

**NO STABLE GROUND:  
REAL DEMOCRACY IN THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT**

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**PhD Thesis**

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*Rodzicom*

To my Parents

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## SUMMARY

This thesis documents and analyses various aspects of the Occupy movement in Dublin and Cork in Ireland as well as the San Francisco Bay Area (Oakland, San Francisco and Berkeley) in the United States. The core focus of this investigation is Occupy's direct democratic processes and dynamics both as a way of making decisions as well as organising collectively. I draw on militant ethnographic, movement-relevant and participatory action research as well as on the theoretical concepts of Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan in order to develop an embedded and nuanced, contemporary understanding of the nature of political engagement and direct democracy in the Occupy movement and beyond. The research shows what direct democracy *actually* looks like. If I were to point to one thing that the Occupy movement taught its participants, it would be that direct democracy, as practised by real people in real situations, is not always this ideal of a non-alienating, self-transparent way of making collective decisions and engaging in actions.

This research highlights the realities of the movement situation where the participants had to negotiate uncertainty with their responsibility and commitment to Occupy and the issues that it raised. The analysis also brings out the complexity of Occupy's temporalities of living "real democracy" that does not simply mean "substantive" as opposed to the "void" liberal representational form of democracy. In my usage, real democracy signifies the lived experience of people's political engagement that is radical yet riddled with inconsistencies and uncertainties. The analysis outlines also the framework of "real politics" – a politics that accepts the constitutive lack of the political sphere, the contradictory demands at the basis of democracy, the irreducibility of social antagonisms and alterity.

In this thesis, I am interested in giving an account of and analysing the subjective realities of Occupy participants' political engagement with change. I also claim that this engagement represents an innovative approach to democracy which may constitute an alternative to the current liberal representative politics of the Western world. This thesis hopes to feed back in to movements an understanding of social action as inescapably complex and often contradictory in nature, which is positive since it affirms movements' radical agency (movements do not unfold in an automatic or a structurally determined way but make active interventions into their situations).

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **NO STABLE GROUND**

In early summer 2012, I arrived in Oakland with my pocket recorder and a set of spare batteries. I wanted to check where the people from Occupy were at, participate in whatever actions I could, hear some of their stories, share mine, and depart with a well-intentioned but still pretty obscure promise that we will all benefit from the experience. As a perpetual immigrant, I could not offer anything more than that.

Back in Ireland, months flew by while I was trying to code the interviews and decipher pages filled with miniature worm-like zigzags. One evening as I was turning a loose page in my Oakland notebook, an emphatic arrow with the word research next to it stood out. It was pointing to a little note that said: "City Hall and amphitheatre in front." That was it. I went back to my photos from Oakland. It turned out that when I had been scanning them, I mechanically skipped over ones with no "action" in them. I glanced over the photos of an empty Oscar Grant Plaza where Occupy Oakland used to have its main encampment. Now displaying them on a computer screen, I smiled at the sight of the unpretentious amphitheatre at the foot of the magnificent construction of City Hall. The structure of the amphitheatre looks relatively new and consists of four levels of concrete benches that encircle a light blue and greyish dais of six half-round steps. The terrazzo features Lake Merritt, City Hall and the Jack London oak tree as its central images. This was the place where numerous Occupy Oakland assemblies were held and it is the exact spot where on the night of 26<sup>th</sup> October 2011 Occupy Oakland reached an agreement to hold a general strike a week after. The action on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2011 was the first general strike in Oakland and the entire United States since 1946.

What was so special about the amphitheatre? Perhaps, as one of the occupiers told me, his voice raising and becoming subdued from excitement: "It was like it was made for it!" I started remembering that I had talked about this peculiar structure with other people in Oakland and how they were laughingly encouraging me to "research" the history of that place. At the time, I did not make much of these suggestions although I did think that it was a great stroke of ironic luck to have the amphitheatre in such a symbolic place. Much the same way as it was ironic to be able to stage a five-month occupation in the spacious Central Bank plaza, located amidst an otherwise crowded and densely interlaced Temple Bar area in Dublin.

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We know for certain that the Central Bank plaza was not meant to be a place for airing public grievances and sustained civil disobedience. The “big bank” was finished in 1980. It is a suspended structure which means that it was literally built from the top down, because each floor was assembled at the ground level and then hoisted up, with the top floor going up first to be suspended from two tall concrete towers that constitute the core of the construction (‘1980 - Central Bank of Ireland, Dame Street, Dublin’, 2010). Originally, the plaza did not have a fence around the grand stairs leading to the entrance of the building but the sole function of the inviting benches and granite pavement with fan-shaped patterns was only to balance the sharp and austere curvature of the great building. Interestingly, the construction history of the Central Bank parallels the symbolism behind the story of Oakland City Hall.

Was the amphitheatre in front of Oakland City Hall made for public assemblies of self-governing communities? I knew that tracing the original intentions of planners and investors might prove an utterly futile exercise but I decided to try anyway. And I am glad that I did – however briefly – because there is an illuminating story behind it. When the City Hall at 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway (Oakland's fifth city hall) was built in 1914, it was the tallest building west of the Mississippi and considered to be cutting edge – built in Beaux Arts-style, setting new trends by combining traditional civic roles with a high rise office building. It had 14 floors and accommodated a city jail, police and fire stations and even a hospital (Ward, 2011). The plans to renovate the plaza began in the 1960s and by 1984 the intention was to make it into a symbolic civic and ceremonial centre. It was proposed that one of the objectives of the square should be “a performance space with both stage and audience areas, holding rallies and demonstrations, formal City Hall arrivals and departures” (Oakland History Room, personal communication, March 17, 2013). As the design efforts were shaping up in the 1980s, nobody foresaw that they would be brought to an abrupt halt.

The Loma Prieta earthquake that struck Oakland and the San Francisco Bay Area in October 1989 left City Hall severely damaged. From the outside it might not have seem like much – only the clock tower hovering over the massive structure suffered the most. But had the shaking continued, it was only a matter of seconds before it would have collapsed. The structural core of the building was also severely damaged. The amount of resources needed to fix it was immense and the city needed to decide what to do with the evacuated building.

Thanks to money from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Oakland Redevelopment Agency and local bond issue, the building was completely restored (‘Post-

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earthquake building restoration wins award', 1997). As part of the \$85 million deal, the building received a significant earthquake retrofitting. The new base isolation system required that 90 steel structural columns be cut off from the concrete foundation of the building, lifted up, placed upon a platform made of concrete and steel, which in turn would rest on 113 steel-encased rubber bearings bolted to the foundation. That essentially means that the building itself is not attached to its foundation so that in the case of an earthquake, it can move from 18-20 inches laterally (Burt, 2009). The building is rootless; it does not have a stable foundation.

In 1994 a decision was made to rename City Hall Plaza "Frank H. Ogawa Plaza" after a Japanese-American Oakland City Councilman who served for 28 years and died of lung cancer (Obituary Mercury News Wire Services, 1994). A year after, in 1995, Oakland City Council voted to spend \$102 million of the city's redevelopment agency money on a project to restore downtown. This anti-blight push to counteract the results of the earthquake and the 1980s recession identified the local stores and artists as potential losers of the new project (DelVecchio, 1995a). Who was to gain from it? Well, it was going to provide space for hundreds of City workers and boost property values in the abandoned urban core. In the mid-1990s, the local media also unashamedly declared that the redevelopment project will help the plaza in front of City Hall to "become the public ground it was meant to be" and even assist in "reaffirm[ing] the democratic tradition of the civic plaza" (DelVecchio, 1995c).

When completed in 1998, the project – together with its restoration of Frank Ogawa Plaza – was to encourage street life (DelVecchio, 1995b, 1995c). Most likely, the city advisers did not even imagine the kind of street life that Occupy Oakland brought to this place in October 2011. The movement renamed the square "Oscar Grant Plaza" after a black man shot dead by a BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) police officer on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2009 and in recognition of the ongoing struggle for justice for Oscar Grant.

At the press conference a day after the (first) eviction of the Occupy encampment carried out for variously defined "safety reasons," Mayor Quan said that the city agencies were trying to "restore the park as a free speech area" (*Occupy Oakland Media Update - October 26, 2011*, 2011). Oscar Grant Plaza was to remain a place for democratic and free debate only on the condition that there would be no tents, tarps and sleeping bags! In other words, in a building unattached to its foundation, we were told that the plaza could only function as a democratic and public space if the very activity of democratic conversation and radical protest – now

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suspended – remained an abstract possibility; a possibility that stays unrealised.

Some may claim that the protest could have been more successful, or continued, if the participants had not insisted on the occupation as their main strategy, and/or it could ensure the safety of all. In other words, maybe Occupy would have been allowed to stay or come back if it could guarantee that there would be no injuries, knife-pulling, drug dealing, sexual harassment and homelessness. If the city officials were pressed further for their ideal notions of exercising the right to free speech, we would soon discover that the City's idea of protest does not amount to much that could really bear its name. Occupying and trying to practise real democracy in the here and now is frequently a messy and challenging endeavour with its own inconsistencies, deformations and problems. But this is exactly why it is called *real* democracy. If we were to get rid of all messiness, we would be left with an empty egg shell that might be perfectly round and smooth but has not a trace of a potential for life in it. Democracy, in the end, is about the notion that no idea for governing ourselves is good enough to last for ever. No idea can be that universal. Funnily enough, it seems that sometimes we need a quake to realise that the ground under our ways of governing is not that stable after all.

## **THESIS SUMMARY**

This thesis documents and analyses various aspects of the Occupy movement in Dublin and Cork in Ireland as well as the San Francisco Bay Area (Oakland, San Francisco and Berkeley) in the United States. The core focus of this investigation is Occupy's direct democratic processes and dynamics both as a way of making decisions as well as organising collectively. The question that structures the research is: how did direct democracy work in Occupy? I draw on militant ethnographic, movement-relevant and participatory action research as well as on the theoretical concepts of Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan in order to develop an embedded and nuanced, contemporary understanding of the nature of political engagement and direct democracy in the Occupy movement and beyond. The research shows what direct democracy *actually* looks like.

This thesis is not aimed at answering the questions of why Occupy happened, what makes movements like it more or less likely or why they sometimes work and sometimes do not. Instead, this research addresses the problematic of what happens in a movement context when it seems that the potential for change has been activated. In particular, I am interested in

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giving an account of and analysing the subjective realities of Occupy participants' political engagement with change. I also claim that this engagement represents an innovative approach to democracy which may constitute an alternative to the current liberal representative politics of the Western world.

To begin with, this research highlights the realities of the movement situation where the participants had to negotiate uncertainty with their responsibility and commitment to Occupy and the issues that it raised. The analysis also brings out the complexity of Occupy's temporalities of living real democracy. This complexity does not signify merely the plurality of identities and diversity of outlooks, but marks moments when it seems that the dominant social construction starts to fall apart and another one is in the making. These are the moments of "real politics" – a politics that accepts the constitutive lack of the political sphere, the contradictory demands at the basis of democracy, the irreducibility of social antagonisms and alterity. In Occupy, participants often made decisions and took actions in the face of irresolvable dilemmas with contradictory demands. What makes the movement particularly interesting is how it endured those aporias and deconstructed the "originary violence" (the "no stable ground") of the dominant systems of governance. Institutionalising the possibility of that deconstruction could be helpful for mobilising political engagement. It might also facilitate social change in a direction of more direct democratic systems. My argument, however, is that one should be careful with what one thinks that direct democracy could actually be and do. If I were to point to one thing that the Occupy movement taught its participants, it would be that direct democracy, as practised by real people in real situations, is not always this ideal of a non-alienating, self-transparent way of making collective decisions and engaging in actions.

Bearing this in mind and finally, this thesis offers an analytical reflection on the potential of direct democracy as a concept of social change on a grand scale. Through a brief exploration of the history of participatory democracy, it probes the Occupy experience and the conclusions about the nature of political engagement for insights into the possibility of more participatory democratic systems of self-governance and of reinventing democracy itself. Can (some form of) direct democracy become an actual alternative to representative democracy? Although direct democratic decision-making in Occupy was not totally non-alienating and self-transparent, none of the events that effect vast social changes really are. Instead, they require a leap of faith, an act that expands the meaning of freedom, collectivity and democracy itself beyond their current political forms.

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This thesis hopes to feed back in to movements an understanding of social action as inescapably complex and often contradictory in nature, which is positive since it affirms movements' radical agency (movements do not unfold in an automatic, or structurally determined way but make active interventions into their situations). I hope that this could help foster a sense of possibility and potential in social movements as opposed to the expectation of failure of all popular protest which the powers that be rely on in order to uphold their authority.

### **WHY THIS TOPIC AND WHY NOW?**

This research project did not start out as an exploration of the Occupy movement. I started thinking about how participants in movements make decisions, and what actions follow these decisions, because of my own involvement in alter-globalisation and student movements. The title of my first research proposal was about contemporary alter-globalisation movements and the (im)possibilities of radical action in post-politics. Occupy was indeed a major turn-around in my research. Firstly, I moved on from researching small anarchist collectives to the local manifestations of a global phenomenon. Secondly, the impact of the debilitating closure of post-political discourses and financial economy seemed to be crumbling as the impossibility suddenly turned into a possibility.

In order to further explain some of the reasons why I was moved to research this topic, I should quote parts of my first research proposal at some length here. They also aptly demonstrate what my assessments of some of movement literature and the potential for change were at that time:

The impulse to research [how] the contemporary alter-globalisation movements decide to act has essentially stemmed from, what I perceived to be, an incongruence between my experience with social and political activism on the one hand, and orthodox sociological and "scientific" scholarship on social movements, on the other. As an International Relations graduate, I was accustomed to the way of speaking about major political and social events that laid great emphasis on the so-called "high politics" of guarantees, self-interest and international anarchy in which every nation-state is alone to fend for itself. On the ground, however, as an alter-globalist and student activist I noticed that informality and sometimes seemingly naïve trust between people and groups decided about a success or failure of an initiative. In traditional sociology I was also unable to find a vocabulary that would make me understand my experiences with social movements and help think about what I, what we should be doing. What

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struck me most was that sociological theories about social movements offer little when it comes to instigating social change. The social change that the very “object” of those theories strives to achieve every day...

The following paragraph described more my hope (that I will eventually discover new forms of politics within alter-globalisation groups) than any concrete knowledge:

The main research aim is to investigate how the alter-globalisation movements decide to act. This is to mean [that] I would like to get engaged in the movements in order to search for new forms of politicisation and mobilisation of new forms of politics and decision-making...

It turned out, however, that eventually – with Occupy’s help – I was able to analyse some interesting direct democratic forms of politics. Two years before the movement started, however (and like in many moments in the past before big social upheavals), it was easy to see why it was not expected:

[The] post-political reality finds its reflection in the crisis of contemporary social movements. Big-scale collective acts have become suspicious (Žižek, 2008) not only because after the Cold War ideological struggles are passé, but also because resistance is increasingly shut in in individual or legal remedies. Hence, movements further depoliticise politics itself (Douzinas, 2007). As far as they appear, the mode of large collective actions is deliberately designed to resemble partying in order to remove any inconvenience that is traditionally associated with protesting (Edkins, 2000)...

Movements with a more charitable underside may even breed the feelings of distance and produce alienation (Douzinas, 2007) since their activities are built on the clear distinction between “them” and “us.” Needless to say, this distinction is hierarchical. Big international organisations contribute to this crisis as they perceive NGOs, rather than self-organised and less institutionalised social movements, as a guarantee of the approximation to direct political participation (UN Economic and Security Council, 1994). The so-called subaltern movements are hindered because together with aid brought by social organisations, people receive a set of ideas and preferences of Western modernisation (Duffield, 2003). Social democratic and postmodern perceptions of movements advertise the role of the actors as that of making power visible (but not striving to replace it) (Stammers, 1999) and guarding the ethics (of the world?) by propagating moderation. Against the plight of the helpless and the weak (Shue, 1980), who they never fail to call just that, there is the majority of contemporary social movements which draw their discursive strength and resources from the combined forces of post-political neoliberalism and the rule of law.

When I read those words now, it amazes me, that despite this (probably over-)critical assessment of the scope of movements’ agency and the contemporary political environment at



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the time, I was still trying to find out what movements can do to act in radical ways and effect meaningful change. There was a problem and I wanted to help in resolving it. I just could not stand the thought that social movements could not act on their potential for bringing about democratic change and I wanted to understand and locate my simultaneous indignation with the current state of things and a passion for change.

This did not stem from any particular ideology or worldview. I do not come from a very politicised family. I did not read Proudhon and Bakunin as a teenager, did not wear a Mohawk and wore ripped clothing only when I was doing dirty physical work. I was brought up large distances away from movements' "centres of action." In other words, I did not grow up as a revolutionary; I was (still am?) a ferocious rebel though, hypersensitive to all signs of injustice and discrimination, a fair share of which I have suffered through for the better part of my life. I only got to know that I could call myself anything in terms of political outlook when other people started to tell me who I was. This is probably what has made me always more concerned with the practical and human dimensions of people's actions than with how those actions measured up to some criteria and suspiciously grand plans. Unavoidably, this is also the approach that drives me in this thesis. Although my main concerns are always practical and political rather than expressive or ideological, my ontological stance or the way I approach questions of social change, justice and politics is from a broadly anarchist and anti-capitalist perspective.

## **THESIS STRUCTURE**

This thesis is comprised of: an introduction, eight chapters that deal with theory, approaches and methods of movement research and an analysis of empirical findings, and a conclusion. The introduction provides a broad overview of the issues that I will be tackling in the findings chapters by investigating the story of the Oscar Grant Plaza where Occupy Oakland had its main encampment. It also summarises the major points of this thesis and explores the reasons that made me embark on this research project.

In chapters 1-3, I explore different aspects of the existing literature and theories about movements. In particular, the first chapter outlines the main shortcomings of the emerging literature on Occupy and provides a broad overview of the different literatures on earlier movements (especially the alter-globalisation movement) and direct democracy. It then

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presents a short description of how the Occupy movement came to be, what its main features and outcomes were. This is followed by an introduction to the consensus decision-making process that outlines its practical advantages and disadvantages.

Chapter 2 deals with the “canon” of social movement theory. Firstly, it lays out three criteria for an effective analysis of Occupy and identifies three clusters of concepts that would be important for the analysis of empirical findings. The clusters are grouped around such concepts as: uncertainty, potential for change and an inherent failure of all structures of governance. In that chapter, I provide a critical analysis of the different social movement theories with reference to the particular features and dynamics of the Occupy movement.

In Chapter 3, I introduce the philosophical thought of Jacques Derrida and the psychoanalytical theory of Jacques Lacan and bring it to bear on the three clusters of concepts that will be used in the findings chapters. I also demonstrate how their approaches to knowledge and knowledge production square with the interdisciplinary character of this thesis.

Chapter 4 discusses the approaches and methods of movement research that I used in this project. Firstly, I outline the methods of data collection. Subsequently, I provide detailed descriptions and reflexive analyses of the three main approaches employed in this research: militant ethnography, movement-relevant research and participatory action research. I then move on to explore the nature of the researcher’s role in this project by examining the possible relationships between researchers and activists in engaged research. I also attempt to shed some light on how systemic challenges and the changing model of science influence those relationships. I conclude this chapter with a broader discussion of an understanding of ignorance as a positive condition of knowledge and what this means for an individual’s social and political activism. Each of the sections in this chapter starts with an excerpt or a set of excerpts from my field notes and interviews. Their purpose is to illustrate, in an empirical way, how the methodological approaches that I describe were employed in practice in this research project. They also illuminate other methodological issues that I otherwise examine on a more theoretical level.

Chapters 5-8 present an analysis of the empirical findings of this research. Chapter 5 provides a detailed description and analysis of the processes of learning consensus decision-making in Occupy Dame Street in Dublin, Ireland. It points to the ways in which uncertainty impacted on the processes of learning in Occupy and how it intersected with the responsibility and

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commitment of the participants.

In chapter 6, I first outline some of the mechanisms and effects of prefiguration in Occupy. Subsequently, I attempt to go beyond the theoretical framework that prefiguration offers by exploring different aspects of living temporalities in the movement. In this part of the thesis, I also present my understanding of “real democracy” that highlights the complexity and uncertainty of movement situations.

Chapter 7 explores the mode of Occupy participants’ engagement with radical change. It also sketches the framework of the real politics within which they were acting. It is a politics that accepts the constitutive lack of the political sphere, irreducibility of social antagonisms and alterity. Firstly, by utilising Lacan’s and Derrida’s theoretical constructions, the chapter examines ways in which Occupy aimed to transcend the rules of the day. It then describes some challenges that the movement faced. Subsequently, I briefly analyse a few aporias that were endured in Occupy. Lastly, I discuss the question of whether it is inevitable that the “lacks” in the system and in subjects, keep constantly re-emerging and what this can mean for future radical activism.

In chapter 8, I ask the question about the future of direct democracy by looking at the history of this practice in a number of movements. I also explore the idea that, what was new about the revival of direct democracy that Occupy brought with it, was the return of a vision that direct and participatory democracy should be something more than merely a mode of movements’ internal organising practices. The Occupy movement reinvigorated the idea that direct democracy could describe a political system.

The sequence of the findings chapters marks a progression of this thesis’ argument in two ways. Firstly, they indicate an increasing degree of theoretical sophistication, abstractness and an expansion in scale: from an analysis of concrete movement situations, through a description of broader processes of “living real democracy,” to a framework of what I have come to call “real politics.” This is, in turn, followed by a brief discussion of direct democracy as a concept of social change and the possibility of “scaling up” of direct democracy.

Secondly, every findings chapter picks up the argument about the nature of radical political engagement where the previous chapter left it off. In chapter 5, I say that in order to make consensus decision-making work better, movement participants may need to accept an interstitial nature of autonomy, that is the complexity of the situation where one lives in

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between two worlds: the actual one and the one such movements as Occupy hope for. The following chapter develops this argument in that it analyses how that interstitiality was played out in Occupy – both in prefigurative and other ways that escape the framework of prefiguration. The analysis reveals the complexity of the movement situation and develops an understanding of real democracy that incorporates the inconsistencies and messiness of Occupy's actions. In chapter 7, I explore the nature and meaning of these inconsistencies for Occupy (which were manifested in many paradoxes and aporias of democracy) as well as a broader framework of real politics. In chapter 8, I examine the possibility of the “scaling up” of direct democracy from an internal practice of movements to popular regional or national levels. I conclude that this may be possible but in order to make it work, democratic structures would have to go beyond the mere emulation of movements' systems of decision-making and instead make all democratic innovation centred around those who are excluded from its workings. As the Occupy experience showed, however, one should not expect that direct democracy is always going to be a completely self-transparent and non-alienating process. Furthermore, I point out that treating direct democracy as a concept of social change, and making it work on a grander scale, may also require changing the rules of economic organisation and scales of governance.

This thesis concludes with a brief summary of the arguments made, questions for further research and proposed contribution to knowledge that it offers. I finish with a reflection on the nature of political engagement and possibility for social change. The thesis is followed by nine appendices.

- Appendix 1 is a glossary of the main terms that were used in Occupy.
- Appendix 2 is an information handout about consensus decision-making in Occupy Dame Street that I prepared and which was used in the camp.
- Appendix 3 is an information sheet that I used during one of the first workshops that I organised about consensus decision-making in Occupy Dame Street
- Appendix 4 is an example of other materials about consensus that were used in Occupy Dame Street. This handout was created by the Seeds for Change network.
- Appendix 5 is a poster announcing a series of Conversations about Occupy – a series of workshops in Occupy Dame Street.

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- Appendix 6 is a summary of the discussion of the Occupy – Lessons learned workshop that I co-organised during Grassroots Gathering in Galway, 2012.
- Appendix 7 is an interview consent form that I used in the interviews that I conducted for this project.
- Appendix 8 is a sample of my interview coding.
- Appendix 9 is an interview transcript.

Various parts of this thesis have been published as two research articles in *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts, and Change*, Vol. 36 as well as *Interface – a journal for and about social movements*, 5(2). Other parts are under consideration by *Globalizations* and *Social Movement Studies*.

## **AT THE INTERSECTIONS OF A MOVEMENT, DEMOCRACY AND EMERGING LITERATURE:**

Introduction to Occupy and consensus decision-making

### **LITERATURE ON OCCUPY: MAIN CONCERNS**

Inevitably, when one is researching a contemporary phenomenon such as the Occupy movement, the first difficulty that one is likely to encounter is that there is no established “literature” about it. This is as much an advantage as a liability. It is thrilling to be able to contribute rigorous analysis to a recent occurrence that has had such a wide resonance around the world. It forces researchers and activists to engage in timely discussions about issues that matter here and now. It provides critical input into debates and actions that aim to change the ways in which we think about and act in the world. Although I think that this should be the main aim of research, I also realise that an opportunity to actually act on this vision of what research may be, is not something that scholars and activists can experience very often. Due to the lack of established literature on the subject of Occupy, the researchers have some freedom in the way in which they choose to construct their account of what Occupy was. With this freedom, however, also comes responsibility and this is where some of the current and emerging literature on Occupy has not lived up to the potential of what it could have been.

The lack of established literature on Occupy may be a liability because doing research about the movement, I often found myself adrift, not sure how specific or common my observations were and looking for others’ insights into some of the most mind-boggling questions. Naturally, Internet and the blogosphere provided immense resources with information about Occupy. A lot of the time, however, this was in the form of an activist know-how (primers on the consensus process, the General Assemblies etc. (such as: UnaSpencer, 2011) or, even more often, activist, journalistic or academic popular commentary. As important and informative as they were, by the very nature of the time and contexts they were written in, one could not expect that they would advance a detailed analysis of the movement. Nevertheless, I did find a number of robust individual blogs of Occupy participants that were a crucial reference point for many Occupiers and a great source of grounded analysis. Prime examples of that are: Occupy Dame Street in Dublin, Andrew Flood’s commentary on the Anarchist Writers’ blog and Unkie

Dave's boomingback or in Occupy Oakland – Omar Yassin's Hyphenated-Republic. Academic and journalistic commentary should also not be dismissed because a lot of it was often debated in the camps and referenced by participants in conversations. This is especially true in the case of nationally- or locally-specific commentary about the Occupy camps as well as the texts of such academics/journalists/activists as Naomi Klein, David Graeber or Noam Chomsky, for instance.

When one considers English-language literature alone, there have also been many books, scholarly articles and even entire journal issues or sections dedicated to Occupy and other anti-austerity movements. These are for example: *Interface* 4(1), May 2012 (a multilingual journal "for and about social movements" aimed at furthering the debate between movement practitioners and the academia), *Social Movement Studies* 11(3-4), 2012 (an international academic journal publishing research and analysis about extra-parliamentary movements, grounded in the subdiscipline and theoretical frameworks of social movement studies), *The Sociological Quarterly* 54(2), Spring 2013 (based in the US Midwest, aims to publish cutting-edge sociological research and theory and advertises itself as one of the leading generalist journals in the field). Like a lot of activist and academic commentary, however, a substantial portion of it bears the marks of immediacy and urgency to say something about this "new thing that was happening." Many authors rushed to write about Occupy in a way that regardless of its form, whether it was a book or a newspaper article, still resembled more a commentary on the movement and its context rather than a systematic analysis of, at least some aspects of, Occupy. In fact, many of the books that have been published about Occupy are actually simply collections of short articles and stories, many of which had been distributed via Internet (for example: Flank, 2011; Taylor et al., 2011; Van Gelder, 2011b). There was also a peculiar bifurcation of the tone of these early works: many of them were very celebratory and supportive of the movement; the others were scathingly critical and this includes works that were produced by both movement participants and its conservative opponents. It seemed like it was very difficult to remain cool-headed in the heat of the events, which also shows that Occupy was perceived as a significant event and perhaps even one that can potentially be effective.

The major problem with the early literature on Occupy, however, is that a large portion of it actually consists of authors' ideological manifestos and treatises. There has emerged a separate strand of literature that I would call "Occupy [insert word here]" literature. Its distinct

feature is that the authors in this strand use Occupy as a pretext or a case study to elaborate on some crisis, catastrophe or a failure of public policy and call for a revolution to save something that they perceive to be common good such as education.<sup>1</sup> The titles of such books are for example: “Occupy Spirituality,” “Occupy Money,” “Occupy Religion,” “Occupy Education,” “Occupy Nation,” “Occupy Economics” and even “Occupy Everything!”. Many other accounts of the movement as well as a body of counter-accounts “debunking Occupy’s myths” are also essentially either celebratory or critical, not on the basis of any particular analysis of Occupy but the author’s pre-existent ideological positions or theory that they support (such as: Boothe, 2011; Sheehan, 2012). In other words, in a lot of literature on Occupy, the movement was reduced to a status of a “hot” case study for the authors’ predetermined ideological or theoretical frameworks. Hopefully, some of the upcoming titles will add to the existing literature. Especially promising may be texts that will offer systematic research analysis and try to situate Occupy in broader contexts of historical waves of protests or the development of democracy as well as works by reflexive participants. There are also a substantial number of articles and a few books about Occupy that I draw on throughout this thesis because even though the majority of them remain within the category of a commentary rather than a developed analysis, they are still useful for illustrating some points or providing further evidence for the conclusions reached in this thesis.

There is one more issue with the contemporary literature on Occupy that has to be borne in mind when researching the movement. Some of the people who write about Occupy are activists and scholars who have long been interested in social movements both personally and professionally. They have lived through different waves of protests and have then developed their own takes on what works and what does not as well as emotional attachment to personal and collective experiences that have shaped their biographies in profound ways. They also have an organisational memory of the movements that they have been part of. In addition, there are people who may be new to social movements; many only entered this complex environment recently when they joined anti-summit protests or Occupy itself. The intersections of history and biography and how the two groups of writers/participants are going to understand the significance of the current moment are, therefore, very different.

There is an ongoing debate that started in the Occupy camps that deals with precisely this “generational divide” (for a lack of a better phrase since the difference does not need to be

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<sup>1</sup> This analysis, however, does not come out of the movement’s own development.



based on age or on how long one has been involved in movements). Many enthusiastic or celebratory accounts of the movement are sometimes dismissed on the grounds that “Occupy got famous for a lot of things it did not invent” (Leach, 2013; J. Smith & Glidden, 2012). The argument often goes on to show how the origins of Occupy’s tactics lie in the previous waves of mobilisation and earlier movements. I absolutely agree with the point that Occupy (or other movements in the recent global wave of protest) did not come out of nowhere and invent all its tactics by itself (Flesher Fominaya, 2014). Nevertheless, I have noticed that unfortunately, the discussions about whether Occupy was actually something “new” or it was merely recycling the old tactics without even knowing it and claiming all the credit, are actually about something else. We must admit that sometimes these discussions are essentially about seeking recognition and affirming the relevance and importance of one’s own personal experiences of events that one has researched or lived through.<sup>2</sup> I think there is nothing wrong with this attitude but my take on it is that it misses the point. It really is not about whether Occupy was “new” or “old;” what is really important is what it did and perhaps what it did not do within the limited time frame in the context of this research. This is also the approach that I am going to take in this thesis.

Given the problematic status of the emerging literature on Occupy, I have often had to draw on literature about various parts of the alter-globalisation movement which has been the closest in comparison to Occupy in terms of its tactics and goals. This literature is fragmented and problematic in some of the ways that I mention below, but it also highlights movement historical continuity and evolution (Flesher Fominaya & Cox, 2013). The works about various aspects of the alter-globalisation movements by such authors as: Jeff Juris, Marianne Maeckelbergh, Geoffrey Pleyers or David Graeber have also often been met with the same kind of reproach about their “historical awareness” and celebratory tone as Occupy. On the one hand, most of these authors succeeded in introducing, into the academic world, descriptions and portrayals of social movements, which their participants would be happy to identify themselves with. While on the other hand, the same cannot be said about most of the more conventional academic writing about movements. I have found the research and insights of Juris, Maeckelbergh and Graeber helpful in my own analysis and draw on them in my findings chapters in order to explore some aspects of the Occupy movement. At the same time, I

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<sup>2</sup> At other times, labelling certain actions as new or spontaneous serves strategic interests of movements, but it may give discursive, if not political, advantage to extremist groups that are able to use the argument of spontaneity to mask their real links and/or benefactors (Flesher Fominaya, 2014).

remain critical and careful with relying on their overall conclusions too much. In fact, this thesis attempts to contribute a necessary and important counterweight or complement to such celebratory accounts of Occupy and the nature of radical social movements in general. This research brings out what is real in movements through an analysis that is neither celebratory, nostalgic and back-patting nor dismissive and defeatist, but instead grounded, bottom-up, extensive and rigorous. It is also obviously inherently supportive of the movement but in a way that remains committed to a future of struggle as well as aware of how much work has been done and how much work there is still to be done in order to bring about the world we want to live in.

#### **LITERATURE ON EARLIER MOVEMENTS AND DIRECT DEMOCRACY**

Another body of literature that this thesis engages with is very difficult to summarise under just one heading. The research covers a wide range of social processes (with different names) that relate to a widespread phenomenon. It employs varying disciplinary, methodological approaches and theoretical perspectives, and it often comes from different national contexts. This thesis has two focal points – the Occupy movement and direct democracy. With regards to the latter, the following have been utilised. (While not all of the texts and approaches are drawn on in this thesis, they provided a useful background for my research.)

- Direct democracy (David Graeber (2009, 2013) – anarchist academic, anthropologist, alter-globalisation activist),
- Consensus decision-making (Patrick Coy - peace and conflict studies. Jane Mansbridge (1983) – face-to-face democracy, anti-deliberative dynamics in social movements. Lynne Woehrle – sociology and behavioural science, peace social movements),
- Participatory democracy (Francesca Polletta (2004) – sociologist, culture and social movements),
- Prefigurative politics (Marianne Maeckelbergh (2009) – anthropologist, decision-making in global social movements, the use of new digital technologies in movements, engaged research),

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- Horizontality (Marina Sitrin (2012) – writer, activist),
- Cultural revolution (Barbara Epstein (1993) – US history, anti-nuclear movements, cultural radicalism),
- Revolution of every-day life (Laurence Cox (Cox & Nilsen, 2014; Flesher Fominaya & Cox, 2013) – engaged social movement research, “movement of movements.” The Free Association – network of writers/activists loosely based in Leeds, UK, alter-globalisation movement),
- Deliberation within social movements (Lesley J. Wood (2012) - sociologist, alter-globalisation activist, diffusion and dynamics in transnational social movements),
- Anarchist organising (Colin Ward (2001) - anarchist writer, social historian. James Bowen (2004) - literacy development worker. David Graeber),
- Grassroots organising (Ella Baker – African American civil rights activist, Myles Horton (Horton & Freire, 1990) – educator, American Civil Rights Movement. Paulo Freire (2000) – educator, critical pedagogy)
- Anti-authoritarian organising, anti-hierarchical organising (Jo Freeman (1972) – feminist and activist, civil rights and women's liberation movements. Uri Gordon (2008) – anarchist theorist and activist),
- Autonomous organising (John Holloway (2002, 2010) – sociologist, the Zapatista movement in Mexico, alter-globalisation movement. Ramor Ryan (2011) – anarchist writer, activist),
- Non-violent organising and movements (Barbara Epstein. Starhawk (2002) – writer and activist, feminist, alter-globalisation movement),
- Autonomous geographies (Paul Chatterton – geographer, urban cultures, social

movements. Jenny Pickerill – geographer, environmental activism and grassroots organising),

- Networks (Jeff Juris (2008) – anthropologist, social movements and globalisation ),
- Democratisation studies and its intersections with social movement studies (Donatella della Porta (2013) – political sociologist, global justice movement),
- DIY (Tim Jordan (2001) – digital cultures, alter-globalisation movement),
- Space, performance, drama (Kevin Hetherington (1998) – geography/sociology. Richard Schechner (2003) – performance studies. Victor Turner (1986) – cultural anthropologist, ritual, performative drama, “social dramas” and phases of public action),
- Dictatorship of the proletariat (Slavoj Žižek (2000, 2010), provokingly as per usual – Marxist philosopher and Lacanian psychoanalyst).

Although many of the above examples do not explicitly (or implicitly) talk about direct democracy or use a different conceptual language, the list demonstrates (but does not exhaust) the range of possible angles and approaches that one can take to study movements that use some form of direct democracy. Direct democracy, which is essentially a way of organising and deciding collectively, and the context in which it was practised in Occupy may be usefully analysed and described by using a broad spectrum of conceptual tools from a range of disciplines and genres. Literatures on the alter-globalisation movement and direct democracy both cross many analytical and disciplinary orientations. In the above list, however, anthropology and anarchism-related analysis seem to dominate. This is because direct democracy pertains to anarchist ideas and how they are introduced in practice. Anthropology resonates with the methodologies and approaches chosen for this project, that focus on dynamic processes of how people practise certain self-governance models.

Those accounts do not constitute an integrated body of literature because its parts were

written at different times, in different contexts, for or about different movements and with different audiences in mind. Needless to say, with such a broad spectrum of potential empirical and conceptual frames of reference, none of the above could provide a coherent framework for understanding the multifaceted experience of Occupy. I find them immensely useful for exploring some of the aspects of Occupy in my findings chapters but they are neither as institutionalised and integrated as the canon of social movement theory is, as will be discussed in the following chapter, nor developed enough in their own right for the purpose of providing an overarching framework for an analysis of Occupy.<sup>3</sup> This is why I propose to use Jacques Derrida's and Jacques Lacan's theoretical constructs to fill this vacuum. This is not in a way that would treat their theorising as the only or best way to understand Occupy. Rather, it is as one analytical lens that thematises uncertainty, potential and the inherent failure of the dominant structures of governance, which are the focus of this thesis. The theoretical lens employed in this thesis is also in keeping with the tradition of European social theory that has always been shaped by social movements (Cox & Flesher Fominaya, 2013).

Having explained the difficulties with contemporary literatures on Occupy and direct democracy, I will now attempt to provide a brief introduction to the movement and consensus decision-making.

## **OCCUPY MOVEMENT**

The beginnings of the Occupy movement can be traced back to July 2011 when *Adbusters*, a small magazine based in Vancouver, Canada and run by anarchist "culture jammers," announced a call for a symbolic action on September 17, 2011. Inspired by the revolution in Egypt and the latest wave of encampments in Spain, the protest was to take place in Wall Street, New York City. By that time, occupations of central public squares had already proved a useful and inspirational tactic and had become one of the main features of the uprisings in the Middle East as well as the anti-austerity protests in Europe. Similarly in New York, the call was to "bring tent" – a prologue to a major "shift in revolutionary tactics" (*Adbusters*, 2011). This new tactic was to rely on prolonged and centrally located physical gatherings and assemblies of

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<sup>3</sup> This is despite the relevance of direct democracy for democratic theorists and the significance of radical democratic models and theories since the New Left in the 1950s and early 1960s, as well as the revolutions of 1989.

people.<sup>4</sup> They were to organise in a bottom-up and leaderless fashion. The call posted under OccupyWallStreet hashtag read: “On September 17, we want to see 20,000 people flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades and occupy Wall Street for a few months. Once there, we shall incessantly repeat one simple demand in a plurality of voices.” The aim was clear – Wall Street – “the greatest corrupter of our democracy” (Adbusters, 2011).

Wall Street was seen to represent corporate greed and the source of the financial crisis that had been sweeping across the world since 2008. This analysis was captured in the movement’s slogan – “we are the 99%.” Wall Street stood for banks, big corporations, and the other “super rich” among the 1% who claim the world’s wealth and common assets for private profit and their own interests at the expense of the 99% (Van Gelder, 2011a). Occupy was to respond to their practices that treated capitalism’s flaws as if they were irrelevant and the current economic system as the only one conceivable (Graeber, 2011). This assessment of Wall Street was inextricably linked with the bifurcation of First Amendment freedoms – different for the 1% and the 99% (Rosenberg, 2011) as exemplified by the issue of Super PACs for instance. The workings of the representative form of democracy also raised substantial concerns (Strauss, 2011a). The issue was not only that the 1% hold almost \$20 trillion in wealth while the entire United States government budget was only \$3.8 trillion (Flank, 2011). The crucial problem was rather that the government was seen to make active interventions on behalf of the 1%. These included tax breaks for the wealthy, global trade agreements that lead to offshoring jobs, agricultural subsidies that favour big agribusiness over smaller family farming, formation of Super PACs, etc. (Van Gelder, 2011a).

