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Eckles Reflection Essay

### Occupying Gelman: Reflections on Research

For a twenty-five year old freshman out of practice with outlines, MLA format, and all the trappings of college writing, a UW1020 course was a powerful reentry to the world of academia. But the intensive writing course not only prepared me for assignments to come, it helped me come to terms with myself—how a somewhat unconventional path of left activism had landed me at George Washington University, mulling over rhetoric in a classroom full of seventeen and eighteen year olds. Professor Randi Kristensen’s course “Radically Rewriting America” and in particular our final research paper assignment helped me situate myself in my new surroundings. The topic I chose—“We Will Demand Nothing: The Revolutionary Potential of Occupy” too, helped me situate myself in a rapidly changing movement. It gave me a chance to digest lessons from my experiences in the anti-war and anti-globalization movements of the past decade and my lifelong residency in the DC area.

In addition to my background in radical left politics, I had another compelling reason to be heavily invested in observing the Occupy movement in those months: I was homeless. A series of misfortunate accidents had moved me into a storage unit toward the beginning of the semester, and the outrageously high cost of rent in the District, combined with a historically low vacancy rate, were stacked against me. For several months I slept on couches of friends and family or in my truck. During that challenging time, the physical space of Gelman served a vital role for me. The library was a safe, stable place I could go to focus on work. At all hours of the day I mined the bibliographies of beloved texts to trace the genealogy of ideas. Gelman is also conveniently located a short walk away from the Occupy DC McPherson Square encampment. Many late nights while working on my research paper, I would have the Occupy DC livestream

open in the background. If I was lacking inspiration or if the threat of eviction loomed, I would go to the square. There occurred some of the most intense, surreal standoffs I have witnessed in my decade or so of street protest experience. After watching protestors get lassoed, dragged, and airlifted off a roof by riot cops in a helicopter, surrounded by tanks, I returned to Gelman and filtered my experiences through theory. Because I was so viscerally invested in my topic, it was vital to choose my theoretical framework carefully and to articulate my research question clearly.

The library provided another precious resource, too: librarians. Though my nearly decade long break from conventional education had familiarized me well enough with the Dewey decimal system, I relied on the librarians to help untie the mental knots that go along with attempting long papers. At one point I recall slouching up to the reference desk in a daze, begging to have *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari's absurdist treatise on living an anti-fascist life, explained to me. Another time, I found myself in the predicament of trying to cite a leaked memo. This sort of source was certainly not on the OWL Purdue site yet, and I found myself at a loss. The librarian suggested that I cite reputable news coverage of the memo as well as a stable hyperlink for the memo itself. I found that solution to be helpful, inventive, and very suitable for my purposes.

Through the process of writing my paper, I became familiar with GWU's resources and refreshed my writing skills. I gained experience negotiating complex topics, and maintaining enough organization during my writing process to bolster my sanity through completion. During the long process of writing this paper, I sometimes found myself in agony, wishing that I had chosen a topic I did not care about so passionately. Because the stakes felt so high, it felt necessary not to misrepresent myself, the movement, or the Anarchist, Post-Marxist, and other leftist thinkers who had inspired me. But now at a safe distance from the assignment, I affirm my

decision to pursue the research interests closest to my heart. The process of doing so enriched not only my academic skills but my understanding of myself and the world I inhabit.

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13 December 2011

## We Will Demand Nothing: The Revolutionary Potential of Occupy

### **1. This Time, Let's Win: The Exigency Of My Research**

Prior to this year many left activists, including myself, had written off the possibility of ever seeing widespread radical social change or economic justice in our lifetimes. My friends and colleagues range from lawyers toiling away to end capitol punishment to veggie-oil and biodiesel mechanics, from transgender activists to teachers, from veterans against the war to sustainable agriculturalists, from union organizers to radical artists and musicians. My community and sphere of awareness is certainly not exhaustive nor is it a pan-spectrum utopia, yet it is diverse in terms of race, class, sexuality, gender identity, ability, and alienage. I am speaking as one who was reared in the democratic-globalization movement of the 1990's and 2000's. We had hunkered down for the long haul, devoting our lives to community work and direct services. We had learned the art of self-care and of regularly nursing ourselves back from burnout. But the popularity—and here I mean popular in the "of the people" sense—of the Occupy movement shook the dust off of us. Finally, the national conversation is about economic injustice and wealth disparity. Shockingly, the kind of vital left dialogue that used to be relegated to poorly attended panels and small-circulation publications is a national topic of conversation. Occupy The Hood is in the streets and in the news, demonstrating the inextricable ties between capitalism to racism (Strauss, "Occupy the Hood"). Indigenous Americans have the rhetorical

