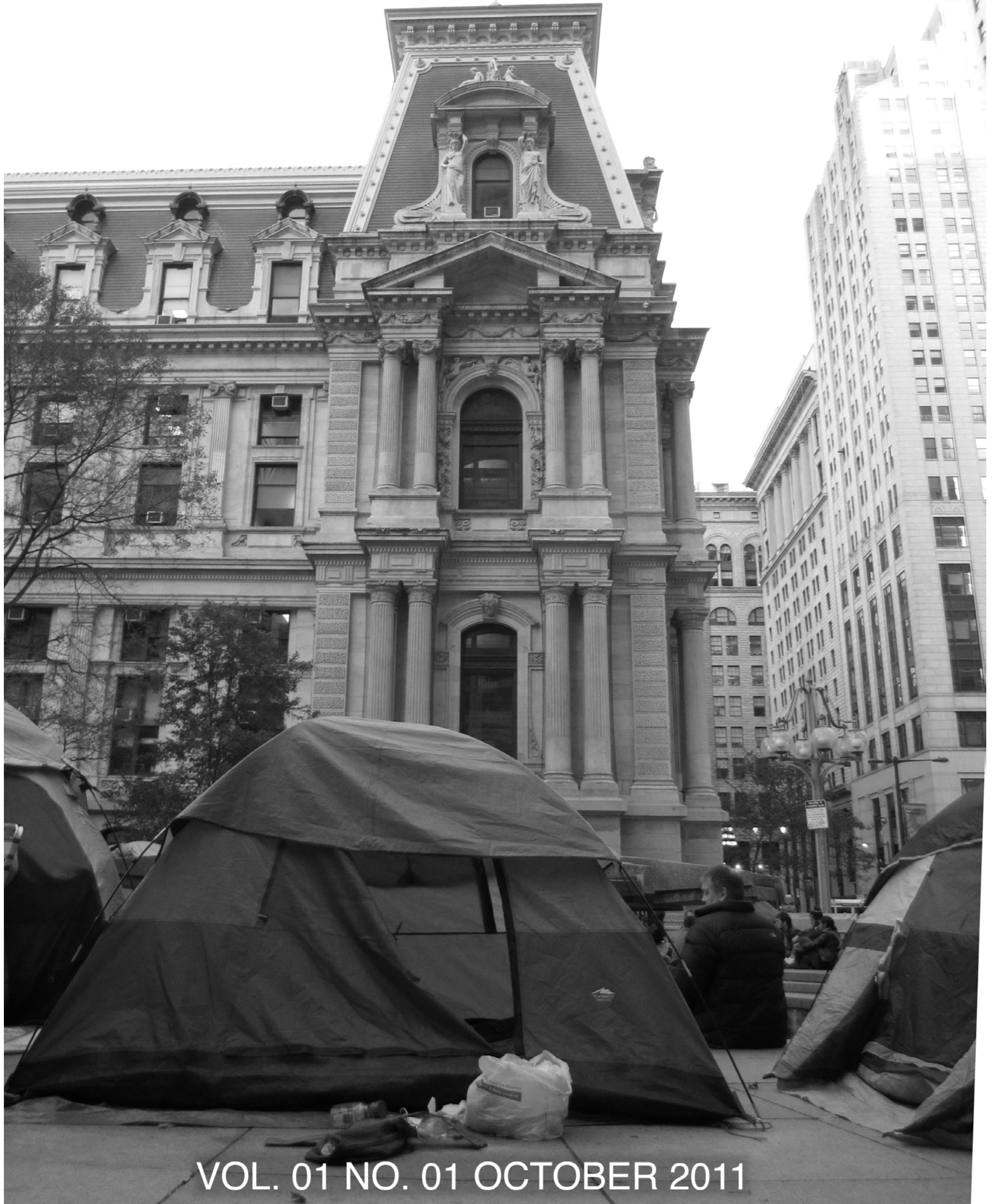


OCCUPY PHILLY

machete



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Introduction to Occupy Philly: Machete

Occupy Philadelphia, like the other occupations, is an attempt at creative disruption. It is disruptive in taking over Dilworth Plaza and rupturing—even if marginally—the flow of bodies and traffic in the city and soon perhaps the construction of a \$50 million skating rink scheduled to start in November at the plaza. The occupation has launched a critique of the “democratic” processes of our city and country by trying to construct a more direct kind of democracy on the steps of the city’s bureaucratic machine. But this is a kind of creation as well: the protestors endeavor to forge a democracy that exists for people, not for corporate profit and not for economic efficiency. And they have constructed a city of over 300 tents and in that city created mechanisms to address sanitary, dietary, medical, and educational needs and to exercise greater political freedom.

