



# tidal

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**occupytheory.org**



## The questions are simple.

**Why does a small group of humanity reap the efforts of billions?**

**Why can this elite group poison the planet to further enrich themselves?**

**Why do we accept a soulless social order built around the concept of people staying in line?**

**Why do we allow armed police to beat and cage us if we step off that line?**

# Communiqué #2

**1. When you're sitting in jail**, the topic of justice can't help but come up. You work backward from sitting in your cell, to your ride in the police car with handcuffs, to when the police threw you face-first on the ground and applied said handcuffs. You ask how and why this all happened. And in your pain in your cage, someone tells you, incredibly, that it's because you asked for it. It's all in your social contract.

As with any profound concept, this may take a while to digest. Connoisseurs of the brazen should at least admire the answer's audacity. It's delivered by someone certain or shameless enough to look you in the eye and say that, despite your insistence that you have no desire to go to jail; that you think the social arrangements you are protesting represent an abomination and stain on the human soul; that you believe people should be commended for speaking out for the public good against the rapacious few; that despite all of these things, you have really agreed to exactly the opposite.

Naturally, you want to see what you signed that said all of this. There must be a copy. Binding contracts must be in writing for all but trivial matters. (Maybe locking you up is trivial?) A contract needs to be signed by the parties to be bound. In some states, important clauses must be highlighted. The part where the police get to club you, for example, should be in bold. There should be a forum to discuss misunderstandings: "Your honor, I'm pretty sure I declined the tear gas and pepper spray options."

The most threadbare contracts contain these basic elements. They ensure that contract parties have actually understood their agreement and consented.

**2. Perhaps this knowledge** makes you smug, in your cell, temporarily. But when your mind starts to wander over the acres of words-on-paper you've seen in your lifetime, you get uneasy. Maybe all this stuff was in the fine print on an insurance or loan form. You signed some of those. It could have been in your rent agreement or credit card application. How many Agreed to Terms and Conditions boxes have you checked? What were all the warnings on the reverse side of your tickets and receipts?

It's possible that if you stitched together every release of liability, consent form, waiver, permission slip and application in your life, there may be so little left of you as a legal person that a trained law officer would slap you in disgust. You could have signed away your right to breathe and to have an opinion years ago.

But it's probably worse than even that. The modern social contract, given its importance, operates beyond traditional contract principles. Atavistic notions like print and consent insult its stature. The modern world changes too quickly. Today's social contract shrinks already minuscule print to a quantum text, subject to probabilistic fluctuations based on the elite's needs at any given time. Consent may be inferred; to collect everyone's actual signature would require some kind of absurd robo-signing process.

We learn as part of the contract that we have granted a virtual, seemingly irrevocable, power of attorney to a small group in government and industry to act in our name. We appear to have granted this when we chose to be born, and ratify it daily by our continued existence.

In this context, questioning the social construct makes about as much sense as an ant putting down its burden and demanding to speak to the queen.

**3. Some might point to laws** and legal process as guarantors of our rights. When you are arrested for protesting, you will spend on average at least 24 hours in jail. No one thinks you pose a particular threat; they keep you because the system takes that long to process your existence. The mere size and impersonal nature of the system dictates this treatment. We have learned to accept this from inflexible institutions, to be cheated of our time and money, to be passive in the face of unresponsiveness. But frankly, it can be embarrassing to be locked up in a metaphor for what you're protesting.

We know that laws can be enforced against you in a heartbeat, but that fighting for your legal rights can take years. Properly understood, laws explain to the weak what they may not do. This is seen as preferable to more autocratic arrangements, where rules are made up after the fact. We don't seem to mind being told what to do, as long as we're provided the simple courtesy of advance warning. Even that tender mercy comes under routine attack by the authorities.

**4. Let us consider** to whom or to what we have given our proxy. Even here, confusion reigns. It's not entirely clear how the bank that owns your home relates to the police smacking you around, or what they have to do with the credit card company charging too much, or those credit rating people, and how that ties into whatever layer of government happens to hassle you on a given day, and how all that

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## **We must also recognize that each generation inherits a different world and requires different solutions, and that the sources of yesterday's hope and liberation can become tools of today's oppression.**

means we should have a war or two going on, or planned, while the environment is converted to a trash-strewn sauna. Whatever that thing is has grown so huge and weird that we struggle even to find a name for it—the System, the Military-Industrial Complex, the Institution, the State, the Matrix, the Man. No one really understands what the Thing means or intends, but pundits occasionally offer a metaphor.

The Thing resembles a ship that we're all on together. Not a cruise ship exactly, but more of a steam ship/trawler. We have a captain who steers while we shovel coal and swab decks. He seems to have us headed toward a typhoon. The captain stares at the impending doom on the horizon and grins ecstatically. He's clearly thrilled to be the captain. He faces down a storm that we can only wincingly glance at with one squinting eye, and he jabbers incessantly about hope and destiny. We realize that he does not see as a normal person, by passively receiving light through his pupils. Rather he uses his eyes offensively to project what he wants to see on the world. He has become so practiced at his fantasia that he can no longer recognize what we, cringing on deck, see as certain catastrophe.

Or maybe the Thing should be understood as the body politic. We each have our own role as cell or organ within the body. The brain tells everyone what to do, because bodies just work that way. If you were part of the brain, you would know. Beyond that, things get foggy. From what we can tell, our collective body is some kind of morbidly obese ranting child that eats what it sees and screams when someone threatens its toys. It may have severe emotional deficits and boundary issues. Are we part of the spleen? Free-floating radicals? Maybe we are some vague notion of decency trying to make our way to the brain to make our plea for the rest of humanity.

**5. What succor can we draw** from our social arrangements? The elite have hijacked our institutions and bent them to their will. They have been sustained by the cultural myth that humanity advances only through unchecked greed.

Our present institutions exploit our weaker aspects, our laziness and passivity, our love of ease, our self-centeredness. They encourage our addictions to the vain and superficial. In return for our dignity, they offer us the salve of television, magazines, movies, games, from which we invent fantasies and identities in which to hide. Escapism has grown from occasional distraction to central social tenet. No one wants to deal with life, really. We want to believe the beautiful lie that humanity has overcome the ancient need to work and suffer, despite all evidence to the contrary.

**6. The basic themes** have been with us now for centuries. The machine grows too great to control or comprehend; the sweat of the many sustains the dreams of the few; obsessions built on hatred and

false mythologies occupy our minds. We have shown ourselves capable of great compassion and depravity.

For a small percentage of the population, the world seems a wonderland played out in the spotlight of a magical theatrical show. Those standing off-stage with brooms and hammers understand the true costs of the production, the falsity of its script and imagery, but still can't look away. Some even cheer for the tacky actors who gobble up the world, as if their open disdain for humanity were somehow heroic.

The true nature of our circus has by now revealed itself. We notice that the big top has burst into flame, that when we turn to the ring-master we see his sweat streaking away his greasepaint, revealing the clown beneath.

**7. Most of what we have, we received as a gift** from our forbearers and creation itself. We should not surrender the hard-earned concessions wrung from life by past generations for the comfort of the few. We must also recognize that each generation inherits a different world and requires different solutions, and that the sources of yesterday's hope and liberation can become tools of today's oppression.

Our past solutions no longer serve as guarantors, exemplars, protectors, and do not deserve the power we have ceded to them. We must wean ourselves from them and reclaim that power.

Our present solutions must build on the generous aspects of our beings and the potential of our time. We must no longer abdicate responsibility for developing our lives and spirit to others.

**8. Each age brings changes** in human capacities and creates new space for possibilities. Past generations have fought oppression to claim as much of that space for the good as possible, sometimes succeeding, often not.

In our age, the capacity for connection, self-education and self-operation has exploded. This offers a window of opportunity, with its unspoken, unresolved question: Who will take and shape the bulk of the resulting potential? The space can be used for the benefit of all, or employed to enrich the few at the cost of the many. The window will not remain open long before being overwhelmed by claims from those in power.

**9. It occurs to you in jail** how much you've been had. Locked away, apart from the mesmerizing screens, the deal seems plain: There is no deal. The social contract exists only as rationalization. In its place, there is what you can be suckered or bullied in to accepting, and whether you are brave and strong enough to resist.

What's galling in this light is the creepy, sanctimonious importance that the elite attach to honoring contractual obligations when something comes due from you. You gave your binding promise! Never



**Blocking the triborough bridge** during a 1964 sit-in protesting unequal living and school conditions of African-Americans.

mind that every manner of manipulation, false promise, lie, obfuscation, pressure or cajolery was employed to extract it; you're too insignificant to back out of your word.

**10. The questions are simple.** Why does a small group of humanity reap the efforts of billions? Why can this elite group poison the planet to further enrich themselves? Why do we accept a soulless social order built around the concept of people staying in line? Why do we allow armed police to beat and cage us if we step off that line?

One might answer, "because we allow it, and because we are content with the beggar's portion," but this is uncharitable. Forging unity among ourselves to resist, to act, is hard. It must be built person-by-person by engaging with each other, believing that each of us has value, that if we learn the trick of working together we will change the world. We must unplug ourselves from the bloviating network of the banal and talk with someone.

We must nurture the habit of thinking for ourselves. We have surrendered most of the space we should occupy to others, and we have accepted a sliver in return. This pattern has become so established that, when we attempt to assert otherwise, we will be attacked and jailed. When we live and think independently, we lessen our dependence on

institutions we can't control. Their strength depends entirely upon our relative ignorance and powerlessness, our willingness to acquiesce. We can develop the skills needed to live together as a human race that might actually be able to share the planet without destroying it.

