. As can be expected, some people say some really fucked up racist/sexist shit, but they are usually booed off stage. With what may be a perfect ending to the first week, a letter from the city (delivered 30 minutes before the GA) was read aloud. The city detailed specifically what must be improved or taken care of “for our own safety” (when did the city ever care about our safety anyways?). Boldly (you could feel tension when the idea was initiated), some began chanting, “Burn it”. Without hesitation, someone took a lighter to the letter. Another person added lighter fluid to the burning, single sheet of paper. The flames raged wildly for a full minute. The crowd of at least 300 cheered and hollered with an enthusiasm unprecedented at any prior GA. *For some reason, we feel that Occupy Oakland is different...*

In addition to the amazing infrastructure and the excellent facilitation that has been set up, the organized events are extremely diverse and most of the time explicitly political. Each of the events throughout the first week nurtures the overall, vengeful tone of the occupation—performances, Hip Hop shows, poetry slams, and movie showings. In each case, people find time away from hard work to enjoy each other’s company. In addition to planned events, numerous impromptu ciphers, dance parties, and performances break out—accentuating a generalized desire to cultivate autonomous actions. One day a SambaFunk Band marched their way into Oscar Grant Plaza, and proceeded to play for almost an hour—hundreds surrounding them, dancing. This beautifully unexpected addition to the occupation, along with others like it, demonstrates a recurring spontaneity. Multiple times throughout the day you hear people exclaim how inspired they are by this occupation and what is possible here. In addition to the more creative and fun events, workshops take place during the day and have been explicitly nonconformist. The workshops range from topics such as contemporary uprisings in Greece, Chile, and Oaxaca to Occupy Everything, which connect the student occupations to what is happening here. This upcoming week, every day from 1-5pm there are more of the same: specific talks discussing particular political topics such as “Police/

State/Prison” and “Oakland schools are being shut down! What are we gonna do?” Notably, the very first demonstration out of Occupy Oakland was an anti-capitalist march where over 200 people marched through downtown Oakland chanting, “1, 2, 3, 4 – organize for social war!”—among other things. This march attracted a diversity of people. Over 200 rebels chanting these radical slogans chill you to the bone. The following night, a queer march left from the occupation and went to Hella Gay, a queer dance party in Oakland. Upon reaching the club, marchers demanded to be let in for free and the venue acquiesced.

Incessantly, Occupy Oakland startles and excites many with its implicit radicalism. On Saturday, October 15<sup>th</sup>, MoveOn.org (a “grassroots” organizational front for the democratic party) organized a march and demonstration in conjunction with the national occupation movement’s day of action. They attempted to exploit Occupy Oakland when they announced that it would draw to a close in Oscar Grant Plaza with a series of speakers including several mayors from around the Bay. Upon this announcement, a proposal was brought to the GA: a refusal of special treatment and/or endorsement of politicians and political parties/organizations. It passed like a maple leaf in the wind. After negotiations with MoveOn, and based on our own policies, no politicians would be allowed to speak on behalf of their party at that event and thereafter. Surprisingly, MoveOn eventually complied with our demand. When someone broke the agreement (rather, they took advantage of a loophole) and began reading a statement from Congresswomen Barbara Lee, someone from the occupation promptly told those from MoveOn how they broke the agreement and how the democratic party is “counter-revolutionary.” At this point those who were brought to the occupation via MoveOn’s march began to disperse and explore the camp (perhaps because it was far more interesting than hearing all of the old boring democratic rhetoric that has been said time and time before).

### Analysis

Over the past few years, Oakland has demonstrated its uniqueness in social conflict and protest. This distinctiveness isn’t anything new; rather, it has just reemerged. To elaborate, a comrade wrote in “The Occupation Movement: On Greed, Unity & Violence”:

*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 its 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 who 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.*

Occupy Oakland reflects Oakland's radical history. Because of this, an overwhelming anti-police sentiment guides the conversation about, and the reaction to, police. The GA has refused to comply with the city's demand that we apply for permits (which we were told would automatically be accepted without charge). This lawlessness has played out when police have attempted to enter the occupation. On several occasions, many surrounded the approaching police and in unison began chanting "Pigs go home!" and "Cops get out!" When the police officers realize their lack of power, they have no other option but to leave. This tactic of resisting the presence of the police started spontaneously, but has since been the usual response. We hope that other occupations will look to this practice and realize its significance.

Despite the brilliant infrastructure, there have been problems. Some extremely important committees have been slow to respond to the growing needs of the camp. Some of this is due to the transient nature of the groups, where people come in and voice their disagreements and then take off, leaving the work to the people in the committees who are already stressing about getting things done. Although there is "beauty in the chaos," it has become evident that to some degree, disciplined organization is imperative. Ideally, a harmony of chaos and composition will surface.

One of the biggest problems emerging in the camp are specific dynamics of racism, sexism, and other oppressive habits. In the first several days, excitement and festivity ruled the commune. This slowly transitioned into over-frequent dance parties that spilled late into the nights. Excessive drinking, unwanted sexual advances, harassment, and fights persist daily. This behavior, it should be mentioned, also exists without the presence of alcohol, but takes on a different form with alcohol. [NOTE: we are beginning to see reports of delinquency, drug use, and violence in the media that may begin to be duplicated in other media outlets. This could be the beginning of a campaign against the occupation. We would like to mention that these problems exist everywhere, as this occupation is to some extent a microcosm of Oakland, and until there is incentive to unlearn these behaviors, "peace" cannot be actualized. Again, this is not to say that they are not serious or that they are tolerated.] All of this has led to concern about the camp developing a Burning Man or Woodstock environment, devoid of almost all political content (oth-

er than the politics of culture, sub-culture and counter-culture which have a very limited potential and ultimately alienate people from one another). What is desired is a complete transformation (or destruction) of society, not just a cultural one. These dynamics are not unique to the occupation, but rather happen every day in Oakland and everywhere—they are symptomatic of a society that has broken all of us. In reaction, a mediation team has been set up to de-escalate situations and allow for dialogue between those in conflict, resulting in much benefit. Despite all of this, Occupy Oakland is magnificently self-regulating—when a fool's gotta go, a fool's gotta go. This occupation is constantly growing and expanding—becoming more and more dissident by the day, pushing us all to our limits. Let's see what else this occupation movement has to offer...

Beneath the internal conflicts lies an aching desire to externalize such wrath. Hundreds upon hundreds of people simply talk and mingle, discussing politics and life. You can almost taste a collective hostility towards each individual's own socialization. People are learning how to be human beings without the mediation of capitalism and its apparatuses. Whereas alienation and isolation rule our every interaction, it has been replaced by the crisis of remembering the last ten names of those you've met in the past hour. The war on alienation and isolation is fought through complex and voluntary social experiments, ultimately revealing the gaps of power relations that are facilitated, in part, by capitalism

Another pressing issue is that of expansion. The plaza now hosts somewhere around 150 tents on the grassy areas alone. Sunday night, 30 minutes before the GA, a letter from the city was delivered en masse to people in the occupation. It detailed the city's intolerance of many things—among them, camping in the concrete area of the plaza. Logistically, moving to the concrete would be the most immediate remedy to the growing population density of the occupation. Are we to push that boundary? Already, a small encampment has manifested in Snow Park, which is a few blocks from Oscar Grant Plaza. Almost all of the grass is taken up at this point and if we are to push the boundaries with the city, we must be prepared to defend the spaces we select to house us next. Expansion onto the concrete would only be a temporary solution. If we are to expand to another location, we must nurture the crisis of the occupation—population density—and encourage many more from the street find a home in the occupation movement and seduce others out of their homes to do the same. [NOTE: Those occupying Snow Park stand their ground against police who tell them they are not allowed to be there due to a school being nearby. Since then, to some extent, the school and its students have announced support of the occupations in OG Plaza and Snow Park. However, Snow Park is in need of a greater occupying force. As of tonight, we are unsure whether that extension of the occupation can be held through the following day.]

The recent letter from the City gives light to their attempt to stifle our capacity. With good reason, they are afraid. It is likely the occupation will attempt a diversity of expansion strategies through the coming week. Undercover police are naive to think we haven't noticed their technique of dividing the occupation on already present tensions—some COINTELPRO type shit. The camp is vulnerable—bearing wide-open entrances in almost every direction. Do we look to barricades? Do we take the barricades into the street? These are questions that will be answered in either a collective, intuitive and organic response to police eviction or in much planning and preparation. One thing is certain: the people of Occupy Oakland are well prepared to defend their new home.

Occupy Oakland (as you may have gathered at this point) is unlike any other. We begin to appreciate this when we realize our potential and current condition—that we are a force to be reckoned with, a danger to the capitalist functioning of Oakland. Police attack is no more imminent than the all too likely opportunities of widespread insurgency. Strategizing in accordance to our immediate geography's potential as well as its weaknesses is key. Unions, schools, libraries and more, they are already our allies, as we are theirs. An overpowering confidence saturates the air of Oscar Grant Plaza—a threat and a promise.

*Occupy Everything! Demand Nothing!*

—Autonomous individuals among the liberated  
space known as Oscar Grant Plaza

## Dear Occupy Oakland: *A letter on strategy* by ingirum

It seems clear that the police do plan to move in on the occupation and to ultimately evict those who now occupy Oscar Grant Plaza. This letter suggests a possible tactic to use in place of the climactic and dramatic scenario that is sure to arise.

Let us first identify what the occupation is. The occupation is a good tactic that has been used to take over space and make it common to all those who wish to participate in the appropriation of a certain geographic area. It has had its victories.

It is no small task to set a new precedent for our era of interaction with the state. The mere fact that such an amazingly diverse group of people can come together and share space with all of the joy, playfulness and

even hostilities that Occupy Oakland has dealt with, is a victory in itself.

The occupation is also a spectacle. This is not the beginning of an insurrection, it is a laboratory where different forms of organizing, decision-making and interaction can be tried, tested, and eventually used or not used. It is a rare moment when space is actually held and used to this end.

*What Occupy Oakland is not is a home.*

What makes the radical contingent of those who inhabit Occupy Oakland so threatening to the social machine is that they have pushed for a refusal of demands, a refusal to negotiate and ultimately a negation of the social relationship that allows the radical contingent to be perceived as being on the same plane as the state.

It is the imperceptible nature of the demandless occupation that makes it toxic towards the current social relationship.

In the refusal to negotiate must also be the refusal to interact in conflict based upon the state's understanding of the form. This is not the time to stand ground, because what makes us so threatening is that it is not their ground that we want. We do not care about their park, about their city hall. The most incendiary move at this point would be to wait for the police to amass, and then to leave in style.

If you fight them militarily you will lose, there is no doubt about that.

It is not a military war we are involved after all, is it?

*This is civil war.*

What makes our amoral position so useful is that we value nothing. We do not have a front line to attack, because all that can be considered valuable, be it mystified property or luxury cars can be turned into our weapons, and then abandoned on a moment's notice. Their Mercedes can quickly become our \$80,000 barricade, and we do not blink an eye.

The occupation was not worthless, it was useful, it has been used.

Discard their real estate and find the appropriate moment to skillfully exit.

It is the only way in which this can be called a victory.

After all, all they'll have is their rat-infested park back.

## Letter from an Anonymous Friend after the Attack on the Oakland Commune

by anonymous

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  
from [www.bayofrage.com](http://www.bayofrage.com)

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 4:30am on October 25, Occupy Oakland was raided by more than five hundred 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.

"The revolution" does not exist. It is not a horizon to be struggled toward, and no movement in the history of struggles has "failed." The real movement is the movement of bodies, working on what exists. If the occupation is inevitable, it is because it is what is happening everywhere, now. If we have to make it, it is because our bodies are the material collective that it is. If it is repressed, its inevitability remains. The twenty-first century is the time of that inevitability, because the limit it surges against, repression, is also the dynamic of its movement: in its death throes, the openly repressive forces of capital are the manifestation of its own weakness, returning people to the destitution from which they revolt. "This

occupation is inevitable, but we have to make it,” because in a time of mass debt, of mass foreclosures, of ruthless austerity, of sprawling slums, there will be no alternative to the material necessity of taking what we need and using it amongst ourselves.

None of this makes a difference this morning, while the enemy guards its ruins and our comrades are in jail. But if we knew this morning would come, we also know that the clocks have already stopped, that the real movement continues, and that time is on our side.

1. January 13, 2012 - When [police chief] Jordan received an update that crime was actually down 19 percent in the last week of October, he wrote an email to one of Mayor Jean Quan’s advisers.

“Not sure how you want to share this good news,” he wrote. “It may be counter to our statement that the Occupy movement is negatively impacting crime in Oakland.”

From <http://www.ktvu.com/news>

# The Oakland General Strike

## Statement on the Occupation of the former Traveler's Aid Society at 520 16th Street

by some friends of Occupy Oakland

Last night, after one of the most remarkable days of resistance in recent history, some of us within Occupy Oakland took an important next step: we extended the occupation to an unused building near Oscar Grant Plaza. We did this, first off, in order to secure the shelter and space from which to continue organizing during the coming winter months. But we also hoped to use the national spotlight on Oakland to encourage other occupations in colder, more northern climates to consider claiming spaces and moving indoors in order to resist the repressive force of the

weather, after so bravely resisting the police and the political establishment. We want this movement to be here next spring, and claiming unused space is, in our view, the most plausible way forward for us at this point. We had plans to start using this space today as a library, a place for classes and workshops, as well as a dormitory for those with health conditions. We had already begun to move in books from the library.

The building we chose was perfect: not only was it a mere block from Oscar Grant Plaza, but it formerly housed the Traveler's Aid Society, a not-for-profit organization that provided services to the homeless but, due to cuts in government funding, lost its lease. Given that Occupy Oakland feeds hundreds of people every day, provides them with places to sleep and equipment for doing so, and involves them in the maintenance of the camp (if they so choose), we believe this makes us the ideal tenants of this space, despite our unwillingness to pay for it. None of this should be that surprising, in any case, as talk of such an action has percolated through the movement for months now, and the Oakland GA recently voted to support such occupations materially and otherwise. *Business Insider* discussed this decision in an article entitled "The Inevitable Has Happened."

We are well aware that such an action is illegal, just as it is illegal to camp, cook, and live in Oscar Grant Plaza as we have done. We are aware that property law means that what we did last night counts as trespassing, if not burglary. Still, the ferocity of the police response surprised us. Once again, they mobilized hundreds of police officers, armed to the hilt with bean bag guns, tear gas and flashbang grenades, despite the fact that these so-called "less-than-lethal" weapons nearly killed someone last week. The city spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to protect one landlord's right to earn a few thousand every month. Why is this? Whereas the blockade of the port—an action which caused millions of dollars of losses—met with no resistance, the attempt to take one single building, a building that was unused, met with the most brutal and swift response.

The answer: they fear this logical next step from the movement more than anything else. They fear it because they know how much appeal it will have. All across the US thousands upon thousands of commercial and residential spaces sit empty while more and more people are forced to sleep in the streets, or driven deep into poverty while trying to pay their rent despite unemployment or poverty wages. We understand that capitalism is a system that has no care for human needs. It is a system that produces hundreds of thousands of empty houses at the same time as it produces hundreds of thousands of homeless people. The police are the line between these people and these houses. They say: *you can stay in your rat-infested park. You can camp out here as long as we want. But the moment that you threaten property rights, we will come at you with everything we have.*

It is no longer clear who calls the shots in Oakland. At the same time as



OPD and the Alameda County Sheriffs were suiting up and getting ready to smash heads and gas people on 16th St., Mayor Quan was issuing a statement that she wished to speak to us about returning the building to the Traveler's Aid Society. It is clear that the enmity between the Mayor and the Police has grown so intense that the police force is now an autonomous force, making its own decisions, irrespective of City Hall. This gives us even less reason to listen to them or respect their authority now.

We understand that much of the conversation about last night will revolve around the question of violence (though mostly they mean violence to “property,” which is somehow strangely equated with harming human beings). We know that there are many perspectives on these questions, and we should make the space for talking about them. But let us say this to the cops and to the mayor: things got “violent” after the police came. The riot cops marched down Telegraph and then the barricades were lit on fire. The riot cops marched down Telegraph and then bottles got thrown and windows smashed. The riot cops marched down Telegraph and graffiti appeared everywhere.

The point here is obvious: if the police don't want violence, they should stay the hell away.

## Blockading the Port Is Only the First of Many Last Resorts

by Society of Enemies

By any reasonable measure, the November 2 general strike was a grand success. The day was certainly the most significant moment of the season of Occupy, and signaled the possibility of a new direction for the occupations, away from vague, self-reflexive democratism and toward open confrontation with the state and capital. At a local level, as a response to the first raid on the encampment, the strike showed Occupy Oakland capable of expanding while defending itself, organizing its own maintenance while at the same time directly attacking its enemy. This is what it means to refer to the encampment and its participants as the Oakland Commune, even if a true commune is only possible on the other side of insurrection.

Looking over the day's events it is clear that without the shutdown of the port this would not have been a general strike at all but rather a particularly powerful day of action. The tens of thousands of people who marched into the port surpassed all estimates. Neighbors, co-workers, relatives—one saw all kinds of people there who had never expressed

any interest in such events, whose political activity had been limited to some angry mumbling at the television set and a yearly or bi-yearly trip to the voting booth. It was as if the entire population of the Bay Area had been transferred to some weird industrial purgatory, there to wander and wonder and encounter itself and its powers.

Now we have the chance to blockade the ports once again, on December 12, in conjunction with occupiers up and down the west coast. Already Los Angeles, San Diego, Portland, Tacoma, Seattle, Vancouver, and even Anchorage have agreed to blockade their respective ports. These are exciting events, for sure. Now that many of the major encampments in the US have been cleared, we need an event like this to keep the sequence going through the winter months and provide a reference point for future manifestations. For reasons that will be explained shortly, we believe that actions like this—direct actions that focus on the circulation of capital, rather than its production—will play a major role in the inevitable uprisings and insurrections of the coming years, at least in the postindustrial countries. The confluence of this tactic with the ongoing attempts to directly expropriate abandoned buildings could transform the Occupy movement into something truly threatening to the present order. But in our view, many comrades continue thinking about these actions as essentially continuous with the class struggle of the twentieth century and the industrial age, never adequately remarking on how little the postindustrial Oakland General Strike of 2011 resembles the Oakland General Strike of 1946.

#### The placeless place of circulation

The shipping industry (and shipping in general) has long been one of the most important sectors for capital, and one of the privileged sites of class struggle. Capitalism essentially develops and spreads within the matrix of the great mercantile, colonialist, and imperial experiments of post-medieval Europe, all of which are predicated upon sailors, ships, and trade routes. But by the time that capitalism comes into view as a new social system in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the most important engine of accumulation is no longer trade itself, but the introduction of labor-saving technology into the production process. Superprofits achieved through mechanized production are funneled back into the development and purchase of new production machinery, not to mention the vast, infernal infrastructural projects this industrial system requires: mines and railways, highways and electricity plants, vast urban pours of wood, stone, concrete and metal as the metropolitan centers spread and absorb people expelled from the countryside. But by the 1970s, just as various futurologists and social forecasters were predicting a completely automated society of superabundance, the technologically-driven accumulation cycle was com-

ing to an end. Labor-saving technology is double-edged for capital. Even though it temporarily allows for the extraction of enormous profits, the fact that capital treats laboring bodies as the foundation of its own wealth means that over the long term the expulsion of more and more people from the workplace eventually comes to undermine capital's own conditions of survival. Of course, one of the starkest horrors of capitalism is that capital's conditions of survival are also our own, no matter our hatred. Directly or indirectly, each of us is dependent on the wage and the market for our survival.

From the 1970s on, one of capital's responses to the reproduction crisis has been to shift its focus from the sites of production to the (non)sites of circulation. Once the introduction of labor-saving technology into the production of goods no longer generated substantial profits, firms focused on speeding up and more cheaply circulating both commodity capital (in the case of the shipping, wholesaling and retailing industries) and money capital (in the case of banking). Such restructuring is a big part of what is often termed "neoliberalism" or "globalization," modes of accumulation in which the shipping industry and globally-distributed supply chains assume a new primacy. The invention of the shipping container and container ship is analogous, in this way, to the reinvention of derivatives trading in the 1970s—a technical intervention which multiplies the volume of capital in circulation several times over.

This is why the general strike on November 2 appeared as it did, not as the voluntary withdrawal of labor from large factories and the like (where so few of us work), but rather as masses of people who work in unorganized workplaces, who are unemployed or underemployed or precarious in one way or another, converging on the chokepoints of capital flow. Where workers in large workplaces—the ports, for instance—did withdraw their labor, this occurred after the fact of an intervention by an extrinsic proletariat. In such a situation, the flying picket, originally developed as a secondary instrument of solidarity, becomes the primary mechanism of the strike. If postindustrial capital focuses on the seaways and highways, the streets and the mall, focuses on accelerating and volatilizing its networked flows, then its antagonists will also need to be mobile and multiple. In November 2010, during the French general strike, we saw how a couple dozen flying pickets could effectively bring a city of millions to a halt. Such mobile blockades are the technique for an age and place in which production has been offshored, an age in which most of us work, if we work at all, in small and unorganized workplaces devoted to the transport, distribution, administration and sale of goods produced elsewhere.

Like the financial system which is its warped mirror, the present system for circulating commodities is incredibly brittle. Complex, computerized supply-chains based on just-in-time production models have reduced

the need for warehouses and depots. This often means that workplaces and retailers have less than a day's reserves on hand, and rely on the constant arrival of new shipments. A few tactical interventions—at major ports, for instance—could bring an entire economy to its knees. This is obviously a problem for us as much as it is a problem for capital: the brittleness of the economy means that while it is easy for us to blockade the instruments of our own oppression, nowhere do we have access to the things that could replace it. There are few workplaces that we can take over and use to begin producing the things we need. We could take over the port and continue to import the things we need, but it's nearly impossible to imagine doing so without maintaining the violence of the economy at present.

#### Power to the vagabonds and therefore to no class

This brings us to a very important aspect of the present moment, already touched on above. The subject of the “strike” is no longer the working class as such, though workers are always involved. The strike no longer appears only as the voluntary withdrawal of labor from a workplace by those employed there, but as the blockade, suppression (or even sabotage or destruction) of that workplace by proletarians who are alien to it, and perhaps to wage-labor entirely. We need to jettison our ideas about the “proper” subjects of the strike or class struggle. Though it is always preferable and sometimes necessary to gain workers' support in order to shut down a particular workplace, it is not absolutely necessary, and we must admit that ideas about who has the right to strike or blockade a particular workplace are simply extensions of the law of property. If the historical general strikes involved the coordinated striking of large workplaces, around which “the masses,” including students, women who did unwaged housework, the unemployed and lumpenproletarians of the informal sector eventually gathered to form a generalized offensive against capital, here the causality is precisely reversed. It has gone curiously unremarked that the encampments of the Occupy movement, while claiming themselves the essential manifestations of some vast hypermajority—the 99%—are formed in large part from the ranks of the homeless and the jobless, even if a more demographically diverse group fills them out during rallies and marches. That a group like this—with few ties to organized labor—could call for and successfully organize a General Strike should tell us something about how different the world of 2011 is from that of 1946.

We find it helpful here to distinguish between the working class and the proletariat. Though many of us are both members of the working class and proletarians, these terms do not necessarily mean the same thing. The working class is defined by work, by the fact that it works. It is defined by the wage, on the one hand, and its capacity to produce value on the other. But the proletariat is defined by propertylessness. In Rome,

*proletarius* was the name for someone who owned no property save his own offspring and himself, and frequently sold both into slavery as a result. Proletarians are those who are “without reserves” and therefore dependent upon the wage and capital. They have “nothing to sell except their own skins.” The important point to make here is that not all proletarians are working-class, since not all proletarians work for a wage. As the crisis of capitalism intensifies, such “wageless life” becomes more and more the norm. Of course, exploitation requires dispossession. These two terms name inextricable aspects of the conditions of life under the domination of capital, and even the proletarians who don’t work depend upon those who do, in direct and indirect ways.

The point, for us, is that certain struggles tend to emphasize one or the other of these aspects. Struggles that emphasize the fact of exploitation—its unfairness, its brutality—and seek to ameliorate the terms and character of labor in capitalism, take the working-class as their subject. On the other hand, struggles that emphasize dispossession and the very fact of class, seeking to abolish the difference between those who are “without reserves” and everyone else, take as their subject the proletariat as such. Because of the restructuring of the economy and weakness of labor, present-day struggles have no choice but to become proletarian struggles, however much they dress themselves up in the language and weaponry of a defeated working class. This is why the Occupy movement, even as much as it mumbles vaguely about the weakest of redistributive measures—taxing the banks, for instance—refuses to issue any demands. There are no demands to make. Worker’s struggles these days tend to have few objects besides the preservation of jobs or the preservation of union contracts. They struggle to preserve the right to be exploited, the right to a wage, rather than for any expansion of pay and benefits. The power of the Occupy movement so far—despite the weakness of its discourse—is that it points in the direction of a proletarian struggle in which, instead of vainly petitioning the assorted rulers of the world, people begin to directly take the things they need to survive. Rather than an attempt to readjust the balance between the 99% and the 1%, such a struggle might be about people directly providing for themselves at a time when capital and the state can no longer provide for them.

#### Twilight of the unions

This brings us finally to the question of the unions, the ILWU in particular, its locals, and the rank-and-file port workers. Port workers in the US have an enormously radical history, participating in or instigating some of the most significant episodes in US labor history, from the Seattle General strike of 1919, to the battles on the San Francisco waterfront in 1934 and the sympathy strikes that spread up and down the coast. The

ferocious actions by port workers in Longview, Washington—attempting to fight off the incursion of non-ILWU grain exporter EGT—recall this history in vivid detail. Wildcatting, blockading trains and emptying them of their cargo, fighting off the cops brought in to restore the orderly loading and unloading of cargo—the port workers in Longview remind us of the best of the labor movement, its unmediated conflict with capital. We expect to see more actions like this in this new era of austerity, unemployment and riot. Still, our excitement at the courage of Longview workers should not blind us to the place of this struggle in the current crisis of capitalism. We do not think that these actions point to some revitalization of radical unionism, but rather indicate a real crisis in the established forms of class struggle. They point to a moment in which even the most meager demands become impossible to win. These conditions of impossibility will have a radicalizing effect, but not in the way that many expect it to. They will bring us allies in the workers at Longview and elsewhere but not in the way many expect.

Though they employ the tactics of the historical workers' movement at its most radical, the content of the Longview struggle is quite different: they are not fighting for any expansions of pay or benefits, or attempting to unionize new workplaces, but merely to preserve their union's jurisdictional rights. It is a defensive struggle, in the same way that the Madison, Wisconsin capitol occupation was a defensive struggle—a fight undertaken to preserve the dubious legally-enshrined rights to collectively bargain. These are fights for the survival of unions as such, in an era in which unions have no real wind in their sails, at their best seeking to keep a floor below falling wages, at their worst collaborating with the bosses to quietly sell out workers. This is not to malign the actions of the workers themselves or their participation in such struggles—one can no more choose to participate in a fight for one's survival than one can choose to breathe, and sometimes such actions can become explosive trigger points that ignite a generalized antagonism. But we should be honest about the limits of these fights, and seek to push beyond them where possible. Too often, it seems as if we rely on a sentimental workerism, acting as if our alliance with port workers will restore to us some lost authenticity.