space to remind everyone that the entire United States of America is occupying stolen land (Montano, "Decolonize Wall Street!").

Resistance has a rich history. A beautiful history—we are beautiful, and resilient, and we are losers. We are the losing side. An Egyptian activist reflecting on the impact of organizing for a losing movement allowed that “on some level, even though you didn’t realize it, you’d given up thinking that you could actually win” (Smith, “Pre-Occupy”). For my fellow movement participants, therein lies the urgency in my research. What I need to know—what we in the Occupy movement all need to know is this: how can we win? An inquiry into the revolutionary potential of Occupy holds relevance for everybody, not just seasoned left activists or those already identifying with the movement. As Noam Chomsky recently noted, today “there are real threats to the survival of the human species” including nuclear proliferation and “environmental catastrophe” (“Occupy the Future”). A groundbreaking linguist, cognitive scientist, and professor emeritus at MIT for over half a century, Chomsky is not given to exaggeration or embellishment. He is not making an overstatement when he concludes, in reference to the Occupy movement, that “unless the process that's taking place here and elsewhere in the country and around the world continues to grow and becomes a major force in society and politics, the chances for a decent future are bleak” (Chomsky, “Occupy the Future”). Occupy’s implications are not just national or international, but global, and it is with seriousness and urgency that I commenced this inquiry.

## **1.1 My Inquiry**

I am evaluating the viability of Occupy as a movement with revolutionary potential. I use “revolutionary” to refer to a fundamental and comprehensive change in both the way people govern themselves and associate with one another. I will do this by examining Occupy’s tactics

and developing a set of criteria against which its potential may be judged. I also will be assessing left tactics and Occupy values through the lens of a particular set of thinkers, specifically Situationist Guy Debord and post-Marxists Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari.

## **2. In First Person: Writing As A Participant**

My perspective on the movement inspired by Occupy Wall Street is influenced both by my participation in the movement and my stake in its success. I have continued to participate in my local group, Occupy DC at McPherson Square, throughout the process of researching and writing. Because I believe in this movement and want it to thrive, my treatment of it is colored by hopefulness and determination. Though I love the movement, I have not turned a blind eye to its shortcomings. To the contrary, Occupy's significance to me inspires a more critical examination.

The Occupy movement is comprised of localized autonomous groups in the United States of America and abroad. Each group represents the experiences and concerns of its participants and location, but there are significant commonalities in organization and values. Correspondingly, each individual who participates in the group is an autonomous, equal individual, united by common goals and involvement in non-hierarchical decision-making. I use "Occupy" and "the Occupy movement" to refer to the movement as a whole. My experience and research is based in Occupy DC. I have followed the original Occupy Wall Street in New York City closely and use "Occupy Wall Street" or "OWS" to refer to that group specifically. To a lesser extent I have also followed Occupy Oakland and Occupy Philadelphia. The occupations I have named are the ones in which many of my friends and colleagues are involved.

Due to the recent and ongoing nature of my subject, I have utilized a variety of non-academic sources such as communiqués, first hand experiences, blog posts, and periodicals in my research.

### 3. What Is The Occupy Movement?

In July of 2011, the Left anti-consumerist magazine *Adbusters* put out a call for a different kind of protest. Inspired by the energy and success of the Arab Spring, organizers had an idea for a “new formula” (*Adbusters*). That formula: to take over what seems to be a public space, and build momentum outward from it; organize horizontally, and hold public forums until one demand is reached—a demand that “awakens the imagination” and moves the country toward a “radical democracy” (*Adbusters*).