**11. It is customary to give some type of notice** when ending a contractual relationship. We should respect the formalities, even in the face of a sham.

Since we're not sure who's supposed to get the notice, we are forced to deliver it generally to the world by word and deed in every available forum. We proclaim from our jail cells, in city squares, on Wall Street, from every space we occupy: We want no part of any contract that produces a world like this; we do not consent to be governed; we take responsibility for our own lives.

Any powers of attorney are hereby terminated. If we want you to do something in our name, we will tell you.

When you come to collect on the fruits of your arrangements, we will not comply. We will go out of our way to thwart the efforts of the 1% to take what does not belong to it, to wipe away the old orders of oppression, to change the world for the good.

# Pulling THE EMERGENCY BRAKE

BY Marina Sitrin

“**M**arx said that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps things are very different. It may be that revolutions are the act by which the human race traveling in the train applies the emergency brake.” Walter Benjamin’s words perfectly fit what occurred around the globe in 2011 and in many places before this, and much further south, from Chiapas and Oaxaca Mexico to Argentina. Our movements are the shouting of “No!” The “Ya Basta!” The “Que Se Vayan Todos!” They are our collective refusal to remain passive in an untenable situation. And so we pull the emergency brake, freeze time, and begin to open up and create something new. We are not even sure what that something is. We know we want to create open space. What that looks like we are discovering together, as we create, which is also how we create: together, horizontally and with affect. What we are doing and how we are doing it are inextricably linked, and both are part of this prefigurative movement.

## A Few Dangers in Openness

In these moments of crisis people come together, look to one another, and create new supportive relationships. These ties can be some of the most beautiful and solidarious that we ever experience. They can also be some of the most fleeting. Time and time again, institutional powers repress and co-opt these relationships, or distrust causes our networks to implode from within. How can we prevent this dissolution? How can we bring about lasting moments where history breaks open, our imaginations are freed and we are able to envision and create new landscapes towards new horizons? Below, I address a few of the

many potential challenges we face as a movement by looking at the example of Argentina, where autonomous movements now have ten years of experience. I use the examples of left political parties and the State, but the challenges are many and the point is to begin an open conversation about these challenges so as to overcome them, or even better, to avoid them.

## Political Party Disruption

The relationships we are creating in our movements attempt to open space for all people who agree with a set of emancipatory principles. Occupy does not create structures of membership or behavior modes—anyone is welcome. This inclusion is both our strength and a potential weakness if we do not think carefully about what can happen in these open spaces and organize accordingly.

In Argentina after the 2001 popular rebellion, the people formed hundreds of neighborhood assemblies, all using horizontalidad, resembling what Occupy is attempting to create with general assemblies in neighborhoods, towns and cities—forging new relationships while striving to meet basic needs. While the neighborhood assemblies faced numerous challenges, one of the most destabilizing was left political party disruption. This interference took many forms: trying to control the assemblies’ agenda; loading the speakers list with party members so as to dominate the conversation; and even organizing disruption campaigns, especially in the interbarrial (the assembly of assemblies where many hundreds of assemblies came together to make decisions). There, party members mobilized to disrupt an assembly, shouting out of turn,

LA VERDADERA  
DEMOCRACIA  
ESTA EN LAS  
CALLES



making demands, such as the end to imperialism now, or the need for a ten-point plan for women's liberation—all to be decided that night. Most deviously, these party members often did not identify as members of a group so they appeared to be just regular passionate participants. This trick, of course, then brings out the most wonderful of our democratic impulses, which is to make sure these people are fully heard. But if their agenda is not sincere, is it democratic to allow them the space to make demands on the group?

Our open and horizontal assemblies are our strength, but they leave us vulnerable to those who disrupt or divert the agenda. Having principles of unity, base political agreements and behavioral norms, bolstered by ways to effectuate these agreements, will create open spaces with limited disruption. The argument here is not against any particular group or institution (though not in support of them either), but to address the behavior. It is not about them being bad, but us being better.

### Elections & the State

The national elections in Argentina also created a great deal of disorientation and demobilization for the movements. The 2001 rebellion forced out five consecutive governments with popular power. The legitimacy of the State was in question. People organized assemblies in neighborhoods, unemployed workers' movements grew exponentially, and workers, using horizontalidad, recuperated workplaces, without bosses or hierarchy. The State responded with direct repression, cooptation and attempts at legitimate re-institutionalization: popular elections. The people planned to boycott the elections and form assemblies of assemblies, creating a potential dual power situation. Then, a far right candidate appeared on the ballot, a man responsible for the last decade of privatization who ran on a ticket of "law and order." Fear pervaded the movements, and the conversations shifted to what to do—vote? not vote? organize against the candidates?—sidetracking the movements' agendas to that of the State and the State's agenda. The center candidate won, but at the expense of a loss of momentum in the movement and a shift in the point of reference. People had positioned themselves in relation to the possible and real offerings of the State rather than in relation to the alternative powers being developed by the movements.

Years later, many reflect on the question of elections and the State in a different way. The perspective is not a total boycott. The most important thing, however, is to maintain the movements' agendas and—from the point of reference of the movement—decide strategically the relationship to institutional power. Some have referred to this strategy as "With, Against and Beyond the State." Along these lines, at the time of the latest elections, one movement participant explained that her perspective was to "vote and run." She explained that there were intentionally few conversations in the assemblies about the current elections.



Graffiti from Argentina

Similarly, the perspective on material support is to take what movement participants can get only as long as they maintain their own agenda. As soon as the State puts demands or qualifiers on the offer, the people walk away.

The politics of our movements necessarily means that the State cannot fix the problems of society. The State, whether capitalist or socialist, cannot be the emancipatory agent of change. Yet, when we as movements try to work outside the State and without conscious engagement, the State will always engage us, through direct repression and countless covert tactics. Our point of reference should continue to be one another and the creation of directly democratic spaces, but we must also find ways to negotiate issues of institutional power while maintaining our agenda.

# So, What Are the And Where Do They Go From Here?

BY JUDITH BUTLER

Ever since the Occupy Movement emerged onto the political landscape, critics and skeptics have both asked, “so, what are the demands?” And in more recent months, skeptics have asked whether the movement has lost momentum since many of public sites occupied have been cleared by state-ordered police power. Let us consider first the question of demands, and then turn to the question of where the occupy movement moves now.

If we think about this first question, we can see how firmly entrenched the notion is that political movements, if they are to qualify as “political”, must (a) be organized around a concrete and discrete list of demands, and (b) endeavor to have those demands satisfied. For the moment, let us consider what kind of politics is characterized by such assumptions, and what kind is not. In other words, although we take for granted that politics must furnish a list of demands that can be satisfied, it does not follow that we are right to take that version of politics for granted as some of us clearly do. Let us think, then, about the component parts of this skeptical claim, and see which version of politics is assumed and promoted by this question. Further, let us consider whether the kind of politics that Occupy pursues not only fails – or refuses – to comply with this idea of politics, but is actively trying to establish another one. So let us start with two of the basic

building blocks of the skeptical position: (1) demands that appear in the form of a list, (2) demands that can be satisfied,

1. *Demands should take the form of a list.* Let us imagine that the Occupy Movement were to say that we have three demands: (a) the end of home foreclosures, (b) forgiving student debt, and (c) a decrease in unemployment. In some ways, each of these demands surely resonates with what Occupy is about, and people who are concerned with all these issues have clearly joined occupy, joined demonstrations with signs that oppose home foreclosures, unmanageable student debt, and unemployment rates. So the list of demands is clearly related to the Occupy Movement, and yet, it would be a mistake to say that the political meaning or effect of the Occupy Movement can be understood perfectly well by understanding these demands or, indeed, a much longer list of demands. The first reason is that a “list” is a series of demands. But a list does not explain how these demands are related to one another.

If one of the main political points of the movement is to draw attention to, and resist, growing inequalities of wealth, then that is a social and economic reality that crosses all the specific demands that such a list might include. But it would not really count as one demand among many. In other

words, through what language and action does one call attention to a growing inequality of wealth in which the rich monopolize increasingly greater amounts of wealth and the poor now includes increasing numbers of the population? This point is made evident by each of the particular issues on the list, a list that could include the decimation of social services, including public healthcare, of pensions, the increase in “flexible” labour that makes workers into a disposable population, the destruction of public and affordable higher education, the overcrowding of primary and secondary public



The number of participants surged.

Illustrations from *The Beginning of the American Fall* by Stephanie McMillan

The Occupy concept caught like wildfire. By October 9, more than 600 “Occupy” protests had been held or were ongoing across the U.S.



BOSTON



CLEVELAND



SEATTLE



KNOXVILLE



SAN FRANCISCO



DALLAS...

# e Demands?

schools, tax breaks for the rich, depression of wages, and increasing government support for the prison industry. We can make such a list, add to such a list, even become more specific about such a list, but no one item on the list can help us explain what gathers all those items together on the list. If we argue, though, that increasing wealth differentials and inequality that emerge directly from contemporary forms of capitalism are exemplified by each of these issues, and that together they provide evidence for the claim that capitalism relies upon, and reproduces, social and economic inequalities of this kind, then we are making a claim about how a system works and, more particularly, how the capitalist system works now: inequalities are becoming greater, assuming new and devastating forms, and this accelerated process of inequality remains unchecked by existing state and global authorities who have a vested interest in making capitalism work.

