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 ahistorical) 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.


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

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 reducing 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,

...
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.
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 16th 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 houseless 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 occupation 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...

from pugetsoundanarchists.org/
OK...But...The what collective?

Turritopsis Nutricula is a multi-gendered, multi-cultural, multi-generational collective of individuals with varied sexual orientations, cultural affinities and favourite foods. We are a Revolutionary household. By this we mean that we are opposed to police, prison, border, racism, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, fatphobia, 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. 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 it taught that jellyfish everything it knows. Since taking this house, we became a whole new jellyfish.

...You took a house? How?

Accidentally. We marched from SCCCCCCCCC [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 the 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 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, 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*

The #occupy movement joined us.

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 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-bureaucratic 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 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—a sine qua non of consumer trance and obedient wage slavery. Cheffdom (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, external/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 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 and 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 was 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’s already a form of resistance—but also a pleasure in itself—a prime reason for human sociality—a structure for creativity and imagination—for poetics or aesthetic making, whether it be tools or human relations or musical 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.

blog.thephoenix.com
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, creating a list of unified demands, moving that responsibility from the General Assembly to individual campaigns doesn't solve the issue of co-opting. 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 risk that the whole occupation could fall victim to this possibility, we still need safeguards 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, empowering working-class people to become their own leaders.

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.
ties 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 grassrōo

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 communiqué by W.A.T.C.H. from Baltimore.
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 encampments in 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 irreplicable, 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 repetitious 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 containing 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 containing 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 containing 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 containing the same coercive effects as watching the television news or sitting behind a computer screen.

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 a day later—September 17, 2011—a call issued by the Canadian anti-capitalist magazine Anarchist News 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 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 all those who have attended the festivals which would characterize much of the Occupy movement. This celebratory tone of social movements is familiar to all those who have attended the festival atmosphere which would characterize much of the Occupy movement.

The police repression by the city, 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 criticism of the police repression by the city.

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 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 occupa-
tion in the early hours of the morning. This display of force is intended
to dissuade Occupy activists from escalating the situation further by tak-
ing 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 seri-
sous 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 Balti-
more, 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 stran-
gling the occupations: the inclusion of the occupations within the para-
digm 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 Or-
ange County, California, tents were declared by the city to be legally pro-
tected “free speech.”

In Seattle, where occupiers have refused to cooperate with city offi-
cials and instead have used the encampment as a base to plan actions
against banks and foreclosures, the police have attacked demonstrator
s 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-ap-
paratus. 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 pub-
licized 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 con-
ference 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 coun-
try 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,
one who wanted to separate themselves in my city away from the an-
archist 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 inter-
view 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 demonstra-
tions, then the relationship itself serves as a shock absorber. Picture
police officers helping to protect the demonstrators. Picture demonstra-
tors saying, "We see people on the fringes, for example, who are essen-
tially 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 deduce 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 repack 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 Placa Catalunya nonetheless took a liking to the common Catalanian 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 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 representation 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 a 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 capital 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 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 task 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.

It is fair to recognize the difficulty and the immensity of the task of the revolution that wants to create and maintain a classless society;...
I question just how self-sustaining this movement-feeding 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 Cresenda Desafio*

by anonymous

Does Cresenda 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, Cresenda 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 Cresenda, 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 Cresenda 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 form 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 Cresenda 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, Cresenda 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 down 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, Cresenda 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 Cresenda Desafra

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 destroying 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 Desaffo's "Occupy Nothing, Take Everything." A perspective that we may have shared if it weren't for the latter crucial component. Desaffo is a skeptic, I wouldn't deny her that, isolation, and mediation are all forms that keep us passively discontent. However when I repeated the word armchair it was an effort to convey a simple contradiction: anarchists must have a praxis but from Desaffo's article all I gathered was critique without practice.

The arguments spelled out in Occupy Nothing were nothing but a regurgitation 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 Desaffo'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 Desaffo 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 Desaffo 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.

Desaffo 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 Desaffo 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?" Desaffo'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 Desaffo'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 freedoms she so desires. The moments akin to freedom I have experienced at Occupy cannot be transcribed, only lived, so I dare Desafio to risk the hurt of her current reality both terrible and potentially thrilling by embracing her own revolt whether social or anti-social.

As Desafio 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.
Time-Warner, the pitchforks are on back-order from Amazon.com till 236 of demands, decided by two of every three people with the ability to speak. They get more Amazonian trees for handles. "Burn 'em! All the while, wearing fossil fuel plastic masks trademarked by rings, of crusades. Why are you wearing black? Are ye witch, or anarchist, per middle class yacht club attendees? The blanching homogenization list of rules grows, "Wear polo and khakis please, so as to better represent Our image? So we are all now Kinko's slaves? We are all up-foothold in the media outlets all seeking capitalize on the spectacle, the placed upon their behavior, but not by whom you may be thinking (oink to the streets to "occupy", there are more and more harsh restrictions which power re-forms itself, the saving grace of control, As people take re-form is akin to providing condoms to rapists, Reform is the means by which stolen our money, I- All the, 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, 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 protesters 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 watching 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 wilderness 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 write 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 is not beheaded. We know that we need to struggle in some way if we want to overcome it. This statement is not a rejection of the occupation; it is a way of being present that could be avoided, as if the present conditions were not so grave, 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* folks 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. 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.

We are the 99%!

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 justice 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 boil over 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, London, 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 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). In the desire 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),
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 undertow, 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 militancy 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 worshiping 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 non-unionized, unemployed, and precarious workers 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 underruts 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 militarily, 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 isolation...
make any effort to stop it, With some organization and planning, this type of criticism •

drivers on lines in low-income neighborhoods in San Francisco no longer ing) but is a blatant refusal that has become so widespread that most bus as quietly stealing a service (like jumping a turnstile when no one's look-

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 being 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.

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.

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.

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 every-
day. 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.
app\ndex

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.
“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, anarchists 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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