The project of this special series of Machete is to express that creative disruption in thought. This magazine

means to be a public space where our occupation can question itself and argue among itself and with those outside it about its meaning and the course of its movement. It is a space in which traditions about revolution, democracy, rebellion and protest can be questioned and ruptured, and in which critique is possible. But it can also be an arena for experimentation with new ideas about the movement in which traditional concepts can be reconfigured into newer, better forms more adequate to what we’re doing in Dilworth Plaza and elsewhere. The goal is creative conflict: with undemocratic politics, with our crisis-ridden economy, and among protestors and their interlocutors.

This magazine thereby means to fight the attempts of politics and popular media to tell the occupation what it is. To Obama we’re simply “frustrated” people who don’t know what else to do and so have taken to the streets. To Eric Cantor we’re a “mob,” and to Herman Cain we’re “lazy”

and “jealous.” Despite the differences the message is always the same: the occupations are literally thoughtless. We’re pure, idiotic emotion without the capacity to speak or to think for ourselves. The job of American politics is to give us our voice, they say, in order to make us intelligible for the first time and so they can address our irrational needs.

The occupation movement doesn’t need their voices because it has begun developing its own in the General Assembly, in its direct actions and marches, in the creation of signs and the construction of tent cities, and in the experimental demands already suggested by Occupy Wall Street and those beginning to be formed at Dilworth Plaza. This magazine is meant to be a tool by which those voices already at work can engage themselves as well as others in creative conflict.

-John Schultz

Rethinking Revolution

The Time of Change

The current conjuncture requires a profound rethinking of revolution. Such a task is not an endeavor external to the revolutionary activity that has swept the world, from North Africa and the Middle East to Europe, North America and elsewhere. Rather than theory being an activity that is somehow naturally distinct from practice, it is essential to recognize that there is always an implicit theoretical framework operative in revolutionary activity. Drawing on the work of Antonio Gramsci, we can say that the theoretical frame often functions as a form of practical common sense whose central orientation is rarely questioned. In these terms, the task at hand is to move from common sense assumptions concerning revolution to what Gramsci calls 'good sense': critical reflection on our unquestioned presuppositions that allows us to reflexively produce alternative modes of thought and practice.

The rethinking of revolution today can help us break with two widespread, common sense assumptions that have had, and continue to have, debilitating effects. The first is what I propose to call the conservative conception of revolution, according to which a revolution is a cataclysmic event, a circumscribed rupture in time. This conception assumes that revolutions are intermittent events between established, consensual systems. Revolution, in this sense, would simply be an intermission, an entracte—or what is, literally, 'between acts'—a brief hiatus in the ongoing life of the status quo.

The conservative conception of revolution qua intermission is directly linked to what I propose to call utopian blackmail: to merit the name 'revolution,' which is still largely considered a politically incorrect term in the Euro-American world, a movement has to instigate a massive sea change all at once, an apocalyptic upheaval within the circumscribed time of an intermission. This is a form of blackmail because, strictly

speaking, it is structurally impossible to radically transform the entire complex and variegated topography of society within a finite, limited amount of time. You can remove heads of government quickly, and this can be an extremely important symbolic act, but a radical transformation of the totality of society and its structures of governance takes time: it cannot be reduced to a brief intermission between the main acts. There are many historical examples that bear this out. For our purposes here, we can simply cite the recent case of Egypt, where we see that the removal of the U.S. backed autocrat, Hosni Mubarak, has not immediately led to a fundamental transformation of the political, legal and military order. On the contrary, there is an ongoing revolutionary process whose story cannot be written simply in terms of the removal of a single leader.

Those who refuse to use the term 'revolution' for anything short of a cataclysmic but intermittent sea change succumb to utopian blackmail and the conservative conception of revolution. They accept the common sense understanding of a revolution as a social earthquake in which a sudden, apocalyptic shift in tectonic plates allows for the rebuilding of the status quo to commence immediately. 'Good sense' requires that we recognize that the simplistic opposition between the status quo and cataclysmic revolution understood as a messianic break in time is a false opposition.

