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Liberty Plaza. A "Message" Entangled with its Form

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As I walk through lush Brownstone Brooklyn at night, I try to reconcile the stillness that pervades these streets with the urgency of Liberty Plaza. I wonder, did I lose touch with the beauty of the wet bluestone and wrought iron gates somewhere along the course of one of my many feverish runs to the 4/5 station to get to Wall St?

I know that I'm young, and sometimes it's hard to tell whether the quaking I feel is the strength of my own heartbeat or the earth moving under my feet. I wonder if it's impossible at any age to have perspective from the midst of something that resembles a movement; I imagine the view from the middle of the General Assembly looks dramatically different than the one from a calmer, more static place.

Yet the quaking earth hypothesis is supported by the fact that perhaps the sight from Liberty Plaza is similar to the one a person might have glimpsed from Tahrir Square, from Madison's Capitol Square, from Ben-Gurion Boulevard, from among the *indignados* in Madrid and the protests in Greece. In Zuccotti Park, occupiers' disaffection is part of a powerful surge of global discontent, a surge

that is manifesting itself in the collective realization of bodies and voices as strategic tools for communication and collective action.

Many feel an immediacy springing from a loss of stability--an affordable education, a job, a home, a pension, health insurance--that we had taken for granted. Even those who don't face immediately precarious situations are admitting to themselves that something has been terribly wrong for some time. We watched as our government deregulated the market, then bailed out the banks whose criminal activities led to the financial implosion; as they cut the taxes of the rich while 15% of American families fell below the poverty line; as they spent billions of dollars on imperial wars that divert money away from education and infrastructure, and any real solution to avert environmental degradation. If we've been apathetic, its because we've failed to see how to act. We have learned to be wary of "Change." We lack faith in our politicians, entrenched as they are in the impotent theatrics of the two-party system.

Yet in Liberty Plaza, people find themselves confronted with a radically inclusive new platform. In the horizontality of this platform, many who are disaffected now see a means of engagement that is immediate and real. If Occupy Wall Street has failed to use this platform to limit itself to a discrete set of demands, it is because it refuses to undermine the depth and breadth of what's wrong. OWS's "message" is entangled with its form, its self-sustaining structure in which the group provides for its own physical, social, and intellectual needs. (Given the group's collective intelligences, it is becoming evident that its members can teach each other as much, if not more than any institution can).

Much has been made of the people's microphone. When it works, its power is immense. People within hearing range chant each

other's words to convey them to those standing on the periphery of the larger group. Each person pits herself between the mouth of the speaker and the ear of the listener in a manner that is both self-affirming and egoless. Loudly echoing the voice of another feels a bit like cursing, a vigorous and strangely gratifying speech act.

Occupiers are learning to use their bodies in ways that break with the modes of moving circumscribed by our culture of efficiency and the near-total encroachment of privatized space. Its members are learning how to stay in one place, how to civilly disobey, how to dumpster dive, how to interrupt auction proceedings. They are also confronting their bodies and the bodies of others, the cold, the rain, the smells and needs that bodies have that we can facilitate so quickly in the comfort of the office and the home.

Occupy Wall Street is streamed, tweeted, posted and reposted. It is a curiosity, a screen for projection, a spectator sport, everyone's favorite and most hated child. Yet people continue to come daily who earnestly want to join or to aid the effort. OWS has become a receptacle for the lost progressive hopes of a previous generation. Despite the attempts of some media sources to caricature the occupiers, they constitute a diverse group that is attracting even more diversity. OWS has gained the support of many labor unions and community groups. Most importantly, its existence is enabling a necessary discourse to enter the mainstream.

Liberty Plaza can also be an immensely frustrating, anxiety-provoking, and chaotic space. Sometimes, the chaos threatens to prevail and dissolve the whole. This is a particular risk now: as its numbers grow, OWS must become capable of incorporating interested parties in meaningful ways, and must begin a real conversation about its own future. Yet in this heightened unknown

many sense something uncanny, something real that feels unreal because it has been suppressed by layers and layers of banal culture, farcical politics, and corporate sterility. They see a spark of true, systemic indeterminacy, in contrast to the systems entrenched by the collusion of money and power.

Occupy Wall Street is still a writhing, inchoate entity, yet it has a structure that can and must beget more structure. Its future is totally unknown, but the commitment among OWS's ranks, the resonance of its message, and the appreciation so many feel for the rupture it presents from the status quo, assures me that this "occupation" will persist, whatever this persistence looks like. Perhaps the group will recognize the naiveté of the dreams of the most utopian among it, and compromise soon to settle on a list of specific economic demands. (Occupiers are smart, and knowledgeable, and have big, open ears to those even more so). More probably, the "occupation" will continue to grow, to spread to other cities, to protest, and to self-determine, choosing to partake in a society whose structure its members believe in, rather than one corrupted to the point of disrepair.

In my more lucid moments, I know that Occupy Wall Street is a lichen that is preparing the intractable political ground for more substantive plant growth. In my dreams, however, Occupy Wall Street will evince its true self, not when the media and well-meaning liberals tell it to produce a message, nor when it hands over its momentum to sympathetic, institutionalized political groups, but when the egalitarian entity it has created itself yields some kind of answer.