Let's remember that, in the present instance, the initiative is coming from outside the port and from outside the workers' movement as such, even though it involves workers and unions. For the most part, the initiative here has come from a motley band of people who work in non-unionized workplaces, or (for good reason) hate their unions, or work part-time or have no jobs at all. Alliances are important. We should be out there talking to truck drivers and crane operators and explaining the blockade, but that does not mean blindly following the recommendations of ILWU Local 10. For instance, we have been told time and again

that, in order to blockade the port, we need to go to each and every berth, spreading out thousands of people into several groups over a distance of a few miles. This is because, under the system that ILWU has worked out with the employers' association, only a picket line at the gates to the port itself will allow the local arbitrator to rule conditions at the port unsafe, and therefore provide the workers with legal protection against unpermitted work action. In such a situation we are not really blockading the port. We are participating in a two-act play, a piece of legal theater, performed for the benefit of the arbitrator.

If this arbitration game is the only way we can avoid violent conflict with the port workers, then perhaps this is the way things have to be for the time being. But we find it more than depressing how little reflection there has been about this strategy, how little criticism of it, and how many people seem to reflexively accept the necessity of going through these motions. There are two reasons why this charade is problematic. For one, we must remember that the insertion of state-sanctioned forms of mediation and arbitration into the class struggle, the domestication of the class struggle by a vast legal apparatus, is the chief mechanism by which unions have been made into the helpmeet of capital, their monopoly over labor power an ideal partner for capital's monopoly over the means of production. Under such a system, trade unions not only make sure that the system produces a working-class with sufficient purchasing power (something that is less and less possible these days, except by way of credit) but also ensure that class antagonism finds only state-approved outlets, passing through the bureaucratic filter of the union and its legal apparatus, which says when, how, and why workers can act in their own benefit. This is what "arbitration" means.

Secondly, examined from a tactical position, putting us blockaders in small, stationary groups spread out over miles of roads leaves us in a very poor position to resist a police assault. As many have noted, it would be much easier to blockade the port by closing off the two main entrances to the port area—at Third and Adeline and Maritime and West Grand. Thousands of people at each of these intersections could completely shut down all traffic into the port, and these groups could be much more easily reinforced and provided with provisions (it's easier to get food, water, and reinforcements to these locations). There is now substantial interest in extending the blockade past one shift, changing it from a temporary nuisance to something that might seriously affect the reproduction of capital in the Bay Area given the abovementioned reliance on just-in-time production. But doing so will likely bring a police attack. Therefore, in order to blockade the port with legal-theatrical means we sacrifice our ability—quite within reach—to blockade it materially. We allow ourselves to be deflected to a tactically-weak position on the plane of the symbolic.

The coming intensification of struggles both inside and outside the workplace will find no success in attempting to revitalize the moribund unions. Workers will need to participate in the same kinds of direct actions—occupations, blockades, sabotage—that have proven the highlights of the Occupy movement in the Bay Area. When tens of thousands of people marched to the port of Oakland on November 2<sup>nd</sup> in order to shut it down, by and large they did not do it to defend the jurisdiction of the ILWU, or to take a stand against union-busting (most people were, it appears, ignorant of these contexts). They did it because they hate the present-day economy, because they hate capitalism, and because the ports are one of the most obvious linkages in the web of misery in which we are all caught. Let's recognize this antagonism for what it is, and not dress it up in the costumes and ideologies of a bygone world.

December 2011

## The Anti-Capitalist March and the Black Bloc

by anonymous

In addition to the marches called for by the General Assembly of the Oakland Commune, several marches were organized outside the formal processes at Oscar Grant Plaza. The organization of this, and other “unofficial” actions throughout the day is a point to be celebrated: the GA has consistently emphasized autonomous action and the strike has to be seen as a success in opening space for such autonomous activity. Most significant of these was the march that departed from the intersection of Broadway and Telegraph at 2pm. This march had been anonymously called as an *anti-capitalist march*. Both the poster promoting the march and the banner at its front boldly proclaimed “if we cannot live, we will not work; general strike!” An accompanying banner declared “this is class war.” This messaging of the march matched its stated intention and its subsequent action: to shut down those businesses and banks that remained open despite the strike (a promise it would make good on).

The small concrete triangle at the intersection of Broadway and Telegraph has great significance in the recent and long-past history of the struggle against class society in Oakland. In 1946, this intersection was the stage for the opening act of what would be the last General Strike in the United States before Wednesday. More recently, anarchists and anti-



state communists in the Bay Area have used the intersection as a staging point for a series of three anti-capitalist processions in downtown Oakland. Named *anticuts*, these marches were a conscious attempt by anti-capitalists to carve out (anti)political space in Oakland from which to begin a non-statist/non-reformist response to the financial crisis, in the absence of any foreseeable social movement in the States. Each one beginning at Broadway and Telegraph, these three marches took to the streets of Oakland and took as their objects certain focal points of hate in downtown: particularly the jail and certain highly visible banking institutions, but also the police whenever they came into conflict with demonstrators. To the extent that the intention of this sequence was to claim space for and build the offensive capacity of anti-capitalists in the Bay Area, the anti-capitalist march during the general strike proved this initial sequence to be a success. Noise demonstrations have returned to the jail several times through the course of the occupation, each communicating louder and more fiercely to the prisoners than the march before. However, it was specifically the downtown banks that attracted the ire of this particular march. The anti-capitalist march on November 2 must then be understood within a continuum in time; it must be seen as the emboldened and enraged continuation of a communizing thread that aims to collectively claim and determine space within the city of Oakland.

Any reading of recent anti-capitalist street endeavors in the Bay Area also offers another discreet lesson to the students of social struggle: *come materially prepared for the conflict you wish to see*. Following this analysis, one could read this march as highly conflictual based solely on the obvious material preparations that went into it. From the outside, one could see that the march was equipped with two rather large reinforced banners at the lead, scores of black flags on hefty sticks, dozens of motorcycle helmets, and the now familiar book shields. Add to this the anonymity afforded by hundreds wearing masks and matching colors, and there is no question that these demonstrators came to *set it off* that afternoon. The black-clad combatants at the front of this march would retroactively be referred to with much notoriety as the black bloc, though this is perhaps a backwards reading of the events of the day. Rather than a coherent subject group or organization that set out to offer a singular political position, this tactical formation should instead be thought of as a void, a subjective black hole where those who shared a similar disposition could be drawn to one another for protection and amplification. The so-called black bloc forcefully asserted a desirable situation for those who wanted to accomplish outlaw tasks despite repressive state apparatuses. Many will question the meta-physical implications or the contemporary efficacy of this particular form of making destroy. Yet regardless, it is important to emphasize that in the context of efforts to openly attack capitalist institutions in the face of in-

tense surveillance, concealing your identity and rolling with friends will continue to be the best tactic. Additionally, this effort further expands the intention of anti-capitalist space in the bay area, offering a way for social rebels to find one another and act in concert.

Toward this end, the anti-capitalist march was quite successful in heightening the conflict in the streets of Oakland during the general strike. To the pleasure of a great majority of the several hundred demonstrators, an active minority within the march set about attacking a series of targets: Chase Bank, Bank of America, Wells Fargo, Whole Foods, the UC Office of the President. Each was beset by a stormcloud of hammers, paint bombs, rocks, black flags, and fire-extinguishers loaded with paint. The choice of these targets seems intuitive to anyone attuned to the political climate of Oakland. The banks attacked are responsible for tens of thousands of foreclosures in Oakland alone, as well as the imprisonment of Oaklanders through the funding of private prisons and immigrant detention. Whole Foods, in addition to its daily capitalist machinations, had purportedly threatened its workers with repercussions if they'd chosen to strike. UCOP, besides being the headquarters for the disgusting cabal that rules the UC system, was rumored to be the day's base of operations for OPD and its cronies. Despite any number of reasons to destroy these places, the remarkable point of these attacks was that no justification was necessary. As each pane of glass fell to the floor and each ATM was put out of service, cheers would consistently erupt. Foregoing demands of their enemies, demonstrators made demands of one another, shouting *wreck the property of the one percent!* and *occupy/shut it down/Oakland doesn't fuck around!* In 1999, at the height of neoliberal prosperity, participants in the black bloc at the Seattle WTO summit issued a communique detailing the crimes of their targets. A dozen years and a worldwide crisis later, such an indictment would seem silly. Everyone hates these places.

This isn't to say that there wasn't conflict over these smashings. A small yet dedicated group of morons set about trying hopelessly to defend the property of their masters. In the name of non-violence, these thug-gish pacifists assaulted demonstrators and sought to re-establish peace on the streets. Thankfully, these people were as outnumbered and ill-coordinated as they are irrelevant. Chair fights and brawls ensued, but each skirmish concluded with the hooded ones and their comrades on top. The anti-capitalist march and the formations that comprised it, should also be looked to as a practical means of neutralizing and marginalizing such peace police as well as the plain-clothed officers who fight at their side.

Property destruction is not a new element for the Oakland Commune. In the weeks prior to the anti-capitalist march, the property of various police entities were attacked by communards several times: an anonymous communique claimed an attack on an unmarked police cruiser

parked near the plaza; the riot following the eviction of Oscar Grant Plaza took a few more cop cars as its victim; a march against police brutality, days later, smashed the windows at OPD's recruiting station next to City Hall. The destruction of the anti-capitalist march is set apart from these incidents for a handful of noteworthy reasons. Firstly, this demonstration marked the first large and coordinated act of collective destruction by the nascent Occupy movement. For a movement that fetishizes rewritten narratives of non-violence in the Arab Spring, this event served as an act of forced memory. Clandestine attacks, however lovely, have a tendency to be overlooked, whereas hundreds of masked individuals comprising a march that makes destroy cannot so easily be ignored. Secondly, this symphony of wreckage marked a turning point in the naughty behavior of the occupations. Rather than reacting to police provocations (and in doing so feeding certain narratives about what justifies destruction) the demonstrators of the anti-capitalist march determined to take the initiative and the offensive in smashing their enemies without waiting to be gassed and beaten first. In doing so, they concretely refused the pacifist ideology of victimization that characterizes the dominant discourse of policing and violence. Lastly, in specifically targeting the dreaded banks and corporations, so hated by the occupation movement, these attacks served to equip the movement with the teeth it had previously been missing. Not only do these people hate the banks, they'll actually make concrete attacks against the institutions they hate.

For enemies of capital, the shattering of bank windows and the sabotage of ATM machinery is beautiful in and of itself. It is intuitive that wrecking the property of financial institutions and forcing their closure is desirable. Some will argue that plate glass can be replaced and that any business closed by these actions would likely re-open the next day. This line of criticism isn't wrong on the face of it, but it often misses a certain set of implications at the center of chaotic episodes such as this. For those seeking to destroy class society, chaos itself must be seen as a primary strategy at our disposal. Theorists of social control often cite the broken window theory: a way to describe the phenomena where the introduction of disorder to an otherwise perfectly ordered environment begets and creates space for further disorder. At the heart of this theory of governance is the understanding that biopolitical government must treat any interruption of order as a threat to order as a totality. Put another way, this violence against the facades of these capitalist institutions is damaging to said institutions in a manner far more grave than the cost of a few windows or the lost labor time. Rather, this activity sends signals of disorder pulsing through the imperial system. In the way that a broken window indicates the instability of an environment, the concerted efforts to smash the windows of various banks signals a coming wave of violence

against the existent social order and its fiscal management. In the same way, attacks on police apparatuses signal the coming of far greater confrontations with the institution of policing. In a system as future-oriented and perception-driven as capitalism, this type of perceived disorder is catastrophic to investor confidence and to the key functions of the market. One need only look to the Eurozone to see the way in which anti-austerity revolt is intrinsically tied to the collapse of any illusion of security or confidence in the capitalist mode of production. Last year, black-clad haters in London smashed windows and attacked banks during a UK Uncut day of action. Months later, dispossessed people all over England set about burning police cars, attacking police stations, looting stores and generally expropriating a future they were totally excluded from. Though the professional activists of UK Uncut were quick to distance themselves from the rioting in London, nobody was fooled. The actions of vandals during the UK Uncut events demonstrated that the crisis had arrived; that disorder was about to unfold. The left bewailed the nihilistic elements that had “infiltrated” “their protest”, either anarchists intent on destruction or hooligans out to get theirs. When in subsequent months, massive segments of London’s underbelly rose up against their daily misery, they confirmed the fears of the bourgeoisie: the war was at their front door. In Greece and now in Italy, the violence of insurrectionaries in the streets corresponds to the chaos tearing through the countries’ economies. In each of these events, the reality that there is no future comes tearing into the present. To quote comrades in Mexico, *chaos has returned, for those who thought she had died!*

One can already see this instability rending its way through Oakland. The business leaders of the city are all too aware of the implications of this sort of anti-capitalist activity in the East Bay. In the days following the strike, bureaucrats from Oakland’s Chamber of Commerce went to City Hall to wring their hands about the previous day’s destruction. According to them, three businesses had already withdrawn from contractual discussions about opening their doors in downtown Oakland. Another downtown business association, comprised primarily of banking institutions and corporate investors, bewailed the existence of the Commune. They asserted that the activities of the occupation and the strike were causing a great deal of damage to Oakland’s business community and that many “local businesses” wouldn’t survive another month of its existence. Clearly it is wrong to locate a month of anti-capitalist activity as the cause of financial crisis in the town, but there is a truth buried beneath their denial. These events in Oakland cannot be conceived of outside the context of the crisis as it unfolds. By the same logic, the activities of Oakland communards cannot be separated from the social conflict which propels them and of which they are but a small part. Almost two

years ago, social rebels in the Bay Area locked themselves into university buildings and ran blindly onto freeway overpasses declaring *OCCUPY EVERYTHING* and *WE ARE THE CRISIS*. The former slogan has become a self-fulfilling prophesy. Perhaps the latter is coming to fruition as well.

First Note: *We Are Not Peaceful*

Predictably, dogmatic pacifists responded to the vandalism and fighting by screaming *PEACEFUL PROTEST* and *NON-VIOLENCE*. The majority of demonstrators responded by taking up the chant, *WE ARE NOT PEACFUL*. Since the strike, this particular conflict has played out in innumerable discussions. In each case, the meaning and efficacy of ‘violence’ is drawn out and debated *ad nauseum*. In the skirmishes between occupiers and university police that played out the following week on University of California campuses, this discourse surrounding violence escalated to pure absurdity. After UC police beat protesters on the UC Berkeley campus, police and university officials declared that such beatings were in fact not violent, while those students who linked arms in the face of police assault had themselves committed a violent act. Within the logic of power, force dealt out by police batons is not violent, while solidarity and care in the face of such force is violent. In the clearest way possible, this tragedy-comedy demonstrates precisely why it serves us to avoid discussions of non/violence. Violence will always be defined by Power. Those who resist will be labeled violent, regardless of their conduct. Likewise, brutality at the hands of those servants of Power will always be invisible.

There is an intelligence in this declaration against peace, but it cannot be reduced to this or that position on violence. Any attempt to define violence will always fall back upon abstraction. Any attempt to deploy such a definition is always already useless. Rather than being for or against violence, it behooves us to instead position ourselves against peace. In defining peace, let’s avoid abstraction. We can name every miserable element of the daily function of capital as *peace*. Peace is our terrible jobs, our lack of a job, our workplace injuries, the time stolen from us and the labor we’ll never get back. Peace is being thrown out of our homes and freezing on the streets. Peace is when police officers kill us in cold blood on train platforms and in our neighborhoods. Peace is racism, transphobia, misogyny, and anti-queer attacks. Peace is immigrant detention and prison slavery. When the apologists for class society declare their intentions to be peaceful, we understand it as their desire for the perpetuation of the day to day atrocities of life under capital. To raise one’s fingers in a peace sign in the face of our armed enemies can only be seen as the greatest act of sycophancy. The tragically common chanting of *PEACEFUL PROTEST* should really be read as *NOTHING, NOTHING, MORE OF THE SAME!* It should be abundantly clear, then, that we are quite done with peace.

Reading peace as a euphemism for the horrors of the present, we must take as our task the immediate suspension of social peace.

The dominant discourse of peaceful protest bears a more troubling implication. Many who advocate for peaceful protest actually do so quite cynically. It isn't out of a desire for an absence of violence (as evidenced by their violent efforts to police others and enforce their peace). Rather, these peace-warriors operate on an assumption that so long as they are sufficiently meek, their cause will be just. Following from this, so long as they are passive, the inevitable violence enacted upon them by the police will appear illegitimate. This attempt at self-victimization, beyond being a foolish tactic, is a specific measure to invalidate resistance and to justify the operations of the police state. Any criticism of peace discourse must also be centered around an understanding that this language originates from, is advocated by, affirms the position of, and is in itself the State.

Rejecting the logic of social peace, we instead assert a different rationale: social war. Social war is our way of articulating the conflict of class war, but beyond the limitations of class. Rather than a working class seeking to affirm ourselves in our endless conflict with capital, we desire instead to abolish the class relation and all other relations that reproduce this social order. Social war is the discrete and ongoing struggle that runs through and negotiates our lived experience. As agents of chaos, we seek to expose this struggle, to make it overt. The issue is not violence or non-violence. What's at issue in these forays against capital is rather the social peace and its negation. To quote a comrade here in Oakland: *windows are shattered when we do nothing, so of course windows will be shattered when we do something; blood is shed when we do nothing, so of course blood will be shed when we do something. Social war is this process of doing something.* It is our concerted effort to rupture the ever-present deadliness of the social peace. It is a series of *somethings* which interrupt this nothing.

#### Second Note: *We Are the Proletariat*

In the course of the anti-capitalist march, like countless before it, many attempted to take up an all too familiar chant. *WE ARE THE 99%*! However this consensus was quickly disrupted. Anti-capitalist demonstrators quickly took up a different chant: *WE ARE THE PROLETARIAT!* From an anti-capitalist perspective, this is as important an intervention as a hammer through any financial or police apparatus. Firstly, the prevailing conception of the 99% must be recognized primarily as a means to control the activity of rebellious elements within a mass. Originally a reference to crazy distributions of wealth in the United States, the 1% has come to be an empty and abstract signifier for any dominant group. A relevant example of the application of this normalizing concept is the recent letter from the Oakland Police stating that *they too* are part of the

99%, and struggle daily against the criminal 1% comprised of thieves, rapists, and murderers. Another odious deployment of the concept is the way that lovers-of-bank-windows declare that anarchists are in fact the 1%, opposed to the peaceful 99% of protesters. Even more absurd is an assertion by police apologists that, in fact, 99% police officers are good people and that only 1% of them are sadistic sociopaths. Each of these examples points to the fact that wherever it is cited, the meme of the 99% is always synonymous with one undifferentiated mass or another. Cops and mayors are part of the 99%, anarchists and hooligans clearly are not. Acting as a normalizing theoretical concept, it always functions to otherize a deviant element and to inflict disciplinary measures on that element. Insofar as it is a reference to a mass—an abstract, peaceful, law-abiding mass—the 99% can only mean society itself.

We cannot, however, read this use of the concept of the 99% as a misappropriation of an otherwise correct term. From the beginning, the concept was totally useless to us. There is no such thing as the 99% and it can never serve to describe our experience of capitalism. The use of such a framework requires a flattening out of a whole range of power relationships that constitute the real structures of our lives. In my daily life, I have never met a member of this mythical 1%, nor do I analyze this 1% as some elusive enemy in my hand-to-hand conflict with capital. I have never been directly oppressed by a member of this 1%, but I have been oppressed and exploited at the hands of police officers, queerbashers, sexual assaulters, landlords and bosses. Each of these enemies can surely claim a place within this 99%, yet that does not in any way mitigate our structural enmity. The strength of certain anarchist critiques of capital is to be found in their location of diffuse and complex power relations as being the material sinews of this society. The world is not miserable simply because 1% of the population owns this or that amount of property. Misery is our condition specifically because the beloved 99% acts to reproduce this arrangement in and through their daily activity.

Fleeing from this miserable discourse, we assert that if the 99% percent is real, we are not of it. Rather we are the proletariat. Often misconstrued as being synonymous with the working class, there is in fact a discrete distinction in our efforts to define ourselves as such. Rather than referring to a positive conception of wage-laborers, our use of *proletarian* is meant to negatively describe those who have nothing to sell but their bodies and their labor. Having nothing, being the dispossessed, the proletariat is the diffuse and yet overwhelming body of people for whom there is no future within capitalism. Those who comprised this proletarian wrecking machine perform any number of functions in society—sex workers, baristas, medical study lab rat, petty thieves, servers, parents, the unemployed, graphic designers, students—and yet we are united spe-

cifically in our dispossession from our ability to reproduce ourselves in any dignified manner within the current social order. In a post-industrial economy, an attention to our economic position must be central to our efforts to destroy that economy. Where in the past the proletariat was primarily comprised of industrial labor, it was conceivable that workplace takeovers and seizure of the means of production made a certain amount of sense. For those of us with absolutely no relationship to the means of production, an entirely different set of strategies must be cultivated. Being a genuine outside to the vital reproduction of capital, our methodology must valorize the position of the Outside and must pioneer ways in which this outside may abolish the conditions of its exclusion.

For those trapped within the field of circulation, this will mean an interruption of that circulation and an expropriation of the products to which our labor adds value. For those engaged in informal and criminal practices, it will mean developing new methods of collective crime in order to loot back a future that isn't ours. For those excluded from economic structures, it will mean efforts to blockade and sabotage and destroy those structures, rather than any attempt to self-manage the architecture of our exclusion. For those who need homes, it will mean occupation. For those who hunger, it will mean looting. For those who cannot pay, it will mean auto-reduction. This is why we steal things, this is why we smash what can't be stolen, this is why we fight in the streets, this is why we make barricades and block the flows of society. As proletarians—as those who have nothing but one another—we must immediately set about creating the tactics to destroy the machinery that reproduces capitalism and at the same time forge means of struggle that will sustain us for conflicts to come.



# Oakland's Third Attempt at a General Strike

by Hieronymous

*Oakland was still at the frontier, where the issues were sharper,  
the corruption cruder, the enemy more easily identifiable...  
There was nothing abstract about the class struggle in Oakland.*

—Jessica Mitford in *A Fine Old Conflict* (1977)

Oakland, California has historically suffered by being in the shadow of the golden allure of San Francisco across the Bay. From the Gold Rush to the Summer of Love to the Castro District as a Gay Mecca to the Dot Com Boom, San Francisco has been known around the world as a magnet for get-rich-quick dreamers, bohemians, and idealists. Berkeley, bordering Oakland on the north, was the birthplace of radical student agitation throughout the 1960s, beginning with the Free Speech Movement on the University of California campus in 1964. Oakland has always been a gritty industrial town, whose working class residents have ranged from reactionary whites in the Ku Klux Klan (in the 1920s) and Hells Angels (after World War II) to blacks at the cutting edge of civil rights struggles. Today it is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the US. Oakland was thrust onto the world stage in 1966 with the Black Panther Party and its militant self-defense of the African American community.

The radical history of the Bay Area is like a giant tapestry and its threads run through the whole region. Telegraph Avenue is 4.4 miles long; it merges into Broadway at Latham Square on the Oakland end, the exact location of the strike of women retail clerks at two department stores on either side that sparked the 1946 General Strike. That strike led to the Taft-Hartley Act (the 1947 federal law banning strike and solidarity tactics that make general strikes possible) six months later and was the beginning of Cold War politics that smothered class struggle for a generation. On the Berkeley side, Telegraph ends at Bancroft Way right at Sproul Plaza on the UC Berkeley campus. Exactly eighteen years later, on the exact day that the Oakland General Strike was officially declared, December 3, the Cold War began to thaw in a mass arrest of over 800 (the largest mass arrest up to that time in California) at a Free Speech Movement sit-in at Sproul Hall. Several of those student protestors had been radicalized by participating in Civil Rights organizing in the Deep South for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE); many had taught at Freedom Schools. For the rest of the sixties, UC Berkeley was shut down several

times due to mass student strikes and protests, including a month-long occupation of People's Park by the National Guard, sending waves outwards as the youth revolt spread throughout the world.

Even within Oakland, the tapestry has threads that are deeply rooted in previous periods of heightened class struggle, having cross-fertilized with other radical movements across the country, as well as the world. Being that San Francisco is at the tip of a narrow peninsula, surrounded on three sides by water, Oakland became the mainland terminus of the transcontinental railroad when it was completed in 1869. Trains ran along 7<sup>th</sup> Street through West Oakland to the Mole, a railroad wharf complex extending into the Bay where ferries completed the journey west to San Francisco. During the nationwide Pullman Railroad Strike of 1894, workers occupied the tracks around the Mole, disabled trains, and the whole community prepared to defend the strike. In subsequent years, landfill pushed further into the Bay and the site of the Mole is at the heart of the current Port of Oakland, the destination of our mass march and shutdown during the attempted General Strike on November 2.

The Black Panthers had a significant base in West Oakland, where massive railroad yards had been built at the western terminus of the transcontinental line. A thread, although tenuous, connected them with the legacy of African American railroad porters who settled there a generation before. The area became the West Coast organizing center for the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, a socialist union founded in 1925. The Brotherhood came out of the radical ferment of that era; in October 1919 Brotherhood founder A. Philip Randolph wrote in *The Messenger*, "The Negroes and the Industrial Workers of the World have interests not only in common, but interests that are identical." The IWW, whose members are called "Wobblies," is an interracial revolutionary union founded in 1905 in Chicago that adopted a class struggle approach to organizing through direct action and the strike weapon, striving towards class consciousness and the general strike, with the ultimate goal being the creation of a classless society.

The Wobbly spirit—best embodied in the opening lines of the IWW preamble: "The working class and the employing class have nothing in common"—was pervasive in the Bay Area, especially in the class-unity solidarity actions, sympathy strikes that exploded into many mass strikes and in turn led to at least two full-blown general strikes.

*You see, all of us were very actively involved and this makes all the difference in the world. Another thing, very few of these people were orthodox Commies because the basic tradition on the West Coast was IWW. The attitude was really an anarchistic attitude...*

—Kenneth Rexroth, interviewed in  
*The San Francisco Poets* (1969)

Oakland developed as an industrial center in tandem with San Francisco's rise as the financial hub of the West, especially after manufacturing was shifted to Oakland en masse after the 1906 Earthquake destroyed large parts of San Francisco.

The 1934 General Strike that shut down San Francisco crossed the Bay and completely paralyzed Oakland too. Here is a description:

*An estimated 15,000 building tradesmen in the East Bay laid down their tools; now they were joined by some 27,000 workers affiliated with Central Labor Council local unions. The East Bay's street car system and the Key System ferries halted operations... Employers were especially upset when the Key System's employees' strike resolution called for the employees "and the workers of the community to take over the transportation system for working people." Businessmen, "frightened" by the prospect of "an actual class struggle," had asked Governor Merriam to send the National Guard into Oakland.*

—David Selvin, *A Terrible Anger: The 1934 Waterfront and General Strikes in San Francisco* (185)

Oakland was seized by a general strike again in 1946, called a "Work Holiday" for its 54-hour official duration. It was the last citywide general strike during the mass strike wave after World War II (1946 had more strikes, 4,985, with more workers, 4,600,000, than any other year in US history—that also included six cities shut down by general strikes). It was in this period that deindustrialization really began, with the closing of wartime shipyards and crises in employment and housing whose effects are still felt today. Many blacks, as well as whites, had been recruited from Dust Bowl southern states to work at industrial jobs. When those well-paid unionized jobs began to disappear, as manufacturing was moved abroad, African Americans suffered the plight of "last hired, first fired," a tragic legacy that still haunts East Bay cities like Richmond and Oakland to this day.