Revolution is not an endgame. It is an ongoing process of social negotiation and transformation that requires time, and that often constructs its own unique temporality (not to mention its own spatiality, as is clear in the case of occupation). This is one of the features of the Occupy Movement that its critics and the corporate media have generally been unable to understand. In the attempt to script these events in terms of the climaxes and dénouements of a digestible sitcom, the mass media have

been scrambling to identify the leaders of the movement and their specific demands in order to inscribe the entire movement within the framework of representational politics and judge its relative 'success' or 'failure' in relationship to its 'official goals.' This is not only an attempt to reduce more or less unprecedented developments to the established and comfortable archive of televisual screenplays, it is also a direct attack on the unique political temporality of this movement: rather than accepting the representational logic of a circumscribed set of official goals with identifiable milestones, or even the finite temporality of traditional protests, the Occupy movement nourishes an open-ended process of collective negotiation concerning a multiplicity of unofficial objectives, and it abandons the finite and circumscribed nature of protests in the name of an endless political process of social transformation.

Moreover, regarding the supposed lack of a clear message, it is difficult to imagine a more straightforward label than 'Occupy Wall Street.' Consider, for instance, the pressure group that is often juxtaposed to the Occupy movement as being 'better organized' and 'more focused' (thanks to extensive corporate sponsorship): the Tea Party. Could anyone imagine a more confusing name for a movement than one that suggests that the central goal is to get together and drink tea? Furthermore, demands of the Occupy movement have, of course, been issued, and they far surpass any simplistic opposition to 'Wall Street greed' (see, for instance, <http://occupywallst.org/forum/proposed-list-of-demands-please-help-edit-add-so-th/>). However, none of these demands are official, nor have they been focused by corporate sponsorship. And none of them aim at stopping the process of revolutionary transformation that seeks to reinvent democracy and federate between different fronts in the struggle. This is why the criticisms of the presumed lack of Tea-Party-like focus are misguided: the ongoing process of collective negotiation between multiple concerns—economic, political, social, environmental, etc.—and explicit demands are not mutually exclusive.

In these times of revolutionary transformation, it is integral to the ongoing movement to rethink revolution itself in order to debunk utopian blackmail and the conservative conception of revolution. Revolutionary activity is an immanent action of collective social reconfiguration whose temporal horizons are indefinite. In spite of what the media pundits and defenders of representative politics would like to have us believe, this revolution is not an endgame. It is only a beginning!

-Gabriel Rockhill



Interview with Charles Holmes, Resident of Occupy Wall Street at Liberty Plaza, October 13th , 2011



Çetin Gürer

The interviewee requested that his real name not be used.

ÇG: How did you hear about this movement?

CH: I live over in Brooklyn, so I wasn't that far from where it was going on. ... I also followed a lot online and I finally got out here on the 12th day, the night that the first declaration was read. And I sleep here and come during the day. I come here as much as I can.

ÇG: Have you been in the General Assembly? What do think about it?

CH: This is the purest representational democracy you can really ask for, how they decide everything down here. Proposals are presented, people vote on them ... and things are actually being carried out.

ÇG: Do you think that this is the moment of history direct democracy is coming back?

CH: Yeah, there is no doubt in my mind that it is a historical moment we are seeing right now. I spoke to friends about Occupy Albany. One of them himself said that he was waiting for another chapter to be written in the

history books that hasn't been there yet. He dreamed about that chapter to come and right now he is saying that that chapter is being written right now and in real time. And I couldn't agree more.

ÇG: Do you observe any specific changes in your life, thoughts, feelings, or opinions since you have been here?

CH: Everyone who comes here, no matter how keyed in they are to the issues presented here, they just want to know about [them]. This to me has been a garden of learning as well as a garden of revolution. I learn new things every day: issues discussed here [like] regulating the banks and dialing back the Bush tax cuts for the highest earners, and looking at the overhaul of the 1% tax code. ... A big movement right now that a lot of people have really considered is taking their money out of the big banks and putting them into credit unions. So a lot of people down here hear that and say 'Oh my God, why didn't I see this before? That's such a great idea, why should I give my money to Chase when I can deal with the credit union in my neighborhood?' New things are being learned all the time, new people are coming here and making those things known to everyone.

ÇG: Do you think the occupation of public space can change decisions made by the political and economic elite?

CH: In the movement we haven't wanted to nail down too many concrete beliefs that are held across the entire occupation because we don't want to alienate people. We want to gain as many numbers before we actually bring everyone together to unanimous consensus on a platform. But I believe that ... when we do get to a point of having a platform that represents the desires and believes of all occupiers, we can take that platform to bring to those politicians and to policy makers and use that to bring them to our side.

ÇG: Do you think the friendships you have here are different than those you have in other contexts?