Occupy has been seen by many commentators as a marriage between the anarchist practices of the “new” social movements and the substantive focus on economic and social issues of the “old” movements (Leach, 2013). The 99%–1% division was most evident in the data for the share of aftertax income by population slice. In 2007, a vastly unequal growth made these shares grow even more unequally. The top 1% experienced a more than doubling of their share in aftertax income growth between 1979 and 2007. For the remaining 99% of the population, their income barely changed or dropped by up to seven points (Henwood & The Congressional Budget Office, 2011). The initial formulation of Occupy’s critique of the dominant economic and political systems was, therefore, specifically related to the US situation, but also capable of

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<sup>4</sup> As opposed to the camps from the earlier repertoires of summit hopping activists, which was framed as a critique/positive development of the earlier alter-globalisation movement.

a translation to other national contexts.

Although statistics (no matter how horrific) can barely give rise to a social movement on their own, their bearing on people's lives was later confirmed and given meaning in personal stories of protesters – written on cardboard signs during marches or in their various posts online. One such story on the [wearethe99percent.tumblr](http://wearethe99percent.tumblr.com) blog read:

I got my first job mowing lawns when I was 13. I went to work for the Federal government, laying fences, when I was 15. At 17, I left home and put myself through college and law school, without my parents' help. Yes, I had student loans, and yes, I paid them.

I lost my job in 2009. Despite hundreds of phone calls, resumes, and a few interviews, it seems I am now "overqualified," at age 50, to be employed. I am coming to grip with the fact that I will never earn what I took for granted, just a few years ago.

I have run through my savings, my investments, and my retirement accounts. I lost my house. My wife left me a year ago, and cancelled my health insurance. My heart medications, insulin, and related supplies, not to mention ADD meds for my teenager, total \$3500 a month. I don't have \$3500 to spend on meds, so I take a daily aspirin, and my kid is suffering in school. I'm waiting on the word that I have renal failure. A vial of insulin, that used to cost \$15 a few years ago, now costs \$80. Big pharma is gouging.

Now, I am facing eviction. My two children have never seen daddy without money. I am facing the grim fact that my life insurance policy and social security death benefits may provide my kids better financial security than I can. Like George Bailey, I am 'worth more dead than alive.' I AM THE 99%

Jack

Austin, Texas

Obviously, not everybody who was struggling with these and similar problems went out and joined Occupy: it takes more than objective conditions to encourage people to act. Motivated by dramatic personal experiences such as the one described above, other principles (including solidarity), or fear of an express downward plunge into poverty, on the 17<sup>th</sup> September, an estimated five thousand people answered the call to demand "democracy not corporatocracy" (Adbusters, 2011) and around three hundred camped out at Zuccotti Park (later renamed – Liberty Plaza) in Lower Manhattan, New York (Maryse, n.d.). In early November, the General Assembly, the main decision-making body of the occupation run by the principles of direct democracy, adopted by consensus the following statement of autonomy:

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Occupy Wall Street is a people's movement. It is party-less, leaderless, by the people and for the people. It is not a business, a political party, an advertising campaign or a brand. It is not for sale.

We welcome all, who, in good faith, petition for a redress of grievances through non-violence. We provide a forum for peaceful assembly of individuals to engage in participatory democracy. We welcome dissent.

Any statement or declaration not released through the General Assembly and made public online at [www.nycga.net](http://www.nycga.net) should be considered independent of Occupy Wall Street.

We wish to clarify that Occupy Wall Street is not and never has been affiliated with any established political party, candidate or organization. Our only affiliation is with the people.

The people who are working together to create this movement are its sole and mutual caretakers. If you have chosen to devote resources to building this movement, especially your time and labor, then it is yours.

Any organization is welcome to support us with the knowledge that doing so will mean questioning your own institutional frameworks of work and hierarchy and integrating our principles into your modes of action.

SPEAK WITH US, NOT FOR US.

Occupy Wall Street values collective resources, dignity, integrity and autonomy above money. We have not made endorsements. All donations are accepted anonymously and are transparently allocated via consensus by the General Assembly or the Operational Spokes Council.

We acknowledge the existence of professional activists who work to make our world a better place. If you are representing, or being compensated by an independent source while participating in our process, please disclose your affiliation at the outset. Those seeking to capitalize on this movement or undermine it by appropriating its message or symbols are not a part of Occupy Wall Street.

We stand in solidarity. We are Occupy Wall Street. (Occupy Wall Street, 2011)

This statement of autonomy describes the character and the principles of the movement that many Occupy encampments around the world drew on and took inspiration from. As soon as a few weeks after Occupy Wall Street began, and thanks to social media that played a huge part in the process, the principles and practices of the movement spread to cities across the United States and far beyond to places such as: Toronto, Rome, Dublin, Sarajevo, Seoul and Sydney (AlJazeera, 2011; Gabbatt, 2011; McVeigh, 2011). In early October 2011, Occupy protests took place in over eighty countries, making Occupy a truly global movement against economic



inequality and the loss of popular political power. Under the “physical” occupations category, an open and public Occupy Directory (at [directory.occupy.net](http://directory.occupy.net)) lists 885 occupations in 50 countries around the world. The majority of the occupations under the Occupy banner took place in the United States (620 are listed), Canada (37), United Kingdom (28), Germany (21), the Netherlands (12) and Brazil (11). The number of encampments in other European countries as well as states like: Mexico, New Zealand, Argentina, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Iran, South Africa, Antarctica, Colombia, Costa Rica, Haiti etc. are all in single digits. Many participants and commentators in the USA saw its radicalism and the anarchist element that was part of the movement to be its strength and one of the main reasons why it succeeded in mobilising so many people (Graeber, 2013). However, most of the camps in the United States were evicted by the end of 2011. In Europe, Occupies in London and Dublin, for example, stayed on for several months; the former formally ended in June 2012 (after eight months in operation!). The protests under the Occupy banner were probably most significant in the USA and moderately important in the UK and Ireland in terms of how they influenced the political and public debates in these countries. In other parts of the world, similar arguments were being made through the *Indignados* in Spain and other anti-austerity movements in Europe, in the wave of Arab Spring upheavals and the ongoing struggles in Latin America.

Even with this popularity and a massive wave of solidarity and support, in its early days the movement experienced a major media blackout. Later it was also criticised mainly on such mainstream media outlets like Fox, CNN, *The Wall Street Journal* or local media like *San Francisco Chronicle* – most persistently for its lack of clear focus or stated demands. This is why it was occasionally described as anti-political. In some accounts, it was also depicted as a protest of counter-culture youth or the bitter and lazy unemployed. Some critiques originated within the movement itself and were aimed more at searching for ways of improving rather than delegitimizing or discrediting it. In many such cases, commentators as well as participants appealed to the egalitarian ethos of Occupy and pointed to class or racial inequalities and perceived discrimination within the movement (Strauss, 2011b).

Even more importantly than criticism that the movement was receiving, many Occupy protesters especially in the US but also elsewhere, were met with threats and use of force by the police. Hundreds were arrested and some were injured during marches and peaceful sit-ins. According to [OccupyArrests.com](http://OccupyArrests.com), there have been at least 7,719 arrests of Occupy protesters in 122 cities across the US. Here are a few examples:

*At the intersections of a movement, democracy and emerging literature*

- On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 700 people were arrested while trying to cross the Brooklyn Bridge in New York.
- After the global day of action on 15<sup>th</sup> October, there were several hundred arrests made across the United States, including 175 held by the police in Chicago.
- A story from UC Davis made national headlines in mid-November 2011 when University police pepper-sprayed a group of protesters seated peacefully on a pavement. Ten were arrested.
- In January 2012 – long after the eviction of the camp – more than 400 were arrested in Oakland, California.

The main slogan of Occupy, after evictions began, was “you cannot evict an idea whose time has come” and the protesters swore that they would be coming back and would try to occupy spaces, hold assemblies, and organise for another phase of Occupy.

Subsequent accounts of the outcomes of Occupy as well as the wave of smaller direct actions and protests that followed demonstrate that the movement had significant ripple effects in people's personal lives as well as for their potential and propensity to organise collectively. Some homeless participants credit Occupy with helping them recover from addiction and to eventually attain housing (C. Smith, Castañeda, & Heyman, 2012). After camps were evicted, in many places across the US, there has been an increase in work stoppages. They also witnessed extraordinary levels of community support such as in the case of the Chicago teachers' strike. In addition, there have been protests among nurses, Caterpillar workers, Walmart warehouse and retail workers and students, to mention just a few (Piven, 2013). After hurricane Sandy in northeastern United States in 2012, Occupy Sandy, comprising many Occupiers from Zuccotti Park, launched a community-based recovery campaign. In Ireland, groups that targeted specific issues connected with anti-austerity policies, such as the consequences of socialised bank debt or the workings of NAMA, outlived Occupy and continued their work after the camps were gone.

The sense of rupture and the “new” that pervades many accounts of Occupy usually refers to either some participants’ experience of entirely new social relations and democratic practices that the movement created and developed or to the contemporary specificity of capitalism and liberal representative democracy where decision-making has been captured by economic

interests of the wealthiest. As other commentators and scholars point out, however, what might actually be new about Occupy is rather its specifically middle- and working-class base and how the current crisis and the development of the capitalist system have left this section of society to fend for themselves. This might have also created problems with ensuring diversity and inclusivity in the movement by employing decision-making process that was culturally specific (Nugent, 2012). To reiterate, this thesis is not aimed at providing a historically-oriented perspective of Occupy. I am highlighting the main points of the debates about what was new about Occupy for introductory purposes so that the reader can get a taste of the discussions that have centred on this movement.

Having provided a brief description of the Occupy movement, I will now introduce the notion and practice of consensus decision-making.

### **CONSENSUS**

There are many decision-making processes that can be described in terms of consensus. Below I am going to describe only one set of its meanings and practices that is particularly specific to the autonomous sections of the alter-globalisation movements (for a glossary of the most common terms associated with consensus such as a block, see Appendix 1). Consensus is a way for social movements and other groups to arrive at collective decisions through a process in which the views of all participants are acknowledged and validated, and their concerns addressed. Within direct action movements, consensus is often seen as a process that ensures that actions a group agrees to undertake are participatory and sustainable, and that there is a sense of individual and collective ownership and responsibility for the action. Principles that help consensus decision-making work best include: (1) participants should respect the process and other participants; (2) they should work to develop mutual trust and assume that other participants also have good intentions; (3) they should understand the importance of not only what they do but also how they go about doing things for the world they want to bring about; (4) they are committed to work collectively and creatively on the decisions that need to be made.

As Woehrle (2003) points out, consensus is not synonymous with compromise or negotiating the lowest common denominator solution. Rather than merely an outcome of a discussion, consensus is also a process through which each participant can become invested in the

decision and maintain their commitment to the movement or a group (Woehrle, 2003). It is then also easier for them to support an action even if they do not think it may be the best. This is why consensus does not have to mean unanimity or “uniformity of opinion” (Coy, 2003, p. 88).

In the practice of the alter-globalisation movement responsible for such anti-summit mobilisations as in Seattle in 1999 or Genoa in 2001, consensus has not always meant unanimity. Big actions such as shutting down the World Trade Organisation meeting required that the groups involved agreed to act within some general guidelines and shared the intention of disrupting the summit. They did not have to agree to use one specific tactic or develop a shared political analysis. The emphasis was on coordination rather than conformity (Graeber, 2009; Starhawk, 2002).

This understanding of consensus may be particularly relevant to the alter-globalisation movement, some other autonomous and direct action groups and the Occupy movement that drew on many of their terminologies and practices. For them consensus has more often than not meant identifying a spectrum of individual or autonomous group actions, positions and responses that were consistent with the overall goal of a larger grouping of people. This was manifested in how large actions were organised. In the wake of the 1999 protests, for example, downtown Seattle was divided into thirteen “pie slices” surrounding the Washington Convention and Trade Center where the WTO Ministerial was taking place. Different clusters of affinity groups were responsible for blocking each section (Solnit & Solnit, 2009). Starhawk described the wealth of possibilities that each group had: “[t]here were groups doing street theater, others preparing to lock themselves to structures, groups with banners and giant puppets, others simply prepared to link arms and to nonviolently block delegates” (2002, pp. 17–18). Moreover, participants in the alter-globalisation movement have often organised into different colour blocs – each with its own character and risk tolerance. This tactic has now been largely abandoned. In Quebec City in 2001, there were a number of different colour blocs planned for the action during the Summit of the Americas. There was a festive green bloc, the yellow bloc which engaged in classic civil disobedience tactics and a disruptive red bloc whose participants also faced the highest risk of arrest and repression (Graeber, 2009). As a result, tactical, personal, and ideological diversity could be embraced and encouraged rather than perceived as something that needed to be overcome. In Occupy Dame Street, this unity-in-diversity manifested itself during actions when participants took on roles that they felt

comfortable with or that involved levels of risk that were acceptable to them.

### **Consensus – advantages and disadvantages**

One can point to many advantages of using consensus. Its advocates claim that it produces the best thinking, minimises egoistic attitudes, and increases problem-solving skills (Coy, 2003). Consensus promotes participation and facilitates direct action on the sources of injustice as well as minimising hierarchy and professionalisation in groups working for social change (Mueller, 1993). Through consensus, participants in direct action reaffirm their commitment, dedication and a sense of community that can boost their confidence and help them face the risks involved in contentious action. The process draws attention to differences that might otherwise remain hidden and provides a space for mutual understanding. It can strengthen movement bonds, foster solidarity (Epstein, 1993), and spark innovation and development through participatory democracy (Polletta, 2004).

The literature about the practice of decision-making within the alter-globalisation movement emphasises also the prefigurative advantages of using consensus. Maeckelbergh (2011) claims that this stress on direct democratic processes marks a shift from strategies that try to “conquer the world” to those that seek to “build the world anew” (Maeckelbergh, 2011, p. 2). Movements have also stressed the pragmatic dimension of direct democracy as part of a more “constitutive politics” (The Free Association, 2011, p. 31) and not as a principle of ideology but rather “a matter of practice” (Nunes, 2005, p. 301).

In Occupy, there was also an emphasis on becoming rather than being of direct democracy. The process was open-ended, malleable and bottom-up. It did not have any specific end point or a goal (Razsa & Kurnik, 2012). Some point out that it was also characterised by “radical inclusion” that is “less about the general inclusion of the whole '99 percent' and more about a vision of social justice based on the active deconstruction and transformation of oppressive power relations” (Maharawal, 2013, p. 179). This deconstruction was to be based on the deliberate (and deliberative) creation of feminist and other anti-oppressive spaces for people to participate in.

Prefiguration also produces stances that are inherently political. It challenges claims such as Mansbridge’s, for instance, that thinking that consensus could substitute majority rule in all circumstances is mistaken since it should be only one of many ways of making decisions

collectively and it is better used in some contexts rather than others (Mansbridge, 2003). While there can hardly be any doubt that the adoption of consensus must be related to a particular context that a given group acts within, it is this assumption that “the majority rule is here to stay” that is anti-political, because it closes down all discussion about the continuing relevance of the majority rule. And this is this stance that the Occupy movement and other groups that use consensus want to challenge. One cannot ignore this claim and simply substitute a rational calculus of benefits and costs for empirical analysis of particular groups and context, at least not in the case of the direct action movements that “reject conventional ideas of political rationality” (Epstein, 1993, p. 228).

Consensus has also been ascribed “the potential to democratise decision-making and redress power imbalances” (Coy, 2003, p. 90). For some, it is only a potential since the system itself cannot guarantee equality. According to Mansbridge, equal participation can never be assured and informal hierarchies similar to those described by Jo Freeman (n.d.) in the women's liberation movement can always arise (Mansbridge, 2003). Again, it would be foolish to disagree with such a claim completely but the issue may be more complex than that. This is because in the practice of the alter-globalisation and Occupy movements, both issues tend to be resolved in ways and through processes that *are* prefigurative in nature.

To start with, equality of participation is encouraged throughout the process and not simply required or assumed (Maeckelbergh, 2009). A similar dynamic was observed by Coy (2003) who noted that the members of Peace Brigades International teams (an NGO that uses consensus and promotes a non-violent resolution of conflicts) not only listened to, but proactively acted to create a space for safe sharing of other members' concerns and experiences. This does not always, or perhaps even most of the time, produce equal inclusion and input from all participants, but it does redefine the meaning of the decision that is made through such a process. Ultimately, what matters is not only the decision's content but also the effect that the process has on the dynamics and inequalities between participants (Maeckelbergh, 2009). Through the process and in a prefigurative way, participants often work to make these dynamics resemble those that they would like to see in a future, more egalitarian society.

Similarly, class, racial, gender and other differences that can often translate into various inequalities and lead to the creation of informal hierarchies can be dealt with in a prefigurative way. Firstly, movements can develop an understanding of complex equality. This notion

recognises that by the virtue of their expertise and experience some participants may temporarily have more authority than others in some areas – provided they are willing to cease that authority and work to share that expertise (Polletta, 2004) as a form of resource redistribution (Gordon, 2008). In this way, the consensus process can be understood in the context of a larger prefigurative, developmental and educational work that people engage in, which is actually not too far from what Mansbridge (1983) seemed to claim in her earlier work.

Some authors have considered consensus to be a space of decision-making that is merely expressive, ideological, or interest-driven. However, many differences as well as inequalities are relational and can change through the process. Since consensus embraces and does not attempt to eliminate difference and conflict, participants can strive for a diversity of outcomes that recognises people's particular life situations and viewpoints. In this way, they also prefigure a world where pluralism is valued and reflected in the variety and multiple courses of action (Maeckelbergh, 2009). This encourages people to take responsibility for their own actions and develop solidarity with the group (Starhawk, 2002).

Nevertheless, as the case of Occupy aptly demonstrated, it is very unlikely that a leaderless movement run on the principles of openness and direct democracy can ward off the issues of exclusion and power completely. The main areas where Occupy's practices internationally turned out to be particularly unsatisfactory or problematic were their relations with unions, the inclusion of the homeless and the gender dynamics (Pickerill & Krinsky, 2012). The power imbalances within the 99% were also brought to light when some parts of it such as socialist parties, conspiracy theorists, the NGO sector, were trying to impose their own priorities on the rest (C. Smith et al., 2012). There could be many reasons why this happened. Firstly, some have pointed to the incredibly complex structure that the movement operated on – with various forms of meetings, hand gestures, working groups, facilitation roles and so on. It seemed like one had to have quite a bit of knowledge of those rituals and rules in order to be able to participate in the process in an effective way. If these rules were devotedly adhered to to the point of fetishising the process, knowledge of the decision-making structures could actually translate into implicit power and be used to silence or undermine voices of those who did not possess that knowledge (Leach, 2013).

Secondly, many have noted that informal hierarchies based on a person's ability to camp out or be continuously present also emerged in Occupy. Moreover, since formal structures of accountability were missing, it was easier for informal cliques to form and dominate or

influence the movement's course of action. Other common criticisms of the democratic process in Occupy include such issues as long and frequent General Assemblies that made participation difficult for some who, for example, had to take a long commute to be at the camp. The radical openness of the movement could also be seen as a problem as new participants might be unaware of the debates that had taken place before they joined the movement, which could lead to repeating the same conversations instead of moving forward. Furthermore, consensus itself could be interpreted as a culturally-specific form of making decisions that does not take into account participants' varying backgrounds and experiences. Finally, another critique draws attention to the problem of how long debates and direct democratic processes could detract essential energy from the work of movement building (J. Smith & Glidden, 2012).

As earlier research demonstrated about movements (Polletta, 2004), similarly in Occupy, if a particular culture that fosters the values of direct democracy was absent, structural complexity could be insufficient to create a level playing field for everybody (Leach, 2013). This has led many observers and Occupy participants to point out that we need to pay more attention to real differences and power relations within movements (Juris, Ronayne, Shokooh-Valle, & Wengronowitz, 2012). Some have also proposed that in order to manage a trade-off between efficiency and inclusiveness, the direct democratic models of organisation should become less complex and less often binding on large groups (Leach, 2013). For example, a smaller working group should only seek authorisation from a larger forum if it is in some way harmful to proceed without it (Graeber, 2013).

Advantages notwithstanding, consensus decision-making can have its limits and disadvantages. Further to the issues that I mentioned above, some researchers claim that it works better in small rather than large groups (Coy, 2003; Epstein, 1993; Mansbridge, 2003). It may also be more efficient when the movement and its goals are well-defined, and its members think alike (Epstein, 1993). Consensus is sometimes known for its inability to resolve personal conflicts. Arriving at consensus may become really difficult when the participants have to, for example, go outside the normative frameworks of friendship that they have relied on so far. Furthermore, since the consensus process requires time, deliberation may substitute for action (Polletta, 2004). Even in radical political groups, it can create situations in which participants default to conservatism because they cannot reach an agreement on a more radical course of action (Mansbridge, 2003; Pollard, 2011; rhizome, 2011).



### **What is Occupy?**

For the purposes of this thesis, Occupy is understood as its particular locations that I researched in Ireland and the US. When location is not a factor and I am referring to the movement in general, Occupy will be understood as part of the anti-austerity wave of protests that built on and developed many of the radical arguments and tactics of the earlier alter-globalisation movements. In addition to Occupy being part of the anti-austerity wave, like the revolutionary tides in Latin America and the Arab world before it, it also had, or possibly still has, the potential to remake states but not in the traditional way of taking over state power. The movement's critique was clearly anti-state and although its goals were revolutionary (direct democracy, lifting up of debt etc.), to remake a state along the lines that the movement desired requires more than the familiar "revolutionary script" where taking over state power is the central element. The Occupy movement puts into question the entire idea of the state as we know it and I think that this can be called revolutionary too. For me, direct democracy is also part of the anti-capitalist struggle, the elements of which were definitely present in Occupy.

In the current chapter, I tried to describe the two main focuses of this thesis: the Occupy movement and the consensus process. The former is quite recent and there is still a lack of analytical and reflexive literature about it. Both are multifaceted phenomena that can be described and analysed from many disciplinary and political perspectives. What complicates the matters even further is that many of the terms that one uses to represent the movement and direct democratic processes are themselves politically contested concepts. Hence, in this thesis, rather than discussing what Occupy was, I prefer to concentrate on what its participants did and what this experience can teach them as well as contributing to our knowledge about movement realities. In the following chapter, I review movement theory literature that has gained the status of the orthodoxy for studying social movements, in order to assess its relevance for the task of analysing Occupy.

## **HOW CAN WE EFFECT MEANINGFUL SOCIAL CHANGE?**

On the question of failure, social movement theory,  
and other things that should be set aside

I should start this literature review by stating that the approach taken in the following pages is not very common within the subdiscipline of “social movement studies.” It challenges the idea that in order to study movements, one has to use what has been defined as “social movement theory,” comprising accounts of: resource mobilisation theory, superseded by political opportunity structures and dynamic mobilisation model, with a complementary role accorded to the theories of new social movements. The “canon” of movement theory thus conceived has gained a particularly high status in the US but its categories have also sometimes been adopted in Europe particularly by such scholars as: Donatella della Porta and others at the European University Institute’s Centre on Social Movement Studies (COSMOS), as well as Dieter Rucht at the Berlin Institut für Protest- und Bewegungsforschung (Cox & Szolucha, 2013). Throughout the years, many critiques of social movement theory have been formulated but most of them remained within the confines of its conceptual frameworks. The canonical accounts of social movement theory might have gained institutional legitimacy but they have failed at convincing movement participants and movement-linked authors (Bevington & Dixon, 2005; Cox & Flesher Fominaya, 2013; Croteau et. al, 2005; Darnovsky et. al, 1995; Flacks, 2005).<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, there is social movement theory, particularly in Europe and developed in closer relationship with movements, that avoids some of the shortcomings of the US movement studies.<sup>6</sup> I find it helpful to draw on this literature in different places of the thesis but I also recognise that these types of social movement writing do not represent a cohesive perspective, which, in turn, reflects the complexity of real life theorising of movement-linked authors.

This is why in this thesis, I have found European social, political and psychoanalytical theory, in particular, the thought of Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan, that has been shaped by movement history and represents a more coherent theoretical perspective, useful in explaining the processes that were taking place in Occupy. I have also adopted an approach to social

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<sup>5</sup> I present a more detailed argument for movement-relevant research in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

<sup>6</sup> See for example: Barker & Cox, 2002; Bevington & Dixon, 2005; Flesher Fominaya & Cox, 2013; contributions to the *Interface* journal etc.

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movement research that seeks to make strong links between movements' own processes and dynamics and their academic analysis. This thesis aims to provide useful information and reflection for movements and to produce an analysis that would be at least to some extent helpful and applicable by movement participants to new situations and movements. This work is concerned with the mode of Occupy's participants engagement with change as a way to say something useful about the future of movements, democracy and the possibilities for social and political change. My research tries to answer the question of how direct democracy worked in Occupy and what happens when potential for change is activated. In a movement context, what is the process of change like? How do its various dynamics actually work? Ultimately, all my description and analysis amounts to one question that, noncoincidentally, drives all social movements as well: how can we effect meaningful social change? It is also this question that will help assess the relevance and usefulness of the "canon" of social movement theory for the task of analysing Occupy.

Below I present a critique of the canon of social movement theory. This is going to be followed in the next chapter by a brief discussion of reasons why I found Derrida's and Lacan's thought useful in theoretically exploring the Occupy movement. I focus on these two thinkers because I have found that their work taps into what many people researching and involved in contemporary social movements actually think about their engagement, democracy as well as the nature and possibility of social change.

In this chapter, I explore different accounts of social movement theory but I would like to begin by recording two observations that provide a good preliminary background for the issues that I discuss below. This will help to identify criteria for an effective analysis of the Occupy movement.

#### **CRITERIA FOR AN EFFECTIVE ANALYSIS**

I made the first observation at a screening of a documentary "Peripheral Vision" about grassroots resistance of a small group of dogged villagers of Ballyhea in North Cork, Ireland who started a weekly march against the bank bailouts and austerity. The movie portrayed the familiar ups and downs of bottom-up struggle, cycles of disappointment, determination and hope. The first question that somebody from the audience posed to the filmmaker – Donnacha

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O’Brian – after the screening was about how we, meaning activists and others engaged in community struggles who were the majority of the spectators, could help in distributing the movie. This question made me think. According to the canon of movement theory, the group from Ballyhea did not really achieve anything and was ineffective in its actions. They did not only fail to stop the bondholder payouts, but were also unsuccessful in mobilising more people from their own community. Wouldn’t it be socially counterproductive and politically inexpedient for activists to spread that message to other campaigns and groups around the country? The answer must be “no” since how the members of the audience understood the struggle of the people in the documentary was radically different from how it might be espoused by the canon of social movement theory. For us the story of the Ballyhea villagers was not one of their failure and political ineffectiveness. On the contrary, the documentary showed the inherent failure not of the protesters but on the part of the dominant structures of governance. Through the marches, self-education as well as their trip to the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, the group from Ballyhea exposed the failure of the Irish government, the austerity discourses and the politics of the troika to accomplish two things. Firstly, the government and its allies did not develop policies and establish structures that would reflect the villagers’ democratic needs and desires. Secondly and failing that, they were also unsuccessful in securing a total social agreement to the political decisions that they imposed on their populations. Furthermore, it may seem pretty amazing that these protests happened at all, considering how much effort governments, media and as it turns out, social movement theory put into creating this expectation that social struggles must fail and most of them always do.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis stemmed from a desire to directly counteract the forces that gain power from creating that sense of movements’ failure in the parts of the world that this research is concerned with. I am also interested in how movements *actually* act in alternative ways to the status quo. For this purpose, this thesis addresses and explains the inconsistencies, paradoxes, uncertainty and complexity of social movement situations in ways that do not perceive them as “debris,” lamentable failures or imperfections of human agency or theoretical generalisation. I will leave this line of argument to tirelessly predictable politicians, mainstream media and canonical movement theory. Unfortunately, some groups of activists may also fall for this discourse from time to time.

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<sup>7</sup> It is striking that these protests happened in rural Munster (a traditionally more conservative part of Ireland) and that they addressed broad political issues rather than local ones.

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In addition to the benefits that come from learning from our mistakes and knowing our weaknesses, I think that beginning an analysis of a social movement from what makes others throw up hands in the air is important for a host of other reasons. In this way, the thesis avoids perpetuating the debilitating closure that the post-political discourses at least in the West have imposed on populations' collective and individual imaginations. It counteracts positivist visions that treat history as an objective field where change is predetermined by historical and structural conditions and opportunities. This is in direct opposition to the ways in which social movements have often intervened in history by retroactively changing the very preconditions of what was possible. Secondly, unlike canonical theories, movement analysis that I am talking about here also thwarts state's power as a sole arbiter of victory and failure on the political scene. Moreover, it is important to keep in memory the goals of social movements that have not yet been achieved (aka their "failures") because these aims never just disappear with subsiding mobilisation but can provide us with clues as to what the unresolved issues still are and what kinds of demands may become salient in the future. Starting one's analysis with what is usually set aside as an uncomfortable remainder of dominant social and political arrangements also parallels the ways in which many movements act. They take up issues and support people that – if you were a privileged or simply an ordinarily contented citizen – you previously never encountered. Finally and perhaps most importantly, starting analysis from recounting various inconsistencies and the complexity of a phenomenon underscores the importance of these facets of a social movement that point to its transformative potential, that is, its ability to affect vast and meaningful social change. This potential does not stem merely from the sheer diversity in movements such as Occupy but from the fact that the overwhelming complexity of a movement situation, with all its inconsistencies and paradoxes, is revealed at the moments when there is a sudden crack in the dominant structures of governance, and when social action taps into the disconnect between the political system and what is excluded from it, i.e. its remainder.

The second observation that I wanted to recall in this introduction concerns my experience of reading the "canon" of social movement theory, which I started only after I decided to apply to do my PhD. Shortly afterwards, while dusting shelves in a social library of an anarchist collective in Warsaw, Poland, I was struck that it did not have any of the books about movement theory that I was reading at that time. It did, however, have multiple books of political philosophy and even psychoanalysis; hence, the lack of canonical readings on movement theory could not just stem from activists' alleged dislike of abstract and theoretical

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thinking. Later, I made the same observation in many other social and individual activist libraries.

The above observations are important as examples of particular experiences, analysis and reflection that have led me to critically evaluate the usefulness of the canon of social movement theory and in particular, its recent trend of rapprochement between structural and constructivist theories (i.e. dynamic mobilisation model). In what follows, I illustrate that these theories do not offer any real room for research that thematises the complexity of movement struggle. Experiences like those that I recalled above also directed me towards learning more about the processes and structures that are at work in individual and social change. In the end, I used Jacques Derrida's political philosophy and Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical thought to describe and analyse the Occupy movement because they best reflected the rich evidence about agency, contingency and paradox that I found through my research. Retrospectively, I can say that I based my choice of theoretical frameworks on three broad criteria:

- First, they had to be nuanced in order to make sense in the face of ethnographic evidence gathered in highly complex and confusing contexts. They should allow for ethnographic sensitivity and by their very structure, preclude analysis that would present flattened-out and oversimplified pictures of Occupy based on rationalistic, instrumental or ideological calculations that would be inferred or worse, projected onto the movement.
- Second, they should offer ways of thinking about resistance that movements may recognise as practical and useful. Such theories ought not to be detached from the day-to-day realities of movements and they ought to appreciate how much hard work participating in a movement requires.
- Third, they should take as their starting point the things that are usually set aside in social movement analysis such as: inconsistency, complexity, paradox and uncertainty (this is both an argument for proper empirical research, and one specifically related to democracy the inherent features of which are its contradictions). Theories of social movements should not settle on claiming that something "may or may not happen in this way" without even a brief explanation of the significance of this claim. Their explanatory power should not rely on vague combinations of description and rationalistic inference. Rather, still paying attention to the existing and historically dominant structures of social interactions (such as the state), they should also valorise

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movements' imagination and their experimental learning instead of quietly setting a theoretical cap on them.

Throughout this research project, and contrary to the focal interests of the mainstream movement theories but very much like movements' participants whom I met during my lifetime, I was not really preoccupied with the preconditions that led to the emergence of Occupy. Rather, I was much more interested in the question of "what's next?" It is also a question that I am implicitly asking throughout the following pages. As an answer to that question, one account of canonical movement theory offers this description of major social upheavals that lead to vast political changes: "what began as a springtime of freedom ends partly in reform, partly in repression, and almost everywhere in disillusionment" (Tarrow, 2012, p. 350). Such an account reproduces the paradigm of recurring cycles of social discontent without even a limited reflection on the broader inevitability, significance or realities of such dynamics. It is also easy to mistake its bluntness for a neutral statement of a historical fact whereas in reality, it has ideologically charged political effects in that it reflects (or helps create?) a sense of inevitable failure of radical action, which the powers that be rely on heavily. (Imagine how different our world would be if the majority of people in the geographical, political and temporal contexts that this research is concerned with did not believe that they can never affect meaningful social and political change?) A theory that does not confront inevitable inconsistencies of social action and the "no stable ground" under all structures of governance – as Derrida retorts: "could do very little, almost nothing... Such a political history or philosophy would deck itself out in 'realism' just in time to fall short of the thing – and to repeat, repeat and repeat again, with neither consciousness nor memory of its compulsive droning" (Derrida, 2000, p. 81).

#### **SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY AND OCCUPY: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL**

Instead of replicating the disciplinary history of the canon of social movement theory (from the collective behaviour and resource mobilisation theories through the paradigms of political opportunity structures and "new social movements" to the arrival of the dynamic mobilisation model), in this section I propose an alternative approach to a critical literature review. Before demonstrating in the following chapter how the social theory of Derrida and Lacan may remedy some of their shortcomings, I outline and evaluate some of the main tenets of the canonical accounts of movement theories in relation to the three criteria specified above as

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well as three clusters of (interconnected) concepts that are used in the analysis of findings of this research, namely:

Cluster 1: Uncertainty, retrospective judgement, contingency, undecidability, responsibility, aporias, temporality.

This cluster groups concepts that I found useful in analysing various aspects of the movement's and its participants' agency concerning such questions as: how do they make decisions? what contextual factors influence them in making those decisions? how and why do they take responsibility for their actions? and how do they assess their activities?

Cluster 2: Reminders of dominant structures, potential of social movements to bring about change, inconsistencies of situations and actions, complexity.

The second cluster provides a link between the other two clusters in that it connects aspects of movement agency with its structural contexts and opportunities for action (cluster 3). It concerns the various dimensions that deal with the complexity of actual movement action. It addresses the origins of radical action (reminders of dominant structures), highlights the inconsistencies of actual situations and actions and speaks about the future of movements and their potential to bring about change.

Cluster 3: Inherent failure of structures of governance, "no stable ground," *coup de force* at the basis of law, paradox.

Under this cluster, I gathered notions that deal with the structural conditions of movement action. All of these concepts emphasise the unstable nature of seemingly permanent social constructions.

### **Cluster 1: Uncertainty versus political opportunities and dynamics of contention**

The task of describing and analysing real democracy in Occupy requires that one explains the movement's decisions and actions, hence various aspects of its agency. Through this research I found that the first cluster of concepts and such notions as uncertainty, in particular, were very helpful in producing analysis that was not only sufficiently nuanced but could also be recognised as valid by movement participants (therefore satisfying the criteria 1 and 2). Furthermore, by bringing uncertainty back to the equation, theoretical analysis starts from



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what is usually set aside and thus helps valorise the immense work done by the movement as well as its potential to imagine and start building structures beyond what is considered possible within the hegemonic discourses (criterion 3).

Below I contrast the theories of political opportunities and dynamics of contention with the cluster of concepts 1 i.e. various facets of a sense of uncertainty that prevailed in Occupy. Firstly, I discuss movement theory's balance between agency and structure against the main findings of this research that show that uncertainty had an immense impact on the development of the movement. Thus, I assess the possible *theoretical bias* of the structuralist canon of movement theory. Secondly, I tackle the dilemmas about the retrospective nature of movement analysis and, hence, its potential usefulness and validity in still unfolding temporalities. In other words, I evaluate the theory's *analytical method* in relation to the second criterion for effective analysis that I identified above. In the remaining two subsections, I point to the possible *political bias* that makes the theories of political opportunities and mobilising dynamics ineffective for a meaningful analysis of Occupy (i.e. not recognised as valid by participants – criterion 3). This discussion contrasts: (1) the prominent role that the state plays in the canon of movement theory with Occupy's desire to self-govern and its consistent refusal to recognise the state as an object of demands; and (2) movement theory's implicit premise that systemic change can never happen with the movement's strategising.

### *Political opportunities and the question of agency*

According to the theory of political opportunity structures (POS), success or failure of a social movement is determined by external, structural factors – political opportunities. This is in stark contrast to my research which found that the development of Occupy depended on its participants' actions and decisions that were made in a context of great uncertainty. Occupy participants assumed responsibility for tactical commitments of the movement and worked hard to sustain mobilisation in a situation where their ambitions for change were so vast that it would be nonsensical to engage in any sort of calculation about to what extent the current political structures were actually open to the transformation that the movement was striving for. In other words, the movement's radical aims defied the logic of structural calculability.

The POS paradigm was first formulated in the 1970s by Eisinger (in 1973) and Tilly (in 1978). Political opportunities are defined as consistent signals that discourage or encourage people to

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engage in contentious politics (Tarrow, 1996). POS describe the relative openness or closure of a political system to movement's demands. Opportunities for protest are essentially curvilinear i.e. both great openness (through providing alternative and less confrontational channels for engagement) and limited openness of political regimes (e.g. a threat of state violence) can make action less likely. This was later specified to depend on state capacities, availability of possible allies and the country's level of democratisation (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001).

Through a cooperation between theorists from the POS model and resource mobilisation theory, a political process theory (PPT) was subsequently developed (or reworked from its initial formulation by McAdam in 1982). PPT rests on the interaction and combined effects of three elements: political opportunities, mobilisation structures and framing of shared identities and understandings (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996; Tarrow, 2011). Mobilisation structures are vehicles for claim-making that are available for social movements such as pre-existing social movement organisations or networks (McAdam et al., 1996). Framing is a capacity of social movements to act as signifying agents and to produce and propagate certain meanings (Snow, 2004).

Some scholars have attempted to further unpack elements of the PPT. Gamson and Meyer (1996) distinguish between the stability and cultural-institutional dimensions of political opportunity. The stability dimension runs from such stable factors as: the strength of the state and its traditions, judicial capacity and independence, to more volatile aspects like for example: access to mass media, Zeitgeist, elections and policy changes. The cultural-institutional dimension balances institutional aspects like shifts in political alliances with cultural aspects comprising public discourses and class consciousness (Gamson & Meyer, 1996). Tilly's categorisation of collective claims also corresponds roughly to the dynamics of framing and mobilisation: identity claims manifest the existence of an actor; standing claims refer to their rights as members of certain collectives and demand recognition; programme claims urge their objects to take a particular action (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007). Similarly, Koopmans' distinction between instrumental, subcultural and countercultural movements can be perceived to further develop the concepts of framing and mobilisation structures (Kriesi, 1996).

Despite the fact that structural theories of social movements usually emphasise that one should consider the interactive rather than merely independent influence of all elements of the PPT, structuralists have been criticised chiefly for their theoretical bias, i.e. overemphasising the role of structures at the expense of agency and culture and neglecting the social

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constructivist dynamics that are involved in the workings of the structures they refer to. For instance, the structural bias of the POS and PPT collapses differences between physical capacities for repression and its actual use, a decision to act with an opportunity. Furthermore, political opportunity theories tend to focus on movements that best fit the model they propose so that prefigurative (such as Occupy) moral and artistic movements are ignored (Goodwin & Jasper, 2004).