Even though the attempt at a General Strike on November 2, 2011 was only partially successful, Oakland ranks with Philadelphia (1835 & 1910) and Chicago (1886 & 1894) as the only US cities to have had more than one general strike. The following is an account and analysis of the events and organizing that led to the call for Oakland General Strike III. But the spirit of the Work Holiday lived on in 2011. In 1946, the city was completely shut down by the class-conscious solidarity of 130,000 workers. Spontaneous strike support committees closed all businesses, except bars which were allowed to stay open if they only served beer and put their jukeboxes out on the sidewalk. As Stan Weir (in his essay "The Informal Work Group") put it: "People were literally dancing in the streets in anticipation of some kind of new day."

## Occupy Oakland

The encampment at Oscar Grant Plaza started on October 10, 2011, following the international movement inspired by Occupy Wall Street that began in Zuccotti Park in New York on September 17, 2011. It immediately threw the city's politicians into crisis; most, opportunistically, sought to position themselves as sympathetic to the global movement. Oakland mayor Jean Quan, a former UC Berkeley 60s activist, got caught up in a Catch 22: she both supported Occupy Oakland and ordered its repression; she was conveniently in Washington DC when the attack occurred. Her weak support for former Chief of Police Batts' proposal for gang injunctions may have caused him to resign, one day after Occupy Oakland was founded, and has put her at odds with tough-on-crime members of the city council. The city government is rife with infighting; in this crisis of legitimacy, the police union has issued several absurd press statements attacking the mayor, as well as complimenting *and* attacking Occupy Oakland.

The predawn attack on October 25, with police from eighteen Northern California jurisdictions—from cities as far away as Vacaville, Fremont, and Palo Alto—was not only a militarized operation, it was unprovoked. The 600 cops, outfitted with riot gear and backed by armored vehicles and helicopters, moved in, preemptively shooting tear gas canisters and “beanbag” rounds and throwing flashbang grenades. The aftermath left Oscar Grant Plaza looking like a hurricane had hit it. The news of the intensity of the raid spread around the Bay Area like wildfire.

## Our Resistance

In response, a spontaneous demonstration was called for 4pm that same day at the main branch of the library, six blocks down 14<sup>th</sup> Street. After speeches and news updates on arrestees, the crowd marched. It started with hundreds and by the time we got close to Broadway, at the center of town, we were nearly a thousand. As the march tried to go near the jail, we had our first skirmish with the cops when they arrested some protestors, were surrounded, then reinforcements came firing tear gas and beanbag projectiles, as well as throwing flashbang grenades. Our march was dispersed, but through street smarts we all regrouped and went to the intersection of 14<sup>th</sup> and Broadway, the epicenter of many of the events not only in the Occupy Movement, but also the location of protests and riots over the last two and a half years (over the killing of Oscar Grant by BART transit police on January 1, 2009).

Once back at the intersection, the cops repeatedly warned us to disperse because we were an “unlawful assembly,” reading all the legal codes being violated. With very little provocation (reportedly a plastic water bottle was thrown), they shot the first massive barrage of tear gas

at us, sending the entire crowd running. Over the next several hours, they proceeded to shoot a total of four huge volleys of long-range tear gas canisters from their defensive perimeter of metal barricades around Oscar Grant Plaza. Each time we dispersed, we ran several blocks away to avoid the fumes, a few times marching a few blocks around the area, but always returning to 14<sup>th</sup> and Broadway. It was an incredibly inspiring victory in simply standing our ground, regardless of how much tear gas they shot at us. And we grew; what at first seemed like around a thousand had easily doubled by the end of the night.

It was during one tear gas volley that Iraq War veteran Scott Olsen had his skull fractured by a direct hit, and as others came to his rescue another cop threw a grenade directly at them. Again, videos of this went viral on the internet, helping to catalyze the growing anger into concrete actions. It would not be too much of a stretch to say that the tear gas organized the call for a general strike the next night. Oakland once again turned to class struggle as a weapon in response.

### The General Assembly and Call for a General Strike

A General Assembly was called for 6pm at 14<sup>th</sup> and Broadway the next night, October 26. No cops were anywhere in sight, except a few underground in the BART station. Soon after, chainlink fences surrounding the plaza were being methodically pulled down and stacked in orderly piles. The crowd came, kept arriving, and this flow never seemed to stop. We held the General Assembly in the amphitheater. And as we began, even more people arrived. By its peak, there were about 3,000 people participating. The general strike proposal was made and we had breakout groups to discuss it. The approval procedure was modified consensus, with 90% required to pass. 1607 people voted on the general strike proposal, despite many more people than that in the amphitheater; 1484 voted in favor of the resolution, 77 abstained and 46 voted against it, passing it with 96.9%.

### Planning the General Strike

The next night, October 27, we had a meeting to plan for the general strike right before the General Assembly. During the strike preparation break-out, I joined the labor group (others were community outreach and education, which in turn broke into three groups: K-12, community college, and university). Some union “piecards” (bureaucratic officials) tried to give speeches, but could not adapt to the “people’s mic” and were shouted down. (Developed at Occupy Wall Street to deal with the lack of amplified sound, the people’s mic forces speakers to be concise and use short phrases, since each sentence is repeated by the audience for all to hear.) Other speakers made clear that this is merely a first attempt at a general strike, which when they occur are usually the culmination of a period of height-

ened class struggle. Using the rhetoric of an offensive counter-attack was a popular sentiment that came up naturally. We knew we were planting the seeds of an idea that would take further, more intense, struggles to truly bear fruit. The actions on November 2 would only be the opening salvo.

When it was my turn to speak at the labor break-out, I made clear that in the US only 11.9% of the working class is in unions. So for a general strike to succeed, it will take the involvement of the unorganized 88.1%. I mentioned that a fixation on the unions will be our undoing. I brought up the example of the unorganized immigrant, Spanish-speaking workers who fought the Sensenbrenner Act (H.R. 4437, which would make the undocumented felons and assisting them a misdemeanor). On May Day 2006 millions participated in a nationwide work stoppage and 16,500 striking *troqueros* (short-haul port truckers) effectively shut down 90% of the massive Los Angeles/Long Beach Port complex. It reached the intensity of a general strike and succeeded in forcing Congress to withdraw the proposed law. In Oakland, Spanish-speaking workers marched nearly a hundred blocks and 50,000 converged on downtown, in the biggest mass of striking workers since the '46 General Strike. The unorganized *troqueros* at the Port of Oakland had an eight-day wildcat in 2004 and have had other spontaneous strike actions since then.

Those *troqueros* are clearly the most militant working class sector in California, having a track record of combative direct action over the past decade. During the break-out, I also made the point that our literature needs to be translated to Spanish, and since the port of Oakland is about twelve blocks away we should do outreach there. I also mentioned that Oakland's Chinatown begins just four blocks from Oscar Grant Plaza and that there are still many garment sweatshops and other cottage industry factories nearby, so we should also get literature translated into Chinese and reach out to our fellow workers there. My point was that our actions need to go beyond the narrow definition of labor (usually connoting unions), and become a class movement.

To put this into practice, on Monday, October 31, three of us got to the Port of Oakland at 6am and handed out English and Spanish fliers to the *troqueros*, most of whom were supportive of our efforts and acknowledged that they are part of the 99%, but none of whom knew anything about the general strike call. This one-day fliering, with just a few of us, was insufficient for such a strategically important sector on the waterfront—especially as the march on the day of the General Strike encountered *troqueros* before anyone else when we made it to the Port.

In side discussions during the build up to November 2, some of us talked about the six-day occupation of the Republic Windows and Doors factory in Chicago in December 2008. We mentioned the general strikes that began on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe in 2009, spread to nearby

Martinique, and won all their demands. We talked about how the occupiers of Tahrir Square in Cairo had fought pitched battles with the police, held their ground, and had brought down the Mubarak regime in Egypt.

When the proposal to occupy the Port of Oakland was made at the General Assembly on October 27, many learned for the first time about the actions of International Longshore and Warehouse Union militants in Longview, Washington. In September these actions blocked trains and sabotaged the brand new EGT grain terminal when management brought in another union to scab on their jobs. The world is on fire and many have begun to see that class struggle in Oakland can be part of the process of fanning those flames.

### Oakland General Strike, November 2

By 9:30am a crowd of several hundred were already filling the intersection of 14<sup>th</sup> and Broadway, the epicenter of much action over the last couple years. Although the crowd was sizable, it was in flux as people kept arriving in a never-ending stream; by mid-morning it had grown to several thousand.

There was an unconfirmed report that longshore workers dispatched out of the union hiring hall in the morning refused to take their job assignments. Someone who drove through the Port of Oakland after the shift started reported that only 4 of the 36 cranes at the port were operating. The Contra Costa Times claimed that 40 of the 325 longshore workers dispatched out of the ILWU hiring hall did not report to their job assignments at the port and joined the strike. Port officials scrambled to find replacements, but this act of solidarity forced the port to operate below capacity for the entire day.

Local community radio station KPFA claimed 18% of Oakland schools were closed due to teachers not reporting for work; 5% of Oakland city employees took the day off. The Men's Wearhouse, located in the Rotunda Building which in 1946 had been Kahn's Department Store whose striking workers sparked that year's General Strike, posted a sign in its window saying "We stand with the 99%. Closed Wednesday, Nov. 2."

A morning march began to creep up Broadway, went past Latham Square, turned, and in a couple blocks was in front of the State Building, at 1515 Clay Street, that during Stop the Draft Week in 1967 had been the Army Induction Center and the site of the most militant anti-war demo of the 1960s. And the actions in 1967 spawned some of the same acrimonious debates occurring today, between pacifists and direct action militants. The latter, seeing the ineffectiveness and futility of symbolic spectacles, called for the escalation of tactics from protest to resistance.

This intensification of the struggle happened in two phases. The first militant action was on Tuesday October 17, 1967 as 3,000 protesters were



routed by the cops. They regrouped, re-strategized, and the following Friday, the 20<sup>th</sup>, went back with 10,000 and routed the 2,000 cops, controlling the streets for the day. Frank Bardacke, Stop the Draft Week organizer and one of the Oakland 7 defendants, put it best:

*We controlled the downtown area of Oakland for most of the day and the cops were outnumbered and confused and scared. And we shut down the [Army] Induction Center, we did just what we said we were going to do, we shut the mutha down!*

—Berkeley in the Sixties, documentary

Controlling the streets was not enough, as this was not only the high point of the anti-war movement but was the limitation it never went beyond. Resistance is a dead end if it cannot challenge the capitalist imperative to war, which can only begin to happen through class struggle. This passage shows that contradiction:

*In the Vietnam War, for example, the picture most people had was of middle-class radicals, the New Left, fighting against the war and the hard-hats supporting it and beating up the anti-war students. Yet more war production was stopped by workers carrying on ordinary strikes in the course of their lives in the plants than by the whole antiwar movement put together. There were strikes at Olin-Matheson, which made munitions, at McDonnell-Douglas, which made fighter planes, on the Missouri Pacific railroad, which transported war materials for shipment from the Pacific coast. In a few instances, strikes lasted a couple of weeks, and the shortage of planes and war material reached the point where the Johnson administration was getting ready to take over the plants to stop the strikes.*

—Martin Glaberman and Seymour Faber,  
in *Working for Wages: The Roots of Insurgency*

### Flying Picket at a Non-Union Workplace

Coming along Clay Street and passing 14<sup>th</sup> Street, we saw a dozen members of the local Industrial Workers of the World branch. Along with a member of the International Socialist Organization, a Trotskyist group, they were trying to gather some people together to shut down a business where the workers had wanted to come out for the general strike, but the boss would not allow them. Just as they pulled us aside, some local insurrectionists were passing by in the march and someone mentioned asking them, so I ran ahead and told them: “The Wobblies know a business that needs to be shut down.” They joined us without question and we instantly had doubled our ranks. On the way to the business it turned out to be Specialty’s Café, a business that has baked goods, sandwiches, soup, and



coffee, and caters to lunchtime office workers. Just before 11am, our flying picket broke into two groups to avoid detection by police or security, and then marched eight blocks. As we walked along a pedestrian plaza, we had to pass what turned out to be a police van; it had loaded food and was leaving just as we were arriving. We converged at the café entrance, located on the ground floor of a high-rise office building, and walked in en masse and filled the whole space.

Customers did not know what to make of us, so they quickly left the store. So we began loudly shouting slogans like “*Shut it down!*”, “*General Strike!*” and “*Let them strike, it’s their right!*” After we noisily created havoc and prevented the café from operating, someone negotiated with the boss and he agreed to close, let the workers leave, and pay them for a full day’s wages—even though they had not even been there half a shift. There were about fifteen people working there, with about five Latino guys baking and cooking in the visible kitchen and the rest were young black and white women and men working the counter and serving food.

Most of the workers were excited at our action, especially the ones who knew some of the Wobblies, but they had to be discrete in front of management. There was some confusion, at least until management disappeared from the windows, but once that happened the workers were all smiles and talked to us through the glass doors. We asked if we should stay or leave, and the enthusiastic response was “Stay!” So we put a banner reading “HUELGA” (Spanish for “strike”) over the plate glass window facing inside, which immediately evoked smiles from the Spanish-speaking kitchen staff. As it got closer to noon, white-collar workers flooded out of their offices heading to Specialty’s for lunch. Many had ordered their sandwiches or soup with credit cards online and did not believe us when we told them the store was closed; many rattled the locked door anyway to confirm, then left in despair while we tried to explain the general strike. We then blocked the main door with another banner that said “WE’RE HERE IN WORKING CLASS SOLIDARITY!” and about ten of us stayed for the next hour, chanting messages of solidarity. The same worker who told us to stay later said through the glass “You did it! You shut it down!” and gave one of the Wobblies a fist bump through the glass door. We stayed until all the workers had left the café, hoping that some of them would make it to the area around Oscar Grant Plaza to join the strike.

While we were waiting for the workers to leave, a couple of potential customers complained that we were “attacking a small local business.” Before we could refute this and explain that this business was notorious for miserable working conditions, regardless whether it was local or multinational, a young black man who just arrived to our action said he was formerly an assistant manager at this café. He then pointed out that employees made low wages, worked under terrible conditions, and the kitchen

staff with poor English-speaking skills were manipulated and often worked for years without a raise because the boss exploited their lack of language ability to cheat them out of automatic wage increases. We later found out this store is part of a chain; Specialty's Café & Bakery is a San Francisco-based chain of thirty outlets throughout California, in Seattle and Chicago, with venture capitalists funding an ambitious nationwide expansion plan.

And at the end of our picket, security guards came out of the building with an ideological agenda. They engaged us, constantly said they were "with us" because they were the "99% too," but their mission was to demoralize us and dissuade us from anything confrontational that might shut businesses down. They kept telling us "you're doing it all wrong," to which those engaging them asked what the "correct" way to do it was. Their answer was simply a barrage of confused and emotional criticism. Most of us saw that they were just doing their jobs, and ignored them.

This was one of the most inspiring actions of the day. We also promised the workers that we would return to picket and occupy if they did not get the full day's pay, or if anyone suffered recriminations. The flying picket tactic showed an extremely effective method of aiding non-unionized workers who wanted to join the general strike. Too bad the several thousand in the 2pm anti-capitalist march could not repeat this solidarity tactic with the 125 workers at Whole Foods, whose management is virulently anti-union. The masked-up black bloc opted for breaking a few windows and spraying some graffiti instead of something in solidarity with the workers inside the store. I have talked with former workers at that store about the awful conditions and they said workers there would be very sympathetic to actions in solidarity with their plight.

Soon after we joined a march of around a thousand going down 21<sup>st</sup> Street toward Broadway, in the area that is Oakland's mini-financial district. We saw the same security guard who kept trying to steer us away from Specialty's Café, telling us to go to Bank of America instead. It then became clear that her security detail did not include Bank of America, so she was really just telling us to go away. But as we passed the corner of Valdez Street, this same security guard was playfully engaging in some kind of cat and mouse attempt to protect the concrete retaining wall, along the sidewalk, right on the corner. Soon enough it became clear why. The corner had been covered with cardboard painted the same color as the concrete, but when protestors began tearing away the cardboard, beneath was written "MORGAN STANLEY SMITH BARNEY." The day was full of surreal moments like this.

### Back to Downtown

Rejoining the massive downtown crowds was an anti-climatic let-down after shutting down the café. It was festive, full of music, and over

ten thousand people were enjoying themselves, but the point of the chants, the slogans, the posters, and the signs was indignation, moral indignation. The exception was the incredibly inspiring “DEATH TO CAPITALISM” and “OAKLAND COMMUNE” banners strung above the street at 14<sup>th</sup> and Broadway. It was hard to consider it a general strike when the most common slogans were “tax the rich” and “banks got bailed out, we got sold out.” Where was the class struggle? How could we even make the stretch to call it a general strike when a sizable portion of us only wanted to reform and re-regulate the banks? Putting forward “occupy the banks” as a demand, as well as the actions of blocking their doors, was simply a moral tactic to force the financial sector to be more “responsible.” It would be erroneous to call these actions “flying pickets,” since those who went to the downtown banks never attempted to reach the rank-and-file bank workers in solidarity. This was a glaring weakness in our attempted general strike, but probably to be expected since effective class struggle has been largely absent for decades.

We were back at 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway and the crowd had grown to be in the tens of thousands. On the street at Latham Square, someone had made an altar with “Death to Capitalism” written across it. Before we realized it, the 2pm anti-capitalist march was to begin. It assembled near the statue at Latham Square, ground zero for the 1946 General Strike, and we stayed near the back since none of us was masked-up. This activist uniform usually connotes tactics of property damage and attempts to fight with the police; the latter almost universally results in dozens—if not hundreds—of arrests. Being at the tail-end of the march, we missed the smash-’em-up at Whole Foods. But we were verbally assaulted for “condoning” the window breaking and graffiti once we got near the store’s entrance. Since we did not really know what had happened, we simply defended our fellow protestors, regardless of what they had done. This somehow enraged the finger-pointing liberals further and I have never seen such vitriol and hatred from people who claim to advocate for Gandhi-style pacifism. At least the black blockers are not hypocrites.

We also missed the smashing and graffiti back at the Bank of America at the Kaiser Center. The vanguard of the march, the black bloc of a couple hundred, made it back downtown so quickly that we were unable to catch up. But we did see some of the destruction at the Wells Fargo Bank at 12<sup>th</sup> and Broadway, where a circus of moral indignation was no longer directed at the banks, but was directed at the black blockers instead. One high priest of this moralism was even proposing that the Port action be canceled because of the broken bank windows. We just could not tolerate this absurdity, so someone from our group interrupted his tirade and said “This is just a conspiracy by the plate glass industry to sell more glass.” Even the moralist laughed, as did most of the defenders of the

smashing; it defused the situation and the crowd began to break up.

#### The Seattle Model: 1919 vs. 1999

The tactics of the black bloc quickly hit a practical dead end and brought on the same pointless violence vs. non-violence debates that are just as divisive today as they were in 1967 at Stop the Draft Week—repeated ad nauseam again at the WTO protests in Seattle in 1999. Property destruction can be effective if used properly and in the proper context. A perfect example was the members of the ILWU Local 21 at the Port of Longview, Washington who sabotaged the opening of the EGT grain terminal with scab labor, paralyzing the facility and setting off wildcat strikes that shut down the ports of Everett, Seattle, and Tacoma in Washington and Portland in Oregon (an even better example was the 77-day occupation of the Ssangyong Motors factory in Pyeongtaek, South Korea in the summer of 2009; workers fashioned defensive weapons from the auto plant's workshops). On September 7, 400-500 longshore workers and their supporters blocked trains for three hours, stood down 40-50 riot gear equipped cops, even unarresting some of their comrades. Sometime after 4am the following morning hundreds of longshoremen and their supporters stormed the EGT terminal. Armed with baseball bats, they broke down the gate, smashed up the guards' shack (no one was harmed), drove the guards' car into a ditch, entered the plant site, cut air hoses on the train that had arrived on site the day before, and dumped tons of grain from over 100 railroad cars.

Without a strategy, the black bloc becomes a form devoid of a theoretical basis in the content of what is being struggled for, which can be summed up as a form of violent activism. It is clearly not class struggle, which suggests an anti-capitalist practice based on the class conscious activity of the working class—that includes everyone disposed from the means of survival, the unemployed, the homeless, and all others suffering from the oppressions of capitalism. The goal of class struggle is realizing a classless society, using the strike weapon—up to and including mass or general strikes—and solidarity actions to create a revolutionary rupture in the production and reproduction of the social relations of capital. Activism, conversely, is focused on forms, never getting beyond means to even strategize towards ends—unless the ends are still within capitalism. The spectrum stretches from non-violent liberal reformism—those wanting to democratize capitalism and correct its injustices peacefully—to the opposite pole of black bloc activists who think it possible to smash a social relationship away by mere might, as though will power alone can make anyone with a claw hammer a revolutionary subject. This limits them to the tactic of attacking the forms of capitalism, where static objects like plate glass windows are surrogates for the dynamics of accumu-

lation, but to never theoretically comprehending its content. They are oblivious to how consciousness, experience, and human agency develop as the content of the historical process of revolution.

The non-violent activists wanted to create a circus sideshow of protest—never allowing militancy to even rise to the level of resistance—replete with puppets, banners, marching bands, and the usual activist-protest tactics to shut the banks by simply blocking the doors. Not that festivity is bad, but it would be more euphoric if all commerce—including banks—was targeted by mass strike actions like in 1946. Rank-and-file workers in the banks were not seen as class allies who would benefit from solidarity actions to shut them—hopefully with pay—like what happened at Specialty's. The activist morality goes like this: corporations and banks are evil and people working in them are complicit in this depravity. Hence wage workers become the evil other and must face an accusatory finger branding them as “part of the problem.” This moralizing is devoid of a systemic analysis, totally lacks a critique of political economy, and fails to understand class consciousness and solidarity. Liberal activists live in a fantasy world, where they are “classless angels” crusading to bring “social justice” to the people, which in practice often amounts to nothing more than empty rhetoric and banal slogans backed only by moral appeals.

The insurrectionists in the black bloc want to create an orgy of destruction, believing that social relations can be simply removed through negating their forms, by smashing them, totally oblivious to the content of capitalism—both in theory and in practice—as well as the possibility of finding working class allies in the stores they are smashing. Those low-income hyper-exploited wage slaves often hate work as much as—or more than—the black blockers.

Activists, whether banner-waving blockaders or window-smashing black blockers, fit neatly into the “Seattle Model” of the diverse activist tactics used in the 1999 WTO protests. Some want harmless, non-violent protest; others want violent, disruptive resistance. Neither came close to the tactics, let alone the strategy, of class struggle on a mass scale—which is the most basic definition of a general strike.

Those of us who participated in the solidarity action at Specialty's root our theories and practice of class struggle in what can best be summed up as the “Chicago Idea.” This class struggle model reached its high point in the Seattle General Strike of 1919 where workers—like in the Paris Commune of 1871—ran the city themselves; in the case of the Seattle in 1919, it was for five days.

### The Chicago Idea

The Chicago Idea was a direct descendent of the fallout from the bloody suppression of the Paris Commune and came to birth in the move-

ment for the eight-hour day in the 1880s. It was led by anarchists who advocated for militant class struggle to create organizational forms that would become the “embryonic” forerunners of a future “free society.” Here is a description:

*The first sign of change came in March 1882, when a group of German tanners struck and demanded a wage equal to that of the more skilled English-speaking carriers. When employers refused the demand and the carriers struck in sympathy with the immigrant tanners... the carriers acted not on the basis of “any grievance of their own, but because of a sentimental and sympathetic feeling for another class of workmen.” The sympathy strike even surprised the editor of the of the trades council newspaper, who said it was “something new and wonderful.” The seventy-two-day exercise in solidarity was, according to the Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, “one of the most remarkable on record, an action “conducted on the principle of the Knights of Labor which proclaims that “an injury to one is the concern of all.”*

—James Green, *Death in the Haymarket*, p. 98

The state found this revolutionary working class movement so threatening that, like with the mass executions of the Communards of Paris, it was brutally crushed. The triggering incident happened at Haymarket Square in Chicago in 1886, in response to the police murder of workers during the strike for an eight-hour day. After a sham trial, four anarchists were scapegoated and hung, becoming the Haymarket Martyrs.

The IWW was founded on of the legacy of the Chicago Idea, but its spirit rises up in every act of solidarity, from sympathy strikes to wildcats to collective acts of sabotage to full-blown general strikes. When the strike of women retail clerks in Oakland in 1946 was being scabbed on by a professional strikebreaking firm, the spontaneous sympathy strike of transit operators, truck drivers, office workers, machinists, factory workers, maritime workers—and eventually almost the entire working class of Oakland—was the Chicago Idea in practice.

#### Mass Solidarity Action Substituting for Unionized Workers

*A mechanic originally from Oakland boasted to a 1936 union convention that “a picket line in that country [Oakland] is more effective than a barb wire fence.”*

—in Richard Boyden’s dissertation “The San Francisco Machinists from Depression to Cold War, 1930-1950”

During previous general strikes, Oakland was a manufacturing hub for all of northern California. Factories produced goods for domestic consumption, as well as some for export. A picket line was often all that was

necessary to tap into the class consciousness of workers to shut down businesses—with the effectiveness of a “barb wire fence.” But those struggles and that consciousness have long since receded and been forgotten. At worst, the US is amnesiac and anti-intellectual; class-denial is a defining cultural feature. Since the last wave of wildcat strikes in the 1970s, the ruling class has succeeded in its counterattack by displacing class antagonisms through deindustrialization, class recomposition, and creating ideological mystification—the “society of the spectacle.” The further integration of a world market has transformed the planet as well; globalized production and supply chains mean that commodities are produced on every continent, as well as being transported to and consumed in every corner of the earth. In 2011, Oakland produces much less than is consumed, so most goods are imported. Many of them come through the Port of Oakland, after being produced and assembled elsewhere.

It should not be forgotten that the Port has had rising exports, sending abroad commodities such as fruit and nuts, meat, machinery, beverages, scrap metal, animal hides and skins, chemical products, woodpulp and paper, cereals, grains, seeds, processed food, plastic, and cotton. Some of those same commodities come back through the port as finished goods, like clothes, shoes, vehicles, electronics, furniture, toys, and product packaging.

The Port of Oakland moves \$39 billion in imports and exports per year. So a work stoppage can prevent the movement of \$106,849,315 worth of commerce for a single day. This made it the most worthy target of class struggle activity during the November 2 attempt at a general strike. Some ILWU workers on the docks make over \$100,000 a year, putting them among the highest-paid industrial worker in the US. These conditions were won in the 1934 General Strike, protected with another strike in 1936, and were consolidated by a major strike again in 1948; in that fourteen-year period the ILWU had 1,399 legal and illegal work stoppages as part of this process.

The last strike of the ILWU was in 1971, but they have done political actions on the docks to boycott ships from post-junta Chile and with munitions headed for El Salvador, in addition to refusing to work ships from South Africa during apartheid. They have invoked contractual privileges to shut West Coast ports in solidarity with the struggle of political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, to celebrate May Day in 2008, and to protest the police murder of Oscar Grant. They attempted an unauthorized contractual shut down on April 4, 2011 in solidarity with the fight against Governor Walker’s anti-labor legislation in Wisconsin, for which they are currently being legally prosecuted. There are rumblings about possible solidarity actions with the workers in Longview, Washington, that might spread beyond the ILWU’s jurisdiction on the West Coast and draw in



the International Longshore Association on the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts too. Despite all that, Local 10 on the docks of Oakland is restricted by a no-strike clause in their contract and their legacy of wildcat striking is in the distant past. So, the mass of other workers in Oakland had to substitute for them and do what they were legally unable—or unwilling—to do, which was to shut down the port. Hopefully, this will encourage them to engage in economic strikes in the future on their own behalf. Contract or no contract, the only illegal strike is one that loses.