CH: I slept down here a few nights ago and I was sleeping basically on the concrete ... but I didn't bring a lot because it wasn't especially cold. A group of younger people insisted that I take a pillow and a blanket to sleep on as bedding. I didn't take the blanket from them, but then I woke up at 2 A.M. and saw that someone had put the blanket over me because I was shivering. That is the kind of solidarity and compassion that you can count on here. It is definitely a different kind of friendship.

ÇG: Would you call this a revolution, or is the notion of 'revolution' is passé?

CH: I am of the mind of never ending revolution. An unending revolution is what we should always seek and I think that this country really is. I am someone who looks at the constitution as a living, breathing thing that is going to change, be adjusted with time. ... Down here I think it is an ongoing revolution, one that is more needed and powerful than we have seen in any recent years.

What do we mean by 'Direct' Democracy?

One of the most exciting features of the recent 'Occupy' movement has been the conscious effort to rethink and rework our modes of political relation and organization. Across the many Occupy sites, forms of democracy are being enacted which explicitly contest the idea that representative democracy is the only, or the best, shape democracy can take. The Occupy sites are thus experimenting with what can be called 'direct' democracy or 'participatory' democracy, in which there are no leaders and no representatives, and where all members have a voice and all members can contribute to the final decision. Many occupy sites also employ a consensus model of decision-making, in which factions are not pitted against each other to accumulate majority votes, but where all members must reach a common ground. However, the meaning of direct democracy and the reasons why it should be championed as truly democratic are still unclear. What do we mean when we say direct democracy? What vision of politics and what assumptions of the political body constitute this concept?

The critique of representative democracy is often taken to be a case of the critique of representation in general. A representation is always inadequate to what it represents, because it is always a partial and selective representation of what it represents. A representative, such as an elected official, does not represent the people, or even her constituency, but only represents a particular segment of the people. As such, the decisions of the representatives are decisions made in the name of the people and have consequences for the people as a whole, but actually represent only a skewed segment of the people. The Occupy movement has criticized representatives on precisely this basis; politicians do not represent the people, they represent corporate interests, the 1%, or the

capitalist system itself. We cannot simply get 'better' politicians or political representatives; the problem is in the nature of representative democracy itself.

On this basis, the call for direct democracy is made. In such a model, the people and the decisions the people make are not to be mediated by a representative. The people will make its own decisions, each person will have a voice and each person will have a say in the decision. In this way, the problem of representation can be avoided altogether. However, direct democracy does not dispense

however, attempts to enact a 'pure' self-representation: a representation which perfectly reproduces the political body within a decision without loss.

Despite the admirable attempts to enact direct democracy and consensus decision-making, I think we should be wary that pure self-representation is possible. I am not simply pointing out that a certain person or group of people do not 'get their way' because of consensus. Rather, the problem is that there is a necessary loss of the multiple under the unity that any representational model entails. If we wanted to provide an explanation of how the multiple is diminished under the unity, it would have to be done in terms of the content on the multiple itself. That is, to understand the loss, we would have to look at how the desires, alliances, and subject positions of the people interact with each other to engender the unity. In this way, there is a real danger of the emergence of new forms of power and new forms of systematic marginalization when the multiple represents itself under a unified decision. Of course, any system will have its problems, but if we think that the representations of direct democracy are pure, we will end up ignoring the problems and fail to do anything to account for their necessary failure. We should not, therefore,

automatically believe that formal direct democracy is the best model to enact real substantive democracy. I think the more radical experiment of political organization consists of asking: how can we organize such that we acknowledge the necessary failure of our attempts to represent our own desires?

-Amrit Heer



with representation. That is, it does not dispense with a structure in which there is, on the one hand, a people (as a multiple) and, on the other hand, the decision of the people (as a unity). That is, if the people have certain needs, wants, and desires, then the decision of the General Assemblies attempts to represent those needs, wants, and desires in decisions reached by the Assembly itself. As such, direct democratic General Assemblies are still based on a representative model of political organization. Direct democracy,

Thoreau and Revolution

It has long been the promise of revolutionary action that it will inaugurate not only a new social system, but also a new human. The tight, ineradicable link between individual and society necessitates this dual movement. If something of this gesture has been minimized in the Occupy Movement – as compared with, say, the Zapatista Movement – perhaps it is because of a material inequality so great that mere mention of personal change smacks of the egotism of self-interest that has fueled so many of our current problems. A proper thinking through of revolutionary activity requires that we understand societies, individuals, and nature(s) as feedback

justice, we were told the situation was changing. We had despaired; now it was time for “hope.” But to tell a despairing man that he need only hope to be cured is not much better than telling a sick man he needs only health to feel better. In either case, there is no transition, no logic by which we can move from one pole to another. There is, in a word, no process.