Although Occupy emerged as a response to a major economic crisis and the changes that it brought to political agendas and people's daily lives, the POS and PPT paradigms do not explain why the movement started at the moment that it did i.e. in 2011 rather than when the crisis began in 2008 and when many political decisions concerning countries' responses to it were being made.<sup>8</sup> This may be a result of the theories' narrow understanding of politics and power as centred around structures rather than complex and contingent processes where eagerness to protest needs to be created and upheld instead of just assumed. The structural theories also do not contribute to an understanding of why the movement spread to other countries and why its participants, in all places, adopted the same major tactics (city square occupations, general assemblies, direct democratic decision-making) despite varying mobilising structures and opportunities for protest in different states. In the case of Occupy, and its broad popular (oftentimes previously unpoliticised and non-activist) base, one certainly cannot rely on the theories' assumption that political identities precede collective action. Furthermore, by employing the PPT for an analysis of Occupy, one would risk severely downplaying the role of the agency of movement participants. Most of their actions were aimed at building prefigurative communities rather than claim-making and demanding more inclusion in the traditional political processes, which is the focus of structural theories.

### *Political opportunities, dynamics of contention and retrospective judgement*

Another shortcoming of the theories of political opportunities is their analytical method which makes it easy and tempting to identify opportunities retroactively. It might have been easier to

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<sup>8</sup> I am familiar with a possible structuralist critique to this argument that says that historical record does not show a direct relation that profound socio-structural changes automatically trigger social contention, but rather an *indirect* one that takes into account changes in political alignments etc. I think that such an understanding of political opportunities represents theorising that fails to meet my criterion 2 in that instead of being first of all of practical value to the movements concerned, it seeks conditions under which a predetermined theory would be correct.

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retrospectively tie protest to political opportunities during the Cold War than it is now, because during the Cold War many issues could be related to more or less profound political events (Goodwin & Jasper, 2004). Is retrospective judgement, however, necessarily bad for movement theorising? I believe that it is in fact an essential and inevitable part of thinking rigorously about social life and one of the important facets of uncertainty (cluster 1) that all movement action has to deal with. In line with my first criterion, about ethnographic sensitivity, it may, however, be unsatisfactory as an analytical tool if the “retroactivity” of judgement is not acknowledged as such or supported by detailed empirical evidence so as to prevent processes from being inferred instead of painstakingly documented.

One of the major critiques of POS is that opportunities need to be perceived in order to be recognised as opportunities at all (Gamson & Meyer, 1996). Kriesi et al. (1995) points out that the same opportunities would be more or less favourable depending on what kinds of issues a group raises and which policy areas it addresses. Other scholars have also developed a concept of discursive opportunities that deal with the extent to which prevailing discourses and identities make for an open or closed setting for movement's actions (Giugni, 2011; Koopmans, Statham, Giugni, & Passy, 2005). These developments, however, do very little in terms of demonstrating how these structures work in reality, i.e. how they are actually perceived and recognised by movements. By retroactively inferring dynamic processes from changes in structures, they run the risk of perpetuating the structural bias by failing to explain the processes that they refer to. This is also important in so far as it precludes and renders unnecessary an ethnographically sensitive account of social movements, which contradicts one of my criteria for an effective analysis.

Recently, as a response to those and similar criticisms, some of the most prominent theorists in the structural tradition embarked on a reformulation of their agenda for mobilisation. Significantly, in “Dynamics of Contention” - an inauguratory book in this trend – McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly wrote:

We come from a structuralist tradition. But in the course of our work on a wide variety of contentious politics in Europe and North America, we discovered the necessity of taking strategic interaction, consciousness, and historically accumulated culture into account. We treat social interaction, social ties, communication, and conversation not merely as expressions of structure, rationality, consciousness, or culture but as active sites of creation and change. We have come to think of interpersonal networks, interpersonal communication, and various forms of continuous negotiation – including the negotiation

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of identities – as figuring centrally in the dynamics of contention. (2001, p. 22)

They sought to explain contentious politics by identifying

its recurrent causal mechanisms, the ways they combine, in what sequences they recur, and why different combinations and sequences, starting from different initial conditions, produce varying effects on the large scale. (McAdam et al., 2001, pp. 10–11)

Although the move from static to dynamic analysis, from the POS and PPT to the model of dynamic mobilisations, is a positive development, the new paradigm still works with the old categories. Its declarative aim, however, is now to document how opportunities and threats are attributed to structures rather than to automatically read from objective political changes. Similarly, the mere existence of organisations is now perceived as insufficient to explain movement's mobilising structures. Instead, it needs to be shown exactly how movements appropriate sufficient organisation and numbers. Finally, strategic framing is recognised as a social construction that refers to many broader interpretive processes (McAdam et al., 2001).

“Dynamics of Contention” promises to unpack political opportunity and mobilizing structures by propagating a new mechanism-and-process approach to studying collective action. It defines mechanisms as “a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations.” Processes are “regular sequences” of mechanisms that produce similar changes of those elements (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 24). Furthermore, the authors identify more than a dozen different mechanisms such as: “creation of new actors and identities through the very process of contention; brokerage by activists who connected previously insulated local clumps of aggrieved people; competition among contenders that led to factional divisions and realignments, and much more. These mechanisms concatenated into more complex processes such as radicalization and polarization of conflict; formation of new balances of power; and re-alignments of the polity along new lines” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 33).

Methodological implications of this seemingly abrupt change of emphasis, from static variables to dynamic processes, are also quite radical in that the authors claim that from now on, movements, strikes, revolutions etc. are to be understood as nothing more than retrospective constructions by participants and observers. Such conclusion raises some doubts about the causal force of the mechanisms and processes that McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) described. If entire series of events are called revolutions, only on the basis of a retrospective

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judgement, then wouldn't the mechanisms of attribution and perception described by analysts also depend on such retroactive inference? I raise this question because I think that the problem of how to distinguish causal analysis from inferential reasoning is one that haunts the theorising of the “deans” of structuralist-turned-dynamic movement theory since “Dynamics of Contention” was published in 2001. It seems to me almost as if their “mechanism-and-process” conversion developed from an analysis of structures to an exploration of how structures work. This shift, however, still fails to account for a place of agency and uncertainty in social movement action. I find the dynamic model approach underconceptualised because it does not make clear how mechanisms and processes operate between agency and structure. It also elevates analysts’ and participants’ retroactive judgement to the same level of significance. I would insist that while it may be justified in the case of the latter if it is part of research project's empirical data, in the case of the former, it comes dangerously close to analytical inference aimed at showing at all cost that a predetermined theory is correct.

In fact, a decade after “Dynamics of Contention” one of its authors – Tarrow – himself pointed to other criticisms of the book:

it tossed off mechanisms and processes with abandon without defining or documenting them carefully, much less showing how they worked. Second, it remained unclear what methods and evidence students and scholars could use to check out its explorations. Third, instead of making a straightforward presentation of its teachings, the book reveled in complications, asides, and illustrations (Tarrow, 2011, p. 188).

At yet another instance, he admitted that “what Dynamics and cognate work over the last decade did not do was to bridge the gaps between structural and process-based approaches” (Tarrow, 2012, p. 52). He was also aware that resorting to “mechanism talk” had become an easy escape whenever there was a need to explain unexpected variance. While analysing the Occupy movement, I remained unconvinced by the model of dynamics of contention not only due to its vague formulations and questionable empirical foundations, but also because the ethnographic data that I gathered throughout my research did not square with some of the mechanisms that the model described (hence, the model did not fulfil my first criterion for analysis). I will return to those mechanisms in the last subsection.

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### *Structural theories and the state*

One of the defining features of Occupy was its refusal to formulate demands that it could put forward to state authorities. Such a move would have been seen as further legitimisation of the position and power of elected representatives and would have gone against the movement's ethos of autonomy and self-governance. Yet, the canon of social movement theory (structural as well as the new social movement theories which I will return to in the section on the third cluster of concepts) is politically biased in this context because it considers the state as an object of movement's demands as well as the place where political opportunities for action emanate from. McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly write for example:

The contentious politics that concerns us [social movements are one form of such politics] is episodic rather than continuous, occurs in public, involves interaction between makers of claims and others, is recognized by those others as bearing on their interests, and brings in government as mediator, target, or claimant. (2001, p. 5)

This continuing relevance of the state for understanding social movements has been justified by their interrelated history; by how the development of “the national social movement was concomitant and mutually interdependent, with the rise in consolidated national states... It followed that movements could be studied only in connection with politics, and that they would vary in their strategy, structure, and success in different kinds of states” (Tarrow, 2011, p. 27). Since the late eighteenth century, as Tilly points out, “a distinctive way of pursuing public politics began to take shape in Western countries [and] acquired widespread recognition in Western Europe and North America by the early nineteenth century” (Tilly, 2004, p. 7). This distinctive form of public politics was later called a social movement and making collective claims on target authorities became one of its main features.

Although I agree with Tilly's argument that movements should not be understood as “solo performances” but rather as interactive campaigns (interacting also with the state), I would question the (specifically US theoretical) premise maintaining that the state authorities necessarily have to play a prominent and highly specified role in movement struggles. I think that social movement is constantly evolving as a historical phenomenon and the role of the state cannot be ignored in movement strategising (if for no other reason than at least because of its capacities for violent law enforcement). Nevertheless, as Occupy and other movements that employ innovative tactics (e.g. Anonymous) show, the state does not have to be the major object of movement's demands. Opportunities for action may also be difficult to explain only

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on the basis of features of a national political system. This critique has been addressed to some extent by such concepts as “complex internationalism” that deals with multiple levels of opportunities in the context of globalised, multilevel governance (Tarrow & della Porta, 2005). Furthermore, other structuralist theorists note that we also need a more subtle interpretation of the interaction between movements, civil society actors and the state since the former have, nowadays, become more and more (formally and informally) embedded in the structures of the state itself (Giugni, 2011). Structuralist theories, however, are still unhelpful if one wants to account for a movement that unlike parts of the global justice movement before it (as exemplified by the workings of the World Social Forums and the role that NGOs played in the process, for example) mobilised in more autonomous ways against neoliberal economics and post-politics i.e. phenomena with no clear boundaries and many centres of power (Holloway, 2002).

The 2008 economic crisis and the social response that followed required and drew on a more robust understanding of politics and power in society – one that can hardly be captured solely by the features of a national state system but also has to do with international financial capitalism. Social action in that context was characterised by uncertainty, depended to a large extent on movements’ temporalities (their most immediate situations) and demanded that participants took responsibility for decisions and actions the results of which they could not always foresee.

*Transgressive contention, movement society and the possibility of systemic change*

Occupy saw itself as a radical challenge to the ways of liberal representative politics and the neoliberal economy. Its strategising, that was built on prefigurative ethos and the communities that were created in the camps, testified to the possibility that an entirely different way of acting collectively is possible. The occupations were open for everybody to join in and the participants' goal was not to create small or closed autonomous spaces. Thus, the movement embodied the possibility of a systemic change. Structuralist theories of the canon of social movement studies, however, even if they implicitly make a distinction between revolutionary and reformist potentials of social action, make no room for a kind of society-wide change that transforms the very conditions of what is possible. This political bias dismisses a lot of movement strategising and discourses as immature or utopian, simply because the world such



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movements as Occupy strive for is not yet conceivable under the conditions of the current debates. Hence, canonical movement theory fails to satisfy my criterion 3 which requires that it valorised and paid attention to movement's imagination.

Structuralist theorists have noticed differences between revolutionary and reformist variants of social action. McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) call them transgressive and contained contention respectively. "Contained contention refers to those cases of contention in which all parties are previously established actors employing well established means of claim making" (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 7). This form of social resistance tends to reproduce existing regimes in contrast to transgressive contention that is more likely to produce "substantial short-term political and social change" (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 8). The only difference between the two in this framework seems to be in how in transgressive contention

at least some parties to the conflict are newly self-identified political actors, and/or at least some parties employ innovative collective action. (Action qualifies as innovative if it incorporates claims, selects objects of claims, includes collective self-representations, and/or adopts means that are either unprecedented or forbidden within the regime in question.) (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 8)

The authors note that episodes of transgressive contention often grow out of contained contention but the binary between the new and the existing that they establish remains limited as it is connected with and ascribed predominantly to actors' features. Consequently, any substantial change is also seen as a result of agential innovation rather than an effect of its remaking of the social and political structures in such a way that they retrospectively posit the conditions necessary for the actor to succeed in affecting change.

The theory of mobilising structures and the subsequent discussions on "social movement society" also deradicalise the potential of social movements to challenge the status quo in profound ways. The concept of a social movement society grew out of an observation that social movement organisations and other groups that may play a role in movement organising have become a routine part of politics. This was in a political landscape of increased professionalisation and one that emphasised the necessity of institutionalisation of social movement activity (Kriesi, 1996; Meyer & Tarrow, 1998b).

According to two of its exponents – Meyer and Tarrow – a movement society means that:

- Firstly, social protest has moved from being sporadic ... to become a perpetual element in modern life.

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- Second, protest behaviour is employed with greater frequency, by more diverse constituencies, and is used to represent a wider range of claims than ever before.
- Third, professionalization and institutionalization may be changing ... the social movement into an instrument within the realm of conventional politics. (Meyer & Tarrow, 1998a, p. 4)

Although such a concept legitimises conflict in society and establishes social movement actors as recognised agents on the political scene, in practice, movement society excludes movements, such as Occupy, that eschew forms of organisation based on institutionalisation and hierarchy. Furthermore, it extends state's and business' control over who has access to political processes and thus makes it easier for them to resist the change that threatens their political or corporate interests.

## **Cluster 2: Where is the remainder?**

The second cluster of concepts concerns the complexity of actual movement action: its complex realities and origins (how movement action taps into the disconnect between the dominant structures and their remainder i.e. what is excluded from them). In this section, I evaluate the relevance of movement theory in relation to this cluster of concepts as well as the three criteria for an effective analysis of Occupy. After assessing the possible theoretical, methodological and political biases of the structuralist canon of movement theory in the previous part of the thesis, in the first subsection in this part, I evaluate movement *theories' applicability* to such movements as Occupy as well as their *ability to predict* the nature of future mobilisations in relation to the broad base of the movement (the 99%) and the issues that it raised. In the second subsection, I develop an analysis of movement theories' *philosophical prepositions* with regards to their understanding of the complexity of actual movement actions.

In the two subsections, I introduce two other recognised movement scholars (Melucci and Touraine) who do not belong to the structuralist canon but have been widely recognised as providing complementary or alternative accounts of movements to the structuralist orthodoxy. Melucci's theory can be located in the context of the Movement of 1977 in Italy that objected to the political systems based on parties and unions. Melucci claimed to reject the kind of totalising attitudes and "integralism" that was still prevalent in the student revolts of 1968 (Cox & Flesher Fominaya, 2013; Melucci, 1989). Touraine's work on a variety of movements (chiefly:

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the labour and anti-nuclear movements as well as his analysis of “Solidarity” in Poland) has gained him much popularity in Europe and Latin America. In the English-speaking world, however, it failed to receive as much recognition and his method of “sociological intervention” was widely criticised in the US and the UK. Touraine is not usually included in the pool of the “new social movement theorists” but he is recognised as a contributor to the field.

*Melucci, Touraine and the 99%*

When I speak of a remainder of dominant social systems, it is to describe groups that have been left behind, their voices underrepresented, or not represented at all. Naturally, most Occupy participants were *formally* included in the decision-making of their respective countries. This inclusion, however, was formal and not substantial as, ultimately, it did not mean much against the power of money. Social movements provide channels for the parts of societies that are excluded (in formal as well as more subtle ways) so they can challenge the hegemonic structures that had put them in that position.

For Occupy, the remainder was declaratively and practically the 99% who had been excluded from meaningful political representation by the power of money and the workings of the neoliberal system. The protests were a response to the financial crisis as well as the crisis of liberal representative democracy. Hence, in many countries, and particularly in the United States (where the left was traditionally marginal to politics), Occupy marked a return of the issues of economic inequality and democratic non-representation. Although before 2011 these issues never disappeared from movements’ agendas, they had been largely left aside by the orthodox movement theorists for the last twenty years, failing to satisfy my criterion 1 about the sufficient complexity and ethnographic sensitivity of a movement theory.

This omission is visible in – what has been construed by the US movement perspectives as – new social movement (NSM) theory and in Touraine’s analysis of new centres of social conflict. NSM theory has been less interested in redistribution of resources and more in the struggles around certain groups’ political participation, and the relations of power within the welfare state, education and health systems etc. Within the NSM paradigm in the 1990s, Melucci claimed that there was a shift in the focus of movement mobilisation which was now to concern “reappropriation and reversal of the meaning produced by distant and impersonal apparatuses” (1996, p. 101). According to this understanding of the role of social movements,

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they were processes for building collective identities and counterhegemonic meanings. Antagonist movements which break the rules of the game rather than simply react to a crisis or express a conflict, campaign for more control over systems of production that in modern Western societies comprise not merely economic resources, but also information, symbols and social relations.

This definition can also form the basis of what Touraine calls, the cultural paradigm that brings centre-stage demands for cultural rights where “cultural categories replace social categories, and where each person’s relations with herself are as important as mastering the world used to be” (Touraine, 2007, p. 3). The new “quest for ourselves” emerges from a central conflict that Touraine (2007) describes as one between non-social forces (bolstered by globalisation such as the global market, wars etc.) and the subject.

The Occupy movement has questioned the validity of the NSM theory in that it reaffirmed the continuing relevance of social, economic and political rights through its focus on economic inequality and political non-representation. However, this was not in the form that would justify a return to frameworks based exclusively on social or economic categories. Rather, Occupy – particularly in the US – created a new dynamism where the issue of economic and political deprivation provided an overarching framework and a rallying theme that still made it possible for NSM struggles to become an integral – although not central – part of the movement. This was reflected in Occupy’s discussions and working groups that were created not solely around different functions that needed to be performed in the camps but were also issue- or identity-based. An important difference between the reality of Occupy and Touraine’s predictions for the future of social movements is that although to some extent it did “engage in a more general form of action to reconstitute the totality of individual and collective experience” (2007, p. 210), contrary to his expectations, it did not “supercede all polarisations.” In fact, Occupy stemmed from a sense of polarisation between the 99% and the 1% as well as between ordinary citizens and their political representatives.

This polarisation, and a desire to self-govern, led to the establishment of participatory and direct democracy as one of the defining features of the movement. Yet, in the face of this development, not only NSM but also other canonical social movement theory was also largely taken by surprise since it has only recently started to pay more attention to the role of movements in the processes of democratisation from below mostly thanks to the role of alter-globalisation movements (della Porta & Rucht, 2013; della Porta, 2009, 2013). Even these

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accounts, however, are concerned with activists' attitudes towards and movements' practices of internal democracy but they do not envisage direct democratic processes as a potential basis of broad social mobilisation, much less as a concept for social change. In other words, they offer only limited help if one wants to analyse Occupy, i.e. a movement of people who felt deprived of real political representation and questioned the legitimacy of a system based on delegation.

### *Structuralists' and constructivists' troubles with complexity*

Throughout this research, I found that Occupy was an incredibly diverse movement that unfolded in highly complex environments. Both structural and constructivist accounts of social movement theory explicitly question the assumption that movements are unitary actors. However, their understanding of diversity and complexity differs from one that I found most useful to describe what was happening in Occupy. Through this research, I found that categorising people and their actions according to their identity or affiliation was problematic and could not always explain the choices and decisions that they made (see chapter 6 and 7). Instead, complexity and diversity within the movement was best understood not as an aggregate of arbitrary categories (who was to decide which part of a person's identity had real bearing on their actions and which did not?), but as a reality that was riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions. Plurality of identities was part of this complex picture but it was not static and depended on changing situations and relationships within the movement. As a feature of a social order, complexity, thus understood, was not predetermined (like in movements driven by a demand for more political inclusion of a particular identity group) but it was something that was revealed at a moment when it seemed that a potential for change had been activated. It revealed the parts of social reality that had been neglected or systematically excluded from the dominant discourses. Unlike simple plurality, this complexity was characterised by contradictory and inconsistent demands. Hence, neither movement's alleged unity, nor a common understanding of plurality and complexity were sufficiently nuanced to reflect Occupy's reality (criterion 1).

Tilly regards movements' alleged unity as one of the mistaken ideas that need to be dispelled but he admits that activists may nevertheless find useful the promulgation of the idea that movements are "solidaristic, coherent groups rather than clusters of performances" (Tilly,

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1999, p. 256). Bizarrely, his own definition of a social movement as, *inter alia*, repeated public representations of the WUNC quartet: worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment, draws on identity-related categories (Tilly, 2004). Tilly sees movements as “displays” and representations of those categories. Yet, WUNC analytically creates identities to the same extent as it merely displays a “miraculous” aggregate of individual identities, bodies, interests and intentions.

Furthermore, by trying to escape the naivety and oversimplification of movement's unity, Tilly defines movements as repeated public displays of seemingly shared identities and interests. In other words, he separates the “real” movement complexity and a lack of unity from the WUNC displays that take place as part of movement's campaigns. He distinguishes between “how movements really are and how they seem to outside observers.” This separation, although philosophically salient, is never theorised or explained in any detail. Tilly (2004) only asserts that treating movements as unitary actors obscures how they actually work in terms of constant realignments and interactions between different stakeholders. It is, however, never examined where this complexity comes from and what role the lack of unity has when we are dealing with a vast social change or a minor reform.

Melucci also sees movements as:

heterogeneous and fragmented phenomena, which internally contain a multitude of differentiated meanings, forms of action, and modes of organization, and which often consume a large part of their energies in the effort to bind such differences together. Movements, characteristically, must devote a considerable share of their resources to the task of managing the complexity and differentiation that constitutes them. (1996, p. 13)

In addition,

two ingenuous epistemological assumptions still persist that have left their mark on the study of collective phenomena. The first one is the supposition that factual unity of the phenomenon, as perceived or believed to be there by the observer, actually exists. The proximity in space and time of concomitant forms of individual and group behaviour is elevated from the phenomenological to the conceptual level and thus granted ontological weight and qualitative homogeneity; collective reality, as it were, exists as a unified thing. (Melucci, 1996, pp. 14–15)

Despite the fact that, in his earlier work, Melucci engages to some extent with this complexity (1989), later he escapes the dilemmas that is creates by exploring movements “not as an empirical categorisation of certain types of behaviour but as an analytical concept” (1996, p.

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21). He unapologetically acknowledges the active role that an analyst plays in selecting only certain empirical data and from that constructing his/her objects of analysis. This way, analysis does not have to coincide with the empirical richness of the phenomenon.

I understand that such an analytical move (a flight to analyst's subjective judgement) may be motivated by Melucci's desire to further distance his theorisations from accounts that without acknowledging it, reduce empirical complexity to calculations of interests. In Melucci's account (1989), conversely, diversity is always present in a movement (not only as differences of opinion and tactic, but also between periods of intense public activity and during "the invisibility phase" through submerged networks). The complexity of movement situations is also acknowledged as a given. In this context, social action is *produced* or, as he puts it: "[w]ithin the boundaries of certain structures, people participate in cognitive, affective and interactive relationships and creatively transform their own social action and to a certain extent their social environment as well" (Melucci, 1989, p. 197).

One of the central questions that I had in this project with regards to the issue of complexity within the movement was the significance of this complexity: what did it actually do in the movement? How did it affect Occupy? In my research, complexity explained the real choices of movement's participants, the imperfect workings of its democratic systems, and offered some initial insights into the possibility of participatory democracy in the future. Reading Melucci's theory, however, I was constantly under the impression that complexity in his understanding was something that was to be overcome either by the dynamics of solidarity or the processes of creating collective identity. His main task seemed to be to understand why this overcoming of complexity succeeds or fails. Although this question is still important, I noted that for an effective analysis of Occupy, complexity should not be understood simply as a plurality of identities, outlooks, processes of meaning-making etc. (even if they are contested and not merely stable). Instead, it is better understood as a reality in which actors have to negotiate various contradictory and inconsistent demands. In contrast to Melucci, I do not claim that these demands are solely or even predominantly a result of (different or conflicting) individual(ised) motivations. To a large extent, the contradictory nature of those demands stems from the features of democracy that is based on conflicting requirements (e.g. equality of all versus respect for every person's individual rights etc.). This kind of complexity-as-contradiction can hardly be overcome and in fact, it is one of democracy's inherent features (I explain this further in my discussion of democracy-to-come in the following chapter). Hence,

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the philosophical prepositions of Melucci's theory as regards his understanding of complexity and diversity fail to satisfy my criteria for an effective analysis of Occupy. Although he acknowledges that action does not derive spontaneously from people's identities or social conditions, he still holds an individualistic view of complexity, therefore neglecting its inherently structural aspect that, as this research shows, was recognised by the movement's participants.

### **Cluster 3: Failure(s) of the state**

I have so far evaluated various canonical movement theories, as well as accounts connected with the NSM paradigm, from a number of angles. I assessed their theoretical, methodological and political biases in relation to the first cluster of concepts and analysed their applicability, ability to predict and their philosophical prepositions with regards to the second cluster. This subsection deals with the third cluster of concepts i.e. one that focuses on the unstable nature of seemingly permanent social constructions. It refers to some of the participants' questions that came forth during the research, such as: how was Occupy possible? What "made" it happen? What can this occurrence teach us for our future political engagement? With regards to this cluster, the most essential feature of the canon of movement theories' is their take on the state. The three criteria for an effective analysis help to critically evaluate the canonical theories' *validity*, their ability to accurately reflect the on-the-ground reality of movements as well as their possible *social impact*. Together with the analyses from the previous subsections, this will help provide a comprehensive assessment of the various aspects of movement theories.

Occupy participants prided themselves on their autonomy from the state and their refusal to address its structures and thus reproduce their legitimacy. This was seen as a source of movement's strength, inspiration and innovative potential. Social movement theory, however, has a quite different take on this. Movements' autonomous tendencies are perceived as a sign of weakness at best, and they can pave the way for a turbulent and violent future at worst. I examine these claims more closely below.



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*Autonomous tactics versus images of violence and movements' weakness*

Occupy was not the first movement to use autonomous tactics and principles of organisation such as direct action and direct, participatory democracy. Correspondingly, this development has not escaped the attention of movement theorists. They noted that the power of many NSMs lies in challenging their objects through appealing to public opinion rather than elected representatives (della Porta, Andretta, Mosca, & Reiter, 2006). With regards to movements with specifically autonomous tactics, however, Melucci pointed out that “[a]ppeal to spontaneity, anti-authoritarianism, and anti-hierarchy seem to be common to many recent forms of collective action. Hence, the fragmentation, the weak organization, and the incoherence which persistently plague such forms of action” (1996, p. 103). He claims that this constitutes the central problem of new movements. A way to resolve this issue would be for movements to develop such forms of action and organisation that allow for political mediation without becoming an integrated part of political structures. However, Melucci himself does not seem to believe that this is a viable goal. Strangely, what immediately follows the above statement is an alarmist account of what this failure could mean for the future of our societies: “[a]uthoritarian rationalization or ungovernable crisis remain thus not just figments of the imagination” (Melucci, 1996, p. 113). This can be read in a conservative way or, knowing Melucci's anti-communist politics, as another sign of his incredulity towards totalising ideologies.

Either way, for this assessment, Melucci would find an unlikely ally in the structuralist strand of movement theorising. Tarrow is also wary of the recent developments. He notes that we have now moved beyond the benevolent movement society the arrival of which he and others proclaimed in the 1990s. At that time, it seemed that many unconventional forms of participation were becoming not only more widespread but also increasingly institutionalised and conventionalised (Meyer & Tarrow, 1998a). Something must have gone wrong as what we have been watching since then according to Tarrow is:

the violence in the streets of Athens; ... violent demonstrators at international summits; ... the return of the police to aggressive protest policing; ... the surge of Islamist terrorism around the world. The world may indeed be becoming 'a movement society', but because of changes in states, capitalism, and the international system, that society is increasingly turbulent. (2011, pp. 261–262)

It strikes me as bizarre firstly, that anti-summit mobilisations of the alter-globalisation movement that is committed to non-violence (the definition of violence in this case obviously

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excludes instances of principled property destruction) is thrown in together with “Islamist terrorism.” This raises questions about the theories' validity as it blindly mimics the discourses of the state and mainstream media without offering any ethnographic evidence that would explicate the nature of that movement's purported “violence” or its origins (hence, it fails to satisfy my criteria 1 and 2). Secondly, I am surprised by the images of a permanent state of violence, ensuing disorder and anarchy that both Melucci and Tarrow are depicting. Following their line of reasoning, movements with autonomous tactics are on the one hand, politically weak and fragmented but on the other, able to cause international havoc and bring about a new world (dis)order where violent collective action (authoritarian or simply chaotic, by which the theorists would mean anarchist) is the only way to go. This is yet another example of how the sense of failure of such movements as Occupy is being created in the field of academic movement theorising (and it shows that some theorists are unable to engage effectively with the practices of new movements – criterion 2). The argument is that the movements are too fragmented and weak and hence destined to fail politically. And if they do not collapse in on themselves under the weight of their internal infighting, or lose numbers and support, they would surely just cause a crisis and all-round chaos.

One must ask: why do those theorists come to such conclusions? And what does it tell us about their theories? I do not suppose that their thinking can be interpreted simply as a reflection of the spirit of their times. Melucci wrote “Challenging Codes” before 9/11 when the neoconservative discourse of keeping things “civilised” and “our way” lest the “axis of evil” takes over, really gained some ground. Tarrow, on the other hand, wrote his piece a decade after the attacks on the World Trade Center, after the Arab Spring and the first anti-austerity protests in Europe. Yet, he still seems to be mired in the post-9/11 rhetoric. Additionally, as a social movement theorist from the USA, he may be operating under different assumptions from those that have defined many social movements in Europe and other parts of the world. Chiefly, it must be recognised that – in Europe unlike in the US – historically, democratic, nationalist, labour and other movements have frequently participated in the making and remaking of states (Cox & Flesher Fominaya, 2013) through violent as well as non-violent means. I think that movement theory must recognise that overthrowing dictators by a popular movement may not always be a completely non-violent affair.

Images of impending crisis and looming violence, brought on societies by those new movements, do not reflect movement's reality but instead serve one function – they obfuscate

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and undermine actors that do not fit the theorists' predetermined criteria of non-violence and political efficacy as well as justify and legitimise the status quo. The theorists define those criteria unilaterally i.e. without considering how movements themselves understand such notions.

*What about the state?*

Movements such as Occupy not only challenge the legitimacy of the internal workings of the state but also the overall compatibility of its national structures with the kind of the world that the movements would like to bring about. Hence, the state as a system that organises national and international interaction is put under scrutiny.

Social movement theory is largely in consensus over the continuing relevance of the state for movement struggles and asserts that its power is not going to disappear for the foreseeable future (Tarrow, 2011). Tarrow (2012) acknowledges, however, that movements and movement intellectuals have never really thought about resistance to be limited by national boundaries. Marx, Lenin, Gramsci – they all saw political contention in global terms. Occupy was also an example of transnational resistance. It eroded the power of the state since it did not rely on its structures to spread the movement around the globe. In this way, it was an example of transnationalisation of protest and cosmopolitanism of activism that movement theorists talk about (Tarrow & della Porta, 2005; Tarrow, 2012). That was not, however, the main way in which Occupy aimed to limit the power of the state. The erosion of state power that Occupy participants testified to stemmed mainly from their opposition to the utter failure of their national governments and elected representatives to respond to the financial crisis in a socially responsible and equitable way. Yet, canonical movement theorists seem to leave out the possibility that erosion of state's power can come from within the national borders, which further questions the validity of their theories.

Many of them mainly point to the processes that come with globalisation and international multilevel governance as eroding state's power. Tarrow believes, however, that they are only "nibbling away at the autonomy of the national state but not at its sovereignty" (Tarrow, 2011, p. 257). What can this mean? I think that claims to sovereignty simply tie people to political decisions of their representatives as in the case of private-turned-sovereign debt during the financial crisis. In this example, sovereignty is then something that powerful interests can prey

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on and use to their advantage. If sovereignty is more often used as a bastion of national control biased in favour of the 1%, then why would movements not want to rethink how it works? Detachment from national loyalty does not have to result solely from globalisation but at least in the case of Occupy, it is more likely to be a response of citizens disenchanted with the workings of liberal representative democracy.

*How valid is canonical movement theory?*

Some movement theory also abounds with descriptions of mechanisms or processes that take place in movements but they are often not backed up by empirical evidence. This fails to satisfy my criterion 1 for an effective analysis. Hence, what happens is that the reader often gets a combination of rationalistic inference and oversimplification of real movement dynamics. Examples are plenty but this one drew my particular attention as it exemplifies some of the underlying assumptions that help flatten out the complex dynamics of movement situations:

exciting as it is for scholars to focus on the activists who come together across borders to protest against neoliberal capitalism and/or hegemonic states, this does not make these activists “transnational”: rather, as I argued in the last chapter, they are rooted cosmopolitans, who join transnational protest movements as a side product of their domestic activities. Think of the “global justice” activists who gathered at the international counter-summit in Seattle in 1999. Although the “Battle of Seattle” was widely trumpeted as an incident in the struggle of the “global South” against the “global North,” the largest proportion of activists were actually American trade unionists seeking protection for their jobs. (Tarrow, 2012, pp. 235–236)

To be clear, it is not my aim here to argue with Tarrow’s point about transnational versus “rooted cosmopolitan” nature of protest but I do want to show how his theoretical edifice is removed from the actual realities of movements on the ground. His first assumption is that immediate realities in which participants of such movements invariably operate can be ignored. Seattle’s location (in the global North) and its accompanying logistics do not seem to impact the author’s judgement. Instead, the national and ethnic composition of the protest is presented to us almost as an intended outcome, rather than something that had been influenced by a suite of variables (and ignores the fact that there were substantial summit protests in the global South where most of the participants were from the country where the protest was taking place). Secondly, the above description obfuscates the mobilisation in Seattle in that it ignores the dynamics of solidarity action and the extent to which the aims and

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messages that the participants wanted to project were multiple and a little more sophisticated than the phrase “global South versus North” seems to suggest. All the temporalities and complexities of movement action are also subsumed under the simplistic quantitative measurement of which group was the largest during the protest. This ignores the fact that trade unions have always been an important part of the alter-globalisation movement and their support was also welcomed in many Occupy locations. Moreover, as anybody who actually participated in organising protest action would know, the fact that the trade unionists were seen as simply campaigning for their jobs could as well just mean that the unions happened to have a new set of fresh banners from their ongoing campaigns that they wanted to reuse in Seattle – something that movements do all the time. Finally, union’s participation does not mean that the goals of the action were somehow changed or abandoned.

*What does canonical social movement theory actually do, then?*

In this section, I would like to assess the possible social impact of the canon of movement theory, which roughly corresponds to my second and third criteria for analysis. Social movement theory treats movements as part of an overall political landscape which it would like to preserve in its current or not radically altered form. Simultaneously, it neglects movements’ potential to bring about systemic change or misleadingly interprets it as violent propensities that can lead to dangerous destabilisation and crisis. In other words, canonical movement theory does not make room for accounting for the dominant structures’ inherent failure to be truly democratic. It also seems to contradict all that we have learned from history that no human-made system of governance can answer everybody’s needs and therefore last forever. Yet, social movement theory seems to be in complete disavowal of this simple fact in relation to the possibility of *radical* change as opposed to its support for the “right to protest.”

This has important consequences for what the canon of movement theory can actually do and what its social impact may be. In the words of its proponents, the aims of the dynamic mobilisation model, to take just one example, are: “not to posit deductively linear trajectories and predictable outcomes but to identify the processes and their constituent mechanisms that constitute different dynamics of contention” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 70); or simply: “to single out significant recurrent mechanisms and processes as well as principles of variation” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 33). Of what practical value can their analyses be to unfolding social

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movements or activists reflecting on the tactics that they adopt? I am tempted to claim that social movement theory has actually little to say to movement participants; it has particularly little to say about recent or unfolding protests and revolutions and it has really very little to say that would *actually matter* in those contexts, as this fragment may demonstrate:

It is too soon to gauge the effects of the financial crisis of 2008–2011 on contention in different countries, but from Greece, Ireland, Iceland, Portugal, and Spain in the global North, to Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen in the global South, the crisis took different forms and was processed through different institutional structures in different countries. The Greek austerity crisis produced mass protest and violence, while the implosion of the Irish, Icelandic, Portuguese, and Spanish economies produced electoral realignments. Similarly, though there was a commodities crisis throughout the Middle Eastern economies in 2010-11, the revolts against their governments took radically different forms and had different outcomes, from the partially successful democratizations in Tunisia and Egypt to the civil strife in Libya, Syria and Yemen to the grudging reforms allowed by the monarchical regimes in the Gulf. (Tarrow, 2012, p. 152)

There is much to say, then, about why various social theorists, engaged journalists and other public intellectuals have been asked to comment on the recent wave of protests much more often than orthodox movement theorists have. What does it tell us about movement theory that its theorists usually *are not* public intellectuals?

Having discussed some of the main tenets of canonical social movement theory in relation to my research, I will now try to summarise the major features and outline reasons why I adopted Derrida's political philosophy and Lacanian psychoanalysis as useful social theories for an effective analysis of the Occupy movement.

## **WHAT IS IMPOSSIBLE IS REAL:**

### Derrida, Lacan and a quest for real democracy

This thesis addresses the problematic of people's engagement with change when they act as participants in social movements such as Occupy. My own encounter with Derrida and Lacan as thinkers who have something useful and interesting to say in this context, was mediated through my own practical and political concerns when as a movement participant, I was struggling to understand the complexities of movements' situations. Thus, their works have always had a political meaning for me. Indeed, they offered to blend the subjective and the political in a way that I found relevant to my own as well as other people's experiences with movements. In fact, their insistence on the importance of the personal and the political resonates with a lot of contemporary movements that highlight both as (interrelated) sites of struggle for change.

Although largely absent from the literatures on the alter-globalisation movement and direct democracy that I am sympathetic to (I outlined the main authors in the first chapter), I think that Derrida's and Lacan's theoretical insights can be successfully related to most of it. Derrida and Lacan help develop our existing understanding of the nature of political engagement with change because their concepts fill a real gap in those literatures. Namely, they thematise and help incorporate uncertainty, complexity, aporias and inconsistencies of people's decisions and actions into a way of thinking about democracy and politics in such a way that they make possible research which is ethnographically sensitive, nuanced and relevant to the movement's own experience. Derrida and Lacan may not offer a robust theoretical approach to social movements or explain how all movements work all the time. I think that my own use of their theoretical thought is best understood as an attempt to find a conceptual framework to study the mode of people's political engagement with the lived reality of change within the context of such movements as Occupy. I am particularly interested in exploring the meaning and consequences of some of the most intellectually hard to grasp (and movement-relevant) areas of this engagement that concern uncertainty, complexity, aporias and inconsistencies of movement situations.

Derrida's and Lacan's theories are contested and they often have more than just one reading

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(especially since the theorists themselves made changes in their frameworks or definitions of their concepts over time). While I can say that I am more convinced by a “continental” (rather than North American) reading of Derrida, I cannot say that I am following any one particular “reading” or “tradition” in terms of how Lacan's works have been interpreted. I mostly rely on my own reading of his seminars. In the case of Derrida, I base my understanding of his concepts on a broad range of his works from various points of his career and some secondary sources that I indicate below.

This chapter summarises how Derrida's and Lacan's theoretical thought may be useful for an effective and interdisciplinary analysis of the Occupy movement.<sup>9</sup> The main aim of this chapter is to provide an introduction to the theoretical concepts and frameworks that this thesis draws on. They are concepts and ways of thinking that were developed by Derrida and Lacan and which I am going to apply to my analysis of Occupy. Both Derrida and Lacan had some explicit things to say about politics as well as people's engagement with change. In this thesis, however, I am also attempting to sketch the frames of a way of thinking about political engagement in social movements (the frameworks of real democracy and real politics) based on Derrida's and Lacan's works, which will also require that I make some broader extrapolations from their insights. The results of this undertaking are, as always, open to judgement.

The chapter begins with an introduction to who the two men were as theorists, what their writing is like and what kinds of reception it received. The rest of the chapter is structured around the same three clusters of concepts as the previous chapter. It concludes with a section that looks into the issue of how an interdisciplinary approach, that I adopted in this research, contributed to an effective analysis of Occupy.