The skeptic might still respond with the following: “but don’t we have to work on each of these issues separately in order to make any real difference in people’s lives? If we would

all take on some one issue, we could make our way down the list, finding practical solutions for each item there.” To take this point of view, however, is to insist that the items can be separated from one another. But if we need to know what links the items together in order to provide a solution to this problem, then our politics depends upon our asking about the systemic and historical character of the economic system itself.

Indeed, if we understand how the increasing differentials in wealth (and the accumulation of more wealth by fewer and fewer people, and the extension of poverty and disposability to increasingly larger numbers of people) follows from a particular economic organization of society, one that is geared to produce ever more acute versions of this inequality, then in order to address any of the items on the list, we have to understand the broader structure of inequality to which each item points, and we have to think about ways of objecting to that economic regime, rather than seek to make smaller adjustments to its operation. Indeed, if we “fix” any problem on

the list without addressing the reproduction of inequality, and if that inequality is being reproduced in ever more acute ways, then the list just gets larger, even as we seek to remove a particular item from it.

We cannot fix the one form of inequality without understanding the broader trends of inequality we are seeking to overcome. By thinking that all the items must be disaggregated, we miss our mark and narrow our vision at the expense of both social and economic justice. Of course, one can work on any of these items at the same time that one struggles for the end to the structural reproduction of inequality. But that means that some group, some political articulation, has to keep attention on the problem of structural inequality. If we think that there are adequate resources within the current economic regime to fix these problems, then, we make an odd assumption. We assume that the very system that has produced the inequality that characterizes all the items on the list can serve as the recipient of our demands. This brings me then to the second presumption made by the skeptic’s question.



## 2. Demands should be capable of being satisfied.

This surely seems like a reasonable point. But anyone who argues that demands must be capable of being satisfied assumes that there is someone or some existing institutional power to whom one could appeal to have one's demands satisfied. Union negotiations backed by the threat of strikes usually do have a list of demands which, if satisfied, will avert the strike, and if not, will commence or prolong a strike. But when a company, corporation, or state is not considered a legitimate partner for negotiation, then it makes no sense to appeal to that authority for a negotiated settlement. In fact, to appeal to that authority to satisfy the demand would be one way of attributing legitimacy to that authority. So articulating demands that can be satisfied depends fundamentally on the attribution of legitimacy to those who have the power to satisfy the demands. And when one ceases to direct demands to those authorities, as happens in the general strike, then it is the illegitimacy of those authorities that is exposed. This is one important implication of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's contribution to Occupy Theory.

But if those existing institutions are complicit with the economic regime that depends upon, and furthers, the reproduction of inequality, then one cannot appeal to those institutions to bring about an end to the conditions of inequality. Such an appeal would defeat itself in the course of its articulation. Simply put, the appeal or demand that sought to be satisfied by the existing state, global monetary institutions, or corporations, national or transnational, would be giving more power to the very sources of inequality, and in

that way aiding and abetting the reproduction of inequality itself. As a result, another set of strategies are required, and what we are now seeing in the Occupy Movement is precisely the development of a set of strategies that call attention to, and oppose, the reproduction of inequality.

Perhaps to the skeptic the idea of making "impossible demands" is equivalent to vacating the field of the political itself. But that response should call our attention to the way that the field of the political has been constituted such that satisfiable demands become the hallmark of its intelligibility. In other words, why is it that we have come to accept that the only politics that makes sense is one in which a set of demands are made to existing authorities, and that the demands isolate instances of inequality and injustice from one another without seeing or drawing any links among them? One can see that the restriction of politics to a list of demands that can be satisfied thus keeps the field of politics restricted to contemporary electoral systems that operate on the assumption that any radical change in the economic regime is non-negotiable. So, whatever is negotiated, whatever demand is satisfied, will not touch upon what is non-ne-



gotiable, namely, the reproduction of an economic regime that is spawning inequalities at an alarming rate. We might say the particular politics that defines practical and intelligible politics as the production and satisfaction of a list of discrete demands is committed in advance to the legitimacy of existing economic and political structures, and to a refusal of the systematic character of inequality.

As we can see, one of the key ways that existing regimes of power maintain their legitimacy is by debunking and dismissing all forms of popular political resistance that call their own legitimacy into question. They have strong self-interested reasons to dismiss the Occupy movement as "apolitical." At that moment, they are trying to maintain a monopoly on the discourse of the political, trying, in other words, to define and control the power of discourse that will establish who makes sense, whose actions are truly political, and who is "beyond the pale," "misguided," and "impractical."

The uprising that calls into question those strategies of self-legitimation reminds us that a form of government or power that is democratic depends upon the popular will of the demos, the people. What recourse do people have when the institutions that are supposed

to equally represent them politically, provide conditions for sustainable work, secure basic health care and education, and honor basic rights to equality, end up distributing all of those basic resources and rights differentially and illegitimately? At such a moment, there are other ways of enacting equality, showing up together on the street or on the internet, producing alliances that demonstrate the resonance, the overlap, and the broader links among all those items on the list of contemporary injustice.

No political or economic regime can claim to be legitimately democratic when it fails to represent the people equally. And when that inequality becomes pervasive, and is treated as an irreversible fact of economic life, then the people who suffer that inequality act in alliance, enacting and calling for the kind of equality. Some might object that radical equality is impossible. Even if that were the case – and there is no good reason to accept that claim at face-value – it would not be possible to think democracy without an ideal of radical equality. So radical equality is a demand, but it is not directed to those institutions that reproduce inequality. It is directed to the people themselves whose historical task is the making of new institutions. The appeal is to ourselves, and it is this new “we” that is formed, episodically and globally, in every action and demonstration. Such actions are in no sense “apolitical.” They take aim at a politics that offers practical solutions at the expense of addressing structural inequality. And they remind us that every form of politics gains or loses its legitimacy depending on whether it accords equality to the people it is said to represent. Otherwise, it fails to represent, and so destroys its own legitimacy in the eyes of the people. In demonstrating, in acting, the people come to represent themselves, embodying and reanimating the principles of equality that have been decimated. Abandoned by existing institutions, they assemble themselves in the name of a social and political equality, giving voice, body, movement, and visibility to an idea of “the people” regularly divided and effaced by existing power.

So where does the Occupy movement go now? To answer this question, we have to ask first, who poses this question? And we have to ask, in what form does this question appear? One point is clear from the start: it is not the

tasks of intellectuals to pose and answer the question. One reason is that intellectuals do not have prescient powers and theory cannot have the job of prescribing to those who are engaged primarily as activists. Indeed, let us take this whole distinction apart, since activists are very often theorists, and theorists are sometimes also engaged in forms of activism that are not primarily concerned with theory. The best any of us can do is to track what is actually happening, how it moves people, and what effects it has. And what we see right now, I believe, is that the Occupy movement has several centers, that its public actions are episodic, and that new forms of effectiveness are increasingly evident. By “effectiveness” I do not mean that demands are being formulated and satisfied, but that mobilizations are increasing in size and appearing in new geopolitical locations. As the US elections dominate the news media, it remains clear that a large part of the population understand that their concerns are not addressed by electoral politics. So Occupy continues to delineate the way the popular will wants a political movement that exceeds that of electoral politics. In this way, the “representative” claim of electoral politics is itself brought into greater crisis. Few achievements could be more important than showing that electoral politics as it is currently organized does not represent the popular will – and that its very legitimacy is put into crisis by this divergence of democratic will from electoral institutions.

Perhaps most importantly, though, is that Occupy questions structural inequality, capitalism, and the specific sites and practices that exemplify the relation between capitalism and structural inequality. If Occupy has drawn attention to forms of structural inequality that affect any number of corporations and state institutions, that adversely affect the general population as they try to meet the basic needs of life (shelter, food, health care, employment), then it has surely brought attention to the general economic system that relies upon, and produces, inequality with increasing intensity. We can argue whether capitalism is a system, an historical formation, whether its neo-liberal versions are substantially different than the capitalism criticized by Marx in the 19th century. These are important debates, and academics

should consider to focus their attention there, to be sure. But there remains the question of the historical present of capitalism, and Marx himself tells us that we must take as our point of departure the historical present. What are the specific public institutions and services that plunge ever more people into conditions of precarity, the corporations whose exploitative practices have decimated working lives, the health care conglomerates that profit on illness and refuse to offer adequate health services, the public institutions that are either being decimated or subordinated to corporate logics and the profit calculus? Paradoxically but urgently, Occupy must act episodically to target and expose these sites of inequality, finding their public face and instance, and seizing or interrupting those processes by which inequality and increased precarity are being reproduced.

So, I do not think we have only to mourn the loss of Zucotti Park or other public spaces where Occupy was dwelling. Perhaps the task is to undertake squatting as a form of public protest, even if it is only episodic and targeted. Paradoxically, one can only draw attention to radical inequality by exposing the sites where inequality is reproduced. This must happen in relation to centers of corporate and state power, but also precisely at the site of “service delivery” – health care corporations that fail to provide service, banks that exploit those who keep their money there, universities that become the tools of corporate profit. These are just a few. But if Occupy is episodic, then its target is not known in advance. And if it targets unemployment in one place, unaffordable housing in another, and the loss of public services in yet a third, then it strings together over time a sense of how capitalism is located in concrete institutions and sites. As much as we find against structural inequality and a “system” that profits by its reproduction, we have to focus on the concrete instances where that inequality takes place. So if we do not stay in the same place, it is not to be lamented. If we are on the move, then we are, in collective forms, tracking the sites of injustice and inequality, and our trail becomes the new map of radical change.

