

Before beginning

MTL is in the West Bank. We are visiting friends and family, and retracing memories of the first Palestinian uprising. We are traveling, listening, recording, and translating. Land, life, liberation are on our mind. Then Mohamed Bouazizi ends his life through self-immolation. Tunisia breaks.



We return to New York. The city looks and feels different. Things are buzzing; we are watching closely. Soon Egypt breaks. We see revolutionary people-power from below. But it doesn't seem to apply to the United States, even though we know it is all connected in an expanded field of empire. We say to ourselves, "That is a revolution against decades of brutal military dictatorship backed by the United States; those are not the same conditions faced by those living in the heart of the empire itself." But then Greece breaks. Here is a nominal democracy and yet people are rising up, taking to the streets, and holding the squares. Then Spain, a Western nation with an advanced economy in the midst of elections. With the crisis people are compelled to occupy, throwing into question the legitimacy of the entire political process: *basta ya! no nos representan*.

We start to feel something is possible in the United States. The Wisconsin capitol building is occupied, and the occupiers invoke Egypt; labor and community groups set up the Bloombergville camp in New York to protest urban austerity, making reference to the Spanish *Indignados*. Cracks are forming. The power of the powerless is beginning to show itself.



The artist as organizer

We are meeting regularly. In light of the global economic disaster, we know we have the chance to push things further in the United States. The crisis has produced an opportunity. We are privileged to be in New York. We carry our cameras and our notebooks to document things, but we end up participating. The art we had imagined making for so long is starting to happen in real life. We do not have time to agonize about representation. We are making images, writing texts, having conversations, and developing relationships out of necessity and urgency. Aesthetics, research, organizing—it is all coming together in the creation of a new public space in the heart of the empire. It embodies imagination with implications on the ground. #occupywallst.



At this time, occupy is a verb rather than a noun. People meet every Sunday at 5 p.m. for an hour to plan for the occupation on September 17. First at the Charging Bull sculpture a few blocks from the New York Stock Exchange on August 2. Next at the Irish Hunger Memorial in the Financial District on August 9. Then at the same time every week at Thompson Square Park in the East Village. A horizontal process is used in meetings. Facilitation allows for the maximum number of diverse voices to be heard. No one can speak on behalf of others. Organizations cannot participate as such, only as people speaking on behalf of themselves. The slogan "We are the 99%" is proposed to invite others to join. Everyone is interested in creating space, not deciding an agenda or specifying demands. Folks are in minimal but fundamental agreement on the need to reorganize social, political, and economic life in a manner that is just and equitable.

Liberating space, cracking capitalism

We occupy on September 17. A tweet goes out to gather at Chase Manhattan Plaza in front of the Jean Dubuffet sculpture. It's a few blocks from the stock exchange. We find the plaza barricaded, so we go to plan B: Zuccotti Park is wide open.

Our backs are on pizza boxes. Our bodies warm the concrete. You look up, the buildings cease to dominate the horizon as figures against a ground; instead, they frame a threshold of freedom opening onto the sky. Di Suvero's "weird red thing" watches over us. We dumpster dive. *If we have food, people will stay*. The kitchen is born. When the police prohibit amplification devices, we institute the People's Mic: we repeat what people say so others can hear, and in the process we internalize each other's words.



General Assemblies are held daily. Rather than issue demands, we articulate principles of solidarity. We begin the process of mapping capitalism with our bodies. We take direct action to communicate injustice. The park is now everyone's open wound. We realize how much needs to be undone. We address racism, colonialism, patriarchy and other forms of oppression head on. At the epicenter of financial terrorism, we establish a community of care and healing—a people's refuge in the belly of the beast.



We are sparking imagination. Occupations are spreading. Momentum is building. But they evict us from Zuccotti Park. Attempts to occupy Duarte Square at 6th and Canal do not succeed. We are arrested and brutalized by the NYPD. A police state fears everything that does not follow its script. Our greatest threat is that we speak openly about inequality while establishing a self-organized community, a community grounded in the commons.

May Day comes and goes

Winter is hard. The camps are gone. Police repression has taken a toll. We realize we have to work differently to create conversations and actions in the absence of the park. We organize towards a future date and choose May Day—a day of global labor solidarity that has been suppressed in the United States. We come together: labor and student organizers, people from Occupy Wall Street, undocumented workers centers, inspired academics, and insurrectionist friends. We have weekly planning meetings. We debate what constitutes a general strike? Who can make the call? Who can participate? What does strike mean for precarious, undocumented, or non-unionized workers? What are the consequences of a call to strike that goes unheeded?