#### **JACQUES DERRIDA (1930-2004)**

Derrida can be seen as a public intellectual in the classic French sense; he engaged with many big political and social issues of his day, participated in movements and protests and often spoke up about injustice and inequality. Beyond that, he was also a public figure. In May 1968, he organised the first general assembly at École Normale Supérieure in Paris (Bennington &

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<sup>9</sup> Derrida and Lacan are often paired in much of philosophical literature which usually accepts a broad similarity between their concepts, but also points out differences between the thinkers' theoretical frameworks.



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Derrida, 1999), where he was teaching at the time. He also marched together with the avant-garde *Tel Quel* magazine writers in the mass demonstration on 13 May 1968 but, typically for him, his attitude to the events was cautious (interestingly, critiques similar to his were sometimes levelled at Occupy):

What really bothered me was not so much the apparent spontaneity, which I do not believe in, but the spontaneist political eloquence, the call for transparency, for communication without relay or delay, the liberation from every sort of apparatus, party or union... Spontaneism, like workerism, pauperism, struck me as something to be wary of. I wouldn't say my conscience is clear on this matter and that it's as simple as that. These days..., I would be more cautious about formulating this critique of spontaneism. (Derrida in Peeters, 2013, p. 197)

He never joined the French Communist Party or approve of Maoism. Throughout his life, he spoke against and acted in defiance of academic and state authorities in relation to such issues as for example: the persecution of Czech intellectuals (he was arrested in communist Prague in 1981 where he came to give an address at a secretly organised philosophy seminar), the proliferation of nuclear power, Apartheid in South Africa and the war in Iraq.

Derrida's work also resonates with many strands of anti-hierarchical organising and the goals and tactics of the alter-globalisation movements because of its emphasis on diversity, autonomy and a refusal to formulate an "ideal" and integrated programme for the movement. Even those who would disagree with Derrida admit "how 'timely' Derrida's philosophy had become – not, of course, in the sense of reflecting the received wisdom of the day... – but in articulating, and indeed in this case anticipating the preoccupations of new movements of resistance to neo-liberalism and imperialism" (Callinicos, 2008, p. 86).<sup>10</sup>

Derrida is also quite known and often read in various anarchist circles and movements in Europe and this is despite the fact that reading Derrida's works is very hard due to their metaphorical, sometimes poetical language and the minutely detailed analyses that he always engages in his writing. Reading about Derrida is oftentimes only slightly easier because it seems difficult to write about him without emulating his logic or elaborate style. Another difficulty is that there are many contradictory analyses of Derrida so in order to develop a coherent understanding of his thought, one has to read his writings very attentively as well as be aware of the different interpretations of his works. In this thesis, I relied primarily on Derrida's own texts as well as the writings of such typically politically sympathetic people as:

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<sup>10</sup> Alex Callinicos is a member of the Central Committee of the Socialist Workers Party.

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Beardsworth (1996), Bennington (1999), Caputo (1997), Critchley (2008), Hurst (2008), Newman (2001), Norris (1985, 1988, 1990) and Spivak (in Derrida, 1967). This literature spans the disciplines of: political theory, philosophy and literary criticism and theory.

Those few names that I mentioned above do not exhaust the list of people who have written about Derrida. Nevertheless, they point to those few (a few dozen maybe, as Derrida himself said (2004)) who have undertaken a careful and detailed analysis of Derrida's works and come to defend his thought against some of the most common charges. Derrida's thought spurred a lot of controversy, which resulted in a long-standing argument with US analytic philosophers and consistent misreading of Derrida's writings by American literary departments. These were no conventionally moderate affairs – they led to an attempt to block Derrida from being awarded an honorary doctorate degree from the Cambridge University (ironically, it turned out that the philosophers who opposed that award had not read Derrida at all) (Critchley, 2008). The animosity did not even go away with his death and such papers as the *New York Times* published hostile obituaries like: “Jacques Derrida, Abstruse Theorist, Dies in Paris at 74” (October 10, 2004) and Simon Blackburn wrote in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* that “Derrida had tried hard but failed philosophically” (November 12, 2004), to mention only the mildest of them.

Somewhat reassuring, considering the above difficulties with reading (about) Derrida, is that he claimed that “we have not even begun yet to read [him]” (Derrida, 2004, p. 9), which I take to mean both: the refusal to be understood as an advocate of the postmodern “everything goes” attitude to writing and reading (which comprehension is popular in the field of literary studies) and his insistence on “reading more,” reading carefully and approaching his texts without any preconceived notions.

Apart from failing to read Derrida's works, read enough of them and read carefully, another reason for misreading Derrida is his commentators' overreliance on slogans. “All interpretation is misinterpretation,” “there is nothing outside the text” are only two examples of catch-phrases from Derrida's works (Norris, 1990). This reduction has to be especially lamented for it ignores the textuality of Derrida's writing and debases deconstruction to an all-out “licence to kill.” By paying attention to textuality (evocative and literary as well as argumentative and philosophical meanings and intricacies of his texts), one would avoid misreading Derrida in a sense that it would be less likely to miss the subtleties of the argument and more likely to appreciate its rigour and the fact that the best analytical work does not have to avoid a style

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that uses certain literary tools.

At the methodological level, whoever has read enough of Derrida's works instead of basing their claims mainly on secondary readings, cannot but admit that his argumentation is rigorous and his working-through patient and scrupulous. According to Derrida, the “right” to subjective interpretation presupposes and demands that a rigorous work of deconstruction is undertaken first (Norris, 1985).

One of the keys to understanding Derrida is to understand what deconstruction is. Deconstruction, the term he is most commonly associated with, has been defined variously as: praxis, pedagogy (Critchley, 2008) and “the most radically political of discourses” (Bennington & Derrida, 1999, p. 230). Deconstruction entails a movement that unmask internal contradictions of any philosophical text.

It might be said that deconstruction is a way of reading texts — philosophical texts — with the intention of making these texts question themselves, forcing them to take account of their own contradictions, and exposing the antagonisms they have ignored or repressed. What deconstruction is not, however, is a philosophical system. Derrida does not question one kind of philosophy from the standpoint of another, more complete, less contradictory system. This would be... merely to substitute one kind of authority for another. (Newman, 2001)

Deconstruction should not be utilised only in the case of philosophical readings since it is also inherently connected to justice, as Derrida points out:

Each time you replace one legal system by another one, one law by another one, or you improve the law, that is a kind of deconstruction... So, the law as such can be deconstructed and has to be deconstructed. That is the condition of historicity, revolution, morals, ethics, and progress. But justice is not the law. Justice is what gives us the impulse, the drive, or the movement to improve the law, that is, to deconstruct the law.... Justice is not reducible to the law, to a given system of legal structures. That means that justice is always unequal to itself. It is non-coincident with itself. (Derrida in Caputo, 1997, pp. 16–17)

The periodic deconstruction of law in the name of justice is also how social and political change happens. Hence, some practical deconstructive work must inevitably be taking place in social movements. People strive to change law (effectively, change a social system) because of a promise of justice.

A similar argument can be made (and was made by Derrida) about democracy in what he calls

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a democracy-to-come. In fact, Derrida's understanding of this term was one of the main reasons why I saw his thought useful for an effective analysis of Occupy. None of the existing or past particular democratic regimes have really lived up to what one would ideally call a democracy (nor was any internal democratic organising within movements etc. entirely successful). We constantly “fail” at construing ideal democracy because the task is impossible. It is impossible, however, not because we are striving to reach the ideal while we live in an imperfect world and are imperfect creatures. What is impossible is not merely achieving the ideal. Rather, building ideal democracies is impossible because it involves contradictory demands such as those between: treating everybody the same and respecting their singular needs or one between the sovereign will of the people and the rule of law backed up by (if need be) violent enforcement. We cannot pretend to be able to resolve such contradictions so we need to endure and live through them.

This is because democracy is built on a principle of intrinsic antagonisms and a recognition that no political arrangement can be truly universal and last forever. I chose Derrida for an analysis of Occupy because of his focus on this “impossibility of democracy.” It offers to provide new insights which may extend the discussion about prefigurative politics that is often used as a theoretical framework to describe the main features of Occupy. Derrida's theoretical toolbox also points to those aspects of participants' engagement that prefiguration does not explain and which pertain to aporias of decisions and actions (chapter 7) as well as the living temporalities of the movement's situations (chapter 6). Furthermore, I thought that it would be interesting, ethnographically sensitive, theoretically valid and practical to speak about democracy in Occupy not in relation to an ideal of what democracy might be but in relation to the impossible, i.e. to an understanding of democracy as entailing contradictory demands. Consequently, I call the democracy that I experienced and researched in the movement a real democracy since as Derrida points out about the impossible: “it is [also what's] most undeniably *real*. And sensible” (Derrida, 2005, p. 84).

#### **JACQUES LACAN (1901-1981)**

On the face of it, Jacques Lacan is definitely an unusual suspect when one reflects on the thinkers likely to produce valid theories of social and political subversion. This French psychoanalyst who never abandoned his clinical psychiatric practice for armchair

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philosophising or political engagement, for that matter, has been famous for his intentional unreadability (Lacan, 1969) and quite extravagant behaviour. As many so-called postmodern thinkers, he is mostly recognised by being an author of such provocative sentences as: “there is no sexual relationship” or “woman doesn't exist.” At various stages in his life, he demonstrated orthodox and elitist leanings and a boastful attitude. He advocated a return to Freud while there was a general inclination to go beyond the original doctrine; he endeavoured to form some sort of a school for a closed circle of his disciples; and exclaimed “The revolution, (...) [I am the revolution!]” (Roudinesco, 1997, p. 338) when asked for money to help his Maoist friends. He was not particularly modest also when he claimed that “[t]he psychoanalytic act, [has been] neither seen nor heard of before me, namely, never mapped out” (Lacan, 1969, p. 104).

At the same time, Lacan's name got tied to the May events in 1968 when he observed the teacher's strike and suspended his seminar. He also apparently met with student leaders (Roudinesco, 1997). My understanding is that he had a very “practical” approach to psychoanalysis in that he expected that the May events were going to help him and his students develop his theory. He was infuriated by the suggestion, that some of his students made, that it could be the other way round – that those participating in the “insurrection” should learn something from psychoanalytical theory. To the question of what psychoanalysts can do for the insurrection, he answered: “[t]he insurrection answers...: what we expect from you for the moment, this is the time to help throw some paving-stones!” (Lacan, 1967, p. 192, XV, 15/5/1968).

Lacan was very clear in that one should never resign oneself to any order (Roudinesco, 1997). Moreover, he was almost organically interested in the issues i.e. motives and methods of power, and importantly, the power that produces change (Hecq, 2006; Roudinesco, 1997). He believed that “[p]sychoanalysis does something” (Lacan, 1967, p. 19, XV, 15/11/1967) and thus is able to influence structures in profound ways. It struck him as odd that Freud showed no signs of faith in an “immanent movement of freedom: neither of consciousness, nor of the masses” (Lacan in Pluth, 2007, p. 4) and he found “delinquent” a view of American Freudianism that a person should be adapted to society. His own contention about freedom was that people are truly free only when they take into account that they are subject to unconscious determination (Roudinesco, 1997).

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Lacanian psychoanalytical theory has been recognised as “a radical and subversive doctrine whose practice calls into question dominant discourses of autonomy and subjective self-determination” (Grigg, 2008, p. 119). Recently, it began to be appropriated by thinkers and in fields beyond psychoanalytical treatment. This appropriation does not entail a “psychologisation” of topics and subjects under discussion. It has nothing to do with talking about “connecting with people’s most true selves” etc. Rather, such thinkers as: Badiou, Castoriadis, Laclau, Stavrakakis, Žižek and others who have sometimes been grouped under the label of “Lacanian Left” (Stavrakakis, 2007) have acknowledged Lacan’s thought as an important resource for the analysis of the condition of contemporary society and politics, particularly in relation to the questions about the future of democracy.

Lacanian psychoanalytical thought is almost the exact opposite of the common sense idea of what psychoanalysis should do, that is to free patients from their peculiar fantasies, help them “move on” or “get on with it” and confront reality as it really is (Žižek, n.d.-b). Lacan sees “reality” as composed of three orders: Symbolic, Imaginary and Real. Oversimplifying slightly, the Symbolic part of it refers to the dominant rules and norms, social structures and discourses (this is what, commonsensically, we are most likely to call “reality”). The Imaginary is a field of images and illusions that an individual creates in order to make sense of and uphold the coherence of the Symbolic (according to Lacan, this is also the usual focus of many psychoanalytical schools). An innovative contribution of Lacan’s theory is, however, mostly captured in the concept of the Real. The Real is that which eludes the Symbolic structures but not because it has some objective positive presence outside of them (Žižek, n.d.-a). We know that the Real exists (so it has a positive presence), but we know about it only when it introduces gaps and causes fractures, cracks and brings to light inconsistencies in the Symbolic. (This is also one of the points of connection between Lacan and Derrida's notion of deconstruction, for example.) Lacanian psychoanalysis is aimed at identifying with these inconsistencies, cracks and their meaning.

This movement is called “traversing the fantasy” or simply an act. I came to understand it to entail three steps:

- Recognising oneself as inherently alienated, not least by being born into a particular social and linguistic system. Realising one’s investment in sustaining the dominant structures.

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- Separating oneself from the fantasies – imaginary scenarios and explanations – that make the dominant structures appear stable, natural and neutral.
- Identifying oneself with the excess, remainder of dominant structures the meaning of which is not legitimised by those structures. The remainder is not adequately captured in the Symbolic order. The act rewrites the rules of the existing order and retroactively posits the preconditions of its own occurrence.

Given the potentially radical implications of the act, no wonder that Lacan's fifteenth seminar where he discussed acts was jokingly dubbed the "Che Guevara seminar."

In philosophical analysis, the structure of the encounter with the Real that takes place through the act is the same as the moment of the political. It is an instance when antagonisms assert themselves and a radical change in social and political systems happens (this often means that the previously depoliticised become mobilised and radicalised). It is "the point where social construction fails. This is also the possibility of creation and destruction of the Symbolic order... Whereas traditional politics attempt to cover over the necessarily incomplete nature of all forms of discourse, the political moment is... the traumatic exposure of this failure" (Hoedemaekers, 2008, p. 158). Like Derrida, Lacan presents us with a more nuanced understanding of what the real is. It is connected to something that is excluded from the dominant systems but not in a sense that it has some prior, independent existence outside of these systems. Rather, it emerges through the cracks in the Symbolic. It does not "produce" these cracks, though. They are an effect of a complex interplay between agency and structure.

A quest for real democracy is then an exploration of how democracy works, bearing in mind the features of Derrida's democracy-to-come and Lacan's act and his understanding of the Real. The two thinkers offer a rich and detailed conceptual toolbox for examining the workings of democracy as seen through the processes of individual and social change. As theorists, Derrida and Lacan often exceeded their immediate fields of interests in order to say something important about the current events. The subsequent interpretations of their works expand the scope for a serious engagement with their thought and provide further opportunities for analysing the nature of resistance and social change. It must be made clear, however, that an analysis that draws on their works will often have to proceed by way of metaphor and analogy.

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This is because it is very common for the two thinkers to recast the terms of such broad social phenomena and mechanisms like violence or revolution by working through the assumptions of Saussurean linguistics or the morals of ancient Greek dramas, for example.

In the following section, I will explore what Derrida's and Lacan's theoretical frameworks might offer us in relation to the three clusters of concepts that I had previously identified.

#### **CLUSTER 1: UNCERTAINTY AND RESPONSIBILITY**

When one researches a movement that is engaged in direct actions and makes decisions by a form of direct democracy, one quickly realises that the movement hardly ever has a privilege to make fully informed decisions. There are just too many unknowns in movement situations: will we keep our numbers, when will the police intervene and how, will it rain, will our way of making decisions by consensus really be open and not alienate some groups etc.? When I started analysing Occupy, I was looking for a theoretical framework that would take seriously the radical discourse and goals of the movement and, at the same time, thematise its day-to-day realities of acting in the face of uncertainty on the one hand and a sense of urgency on the other. In other words, I wanted to find a way of talking about the movement that would be consistent with its stance that was against hierarchical leadership but not against risk-taking. There was also a particular kind of responsibility that was required of Occupy participants to keep the movement going and I was looking for a vocabulary to be able to reflect on that in a theoretically rigorous fashion. I have found both of these things in Derrida's and Lacan's theories.

Many of Occupy actions in Ireland and California were risky, illegal or their legal status undetermined. Nevertheless, the movements acted in a myriad of different and radical ways and addressed concrete needs and desires of its participants. This is despite the fact that they only had very broad goals of bringing about real, participatory democracy and the context of their actions was always characterised by uncertainty. Occupy working group meetings and GAs reflected participants' hope and determination to do something in a particular way much more often than their conviction that it was going to work. This is where I found Lacan's understanding of an act useful.

Occupy's desire for real democracy was so radical that it was inconceivable that it could be



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realised simply by making a few adjustments to the current systems of governance. It required a wholesale social change, a restructuring of the dominant systems in their totality. The way in which change happens (or is legitimised), however, is such that its conditions and justifications can only be supplied in the reality after that change takes place; they are retroactive. As Lacan puts it: the “act designates a shape, an envelope, a structure such that, in a way, it makes everything that up to then has been established, formulated, produced as a status of the act, depend on its own law” (Lacan, 1967, p. 62, XV, 6/12/1967). In order to effect social change, then, Occupy participants were right to take action in spite of all uncertainty. If they were going to succeed, their actions would also produce the conditions of possibility of the change they effected. The power of an act does not rely on dominant laws or customs and it is not aimed at redefining a subject’s position in reference to the dominant networks of power and privilege. It is not merely about substituting one figurehead with another. The act, then, “takes the place of an assertion, whose subject it changes. It is not an act to walk if all one says is ‘it walks...’, or even ‘let us walk...’, but only if it ensures that ‘I’m getting there...’ is verified in it” (Lacan, 1969, p. 105). The understanding of the act as an assertion is ethnographically sensitive and practical because it reaffirms that urgency is characteristic of social movement situations. In movements such as Occupy, one needs to address injustices now without waiting to realise some regulative ideal of a utopian social system.

There is also an additional reason why an urgent necessity to decide and act in the face of uncertainty is consonant with the workings of direct democratic movements. It is because it keeps claims to absolute knowledge at bay. Occupy made many of its decisions not only in the face of uncertainty, i.e. a mere lack of assurance based on absolute knowledge, this uncertainty oftentimes resembled, what Derrida (2000) calls, “undecidability.” Undecidability is a condition of decision in that it marks people’s agency when they decide under an obligation to act but in the absence of clear directives, tied up in contradictory demands and paradoxes of the possible consequences of their actions (Hurst, 2008). This does not mean that naivety and a lack of knowledge are conditions of decisions. On the contrary, actors must engage in rigorous deconstruction and know as much and as well as possible before deciding. Deconstruction is also a process through which they learn about the paradoxes and aporias of their situation. Making a concrete decision in the face of paradoxes and taking responsibility for it encourages risk-taking but hinders vanguardism (in the pejorative sense).

Undecidability is a condition that eschews ideological blueprints and makes decisions always

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open to the possibility of deconstruction. This is because in a real movement context, it is experienced and remembered as an “imperfect” decision but one that had to be made one way or another. It can be defended but it can also be altered because what characterises that decision is not some “better knowledge” or enlightened vision, but a memory of that undecidability, i.e. the contingency of that decision, its lack of foundations. The status of the decision made under the conditions of undecidability is then precarious but it also brings the agency of social movements to the fore. Social change is not an unfolding of a predetermined plan, but a difficult job of working through and reworking social conditions and of being open to the incalculable consequences of one’s decisions.

This also raises challenging questions about transparency that every movement trying to bring about direct, participatory democracy must take into consideration. By rejecting the possibility that an analysis/demand etc. is absolutely right, movements may aim at “total transparency” of the radical social revolution that they want to make happen (Žižek, 2006). In fact, many radical leftists adopt this logic as they acknowledge that there is no foundation upon which to base new authority and no transcendental guarantee. Instead, they advocate choosing democratically a project of what a better democracy might look like and how to introduce it. Thus, as Žižek points out:

[f]rom this perspective, democracy is not so much the guarantee of the right choice as a kind of opportunistic insurance against possible failure; if things go wrong, I can always say we are all responsible. Consequently, this last refuge must be dropped; one should fully assume the risk... Like Lacanian analyst, a political agent has to commit acts that can only be authorized by themselves, for which there is no external guarantee. (Žižek, 2004, p. 320)

This tension between the impossibility of transparency and the need to take action on the basis of what we currently believe to be true is yet another aporia (an impasse of deciding between contradictory demands – chapter 7) that social movements must negotiate and endure in their day-to-day realities. Derrida and Lacan are useful in this context because they preserve these paradoxes and do not try to explain them away in favour of some “better” or more “enlightened” understanding.

## **CLUSTER 2: REMAINDERS AND COMPLEXITY OF MOVEMENT SITUATIONS**

Both Derrida and Lacan aim to preserve the remainders of any system. They do not allow these anomalies, these forgotten excesses to be incorporated into the dominant ideological frameworks and ironed out. In fact, a Lacanian psychoanalytical act starts from things that should be set aside i.e. parapraxis (Freudian slip) (Lacan, 1967, XV, 22/11/1967; 10/1/1968). At the initial stages of an analysis, the analyst may occupy the position of the “subject supposed to know.” The analysand will expect that the analyst will provide him/her with the real meaning of his/her symptoms. This is not, however, what happens in the act. “[T]he position of the subject supposed to know,” as Lacan puts it, “is tenable because it is the only access to the truth from which the subject is going to be rejected by being reduced to his function of cause of a process that is in an impasse” (Lacan, 1967, p. 58, XV, 29/11/1967). Analogically, what this means for political actors, such as movements, is that the remainders they mobilise and act with do not seek recognition from a dominant order (Pluth, 2007) or any rival source of meaning. Rather, the dominant order is identified as a problem that prevents the remainder from fully determining its meaning.

Social change happens when “we elevate... the excluded truth of the social field (which has been stigmatised as an alien particularity) to the place of the universal – to the point of our common identification which was, up to now, sustained by its exclusion or elimination” (Stavrakakis, 1999, pp. 133–134). The expectation is that substantial parts of entire societies suddenly become politicised, radicalised and identify with that part of it that has so far been excluded from the dominant systems.

This is why I think that one needs to take seriously the claim that “we are the 99%” when analysing the Occupy movement. It does not only speak of the part of Western societies that feel excluded from the workings of liberal representative democracy and financial capitalism, but it is also universal enough to inevitably generate paradoxes, inconsistencies and disagreements among the 99%. The remainder is not only the 99% itself but also every part of it that prevents the supposed unity from closing upon itself.

This is important in so far as it “is not only a matter of description, of saying that this is the way it is. It is a matter of accounting for the possibility of responsibility, of a decision, of ethical commitments” (Derrida in Caputo, 1997, p. 13). When one preserves and makes space for those paradoxes and inconsistencies in one's analysis, one is not merely presenting a more ethnographically sensitive account of the real complexity of the movement and its situation.

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Keeping open the possibility for those inconsistencies is also synonymous with making room for a responsible decision – for a potential for social change, which has been one of the goals of this research.

Finally, complexity of movement situations is important not only because it designates something that participants have to grapple with on a day-to-day basis. When one system of social relations begins to disintegrate, these inconsistencies and paradoxes of radical action are crucial as they are also bound to transform participants themselves. When social change happens, it never just transforms the subjects' environment but people as well.

### **CLUSTER 3: INHERENT FAILURE OF STRUCTURES OF GOVERNANCE**

Occupy – the fact that it happened and happened in many places around the world – attests to the failure of the dominant governance structures of liberal representative democracy and financial capitalism. This is because if they were working fine for everybody, there would surely be no reason to protest. This failure is inevitable. The state itself “knows” that it is inevitable and that is why it incorporates the possibility of that failure into its structures in different mechanisms and apparatuses of law enforcement and forms of organised violence. As Graeber repeatedly points out, especially in protest situations, power “usually turns out, in the end, to be a euphemism for organized violence” (2013, p. 270). Although I generally agree with Graeber on that point, I think that he does not go far enough in his analysis in that he does not ask the question of what lies at the basis of this perceived need for violent enforcement. Why does power have to be backed up by force? I believe that this is not because power is omnipotent and upholds its enforcement apparatuses for the simple purpose of disciplining “deviant behaviour.” Quite the contrary; power needs force because its status is incredibly fragile. It exists only to the extent that people behave as if it does, as evidenced in revolutionary situations. The organised violence that Graeber talks about, then, is a sign of how weak the powers that be are and how there is no stable foundation that they could rely on for their claim to power and authority.

One of the (probably “political”) aims of this research has been to theorise this failure of structures of governance as inevitable and thus to broaden our understanding of potential for radical social change. The scope for action might expand significantly, if we remembered that the origins of every system of governance and every ideology are essentially justifiable

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retrospectively and sometimes also unlawful within that system or ideology (this is why capitalism in its current form is often justified by referring to “human nature” rather than to the political decisions of Reagan or Thatcher in the 1980s, for instance). In reality however, there is “no stable ground” beneath those structures i.e. no stable legitimation and conceptual grounding. There is a founding violence at the genesis of every system of governance but people tend to gradually forget those violent and contingent origins in what we come to know as reality (Bennington & Derrida, 1999; McGowan, 2007). People begin to see this reality, not only as natural, but also probably as essential, perhaps even eternal. Social movements and their struggles are arenas where these assumptions are being challenged.

The inherent failure of all hegemonic structures is deeply unsettling rather than just another version of the conservative cycles of “the return of the same” or a transcendental condition for a harmony of the cosmos through our minor differences. As Lacan asked in his seventh seminar: “[c]an anything be poorer and more worthless after all than the idea that human crimes might... contribute in some way to the cosmic maintenance of the *rerum concordia discors*?” (Lacan, 1992, pp. 212–213).

This *coup de force* – an ineliminable act of power – at the root of all dominant systems is at the same time deeply disturbing and potentially central as a mobilising factor. This is because it signifies a unilateral and contingent decision but even more so because that decision represses, excludes and reduces the complexity of the social realm to the structures and assumptions of one particular system of governance. A return of what has been repressed is inevitable because any system cannot take into account the overwhelming and constantly evolving diversity of the real world. Additionally, in the case of democracy, this “return of the repressed” is inescapable because democracy “will always remain aporetic in its structure (*force without force, incalculable singularity and calculable equality, commensurability and incommensurability, heteronomy and autonomy, indivisible sovereignty and divisible or shared sovereignty...*)” (Derrida, 2005, p. 86). Hence, it is not only the complexity of reality which is simply “overflowing” the arrangements of any social system that may destabilise the hegemonic structures of governance; it is also the fact that this system conceals aporias, inconsistencies and paradoxes. It depends on them to function but they also occasionally burst into the open and become the focus of struggles for meaningful change.

#### **DERRIDA, LACAN AND INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH**

By employing Derrida's and Lacan's theoretical concepts, I have given my analysis an interdisciplinary character, which is supplemented by militant ethnographic, movement-relevant and participatory action research (next chapter). In this section, I attempt to explain why Derrida's and Lacan's theoretical frameworks are compatible with interdisciplinarity and why I used an interdisciplinary approach to research and analysis in this project.

Interdisciplinarity essentially attends to the critical question of where knowledge is produced, by whom and how it is distributed. All of these issues are crucial for research that aims to produce knowledge that is useful for movements. According to some understandings of interdisciplinarity, it decentralises knowledge and helps question its assumptions and methods i.e. think about, not only within discourses (Kamarck Minnich, 2004). The integrative approach of the purposefully interdisciplinary ways of doing research is also consonant with the anti-hierarchical ethos of movements like Occupy since the study proceeds from the same assumption that all kinds of wisdom are around us at all times (De la Garza, 2007; Welch IV, 2003).

In this context, I find Derrida's and Lacan's ideas useful in how they talk about the production and transmission of knowledge. When they are drawn on in order to support the case for interdisciplinary research, however, it is all too easy to deradicalise their ways of thinking about embedded knowledge and the influence of subjective judgement as another example of a postmodern free play. Underlying both thinkers' positions, however, is the view that knowledge is a process. This is not the traditional progressivist belief that knowledge is a linear process that proceeds from the lack of knowledge and ignorance to (fuller) knowledge and self-consciousness. Interdisciplinary research based on such a belief typically speaks about raising people's awareness, freeing them from their false consciousness and broadening their horizons. This seems to me to be an impractical way of thinking about researching social movements – it is a type of a conversation with movements where one side possesses knowledge and the other does not. According to Lacan, this view of knowledge sees it as a structure of address (Felman, 1982). Knowledge may be presumed in some person, institution, or a system. Just like in psychoanalytical treatment at the beginning of the analysis, the patient addresses the analyst as a place from which he or she wants to learn about the meaning of their symptoms. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, what the patient receives, however, is not any master knowledge. Rather, it is the analysand who does most of the work in analysis. He/she

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creates his/her own knowledge that is intersubjective, i.e. dependent on a progressive revelation of the (parts – not all of) subject's unconscious knowledge (things he/she does not know that he/she knows) in a process of interaction with another person (analyst in psychoanalysis) (Evans, 1996). Lacan's understanding of (symbolic) knowledge points out that it is created in an intersubjective process, in a non-hierarchical relation and that it draws on subjects' existing experiences and knowledge. I find this understanding of knowledge production very useful in researching movements such as Occupy.

Another area of confluence between Derrida, Lacan, the realities of movement action and interdisciplinarity is the latter's sensitivity to the role of contexts in interpretation and action. Both Derrida and Lacan were no strangers in this field as they trespassed many disciplinary boundaries from anthropology through philosophy, psychiatry, literary studies and psychoanalysis to politics, ethics and topology (study of shapes). Derrida's notion of *différance* is a process through which difference emerges by being different in substance and deferred in time, space and from one person to another. This convinces me that phenomena such as movements or disciplinary viewpoints always exist in a context. In a sense, they are inseparable from it but at the same time, constantly haunted by the prospect of decontextualisation – of somebody else taking the person's utterance and embedding it in another context (Bennington & Derrida, 1999; Derrida, 1993). Lacan sees this possibility as structurally unavoidable because language – the principal mode of communication – is already such a decontextualising tool (Lacan, 2006).

The importance of contexts is practical rather than merely a theoretical embellishment because interdisciplinary work has to ask what scholars are saying as well as why they are saying it and in what contexts what they are saying actually makes sense. This non-linear thinking has a provisional quality that is characteristic of critical thought and intuition which, in turn, are both indispensable for a project that looks into the possibilities of radical action in a world that is in the midst of a major economic, social and political crisis.

Furthermore, this practically-oriented attitude of interdisciplinary research and analysis is visible in how interdisciplinary scholarship does not focus on the question of which theoretical frameworks are more intellectually compelling than others, as is often the case with disciplinary and methodological rows over scientific reliability. Rather, interdisciplinary analysis (as well as participatory research) probes the type of explanations that it offers for whether they are answerable to the present urgencies (Fish, 1989). This is reflected in the aims of this

research in that I did not want to compartmentalise participants' reality and wanted instead to base the validity of the project's findings on their capacity to constitute change (Fuster Morell, 2009) – not on the extent to which my research represented “good” sociology or “good” political science (in the sense of demonstrating canonical orthodoxy).

Interdisciplinary movement research, therefore, focuses strongly on the problem at hand (Newell et al., 2003). This is in contrast to other approaches which can concentrate more on the disciplinary and institutional affiliations of the researchers. Two of the most notable theorists of interdisciplinary studies – William H. Newell and Julie Thompson Klein – have both asserted that defining the problem should precede the determination of which disciplines would be suitable for addressing it (Newell, 2001).

This could also help ensure that one's research makes a real contribution to social action. An interdisciplinary approach is again useful in this area. Since it proceeds by way of analogy, affinity and integration (Boix Mansilla, 2006; Spooner, 2004; Wolfe & Haynes, 2003), it may also be close to the practice of doing movement-relevant research that itself would be an example of the world movements want to bring about. By integrating our own knowledges through inclusive interaction with others, one does not only create common vocabulary and methodologies of social enquiry, but also common understandings and possibilities for action. For any interdisciplinarian, it is important to acknowledge that analogies can be found in many creative ways – not only by going through book alleys on a number of different library floors. Analogy is similar to a metaphor in that creative thinking is indispensable if one wants to understand it. There are many tools for creative thinking but most of them bear incredible resemblance to those that are used in interdisciplinary and participatory approaches to research and include, for example: observing, synthesising, imagining, body thinking, playing and empathising (Spooner, 2004), all of which constitute part of this project's methodologies that I explore in the following chapter.



## **SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN REALITY:**

### Approaches and methods of movement research

This project adopted participatory action as well as militant ethnographic methods of enquiry and took a movement-relevant approach to research. Participatory action research is an approach that involves an active involvement of all research participants in a cyclical process of research, action and reflection. Militant ethnography is an ethnography that involves researchers as active practitioners in a group or phenomenon that they are studying. Movement-relevant research is about the production of knowledge that is interesting and useful for the movement(s) concerned. In the following chapter, I describe the main features of these methodologies of movement research and analyse how and why they were used in this project. In particular, after outlining the data collection methods, I will explore how this project's aims and needs corresponded with the methodologies chosen. This will describe the suitability of these approaches as well as highlighting their limitations and the challenges that they posed during research in the Occupy movement. I will also explain how the project and its methods had to evolve as a response to the changing situation and dynamic of Occupy. Secondly, I aim to examine my own role as a participant-researcher and its epistemological consequences for this project. Participatory action research (PAR) and militant ethnography are both non-traditional approaches to research in that they merge the roles of researchers and participants. I explain why I thought that they would be best suited for this type of project from the perspective of an engaged researcher. Lastly, I explore the relation between knowledge and movement action in the context of a changing model of science. I used participatory action and movement-relevant research as well as militant ethnography because they best reflect the kind of lived experiences that reveal the paradoxical link between knowledge and action – the relation that is crucial in all social movements. Movements value and always seek good, reliable knowledge but many of the decisions that they make and most radical actions that they undertake require a leap of faith into the unknown.

## **METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

### **Dimensions of participation**

In general, there were three levels at which my participation and interpretation in the movement unfolded. There was structured participation that revolved around the organisation of workshops and facilitation of assemblies and meetings (this took place in Dublin). The research problem was articulated and evolved during consensus decision-making and facilitation workshops (which constitute the participatory action components of this project). As a result of the realities of conducting research in a dynamic and ad hoc space, however, I cannot now recall the precise number of these workshops.<sup>11</sup> There were undoubtedly no less than five workshops that I co-organised and co-facilitated and many more where I was an active participant. The core findings of this research are structured on the themes that came forth during the workshops.

The bulk of my participation in the movement, however, was non-structured, i.e. concerned with the day-to-day running of the encampment, creating interpersonal relationships, becoming part of a group and gaining credibility within the movement. As a method of data collection, militant ethnography concerns elements of both structured and non-structured participation in Occupy. I used militant ethnography in Dublin and Oakland.

The last dimension of my participation in the movement was interviewing that took place largely after the Occupy camps were evicted. The majority of the interviews were conducted in the San Francisco Bay Area and Cork, with just a few being done in Dublin. The interviews are used to illustrate how Occupy participants reflected on the robust themes that emerged during workshops. They also helped demonstrate in what ways these themes were played out in people's own experiences. Additionally, the interviews provided an opportunity to reflect on participants' experiences, which, as many of them admitted, they felt was therapeutic.

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<sup>11</sup> Occupy Dame Street was a very intensive experience of a movement space that is run 24/7 in a physically challenging environment, which often also attracted massive media attention. I carried out my research while also trying to balance it with teaching and studying.

## **Data collection**

In this project, I used the following data collection methods:

Method A: Participatory Action Research in Occupy Dame Street (ODS):

- a) co-organised consensus decision-making and facilitation workshops
- b) helped with drafting the original proposal for the adoption of consensus in ODS
- c) was a member of the facilitation group, facilitated assemblies and other meetings
- d) designed information materials about decision-making in ODS (Appendix 2)
- e) facilitated the organisation of a week of reflection in ODS (Appendix 5)
- f) co-organised a workshop about lessons learned in Occupy at the Grassroots Gathering in Galway in October 2012 (Appendix 6).

Method B: interviewing (in ODS and Occupy Cork in Ireland, and Occupy Oakland, Occupy San Francisco and Occupy Berkeley in the USA):

- a) semi-structured and informal interviews with Occupy participants comprised but were not limited to the following themes:
  - i. biographical narration (How and why did they get involved in the movement? What was their role in Occupy?)
  - ii. explanation and evaluation of decision-making (How were decisions in Occupy made? Were the methods used effective, democratic? Were there any problems with how decisions were being made?)
  - iii. story telling (What were some of the most important/memorable moments in the movement?)
  - iv. critical reflection (What is their perception of the movement, its meaning and role? How has this perception changed, if at all?)

I interviewed five participants of ODS, nine participants of Occupy Cork and twenty six participants of various Occupies in the San Francisco Bay Area: Occupy Oakland, San Francisco,

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Berkeley and Occupy The Farm (forty interviews in total). The majority of interviews were individual interviews but in three cases, I conducted interviews with two participants. Most of the interviews were recorded and every interviewee was offered an opportunity to receive a copy of the recording. I prepared and used an interview consent form that the interviewees signed and could keep a copy for their own records. Most of the interviewees signed it but a few thought that it was unnecessary once they had given verbal consent (consent form – Appendix 7).

Method C: militant ethnographic enquiry (collected extensive fieldwork notes in English)

a) In ODS:

- i. participant observation during five months from October 2011 – March 2012,
- ii. day-to-day organisational help in the camp
- iii. active participation in meetings, actions and decision-making.

b) In Occupies in the San Francisco Bay Area:

- i. participant observation from 18. June 2012 - 29. June 2012,
- ii. participation in a General Assembly (GA), Reimagining the GA and its planning meeting, Lakeview school occupation and a march, Occupy Oakland Research Committee meeting

### **Coding and analysis**

#### *Workshops*

The research question as well as the core findings of this project emerged from the themes which came forth during the workshops that I co-organised or participated in. The themes manifested themselves mostly as practical or political problems that the participants were discussing. They were repeatedly identified as “issues” that the participants, however, could not easily resolve. For example: practical discussions about how to recognise a principled block during the consensus process gave rise to themes that concerned inconsistencies and the

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complexity of Occupy's decisions. Other times, the themes emerged from discussions during which the participants agreed that two, seemingly contradictory arguments were equally true or valid such as that cooperation with other groups was important and that Occupy's autonomy was crucial too.

The themes that emerged in the workshops marked a paradox, or an intellectual/practical deadlock, that needed explanation but that did not stop the movement's participants from acting. Uncertainty, complexity and inconsistencies of actions became the themes in this project because the participants used their different aspects to make sense of the problems that they were facing. During the workshops, it seemed that these issues were experienced as necessities of the movement situation that the participants were in. I wanted to find out whether these themes were also part of the subjective realities of Occupiers' political engagement and to use them to generate interview questions. The interviews confirmed what I observed in the workshops and my ethnographic fieldnotes.

In the coding process and during the analysis, I used the themes to group the particular experiences, actions, processes and concepts that my interviewees referred to. These themes gave rise to a general conceptual framework that centred on the notions of uncertainty, complexity and inconsistencies that related to people's engagement with change. Subsequently, Derrida's and Lacan's theoretical concepts were employed in order to further explicate these themes and explore their meaning in the context of the changing nature of politics and democracy in the contemporary Western world. Thus, the themes and the basic concepts arise out of movement processes and discussions.

### *Interviews and fieldnotes*

All interviews were coded (example in Appendix 8) and the Dublin interviews were transcribed (example in Appendix 9). The coding process began after the interviews in Dublin and the US were completed. The first cycle of coding involved developing a number of emic, descriptive, single and multi-word codes that helped to group the data into sets that referred to factual events, the main processes that took place in the movement and the actors involved. These codes were later connected to concepts used by the participants themselves such as violence, politicisation, leadership or burnout (this approach draws on the main premises of grounded theory, Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For the purpose of analysis, I drew on Lacanian psychoanalysis

and Derrida's political thought. On the basis of the themes that emerged during the workshops, I developed a number of categories and subcategories that the concepts and codes from interviews were subsequently grouped into. These included for example: prefiguration, criteria of the political act, aporia and unresolved questions. I was then able to analyse the data gathered not as a set of individual experiences, perceptions and reflections, but as part of incredibly dynamic processes of decision-making in Occupy and the entire movement situation.