### March to Shut Down the Port

We gathered for the 4pm march to the Port from 14th and Broadway because in prior organizing meetings it had been emphasized that we needed to be at the port before the parking lots opened at 6pm for longshore workers coming to the 7pm shift. The furthest terminal entrances are 3.7 miles from our starting point, so we needed to leave early enough to set up our picket lines at the gates before the workers got there. We could tell the march was extremely large, but more importantly everyone was in high spirits. As we crossed the 880 Freeway, cars crawled beneath us and many supportive honks could be heard in response to the many banners that were put up on the fences on the bridge.

As we entered West Oakland, people came out of apartments and houses and stood along the street cheering us on, like in a celebration. A few even joined us, but mostly people just waved at us with smiles of joy on their faces. This area is ethnically mixed, but is still predominately African American as it had been in the heyday of the Black Panthers. Although not all of them joined us, these bystanders were clearly part of us. This was hammered home when we passed a modest house near the corner of 10<sup>th</sup> Street. A boy of about eight stood on the porch, along with others who looked to be his grandmother and teenaged brother. He was excitedly holding up a paper on which “99%” had been written. His enthusiasm gave off such a life-affirming sense of hope and confidence that my spirits shot another notch higher. Just the sense of common vision I shared with that young guy made me certain that whatever happens, some young people are living through an historical moment they will remember for the rest of their lives.

It was when we turned onto Adeline that the march’s size began to dawn on me. We were many blocks long, but the streets were completely filled, from curb to curb. It was when we got to the top of the bridge over the railroad tracks, which curved and became Middle Harbor Road, that I got a true perspective on how many we were. I could look ahead and see the whole intersection around the entrance to the APL terminal was filled with a mass of human bodies, in the midst of which were six trucks all stopped abreast of each other across almost the whole road. I turned



back around, and looked down the bridge along the route we had just come. As far as I could see, people were still coming. It was like a tsunami of humanity, just one giant mass of people flowing across the landscape. This realization made me feel so euphoric that I felt like I was in a dream.

As we got to the intersection at the Port where there is a traffic signal at the entrance to the APL terminal, I marveled at the six trucks idled six abreast in the midst of the human swarm. I wondered what the *troqueros* thought about the shut down, so I asked the first two I saw standing next to their trucks. I began by apologizing for preventing them from working. They immediately responded by rejecting my apology, saying “We’re part of this and we’re happy it’s happening.” Their only disappointment was that they thought the strike would happen in the morning. Regardless, they were all smiles, shook all our hands, introduced themselves (I think they were from East Africa, maybe Ethiopia), and we left knowing at least some port truckers were pleased with the inconvenience.

I saw lots of old friends and comrades, some of whom I had not seen in decades, but even strangers had a familiarity as though I had known them my whole life. Everyone was talking with everyone else; atomization and alienation had melted away and even if fleeting, there was a collective joy that is beyond words. Our group would gain a person, and then someone would drift off. We eventually made it all the way to the end of Middle Harbor, where it ends at 7<sup>th</sup> Street. The sun had set and as it got darker and darker, we made our way to the crucial intersection at 7<sup>th</sup> and Maritime. On our way, we had heard misinformation as people told us we were not needed here. But that was not true, because from that intersection there are two entrances to the Port for access roads to the outside.

Our informal group got involved in making sure people created a human blockade to both entrances. But people were still confused, so someone yelled “mic check” and we had an impromptu meeting. The first speaker asked what we should be doing. One of our group spoke up and made a concrete proposal, which was: 1. no vehicle could pass us to enter the Port; 2. no truck with containers could go either in or out; 3. we would allow all workers to pass us to leave the Port. It was near unanimous agreement. And we protected this strategic intersection and no one entered. Eventually the entire intersection was filled with about 500 protestors.

Soon there were some cars and vans wanting to pass us. Some hot-heads got in front and blocked them in, saying it was a general strike and they were going to shut “everything” down. We pleaded to let them out, but their response was “we walked here, so they can walk out of here.” We reconvened an assembly and once again reminded everyone of our earlier consensus on the three principles of our occupation of the intersection. Quickly, with no effort, we confirmed our earlier consensus with near-unanimity. Despite these few dissenters, who seemed obsessed

about punishing anyone working in the Port, we were able to defend our blockade and let workers get out.

Soon a truck with a trailer rolled up to us. The driver said he was tired and sick and was headed home. We asked why he still had a trailer, so he explained it was empty. We said if that was so, could we have his permission to open the doors and check. He got nervous and said it was “sealed,” to which we responded that sealed containers are not empty. We checked and it actually was not sealed. We worked out a compromise with him and he backed up, turned around, and parked somewhere within the Port. Despite some non-cooperative participants, our people’s mic and consensus decision-making process worked extremely well and allowed us to make very quick decisions.

Around 8pm, we got word that all of our section of the port, that was about three-fourths of the entire complex, was completely shut down by the sheer force of all our bodies—which reasonable estimates put at 40,000–50,000 (although an artist comrade analyzed helicopter photos and put it closer to 100,000). It was exhilarating. Around 9pm, we got word that the outermost terminal had been picketed by the bicyclists who had got there first, then with others who had made it there on foot, and the health and safety arbitrator had ruled that the workers did not have to cross the “unsafe” picket line and could go home with a day’s pay.

## Conclusion

A couple dozen of us had to use direct action at Specialty’s bakery to leverage management into shutting down and paying their non-unionized workers for the whole day. We had used the tactic of mass action to shut down the 5<sup>th</sup> biggest port in the US, and all of our bodies were the means to paralyze the port, sending the ILWU longshore workers home with pay as well. That day Jessica Mitford was right, there was nothing abstract about class struggle—and the solidarity of the General Strike attempt—in Oakland. At least 50,000 of us proved it. And this model needs to be repeated everywhere, if we hope to go beyond resistance and truly start taking the class war on the offensive.

The thread from Chicago has been picked up once again in Oakland, but it needs to be cast across the Pacific, to connect with the rising class consciousness of the striking workers in the burgeoning factory towns of China; it must then spread solidarity across the entire global supply chain and link together class struggle *everywhere*. Only then can we truly live up to the internationalist implications of the old Wobbly adage: “An injury to one is an injury to all.”

But we are clearly at the beginning of a process where class relations will become less abstract as we continue to fight back against austerity. This will necessitate linking up across borders, helping to spread these

struggles to every corner of the planet. If the definition of the 99% is able to translate into class terms through the dynamic of class struggle, our next attempt at a general strike will be propelled forward much more forcefully by class consciousness. E. P. Thompson sums up this historical process quite lucidly:

*...far too much theoretical attention (much of it plainly a-historical) has been paid to "class," and far too little to "class-struggle." Indeed, class-struggle is the prior, as well as the more universal concept. To put it bluntly: classes do not exist as separate entities, look around, find an enemy class, and then start to struggle. On the contrary, people find themselves in a society structured in determined ways (crucially, but not exclusively, in production relations), they experience exploitation (or the need to maintain power over those whom they exploit), they identify points of antagonistic interest, they commence a struggle around these issues and in the process of struggling they discover themselves as classes, they come to know this discovery as class-consciousness. Class and class-consciousness are always the last, not the first, stage in the real historical process.*

—E. P. Thompson, "Eighteenth-century English society: class struggle without class?"  
*Social History*, Vol. 3, No. 2 [May, 1978], p. 1489)

# Violence & the Police

If there is one principle that distinguished the occupations with a strong anarchist presence from the ones with none, it concerned the police. Beyond just blanket opposition to the police as a simple rebellion against authority, anarchists view the police as functionaries. A partial definition of the state could be that it is an agency that holds the monopoly on violence in society. The police are the most visible expression of this violence and have been exposed in this role over and over again during the Occupy Movement.

This definition highlights why many anarchists have little patience for the way in which the discussions happen around violence in North America. Without getting into the nuances of what exactly violence means, it is fair to say that the proportion of violence inflicted by police using clubs, noxious gas, pepper spray, shields, and boots has been so much greater than any other group that even to speak to them as near equivalent demonstrates either total ambivalence towards humans or utter revulsion to the political message of the Occupy Movement.

# Seven Myths About the Police

by CrimethInc.

The police exercise legitimate authority. The average police officer is not a legal expert; he probably knows his department protocol, but very little about the actual laws. This means his enforcement involves a great deal of bluffing, improvisation, and dishonesty. Police lie on a regular basis: “I just got a report of someone of your description committing a crime around here. Want to show me some ID?”

This is not to say we should unthinkingly accept laws as legitimate, either. The entire judicial system protects the privileges of the wealthy and powerful. Obeying laws is not necessarily morally right—it may even be immoral. Slavery was legal, aiding escaped slaves illegal. The Nazis came to power in Germany via democratic elections and passed laws through the prescribed channels. We should aspire to the strength of conscience to do what we know is best, regardless of laws and police intimidation.

The police are ordinary workers just like us; they should be our allies. Unfortunately, there’s a big gap between “should be” and “are.” The role of the police is to serve the interests of the ruling class; anyone who has not had a bad experience with them is likely privileged, submissive, or both. Today’s police officers know exactly what they’re getting into when they join the force—people in uniform don’t just get cats out of trees. Yes, most take the job because of economic pressure, but needing a paycheck is no excuse for evicting families, harassing young people of color, or pepper-spraying demonstrators. Those whose consciences can be bought are everyone’s potential enemies, not allies.

This fairy tale is more persuasive when it is couched in strategic terms: for example, “Every revolution succeeds at the moment the armed forces refuse to make war on their fellows; therefore we should focus on seducing the police to our side.” But the police are not just any workers; they’re the ones who chose to base their livelihoods upon defending the prevailing order, thus the least likely to be sympathetic to those who wish to change it. In this context, it makes more sense to oppose the police as such than to seek solidarity with them. As long as they serve their masters, they cannot be our allies; by denouncing the institution of police and demoralizing individual officers, we encourage them to seek other livelihoods so we can one day find common cause with them.

Maybe there are some bad apples, but some police officers are good people. Perhaps some police officers have good intentions, but once again,

insofar as they obey orders rather than their consciences, they cannot be trusted.

There's something to be said for understanding the systematic nature of institutions, rather than attributing every injustice to the shortcomings of individuals. Remember the story of the man who, tormented by fleas, managed to catch one between his fingers? He scrutinized it for a long time before placing it back at the spot on his neck where had he caught it. His friends, confounded, inquired why on earth he would do such a thing. "That wasn't the one that was biting me," he explained.

Police can win any confrontation, so we shouldn't antagonize them. With all their weapons, equipment, and surveillance, the police can seem invincible, but this is an illusion. They are limited by all sorts of invisible constraints—bureaucracy, public opinion, communication breakdowns, an overloaded judicial system. If they don't have vehicles or facilities available to transport and process a great number of arrestees, for example, they can't make mass arrests.

This is why a motley crowd armed only with the tear gas canisters shot at them can hold off a larger, more organized, better-equipped police force; contests between social unrest and military might don't play out according to the rules of military engagement. Those who have studied police, who can predict what they are prepared for and what they can and cannot do, can often outsmart and outmaneuver them.

Such small victories are especially inspiring for those who chafe under the heel of police violence on a daily basis. In the collective unconscious of our society, the police are the ultimate bastion of reality, the force that ensures that things stay the way they are; taking them on and winning, however temporarily, shows that reality is negotiable.

Police are a mere distraction from the real enemy, not worth our wrath or attention. Alas, tyranny is not just a matter of politicians or executives; they would be powerless without those who do their bidding. When we contest their rule, we're also contesting the submission that keeps them in power, and sooner or later we're sure to come up against some of those who submit.

That being said, it's true that the police are no more integral to hierarchy than the oppressive dynamics in our own communities; they are simply the external manifestation, on a larger scale, of the same phenomena. If we are to contest domination everywhere, rather than specializing in combating certain forms of it while leaving others unchallenged, we have to be prepared to confront it both in the streets and in our own bedrooms; we can't expect to win on one front without fighting on the other. We shouldn't fetishize confrontations with uniformed foes, we shouldn't

forget the power imbalances in our own ranks—but neither should we be content merely to manage the details of our own oppression in a non-hierarchical manner.

*We need police to protect us.* According to this line of thinking, even if we might aspire to live in a society without police in the distant future, we need them today, for people are not ready to live together peacefully without armed enforcers. As if the social imbalances and fear maintained by police violence are peace! Those who argue that the police sometimes do good things bear the burden of proving that those same good things could not be accomplished at least as well by other means.

In any case, it's not as if a police-free society is suddenly going to appear overnight just because someone spray-paints "Fuck the Police" on a wall. The protracted struggle it will take to free our communities from police repression will probably go on as long as it takes us to learn to coexist peacefully; a community that can't sort out its own conflicts can't expect to triumph against a more powerful occupying force. In the meantime, opposition to police should be seen as a rejection of one of the most egregious sources of oppressive violence, not an assertion that without police there would be none. But if we can ever defeat and disband the police, we will surely be able to defend ourselves against less organized threats.

*Resisting the police is violent—it makes you no better than them.* According to this line of thinking, violence is inherently a form of domination, and thus inconsistent with opposing domination. Those who engage in violence play the same game as their oppressors, thereby losing from the outset.

This is dangerously simplistic. Is a woman who defends herself against a rapist no better than a rapist? Were slaves who revolted no better than slave-holders? There is such a thing as self-defense. In some cases, violence enforces power imbalances; in other cases, it challenges them. For people who still have faith in an authoritarian system or God, following the rules—whether legal or moral—is the top priority, at whatever cost: they believe they will be rewarded for doing so, regardless of what happens to others as a result. Whether such people call themselves conservatives or pacifists makes little difference in the end. On the other hand, for those of us who take responsibility for ourselves, the most important question is what will serve to make the world a better place. Sometimes this may include violence.

*Police are people too, and deserve the same respect due all living things.* The point is not that they deserve to suffer or that we should bring them to justice. The point is that, in purely pragmatic terms, they must not be

allowed to brutalize people or impose an unjust social order. Though it can be empowering for those who have spent their lives under the heel of oppression to contemplate finally settling the score with their oppressors, liberation is not a matter of exacting revenge but of rendering it unnecessary. Therefore, while it may sometimes even be necessary to set police on fire, this should not be done out of a spirit of vengeful self-righteousness, but from a place of care and compassion—if not for the police themselves, at least for all who would otherwise suffer at their hands.



Delegitimizing the police is not only beneficial for those they target, but also for police officers' families and police officers themselves. Not only do police officers have disproportionately high rates of domestic violence and child abuse, they're also more likely to get killed, commit suicide, and struggle with addiction than most sectors of society. Anything that encourages police officers to quit their jobs is in their best interest, as well as the interest of their loved ones and society at large. Let's create a world in which no one oppresses or is oppressed, in which no one has to live in fear.

*Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or both.*

— Frederick Douglass





As the camping occupations were bulldozed and tear gassed out of existence by the police, partisans of the Occupy Movement scrambled to respond. Beyond lawsuits (which will take years to percolate through the judicial system) and calls to "return in the spring," are a variety of anarchist strategies. These serve as good examples of anarchist strategic and visionary thinking. One visible call out has been for the Occupy Movement to take possession of unused property. This has already happened in public and private in several towns. The longest standing building occupation is the Turritopsis Nutricula Collective house in Seattle. Their statement, along with an article arguing explicitly for this strategy (from Denver Ignite!) are included. Peter Lamborn Wilson argues that these protests against finance capitalism are an opportunity to reinvigorate alternative currencies and economic schemes that have in the past been part of the anarchist arsenal. Occupy Boston demonstrates the principle of anarchist decentralization by fracturing one Boston General Assembly like the Indignados of Spain. Finally a member of the Seattle Solidarity Network opines that the tactics of a leaderless, directly democratic, direct action group that fights to win are the next best step for Occupy.

# Next Steps

# The Other Way to Occupy Denver

by igloosRforever

As weather gets colder, DPD pushes homeless and occupiers further into a corner. Hancock plans to make sleeping on the sidewalk a crime and talks about ejecting the homeless from the 16<sup>th</sup> street mall. Meanwhile, as Occupy Denver concedes more and more ground to the authorities every day there are many that are beginning to doubt its effectiveness. The point of Occupy Anywhere should have never been to make a symbolic plea to our leaders to do the right thing, moving them with our dedication and now, as the winter begins and those sleeping outside have no other coverings allowed but tarps, moving them with our suffering.

Martin Luther King and the christian pacifist early civil rights movement may have used the same tactic (for example putting kids in a situation where they'd be attacked by dogs, to make good press for the North) but at least the majority of the actions at that time were focused on direct defiance of the Jim Crow system. No luck in Denver, or most occupations. Such a movement can only succeed when directly challenging and uprooting the things that it protests, through action. Occupy Denver is doomed to failure if its content to be nothing more than a symbolic statement, along the lines of a "die in," but with the real possibility of someone actually dying to make that point. An encampment is possible, and worth pursuing and attempting, but it will have to deal with two obstacles: a city government and police force bent on crushing any action taken to make houselessness survivable, and people in the occupation itself who actively sabotage the same attempts (it's no coincidence that most of the second group has a place to go home to at the end of the GA).

Occupy Denver's 24/7 team, a name they have bestowed upon themselves, are those who are most vulnerable within this movement. Most of them are homeless or street youth. Yet the movement prefers to use them as publicity when convenient and then turn their backs on them when they choose to truly make the park their home. Last night a homeless veteran, Reno, was arrested after laying claim to Civic Center Park as his home and pitching his tent on the snow covered grass. He chose to defend his home and was arrested for it. But, where were the many other Occupiers when the police came for both Reno and his home? A small group shouted "shame" and other admonishments at DPD for their despicable actions, but no one sat down in the face of those officers to help this man defend his home and right to warmth .

The truth is that the city, state, and their army (DPD) will continue

their assault on those who are most vulnerable and do not see tents at the park as a symbolic action, but rather see it as a necessity to ensure their survival during the winter months. How long will Occupy Denver sit idly by with their hands nervously wringing in their laps as they ponder whether this hurts the movement or furthers it? When will those within Occupy Denver who have a warm, safer place to call home at night stand in true solidarity with those who do not?

Seeing as Wall Street and “the banks” are the biggest targets of the occupy movement and a huge number of the people who’ve slept at, worked for, defended and gone to jail for the occupation have been houseless, squatting of foreclosed homes seems like one of the best responses. Squatting is direct disobedience of the target, that happens to leave the rebel drier, warmer and safer than those that stick around for the symbolism. Vacant, bank-owned houses are abundant everywhere. Below are a few sites that track houses that could provide shelter to those without it. The first one tracks all vacant properties held by the FHA, Fannie Mae, and Freddie Mac. There are many more owned by other banks, absentee landlords, and so on but this is the biggest accurate resource. The second is based on the post office, based on which addresses haven’t received mail in the last six months: this is less reliable but yields more results. There are enough roofs in the Metro area to house everyone through the winter, and any action taken to prevent that housing from happening amounts to nothing less than murder.

<http://www.huduser.org/REO/reo.html> (Directions: set up an account by clicking signup. Put in a name (any name), an email (doesn’t have to be real) and a password, create it, sign yourself in. Zoom in to the general area you want to check out, then when you’re close enough, check the box to the left hand side of the page saying “view properties”. They should show up.) <http://www.huduser.org/portal/datasets/usps.html>

## A Somewhat Belated Introductory Communique from the Turritopsis Nutricula Collective

*...Wait...What?*

It would have been nice to have this statement out a week ago...but we've been busy building a house around ourselves...

*OK...But...The what collective?*

Turritopsis Nutricula is a multi-gendered, multi-cultural, multi-generational collective of individuals with varied sexual orientations, sub-cultural affinities and favourite foods. We are a Revolutionary household. By this we mean that we are opposed to police, prison, borders, racism, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, ageism, body-policing, speciesism, fascism, capitalism, and any other form of oppression.

*OK...But WTF is a turritopsis nutricula??*

The immortal jellyfish. They are about 4.5 millimeters in diameter and are in the process of taking over the oceans.<sup>1</sup> Possibly the only biologically immortal animal, they will not naturally disappear or die out; they will only multiply. To perpetuate its life indefinitely, the turritopsis nutricula continually reverses its aging process once it matures and begins maturing again from the polyp state. To do this, the turritopsis nutricula transdifferentiates, meaning each of its cells are transformed into a new type of cell. In essence, it becomes a whole new jellyfish each time. We taught that jellyfish everything it knows. Since taking this house, we've become a whole new jellyfish.

*...You took a house? How?*

Accidentally. We marched from SCCCCCCCC [joking reference to Seattle Central Community College —ed.] to the house after announcing we'd be taking over a building at the end of the march. We expected to meet resistance from the state, immediately, but the cops stayed at their cars and, before too long, left without saying anything to any of us. We expected them to come back. They didn't. We expected pepper spray and hand cuffs and battering rams. It hasn't come. That doesn't mean it won't. But we're prepared. We've put a lot of work into our new home and we intend to keep it.

*Wait...Was this approved by the GA??*

Absolutely not. This was [is] not an "Occupy Seattle action" and we have no intention of giving away our autonomy to a new government, or to anyone, for that matter.

We were all involved in one way or another with Occupy Seattle, and the march started at the camp so that anyone there could join us, but the march was organized autonomously and all decisions about the house have been made collectively by those squatting and building it.

*...So, you're not with Occupy Seattle??*

*\*Sigh\**

If we claimed unity with Occupy Seattle, that would mean we have the same goals, intentions, tactics, desires, and demands and that one flag can wave for all of us. We don't intend to be united with anyone; instead, we stand in solidarity with the #occupy movement, meaning we may have different goals, intentions, tactics and desires<sup>2</sup> and will work with and support Occupy Seattle, as well as #occupy movements elsewhere, The Umoja Peace Center, The Seattle Solidarity Network, strikers and squatters world-wide, and anyone else struggling against oppression and fighting for Freedom, with hopes that those comrades will also stand in solidarity with us.

There are actions and analyses coming from the #occupy movement that we will participate in and share. Others, we will oppose. There is talk now of turning Occupy Seattle into a 501(c)(3), despite the role the nonprofit industrial complex, the seventh largest industry in the world, has played in maintaining capitalism and degrading our communities, environment, and lives, not to mention the way 501(c)(3) status has been used to co-opt movements in the past. The camp is also intending to move to the lawn of a church, after having been invited to do so, thereby forgoing all of the friction and tension we've created where capital flows most freely in Seattle and within the recently-deceased "logic" of capitalism, to create points of departure from that mindset and points of Attack against capital and its watchdogs. Rather than uniting with decisions like these, we recommend that participants of Occupy Seattle, and other #occupy movements, act in solidarity with actual occupations everywhere and take over their school, workplace, home, or favourite Nike store.

Remember: Reclamations have been taking place as long as military occupations. Some members of *Turritopsis Nutricula* have been squatting, occupying, and otherwise resisting capitalism and other forms of oppression in various ways for decades. We live just down the street from what was the longest building occupation in US history: The Northwest African American Heritage Museum, later co-opted by the Urban League, in 2001, but still a testament to possibilities. Let's not forget our history.

The #occupy movement joined us.

1. "We are looking at a worldwide silent invasion" —Smithsonian Tropical Marine Institute scientist Dr. Maria Pia Miglietta.

2. "Demands" was intentionally included in the first list and omitted here because we as Revolutionaries have no intention of demanding anything from any "authority," we simply intend to overthrow them.

# Occupy Wall Street, Act Two

by Peter Lamborn Wilson

*Money Has An Enemy.* — Charles Stein

Some radical historians claim the entire Historical Movement of the Social went wrong in 1870 when the Paris Commune failed to expropriate (or at least destroy) The Bank. Could this really be so?

Since 1971 Bank Power—“Money Interests” as the oldtime Populists and Grangers used to say—ie, the power to create money as debt—has single-handedly destroyed all chances to remake any world closer to our heart's desire. Some anarchist theorists hold that there can be no real revolution except the revolt against money itself—because money itself WANTS capitalism (ie money) to rule. Money itself will always find a way to subvert democracy (or for that matter any government power that opposes Money's interests) and to establish the rule of Capital—ie of money itself.

“Alternative currencies” will not cure the situation (as Marx rightly sneered) because *real* [bad] money will always drive the “good” money out of circulation. Alternative money only “wins” in the scenario where it replaces money entirely. But in that case it will have simply *become* money itself (which is protean and can take many forms).

American progressive Populism—like the agrarian Grange or industrial Knights of Labor—knew certain esoteric secrets we should study. They believed the real producers (“labor”) could organize alternative institutions (within the legal system) that could erode the rule of Money and perhaps eventually replace it: producers & consumers co-operatives and labor unions. Money would still be used at first—but *not banks*—so toxic debt could be avoided. True producers would mutually finance each other (say at 1% interest to cover administrative costs). With “Mutual Banks of

the People” plus co-ops they would protect their economic position and advance it thru labor agitation including strikes, boycotts, etc.

“Mutuality” works as a non-State non-central-buraucratic form of socialism, thus providing no unjust power positions for its administrators. It starts, like Occupy Wall Street, as a consensus-ruled *direct* democracy (the exact opposite of the Neo-Con freemarket “democracy” of predatory Capital). *Revokable delegates* are sent to larger regional or other administrative Councils.

Thus success of such a system means NEVER participating in representation or “republican” forms of legislative politics (“keep politics off the farm”—*Grange Songbook*). The American Populist movement made the *fatal error* in 1896 of joining the Democratic Party—and instead of being crucified on a cross of gold, American radicalism was crucified on a cross of silver. [I'm not going to explain this joke; look in the Encyclopedia under “William Jennings Bryan.”]

The only true method of organizing the alternative world of Mutuality is thru voluntary non-state free institutions such as co-ops, mutual banking & insurance, alternative schools, various types of communalism and *communitas*, sustainable economic ventures (ie non-capitalist businesses) like independent farms and craft ateliers willing to federate with the commons *outside* of the sphere of bank/police/corporation power.

Of course if it ever reached a certain point of success this Mutualism would be directly challenged by Money Interest Power. Lawyers & police will swarm, then military force will be used. The question then will become a different question—*War against Money*. Could such a struggle be waged as “non-violent war?” In theory, maybe—in reality, who knows?

Actually the whole OWS movement and its future becoming might well be seen as “military” in a Sun Tzu way, ie as tactical and strategic “politics by other means” (to reverse Clausewitz). Interestingly, however, the originary move in such a strategy would now appear to be a tactical retreat—just like in certain kinds of Judo or Aikido—a retreat from the world entirely ruled by money to a world of voluntary cooperation (“the gift”) outside the power of BANKS.

This retreat would happen gradually—and since in truth there is no “Outside” to retreat to, the tactic must remain mixed and impure. We can make a new Outside out of our own failure. But as we begin to (re)create an Outside to Money, I believe the rewards will be rich and immediate. Sharing things is inefficient and bad for Capitalism—but (or rather—so) it's got a pleasure nexus in it, an intimacy and human fellowship that millions of Americans now lack and miss. Even the family is threatened by our present “economy of Greed”—as for the Social in general, i believe it may already be dead and beyond revival. However I intend to go on acting and writing as if I believe it can be SAVED—why?—because pessimism is so boring.



In fact boredom is already a sign that the enemy is very near—it's the *sine qua non* of consumer trance and obedient wage slavery. Cheat boredom (as the Sits used to say) and already you're winning something back.

Adventures in Mutualism will have to start small—but even a few neighbors can organize a car-pool—or share other “necessary” technologies like electric power, garden tools, telephones, etc.