Fig. 1. "What Is Our One Demand?"  
Lasn, Kalle et al.

That protest, Occupy Wall Street, kicked off in September thousands strong and grew in numbers from there. Then, across the country autonomous solidarity protests began forming with the same formula. The initial protest was called in response to the growing power and waning accountability of multinational banks and corporate interests, as well as their role in burgeoning wealth inequality, the foreclosure crisis, and their impact on democracy. Originally OWS organizers conceived of a goal to create a presidential commission dedicated to keeping the money out of politics, then that idea was quickly dismissed as too limiting (Farrell, “America’s Tahrir Moment”). At the time of this writing, the “one demand” written on *Adbusters*’ mischievously elegant first poster has not crystallized (Fig. 1).

### **3.1 Who Is Protesting?**

But what about the composition of the movement—who is protesting and why? Does the composition of the movement have a role in determining the movement's strength? Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri use the term multitude to refer to “a set of singularities” united with the common aim of “transformation and liberation” (99). Is the Occupy movement a multitude? A microcosm of the movement's sentiment is the blog “We Are The 99%” in which people post photos of themselves, typically holding a sign that explains how they have personally been affected by wealth disparity. A common theme throughout is the inability to pay for one's health care. Contributors are often over-employed but underpaid, or unemployed and overeducated. Many have partaken in sex work as part of their individual survival strategies. Those not as badly off who still wish to express solidarity own their privilege, and refer to it as “luck.” All identify as part of the “99%.” The “We Are The 99%” blog is an example of a way in which people who have access to technology but may be geographically isolated or unable to join physical protests due to work obligations or childcare can participate in spirit. OWS founder David Graeber describes participants as being “working-class or otherwise modest backgrounds, kids who did exactly what they were told they should: studied, got into college, and are now not just being punished for it, but humiliated – faced with a life of being treated as deadbeats, moral reprobates.” (Graeber, “OWS Rediscovered the Radical Imagination”). A claim at the center of the Occupy movement is that the stories of these people are politically significant—and that their experience of individual injustice is linked to a much larger collective injustice.

### **4. Tactics**

In order to determine wherein the revolutionary potential of the Occupy movement may lie, we will briefly review the tactics it employs—both de facto and intentional. I argue that

Occupy's strongest tactics are claiming space, repurposing space, building community, and staging direct actions. Even outside an investigation like mine, it is of vital importance to evaluate Occupy's tactics, because the movement itself is sometimes wrongly criticized as not having any of worth. To begin my review of the tactics Occupy employs, I will discuss and dismiss one it largely does not—the issuance of formal demands to the State. Discussion of demands provides a useful opportunity to explore issues of co-option, strategy, and counterpower.

#### **4.1 Tactics: the Demand for Demands**

Before the first protest even began, OWS organizers intimated, with *Adbusters'* hallmark playfulness, that the “one demand” raised in the original poster might be taken at face value or might be a “zen koan”—a riddle for contemplation (Fig. 1; Farrell, “America's Tahrir Moment”). The question of whether or not the movement should issue clear demands has been raised both within the movement and without. The absence of articulated demands has been fuel for critics within and outside the movement who characterize the protests as too unfocused to be taken seriously. Even Gene Sharp, esteemed non-violent resistance advocate and scholar, argues that Occupy protesters “don't have any specific demands or a clear objective” and “need to study how they can actually change the things they don't like” (Sharp, “Q&A”). To the contrary, I argue that protests have a clear objective and a clear message, and that the issuance of explicit demands is impossible, ineffective, and a quick path to co-option.

At Occupy DC, when the discussion of demands does get the full attention of an entire GA, the myriad and disparate demands suggested obviate that explicit demands and the type of ardently democratic horizontal decision-making we use are mutually exclusive. But my experiences alone need not suffice. In a dispatch from the fifth day of OWS in New York City,

the protesters' "one demand" was described variously as ending "capital punishment," "wealth inequality," "police intimidation," "corporate censorship," "health profiteering," and even "the modern gilded age" (OccupyWallSt, "A Message"). Indigenous activist JohnPaul Montano of the Nishnaabe puts forth demands which include freeing political prisoner Leonard Peltier and for the government to "honor all treaties signed with all indigenous nations whose lands are now collectively referred to as the 'United States of America'" (Montano, "Decolonize Wall Street!"). I contend that a diverse non-hierarchical movement that disallows the appointment of a specific individual or group to the position of spokesperson is fundamentally antithetical to the pronouncement of explicit, concise, and credibly agreed upon demands.