Thoreau tells us later in *Walden*, “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation,” but it is prior to this, in “Resistance,” where he tells us why: “The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies... Others... serve the state chiefly with their heads.” The

moves on with the resolution: I will no longer. The resolved person must then find the means to effect their dissolution from the state.

This is what Thoreau means by “in earnest and with effect.” And it will not mean protecting ourselves as individuals of conscience while we send someone else to do our dirty work. Thoreau’s example, as pertinent in our day as it was in his, is the individual who says, “Let them try to send me to war, I will refuse.” Yet everyday she pays the taxes that send another person to the front in her place. To act in conscience then is not merely to refuse because of personal interest. It is to refuse because of an acknowledgment of one’s own complicity, and a resolution to end that complicity all the way down.

Those who have turned to Thoreau – King, Gandhi, many more – have not always repeated his specific actions. Sometimes we resist the state by refusing to pay our taxes, sometimes by refusing to buy certain kinds of clothes, or to take public buses. Indeed, in our present conjuncture refusing to pay taxes may help end the war, but it won’t help our equally important messages about the need for public healthcare and fair tax codes. This is why Thoreau will speak of action that must “belong to the hour” – belong to our ability to understand and act in the present moment.

It is this action – not the overthrow of the state – which Thoreau calls “essentially revolutionary” – though of course such an overthrow may be that as well. But a coup d’etat which occurs without having a proper conscience and resolution is not revolutionary for Thoreau; it is just more of the same. The true revolution is “Action from principle – the perception and performance of right.” Such action may not have the visible effects of total revolution, but it will have been a moment in a long march to real and lasting change. Moreover, it will have been a moment which helped end our despair, and which continues to nourish our future actions.

Such action for Thoreau need not be physical. While mere language – signing a petition, say – may be useful but not revolutionary, true expression is. Words as individual parts of a language are empty: We. The. Ninety. Are. Nine. Percent. But



loops of mutual dependence and power.

What such an understanding gives us is not a fall back into mere subjectivity or a banal environmentalism. Rather it forces us to confront the environment and the social as things which we are responsible for making, at the same time that they are responsible for making us. There is arguably no greater statement on this situation and its meaning for politics than Henry David Thoreau’s “Resistance to Civil Government,” or, as it is better known, “Civil Disobedience.”

Thoreau’s aim in “Resistance” is to unmask the workings of political despair. Despair, for many of us, was the position in which we found ourselves in 2008. After eight years of seeming impossibility for political

beginning of despair then is a refusal to acknowledge our relationship to the state. Rather than being its mutually constitutive part, we merely serve it. The only service it does us in response is to lead us into despair. And acts of desperation – acts which for Thoreau include diversions from our goal, “the games and amusements of mankind” – can lead us nowhere.

The beginning of overcoming despair is thus to refuse the condition in which we serve the state chiefly with our bodies and our heads, and begin to resist the state by our conscience. This resistance does not take the mere form of hypocritical opposition – to petition the government while doing nothing “in earnest and with effect” to change the situation. It begins with the concession – I serve the state – and

expression forms those words into an action of constituting a political unity: “We are the ninety-nine percent.” If the phrase feels good to say, it is because it is essentially revolutionary. And if it someday feels good to remember, it will be because we no longer have cause to say it, because the ninety-nine will have become one, and the vast injustices of the present will have been overcome.

But we are not there yet. And arriving there for Thoreau will mean the difficult work of acting from conscience and being resolved to find our means of action. This difficulty is compounded by the need to be aware of the risks we are taking. Our actions must be thoughtful: “consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil.” Such were, for example, the consequences of the Iraq War. No one would deny that Saddam Hussein should not have remained in power, but in the war effort there was no action from conscience, and no precision in how to go about achieving change, and the resulting quagmire came as no surprise to many of us.

Thoreau also has a word on violence when it comes to action. His interest is a “peaceable revolution.” For Thoreau this is not a commitment to passivity and non-violence. It is a commitment to stop committing violence. We are violent everyday in that we support others to be violent by our very existence in an unjust world. If we are to be humans of conscience, then we must be resolved to ending violence. For Thoreau the means to this must themselves be peaceable, for if we are ourselves violent then we are living in contradiction. To be contradictory is to be at war with ourselves, and to be at war with ourselves is nothing other than despair. For remember that despair began when we refused to acknowledge that we were the makers of our own world by our participation in it. In other words, it began when we pretended to be whole when we were in fact split between our conscience and our daily lives. A life of conscience unites our vision and our actions – “the perception and performance of right.”