# General Strike

BY GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK

When the entire workforce of a city lays down its tools and refuses to resume work until certain demands are met, it is called a General Strike. The idea first came from the nineteenth-century anarchists, who did not constitute a workforce but were people of anti-statist convictions. Rosa Luxemburg, the Polish revolutionary thinker (1871–1919) murdered by German reactionary troops, rewrote the concept of the General Strike and claimed it for the workforce (proletariat) after witnessing the great General Strikes in the Russian Empire that began in 1896 and ended in the tremendous General Strike of 1905. Georges Sorel (1847–1922), a French thinker who moved from the political Left to the political Right, also conceived of the General Strike as a way to energize the workforce.

The African American historian and sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963) described the exodus of the slaves immediately after Emancipation as a General Strike, because slavery had not allowed the “Black Proletariat” (plantation workforce for the cotton industry) to form itself as a regular workforce.

Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), the Indian national liberationist, rewrote the General Strike once again and claimed it for the colonized as such, regardless of class. Thus it was shifted from a working-class movement to something like a mixture of civil disobedience and boycott politics. He called it “Non-Cooperation.” W.E.B. Du Bois followed this carefully.

Today the global workforce is deeply divided. And globalization also operates by way of finance — trading in uneven currencies — which has little to do with the workforce. A great deal of the economy is digital. It is time again to reclaim the General Strike. It is being reclaimed by those who have been disenfranchised from the benefits flowing toward the

citizen in a socially just state. Corporate greed leading to indefinite foreclosures, bailout of banks, 1% against 99%, decimated healthcare, corporatization of education at all levels — leading to exacerbation of student loans, and the destruction of the teaching profession; and a general corporatization of every aspect of life — agriculture, sport — the list goes on. Labor joins hands in this redefinition of the General Strike as a collectivity of disenfranchised citizens rather than the chief moving force.

Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) had defined those who had no access to the welfare structure of the state, those who had no part in the state, as the subaltern. These were

the poorest of the poor.

Today this too is being re-written. What we are witnessing is the subalternization of the middle class — the largest sector of the 99%. The General Strike, as with Du Bois and Gandhi, is now a powerful symbol; not just a neatly matched worker/master fight. The

power of a symbol is infinitely greater than that of a mere fact. A fact can seemingly be quickly corrected, with all the service of the corporate sector.

At this point, the things to remember are:

- a. **the General Strike has always been special because it is undertaken by those who suffer, not by morally outraged ideologues.**
- b. **It is by definition non-violent (this is why Gandhi could segue into it), though the repressive apparatus of the state has used great violence against the strikers.**
- c. **Although the results are transformative, the demands are generally focused on laws: the length of the working day for the Russian workers; the fourteenth and fifteenth**

“IF ONE SEES THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE GENERAL STRIKE AND THE LAW, ONE REALIZES THAT THIS IS NOT LEGAL REFORMISM, BUT A WILL TO SOCIAL JUSTICE. THIS INTENSE COMMITMENT TO LEGAL CHANGE AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION IS A BID FOR JUSTICE. THE RIGHT TO A CEASELESS CIVIL REVOLUTION WON BY A GENERAL STRIKE.”



These are two photos from 1937 that reflect two different strikes. At right, 60,000 people attended "great gathering of labor in Cadillac Square," part of what is considered to be the most important strike in U.S. history. At left, 110 women in Detroit's main Woolworth store spent six days in the store, sleeping on the counters. They ended their strike when they were granted a 5¢ per hour increase.



**Amendments(in substance if not in discourse) by the former slaves; a decolonized legal structure by Gandhi. So, laws banning bailout, legal oversight of fiscal policy – tax the rich – de-corporatization of education, lifting agricultural subsidies – changing electoral laws so it is not only the rich who run – where will you stop? If one sees the connection between the General Strike and the Law, one realizes that this is not legal reformism, but a will to social justice. This intense commitment to legal change and its implementation is a bid for justice. The right to a ceaseless civil revolution won by a General Strike.**

- d. **Unlike a party, a general strike refuses to cooperate until things change. Pressure is working; witness the 5% victory over debit card charges!**

General Strikes are always against "Wall Street" or capitalism. But, because revolutions have also been against bad regimes represented by single dictators or kings, our idea of "revolution" is confused with armed struggle, violence, and regime change. In Russia the Czars, in China decadent feudalism and Euro-colonialism, various regimes and the latifundia system in Latin America, in France the Bourbon monarchy, in America the Hanover monarchy and later the slaveholding system; today, Zine el-Abidin ben Al for the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Muammar Gaddafi in Libya.

By contrast, in the "Occupy Wall Street" movement the spirit of the General Strike has come into its own and joined forces with the American tradition of civil disobedience: citizens against an unregulated capitalist state, not against an individual and his regime. Therefore, short-term: change the laws that make the state accountable to business and banks, not to people. Long-term: establish and nurture an education that keeps this will to justice alive.



# Five Theses on the Student Strike

BY AUTONOMOUS STUDENTS AT  
THE CUNY GRADUATE CENTER

## **I. As students, we strike at the heart of an economy that depends on an education system that exploits us, disciplines us, and profits from us.**

To strike as students is to recognize ourselves as workers in the present and future economy. Our labor is necessary to produce and reproduce an educational system which is a source of profit and plunder for the 1% and a source of disciplined and exploitable labor power. A student strike is a refusal of this role at every level—from high schools to colleges and universities. So long as the employing class profits from our knowledge, we should not pay tuition and be plunged into debt in order to be employable. Instead, we should be guaranteed a wage to learn.

## **II. We strike to reject a system that divides us.**

We strike because our desire to learn must not be used to maintain violent social divisions. We reject a system that exploits our differences and divides us along race, sexual, gender, and class lines. We are taught that education is our best means to ‘get ahead’ in life, yet, many are also left behind, devalued, discarded, or simply excluded. We reject a system that forces us into vicious competition and pits us against each other.

## **III. We strike against a failing system that robs us of our future**

We strike against the devaluation of our education through austerity measures, rising tuition and budget cuts. We strike against being doomed to lifelong debt, constant training and re-skilling, and against a system that saddles us with the cost of producing exploitable workers for the market. We refuse an educational system governed by the dictates of competition, individualism, and profit.

## **IV. We strike to affirm and create education as we want it.**

We strike for an educational system that serves our collective needs and desires. We want to be decision-makers in our collective future, for knowledge to be a genuine commons and not a source of profit.

## **V. We strike to build our collective power and create something new.**

To strike is to realize our power to determine our everyday lives. We refuse to let our bodies and our minds be held hostage to the current educational and work regimes, to collaborate quietly as the violent logic of capital bankrupts us of our present and future. We strike together to build a better world and reclaim our future.



Would you strike against war? For free education? Free health care? Against police brutality?

***What are your demands?***

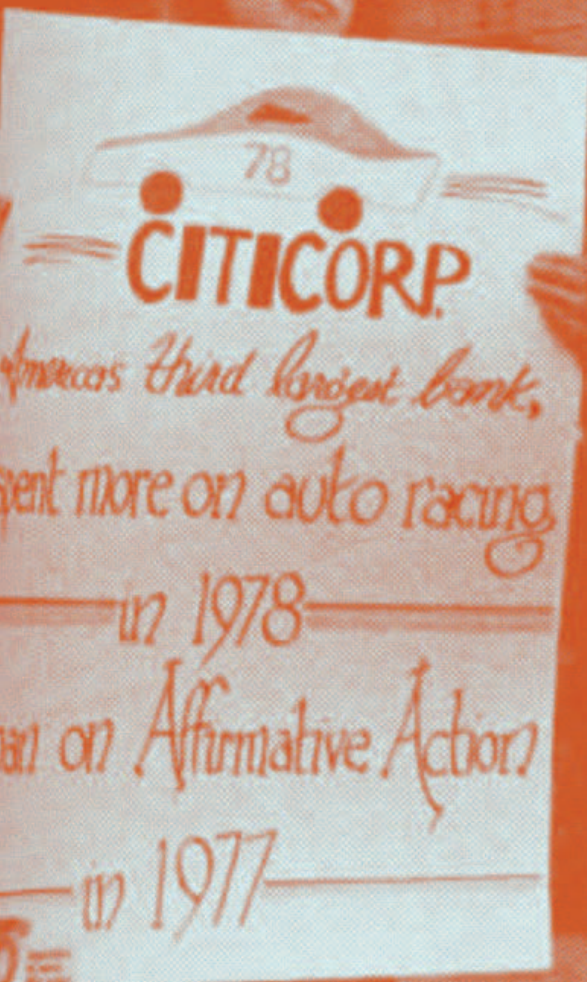
שביתה **strikes**

απεργία **stachka** ストライキ

# Getting Ready for M

Occup  
solidari  
day witho  
and more. O  
are:

No Work No  
No Shopping



grève streik बंद  
sciopero 罷工 اضراب huelga

# May Day 2012

by Wall Street stands in  
ty with the calls for a  
out the 99%, a general strike,  
On May Day, wherever you

o School No Housework  
g No Banking

## Take the streets



### Student Debt Strike

There are no statistics to substantiate the psychological battle that student debtors are fighting. It is impossible to account for the suicides and the runaways. This year, student debt will top \$1 trillion dollars in the US.