The transcriptions of interviews, as well as drafts of two scholarly articles that I wrote about the movement, were sent to participants for feedback. This further enhanced participants' control over this research project and validated my findings. In particular, all feedback that I received confirmed that my research and analysis managed to capture many of the complicated dynamics, messiness and complexity of the movement (especially the relation between its ambitions and shortcomings). It also pointed to some areas for improvement such as making a clearer argument why the contradictions that the movement experienced were its strength.

Although in this thesis, I use direct quotations from interviews more frequently than cite my fieldwork notes, it has to be understood that all analysis is deeply saturated with my own previous as well as post-Occupy experience with anarchist and alter-globalisation groups and movements. I cite all participants without making any changes to their contributions. This approach is deliberate and aims to retain the authenticity and indeed ambiguity as well as maintaining the poetic quality of their contributions.

### **Suitability of research methods and possible limitations**

The methods that I used were appropriate for this project because they acknowledged the diversity of the population studied (movement's participants) as well as the project's emphasis on *dynamic processes*. They made it possible to capture change and complexity which were the two defining characteristics of Occupy at the time when this research took place. The methods and approaches that I used in this project were intended to unravel and do justice to the entire panoply of experiences, situations and perspectives. In this way, the analysis does not focus on a formulation of static, theoretical positions but presents a dynamic social paradigm with a potential to contribute to our understanding of direct democracy.

The project may also tell us something interesting about the feasibility of this direct mode of

decision-making in general. This generalisation is an example of how the project evolved – from a case study of decision-making in one Irish Occupy, to a set of cases from two different countries, and finally to a study of direct democracy in practice. This research also asks the question about the future of direct democracy and offers to contribute an original perspective to this debate. It treats this question not merely as an interesting theoretical puzzle, but a justified call for the development of movement-relevant knowledge.

Throughout this project, I made every effort to be mindful of the need of diversity of participants. To this end, I intended to interview participants from different social groups, of different age, gender and political persuasions. However, I failed to interview both: a homeless participant of ODS and a long-term activist from Dublin, the latter of whom, I suspect, did not quite trust journalists and scholars (and perceived me to be one of either). In general, I found that students, persons working in the non-governmental sector and members of established political groups were most keen on giving an interview in Occupies in Ireland as well as in the San Francisco Bay Area. As a result, the conclusions that I reach in my analysis based on the experiences and perceptions of the participants, may be more optimistic than those of a more diverse cohort. This potential limitation of the project is, however, slightly mitigated by the fact that the groups that I listed as most keen interviewees were also the biggest in terms of numbers in Occupy. Nevertheless, I acknowledge this limitation and would prefer to also highlight the perceptions and experiences of movement participants whose voices may usually be absent from scholarly movement analysis.

#### **RESEARCH APPROACHES**

In this project, three methodologies were employed: militant ethnography, movement-relevant research and PAR.<sup>12</sup> I treat them as highly complementary yet separate because each of them highlights a different but an equally significant aspect of this project's methodology. PAR provides methodological grounding for the "action" part of this research that involved the organisation of workshops and taking an active part in facilitating assemblies and meetings in Occupy. It is also through PAR methods that the main themes of this research emerged. Militant ethnography supplied the broader, bodily, behavioural, interpersonal and political context for these themes and allowed me to continue the research beyond the spaces and

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<sup>12</sup> I have discussed them as data collection methods above but in this section, I would like to describe their methodological import for my thesis.

times of my structured participation. In places like Occupy Cork and other Occupies in the San Francisco Bay Area, which I only visited after the camps were gone and where I could not develop the kind of long-term and participatory processes that PAR allows for, militant ethnography was indispensable for building grounded and reliable narratives about those places. My engagement through militant ethnography also helped to find interviewees and secure their consent. Furthermore, it facilitated the interviewing process itself as I was not perceived as a complete outsider to the Occupies in which I did not take part. The movement-relevant component of this project's methodology focused on the production of information and knowledge that would be relevant and useful for the movement as well as this research – both within and beyond the movement settings. The movement-relevant aspect was useful in the analysis, writing and dissemination of the results of this research. This methodology has also expanded the scope of my thesis by underscoring the need for a “feasibility study” of direct democracy as a concept of social change. The three methodologies and approaches used here are, therefore, highly intertwined and they have a common epistemology, which I will outline in the section about the role of a researcher.

Research approaches for this project were chosen on the basis of its aims and the needs of its participants. When I undertook the exploration of decision-making within the Occupy movement, I realised that I needed to facilitate equal and open discussion and encourage reflexivity. Many participants perceived the Occupy phenomenon as a unique life and political experience. The movement's ethos was egalitarian and the novel tactic of prolonged occupations in city centres influenced the exploratory nature of this project and led me towards participatory, movement-relevant and engaged methodologies. Participatory action and militant ethnographic approaches encouraged shared ownership of the research and collective responsibility for its outcomes. They also helped ensure that the project would be predicated on participants' needs and capacities.

### **The situation on the ground**

When I joined ODS on the first day of the occupation (as an activist researching direct democratic processes<sup>13</sup>), the immediate issue related to the decision-making processes was that we had not established any yet. In order to facilitate the encampment and carry on its

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<sup>13</sup> It was not clear at the time that there would be an occupation and that it would last for more than a weekend.



leaderless ethos that the movement had gained in the USA, what needed to be done first was to facilitate the discussion about the various decision-making processes. We also needed to establish and develop participants' knowledge about consensus and their skills so that whatever model of decision-making was adopted, it could be practised in an effective way. When the immediate problems came to the fore, my impulse (as someone who has been involved in movements previously) was to try to resolve them. Thus, there was not a clearly defined start to the research.

One of the major methodological strains during this project was that it differed from many of earlier PAR or ethnographic enquiries in that it did not have any "official" beginning or end. It was not "launched" in the way that many well-established participatory research programmes or individual projects are. The roles of the participants in this research were not defined once and for all. My own role has also evolved throughout this project. Its aims were not set in stone and they also changed when the situation of the movement developed. Due to its radically open and anti-hierarchical nature, the research could not aim at facilitating an establishment of an organisation or any other body as sometimes happens in PAR. The situation of the movement was fluid. Membership was very unstable and there was a quick turn-over of participants. Occupy also did not operate in well-established settings where it is clear who the main stakeholders are and how they will be affected by the research. Occupy was radically open to all political and social groups. Hence, there were also widely varying views on the movement, its aims, and the decision-making processes themselves. All of this made this research project challenging. However, it also helped me explore not only the technicalities of consensus decision-making, but also the feasibility of direct democracy itself.

### **Militant ethnography**

The below fragment is an example of the field notes that I took as part of the militant ethnographic study of Occupy.

I wake up (relatively) early, get on my bike and cycle into town. We have been planning this action for a couple of months - since November, I think. I can recall how M gave me a few nods to let me know that she wants to talk - in private. So we moved away a bit from the group of people with whom we have been occupying the square in front of the Central Bank in Dublin. "Listen, we're planning a meeting..." -

### *Social movements in reality*

she whispered, rumpling nervously some pieces of paper. "We want to plan an action against NAMA.<sup>14</sup> It would be great if you could come. We're meeting in Seomra.<sup>15</sup> Oh, and this will be a closed meeting so don't tell anybody about it for now, OK?"

Why so secret? This is unusual. Well, I guess... I remember what happened with the last building where a similar group wanted to start a social campaign. One day we just learned that there had been a fire in the building, making it unsafe for that group's purpose. I also surmised that this time the group is considering an occupation of a concrete building and that's always hard, especially if your aim is not simply squatting but opening the building up for community use.

Today months of planning, discussions, meetings and research are over. What seemed impossible will once again become possible. Only a few people know the exact address of the building but we all saw pictures from the inside made by the "building group" and agreed to occupy that building. The campaign starts at noon. The exact address will be posted on Facebook. I know the approximate area where the building is and I am going to meet there with others a little bit earlier. As I cycle into town and following familiar voices and laughter, I find the building that we have been talking about for the past three months. The place has an interesting history. Originally (in the 19th century), it was an institute set up by the Quakers.

We are putting up some information, bringing chairs, setting up the media centre that is going to send out Tweets, we are preparing a table with coffee, tea and vegan muffins with ice toppings arranged in the name of the campaign. All of this thanks to our own efforts - without any help from catering or transport companies. The building looks like it has been neglected for quite some time. It sends shivers down my spine - it's cold, very cold. The kids are running around in woollen hats and gloves. I would swear that I could see their breaths. In the air, there is a smell of rotting floor coverings. A nice surprise is that there is running water in the bathroom - icy cold - obviously. I am happy that at least it is not windy... When a quite big crowd has gathered, it is time to start...

After a few hours, the police come - they have been called by the security company that looks over the building. The first to arrive are policemen dressed in plain clothes. They are from the Special Branch (Special Detective Unit) which in Ireland is responsible for counterterrorism and monitoring of subversive and extremist groups... Really, didn't they stretch it just a bit to send them here, for us? Soon, however, what we can see from the windows is not just the police cars because they have been literally swarmed by a crowd of people. Through many informal networks, they all have got a message about

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<sup>14</sup> National Asset Management Agency - an Irish institution created after the property bubble burst. It took over banks' "toxic" loans. As a result, the banks got a substantial injection of capital that came from taxes and budget cuts, but it did not make them start lending again and many buildings lay vacant despite the fact that it is effectively a public institution that is in charge of them.

<sup>15</sup> Seomra Spraoi - a social centre in Dublin.

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what had been happening in the building on Great Strand Street and came out in solidarity. The narrow street is now filled with laughter, cigarette smoke and overlapping echoes of an engaged discussion among predominantly young people. We are waving to them from the windows of the building and they wave back at us. Eager and excited, we are exchanging short jokes and little snips of information. We are on the first floor of the building. The rotting floor squeaks mercilessly under a hundred feet moving in the rhythm of a flying bumblebee. The policemen are guarding the exit on the ground floor. What do they want from us? The door was already open when we came!...

As engaged researchers, we should be especially aware of the rules of “silent solidarity”<sup>16</sup> so as not to endanger anybody’s safety. The idea is that nobody should be singled out to face the negative consequences of their actions. This builds a sense of community and a feeling that one can rely on others. (January 28, 2012 notes)<sup>17</sup>

### *What is militant ethnography and how did I use it?*

I turned to ethnography because I wanted to capture the particularity and contexts of the multiple ways in which people experienced the Occupy movement. According to Jeff Juris (2007), one of the main features of militant ethnography is that it rejects the tendency to analyse movements as if they were spectacles or objects to decode. Instead, in order to better understand the logic that leads to certain social practices, researchers should become active practitioners. They could be responsible for organising actions, workshops, help run meetings, participate in strategic debates and take risk during direct actions, which means that they should also be prepared to “[put] one's body on the line” (Juris, 2007, p. 165).

I chose militant ethnography for this project because it aims to provide movements with tools for constant self-reflection. I understood that this could help activists in making decisions about future actions as well as about internal organisational structures that were still unclear at the beginning of ODS. It is not militant ethnography's goal, however, to supply movements with ready-made blueprints or guidelines for action. This corresponded with the ethos of movements that use direct democracy such as Occupy because they are non-hierarchical and reject vanguardist practices. Instead, they emphasise egalitarian discussion, consensus and prefigurative politics. Prefiguration stresses the importance of creating in the here and now the

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<sup>16</sup> Here expressed in the statement that the door was already open, hence no crime has been committed.

<sup>17</sup> In this thesis, references to notes and interviews specify the date and the source of a quotation. The fieldwork location where the quote comes from, is identified in the quote itself or immediately prior/after it.

non-hierarchical relations and a model of society that we would like to live in in the future. Hence, the main features of militant ethnography coincided with the needs of the participants, the ethos of the movement and the project's aims.

Juris' militant ethnography was carried out in horizontal collaboration with movements. It aimed to avoid mentor-like posturing and defining the world for the movement. In Juris' research, this method of enquiry had three components. First was the collective reflection and visioning about concrete practices as well as cultural and political models for the alter-globalisation movement. The second part was a common analysis of broader social processes and power relations that influence movement's decisions. The last component was collective, ethnographic reflection about diverse social movement networks, how they cooperate with one another and what can be done to ensure a better relation to the outside community (Juris, 2007, 2008).

Although I did not strictly follow his model, the example of a multi-stage research process helped me realise that in order to practise militant ethnography, it is not enough to attend demonstrations and sing some chants. Militant ethnography requires engagement that builds mutual trust and commitment to the issue. This produces more reliable and valid research in that it helps all researchers and participants to better understand the logic and contexts of their actions. Importantly, it also means that to a greater extent than in traditional approaches to research, researcher and participants share many of their experiences. They are invaluable in all movement building but for the researcher they also produce better understanding of participants' actions. In the process, researchers' bodies also become one of their research tools (Juris, 2008). This aspect was also important to me because experiencing the cold and piercing damp of Dublin's city centre during the five winter months helped me make sense of many of the movement's actions and decisions. This common experience also made many of Occupy participants more understanding and mindful of others and their well-being. It helped build solidarity between the researcher and movement participants in a similar way as crossing the gates of the occupied Lakeview school in Oakland, when I and many other participants all asked the same kinds of questions: how illegal is this action? How far can I go? What do we do when the police come? These questions are not easy and they point to the degree of courage and commitment that is not routinely present in the majority of sociological research.

*Why use militant ethnography?*

The above questions mark also the difference between militant and other forms of engaged ethnography, which may still produce meanings and categories that are deeply subjective. They are an outcome of a collision between the world and culture of the researcher and that of the researched (Scheper-Hughes, 2000). In principle, militant ethnography is a more collective process. Ideally, militant ethnography should be able to produce results that are more valid and reliable than other ethnographic models. What is important for me, however, is not necessarily the particular form of ethnography that was used in this project or a name one gives to it. I do not want to justify my methodological choice by proposing simply that all engaged forms of research can and should claim moral high ground over the traditional, “neutral” approaches. Rather, I think that the moral primacy of engaged research should not be understood as an a priori assumption but as a pragmatic evolution of research practice in a principled response to the research situation. As Nancy Scheper-Hughes admits, her transformation from an objective anthropologist to a politically and morally engaged *companheira* did not happen through her critical self-reflection. Rather, it was through her research subjects' insistence that she changed her role, that her transformation occurred (Scheper-Hughes, 1995). Far from an a priori condition, then, ethical primacy of engaged research is established *in practice*.

*What were the challenges of militant ethnography?*

From the beginning, the practical dimension of this project was crucial to me because I wanted to respond to the movement's concrete situation and its needs. I soon realised that my goals coincided with the expectations of many participants. Hence, I had to make this research relevant and almost immediately useful for the movement. The fact that it had concrete practical implications also helped me find my own role in the movement and feel useful and part of the group. On the one hand, it helped me build trustful relations with other Occupy participants and feel valued and morally sound about what I was doing. On the other hand, however, it also made it difficult for me to keep reminding other participants that I was also a “researcher.” It felt strange to go back to this role during interviews. After my practical work in Occupy, engaging in more traditional research methods again (during interviews or coding) did not feel like a “real thing.” I was surprised to experience practical engagement as deeply ethical and justified, and the methods and activities associated with more traditional and objective modes of science as morally and personally troubling.

It may be, however, as Scheper-Hughes (1995) puts it, that artificial neutrality and cultural and moral relativism constitute an anthropological bluff. They lack any value if they limit themselves to recounting political and moral dilemmas as if they were not connected to somebody's real struggle between life and death, good and evil. In tense situations where power is involved, a researcher's inaction can have political effects. Such limiting of ethnography is itself a political act (Low & Merry, 2010). This is why Scheper-Hughes proposes to substitute observation with witnessing since witnesses are accountable not to "science" but to history. She suggests an anthropology that is "good enough" in the place of a postmodernist anthropology with its capillary idea of power. A good enough anthropology, as I understand it, is a practice of solidarity with research participants that grants them recognition. Moreover, Scheper-Hughes' proposition of "barefoot anthropology" consists of two parts: knowledge and action. The task of barefoot anthropologists is to produce convincing and morally demanding texts and pictures that would speak to people's conscience. Furthermore, they ought to subvert the traditionally conceived academic roles by considering the real needs of the people who are subjects of their work (Scheper-Hughes, 1995). Barefoot anthropology is, then, above all connected to responsibility: "[a]nthropologists should, I believe, be held accountable for what they see and what they fail to see, how they act or fail to act in critical situations" (Scheper-Hughes, 1995, p. 437).<sup>18</sup>

According to this understanding, anthropology should be ethically grounded in the practical situation of research participants. In this context, researchers take responsibility for their actions because they feel morally and politically obliged to act for the good of the community where they work. Although this helps create a more detailed, practical and nuanced understanding of the research topic and the intentions of the participants, taking a concrete stance may also close some doors. Throughout this project, I witnessed some interpersonal conflicts and animosities develop, which is natural given the wide diversity of people who took part in the Occupy movement and the tense situation that all participants were subjected to. I had my own views about the behaviour of other participants and the splits that occurred. Although I found it challenging, I managed to still be able to work with all groups and people – regardless of whether personally I approved or disapproved of their actions. Retrospectively, I think that my double function as a researcher-participant played a huge role in this. I would not have got involved in some meetings and groups if I had not been a researcher but only a

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<sup>18</sup> This position stands in contrast to her earlier work on Ireland that led to her being essentially boycotted from the communities where she did her research.

participant. My personal feelings and friendships would probably take over and I would not have worked with as wide a range of people and taken part in as many different actions and meetings if it had not been for the fact that I thought that it would be important for the validity of this research.

Moreover, this project made me aware that by taking a stance and becoming morally and politically entangled in the situation of research participants, one's relations with diplomatic and governmental institutions and agencies may pose a challenge or become a cause for concern. They have the tendency to be quite insensitive to moral arguments, have the power to restrict citizens' mobility and the capacity to use force. It is a well-known fact within anarchist and alter-globalisation movements that the state has the tendency to overreact to their actions. This is exemplified by the scale and type of resources that the police use during direct confrontation with the protesters (or, equally, when their demonstrations are peaceful). One such example is the intervention by the Special Detective Unit during the occupation by UnlockNAMA (a group formed by some ODS participants with an aim to restore publicly owned buildings for community use) that I referred to in the journal notes at the beginning of this section. Similarly, in December 2011 the London police released a document that listed Occupy along such terrorist threats as al-Qaida in Pakistan and Farc in Columbia (Malik, 2011). I wanted to avoid those possible, ridiculous associations when I was applying for a visa to go on a research trip to the USA. I concluded that the safest thing was to refrain from mentioning the name Occupy and creatively use such "respected" and mainstream brands as the global justice movement instead (if it got to the point that a consul would like to know the details of my research. Fortunately, he was satisfied with "social movement research").

### **Movement-relevant research**

From fieldnotes:

What is consensus? How to explain it? Well, now I have to really think about these questions since I (so foolishly) proposed to do a workshop on it tomorrow. It was an impulse. I could not help it after a GA where it turned out that many people really wanted to talk about which decision-making system ODS is going to adopt but there was no time for that discussion then. I am back in my postgrad office in Maynooth, staring at an empty piece of paper. Maybe should switch the orientation to horizontal. What sources am I going to use? Which are most relevant for Ireland? How should I know?! OK, let's have a couple of sources and variants of consensus and we will take it from there. Takethesquare.net seem to

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have developed a nice format for putting forward a proposal. I will add a couple of points from their materials. Then – technicalities. OK, let's have a simple graph of the different stages of the process. I know what they are from my own experience but can I also give people some more tangible sources? It seems that [seedsforchange.org.uk](http://seedsforchange.org.uk) and the Direct Action Network may be good reference points. And done! Now it's only photocopying and I am out of here! (October 10, 2011 notes)

### *Anarchist anthropology and this research as a feasibility study of direct democracy*

Another approach utilised in this project was movement-relevant research. Its main priority is the production of knowledge or social and political theory that would be interesting and useful for those who are trying to change the world. According to Graeber (2004a), a science – like his proposal for an anarchist anthropology – that would undertake the task of creating such movement-relevant knowledge needs to be based on two assumptions. Firstly, it has to stem from the principle that “another world is possible.” Naturally, this principle does not refer to any absolute wisdom which is impossible, but rather, it relates to an optimistic imperative that encourages action. Secondly, anarchist anthropology would reject any attitudes that are vanguardist. As the result of these two principles, it would change the shape of social theory in the manner of direct democratic processes (Graeber, 2004a). By studying anarchist anthropology, one could learn about anarchist social relations and examples of non-alienated forms of action that can be found everywhere and much more often than we would expect. Typically for anarchists, as Graeber claims, such action does not necessarily involve direct confrontation with power. Slipping away from its influence may be a more effective form of resistance. In Graeber's (2004a) proposal, researchers could also be responsible for studying the feasibility of radical ideas. Graeber focuses on anthropology because he is confident that anthropologists already have all necessary instruments and tools for producing knowledge about how “another world is possible.”

When this project started, I thought that Graeber's proposition was interesting but did not expect that I would be able to provide a “feasibility study” of direct democracy. I understood my task as strictly related (and perhaps limited) to the locations of the Occupy movement where I conducted this research. What made me change my mind was a comparative analysis of the challenges, problems and stories of Occupies that I studied in Ireland and the US. Despite the geographical distance, the countries' different political and activist histories and their respective positions in the global financial system, I have found striking similarities between how Occupies were organised in both states, how they developed, what problems



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they faced, who participated in them and in many other dimensions. I then compared my knowledge of direct democratic practices in Occupy, with the modern history of direct and participatory democracy and the discourses that these practices have been part of. On this basis, I have been able to identify a few features of direct democracy as it was practised in the movement, and to analyse what they could contribute to our understanding of this mode of decision-making and social and political organisation.

Subsequently, following Graeber's proposal, as well as the main principles of movement-relevant research, I tried to answer the question of what this research about real democracy in Occupy could tell us about the possibility of direct democratic forms of social organisation in the future. At the same time, I wanted to avoid the easy path of a typically managerial or developmental attitude to history and change in which it is always in the future that the full potential of a concept or a practice can be realised; the most recent developments are always also the most promising, and all problems are contingent and likely to be overcome.

### *Counter-expertise*

Another variant of movement-relevant and specialised knowledge is the so-called counter-expertise (Cox & Flesher Fominaya, 2009). A good example of such knowledge is that produced for and by Shell to Sea in Ireland or movements against fracking.<sup>19</sup> Knowledge about fracking produced by such movements offers a fuller picture of all consequences of gas extraction and unlike a lot of information about fracking that is widely available, it is not influenced by corporate interests or political propaganda.

Within counter-expertise, the role of researchers and academia is to disseminate movement-relevant knowledge and to legitimise it. Such movement-relevant knowledge informs people about the real impact of governmental and commercial projects on their rights (which, by the way, are usually curtailed in anticipation of these projects). Counter-expertise in Occupy was important because participants wanted to know that their impressions about the worsening of their situation after the financial crash in 2008 were not merely a subjective feeling, but a quantifiable and documented result of the workings of global financial capital. The "we are the 99%" slogan is a prime example of such counter-expertise. One aim of this project was to

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<sup>19</sup> Fracking is a controversial method of shale gas extraction which can have adverse effects for human health and the environment.

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contribute to the production and dissemination of counter-expertise about different forms of direct democratic and consensus decision-making. It could be called counter-expertise because it often involved participants' detachment from the idea that the only viable form of democracy has to be based on representation.

### *Main limitations and challenges of counter-expertise*

Movements' emphasis on uncovering the forgotten meanings, possibilities or the government's and business' secrets, however, can also have a potentially destabilising effect and may induce something similar to a paranoia. This can happen, for instance, when the influence of conspiracy theorists in the movement becomes very strong. It has to be noted, that they were definitely present in Occupies in Ireland and the US but the real influence of their ideas varied at different times throughout the development of these movements. Hence, movements have to be very careful in how they produce, treat and use their counter-expertise as in the heat of the situation, it may be easy to stop distinguishing between fact, justified supposition and a wild guess or an ungrounded suspicion.

Similar caution is also required in relation to the fact that not all counter-expertise may be deployed for movements' benefit. Some is also used entirely by the mainstream organisations in medical or social-statistical contexts, for example.

Although very important, movements' counter-expertise is not sufficient to resist controversial gas explorations or to stop following the rules of representative democracy. As many activists have found out in practice, the major problem is not the lack of knowledge itself, but the sense of helplessness and the lack of belief that people can do something to change their situation. They may think that there is no point in trying (Peters, 2005).

### *Movement-relevant research*

As a response to those concerns, such authors as Laurence Cox, Douglas Bevington and Chris Dixon, Marcy Darnovsky, and others point to the fact that movement researchers should also help answer the questions about how a movement should be organised and react in a given situation, and what are the best practices for actions (Cox & Flesher Fominaya, 2009)? Bevington and Dixon coined the term movement-relevant research. According to this idea, how

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important and relevant given research is for the movement could be judged by assessing its input into movement debates and strategies as well as the extent to which it answers questions that are important for the movement (Bevington & Dixon, 2005).

While social movement studies (a more mainstream approach to movement research) concentrates on finding similarities between limited cases that exist in different conditions and contexts, movement-relevant research is based on a direct engagement of the researcher that:

is needed throughout the research process, with particular attention to the formulation and impact of that research. This deepened connection consists of more than just working directly with movement participants. It is a process of relationship building that may take significant work on the part of the researcher. ... Direct engagement is not simply chumminess with a favored movement. It is about putting the thoughts and concerns of the movement participants at the center of the research agenda and showing a commitment to producing accurate and potentially useful information about the issues that are important to these activists. (Bevington & Dixon, 2005, p. 200)

### *Movement-relevant versus formalised approaches to movement research*

This research about direct decision-making in Occupy is movement-relevant because it aimed at producing useful information (that would respond to participants' concerns) and was possible only through direct engagement with other participants. Many academic debates focus on formulating hypotheses and empirical generalisations that reify movements. This is how they become subsumed by abstract empiricism. Analysis that is created in this way is so detached from any concrete context that one may rightly doubt whether movements described in this way exist at all (Darnovsky, Epstein, & Flacks, 1995). Conversely, this project arose in response to the real need of the Occupy movement to learn and develop a direct democratic form of decision-making. I am certain that the project was not a prerequisite to this process and ODS would have established its model of decision-making without it, but I also think that my engagement sped up the discussion about consensus and helped spread the knowledge about it. My direct engagement was crucial in this respect because in many movements with anarchist values, their philosophy is more often expressed in the principles of their internal organisation than in their discussion (Croteau, 2005).

This is also why producing movement-relevant knowledge helps understand the actions of activists better than rational choice theories (often used in orthodox social movement studies). Unlike movement-relevant research, which is based on an assessment of a concrete situation

and movement's needs, rational theories judge movement participants from the point of abstract possibilities and non-embedded positions. I admit that US movement literature after the mid-1970s was progressive compared to an earlier Cold War understanding of social movements as irrational mobs susceptible to ideological manipulation. Nevertheless, the mainstream literature about movements has also strengthened the tendency for formalisation in the field. New and existing analytical paradigms were soon developed. This was especially visible in the US context where the resource mobilisation and political opportunity structure theories (among others) gained considerable popularity. Since then movement research has often relied on connecting concrete cases or issues with these paradigms. In reality, however, it is very hard to analyse activists' actions solely with rational choice theories or regard their behaviour as determined entirely by their situation. This is because they very often get involved in activities that are risky and unconventional. There is rarely any guarantee of success, yet many activists sustain their commitment throughout long periods of time, if not for their entire lives (Flacks, 2005).

### **Participatory Action Research**

#### Research

It's an early afternoon. We use mic check to call the first workshop about consensus decision-making. The topic has been raised at almost all General Assemblies for the past couple of days and we always concluded that we need to discuss this issue and choose a model of consensus that we could use in ODS. I have some practical experience in this area and have been researching decision-making processes in social movements for my PhD for two years now. I decide to organise the workshop in order to start creating spaces where Occupy participants could discuss different direct democratic ways of making decisions. In a short while, there is already a circle of us and I begin by asking everybody to introduce themselves. I have prepared some brief information about different models of consensus but say that this is only as an introduction to a discussion and encourage everybody to share their own experiences... (October 10, 2011 notes)

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This is the third workshop about consensus decision-making that I organise. After the discussion, we prepare a proposal for a concrete model of consensus that is going to be put forward before the General Assembly on the very same day. As it turns out, the GA will also approve it (by consensus!). The person who presents the proposal in front of the assembly begins by saying that: "Consensus is not a way of making decisions that we are familiar with..." (October 14, 2011 notes)

## *Social movements in reality*

### Action

As I enter the fibreboard kitchen, I notice that fastened onto one of its walls there is diagram of the consensus process that I prepared as a member of the facilitation working group.

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It's a November evening. People have gathered at the square in front of the Central Bank on Dame Street in Dublin. There is a General Assembly. We have formed a circle and are discussing the proposal to take part in a march and organise it together with the Dublin Council of Trade Unions. It is not an easy decision because many of us are pretty negative about trade unions in Ireland. Participants are criticising their close partnership with subsequent governments and their detachment from the day-to-day issues and problems of the ordinary union members. The discussion is long and exhausting but it is also a necessary part of the decision-making process...

A middle-aged man with long dreadlocks and wearing a denim jacket is next to speak. He has been on Dame Street from the start. I often see him when he is peeling vegetables, playing the guitar or running nervously around the tents, trying to organise something. Some time ago at one of the assemblies he also admitted that he has gone through a personal transformation as a result of Occupy. He was able to overcome his own ego thanks to the new friendships and an experience of collective effort. Now he is saying:

- I think we should take a leap of faith. This is what they're doing in New York, in Wall Street. They've got the unions involved. When we go on this march, or if we go on this march, we're still gonna come to Dame Street, we'll still have our own beliefs, our own principles, you know. And the whole banner thing... a banner isn't going to occupy your mind. You're not going to come out on the other side as any different. So don't be afraid, take a leap of faith. But I'd also like to say that I'm gonna respect the consensus decision of the crowd tonight. If we decide not to go, that's all good and well because I trust you! Thank you! (November 14, 2011 notes)

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I am facilitating the GA tonight. In front of me there is a well-known Dublin professor and a long-term activist. At this point of the decision-making process, we ask everybody if they have any concerns or think there are other issues that may be problematic for the action that has been proposed. After that we will ask for amendments to the proposal that would address the concerns raised. The assumption is that in this way, everybody is working to make the proposal better. This fosters common ownership of the action and encourages participation because it has not been imposed on anybody but worked out collectively during an open debate.

When new concerns are being raised, suddenly the discussion is interrupted by that professor-activist shouting: "This is all so negative! I want to speak for the proposal as it is!" (October 28, 2011 notes)

## *Social movements in reality*

### Reflection

After a nearly entire day spent on Dame Street, I cross the street and go to The Sweeney's. Its workers have been very supportive from the beginning of the occupation – they have allowed us to use their free wifi, let us “occupy” their dry and warm spaces for meetings, not to mention the bathrooms. In the bar, I am meeting with a group of people that have just come in here after the assembly. They are development educators. We talk about the problems in the camp and about the movement's aims. They offer that they could facilitate a few GAs if we need more people to help out in that way. I throw in an idea of a “reflection week.” It has been on my mind for some time now. It could be a series of meetings that would not be assemblies or any of these meetings where we only talk about the camp. I think that such a week of reflection would do good to a lot of campers and ease some tensions that have appeared. The meetings may also be open to everybody so that people who have not had a chance to get involved, would be able to do so now. Soon we are all engaged in a lively discussion – creative ideas are springing up with the frequency of one hundred per minute. We set our plates aside and take out our notebooks and address books in mobile phones. [The reflection week was eventually called “Conversations about Occupy.” The group of development educators ran a series of world café discussions which consistently received a positive and enthusiastic feedback.] (October 29, 2011 notes)

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It's been a year since Occupy. There's been some talk about organising a Grassroots Gathering (GG) in Galway this year [a meeting for grassroots movements and communities]. The discussion about Occupy on blogs and in social media has recently died down a little. I have a feeling that it was not particularly reflexive in its final stages and focused more on “narcisisms of small differences.” That's why I am a bit wary about opening that can of worms again but decide to try anyway and organise a meeting for Occupy participants from all over Ireland. Its aim could be to talk about challenges that we all faced during occupations and lessons that we learned from the Occupy experience. I think that we should not concentrate on problems or perceived failures of the movement. [Feedback also confirmed that that approach was most desired by the participants.] (September 14, 2012 notes)

I consult about my idea with other Occupy participants with whom we are now co-organising the GG. It seems fine. I need to write a short blurb about the proposed meeting – about its aims and also need to find somebody who would like to facilitate it. We need to talk about how we are going to run the meeting. Perhaps small group discussions first followed by a general discussion where we could sum up our conclusions. [After the meeting, I gather all of the conclusions, write them up and together with a short summary of the discussion send it out to the meeting's participants and the admin of the GG webpage.] (September 30, 2012 notes)

*What is Participatory Action Research?*

Participatory Action Research (PAR) has a few specific features that distinguish it from other approaches to research (in the literature, PAR is variously defined as *a methodology* or *an approach* to the research process that itself uses other, sometimes more traditional methods of data collection). Firstly, PAR is characterised by a democratic and cyclical process of research, action and reflection. It puts a lot of emphasis on fostering and generating active attitudes of all research participants. They should control the production of knowledge. It is important to share this knowledge and distribute it among the interested parties as well as to care for its constant development. Secondly, the role of researcher(s) in projects that use PAR integrates the tasks and duties of researchers and participants. There is no privileged role because *all* research participants are simultaneously engaged in these two roles. Finally, PAR is based on the assumption that in all groups and situations, there is always a potential for progressive change. Participatory action approach to research helps build relationships, organisational structures and enacts a real change in power relations. Below, I will try to elaborate on some of the above characteristics (a more detailed description can be found in (Szołucha, 2012)) and describe how PAR was played out in this project.

*Why and how did I use PAR?*

Before embarking on this project, I studied PAR because its principles resonated with my previous experience as a participant in leaderless movements and groups. I appreciated its democratic ethos which was in contrast to the tendency of some traditional approaches where activists are treated as valuable *sources* of knowledge, but not regarded as equally capable of evaluating it (Dawson & Sinwell, 2012). As a movement participant, I knew that there was a lot of valuable and interesting knowledge that only activists had access to. I also observed participants of non-hierarchical movements to be critically self-reflexive, very skilful and self-directed in knowledge production. I realised that the only way to tap into these immense deposits of explicit and tacit knowledge was by contributing to the movement and trying to engage others in the research process.

The fostering of a participatory attitude far exceeds the *methodological* requirements and ethos of PAR. According to Orlando Fals-Borda – a Columbian sociologist who coined the term Participatory Action Research (Hall, 2005; Pynch, 2007) – participation in research should help

build control for all excluded and marginalised groups and assist them in developing their skills and a sense of self-determination. The ultimate goal of PAR is essentially sustainable social transformation. Before this is possible, groups can use PAR to learn how to exert pressure and articulate their perspectives in concrete actions (Fals-Borda, 1991). Since projects that use PAR have ostentatiously transformational goals and lead to concrete effects, they are often perceived as political and controversial (Cahill, 2007a; Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Pain, Kindon, & Kesby, 2007; Rahman, 1991). They shatter the false picture of reality in which injustice is inevitable and radical action almost never produces the desired results (Fine & Torre, 2006).

The aims of the PAR component in this project, however, were far more modest than a wholesale social transformation. It was, however, intended to bridge the knowledge and skill gap between activists familiar with direct democratic forms of decision-making and other Occupy participants who were only starting to learn about the technicalities and the philosophy of consensus. All decision-making and facilitation workshops that I co-organised were conducted in an egalitarian and participatory way where knowledge was not transmitted merely in one direction – from those with previous experience to those without it. During the workshops, various materials were used. The first outline of the possible consensus process that I hastily threw together in the first days of ODS was a single sheet of paper with a simple graph and a summary of the consensus process (Appendix 3). Later on, when the GA agreed on its version of the decision-making process, I prepared more detailed explanatory materials that outlined the main hand gestures and a few principles of consensus as well as its procedural points (Appendix 2). This was then posted on the ODS website and a kitchen wall in the camp. At other times, the materials of Seeds for Change – a network of independent activists who provide training for co-ops – were used (Appendix 4). During workshops, the participants (ranging from seven to about thirty) explored the potential and real problems that arise from practising direct democracy, shared their experiences and used their stories to discuss and learn about advantages, challenges and disadvantages of consensus decision-making. I hope that through their involvement in the Occupy movement, many people had a chance to practise and learn various direct democratic ways of self-governance. Although there has not been a massive turn-away from representative forms of democracy worldwide, I think that thanks to the experience that thousands of people gained in Occupy, the movement added to the transformational potential of our societies. Occupy in Ireland did introduce a new generation of activists to direct democratic practices, alongside those who were already familiar with them from older movements (Laurence Cox, personal communication, September



5, 2014). And I am very happy that this project could make its own tiny contribution to this effect.

Another aspect of PAR, that made it suitable for this project, was that in this approach research is always conducted *with* instead of merely *about* its participants (Cahill, 2007b; Koch, Mann, Kralik, & Van Loon, 2005; Langan & Morton, 2009; Reason, 1999). In PAR, all research participants are simultaneously researchers. Decisions about the course of research are made collectively at the beginning of PAR projects. Participants decide about the nature of their interaction and how the data gathered will be analysed (Camarota & Fine, 2008; Fals-Borda, 1991). I call the knowledge that is produced in such egalitarian, participatory and practice-oriented way – living knowledge. It is created from the grassroots perspective, bottom-up – on the basis of what the participants already know by living and working in a concrete environment. Thus, PAR connects research, education, mobilisation and action in the local sphere as well as in a broader social context (Healy, 2001; James, Milenkiewicz, & Bucknam, 2008; McIntyre, 2008; Stoecker, 1999).

*What were the challenges of PAR in this project?*

Although PAR fitted squarely within the aims of this project and the needs of its participants, its concept turned out to be sometimes problematic in practice. Occupy was a challenging research environment for a number of reasons. Firstly, needs assessment was difficult since in this movement situation, needs were plenty, differing, idiosyncratic at times, hard to determine, constantly changing and immediate rather than long-term. Secondly, there were time constraints that limited Occupy's scope for action and deliberation. Nobody knew how long the camp was going to last and there were always many issues that had to be attended to immediately. Membership was not stable and there were clearly differing views about what Occupy could or should be. My role as a participant-researcher, who wanted to facilitate discussion about direct democracy, was sometimes at odds with the goals of some other participants. For example, there was a tension between the aims of this research and the needs of the Socialist Workers Party who had their own ideas about internal organisation and democratic processes. Furthermore, as in many movement contexts, for some Occupy participants, analysis and reflection were sort of dirty words – parts of movement practice that are not important or serious enough. This made it difficult to propagate certain forms of collective discussion and encourage people to participate in them.

Consequently, the approach adopted in this project was not a pure form of PAR as described by the above authors. Research was still conducted with and not simply about the Occupy participants and we all underwent a cycle of research, action and reflection. In decision-making workshops, Occupy members participated in the research part of the process. By practising consensus in GAs and other meetings, and during actions, they validated what they learned about it in practice. Finally, they reflected on the challenges and the lessons learned during the week of reflection as well as the workshop at the GG in Galway in October 2012. However, what distinguishes this project from other schemes that use PAR is that I made very conscious efforts to ensure that this research would not be seen as solely *my* project. Due to Occupy's leaderless ethos, it was important to me that I did not take ownership of this project or be perceived as a person leading it. I did not go into this research thinking about it as my "doctoral research project" and did not limit myself to the research-linked strands of Occupy but played various roles in the movement and the project. I also think that many of the participants did not see my involvement in Occupy to be motivated entirely or even predominantly by the needs of this project, and they did not perceive this research as "mine."

