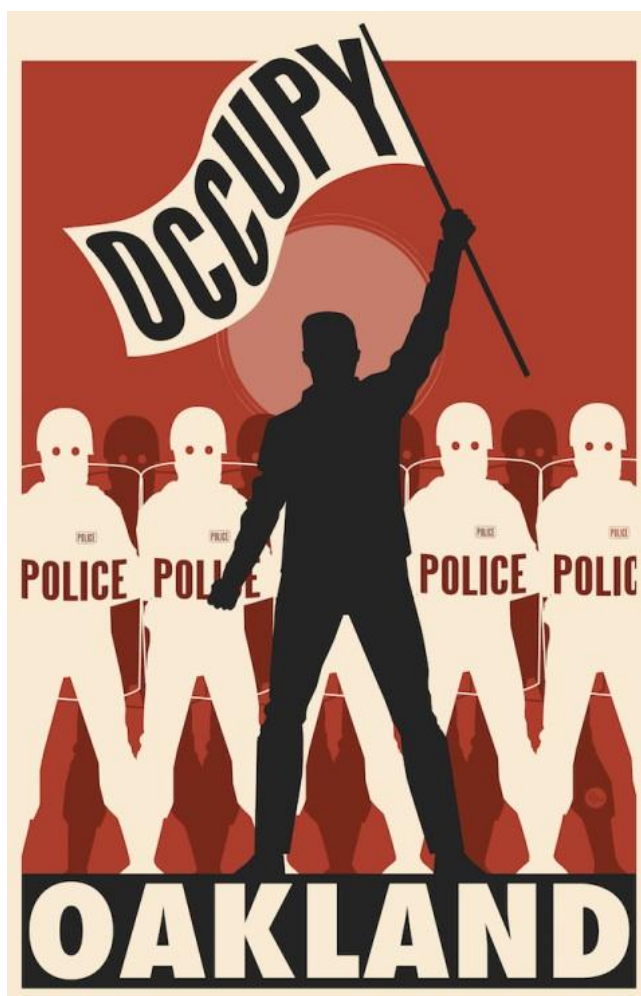


# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Occupy and Education: Introduction

by Joseph Entin, Richard Ohmann, and Susan O'Malley



POSTER BY RICK BLACK

**W**e were inspired by Occupy Wall Street (OWS) and the rapid spread of Occupy across the United States and beyond. The commune-like camp sites, the general assemblies and use of the people's mic, the marches and demonstrations, the provocative refusal to issue demands, the proliferation of working groups and spokes councils, the creative explosion of revolutionary slogans and art, the direct condemnation of corporate finance and of the massive inequalities that structure our society, the "free university" teach-ins, the campaigns against foreclosure and debt—all these elements of Occupy gave us new hope that radical change might happen in our time.

Occupy has also been compelling for us as educators. It gives fresh life and meaning to many progressive ideas about education that *Radical Teacher* people have been debating, writing about, and trying to practice for years (decades, for some of us!). Occupy activists, artists, and teachers understand that education plays a crucial role in the reproduction of social hierarchies, and is therefore critical to the transformation of those hierarchies. Occupy has sprouted countless initiatives in popular education: open air assemblies, teach-ins, lectures, collaborative working groups, popular slogans such as the widely hailed "We are the 99%," posters, videos, and so on. For a sampling of the educational activities at OWS, see Jackie DiSalvo's article in this issue of *Radical Teacher*; on the movement's rhetorical strengths and innovations, see Ira Shor's piece. Occupy has been a pedagogical movement—not only, but markedly. Much to our satisfaction, Occupy has been a site of educational ferment and experimentation, a place to try things out, where new notions and practices are welcomed and embraced, even if some of them (inevitably) do not hold up. Occupy understood from its inception that knowledge production and learning are central to social and political struggle and that traditional relations of teaching and learning need to be reorganized to reflect the core ideas animating the movement. Indeed, many of the political ideas at the heart of Occupy—including its egalitarian ethos, its radical critique of existing institutions, and its commitment to building counter-institutions—have substantial implications for education. This issue of *Radical Teacher* explores a few of these implications and explores various forms of teaching and learning in, around, and about the Occupy movement.

## Occupy Pedagogy

What would it mean to occupy education? Here are three theses about specific challenges that Occupy's direct, participatory democracy poses to traditional educational structures and practices.

Thesis 1: education takes place outside the classroom, as well as in it. Students and faculty from many New York colleges and universities have been active in OWS from the beginning, and have brought Occupy ideas, tactics, and energy to struggles within the university. Around the City University of New York (CUNY), students and faculty established working groups and sponsored teach-ins about key political issues on campus, most notably the CUNY Board of Trustees' decision to raise tuition, which

protestors opposed in vigorous demonstrations at Baruch College in the fall of 2011. At Brooklyn College, where one of us teaches, students brought the Occupy movement to campus by leading a series of general assemblies on the central quad and in the lobby of the administration building. These assemblies, groups and teach-ins were not only sites for political organizing, but also educational events, designed to share and spread knowledge. Although they were often short-lived, and at times attracted small numbers, they created spaces where all—students, faculty, staff, community members—could contribute what they know to an emergent understanding and critique of CUNY and its place in the city and society more generally. A similar spirit marked the 2012 "free university" sessions held in Madison Square Park, where anyone could teach a class, everyone was an educator, and there were no administrators in sight.

***Occupy has also been compelling for us as educators. It gives fresh life and meaning to many progressive ideas about education that Radical Teacher people have been debating, writing about, and trying to practice for years (decades, for some of us!).***

Thesis 2: traditional hierarchies are overturned. Specifically, the logic of horizontalism subverts conventional teacher-student dynamics, in which the teacher is an "expert" or "authority" and students the relatively passive recipients of our superior knowledge. In general assemblies held on several CUNY campuses, students were the initiators and leaders, teaching *faculty* how to use hand signals and develop consensus. In speaking out about our experiences at CUNY, students and faculty learned together in a collaborative, participatory fashion that served to critique the way knowledge production takes place in most classrooms—even in those led by most progressive educators. The human mic lends the power of the collective to whoever is speaking, which allows students, who are usually positioned in classrooms as listeners and recorders, to assume a power they typically do not otherwise have on campus (think of faculty literally repeating student voices through the mic as a direct-democracy counterpoint to the more patronizing classroom paraphrase, in which we use our own words to recapitulate students' remarks). As the essay in this issue of *Radical Teacher* by Cathy Borck, Jesse Goldstein, Steve McFarland, and Alyson Spurgas suggests, implementing anti-authoritarian, collaborative pedagogies within a university classroom is no easy feat—but the attempt often generates some wonderfully unexpected forms of thinking, learning, and self-reflection.

A corollary: knowledge must be produced in alternative ways through alternative channels. The Occupy movement has proliferated non-traditional instruments of knowledge production, from general assemblies and working groups, to the Occupy Library and various formal and informal counter-archives (such as the archive of

posters at <http://occuprint.org/>, to pamphlets and journals such as *Tidal* and the papers published by *N+1*. At Brooklyn College, when faculty sponsored a formal discussion of the Occupy movement, they asked student activists to stand at the front of the room and lead the conversation. At a fall 2011 teach-in, students occupied the large library auditorium and spoke in frank, personal terms about the economic, racial, and social struggles they face, while faculty listened, encouraged, asked questions. Again: official institutional patterns and power arrangements were upended as student knowledge was given space it is normally denied.

Thesis 3: educational institutions are sites of struggle. Much of the student-faculty collaboration in 2011 and 2012 at CUNY was organized around struggles at the university—against tuition hikes, against police crackdowns on student/faculty protests, against student debt, against CUNY surveillance of student groups (for a student perspective on some of these events, see the essay in this issue by Julieta Salgado). The driving force behind this movement is a commitment to *access*—to educational opportunities, to CUNY's resources, to public discourse. In dreaming of more perfect educational relations, habits, and institutions, students and faculty have developed new energy and solidarity for fighting within the highly imperfect university we inhabit, in hopes of transforming it as best we can.

We imagine wide agreement, among *Radical Teacher* readers, with our three theses, simplified thus. We will now reflect on three somewhat more complex questions that Occupy has highlighted for us.

## On Teaching, Teachers, and the Power Relations of Political Education

What was, is, and might be political education in and around a movement such as Occupy? We happily concede that the very question implies distinctions between action and learning and between teacher and student that, as our theses outlined above suggest, the movement overrode from its earliest days and nights in Zuccotti Park. General assemblies, mic checks, and "horizontalist"

pedagogies all presumed collaborative learning, closely bound to practice. Learn by doing; reflect, learn, do more. Let the educator be educated. Such principles and rules of thumb have been continuously in play since the rise of 1960s movements, and are familiar to most left and feminist activists, but Occupy's embrace gave them new life, and heartened people like the editors of this journal. In this time of teaching to the test and measuring college education by its dollar benefits to individual graduates, corporate bottom lines, and gross domestic product, it has been especially refreshing to see thousands teach and learn toward democratic ends, in rebellion against the rise and rule of the 1%. We mean to enlist this issue of *Radical Teacher* in that rebellion.

But while we subscribe to Occupy's egalitarian principles of learning and doing, we are structurally teachers, nonetheless, or teachers-in-formation, or retired teachers. Inevitably, we reflect on the political and educational work of Occupy from that perspective. What was and might be taught, in Occupy and its successors? What do activists need to know? How best to build and share that knowledge? In what sites? These questions imply a crucial role for progressive educators, who bring along our experience as teachers, our time as educational activists, what we think we know about politics and history, about good movement practices, and about movement blind alleys. How can we make our experience and knowledge as activists and educators useful to groups not made up chiefly of teachers?

Walking on eggshells, we three offer these thoughts. Educators need to be educated, but we do know some things. Years of progressive politics and teaching have taught us about the risks of sentimental or utopian pedagogies--grooving in the grass, everybody gets A's, socialism in one classroom, etc.—and the greater dangers of a movement class or group being dominated by vanguards, male heavies, or just plain runny mouths. The previous 95 issues of *Radical Teacher* are a record of such risks and of strategies for combatting them. Enough said. We should share this hard-won knowledge, not surrender it. It will change as we "teach" it.

Collectively, we radical teachers also know a lot about how the social, economic, cultural, and political system works. We celebrate Occupy's tidy naming of the 1% and



PHOTO BY JULIETA SALGADO

the 99%, but the division it refers to is old knowledge for us. We have been learning and teaching about it for decades, even as our teaching failed to stop the 1% from scarfing up far more of the country's wealth than it owned back in 1967 when G. William Domhoff published *Who Rules America?* (see his excellent website for really helpful definitions, tables, charts, and other specifics), or even when whatshisname wrote *Capital*. How can we join our knowledge (and our awareness of much more to be learned) to OWS's nifty slogan, to the collective anger it helped mobilize, to what young activists who are not teachers know from their own lives and learning, and to strategies for ending rule by the wealthy? Occupy brought a hard truth into the public arena. That truth needs lots of public discussion and refinement, right down to basics such as the critical difference between wealth and income, or that between the bottom 90% of the 1% and the wealthiest few thousand families, in this society.

***Occupy has also taught that when we think about political education in and around a movement, we must think big.***

OWS recognized its need for infusions of established left, feminist, anti-racist, queer, and other oppositional knowledge. Many of its speakers and workshop leaders came trailing clouds of celebrity. But it was good, wasn't it, for activists to bring perspectives of David Harvey, Naomi Klein, and the like into movement work and learning? Maybe we can kick the celebrity habit in time, or at least remain critically aware of it.

(How about a grassroots, Occupy think tank, a kind of latter-day Institute for Policy Studies, where intellectuals could work for free, building knowledge in dialogue with organizers and disturbers of the political peace?)

## On "Audience"—Who Are We Trying to Teach?

Political education: what is it, in and around a movement? Leftists shy away, now, from such terms as "false consciousness," "radicalizing," even "consciousness raising." Is it only the terms that we reject, as laden with Old or New Left vanguardism? Do we want to shed the appearance of condescension while keeping the authority that goes with superior knowledge? Do we old hands in fact know more than newcomers about how power and hegemony work? Do we owe it to fellow activists, especially younger recruits, to put our experience and knowledge on offer? Questions of teacherly authority deserve serious pondering and recurrent debate.

These questions will not receive neat answers here, beyond another wave of our hands at the back issues of this journal, and the obvious point that a movement like Occupy has no single format for the exchange and building of knowledge. Between general assemblies come one-time workshops, longer-term classes, video showings, informal tabling and discussion, subgroup and committee meetings,

art and poster displays (teaching by images), music, newspaper writing and editing, the making of libraries and, yes, lectures by well-known leftists. See Jackie DiSalvo, in this issue of *Radical Teacher*, on the hundreds of educational events that erupted in, and out from, Occupy Wall St.; Joe Ramsey on Occupy Boston's educational and organizing raids on the "T"; the articles by Ira Shor and by Cathy Borck et. al., on teaching regular, for-credit, university courses about OWS, and/or on knowledge and teaching conventions developed in Zuccotti Park; Dana Blanchard's article on interactions between Occupy Oakland and teacher union struggles. Teachers have been contributing to the movement in many roles and styles. Lots to talk about, before the next regrouping.

Occupy has also taught that when we think about political education in and around a movement, we must think big. A movement can be a national or global classroom. Who would have thought, in the fall of 2011, that a year later the idea that a tiny group of Americans had made themselves rich, powerful, and menacing would be ubiquitous in media? That the question of whether there is class warfare in the United States would be hotly debated? That the year 2012 would end with two months of noisy (if not very illuminating) combat over the determination of President Obama and the Democrats to tax rich people a bit more? Occupy deserves major credit for putting inequality in the midst of political debate and conflict.

This was not just a matter of demonstrators getting attention from mainstream media, but of reframing their stories, accomplishing a good deal more than the old Students for a Democratic Society's motto claimed: "We made the news today, Oh boy." If Occupy grows and morphs into a permanent, egalitarian movement, it will do so in part by educating the media, and through media, the whole conscious public. Of course that education will be painful, let us hope, and fiercely contested, since if it happens it will mean the dismantling of dominant ideology. Teachers and everyone else in such a movement would need to be smart and honest about the possibilities of such an educational project. For example, it is great when Charlie Rose invites David Harvey, Rick Wolff, and David Graeber onto his show (Graeber didn't make it). And in media a bit farther from the mainstream, it is great that Rick Wolff—a *Radical Teacher* author, by the way—has a weekly program ("Economic Update," Saturday 12:00-1:00) on New York's WBAI, which also airs "Occupy Wall St. Radio" each weekday from 6:30 to 7:00 pm. When the day comes that "our" intellectuals and pundits appear regularly on the Sunday morning, TV network talk shows, we will need to strategize better and more ingeniously than our marginal position has required up to now. New media may be more important than CNN; we three are not the right people to set an agenda for that workshop.

## On "Teaching" History

As suggested by Jackie DiSalvo in this issue of *Radical Teacher*, high on the list of educational needs, within whatever political movement succeeds Occupy, will be the need for (take a breath) history. Who can be against that?

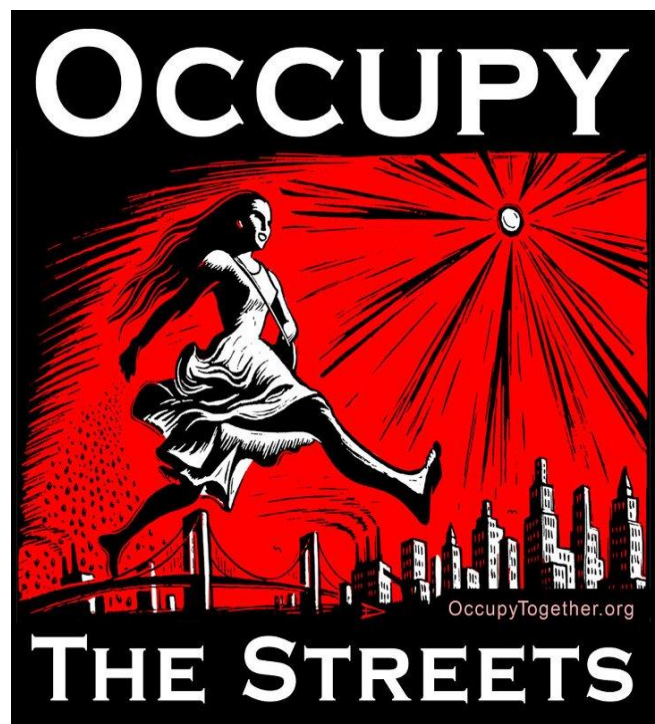
But the challenges are daunting. In this context "history" means a number of very different things. To name just three, first there is history as practical lessons: more-radical-than-thou face-offs are poison; the police are not trying to help us; living the revolution as if it had already happened is a fine idea, but within limits; and so on. Second, there is history as serious knowledge of resistance, rebellion, and social transformation—not as potted "background" or as inspirational tales, but as a shared awareness laced right into meetings, publicity, actions. And third there is history as big stories—not necessarily the master narrative of Marxism, but guiding stories of what happened over time: for one huge example, the story of how 60s and 70s movements were tamed into entitlements and identity politics, with conscious class struggle then chiefly relegated to the conservative foundations and organizing strategies that have made capitalist politics the cesspool they are today. Building historical consciousness into the next Occupy will surely be tough, not a matter of quick briefings or timeouts for crit-self-crit.

To make things tougher, our history must also be a provisional story of the future. Are we living in a civilization blindly heading toward collapse—unsustainable empire, resource wars, environmental disaster, barbarism, and so on? Plausible enough scenarios, these days. Or does the social order of the 1% hang together via some combination of ideology, technological tricks, fascist oppression, and regimes of total surveillance? Practical organizers may say, in effect, let us fight today's battle, undistracted by such nightmares. They have a point. So do the narrators of disaster. It is hard to see how life in 2030 could be like life in 1990. Occupy 2013 would be unwise to imagine a modest redistribution of wealth and power as returning history to an old normal.

Since late 2011, the encampments at Zucotti Park and elsewhere around the country have been shut down by agents of state repression, often with unapologetic brutality. Confronted by a vibrant, creative, and expanding challenge to expectations about what constitutes public space, who can claim it, and how it might be used, political and economic elites responded with blunt force. In cities around the nation—from New York to Oakland—police arrested occupiers, tore down tents and tarps, confiscated (and in some instances discarded) books, signs, and other materials. Yet Occupy continues to grow and evolve, changing shape to meet new conditions. Occupy has taken root in the cracks, spreading into new areas, taking new forms, including: the anti-student debt, Strike Debt, and Rolling Jubilee campaigns; the occupation of foreclosed homes; a range of environmental justice actions; and

Occupy Sandy, an impressive mutual aid and community organizing program established in the wake of the hurricane that devastated areas of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut in late 2012. These are just a few of the many diverse campaigns that Occupy has sprouted and nurtured—campaigns that demonstrate the movement's flexibility, variety, and ongoing influence (for more information, see: <http://occupywallst.org/>). And even on the nation's central political stage, the movement's influence is hard to deny: Barack Obama defeated Mitt Romney by running on an Occupy-inflected platform, condemning the Bain Capital titan as a self-serving member of and advocate for the 1%. We hope that Occupy will continue to develop and grow, and that its radical, egalitarian, antiauthoritarian principles will reverberate in our communities, on our campuses, in our classrooms, and beyond. And we hope that this issue of *Radical Teacher* will play a role in expanding and deepening the continuing conversation about Occupy, education, and the struggle for social and political justice.

We invite responses to articles that follow: go to <http://radicalteacherblog.wordpress.com> and talk with us on the *Radical Teacher* blog. If you have a comment you would like us to consider for the next issue of RT, email [JEntin@brooklyn.cuny.edu](mailto:JEntin@brooklyn.cuny.edu), [susanomalley4@gmail.com](mailto:susanomalley4@gmail.com), or [richardohmann@earthlink.net](mailto:richardohmann@earthlink.net).



OCCUPY POSTER BY ERIC DROOKER



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# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Political Education—Occupy Wall Street’s First Year

by Jackie DiSalvo



FREE UNIVERSITY, SEPTEMBER 18-22, NEW YORK CITY. PHOTO BY LEONARD VOGT

**W**hile Occupy Wall Street (OWS) is easily identified with direct action in the streets, equal recognition should be given to the vast amount of political education that took place. This article will give an overview of that and briefly assess its emphases and absences. First of all, consistent with its horizontalism, OWS had education provided both by academics and public intellectuals, and by self-educated activists. Secondly, as seen in the accompanying list of educational events, there was a lot of it, especially while we occupied Liberty Plaza (Zucotti) in October and November. I count over three hundred events: lectures, panels, workshops, and trainings during the period for which I reviewed records from October 2011 through September 2012. In addition, there were at least six all-day conferences. This review only includes events produced by OWS Working Groups and listed on [nycga.net](http://nycga.net) and the closely aligned Free University. I do not include all the others associated with Occupy, the almost daily Think Tank discussions on various topics, or all of the fifty-two daily talks and performances which occurred beginning in March as the Cultural Occupation of Liberty Square (COOLS) or myriad other cultural events: performances, poetry readings, theater, films, and art exhibits.

Many events were sponsored by the Empowerment and Education Working group, with at times as many as four a day and later by Occupy University. Others were presented by Working Groups such as Alternative Economy, Alternative Banking, Occupy the SEC, Alternative Currency, Labor Outreach, Immigrant Workers Justice, Sustainability, Environmental Solidarity, Earth Summit, Healthcare for the 99%, Tech Ops, Activist Legal, People of Color Caucus, Media Justice, Global Justice, Direct Action, Arts & Culture, Occupy Museums, Fiber Arts, Non-Violent Communication, Trade Justice, Food Justice, Meditation, Religious Support, Outreach, Council of Elders, Media, Politics & Electoral Reform, and the Free University. Several were cosponsored by other progressive organizations.

The specific topics reflected the politics of OWS; hence, the largest number were on the economy, finance, and the 1%: Wall Street corruption, bailouts, banks, financial crisis, regulation, money, white collar crime, corporate rights, predatory lending, derivatives, regulation, the SEC, the Federal Reserve, national debt, the Volker rule, the NYC fiscal crisis, tax inequality, free trade and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Robin Hood (financial transaction) tax, Goldman Sachs, radical economics, capitalism, and economic alternatives such as squatting, cooperatives, credit unions, and participatory budgeting. Increasingly a focus developed on debt: student, mortgage, credit card, municipal, debt and punishment, democracy and debt, the morality of paying back student debt. There were parallel sessions on the relations between the 99% and the 1%: austerity, economic and political inequality, inequality and the law, democracy, elections, corporate versus human rights, campaign financing, money and politics, and amending the constitution. Considerable attention was given to labor issues and history: work, labor law, strikes, general strike, immigrant and domestic workers, the triangle fire, union democracy, jobs, unions

and racism, a community-farm worker alliance, and free lancers. Some consideration was given to race relations: civil rights, racist behaviors and attitudes, healing internalized racism, whiteness, students of color, the Black Panthers, Islamophobia, indigenous people, immigrants, and immigration law and deportation, as well as talks by Angela Davis, Harry Belafonte, Cornel West, and others. Discussions also took place on related issues of repression: the stop and frisk policy, excessive police force, the prison-industrial complex, mass incarceration, as well as issues particularly relevant to activists, such as knowing your rights, people's justice training, jail support, a legal support system, and anti-repression training.

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The very few historical presentations dealt with precursors to OWS such as the general strike and the history of May Day. Eventually an interest in environmental issues developed with programs on sustainability, coal, fracking, nuclear power, mountain top removal, permaculture, eco-socialism, food justice, tar sands, the Spectra pipeline, alternative energy, green jobs, a green economy, and the relationship of capitalism and ecology. Specific concerns of the 99% were examined: health care, the hospital crisis, housing, foreclosures, media justice, public education, The City University of New York (CUNY), the education bubble. Some programs treated international issues: South Korea, Egypt, Tunisia, Papua New Guinea, Panama, Palestine, Guatemala, El Salvador, Greece, Yemen, Bahrain, Nicaragua, the Middle East, North Africa, and Columbia as well as migration, colonial trade, and deconstructing empire.