An entire generation is facing a future under water. We are entering adult life ripped from our sense of ourselves. We are in debt. We are humiliated. We struggle alone.

Debt destroys solidarity; it corrodes relationships and social movements with the yolk of obligation to work and consume.

Debt has disciplining effects. We tailor our lives to combat it consciously and unconsciously, and we effectively undergo a total transformation. We socialize these changes, they spread like a disease. We adapt strategies to conceal our disgrace by selectively interacting with those who are radically different than we are. We can't bear to look at ourselves in the mirror. What we study changes. Our strategy must be to target industries that we can profit from. We ignore our actual interests. We manufacture false identities based on status in order to forget ourselves. We blindly pursue dignity at every turn faced with our own personal shame. Politically we

**A Book Bloc, London, 2010:** By using books as shields and bringing them into the streets demonstrators are drawing attention to the violence at the heart of the neoliberal ideology. Books are our tools - we teach with them, we learn with them, we play with them, we create with them, we make love with them and, sometimes, we must fight with them.

forget our own interests. We have already become someone else. We hold the beliefs of the other and fight for them, no matter how ludicrous.

We could collectivize fights against debt and unemployment, fight as a people, democratically, horizontally.

But the way student loan debt is structured has prevented us from engaging or creating a movement. Our loans don't effect us until after we graduate. The myth of the American dream persists throughout our college years, only to come crashing down when we enter the real world. We can't get jobs that afford us the luxury of paying off our debt and living a comfortable life. We work during the day and study at night. We work at night and study during the day. We will not risk quitting a low paying job to work for ourselves; the danger of default is too great. We will not open our own businesses. We will not create jobs for others. We will delay marriage, having kids, traveling. We will not pursue our dreams.

We are destined to pursue our collective nightmares in

isolation. Where is the rage?

Refuse your debt! Cast off the chains that bind you to the state and the financial system.

Join the Occupy Student Debt Campaign and build a movement. Become a part of an action of mutual aid. Band together with others across the country. Sign the pledge of debt refusal. If you are not in debt, sign a pledge of support for debtors repudiating their debt. If you are a faculty member, sign the pledge endorsing the action and show support for your students. Your wages are being cut and your knowledge undervalued. Don't be complacent in a system that is swallowing you whole!

Make the decision to refuse your debt and start today. Join us.

## Women's Strike

The issues of economic oppression and the realities of gender are intrinsically linked. To separate them would literally be impossible—and yet this reflexive relationship of oppression is constantly ignored or relegated to 'disturbing factoid' status. To be sure, there are indeed numbers and percentages that will make your eyes widen. The UN reports those of us who are female assigned at birth make on average 17% less than those who are male assigned. Women, as a gendered category of people, perform 66% of the world's work, and produce 50% of its food. Yet we earn only 10% of its income and own 1% of its property.

The global economic crisis has and will continue to reinforce patriarchy through an economic stranglehold on the necks of the female assigned and identified. But the solution is nowhere near the economic reform and recovery promised by politicians and NGOs. In fact, the solution can never be a proposed program, development initiative, or microfinance game. Those of us who have been called or call ourselves women un-

derstand that history has turned us into property.

We have been used by capitalism, we have been sold and traded on Wall Street, we have been expected to create healthy homes and families and are then evicted from those same homes without a second thought. We have been used to keep homes afloat while husbands work, and we are now being used to keep a failing, exploitative economy running as efficiently as possible.

A general strike on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012 is an opportunity for us to come together and call out the extreme damage and oppression done by capitalism to the human community.

It has divided us based on gender and has ensured the exploitation of those of us labeled "woman." The general strike is a gendered issue and we must illuminate this through our actions on May Day. Don't go to work, don't go to school, don't behave and don't buy. Get in the streets and build

community. We can create the world we want to see once we remove our consent from the world that destroys us.

## Housing Strike

The most intimate corners and spaces in our lives have been stolen from us in thefts justified by words like property rights and mortgages and rent checks. It's time to question these false contracts. Why does a bank that split ownership of our homes into hundreds of parts, tanked

our economy, stole our investments and is now trying to extort mortgage payments from us say it owns our home? Why does a management company that owns half the city, that exploits families' basic necessities for profit, and that is now raising our rent when real wages haven't increased in 50 years deserve to own our apartments?

Housing has always been an unequal financial arrangement: those with consolidated wealth prey on families' most fundamental needs. Foreclosed properties stand as bitter

“WE HAVE BEEN USED BY CAPITALISM, WE HAVE BEEN SOLD AND TRADED ON WALL STREET, WE HAVE BEEN EXPECTED TO CREATE HEALTHY HOMES AND FAMILIES AND ARE THEN EVICTED FROM THOSE SAME HOMES WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT.”



A hunger march organized by the unemployed councils, Chicago 1932.

reminders of how far those with power will go to enforce this contract: In New York City, 10,000 homeless families sleep in shelters each night while 80,000 apartment units and homes stand vacant in the borough of Brooklyn alone—company owned, 1% controlled. It's no wonder that so many have been evicted across the country: a family has to earn \$16.31 an hour to be able to afford housing at the national average “fair” market rent, while the federal minimum wage stands at a mere \$7.25 an hour.

State and urban governments selectively enforce their laws to prop up this injustice, while mainstream media constructs a national narrative in which private ownership is a right but a family's basic shelter, security and safety is a privilege. Landlords' right to property is brutally enforced under the guise of the Fourteenth Amendment, but citizens' right to life—that inalienable right of the Declaration of Independent—is ignored. Meanwhile, Wall Street's too-big-to-fail banks are nothing more than black holes that require a constant stream of our money to survive, that are already teetering, relying on tax-dollar handouts from the State to avoid failure.

Paying rent and mortgage is akin to funding our own social and economic marginalization. It's time to say enough: No more rent checks. No more mortgage payments. Strike against a system that is already broken; refuse to make payments that are already invalid. This apartment, this house, this country: This is already our home and we will assume full ownership.

## Arts Strike

The arts will be crucial to our collective economic non-compliance on May Day 2012. The arts are embedded in the broader cultural and media sectors of the neoliberal urban economy. People who work in these sectors, including musicians and writers, performers and architects, dancers and designers, photographers and filmmakers, typically work numerous other jobs to make ends meet. We work as students, educators, bartenders, proofreaders, interns, tour-guides, care-takers, art-handlers, administrative assistants, street-vendors, and more. Though some of us belong to unions, cultural workers are largely precarious and unorganized. Many of us do not have jobs at all. And cultural workers are debtors—we share this “negative commons” with the rest of the 99%.

Cultural workers are variously striated by class-background, race, gender, age, immigration-status, education, institutional affiliation, and cultural prestige, with the most elite often serving as the avant-garde of gentrification. Building a strike-alliance involving cultural workers will thus be complicated. Matters of privilege and hierarchy will need to be deeply examined. But it will also be quite powerful, given



Memphis sanitation workers strike, 1968.

that the cultural workers of the 99% create the cultural commonwealth from which the 1% in the entertainment, tourism, and real-estate industries draw their astronomical profits.

As cultural workers, we can contribute our various skill-sets to the build-up for May Day through creative media, research, and direct action. At the same time, we can do formal and informal outreach in our workplaces, institutions, communities, and social networks.

May Day will be beautifully disruptive. As we shut down the privatized city of capital, we will open new public spaces that are empowering and inspiring. The strike will be an exercise in radical imagination informed by dreams of beloved community and histories of militant resistance. It will draw upon and reinvent the creative tactics of earlier struggles for freedom, equality, and justice from across the world. We will continuously add and multiply our collective creativity so that every act of defiance also demonstrates the possibility of another world beyond neoliberalism.

When we withdraw from work, let's not just stay home or go shopping. Imagine May Day and its build-up as a Spring celebration of the arts, a people's jubilee of the cultural commons. Everyone will be invited to the party: the kids and the elders, the singers and the dancers, the clowns and the monsters. Let's go out into the streets, parks, and lots to reclaim our city. Let's march, converge, and assemble with our friends and families, communities and allies. Let's make some art, pitch some tents, plant some seeds... and see what grows for the Summer and beyond.

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM:

SUZAHN EBRAHIMIAN, THOMAS HINTZE, YATES MCKEE, TEAM TIDAL, AND CONVERSATIONS WITHIN DIFFERENT WORKING GROUPS AND ASSEMBLIES



# Excerpt From an Account of the General Strike of 2022

BY ANDY POLLACK

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## **... As the applause died down, Sister Tompkins began to speak:**

“Comrades! On this, the seventh day of our general strike, the Citywide Coordinating Committee of New York’s Workplace and Community Assemblies has asked me to sum up its meaning and significance.

“During the general strike five years ago, we stayed out in the streets for ten days until driven back by murderous force.

“Nonetheless the strike was a success, for we rose as one and denied the bosses the profits extracted from our labor. And we proved it is our labor alone that keeps society running. (Applause.)

“What’s more, in the years since 2017, new unions have sprung up in thousands of worksites, each breathing the fire and love of those days, and giving millions confidence in their ability to fight the bosses.