The next stage of sharing might include *cooperatives*—a neighborhood CSA or food bank or home-school group. Then the next stage could be *institutional* and move toward genuine Mutual insurance and banking (Fraternal/Sororal organizations used to supply many of these functions—including the Grange and the Knights of Labor.)

The next stage would be *federative*, nets of groups and regions as envisioned by Kropotkin and Landauer as well as Proudhon—and by the free Russian Soviets *before* the Bolshevik coup in Oct. '17.

The key here would be to “organize the kernel of the new world inside the shell of the old” as the *IWW Preamble* suggests. In other words NOT to wait till “conditions are ripe” in Marxist terms but to begin here & now—not just with demonstrations and media games and info, info, info, but also with real-life economic and cultural organizing. Why?—Because who wants to have to wait to enjoy some fruits of Revolution if it were possible to experience at least a few of them *now*—or after a few years of intense *agitation* and *attention*.

Such organizing certainly doesn't “take the place” of resistance (including even riot and crime, much less squatting or debt refusal). It already *is* a form of resistance—but also a pleasure in itself—a prime reason for human sociality—a structure for creativity and imagination—for poesis or aesthetic making, whether it be tools or human relations or music or gardening or shelter or just normal everyday *conviviality*—that lost ideal.

In any face-to-face confrontation with Wall Street “we” must always lose—because WALL STREET IS EVERYWHERE. The up-side of this is that therefore we must occupy “Everywhere”. We must inhabit our own space-of-daily-life—the real physical space/time we live in. If necessary we will squat it. And from the space of tactical retreat (not abject dispersal and defeat, but the orderly retreat *toward* logistic reinforcement—to quote Guy Debord quoting Napoleon!), from the liberated zones whether temporary or not, we will plan our next moves in this end-game between Money and Life itself.

# Occupy Boston's Anarchist Alliance Calls for Neighborhood-based General Assemblies

Occupy Boston held its first post-Dewey General Assembly on Saturday evening at the Boston Common bandstand. At Saturday's GA, a member of the Anarchist Alliance of Occupy Boston made a statement calling for neighborhood-based general assemblies throughout the winter.

"We are proposing the creation of neighborhood-based Occupy General Assemblies, and participation in those that already exist, such as Occupy JP, Somerville, the Hood, El Barrio," he said. "These assemblies will seek to connect and support existing community groups and will draw in local supporters long time and new, thereby spreading the ideas and activities of the Occupy movement."

The most recent local neighborhood-based Occupy initiative is Occupy Allston-Brighton, which surfaced earlier this week and holds its first General Assembly on Thursday evening. The group is still seeking an indoor space for the GA.

"We will strive to federate these groups and hold summits over the coming months," continued the Anarchist Alliance member. "This initiative will build power over the winter with the intention of allowing us to regroup as a stronger and more united force in the spring against the 1%. We believe this should be the focus of the Occupy movements over the winter."

"If you would like to be part of this initiative, take leadership in your own community, start it," he said. "Work with existing neighborhood assemblies. We are all leaders. We have no rulers. All power to the people."

For updates on neighborhood-based Occupy initiatives around Boston, follow @BostonPhoenix, @Occupy\_Boston, @OccupyAllstonBr, and @OccupyCambridge on Twitter. Follow Occupy the Hood, Ocupemos El Barrio, Occupy JP, and Occupy Somerville on Facebook.

# Occupy Wall Street's Next Steps

by John Jacobsen

*Direct Action is a method by which we ordinary people achieve specific political and economic goals, without having to rely on so-called experts - be they politicians, lawyers or businessmen. In this way, together, we confront the powers which oppress us, and take targeted actions against them to win our demands.* —Anonymous

Occupy Wall Street has taken the nation by storm. It has spread to nearly every major metropolitan area in the country, attracting hundreds of thousands to its confrontational, directly democratic structure.

Since its inception earlier this year, protests have steadily become more militant—beginning with the occupations of public parks, and moving on to attempted general strikes and direct attacks on the banks.

In the wake of these popular actions, the banks have been forced to cancel plans to fully implement new debit card fees. Wells Fargo, CHASE, and finally, Bank of America, have all yielded to the increased pressure protestors have brought down on them, in the form of bank closings, transfers in which over one million bank customers switched to credit unions, and direct confrontations with CEOs and those who support them.

The lesson here is clear: within a matter of days, the concerted effort of the people has accomplished a small piece of what it took the Democratic party months to bungle—we have won what essentially amounts to a financial reform which will save workers around the country mounds of desperately needed cash.

The victory, however, was far from intentional—no group specifically called an action or undertook a campaign to end these bank fees. The fee cuts, then, have simply been a fortunate accident, which may help more of us learn that when we act together, we can achieve more than political parties ever have. When we take Direct Action, a whole new world opens up to us.

## Demands:

The liberal establishment has, since almost the beginning of the US's answer to the global occupy movement, scolded occupiers time and again for not having a list of clear demands.

Various assortments of protesters and radicals, for their part, have retorted that either the occupy movement is simply not about demands, or that any attempt to unify the occupations under a list of demands would allow it to become watered down and lose its revolutionary potential.

Certainly, the occupations have attracted massive numbers of people without the need for—and probably because of—the nebulous character of the protesters' immediate aims. Mass movements are mass movements, after all, because they incorporate such a wide and diverse set of people, with a correspondingly wide and diverse set of aims.

Further, solidifying any sort of official list of demands may very well make the protests that much more controllable by the authorities, who could use moderate concessions and reforms as a means of pacifying protesters. Certainly, this is the wish of liberal commentators such as Anne Applebaum of the *Washington Post*, for whom the protests' "lack of focus," and "confused nature" relegate it to the realm of mere "free speech," and not the noble and effective processes of the "democratic institutions" we already have. She warns readers that if the protests continue to oppose opting back into the system, they risk "[accelerating] the decline" of Western Democracy as we know it.

Cementing a list of demands for the entire movement, however, let alone even for one city, is a needless and probably alienating endeavor. People who currently support the occupations, but may not have the numbers they need to get their demands onto an official list of demands, will simply walk away if they feel like no one is listening to them. Though each of these groups may be small, the number of small groups with their own pet issues is rather large—an attempt to solidify an official list of demands would push them away—and people would leave in droves.

But despite the real possibility that a list of demands could allow the occupations to be co-opted and pacified, a more basic point remains: real, tangible concessions from the 1% are important for protesters to strive for, not only to alleviate the everyday violence we are subjected to, but also as campaigns to empower us and attract new bodies to the occupations.

Practically, this means using the occupations as base camps for individuals and groups to organize their own campaigns, with their own demands. The occupations should remain autonomous, free spaces for people to meet, discuss, and resist, free from the baggage of needless infighting over what particular demands should "unite" us.

## Organizing:

Clearly, although it would avoid the meaningless infighting over creating a list of unified demands, moving that responsibility from the General Assembly to individual campaigns doesn't solve the issue of being co-opted. Politicians and liberal organizers will be just as capable of co-opting a small campaign as they would be at co-opting an occupation, probably even more so. Although it would substantially reduce the odds that the whole occupation could fall victim to this possibility, we still need safe guards against it.

To this end, we turn to the example of the Seattle Solidarity Network—a Seattle-based organization that has successfully led winning Direct Action campaigns against some of the wealthiest and most powerful corporations—most recently, for example, against CHASE bank.

The Seattle Solidarity Network, or SeaSol, has been able to maintain its own independence and autonomy from politicians and capitalists alike by adhering to a strict set of organizing principles.

*1. They don't rely on paid organizers or professionals of any sort.* This means the organization is 100% volunteer run—so no need for grants or large cash infusions of any sort. It also means that its tactics and strategy can be taught to anyone interested in becoming an organizer themselves, empowering working class people to become their own leadership.

*2. They use Direct Action.* This means that the group does not depend on politicians taking up their cause, or on judges hearing the righteousness of their demands. They put pressure directly on their targets themselves, in the form of pickets, flyering, and more colorful tactics – the goal being to make it harder for the target to give in than to hold out.

*3. They are directly democratic: no one speaks for others.* One person, one vote. This ensures that control of the group remains in the hands of its participants.

In order for occupy to sustain its growth, it will have to transition to some form of organization and action which can achieve concrete gains for itself and its communities. In part two, we will go into more detail on the winning strategy and tactics of the Seattle Solidarity Network, and how Occupy could use some of its lessons to help itself.

## How to Win a Fight with the 1%

Over the past month, Occupy Wall Street has chalked up a large number of bold actions against both government and private authorities; it has led an attempted general strike, raucous marches, occupations of banks and abandoned buildings, disruptions of political speeches and press events, and a massive West Coast shut down of major port terminals.

The actions, moreover, have already achieved limited successes—besides having created space for Americans to come together outside of the established political system, they have rightly been credited with having stopped fee increases amongst the largest banks in the country, as well as having widely validated the American public’s fury over increasing inequality, generating massive media exposure. Largely, however, the only real material victory of Occupy so far—its having stopped increased bank fees—has been incidental, and was in no way a conscious objective of the Occupy Movement.

Accordingly, the Occupy Movement remains increasingly susceptible to losing its momentum if it does not achieve some tangible, substantive gains for itself and for its communities. People, after all, don’t just want to vent forever – they want something done. We can be certain that if people do not see real results from the Occupy Movement soon, they will move on to something which seems to offer them more; and with our two political parties gearing up for election season, we should take this threat all the more seriously.

Concretely, what this is going to mean for Occupy supporters is to re-orient their organizing from mass, symbolic actions—such as “mic-checking politicians” and waving signs at CEOs—to more targeted campaigns designed to win real, immediate gains for ourselves.

#### A look at Direct Action and the Seattle Solidarity Network:

A small group, comprised of only several hundred people, the Seattle Solidarity Network (SeaSol) is an organization for local Occupy groups to look to for inspiration, because of just how much it has achieved with such little resources.

Its success, in large part, has been due to its unique strategy. Originally, a good part of this strategy was borrowed from organizations such as the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty and the Industrial Workers of the World, who had launched Direct Action campaigns similar to SeaSol’s present day actions.

The idea of confronting our problems ourselves, of course, actually predates both SeaSol and its forerunners. It is based not only in the anarchist tradition of self management, but critically on the idea that by surrendering control over the outcome of your problems to someone else, you’ve more than likely surrendered the possibility of the outcome of your problem being solved in your favor.

Thus, unions who have relied on the Democratic Party have lost the battle over the Employee Free Choice Act, NAFTA, and even the right to basic collective bargaining rights in Wisconsin; environmentalists have lost a series of contests over offshore drilling and smog regulation; and citizen volunteers for Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign have lost bat-

tles for more transparency in government, and an end to corporate influence over legislators. The list could go on.

Despite the obvious setbacks of relying on political parties and “specialists,” the reason organizations like the Democratic Party remain so pervasive is because there is no obvious alternative for most people. What alternatives there are in the United States are often disorganized, directionless, and most importantly, they normally aren’t *relevant*. They simply don’t achieve anything meaningful to our day-to-day lives.

SeaSol might be seen as a response, then, to both the dominance of “professional” activist organizations that specialize in mediating people’s struggles, and to their ineffective counterparts who partake in the sorts of symbolic, wishy-washy politics the grassroots left has become synonymous with.

The initial debate in anarchist circles about Occupy was whether or not we should be involved at all. The concern, from day one, was whether the radicalism of the anarchist perspective would be lost by associating with a mass movement that was so nebulous and clearly based in demographics that anarchists are uncomfortable working with (indignant liberals, Ron Paul fans, etc). This concern was abated in the towns where there was a large enough group of focused anarchists who were willing to get their hands dirty and get involved anyway. Towns with large anarchist populations, like NYC, that didn't have an organized body of people who were willing to work together had little impact on their local Occupy.

Another criticism comes from skeptics who aren't as concerned about representation as they are about composition. Their argument would be that one, a mass movement isn't capable of achieving anarchist aims by the very nature of mass movement and two, participation in such a movement isn't anarchist itself. These concerns are developed in the series of letters between an editor of *The Sovereign Self* (a publication from Tacoma Washington) and a correspondent.

Finally, there is a criticism that any movement in North America has to take certain issues of identification, experience, and oppression into account. This is developed by a communique by W.A.T.C.H. from Baltimore.

# Criticism



# Lost in the Fog: dead ends and potentials of the occupy movement

by Lost Children's School of Cartography

## Introduction

*So what do you make of this Occupy movement in America?* Of course it is the news that everyone wants to hear about. Al Jazeera claimed shortly after the encampment near Wall Street was founded that the Occupy movement in America was facing a mainstream “media blackout.” But in reality, it seemed that nearly every media source was dedicating coverage nationally and internationally. Despite all the press, if one added up the total number of participants in the fledgling occupations throughout America at that time, he would end up with far less than the total number of demonstrators at a general strike in Athens, or a single American anti-war demonstration from 2004.

This alone should serve as a cause for skepticism, although perhaps it is only predictable that in America, of all places, a social movement would arise firstly as the mere *spectacle of revolt*. After all, its initial coordinators intended from its inception that the Occupy movement of America be a copy of a copy. The genuine, spontaneous, and seemingly unstoppable surge of rage—the insurrection—in the Arab world had already been watered down into the pacifist indignados movement of Europe. Next the American radicals who called for an occupation of Wall Street would try to copy-and-paste the indignados movement to America by sprinkling a tactic—occupation—on what they hoped would prove grounds fertile enough to grow a movement.

That movement now seems to be swept up in its own momentum, and every day there are new developments in what seems to be a genuinely unpredictable and leaderless social reaction. While the occupations were perhaps first populated by the same cliques of activists who had championed the previous failed American social movements, the encampments and demonstrations have grown because they have attracted the self-identified American “middle class.” As American society comes under further blows of the so-called “crisis” of capitalism, the illusion of middle class comfort dissipates, revealing its previously hidden, but now more apparent, dispossession. The Occupy movement is an opportunity for the middle class to protest the “unfairness” of their *proletarianization*. In part thanks to widespread disillusionment with political representatives,

previously non-activist citizens are suddenly eager to participate in an activist social movement. Paradoxically, the brightest hope we can find in this situation is also the grimmest fact: the increasingly dire economic situation is not turning around, and life will not go back to the way it once was. It is precisely because the movement for a preservation of the illusory American dream is doomed to fail that the Occupy movement has the potential to supersede itself.

Of course, regardless of its active decomposition, the middle class carries its values into the movement—the ideological values of the *good citizen*. One could characterize the Occupy movement as a citizens' movement for the survival of capitalist democracy in a moment ripe with potentials for true rupture. Here, self-described radicals, anti-authoritarians and in some cases even anarchists may play the most critical but hidden roles in recuperation, if in their well-intentioned attempt to “build the new world in the shell of the old” they actually succeed at *protecting the core of the old world in the shell of the new*. (We will elaborate on this in a moment.)

But there is also a beautiful discord within the situation. The Occupy movement can hardly be summed up by any particular ideological stance, and its greatest potentials spring from its chaotic features and resistance to definition. Anarchists who have stubbornly refused any participation in what they have dismissed as merely a bourgeois movement have safeguarded their identities as the most radical of all at the cost of guaranteeing their own irrelevancy in the developing situation. In order to move the Occupy movement in the direction of genuine upheaval, anarchists must participate to cause sustained and intensifying disruption and destruction of the apparatuses of capital in order to make this movement a threat to capitalism, aiming to outflank the State by generalizing these tactics. We will also explore the developments in this direction so far as well as some future potentials.

## I. The Destruction of Experience

*When a half-completed action, which has been suddenly obstructed, tries to carry on further in a form which it hopes will sooner or later allow it to finish and realize itself—like a generator transforming mechanical energy into electrical energy which will be reconverted into mechanical energy by a motor miles away—at this moment language swoops down on living experience, ties it hand and foot, robs it of its substance, abstracts it. It always has categories ready to condemn to incomprehensibility and nonsense anything which they cannot contain, to summon into existence-for-Power that which slumbers in nothingness because it has no place as yet in the system of Order. The repetition of familiar signs is the basis of ideology.*

—R. Vaneigem

The rise of interdependency of people and technologies has left us with the destruction of experience. Experience can be found not in reading the news, with its abundance of remote fragments of information, nor during the journey through the nether realms of the subway; not in the demonstration that suddenly blocks the streets; nor in the cloud of tear gas slowly dispersing amid the buildings downtown. It does not suffice to move about, to lose and acquire things, to have encounters, or even to witness more dramatic acts such as political resistance and violence in order to have experience. Wherever we turn experience eludes us. Experience is transmitted not by the extraordinary but by the everyday and it is the very ability to share and communicate everyday experience that has been lost. We have, therefore, “events”—staggering quantities of them—but they are assimilated into no real experience.

To arrive in a space, for the purposes of this essay, we begin in New York City, amidst half a billion people and an embryonic social movement. It could superficially appear to be somewhat of a break from the character of the typical everyday life, emptied of experience. To the contrary, the unifying slogan of the Occupy movement, “we are the 99%,” is a shining example of this profound loss of meaning. Hundreds of people, especially in the first days of the occupations, stood before a crowd, many for the first time, to share their stories of dispossession living under modern capitalism. To mention the slogan again, “we are the 99%,” the intended meaning of which is “we are 99% of the population and it is the 1%—the elite class—which reaps the benefits of our misery,” is not an innocuous statement, whatever truth may be found therein.

Some of the first images of the occupation at Zuccotti Park were taken from cell phone cameras, but this tendency to distance oneself by standing behind a camera is not the only reason these moments too lacked experience. One could also witness the lack when, in the early days of the occupation, Slavoj Žižek gave a speech which was naturally captured on video and viewed widely on the internet. For the first time people around the country and around the world saw the self-proclaimed inventiveness of the Occupy activists at work. The People’s Mic is a technique which developed out of the police prohibitions of voice amplifying devices, such as microphones and megaphones, and has rapidly become a symbolic tool for the expression of a unified voice in lieu of any pretense of individuality.

It would be a misreading of this text to assume an elitist tone from the characterization of the Occupy activists as one and the same. In fact we would like to point to the divisions within this 99% that are irreparable, unalienable and inexorable. This slogan functions in favor of control through inclusion. It is an ideological position prevalent throughout liberal democratic society, that of multiculturalism and the insistence upon tolerance, which has emerged as a right-hand-man to Order, intent on

wiping out any agitational forces within the movement, even calling in back up forces of control, i.e. the police. Upon seeing the video on YouTube of the aforementioned speech in which Žižek states “we are awakening from a dream which has turned into a nightmare,” one cannot help but feel a bodily chill provoked by the repetition from the audience. The mob repeats these words like a nightmarish brainwashing, reaffirming its unity by simultaneously raising its cell phones to capture the event. Perhaps a certain truth is revealed in the natural emphasis given to certain words of speeches due to the tendency for one to repeat only what she feels resonance with and more loudly, with greater verve. Yet, it is evidence only of the fundamental loss that these subjects have suffered that this repetitive game comes with such ease, and seemingly without a sense of fear, much less a sense of irony.

The reports about this tactic of repeating the words of fellow occupants consistently take a positive tone. It is implicit in these accounts that the visceral effect of this process has an all-out beneficial outcome, that unanimity is a desirable end, and that unanimity could even call itself diversity. What is lost here, besides half the time on the clock to allow for repetition, is an analysis of the ways in which the People’s Mic contains the same coercive effects as watching the television news or sitting behind a computer screen. The People’s Mic, like the news, or the internet, relies upon the subject’s passivity, while at the same time presenting the dangerous illusion of participatory action. It is the loss of unmitigated communication has created pervasive passivity. The reliance upon a distanced intake of information, and the conclusion of respect for the authority of a speaker behind a podium or at the occupied park, hints at the authority of the event.

What would be truly inspiring is if the situation was turned completely around: if the crowds refused this ventriloquism in favor of the hundreds of conversations waiting all around them. Imagine the occupation flipped on its axis, its inhabitants acting together based upon true affinity and setting their spectator role alight; the chaotic environment consumed in a cacophony edging toward real experience.

## II. The Events of the “Occupy” movement

Wall Street was the initial line that divided the colonists from natives, the “civilized” from the “savage,” and after the wall fell, what came to divide individuals was what Wall Street controlled: the flow of capital. The obvious significance of such a target has previously been noted by the enemies of power. On September 16, 1920, Wall Street was bombed as an act of revenge for the State’s framing and execution of the Italian immigrants and anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti. The bomb, carried within a horse drawn carriage, shattered the autumn morning in the financial

district of New York, killing thirty-eight people and injuring nearly two hundred more, in an explosion of light and sound. The actors left a trail of leaflets which read “Remember, we will not take it any longer. Free political prisoners or it will be sure death of all of you,” and were signed by “Anarchist Fighters.”

*The Washington Post*, at the time, called the bombing “an act of war.” In the pages of American History this attack, which shut down the economic nerve center of American capitalism, is considered the first act of American terrorism. No surprise then that ninety-one years and one day later—September 17, 2011—a call issued by the Canadian anti-capitalist magazine *Adbusters* to shut down Wall Street again—this time with a 20,000 person occupation—warranted extra attention from the State. But on the day of the proposed action, a demonstration of only a few thousand people neared Wall Street, protesting economic injustice. The police successfully pushed the demonstration to Zuccotti Park (which occupiers later renamed Liberty Park) sweeping the demonstration from the very space which it sought to disrupt and into the corner. This park, like most parks and squares in American cities, has gradually been emptied of life by anti-social ordinances to keep people from inhabiting it, or even sharing any meaningful amount of time within it. Thus ensued the festival atmosphere which would characterize much of the Occupy movement. This celebratory tone of social movements is familiar to activists and wholly apart from the realm of conflict. The speed with which this was accomplished was not only due to the size of the demonstration, a mere 2,000 people, but also a result of the strength of the planned police repression by the city.

The level of police control over the event signals the potential threat that occupations contain. There was nearly one NYPD officer for every fifteen people present, including police in full riot gear. The NYPD issued a 10pm curfew for the area and shut down the power on the blocks of the occupation in order to encourage people to leave. After the police arrested seven hundred people for marching on the Brooklyn Bridge, occupations appeared in numerous cities around the nation. The tactic of occupying public space generalized to hundreds of cities in the US within weeks and within a month there were more than one thousand occupations nation wide.

As diverse as the context of the occupations may have been (given their relative geographic proximity), the organizing committees were united by a central theme: insistence upon lawfulness. The official calls to “Occupy” were thick with the language of the law, going so far in New York as to insist “the sovereign people of any nation have the right to guide the destiny of their nation and may do so by respecting the law.” September 17th was to be a peaceful day of rage. The internet overflowed with ‘how

to' manuals designating appropriate, and legal, demonstrator tactics.

The occupations in the United States claimed inspiration from North Africa and Europe, and in doing so reduced the rebellious occupations of Tahrir Square to calls for Western-style democracy. By understanding the Egyptian insurrection as a non-violent movement for democracy, the American Occupy activists affirm their own pacifism and cry for so-called "real democracy." This obscures from view the general discontent with the global capitalist system.

### The 2011 Oakland General Strike

Oscar Grant Plaza is named after a man who was killed by Bay Area transit police on New Year's day in 2009. In response Oakland saw days of rioting. When an occupation began in the plaza in October of 2011, and shortly thereafter received an eviction notice from the city government, it thus came as no surprise that the occupiers' response was uncompromising. The memory of those riots, and a widespread hatred for the police in general, formed the backdrop of a scene ripe for social upheaval. The response to the eviction notice read:

*Social rebels from around Oakland have created a genuine autonomous space free of police and unwelcome to politicians. Whereas other occupations have welcomed police and politicians into the occupation, negotiating with them, Oakland has carved a line in the cement. That line of demarcation says: if you pass, if you try and break or shadow this autonomous space, you are well aware what we are capable of.*

Nonetheless, the government's attack came on October 25, with police from eighteen Northern California jurisdictions—from cities as far away as Vacaville, Fremont, and Palo Alto—and was a militarized operation. The six hundred cops, outfitted with riot gear and backed by armored vehicles and helicopters, moved in, preemptively shooting tear gas canisters and "beanbag" rounds and throwing flash-bang grenades.

Iraq War veteran Scott Olsen had his skull fractured by a tear gas canister which was fired directly at his head, and as others came to his rescue another cop threw a grenade directly at them. Videos of this went viral on the internet, helping to catalyze the growing anger into concrete actions. On October 26 the General Assembly of Oakland called for a General Strike for November 2. (In the United States only 11.9% of the working class is unionized; much wider involvement would be required for a successful general strike.)

No General Strike has happened in the United States since 1946 when, also in Oakland, one hundred thousand people successfully shut down the city. On the day of November 2 no one was certain if the general strike would indeed occur. We have yet to see a thorough analysis of the composition of strikers that day, but tens of thousands of people—as

many as one hundred thousand by larger estimates—turned out to the marches and, despite serious conflicts with non-violent activists and citizens protecting property from people intent on destroying it, the day was considered a victory. In fact, the crowds of otherwise good citizens cheered when bank windows were shattered, a reaction seldom seen in the United States and surely an indicator of growing discontent with the capitalist order. The ports of Oakland were shut down for the day both by the mobs of demonstrators surrounding them, and by the Longshoreman union of port workers, who participated in the strike.

Since the general strike in Oakland the occupied encampments have been contested terrain, with police evicting them and demonstrators re-occupying.

### Police Repression

The police repression of most occupations has been swift and brutal. In Atlanta the police evicted a group of two hundred people from Troy Davis park with one hundred police including riot squads, helicopters, and cops on horseback. In North Carolina, after a building was occupied for only one day, the police invaded with assault rifles to evict the occupation in the early hours of the morning. This display of force is intended to dissuade Occupy activists from escalating the situation further by taking buildings, action which constitutes a real threat to capitalism.

The State is employing a familiar tactic to disrupt this movement — tiring people out with the threat of lengthy court procedures and serious legal charges. In the first month of occupations there had been over three thousand arrests, and hundreds more since.

While the overt repression by the police makes their role inarguable, there are less apparent forms that police disruption could take. Repeatedly, some elements of the movement call for police to join the occupations as part of the 99%, police unions have endorsed the occupation in Baltimore, Maryland. Clearly, the asphyxiation that the inclusion of police would have on the already pro-law-and-order occupations is one possible dead end that the occupations face.

All across the country the State employs a two fold strategy to strangling the occupations: the inclusion of the occupations within the paradigm of the law and the simultaneous exclusion of their violent potential force. In places such as Sacramento district attorneys have refused to prosecute protestors, speaking up in support of the movement. In Orange County, California, tents were declared by the city to be legally protected “free speech.”

In Seattle, where occupiers have refused to cooperate with city officials and instead have used the encampment as a base to plan actions against banks and foreclosures, the police have attacked demonstrators

indiscriminately. They are now under scrutiny after a crowd was wildly pepper-sprayed while complying with police by moving out of the street and on to the sidewalk. Among them was an 84 year old woman. The image of her tear-streaked face became the photo opportunity for the pacifists to tout their self-fulfilling logic which mistakes publicizing the brutality of the police for a substantive critique of the police-state-apparatus. She has now appeared as a guest on international progressive media such as Democracy Now. Also among those attacked by the police at this demonstration was a pregnant woman, who the police kicked and hit in the stomach with a bicycle, then pepper sprayed. She was rushed to the hospital, but still suffered a miscarriage. This very brutal and publicized attack comes as another in a long string of unprovoked violence from Seattle police, who faced both a militant anti-police movement in the streets and the beginning of a Federal investigation last winter.