#### **4.2 Tactics: Demands, Direct Action, and Counterpower**

Even if formal demands could be issued, I am ideologically opposed to their issuance. Making demands of the State legitimizes the governing power of the State and positions the demanding party as inherently subservient to the State—relegates the demander to the role of fringe petitioner. In contrast, the tactics Occupy does employ position the movement as a counterpower—an alternative body of power separate from the State that could replace the organizations imposed by the State. OWS founder David Graeber rightly observes that formal demands "might imply recognizing the legitimacy of the politicians against whom they are ranged" (Graeber, "OWS Rediscovered the Radical Imagination"). Another perspective of making demands positions the demander as a terrorist holding the State hostage. Graeber draws a clear distinction between protest and direct action, maintaining that "protest, however militant, is an appeal to the authorities to behave differently; direct action... is a matter of acting as if the existing structure of power does not even exist" (Graeber, "OWS's Anarchist Roots). Direct action, a broad term including any activity outside of State ordained channels of complaint and

restitution, encompasses most Occupy tactics, whether in organizing mass bank withdrawals, blocking ports, or providing health services to those who normally could not afford them. In addition to accomplishing specific goals, direct action also sends a strong message. As nineteenth-century American anarchy-feminist Voltairine de Cleyre wrote, “direct action is always the clamorer, the initiator, through which the great sum of indifferentists become aware that oppression is getting intolerable” (de Cleyre, “Direct Action”).

### **4.3 Tactics: Occupying Space**

The Arab Spring-sourced strategy of literally occupying space is one of the movement’s most potent tactics. Here I include occupying public outdoor spaces, occupying abandoned or foreclosed properties, and occupying rhetorical space in the national conversation. Though Gene Sharp dismisses this tactic as well, scoffing that “simply sitting or staying in a certain place will not change or improve the economic or political system,” I disagree (Sharp, Q&A). The protesters are not merely sitting in place but building community, challenging fundamental assumptions about what is possible, and staging direct actions. Furthermore, the mere act of occupying space changes the political climate, affects public consciousness, and reclaims the public sphere. In critical theorist Nancy Fraser’s critique of Jürgen Habermas’ conceptualization of the public sphere, she notes the importance of the public sphere to democracy, noting that it is “not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations, a theater for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling...the public sphere permits us to keep in view the distinctions between state apparatuses, economic markets, and democratic associations, distinctions that are essential to democratic theory” (Fraser, 57).

Not only does Occupy reestablish a public sphere, it creates a space that disrupts the isolation that characterizes much of life under late capitalism—indeed, that isolation is integral to

its functioning. Or, in Debord's words, "separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle...the reigning economic system is founded on isolation; at the same time it is a circular process designed to produce isolation" (22). Journalist Aaron Lake Smith observes Occupy's disruption of that isolation:

People like to go to Occupy Wall Street because it is a tear in the commoditized social fabric of New York City...The best place to go when you're lonely is the Temporary Autonomous Zone. You might see someone you know. You might have an interesting conversation with someone you don't. Normally frigid social relations are warmed up and people can interact with each other on an even playing field, without being dogged by hierarchy. (Smith, "Pre-Occupy")

Additionally, the mere sight of so many tents occupying a public space disrupts the urban landscape and provokes thought. That the occupants of the tents are not the stereotypical homeless-presenting individuals but more privileged-presenting people creates a *détournement* of homelessness itself.