“This year when we struck we did not leave work, but instead occupied our offices and factories, our schools, hospitals and childcare centers. And we invited into them the parents and children, all the residents of the surrounding communities, who are helping us to run this strike and to protect the occupied worksites.

“Together we are organizing provision of food and medical care, as well as cultural and educational efforts to bolster our spirits and fortify our steadfastness.

“At each workplace we democratically decide how to finance those activities, just as our Citywide Coordinating Committee and in turn the Coordinating Committee for all Occupied Zones in this country democratically decide how to allocate the pooled resources of the General Strike sites.

“In all this we are getting practice for the day when we will carry out these tasks as part of building a new society. (Applause.)

“We may not get there this time. The rulers’ police and military are massing on the opposite sides of every bridge leading into the city. And our resistance, while carefully prepared, may not suffice.

“But no matter the outcome of the coming battle, we have written an indelible chapter in history, one which, even should we not complete our work, will be read with pride by our children and grandchildren, who will learn from our successes as well as our mistakes, and who will usher in that new society.”

(Prolonged, stormy applause.)

“Let us turn now to a report on our coordination with other striking cities...”



"On strike, River Patrol, Local 1299"

Would you strike  
for queer rights, the  
undocumented,  
the homeless youth,  
the women?



***Who strikes? Who has the right to strike?***



Laundry Strike, NYC

In 1951 5000 transit workers filled Hudson St. in NYC outside of the Board of Transportation building to demand a 40-hour work week.

Would you strike  
for Egypt? For  
Oakland? For  
Chile?

**Would you strike  
instead of settle?**

# We Are Here

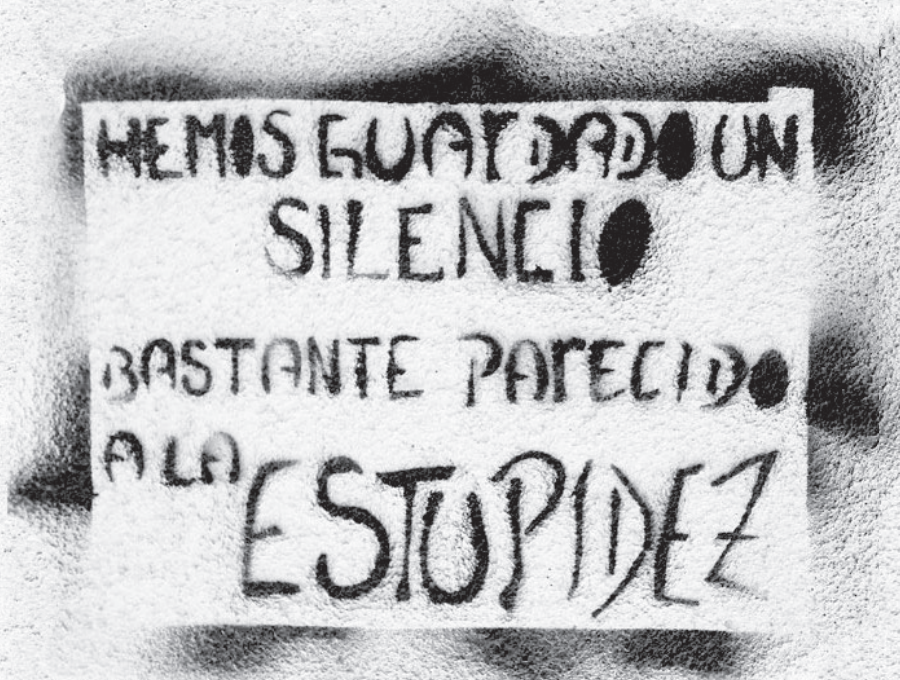
## BECAUSE YOU ARE THERE

BY JUAN CARLOS RUIZ

A few years back, I took my niece and my nephew to the aquarium, and the image that I saw still fuels my imagination. In the tank, a projected light in the shape of a fish kept moving and, thus, the penguins kept chasing after it. This poignant image leads me to reflect on the human rights work and the justice movement that I have been part of for the last two decades. I have come to live this life as a displaced immigrant from Mexico, whose family was squeezed out by foreign, neoliberal policies that have affected millions and millions negatively. The saying that is common among many of us who have been ousted is, “we are here because you are there”—“there” meaning our homelands from which we have been forced out under the banner of democracy and development. I have the privilege of struggling side by side with people who have been under the eye of the gun, so to speak, and who live day in and day out risking and acting to change systems that are oppressive and inhuman. My family, mentors and close friends have always been part of the struggle in facilitating a more humane, and community-oriented society. Their analysis always point to that radical sense of being connected in a genuine, real and human way to each other and to the earth. It’s a radical, human understanding that takes in the whole of creation and sees the intricate seamless web of all life as sacred.

It is rare to see the making of history. We realize that, with the Occupy Movement, a spark that has fed the imagination of thousands and compelled them to action has taken flight from the great fire of indignation and injustice that our communities of color have been living with and resisting for centuries. It is the making of history that we are witnessing, and it does concern all of us. A visible shift is underway in the way we resist, organize and how we come to know, engage and shape our lives and the society we live in.

It is in this empowering awareness that we are occupying anew the dates that once were significant on our journeys for liberation. May 1st is around the corner and the question is already on the organizing tables as we prepare for our own spring. How can we use this date to build a movement that is inclusive and effectively ad-



**“We have kept a silence quite similar to stupidity,” Valparaíso, Chile.**

*Photo: Alfredo Jaar*

dresses the many needs of our communities? It is encouraging that representatives of all sectors of our society are at the table. Now it is time for the 99% to be counted.

The image of the light comes back to my mind, probing and questioning: Are we just following a light that deceives us and keeps us captive in the same molds of thinking and acting, captive to the collapsing institutions and governments that do not respond to the needs of the many nor further the common good? Or are we truly building a movement that is liberating and creating communities where doing what is good is easier than doing what is dehumanizing?

Dan Berrigan poetically points to that reality whenever he is asked why he keeps resisting, “Because of the children, they said, and because of the heart, and because of the bread. Because the cause is the heart’s beat and the children born and the risen bread.”



## Pillow Fighting for our lives

The recent wave of Chilean student protests exploded in April 2011. Sparked by a confederation of university students, the protesters called for a strike to demand free public education, equal access to the country's best schools, an end to for-profit schools and student participation in university governments.

The Chilean educational system is notoriously underfunded, unequal and stratified by class, and the strike and revolutionary spirit quickly spread across the universities and secondary schools. Hundreds of thousands of students mobilized for protests, sit-ins, school takeovers, flash mobs and spectacular media demonstrations. By June, the students effectively shut down the educational system. By July, they ousted the Minister of Education. The Chilean winter had begun.

The Chilean student movement combined mass mobilization, occupation and subversive creativity to achieve an impact that is hard to exaggerate. Wielding barricades and banners, students occupied hundreds of school buildings. Public spaces became homes to dozens of massive demonstrations, where thousands of people used rehearsed choreography to create theatrical performances for the media to report and consume—thereby going ninja on mainstream media.

Students used symbolism and spectacle to communicate. Pillow fights in front of parliament raged for a “best education.” Mass kiss-ins spread “passion for education.” Die-ins theatrically demonstrated “casualties by tuition increase,” and paint-bombings of police armored vehicles mocked the legacy of fear that has defined Chilean politics since the years of Pinochet.

All of these actions demonstrate the depth of thought behind the Chilean Students’ movement, and their ability to break through the police versus protester binary narrative and successfully reach and engage the 99%.




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PHOTOS: Eliseo Fernandez, Aliosha Marquez, Ivan Contreras

# On Losing Complacency & Fear

BY SANDRA MARIE NURSE

In the United States, the Occupy movement is at war with complacency and fear. From friends and strangers outside the movement I hear pride and apathy in the same sentences. It goes something like, “We are so proud of you and all you are doing!” How proud they are that Americans are taking to the streets in protest of injustice, and yet how far removed from the fight they remain.

Many of us in Occupy spend hours upon hours figuring out how to

grow a movement. We are constantly asking ourselves how to get everyday people involved. We think of how much information about global injustices we have at our fingertips or more importantly, how easily we can see vast disparities all around us. We are growing insane wondering why we would even need to consider canvassing. We scream and rant to each other in bewilderment and disbelief at our acquiescent American public: Where is the rage? Why aren't there 100,000 in the streets?

Complacency is a most subtle, most difficult thing to recognize in oneself. I find it in the most well-intentioned, good-spirited individuals. They wander into the movement here and there and offer welcomed brilliant ideas and careful criticisms. They are satisfied, delighted even, about the Occupy movement but find themselves hamstrung by their daily grinds. They say they don't have time, cannot jeopardize their jobs or simply do not know where to begin.

When I think of how to address this reaction, it seems useful to think of complacency in terms of satisfaction and time. The degree to which we are satisfied or content with life as it is tends to dictate the time we dedicate to altering it. Beyond this, confidence in our thoughts and our moral intuition drives our personal initiatives that challenge those structures that do not satisfy our needs. When we lack the latter, we look to create a sense of sufficiency—that we have participated just enough to feel as though we actually have a say in the trajectory of our society.

In this moment, in the United States, complacency is only slightly understandable. We can still enjoy capitalism's creature comforts: nights out with our friends at interesting bars, locally grown organic produce and hot new shoes. There is still a very real space between choosing to mobilize in the face of oppression and having to for survival. Our threshold for tolerating corruption and white-collar crimes seems rightfully proportionate to our privilege.