Frequent activist training took place. There were sessions on grassroots organizing, nonviolent direct action as well as in skills such as de-escalation, facilitation, crowd funding, making media, surviving disasters, live streaming and net technology, including Word press, creating newsletters and mailing lists, and social media. People also learned medical techniques: first aid, herbal remedies, holistic body care, and alternative medicine, as well as growing sprouts, preparing for evacuation, bartering, pedal power, and drawing. Some workshops focused on personal matters: sexuality (belly dancing, alternatives to monogamy), spirituality (meditation), and overdose prevention. Culture was a matter for some, but not much, analysis on politics and art, dealing with museums, community radio, theater of the oppressed, and the politics of hip hop and workshops on music, art, screen printing, fiber arts, knitting, and revolutionary games.

Beyond single programs, Occupy University planned whole courses: Radical Economics 101, debt, radical pedagogy, and labor. The Direct Action group taught street tactics in a weekly Summer Disobedience School in which

people immediately practiced what they had learned at various corporate targets. Moreover, there were at least four one-to-three day conferences. A two-day Forum on the Commons examined everything from theories on the loss and creation of the commons to struggles over ownership of water, seeds, health care, education; from art and copyright to public goods, alternative energy, solidarity economics, eco-socialism, alternative banking, alternative economies and the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development. A Making Worlds Collective continues to pursue the theme of sustainability. In another two-day teach-in on "Winning the Crisis" academics, activists, artists, and organizers talked about debt, cultural paradigms, and movement building from Occupy to Venezuela. A three-day conference brought together representatives of OWS with members of the Union of Radical Political Economists. On May Day a remarkable Free University took over Madison Square Park for ninety inspiring classes with such notable academics as David Harvey, Francis Fox Piven, Wayne Koestenbaum, Andrew Ross, Ann Snitow, and David Graeber, as well as poetry and play readings, poetry and protest song writing, workshops in ESL, debate skills, radical figure drawing, "occupied algebra" and "radical recess" all day. The day was so successful that the Free University was repeated and extended to four days in September 2012 with too many topics to list here. In addition, a substantial amount of internal education took place within working groups. It is impossible to calculate all the knowledge shared in the unceasing conversations that took place, first in Liberty Plaza, then in many other venues.

***Much of my own development was provoked by the strategic issues raised initially by Students for a Democratic Society as it wrestled with the historical gaps, political backwardness, and anti-communism we had inherited from McCarthyism.***

In assessing this array of events I am conscious of its contrasts with my own political education back in the 60s and 70s. In that era many of us were just discovering the poverty of *The Other America*, the brutality of Jim Crow segregation, the nature of class society, and the complex and subtle processes through which women were rendered second-class citizens. Most of my learning came in what we called "the shadow university" at the University of Wisconsin: speakers, self-taught study groups on labor history, literature and politics, imperialism, etc., polemics and conversations on the left, especially in Students for a Democratic Society, the consciousness-raising groups in the early stages of the feminist movement and later study groups of a Marxist collective.

In contrast, through its understanding of the role of the ruling class, the 1%, and labor as central to the 99%, Occupy started at a higher level of analysis and quickly developed sophistication in the main areas indicated above. However, what was not studied is as interesting as what

was. Whereas the interests of Vietnam-era activists were impelled by war and imperialism, OWS, despite its location in an international movement precipitated by situations in North Africa and the Middle East, kept its eyes steadily fixed on the domestic crisis. Although the United States was still at war, and there was an Antiwar Working Group, there was almost no discussion of Iraq or Afghanistan, war or militarism, except for two sessions on the arms trade and the narco-military state. It was quite a while before a Global Justice Working Group began to hold anti-imperialist programs.

Women's issues were also strangely neglected except for a few talks on women in the Philippines, Iran, and Palestine. A few programs treated gender binary, gender and sexuality, and queers and economic justice, but almost nothing on feminist ideas or the feminist movement except one discussion of horizontalism and feminism, and one on challenging male supremacy.

Much of my own development was provoked by the strategic issues raised initially by Students for a Democratic Society as it wrestled with the historical gaps, political backwardness, and anti-communism we had inherited from McCarthyism. We struggled to figure out what kind of a movement was necessary to transcend the conservatism of the U.S. working class, and our campus-based movement's estrangement from it. Eventually our anticommunist legacy was challenged which led to serious study of Marx, Lenin, and Mao, revolutionary theory, and the history of the left.

In contrast, Occupy undertook precious little exploration of political theory (except one study group on anarchism), the history of political movements, or the strategic questions arising from them, except for discussions on "Mistakes Movements Make" and "How Movements Get Undermined." The ideological crisis provoked by the fall of Russian and Chinese communism and the global dissolution of communist parties meant there was little interest in socialism, the USSR, China or Cuba, guerilla movements, radical political parties, or Marxism (although some Marxist ideas underlay parts of the more analytical symposium on the commons).

One reason for the poverty of theoretical, historical, and strategic study and debate is the dominant role initially played by a group of anarchists who brought certain principles to OWS, partly from European movements: an emphasis on horizontalism, autonomy, consensus, utopian ideas of prefiguration, diversity of tactics, and the concomitant rejection of socialism and Marxism. These anarchists claimed ownership of OWS although Marxists, like myself, were also involved in its founding. Promoting their viewpoint in *Tidal*, the OWS theoretical journal, and dominating the discourse of assemblies, they often tended to treat these political principles as beyond debate or even discussion. Also repudiating any strategy directed at the government, anarchists eschewed reform demands to be met through legislation. That plus a blanket dismissal of all forms of electoral activity, party organization, and socialism rendered most previous radical history irrelevant. For various reasons, instead of debating these assumptions, Marxists allowed this suppression throughout



year one by holding their disagreements in abeyance primarily for the sake of unity in a dynamic, but still unconsolidated, movement. Consequently, as in the 50s this self-censorship enabled a new form of anticommunism to prevail unchallenged. While this spared Occupy the sectarianism that often plagued earlier movements, it also produced an evasion of strategic questions and an inability to learn anything from the past.

At the same time, anarchists' emphasis on autonomous political and economic self-organization resulted in the advocacy and discussion of strategies of "solidarity economics," including cooperatives, squatting, bartering, debt refusal, and alternative economies and currencies without much critical analysis or study of their history or viability. For example, the forum on the commons, which discussed such strategies, did not discuss socialism. The espousal of self-reliance and mutual aid, as opposed to government services, led to trainings ranging from growing sprouts and using pedal power for energy to bartering and re-organizing birth and baby care. Given the rejection of campaigns to influence legislation, and other strategies, the primary tactic remaining was to go into the streets and denounce the system, hence the continual training in the tactics of direct action.

However, as OWS moves into its second year, new political tendencies are evolving within it which seek to face and understand its strategic shortcomings, such as its lack of racial and class diversity, and the relation of that to its refusal to organize around the concrete reforms workers and the poor so desperately need. New emphases in education are bound to result.

## Political Education Events—Occupy Wall Street's First Year

Em and Ed = Empowerment & Education; POC = People of Color Caucus; (...) = Working Groups

Repeated Trainings: Direct Democracy, Facilitation, Direct Action, Legal Rights, Non-Violent Communication, Anti-Repression, Speaking About OWS, De-Escalation (Security), Non-Violence, Medical, Information Technology Livestreaming, Using Social Media, Word Press (Tech Ops)

### OCTOBER

Behind the Wall: Crises, Regulations and Derivatives

Occupy Walmart: Walmart Workers Demand Respect

Debt, Enslavement & Capital Punishment, Sylvia Federici

History of Radicalism: Reclaiming the American Revolution

Bailouts and the American Casino Film

The True Cost of Coal (Environmental Solidarity)

Open Forum: Community/Farmworker Alliance NYC

Healing Internalized Racism (POC)

Grow Your Own Sprouts (Sustainability)

Student Loan Debt Abolition, George Caffentzis

Labor and Education at CUNY (Occupy CUNY)

Capitalism & Ecological Crisis, Fred Magdoff & John Bellamy Foster

ESL (Em & Ed)

Theater of the Oppressed Workshop (POC)

Gasland, Director Josh Fox and Sean Lennon (Environmental Solidarity)

Surviving Poisonous People in Decentralized Groups, Video & Workshop

Teach-In on Healthcare (Healthcare for the 99%)

***Given the rejection of campaigns to influence legislation, and other strategies, the primary tactic remaining was to go into the streets and denounce the system, hence the continual training in the tactics of direct action.***

Participatory Budgeting in NYC, Josh Lerner, Participatory Budgeting Project, Vincent Villano, Voices Heard (Alternative Economics) Giving Banks a "Haircut," Mike Konczal, Roosevelt Institute

Revisioning Money, Arthur Brock: Alternative Currency Expert, Metacurrency Project, Charles Eisenstein, author, Sacred Economy (Occupy the SEC)

Community Radio, the Culture of Impunity, & the Narco-Military State: Postcards from "Post" War Guatemala, Lisa Maya Knauer

Conversation on Power & Privilege (POC)

Whiteness and the 99%: Workshop for White Folks, Monica Dennis & Rachael Ibriham, Anti-racist Activists

US Housing Policy vs. Housing as a Human Right, Peter Marcuse & Tom Angotti (Em & Ed)

Foreclosure, William Black

OWS meets Japanese Anti-Nukers in Conversation with Jonathan Schell

Mountaintop Removal (Environmental Solidarity)

Credit Unions, Elizabeth Friedrich, National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions,

Peter Bray, NYC Financial Network Action Consortium

Human Rights Not Corporate Rights, Shannon Biggs, Community Rights project, Global Exchange CA, Ben Price, Community Environment Legal Defense Fund (Em & Ed)

Paths to More Democratic Government (Em & Ed)

Queers in a Time of Economic Crisis, Queers for Economic Justice, Sylvia Rivera Law Project (Em & Ed)

Media Justice, Betty Yu, Center for Media Justice & Carlos Pareja, People's Production House

Inequality Before The Law, Carl Dix, October 22nd Coalition to Stop Police Brutality & Campaign to End the New Jim Crow, Christine Harrington, Professor of Politics and Law, NYU (Em & Ed)

The Occupation of Wall Street, Discussion with Raymond Lotta and Andy Zee

Legacy of the Triangle Fire, Then and NOW (Em & Ed)

Making Media, Building Our Movement, Una, Ora, & Shreya Media Educators & Allied Media Conference

Radical Politics, U. S. Imperialism and Youth Activism in El Salvador, Margarito Nolasco, National Youth Secretary FMLN, Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) (Em & Ed)

Predatory Lending in Multifamily Homes, Tenant Organizers, Urban Homesteading Board, The U.S. Occupying Movement & the Movement in Other Countries, David Kauf (Em & Ed)

Eco-socialism, Joel Kovel, The Enemy of Nature, founder Eco-socialist Horizons (Em & Ed)

Voices Against Social Injustice: Troy Davis, Rosa Clemente, Green Party, NYU, Troy Davis Collective

Racial Micro-Aggression: How Little Things Add Up (POC)

"Books Not Bars," Film, Prison Industrial Complex, NYU Center For Multi-cultural Education

Beyond the Gender Binary, LGBTQ & the Anarchist College

Civil Rights & OWS: Film & Discussion w/ Harry Belafonte

How to Start a Cooperative Food Business, Green Worker Cooperatives (Alternative Economy)

Lessons of the Greek Revolt, Neni Panourgia, Greek Anthropologist & Historian of Greek Left (Em & Ed)

Teach-in on Demand for Jobs For All (Demands WG)

Nightmare on Wall Street: Capitalism and Ecological Crisis (Environmental Solidarity)

Behind the Wall: Teach-in on Derivatives, Crises, Regulations, Alexis (Occupy the SEC)

What is wrong with Capitalism? Alex Callinicos, An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto & Bonfire of Illusions: The Twin Crises of the Liberal World (Em & Ed)

Angela Davis (POC)

Foreclosures, William Black (Em & Ed)

General strike, Jack Heyman, Longshoreman, Oakland, CA (Em & Ed)

Urban Squatting and a Vision for Restructuring Governance, Frank Morales, Organizing 4 Occupation

Challenging Corporate Power & Restoring Democracy, John Bonifaz, Free Speech For People (Em & Ed)

Yemen uprising and the Arab Spring, Yemeni



FREE UNIVERSITY, SEPTEMBER 18-22 FRANCES FOX PIVEN TEACHING PHOTO BY LEONARD VOGT

activist Ibrahim Mothana (Em & Ed)

Inequality, Exploitation and the Politics of Crisis, Aaron Major, Soc., U of Albany, SUNY

Hip Hop & Social Change, Sujatha Fernandes, Soc., Queens Col & GC, & Rebel Diaz Arts Collective (Em & ED)

Drawing Workshop (Arts & Culture)

The 2008 to 20?? Financial Crisis, Max Fraad Wolff, Economics, New School (Em & Ed)

## NOVEMBER

Economic, Political and Governmental Implications of OWS, Lily Shapiro, Peter Cunningham, George Shulman, Peter Rajsingh, & Shankar Prasad (Em & Ed)

Start an Operative Green Construction or Weatherization Business, Green Worker Cooperatives (Alternative Economy)

U.S. Military & Economic Violence in Nicaragua, Uriel Antonio Carazo Garcia

To an America Beyond Capitalism, Gar Alperovitz, Pol. Economy, U Md, co-founder

Democracy Collaborative, *America Beyond Capitalism* (Em & Ed)

The Emerging New Economy or an Economy of "Plenitude," Juliet Schor (Em & Ed)

Occupy the Financial System, Elizabeth Friedrich, National Federal Community Development Credit Unions, Linda Levy, LES Credit Union, Kevin McQueen, Community Development Finance Lab, Annie McShiras, Responsible Endowments Coalition Credit Unions (Alternative Economy)

What's Wrong with Wall Street? Cathy O'Neil, Academic, Hedge Fund, Internet Startups (Em & Ed)

W. Papua Independence, Octovianus Mote, W. Papuan Leader, Bureau Chief, Kompas Newspaper, Eben Kirksey, CUNY GC, *Freedom in Entangled Worlds: W. Papua and the Global Architecture of Power* (POC)

Grassroots Organizing For Human Rights

Healthcare as a Human Right, A People's Budget & Movement Building Strategies, James Haslam, Kate Kanelstein and Matt McGrath, Vermont Workers Center (Education & Healthcare for the 99%)

Tar Sands = Game Over for the Planet (Environmental Solidarity)

Global Revolutions: U.S., M. East & N. Africa, Esra Abdel Fattah (2008 Egyptian general strike), Jamel Bettaieb, (Tunisian labor activist), Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh, (Iranian Women's Rights Activist) (PR)

Jonathan Lethem, *Chronic City & The Fortress of Solitude* & Lynn Nottage, playwright

The National Debt: Fact & Fiction (Em & Ed)

Dialogue—El Barrio & OWS, Movement for Justice in El Barrio (Outreach)

Building a Movement, John Sellers, Ruckus Society (Direct Action)

Inside the Global Arms Trade, Andrew Feinstein, Former MP, ANC & Open Society Fellow (Em & Ed)

Americans for Financial Reform Conference: The Volcker Rule (Occupy the SEC)

Open Source Democracy, & Program or be Programmed, Douglas Rushkoff, *Life Inc.* (People's Library)

NYC Fiscal Crises, Kimberly Phillips-Fein, Gallatin School & Joshua Freeman, History, CUNY GC, (Em & Ed)

Federal Reserve Awareness Day: Call In, David Korten, *Agenda for a New Economy* & Harrison Schultz, OWS (Outreach)

Good Jobs Not Giveaways (Em & Ed)

Squatting and Homesteading, Frank Morales (Em & Ed)

Parents & Students of Color in NYC Public Schools, NYC Coalition for Educational Justice

Opioid Overdose Prevention, Michael Duncan, PA, and Nicole Krempasky, CNP (Safer Spaces)

The Waltons: Not Paying Their Fair Share, Tammy Yancey, leader, Our Walmart (Em & Ed)

What Organized Labor Can Learn from the Occupy Movement, Steve Early (Em & Ed)

Portraits of the Solidarity Economy, Film (Alternative Economy)

Challenging Islamophobia, Dina Ahmed & Donna Nevel, Women Against Islamophobia and Racism (WAIR)

Radical Economics 101, (weekly) Susan Lerner, Common Cause (Em & Ed, Money in Politics, & Occupy University)

Teach-in (Health Care for the 99%)

Audio and Print Walking Tour of Wall Street (Arts & Culture)

Economics for the 99%, Paddy Quick, Union for Radical Pol. Economics (URPE), St. Francis College

People's Justice Training 4 Trainers, Facilitating Know Your Rights Trainings for your Community (Activist Legal)

Resist Empire, Reclaim Our World, Recreate Solidarity (POC)

South Asia Solidarity Initiative, War Resisters League

Historical Antecedents of OWS, George Katsiafias, books on 1968, European social movements (Em & Ed)

Permaculture, Anthony Faust (Sustainability)

Stand with Indigenous people, Film, *Crying Earth Rise Up* Music, Epitaneo Collective, "No Longer Compromising Mother Earth," Debra White Plume (Lakota), Owe Aku, Intl. Justice Project, TransCanada-USA Pipeline

Occupy Together—Decolonize the 99%

Occupy Seoul, Curtis Ellis—American Jobs Alliance, Sukjong Hong, Nodutol for Korean Community Development, Korean Americans for Fair Trade

Ana Maria Quispe, Food Justice Organizer vs. Peru Free Trade Agreement, Christina Schiavoni, U.S. Food Sovereignty Network, Adam Weissman, Global Justice for Animals & the Environment, (Solidarity & Trade Justice)

Student Debt and Free Education, Andrew Ross, Scholar and Activist, NYU

Stories from the Global 99%: Fil-Am Women Share Stories from Mass Movement & Trip to Philippines

Joint Earth Summit (Sustainability & Environmental Solidarity)

Electronic Voting & Communication Systems Workshop (Tech Ops)

A More Humane Approach for Those in Distress, Winddancer, Psychoanalyst (Em &Ed)

Education Revolution, Jay Kim & Karen Gargamelli, Common Law

Organizing 4 Occupation to Take Over Vacant Spaces, Frank Morales

Plarn Workshop: Transform Plastic Garbage Bags into Yarn (Fiber Arts)

Kundalini Yoga (Meditation)

Policing Wall Street? Alexis, Former Wall Street Worker (Solidarity & Occupy the SEC)

## DECEMBER

Ancestral Healing Workshop, Doña Leova, Healer & Community Leader, Nahuatl Indian Tradition

Immigrants are the 99%! Detentions, Deportations & Wage Theft (Labor Outreach & Immigrant Worker Justice)

Constitution (Constitution)

Collaborative Groups Training, Starhawk (Direct Action)

Democracy Makes Unions Stronger (Labor Outreach)

Deconstructing Empire, Building for the Long Haul, Starhawk & Lisa Fithian (Direct Action)

Healing Communities: Teach-In & Ritual with Starhawk (Direct Action)

Role of Religious Practices in Keeping the Health of Your Background (Religious Support)

Case Against the Pope: Accountability for Rape and Sexual Violence (Religious Support)

De-escalation, Mediation & Community Watch Training (Direct Action)

An Occupy Green Economy, Earth Summit

Mobile ThinkThink @ Whitehall Ferry

## JANUARY

Gender/Sexuality 101 Workshop (POC)

Training, People's News Wire and How to Use NYCGA.net! (Tech Ops)

Consciousness of Transformation, Pachamama Alliance (Sustainability)

Strategies for Change & Dealing with Police Violence, Allan Nairn, Journalist & Activist

Education Bubble (Em & Ed, Think Tank, Occupy Student Debt Campaign & Occupy University)

Film, *The Inconvenient Truth Behind Waiting for Superman*, & NYC Educators & Parents (Occupy Brooklyn)

Connection to Nature—The 5 Core Routines of Awareness (Council of Elders)

Horizontal Pedagogy Workshop, Regularly (Occupy University)

Labor Movement & Occupy Wall Street, John Samuelson, President Transport Workers Union, Tammy Kim, Urban Justice Center, Mario Dartayet-Rodriguez, Organizing Director DC 37, and Amy Muldoon, CWA (Labor Outreach)

Knitting Lessons, Evaluations & Repairs (Fiber Arts)

Occupation with Art and Ideas, Modern Political Movements, Historian Jonathan Soffer, NY Poly

Environment, Occupy & Renewable Energy, Ken Gale, EcoLogic, WBAI

Laws vs. Liberties Forum (Activist Legal)

Traditional Peace Principles & OWS (Council of Elders)

Herbal Medicine Training (Medics)

Occupy Town Square Washington Square Teach-Ins

## FEBRUARY

Papua New Guinea, Eben Kirksey, Anthropologist CUNY GC (Global Justice) (Em & Ed)

Social Media Workshop (Media)

Concepts of Solidarity, Tactics & Action Agreements (Direct Action)

Free Trade, Murder, & Resistance in Panama & Colombia, Ruth Santana & Adam Weissman, Global Justice for Animals & Env., Ricardo Prado, Colombia activist, Curtis Ellis, American Jobs Alliance, Christina Schiavoni, U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance, Leandra Requena, Peruvians in Action (Trade Justice)

Occupy Town Square Teach-In (Anti-Racism Allies)

The Volcker Rule (Occupy the SEC)

ThinkTank: Definitions of Violence

Making Worlds: A Weekend Forum on the Commons (Em & Ed)

Reading Group on Spatial Occupation / Arts & Culture Residency Project, Weekly

Think Tank: Solidarity & Tactics

Think Tank: What is Work?

New York's Hospital Crisis (Health Care for the 99% )

Public Campaign Financing for NY State, Jesse Layman, Citizen Action (Politics & Electoral Reform)

Financial Transaction Tax (FTT) (LGBTQ)

Apartheid in Israel/Palestine, Omar Barghouti & Noura Erakat (Solidarity & Global Justice)

Solidarity in Action: Witnessing Apartheid, Supporting the BDS Call, Premilla Nadasen, Jasbir Puar, & Riham Barghouti (Solidarity & Global Justice)



FREE UNIVERSITY, SEPTEMBER 18-22. SUSAN O'MALLEY TEACHING PHOTO BY JOSEPH ENTIN

Think Tank: Why You Can't Shop Your Way to the Revolution

Occupy Town Square Tomkins Square Teach-Ins

## MARCH

Migration, Race, & the Carceral State, Mizue Aizeki (Organizer, Documentaries), Kenyon Farrow (Writer, Activist), Pooja Gehi (Social Justice Lawyer), Mae Ngai (Columbia U) (Solidarity & POC)

Arizona's Anti-Immigrant Law, Tucson Teachers Speak Out! Film *Precious Knowledge*, Maria Federico Brummer, Mex-Am Studies Teacher, Sean Arce, Tucson's Mexican-Am Studies

May Day and the General Strike, Weekly Teach-Ins till May Day: Jeremy Brecher, Manny Ness, Paddy Quick, Barbara Bowen, Stanley Aronowitz (Occupy University)

COOLS, Cultural Occupation of Liberty Square, Every Noon, over 52 talks & performances  
COOLS, De-Escalation Security, Brendan Burke (Security)

Think Tank: Tactics for May Day

COOLS, Behind the Wall: Crises, Regulations & Derivatives, Alexis Goldstein (Occupy the SEC)

POS & Crowd Funding Skill Share, FundHub

Racism, Resistance & Workplace Organizing: Aijen Poo (National Domestic Workers Alliance), Teamsters, Local 814, Domestic Workers United, (Immigrant Worker Justice & POC)

Student Debt Crisis, Andrew Ross, NYU, Sarah Jaffe, AlterNet, Samir Sonti, Grad Student, Government, Cornell, (Em & Ed)

Repression & Resistance from the Panthers to OWS, Film, *Cointelpro 101*, Laura Whitehorn, former political prisoner, Bob Boyle, attorney, Cisco Torres, former Black Panther, Lamis Deek, Muslim Defense Committee, NLG-NYC, Andy Stepanian, defendant SHAC 7 case (Activist Legal)

COOLS, How I Keep Journalists from Killing Dissidents, Stéphane Koch, IT & Communication (Arts & Culture)

Elizabeth Friedrich & Dr. Julio Huato (Occupy the SEC)

Winning the Crisis, Brandworkers, George Caffentzis, Silvia Federici, Jim Fleming, Fran Ilich, Matthew Frye Jacobson, Monica Johnson, Ed Debtors Union, Aaron Levy, Movement for Justice in El Barrio, Tavia Nyong'o, Cheryl Payer, Amy Roberts

OWS Archival Project, Andrew Ross, William Scott, Shanté Paradigm Smalls, Jack Tchen, Gregory Wilpert (Trade Justice People Occupying Public Space (POPS), Every Noon, Union Square

Occupy Your Sexuality: Workshop Series, Stefanie Iris Weiss, *Eco-Sex: Go Green Between the Sheets* and *Make Your Love Life Sustainable* (POPS)

Precursors to OWS in NYC, Mike Wallace, Historian, & Elections – Are the Results to Be Trusted? Eric Light (POPS)

Current State of Regulation of the Finance Industry, Gerson Gibbs, Complacence Professional, FINRA, SWC (COOLS)

What Are Our Legal Supporters Doing? & Law How Can Law Help Build Occupy? Jane Moisan, lawyer

Why Do Police Sometimes Use Excessive Force? Police Captain Ray Lewis

Alternatives to Monogamy, Suzanne Sutton, Tantra Teacher and NVC trainer (POPS)

How Movements Get Undermined, Richard Greenwald, *Labor Rising: The Past and Future of Working People in America*

Mistakes Movements Make, Ben Shepard, Direct Action Designer, OWS

How to Reduce Negative Impacts and Create Positive Impacts on the Planet (POPS)

Pedal Power and Surviving Disasters (Sustainability)

Belly Dancing: Fitness, Fun and Artistic Expression, Olga El, Kandake, Dance Theater for Social Change

Horizontal Structures & Feminism, Suzahn Ebrahimian.