The movement's occupation of public space also catalyzes a decolonization of the imagination. As provocative post-Marxist Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek noted in his address to OWS, "the ruling system has even oppressed our capacity to dream. Look at the movies that we see all the time. It's easy to imagine the end of the world. An asteroid destroying all life and so on. But you cannot imagine the end of capitalism." The importance of imagination cannot be overstated. The status quo relies utterly on the ability of the State to "[convince] us all that the current form of capitalism is the only conceivable economic system, so its flaws are irrelevant" (Graeber, "OWS Rediscovered the Radical Imagination"). OWS founder David Graeber and Žižek's voices are in unison on the paramount importance of imagination:

If the occupiers finally manage to break the 30-year stranglehold that has been placed on the human imagination ... everything will once again be on the table – and the occupiers of Wall Street and other cities around the US will have done us the greatest favour anyone possibly can. (Graeber, “OWS Rediscovered the Radical Imagination”)

Žižek also makes the important point that Occupy does not necessarily exist to provide answers, but to ask questions:

Remember that our basic message is ‘We are allowed to think about alternatives.’ If the rule is broken, we do not live in the best possible world. But there is a long road ahead. There are truly difficult questions that confront us. ... But what do we want? What social organization can replace capitalism? (Žižek, “Žižek in Wall Street – Transcript”)

#### **4.4 Structure is Tactic: Occupy as Multitude**

Hardt and Negri describe the multitude as “the only social subject capable of realizing democracy, that is, the rule of everyone by everyone” (Hardt and Negri 100). Following that, it seems logically consistent to demand that the composition of any movement should be unflinchingly democratic—otherwise, how could a multitude conquer Empire, emerging to “express itself autonomously and rule itself” (Hardt and Negri 101). In regards to this consideration, I do find the unequivocal commitment to democracy within the Occupy movement to be promising. Occupy Wall Street, Occupy DC, and localized occupations across the country are all using horizontal models of decision-making such as consensus. I argue that participation in consensus decision-making processes is a transformative experience, one which provides participants with real life experience forming social relationships based on cooperation and compromise—the alternative being coercion, domination, and exploitation. The latter

methods are the domain of the State—or in the terminology of Hardt and Negri, which rightly acknowledges the transnational nature of powerful entities—the Empire. Just as horizontal decision-making processes transform the lives of those who participate, commitment to those processes transform a movement into a revolutionary counterpower. Chomsky confirms the paramount importance of direct contact with Occupy, affirming that “you learn from participating. You learn from others. You learn from the people you're trying to organize” (Chomsky, “Occupy the Future”).

## **5. Criteria for a Revolutionary Movement**

Most of the cultural critics whose work I used in exploring this topic make it a point to state that their work is not intended to be prescriptive. Their work is concerned with how the apparatus of social control operates, or with contrasting the organization of the ruling order to the organization of the multitude. I suspect that this silence is calculated. We see that “modes of repression always follow innovations in resistance,” so there is a clear impetus for silence for those with a stake in substantial radical change (Fernandez 165). Why show the State your hand, your blueprint? This is why many authors offer ideas but leave the reader (and generations of scholars, subsequently) to draw their own conclusions. I recognize the value of that strategy, but I have chosen to disregard that concern. I do not intend this paper to be an inert documentation of a particular moment in history, but a living document and an active intervention in an unfolding uprising. It is with that sense of urgency that I present my criteria for what a left movement needs in order to be successful. These criteria is a result of revisiting the democratic-globalization movement, reviewing radical theory, and digesting my own experiences and involvement both in previous activism as well as the Occupy movement.

### **5.1 Criterion: The Movement’s Tactics Must Not Legitimize The Ruling Order**

Or, put in a way that avoids the contrary voice characteristic of opposition movements: the central tactics of the movement must serve to build counterpower, instead of validating the same power structures it disputes. I have already expounded on this criterion in my discussion of tactics, so here I will only add a few notes. I do not mean to diminish the importance or impact of reforms sought or achieved within legitimate channels. When quality of life improves for marginalized or repressed communities, people do not lose commitment to revolutionary causes, they simply have more energy to dedicate to organizing as opposed to individual survival strategies. Note my use of the term ruling order, where previously I have used “the State.” I do so intentionally, to acknowledge the “system of relations” that includes explicitly governmental institutions, non-governmental institutions, and the “strategic adversary” that Michel Foucault names in his introduction to *Anti-Oedipus*: “the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us” (xii).