In PAR, the roles of academic researchers (i.e. those affiliated with academic institutions) may be different depending on the needs of the group and the research process. Researchers may, for example, play the roles of initiators, consultants or collaborators. All of them involve competences that are not strictly academic but require good organisational, writing and networking skills, to mention just a few. This integrated role of a researcher and a participant is based on the view that communities can be self-sufficient and that their collectively created knowledge be recognised as valid and valuable (Hall, 2005; Stoecker, 1999). The task of a researcher, who joins the group from the outside and has a typically academic experience, is to actively work towards the effacing of boundaries between the researchers and the researched (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire, 2003; Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007; Maiter, Simich, Jacobson, & Wise, 2008; McIntyre, 2008; Minkler et al., 2002; Wadsworth, 2005). In participatory research, it is often necessary to take risk (in Lacanian as well as more traditional ways) and to assume collective responsibility for the actions of the group, bearing in mind, however, that emancipatory intentions do not automatically lead to emancipatory results (Lennie, Hatcher, & Morgan, 2003), and participation is not just a symbolic or tokenistic gesture.

All of the above makes projects using PAR's philosophy difficult and in some respects, even

painful. At different moments in the process, all participants may feel annoyed, dissatisfied, disappointed or helpless in the face of power. In this project, participants may have found some issues frustrating or challenging. These feelings are important because they are a sign that all researcher-participants are trying to be competent members of the group.<sup>20</sup> Personally, I found it difficult to reconcile academic norms of what constitutes a “due research process” on the one hand, with the leaderless, egalitarian ethos of Occupy and the fact that I did not limit myself to the role of a researcher on the other. One instance of this was when I realised that there was too quick a turn-over of participants in Occupy, to fully ensure that all participants knew, at all times, that my work in the movement was going to constitute part of the research for my doctoral thesis. If I wanted to keep everybody informed about my intention, I feel that it would have had serious consequences for my own engagement in the movement and perhaps even jeopardise the outcomes of this research.<sup>21</sup> In some situations, my involvement could have been misconstrued as being directed primarily towards the goal of gathering data for my thesis. Occupy was mistrustful of mainstream media and wary of possible police surveillance. In this context, constant reminders about this research as a “project” could have made the participants feel as though they were being watched and/or they could have turned the group against me. Given that I have moved to Ireland two weeks before the movement sprang up in Dublin, and did not know anybody, no-one could vouch for me. As a result, I had to earn credibility in order to remain part of the group. At other times, such as during the GAs, it would simply have seemed awkward if I consistently reminded everybody about my intention. Although I did try to inform as many Occupy participants as possible about my role, I did not want them to perceive my involvement as being motivated by the individualistic interest of gaining a doctoral degree. This is why I always made sure that knowledge produced by using participatory action approach to research would be public and easily available for all movement’s participants.

Thus, the participatory approach to research which was adopted in this project, was an adaptation of traditional PAR in recognition of the constraints in which ODS operated. Such adaptation allowed the group to move forward, publicise and distribute its knowledge widely, helped me to carry on my research and to gain credibility within the group. At the same time,

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<sup>20</sup> I owe this observation to Laurence Cox.

<sup>21</sup> The issue of informed consent has been a problem for a lot of movement research especially in relation to the formalised ethics review procedures. It may sometimes be expected that the researcher should be able to secure informed consent from all participants, which is simply impossible in contexts like demonstrations, for example.

however, once ODS was evicted, I found it hard to establish boundaries between my analysis and the expectation of one research participant who thought that I would run everything that I write about the movement by my interviewees and that I would do it well before I decide to submit anything to an academic journal. I did want to ask my interviewees for feedback and incorporate their remarks in my writing and I did do that for the first two articles that included substantive empirical material about Occupy. In the case that the participant was concerned with, however, I found it physically impossible to send her a full draft well before the submission to the journal – simply because it was ready only shortly before the deadline. We explained our respective expectations to each other but her decisive response still remains an issue for me.

This situation may not be that unique – especially in anthropological work. Ethnography is, necessarily, an act of translation and is, therefore, deeply subjective. Moreover, it is one legacy of Malinowski's ethnographic method that there is a separation between work in the field and the analytical work of the ethnographer. Mosse (2006) describes, for example, how some of his informants objected to his work and resisted anthropological boundary-making between 'field' and 'desk'. He claims that writing that has been the traditional anthropological exit strategy may have come into question in that moment. His example made me aware of the intricacies that may be involved in the mechanism of feedback – how participants' opinions about my work are influenced by their self-definition, a willingness to be represented in a particular way and perhaps even their assertions of power (over me as a writer, for example). The overwhelmingly positive feedback that I received from Occupy participants, however, may mean that my accounts of the movement were not only fair and correct in the factual but also in the normative sense; that they were “socially appropriate” and respected (Mosse, 2006, pp. 944–945).

From a broader perspective, these and other dilemmas that researchers may encounter during projects that use participatory approach to research, stem from the challenges that it poses for the Western way of thinking about science and the standards that it creates. The legitimisation of living knowledge challenges the Western paradigm with its modernistic viewpoint and a positivist philosophy (Reason, 1999) in that the goal of PAR is not only to improve the conditions of the researched groups, but also to abolish the establishments' monopoly on the

definition and control of knowledge and knowledge production (Koch & Kralik, 2006).<sup>22</sup> I think that this project was bound to confront the questions of ownership and leadership because, unlike in the positivist Western models of science, PAR is to legitimise living knowledge and lead to concrete action that aims to abolish rather than uphold the status quo. Paradoxically then, the dilemmas that I encountered during this project may well testify to the fact that I was “doing something different” since more conventional research would not run up against such questions. Non-engaged researchers could be asked to demonstrate how their enquiry may impact policy-making or what the commercial applicability of their research is. Importantly, however, their research is not expected to affect social change, which PAR aspires to do even during the research process itself!

*How did PAR in this project facilitate change?*

In PAR, the validation of research results should be based on the extent to which they lead to change (Fuster Morell, 2009). How can this be assessed? In some projects, it may be quite easy. This applies to those of them that help build organisational and sustainable structures in response to the concrete needs of a given group. Examples include the creation of DCTV – Dublin Community TV (Margaret Gillan (Gillan, 2010)) and the International Union of Sex Workers (Ana Lopes). In other cases – especially such as short-living social groups, movements or temporary situations like square occupations – an answer to the question to what extent research has led to change or been successful is a bit more difficult but not impossible.

In this project, PAR helped to create a space in which all participants could feel expert and be free to voice their opinions. They could also experience a community and realise that “their” problems were strikingly similar to those of other people. Thanks to this process, they were encouraged to start acting collectively to improve their situation and enact a broader social change. This is also how participants learn that they want to help others “open their eyes” (Cahill, Rios- Moore, & Threatts, 2008). One of the biggest successes of this project was that various facilitation and decision-making workshops helped achieve consensus on the issue that would seem impossible to agree on in the general society, namely the question of what decision-making model we should adopt. Similarly to what other PAR researchers report

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<sup>22</sup> Fortunately in the Irish case, for example, this monopoly is already weakened by the continued organisational as well as analytical effort of groups and individuals gathered around the Workers Solidarity Movement, Grassroots Gatherings, Provisional University and others.

(Flicker, 2008; Kinson et al., 2007), this research also assisted the movement participants in developing their facilitation, discussion and political skills.

Another way in which PAR may lead to change is in how it transforms movements and influences their future practices through the processes of learning and reflection. I think that PAR in this project took participants' living knowledge into consideration, validated their experiences and nurtured learning within the movement. PAR, then, draws one's attention to the fact that social movements are not merely rational or instrumental organisers, but also places where the process of learning and individual and collective change takes place. This also makes us aware that what influences mobilisation and movement activity is the motivation of its participants, their common relationships and the meanings that they give to various actions – and not solely a movement's resources or the changing parameters of political opportunities. I strongly believe that a participatory process which builds on and develops people's living knowledge has great potential to contribute to progressive social change. One would not find descriptions of such processes in history textbooks that cultivate a liberal and bourgeois model of historical knowledge (Purkis, 2004), but this does not mean that they do not take place. On the contrary, they are happening all the time but they are usually transmitted orally or – nowadays – through activists' blogs, Twitter accounts or other social media channels.

Another way in which PAR in this project may facilitate change in the long run is through the processes of learning about radical concepts and putting them into practice. Unlike the traditional role of education that is to prepare people for living in the existing economic and social system, radical learning oriented towards practice is a collective process during which its participants challenge and plan to transform the dominant relations and structures of power (Jesson & Newman, 2004). This learning does not have a lot in common with the institutional model of education but derives from processes that are informal and unplanned. It is usually only through reflection that it is possible to bring to light the immense deposits of what the participants have learned unintentionally during actions. As Foley (1999) suggests, critical and emancipatory learning is probably the most important kind of learning in general. It helps people make sense of their situation and take action. Furthermore, they start to recognise themselves as individuals able to produce knowledge, plan and undertake concrete action (Foley, 1999). Since many of the people who were involved in Occupy stayed politically active after the camps were gone, we can definitely hope that the learning that took place in the movement did not go down the drain. Instead, it is being diffused, adapted and developed in

myriads of struggles that are going on every day in various areas of social and political life.

### **Plan for the remaining part of the chapter**

The fundamental rationale behind the specific choice of research approaches and methodologies that I have presented is my conviction that research should have real impact and/or provide knowledge that matters for the potential users of that research. This project could not be any different. I used methodologies that I believed could help me produce detailed, valid (militant ethnography), and relevant (movement-relevant approaches) knowledge that would be almost immediately applicable and created in a process that actively involved other research participants (PAR). This choice presented its own challenges that I tried to resolve with varying degrees of success.

Importantly, through employing those methodologies I also wanted to learn about the link between knowledge and action. In the previous sections, I described the research approaches that I used to help me study how movements and their actions can produce knowledge. However, throughout this project, as well as my earlier involvement in movements, I realised that examining the relation in the opposite direction (from knowledge to action) is much more complex. Before reflecting in more theoretically rigorous terms on the link between knowledge and action in social movements in the last sections of this chapter, I would like to contextualise that discussion by exploring the features and challenges of the researcher's role in participatory and militant projects in the following part of the thesis.

Exploring the role of the researcher and his/her relation to other movement participants is important in this regard because neither knowledge nor action are disembodied forces that produce automatic changes in social and political structures. Instead, they need agents that are, additionally, subject to the complicated dynamics of negotiating contradictory demands and meaning-making. By studying the researcher's role, one does not only get a glimpse of the challenges that these dynamics pose in the processes of knowledge production; he/she can also understand the epistemological underpinnings of this project that determine the humble role of those who have knowledge in a process of contributing to social change that requires a leap of faith.

### RESEARCHER'S ROLE

It's a sunny but quite chilly morning in Oakland. This time I spent the night in a little guest room of the Temescal Creek cohousing community... I am leaving through a wooden gate and cycle onto an empty street. I have been invited to a breakfast with Jerome.<sup>23</sup> He was a member of the Black Panthers and the Congress of Racial Equality.

Jerome lives in a bungalow like most of the families in this neighbourhood. There is an American car parked on the driveway. When he opens the door, he immediately delves into a deep conversation with me. In general, it is about how religious and ethnic conflicts are unavoidable. That is, he really just includes me in the discussion that had been going on before I arrived.

- Oh, wait a minute – he interjects. Do you have a lock for your bike? It'd be best if you bring it on the porch and lock it here. A few years back you would not need to do it but now...

I smile and struggle a little to get both of the wheels onto the tiny platform. Jerome leaves me there and runs to the kitchen. In the first room that I enter there is a time-worn armchair, a TV set and plenty of book shelves that reach the ceiling. I follow the smell of tortillas and refried beans and reach another room where there are even more books and a big table. At a first glance, it seems that most of the titles are about the civil movement, socialist politics and the social history of Africa. I can now also see with whom Jerome had been talking before I came. It's Fabio – he is in his early twenties and wearing a white kufi. When I come in, hunched a bit, he is rolling up his joint.

We are carrying on with our discussion during breakfast. Jerome declares himself a socialist. We jump from one topic to the next. All three of us have a lot of ideas and experiences that at times differ from one another quite substantially but it could hardly be any other way. From time to time, Jerome gets up to bring something from the kitchen or look for a book in his impressive library. He can reference countless dates, names and acronyms. Sometimes I need to ask him what they mean. Jerome and Fabio often ask me about the history of Ireland and Poland. Before I even realise, Jerome starts calling me a professor. But is he only teasing me, joking or is he simply enjoying the conversation that we are having? When I object and say that I do not even have a PhD, he asks:

- Yeah, but you work at a university, right?
- Yes, that's correct [I am a tutor in Politics].
- Then you're a professor! And that's very good that you are!

When I ask him about Occupy, he says that people need to start learning from their own mistakes. He would not like to work with somebody who does not want to learn from their mistakes. (June 26, 2012 notes)

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<sup>23</sup> Names changed.



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Today I am back at Jerome's again. I want to drop in just for a second to give him back his DVD which is a collection of short videos showing the arbitrary activities of the US police... I come in and thank Jerome for the DVD, thinking that I will soon be free to go to Berkeley where my next meeting is. Bang goes my plan...

- Good that you're here. You're a professor so you'll be able to help me.

There is no point in objecting and clarifying this, I guess.

- I've been asked to write a short solidarity note but I can't get to it.
- But what's the matter?
- Come on, I'll show you the video and the e-mail that I got.

It turns out that during the recent San Francisco Pride parade a young man was assaulted by the police. The organisers are now asking for a note of support. Jerome does not really "feel" the LGBT issue – neither ideologically, nor politically. When we come back to sit at his big table, there is a blank sheet of paper and a pencil there in front of me immediately. Jerome leaves the room to make something to drink. I look at my watch. Fifteen minutes is the maximum that I have for this. I write that we stand in solidarity with that young man, condemn police brutality and recognise and support the right of the LGBT community to freely demonstrate. I give the piece to Jerome.

- Now, thanks! I am good now. See, told you you're a professor!

I do not have time to ask him but what does he actually mean by that? Is it because I did a good job? Or maybe because I did something that did not really have that much meaning or sense? Perhaps I just wrote something according to a "template" that I had been familiar with, not knowing the context of that concrete situation at all? Or perhaps what he said was part of a pedagogical practice in relation to a younger generation of activists? (June 28, 2012 notes)

It is easy to misinterpret the role of a researcher in engaged research. An extreme example of that may be the suggestion that Occupy's uniqueness owes a debt to an ethnography of central Madagascar. Or, equally bizarrely, that the movement has academic roots (Berrett, 2011). Both statements rely on an assessment of one ethnographer's role in planning of the occupation of Wall Street and the subsequent visits of a few academics to the occupied plaza in New York. In other words, there may be a tendency to overestimate the role of academic intellectuals in important social and political events at the expense of other participants that history usually renders anonymous.

In fact, the role of academics and theorists in loosely defined “left movements” is constantly changing. In the Leninist groups, the division of work where certain people were responsible for the more theoretical part of the struggle was taken for granted. In groups that are inspired by anarchist principles and analysis, such a division would be more problematic but not impossible. Members of such groups usually take part in many educational meetings and projects as well as independently developing the knowledge about these aspects of politics, movements and societies that interest them most. One of the first and the most common features of social centres, squats and occupations, such as Occupy encampments, is a library. It usually displays a very diverse collection: from writings by Proudhon to Derrida, from zines from activist journeys and anarchist magazines from all over the world, to science fiction novels and meditation guides. Information is now much more widely available and dissemination channels are also plenty. The rise of blogs, listservs, collectively created documents etc. indicates a change in the patterns and technologies of communication that expands movement's opportunities for self-publishing and knowledge production.

In such a context, it seems as if almost everybody can be a movement intellectual. Yet, it is an exceptionally demanding job. Some activists acquire the status of a movement intellectual thanks to their critical analysis skills and their knowledge of history. Experienced activists are treated with respect because of the importance of the events in which they participated or the personal costs of their long-term involvement. This respect is not, however, gained once and for all. Like movement intellectuals, activists are expected to be always ready to use their authority for the good of the movement. Furthermore, there may be a “perfect standard” of a real activist. If activists feel that they do not live up to this standard, as Bobel (2007) notes, they might rather not want to be called activists at all.

Thus, almost everybody can be a movement intellectual (and everybody to some extent is) but this position requires long-term involvement and the mastery of the difficult art of balancing one's life with the “standards” of activism. If this is true, however, where does it leave researchers that are part of the institutionalised structures of the academy? The literature about engaged forms of research usually talks about some sort of a division between an activist and a researcher. More important than the personalisation of the different ways of intellectual production as roles or types of individuals is the question about the type of knowledge that is produced “in each of these roles,” which would differ in respect to its subject areas, content, methodological assumptions and evaluations. In addition, knowledge produced

in each of these two roles generates its own problems and challenges for the researcher and the entire research process as well as movements' epistemology. I will now turn to these issues and discuss the main aspects of engaged research conducted by academics as well as my own research experience in Occupy.

### **Researchers or activists?**

#### *My participant-researcher role in Occupy*

The easiest answer to this question would be: engaged and militant research requires that academics are simultaneously researchers *and* activists. Reflecting on their experience of conducting ethnographic research about Occupy, Glück and McCleave Maharawal (2012) conclude that their presence at the occupied plaza by itself was enough for them to be structurally entangled and implicated in the collective decision-making process. In many Occupies in the US, decisions were made by modified consensus, which meant that abstaining from vote carried as much weight as voting for or against any concrete proposal. Every decision had material consequences so the researchers had a direct impact on the development of the movement and they automatically became part of the group. The same applies to ODS and other Occupies that I visited. My presence at the encampment was synonymous with my involvement in the group and that is how I, unbeknownst to myself and quite quickly, turned into a curious hybrid – a participant-researcher.

In October 2011, I had just moved to Ireland and like everybody else was a little taken by surprise when the Occupy movement started in the US and then spread to Europe and worldwide. It was obvious to me that, in that situation, I could not rely on my personal interpretations of the historical and political national context about which – at that time – I was only beginning to learn. I got involved in the movement because I was interested in direct democracy that has been one of the core focuses of anti-capitalist struggles around the world and it constituted an important part of my own activist experience. At the same time, I quite clearly was not in a position of privilege and my previous activist experience from Poland, Scotland and Canada, that was helpful in some respects, was pretty useless in others. My knowledge of social movement theory was unhelpful and unsuited for the situation. Reflecting on my role in Occupy, I think that I could say that I was a facilitator, a helper, an active participant, and a (foreign) guest. I provided information and lent a helping hand or an

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understanding ear when it was needed and/or requested. My role was at times difficult to establish because the context was not institutionalised and in constant flux. Outside of the movement, or in its other locations, I was a knowledge bearer and was always happy to share my movement-relevant knowledge with other participants, supporters or researchers. I was also a guest whose role was to make connections and build solidarity for the movement.

The aim of this research was to create new possibilities for action through research, action and reflection. I played my role in a way that I hoped would contribute to the accomplishment of this aim. The means to this end and my roles coincided in how I helped with:

- facilitating the conversation,
- organising,
- changing the rules of the conversation,
- encouraging reflexivity,
- tapping into knowledge that already existed,
- assisting others in developing useful skills,
- creating a space for recognition and acknowledgement,
- creating ways for people to remember earlier struggles,
- making connections,
- assisting others in making connections.

Nothing that I did was that extraordinary and I think that it should not merit any sort of special recognition in the movement context. In fact, people do those things (to a greater or lesser extent) all the time. The only difference may be that in the overwhelming majority of cases, they do not turn their work into a PhD. I had developed a critical educational awareness through my previous involvement in the student movement so when I joined Occupy in my double role of a participant-researcher, unavoidably, one of the main challenges of this research for me became how to find a way to deal with all the negative connotations of a “PhD.” Such associations may include: this person only cares about getting a degree, being an “expert” or becoming a part of a hierarchical and increasingly commercialised institution. To be

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sure, during my work in Occupy nobody explicitly confirmed my fears that my role might be misunderstood in that way. Regardless of that, I remained critically aware of these associations and did my best to start creating a new and different way of combining the role of a researcher and an activist. My work at a university was not simply a day job that helped me make a living and provided access to resources and knowledge. I tried to move some of the practices that I learned in anti-hierarchical movements into the academy, for example, in the way in which I organised classes with students and in the relationships that I established with my colleagues and other people who work at the university. I am also continuing the work to make living knowledge produced in social movements (as well as other areas of social life) appreciated and valued in the academy.

### *Academic versus activist researchers*

The description of my role as dual and based on the positions of a researcher and a participant, however, does not tell us much about the real differences and incompatibilities between these roles. I will begin by considering the discordance between the positions of academic and activist researchers and then move on to discuss the real tensions *within* the role of the latter. Drawing on Gramsci, Barker and Cox (2002) distinguish between two types of intellectuals researching social movements: an academic intellectual and a movement intellectual.<sup>24</sup> This distinction does not have to coincide with the boundaries of academic affiliation because movement intellectuals may also work at a university. Movement intellectuals, however, produce knowledge *for* and *within* the movement, unlike academic intellectuals who create theory *about* it. The role of a movement intellectual is twofold: firstly, he/she produces ideological and moral justification of movements' actions, promotes its ideas and defends it against criticism. Secondly, he/she analyses the situation of the movement (considers its history etc.) in order to contribute to a strategic and tactical proposals about how the movement should act given its current situation, purposes and resources (Barker & Cox, 2002).

Tensions between the roles of an academic and an activist researcher may arise when a researched community already has its "own intellectuals." Their task is to produce knowledge that fosters solidarity and unity within a group and beyond it. The image of academic intellectuals, on the other hand, is often associated with a drive for an intellectual status

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<sup>24</sup> As Cox recently claims, however, they should have stressed it more that these are two types of relationships to intellectual production rather than two types of a person.

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confirmed by an institutional affiliation. The knowledge created in this context is usually formal and limited by the vocabulary, literature and a set of methodologies typical for a concrete academic discipline. This conflict between movement and typically academic intellectuals concerns not only the right to represent a given group politically or intellectually. It is also a struggle for the ways in which knowledge about the movement will be produced and how it will be legitimised (Escoffier, 1995).

### *Combining the roles of a researcher and an activist*

Prior to this project, I had been dissatisfied with the forms and results of research conducted by using traditional tools. Soon I learned that I was not alone and other researchers were also discontent with how their work was subjected to the institutionalised context of the university (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). In this project, I wanted to tell participants' stories in a way that would convey the richness and complexity of Occupy in detailed and nuanced accounts of the movement. I attempted to achieve this goal through research that would be participatory as well as providing concrete input and movement-relevant knowledge for the development of Occupy. At the very beginning of this research, I realised that the only way to make it successful was by combining the roles of a researcher and an activist.

Participatory and militant approaches to research were relevant to my previous activist experience in anarchist and alter-globalisation groups in Poland and elsewhere. Through my prior involvement in those groups, I came to understand and respect their principles, rules and analysis. I experienced, for myself, the thrill of action, disappointment and failure, fear and joy of small and big victories. I understood the reasons for mistrust towards other groups, such as politicians and the media, and internally battled with explicit or implicit anti-intellectualism of some anarchists. I valued their regard for practical action and their attention to concrete, material consequences. I admired their perseverance, courage and even enjoyed their sense of (sometimes vulgar) humour.

When I studied movement theory on the other hand, none of it resonated with my experiences of movements and activists. It was formal, seemed detached and quite simply concerned with issues that were of little importance or interest to the activists themselves. At the same time, however, according to the standards of a considerable part of scientific community, what I had read was the "canon" that defined how movements should be studied. I felt torn. On the one

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hand, there were the demands of a scientific institution (not Maynooth University at that time yet) and the expectation that all knowledge about movements had to be produced following a certain model that valued detachment, positivist objectivity and theoretical predictability. These were the benchmarks that were used to assess my research despite the fact that its philosophy and goals were explicitly different from those of more traditional social movement studies. On the other hand, I had a conviction that valuable knowledge about social movements could only be produced by researcher's engagement and participation of their members; and this was also the only truly ethical way of conducting research. Here, however, I encountered another difficulty – I had the experience of activist groups that were anti-intellectual and although this trend was not as strong in Dublin as it was in other places, I was automatically wary of the issues with a double role of a researcher and an activist.

By commencing my PhD studies at Maynooth University and entering a friendly and understanding scholarly environment, I became able to articulate the reasons for this wariness. The perceived incompatibility of the roles of an activist and a researcher does not stem from the fact that they have contradictory demands: full involvement on the one hand and neutrality and detachment on the other. Quite the opposite – *a researcher at a university automatically becomes part of a machine that is not neutral but interlinked with concrete political regimes and economic interests that help sustain the status quo rather than strive for progressive social change* (Croteau, 2005). It is because these two forces appear to pull in opposite directions that the roles of an activist and a researcher may seem incompatible; an activist scholar would like to produce movement-relevant knowledge. However, he/she is limited by the themes, practical impacts and potential established partners that are predetermined for him/her by the institutions that, for example, distribute research grants. All of these themes, impacts and partners are obviously mainstream and reflect the dominant economic and political discourses of the day.

### *Degrees of researcher's involvement*

In the context of conflicting demands between the roles of an activist and a researcher, one may try to gradate the degrees of researcher's involvement. Croteau (2005) distinguishes between three possible configurations: SCHOLAR-activist, scholar-ACTIVIST and SCHOLAR-ACTIVIST. The first one treats his/her own career development as the main priority. In this case, researchers are usually successful in the academic field but their work gradually becomes

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useless for social movements, even if it is explicitly about movements. They may excuse their lack of involvement in various ways. Some feel that they are making enough of a contribution to movements by educating students. They think that their teaching may inspire others to affect social change. By themselves, however, SCHOLARS-activists may deradicalise their aims and support moderate reforms rather than more radical social change (Croteau, 2005). This attitude can also take the form of “radical quietism” – the production of complex critiques of discourses that do not contribute to movement’s development but serve to justify passivity and situate their author in a morally superior position (Cox & Flesher Fominaya, 2009).

Scholar-ACTIVIST treats activism as more important than his/her scholarship. This becomes possible for example after tenure is obtained. One can then change the style of his/her writing as well as the places where one publishes the majority of one’s texts. Knowledge created by such a person has a huge potential for being truly movement-relevant. Administrative sanctions and disappointment with the response of the academy, however, may also lead to its abandonment and consequently, limit the ability of a scholar-ACTIVIST to undertake autonomous research.

If one chooses to combine the roles of an academic and an activist and does not want to be relegated to the margins of the academy, he/she may produce two versions of knowledge: one for other academics and its translation for activists (Croteau, 2005). Regardless of the fact that this would be a very time and energy-consuming practice, there is also another issue with this approach. Namely, the proposition of a SCHOLAR-ACTIVIST does not integrate the two roles. They remain separate but exist parallel to each other (Dawson & Sinwell, 2012). Moreover, although the strategy of a scholar-ACTIVIST is best suited for the position of an established academic, it is often aspiring academics such as PhD students who play this role. Finally, one also has to consider the national specificity of the problems with combining the roles of an activist and an academic. In some European countries and intellectual traditions, movements appropriate certain theoretical writings regardless of their sophistication and abstractness (as happens with some poststructuralist French writers, for example). In other, such as Ireland, there are weaker demands for academic credentials (compared to the US, for instance) and more tolerance for the engagement with NGOs as part of public debate.



*Challenges of researcher's involvement*

The scholar-activist distinction is useful because it helps make sense of the tensions and incompatibilities that are characteristic of research that combines these two roles. In the background of this dualism, however, lingers another divide – that between theoretical and practical knowledge, theory and action, and between academic institutions and social movements or society in general. Participatory and militant research aims to abolish the hierarchy and the relations of domination that are present in these divides. It also questions them through actions that blend these two forms of knowledge and the two positions together.

It is this chapter's ambition to serve as an example of how academic researchers who conduct participatory or militant research may engage in critical self-reflection about the relationship between the sites where science is produced and the society at large (Darnovsky et al., 1995). Another way in which researchers may work to abolish the hierarchies between different kinds of knowledge is to unlearn some academic privileges and substitute the dominant epistemology by prefigurative everyday practices. They could also stop treating knowledge as a "thing" that one can discover following strictly defined procedures, and see knowledge as immanent and dependent on many relations. One also has to be careful with some critical approaches that may sustain the division of work between movements and academics because they may promote an intellectual vanguard. Furthermore, such division, although created to bolster the value of knowledge produced within social movements, may also infantilise it by claiming that it is concerned solely with the practical and the empirical (Motta, 2011).

In addition, it is important that researchers within social movements do not consider only the knowledge and positions of those participants whose model of involvement is similar to that of the researcher. One should not confuse the entire movement for a group of people who are central in organising its actions or are most politicised. Concrete actions are only one part of movement's everyday activity. The commitment of the majority of its participants may well be expressed in a specific lifestyle (Cox, 1999, p. 199).

Even before I joined ODS and began this project, I was conscious of many of the above issues and challenges. This did not make the research any less difficult. I learned a lot during this project. I realised that active involvement in the movement is not enough for good research that wants to avoid reinforcing hierarchies between the researcher and the researched as well as between the different kinds of knowledge. One has to get involved in research – both

physically and intellectually. We need a process that is creative and reciprocal in how it helps all research participants to work through and transform their identities, roles, power relations and skills.

### **Systemic challenges**

In tandem with the challenges that stem from how one decides to balance the two sides of the double role of a participant-researcher, there are some systemic, broader social issues that also need to be taken into account. One of the systemic challenges that one confronts doing militant and participatory research comes from the contradictory practices of our work in the field and in the academy. The ethos of such projects fosters the control of the researched over the research process. Consequently, the majority of publications that come out of this process should be easily available to all its participants. From an academic perspective, however, the rank of a researcher depends on the ability to publish his/her work in the most prestigious journals which often offer only a very limited access to their resources. It is also taken for granted that the research outcomes will be regarded as the results of individual work. Additionally, since many ideas are ascribed to concrete individuals on the basis of publications, the academy may be more susceptible and responsive to movements that produce theory than movements who focus on practice (Kowzan & Prusinowska, 2011).

In this project, I tried to strike a good balance between these two demands. The majority of texts that I wrote were published online as open and free access. I produced movement-relevant as well as academic pieces. In the case of one academic article about Occupy that was not available for free, I posted my copy of it on my online profile.

Another challenge that I had to face during this project was that there were a couple of times when I was taken for a journalist or a researcher that only looks for a standard answer to the most common questions. I think that such a misunderstanding may occur during dynamic actions, tense situations such as occupations or at the beginning of a research process and in unfamiliar contexts. Every activist group has their own “rap” or “drill” – a set of general, eloquent and agreed answers to the questions of the media or an ambiguous public. These raps are not worthless as parts of our research but they are highly unsatisfactory as viable data. Much more interesting than their content may be how they are created. If knowledge produced using participatory and militant research is to be movement-relevant, movement

participants have to share with us something that is more than a pre-learned rap.<sup>25</sup>

Personally, I would caution everybody who would contrapose a rap to the participants' own views and reduce it to a simplified difference between false and true discourses. As James C. Scott (1990) puts it, there are actually three – not two – types of discourses/transcripts. There is a private discourse of the people and institutions with an established power and authority in the society. There is the public transcript which describes the interaction between the subordinates and those who hold power. And there is the hidden transcript which refers to all those discussions and discourses that are going on offstage, outside of power's gaze.

These offstage practices may confirm, contradict or transform what is going on in the public transcript of the oppressed groups. Scott warns against hasty judgements about what appears in public and what remains hidden. For example, it is not right to claim that what is public is determined by necessity and what is hidden is characterised by freedom. The hidden transcript is produced for a different public and under the influence of different forces than the public transcript. By analysing how the two transcripts differ, one can determine the real impact of the dominant structures on the production of public transcripts by such groups as social movements (Scott, 1990). As a participant-researcher I took part in the creation of hidden transcripts and raps and was not a passive receiver of their products.

### **Researcher's role post scriptum: the changing model of science**

Throughout the entire project, I was constantly asking myself: how does this research fare against scientific knowledge that is produced in other fields and disciplines? After surveying some recent developments in physics, computer game designs, education, sociology and anthropology, I came to the conclusion that this research may be yet another example of the changing model of science. In this model, it is not only a science that – questioning its current limitations – aims at a fuller description of our reality. It is also a science that overcomes these limitations and asks questions about the social meaning of its development – about what is important and worthwhile. In its own ways physics, with its seemingly unending innovative potential, for example, has to tackle the question of how to distinguish science and speculation i.e. what is yet impossible to observe or test empirically and what constitutes a possibility that

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<sup>25</sup> A similar dynamic was described by Goffman's front-stage and backstage presentations. It also relates to the first of Barker / Cox's tasks of movement intellectuals (public representation and justification) as against the second (analysis and strategy).

would be unattainable not only in practice but also in principle? In other words, what are the practical and useful boundaries of research? And given these boundaries, what should be the sources, aims and types of research?

One could not learn about the limits of practicality and usefulness of research in any other way than through fearless engagement and during the research process itself. The model of science is changing because of the changing model of researchers' engagement. In social movement research specifically, it is increasingly acknowledged – like Barbara Epstein does in her study of non-violent direct action in the 1970s and 80s – that active involvement “is the most reliable path to understanding” (1993, pp. 19–20). Naturally, this is taking place at varied paces and to different degrees in different fields, disciplines and contexts. For example, changes in the *academic* model of knowledge production at the departments of adult education or anthropology are much more visible than in sociology. In the latter, however, the national context is also important. In the West, we need a separate phrase to describe these tasks of sociology that are concerned with its social responsibility (public sociology, for example). At the same time, in India or South Africa, such responsibility is taken for granted (Szołucha, 2013). In physics, we would not have been able to witness the immense scientific progress that the discipline has made if all projects that dealt with – at the time – unverifiable ideas were suddenly halted. *Perhaps especially in social sciences, then, it is important to remember that the limits of science are always a step ahead of the boundaries of what is possible.* It is, therefore, not naive, scientifically unjustified, dangerous or plain crazy to engage in research that carefully treads the boundaries of the possible and the impossible, what is and what may be.

Nobel laureate and physicist Steven Weinberg once wrote that the mistake of physicists is not that they take their theories too seriously but that they do not take them seriously enough. Could social scientists be similarly accused i.e. of not taking their ideas seriously enough, of not trying to explore the theoretical cracks and of not engaging with the imperfections and injustices that they can discern in our reality? Do social scientists think that the current standards of scientific enquiry, defined by detachment and positivism, are timeless? In this context, it is important to remember that the models of social and political engagement are constantly changing: from feudal systems to the various models of citizenship and bio- and post-political systems of control. There are also models of engagement that question the role of a nation state. Could (and should) science remain unaffected by these changes in the models

of engagement? Recently, there has been a lot of talk about the role of Internet during the Arab Spring and square occupations around the world. Importantly, these social movements did not use social media only to describe their reality, but to change it for the better. Even in one of the most unreal realms of our lives – computer games – designers are already creating worlds and tasks that will allow using game designs to work out innovative strategies for dealing with *real* problems of our planet. Given that we are currently spending three billion hours a week for playing computer games (McGonigal, 2011), this may be a significant development. Models of engagement are, therefore, constantly changing. Scientific engagement should not be limited to the everyday acts of sharing food, transport or other resources with the people researchers work with. The most important orientation of scientific engagement – at least in social and political sciences – is “revealing, critiquing, and confronting the unjust use of power” (Singer in Low & Merry, 2010, p. S202).

Through engaged research and critical reflection over our practices, we can situate our research firmly in *reality* because we take seriously the constantly changing models of social engagement. We embrace their global development and bring out their creative potential. We are also uncovering living and grassroots knowledge which exists not only in order to take part in social debate but perhaps also to influence its conditions. Producing knowledge that is critical in relation to the dominant structures, however, is not sufficient. A lot of engaged social movement research works with people who already have a critical awareness of the main shortcomings of the hegemonic systems. Hence, what becomes important in such contexts is the question of how to make practical use of that knowledge; how to utilise it effectively in the processes of striving for change.

Having considered some of the main issues concerning the role and situatedness of the researcher in participatory and militant ethnographic projects, as well as the changing model of scientific engagement more generally, I will now conclude this chapter by analysing the connection between movement knowledge and action.

#### **IGNORANCE AS A PRACTICAL CONDITION OF KNOWLEDGE**

I am in the Mission district in San Francisco. Here and there I can still read Latino names of shops and small services. I still have some time before my next meeting so I take a slow stroll around the area hoping to learn something about its history. Graffiti is almost everywhere – on buildings, closed-down

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shops, rubbish bins and parking meters. Some of them refer to the early history of this place and its native people. Most of it, however, invokes the Latino character of the district. There are pictures of joined hands of different colours, guns, graves, tears, peace symbols – so they are typically emancipatory and talk about discrimination and empowerment.

Looking at all this graffiti, it feels like you are in a different world because Mission today is at least partially, if not completely, gentrified. It is more likely that you will meet a young hipster here than a working class kid.

I am going to meet with a long-term activist who lives in the area. Actually, it would be easier to list the things that he did not do than those that he did. He is a white man and although I do not know him, I am expecting somebody in his sixties. I have never met with him in person. A friend gave me his phone number – the only way to get in touch with him as he is a luddite and would not go near a computer.

It seems that he lives in a small Victorian house. When I ring the doorbell, there is complete silence on the other side. It is only after some time that I can hear the wooden floor squeaking under careful steps. Not opening the door completely, a grinning man with white hair sticks his head out to greet me. Before I even manage to say a word, he asks:

- What is Mike's<sup>26</sup> mother's maiden name?

(Mike is our mutual friend.) I am a little ruffled by that question and the only thing that I can do is to repeat the question, hoping that I will then understand it.

- What is Mike's mother's maiden name?! I haven't got the faintest idea!
- Good. Now I know you're not an agent. – We both burst out laughing and he invites me to come in. So it seems that ignorance is sometimes more useful than knowledge. (June 24, 2012 notes)

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It's the middle of the day in Oakland. I am sitting on wide, steep stairs that lead from the pavement straight to the Lakeview school grounds. That is, this is how it has been until recently. Now the stairs lead to nowhere else than a metal fence with handmade banners about the occupation and police warning notices threatening everybody who will not leave the school grounds with arrest. There are a few tents pitched behind my back and some classes are going on.

I am talking with an activist who has become really engaged in this occupation. All such conversations are very emotional because the things that we are talking about – Occupy, our earlier experiences, problems, failures but also successes and hopes – are important for us and have an impact on the kind of

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<sup>26</sup> Name changed.

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activists that we are going to be in the future, how we are going to organise the next action and what we are going to expect from ourselves and others. Essentially, every such conversation boils down to one fundamental question – will we be able to use the knowledge that we have gained through our successes and failures, hopes and disappointments in a useful way?

When I am about to leave, he stops me by saying:

- How did we get in here except by complete accident, by being aware that the failures weren't a hundred percent sure, right? And being aware that once we didn't fail, it was OK to take advantage of the success and not just assume that more failure would come from it. (June 28, 2012 interview and notes)

Participatory and militant approaches to research aim at the production of viable and movement-relevant knowledge. The relation between knowledge and action in movement context is, however, far from straightforward. It is unlike in the institutional model of education which assumes that ignorance (non-knowledge) and knowledge are consecutive stages in a linear process of learning where a person leaves the position of ignorance to gain knowledge. This understanding of learning is problematic in PAR as well as for the ways in which social movements act. Participatory research is based on the idea that participants already have (living) knowledge which they then develop through the research process. Nobody is a blank sheet of paper that needs to be subjected to some enlightening procedure. Participants' history is not ignored and they do not undergo processes similar to those from the industrial era that aimed to manufacture identical products. Rather, like all judgements and expertise, movement's knowledge is created under specific temporal conditions and entwined with inter-subjectivity. For this reason, participatory research needs to take into consideration the situated knowledge of its participants. It also should create spaces where this knowledge could be developed through learning that is collective, formal, informal and/or unplanned.

Furthermore, movement's knowledge is temporal and influenced, *inter alia*, by the processes of collective history and memory making as well as the formation of myths. In anti-authoritarian movements, it is very difficult to create a single narration line since one cannot simply focus on what was decided by the top body in the hierarchy. This is why any action may sometimes acquire disproportionate significance only because some persons who participated in it had an established authority in the movement or the society. They may also have better access to channels through which they can distribute their own version of events. This is not because of somebody's bad will. Rather, it is an activist version of the mechanism that is known

all over the world and marks the division between mainstream and independent media for example.