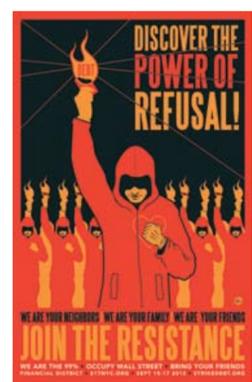


Finally, people agree on the following language:

OCCUPY WALL STREET STANDS IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE CALLS FOR A DAY WITHOUT THE 99%, A GENERAL STRIKE AND MORE!! ON MAY DAY, WHEREVER YOU ARE, WE ARE CALLING FOR: NO WORK, NO SCHOOL, NO HOUSEWORK, NO SHOPPING, NO BANKING. TAKE THE STREETS!!!!

After months of planning and preparation that yield thousands in the streets, a movement is not yet born. We realize unionized workers cannot break from the chains of their bosses and their leadership. So much has changed. Wages are stagnant, unions are busted, municipal austerity has set in; the exploitation of the worker increasingly overlaps with the experience of being in debt. We are all forced into servitude to Wall Street as we try to make ends meet. We articulate the indebted as a political subject.

Strike Debt



We focus on debt and touch a nerve. The new American dream is to get out of debt. Education debt, medical debt, credit card debt, mortgage debt, payday loans. We meet people where they are at, where global finance touches our lives in the most immediate ways. We gather and tell stories. The feeling of strength in weakness. The power of refusal—*can't pay, won't pay*. The smell of the bills going up in smoke as we testify together. The images become actions and back again. We perform our shared reality to break the silence, the shame, and the isolation, and build community instead. We imagine debt as more than a set of "issues." We imagine debt as a placeholder for a dehumanizing system in its totality; debt as an amplifier of other oppressions; debt as a racist war machine; debt as a distillation of non-freedom. We imagine other debts and other bonds: to friends, family, community, rather than to the banks. Debts owed from immemorial histories of slavery and colonization. Debts that are both immeasurable and singular, debts that mark our lives and relations in different ways.



...and other racist, capitalist bullshit

The identity of the debtor gains traction, but primarily among middle-class white people. We know that debt impacts poor communities of color the hardest, from subprime mortgages to payday loans, to urban austerity. Debt intersects with racialized state violence on an everyday basis. All roads lead to Wall Street, but they pass through the precinct, the prison, and the morgue. As we reimagine resistance to capitalism at an urban level, we think of those killed by the NYPD, private security forces, and racist vigilantes around the country:

AMADOU DIALLO	MANUEL DIAZ
SHANTEL DAVIS	RAMARLEY GRAHAM
SEAN BELL	TRAYVON MARTIN
OSCAR GRANT	KIMANI GRAY



...and so it goes.

Climate strike



Climate strikes back against Wall Street, and we all get flooded. The banks are under water. The ocean in the streets, block by block. The boardwalk is in ruins. We convert churches into hubs for mutual aid. There is a void left by the State. We do not hesitate. We step in, we take the risk. It is a crisis and an opportunity. We are reminded that "our struggle against the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few is also a struggle for life—and that an obsession with growth and firing up a sputtering economy misses the larger ecological questions confronting the planet."



We offset the negligence of the city and the agencies so everything won't fall further apart. A grey area between emergency relief and political resistance; *can we pivot in that space?* Can we align our responsibility to act with what we are working toward? How do we link climate to debt, to work, to sustainable living?

We go to Detroit with these questions.

It does not resemble a city

Detroit is a mythic wasteland of romantic ruins and vacant space. This post-industrial picturesque effaces those living and struggling in what used to be the city. Capital and the state have withdrawn from massive swathes of territory. Every square inch is a Wall Street crime scene. In both its devastation and possibility, Detroit is an outpost from our collective future. Long-term struggles on the ground throw everything into a new light: our own cities, our own work, our own lives. Racial, economic, and environmental justice understood in a global context of empire, neo-liberalism, and climate disaster. People thinking of revolutionary time in decades and centuries, rather than in days and months. Non-monetary economies; community-based agriculture; work beyond jobs; education beyond school; culture beyond art; life beyond capitalism. In Detroit, we hear over and over: how do we live?

Do you remember when they said it was the end of history?

Do you remember when we couldn't imagine?

Do you remember when a borderless world wasn't possible?

Do you remember when the crack opened beneath our feet?

The liberated territories are coming.

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