Making the Park Inviting & Welcoming, Mariette Papić, Consultant on Authentic Messaging, Former Staff Member Women's Health Non-profits

Creating Democracy & Challenging Corporate Rule, David Cobb, Move to Amend the Constitution (POPS)

Surviving Disasters: Nuclear War/Accidents, Epidemics, Solar flares, Electrical Outages, Alex Nicoletti, Disaster Survival & Living Off the Land Teacher (POPS)

Engaging with Regulation and Reform—Corruption, Crisis, Regulation, & Enforcement: History of Financial Crises, Structure of Wall Street, Volcker Rule & the Public's Role, Elizabeth Friedrich (POPS, Occupy the SEC)

Subversion of the Status Quo Through Play, Alec (RevGames)

Making Beneficial Mud Balls That Bioremediate Polluted Waters, DD Maucher, Masters of Succession (POPS)

Occupy Your Sexuality, Fighting Back Against the War on Women with Pleasure, creativity, and FUN

Green Sex: How to Defend Your Sex Life & the Environment, Stefanie Iris Weiss

Medical, Dealing with Disaster Related Burns, Broken Bones, Shock, Radiation Sickness, Frostbite, Hypothermia, Herbal & Conventional First Aid Kits, Acupressure, Vital Signs & More, Alex Nicoletti

Dealing with Police Repression Creatively, Bernardine Dohrn & Bill Ayers (POPS)

Rap Battle: People of New York vs. the NYPD, Public Forum Where the Cops Will Have to Listen to You!

A Nation of Freelancers, Historian, Richard Greenwald, How Does the Large Percent of People Who Work Freelance Create Challenges & Opportunities for People's Movements?

Evacuations: Items for a Go Bag & Other Supplies, Creating a Prearranged Safe Place, Alex Nicoletti

Occupy Town Square, Fort Greene Teach-Ins

## APRIL

Training on Constituent Relationship Management System, CiviCRM, Creating a Newsletter, Mailing Lists, Profiles for Newsletter Subscription & Contacts (Tech Ops)

Is Education an Asset? (Em & Ed)

Forum: Adam Weissman, Reverend Billy Talen, 2009 Green Party Mayoral Candidate (Trade Justice)

Debt and Punishment, Nicholas Mirzoeff (Em & Ed)

ThinkTanks, Daily Political Protest in Arts Institutions: Co-optation; Is Political Art Neither Political nor Art? Pros & cons of international mobility in the arts? Role models for institutional change (Occupy Museums)

Deported from Bahrain: An Eyewitness Account, Radhika Sainath, Civil Rights Attorney, Mideast Institute, Columbia U & American Council for Freedom in Bahrain (Global Justice)

Film and discussion, May Day *Realtime*, Anthology Film Archives (Occupy University)

Is It Moral to Pay Back Student Loan Debt? George Caffentzis (Em & Ed)

Radical Economics 101, Suresh Naidu & Maliha Safri, Center for Popular Economics, Weekly, (Occupy University & Alternative Banking)

Occupy Precarity, Occupy Crisis: How Can We Overthrow the Global University and Organize the University of the Commons? Gigi Roggero (Em & Ed)

History of May Day & General Strikes, Play: *Waiting for Lefty*

## MAY

May Day Free University: a Day of Seminars, Lectures, Discussions, Readings (GC GA & Em & Ed)

Occupied Algebra, Weekly, Union Square (Occupy University)

Comics & Picture-Story Symposium, Weekly, for Artists & Writers (Occupy University) Corporate Power, Diet, and Animal Agriculture, Animal Issues, OWS at Brooklyn Food Conference Great Reskilling Workshops: Urban Permaculture, Green Mapping, Holistic Body Care, Alternative Energy, Bartering, Music, Art, & Food, Horticulture Center (Sustainability)

Consequences of U.S.—Colombia Free Trade Agreement, Colombian Senator Jorge Enrique Robledo (Trade Justice)

Labor Law for the 99%, Daniel Gross, Brandworkers, Sonia Lin, Attorney, Immigration and Employment Law (Labor Alliance)

Summer Disobedience School, Saturdays, Direct Action Training: Target-Scouting, March-Pacing, Research & Messaging, Mic-Checking, Banner-Deployment, Communications Coordination, Media Documentation, and Police Liaison & Practice at Nearby Targets in Infiltrations, Interruptions, Slowdowns, and Blockades (Direct Action)

Poetry and Political Feeling, Weekly with Disobedience School No Back Room Deals for the 1%; The World Can't Afford the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) (Trade Justice)

Why a Constitutional Amendment to End Corporate Personhood? (Em & Ed)

#### JUNE

Film, *Koch Brothers Exposed* (Politics & Electoral Reform & End Corporate Personhood)

The Commons, Commoning & Squatting, Children's Workshop, Art, Potluck (Arts & Culture & Occupy the Land)

Pop-up Free University in Bedford-Stuyvesant Park

Occupy Town Square Staten Island Teach-Ins

#### JULY

Summer Disobedience Schools, Weekly Speakers: Gayatri Spivak, David Graeber, Andrew Ross

Why Egypt Matters: U.S. Lawyers and Activists from Fact-Finding Mission (Global Justice)

Non-Violent Direct Action Training to Stop the Spectra Pipeline



FREE UNIVERSITY, SEPTEMBER 18-22, 2012 NYC  
PHOTO BY LEONARD VOGT

Film, *Broken on All Sides*, Mass Incarceration (Occupy Sunset Park)

Occupy Town Square Bushwick Teach-Ins

Occupy Town Square Jackson Heights Teach-Ins

#### AUGUST

Six Ways of Being in Debt, Richard Dienst (Em & Ed)

Resolving Conflicts within Occupy (Non-Violent Communication)

Conference, Political Economy of the 99%, Camp Epworth Occupy & Union of Radical Political Economists (URPE)

Occupy the Trans-Pacific Free Trade Agreement—NAFTA on Steroids! Conference Call (InterOccupy)

Occupy Town Square Sunset Park Teach-Ins

Occupy Town Square Astoria Teach-Ins

CrowdTangle/OccupyNetwork Demo & Training

Workshop on Grand Juries

#### SEPTEMBER

OWS One Year Anniversary: Three Days of Education, Celebration & Resistance

Free University: Classes, Readings, Lectures, Performances Sept. 18-22

Occupy & Feminism (Occupy University)

Social Media Summit & Affinity Group Un-Conference (Council of Elders)

Occupy the TPP: Stop the Global Corporate Coup! Direct Action Training



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# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Occupying the Red Line—Radical Education, One Subway Car at a Time

by Joe Ramsey



PHOTO BY ERIC DROOKER



**W**e work in teams of three or four, starting at the back of the train (in Davis Square, Somerville), and working our way forward, car by car, as the Red Line heads South (towards Ashmont, Dorchester). We carry stacks of leaflets, stickers, bundles of Boston Occupier newspapers, clipboards tucked under our arms—a band of guerilla radical educator-agitators, the revolution underground, riding the rails.

I take the speaker's position near the center of the car, where—with the right vocal projection—it is possible to reach riders at both ends at once. I wait until the car doors shut (a muffled loud-speaker announcement giving way to an electric ding ding), take a deep breath, and use my diaphragm to lift my voice above the grind and howl of the barreling train, without going shrill. Sometimes, on a crowded train, I will alert those passengers right beside me with a smile; things are about to get loud:

"Good afternoon, my fellow T-riders, if I may have your attention for 2 minutes? I know many of you have had a long day at work, so I promise to keep it short. I'm working with the Boston Fare Strike Coalition. That's Boston Fare Strike Coalition. We're a group of T-riders who have come together to defend our public transportation system, against the politicians and the bankers who are out to wreck it. They Say Fare Hike. We Say Fare Strike! As I'm sure most of you already know: the MBTA and the Mass State Legislature recently raised the price of riding the T in our city. On July 1, they jacked up our fares by 23%, while cutting services. Making us all pay more for less. They raised fares on students and seniors by close to 50%, and on the disabled by over 100%, balancing the budget on the backs of the most vulnerable members of our community. We say this is wrong."

Boston Fare Strike (BFS) grew out of the organization known as Occupy MBTA, or "Occupy the T," an official working group of Occupy Boston (OB) formed shortly after the police destruction of OB's encampment at Dewey Square, and in response to the Mass Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)'s announcement in Jan. 2012, that to cover a projected \$100+ million budget shortfall, they would be resorting to a mix of draconian service cuts and fare hikes. Occupy MBTA's efforts included public outreach to T riders and other community organizations, as well as protest rallies and marches, street theater, and "mic checks" at MBTA hearings aimed at pressuring public officials, sharpening rider opposition, and shifting the public discourse around both the underlying causes and the

human impacts of the projected cuts to public transportation. What distinguished our work in Occupy MBTA from that of other T-advocacy groups (most notably the T-Riders Union, known as TRU) is how we worked to frame the T's budget crisis in a more radical way—by examining not only the history but also the corporate beneficiaries of the huge debt load that the transit system has been burdened with since 2000, by contrasting the lack of federal funding to mass transit with the immense resources poured into the military and prison budgets, by discussing mass transit expansion as a global environmental necessity, and by discussing wealth inequality and austerity (not just "bad policy" or "bad management") as the roots of the current public funding crisis. We also worked to introduce bolder forms of mass direct action and media spectacle into the campaign to "Save the T."

Occupy MBTA's work, in tandem—but also in tension—with that of longer established non-profit advocacy groups such as the TRU, whose pragmatic approach and investment in existing state structure often made them resistant to Occupy's approach, culminated in a major protest rally on April 4th inside and outside the Massachusetts Statehouse, alongside members of the local transit worker union the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU). In many ways, April 4th marked both Occupy MBTA's greatest victory, and its defeat; it was our largest and most spirited rally—several hundred attended (see video footage at [www.occupymbta.org](http://www.occupymbta.org))—but it was also the date when the Massachusetts Department of Transportation formally enacted its regimen of cuts and especially of fare hikes, albeit over a massive rider outcry of "Shame! Shame! Shame!" The rally represented a significant declaration of opposition, but also marked the moment when the emergent Occupy-MBTA coalition began to stumble, stall and fracture. After all, the group had built its work around the clear and concrete (albeit largely reactive) demands: 1) no hikes, no cuts, no layoffs; and 2) a comprehensive, sustainable, and affordable public transportation plan that works for the 99%! With both hikes and cuts enacted and discussion of a "comprehensive" plan put off to the indefinite future, what was to become of such a defensive formation? From the start Occupy MBTA had been composed of a mix of radical and more liberal tendencies, of those inclined towards lobbying established politicians and those towards direct action. With the immediate, unifying force of a common

enemy no longer a threat but a fact of law, what was our coalition to do?

This tricky transition was compounded and obscured by the most audacious T-Occupier action yet, a 10-day occupation of the statehouse steps, kicked off at the April 4th rally, to protest the MBTA plan in the form of "Camp Charlie," named after the MBTA's ironic official mascot, the permanently imprisoned protagonist from "Charlie on the MTA." Made famous by the Kingston Trio in the 1950s as the "man who never returns," Charlie "rides for ever 'neath the streets of Boston," because he cannot afford the cost of the fare hike (then implemented as a 5 cent transfer fee). The affinity group that launched Camp Charlie, acting autonomously, and citing (understandable, but ultimately misplaced) "security concerns," failed to even inform other members of the Occupy MBTA coalition about its plans; some of us rallied to support the action in what ways we could, even though we had not been included in the planning; others did not.

Looking back, the Camp's main impact, despite some high moments (see for instance the excellent speech "From Occupy to Revolution" given there by Barbara Foley on YouTube, or the stunning public sculpture about fare-free mass transit, which occupiers erected) were five-fold: 1) to exhaust the most committed core members of the OccupyMBTA coalition; 2) to cut off the most integral organizers of the coalition from the (web-based) resources that had been key to the movements coordination; 3) to alienate many coalition members who had not been consulted about the dramatic tactical change; 4) to dilute the message of our particular struggle by drawing into the mix sectors of the movement more interested in physically occupying than in T issues; and 5) to disperse the focus of the movement, unceremoniously ending our weekly indoor meeting schedule and the more cohesive and targeted work of Occupy MBTA.

***"Come together with your friends, co-workers, fellow riders, and other members of Boston Fare Strike and refuse to pay the fare."***

After Camp Charlie, we all needed a break. Following a month of dispersion, exhaustion, recovery, and regroupment, Boston Fare Strike emerged in late May-early June 2012 as an effort to refocus, to radicalize what remained, and to move beyond protesting the MBTA plan,

to building actual direct action resistance against the fare hikes implementation in July, 2012.

Of course this organizational, strategic, and tactical shift called for a rhetorical shift when "riding the rails": we were no longer just trying to get riders to attend rallies and hearings, but to refuse to pay the raised fares themselves, in an act of civil disobedience:

"We at Boston Fare Strike say this fare hike amounts to making you pay an additional TAX just to get to work. A TAX to get to school. A TAX to get to the doctors or to get groceries. It's a TAX on T riders, on poor and working people, at the same time the rich are making record profits and DODGING taxes like never before. It's a wage CUT when wages are already too LOW as it is. We at BFS say that this is wrong. And we won't go along with it. We say it's right to resist this attack. It's right to refuse to be abused. They Say Fare Hike. We say Fare Strike!"

Sometimes I stop here. Sometimes I have to. The time between T stops varies, as does the mood of the passengers, not to mention my own ability to keep my rap clear while I address anywhere between twenty and ninety fellow riders at the top of my lungs. Most of the time, though, I am able to keep my focus and the crowd's interest and can continue on to the second half of the speech, where I draw out an interpretation of the underlying economic and political significance of the recent transportation cuts and hikes. From an educational standpoint, I see this second-half as key:

"The Big Lie here is that there 'isn't any money' so these cuts are 'necessary.' Don't believe it. These cuts aren't necessary. There's plenty of money. It's just in the hands of a few. The richest 1% of the population owns more wealth than the bottom 50% in our society. But they are telling US that we need to 'suck it up' and pay more, while the RICH run off with billions. It's time we get the money from the people that GOT the money, the people that TOOK the money. There's plenty of wealth in this world to make necessary things like Transportation free for all. The U.S. government spends TRILLIONS on war every year, trillions on bank bailouts. But when something that the people actually NEED is in budget crisis, then they act like 'there's no money.' The Banks Get Bailed Out, but We get Sold Out. We at Boston Fare Strike say, that 'If the Banks Get a Free Ride . . . Why Can't We?' We are calling for people to participate in a voluntary campaign of FARE REFUSAL across the city. Come together with your friends,

co-workers, fellow riders, and other members of Boston Fare Strike and refuse to pay the fare. Together we can send a message to the MBTA, the banks, and the politicians, and to our fellow riders that we won't be treated like cattle anymore. That we won't go along with an abusive plan that raises fares on the poor while continuing to pay interest profits to the rich. That public transportation is a right that belongs to all. At Boston Fare Strike, we say: It's right to refuse to be abused. Thank you for your time."

Sometimes, I close with a nod to the future cutbacks that are—sure as you can read this—coming, just as are bipartisan cuts to other social "entitlements." (Already another \$100 million+ budget deficit is being projected for next year, meaning that more service cuts and fare hikes are likely right around the corner, even as this article is appearing. Similar cuts appear to be on the way in New York City.) I always try to open and close with language that signals basic respect for the people I am addressing.

As I am speaking, others hand out leaflets that (on one side) explain why the T fare hikes are wrong and unfair, and (on the other) offer practical "how to" guidelines for avoiding the fare ("hold the door for the person behind you," "use a backpack to trigger the sensors"). Another fare striker tapes up flyers over the corporate advertising that has somehow become our subway's wallpaper. "They Say Fare Hike, We Say Fare Strike!" proclaims our leaflet cartoon striker, as she gleefully kicks over a turnstile. In a sense this leaflet holds together competing tendencies within our tenuous coalition; there are those of us more committed to mass education, and those committed more to "action"; tending to be more anarchist-inclined, their pedagogy at times amounts to the "propaganda of the deed." Preferring the mode of the saboteur to the agitator, these comrades' signature action is to help stickers find their way over the sensors that trigger the subway turnstile doors, liberating T stations, for a minute or an hour, making free rides available to all those coming into the station. The hope is that a taste of free transit, and of civil disobedience, will prove enticing, if not addictive. The hope is also that those, particularly youth in poor communities, who already often rely on fare evasion to move about the city, may come to see their already existing resistance in somewhat more politicized and social terms.

Afterwards we engage people in individual or small group discussions, field questions, invoke radical horizons,

speak to objections, clear up factual confusion, sometimes debate tactics, circulating the clipboard and sign-up sheet as we go. (We have had hundreds of people sign up in support, though we have found that email leaves much to be desired as a mode of follow-up with new contacts.) We are trying to find a way to turn these subway cars into radical classrooms—indeed, the Red Line rides about an hour from end to end, not too different in length from the typical college class. Nor are most T riders any less capable of or less interested than tuition-paying undergrads in having a critical conversation about how capitalist austerity and ruling class war demands a radical approach to fighting back. It is a ripe and teachable space, all the more so for the way they include a great number of people who are very likely to be excluded from our college classrooms, for not being able to pay. More recently, we have found bus stations (such as Ashmont, at the end of the Red Line) to be even more receptive—not surprising considering the class demographics of bus vs. subway riders)—though the MBTA police are quicker to descend on "solicitors" above ground than under it.

Make no mistake: this is not something that subway riders in Boston (anywhere?) are used to. Nor is it something we T-occupiers have quite figured out yet. But the reception is generally very positive, the prospects are real. Some T-riders applaud and cheer, others smile and nod. Some may never turn off their i-pods, but the vast majority do. People will give you two minutes, even three—that is one thing we have learned—at least if and when you seem passionately committed to the issues at hand. Many of them appear energized by a radical, class critique of the existing system. Often the more radical pitch gets the more enthusiastic response, and often it is not until one signals a more revolutionary aspiration—pointing out that the T struggle is really only one front in a wider struggle of the 99%, or that capitalism itself needs to go—that some riders get excited about the campaign. Many seem excited that someone is finally saying out loud and in public what they have been thinking privately. At worst, we are giving them a bit of free protest theater to fill the gray void of the commute. It depends on the part of the city we are working in, of course, but, especially in the historically working-class and non-white areas of the city (for instance Dorchester and Roxbury on the South side of the Red Line I most frequently ride), a strong majority of people are visibly and audibly appreciative of what we have to say. And the fact that we are looking to

hear what they think as well. In fact a significant adjustment we have made in the course of our campaign has been to try and slow down the dash from car to car, to give us a chance to really converse and connect with those who are most interested. We have much more work to do in this direction of deepening the conversation.

Once we have had a chance to leaflet and talk with those who are interested, we head out the doors and then back inside the next T car, holding the doors for one another, heading towards the front of the train, ready to create another fly-by guerilla radical classroom on the Red Line.

It is very much a work in progress, but it is an ongoing attempt to "Occupy the T," an attempt in Boston to bring the spirit of Occupy to the people, where they are at, to concretize the motto "We are the 99%" in ways that can contribute to stirring popular consciousness towards root-cause interpretation of everyday working-class issues. We are bringing radical political discourse into a public space where corporate ads and muffled loud speakers of the state usually rule, even as that public space—and the service it enables—is itself under attack, and even as T stations and T cars concentrate huge numbers of working-class people, outside the discipline of the workplace, on a day-to-day basis. What has been keeping us from turning T stations and T cars into radical popular classrooms? How many people could we reach each week, each month, if we took seriously the call to occupy our daily commute?

For many occupier-activists, post-occupation, this has been a big—and often an uncomfortable—step forward: engaging everyday people—reaching out directly to non-activists, struggling to express often radical beliefs in accessible and popular language that can reach people in demanding circumstances, preaching to the non-converted, dealing with people's questions and resistance, on your feet, in real time. (It would seem that radical teachers, who are familiar with operating in such a high-pressure

zone, could have lots to contribute to this sort of a campaign.) At the very least this effort to Occupy the T has taught many of us how long we still have to go on this radical Red Line we seek to ride, this train on which, as long-time Boston radical historian and activist Howard Zinn would say, no one can be neutral.

\*\*\*

Once we hit the end of the line, we work the station in Ashmont, talking to those waiting for buses, sometimes 'liberating' more station doors. Then we head back North, starting again at the back of the train, working forward, car by car. In this way, it is possible to reach hundreds, sometimes even a thousand people in the course of not much more than an hour or two.

We have passed out thousands of newspapers and leaflets. Riding the rails has become one of the primary means through which our local occupy paper distributes thousands of free papers each month, one year after the police eviction of Dewey Square. Subways remain a place where people still actually do read print newspapers.

In a case of the form outstripping the content, even after the T-struggle has somewhat quieted here in Boston, at least until the next round of cuts, occupy activists continue to seek to transform mass transportation into both an occasion for and a site of radical popular education. We have learned that Occupying the T doesn't have to be about T-specific issues; that public transportation is a potential space for radical education on other issues as well. Like many public spaces, it is a potential weak link in the capitalist system, (even as it is essential to that system's functioning), a zone where the contradiction between socialized production and privatized control provides an opening, for outreach, agitation, education, investigation, and the constitution of new forms of working-class collectivity and resistance. But only if we take up the challenge.



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# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Poems from the Occupy Movement

Preface by Pam Annas



PHOTO BY DANA BLANCHARD

**F**rom the beginning of the Occupy Movement, poetry has occupied a major supporting role. Both the New York and Boston encampments immediately set up a library tent, and poetry readings were a regular part of the camp's activities. I took the T to Dewey Square in Boston in October 2011 to participate in one of the camp's weekly poetry readings. It was raining. The tents stood shoulder to shoulder, blue and dripping with water, crowded onto an island in Boston's financial district. A 10 foot tall wooden statue of Gandhi on wheels gazed peacefully over the camp. I stood there looking up at him backgrounded by the black glass of a skyscraper housing a bank and talked with a white bearded Vietnam vet who said his back would not take living in the camp, but he came down every day to be part of Occupy, which he had been waiting for, for almost 40 years. There were about 15 of us reading that day outside in the rain, the camp bordered on all four sides by busy streets, busses, trucks, and car sirens and horns. We had a speaker system which kept shorting out from water dripping on it; one of our number periodically banged on the microphone to make it work as we took turns, water dripping off our hoods onto our poems turning into pulp in our hands. Sounds soggy, but in fact it was incredibly exciting. Politically, communally, and poetically.