## **5.2 Criterion: The Movement Must Resist Incorporation Into The Ruling Order**

In this context, I use incorporation to refer to the process by which a movement ceases to be an independent entity and instead becomes a part of the status quo. This can happen as a result of actions (or inactions) taken by the movement itself or by the manipulation of situations by outside entities such as the State or the corporate media. I also use the word co-option to refer to the latter situation.

In November, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) made an early endorsement of President Obama and adopted the language of the Occupy movement in one fell swoop (Thomas, “99% Arrive”). To some, unions are a powerful example of counterpower, and their important role in advocating for, uniting, and improving conditions for working people

historically should not be understated. However, today they are part of the ruling order, the same political establishment whose corruption, campaign donations, and bureaucracy Occupy problematizes. With election year around the corner, many Democrats are already attempting to use the momentum of Occupy to get reelected. Lawyer and journalist Glenn Greenwald warns that “[White house] aligned groups such as the Center for American Progress have made explicitly clear that they are going to try to convert OWS into a vote-producing arm for the Obama 2012 campaign” (Greenwald, “Here’s what attempted co-option of OWS looks like”). The “We will NOT be Co-opted” working group of OWS dismisses endorsements and comparisons to the Tea Party as “undermining the very essence of this movement with your obsolete divide and conquer groupthink propaganda.”

A leaked memo from the DC based lobbying firm Clark Lytle Geduldig & Cranford to the American Bankers Association provides indisputable evidence of a conscious effort on the part of the ruling order to delegitimize, destroy, and co-opt the Occupy movement:

Well-known Wall Street companies stand at the nexus of where OWS protestors and the Tea Party overlap on angered populism ... This combination has the potential to be explosive later in the year when media reports cover the next round of bonuses and contrast it with stories of millions of Americans making do with less this holiday season. ... It will be vital to understand who is funding [Occupy] and what their backgrounds and motives are. If we can show that they have the same cynical motivation as a political opponent it will undermine their credibility in a profound way. (Clark et al, “Proposal: Occupy Wall Street Response”)

The non-hierarchical nature of Occupy provides some protection against the type of scheming the memo suggests, but it is still vital for movement participants to understand the strategies and motivation of their opponents.

The risk of incorporation from within the movement is more difficult to enumerate. It lies in self-satisfaction and nostalgia, and Žižek warns of it in his address to OWS: “There is a danger. Don’t fall in love with yourselves. We have a nice time here. But remember, carnivals come cheap. What matters is the day after ... Will there be any changes then? I don’t want you to remember these days, you know, like ‘Oh, we were young and it was beautiful.’”

### **5.3 Criterion: The Movement Must Not Replicate Oppressive Social Relationships**

Why is it so vital for our movements to reflect the world we wish to live in? Why is it essential for the Occupy movement to be an intersectional feminist movement committed to dismantling oppressive social relationships? The heart of the Occupy movement is an objection to unearned power. That is the same objection at the heart of work seeking to dismantle patriarchy, white supremacy, homophobia, ableism, and the myriad intersectional oppressions that both sustain the ruling order (read: the 1%) and keep the 99% divided and thus conquered. But this criterion has a caveat: there is an expectation that the movement is constantly evolving and that this perhaps impossible end is constantly being worked toward. We do not enter into revolutionary organizing as blank slates but as products of our society and conditioning, with all the internalized oppressions and baggage that entails. Here I invoke the concept of the Body without Organs (BwO) from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The BwO is an assemblage with no fundamental organizational principles. It is also an impossibility: “you never reach the Body without Organs, you can’t reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit” (Deleuze and Guattari 150). The BwO is an entity in constant flux with emergent properties—which is how I would

describe a horizontally organized protest such as the Occupy movement. A movement defined by process necessitates fluidity. Working groups or committees may last but a week, with a complex and multifaceted identity based on the constantly changing membership. Pure democracy (the BwO) is never truly achieved, as we work toward the goal of dismantling our internalized oppressions and all the other factors that keep us from being purely democratic, unprejudiced beings. The concept of the BwO is consistent with the anarchist emphasis on process that Occupy has adopted in its decision-making methods and organization.