This performance is not momentary, it is perpetual, it demands commitment. When we have gained conscience, when we have found our action, then, “Let your life be a constant friction to stop the machine.” The path to overcoming despair which began with conscience ends with conviction, with the willingness to give one’s life to a cause. This does not necessarily mean martyrdom, imprisonment, or abandonment of obligation. It means giving your life, not some abstract idea of “a revolutionary life.” It means giving what you can to overcome despair, and to help others to overcome theirs. And lest we fret that our attempts at change are frustrated no matter how much we give, Thoreau leaves us with this: “For it matters not how small the beginning may seem to be: what is once well done is done for ever.”

-Avi Alpert



Self interview No.1 (Excerpt)

Q: What is the problem? Is it that there remains within the occupation a space unoccupied by the occupiers?

A: No. That is not my main concern. But yes, there is some sort of Zeno problem: no matter the amount of space occupied, there is more space (psychological, political) produced that remains unoccupied. It is also the case though that there is something within the occupied space that is never occupied enough. ...

Q: Would it have been better if Occupy X had never occurred?

A: Not at all. My problem with it is that it is represented by those participating as a chosen action undertaken by an autonomous body that has somehow 'decided' against its conditions. I think this is a naïve representation of autonomy. It would be more useful to think of it in terms of a particular behavioral array which has been manifested in this form because it could take no other.

Q: You mean that the occupiers were driven into the act that they have taken, that it could not be otherwise?

A: I mean that they express the development of a particular logic to this particular point. The 'successes' and limitations of the action are realized by that which conditions them. ... I do not think, for this particular group of people constituted as it is, that there are many alternatives to this symbolic siege of symbolic landmarks of the productive relation. The move of politics into symbolism always indicates that a particular form is at the evolutionary edge of what it is and what it can be.

Q: Occupy London did not manage to occupy its chosen space at all. It somehow bypassed what it intended to do. What do you make of this?

A: It is not an 'occupation,' even on its own terms. It manifested itself by activating archaic laws of sanctuary, and thus currently relies for its continued presence upon the goodwill of the state church. An ideological escape route of religious symbolism in which the priorities of spirituality are set against those of materialism is thus established.

Q: This path of least resistance into moral symbolism also says something about the personae, the subject formations, that are taking part. ...

A: Of course, not only is a specific space defined by the project of occupation but a specific mode of being is also generated. It would be too easy to talk of a proprietary comportment, but there is a self-identifying, self-righteous element to the psychology of occupation which is inherited from what can broadly be called third estate formations. They mis-locate where the human appears, thinking it resides in the act of authoring worlds and making things happen. But this idea of human endeavor has already been the dominant mode of subjectivity for the last two hundred years. It seems they have transposed the model of bourgeois agency from 'enterprise' to social activism. ...

A: Decision-making as a process, and as function of society, is not the cause of social change but an outcome. The point where decision-making, and the bodies which enact decision-making, are manifested and participate in social mechanisms is not decided by those bodies themselves. It is futile to make decisions, and invoke general assemblies, where these have no purchase on reality. In all societies actual decision-making only applies to a very small area of life. ... The fetish for the rule of society by decision, and for its process as an end in itself, as this appears amongst the occupiers in the form of 'real democracy,' indicates an unthought-out approach to all that is not decidable in human community.



The goal is always to capture and analyze the faults within the general model. It would perhaps be more useful to record that these rigid, carried-over formations ... remain invisible to those participating. The occupiers see themselves as embodying an alternative when it would be more helpful if they attempted to map how they remain part of the same. ... Workers may occupy a factory but the extent to which they control its processes is often minimal. In reality, the factory is occupying them, and their 'occupation consciousness' is merely taking an optimal form, i.e. self-managed exploitation; where readily recognized, embodied class struggle is obscured by self-identification with production, and with positive 'achievements.' Similarly, with the occupiers it is difficult for them to come to terms with the limits of their capabilities.

Q: Describe these limits in greater detail.

Q: [W]hat is the 'alternative' to occupation?

A: The important thing is to try and think in terms of departure ... of going somewhere else, of being something else. That is, we should think of releasing and relaxing the space from the current specifics of our presence. We should be listening out for the voices of the space that are already active in it, and listening out for the voices that are speaking through us, but which we do not recognize as our own. ...

-FD