The American population, the 1% of the world, is wrapped in a skin filled with memory we must shed. Memory of false historical narratives, of manipulations we knowingly uphold, of dreams about “making it” and of an existence that seems to have stopped evolving. These false memories require our collective insomnia. We are not at the end of history, as some would have us believe. Our current society does not represent the best we can do. There is nothing inherent to human beings that allow some to achieve financial success by their own volition and others to remain stagnant in reaching an acceptable quality of life.

We need to connect ourselves and the products we use, the places we work and the ideologies we uphold to the millions who deal with their consequences around the world. Whether through collective ignorance or denial, our complacency is an utter insult—heaps of salt in their gaping wounds—to the impoverished millions who mobilize daily against extremely violent oppression and systematic execution. Those



who cling to the last toxic droplets of trickle-down capitalism, who have the most important thing to lose—their existence, their ability to experience living in this most beautiful world—are left to eat the dust our disinterested feet kick in their faces.

It is not enough to pat protestors on the back as they march by; it's condescending. It is not enough to do feel-good charity; this is borderline criminal. It is not enough to read the volumes of literature on the ills working against a peaceful and just humanity. It is not enough to be open to hearing the struggles of millions. It is not enough to talk politics at your dinner table. There is something we are missing in these moments, and it is only found when we put our bodies on the line as agents of change. To fight in this moment is to welcome discomfort, is to expect inconvenience and is to move in spaces you have never dreamed of.

Past complacency, there is real fear. Most talk about fear in terms of the unknown, but it feels more befitting to talk about fear in terms of human disappointment. Disappointment that we cannot actualize a better world. Disappointment that those we trust the most in our fight will make grave mistakes. Disappointment that we may pass before we see our efforts come to fruition. These are things to truly fear because these are human. More importantly, these disappointments will never be a non-factor in our fight. We must come to terms with this fear and turn it into a source of inspiration by acknowledging the incredible courage and grit it takes to put ourselves on the line. We must trust not just each other, but our inevitable stumbles. We must bend our backs to ensure the fumbling of our ideas land softly.

The inexplicable sense of liberation felt while peeling away each lie from our skins is met with immediate terror. During the time it takes to replace it with truth, we may feel the real sense that our intuition may be misleading us. There is a panic that we have given it away so freely for nothing. Our efforts are equally powerful and terrifying in their naïve honesty: We want a just world. Every blind step where we fall, it seems to be into an endless pit. However, the profound relief you will feel, the fulfilled sense your body gains when you hear the pitter-patter from the charging feet of others, a collective jangly wander towards justice that does not tire even though there is no end in sight.

Putting the fear of personal consequences behind us, there is now an opportunity for us to live up to the promise and spirit of resistance. This spring, as many cities and towns across the nation launch new occupations, mass days of actions and general strikes, it is crucial we



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whole-heartedly embrace spring as a budding revolution. When we occupy, we hold space with our bodies and put aside our fear of enduring physical violence from the state or of spending nights in jail. When we hit the streets in mass actions, we bring our collective disillusionment and outrage into the public realm. When we strike, we overcome the anxiety of not participating and cooperating in systems that fundamentally restrict our human potential and that work to separate us from each other. When we refuse to engage a corrupt and broken electoral system, we stop fearing society without central leaders and start looking to lead together.

It is a personal challenge for us all to push beyond our false sense of security and move without trepidation. I know and I trust we will tear away these dreadful constraints as we move towards revolution. I know that at our most alive, we are together crying, screaming and shouting at injustice; that at our most alive, we are together thinking, talking, marching and pushing towards liberation. At our most alive, there is no complacency. There is no fear. There is only trust in each other as we hold hands on the frontline of this fight.



# Media As Direct Action

**Since the earliest days of the occupation, great efforts were made to influence media spin..**

Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Livestream—the goal was to attract reporters, wrangle, and document. But as mainstream media interest grew, the press twisted and conflated our voices. Why did we expect anything less?

We live in a world defined by a system of mass manipulation, and the media is its greatest weapon. Although decentralized and semi-democratic online platforms offer us unprecedented access to alternative media, we have yet to harness these resources in reflexive, proactive ways that present accessible narratives to the outside world. Instead, we have tried to control the spin of mainstream media, engaging on its terms and playing by its rules.

In focusing on the spin, we have not only missed opportunities to message proactively, but we have witnessed the rise of a more disturbing trend: actions defined and supported internally and externally based on perceived press response.

The extent to which we allow press to define our actions is the extent to which we lose. Radical structural change requires radical departure from traditional formulas, models and rules of engagement.

BY KATIE DAVISON

## THE PROPOGANDA MODEL: POWER AND HEIRARCHY

From Glenn Beck, Rupert Murdoch and Fox News, to Wolf Blitzer, The New York Times and The Post, newsgathering and reporting is a comedic theatre in which the only thing we can know for sure is that we aren't receiving the whole truth. Fox News, with its flashy tickers, and beautiful, angry women, ranks much higher in the U.S. than the tamer, blander backdrops of Al Jazeera and the BBC. This is the culture industry, which objectifies and reifies subtly, in packaging, style and content, while we sit eyes glued to the tube absorbing the drivel that is spoon fed to us, asking for more. It is a cyclical dilemma, mass culture defining society to the extent that society is no longer able to critically evaluate the beliefs that define it. Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of the "culture industry" resonates today, fostering consumption-based needs, manufacturing consent, standardizing cultural goods and watering down critical thought.

The propaganda model is more straightforward, easier to spot. Who owns Fox News and what's its agenda? Which advertisers air most frequently, and how does that affect the corresponding channels content? Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman's 1988 watershed analysis of the propaganda model, "Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media," remains the best explanation of the various ways media outlets are co-opted by corporate conglomerates and their government partners. Chomsky and Herman focused on five filters—ownership; advertising; sourcing (think subsidized media—privileged access to elites and policy makers); flak (the prospect of negative responses/criticism from powerful interest groups); and anti-communist sentiment (revised to incorporate fear

and anti-Islamic sentiment as a means of ideological control)—all of which act as a corporate kaleidoscope, filtering and warping news coverage to reflect the attitudes, beliefs and agendas of the powers that be.

Over the last twenty-plus years, the Internet promised to change the rules of the game. Many hoped this technology would usher in a new era of truly democratic and accessible media. This has not been the case.

### THE PROPOGANDA MODEL LIVES ON IN THE INTERNET

When I entered the field in 2004, the industry was in the throws of a mad scramble to protect profit margins. The fear that the Internet would usher in the Marxist equivalent of the end of capital raged like a wildfire through the industry as service providers and media outlets struggled to undermine net-neutrality and create tiered models of engagement.

Over the years, the corporate machine prevailed. Think of the annoying 30-second ad you can't click away, the pop-up banners littered across your screen, the built-in marketing links within bodies of content and the search engines that generate advertising in line with your likes and dislikes. Think of companies like Google, Yahoo, and Amazon as the new corporate conglomerates dominating this “decentralized” platform. Think of site traffic as the new subscription, controlled access to the most widely visited sites and more disturbing trends like the rise of identity theft and tracking. The propaganda model inserted, the filters in place, the Internet now allows for the same bottleneck of power, wealth and information as its analog counterparts.

### MAINSTREAM MEDIA IS NO DIFFERENT THAN THE BANKS

The media is one of the most effective tools protecting market interests and shaping public opinion and, as such, should be thought of no differently than concentrations of power on Wall Street or Capitol Hill.

So why, in this one area, do we continue to play by their rules? At what point does an attempt to work within a corrupt system begin to replicate the system we seek to destroy?

At the point where that system begins to dictate our actions, to water down our resolve and undermine our solidarity. There is perhaps no better example than December 17.

D17 was an incredibly controversial action within the movement, in part because of the anticipated media response. Many were afraid that this would appear to be an attack on the Church. That this particular church was actually a Real Estate corporation and the third-largest landowner in Manhattan with a vestry that reads like a who's who of Wall Street was beside the point.

The morning of the action The New York Times printed an article pulled straight from Trinity Wall Street's press kit. Bought and paid for, it was a scathing attack on OWS in defense of the Church, and it created a wave of panic through our ranks. To enter the space or not to enter the space, that became the question. That the media had any role in that conversation, proves my point. The New York Times manufactured dissent among our ranks while perpetuating consent for the position of an organization run by the 1%. Had we accepted that the Real Estate giant

would pull the media out of their tool kit and used that understanding to inform a creative, proactive messaging strategy leading up to the action, perhaps the battle would have looked different.

### THE ANSWER IS CREATIVE

2012 is about a plurality of tactics: disrupting business as usual while presenting viable alternatives to the public at large. We must think of media engagement as strategic, direct action—a tool for subversive empowerment.

From the Situationist's *détournement* and tactical media strategies to hacktivism, pirate radio and street theatre, alternative media has explored ways in which we can engage audiences and create outside traditional modes of production and distribution since the 1950s. We should draw inspiration from the ‘hit-and-run’ strategies employed by groups like the Yes Men in creating tactical media around actions and issues. We should re-envision guerilla communication and the street theatre of the 1960s. How can technology update and expand these techniques to reach broader audiences?

Imagine if D17 had looked like a national guerilla “marketing” campaign—“Trinity Wall Street gets behind Occupy Movement!” “Trinity endorses new occupation at Duarte Square!” “The Church in Support of OWS!”—while we simultaneously created informative and thoughtful pieces about space.