As it stands now, the Occupy movement is far from achieving this criterion but on the right track. Occupy DC has a people of color working group and a white allies working group to support its efforts, and numerous occupations have employed anti-racist and anti-oppression trainings. A faction within Occupy DC, calling itself Decolonize DC, issued a declaration delineating the many ways in which the movement has thus far failed marginalized people, including “men of color being racially profiled and falsely accused of wrongdoing,” “failure to make meetings and assemblies accessible to people who are deaf and to people with disabilities,” and “cis-men complaining about being asked to inquire about pronoun preference” (Decolonize DC, “Statement”).

#### **5.4 What Does A Post-Revolutionary Society Look Like?**

Presenting criteria that a left movement needs to meet in order to be revolutionary begs questions, or at least discussions, of what a post-revolutionary society might look like. In answer to that question, I will partially plead the same calculated silence as my aforementioned scholarly predecessors. The post-revolutionary society will necessarily reflect the wishes of those who comprise it, and will not be monolithic or stagnant. It is not up to a single academic to be the architect of a post-revolutionary society. Furthermore, I dismiss entirely the validity of the notion

of a *post-revolutionary society*. A people that has dispensed with some methods of control and oppression will encounter still more mechanisms of that kind, within and without, as I stated in the third criterion.

The 1983 feminist alternate-history film *Born In Flames* depicts an America celebrating the anniversary of a revolution, and the government self-identifies as Socialist. News outlets celebrate the improved conditions for all people, but to viewers it quickly becomes obvious that the “revolutionary” changes have not benefitted women, lesbians, or people of color. Indeed, their position is still one of subjugation and disadvantage. Women’s militias form and agitate to create further change. There are many lessons to be learned from this excellent film. Perhaps the greatest is that the moment in which a movement declares itself to be post-revolutionary is the moment in which it becomes post-revolutionary in another sense—it becomes the establishment. In *Society of the Spectacle*, Situationist Guy Debord observes the insidiousness of self-congratulation and its role in the mechanisms of social control: “the ruling order discourses endlessly upon itself in an uninterrupted monologue of self-praise” (19). The revolutionary society is itself a BwO, to be forever attained (Deleuze and Guattari 150).

## **6. Conclusion**

The revolutionary potential of the Occupy movement lies in its ability to establish itself as a counterpower and act in accordance with the criteria I have outlined. The many nuances of self-governance such as restorative justice processes and accountability processes bear further exploration. My investigation was remiss in several respects, most notably in its examination (or lack thereof) of unions, informants, marginalized communities, and the USA’s role in the world.

My discussion of the relationship between organized labor and the Occupy movement was quite cursory. There are many lessons to learn about building counterpower from labor

history, and there is also a threat of co-option from unions. The interactions between organized labor, Occupy Oakland, and wildcatting port workers in the last few days throughout the West Coast port shutdown are one site ripe for inquiry. In my discussion of co-option, I abstained from mentioning the role that State infiltration and informants have played, historically and also today, in the co-option and dissolution of movements. With the recent passage of the National Defense Authorization Act, it appears the next weapon of the State may be to detain its own citizens without charge, as domestic terrorists. Occupy must somehow prepare itself for such an alarming and brutal use of State power. Though marginalized peoples and communities were not wholly absent from my exploration, it absolutely bears reemphasis that only a movement directed by the needs of its most marginalized and disenfranchised participants truly holds popular revolutionary potential.

Finally, Occupy should also be scrutinized in a global scope. Ultimately, its success will depend on the extent to which it has both accrued and participated in international solidarity. Though “western industrialized nations are now being masticated by the financial monster they themselves created,” it is essential for USA Occupy participants to understand that much of the rest of the world was devastated first (Adbusters, “#OCCUPYWALLSTREET Update”). I believe that truth calls for radical first world accountability, and it remains to be seen what that might look like.

We will ask nothing. We will demand nothing. We will take, occupy.

(Knabb, “MAY 1968 GRAFFITI”)

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