The selections in this offering of poetry from the U.S. Occupy Movement come from the hundreds of poems written, read, submitted and collected during 2011 and 2012 on various websites and blogs, and in one print anthology so far. These poems were chosen to represent the scope of the Movement across the United States; to capture the look, sound, and spirit of various Occupy sites; to raise political issues central to Occupy protesters and their supporters; to showcase a range of excellent political poetry specific to a contemporary progressive movement; and to provide accessible, vivid, and well-crafted poems for use in middle school, secondary school and college curriculum on the Occupy Movement.\*

The poems here are mostly in free verse, though prose poems, haiku, found poetry and a duet with a rock and roll ballad are included—"After 99 weeks not working, dude, you'll never, no never go back." I did run across a tanka, a villanelle, a pantoum, a sestina, a sonnet or two, and a lot of slam/performance poetry. Play with the meanings, associations, and synonyms of the word "occupy" is irresistible. Provocative lists of grievances, bills of rights and declarations of independence from the abuses of monopoly capitalism are here, as well as powerful images of community and celebration. The people

rolled in wheelchairs, walked with walkers, rode in buses  
or ran with breathless abandon, carrying signs and banners,  
dancing to music and speeches,  
marching to whatever drummer they chose

or, more metaphorically, are "rag-tag surgeons of man's greed and waste" or crows noisy, ungovernable, who "like to nurse their/grudges and pass along your name." The camps: "boxes of carrots, battered apples, scribbled-on cardboard—/inscriptions like unloaded pistols, peace being swordless." The bullying 1%: "I mean who else lunch money would they steal and be able to get away with it." Occupy clearly caught the poetic as well as the political imagination of the country. The ghosts of Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman, each an expert on occupation, hover over the camps.

We hope you will enjoy these poems and find them useful in your classrooms, and that you will check out the hundreds more on line and in print.

### \*Sources for more Occupy poetry:

- The first print Occupy anthology, *Liberty's Vigil, the Occupy Anthology*, eds. Karla Linn Merrifield and Dain Wilder ([www.foothillspublishing.com](http://www.foothillspublishing.com))
- A print anthology in production, *Occupy SF: Poems from the Movement*, eds., Virginia Barrett and Bobby Coleman ([www.studioaraswati.com/occupy.html](http://www.studioaraswati.com/occupy.html))
- Poems from Occupy Wall Street ([peopleslibrary.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/occupypoems1.pdf](http://peopleslibrary.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/occupypoems1.pdf))
- 99 poems for the 99% anthology (<http://99poemsfor99percent.blogspot.com/2012/01>)

## Strike Day in Oakland\*

Joan Annsfire

A human tide of people swept into the port.  
We moved as one, wound up and over the bridge and came down,  
came out, came across, danced and chanted;  
like straw spun into gold, anger and pain transformed into victory  
that moment, that day, that army of the 99 percent.

In the silhouette of sunset,  
under the dark outline of cranes and containers,  
dwarfed by the massive equipment of the shipping industry,  
individual drops of water ran together as a mighty flood,  
heavy and purposeful grains of sand whipped into a swirling storm,  
becoming more than enough to clog towering structures of steel.

Self-proclaimed welfare queens, poets and rappers, old and young,  
rolled in wheelchairs, walked with walkers, rode in buses  
or ran with breathless abandon, carrying signs and banners,  
dancing to music and speeches,  
marching to whatever drummer they chose.

All declared, we are here, this is really happening,  
today reality is not virtual but actual,  
something being born, something growing,  
something new, something more.

The water lapped at the ships in port,  
the cranes bore silent witness, the sky went dark,  
the air stayed warm,  
the songs went on.

\*Joan Annsfire writes that the Occupy Oakland Strike of November 2, 2011, successfully shut down the Port of Oakland. 15,000 – 35,000 people came up and over the freeway overpass to the port at sunset.

"Occupy Your Mind"  
(Signs seen at Occupy SF, October 2011)  
Christopher Bernard

I Love the Smell of Nasdaq Burning in the Morning  
HONK! 4 REVOLUTION

Put Wall Street in the Stocks  
Hey 1%! I'm Learning to Share—How About You?  
No Billionaire Left Behind

Bank ROBBER of America  
(What Would Jesus Tax?)

Income Inequality: 45 Egypt, 81 China, 93 USA  
*The 99% Too Big to Fail*

(Take Back "US" in the USA)

.....The flutter of a.....Wall Street CEO's whim.....can ultimately  
cause a.....DISASTER.....all around the World!!!

THE WORLD WILL KNOW FREEDOM

Dissent is the Highest Form of Patriotism - Howard Zinn  
End Corporate Personhood!

(Attorneys Support the Occupation Too)

AND PEACE ONLY WHEN

Glenn Beck Can Occupy His Balls in My Mouth

The Deck is Stacked Against Us!!

Stop Off \$horing Our Jobs!!!

THE POWER OF LOVE



HONK If You're the 99%  
*The Buck Suckers Stop Here*  
**Student Loan Debt Is My Original Sin**

OVERCOMES THE LOVE

99 > 1

The Rest of US Taking Our Country Back

OF POWER

Be the CHANGE You Want to See in the World  
Be the CHANGE You Want to See in the World  
Be the CHANGE You Want to See in the World  
Be the CHANGE You Want to See in the World

## Wall Street Occupied

Peter Neil Carroll

Sprawled on damp concrete, the teachers scribble red-ink comments down the weary margins of homework, give praise or encouragement, a checkmark, the letter grade that causes a student's stomach to sink or swim, working on weekends in topsy-turvy times, to plead for their jobs.

From Jersey City, Brooklyn, the Bronx, street smart, accredited, saying 1984 IS NOT AN INSTRUCTIONAL MANUAL, they are fighting City Hall and the Governors in Trenton and Albany, vice-principals in charge of bondage and discipline, budget-cutters who believe number two pencils are the wave of the future.

This is Wall Street occupied by maniacs who haven't abandoned hope for the young, the gray-headed high school algebra expert reassigned by a clever administrator to teach pre-kindergarten classes so maybe she'll feel so demeaned or bitter she'll surrender and quit and be replaced by a less adroit but cheaper version so the dollar saved is a dollar unearned; only the students notice the difference.

A scraggily, black-bearded man is singing an anthem of hope while holding a sign written on a scrap of cardboard torn off a box:

BANK OF AMERICA  
MAKING AMERICA  
HOMELESS ONE CHILD  
AT A TIME

Someone starts drumming a bongo, a familiar tune rises, yes, and a hundred voices lift the melody softly, humming through the unsingable parts of the lyrical war cry to the land of the free—repeat, land of the free—FREE, FREE! Even patrolman Miele, armed with pistol, whistle, black baton, who tells me his worries that the young will run amok through Liberty Square, reveals a personal, tentative smile at the outlaws who terrify politicians with our national anthem.

Amidst soiled clothing, scruffy hair, no whiff of alcohol, tobacco,  
no drift of weed yields that stupefying buzz of the old-time protests,  
no distractions, no drama descends beyond the sheer reality of hope.  
Wall Street, home of America's fictional corporate individual  
claiming constitutional rights to buy politics, is no random target.  
*The only words these corporations know*, reports Occupied Wall Street  
Journal, *is more*. Reversing Jefferson's self-evident truths, life liberty  
pursuit of happiness, a woman's placard announces  
I AM A HUMAN BEING NOT A COMMODITY.  
*They are disemboweling every last social service funded  
by the taxpayers... IGNORE ME/GO SHOPPING/  
GREED KILLS...because they want that money themselves.*

Ghosts of the Great Depression—gray men grimacing  
on soup lines, apple sellers on city street corners,  
Dorothea Lange's Okie mother, bread winners no longer  
bringing home the bacon, forfeiting the love of their wives,  
young women hoisting skirts over their knees for a nickel.  
Not here, not now, not despairing, not yet, but hopeful,  
extravagantly expectant—naïve, I hear the cynics chant,  
foolish, idealistic, child-like dreamers—all true, of course.  
They sing, coming at last to the climax, home of the brave.

## EVEN HERE

Billy Clem

Yes, even here, nowhere in the midwest, acres and acres and acres from any place plausible, where corn, soybean, and wildflowers compete for the sun's surgical light; where barbed-wire was birthed to repair slavery, share cropping, prisons, gated communities; where bookstores, the grocery co-op, and the art gallery go routinely unattended; where the regional clinic's few doctors refuse HIV patients; where a fourth-rate university has yet to teach its first-in-the-family college students, locked in the Ponzi scheme of student loans for no jobs in medicine, law, education, or communication, much of anything they need or can use, especially today, a few persons, we're talking ten-to-twelve at most, a motley crew, children of this black dirt, a few CNAs in scrubs and plastic crocks just off a double; some white suits, tellers on their half-hour lunch from the local bank; two nuns chanting *HELL NO!* and swinging rosaries like their ancestors swang flails; three dykes taking nobody's shit, one on her bike roaring it and flashing a shit-eating grin you wish your cheeks had the courage to cut, her compañeras menacing delightfully; a Vet with paraplegia for Peace, Justice, and Prosperity brave whistles, batons, some passers-by not exactly honking support, and, almost hilariously, the quickly erected barricade, a ribbon screaming **CAUTION** taped to two stop signs, some brown shirt's idea of maintaining the peace, and take the corner of First and Lincoln where a clock, installed by the town's fathers' *illegals* and *boys* not long ago, gaudy, no hourly chime, a face barely visible, records in silence this now two-month operation that the chronically anesthetized patient will never feel. He might hear of this strange occupation of his chest cavity, later in recovery, some subordinate joking it, but he won't give a damn, rolling his eyes, faking a seizure, having had surgeries greater and scarier elsewhere in his diseased body's politics. And these untrained, rag-tag surgeons of Man's greed and waste carving out truth here in the heartland will keep scrubbing themselves against such resistant bacteria; will keep scalpels in hand; will keep working that corner to heal the sick and killing. They will keep, you know, and they will not be arrested mid-procedure.

## The Last Resort of Curfew and Arrest Eric Evans

You could, I suppose, tell the crows  
not to fly but little good it will  
do you, arrogant as they are  
in their evident freedom, winging about  
in stark oblivion and able to mark  
your car in motion with the force  
of an exclamation point.

You might ask  
the crows to submit a grant proposal,  
to justify their avian actions  
in triplicate, signed and notarized but  
they are, I'm sure, short on documentation,  
not the strongest of record keepers,  
not prone to the vague subtleties  
of anecdotal evidence.

There is, of course,  
the last resort of curfew and arrest,  
of shaking the crows from the limbs  
of their occupied trees, tensing  
the institutional muscle, but never  
forget how they like to nurse their  
grudges and pass along your name,  
how they talk amongst themselves  
and will always have you outnumbered.

## Bread and Circuses

Alicia Hoffman

In ancient Rome, a man wanders onto winding streets, wallows in the rich scents of olive oils, red wine, roasting legs of lamb, so sensuous he almost weeps as if the fruits and meats were all he needed to nose his way into a night of entertainment and escape. He makes his way to the gladiator dome, gnaws on the half loaf of wheat bread the officials freely give him at the entrance, and though it doesn't taste that great, it satisfies in a way hand-outs always have, establishing a cooperative system of the give from the rich and the poor who take. He pushes through the throngs until he finds what he came for, there, on the arena floor, a criminally starving man bludgeons his way to a beast. No way to escape, the slave is blanketed in blood by the time the animal wins. The bull always wins. Always, in this media crowd, the man has no thoughts of his life, the troubles he faces to survive another day. In this crowd, he has no voice other than that of a fan roaring for more of the same, and when the show is over, he goes home by the light of the Italian moon, the spectacle bedazzled and bright, past the glorious coliseums and collated prisons for the poor, and he is full of nothing but an ache to sleep away the dullness of his working life until the next working day. But this is a tale of antiquity, and in the modern age there is no parallel to this sordid story. Now, we can laugh and jest at the problems of the past. Now, we cannot mistake our existences for such ossified behavior. Now the populace is content in its success and this ninety-nine percent is a false figure, a figment and a myth occupying the wrong side of our collective brain. Our freedom is obvious and it is apparent that the minority complaining are lazy and whining and crying, and though more could be said on the subject, it is so very tiring; the exhaustion and hunger just set in and we have to work tomorrow to pay our medical bills and student loans and offset mortgages and the Jersey Shore is on the television in twenty minutes, the one with the epic fight between *The Situation* and his so-called friend, and for dinner we have coupons for buy-one-get-one-limited-edition McRib.

## Notes from Occupied America (Poem #17) Karen Lillis

In Erie, Pa., a handful of the dedicated  
were committed to camping in Perry Square  
overnight through January 31<sup>st</sup>. Through snowfall,  
through freezing rain, through winds hurling across the lake,  
through differences of age and opinion. They had the support of the board of  
permits, the chief of police, twenty to thirty at regular meetings, and someone  
who'd donated the sub-arctic sleeping bags.  
The first few nights were glorious.

Then the city reneged: *Oh, coffee pots? Tarps? Supplies? New occupiers signing on? No, there'll  
be no more sleepovers.* The tarps were taken down.

Oakland and Atlanta, Phoenix and Cleveland. The officials speak of "evictions" in terms of  
crowd control, noise control, disease control, pests; a dispersing; a sweeping out; a thoughtful act  
of sanitation. The decree comes down from the mayor or the city council, goes through the local  
police, and spreads to neighboring rank and file units like a cancer.

The protesters measure their time in daily challenges and general assemblies.

Occupy Oakland said, *We meet at 6:00pm everyday until we get the Plaza back.*  
Occupy Atlanta said, *We'll camp tonight in a baseball field, tomorrow in a private park.*

Occupy Cleveland said, *We're seeking a new permit through the end of the week.*

Across the lake, Occupy Erie voted to hold the Square in three 8-hour shifts:  
*We will remain around the clock, they said. We will occupy.*  
*We will stay awake.*

## Notes from Occupied America (Poem #43)

Karen Lillis

Occupy Lubbock is asking for sweaters. Though their nights are surely warmer than Occupy Fort Collins in Colorado, their evenings are much colder than Occupy Corpus Christi, and they've noticed the food supply dwindling more quickly since temperatures dropped.

If you care to reply, Occupy Lubbock needs your wool, your hot meals, your fleece blankets, your old sleeping bags, your extra windbreakers, your leftover canvas, and as many warm bodies as you can spare.



## Elvis Occupies

*(to the tune of Heartbreak Hotel)*

Catherine McGuire

Well, since HR went and RIFF'd me, had to find a new place—it's Hell!

It's down at the end of Bankrupt Street, that old SRO hotel.

(And now you know) the payday sharks own me baby, and now they  
won't loan me, baby

They won't loan me nothing—I could cry.

Foreclosure docket's crowded, but they still can find some room.

Your mortgage paper's lost in space, but they're gonna lower the boom.

(Then you know) You're gonna be homeless, baby,  
and you will go hungry, baby;

you'll be so hungry you could die.

Your résumés keep flowing, but they don't cut you no slack.

After 99 weeks not working, dude, you'll never, no never go back.

(And furthermore) You're off unemployment baby,  
no more unemployment baby.

Just keep tight'ning that belt until you die.

If you've been through unemployment and you've got a tale to tell,  
let's grab the placards, hit the streets and tell them all "Go to Hell,"

(And you know) we won't be lonely, baby—fourteen million of us,  
baby, all chasing so few jobs, we could cry.

Beit Sahur\*  
Fred Marchant

***Occupy Boston, Dec. 9, 2011***

Black plastic garbage bags flapping away,  
the wind said to be high tonight, half the spaces  
without tents and tarps, some naked ground,  
a rain-soft dirt underfoot, the rest just the dull  
paving stones of Dewey Square, all the colors  
muted, as quiet as the few who are left, those  
who have decided to be arrested. Stacking,  
packing up the camp library, the kitchen gear,  
counting. Here in the meditation tent someone  
is just taking a nap, his legs straight out, kicking  
as if in a bad dream, perhaps, of the sheer glass  
walls I passed on my way, the higher offices,  
the brick parapets and vertical cities, the *banca*,  
the lender's tables and their shirted servants  
at the windows looking down over the police  
in lime-green dayglo vests. An artist with  
a camera project in mind is shooting the shapes  
that tents will take when the frames are pulled  
and the nylon billows like a sail in an eager wind.  
There is no fear anywhere, only the sense that this  
first part is over. In a rough-hewn wooden box  
from the Sign Tent, bundles of brown cardboard,  
and in magic marker ink, the wit of the many  
birth pains of a language about ends and means,  
packed into a wooden trough, under the chiming of  
the South Station Clock, in this Shepherds' Field,  
Beit Sahur, "place of the night watch," and manger.

\*Fred Marchant notes that "Beit Sahur" is the phonetic Arabic name for the Shepherd's Fields outside Bethlehem.

## These Are Our Weapons

Hilton Obenzinger

1.

Occupy Wall Street Occupy Dream Street Occupy the Mississippi River Occupy Rocky Mountains Occupy Jet Stream Occupy Ozone Layer Occupy Business Ethics Occupy Temple Emmanuel Occupy Saint Patricks Occupy Bank of America Occupy America Occupy Smiles Occupy Baseball Occupy Florida Occupy Texas Occupy Wonders of the Universe Occupy Deep Hearts Occupy Dawn's Early Light Occupy God Bless America Occupy This Land is My Land Occupy Song of Myself Occupy Buddha's Eye Occupy the Bright Green Light Across the Bay.

2.

Occupy the small spaces in our hearts. Dream of possibilities and wake up with them done. Occupy the hopes that deserve those dreams. Sleep with the thoughts of all the kids who learn to spell their names. Occupy the sky and the stars that memorize their names. Eat with fingers that taste possibilities. Praise the teachers who speak those names. Occupy the small spaces in our hearts as wide as the sky. That's what a new world looks like. Now that all of us are awake, it's time to dream.

3.

Imagination comes from staying in places and traveling across futures, from Wall Street to Occupy the Tundra to Occupy Madrid singing Ode to Joy to Occupy Watsonville of farmworkers and ghosts of Filipino dance halls returning to wander through the fields, occupy the past so that it sets the ground for more free wild hopes—and gratitude for all, gratitude for people standing and walking and marching, for occupying public space with shared rage and dreams, thank you to those people in Madrid waving their hands, empty palms up, chanting "These Are Our Weapons," dangerous empty hands that can build imaginations across an entire planet. Gracias.

99%

## Najaya Royal

What if the sky was yellow and the sun was blue?

What if the amount of money you make

Didn't decide whether you have a home next year or not?

Impossible, right?

We are the 99% that are not rich

We are the 99% who do have to worry about bills getting paid each month

But we are also the 99% with a voice that can be heard around the world

Hear our chronicles

Even though we are frowned upon by the 1%

Though we are the reason the 1% are rich

I mean who else lunch money would they steal and be able to get away with it

We are all against bullies

So it's about time we stand up to the biggest of them all

We all came into existence together

Before money all we had was each other. So why can't we all come together?

When did green paper decide where and how we should live?

When did green paper become a barrier and separate mankind?

Why can't we all live equally? This movement is going to change the world for the better

This movement will finally make us whole

This movement will bond the not so very different classes

Easing bad dreams that foreclosure signs seem to occupy

So we occupy the voice we still maintain

Letting our chants deluge the ears of the ones

Who brought fear into our lives

We can change the world

So the coming generation won't be discouraged before they can dream

We are the 99%

Dewey Square\*  
Alice Weiss

Dome tents and blue plastic tarps smudged like a street woman's topcoat, a  
ramrod straight plain-clothes cop in a piss-colored windbreaker,

standing like debt, boxes of carrots, battered apples, scribbled on cardboard—  
people in knit hats and blankets, in clusters, arguing, praying, airing

their tents—already mildewing from last night's downpour—drums and timbales,  
a sukkah, a stage, rolls of duct tape, a T-shirted apple-eyed string quartet playing

Beethoven, a portable larger than life-size statue of Gandhi, eyeglasses down  
his nose and everything bronzed, tied by a cord to what might be a disused

aluminum light post, Indian cotton bandana tied on his shoulders—gold thread  
entwined in the red figured weave—right hand open and stretched like a tap root

or a flambeau carrier balancing a torch of kerosene-soaked fire cloth, & wrapped  
tightly around the thumb of his left hand, an off-brand Band-Aid,

as if in all of us running to hang onto his fingers we had rubbed the skin  
raw and tried to heal it with whatever stuff we had around.

\*the park where Occupy Boston settled in among gleaming financial buildings and across from the venerable old  
railroad terminal, South Station.

haiku flock  
by Mickey Z.

truth spreads in pasture

we have more to fear from the

shepherd than the wolf



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# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

#occupyoureducation

By Cathy Borck, Jesse Goldstein,  
Steve McFarland, and Alyson Spurgas

In the fall of 2011, Jesse was invited to teach an Occupy Wall Street-inspired course in the Political Science Department at Brooklyn College, a campus of The City University of New York (CUNY). In the spirit of Occupy's horizontalism, self-organization, and de-centering of authority, Jesse reached out to people in his political-academic networks, asking if anyone wanted to join him in team-teaching the course. A handful of doctoral students from the CUNY Graduate Center responded with interest, and six of us moved forward as the instructors, or "Team Taught," as we referred to ourselves.

***Our commitments to radical pedagogy have also been inspired by an array of radical teachers, educational critics, and educational experiments.***

In all honesty, we never quite knew what exactly it was that we were doing, but that was part of the project. We tried to make consensus-based decisions and when consensus was unreachable, we tried to make sure that all of our political and academic commitments were represented by aspects of the course curriculum and structure. Looking back, we can say that the course was incredibly time- and labor-intensive. We read, we lectured, we facilitated, we played games, we argued, we laughed, we cried, we sat through many hours-long meetings, and often we taught and inspired each other and our students, and in turn they taught and inspired us. During our final class, some students expressed hopes that a similar course

would be offered next year, prompting us to consider: should we do something like this again? What are the benefits of presenting and exploring material like this in a less formal and more participatory pedagogical environment, as opposed to a traditional classroom setting? What are the drawbacks? Over the last few years, we have each independently taken part in a range of educational experiments designed to challenge or offer an alternative to traditional classroom experiences. As students, some of us have organized or participated in research collectives and collaboratively designed courses and study groups, both for credit and not-for-credit. Outside of the university, we have organized reading groups, teach-ins, and discussions in public spaces such as Zuccotti Park, art galleries, community centers and even a local archive. During the semester that we team taught together, several of the instructors and students helped organize the Free University held at Madison Square Park on May Day 2012, in which some 2,000 people took part in dozens of classes, discussions, lectures, and workshops.

Our commitments to radical pedagogy have also been inspired by an array of radical teachers, educational critics, and educational experiments. It would be impossible to list them all, from the anarchist Modern School Movement, Rudolf Steiner, Paul Goodman, Myles Horton, and SNCC's Mississippi Freedom Schools to Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal, 1970s feminist consciousness raising groups, Ivan Illich, Grace Llewellyn, John Taylor Gatto, and even projects closer to home, such as the Brooklyn Free School. All together then, our engagements with both the history and

practice of radical and non-traditional pedagogy give us a variety of perspectives from which to evaluate the pros and cons of the #occupyoureducation experience.

### Designing the Course

The class that we were asked to teach is a regular offering in the Political Science Department at Brooklyn College, officially called "Protest and Revolution." Typically, instructors provide a survey of case studies dealing with historic social movements and corresponding theoretical work that tries to make sense of them. A class about OWS seemed appropriate. However, during our initial meetings Team Taught decided to rename the class "#occupyoureducation." This was a deliberate move away from teaching a class "about" Occupy, and towards a more experimental, egalitarian, and future-oriented approach that was true to our understanding of the prefigurative spirit and vision of Occupy. We did not want the active social movement we were all, in various ways, participating in to become an ossified "object" of social scientific inquiry. We felt that Occupy was not a place or a specific set of institutions or even a determinant group of people; it was an idea and a practice, an injunction to challenge—socially, politically, and economically—the everyday patterns that routinized and naturalized our precarious lives.

***At the outset we envisioned a fairly unstructured, democratic classroom space. The syllabus we drew up was presented to the class as a suggestion.***

We tried to develop a curriculum that translated this expansive, inclusive, process-based idea of Occupy into a college classroom. We wanted to "occupy" our classroom: we wanted to create a learning environment that would embody the social and political imaginary of the Occupy movement; if we could do it on Wall Street, why not at Brooklyn College?

Early on, we met to lay out a skeleton of the syllabus. That meeting lasted four hours. We each came to the table with a diverse range of political and academic backgrounds and commitments. We had different but overlapping visions for the course. We went around and around voicing our ideas. The energy was high; we were excited. We decided to each write down on small scraps of paper three different class-session topics that we wanted to teach, in general terms. Then we arranged the small pieces of paper

on the table, pairing up topics that could be taught together and organizing the arc of the course to begin with the most basic or foundational material, conceptually building out from there. When we were done, a bird's-eye view of the table looked like this:



PHOTO BY CATHY BORCK

We then used this as the basic skeleton to draft a syllabus. For each class period, the facilitators of the session chose readings to assign and collaborated on designing the session. On some days two of us co-taught; on other days all of us participated. Regardless of who was "teaching" that day, we all did our best to attend every class. Where we identified over-participation or under-participation among us, we tried to correct it. Along these lines, we tried to facilitate class discussions with a "progressive stack," calling on those who had not spoken (or rarely spoke), women, queer-identified students, and students of color before we called on regular talkers, white, straight, and/or male students.