Finally, movement action draws on solid and scientific information as well as facts that we consider true, believe that are accurate and trust that will be useful. In this project, the recurring theme of politicisation may be an example of this mechanism. The idea that many participants were gaining political sophistication and becoming politicised through Occupy reinforced the movement's commitment to political education attempts such as the organisation of political debates and activist training workshops in the camps. Throughout this project, I heard many stories of people who had not been actively involved in any political cause, but got very strongly engaged in the occupation. It is interesting, however, that not many participants could actually point to concrete individuals who underwent politicisation through their involvement with Occupy. Yet, all of them inferred that such radical politicisation actually took place. This certainty is not synonymous with susceptibility to propaganda or blind faith in one's own ideas since it would be ridiculous to dismiss those claims, given how the movement resonated with thousands of people worldwide. (This research also confirmed that such politicisation really took place for a number of identifiable individuals). Hence, all these instances when we find ourselves not sure about the "objective" truthfulness of given views and facts but, nevertheless, take the risk to claim that they are true (because they usually appear to movement participants as if they "must be true"), are examples of ignorance (non-knowledge).

How then can movements act at all if knowledge is non-linear, situated, temporal and riddled with leaps and inferences rather than being objective and absolute? The easiest answer is that it does not appear as such in the moment of decision. A lot of radical movement action is self-legitimising. It means that it has to claim that it has a stable, if not an absolute, foundation in a particular understanding of human rights, the principle of individual freedom, human decency etc. When movements undertake action, particular conditions of their decision and knowledge are effectively "forgotten." That is to say that these conditions are universalised; they become taken for granted and presupposed without caveats. During protests one hears demands for a just economic system for all; movements do not call for a just economic system for a particular group of activists who developed their own postmodern understanding of equality when they attended a series of trainings in a particular country. This universalisation of living knowledge is part of the essence of all protest activity. The process through which it happens reveals the



mutual dependency of ignorance and knowledge and it is connected to how responsibility works (I talk more about responsibility in chapter 5). By ignoring the specific enabling conditions of knowledge (one's situatedness, participation in collective history-making etc.) in a moment of decision, movements make action possible. They provide a “quilting point” in the unending chain of relativity of individual experiences of injustice. Such ignorance (non-knowledge) is also inevitable since one can never grasp the totality and complexity of all conditions that have influenced one's knowledge. Hence, far from an obstacle, non-knowledge is actually and unavoidably constitutive of knowledge itself and it can lead to radical action.

### **Copernican principle**

I am cycling into West Oakland for the first time. People who live here are mostly African-American and the place has a long activist history. It is also fraught with contradictions – on the one hand, there are a lot of abandoned houses and vacant buildings, neglected pavements and social housing. On the other, there are glass office blocks and apartment complexes surrounded by well groomed green.

Today I am meeting with a long-term activist and an anarchist. He is currently doing his shift at a social bike workshop. After the crisis, he also joined an anti-eviction group. During the entire conversation his alarm phone is on the table and whenever it rings, Brad<sup>27</sup> nervously checks the number. He is also in control of what is going on in the workshop itself – he knows who borrows which tool and he is trying (in vain) to wipe off black lubricant of his hands.

When I ask him about what he thinks is going to happen now, he exhales loudly and says:

- I'm not in the prediction business [laughs and the phone rings. He checks the number and does not answer]. I don't know. ... I'm here for the long haul. I hope that I don't die bitter tomorrow. [laughs] I mean I hope people keep trying. I hope, I don't know, I have certain faith, you know, in perpetual dissatisfaction and effort. I don't know, [it] sounds like a hippie bullshit. [laughs] It's true but I'm not hoping for a win or success predicated upon knowing the end of the story. Could be fucking boring too.
- If you know the end of the story, there is no reason for living the story.
- Yeah, exactly. (June 25, 2012 interview and notes)

In my research, I always try to leave a bit of space for what we do not yet know – as researchers and as movement participants. This stems from the principles of the methods and

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<sup>27</sup> Name changed.

approaches to research that I described above where the educational and experimental character of research as well as the experience of being part of a movement are valued. Non-knowledge, or a specific understanding of ignorance that I outlined above, are constants in the lives of activists, organisers and participants of anti-authoritarian social movements. This is not a result of unfortunate coincidence. Dissatisfaction, constant effort and action are possible only because movements do not know exactly what the future will bring. We can only hope that people will not give up trying to change the world for the better. Progressive social change is not, then, certain and it is not something that comes easy.

Through the process of struggling for change, movement participants take part in many actions with direct aims and in response to some immediate needs. Although changing the coordinates of our economic system may take a while, a direct action that rescues a family from being evicted or work in a social bike workshop for example, is also very important. Such actions give us hope that a future the fragments of which we are trying to build here and now, may one day actually come. Soon after this happens, however, we can be sure that new solutions will also become anachronistic and initiate a new cycle of disappointment and engagement.

The above can be a social interpretation of this part of the Copernican principle that says that the location of our planet in the universe is not privileged. Similarly, in anti-authoritarian movements and research conducted with such groups, none of the involved persons is the centre of the universe. This means that nobody is most important or has a perfect plan and knows the solution to all world's problems. Such an attitude could preclude the creation of a movement vanguard as well as counteract the tendency to perceive academic researchers as the most important part of research.

In other words, such a (most likely – heretical) understanding of the Copernican principle may help activists and researchers to humbly assume responsibility for the part of reality which they can exert some influence on. This interpretation encourages action because it does not require that it must be perfectly prepared (although it usually needs to be prepared the best one can), strictly realistic and “designed for success.” More often, reflective and critical engagement means taking risks, venting one's creativity as well as embracing non-knowledge and uncertainty. Prepared action and engaged research emphasise the educational value of *all* experiences and this is how they create knowledge – practical, accurate and useful. It is the kind of knowledge that has the greatest potential to lead to positive social change.

*Social movements in reality*

Participatory and militant research challenges the dominant position of science produced in the academy. It requires an evaluation of its relevance for the concrete situations in which researchers find themselves. Engaged research is also based on immense knowledge that is produced outside of institutional contexts and describes the problems of people in a more accurate way. It values and legitimises the experiences of people who, in traditional research, would be reduced to its “objects.”

In short, participant and militant research was suitable for this project because it helped describe Occupy's reality in an accurate way. It worked well for exploring what was timely, important and worthwhile. Above all, as engaged research, it allowed me to discover, describe and participate fully in reality i.e. in what was, and what was only possible. This is because what is possible is not merely a plan, a hypothesis or a speculation; it is a potential that is being actualised – every day and in more places than we would dare to expect.

## **LEARNING CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING IN OCCUPY:**

### **Uncertainty, Responsibility, Commitment**

Uncertainty is a constant in movement practice. Movement participants invest a lot of time and energy in order to create strong relationships among themselves and take responsibility for different parts of the movement.

Why do people do it even though they cannot be certain of the results of their actions? What keeps movement participants engaged even after the initial enthusiasm has passed or the movement itself is subsiding? How do movement participants understand their tasks? How do they carry them out?

In this chapter, I will attempt to explore the multifaceted nature of uncertainty in a movement situation where the feelings of uncertainty intersect with responsibility and commitment. I will demonstrate how the participants (primarily the members of the facilitation group) of Occupy Dame Street (ODS) in Dublin, Ireland understood the nature of their actions and how this affected their behaviour. The analysis will draw on the three “types” of responsibility that Derrida distinguishes, in order to explore how the participants negotiated their responsibility and commitment in the face of uncertainty through the processes of participative learning.

I will also analyse how the processes of participative learning took place and developed in ODS. Although learning occurred in many places within the Occupy movement, this chapter will concentrate on the processes and areas related to formal decision-making. This offers a rich field for analysis and reflection due to the centrality of consensus decision-making for the movement.

### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONSENSUS IN OCCUPY DAME STREET**

The ODS camp in Dublin lasted for five months from October 8, 2011 to March 8, 2012 (exceptionally long compared to its US counterparts) when it was unexpectedly evicted in the early morning hours by the Gardaí – the Irish police force. It survived winter by gradually replacing tents with huts and other wooden constructions, and turning part of the concrete plaza in front of the Central Bank into a lively place of GAs, Occupy University meetings (a

series of open lectures and discussions at the camp), live music, communal meals, and a living and meeting space for thousands of people of all creeds and persuasions.

ODS had four main demands that were drafted by the forming media group and agreed by consensus. The first was that the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund stay out of Irish affairs. The second demand was that private bank debt that was socialised, should be lifted. The third demand was that the oil and gas reserves off the Irish coast – now in the hands of private corporations – be returned to sovereign control. Finally, they demanded real and participatory democracy for all. In the first days of ODS, the participants decided that all decisions would be made by consensus. Very few participants, however, knew how that might operate, nor did they have many experiences of participating in this process. There were a number of members of Real Democracy Now! – a group that formed in Ireland inspired by, and in solidarity with, the protesters in Spain – whose open assemblies also operated by consensus. On the first and second day of ODS, quite a few participants came who had been involved in various autonomous, anarchist and environmental groups and movements in Ireland and abroad. They also had some experience of consensus decision-making but there was no pressure from those individuals to adopt the consensus process or a will to explain or teach others how it usually works – partly because they did not want to be seen to be “the voice of ODS.” Furthermore, nobody actually knew if there was any real need to learn consensus, so the question was left hanging for the time being as other logistical issues took precedence. As one of the participants and a member of Real Democracy Now! remarked:

One thing I was clear of, I didn't want ...Real Democracy Now! [to be] seen as the voice of ...Occupy Dame Street. It had its own identity. So on the following assemblies, Real Democracy Now! also emphasised this point ...and also people who joined Occupy Dame Street full-time, people who camped out that had been in Real Democracy Now! had left Real Democracy Now! to take part in Occupy Dame Street... I didn't want that there could be any group that'd be in control and that wasn't the issue at all at the start because there were so many people from other backgrounds and all supporting the idea of consensus like people [from] the collective in the Seomra Spraoi [social centre in Dublin], people at the Exchange [collective arts centre in Dublin], or people that had those ideas but didn't have a formal, big group, [but] were aware of them and had been using them before themselves ... I wanted to make sure that it [ODS] had its own clear identity, so I didn't push myself ...into taking part in a lot of the meetings that took place cause I felt early on that people who were there, camping, doing a lot of the work, had to make a decision themselves, and I would be happy to follow on as long as it, you know, wasn't against anything that I would fundamentally disagree with (May 7, 2012 interview).

### *Learning consensus decision-making in Occupy*

Initially, the GA's agenda of the second day of ODS consisted of five points and the facilitators said that they were going to devote half an hour to the discussion of site rules and regulations while leaving five minutes to the item concerning the process of making decisions. In that time, we were supposed to discuss the different methods of decision-making and conclude which one would be best for our Occupy. This was later extended somewhat not because there was disagreement about which method to choose but because people really wanted to know how consensus works and why other groups, including other Occupies, use consensus. The question that the facilitators posed was about whether people wanted to make decisions by consensus or majority rule. I later wrote in my notes from that day:

A short discussion unfolded; the time was running out and the facilitators did not seem to want a decision on it at that point. Then one of the participants suggested that we could make a decision about which process to choose by a show of hands. This was picked up by the rest and the result was something very close to unanimity. The man then said: "So it's a consensus" and a lot of cheering followed. (October 9, 2011 notes)

This moment is also captured in participants' own stories:

Yeah, I know it's funny. I remember there was something about are we going to have consensus or not and people kind of went: "Oh yeah, OK." And there was this kind of thing like "oh yeah, does everyone seem to agree? Oh yeah, so it seems like everyone agrees, OK." (May 4, 2012 interview)

AS: Do you remember how it happened that we adopted consensus as our decision-making process?

I think it was almost like an assumption but everyone accepted it so it was just the way it went ... You see we were running consensus as a decision-making process without having any training with it in terms of a structured way that there is a pro-consensus process. We were just doing jazz hands [laughs] but it worked. (April 24, 2012 interview)

Consensus, then, was adopted as a kind of default method of making decisions. It was the method that other Occupies used as well and it was associated with other mechanisms such as the hand gestures (like jazz hands) and the human mic.

When I arrived there and I arrived late cause I'm Irish [laughs], nothing has started yet. It was just people standing around, filling the square. I was like: 'Has anything happened yet? What's going on?' I was talking to S and I said: 'S, we have to do something.' And he's like: 'I can't do anything.' What, what? What happened was that they said that we're waiting for the microphones to arrive and I was like 'What?! This is insane, look at these people! This is, could be the beginning of something and people are just gonna leave. Look at the time. You can't just stand around waiting for something to happen. People

### *Learning consensus decision-making in Occupy*

are gonna think that this isn't anything and they're gonna leave. We're gonna do human mic. We don't need microphones!' Have you watched the human mic? Cause I was very excited cause the night before I watched Naomi Klein [giving a speech in Occupy Wall Street]. I was fired up in my blood and I was like this human mic, and I've never heard about it before, this is amazing! And he was like: 'Oh I can't get up and do that.' So I was like, my heart started to pound in my chest. Nobody else is going to do this. If I don't get up and do this, people are just gonna leave and nothing is going to happen so I stood up ... (April 24, 2012 interview)

On the first day of ODS, consensus was not used but the most important hand gestures that accompanied the process in the practice of the Occupy movement were all explained and started to be widely used in all meetings. The participants also emulated the human mic – a way to amplify what a speaker is saying by repeating his or her words by all those who can hear them.

Hence, ODS adopted consensus as its decision-making process without much discussion or informed debate about both its advantages and limits. The appeal of the consensus process in Ireland, with its strong foundations in the direct democratic approaches, emerged in reaction to the economic crisis and a rejection of conventional, as well as traditional left, politics that were seen to have failed. In addition, there was a clear desire to respond to the events in the US and to follow a similar organising model (including Occupy's decision-making). This “consensus as default” option that ODS chose had a number of consequences for the ways in which people began to learn the meaning of consensus as well as the ways in which it works and does not work. First, we might not have appreciated just how complicated a process this could be. Over time and with increasingly structured GAs, it appeared that even a person who participated in the assembly for the first time could quickly learn the different hand signals and the workings of the human mic. However, and as one participant from the media group remarked a week after the occupation started: “People understand the hand signals but don't understand how decision-making works” (October 14, 2011 notes). Second, the confusion created a situation in which there was a pressure and an expectation that participants needed to discuss the meaning and functioning of consensus. This is a fragment of a discussion among participants in the morning of October 14:

Participant A: GA has to be explained – how that's organised.

Participant B: So the first point of the GA should be about consensus decision-making.

Facilitator: Can we get a consensus on that?

*Learning consensus decision-making in Occupy*

Participant C: Do we know what it is? [laughs] (October 14, 2011 notes)

A similar point was made the next day during an open forum after the march:

There has been a lot of talk here about participatory democracy. At the moment it is a very vague slogan. We haven't really started to talk about what participatory democracy is. And we need to start doing that and implementing it here at this place. At the moment this movement is structureless. But structurelessness is not democracy. (October 15, 2011 notes)

Although the above opinion was widespread, it was unclear how this discussion could actually happen and who was supposed to know how consensus works and what it entails. As one participant noted:

I remember a lot of those things weren't clear ... [T]here was a mixture of hesitancy by people because you tend to think that somebody must be organising stuff. So people sort of assumed that [because] they don't want to just make it up completely or make a totally new suggestion, ...somebody here must know what's going on and it's not me so therefore, there are some people over there who sort of look like they know what's going on. You know, they must have some good idea of how to run this thing that none of us has ever done before. And some people did have that in that the Real Democracy Now! people who had been very involved with initiating the whole thing but who were much less involved because there were so many other people once it got going. They had quite specific ideas about things like consensus, General Assemblies and various other things. And a couple of other people who maybe would have been following Occupy Wall Street, you know, in-depth had some very specific ideas taken from there or elsewhere. But I think for example this commitment to consensus, you know, would that have just happened by itself? I don't think so. I think there had to be at least a couple of people who knew something about consensus and who were quite up for it to at least suggest that and who were themselves committed to it. I think it was very open to other things happening but I think there was definitely this kind of aspect of 'nobody really knows what is going on so everyone assumes that somebody else really knows what's going on'... People think there must be a system there where actually there isn't... (May 4, 2012 interview)

The problem with having an informed discussion about consensus was that apparently nobody or no group and especially nobody with experience in consensus decision-making wanted to step up to explain it. A reason for this might be that it would mean temporarily putting themselves in a teacher–pupil relationship instead of allowing the discussion to develop organically. This hesitancy might have stemmed from the fact that the consensus process is non-hierarchical and it is sometimes grounded in the ethos of prefigurative politics where how something is done is as important as what is done (Graeber, 2009; Maeckelbergh, 2009).



I did not, however, experience a sense that other people might have resented me for taking a teacher role when I eventually helped organise two small workshops, that were announced using the mic check technique, and ad hoc groups of around seven people participated in each. I prepared a short outline of different meanings and versions of consensus as well as its general structure that I was familiar with. I began every workshop by saying that all information that I have comes from a number of sources and my own experiences, so they are only some of the many ways of making consensus work. I encouraged every participant to share their own experiences and said that whatever we decide in this workshop had to be something that we think will work best for the ODS situation. Thus, we should not feel obliged to follow any pre-given model. I avoided using definitive language and framed the points in a way that would leave us room for manoeuvre. This included such constructions as: “the way some people found it useful in the past was when they did this in this particular way or following this structure. What do you think?” The second time a group gathered for the workshop – on October 14 – it prepared a proposed structure for the consensus process that was to be put before a GA so that people could think in more detail about consensus process structures. Whether the proposal was to be adopted, amended, or rejected, the idea was that at any point the structure of the consensus process must remain open to further changes when circumstances or needs in ODS change.

A workshop participant, who introduced our proposal at the subsequent GA, began by saying that “consensus is a way of reaching decisions together but it is not something that we are familiar with” (October 14, 2011 notes). Consensus was something that needed to be learned, and the ways in which decisions were taken by simple majority – unlearned. After outlining the proposed structure, the participant suggested that we try it and see if we can make a decision on this proposal using the structure for the consensus process that it proposed. This learning in practice was not only a way to check if the proposed structure could work efficiently in ODS, but it also created a sort of tautological loop: if the people in the GA were of the opinion that the proposed structure had to be changed, they would immediately have to use that changed structure to make the final decision. It could also possibly provide the first successful case of a decision made by consensus and make the adopted structure more legitimate as it might be hard to question its radically democratic credentials. Formally, the structure of the consensus process adopted at a GA on October 14, 2011 – six days after ODS began – remained unchanged and was adhered to even at the assemblies that were called in March – after the camp was evicted.

With this introduction to ODS, let us now analyse how the processes of participative learning about direct democracy developed in ODS and how this affected the participants' behaviour. Three notions will be highlighted: uncertainty, responsibility, and commitment. These concepts are important because they help explain the participants' mode of involvement with the movement in a moment when it seemed as though real change was possible. Uncertainty turns out to have two, opposite facets. One of it is positive and helps participants assume ethical responsibility for their actions. The other, when connected to issues of trust and the need for diversity, can undermine commitment to consensus decision-making.

### **LEARNING DECISION-MAKING IN OCCUPY DAME STREET**

Following the example of other sister occupations in Spain and the United States, consensus became the formal decision-making process in ODS. The ways of adopting, learning, and practising consensus were riddled with uncertainties and inconsistencies, as the following example illustrates:

To block or disagree, you use this gesture [a man makes an “x” with his forearms and a few people standing right beside him repeat that gesture. We use the human mic to repeat what the man has just said.] but the block should not be used very often. [My friend turns to me and whispers: “It should never be used!” And I am thinking: “Why and how come?!”] (October 8, 2011 notes)

An obvious aspect of learning consensus is that it creates a series of situations in which people engage in popular education. They learn, for instance, how to use the human mic, the hand signals, what the block is, and various, non-formalised principles of decision-making. They create a pedagogical context where knowledge is transmitted, questions are asked and answered. Just like in the fragment above, people who enter such spaces of learning often find a very messy place where claims are made, contested and negotiated. In ODS, all efforts at making learning spaces happen were appreciated, but they were also scattered – taking place in small workshop sessions, individual conversations and during GAs.

After the consensus structure was adopted, it became apparent that our learning process had only begun. The inconsistencies and uncertainties that the participants encountered revealed the complexity of building radically democratic and participatory decision-making practices beyond the common frameworks of electoral politics, representative democracy and hierarchical arrangements in the workplace, school etc. Through the processes of learning and

practising decision-making in ODS, participants found themselves in a situation where uncertainty met with responsibility and commitment.

Soon the participants assumed responsibility for teaching, facilitating and upholding the consensus process. This was challenging as they soon faced the paradox: how can one be responsible for something if one does not know the consequences of one's decisions? Let us now turn to this problem by exploring the ways in which participants assumed their responsibility in ODS, understood their tasks and carried them out.

### **Learning and Responsibility**

Having adopted a certain structure of the consensus process at a democratic meeting, the participants on Dame Street had to ensure that the process was cared for and the decision respected, while still remaining open to future alterations where the need arose. It was characteristic of all Occupy encampments and the movement as a whole that it did not have any formal membership and anybody could come, camp out and/or participate in its actions and meetings. Hence, there was a continuous turnover of participants on Dame Street with some staying active throughout. With shifting participation, it was clear that the memory of the structure and the technicalities that we agreed to would have to be actively recreated and reasserted. This, in turn, further fed into the learning processes that were already going on and facilitating a transmission and negotiation of knowledge about consensus. In this section, I employ Derrida's three modes of answering (to, for and before the other) to describe and analyse different aspects of participants' responsibility. This is to draw attention to the multidimensionality of responsibility beyond the individualistic understandings of being responsible for (stable identity-based) oneself, as well as the notions that depend on the reciprocity of individuals' responsibility. In addition, the understanding of responsibility developed in this chapter illustrates one dimension of real democracy as impossible, that is where it entails contradictory demands. In this regard, the impossibility of a fully informed decision, on the one hand, is in direct opposition to urgency and necessity to act, on the other.

One group in particular undertook as their task to take care of the consensus process and to assist people in learning how it operates. The facilitation working group was created in the first week of the encampment on Dame Street. It was a mixed collection of individuals – men and women – most of whom did not live in the camp. There were a few facilitators contributing a

### *Learning consensus decision-making in Occupy*

lot of their time and energy throughout the entire time ODS was operating, while others joined the facilitation working group for a limited period. Some had quite a bit of previous experience in facilitation while others were only beginners.

The facilitation group mostly used the assemblies to explain how the consensus structure worked. It also organised a number of workshops about decision-making and while in principle those were open to everybody, they were also advertised as training sessions for those interested in joining the facilitation group. The workshops varied in character. Some of them were organised in advance. They had an organised structure and prepared materials. There were two workshops of this kind that I co-facilitated. There were many more training sessions that were more ad hoc and usually happened during facilitation group meetings when there were new participants who wanted to join the group. Such workshops were less structured but the new facilitators usually received all relevant materials that we used via e-mail or by joining the facilitation mailing list. The attendance averaged 10–12 participants and the workshops lasted for around one and a half to two hours.

The workshops were places where people's perceptions about consensus developed and changed because all facilitators were learning about the particular way of practising consensus within ODS. The sessions were practice-oriented and concentrated on facilitator roles and process technicalities. It was mainly in the GAs where most tensions around different merits, understandings and workings of consensus had a chance to arise. I will outline some of them later in this chapter.

### *The facilitation group and the facets of responsibility*

The facilitation group took responsibility for helping ODS adhere to its consensus commitments. In late October, at one autonomous meeting of a group of participants in ODS, the responsibilities of the facilitation working group were described as follows: "This group keeps the peace in the sense of everyone getting their say in a true democratic fashion. They also teach others how to facilitate to the best of their ability" (October 26, 2011 notes). The task was considered so important that it was agreed that the facilitation team should be the biggest of all ODS working groups.

Responsibility for the consensus process manifested itself in many ways. Early on we agreed on a model for a GA that was an A4 page of bullet points listing in order things that we felt needed

to be mentioned at each GA, such as a short blurb about the movement, the explanation of the hand signals, and the names of the working groups. It was not a controversial issue and the arrangement proved useful in practice. The idea behind this was that every assembly could be somebody's first so an introduction to the camp and the movement was necessary. As Derrida (1988) puts it, we "answered to" the other (the question, the request or the sign of the other<sup>28</sup>) because we responded to the fact that most of the participants would not be familiar with the consensus process or the camp as a specific associational form. Our actions were a response that was addressed to the other. The learning process was necessary because unless people understood how consensus operates, the unfamiliarity of it could have proved exclusive and driven people away instead of bringing them in, as had happened to some other movements experimenting with participatory democracy (Polletta, 2004).

The efforts of the facilitation group, to learn and teach consensus decision-making, imbued the process with a meaning which was temporary, equivocal and open to the future. This took place at the same time as the team was exercising great care in creating structures to give consensus stability and reliability. The facilitation working group had a rota system where we coordinated and volunteered to facilitate GAs and the meetings of active participants (all who participated in organizing ODS actions). We also helped develop structures for proposing, agreeing on and publishing assembly agendas in advance so that everybody knew the meeting themes and could come to those that they were interested in. The group tried to stick to the agreed schedule of assemblies and other meetings. When an assembly was supposed to take place, the facilitators were then always present, ready to facilitate and it was mainly they who used mic check to announce and begin the GA or other meetings. It was the facilitator's responsibility to come prepared to the GA, which meant that they had read the minutes from the previous meeting or in other ways found out what the points of the discussion were. These often needed to be summarised at the beginning of the next assembly. The group was also responsible for making sure that the minutes from all GAs were posted on ODS website within 24 hours.

Over time, each facilitator also developed a routine of preparing for facilitating a meeting. This is an excerpt about my routine:

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<sup>28</sup> The other here means the human other as well as the otherness that is not yet present or was present. This means that the three modes of answering answer also to/for/before the other regardless of its status in relation to its physical or temporal presence.

### *Learning consensus decision-making in Occupy*

I arrive on Dame Street at around 6 pm and immediately do my usual drill. I come in, talk to whoever is hanging around the usual communal areas (the kitchen, the outreach table, the GA area). This is mostly about very random issues like today I spoke to S about the Tute Bianche and ways the police use force against the protesters. I would then look for the minutes book and more importantly, a person kind enough to volunteer to take the minutes. I will try to locate my co-facilitator and a few persons who went to the last night's GA and knew what the main points of that assembly were and what was to be discussed tonight. Then I would talk to my co-facilitator and we would provisionally divide our roles and think about how best to order the points on the agenda, what structure for discussion would be most efficient, what is the purpose of this meeting and how to ensure that there are action points to be followed on after the meeting. (November 30, 2011 notes)

This short excerpt illustrates a number of things. First, it shows how responsibility could be assumed by a person by virtue of her role as a facilitator. To use Derrida's (1988) understanding of responsibility, she "answers for" what she perceives she is and the role she thinks she needs to play. Second, the fragment also shows that the structure of the GAs was a constant work in progress. When I wrote this note, for example, it was still not clear how to put an item on a future agenda. ODS later decided to have one planning assembly every week. On a Monday, all those who were present made decisions about the themes and issues to be tackled at the GAs during the week. Finally, the fragment points to the fact that the learning about the structure of GAs was not sufficient to make it work – the structure had to be deliberately upheld and cared for. With time and dropping temperatures outside, it became increasingly difficult to find a person willing to take meeting minutes. The "minute-taker hunts" were necessary in order to ensure that the structures, that we all agreed to abide by, did not collapse. This is how one facilitator described actions that she was undertaking because of the feeling of responsibility for a kind of "organisational memory" of the movement:

I did feel that we could help with doing sort of documentation of the kinds of things that needed to be done at General Assemblies – generally in terms of giving a basic introduction, those could vary ... So there wouldn't be that loss that was already happening after three or four weeks where it was like: wait a second, did we already discuss that before or work was done on that a few days ago, ...and we need to hear about it ... I felt that ...there was almost this sense of responsibility where you felt like "well, I have to come again tomorrow" ...again there was no system to be able to go: "listen ...this has been going on for three or four days and here is some of my knowledge that I can now entrust to within the system." It was like if I leave, that knowledge wasn't gonna go to serve for anybody else ... you need to have some other way other than person to person communication to allow things to be communicated because otherwise ... it's far too time-consuming and chaotic. Things get forgotten and lost and nobody

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understands what's going on and it very quickly becomes anti-democratic because people cannot participate and you have an inevitable situation where knowledge becomes power much more so. (May 4, 2012 interview)

This issue of ensuring smooth communication between participants as a way of keeping it democratic brings us to another facet of responsibility in how the facilitators “answered before” (Derrida, 1988) ODS, the Occupy movement and its democratic ethos. “Answering before” is another modality of “answering to” but implies that one does not answer to somebody/something that is singular but instead to an other that is universal or authorised to represent a community. Because of their proximity to the practice of consensus decision-making, facilitators could be a perfect (but obviously, not the only) litmus test for the values of the entire movement. Occupy prided itself to be a leaderless resistance movement that used direct democracy. Hence, it was really important that the facilitators were not perceived as leaders. The perceived task of the facilitation group was not to “be in charge” but to help “the meeting go forward.” The facilitators thought that they should also help build, encourage and foster mutual respect, trust and personal and collective responsibility. All of these attitudes had to be developed and cherished within the working group as well. The following quotations capture this. The first quote comes from a participant and the second from a co-facilitator of the facilitation workshop that I co-organised in early March 2012. The latter fragments are from participants in one of the facilitation group meetings that took place after GAs.

I facilitated a lot in the early days of ODS so some new people who came, took my opinion as representing the movement. [In this instance] I failed as a facilitator and learned never to express my opinion while I'm facilitating. (March 7, 2012 notes)

Facilitation is not about being in charge and it is not about directing the group, but helping that meeting go well and helping every voice [to be] heard. There should also be a rotation of roles... We should help everybody to stay focused... Facilitators also help the meeting to be enjoyable, which sometimes happens and sometimes it doesn't. [laughs] ... Help the meeting move, summarise but do not move too quickly or assume that you understand every point. As facilitators you don't have to find points of agreement but our role is to help people find their points of agreement. (March 7, 2012 notes)

Can I put forward a proposal that as facilitators, during a facilitation meeting, we respect the speaker and not talk over one another? (November 10, 2011 notes)

The issue with the minutes is that – what's our system? Minutes from last night are not up and the minutes book is off site. [a long discussion follows]. OK, so we are saying that we should trust the minute

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taker – the facilitators and the minute-taker take responsibility for putting them up [sending the minutes to the media team who put them on the ODS website] and any discrepancies between our accounts of the GAs will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis? (November 10, 2011 notes)

The facilitators were conscious of the principles that the movement stood for and that our responsibility as being so close to the consensus process was to ensure that our practice of decision-making was consonant with the broader ethos of Occupy. However, we did not avoid some problems: sometimes facilitators failed to remain as neutral as possible, did not manage to make the meeting enjoyable, made mistakes or did not follow the structures that they were supposed to care for.

### *How does responsibility work?*

The above quotations also demonstrate a hidden underside of responsibility in political action: the moment one makes a claim, or a group makes a decision to work according to a particular structure, they are invested with the responsibility that works like a double bind in that one is not only responsible for what one can predict will happen, but also what may happen beyond one's reasonable expectations or predictions. As Derrida puts it: "I assume responsibility for speaking rightly, justly, on this point, *up until now*, up to the point when I am no longer responsible for anything. Hence the point from which all responsibility is announced" (Derrida, 2000, p. 70). According to this understanding, all human agency and true responsibility comes from a moment when one makes a decision that is really a leap of faith. Making a fully informed decision would mean acting like an automaton – according to a predetermined programme or software. No responsibility could follow from such an automated response.

In everyday life, we sometimes like to think that we are free subjects and should only be responsible for decisions that we make following our free wills – hence decisions whose effects we could realistically predict. If that had been the case in ODS, the facilitators should not have taken responsibility for upholding and taking care of the consensus process. When it became clear that understandings of what the process entailed differed and the practice of decision-making was imperfect at times, the facilitation group (like any other individual or working group) could have abdicated their responsibility for teaching or sticking to consensus. Since they could not predict that these difficulties would emerge, as soon as they did, there should have been no further basis for assuming responsibility for the workings of consensus in ODS.



*Responsibility and uncertainty*

ODS participants could have just said – at the point where difficulties and unpredictable outcomes emerged - that they “did not sign up for this” and walk away. However, this is not what happened and it seems that the realisation, that some degree of uncertainty was inevitable in the situation, which we were in, made facilitators feel responsible. By virtue of the situation in which the participants were camping out in the middle of a city, in a very difficult environment, this sense of uncertainty was not solely related to the matter of decision-making. It was strongly intertwined with questions about the camp’s survival. This is how two of the facilitators reflected on the issue of accepting uncertainty and taking responsibility:

I see it in myself when people start coming and asking me things as if somehow I know about them [laughs]. It’s like “I don’t know” ... It’s a tendency that I have ...sometimes to my own detriment – ‘cause I see things and I see what needs to be done or at least I have some ideas of what could be done. And then I’m like “well, OK I should try and make that happen if nobody else is.” And sometimes it’s not stuff that I am particularly interested in or good at either but it’s kind of like we’re just descending into chaos here ... (May 4, 2012 interview)

It was like we were living at the source of the river or something. We were paddling there in the sunshine going “oh this is great, oh my God. What’s gonna happen? Where we’re gonna go?” That’s what I remember and I remember getting that feeling a number of times and I remember that feeling not being there. I remember that feeling being less and less there ...but never in the wider group – not at meetings.

AS: Why do you think it was difficult to get that feeling in meetings?

Because they weren’t focused on Occupy. The meetings were focused on functionality, survival ... Like that last day, the day before the [police] came in. I spent the whole day about getting the stuff off camp, protecting stuff and I talked about we need focus, we need a unifying focus again cause that’s gone. And I’d spoken to S about it ...because we both agree on so many things. And even when we don’t agree, we allow ourselves to feel that, to believe that change is possible. Because that’s fundamental for our own personal view and we can see how close we can come to that and how quickly it can happen. (April 24, 2012 interview)

The second fragment is particularly intriguing because it shows that in the face of uncertainty, like with the police raid that was expected but the exact date was not known, the participant was still seeking to take responsibility. She was trying to find a safe place for ODS documentation. Moreover, uncertainty here had two different aspects. One had to do with the

possible eviction and the camp's survival issues. The other referred to the belief that "change is possible." Why was this good feeling that she mentioned at the beginning not present in meetings? Because they were preoccupied with the matters of survival; they no longer dealt with bigger social and political issues. They lost the feeling that the occupation had potential to make real change happen. Instead of uncertainty of "what is going to happen," there was certainty that no real social change is going to happen.

What were some other bases on which people in ODS accepted this uncertainty? Some of them felt excitement that they were partaking in a form of protest that was something new compared to the practices of the traditional left and the unions. Occupy was also different from traditional politics since it claimed that its aim was not to lobby governments to introduce a particular set of changes. As one participant said: "What I like about Occupy is that it doesn't know what it is. It's refreshing!" (January 21, 2012 notes). For people who considered themselves activists, it might have been not missing out on an opportunity to do something positive for the community:

When you're an activist, I think, it's very difficult ...when there is an opportunity, when something is happening, and there is an opportunity for you to feel like you're really acting for the benefit of your community, of your nation, people or humanity, it's very difficult sometimes to not sacrifice something in yourself or of part of your life. It's very important, I think, as an activist to not feel any regret cause it really diminishes any action that you've done. (April 24, 2012 interview)

For others still, it was part of a learning process where a new society was being created: "We are trying to recreate politics here and an ideal society. We're not just protesters but processors!" (October 26, 2011 notes). Some participants found it important that each participant had their response to the question of what Occupy meant to them personally and specifically, as one of them recalled: "There are so many people asking what we are here for and [I said] that we should have just a short response – we are here for change and that's it and [every participant] can elaborate on that whatever that is for them" (October 13, 2011 interview).

How could people in ODS not only accept and embrace all that uncertainty but also take responsibility for upholding and practising consensus in particular and other tasks that had to be undertaken? Derrida's explanation of an aporia of a decision may be helpful here (Beardsworth, 1996; Derrida, 2000). Although they must know as much as possible about their situation, people can only take ethical responsibility for a decision that they make without

predetermined criteria and a full knowledge of the consequences of that decision. Otherwise, the decision is not really a decision but an unfolding of a programme, a mechanistic application of knowledge (Raffoul, 2010).<sup>29</sup> Paradoxically, then, we took responsibility for consensus because our relative lack of knowledge and experience of it, as well as the uncertainty surrounding our entire situation, was combined with our entanglement in the global Occupy movement.

This entanglement together with the facilitation group's attempts at transmitting the knowledge about consensus are an example of what Derrida calls heritage or inheritance (Diprose, 2006). In the first instance, by learning consensus and becoming responsible for employing it, ODS participants enacted its meanings that they had inherited. For example, we learned about the block as part of the consensus process and we adopted a certain meaning of it. In the second instance, however, those enactments, like employing the block, were never perfect; instead its meanings were reinterpreted, criticised, misunderstood, neglected, developed and changed in a variety of ways. After a few GAs where the block was used, it became evident that it was difficult to tell if a person was blocking on the grounds of their personal views only or if he or she had the good of the group as their first priority. A problem then emerged about who was to decide whether the block was a "principled block" and therefore morally legitimate.

Responsibility that was assumed on the basis of this inheritance, then, was far from the traditional notion of being answerable for oneself. Rather, this kind of responsibility opens itself up to the unforeseeable futures and to the other. Ethical responsibility is an opening to all that is not yet present but will shape the meaning of consensus in the future. Hence, by taking responsibility for consensus and performing their chosen tasks in ODS, the participants were required to refer to something beyond the present imperfections of Occupy such as described by this participant who, as she claims, does not blame anybody for what happened:

There is just reality of what happened like for example me and my friend K were for one day going to be

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<sup>29</sup> Obviously, ethical decisions (in the traditional sense) can also be made when one has a set of particular criteria that determine one's actions and he/she can reasonably predict its consequences. The ethical responsibility that I am talking about here, however, is ethical in a different sense in that it does not refer to any particular moral rules or modes of conduct. The decision that I refer to is made in a context where there are contradictory demands and any choice that one makes is, in a sense, good and evil at the same time. Ethical responsibility in such a context reflects one's willingness to assume responsibility no matter what the consequences, knowing full well that one may be acting ethically and unethically at the same time. I develop this argument in my analysis of Occupy's challenges and aporias in chapter 7.

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able to go to an assembly. She'd never been to an assembly before. She is a wheelchair user and she lives in North-West and it was this one chance that she got to go to an assembly. And we arrived at the camp and it wasn't happening and there was this other meeting happening and we weren't invited into it. Well, we were but there was no wheelchair access. I don't want to place any blame. She was very upset but she wasn't upset with the people there but just she was upset because for her the people in Occupy were about inclusion and it's not anybody's fault but it's just how [it] happened... (April 24, 2012 interview)

Another such imperfection was that there was a tendency to make Occupy Dame Street all about the camp. This is not surprising since the participants needed to put a lot of their energy into just maintaining the basic day-to-day running of the encampment. This was at the same time as they were organising marches and other actions. There was some tension about the importance of the camp for ODS, relative to the larger movement, but there was also awareness of there being a preoccupation with the issues of the camp. It was often stressed even during some of the in-house meetings which dealt with the matters of the camp's survival, that we should not lose sight of the broader issues.

The facilitation group's efforts on their own, however, could hardly guarantee that consensus in ODS would work. In order for it to function properly, it was not sufficient to facilitate the spaces for learning about consensus; it had to gain the status of a legitimate and acceptable way of making decisions. Hence, the response to the decision-making process, in terms of people's commitment to it, was also important.