More interesting still, Oakland Mayor Jean Quan admitted to a conference call between at least eighteen other city leaders to address the problem of the occupations, and specifically to address the problem of anarchist involvement:

*I was recently on a conference call of eighteen cities across the country who had the same situation, where what had started as a political movement and a political encampment ended up being an encampment that was no longer in control of the people who started them. And what I think you're starting to see is that the Occupy movement is looking for more stability. I spent a lot of last week talking to peaceful demonstrators, ones who wanted to separate themselves in my city away from the anarchist groups who had been looking for a confrontation with the police.*

The conference calls were organized by the Police Executive Research Forum, a national police group, one of the 17,000 police agencies in the country. The former Seattle chief of police, Norm Stamper, in an interview following the most recent brutal incident of police repression in Seattle, articulated the insidious strategy that police agencies across the country should be employing against Occupy demonstrations:

*If the police and the community in a democratic society are really working hard—and it is hard work—to forge authentic partnerships rather than this unilateral, paramilitary response to these demonstrations, then the relationship itself serves as a shock absorber. Picture police officers helping to protect the demonstrators. Picture demonstrators saying, “We see people on the fringes, for example, who are essentially undemocratic in their tactics. And so, we need to work together to resolve that issue.”*

The triumph of American policing is this partnership that Stamper alludes to. Programs devoted to the furtherance of identification with authority are the most effective way that the policing apparatus func-



tions, at once reducing the material role of the police in society and more than doubling its unpaid workforce.

A society whose central strategy for control is observation and localized containment sees its greatest threat in that which it cannot identify. Thus, by identifying the conflictual elements as “anarchist”, the police and politicians have gotten something right and at the same time made a gross and self-assuring leap. The forces of disorder in this situation are not, in fact, anarchist alone. They are much more broad, more multitudinous than the forces of order have imagined.

### III. Dead Ends

#### The Ballot Box as Coffin

In a moment we will explore the potentials for the Occupy movement to become a real threat to capital. For now, we will dedicate some thought to the various dead ends the movement may face.

Overt repression of a movement is the simplest termination to understand, but also the least likely that this movement will face. A brutal or violent suppression of a protest movement that has mostly agreed to play by the rules could cause a crisis of legitimacy for the American state and cause the demonstrations to increase rapidly in size and intensity. In US society, even the staunchest of good citizens holds the belief in “freedom of speech” as a practically sacred right. For this and other reasons, a far more likely outcome, and a more efficient avenue for the State, is the violent suppression of any uncontrollable elements of the movement combined with the seamless recuperation of its more digestible elements.

The more liberal of America’s two political parties immediately moved to absorb the Occupy movement as a movement for voters in next year’s presidential election. There is a reason that the reigning president of the United States and other political functionaries of the Democratic party have officially endorsed the Occupy movement. It is important to remember that Obama’s last election campaign was experienced as a “grassroots” “activist” event for so many American voters who essentially cast a ballot for “change” from the stifling climate of the Bush era. The swindle was effective, and Obama was voted in wearing the mask of the *activist* politician; he then proceeded to carry on business as usual. Like the most formulaic of Hollywood sequels, it would be completely unsurprising for the Democratic architects to repackage the same script again. Their campaign to woo occupiers could even be timed cleverly; a long winter spent sleeping in tents and being beaten and pepper sprayed by police could revive the exhausted, naive belief that one’s troubles can be voted away.

The citizens’ values that the middle class carries into the movement prepare the occupations to be buried in the ballot box. Through insisting on a discourse and practice grounded in non-violence and at times

even legality (highlighted, for example, in the ridiculous claim that the Egyptian insurrection was a “non-violent revolution,” a common farce in the American movement at least until Egyptian comrades addressed it directly in their beautiful statement, “Letter from Cairo”), one that affirms the very same values the State claims to defend and honor, such as free speech and democracy, and limited to a critique of “corporate greed” rather than the alienating and dispossessing social relationship of capitalism, liberals attempt to remove any rough edges that would prevent the movement from integrating smoothly into the dominant political apparatus. Furthermore, in contrast to acting directly to abolish alienation together for ourselves and our desires, as in insurrection, to center activity on indignation and protest implies a continued belief in some authority who can hear and possibly grant our demands. Here we recall an anecdote from the indignados movement of Barcelona: the same pacifists of the plaza movement who would cry “non-violent movement!” and “provocateur!” at individuals who dared to so much as block traffic during the occupation of Plaça Catalunya nonetheless took a liking to the common Catalan anarchist slogan, “No one represents us.” It soon became a popular slogan in the indignados movement, but in passing from the anarchists to the pacifists its meaning altered significantly without the changing of a single word. Whereas anarchists have used the slogan to mean “we won’t allow anyone to represent us,” the new significance seems to be, “we are protesting because we have been insufficiently represented.” This position begs for the response of *better representatives*.

One perspective from US comrades has been that, while a critique of these limiting ideologies must be persistently present in the occupations in order to keep the situation from becoming controlled by political parties or would-be leaders, it is only through participation in struggle that American citizens will lose their illusions. For example, the infuriating and common argument at multiple encampments that the police should not be vocally—and certainly not violently—opposed because “they too are a part of the 99%” will not die out because of superior anarchist arguing against the role of the police in the protection of capital, but through citizens’ own direct experience with police brutality. Indeed, already the tone of the relationship between demonstrators and police has changed as police have repeatedly used chemical weapons and so-called “less lethal” ammunition to disperse peaceful protestors. But the strength of the citizen identity should not be underestimated: one popular reaction to the police violence has not been to fight back but to claim that police should not be beating passive demonstrators, *but rather doing their jobs and arresting them*. In Seattle, a protest against police violence recently took the position that police should join the movement. In Washington D.C., when members of the encampment were asked by the media why the po-

lice had let them be while encampments in New York, Oakland, and Portland were being evicted, they cited their “very good working relationship with the police” and, of course, their commitment to non-violence.

The seemingly tireless drive to keep the movement as civil and non-threatening as possible has not barred some radicals from predicting that the political apparatus will prove incapable of co-opting the Occupy movement. It’s worth remembering that the anti-war movement of the early 2000s swelled to massive proportions (with eight hundred thousand marching against the ruling political party in New York City in 2004, dwarfing any given day of all occupations in America combined) but was in the end completely disempowering, more or less terminating in the dead end of a failed voter’s movement against Bush. But this situation is different: whereas the anti-war movement was largely dominated and organized by liberal and leftist non-governmental organizations, according to reports from comrades in the US, their attempts to co-opt or control the current movement have been laughably inadequate. Combining this with the simple fact that for a long time very few people have taken elections seriously in the US, with the majority nearly always abstaining from voting at all, perhaps it is true that the electoral machine will be powerless to transform the Occupy movement into a voter’s mobilization. Still, this conclusion merely begs the question of what form recuperation *will* take, and to answer this we must look more closely at the more insidious pitfalls that may be laid by radicals themselves.

#### Prefiguring What? On Guarding the Old World in the Shell of the New

The more optimistic of radicals have not hesitated to call the Occupy movement a “true revolutionary moment.” Indeed, the movement seems to be growing, and for the most part the overt repression we have already described has only seemed to bring more people into the streets. It remains to be seen if this will continue after the latest wave of coordinated evictions described above. But assuming for a moment that the occupations will in fact continue to grow, we must analyze exactly *what kind* of revolution might be happening. Any revolution that fails to constitute a real *crisis* to capitalism—the realization of communism and anarchy—will wind up providing capitalism with the modifications it needs to survive the superficial crises of its own design. To some, it may seem extraordinarily pessimistic to propose that what some are considering the most inspiring social movement of their lives may actually be the creation of the new forms of social organization through which the dominant order will survive. But it isn’t hard to imagine that, in a world turned upside down by capital, social movements would be animated by the need to resolve the internal contradictions of capitalism in order to ensure its survival for another era, rather than the drive to set the world on its feet.

History is the graveyard of all our ancestors' half-revolutions, and anarchists should know the tombstones by heart. Here we would like to offer a very recent example of the ways that new modes of struggle offered by radicals quickly become the dominant and ubiquitous modes of alienated survival under capitalism. In 1999, Indymedia was developed in Seattle as a way to break capitalist control of the media through decentralized, participatory content generation, publication, and editing. The new potentials of communication that were opened by the technological developments of the internet age were seized upon by radicals as new opportunities for self-representation and self-organization. Less than a decade later, the internet is completely dominated by user-generated content and self-representation, from Facebook to news blogs—but this is almost entirely corporate-controlled and for-profit. Social media is the most glaring example of modern alienation—individuals brought together in their isolation—and it is also widely known that the State relies heavily on social media to spy on activists and radicals. Meanwhile (in the US at least) the Indymedia network has largely fallen into disuse. The change Indymedia activists offered in the way news was communicated was a “radical” change in the sense that it was drastically different from what preceded it, but the social movements it was a part of were not sufficiently “radical” in that they did not successfully cut to the root of the alienation. As such, the tactical developments of radicals of that era sadly look, in retrospect, to be voluntary experimentation to discover the new forms of domination.

The optimistic radicals and anarchists are cheerleading the forms the Occupy movement has taken—the widespread use of occupation as a tactic, the creation of self-managed encampment communities, the refusal of leaders and the use of general assemblies and consensus—but we must also consider that the experimentation offered by this movement may in time pave the terrain of the future repressive society. Douglas Rushkoff, a media theorist and progressive author, has spoken in defense of the occupations by characterizing them as “prototypes for a new way of living.” In his article for CNN, “Beta-testing the New Society,” he explains that occupiers are developing new social forms, such as an alternative currency, that will help society change from a “competitive, winner-takes-all” attitude to the “mutual aid” of “local production and commerce, credit unions, unfettered access to communications technology and consensus-based democracy.” If we are to believe Rushkoff, the occupations are not a tactic for the abolition of capitalism and government but rather the catalyst for the adaptation they need to survive after the crisis. This argument complements the position of an article from the capitalist journal *International Business Times* entitled, “Saving Capitalism from the Capitalists,” which explains the occupations should be understood (from a pro-“corporate capitalism” perspective) as “‘round one’ of a reform process”

for “economic and fiscal reform” against the “risk and greed” that caused the meltdown of 2008. This brings to mind the unfortunate image of occupiers carrying signs reading “We’re not anti-capitalism; we’re anti-greed!” after the routine red-baiting of right wing news stations.

If the occupiers cannot develop strategies to truly threaten capitalism, the best they will be able to accomplish is a self-managed austerity. While the economy cannot or will not provide jobs and homes for people, and while the State cuts the meager amount of social spending that existed before, self-organized encampments provide food, makeshift shelter, entertainment, a feeling of community, some semblance of medical care, and free classes, as well as the personal fulfillment of participation in a political process. This last point is important, because it is critical to understand beyond material elements what the occupations may be providing for people that they can no longer get from the political system. At the same time that disillusionment with democratic representatives soars, capitalism seemingly no longer has any use for the people who have relied on the dual role they are now denied—worker/shopper—for their very identities. This could create a very volatile and unstable situation for power, and left unaddressed would likely contribute to an increase in riots that generalize—with insurrections that are totally irrational and uncommunicative to democratic government and capital becoming the “general strike” of the new era.

From this vantage, it becomes clear that the real risk the occupations face is worse than the usual “pressure release” feature of social movements; rather, what we could see is the self-organization of communities for survival and self-fulfillment *out of the way* of the capitalism that no longer has place for them in its chains. Democracy can even survive—and function more efficiently—as a totalitarian social mode by moving from the ballot boxes to the squares, carried on in the hearts of the good citizens who make up the assemblies. If the Occupy movement can only manage to become a revolution by half, it is prefiguration of the worst kind: the living death of participatory austerity capitalism. It is the inversion of an old anarchist slogan: the preservation of the old world in the shell of the new.

#### IV. Potential

*Popular struggle is obviously not fit to strike any large scale blows but like something vaporous and fluid it should not condense anywhere.*

—Clausewitz

#### From Event to Experience

In order to discern, in the chaotic confusion of the Occupy movement, where exactly the potentials lie, it is indicative to look at where power re-

veals itself to be threatened. It's significant that, for the first two months, most cities have been somewhat accommodating of the occupations—as long as they stay stationed in innocuous spaces, away from the machinery of power they could disrupt. In New York, Mayor Bloomberg again took the position, as with the 2004 demonstrations against Bush, that the city government was happy to respect the “free speech” of protestors, so long as they remained within the confines of the law—and the police barricades that kept them off Wall Street.

A lesser-known example illustrates this: in Seattle, occupiers first camped out in a park at the heart of the city's financial district. The mayor of Seattle—a progressive—publicly endorsed the occupation while also calling on the police to routinely harass protestors by enforcing the law to its most absurd extent, including a rule against tents and against sleeping in public parks. While the demonstrators were enduring the rain and the harassment of police who arrested anyone who so much as sat down with an umbrella, and who shined their flashlights in the eyes of anyone trying to sleep, the mayor graciously extended an offer for the encampment to move to the property surrounding City Hall, where the occupiers would be welcome to set up tents and use the public restrooms. After much debate between the liberals who were willing to work with city officials and who saw the offer as a victory and the more radical elements who instinctively distrusted the invitations of the powerful, the camp decided to stay at the park and face the police harassment. The Seattle occupation eventually moved its headquarters to a university campus, using the encampment as a center to plan actions against banks and the occupation of foreclosed homes in the area. Because the occupation has deliberately chosen to maintain its oppositional power, the police continue to wage war on it, as described above.

As we have noted, it is precisely where the occupations have boldly moved from symbolic protest to active disruption of the apparatuses of power that police have enacted the most heavy-handed violence. If we accept, then, that the encampments themselves as protests are not threatening to the State or capitalism, and that the violent repression of any movement in the direction of occupying private property reveals how this movement might actually become threatening to power, how do we explain the coordinated evictions of encampments in New York, Portland, Denver, St. Louis, Salt Lake City, San Francisco and Oakland a little over a week ago? Without discounting the valuable contributions of some lesser-known occupations, in our analysis the coordinated evictions are the State's response to the Oakland occupation's strategic escalation against capital, and its fear that such action may spread to other occupations. The developments in Oakland are inspiring and unprecedented. From its beginning, the Oakland occupation—or the Oakland *commune*, as some have

taken to calling it—has insisted on its autonomy from the State and from capital. It has shaped itself to be not a protest encampment but a realization of a radical *being-together* in which police and politicians are explicitly unwelcome and the laws and property of capitalists are disregarded. It has openly evoked the power of the city's recent riots. In fact, the mayor of Oakland, who has tried to play a similar game as the mayor of Seattle in simultaneously endorsing the occupation and authorizing police violence against it, was chased from the occupation by an angry crowd when she tried to address it. Most importantly, the occupation has not contented itself with being a mere *alternative* to the larger society outside of it, and has reacted to repression with an offensive against capitalism: the call for a general strike. While, for the sake of strategic clarity, the significance of this event should not be exaggerated or mythologized, it should be noted that this first call for such a strike since 1946 did not come from the labor bureaucracy's representatives, but from an autonomous assembly.

The coordinated evictions that followed the general strike were the State's preemptive blow to prevent such developments from spreading. When thousands of demonstrators stormed and occupied the capitol building of Madison, Wisconsin in 2011, police first fiercely guarded the government halls, and then were called off so that the movement against austerity could be defeated elsewhere: in the courts. The truth is that, in our era, the real reason for the police to viciously defend a territory is to keep an unruly population from discovering that there is *nothing there*, and that power resides elsewhere. The developments in Oakland have provoked the State to evict as many encampments as possible not in order to keep people from holding the parks (or, even more ridiculously, because of the health and safety hazards cited by local governments to justify the raids.) Rather, by breaking up the encampments, the State has temporarily forestalled the possibility of people discovering that the plazas and parks mean nothing other than an opportunity to break with everyday life, find each other, and then spread the occupations *everywhere else*, including the major power arteries of the capitalist system all around us. It is only by relentlessly pursuing war against the dominant social order that the occupations can become *communes*, and not the experimental ground from which capitalism is reformed.

#### From Intelligible to Inoperative

What next? In response to the coordinated evictions, the Oakland commune has again gone on the offensive, this time calling for the coordinated shutdown of all West Coast ports on December 12. All West Coast occupations now have their work cut out for them to plan their own attacks under the duress of the police attacks on their material bases. The trap that is laid now is for occupiers to fall into circular battles merely to



keep the parks as protest spaces—especially if those battles are largely played out as courtroom dramas, as is happening currently in New York.

While *occupying everything* is a tall but necessary order for the still young Occupy movement of America, *demanding nothing* seems to have occurred quite naturally. Although *Adbusters* advised that demands could be decided at Occupy Wall Street's general assembly, thus far the movement has presented no official demands. This is to its benefit. The Occupy movement has been far too undefinable, fluid, leaderless, and chaotic to reach consensus on any list of demands, and any list that could be compiled from participants would be self-contradictory. It has not even been formally decided to demand nothing—this is just the *de facto* position of a movement whose participants are motivated not by a common program or platform, but by general discontent and a preference not to continue on with business as usual.

Needless to say, any effort to speak on behalf of the movement and offer an intelligible demand to power should be resisted and shut down, and this is far easier to accomplish in a movement organized through general assemblies than in previous social movements dominated by non-governmental power concentrations. The more the Occupy movement has no regard for capitalism and its laws and protectors—the more its aims are incomprehensible to power—the better. What some have described as the confusion of this movement is in fact one of its greatest strengths in that it contributes to the movement's uncontrollable nature. By declining demands—or any dialogue with power—while expanding their occupations, the occupiers can refuse to acknowledge any authority other than their own. This undefined opposition is far more threatening to power than articulate protest, which can be digested and reworked back into the system.

The most revolutionary potential of this situation lies not in the building of a movement of some mass identity, but in the Occupy movement superseding itself by remaining a fluid, moving, and thickening fog of non-subjects realizing their desires and material needs in the immediate. This is a far cry from the current situation, and would require the destruction of the very identities now used as fortresses from which to wage struggle. We have already seen that the old forms of struggle, the general strike, can be invoked not by the old powers of labor bureaucracies or leftist political parties, but by the incoherent commune of Oakland. On this new terrain, we will witness the clashing of inoperative resistance and the identity of the middle class citizen, which will either crack under duress or which will prove itself strong enough to carry on the values of the old world—its cult of work, democracy, and alienation. We necessarily must also bring on the destruction of radical identities. The anarchist, with all her preconceived notions of how a revolution is set in motion, must also lose her specialized role in the fog, although not her wits. It is more important to find all the



new pathways to generalizing revolt than to have the biggest, strongest, or most destructive black bloc. If an insurrection is to come, we will need more and more riots—not specialized rioters.

It is fair to recognize the difficulty and the immensity of the tasks of the revolution that wants to create and maintain a classless society. It can begin easily enough wherever autonomous proletarian assemblies, not recognizing any authority outside themselves or property of anybody whatsoever, placing their will above all laws and specializations, will abolish the separation of individuals, the commodity economy and the State. But it will only triumph by imposing itself universally, without leaving a patch of territory to any form of alienated society still existing.

# A Debate on Occupation and the 99%

## Occupy Nothing, Take Everything

by Cresencia Desaffo

The current state of the Western World seems to be in utter disarray; capitalism is failing us. Financial markets are collapsing—people are losing their jobs, and consequently, their homes. The cost of living climbs: college tuition is in an upturn, the cost of food and gas is on the rise. It is now difficult for the masses to ignore the reality that they have let, for far too long, their livelihoods be controlled by government, corporation and ruling class. Understandably, people are in a state of panic. Some are taking this moment of instability as an opportunity to take hold of their lives, without begging the state for help. The rest continue to grovel at the feet of politicians, heads bowed, with their list of demands clutched between quivering fingertips. They beg for governments and the wealthy alike to recognize their state of desperation, to take pity on them and make some *real, democratic* changes.

This is the tone of the “Occupy Everything” movement which consists of the spokesperson for the oppressed 99% whose job it is to yell and scream while occupying parks and shopping plazas (that’ll show them) in opposition to the wealthy 1%. Although it is still fairly unclear what their demands are, it can be sure that they pine for a continuation of their previously comfortable existences. I do not desire what the government deems a good existence. What they have to offer in the form of housing, education, work, and social programs will never satiate my needs. Therefore, I will never align myself with a movement that consists of the masses (the supposedly dissident voice for the 99%) begging the government to give back what is rightfully theirs. My anarchism does not beg nor does it demand. It takes.

As made blatantly obvious by virtue of their contradictory cries for direct democracy and representation and reform, this mass movement, is anything *but* anarchistic. What began as a few hundred people squatting a park off of Wall-Street has now spread throughout the globe—“Occupy Everything” has now become an international phenomenon. Even anarchists are jumping on the bandwagon. To me, this is not a surprise. Anarchists (particularly those residing in the States) have a long-standing tradition of latching on to pre-existing movements and attempting to sway them in *their own* direction. And where are these victories as of yet?

I question just how self-sustaining this movement-leeching tactic is. Sure the loudest of the “Occupy Everything” bunch are furious at the corporate heads who are getting away with what they have done, but where will their fury take them? The reality is that they will not stop voting. Likewise, they will not truly take back what is theirs and the wise anarchist is hard-pressed to convince them otherwise. Arguing with liberals about why their ideas are sub-par only distracts from a potentially very real contention. Now is the time to stop crossing our fingers for a mass movement that hints of anarchy; let’s start defining what it is that we want as individuals. Start drawing lines. Find, in you, what makes your blood boil. Begin to decide what it is you desire and take it—for it is yours.

## Occupy Everything, Take Everything: *A Response to Cresencia Desafio* by anonymous

Does Cresencia wish to be a specialist in revolt and discontent?

She opens her article by claiming “the masses” are having a difficult time ignoring the reality of social control via government, corporations, and the ruling class. And that they now are mostly begging for “real democratic changes.” (Granted she admits a few are not begging.) Her analysis of the masses, which she apparently feels outside of, is in reference to the recent Occupy movement.

In her article “Occupy Nothing, Take Everything”, she snidely chides the Occupiers for simply yelling and screaming while occupying parks and plazas, saying “that will show them.” She is also sure that all the Occupiers “pine for a continuation of their previously comfortable existence.” While reiterating that she does not desire what the government deems a good existence, Cresencia is quick to jump from the assumption that all the Occupiers are meek reformists who are simply speaking truth to power to regain their comfortable positions in society. The irony in her critique is clear. She has never been to Occupy. Her analysis of the people involved paints them all as middle-class liberals lamenting their lost managerial status. Fortunately, that is far from the reality of Occupy.

One of the ongoing questions around the Occupy movement from all sectors has been over the question of demands. Everyone wants to know what they want. Yet, there has been no concrete answer. Because, like Cresencia, many Occupiers also take and do not demand. There has been a strong refusal of demands and a strong push toward taking space. Each Occupy city differs greatly from the other so it's hard to say overall if that is true—I will clarify that I am speaking from my experience at two of the

biggest in the country, Occupy Oakland and Occupy Seattle.

The Occupy movement is at this point a mass movement. Mass movements deserve critique. Mass movements are never wholly anarchistic. Yet, mass movements tend to be the gateway for widespread struggle. Anarchist interventions in movements are key to transforming them into struggles that can be threatening to the social peace. Anarchists are never alone in this desire either. We saw anarchists act recently in these ways with others in the UK student struggle, in the struggle against dictatorship era laws in Chile, in Greece in the struggle against a landfill in a small community, and most recently in the Occupy movement in Oakland.

While addressing Occupy as a mass movement that anarchists are naive to be involved in Cresencia chides anarchists interventions as a US phenomenon, which could not be farther from the truth. She goes on to question the victories in anarchist involvement. It's unclear what victory means to her, but her view from the armchair becomes more clear as she questions victory this early on. Victory in Oakland could look like thousands of people closing down the Port, reclaiming Oscar Grant Plaza, occupying or taking over an empty building, fighting the police openly in the street, or smashing out the windows of a substation. It could also look like hundreds of people taking back the parts of their dignity that is stolen from them everyday by learning to stand up for themselves in Oakland. It also may look like 100 youth and others standing up for their arrested comrades in Seattle by fighting the police and pushing them off the streets. But I imagine victory will show its face more clearly in years to come, building off of the small moments gained in the streets today.

In a similar manner Cresencia wants to dissect and manage the idea of fury as she wished to do with victory. In her closing paragraph she states, "but where will their fury take them?" To her an individual's fury means nothing because she knows nothing of it. This is apparent when she says "the reality is they will not stop voting." Once more, the author seems to be glaring off of her armchair, because the reality is that the majority of people have already stopped voting. Yet, having no faith in anyone but herself and her pretentious sense of consciousness, Cresencia is sure they will continue to flock toward the ballot never learning to "truly take back what is theirs."

What is theirs? And what is ours? As anarchists, I'd hope that we all have a basic class analysis.

We should acknowledge that the ruling class holds the means of production. A simple answer then would be that, we must seize, take, or destroy the means of production. Oddly enough, we can't take all that back by ourselves. We can take back moments of our lives back by fighting back collectively with our comrades and potential comrades as people have done in Oakland and less so in Seattle. We could even expropri-

ate a few commodities and distribute them. But we can't take back the means of production with our few friends and their armchairs. We have to diversify in collective struggle with other people. We have to leave our houses. We certainly shouldn't "cross our fingers for a mass movement that hints at anarchy" but we should fight for anarchy and force out the space that makes movements unpredictable and uncontrollable. Through spontaneity movements can erupt into struggles that explode.

In closing, Cresencia urges all anarchists to "start drawing lines...find what makes your blood boil...take it...for yours." I also urge anarchists to draw lines between yourselves and liberals: don't let them dominate undefined space, find comrades in the streets who share that common boiling point, take back your dignity and push for the indefinite general strike.

## Reality Hurts: A Response to Anon.

by Cresencia Desaffo

Bravo Anon. This is a beautifully articulate and interesting retort to my piece. To answer your question: no, I do not "wish to be a specialist in revolt and discontent." Do you?

It seems as though you took quite a bit of time actually reading my article, which I appreciate. Yours is the first true critique I have received and I am flattered that you have given it so much attention (my ego is bursting). And apparently you know me, or at least think you know me, based on your *outstanding* analysis of my character. We should really get tea sometime, sit back in my comfy armchairs and catch-up like the good ol' days!

Yes, it is true that I have chosen not to attend Occupy Seattle, Olympia, or Tacoma. Call me an armchair anarchist if you would like; I prefer skeptic. I involve myself in actions only if I feel compelled to do so and I believe that it would behoove others to do the same. I have never felt *obligated* to participate in any action or project, so why would I begin now? Hesitancy, critique, and contemplation are not synonymous with inaction. The reasoning behind writing the article was to question those anarchists (you know them well) who jump onto any and all opportunity for dissonance for the sake of simply *doing* something. What I want to know is: for what reason are people involving themselves? It is difficult for me to believe that anarchists are passionately fighting for *themselves and their desires* within the context of this mass movement. If anarchists are only doing for the fear of *not* doing, then the result will inevitably be half-assed and tossed aside once the fire has fizzled out. I have experienced this, first-hand, time and time again (eg: the anti-war movement, anti-prison/anti-border, anti-police, etc)—when shit stops being

exciting, the scene moves onto the next hot thing. My hunch is that this probably has a lot to do with people putting a whole lot of effort into struggles they feel absolutely no connection to, rather than focusing on those contentions with which they can identify.