Radical strategic media is about more than viral YouTube videos; it's about avant-garde media that pushes the limits of traditional formulas, story structures, and methods of communication. It's about creating content that asks questions rather than provides answers.

Faced with an opponent that cultivates false needs predicated on consumption, cultivating work that promote real needs—freedom, happiness, creativity—could be a watershed moment for radical activation. Culture can and will inspire civic engagement. Think interactive media and art projects in public spaces. Think coordinated national guerilla marketing campaigns. Think hacktivism that takes on mainstream media outlets.

We must liberate creativity while focusing our resources on proactive messaging. We must research and experiment with models that have been tried and those that have only been imagined. We must create alternative media outlets that incorporate decision-making processes that reflect the balanced, fair and non-exploitative world we wish to create.

A radical departure from old power structures means empowering autonomous actions, voices, ideas and works that activate a broad base who then do the same. We will never be able to control the mainstream, but why would we want to? We can create outside the language, ideas, parameters, and mediums that aim to define and constrict, to package and standardize. We can use media to educate, communicate, critique and liberate, but we must reassert our creativity from creation to production and delivery. We must marry concepts of autonomous, direct action with our approach to culture and then use media as a tool to free the mind rather than enslave it.

**2012 is about a plurality of tactics: disrupting business as usual while presenting viable alternatives to the public at large.. We must think of media engagement as strategic, direct action – a tool for subversive empowerment.**

## MONEY & MOVEMENTS

# Consider the Lilies

BY NATHAN SCHNEIDER

The day Occupy Wall Street created the Finance working group – now happily renamed Accounting – was frantic. It had to be; this was the first week of the occupation, with donations pouring in from all over the country. Nobody knew who would get to spend it, or how, and the community's needs were mounting every minute. A proposal was cobbled together for that afternoon's General Assembly (GA), and an ally who happened to be at the plaza that day pitched in to set up a fiscal sponsorship. Nobody had much of a chance to think about how to be the change they want to see in the world, at least in this respect.

Things have calmed down somewhat for the winter, and now there's time to think more carefully. There has been tremendous time and energy sapped up in the General Assembly and Spokes Council about often-minute hows and whys of distributing money within the movement. The philanthropy starting to come in from outside risks empowering only those privileged with existing connections to the pursestrings of the wealthy. Of course, full-time activists don't grow on trees, and they need to be supported, as do their works. Yet a paycheck can become a sense of entitlement—good for building a stable institution, but threatening to the militancy of a resistance movement.

Dealing with money is hard, and all the more so for a community committed to making its every procedure reflective of its aspirations. Compared to most other kinds of undertakings, however, true popular movements are actually pretty cheap, and they can come by what they need quite naturally if they're doing their job right.

In the heyday of the civil rights movement, radical groups had to buckle down for years of intensive on-the-ground organizing. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee entrusted budgetary details to Executive Secretary James Foreman, which enabled SNCC to react quickly to the various emergencies that came up all the time. Still, its

members would hold days-long meetings to decide on overall priorities collectively—meetings which make a few hours at the General Assembly seem mercifully short.

“Fundraising went on all the time,” explains SNCC veteran Mary King. “But it was segmented.” While SNCC organizers lived and worked in black communities in the South, The Freedom Singers toured the country, raising money and awareness by singing songs and telling stories about the movement. These weren't entertainers. “They were real people with real stories,” says King, “authentic heroes and heroines working in the movement, until Jim Forman asked them to go on the road.” “Friends of SNCC” chapters formed in Northern cities to organize these performances and support the movement from afar. Not that the intake was very big, in the end; a SNCC field secretary, the person in charge of local operations, earned the equivalent of less than \$70 a week in today's dollars.

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference had a more integrated approach to fundraising. Staffers were expected to contribute at least 10 percent of whatever they spent. “There was plenty of fancy fundraising involving celebrities like Harry Belafonte,” explains Mary King. “Yet the wonderful thing about staff members being expected to help carry their own weight is that it made them remember to be frugal.” They raised money from bake sales, car washes, and family members, often close to the communities in which the staffers were working. King herself advocated for more of this decentralized approach in SNCC. “Grassroots fundraising is extremely important,” she says. “You can draw psychological nourishment from it, and share knowledge. It is not just money.”

Improvisation was also a big part of the civil rights movement's daily bread. During the Montgomery bus boycott, Bayard Rustin turned to nearby Birmingham, where black steel workers made good salaries and often had two cars per family. He persuaded many of them to send their second cars to Montgomery for carpooling boycotters. This made donors part of the effort in a more direct, substantive way than just giving money.

Such in-kind giving has been the basis of the ongoing May 15 movement in Spain, which helped to inspire Occupy Wall Street. According to Spanish activist and journalist Ter Garcia, “Little money, but many hours of voluntary work, made possible the country's most important social movement in recent memory.” Those at the month-long Madrid encampment, for instance, decided not to accept monetary donations at all. As the camp



grew, more and more of its needs—food, printing, and sound equipment, for instance—were provided by people joining the movement. Even now, after having transitioned from encampment to neighborhood assemblies, Madrid's Indignados don't take or manage money.

Where money is necessary, such as for web server space, the Spaniards raise it through small-scale benefit parties or selling swag like buttons and T-shirts. Their widespread anti-foreclosure efforts have deftly avoided legal fees by using trained volunteer activists as advisors to government-provided public defenders. Organizers see keeping money to a minimum as a way of maintaining independence while fostering interdependence.

Down in Washington, DC, those occupying Freedom Plaza intend to create a "co-operative sub-economy" that can support participants and the movement. With the help of political economist Gal Alperovitz, author of *America Beyond Capitalism*, they're now drawing up business plans. One is for an "Occupy food truck," an offshoot of Freedom Plaza's extraordinary kitchen. Another idea is to produce and sell propaganda swag through a worker-owned shop, offering their services to other Occupy groups. This kind of project, if successful, would meet shorter-term goals as well as longer-term ones; besides raising some money, it models a more sustainable alternative to the usual corporate structures. But these occupiers certainly aren't expecting to get rich in the process.

For those in the Serbian resistance movement Otpor!—which helped bring down Slobodan Milošević—nobody got too comfortable, even when hundreds of thousands of dollars were pouring in from Western interests eager to do away with the regime. This money paid for printing supplies, T-shirts, banners, and rallies. "We were volunteers, so our parents were financing us for almost two years," recalls Ivan Marović, one of Otpor's founding organizers, who visited Liberty Plaza in the first week of the occupation. "Old ladies were bringing food and tea to protests, taxis gave us free rides, local cafes would give us free coffee."

If a radical movement is doing what it should be doing, it will run mostly on things other than money. What money it does need will be used better when coming from those whom the movement serves. If you're holding fancy thousand-dollar-a-plate dinners, you've probably become a status-quo NGO, and you'd better start giving up hope of revolution.

"Consider the lilies, how they grow," Jesus is recorded as having told his friends. "Don't keep striving for what you'll eat and what you'll drink, and don't keep worrying. It's the nations of the world that strive after these kinds of things." Instead, he said, work toward the blessed community, as the lilies grow toward the sun—"and these things will be given to you as well."

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**If a radical movement is doing what it should be doing, it will run mostly on things other than money. What money it does need will be used better when coming from those whom the movement serves.**

**I AM** the poor white, **fooled** and **pushed apart**, I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars. I am the **red man** driven from the land, **I am the immigrant** clutching **the hope I seek** — And **finding** only the same *old stupid plan of dog eat dog*, of mighty crush the weak.

**O' let America be America AGAIN** — The land *that has never been* **YET** — And yet must **BE** — The land where *every man is free*. The land that's mine — **The poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME** — WHO *MADE AMERICA*, whose sweat and blood, whose **faith and pain**, Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain, Must bring back our **MIGHTY dream** again.

*O' yes, I say it plain*, America was *never America to me*, And yet **I swear** this oath — **america will BE!**

— Langston Hughes

# tidal

## EDITORS

Natasha Rosa Luxemburg  
Amin Husain  
Babak Karimi  
Laura Gottesdiener

## PRODUCTION

Jed Brandt, Zak Greene,  
Web: Eric Ribellarsi

## APPRECIATIONS

+Yates Mckee, Thomas Hintze,  
Katie Falkenberg, Katie  
Davison, Ron Clark, Alfredo  
Jaar, Nelini Stamp, Isham  
Christie, Nona Hildebrand.

## COVER PHOTO

Michael Bocchieri

## Theory.Strategy.Action. Reading.Thinking.Discussing.

We have spent the winter learning, working and growing. And now we are being propelled to bolder, more intelligent forms of resistance.

Our vision and alternatives will come in time, with patience, working together, when we reflect the strength and diversity of the 99%. Until then, let's grow our power with each other against a government that's no longer responsive to the will of the people it claims to represent.

We hope this Tidal ignites new conversations and deepens older ones amongst each other, in our assemblies, working groups, caucuses, universities, town halls, union halls, bars, bus stops, subway cars, shelters, dinner tables, and workplaces, in every spaces we occupy. The stakes are high enough that the conversations should happen everywhere. And perhaps the coming year will be the moment when we are unleashed beyond a 'movement' and towards a new way of being.

**See you in the  
streets.**

**occupytheory.org**  
**occupiedmedia.us**

Photo: Jason B. Nicholas