At the outset we envisioned a fairly unstructured, democratic classroom space. The syllabus we drew up was presented to the class as a suggestion. As instructors, we decided on material that would take us through the first half of the semester, at which point we planned to hold a



class-wide General Assembly, or “GA,” where the remainder of the semester’s readings, lessons, and activities would be collectively decided upon. Typically, the semester was structured like this:

**Pre-determined classes:**

Week 1 – Introduction to the class, Introduction to Radical Pedagogy

Week 2 – Explaining the Economic Crisis; A Global History of Occupations

Week 3 – Creativity and Cooperation For and Against Capitalism

Week 4 – Whiteness, Race in #Occupy, Limits of Identity Politics/Intersectionality

Week 5 – Ideological Assumptions of Political Action (how people think they can change the world), First Class General Assembly

**Proposed classes:**

Week 6 – Social Movements and the State, Organizational Forms, and Prefigurative Politics

Week 7 – Politics of Space, Social Reproduction, Feminist Herstories, Tactics and Strategies

Week 8 – Occupied Bodies/Occupying Our Bodies in Social Movements and Spaces

Week 9 – Occupy/Decolonize Language/Imagination, Social Movement Art vs. Branding and Cultural Enclosures

Week 10 – Surveillance, Security, and Ontologies of Risk and Threat

Week 11 – Bio/Psycho/Affective-Politics: Intimacy, Witnessing, Ethics, Desire, Erotics, and the F\*\$%ing Revolution

Week 12 – Reflections on the Current Economic Conuncture

(the final two weeks were reserved for student presentations)

**Course Demographics**

The group teaching the course originally included three women and three men. One woman dropped out early on and one of the men was unable to participate in the writing of this essay. All of us are white and between the ages of 30 and 35. Our class backgrounds span working-class to upper-middle-class. We have attended public and private schools—elite, traditional, alternative, and ivy league. One

of us is a lesbian, one is bi-sexual and the rest are straight. One of us is Jewish and the others were raised loosely Christian.

Twenty-two students enrolled in our class. Two-thirds were between 18 and 24 years old, a few students were between 29 and 35 (our ages), and two students were older than all of us. Our class was in the evening—6:30pm to 9:15pm—which allowed a number of students with full-time work schedules to participate.

As is usually the case in the CUNY system, most of the students had spent a majority of their lives living in New York City. Only three of our students were immigrants (a small proportion compared to most other CUNY classes), and the remainder had grown up in the five boroughs. A handful of students came from middle-class families, but the majority came from working-class backgrounds. Two-thirds identified as women and one-third identified as men. About a quarter of the students identified as queer with regard to both sexual orientation and gender presentation. The class was predominantly white—only one-third of the students were people of color, which is unusual at CUNY, where only forty percent of the student body is white.

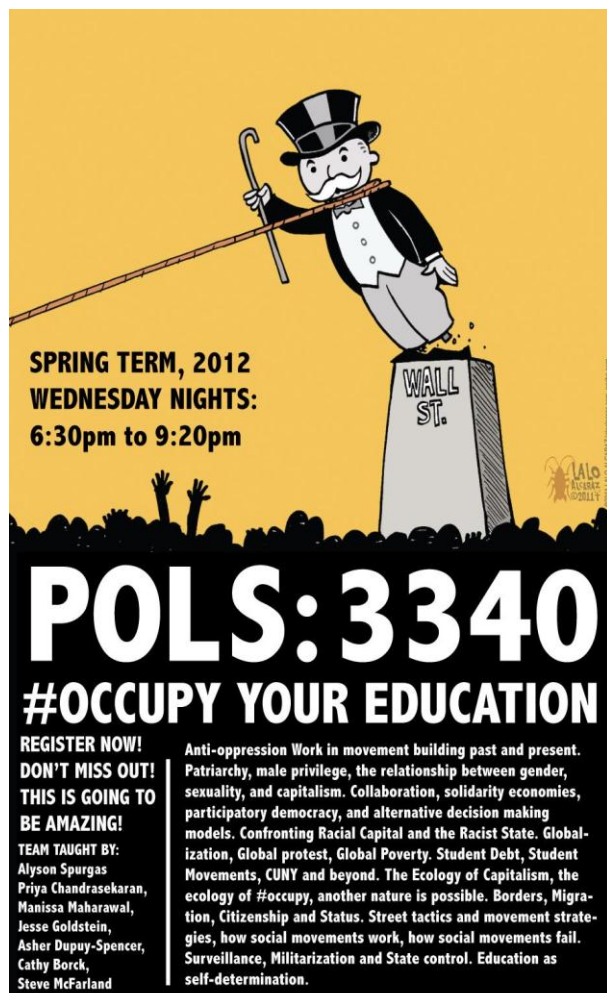
***One of the biggest challenges we faced stemmed from our own internal dynamics as instructors, and our differing pedagogies, epistemologies, and personalities.***

As far as we know, every one of our students worked in addition to attending school full-time. Most of them had part-time jobs in the service industry. A few had full-time jobs, including a United Parcel Service truck driver and a self-employed computer technician. Four of the students were parents.

**Challenges**

Teaching a college course with a large team of graduate student adjunct instructors presented some serious hurdles. Immediately, we came up against the programmed rhythms and expectations of a standardized classroom. No matter how experimental we wanted to be, the class would still be housed within the confines of a degree-granting institution, within the life trajectories of students who were paying more than they could afford in tuition, working low-wage jobs to make ends meet, and who quite simply needed our grades, and their diplomas.

One of the biggest challenges we faced stemmed from our own internal dynamics as instructors, and our differing pedagogies, epistemologies, and personalities. Though all of us are “social scientists,” we all arrived with different academic backgrounds and political commitments. We each come from different disciplines and sub-disciplines (critical ethnography, economic sociology, historical geography, etc.) and from different activist and organizing backgrounds (student movement, labor movement, political artmaking, etc.). While on the one hand, this diversity was a clear strength of our team, it also posed some difficulties. Early on, we saw how small differences could easily escalate into intractable problems when trying to integrate our pedagogical styles and course content, a problem that was exacerbated by our busy work, school, and organizing schedules, which left far too little time to hash things out between us.



POSTER FOR “OCCUPYYOUREDCATION” COURSE

When it came to teaching about “revolution(s),” what some of us thought to be radical others saw as distraction or “fluff,” or alternately, paternalistic and patronizing. We

also had to deal with the implicit question of how we should come across to our students—should we pose as a “united front” of instructors, who are all on the same page, even if we really are not? How do we navigate our personal/political differences when we are in front of the classroom? Should we even be in front of the classroom? How should the room itself be set up? Should we use consensus-based decision-making with the entire class? How can we make this class truly revolutionary, and what does that even mean?

The discrepancy in our individual answers to these questions came to a head a couple of times. The most serious crisis we faced occurred early in the semester, when some instructors felt that another instructor had disrespected them (and their pedagogical techniques, epistemological orientation, and lesson plan) in front of the class. This influenced one member of our group’s decision to leave Team Taught. Throughout the semester, we had to work very hard to ensure that hierarchies did not become concretized, and that course content and teaching styles were not pigeonholed as more or less legitimate forms of scholarship. Despite our best intentions, over the course of the semester hierarchies did develop in regards to how the students viewed each of us, and how they viewed the material we were each “experts” on.

The issue was made more complicated and exciting by the fact that many of the students were already or became our friends and fellow activists. Some of us personally knew almost half the class through student and adjunct organizing at CUNY and through OWS-related activities before the semester started. Many of these students expected a very radical pedagogical style from the course, and some of the instructors hoped to implement this in a very serious way. But it was difficult to make everyone happy. While several of the less politically engaged students expressed excitement at being exposed to new processes and ideas, other students expressed a sense of alienation, feeling left out of the shared political culture, assumptions, language, and acronyms that those with more organizing experience brought to the classroom.

Given our egalitarian and horizontalist commitments, we tried to make room for students to take on some of the traditional roles of the teacher—shaping the syllabus, deciding on classroom activities, lecturing or facilitating discussion on topics they chose. But it was very hard to break the mold of the traditional authoritarian classroom from within. In fact, early in the course a few students

expressed a desire for more structure. Their basic feedback was: “You are our teachers, teach us!” They appreciated our efforts at horizontalism but felt that too much “participation” in coordinating decisions made our class time disorganized and unproductive. Ultimately we decided to provide them with more of what they wanted and adjusted our approach to be slightly more traditional, instructive, and directive.

***Given our egalitarian and horizontalist commitments, we tried to make room for students to take on some of the traditional roles of the teacher—shaping the syllabus, deciding on classroom activities, lecturing or facilitating discussion on topics they chose.***

We had not expected student resistance to non-traditional forms of pedagogy and classroom organization to impact us as much as it did. For instance, most of the weeks we had selected a Theatre of the Oppressed game to complement the material. Early in the class, however, a few individuals cast doubt upon the “seriousness” of these exercises, and unfortunately, we capitulated to the vocal minority and did not play as many of these games as some of us would have liked.

Some students were so unhappy with the direction the course was taking that they went to the chair of the department to air their grievances. About halfway through the semester, we received an email from the department chair. He had received a complaint from one of our students, and in the following weeks, received complaints from two other students. They felt that our progressive stack policy silenced straight white male students on the basis of their identities, and that more broadly, students who did not share our left/progressive views were being silenced because their views were not that of the (radical) majority. They also felt that the class was disorganized and that criteria for assignments were not being evenly applied or clearly explained. All five of us were called to meet with the chair, and we took this opportunity to clear up some misconceptions about the class and to talk about how best to address the needs of these frustrated students.

After the meeting, we made an effort individually to reach out to the students we suspected of lobbying the complaints, engaging them more on a one-on-one basis. We also went over our assignments on the syllabus more

clearly and in greater depth, to make sure there were no misconceptions about the quantity, quality, or deadlines of the work we were expecting. In general, this strategy seemed to work, as we did not get any further complaints, and there were only one or two students who seemed to regularly miss class or were otherwise “checked out” for the remainder of the semester.

During Week Five we held our General Assembly (GA). This meeting was to be held like an Occupy Wall Street GA (following consensus process) and our only agenda item was to decide on the curriculum for the remainder of the semester. A full syllabus had been written, but from that point on, it was provisional.

The GA turned out to be somewhat of a failure. We struggled throughout the semester with the students’ wildly differing familiarities with and orientations to Occupy, radical politics, feminisms, the social sciences, social theory, political structures, and history. Half the class knew exactly what a GA was and were using GAs on a regular basis in their own organizing, a few members of the class knew that they did not like GAs on principle, and the other half of the class sincerely did not know what was going on or how to participate. Furthermore, most of the students felt that the syllabus was fine the way that it was. Students did express interest in learning more about the Occupy movement and we worked more of that material into the syllabus, but by and large the syllabus remained as it had been written before the class began.

### **Class Work**

The emotional work that must be done in and outside of a space like this was significant. By this we mean the work of actively challenging our own beliefs about how a classroom space should be run, challenging ourselves to allow space for others’ teaching styles and political orientations, checking in with each other and ourselves when a class had not gone as well as we would have liked, and making sure all of our individual voices—and those of our students—were being heard.

The time and energy commitments required to teach this course were more than any other course we had ever taught. It was a challenge to make sufficient time for collaborative decision making and regular debriefings, both amongst us as instructors and with students. Further, implementing alternative pedagogies, feminist and anti-racist epistemologies, and challenging power relations

between the instructors ourselves and between instructors and students was an emotionally charged process.

***The time and energy commitments required to teach this course were more than any other course we had ever taught.***

Logistically, this class was very difficult to manage. Throughout the semester, students were required to write eight response papers that put the readings in dialogue with each other. Each student was assigned a contact-instructor who was responsible for keeping all of their material and grades in order (i.e. each one of the instructors had a handful of students that we kept track of, so to speak). This got tricky because it became clear early on that only some of us were “qualified” or “had the expertise” to grade specific weeks’ papers. For example, some of us were much more prepared to grade papers on the labor movement whereas others of us were more prepared to grade papers on black feminisms. As a result, we decided that those instructors who facilitated a certain class would grade papers about those readings.

The reading load tended to be 50-90 pages per week. Readings included quite dense social, political, and economic theory, as well as more accessible capsule narratives of historic social movements and some contemporary journalism on the Occupy movement. The readings were diverse, challenging, and in some cases felt more appropriate for a graduate level course. Each week we also included suggested additional readings on the syllabus for those interested in going into further depth with the topics. Students engaged closely with the readings, though there was some expression in the early weeks that the reading load was too heavy. For many of the students, this was complicated by the fact that they wanted to do all the reading, but simply did not have the time. (On one occasion when students were divided into groups, with each assigned different readings, several students asked for copies of the readings their group had not been assigned.)

As a midterm, students had to write a longer paper discussing several political manifestos. The way we went about grading the midterms was that we all met one evening at one of our homes and read through the papers. It went something like this: one of us would pick up a few papers and say, “So-and-so wrote about the Black

Panthers, Marx, and Mao. And such-and-such wrote about Maria Mies, The Combahee River Collective, and the Zapatistas. Who wants these?” We then engaged in a collective process in which each of us was assigned papers to grade that we felt met with our own qualifications as instructors.



BRAINSTORMING “OCCUPY YOUR EDUCATION”  
PHOTO BY CATHY BORCK

As a final project, students were required to design and carry out a research project. Students could work as individuals or in groups and had a large degree of freedom in constructing their projects (the most central requirement for the final projects was that they had to have a research component, i.e., students had to find something out and this required them to interact with prior scholarship). As instructors, we divvied up final projects like we divvied up midterms. Students who wanted to write feminist zines went with some of us, whereas students who wanted to write twenty-page papers on Leninism went with others. This worked out so that each of us “mentored” a handful of projects and were substantially involved in helping our students through the process. Early on in the semester students had to propose projects and as a group the instructors gave feedback on the proposals and assigned mentors.

The students produced impressive final projects. They made zines, documentaries and CDs, they wrote research papers and funding proposals for non-profits, and they reflected on political actions that they organized. In the last few weeks of class the students presented their work and this was highly rewarding; we got to see some of the fruits of our hard, collective work and overall we were really quite proud. Many of the students expanded their interest in projects or subjects that they were already working on. For instance, one of our students who plays

Capoeira (a Brazilian martial art that combines elements of dance and music) was able to use the final project assignment to learn more about the political history of her art, and to begin experimenting with public capoeira sessions at weekly OWS events.

### Reflections

Toward the end of the semester we began to process the class with our students. One of the activist students in the final round of discussion of how the class went said enthusiastically: "This class was like the reading group I never had time for." In making this observation, she highlighted how difficult it can be for student organizers juggling classes, jobs, and activism to make time for collective study and reflection. By taking space on the course calendar for a class like this, we can make room for student organizers to build political education into their course schedule. Tying a grade to the outcome of the class also gives a greater weight to the reading—we have all taken part in informal reading groups that started off with great enthusiasm and dwindled to a small handful of people actually doing the reading and showing up as more pressing demands on our time, with more immediate consequences, intervened between us and our best intentions. Though many of us would hope to find internal motivation to study and write on radical social change, often it is external expectations, like those of a teacher or student, that spur us to take the time to tackle projects like we did in teaching the course or that our students did with the final projects they completed for the course.

Some of the other benefits we identified in offering a course like this through conventional college channels included use of university infrastructure, the ability to draw participants from beyond the "activist ghetto," and the tendency for people to put more effort into official, for-credit classes for which a grade will be assigned. Another benefit was the personal connections that were made between the undergraduate student organizers taking the class and the graduate students offering the class, which led to closer collaboration in the student movement across campuses.

The university resources that accompany an official class are considerable, and not readily duplicated: a large, quiet, well-lit, climate-controlled room with desks, tables, and chairs for thirty people in a location reasonably accessible to public transportation, and available for three hours at a consistent evening time every week for several

months. These luxuries are not something to scoff at for those of us who have caged space for reading groups in cafes, parks, and public atriums. There are several spaces in New York City—including The Brecht Forum, Bluestockings Bookstore, Atlantic Commons, The Public School, and 16 Beaver, among others—which are designed for political discussion and education, but they are often not readily available for weekly evening sessions due to other scheduling demands. Space within the CUNY Graduate Center for these sorts of unofficial pursuits is similarly at a premium.

***Through these many reflections, it has become clear to us that #occupyoueducation really was a shared experiment in horizontalism: as much as we had to manage our students, they had to manage us. Despite some of the rougher edges of our course, the overwhelming sense was that we had all participated in a collaboration, and were better off for it***

At the end of the semester, it was really heartening to hear the students reflect on the shortcomings of the class and the difficulties of managing a multiple-instructor teaching team. Still, at that point, the feedback we received about the course was overwhelmingly positive, in part because it is much more socially acceptable to give your teachers positive feedback than it is to give them negative feedback. As such, in writing this article, we emailed our students saying, "Grades were submitted long ago, give us the dirt." Many students wrote back, which seems to demonstrate their continued commitment to the legacy of the course. One strongly-identified feminist queer student wrote, "There were moments when the male energy and tone of conversation were super strong and made me personally shut down and lose interest." Another student wrote:

*Some of the drawbacks were that the professors had different teaching styles, which could be cool, but tended to hinder the progress of the lesson and the class because it seemed like sometimes the professors were having ideological battles via the reading material and what it meant to them. I also think that material we learned could have been a bit more cohesive—most of the lessons seemed like separate material that didn't coincide with the previous ones. If they had been connected it would have*

created a more cohesive understanding of the studies and how they interact together.

In a similar vein, another student wrote:

*One thing that was kind of a double-edged sword was that because all the instructors had different backgrounds, interests, priorities and teaching styles, sometimes I felt as if I was watching mom and dad fight. It was awkward sometimes when we were talking about male privilege let's say and a male instructor would blatantly use power to his benefit within the classroom. Sometimes watching different methods duke it out was really interesting and dynamic, but it also led to sometimes feeling like I couldn't say some things in class when a certain instructor was speaking for fear of sounding un-academic, or misinformed.*

Through these many reflections, it has become clear to us that #occupyeducation really was a shared experiment in horizontalism: as much as we had to manage our students, they had to manage us. Despite some of the rougher edges of our course, the overwhelming sense was that we had all participated in a collaboration, and were better off for it. We did not need to produce the perfect class, or realize some Hollywood notion of a transformative pedagogical experience created by the genius of a charismatic teacher-leader. In some ways, the end result is a good reflection of the Occupy movement: an imperfect, collaborative creation, and a messy experiment in creating viable—even if temporary—alternatives to the alienating and immiserating rhythms of our global economy. Our students learned as much with us as they did from us; we all matured through the process of tearing down the structures of a “normal” college class and then trying to rebuild them, together, on our own terms.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The instructors and students in this course all had very different desires around how the course should be run and how social change should happen, and we all had different ways we imagined these desires being satisfied. These notions were influenced by the disciplining we have experienced in the past, through our political educations, through our academic disciplines, through our embodied experiences, and through the practices we engage in in other parts of our lives, including ideological practices that become routinized and habitual. Although it was a challenge, the class was ultimately an amazing experience, as the energy in the room and outside of it was tangible,

palpable, sometimes untapped, and never fully harnessed or directed.

In the face of the simultaneous disciplining and boundary-crossing that was attempted in the space—by instructors, students, and at the institutional and bureaucratic levels that we cannot remove ourselves from as teachers and students within the CUNY system—the class developed as an organism with a life of its own. It was firmly and insatiably political, and the attractions, alliances, allegiances, intimacies, vitriol, vendettas, and utter strangeness that took shape in the few months during which we taught the course were exciting and beautiful. As much as we all regretted being involved at moments, ultimately we knew that we would never have a chance like this again, with this particular moment at our fingertips, and we know now that we are better teachers, students, and organizers from participating in this unforgettable experience.

In closing, we include an informal course evaluation that one of our students posted on her blog at the end of the class:

### **What would you tell other students about this course?**

*I would tell other students that this Protest and Revolution class that we lovingly dubbed Occupy Your Education is a successful and ever-evolving experiment with what a classroom can look like, with what our relationship to academia, to our instructors and to one another can look like. It is a democratic classroom, set up in a way where students' voices are valued and encouraged. The teachers treat you like a person they are sharing information with and who are helping you reach your own personal understanding of the material—they help you feel the relevance of academic work to your personal life, not like someone they need to control and punish. This class will change your life.*

### **What are the strengths of the course?**

*Anti-capitalist, feminist, queer, anti-oppression all around, mutual aid, caring, conversation, creativity, passion, humor, being pushed to write and synthesize a lot of information in a limited amount of time, which is amazing because it made me ask myself “do you really want a PhD?!” and the answer is hell yeah. Also, we're going to change the world, so I'd say that's pretty strong.*

### How can the course be improved?

*It can continue to grow. It can be an example for other courses. Our dynamics can be transmitted into each and every discipline, every CUNY department, we can have a fair, peaceful and democratic school system. It could also be improved by providing a space that has more natural light, plants and other living things, and comfortable seating. It could be EXPONENTIALLY improved by paying adjuncts living wages.*



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# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## What's So Dangerous about a Free Education?

Radical Feminist Musings From a CUNY Student in a Corporate Stranglehold

by Julieta Salgado



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF BETHANY WALTER



I woke up from a feverish nap, the bottom half of my body on the cold floor, my upper torso on a corner piece of matting. Other women's feet lined above my head in a row of little spooning bodies, all of us in a forced intimacy for the night at Brooklyn Central Booking. It so happened I was in the often delightful, but quite aggressive company of queer women in a jail cell. One big friendly dyke asked me, "Yo Sparkles"—my jailbird name due to my gold sequin miniskirt—"What you in for?" I replied: "I wanted a free education."

I was arrested on my college campus on May 2nd, 2012, for participating in a civil disobedience action in front of the college president's office. After months of organizing around tuition hikes, our depleting curriculum, a lack of student resources and consistently ignored invitations to meet with administration, members of the Brooklyn College Student Union held a sit-in outside of the president's office. The goal of our non-violent direct action was to make awareness of our plight unavoidable and to obstruct the path of business as usual. Although I had not planned to get arrested that day, it was not entirely unbelievable that I did: while City University of New York (CUNY) "peace officers" were violently evicting my friends and teachers from the hallway, I decided to let my body go in the middle of all the chaos elicited by our peaceful sit-in. While my friends were refusing to move from their school hallway or trying to film the police or just protect their bodies from violence, while my friend Eric was being wrongfully and brutally arrested,<sup>1</sup> I decided to see what would happen if I just let go. Just let my body go. Let the moment carry me.

My body was tossed around by the motions of the officers pushing my friends. I fell to the ground and decided to stay there with my eyes shut. I was asked if I needed medical attention, I was asked to get up, I was commanded to get up, I was dragged by one arm so that I might get up, I was threatened with further punishment if I did not get up, I was handcuffed because I did not get up. I was dragged, almost dropped on the ground several times, shoulders almost dislocated as I was tossed and turned and hauled out of Brooklyn College by no fewer than three officers and shoved into a police van for further

processing off campus. Not unbelievable, like I said, if you think I was asking for it. But this is not merely an account about Sparkles, the girl who played possum. This is a critical analysis of public higher education by an undergraduate sociology and art major who is resisting the increased corporatization of CUNY with mind, body, and soul.

A teacher and ally recently asked me to write about what led me to become a student activist. The readily available answer is Occupy Wall Street (OWS). I spent time at Zuccotti Park, participated in discussions and general assemblies, and joined several marches. I watched people old enough to be my parents and young enough to be my nephews assaulted for chanting and demonstrating, for protecting each other, for making street art and telling strangers very kind and empowering things, for giving *everyone* who asked food, clothing and shelter. I witnessed and became attuned to the reality that people of color are targets for state-issued violence. I learned that debt—student debt and other forms of debt—are forms of indenture, orchestrated for the wealth of the 1%. During that most colorful American Autumn,<sup>2</sup> it was difficult to convince myself that I still had to go to class, to write papers, to do a little tap dance so all my teachers would keep me afloat in the silent and mechanized world of a corporate education.