Thank you for reminding me, but I am well aware that the top 1% “controls the means of production,” and this, of course, is beyond disconcerting—it’s infuriating. I might remind you that it has been the case for quite a while now, and it wasn’t until it hit more people in their pockets that large numbers of people began expressing their rage. True—not all of the Occupiers are “middle-class liberals lamenting their lost managerial status,” but I do believe that the 99%’s *spokespeople* are upset because their comfortable lives were ripped from them, and that what they are now demanding is their comfort back. Is that such a ridiculous observation? I think not.

Although I choose to stand outside of the Occupy movement’s representation of the 99%, I *am* one of those 99% that this movement is representing. Before this “movement” I didn’t pretend to have *everything* in common with 99% of the world’s population, so why would I assume that the horrible economic climate would radicalize the *masses* so much that I would suddenly have affinity with all of them? Talk about a poor class analysis, Anon—the gap between the top 1% and the rest is ever-growing, but there is also *quite* a large gap between the lower class and the upper-middle class (all represented under this vague 99%). Since when do you have so much in common with say, the upper-middle class and their desires (see: Occupy Harvard)?

Although I am not a fan of demands, I do believe that in order to take one must first define what it is they want. What is it that you would like to take back for yourself, Anon? Is it your dignity? Your autonomy? Is it “seizing, taking or destroy[ing] the means of production”? If so, it should be noted that there is quite the difference between seizing and destroying. You are correct that we “cannot take all of that back ourselves.” But, as an anarchist, why would you desire the perpetuation of the flow of capital? I am only interested in its absolute destruction. I am still unclear what it is that causes a fire in you; that makes you feel as though the Occupy movement is the proper forum for you to express your rage.

You seem to be all willy-nilly in your definition of “victory,” stating that victory could be everything from shutting down the Port of Oakland to smashing a window of a sub-station. In my mind, those things are *not* synonymous: smashing a fucking window (while potentially fun) is purely symbolic; shutting down a port is not—it actually disrupts the flow of capital. I think you misunderstood my sarcasm when I asked, “... where are the victories as of yet?”—I do not believe in some sort of external Cause, and in that sense, am not interested in victory for the masses.

“Winning” is not my goal, because it is a ridiculous one. What I want most is to live free and thrive in all aspects of my life. The State, capitalism, consumerism, civilization...these are all things that stand in the way of my aims. When I live my life truly for *myself* is when I feel victory. All of this being said, I will leave you with this quote to ponder:

*...we realized that all we ever do at one time or another will not stop progress and less so if there are still false-radicals and leftist struggles that aim at the destruction of a target, but have not yet noticed, have not viewed beyond, that all this does not do anything; some think that this is pessimistic, think that we have fallen into defeatism...we say this rather because it is the reality and the reality we know that hurts.*

-ITW (Individualists tending toward the wild)

Yours truly

## For the Rupture of Reality: *A second response*

by R.R. previously (un)known as Anon

The reality we were born into is harsh yet boring. It is terrible and uninspiring. Nonetheless, it is where we live and where we must engage. It is from this perspective that I snidely (perhaps too snidely) jumped to insults in my reply to Cresencia Desaffio's "Occupy Nothing, Take Everything." A perspective that we may have shared if it weren't for the latter crucial component. Desaffio is a skeptic, I wouldn't deny her that. However when I repeated the word armchair it was an effort to convey a simple contradiction: anarchists must have a praxis but from Desaffio's article all I gathered was critique without practice.

The arguments spelled out in Occupy Nothing were nothing but a re-gurgitation of the media's soundbites and cliches. This is disappointing from someone who claims to value "hesitancy, critique, and contemplation" and is adverse to feeling "obligated to participate in any action or project." The lack of critical thought promotes a muddled process that leads to a more passive engagement with the reality before us. Alienation, isolation, and mediation are all forms that keep us passively discontent. We can be hesitant and critical but we must do it from a place where we understand our enemies to the best of our ability as well as our potential comrades and points of rupture. Occupy is in need of critique but the best critique is critical engagement. Occupy has not been static and neither have the anarchists who have participated in it. We have adapted to the protests and occupations, adding our own tactics, strategies, and

analysis—never compromising on our core ideas. Why do we involve ourselves? I can speak for myself and trust that when I speak of “we” I am not misrepresenting the few close comrades I am including in my thoughts.

Contrary to Desafío's conclusions of local anarchists' motivation to engage with Occupy, we do in fact feel passion. I am always on the prowl for dissonance, a chance to link my own discontent to the unknown others who I know feel similarly. This does come from a place of a need to “simply be doing something” yet it is not the place Desafío claims it to be. The need to engage in protests or in tiny ruptures and possible explosions does in fact come from a place of passion, a profound place of desire to experience a collective feeling of revolt and communion against all domination. If my place in movements as an anarchist was for the “fear of not doing” the results would be as Desafío describes, “half-assed and tossed aside,” and I would promptly move on to something more stimulating. Yet, instead I have felt my desire for total freedom set on fire for moments at a time that made every semi-conscious moment of boredom worth it in my pathetic, mostly passionless life. Struggle, comrades, and the connections I have to those relationships are the only things I do feel. Thus I identify strongly with them.

We do not just move on to the “hot next thing when shit stops being exciting”; we act on our desires to make those moments fulfilling. When we step back and see that the social pulse is not in line with ours we pull out until next time. But we are always there and always waiting to reconnect with all the unknown faces in the streets again. This is what inspiration is and what common struggle looks like: it is the breakdown of isolation. This is why I can be so offended when one person speaks ill of a struggle they have never even witnessed.

Desafío and I could argue at lengths over what Occupy protestors want. The reality is that some do want their comfortable lives back but an overwhelming number never had those comfortable lives and are seeking to destroy the world that allows others to have while they do not. Therefore while Desafío stands outside of the Occupy movement I prefer to stand with the latter group of people. I agree with her when she says she stands outside the 99% because it is a crude and abstract representation of many diverse social classes. However, from my experience at Occupy in Seattle, the movement has been a catalyst for the excluded to meet one another. The upper tier of the “99%” is present but distant from the chaotic lesser class.

“What is it that you would like to take back for yourself, Anon?” Desafío's egoism runs clear here. Yet as many egoist and individualists may at times forget, anarchists of the social vein do have individual desires and drives. I may share Desafío's interest in “absolute destruction” yet it is unclear what either of our interpretations of that sometimes mean-



ingless phrase are. She is perpetually confused as to my involvement in Occupy and questions why I choose that forum to express my rage. If I haven't said it already, Occupy is a clear place for that expression because my desire is to share my rage with others. Occupy is a social movement that has attracted hundreds of people in my city to common places of angry and discontent; it has granted me beautiful moments of shared rage and precious moments of life that I have not felt previously. This manifested most profoundly in Seattle at the occupation of a warehouse and the port shutdown, but also in the streets at smaller demonstrations and house occupations.

If she truly wishes to “live free and thrive” and believes that “the State, capitalism, etc...” stand in her way then I encourage her to live as an anarchist egoist, and act against power and for the freedom she so desires. The moments akin to freedom I have experienced at Occupy cannot be transcribed, only lived, so I dare Desafío to risk the hurt of her current reality both terrible and potentially thrilling by embracing her own revolt whether social or anti-social.

As Desafío requested I ponder ITW, I request that she ponder me as a warning:

*The police, the media and the others say that we are alone, that we have no others. Yet the phantom I've carried in my illusions has proven to always have bodies. Sometimes to one another we say they are a product of childhood play, a game of hope and naivety but to you I've said, “You will be the first one to suffocate, oh faithful creature of alienation.”*

—R.R., I am you. You are them and suddenly I am not.

# Occupation, the Other

## Word For Work

by Wylden Freeborne

The latest aggregate upheavals only seek to admire this system, using what is already available and safe as a means of displaying its unrest. What is not, is no matter, but what is, is of great importance. We have lost sight of anything beyond the prison grounds, and now look to redecorate our cells with pictures of a pretty future. This is the doldrum of engagement within the confines of acceptability. To view this as progress may be exactly correct, but to what end?

The current list of demands includes this statement. "Opinions do not help our cause. The numbers in the polling will naturally resolve your feelings democratically. If you strongly agree or disagree with proposed Demands, lobby your cause and get the votes up to represent your opinion. This is what democracy looks like." All demands are kept with a two-thirds majority vote. Those voicing opposition to any demand must lobby to have them removed, and must do so within time allotted. One vote per IP address. Okay, where to begin?

*We are not* political bodies. We are human beings, animals, individuals, and lovers of our lives. We have taken it as given that we must represent ourselves as a cog in the machine of progress through benign measures of voting and lobbying, while those that destroy the worlds are watching from above, sipping brandy and smoking cigars, taking pictures on their smart phones for their Facebook updates. The "occupations" are spreading though, and in Portland, the rhetoric on the page is a bit more than disturbing. "As with most protests, this will be non-violent. Certain members of the group will cover what and what not to do. Where to be, how to behave, as well as where to go." So, who are these "certain members" and how the fuck did they obtain this power? Are they voted in as well? Well, it seems we are disregarding the hook for the worm. The reason this is so popular could be that it is no different than what we have. We are not looking for change any more than we can vote for it. Sound familiar?

As a recovering leftist, there is a large part of me that thrills at the idea of occupying city streets with a thousand of my closest friends and taking on the systems of controls. Having had my time as a reluctant submissive to leftist controls, a time which shall never repeat, it is painfully obvious that allowing for control in the battle for our lives, is little more than shitting with our pants on. We are left with the vile stench of our own making, and encouraged to revel in the shared notion of it. Meanwhile, while the

masses scream of 99%, the indigenous of every land are displaced, murdered, and the way of life that sustains them, the world, and us, is snuffed out for the prospect of more jobs and “shared wealth” for all. I was recently berated by one calling themselves an anarchist for believing more in Salmon than in humans. What a trite bit of racist sense of entitlement we see here. The slanders came at the assumptions: one, that I am a follower of Derrick Jensen, a writer with a few works I have a certain amount of respect for, but whose person is inconsequential to my existence, and two, that Salmon are simply salmon, and are lone casualties of dam structures and river destruction. This person claims that human lives are far more important, without ever once looking at the hundreds of thousands of indigenous peoples whose lives and life-ways are stripped for the dam’s benefit to commerce. The argument set forth is that there is inherent value in certain lives, and certain luxuries (if you call poisoned water, slave labor, animal exploitation, marketing, and commercials *luxuries*, which many do), that does not exist in other lives. We, as “workers” have every right to enjoy the wealth of our labor, and not be content with old shoes and box TVs, but to have what the rich also have. They have stolen our money! All the while, the struggle of colonization and *occupation* of this land is once again put on the back burner of leftist thought, if not ignored completely. The river is a life, and it gives life to forests, to uncountable water species; fish-eating animals, bug-eating birds, shit-eating bugs, and, ready for it, *human* beings. The humanist argument of shared wealth of labor ignores even the human cost of labor, let alone the massive ecological destruction that is also hazardous to all life, because it is all life. Leftists asking for democracy and work. People of the earth, stolen from and ignored.

It does not end there, by any means. The simple act of demanding reform is akin to providing condoms to rapists. Reform is the means by which power re-forms itself, the saving grace of control. As people take to the streets to “occupy”, there are more and more harsh restrictions placed upon their behavior, but not by whom you may be thinking (oink oink) but by the protestors themselves! As the trend spreads, and gains a foothold in the media outlets all seeking capitalize on the spectacle, the list of rules grows. “Wear polo and khakis please, so as to better represent our image.” *Our* image? So we are all now Kinko’s slaves? We are all upper middle class yacht club attendees? The blanching homogenization rings of crusades. Why are you wearing black? Are ye witch, or anarchist? Burn ‘em! All the while, wearing fossil fuel plastic masks trademarked by Time-Warner. The pitchforks are on back-order from Amazon.com till they get more Amazonian trees for handles.

Then, to speak of the utter lack of courage of the imagination. The list of demands, decided by two of every three people with the ability to speak

out, is ever shifting. I would normally consider it a *good* thing to have a flux of demands, as whimsical as the smoke from burning cop cars, but this is not the case. The idea is to whittle it all down to “One Big Demand!” What a slap in the face of desire! There should be more demands than people, more demands than cars, more demands than cell phones! There should be no demands, only good riddance! Good riddance to the system that stole us from ourselves, and sold us back on credit. Welcome to the days spent calmly walking hand in hand with lovers, or running chaotically alone! Good riddance to the time of time itself, and hello to a life lived without regret, without history, without schedule. The death of the imagination is the coffin nail on freedom. How can you say you fight for a better life, when you can hardly imagine one? In the meantime, you while away the hours catching soundbites of Michael Moore shouting down capitalism so loudly that only your subconscious picks up the ad for his soon-to-be-released best seller about eating the third world... for his lunch. This is madness, madness all around! Yet still, there is a creeping Hope. Hope: that dreaded abusive lover that always leaves you feeling worse than the time before. There is Hope for the spark in the powder keg of ambivalence to erupt into a Bacchanalian riot/orgy of star-crossed warriors, flinging off their clothes and bringing down the tent poles to feel the rain. Why, Hope, you filthy bastard, do you curse me so? So I watch, and I listen.

I watch videos of more people swaying to the left and right in a shadow dance of Mesmer motion, being beaten into submission by the other half of the “99%”, those who are paid in thirty pieces of silver to keep you in line, not just today, but every day. Every last day on the job, the cameras are telling you that you are not alone, and you have become so lonely that you wish it so. Every day in the school, as you prop your head to stay awake through the single story of domination. Every night in the bar, as you drop your senses for a rush of numbing lubricant to ease this alienation. You sit, and you wait, because inside, the wildness screams. It does not beg, but defies you for life. And there you are, watching, listening, participating in the roles, while I sit here, and writhe in myself for not knowing how to ask. For never knowing how to say clearly, and calmly, so you will understand and not be threatened. But I'll try...

Hello. I am dying, inside and out, and I need wildness. I need freedom. I need resolve to this life long battle for acceptance of myself. I need to know the feeling of an unlit night. I need to adventure. I need to return to the place where I was born. To be attached to life at every moment. To be wild and free. I need to come alive! I cannot do it without you. So, put down your sign and raze the buildings to the earth with me... the whole world is waiting.

# On the Recent #Occupations: *a communique from W.A.T.C.H.*

This occupation is inevitable, and yet we need to make it. There is no way for capital to continue its reign—this is clear. And yet, capital will not behead itself: we know that we need to struggle in some way if we are to overcome it. This statement is not a rejection of the occupation—as if it could be avoided, as if the present conditions were not so grave, as if we haven't all had enough. But there are things that need to be said. We submit this critique in the deepest solidarity with those people of color, women, queer, and trans\* folx who have endured this occupation while labouring on making it more livable from the inside.

Before anything else, we must frame this movement within a prior occupation, that of white settlers on Nanticoke and Susquehannock land. The genocide, expulsion, and dispossession of native peoples is foundational to the ascent of the US as a center of global capital; we cannot reclaim this country, only acknowledge it as a unit of capitalist destruction.

“We are the 99%”

If we want to use this figure to underscore how far polarized the rich and the poor are today, fine. But those of us that don't homogenize so easily get suspicious when we hear calls for unity. What other percentages hide behind the nearly-whole 99%? What about the 16% of Blacks that are “officially” unemployed, double the number of whites? The 1 out of 8 Black men in their twenties that on any given day will be in prison or jail? The quarter of women that will get sexually assaulted in their lifetime? The dozens of queer, trans\*, intersex, and gender-variant folks that are murdered each year, 70% of whom are people of color? Is a woman of color's experience of the crisis interchangeable with that of the white man whose wage is twice hers? Are we all Troy Davis? As austerity grinds down on us, who among us will go to prison? Who will be relegated to informal, precarious labor? Whose benefits will be cut, whose food stamps canceled or insufficient? Who will be evicted? Who will be unable to get health care, to get hormones or an abortion?

Don't get us wrong. We're not asking for better wages or a lower interest rate. We're not even asking for the full abolition of capital – there's no one to ask. For now, we are simply critiquing this occupation for assuming we are there, while we have so far been left out. Because we know that whatever is next will be something we make, not something we ask for. Even if we don't feel safe there, even if what little analysis and structure

that has emerged thus far makes clear we are not a part of this movement, we radical feminist, anti-racist revolutionaries are going to keep bringing our bodies and ideologies to the occupation, for the same reason that women of color support and attend Slutwalk despite critiquing its white-centered politics: because we see potential for building resistance in our communities and affecting material change. But for this potential to be realized, we have to work together in solidarity with the understanding that unity must be constructed with an analysis of difference, not just plastered blindly over inequalities. Consider this text a chip at the plaster.

### Anti-finance or anti-capital?

Nothing is more clear in the American debt-scape than racial character of everyday finance—but it is sexed, too. And not only because women, like people of color, were disproportionately solicited for subprime mortgages (across all income levels). There is no better indicator that women and people of color cannot be assimilated to the faceless borrowers of the 99% than the strategic location of payday loan offices, tax-preparation outlets, and banks that specialize in subprime mortgages. A map of foreclosures, of adjustable-rate mortgages, a topography of interest rates: all these overlap neatly on the demographics of racialized and feminized poverty. It's not a coincidence: today, race and gender are not grounds to deny credit, but indexes of risk. And as long as risk can be commodified, as long as volatility can be hedged against and profited from, our color and gender will be blamed for the inevitable collapse. This is the absurdity of everyday finance. We are the risk? We are the predators? Finance's favorite game must be the schoolyard refrain: "I know you are but what am I?"

We know that economic crises mean more domestic labor, and more domestic labor means more work for women. Dreams of a "mancession" fade quickly when one realizes male-dominated sectors are simply the first to feel a crisis—and the first to receive bailout funds. The politics of crisis adds to the insult of scapegoating the injury of unemployment and unwaged overwork. And the nightmare of fertility politics, the ugly justification of welfare and social security "reforms." "Saving America's families," the culture war rhetoric that clings to heteronormativity, to patriarchy, in the face of economic meltdown. Crisis translates politically to putting women in their place, while demanding queers and trans people pass or else. And the worse this crisis gets, the more the crisis is excused by a fiction of scarcity, the more the family will be used to promote white supremacy by assaulting women's autonomy under the guise of population control. The old Malthusian line: it's not a crisis, there's just not enough—for them.

Let us be clear: finance is *not* the problem. Finance is a precondition and a symptom, a necessary and contradictory part of capital. Deregulation, globalization, deindustrialization: none of these words can provide a substantial explanation for the present context. Each is only a surface phenomenon of capital's tendency to make its own systemic reproduction increasingly difficult for itself. Crisis and the reconcentration of wealth among capitalists is not only regular but necessary; the tendency to financialization has many historical precedents. Genoa in the 1557-62 looks like the Dutch Republic in 1780-83; Britain in 1919-21 looks like the US today. But even if financial booms and busts are as old as mercantilism, there is a qualitative change to the nature of these crises over the course of the eighteenth century, when capitalist production is imposed on the British countryside. Capitalist production creates an unparalleled need for credit, an unprecedented need to consolidate and centralize capital, a grotesque scale of fungible assets that strives to make everything solid melt into the sophistry of mathematics. Asset-backed securities and credit default swaps didn't make this crisis, they only allowed it to heat up and billow out of control.

For those that recall the warm and golden age of American industrialism with dewy-eyed nostalgia: this crisis began with the failure of US industry in the late sixties. Real wages have been stagnant since then. The oil crisis of 1973 was the hinge; we are living in the declension of US global power. There's no going back, no exchanging unproductive finance for good old-fashioned productive exploitation. Or is there? Today, American industry is indeed firing up again, as capital that had long flown from its shores returns to find wages lower than the so-called third world. "Reshoring": a name for the farce that follows the tragedy of the post-war boom.

History insists on the eradication of capital as the only possibility of preventing crisis. Finance reform and "sanctions" are not enough: we will never see "the military industrial complex dismantled, the police disempowered, and the public sector fulfilling its obligations to the people" by redistributing wealth. Corrupt politicians and greedy financiers are only a superfluous, insulting layer on the thing that is truly condemned: capital, which in our time is inescapable. With this realization, we don't need to occupy Wall Street, or any bank. Why was Tahrir Square chosen? Was it even chosen at all? We could occupy any corner, any room, any building, and it would carry the social significance of what needs to be either appropriated or destroyed. The better question to pose when deciding what to occupy is: what do we want to inhabit? (On this point, it is worth mentioning that the tactic to occupy has evolved since its recent revival in the 2008 occupation of the Republic Windows and Doors factory in Chicago. What struck students in New York, California, Puerto Rico, Lon-

don, Athens, etc, about this tactic was that its strategy to re-appropriate equipment, space, and organization could take place without recognition from the authorities. Demands were auxiliary to the best part: the immediate process of retaking control over the means of production.)

Whatever this occupation is, it is not a camping trip from capital—we are still in the patriarchy, still in a white supremacy, still in a transphobic and disability-loathing society. In these places, assuming we are unified will only obscure the divisions produced by capital, divisions that need to be confronted before anything else.

On the politics of the occupation:

liberalism, policing, and the uses and abuses of equality

The “99%” rolls their eyes at anyone that takes offense to signs referring to the current economic climate as “Slavery 2.0,” or asserting that “The free hand of the market touched me in a bad place.” Comparing (white) student debt to hundreds of years of violence and forced subjugation, entrenched as a system of enduring systematic racism; mocking sexual assault for effect – these statements send a clear message to those of us subjected to such oppressive acts. By trivializing our experiences, these signs simultaneously control and silence how we talk about our marginalized statuses and traumas. To those of us who hoped for Occupy Baltimore’s status as a safe, anti-oppressive space, we read these signs as “BEWARE.”

While some are already bristling at the “identity politics” of those that are offended by racist, misogynistic, survivor-hating signage, the placards that have been denounced the most loudly are those that attack *capitalism*. Concerns about “public opinion” being able to identify and sympathize with our collective messages abound. These so-called debates actively skew the agenda towards the watered down, apolitical, and (com)modified. GAs play out as if we (the comprehensive “99%”) all endorse these views, but communist, anarchist, and anti-capitalist perspectives are in fact excluded before they are given a chance to be voiced. Meanwhile more privileged niche groups like (hella pro-capitalist) small business owners remain front and center. We who are “taking things too far” get left behind by the “99%”.

As a result of this policing, liberal populism has dominated the occupation’s process, statements, and proto-demands. Or better, populism tinged with a healthy dose of hippie new-age individualism (a vaguely counter-cultural disposition suits contentless politics perfectly). Liberalism uses platitudes of “unity” and “equality” not to insist that we should act in order to be unified and equal, but to say that we already are—and as such, should “put aside our differences.” Liberalism refuses to see racism, sexism, and class inequalities as material and systemic, reducing these to the level of individual attitudes of perpetrators and victims; liberalism



only registers and disciplines individual oppressors, never structures. In the process, the systemic character of individuals' oppressive actions is obscured, while the demands made by the oppressed for changes in their actual material conditions are ignored, or worse—appropriated, co-opted. (Take, for example, so-called “reverse racism”: the idiotic triumph of the liberal individual over history.)

The police are not “just workers” and they are not our friends

More than anything, the 99% will be divided by our relationship to the cops. They say: in the interests of “radical inclusivity” that we should avoid anti-police messaging; the police, after all, are part of the 99% that have seen wages, benefits and pensions cut along with the rest of the public sector. They say: we must remember that the police are people too, and not exclude them from our movement before they've had a chance to express solidarity with us. We say: just wait. These arguments assume that an individual can be separated from their institutional/social roles, that a police officer can be engaged with in a purely personal sphere, completely distinct from their occupation as an arm of state repression. A classic liberal tactic to humanize the oppressor, and thus to derail a structural analysis of oppressive systems, and invalidate the anger of those experiencing institutional violence. Advocating a cooperative, amiable relationship with the police brushes aside the violence of widespread racial profiling, sexual assault with impunity, the murder of innocents, and the war on drugs by universalizing a white, middle-class position that believes the police really serve and protect.

And it's not only about police brutality. How can there be non-violence when there are still police? We need to know that as soon as we present a threat to any element of capital—before this point, even—we will be violently repressed. A peaceful, lawful protest by no means guarantees immunity against arrest and brutality: we only have to look at the women who were penned and maced at #Occupy Wall St. to know that. But unless this knowledge is at the forefront of our minds, the first to be arrested will be those that are most vulnerable to police brutality and to breaches of security. (A journalist in the room is a tip-off to immigration officials, not “good press.”) We must make our movement a safe space for the undocumented, for the homeless, those with criminal records, and anyone else for whom contact with the police never takes place on friendly terms. However “nice” a police officer may be to you (FYI: police are often very “nice” to those from the right class and race) does not change the fact that the police are a powerful instrument of violent repression, deployed by a capitalist state to enforce its interests: namely, white supremacy, male domination, ruling class power, and the limitless pursuit of profit.

### Why say “99%” when you mean “me”

The reason #Occupy Baltimore has not yet been anti-capitalist is because, for all its rhetoric of “unity” and “inclusivity”, it is really a movement organized by and for the white middle class. There is a reason why the people most afflicted by capitalism are not coming down to the McKeldin Square. When the organizers act like racism is a “second-tier” issue (for instance, by saying “We don't have time for that—We need to bring this back to the real issue: finance reform.” As if reinstating Glass Steagall will do a fucking thing!) it becomes clear whose movement this is. Let's drop the false rhetoric: what's wrong with the system is not that it isn't fair to the 99%, but because it isn't fair to *them*. The disappearing middle class reappears in the concrete environs of the business sector—to better envision the jobs and upward mobility they desperately want. Don't get us wrong—there can be a lot of good in indignation, discontent, disillusionment. But we need to exorcise the living ghost of the middle class: the spirit of not giving a fuck who you fuck over. Why say “99%” when you really mean “me”?

And you know how it goes: the neutral “me” is the white dude with all the time in the world (we have to say it: the ideal occupier). Whiteness and maleness have been duly reinforced as the not-so-secret standard at this occupation, in many ways. One example: an announcement made by a young white man at a GA that “everyone is accountable when they speak to media, because they represent the occupation as a whole” (FYI: there is no literature, no point person, no infrastructure to guide new members; only judgment). The countless snaps and twinkles in support of such a statement demonstrated clear consensus. Those twinkles expressed a range of assumptions that people who are largely comfortable in their own skin tend to make: being present in a space makes you in charge of its representation; most everyone agrees with you (and should). Those of us who have to prepare ourselves daily for an imminent bash; imminent fight with hostile, privilege-denying strangers; an imminent insult (intended or not), we take issue with this coercion into representation. We don't ask you to represent us (please god no); don't fucking assimilate us to your views and then make us responsible for them. We won't even mention how much and how loud white dudes have been speaking.

Rather than policing the radical voices taking anti-capitalist, revolutionary, and anti-police positions, we should give these voices space to be heard, and listened to seriously. The anarchist in-joke “Make Total Destroy” has a grain of truth: that the real political agenda consists in destroying state power, capitalism, and all its forms of coercive social control. Why was this phrase deliberately excluded from the agenda cards read out during a GA, while such platitudes as “We are All One” and “Peace on Earth and Good Will to All,” were deemed worthy to be shared?

The liberal-or-else reformism of Occupy Baltimore is perfectly encapsulated by the *imposition* of goals of peace and love. Fuck peace: we need to formulate a coherent political analysis and a revolutionary agenda to destroy capitalism and dismantle state power. Rejecting outright the eventual need for an armed uprising reflects an unwillingness to pursue the logic of our own (proto-)demands to their full extent.