THE AUTHOR ON MAY DAY PHOTO BY TOM MARTINEZ

Yet the more telling and complicated answer to the question of what radicalized me is the academy itself: the classroom, the course subjects, the demanding hours of reading texts and synthesizing theory and producing my own work, and the marvelous people and student activists I have come in contact with along the way. In short, my CUNY college life as a whole. A number of other sources and experiences have given me the ability to understand my individual struggles in their larger social contexts, but there has been nothing quite like college, like a public college in New York City this past fall during Occupy, to really wake me up.

At first as a wide-eyed photography student with light feet, I slowly began to follow OWS actions with the personal conviction that maybe, just maybe, I could do something to make a difference. Initially, my goals were

really that vague: maybe I could be one more person at the plaza, at the stock exchange, at an unpermitted march, one more voice saying I do not need a permit to demand justice for everyone around me, to learn what living without a price might feel like. In time, I began to make friends and other connections, too—it turned out that sociology and art made more sense than ever out in the streets! Most important, the relevance of social justice to my student life became so clear to me that activism has now become absolutely necessary to my survival. And ironically, the very educational institution I am (seemingly) fighting has given me the vocabulary and the platform to confront the oppressive dynamics that it embodies and promulgates.

Meanwhile, I saw that the “real world” I would someday join as a professional was falling apart all around me and giving way, in Occupy, to something totally new. Not perfect, not forever, but a tangible hope that another world might be possible. A former teacher of mine once said, “Social Theory without action is just hot air.” It was an afterthought or a murmur but I caught how profound it was. And how utterly dangerous: everything you do here is bullshit if you do not make a difference outside. Maybe we were being scolded for mediocre class work, but I took that as a direct order to fight this wretched system. Period.

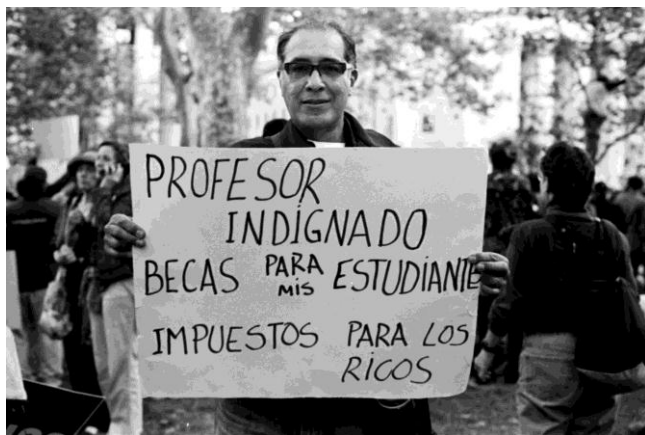


PHOTO BY JULIETA SALGADO

I have come to see that the everyday realities of my life are political. And the challenges of these everyday realities have helped me see what is wrong at CUNY. For starters, being a student is the daily task of cunningly navigating bureaucracies that will certify my educational journey with a degree, all the while using every cent of student loans to keep my sorry ass fed and housed. It takes a double consciousness to want to be a creative, political personality in academia *and* to worry constantly about tuition hikes, unaffordable campus food, racist

“security,” poor student services, and unjust curricular expectations. Although we consent to have our intellects and our emotional endurance challenged by going into higher education, the ugly truth is that actual learning is not the priority of CUNY academic authorities. Rather, education is about following exact steps, showing up, shutting up, performing okay and moving on, like an assembly line of future graduates. The goal is to perform the theatrics of school well and graduate, not to be curious, or to have genuine fulfillment or even failures that lead to self-discovery.

Paying off my student debt seems impossible; the prospect of having to pay twice the cost of my rent every month in loans just suffocates me.<sup>3</sup> So I focus on the immediate, on the resistance of now. My aim as a student activist has not been to fight my school or the college president or even the cops, but to hold CUNY accountable for what I consider to be its societal role: to provide a free and quality education to the people of New York City. To those of us who rely heavily if not solely on the public sphere for our livelihood (elementary education, transportation, medical treatment, social security, food stamps), the increased corporatization of public higher education through tuition hikes means that one more arena is excluding people who cannot afford to privatize their own livelihood. This situation has led my education to become indelibly linked with my political resistance. It has left me with the choice to either radicalize or entirely conform. Conformity not only spells out a murderous debt<sup>4</sup> on my trail, but also renders me an accomplice of the present state of things and the future of CUNY. No, tuition hikes are not okay for me, they are not okay for my classmates, and they are not okay for the future generations. Tuition in general is not okay. For a range of reasons, many CUNY students may not be upset about tuition hikes. But I hold fast to the vision on which CUNY was founded: top quality, free education for all who need it.

The moment I decided that tuition and the surveillance of student activists were unacceptable at Brooklyn and all CUNY colleges, I was confronted with other questions. Should food, shelter, and other public goods really be free? “Maybe,” I wondered, “I should just walk into a store and take food, because it’s your right to eat!” Yes, that is correct! I have not reached a point of necessity where I have taken food to survive, but I judge no one else who has. I think it is criminal to be denied sustenance or that anyone in this city should be homeless considering the highest foreclosure rate in the state is here, in East New

York.<sup>5</sup> The police may exist to shut down your loud neighbor, to stop and frisk youth to appease someone else's sense of security, or to respond three hours late to a violent crime, but more often than not they are around to make sure you never threaten someone else's private property or profits. So yeah, I say take what you need, and the same thing goes for education.

It is an enormous privilege for me to be in college. As a first-generation queer daughter of Ecuadorian immigrants, the odds are neatly and systemically stacked against me. Only 13% of Latinos in the United States have college degrees.<sup>6</sup> I'm excited to help raise that statistic in the next year because I know it will mean that despite the racist, capitalist patriarchy I live in, I—and others like me—will graduate and make what we want out of our education. Is that so dangerous? The fact that more and more Latinas and Latinos might gain greater class consciousness, engage creatively and intellectually in this country, and make profound social changes is dangerous to the status quo indeed. But if education is a privilege, as it is for me, should it also be a commodity? While student loan debt is a national crisis that affects people across ethnicities, genders and social classes, there is something especially harmful about a public school community closing its doors to more and more people. Columbia University was never in the cards for me to begin with, so if the only educational institution that exists for someone like me keeps me out, what can I do? The people that will be excluded from CUNY schools will include that other 87% of Latinas and Latinos that cannot afford an education in the first place. Another good reason for me to resist.

Other contributors to my radicalization are the sociological materials I study as well as other active students I have met on campus. The basic canon of my chosen major includes mostly white, cis-males<sup>7</sup> that tend to be critical of capitalism, and may even be socialists. These "fathers" of sociology are indeed of great import, although incredibly flawed in their lack of comprehensive sex, gender and race analysis. The first time I was assigned *The Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels, I thought someone somewhere was not paying attention: why would academic authorities want to give their consumers a basic level of class consciousness? Didn't they realize how bad this could be for business? I took this basic understanding of capitalism and started organizing with the Brooklyn College Student Union, which is neither a club nor a form of student government, but a close-knit group of radical students resisting the corporate stranglehold on our

education. I also began to learn from different campus communities such as the Brooklyn College Dream Team—undocumented students who are more economically vulnerable to policy changes than your average students—and Students for Justice in Palestine, who raise consciousness on a campus known for its surveillance of Muslim student groups.<sup>8</sup>



PHOTO BY JULIETA SALGADO

This past year at Brooklyn College has taught me that the fruitful little "edufactory"<sup>9</sup> where I study has an undeniable relationship with the New York Police Department, which has a relationship with the CUNY Board of Trustees (whose members are all business people and not academics), which has a relationship with the army recruitment programs that place ads in our school newspaper (and through this recruitment we are offered an escape from our share of the 1 trillion dollar national student loan debt). Seeing how all these things not only relate, but also desperately depend on one another, is challenging, but very necessary. To see, question, and challenge the interconnected structures that govern your school is not a sign of displaced anger; rather, it is an act of genuine caring for your community. The pointless art nouveau sculpture by the Library Cafe ties it all together for me: a combination of kitsch and policy continues to evolve in order to manage an image of normalcy and success while simultaneously protecting investment interests within CUNY. Our tuition will increase by \$300 per year for the next 4 years, yet CUNY executives just received an astronomical pay raise.<sup>10</sup> Drinking fountains will remain broken on campus, because the Coca-Cola vending machines are more profitable; no free tuition also means no free water. The quality of our education falls deeper and deeper by the wayside, but while the college

lawns and banners remain neatly manicured, why should we complain? Isn't this what progress *looks* like?

The fight for education is a legitimate revolutionary front that is understandably but clumsily being kept at bay by implicit and explicit instruments of coercion and violence. Raising tuition every year is an implicit form of racist, classist, sexist violence. It keeps specific bodies out of specific spaces. The aggressive "peace officers" at the gates represent the most explicit form of violent coercion in CUNY. They are around to keep us from feeling at home, from feeling creative, from feeling like we belong at CUNY and that CUNY belongs to *us*. The cops on campus, much like on the streets, much like in elementary school playgrounds, are there to remind us that nothing is ours, that there is no true public space, just the protection of capital's interests by any means necessary. The security forces are there to make sure the path of business, of money, is not obstructed by our individual experiences. The CUNY cops remain on our campuses because our school, like food, like a home, like life with dignity in America, is not free.



PHOTO BY JULIETA SALGADO

Occupy Wall Street shocked me the way it might have shocked anyone who was not yet an activist, who felt fury and compassion, but who until then only had bad consumer choices to blame for society's ills. Suddenly there it all was, open and raw, bursting through the custom tailored seams of the financial district: corporate greed, inequity, police brutality, racism, sexism, rape culture, class war, the housing crisis, health-of-every-kind crisis, and of course, the madness of policing "public" space. I once read somewhere that Occupy Wall Street and all radical spaces are not vacuums; you do not walk into them and leave all the bad stuff outside and find only love and solidarity inside. Even though we were building an

ideological space into a thrilling reality, you cannot wish away years of poverty or trauma, you cannot demand an equitable world and magically expect men not to rape.<sup>11</sup> When things would go wrong in these spaces, it becomes easier to blame the movement than to blame the existing state of society as a whole. Occupy Wall Street was not troublesome because people are leftists or because it housed homeless folks of every circumstance or because it damaged our sweet sense of urbane oblivion. It was troublesome because even dreamers and fighters have had to live within this violent empire. The real resistance comes from within radical spaces, with comrades. The cops are just a distraction from that unlearning and the possibilities for liberation—much as they are on campus.

I learned early on that there was no such thing as truly public space in New York City. At Zuccotti Park, when we would stand in a circle and speak loudly with other people, when we would take up time and space to invest in other people's lives in a public manner, the police would immediately begin to harass us, to disperse our lawful activities. Anything that was not producing capital gain and transaction was obsolete, obstructive and must be destroyed, even if it meant bashing in faces like your own.<sup>12</sup> The meaning and use of the law suddenly bent itself completely out of shape to preserve a space and an ideology whose time was clearly over: that of corporate guild and gain. The very American creed I had been forced to pledge allegiance to as a child was now being purged in the streets, was being sweated out of me as I avoided the blow of a baton, as I tried to take what I thought was mine, what I thought was my own agency and hometown and freedom of movement and instead found my life in danger. A sort of danger no one had ever told me about.

Occupy Wall Street woke up a side of my imagination that could easily become entirely romantic, because isn't it totally sexy to run in the streets and scream "OCCUPY! SHUT IT DOWN! NEW YORK IS A PEOPLE'S TOWN!?" But once the march was over, I realized that the imagination of OWS was utterly applicable to my college education: why exactly did I have to subscribe to life-threatening debt in order to get an education? Why were all my adjunct teachers also struggling with their own student debt, low wages, and threatened benefits? Why did campus security nervously surround my friends and me when we would congregate in a circle? Who made up these rules? I was being set up to fail, my classmates were being set up to fail, the young people I tutor in local high schools were inheriting a CUNY that would only fail them at a later time.

Public education, just like public space, was now a myth, something being held captive by values I was raised to believe were the only ones worth protecting. Someone told me that CUNY was free before the mid-1970's,<sup>13</sup> all hushed, like a secret or an ancient world swallowed by time. And the unanswered question: what is so impossible, so unbelievable about a right to education?

So now that CUNY sounds like a drab correctional facility that continues its violence on my person every single day, do I want to leave it? I thought about that when I had to return to class the week following my arrest. Having to look at the same uniformed faces that had bared their teeth and hands at me, at my friends, at teachers I actually love and admire, I had feelings not of regret but of something far worse: it was a feeling of being in danger in a place I considered a sanctuary. There was something far more personal about being dragged by a cop down the hallway I walk through every day than being shoved by a cop at a street protest. With no regrets, and taking my feelings of unsafety one day at a time, I have decided that violence will not keep me away from my intellectual and artistic ambitions. Not by a long shot. The vulgarity and hypocrisy of brutalizing dissenting students is not enough to kill my dreams. Nor are batons, pepper spray, or bullets. If anything, the fact that people would be willing to hurt me and my comrades for our ideals of equality, access, and compassion is very telling: who is doing the chanting and who is doing the silencing? And which side are you on?

As I mentioned before, we are a revolutionary front. We are repressed because we are of critical importance: we produce both literal wealth and invaluable creative wealth. The workers, the students, and the teachers—we are the academy. What is so dangerous about a free, equitable, anti-oppressive, all-inclusive public education for all people? I hope to find out in my lifetime.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Two weeks after Eric and I were arrested, over 200 faculty members and other supporters held a silent protest on campus, during which they delivered letters to the college president urging that the charges against the two of us be dropped. I ultimately received an Adjournment in Contemplation of Dismissal while Eric battled in court for months to have very serious charges reduced to a disorderly conduct charge. He remains on probation.

<sup>2</sup> Occupy Wall Street folks referred to this emerging season of dissent as the American Autumn, inspired by the Arab Spring of that year in Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere around the Arab world.

<sup>3</sup> A close friend of mine who is a Rochester Institute of Technology alumna has to do this every single month.

<sup>4</sup> Climbing number of suicides due to student loan debt in the U.S [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/c-cryn-johannsen/student-loan-debt-suicides\\_b\\_1638972.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/c-cryn-johannsen/student-loan-debt-suicides_b_1638972.html)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.osc.state.ny.us/osdc/rpt13-2011.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/acsbr10-19.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> "Cisgender" is when an individual's gender matches their sex. I use this term and draw attention to whiteness in order to highlight the lack of feminist theory and works by people of color as standards in Sociology.

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/21/nypd-spied-on-muslim-student\\_1290544.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/21/nypd-spied-on-muslim-student_1290544.html)

<sup>9</sup> "Edu-factory" refers to the way that university education is becoming standardized and commodified. The term also refers to "a transnational collective engaged in the transformations of the global university and conflicts in knowledge production." For more, see: <http://www.edu-factory.org/wp/about/>.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.psc-cuny.org/clarion/august-2012/cuny-lifts-executive-salary-ceiling-stage-set-future-raises>

<sup>11</sup> There was a heartbreaking instance of assault at the Liberty Plaza camp, to which the community itself responded with elaborate support, the establishment of a women-only tent and growing conversations about building safe space within the occupation. Mainstream media and authorities used this occasion to blame activists and not rape culture.

<sup>12</sup> I always call out the police officers with Latino last names.

<sup>13</sup> CUNY was tuition-free until 1975 when, coincidentally, its student body became predominantly people of color. See: <http://takebackbrooklyn.wordpress.com/cuny-101/>.



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## Occupy in One Classroom

By Ira Shor

2011 was an historic year of global protests. Here in New York, the Capitol of Capital, Occupy Wall Street (OWS) sustained a rebel encampment for 59 days at now-famous Zuccotti Park in the financial district. Hundreds of other occupations erupted around the United States and abroad. Occupy activists declared "Another world is possible!" and set out to build it in a small concrete park.

Popular with large segments of the American public, OWS garnered deep material, financial, and political support which helped it through weeks of police beatings, harassments, and arrests, as well as the early onset of wet and cold weather. In those weeks, OWS and Occupy nationally forced into public debate forbidden themes of vast economic inequality, sleazy gambits of financiers, and complicit politicians who bailed out despised bankers with \$7 trillion in taxpayer funds. In New York City, daily marches, assemblies, videos and non-stop teach-ins became a growing challenge to the legitimacy of the state and corporate system. Week to week, OWS shone an unflattering spotlight on ignored needs of "the 99%" and on financiers who do business in the shadows. The brilliant chant "We Are the 99%!" helped coalesce disparate folks abused by the 1%. "The Party of Capital" as David Harvey calls the 1% was on the defensive, losing the war of words and representations.

Unauthorized and creative, struggling to keep up with waves of new participants and new occupations, pressured to enact its own democratic ideals, OWS turned the

political world upside down for 59 days until November 14. Then, billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg ordered a massive police assault after midnight to destroy the still-evolving camp. Sanitation workers hauled away its remains. Most camps elsewhere were similarly liquidated to disperse and silence the consolidated protests in central city squares.



OCCUPY BOSTON PHOTO BY FRINDE MAHER

Decapitated from its signature site, OWS morphed into Occupy 2.0, testing multiple campaigns: supporting immigrant workers on strike at a local bakery, protesting the arrival of hydraulic "fracking" to extract natural gas, publishing a free Debt Relief Operations Manual, allying successfully with other New Yorkers to demand that the Mayor cancel the Marathon and use its lavish resources to help stricken neighborhoods after Hurricane Sandy, and so on.

Like many teachers, I made Occupy a classroom theme. These notes report on my Fall 2012 seminar 'Mic Check': Rhetoric and Resistance In/After "Occupy" at the City University of New York Graduate Center. As I write, we are halfway through the term.

Last Spring, 2012, I published a description of the seminar for the upcoming Fall registration:

"In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Vaclav Havel exhorted idealists to speak truth to power. Playwright and politician, Havel proposed that democratic discourse could undermine undemocratic oligarchies. Such dreams and discourses moved millions to bury the crony regimes of Eastern

Europe. Thus continued a remarkable history of non-violent transformation which can trace its roots to the Gandian campaigns before 1948 in India and to the great American Civil Rights Movement in the U.S in the 1950s-1970s. Confronting entrenched and armed oligarchies is formidable anywhere, yet the weapons of rhetoric have been strangely enabling in democratic struggles. Opposition movements have undermined the 'regimes of truth' and the 'legitimate language' which Foucault and Bourdieu separately named as discursive tools for domination. A bevy of police states from the Baltic to the Adriatic fell by 1991. More recently, an Arab Spring spread across borders with some spectacular successes and some major setbacks, with the Egyptian story heavily-marked by communications strategies. Then, in September, 2011, a handful of creative activists physically occupied Zuccotti Park near Wall Street, encamping in a tent village, launching an 'Occupy Movement' in the Capitol of Capital. For two months, the village morphed into new expressive shapes, attracting tens of thousands to witness if indeed 'another world is possible,' one that challenges the vast economic inequality damaging American life. By the time the Occupy camp was destroyed by a violent police assault in November, it had become an intolerable built challenge to the legitimate authority of Wall Street and the oligarchy represented by billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg. The camp embodied, uttered and projected alternative ways of being and seeing, and was an incubator of alternative rhetoric. Among the alternatives practiced in this transformative space were 'horizontal' social relations. A horizontal rather than a vertical rhetoric structured its meetings. Open general assemblies operated horizontally with rotating chairpeople and with 'stacks' to determine speaking order based on social power of speakers, that is, who speaks most and least in such public spheres, which individuals and groups were socially ascribed lesser or greater authority to speak in public(challenging what Paulo Freire called 'the culture of silence'). Occupy also generated autonomous working-groups which copied the horizontal structure of the general assemblies. Most notable, perhaps, Occupy also installed 'the human microphone' as a public-address system. Denied legal use of sound-amplification at Zuccotti by the police, general assemblies and other large meetings practiced group repetition of a speaker's remarks in a now-famous choral method. The human microphone also emerged as a tool for assertion of utterances at public protests where an individual's call of 'mic check!' assembled the human microphone for amplification as well as for relaying instructions. With Occupy camps now driven out of public spaces, this seminar will study horizontal discourse and rhetorical resistance emerging from the protests."

The seminar filled to capacity (12) on the first day of registration in May. I had been following OWS online, in print, and onsite since it began, and had a file and shelf of materials. My summer reading also provided useful titles for the syllabus, far more than could fit in one course. I sought articulate first-person accounts from participants in the general assemblies, working groups, and protest actions along with analytic and historical texts on the deep economic and ideological background of the famous eruptions of 2011. The syllabus below reflects these

criteria. Often undecided about this text or that, I put the syllabus through multiple versions, changing it again after the seminar began. (One change was apparently one too many: a student objected and others supported her, so I withdrew it.) Here is a late iteration of the syllabus; it changed again when Hurricane Sandy closed the City for a week:

'MIC CHECK': RHETORIC AND RESISTANCE IN/AFTER "OCCUPY"

THURS: 6:30-8:30, PROF. IRA SHOR

READINGS:

*Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, David Graeber, Melville House Publishers.

*Declaration*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Argo/Navis Author Services.

*Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, James C. Scott, Yale UP.

*Occupy*, Noam Chomsky, Occupied Media Pamphlets, Zuccotti Park Press.

*Occupy Nation: The Roots, the Spirit, and the Promise of Occupy Wall Street*, Todd Gitlin, itbooks/HarperCollins.

*Occupying Wall Street: The Inside Story of an Action that Changed America*, Writers for the 99%, Haymarket Books.

*Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, David Harvey, Verso.

*The Leaderless Revolution: How Ordinary People Will take Power and Change Politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Carne Ross, Blue Rider Press/Penguin.

*The Occupy Handbook*, Ed. Janet Byrne, Back Bay Books.

*This Changes Everything: Occupy Wall Street and the 99% Movement*, Ed. Sarah van Gelder, Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

*Voices from the 99 Percent: An Oral History of the Occupy Wall Street Movement*, Ed. Lenny Flank, Black and Red Publishers.

SCHEDULE

Aug. 30: INTRODUCTION: "Occupy, Rhetoric, Resistance"

Sept. 6: Excerpts: "What is Rhetoric?"; Raymond Williams on "Hegemony," "Ideology," and "Signs and Notations"; Derek McGee, "The Occupied and the Occupier"; David Graeber, "Can Debt Spark a Revolution?"

Sept. 13: *Occupying Wall Street*, Writers for the 99%, 1-143, 168-202.

Sept. 20: *This Changes Everything*, van Gelder, 1-84; Chomsky, *Occupy*, 23-103.

Sept. 27: *Voices from the 99 Percent*, Allison Nevit/Una Spenser Posts, 45ff, 50ff, 57ff, 69ff, 92ff,

102ff, 131ff, 143ff, 176ff, 208ff, 303ff; Graeber, "On Playing by the Rules: The Strange Success of OccupyWall Street," 272-284.

Oct. 4: *The Occupy Handbook*: Cassidy ("What Good is Wall St.?"); Acemoglu/Robinson ("Against Political Capture"); Graeber("Occupy Wall St.'s Anarchist Roots"); Greenberg("On the Meaning of Occupation"); Lustig et al.("Basta Ya!"); Goodman/Moynihan("Occupy the Media"); Solnit("Civil Society at Ground Zero").

Oct. 11: Negri, Hardt, *Declaration*, 1-108, Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich ("The Making of the American 99% and the Collapse of the Middle Class").

Oct. 18: Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 1-107.

Oct. 25: Scott, *Domination*, 108-227.

Nov. 1: Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, Section 1.

Nov. 8: Harvey, Section 2.

Nov. 15: Graeber, *Debt*, Chaps. 5, 6, 7 (89-211), Chaps. 11,12 (307-391).

Nov. 22: NO CLASS. THANKSGIVING.

Nov. 29: Ross, *Leaderless Revolution*, Preface and Chaps. 4, 7, 8, 9.

Dec. 6: Gitlin, *Occupy Nation*, 1-231.

Dec. 13: SYMPOSIUM, final reflections due.

The title and academic perspective of 'Mic Check': Rhetoric and Resistance In/After "Occupy" fit my composition/rhetoric appointment to the English Ph.D. Program at CUNY. My plan was to use rhetorical theory and analysis to explore Occupy's oral, textual, and spatial discourses. Progressives in a variety of academic fields could of course teach about Occupy within other academic frames.

***I propose that discourse is a material force for the social construction of human subjects. We become human subjects of a certain kind depending on kinds of rhetoric and discourses directed at us.***

On the first night of the seminar, students introduced themselves, their work at the grad school, what they wanted to learn about Occupy, where they teach, etc. None had studied rhetoric per se, so I handed out definitions of rhetoric from mainstream scholars, including brief historical summaries of rhetoric's origins in Greece 2500 years ago. After reviewing this material, I proposed my own framework for "rhetoric and discourse" synthesized from multiple sources (Dewey, Freire, Burke, Foucault, Bourdieu, and contemporary scholars like James Berlin, Sharon Crowley, John Trimbur, and Richard Ohmann). My compact definition reads like this: "Rhetoric involves the production, circulation, reception, and interpretation of meaningful discourse broadly conceived." I offered it as a

statement of functional elements we would apply to specific OWS actions and texts, as well as to actions by various corporate and political authorities in society. To make the four elements concrete, I handed out news stories from media sources to show "production, circulation, reception, and interpretation" in actual situations and specific events.

Next, I proposed a relation between "rhetoric and discourse" along these lines:

Rhetoric enables us to compose discourses because it is a framework of productive rules, techniques, and guides for generating communication for actual settings, real audiences, in-progress tasks, and articulated purposes. Because we communicate in diverse settings to different audiences with various purposes requiring distinct forms of address, we learn to use multiple rhetorics which enable us to generate appropriate discourses for particular circumstances. Discourses, then, are specific acts of meaningful communication. Rhetoric is a toolbox (often tacit, sometimes explicit) we use for composing discourses to fit any setting and purpose. Discourses built from the tools of rhetoric applied to some kind of expressive material (words, paint, song, etc.) become social tools of communication we use to act in, on, with, or against any setting.

Conceptual statements like these are appropriate for a graduate seminar, but even there they require study and discussion of concrete examples, which I foster through frequent email exchanges as well as in class. I hand out many media stories for cognitive work that follow Paulo Freire's call to "read the world and the word" together, the printed or spoken word as they reveal the nature of experience and power relations in society. I also provide concrete illustrations to elaborate the phrase "meaningful discourse broadly conceived": the discourses we can compose from our rhetorics may take any number of forms in various genres and materials: verbal (spoken utterances, speech acts), textual (hand-written, printed, or online), enacted (body language, facial expressions, hand gestures), visual arts (dance, photography, painting, sculpture, architecture), musical (vocal, instrumental, live or broadcast or recorded), performative (mime, spoken word, film and theater which include speech, props, movement, musical effects), spatial (insofar as exterior streets, roads, houses, buildings, parkland, plazas, display ads, etc., and the interior domains of furnished spaces send messages which are pedagogical), and embodied (because our physical bodies "speak" and can be "read" as discourses relating to gender, race, class, body size (vis a vis size, shape, age, wardrobe, tattoos, piercings, accessories, hair, makeup, posture, teeth, etc.).

In short, I invite thought about rhetoric as an historic invention of communication which enables us to compose specific and diverse discourses for actual situations and intentions using the materials at hand (as Aristotle put it). Yes, rhetoric is a civilization-altering tool which is also a means for composing self and society. When we use rhetoric to compose discourses, we are also composing ourselves as agents in the world while also composing the world we are acting in.



I propose that discourse is a material force for the social construction of human subjects. We become human subjects of a certain kind depending on kinds of rhetoric and discourses directed at us (which Bourdieu called “the habitus”) and which we use in the situations of our lives (which Bourdieu called “fields”). Consciousness is built by our serial experience in discourses.

If rhetoric generates discourses with the power to constitute us as certain kinds of human beings who then constitute their society by our choices and actions, we can ask questions important for understanding the Occupy movement: How do Occupy’s discourses differ from those of dominant society? How do Occupy’s signifying practices work from alternate rhetorics? Can the discourses of Occupy re-compose us into different human subjects from those produced by mainstream discourses always already composing us?

A final foundational notion I introduce involves the role of rhetoric and discourse in modern state formation, especially valuable because 2011 saw mass (unarmed, non-violent) resistance confronting the (heavily-armed, violent) state. Around 1500, European nobility began consolidating kingdoms into large states which concentrated enormous wealth and power in the hands of elites who used their assets to dominate at home and to launch global conquest abroad. For this seminar on Occupy, I suggest a central role for rhetoric in defining minimal conditions for successful state formation: A state is a geographical space with a contiguous border which a dominant group can defend from within against competing groups and from without against foreign forces by monopolizing internally the instruments of violence and the instruments of representation.

Rhetoric and discourse (like mass media and formal schooling) belong to the “instruments of representation”; they signify meanings, explain events, inculcate ways of seeing and being, legitimize some values and groups while discrediting others, influencing how we know what is good, what is possible, and what exists (to use Goran Therborn’s framework). Noting how important discursive tools like books, plans, documents, and maps were to European conquest, Jared Diamond called writing the most important invention of the last 3000 years (in *Guns, Germs, and Steel*). To make this function of discourse tangible, I provide—in class and via email—a stream of current news articles about situations in which state and corporate groups as well as oppositional groups use discursive means to their advantage in power struggles. In ‘Mic Check’: Rhetoric and Resistance In/After “Occupy”, we considered how OWS threatened the corporate-state monopoly on instruments of representation, producing and circulating oppositional texts and images which gained mass

audiences for critical politics. Competing suddenly and effectively with official discourses, OWS made egalitarian, anti-finance values loudly credible for 59 days.

With the class in progress as I write, conclusions about the pedagogy are premature. We have been reading books, essays and chapters weekly, for which I ask each student to hand in a journal excerpting a section of the reading and commenting on it. In each class, students nominate pages we should begin with for discussion. Just before this student choice, I hand out from one to five media illustrations of my notions above and those proposed by the authors we are reading. Today, for example, I cut out a review of a new film, *SEAL Team Six*, produced by Harvey Weinstein, one of President Obama’s premier corporate backers. Appearing just before the November election, this patriotic docu-drama positions Obama as a strong commander-in-chief who took out the villain of 9/11 and the bête noir of the world. Using conservative tropes familiar to standard Hollywood war films, Democratic partisans deployed representations usually favored by Republicans.

A few weeks earlier, conservative forces had released an anti-labor feature demonizing teacher unions and public schools, *Won’t Back Down*, a \$20-million film produced by billionaire Philip Anschutz. However, despite glamorous stars (Maggie Gyllenhall, Viola Davis, Holly Hunter), an enormous advertising budget, and an opening in over 2500 theaters nationwide, the film was a dismal flop, unlike the political documentary favoring charter schools two years before, Davis Guggenheim’s *Waiting for Superman*, which became a cause celebre.



OCCUPY BOSTON PHOTO BY FRINDE MAHER

Enormous sums have flowed into the making of such representations from famous billionaires in America—Gates, Broad, Bezos, the Walton family, Bloomberg, the Koch brothers—who want to privatize public schools and budgets, and replace unionized teachers with low-wage recent college graduates (the Teach for America model).

Yet another example of discourse as a battleground involves a federal tax report secretly withdrawn because of Republican objections. The news story (November 2, 2012, *New York Times*) reported that the non-partisan Congressional Research Service found “no correlation between top tax rates and economic growth,” refuting a major claim by Republicans and Romney that high tax rates on the super-rich are bad for recovery and prosperity. This data-based report was forced out of “circulation,” one of the four functional involvements of rhetoric in society, according to my first framework above.

These items are typical of the specific illustrations of theory I constantly search for and hand out in class or post online, posing them as problems, asking students to apply

concepts from our readings or from my initial frameworks to explain them, and ask how particular situations reflect theories or tenets of Occupy.

Lastly, we follow news of Occupy 2.0—what campaigns are activists pursuing now? Calendars of activities reach me weekly via “Inter-Occupy” which I share in class and online. One group of Occupiers is opposing hydraulic fracking in New York State. Another is supporting immigrant bakery workers in New York City. A third is at work on housing issues; a fourth on debt. Students attended a series of events in NYC involving Occupy and reported back to the seminar.

The great questions are: Can this disparate activity come together as it did in 2011 for a consolidated, mass challenge to inequality? What are the means to make this happen? What did Occupy do well and what did it do poorly? What lessons can be drawn from the successes and failures? Such issues preoccupy many, but no one yet has the answer. Those activists who strode into Zuccotti Park Sept 17, 2011 thought they would be quickly evicted by police or thrown out after the first night. They did not expect to stay 59 days and provoke massive interest. Yet, it all came to pass, so much so that OWS was constantly trying to catch up to events it had provoked, as were authorities whose militarized police solved the crisis for them, for now. Obviously, the vast problems of the 99% are still unresolved; the vast theft of national treasure by the 1% continues with the blessing of both major parties. Such conditions of aggressive class war being waged by the rich has been underway for over 30 years, creating the eruptions at Zuccotti and elsewhere. The unrelenting class war (as well as a race war on dark-skinned people, especially young Blacks) will continue to drive opposition forward and if we do our work well, we will learn how to take it farther, deeper, and larger next time. Academic courses can contribute to such learning.



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# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Occupy Education

By Dana Blanchard



THE AUTHOR AT AN OAKLAND RALLY  
IN SUPPORT OF THE CHICAGO TEACHERS UNION

As I sit at my desk and begin to unpack my materials for the new school year, I come across the poster from the November 2nd General Strike in Oakland. The image is of protesters with signs and flags on top of container trucks silhouetted against the setting sun at the port of Oakland. It is an image that has come to represent the high point of the Occupy struggle in the Bay Area and served as inspiration for what has become possible in the struggle against the 1%. It reminds me of how last year at this same time I began my tenth year of teaching in California facing massive cuts to the education budget, overcrowded classes, shortages of materials and the continuation of the global economic crisis. Despite occupation and protests in Wisconsin and the inspiration of the Arab spring uprisings, the war on public education felt very much like one we were losing, sometimes without even raising a real fight. Public employees and teachers were in the crosshairs and were being blamed for an education system over which we have had almost no decision-making power. How the year began, however, was not how it ended. The entire country began to see that together we could make our voices heard. In Berkeley hundreds of teachers came out to occupy camps and protests and participated in not one but two successful port shutdowns that mobilized over 40,000 people in support of human and worker rights against the rule of Wall Street. Teachers, parents and students came out in force on March 1st and March 5th days of action for public education and demanded the rich in California pay their fair share and start putting money back into public services. The 2011-2012 school year brought hope back into the struggle for public education and teacher rights, and I am changed as an organizer by having been a part of it. The biggest ray of hope now is the model of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and their courageous strike to defend their jobs and fight for educational reforms from below. This struggle represents the culmination of our work in the Occupy movement over the past year. The Chicago teachers are demanding systemic change but taking action against the 1% in the spaces where we are most powerful: the workplace and out in the streets of our communities. I am optimistic that this example can be recreated everywhere and that we now have a new paradigm for how to make our schools better, and it is not by blaming and punishing teachers.

Just as the school year was beginning last year, Occupy Oakland was being born. It began on a rainy week in early October and grew into a small, and then much larger, tent city within a few days. At its largest the occupation space included around 180 tents. It became a place where ordinary people in Oakland could come together to have political discussions, plan events, get food, make art and music and have their children play together safely. The General Assemblies were large, larger than I had thought possible for a new movement, with hundreds of people showing up almost every day to have a say in what they wanted to see changed in the world. For a few months the Occupy space was somewhere I stopped by most nights on my way home from work. It was a part of my daily routine, a new commitment in my life. It energized me to see such diversity and gave me hope that

there were so many people out there who were as fed up as I was about how the wealthy corporations were running things. At the General Assemblies there was a small breakout group that focused on education. The group was a mix of teachers, parents and students, and we brainstormed ideas about how to get more people from the education sector and more families involved in the Occupy movement. From this group I saw the potential to unite the community and teachers in real discussion about how to change our schools for the better.

Just as things were beginning to get comfortable and settled in Frank Ogawa Plaza (renamed by Occupy as Oscar Grant Plaza to honor the young black man brutally murdered on the BART train platform), the Oakland police department and pseudo-progressive Mayor Jean Quan decided to raid the encampment. On October 25th police in riot gear brutally shut down the Occupy Oakland space, violently beat protesters and put up barricades around the space to keep people out. The next day thousands of Occupy Oakland supporters, including dozens of public school teachers, showed up to take back the camp. The ill-timed raid also led to massive general support for the General Strike already being planned for November 2nd. General Strike planning meetings had close to 1,000 people who came together in the newly reclaimed Oscar Grant plaza. We decided to take a stand against police repression and in solidarity with the union and nonunion struggles at the Port of Oakland, a space that generates over \$2 million a day in revenue for big corporations while doing little to support the poor West Oakland community around it. The November 2nd General Strike and march to the port was one of the most amazing experiences of my life. To see over 40,000 people crossing the bridge from West Oakland to the port terminals with the sunset silhouetting their banners and flags was unlike anything I had ever experienced. The image on my office wall reminds me daily of how incredible it was to participate in something that brought the people of Oakland together to say "we want and deserve more."

***The biggest ray of hope now is the model of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and their courageous strike to defend their jobs and fight for educational reforms from below.***

Sadly, the police and the city government could not allow something like Occupy Oakland to exist on their front steps. They certainly could not let the November 2nd day of mass protest be seen as the way forward for our new movement. On November 14th the camp was raided once again, and this time the police put up impenetrable barricades and created a muddy lawn that made it impossible for protesters to reclaim the space. This could have been the end of the social experiment, but instead it helped to fuel another amazing day of protest, the December 12th west coast port shutdown. The port shutdown was organized in support of the ILWU Local 21 workers in Longview, Washington, who were fighting

against their union being busted by the newly built Electric Grain Terminal (EGT) financed by huge transnational corporations like Bunge International. The port shutdown had three demands: support for Longview workers, stopping police raids of Occupy encampments and solidarity with the port truck drivers' campaign to be unionized and have decent working conditions. Though the Occupy encampment was gone, General Assemblies and port shutdown planning meetings continued to happen in the cold damp nights at Oscar Grant Plaza. Hundreds of people came together to not only shut down the port of Oakland but also to cause disruptions simultaneously at ports up and down the west coast. When we met up on December 12th at the crack of dawn, it was inspiring to see so many people out to show solidarity with not only the Occupy movement but also the struggle of union and nonunion workers at the ports and beyond. As someone who had been part of the planning from the beginning, it was incredible to see something that was just an idea a few weeks before become an organized day of action. We did not know then that this would be the last big moment in Occupy Oakland and that political debates about confronting the police directly, organizing mass protests versus small adventurist activities and waning support from the general community in Oakland would tear apart the movement. The lessons learned, however, about the possibilities of building a mass movement against corporate greed and how to connect up different struggles against the 1% were able to be transferred into different kinds of organizing.

Out of the ashes of Occupy Oakland rose up occupations on several college campuses, like the University of California Berkeley and the Community College of San Francisco. These campus occupations came about at the same time that community occupations were being shut down and raided. The connection between the fight for public education and the Occupy movement gave rise to groups like Occupy Education in Northern California. This group brought together new forces in organizing against the massive cuts to education in our state. For the first time public school teachers from early childhood to higher education organized actions with students, families and the community. The Occupy Education meetings were a new space for us to come together and talk about how not only to save public education from budget cuts but also to share our vision for an education system that truly fulfills our ideas about what and how people should learn. The Occupy Education General Assemblies have been meeting since December 2011. The group consists of 25-100 educational activists from all sectors of education and has organized both local actions and the statewide occupation in Sacramento on March 5th. We bring different perspectives to the struggle, but we are united in trying to make change. Instead of allowing the 1% to pit our different sectors of education against one another and make us fight over the crumbs of the budget, this group has built a united struggle that sees our interests in all levels of public education as fundamentally the same: fully funded public schools for all. Our Occupy Education mission statement is grounded not only in the reality that we are in the fight of our lives to save public education but also in speaking to the idea that teachers, students and families in

California deserve much more from this system. As teachers it is critical that we engage in the discussion of what kind of education we want for our students. In the era of Common Core State Standards that set a high bar for what every student should be able to do when they leave 12th grade, we need to fight for the materials and support to make this a reality. In the Occupy Education space we have been able to engage in conversations as educators and students about what a truly liberated educational experience would look like for K-12 and higher education. Bringing in our students' cultural experiences, supporting critical thinking and letting students feel empowered in their education are goals for our long-term movement. This experience has taught me one of the key lessons of the Occupy Movement: we need to know who are our allies and who are our enemies (corporations concerned only with profit, sometimes the Democratic party) in order to organize and win reforms that will help our public schools not only survive but also thrive. Another key lesson in this work and why I believe the Occupy Movement held such an appeal for educators is the idea that what we do does matter. Many of us became teachers to make a difference in the world and then promptly became overwhelmed by the bureaucracy of public education, the stress of yearly layoffs and the heartache of seeing our students and families struggling every day against poverty and racism in our society. We are so used to accepting the status quo and trying to carve out a small piece in the vast universe of oppression where our students can feel safe and respected. What we teach and how we teach matters, but what we do beyond the classroom matters too.



OAKLAND SUNSET DURING PROTESTS

The Occupy Education work has definitely changed who I am as a teacher. At one of our meetings people were discussing the book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire. The teachers and students in the room gave examples of lessons where instead of the teacher "imparting" knowledge to their students, the teachers and students constructed knowledge together in a shared learning experience. In my own classroom practice this has been reflected in a change in how I design my lessons. Every lesson now starts with a student-friendly learning objective that begins with the statement, "I will be able to . . . ." This helps focus learning in my classroom on what

students will be able to do by the end of the lesson and allows them to see the purpose of our work together. This framework compels me to ensure that my students are the center of my classroom, not the teacher, and that my goal is to facilitate learning, not tell them what to do. I am constantly evolving as a teacher; the past year has helped me bring new thinking into my work with students and other teachers as well as be an activist in campaigns beyond the classroom walls.

***This experience has taught me one of the key lessons of the Occupy Movement: we need to know who are our allies and who are our enemies (corporations concerned only with profit, sometimes the Democratic party) in order to organize and win reforms that will help our public schools not only survive but also thrive.***

One of the major campaigns of Occupy Education was around the California Millionaires' Tax initiative, a proposition that was slated to be on the November ballot that would raise money for public education and social services by taxing people making more than \$1 million in income. This was an incredibly popular initiative organized with grassroots groups like Occupy Education and the backing of my union, the California Federation of Teachers (CFT), who helped to get the ballot measure drafted in the first place. Unfortunately, the grassroots effort was not enough to keep some leaders in the union and other backers from pulling the plug on the campaign in March 2012. I learned several lessons as an organizer from this work. The first was that it is possible to link up the fight against budget cuts with the analysis that we need to tax the rich more in our state. This idea has mass appeal and builds on the ideas that began the Occupy movement nationally. The second lesson I learned was that we still have a lot of work to do in the union movement to break from the pulls of the Democratic Party. Governor Jerry Brown put a gun to our heads and said we had to get behind his tax plan or else, and our union leaders politely folded up shop and did what he asked. I think this was a critical mistake and a betrayal of those who worked so hard around the Millionaires' Tax. Within Occupy Education the defeat of the Millionaires' Tax caused some irreparable fissures in the movement.

Since mid-March the Occupy Education group has struggled to have large General Assemblies with a specific focus, that is until the Chicago Teachers' Union fight came on the scene in late spring. In June we had a general assembly of Occupy Education that was focused on our work in education unions. Members of teachers' unions, student organizers and community activists came together to get updates on local union struggles and plan solidarity actions for the fall. The main focuses of the meeting were the potential strike of the California Faculty Association (CFA) at the Cal State University system statewide, the contract battle of the San Francisco Teachers' Union and

the potential strike of the Chicago Teachers' Union. The meeting brought forward many ideas about how to broaden out the struggle in a particular union to the community at large. Having mass rallies in solidarity with teachers and bolstering CFA picket lines had a lot of support. As is often the case the best laid plans did not come to fruition. The CFA accepted a contract over the summer that headed off their potential strike. Unfortunately, the San Francisco teachers' union also accepted a contract laden with concessions and linked explicitly to funding from the Proposition 30 tax initiative put forward by Governor Jerry Brown after he effectively crushed the Millionaires' Tax initiative.

Despite these setbacks after our June organizing meeting, the winter of 2012 is still shaping up to be another significant year in the struggle for public education. Our Occupy Education work and my local union, Berkeley Federation of Teachers, decided to focus on building a solidarity campaign to support the CTU because it is the most significant struggle in public education we have seen in a long time. By winning the strike in Chicago, CTU showed that we can bring an energetic fight back into our own urban school districts, and if they can beat back the attack in Obama's hometown, we can certainly build up our own confidence to break with the stranglehold of the Democrats in our own unions.

The struggle of the Chicago Teachers' Union highlights the potential militancy that the Occupy struggles have injected into teacher union work. In Chicago the CTU has been organizing in the community to link social justice issues like the inequality in school funding and racism to the work of the union in demanding decent working conditions for teachers. At the center of their campaign has been attacking the "local 1%" in Chicago and Mayor Rahm Emanuel's agenda for privatization that involves giving control of schools in the district to private charters while at the same time starving schools of their funding in communities of color. It was crucial that teachers in the Bay Area and around the country supported the struggle in Chicago because it represented the first serious challenge from our unions against government attack in a large urban school district. Locally we were able to hold rallies in support of Chicago teachers, pass resolutions, send solidarity funds and bring out CTU Vice President Jesse Sharkey to Berkeley to speak to union activists in November about how they won and how we can use these lessons in our own struggles. Teachers spontaneously wore red shirts in all of our schools and sent in photos and solidarity greetings from Berkeley teachers to our brothers and sisters on the picket lines in Chicago. Red has officially become the color of struggle again. It was amazing to see visual proof of local teachers identifying with striking teachers half a country away.

In my union, Berkeley Federation of Teachers, we are putting together materials that paint a vision for what we as teachers and the Berkeley community want to see from our public schools. In Chicago the teachers wrote a similar piece called "The Schools Chicago Students Deserve." It is clear that the right wing has dominated the dialogue of school reform for too long, and it is time that those of us in the classroom start to make our voices heard. We have

countless ideas born from a year of struggle in our community, of building alliances with other entities who share our demand that education is a right, not a privilege, and should be fully funded at all levels. BFT hosted an incredibly successful meeting featuring CTU Vice President Jesse Sharkey who came and spoke to teachers, students and families at one of our middle schools. He spoke earnestly about the need to have clear, political demands and then to be able to back them up by doing the hard work of organizing at every school site and mobilizing all members for action. The conversation with Jesse has helped to shape our own contract campaign in Berkeley and inspired us in the fight for the new money that Proposition 30 will be bringing into our district. One key message from Jesse that we often talk about is we are poised in a crucial moment in the labor movement in general and in the public sector unions in particular where if we continue to try to fight in the old way, we will be defeated. The ruling class is coming for our heads, they literally want a world without teachers' unions, and we have to fight back as if we are fighting for our lives. The past few weeks have seen an uptick in labor struggles in the Bay Area and beyond. WalMart workers, beginning in Chicago and explicitly linked with the teachers' strike, are bravely rising up around the country. Local public sector unions have had actions to demand fair contracts, in City Hall and other public spaces, embarrassing the politicians who pretend to support them. At several local hospitals the nurses who are part of the California Nurses Association have had a series of one-day strikes and media campaigns linking Wall Street greed and the decline of patient services at private hospitals. It looks to be an active year in the Bay Area labor movement. I hope that the lessons of Chicago continue to resonate throughout all these struggles.

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Looking around my desk as the boxes have finally been emptied, the pencils sharpened and the space primed for another school year to begin, I am hopeful that this will be another season of struggle and change. The past year has been a rollercoaster of activism, showing both the potential and weaknesses of our side against the ravages of the 1%. The high points were Occupy Oakland's mass protests, the promise of grassroots initiatives like the Millionaires' Tax, the new organizing space that brings

together new young faces and veterans in one room and the connections being forged between groups of oppressed and exploited people. The movement has certainly been hampered by its own political immaturity and the fact it is no longer visible in camps around the country, but this does not mean its legacy has been destroyed. It makes me think of a genie that has been let out of a bottle; once released it can never be forced to go back inside. Working people around the country have been let out and seen a glimpse of what we can do together. We may not be in visible camps any more, but we are in classrooms and schools and workplaces, and we will continue to organize. The biggest change I have seen is the renewal of our educational optimism, the idea that our lived reality, which has been so hard for a long time, is not what we have to settle for anymore. We have a lot of work ahead of us to fix the problems in public education and the inequalities in our country, but some sparks have been lit. As August Spies said in his final words before being executed in 1886 for being an anarchist union organizer, "Here you will tread upon a spark, but there, and there, and behind you and in front of you, and everywhere, flames will blaze up. It is a subterranean fire. You cannot put it out. The ground is on fire upon which you stand." I say let us fan the flames and keep fueling the people's occupation of public education.