Don't tell us to be "pragmatic," to focus on piecemeal reforms and wait for our day in the revolt. Actually, *reformism is idealistic*: reformism believes in democracy under capital, in the possibility of redistributing wealth that is systematically dispossessed from its producers. Our revolutionary desire to destroy capital is not idealistic, abstract, or merely theoretical, nor is it inactive: this aim is embodied in a multitude of actions towards different *immediate and faraway* ends. To us, this means the revolutionary aim is not purely negative, not only about destruction: we work to confront racism, sexism, and class war in our community as an immediate goal, without losing sight that we ultimately cannot live like this anymore. For Occupy Baltimore, this means the 99% must relinquish its presumed equality and acknowledge division if it is to grasp the real conditions of society, and what must actually be done.

"The 1% are winning every time we fight amongst ourselves"

When the excluded call out a movement, we are often told to put aside our differences: it's only common sense that to accomplish anything, we need unity. But the only unity we have, the only equality we share, is the thinnest commonality—the democracy of consumers. Already, in conversations with supposed comrades, our critiques have been met with concern that the "mainstream" won't get it, that the precious, delicate momentum will be stopped. Interventions to a white-washed and patriarchal agenda (which is any agenda that denies the differential impact of capital on people of color and women) are always received as interruptions. At best, they are conceded to with invitations, with "outreach", and with promises to be more inclusive. We say: inclusivity without an adequate analysis is just unstated exclusivity. *This is not identity politics: this is anti-identity politics*. For it is capitalism that pushes us to rank facets of our identities; to select one group as the vanguard and press marginalized identities to choose which aspect of their oppression to make a priority. We refuse this choice: we know that our difference is produced and reproduced by capital and therefore cannot be erased within it, that these differences are real (the most real) and thus should drive our analyses and our actions, and that no unity can be claimed until every social relationship is no longer defined by capital, but by us.

# Occupying Terminology: *Decolonizing Assumptions*

by Dot Matrix

The Occupy Movement in its latest iteration in the US has brought up the on-going questions of language and identity. One of the more significant ways that it has done that (aside from the question of terminology like “the 99%”, etc) is in its use of the word “occupy”.

While for many people, “occupy” has a strong positive connotation (implying a reclamation of space), and its own radical history (AIM's occupation of Alcatraz Island, for example) for others it is so tied to a colonialist history that dumping the word entirely is the most sensible course.

As is common with arguments that are based on some form of identity understanding, the most emotional side is the one insisting that language be changed, in this case the argument is that the movement should use “decolonize” instead of “occupy”. The emotion makes sense, given the context of the relative powerlessness of the people who are fighting for the language change. In this case, First Peoples have for centuries been genocided and made invisible, and controversies over language are one of the few ways that this history can be brought to light, precisely because of the relative ease with which small groups of people can challenge terminology. (This ease, of course, also makes it an over-played tactic, one that the establishment has shown itself entirely capable of subverting and coopting.)

As is indicated by the fact that two out of three of the cities in which this controversy has gotten the most play are two of the cities that are highest in anarchist participation (Oakland and Seattle\*) anarchists are sympathetic to this argument, not just (or even primarily) because we are obviously interested in rejecting racism and colonialism wherever they are, but—more pointedly in this case—because the efforts for “decolonize” highlight the false generalization inherent in the term “the 99%”, a generalization that allows for arguments like “the police are with us.”

Those who push back against changing the term also have valid points to make. As mentioned above, fighting over language is fairly meaningless and easily incorporated by this culture. More specifically, Occupy is a label, and labels have power because they rest on assumptions (those same false generalizations that anarchists must ultimately reject). If the desire is to attract people to a new thing, which allows them to enter into a process that expands their understanding of their own capacity (which would, presumably, include challenging the falsities of the label),

\*<http://occupyseattle.org/blog/2011-10-25/declaration-decolonizeoccupy-seattle> 245

then changing the label means confronting people's assumptions before they've had a chance to build a foundation that would allow a *deeper* challenge to be made.

And the entire question percolates inside this socio-political context, in which people use identity as a way to gain credit within political circles, and other people deny the significance of identity in people's lives (either because of straight up racism, or as way to empower individuals, or both).

There isn't a single correct answer to this controversy, which at its best is built on different understandings of how people grow and change. This particular instance of the controversy could probably be resolved by some combination of terms and practices, but to the extent that choosing sides becomes an issue of declaring one's dedication to a cause, people will continue to resist acknowledging each others' points, and reject finding any appropriate common ground.

# I'm Tired of This Shit:

## *Notes on Revolt and Representation in Oakland and Elsewhere*

by anonymous

Another boring-ass demonstration, another round of entirely uncritical self-congratulatory babble from our would-be spokespeople. We know how all the managers of revolt, the union bureaucrats, the activist "leaders", see the present situation. Their voices are constantly echoed across mainstream media outlets. But they don't run shit. It is those who are still without a voice that will crack this social order at its foundations.

Even in the most exciting displays of sedition there lies a more sinister undercurrent, a tendency toward representation and management, a subtle movement pushing uprisings back toward normalcy. Yet in even the most seemingly mundane daily tasks, behaviors, and disputes often lies a potential for wide scale subversion that can see its own realization through the connection of these seemingly isolated tensions.

### Of Ports Here and Elsewhere

It's not as if the recent struggle of the port workers in Longview isn't

inspiring. It is certainly refreshing to see any level of working class militance these days. What seems to have been lost is the ability of would-be revolutionaries to *critically* support these conflicts, standing alongside rebellious workers while maintaining a discerning perspective.

The situation in Longview is an interesting one. Certainly it is a conflict that has used tactics that have at times, through their confrontational approach, gone beyond anything that the ILWU could endorse. But violence alone does not force a situation to challenge the dominion of economic constraints. For now it is safe to say that the struggle in Longview is, without mincing words, a fight to broaden the domain of a bureaucratic union. The grain exporter EGT refuses to acknowledge the union's dominion by hiring labor from another union to work at its warehouse at the Port of Longview. Understandably, the ILWU rank and file was incensed by this and fought to maintain their livelihoods.

While it is important to support the struggles of outraged workers, we have no intentions of becoming the militant wing of a capitalist trade union. We don't intend to put ourselves on the line as the hired muscle of any representative institution.

Just a few months before the struggle against EGT in Longview, there was another conflict involving the ILWU in Washington. The issue was alleged discrimination by ILWU chapters in Washington State against non-white applicants who wanted to join the union. Though new hires were supposedly decided through a lottery, both people applying for positions and some rank and file workers noted the discriminatory practices. Although it is difficult to know to what degree this occurred, it is certainly true that for generations industrial unions have largely functioned as a way to maintain a state of relative prosperity and financial security for white American men. There are, of course, exceptions to this truth. In any event, it is certainly true that, to this day, unions function not as instruments of unified class struggle but as bureaucracies designed not only to deviate workers' grievances into a streamlining of capitalism, but also as tools for securing the relative wealth and privilege of certain workers while ignoring the needs of the exploited class as a whole.

On the day of the November 2 general strike, Jean Quan decided it would be more beneficial to "allow" city workers to take the day off than to deal with an actual strike. Likewise, it seems as though there was an unspoken consensus between all the managers of revolt, the port management, the union bureaucrats, and the self-appointed leaders of Occupy Oakland that it was preferable to use the guidelines of the union's contract as a means of stopping work for a day than to be faced with the unpredictable possibility of an autonomous strike of longshoremen. On the day of the general strike the actions of Occupy Oakland made it clear

to the ILWU rank and file that even though they are among the best paid and most secure workers in the city, they would not be expected to strike alongside more precarious workers; instead all means would be taken to ensure that their day off would not violate their contract and that they would be paid to stay home.

A month after the general strike we were back at the port, bullshitting for a few hours until the port arbitrator came by and told us the longshoremen wouldn't have to work that shift as outlined by stipulations in their contract. This was a disruption of capital only in the most literal sense; more confrontational than a holiday or inclement weather, but more similar to one of the permitted annual strike days than to an actual autonomous struggle of workers independent of and against their union. No matter how revolutionary we may have perceived the situation when caught up in the moment, we must remember that groups as odious as International ANSWER have used the ILWU's contract as leverage in port shutdowns in years past.

It's hard to feel that the port action of December 12 wasn't a regression into the worst kind of activism. Even though the demonstration was a solidarity action with ILWU rank and file in Longview, their fellow rank and file in Oakland did little to fight in solidarity with their struggle. Instead, a motley grouping of activists descended upon the port to fight the longshoremen's struggle for them, all the while being delicate enough to ensure that the manner in which the "disruption of capital" occurred wasn't so disruptive as to encourage workers to violate their union's contract with the port. Certainly there were a few ILWU members present alongside us, but the overwhelming dynamic was not one of autonomous worker's struggle but one of typical left-wing activism. Of course a unified social uprising will only come about when workers from different industries (or no industries) fight in solidarity with each other's battles. A workplace conflict only truly becomes revolutionary when the lines between those workers and the rest of society are blurred, and the workplace becomes a site for organization and revolt for all who fight for a different world. However, it is bothersome that while workers won't so much as break their contract to fight for their bureaucratic union's struggle to maintain its control of a port in another city, precarious workers of all types are so eager to descend on their place of work to make the struggle for them.

We are not interested in worshipping the memory of the revolutionary base of 100 years ago. The industrial worker, "with his hands on the levers of production" does not possess any special centrality to the current battles. It should be apparent to all that the networks of power exploit nearly every behavior and interaction for their own gain; likewise, resistance to this hegemony will come from all points of contestation.

Indeed, the most inspiring conflicts that have occurred in this country during my lifetime, the LA Riots, the New York squatter's movement of the '90s, the Oakland Rebellions, have superseded all field-of-employment-based divisions between exploited people. The Oakland combatants of July 2010 who freely distributed the looted property of the wealthy did not wait for leadership from any field of "essential workers"; they understood their collective force (far more clearly than any academic or "movement spokesperson") and acted accordingly.

Today, only 11% of American workers belong to unions. This is not to say we oppose the struggles of rank and file workers, only that we understand that as non-unionized, unemployed, and precarious workers we have no false representative bodies; thus our conflicts have the potential to become fights without mediation.

The power of the autonomous struggles of precarious workers and the unemployed must be expanded. The ideology of only-the-white-man-in-the-factoryism must be buried once and for all. The obsession with the importance of extremely male-dominated fields of employment undercuts and devalues the work (and, more importantly, resistance to work) of women, thus resurrecting outdated and ignorant conceptions of class conflict. The position of women and indeed the position of all ignored and marginalized people—the truant high school students, the homeless black men, the queer petty-criminals—will for damn sure not be peripheral to a social upheaval; those of us who are excluded from the celebrated forms of production intend to be the force that permanently suppresses the social order that marginalizes us.

This we must remember: the port workers didn't shut down the port of Oakland, we did, though through an unfortunately bureaucratic process. It would be wise for precarious and unemployed people to utilize this power to disrupt the daily functioning of the city without the mediation of bureaucratic institutions. To truly create this type of disruption, to, for instance, blockade the highways like the Argentine *piqueteros* of the last decade, will require an assessment of our force based on our actual collective strength as opposed to on the stipulations of a union contract.

### No Gods, No Managers

*The Egocrat ... is not an accident or an aberration or an irruption of irrationality; he [sic] is a personification of the relations of the existing social order.*  
—Perlman

A paradigm-shifting conflict requires those in struggle to revolt not only against the institutions that exploit them overtly, but also against all of those who seek to manage their fight, those who deviate revolutionary energy into either socially acceptable venues or into a means of building



power for the representatives of class struggle. Just as rank and file workers must fight against the control of the union hierarchy, so too must aspiring revolutionaries depose those who seek to control and direct our struggle. Though they may at times come from the revolutionary left or anarchist currents, we must be vigilant in exposing those who pretend to represent us yet simultaneously publicly speak the language of the established left.

I'm sure you know the type: "autonomy" and "insurrection" one day, "the 99%" and "constitutional rights" the next. At times this would-be cadre may operate to steer revolutionary energy into certain inopportune directions, but just as often these attempted hierarchies exist simply to boost the egos of a few self-important individuals seeking to recreate old forms of authority in their favor. They are entranced by the populist spectacle and will throw any coherent class consciousness or social analyses out the window if speaking in liberal terms increases their power as representatives of a movement.

It is time to dispose of the Egocrats once and for all.

### The Protracted Conflict

Much of the momentum behind the mass demonstrations of the fall has abated, leaving smaller and smaller numbers of people to attempt to march in the streets or hold events in vacant lots. This decrease in numbers and momentum could have easily been foreseen; however, it doesn't necessarily signal the death of a movement. A revolutionary struggle is characterized not only by large marches and public occupations, but also by the constant subversive current that is always at war with the control apparatus yet expresses itself covertly. Most of us participate in this current to varying degrees; however, if these small scale guerilla actions continue to remain separated they leave combatants isolated and vulnerable.

Domination is a social relationship that is constantly occurring, not merely when we are at work or in school. Likewise, resistance to exploitation must have a constant presence, not just become a display that only rears its head at spectacular street actions once a month. It is important to develop methods to connect these actions, to create a network of covert refusal by building bridges between islands of sedition to create a revolutionary community defined less by geography than by connection to subversion.

1) Create support networks of existing occupied spaces

Occupy Oakland is planning to take over a building later this month. While this is ambitious and extremely appropriate, it's also difficult to imagine a successful public occupation using the name Occupy Oakland being much more than a symbolic example of the direction in which the struggle against the system must go. Based on the longevity of previous

public building takeovers in the Bay (and this is certainly true of Occupy Oakland takeovers) it can be ascertained that, until we develop an effective fighting force and experiment with new methods of assault and defense (which is necessary), any building publicly occupied by a group so hated by the city government is not likely to last longer than a few days. This is not an argument against public occupations, but an argument both for developing our methods of self-defense and for utilizing more covert spaces alongside the high profile ones as a way of both taking large scale public action and actually maintaining control of autonomous spaces. Perhaps for every building that is publicly occupied there could be a more covert counterpart, a somewhat quietly liberated space that enables us to regroup should we not be able to defend the larger action.

It is important to examine the archipelago of occupied spaces that already exists in Oakland. For years there have been squats across West Oakland that provide spaces for combatants to organize and, while being somewhat clandestine, are known to sympathetic parties in their neighborhoods and social scenes as being spaces outside of the market laws of rent and home ownership. Likewise, while exact numbers are difficult to produce, there are certainly thousands of foreclosed homes across northern California that are occupied by their former owners. It is neither necessary nor possible for us to camp out at every occupied home or squat to make ourselves useful. It is good to think of how to do the most while expending the least energy; we are not activists, so while we support the resistance of everyday people to capitalism we must not fall into the mindset that they need us by their side to guide them. People must learn to struggle on their own terms.

It would be beneficial to start developing connections between these diverse spaces, to create supply lines for mutual aid between occupied spaces by putting people in contact with each other and providing them with whatever tools they feel are necessary to secure their occupations. Drills, hammers, food, locks, whatever is needed could be supplied through a mutual aid network that strengthens each individual space while not subjecting them to some democratic process or endless meeting, thus allowing them to retain their autonomy. The creation of this kind of network creates a far more formidable totality than simply the sum of its isolated parts and would serve to show just how large the real occupation movement actually is.

The power of autonomous occupations lies not in their ability to defend themselves martially, but in their ubiquity; that is, they have become difficult to deal with because they are everywhere

## 2) Widespread debtor's revolt

When we fall behind on our hospital bills and student loans in isola-

tion, we find ourselves feeling alone and owing more and more money to large economic institutions. While it may be a bit ambitious, encouraging a popular debtor's revolt would not only provide millions of Americans with more resources to support their families; but would also provide sympathetic parties with funds to support the fight against heavy hand of the state. Such a refusal to continue to pay astronomical interest rates and late fees would be a serious challenge to the entire credit system, an uprising of modern day indentured servants against the terms of their domination. An individual neglecting to pay their debt ends up with more debt; a popular refusal to pay would at the least force a complete restructuring of the debt-based credit financial machine, and possibly play a central role in its eventual destruction.

### 3) Build networks of supply lines

So many of us precarious workers earn our wages at establishments that, with a little creativity, can also serve as supply centers for other disillusioned laborers and unemployed people. Creating a network of people who either work in industries that enable them to pillage supplies or are simply adept thieves transforms workplaces from mere institutions of stolen time and energy into spaces of covert sedition.

A similar network elsewhere in the country continues to expand by providing service workers with a form of covert communication that enables them to identify co-conspirators at other workplaces while remaining undetected by the employer. The operation is simple: if people from the network enter a workplace and someone there also belongs to the network, they will provide the visitors with whatever of their bosses' inventory they need, knowing that when the tables are turned the other party will return the favor.

Through this method, people who have never met before are providing each other with expropriated goods free of charge simply for belonging to the resistance network.

### 4) Don't pay for shit

In many of the struggles of the past, neighborhoods and even cities refused to pay increases in charges for goods and services ranging from transportation to utilities to food. On a smaller scale, we still see this everyday. Visit the Mission District and you'll still see hundreds of people that refuse to pay for public transportation, either entering the bus through the back door or simply walking right past the driver. This is not the same as quietly stealing a service (like jumping a turnstile when no one's looking) but is a blatant refusal that has become so widespread that most bus drivers on lines in low-income neighborhoods in San Francisco no longer make any effort to stop it. With some organization and planning, this type

of subversion could be expanded to include other services.

Perhaps starting small would be easier: organizing across a city to refuse to pay increases in fees for utilities or organizing the tenants of a given landlord to refuse to pay rent increases while still paying the old rate, at least initially. If enough people joined the struggle, it might become possible to stop paying altogether, but this would inevitably require more developed forms of defense. Also, sharing the rebel science of utility piracy with neighbors who have had their service discontinued could help to strengthen the bonds of the subversive network.

### Outmaneuvering the Giant

*A part of this bank belongs to me too, so this is a little piece that belongs to me and my family and my people, that's why. And I'm gonna to keep it as a memory of today when the people of Oakland stood against the big banks.*

—Geraldo Dominguez, as stated to a news reporter when asked why he was picking up shards of glass from a broken Wells Fargo window during the November 2 general strike.

In order to maintain any space or event that brings large numbers of people into conflict with the normal functioning of the city (demonstrations against policing, industry shutdowns, or building occupations) more effective means of counterattack must be developed. Nothing is worse than a small and unprepared crowd walking up to the strongest point of police presence for a showdown. The logic often seems to share some commonalities with tactical pacifism; make a largely symbolic scene but don't take it too far and they'll have their hands tied by their brass or city government and we won't incur too many casualties.

Whether conscious or not, relying on the perceived relative benevolence of the state in these situations is extremely dangerous. When a movement actually becomes a threat (or, when it is not mostly comprised of white middle class weekend warriors), the gloves are off. The importance of strategy becomes readily apparent.

There is much talk around the desire to “fight the police”, so much militant posturing, and a complete lack of tactics for confrontation. How many times have I heard this type of violent rhetoric from people who continue to approach lines of police head-on and empty-handed?

A crowd of thousands and a hundred in black. Ninety five cross their fingers hoping someone else will do something, perhaps five or six do. Someone throws a bottle, someone else knocks over a trashcan. *You're so fucking dangerous.* The police, initially frightened by the prospect of mob violence directed against them, realize how few people they really have to worry about, and take the offensive.

You can only front for so long before someone calls your bluff. Once the element of surprise is gone and our adversaries have accurately assessed our forces, it becomes time to strike using only the tactics we have the capacity to effectively use.

A somewhat indirect method of occupation defense that has been practiced for decades elsewhere in the world is to raise the stakes for the city after a location has been evicted. This generally involves a mob of people storming an upscale shopping district or tourist area and wreaking havoc in an attempt to force the city to reconsider future evictions, thus making the prospects for the maintenance of liberated spaces more feasible. A similar situation (though not regarding occupations) was the capitulation of the city of Oakland (to demands that many of us never made) after the anti-police uprisings of 2009.

The shortcoming of this approach is its reliance on a presumed rationality on the part of local government: that those in power will follow the logic of capital and take the course of action that will result in the least loss of wealth and investment. In countries like the US, particularly in times of crisis, it is difficult to be sure that this type of economic rationalism would stop the city from going to extremes to stop an increasingly ambitious struggle. American government institutions are known to go to any and all means, however costly and irrational, to stop the creation of spaces outside of their control. The city of Oakland, while not in any great economic condition, may be willing to take the financial loss of a few small-scale riots in order to stop the (financially less devastating yet politically costly) prospect of the slow loss of terrain within its borders. When the millions of dollars already spent on stopping people from meeting in public parks and camping in abandoned lots is considered, it becomes apparent that the need to retain control and domination more likely directs the functioning of the state than does the profit motive.

Attacking an adversary at their strongest point rarely works, particularly when they are much stronger and better prepared. There are always weak points. Many martial arts (jiu-jitsu, for example) base the entirety of their discipline on this concept. Going blow for blow with a larger and stronger adversary rarely works, but concentrating all of your force on their least defensible parts works wonders. Focusing the strength of an entire body against the elbow of an assailant will more surely incapacitate them than will trying to push them over with pure strength.

In January of 2009 a few youngsters from East Oakland attacked a police car at a march turned riot that immortalized the memory of Oscar Grant. The two officers retreated from the vehicle as the crowd put it out of commission. Though we weren't a very formidable force, a relatively small crowd managed to intimidate the unprepared officers and struck a tangible blow against OPD that resonated for many people around the world

who saw the image of young brown kids jumping on the roof of a police car. These types of conflicts motivate exploited people to participate; they communicate the message that when we are strategic we can fight back against our enemies and, if only temporarily, strike fear into their hearts.

If we can keep in mind the lessons those young theorists demonstrated so coherently three winters ago, we can apply their teachings to all situations requiring self-defense or counterattack. Just as targets are best attacked when they are unprepared, so too are units more vulnerable when we fight them on our own terms, attacking small groups of adversaries rather than marching headlong to the citadels of power.

To unify daily acts of refusal that seem to be disconnected, to learn to accept as theoretically and tactically important the methods of resistance demonstrated by marginalized and forgotten people, is to construct the beginnings of a network of protracted subversion.

## appendix

# Thank You, Anarchists

by Nathan Schneider

It is becoming something of a refrain among the well-meaning multitudes now energized by Occupy Wall Street that the movement needs to shed its radical origins so as to actually get something done. “If they can avoid fetishizing the demand for consensus,” James Miller wrote in late October in the *New York Times*, “they may be able to forge a broader coalition that includes friends and allies within the Democratic Party and the union movement.” According to some activists, groups like Van Jones’s Rebuild the Dream are poised to turn occupiers into Obama voters. Especially as the 2012 election season starts, the thinking goes, it’s time to get real.

This actually reminds me of long debates about planning that took place in the NYC General Assembly before September 17, and then again during the early days of the occupation. Many people—myself included, though I was there to observe as a reporter—first arrived with some preconceived agenda about what needed to be done given the current political situation and how the occupation should do it: abolish corporate personhood, or enact a Tobin tax, or (as crasser signs would say) “Eat the Rich.” They complained that the anarchists, along with assorted autonomists, libertarian socialists and so forth, were hijacking the movement’s progress by bogging it down in process. But, after a while, after enough long meetings, they started to come around.

For some who were experiencing it for the first time, the General Assembly became a cathartic opportunity to unload long-pent-up polemics. Perhaps never having really had their political voices heard off the Internet, newcomers would interrupt the agenda and turn the people’s mic into a soapbox. With practice, though, that would change. They’d find that hewing to the process was better than making off-topic speeches. They heard stories about the assemblies in occupied squares in Egypt, Greece and Spain firsthand from people who had been there. Helping shape the daily decisions of the Occupation started to seem actually more empowering than trying to tell Obama what to do.

The anarchists’ way of operating was changing our very idea of what politics could be in the first place. This was exhilarating. Some occupiers told me they wanted to take it home with them, to organize assemblies in their own communities. It’s no accident, therefore, that when occupations spread around the country, the horizontal assemblies spread too.

At its core, anarchism isn't simply a negative political philosophy, or an excuse for window-breaking, as most people tend to assume it is. Even while calling for an end to the rule of coercive states backed by military bases, prison industries and subjugation, anarchists and other autonomists try to build a culture in which people can take care of themselves and each other through healthy, sustainable communities. Many are resolutely nonviolent. Drawing on modes of organizing as radical as they are ancient, they insist on using forms of participatory direct democracy that naturally resist corruption by money, status and privilege. Everyone's basic needs should take precedence over anyone's greed.

Through the Occupy movement, these assemblies have helped open tremendous space in American political discourse. They've started new conversations about what people really want for their communities, conversations that amazingly still haven't been hijacked, as they might otherwise might be, by charismatic celebrities or special interests. But these assemblies also pose a problem.

The Occupiers know that more traditional political organizations—such as labor unions, political parties and advocacy groups—are critical to making their message heard. With the “Re-Occupy” action on December 17, they called upon Trinity Wall Street, an Episcopal church, to grant the movement an outdoor public space. As the movement enters the winter and so-called “Phase II,” outside organizations seem to be ever more crucial. But unions, parties and churches aren't the coziest of bedfellows for open assemblies. Precisely what enables these organizations to mobilize masses of people and resources is the fact that they are hierarchical. Moreover, they are financed by, and dirty their hands with, electoral politics—all things a horizontal assembly aims to avoid.

But traditional organizations that have found new momentum in the Occupy movement don't need to sit around and wait for the assemblies to come up with demands or certain types of actions. They can act “autonomously,” as the anarchists would say, doing what they do best with the good of the whole movement in mind: pressuring lawmakers, mobilizing their memberships and pushing for change in the short term while the getting is good. They can build coalitions on common ground with the Tea Party. The Occupier assemblies won't do these things for them, and it would be a mistake to wish they would.

The radicals who lent this movement so much of its character have offered American political life a gift, should we choose to accept it. They've reminded us that we don't have to rely on Republicans or Democrats, or Clintons, Bushes, or Sarah Palin, to do our politics for us. With the assemblies, they've bestowed a refreshing form of grassroots organizing that, if it lasts, might help keep the rest of the system a bit more honest. There will, however, be tensions.



“Any organization is welcome to support us,” says the Statement of Autonomy passed by the Occupy Wall Street General Assembly on November 1, “with the knowledge that doing so will mean questioning your own institutional frameworks of work and hierarchy and integrating our principles into your modes of action.”

Kevin Zeese of the Freedom Plaza occupation in Washington, DC, though certainly no anarchist, is even more militant against the “progressive” establishment: “Bought and paid for with millions of dollars from Wall Street, the health insurance industry and big energy interests, Obama and the Democrats are part of the problem, not the solution.”

In countries like Spain, Greece and Argentina for instance, networks of local assemblies, often built around occupations, have shaped electoral politics even without forming parties or endorsing candidates. Their focus is on the people in them, not those who would purport to represent them. I was in Athens earlier this fall, just as the prime minister was stepping down and the economy was collapsing, and I found that those in the city’s assemblies weren’t really concerned; they were too busy saving local parks and resisting unfair taxes.

Spain recently held a general election, and parties across the political spectrum were responding to issues raised by the assembly-based movement which began there in May and which profoundly influenced the organizers of Occupy Wall Street. Even so, the movement called on people to cast null votes. The right-wingers won. Many on the left here will see this as a dangerous precedent, but in the long term and the big picture, autonomists see it as better than being co-opted. There is more at stake than a contest between one status-quo party or another. Occupations and assemblies are not solely an American, Greek or Spanish phenomenon; they’re the basis of a new global justice movement to confront a global crisis.

As assemblies enter our own politics through the Occupy movement, we should take care to recognize what they’re not and will never be. Even more important, though, is what they’ve already done. They’ve reminded us that politics is not a matter of choosing among what we’re offered but of fighting for what we and others actually need, not to mention what we hope for. For this, in large part, we have the anarchists to thank.



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