OCCUPY OAKLAND SUPPORTING CHICAGO TEACHERS' STRIKE



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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## Teaching Notes

**Not a Self-Help Class: On Teaching Michael Pollan's *In Defense of Food:***

**An Eater's Manifesto**

by Andrew Tonkovich

For two years I have taught a required lower-division research-writing Composition course at the University of California at Irvine officially titled How America Eats. Because the name suggests a sadly passive-sounding "Three Blind Mice" ("See how they run . . ."), I renamed it Food Politics in an effort to provoke engagement with the most important of three "literacies" I teach in this basic, if predictably remedial, writing course: standard written academic American English, research methods, and civic literacy. The core text is activist-foodie Michael Pollan's *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*, its subtitle good for discussion of the ostensible purpose of this bestselling nonfiction take-apart of the so-called Western diet and, yes, a clear, loud call to resist the industrialized food production system: "To reclaim . . . control over one's food, to take it back from industry and science."

Despite my clumsy efforts to further politicize what seems obviously political, many students misunderstand the "manifesto" part of Pollan's title. So, on the first day of class we consider why food might need "defending" at all. Of course I ask what other famous books suggest a manifesto, a word we define. By way of coaxing, I ask about other books which changed public policy and, yes, *The Jungle* comes up.

*In Defense* is accessible, fun, and a great model for research essays on related issues: genetically modified food labeling, obesity, consumer awareness, and government subsidies. The challenge is not persuading first-year writers to accept Pollan's anti-corporate thesis or introducing consumer advocacy groups such as The Center for Science in the Public Interest. Students seem to appreciate noncorporate media like National Public Radio's "Science Friday" and even Pacifica's more radical "Democracy Now!" And, thankfully, I have never had to argue with even one apologist for big business or corporate

capitalism despite self-described "conservative" future MBAs and entrepreneurs who have enrolled. No, my only struggle is getting students to accept that Pollan seeks to change society and not just persuade them personally to eat right or be more health-conscious consumers; to understand that inherent in a manifesto involving "one's food" is the assumption that "one" means everybody; and to see that the author means to encourage *collective* citizen action.

They do not know what to do with the analyses that they have come to through powerful research and even advocacy of legislative or policy positions. An otherwise successful thesis arguing for passage of, say, a bill increasing funding for food safety inspection—an "A" paper, surely—arrives frustratingly shy of a larger critique, with an embarrassing conclusion about how important it is for "all Americans" to "do our part," or else personally pledging—I kid you not—to stop eating junk food.

All this despite my insistence that *In Defense* is absolutely not a diet or self-help book, and my repeated haranguing that Pollan's defense is not only of food, but of democracy. Weeks of researching positions, legislative histories, proposed bills, lobbying by interest groups and advocacy organizations and grassroots activists; of learning about the appropriations process and the work of the odious Chamber of Commerce; and still most students cannot, it seems—how to say this?—get over themselves as only individual consumers, and find a way to enter the larger community of public policy makers, thinkers, activists.

Naturally, I try personal writing, with an assignment requiring that third variety of literacy: the language and practice of civic engagement. Students write a pretend letter on their position to a local PTA, to the university



newspaper, or as a commentary for NPR's "All Things Considered." Of course, this requires studying these rhetorical models: reading an actual PTA newsletter or the school paper, listening to public radio. Yet their efforts are often still shy of making that connection I insist on between the "academic" rhetorical situation and the real world.

So I try one final assignment. Share your draft, I tell them, including its tentative "big conclusion," with at least three people unconnected to the university. Write a short cover letter explaining why you chose them, what you'd like them to understand about the essay's purpose, and, most important, how you'd like them to respond—thinking, acting, valuing your argument.

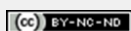
Of course, this final cover letter assignment often turns out to be the best writing students do, and frequently produces a broader argument (about motives, power, our flawed representative democracy) not only on behalf of an essay in a Composition class, but about the purpose of research, advocacy, and civic engagement.

### Call for Teaching Notes for *Radical Teacher*

Is there a book, film, essay, poem, or story that you've found particularly useful in the classroom and want to share with other *Radical Teacher* readers? We are especially interested in Teaching Notes on new materials not widely known, but we would also like to hear about newly rediscovered older works, as well as new ways of teaching familiar ones. Or has something challenging, encouraging, or frustrating happened in class? If you think our readers can learn from your experience -- whether you handled things well, handled them badly, or are still trying to decide -- we'd like to hear about it.

Contributions should run about 500 words. If you'd like to see some sample Teaching Notes, check out "Recent Issues" on our web site.

Please send a hard copy of your Note to Bob Rosen, Department of English, William Paterson University, 300 Pompton Road, Wayne, New Jersey 07470 -- and also an e-mail, with the header "Teaching Note," to: [bobrosen@radicalteacher.org](mailto:bobrosen@radicalteacher.org)



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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News for Educational Workers



PHOTO BY FRINDE MAHER

## The Chicago Teachers' Strike

Even though the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) strike lasted only seven days in September of 2012, what it accomplished and what was written about it will last much longer. Enrolling about 400,000 students, with about 22,000 school workers, Chicago is the third largest district in the country. For a history of what led up to the strike, see *Labornotes*, September 10, 2012.

The press and the public took somewhat different sides on the strike. The national media was "worried that children's education was being imperiled by the entitled members of a public employee union" (*In These Times*, November 2012). The majority of Chicago parents, however, supported the strike and approved of the fair contract fight. In a poll released by an Illinois political report, 66 percent of parents with children in public schools, and 55.5 percent of Chicagoans overall, approved the strike (*American Prospect*, September 14, 2012 and *Labornotes*, November 12, 2012). Even *al Jazeera* (September 1, 2002) wrote that "Chicago public school teachers managed to score a major victory over Rahm Emanuel, Chicago's business-oriented mayor."

With Department of Education's Arne Duncan coming from Chicago and Mayor Rahm Emanuel going to Chicago, the teachers' strike is seen as central to the challenge against national educational reform (Reuters, September 10, 2012). After ten years of top-down "reform" the Chicago teachers showed the power of collective action by school workers and their supporters. The successes of the strike were seen as a feather in the cap of participatory democracy and a sting to a 1% mayor ([www.nationofchange.org](http://www.nationofchange.org), September 25, 2012 and [www.alternet.org](http://www.alternet.org), September 17, 2012).

The hero of the strike was CTU President Karen Lewis, who "held her ground against op-eds by billionaires, liberal media scrutiny and education 'reform' establishment" and even had the nerve to call Rahm Emanuel a "bully" and a "liar" (*In These Times*, November 2012). In the end, the new CTU contract includes: a 3% pay increase the first year, with a 2% increase each following year; phasing out "merit pay"; hiring 600 teachers in the areas of art, music, languages; having only 30% of student test scores factored into teacher evaluations; having laid-off teachers receive hiring priority for new teacher openings.

## International Education Struggles

Sri Lanka shut down 13 of its 15 state-funded universities during the summer of 2012 after the faculty and students went on strike in early July. The strikers want additional funding for education, higher salaries for faculty, and decreased political interference in campus life from the government (TruthDive, August 23, 2012 and BBC News, August 22, 2012).

"Teachers—probably because a majority of them are women—are despised in this country" begins "Schooling in

a Spot of Bother" (*In These Times*, September 2012), describing the state of London comprehensive schools. Just when the number of uneducated, unemployed, and untrained young people has increased by 8 percent in a year, the Secretary of State for Education is planning on introducing still harder examinations with failure rates that would increase an already serious educational divide.

Two Chilean student movement leaders, Camila Vallejo and Noam Titelman, were awarded the Letelier-Moffitt Human Rights Award for their leadership in Chile's massive citizen democracy movement of 2011-2012, the largest protests in Chile since the Pinochet opposition a generation earlier. For over a year, the student movement rallied hundreds of thousands to demand affordable university education and deeper structural changes in Chile, which has the highest per capita income in the region but also the most unequal distributions of wealth (Democracy Now, October 16, 2012).

During a wave of student mobilization in Quebec, Canada, through the spring and summer of 2012, the students won a major victory against the Parti Quebecois government. The tuition hike was cancelled and the anti-protest law that curbed basic freedoms of expression and assembly was repealed. For celebratory articles on this significant victory, see *The Toronto Star*, September 24, 2012; Socialist Project, September 24, 2012; and *Truthout*, September 28, 2012.

The Center for Constitutional Rights and other civil rights groups submitted a letter to the University of California (UC) President advising him of the need to protect pro-Palestinian speech on campus. This lengthy and scholarly letter (35 footnotes) presses the UC President "to consider the chilling effect of efforts to target Arab, Muslim and other students advocating for Palestinian rights on UC campuses." To read this letter, go to *Jadaliyya Reports* of December 4, 2012.

## Student Debt

The editors of the *Wall Street Journal* (a Rupert Murdoch-owned paper) railed against the ongoing expansion of Pell Grants, even with more than \$1 trillion of U.S. student debt, nine out of ten college graduates with student debt, and over one quarter of the repayments on these loans past due. *DOLLARS & SENSE* (September/October, 2012) explains why federal Pell Grants should be expanded to help solve the student debt crisis.

"Escalating Delinquency Rates Make Student Loans Look Like the New Subprime" ([www.truth-out.org](http://www.truth-out.org), December 5, 2012) emphasizes that the amount of student debt is undermining college graduates' abilities to consume and contribute to the economy.

94% of recent graduates borrow to help pay for their educations, and the average debt level is \$23,000 per graduate, contributing to the decline in such things as home ownership because student debtors cannot afford mortgage loans.

And enter the debt collection industry. With about 5.9 million student debtors behind in their payments, the Department of Education last year paid more than \$1.4 trillion to collection agencies to hunt down defaulters ([www.truth-out.org](http://www.truth-out.org), September 10, 2012).

## Charter Schools

Once again, studies show that charter schools do not outperform unionized schools (Chicago Reader, October 3, 2012). Actually, high performing charter schools may simply lie about their scores. As Campaign for America's Future (August 30, 2012) says, "One problem with radical test score gains, as many researchers have noted, is that miraculous improvements in test scores over short periods of time are more often the result of cheating, student skimming, or other test manipulation."

## For-Profit Education

A two-year investigation into for-profit colleges confirmed that the rapidly growing industry is focused more on profits than on its students. For-profits take in about 10 to 12 percent of higher education students who, however, have about a 50 percent failure rate. Last year, for-profits took in \$32 billion in taxpayers' money in the form of federal grants to students. At the same time, for-profit college CEO's are known to take home as much as \$40 million dollars a year (*The Nation*, September 24, 2012). One way to make such profit is online education which, like for-profit colleges in general, have abysmal failure rates. For more, see the weekly newsletter Too Much (September 17, 2012).

## Unions and Education

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) has begun a campaign to organize the adjunct faculty at Georgetown University after successfully organizing several other adjunct faculties in the Washington DC area. The goal is to organize so many colleges in and around the nation's capital that "all colleges in the region will feel a need to improve the pay, benefits, and job security of adjunct instructors" (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 2, 2012).

Campus workers also are in need of unionization. Security guards, cleaning crews, gardeners, janitors, food-service personnel—over 700,000 of them at American colleges do not earn a living wage to provide a minimally decent standard of living for their families (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 10, 2012).

Director General Guy Ryder of The International Labor Organization (ILO) is calling for urgent action to make teaching an attractive career. Ryder wants "to promote sound social dialogue, improve the status of teachers and come up with policies and strategies that attract and motivate people to become teachers." To read a transcript of his statement, go to [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org).

## Race

Today our schools remain perhaps even more segregated than they were before *Brown v. Board of Education*. A Federal loophole involving teacher salaries accounts for lower spending on students of color, thus shortchanging them compared to their white peers (Center for American Progress, August 22, 2012).

For a history of the battle for Black Studies, and a review of Martha Biondi's book on this history, *The Black Revolution on Campus*, see *In These Times*, October, 2012).

## CUNY Pathways

The City University of New York (CUNY) is fighting back against the CUNY Pathways program which is an austerity measure which both cheats the students and violates faculty governance rights. "Scheduled to begin with students entering CUNY in the fall of 2013, Pathways is a university-wide revamp of CUNY's general education curriculum—a policy governing the number and types of classes all students must complete. It was enacted by the CUNY Board of Trustees with the supposed purpose of smoothing transfer between CUNY colleges. The real agenda behind Pathways is about spending less per student and graduating more students in a shorter time at lower cost. Thousands of CUNY faculty oppose Pathways because it diminishes the quality of a CUNY education and underestimates CUNY students. Instead of addressing faculty concerns about Pathways, the administration is barreling ahead, threatening departments that do not comply with reprisals, and doing CUNY students a great disservice" (Taken from the Professional Staff Congress union website, [www.psc-cuny.org](http://www.psc-cuny.org)).

## Resources

For a film project featuring NYC schools pursuing alternatives to the school-prison pipeline, go to <http://www.indiegogo.com/GrowingFairness>.

*Out at Work*, the award-winning documentary about LGBT workplace discrimination, remains the only existing documentary about this critical topic. For purchasing and streaming possibilities, contact [kanderso@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:kanderso@hunter.cuny.edu).

Another classic LGBT documentary, *JUGGLING GENDER: Politics, Sex and Identity*, including the new video *STILL JUGGLING*, is now available on DVD. The two videos, a portrait of Jennifer Miller, a lesbian performer who lives her life with a full beard, explore the fluidity of gender and raise important questions about the construction of sexual and gender identity. For purchase and cost information, contact [tamigold@mindspring.com](mailto:tamigold@mindspring.com).

On the website [www.sharemylesson.com](http://www.sharemylesson.com), teachers put lesson plans and other resources (more than 200,000 of them to date).

Bullfrog Films has produced yet another of its excellent videos for classroom use. *You've Been Trumped* (director Anthony Baxter, 95 minutes) captures the cultural chasm

between Donald Trump as he buys up for golf courses hundreds of acres of wilderness on the northeast coast of Scotland and the local Scots who fight against the purchase of the unique landscape that has been the backdrop of their lives. For purchase or rental information, see [www.bullfrogfilms.com](http://www.bullfrogfilms.com).

Is there a news item, call for papers, upcoming conference, resource, teaching tool, or other information

related to progressive education that you would like to share with other Radical Teacher readers? Conference announcements and calls for papers should be at least six months ahead of date. Items, which will be used as found appropriate by *Radical Teacher*, cannot be returned. Send hard copy to Leonard Vogt, Department of English, LaGuardia Community College (CUNY), 31-10 Thomson Avenue, Long Island City, New York 11101—or email items to [lvogt@nyc.rr.com](mailto:lvogt@nyc.rr.com).



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# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Contributors' Notes

**Pam Annas** is Associate Dean and Professor of English at University of Massachusetts Boston; she has taught courses in working-class literature, modern and contemporary poetry, science fiction, and feminist approaches to teaching writing. Her books include *A Disturbance in Mirrors: the Poetry of Sylvia Plath*, the textbook *Literature and Society* (with Robert Rosen), and a poetry chapbook, *Mud Season* (Červená Barva Press). Her poems have appeared in *Pemmican*, *Istanbul Literary Review*, and *Hunger and Thirst*, among other journals and anthologies.

**Dana Blanchard** has been a public school teacher for 11 years and currently teaches in the Berkeley Unified School District. She is an active organizer with the Berkeley Federation of Teachers.

**Cathy Borck** is a doctoral candidate in the Sociology program at the City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center (GC). Based on two years of ethnographic fieldwork, her dissertation explores pedagogical strategies used in alternative learning environments to re-engage high school dropouts from poor, minority communities in New York City.

**Jackie DiSalvo** is an activist working with the Occupy Wall St. Labor Committee & Occupy Sandy and is a delegate to the NYC Central Labor Committee from the Professional Staff Congress (CUNY Union). She is Professor of English Emerita at Baruch College and the Graduate Center, CUNY. Currently, she is an adjunct at Baruch College.

**Joseph Entin** teaches at Brooklyn College (CUNY), where he worked with activist students and colleagues during and after Occupy Wall Street.

**Jesse Goldstein** is a doctoral candidate in the Sociology program at the CUNY GC. His work focuses on the history of capitalist socio-spatial relations, specifically concerning waste—from agricultural wastelands to disposable consumer products to current green invectives not to waste the planet that we all inhabit. He is also an artist.

**Steve McFarland** is a PhD candidate in Geography in the Department of Earth and Environmental Science of the CUNY Graduate Center, working on his dissertation on union halls in the mid-20<sup>th</sup>-Century U.S. labor movement.

**Richard Ohmann** is the celebrated, pre-posthumous, proletarian deconstructionist.

**Susan O'Malley** is on the editorial board of *Radical Teacher*. She recently retired after 36 years of teaching at The City University of New York (English, Kingsborough Community College, and Liberal Studies, Graduate Center). Currently, she is vice-chair of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women/NY (UN).

**Joe Ramsey** is a writer, educator, and activist who resides in Somerville, Massachusetts. He is an editor of *The Boston Occupier* ([www.bostonoccupier.com](http://www.bostonoccupier.com)) as well as of *Cultural Logic: an Electronic Journal of Marxist Theory and Practice* (<http://clogic.eserver.org>). He welcomes comments at [jgramsey@gmail.com](mailto:jgramsey@gmail.com).

**Julieta Salgado** is a student and artist at Brooklyn College and works with Organization for a Free Society. She is passionate about social justice issues of every variety, but especially about undocumented rights, queer liberation and resistance to war and capitalist patriarchy.

**Ira Shor** teaches at the College of Staten Island and the City University of New York Graduate Center. He tests critical pedagogy in his classroom and has written books and articles about it. Since 2011, he has joined and followed Occupy.

**Alyson Spurgas** is a doctoral candidate in the Sociology program at the CUNY Graduate Center. Her dissertation research explores the production of femininity via neuroimaging, evolutionary psychology, and cognitive behavioral therapeutic technologies which are used to diagnose and treat low or absent sexual desire in women.

**Andrew Tonkovich** teaches Composition at the University of California, Irvine where he is President of the union representing Lecturers and Librarians, edits the *Santa Monica Review*, and hosts a weekly literary arts program on Pacifica Radio KPFK (90.7 FM) in Los Angeles.

## Poets

**Joan Annsfire** is a poet, writer, blogger, retired librarian and activist for social change. Her work has appeared in numerous anthologies, literary journals and on web sites. She lives in Berkeley California and blogs as lavenderjoan. Her poem "Strike Day in Oakland" first appeared in the online anthology *99 Poems for the 99 Percent*.

**Christopher Bernard** is author of the novel *A Spy in the Ruins*. He has published poems, fiction and essays in many periodicals and anthologies in the United States and England. He is also a playwright, founder of the webzine *Caveat Lector*, and a regular contributor to *Synchronized Chaos International Magazine*. His poem "Occupy Your Mind" first appeared in the online *Occupy Wall Street Poetry Anthology*.

**Peter Neil Carroll** is the author of *A Child Turns Back to Wave: Poetry of Lost Places* and *Keeping Time: Memory, Nostalgia and the Art of History*. His poem "Wall Street Occupied" first appeared in the online *Occupy Wall Street Poetry Anthology*.

**Billy Clem**, a radically feminist and disabled gay man, teaches writing, multicultural literatures, and Women's Studies at Waubensee Community College, Sugar Grove, IL. His poem "Even Here" first appeared in *Liberty's Vigil, the Occupy Anthology*.

**Eric Evans** is a writer from Rochester, New York. He runs Ink Publications and is the editor of *The Bond Street Review*. His poem, "The Last Resort of Curfew and Arrest" first appeared in *Liberty's Vigil, The Occupy Anthology*.

**Alicia Hoffman** lives, writes and teaches in Rochester, New York. Recently, her poems have appeared in *Tar River Poetry, A-Minor Magazine, Boston Literary Magazine, Redactions, Brusque*, and elsewhere. She is currently pursuing her MFA in Poetry at the Rainier Writing Workshop at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington. Her poem "Bread and Circuses" first appeared in *Liberty's Vigil, The Occupy Anthology*.

**Karen Lillis** is the author of four books of fiction, most recently "Watch the Doors as They Close" (Spuyten Duyvil Novella Series, 2012). Currently at work on a bookstore memoir called "Bagging the Beats at Midnight," she is an indie bookstore advocate, a small press blogger, and a freelance writer. She thinks the camps were the beginning, not the end, of the Occupy movement. Find her at <http://karenslibraryblog.blogspot.com>. Poems #17 and #43 from her series "Notes from Occupied America" first appeared in the online *Occupy Wall Street Poetry Anthology*.

**Catherine McGuire** has had over 275 poems published in venues such as: *Avocet, FutureCycle, Green Fuse, New Verse News, Nibble, Portland Lights Anthology* and *Tapjoe*. Her chapbook, *Palimpsests*, was published by Uttered Chaos in 2011. With her new garden collection, *Glimpses of a Garden*, (<http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/catherinemcguire>) she has three self-published chapbooks. Her website is [www.cathymcguire.com](http://www.cathymcguire.com). Her poem "Elvis

Occupies" first appeared in *Liberty's Vigil, The Occupy Anthology*.

**Fred Marchant** is the author of four books of poetry, the most recent of which is *The Looking House* (Graywolf Press). His first book, *Tipping Point*, won the 1993 Washington Prize from The Word Works and a twentieth anniversary second edition will be published in 2013. He has co-translated (with Nguyen Ba Chung) *From a Corner of My Yard*, by Tran Dang Khoa, and has edited *Another World Instead: The Early Poems of William Stafford, 1937-1947*. He is a Professor of English, Director of the Creative Writing Program, and founding director of the Poetry Center at Suffolk University in Boston. His poem, "Beit Sahur" first appeared in the online anthology *99 Poems for the 99 Percent*.

**Hilton Obenzinger** writes poetry, fiction, criticism and history. His most recent book is the autobiographical novel *Busy Dying*. He teaches writing and American Studies at Stanford. His poem "These Are Our Weapons" first appeared in the online *Occupy Wall Street Poetry Anthology*. Sections of the poem appear in *Love Rise Up: An Anthology: Poems of Social Justice, Protest and Hope*.

**Najaya Royal** is a sophomore at Benjamin Banneker Academy For Community Development in Brooklyn, New York. She fell in love with poetry at the age of seven and has been writing and performing her work since. Najaya has been published in seven books, had two poems set to opera music, and one performed at Carnegie Hall. With plans to become a music journalist, Najaya is in her second year of the writing mentoring program at Girls Write Now. New York's first and only nonprofit with a writing and mentoring model exclusively for girls, Girls Write Now has been distinguished by the President's Committee on the Arts & the Humanities as one of the nation's top 15 after school arts and culture programs. Her poem "99%" first appeared in the online *Occupy Wall Street Poetry Anthology*.

**Alice Weiss'** poems have been published in *Ibbetson Street 31, Liberty's Vigil, The Occupy Anthology, Wilderness House Literary Review, The Muddy River Poetry Review*, and *Jewish Currents* and recently she has had a poem accepted for publication by the *Alaska Quarterly Review* and *Soul-Lit*. She has been featured at the Provincetown Poetry Festival, and until 2011 she was the Poet-in-Residence at Am HaYam, the Cape Cod Chavurah. She received an MFA from New England College in 2010. Prior to that time she was a civil rights attorney and public defender in New Orleans, Louisiana. Her poem, "Dewey Square" first appeared in *Liberty's Vigil, the Occupy Anthology*.

Born and raised in Astoria, Queens, **Mickey Z.** is probably the only person on the planet to have appeared in both a political book with Noam Chomsky and a karate flick with Billy Blanks. Armed only with a high school diploma, Mickey is the author of eleven books and has spoken and lectured in venues ranging from MIT to ABC No Rio, from Yale University to Occupy University. His poem "haiku flock" first appeared in the online *Occupy Wall Street Poetry Anthology*



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