### **The Problem of Commitment to Consensus**

Since there was no constant membership in ODS, the need to learn consensus and develop commitment to it was ever-present but not everybody used the opportunities to learn. This is despite the fact that the workshops and GAs that discussed the consensus process were as much about learning about its technicalities as debating the reasons why things were done in this particular way. The discussion was always open for input from every participant and a space for adjusting the process was made. For example, all working groups in ODS were open for anybody to join in and all individuals who participated in GAs could make a proposal to change the consensus process.

In the first two consensus workshops, a process, thought to be efficient and democratic, was

agreed to. Later, however, many changes were adopted and implemented, which shows that the decision-making was a constant work in progress in ODS. This was achieved through evaluative discussions of consensus at a number of GAs and in-house meetings in order to reflect on things that were working well and those aspects that needed to be improved. For example, soon some members started to feel that there was too much emphasis put on decision-making:

AS: What were your impressions about consensus then [when you were a facilitator] and what are they now?

I wasn't as concerned with that as I was concerned with debate. I was more concerned with the people being there and people having a chance to voice their opinion. I was concerned with what I felt was important [that] people who came had a chance to be actively involved even if it was actively listening, actively witnessing what happened. I wasn't so much concerned about this decision-making. (April 24, 2012 notes)

In order to accommodate debate, and the fact that at the beginning of the encampment not many decisions needed to be made by the assembly (as opposed to those attending the in-house meeting), the 1 p.m. GA format was changed to an open forum. In late November, when temperatures started dropping, the system was adjusted again. The number of GAs was limited to three a week. They alternated with a new form of meetings – Active Participants Meetings – meetings that happened in the kitchen or the yurt for people who were involved in the organisation of marches and other actions in ODS.

Although the consensus structure was agreed to in at least three GAs, and opportunities for changing it were made, the legitimacy of the consensus process was always severely questioned from all angles (traditional left, disillusioned participants or people who were new to the process). In the long run, this significantly undermined people's commitment to and respect for the process. The structure of decision-making was democratically accepted by the participants on Dame Street, but this neither ended the organisational arguments about which process was most efficient and suitable for Occupy, nor did it solve the real problems that those arguments engaged. In what follows, I analyse two of these problems. One is connected to the lack of trust among participants. The other involves the perceived paradox between Occupy's commitment to diversity on the one hand, and the consensus process in which everybody had to ultimately agree with one another, on the other.

*Lack of trust*

One reason for the deficit of commitment to consensus was the lack of trust between participants and the feelings of uncertainty.<sup>30</sup> This was caused by the fact that most people who came to join ODS did not know each other. They were also uncertain about the potential legality or illegality of the situation in which they found themselves.

It was a group of people that were very eclectic and ad hoc and didn't have necessarily a long term commitment, didn't know one another. People didn't necessarily trust each other at the start. Nobody used second names. People wouldn't like to give their e-mail addresses or phone numbers because of what we were doing was potentially illegal. Certainly, in that first say two weeks, I certainly didn't learn the vast majority of people's second names and that was a conscious decision for most people cause it was like people were nervous to put down their names on things because, particularly in those first weeks, it was like well, how potentially criminal is what we're doing here? Is it or is it not? We were never really able to find out (May 4, 2012 interview)

People's uncertainty as to the extent to which others were willing to take responsibility for their actions in Occupy was also evident. As one of the facilitators put it at a GA in early November 2011: "Appearing, blocking and then not appearing again – that's not the way it works!" (November 10, 2011 notes).

Furthermore, the complex environment that the participants were in and the kinds of relationships that they were developing contributed to uncertainty. Over time, participants were managing a myriad of relations at different levels. Some were living in the camp, were getting to know each other there, forming friendships and welcoming the newcomers. Many were also balancing family and work relationships. There were also complex connections between the campers and the participants who were living off site. In addition, there were the frequent encounters with the supporting public, with the police, the passers-by, the Central Bank employees, the local businesses, the politicians and other political groups. The fear of a threat of being hijacked by one of the "revolutionary parties" of the old left was especially strong in ODS. All of those relationships were characterised by a degree of uncertainty and sometimes outright mistrust. Those feelings had a profound effect on discussions about consensus. They immediately made the fundamental premises of the process problematic as one of the participants emotionally remarked: "Good intentions?! That's impossible! If you

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<sup>30</sup> Jasper (2011) points to this issue as a possible avenue for future research regarding the interaction between trust, which is an affective commitment (relatively stable loyalty), and short-run reflex emotions.

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disagree, people will accuse you of hostile intentions!” (November 10, 2011 notes). This comment demonstrates clearly the ways in which mistrust and the broader context of uncertainty could undermine the entire process and thus hollow out the participants’ commitment to it. At the same assembly, another participant did not put the issue explicitly in terms of trust but used a different category to describe some of the problems with the inevitably diverse and sometimes conflicting world views that people in ODS held:

The elephant in the room seems to be that consensus relies on the assumption of good faith and I think that people who support the principle of a block perhaps imagine themselves blocking but what if the people they don’t like started blocking? (November 10, 2011 notes)

Through the discussions about consensus, participants became wary of the consequences of embracing political diversity in ODS, or as the above fragment puts it – the influence of people who they may “not like.”

### *Consensus versus diversity*

In ODS, an irreconcilable tension arose when the notion that conflicting and even mutually exclusive opinions are inevitable, was juxtaposed to the broad base that Occupy was aspiring to speak to (the 99%). In the middle of that tension was the decision-making process.

The meaning of consensus decision-making, that was relied on in ODS, is based on a set of premises such as people’s goodwill that make the process work better in some groups and settings rather than others. With its “we are the 99%” ethos, the Occupy movement is indiscriminate as to who could participate. As ODS showed, it can be difficult to live up to the associational metaphor of the 99% because it has real consequences in how we shape our deliberative practices. Through GAs, and other discussions in ODS, discourses about consensus developed in which suppositions were taken for granted. One was that people’s opinions would be irreconcilably diverse.<sup>31</sup> This came into conflict with an understanding of consensus as synonymous with unanimity, which brought forward numerous problems. The most pertinent was about how does ODS commitment to freedom and egalitarian discussion square with the process in which we all have to ultimately agree with each other. If put that way and ignoring

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<sup>31</sup> Maeckelbergh (2009) talks about the flip side of this supposition in the alter-globalisation movement where there is a diversity of opinion but it is a diversity of those who are already in some way included in the movement; a diversity of those who already to some extent agree on things. Graeber (2009) implicitly refers to this issue by stating that direct action and direct democracy work best in groups that have established their “principles of unity.”

the intricacies and “ethos” of the process of decision-making, consensus seemed like an absurd proposition. What came to challenge that discourse was a largely moral argument about hope, regaining control over our lives and setting ourselves as an example that would contrast with the practices of traditional politics.

People invested a lot of hope in the consensus process and many moral arguments were made in support of it: “Let’s educate ourselves about consensus. I don’t understand why we can’t try something [new] but we have to use something that’s already being used somewhere else and we know it doesn’t work! Let’s give it a try!” (November 10, 2011 notes). Another, young participant claimed: “the whole percentage idea [majority voting] – it’s what our government is doing!” (November 10, 2011 notes). Some individuals in ODS were able to claim higher moral ground for the assemblies and the consensus process because it was different from the discredited electoral and parliamentary procedures of contemporary liberal democracies. It could also counteract the perceived alienation and the lack of egalitarian spaces to discuss things freely with other individuals. For example, a member of the food group told me about the value that the assemblies and the process had for her: “The greatest thing [about consensus] is being able to talk to people because we’ve all grown so apart” (November 16, 2011 notes).

The situation of tension between consensus and diversity became even more complex when many participants started to associate the consensus process with a few GAs where proposals for cooperation with the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Dublin Council of Trade Unions were discussed. Since the proposals were blocked, ODS did not take part in their campaigns. Many considered this a mistake on the part of Occupy and a failure of the consensus process because it strengthened individualism and fed into an already strong paranoia against the SWP. One of the participants compared it to discrimination: “The SWP – those people could have been involved. I think there’re a lot of people who really care about social change. And to have rejected them all blanket is like racism in a way” (April 24, 2012 interview).

#### **OCCUPY – ACTING IN AN INTERSTITIAL SPACE**

It is difficult to summarise such multifaceted processes as those of learning decision-making in Occupy. The above analysis, however, shows clearly that the feeling of uncertainty was part of the learning in Occupy. The lack of commitment and trust in the decision-making process, and



in one another, further fed into these feelings. Hence, it becomes apparent that uncertainty has two very different dimensions. Although it has a positive dimension, since it encourages creativity and facilitates real social change, it can also have negative effects for building commitment and trust in movement practice. Participants formed new relationships, took on countless tasks and responsibilities, despite all uncertainty, and because of this uncertainty they knew that they were partaking in a true moment of disruption. They experienced a moment of the impossible – a moment that required them to confront their fears and uncertainties and take responsibility for the effects of their actions even though they could not predict what those effects would be.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, uncertainty made alliances with other political actors difficult and inhibited effective communication and cooperation in ODS itself.

In order to further facilitate our learning and help consensus work better, we may engage in movement practice with a little more awareness of, or appreciation for, the “interstitial nature of autonomy” (Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006, p. 732). What people thought were the logical paradoxes in ODS discourses and undesirable tensions, that undermined trustworthy relations, may not necessarily have been caused by some mistake of strategy. Rather, it is an ordinary result of the building of an autonomous and egalitarian space that operates by the rules of direct democracy in the midst of a city and a political and economic system that is in no way conducive to the world that Occupy wants to bring about. Interstitial spaces incorporate both “the desire for autonomy as well as realities of compromise” and they are “ongoing forums for action and reflection or praxis” (Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006, p.741). They involve a constant interplay and negotiation between direct democratic and hierarchical tendencies since their autonomous status is not something that they possess; it is rather a relational tendency (Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006) that movement participants need to constantly create and recreate.

Interstitiality is about living in between two worlds: the actual one and the one such movements as Occupy hope for. Therefore, it was not (or not primarily) the consensus process that led to or exacerbated those tensions; they were rather a predictable and inevitable feature of any space such as ODS because just as “there is no ‘out there’ external to capital relations” (Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006, p. 737), there is no “out there” where the 99% could participate in a truly and perfectly egalitarian discussion. Those spaces have to be built and the building of

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<sup>32</sup> Regarding these issues, other authors and theoretical traditions (particularly Marxism) talk about the inherent value of Socialism-from-Below (Draper, 1966) and a revolutionary praxis of changing society and self at the same time (Barker, 1995).

such spaces is a process that does not start with a blank sheet of paper. Instead, it is protracted and has to take into account many complex contexts, players and challenges.

While it may be true that some differences are irreconcilable, and people have to disagree, consensus is still possible since it does not and has not meant unanimity. In the practice of the alter-globalisation movement, for example, it has often meant identifying a spectrum of individual or autonomous group actions that are consistent with the overall goal such as shutting down a WTO summit. In the case of Occupy, the larger goal could be, for example, establishing an occupation that works according to the principles of direct democracy. A broader awareness of this different understanding of consensus could have helped people recognise their stakes in the process and commit to it while developing trust in other participants.

Uncertainty is an inevitable and at the same time indispensable part of social movement practice because it helps people assume ethical responsibility for their actions. While analysing the role of uncertainty for learning decision-making, I am aware that I am leaving aside yet another and often more immediate aspect of it that has to do with the constant threat of use of force by the police or the city. I do not think that ignoring it is justified in any case (although the kind of response that ODS received from the police was still relatively mild in comparison with such places as Oakland or New York). Indeed, in some movement contexts fear of violence is ever-present and it influences people's actions to a considerable degree (Vysotsky, 2013).

Uncertainty can carry both positive and negative effects but the experience of participants in ODS shows that it does not have to stop people from standing up for what they believe is right. Uncertainty does not render people's actions futile. It points to the complexity of building radically democratic and participative communities in the here and now which is an interstitial autonomous space. It informs our processes of learning in a myriad of ways and forces us to take real ethical responsibility for our decisions. It has a real political dimension that can lead people to realise the potential for true social change (and against the certainties of conventional Irish politics that led nowhere), or as one ODS participant put it:

I have a responsibility. I was involved from the beginning and I think every single individual person who came together was responsible for what came after. And there is this negative connotation around the idea of responsibility sometimes in Ireland, you know. Responsibility means blame. That's not what I mean. I mean responsibility as in it's not blame or credit but it's both... And that's a huge thing. And it might not be just the Irish thing but that unspoken idea that we are not supposed to do things we don't

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know how to do. That the people who do know how to do them are supposed to do those and we should just stick to what we know. That's a real concept that is a part of a system of oppression. And that is why everything that happened in the Occupy camp, when the people didn't know what was going on and what we're supposed to do and still don't, that's why having that feeling and continuing on in itself is a very powerful political action. People don't see that, they don't see the personal you know. Political action is going on a march. Political action is having a camp. A political action is giving out flyers. Political action is about changing the way that you behave. That's political action (April 24, 2012 interview).

In the following chapter, I attempt to unpack and develop the idea of interstitiality that is a more complex notion than prefiguration. For this purpose, I first analyse the prefigurative politics in Occupy, and subsequently, propose a framework of living temporalities. This framework goes beyond prefiguration as a more accurate and fuller representation of the political engagement of the movement's participants.

## **LIVING REAL DEMOCRACY IN OCCUPY:**

### From prefigurative politics to living temporalities

This chapter examines Occupy in order to explore the incredibly complex and temporarily situated realities of political action and the ways of organising that social movements are engaged in. In particular, it analyses some of the practices of prefigurative politics as well as highlighting the multifaceted character of living and researching real democracy in this movement. It is an example of a militant research(er) trying to “feed back in” and speak to all those Occupy participants and observers who found themselves feeling cynical and disillusioned by the movement. I do not aim to defend or idealise Occupy but I do want to give a taste of the complexity and multidimensionality of this movement situation. It is very easy (perhaps even too easy) to claim that some things were done wrong and some were not accomplished at all. To do so, in a constructive way, is an important part of the movement's reflection process, but being cynical about the movement while not appreciating that it had its own complex dynamic can hardly bring us to a better place. Even if one claims that Occupy failed to achieve its goals, one has to admit that it nevertheless succeeded in showing that it is always possible to significantly disrupt the business-as-usual reality and practise a different form of self-government. And if nothing else, its strength lies in firstly, reaffirming, to a new generation, that such a possibility is always real and, secondly, in mobilising our appetites for more and better through popular self-education in struggle.

Below is a story that highlights just how much was going on within the movement and that democracy – as practised in many aspects of Occupy – was not an ideal form of society. It was a real democracy characterised by a degree of messiness and uncertainty that is connected to the realities of all political action. This chapter proceeds in four steps. In step one, I will introduce the historical idea as well as the contemporary usages of prefiguration. Subsequently in step two, I will explore the particular current discourse about prefiguration in the empirical context of Occupy as well as outlining some of the mechanisms and effects of prefiguration thus understood. In step three, this chapter will seek to go beyond the theoretical framework that prefiguration provides and introduce the notion of movement's living temporalities. In the last step, I will show how I apply this notion for the analysis of a number of empirical phenomena and processes in Occupy.

I write this text because I think that in all activists' efforts to create ideally egalitarian, purely anarchist or exclusively vegan spaces, however important we think they are, we tend to forget that the real potential of social movements always lurks in their inconsistencies and indeterminations; it exists in the fact that when radical social change happens, it does not emerge from a stable ground but seems to be a result of a particular conjuncture of contexts, processes and pluralities. Preserving this complex picture has very real consequences for the ways in which we may think about our political engagement and how we strive for radical social change.

### **REAL, IDEAL OR PREFIGURED?**

In Occupy, we practised the ideal or prefigured version of direct democracy. In this section, I outline the different historical meanings as well as the contemporary usage of the framework of prefigurative politics and illustrate how it operated in the Occupy movement. In the next section, I go on to explain why I think there is a need to go beyond this framework and distinguish between the contemporary understanding of prefiguration on the one hand, and real politics and democracy on the other. This will also be analysed in relation to examples of processes and dynamics that occurred in the movement.

#### **Prefigurative politics**

Prefigurative politics has had many names and facets. The idea has been fundamental to the leftist critiques of Lenin and Bolshevism by those in the council communist movement. Gramsci's writings on the Italian council movement in 1919-1920 and Kropotkin's idea of an "integrated human being" also espouse some of the features of prefiguration (Pratt, 1978). During World War 1, and immediately postwar in Europe, the notion could be referred to the workers' control and self-management that took place to different degrees in different countries on the continent (Sirianni, 1980). Industrial Workers of the World have also been committed to building "the new world in the shell of the old." In the USA, the catholic worker movement, from the 1930s onwards, also adopted some of the features of prefiguration. Historically in Europe (but also in Latin America, for example), prefigurative politics has often meant the self-transformation of oppressed or subordinate groups in a process of revolutionary transformation (Pratt, 1978) through their self-organising around basic needs, for

instance. Nowadays when prefigurative politics is called precisely that (especially in the US context), the notion has come to denote a politics that is based on horizontal, autonomous and leaderless forms of self-organising and struggle. Its aim is to prefigure the world we want to live in in the here and now of the ways in which social movements and autonomous groups govern themselves and organise actions. The term is relatively new as it was first used in reference to some of the US movements of the 1960s and its meaning is appealing to many strands of anti-authoritarian organising. (This is also the meaning of prefiguration that will be adopted in this thesis.) Recently, most of the activity that was happening under the Occupy banner could be summed up under this contemporary understanding of prefigurative politics:

the public assemblies, the consensus decision making, the collective spaces in the camps, and the diverse forms of collaborative self-management constitute a set of concrete alternative practices that serve as powerful symbolic yet embodied contrasts between an inclusive, grassroots, and participatory democracy as it ought to be and the current configuration of a representative “democratic” system that serves the interests of the 1%. (Juris, 2012, p. 272)

We, the New York City General Assembly, [...] urge you to assert your power. Exercise your right to peaceably assemble; occupy public space; create a process to address the problems we face, and generate solutions accessible to everyone. (NYC General Assembly, 2011)

True, the scene in Liberty Plaza may seem messy and chaotic but it's also a laboratory of possibility, creating a diversity of ideas, expression and art. (Gupta, 2011)

In most general terms, then, this usage of prefigurative politics blends together a myriad of trends and influences such as: the philosophy of direct action, autonomous and anarchist thought and ways of organising, as well as situationist and DIY ethos of creative resistance and production. Not surprisingly, even surveying the most recent meanings of prefigurative politics in the last two decades or so, one discovers that it is far from static. Therefore, for prefigurative politics to make sense in the current phase (when the experiences of the Occupy movements are still fresh in people’s memories), I will first try to outline some of the different meanings of the most contemporary discourse of prefiguration in order to highlight how its understandings have been changing throughout years and struggles.

When analysing nonviolent direct action movements of the 1970s and 80s, Epstein (1993) often used the word cluster “prefigurative, utopian politics” to describe how the movements of the period moved away from a focus on the state and towards the transformation of culture as their main goal. Her concern was with the effectiveness and sustainability of the models of a

better society built on the premise that a revolution does not require seizing state power in a context where the potential for doing this seemed to have receded completely. Although she recognised the creative potential of direct action, she was not convinced that the ways of organising, that were not able to build a lasting movement or institutions that could serve as an alternative basis of power, would be capable of affecting real social change. If contraposing the somewhat soft and fuzzy “transformation of culture” to the taking over of the power of the state, it is hardly surprising that Epstein (1993) claims that prefiguration in her usage, on its own (i.e. not combined with Marxist perspectives), may only remain a utopian wishfulness that lacks any strategic direction.

The echoes of this understanding of prefiguration could sometimes still be heard in the early 2000s when Juris (2008) set out to explore the network-based organisational forms in the Movement for Global Resistance based in Barcelona. In the few references that he made to prefigurative politics, he used it to describe the “prefigured utopian worlds during carnivalesque moments of transgression<sup>33</sup>” (Juris, 2008, p. 156). Alternatively, prefiguration for him was part of a two-pronged strategy of intervening within dominant politics on the one hand, and creating decentralised networks that prefigure utopian societies on the other (Juris, 2008).

In this, specifically US-based discourse, prefiguration was utopian i.e. doomed to failure in the traditional political sense.<sup>34</sup> As such, its meaning was only a step away from being tagged as cultural or personal.<sup>35</sup> According to this understanding, in their internal structures and ways of organising, the 1960s new left and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), were prefiguring the *values* that they wanted to be espoused by the society on a grand scale. The meaning of prefiguration that stressed its expressive goals was so engrained that in the USA, Polletta (2004) had to develop a list of strategic benefits of participatory democracy in order to problematise or alleviate its now-traditional association with the label “prefigurative.”

Polletta (2004) went on to further strengthen the dichotomy between prefiguration and strategy by contrasting developmental (one type of strategic) benefits of participatory

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<sup>33</sup> This description concerns the action against the World Bank and the IMF in Prague in September 2000.

<sup>34</sup> At this point in US social movement studies, the goal of affecting change within the system was seen by many as one of the main aims of movements in general (See for example: Piven, 2008 and her notions of ‘interdependent’ and ‘disruptive power’).

<sup>35</sup> This dichotomy between strategic and expressive that was put forward in Jean Cohen’s (1985) influential text, was later reproduced in many forms and guises, for example in Bookchin’s (1995) distinction between social and lifestyle anarchism.

democratic practices with a prefigurative commitment to them that “envisions change through personal self-transformation and moral suasion rather than through institutional political change... A prefigurative commitment tends towards absolutism since the object is both to 'oppose' a current regime and to be truly 'opposite'" (Polletta, 2004, p. 74). She recognised, however, that there was still a strong prefigurative, utopian argument in favour of participatory democracy within SNCC itself. In other words, the members derived both strategic and moral, cultural and/or personal benefits from those practices. In the end, there is a certain twist in Polletta's argument when she starts to bring the prefigurative and the strategic closer together. She claims that participatory democracy can still be seen as prefigurative but in a sense that would incorporate some of its strategic dimensions. For example, democratic practices within SNCC helped prefigure fairer bases for authority than conventional ones. Hence, the change that the SNCC were prefiguring does not amount solely to personal or cultural transformation but to a practice of fashioning new forms of authority that they would like to see institutionalised in a future society (Polletta, 2004).

These tensions between strategy and the contemporary usage of prefiguration are also visible in the two tendencies that Pleyers (2010) distinguished within the alter-globalisation movements. One tendency focuses on subjectivity and creativity and the other on reason and rationality. Prefigurative politics in this setup is part of the former. It is connected to the processes of experimentation and spaces of experience. It is also a mode of organising in which there is a consistency between means and ends and where the ends do not precede action. It is a form of a living Utopia and the lack of any pre-established aims is concomitant with a focus on everyday practices rather than grand political battles (Pleyers, 2010).

Starhawk (2002) further links the US usage of prefiguration with emphasis on direct action that takes place in the present unlike the revolution which seems always to be about to happen in some mythical future. Empowering direct action embodies the world that movement participants want to create. Through this kind of action, movements develop strategies, tactics and organisations for new social structures (Starhawk, 2002). It is an attempt to “think not only the ideas but the facts of the future itself” (in Graeber, 2004b). Graeber claims that prefigurative practices offer a foretaste of a better, more democratic society of the future through living the experience of building it in the shell of the old (2002, 2009).



Recently in this particular discourse about prefigurative politics<sup>36</sup> there seems to be a shift away from the language of utopianism and personal expression and towards understanding of prefiguration as grounded in praxis, practice of experimentation, experience and learning. It is a balanced practice that tries to draw on many – sometimes seemingly irreconcilable – aspects of horizontal and autonomous organising and action. For instance, it finds itself constantly steering the rough waters between the fetishism of nonviolence, a cult of militancy and the fetishisation of process (Yuen, 2001). In the same vein, Maeckelbergh (2009, 2011) argued that prefiguration is a *strategic practice* in the alter-globalisation movement. “Prefiguration ... theorizes through action, through *doing*” and: “[t]hrough practice ... movement actors are learning how to govern the world in a manner that fundamentally redesigns the way power operates” (Maeckelbergh, 2011, pp. 3, 15).

The question of strategy or power has not, then, disappeared completely from this discussion but it has lost a lot of the political appeal that it still enjoyed in the twentieth century. There may be many reasons for this but two of them stand out. Firstly, recent practical developments in self-organisation are necessitating a widening of the dichotomy between strategy and cultural transformation. Revolution is no longer synonymous with a violent overthrow of state power (Holloway, 2002). Such experiments in autonomous organising as the People's Global Action network, the struggles of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, as well as people's assemblies in Argentina, latest *acampadas* in Spain, the Occupy movement – all testify to the growing popularity and relative success of (some form of) prefigurative practices.

Secondly, traditional representative forms of politics have become discredited by the authorities' responses to the recent financial crisis and the increasing identity of parliamentary left and right. Popular experience with prefigurative forms of organising rendered them even more obsolete. In this way, the entire distinction between political and personal/expressive that plagued the meaning of prefiguration since the development of its contemporary/US usage, is undermined. Prefiguration is political but not in the traditional reformist sense in which it appeals to the powers that be and tries to put pressure on them in order to affect a desired course of action. Rather in its current discourse, it is a mode of thinking and organising that helps make sense and fill the intermediate vacuum in the space where grand social change is still in the making. This change is possibly going to redefine the meaning of politics and ways

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<sup>36</sup> Advanced mainly by US-based scholars/activists and some celebratory movement analysis and commentary in Europe.

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of governing ourselves in really profound ways that as yet, we are not able to wholly imagine or give shape to but we can and have made it palpable to everyone who wanted to take part. Far from utopian, then, prefigurative politics is currently seen as experienced, immediate, tactile, practice-oriented and as changing the meaning of politics by reappropriating the term from our representatives. So that's theory. What does it look like in practice?

### **Prefigurative politics in Occupy**

There are many areas in which participants in Occupy engaged in what is currently understood as prefigurative practices. I will concentrate on three of them: (1) the occupation as a tactic of building physical spaces of collective work and intense involvement; (2) direct democratic decision-making as a way of building and sustaining democratic communities; and (3) the personal outcomes of politicisation that Occupy had on its participants. This will show how the contemporary usage of the notion of prefigurative politics helps illuminate some parts of movement practice. In the next step, I will briefly outline what we can learn about movements by going beyond the focus on prefigurative politics and towards an understanding of movement's living temporalities.

### *Encampments*

If you have a protest and it's just sort of against something, then that doesn't really take on all that much excitement and life. The thing that made the occupation [in Oakland] really different was that people were actually building something positive. They were like building this little city and so that gave it a really nice feeling. (June 19, 2012 interview B)

Occupy camps were perhaps the landmark of the entire movement. Everywhere from Toronto, Rome, Dublin to Sarajevo, Seoul and Sydney, new tents were being pitched in the centres of cities. The camps featured such common parts as at least: a kitchen, a library, and a media tent where groups of committed participants busied themselves updating the local Occupy's website and tweeting the news from the camp. The encampments were a direct way to reclaim people's popular political power and stand up against the unjust economic policies and/or austerity measures imposed on the majority of the population. Occupying public spaces was one of the most obvious tactics to make their voice heard and be able to start a conversation with other people. As one of the long-term activists and a participant in Occupy San Francisco

put it:

Under neoliberalism, the powers that be have been circumscribing all sorts of things that can and cannot take place. And one of the things they're doing is shutting down public space. And when you lose your right to this and your right to that and when you finally get down to what is a human being – human being has mass and because he or she has mass, it occupies space. And ... we choose to occupy now in mass and that presented a problem to the powers because it insures the public space for one thing, and puts us together in a mass where all sorts of mischief can take place – can and will. [whispers] Not just talking. (June 22, 2012 interview)

The camps were a political space where debate and action in defiance of the authorities could and did take place. But also all of the elements of the camp – even those seemingly non-political – like a 24-hour-operating kitchen had a strong prefigurative meaning in that they gave everybody (and primarily the people who were previously politically inactive) a sense of “look, we can organise things differently” and “we did that” (June 24, 2012 interview A1). The confidence fostered by the experience of collective work and a memory that people did step up and contributed a lot of their energy in moments like this, reverberated in the myriad of actions, groups and campaigns that sprang out or just drew new strength from Occupy. These new campaigns often aimed at recreating and further affirming that feeling of confidence in the power of collective organising and direct action. In Dublin for example, a new group was created when the camp was still in operation. It was called UnlockNAMA and one of its main aims was to open NAMA-owned<sup>37</sup> buildings for public and community use. Its launch was a carefully planned direct action during which the group and members of the community temporarily occupied a building. In Oakland, the Foreclosure Defense Group was constantly on call even in mid-2012 and the number of stories of how this and other similar groups around the country helped people stay in their homes is still growing.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to being political spaces, Occupy encampments were also very important social centres (June 24, 2012 interview A2). They created a sense of community as this participant of Occupy Oakland points out explaining why he got involved after a period of political disillusionment:

When Occupy Oakland began, I really saw, because of how the camp was structured, right – it was open,

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<sup>37</sup> NAMA, National Asset Management Agency – created in Ireland in 2009 – acquired property development loans from Irish banks in exchange for government bonds.

<sup>38</sup> See for example: <http://foreclosuredefensegroup.wordpress.com/victories/>

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anyone could go there and be given a tent, and immediately eat and immediately begin to be involved in political conversations. It could happen all within the first hour. All these things. You become part of the community, part of a discourse and part of like a system of care in which you helped people eat and people helped you eat .... So it was an entire society that formed overnight... So the potential was really there for these communities to finally come together and to learn about each other and to get that political sophistication and lead a real mass movement. And I was very excited about it. (June 28, 2012 interview B)

This sense of community was seen as crucial for enhancing the prospects of future organising. It was prefigurative, in the sense of self-managing, in that the camps brought different people together and connected them by the means of sharing and living in the same space and participating in a common struggle. It was not led by anyone or any group and did not have a predefined agenda or direction. Hence, the decision of what to do and how to go about doing it, was solely in the hands of the participants who, in turn, were all expected to learn from practice and from the experience by being open to the arguments of all the others. Or as the same occupier from Oakland explains referring to a school occupation that he got involved in in June 2012:

I kept saying that 'just wait until we get into that occupation and we're gonna get to the same page.' That doesn't mean that you're gonna get to my page. That means we're gonna find a new page together and that's exciting. It should be exciting to anybody who's been politically active and frustrated at the fact that they don't have any answers to these problems, right? ... When you get hundreds of people out onto the street pulling in six different directions and have chaos for a little while, you get answers that you couldn't find otherwise... [T]he way forward had been pointed out and that we just need to keep getting out here and fucking around and fucking up and not being afraid to make mistakes. (June 28, 2012 interview B)

Finally, the fact that the camps had a strong prefigurative quality can be discerned from how they influenced people's relation to the occupied space as well as their personal lives. There was clearly an intense identification with Oscar Grant Plaza for some of the participants of Occupy to the point that when the camp was finally evicted "it was so easy to feel the difference between Oakland without Occupy and Oakland transformed into a city that has like a thriving public space in the middle of town. [I]t's so magical" (June 24, 2012 interview B).

There was a deep and immediate feeling of bonding and attachment with the physical occupation and some participants compared it to tribal or indigenous ways of interpersonal dynamics among people in the camps. The participants talked about their intense positive

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feeling of being part of a community that gave them a sense of belonging and made them protective of their group and the space that they were sharing (June 18, 2012; March 9, 2013 interviews). Similarly, practical importance of bonds of friendship was described, for example, by Polletta (2004) in relation to the SNCC, as well as Holloway (2010) regarding a sense of comradeship as part of an anti-politics of dignity. Participation in the Occupy movement and in the building of alternatives had the ability to completely take over people's lives. I would often experience it myself and later hear various versions of the same statement that said: “[t]his has been my life basically since October,” or as one participant of Occupy Oakland and a member of a few working committees put it:

Like there was something about that moment that all those people just stepped up, saw the importance and the opportunity that was there and just threw themselves on it. I mean I did that but I know a number of other people who took leave from school, quit their job or got fired from their job... This is ... like I'm gonna regret not being here full time. (June 24, 2012 interview A)

### *Decision-making*

On a Friday night – I think it was ... in October [in Oakland] and you know Friday night, people go out or whatever. And like I was sitting with other people at a GA, we're all at a GA and we realise that there is no reason to go for a party or want to be anywhere except at a GA and that was like the most stimulating thing that we could think of doing at that time and going for a meeting and all the people who were saying this were people who have gone to a lot of meetings and generally hate meetings. Or like, you know, I like a meeting for having something done but like sitting in these meetings it could be very frustrating. So the idea that here we are at a meeting which had its frustrating aspects but you sort of realise that this was like really important and that, you know, you don't mind. (June 19, 2012 interview B)

Consensus or modified consensus decision-making was another vital prefigurative practice that people engaged in in Occupy. It is a direct democratic way of making decisions in that there are no representatives but everybody takes part in the process and everybody's voice counts. It is a decision-making system that the movement's participants would like to see institutionalised not only in the internal practices of Occupy but also in other spheres of social life. In some Occupies, the 100% rule for consensus was adopted (e.g. Dublin) but in many US occupations a modified version of consensus was used instead. It required a super majority (like 90%) of votes in order to approve a decision. Consensus is often seen as a process that ensures that

actions that a group agrees to undertake are participatory and sustainable, and that there is individual and collective ownership of all decisions. Therefore, it is linked to this dimension of prefiguration that speaks about the importance of not only what is done, but also how something is being done. In chapter 5, I examined in detail the participatory learning processes that were part of the practice of consensus decision-making. In this section, I would like to explore consensus in more general terms, analysing its role in the movement and highlighting some of its shortcomings that were not only a feature of consensus in ODS (the focus of the previous chapter), but also in the Occupies in the US that I studied.

For some participants, who had been familiar with direct democratic practices prior to Occupy, consensus and General Assemblies actually became a big part of what attracted them to the movement (June 26, 2012 interview). But even for the participants who were learning the ways of direct democratic processes for the first time, some of its aspects such as the human mic felt very powerful and deeply appealing or as one participant of Occupy Dame Street said: “there's human beings to be heard and to have someone repeat back to you what they've heard you say ..., that's the basis of knowing that you are real” (April 24, 2012 interview).

The processes of setting up and then facilitating direct democratic procedures also involved prefigurative experimentation and evaluation during practice as this slightly longer description from a member of the facilitation committee in Occupy Oakland illustrates:

It wasn't that pre-planned. When we decided in Moswood Park to start Occupy Oakland camp, we basically set out to like a week later to do it. So there is a week of like forming of those committees that mostly were like childcare, kitchen... There was a lot of planning that went into like the first General Assembly and it was like called the General Assembly but it really wasn't. It was like a rally. And it was really cool cause everyone came to the park and they were like probably a thousand people and we had this really great rally... Nothing had been planned beyond that first meeting. There actually hadn't been a facilitation committee formed. So the next day which is the first day of camp, a few of us were just like – what's gonna happen tonight? No one is planning a General Assembly. So I [gathered] a few people like some friends to come up with a really loose structure for the first one... And trying to put in people's head that this is like a DIY movement. If you're part of it, you've gotta be doing something... And that night and the next days, we crafted a structure. And a lot of it was influenced by Occupy Philly. I'm good friends with C and she helped come up with the General Assembly structure there and they'd already been occupying a little bit before us...

It was kinda built as this is a work in progress. It's always gonna be changing, probably. So that's how we kind of got around the how are we going to make a decision when we don't have a decision process, you

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know... It does seem that the General Assemblies were more dynamic and more participatory when there is a lot of things going on and a lot of energy. And then when there wasn't, they're just fuckin' fizzled and people... and, you know, it's almost like any sort of a relationship... When things are busy, you're like fine but when it's like kind of like boring and bad, you're like nittpick at one another and I think, I mean I'm not on that committee anymore, but I think there definitely has been a few waves of 'facilitation versus the people' or something, you know [laughs]...

I don't think that the General Assembly was ever what I really wanted it to be and I feel like mine and O and a large number of people on the facilitation committee kind of had pretty radical ideas about what it should be that other people weren't into. And I think that part of it is that a lot of us are pretty critical of direct democracy when it's that many people. We really wanted to promote as much like autonomous groupings and actions to happen as possible. So I mean we all kind of had this idea that it would mostly be a place to disseminate information and that certain key decisions would be made like, if, you know, the City is putting pressure on us about the camp, what are we gonna do about it or something? But we were all really nervous about it being like a place where every action has to get endorsed and everyone has to agree on every action. It wasn't that bad at first but, the GA ... definitely degraded into a place where you get a rubber stamp for your actions. I think we really wanted it to be a place where you shared your actions and you could deal with the scepticism of the GA like everybody would talk about it and comment, criticise and ask questions just as if it was a decision but in the end, you do what you wanna do. (June 29, 2012 interview)

GAs, however, were not only places where different viewpoints about their purpose clashed regularly, but also spaces where intensive learning was happening (Szolucha, 2013). Learning direct democratic processes was itself an immense challenge especially for the people who were totally unfamiliar with them. Many activists that I talked to recalled how they were very happy seeing consensus being used outside of immediate activist circles, but they also often confessed that it made them cringe inside because they could see how people were really struggling with understanding the value of the process and some of its intricacies. This often resulted in confusion (June 26, 2012 interview), inability to cope with difficult situations or persons (June 25, 2012 interview A), lapse into authoritative facilitation (June 22, 2012 interview) or keeping of the status quo (June 19, 2012 interview A2).

Prefigurative practices that emphasise self-transformation as a way towards social transformation rely on the premise that they can always be criticised and perfected through doing. This encourages critical self-reflection but it also makes it more difficult at times to understand what the critique is really about. Some of the participants felt that, for instance, while some people were claiming that they found the process problematic in some areas, what

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they really meant was that they disagreed with the decision made or the people who put forward a particular proposal (June 25, 2012 interview A). In such cases, discussion about the procedure may be used (consciously or not) as a proxy in order to slow down political decisions (June 28, 2012 interview A). It may also be a symptom that the group has reached the limits of what all members agree on. As one member of the research group in Oakland succinctly explained: “the decision-making process seems unimportant until it's too late” (June 24, 2012 interview B).

At the same time, Occupy participants often felt that some of these drawbacks and misunderstandings could have been avoided if instead of moving on to a vote, there was less time pressure and more debate was allowed so that people could talk over some of the more contentious proposals (June 20, 2012 interview A; June 24, 2012 interview B). For this to work effectively, however, participants would have to respect and be willing to take part in the process (June 23, 2012 interview).

Even if good participation was assured, unavoidably, there would almost always be power dynamics going on in the group. Direct democracy as practised in the movement, then, was not an ideal. In Occupy, power could originate from a number of features. Sometimes somebody's reputation, long-term engagement, the amount of work that they were willing to do for Occupy or their charisma could give their voice more authority or weight (June 19, 2012 interview B; June 29, 2012 interview). Other times, it was just the opposite. Since the default in Occupy was that everybody should be allowed to have their voice heard, some people thought that their voice was the most important one in the room (June 19, 2012 interview A2). What emerged, then, was “the tyranny of whoever wanted to run their mouth about whatever was bothering them” (June 19, 2012 interview A1). In such situations, the process was taken over at the expense of effective decision-making.

### *Politicisation*

The most important thing that has happened is that Occupy Oakland has really encouraged people to be more active when it comes to what's happening in our society and in addressing, you know, all these horrific things that happen as a result of our government and of corporations and most locally in Oakland. Oakland is plagued with many really horrific issues and, ... I think the only way things are going to change ... is when a lot of people get up and try to fight against these processes... If anything, I think that people ... are more politically conscious than they were before and really feel and have seen that a



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lot of their activism does get us somewhere... Those are things that you don't unlearn. (June 23, 2012 interview)

Occupy had an immense effect in terms of how it politicised previously politically inactive people, reenergised disillusioned activists as well as bringing to the fore certain issues that had been taken for granted or otherwise considered off limits in debates. This, in turn, changed the popular perceptions of what is possible in terms of radical political action and equipped people with tools that they could utilise in future struggles. What played a decisive role in the processes of politicisation in Ireland and the USA was the popular character of the movement. When Occupy began, most people only knew a handful of other people who were involved in the same location so any occupation consisted of a random collection of individuals rather than being organised by recognisable and already politicised activist, political groups or milieux (May 4, 2012 interview). This immediately revealed huge untapped, grassroots potential for political change (April 24, 2012 interview) and gave the movement its credibility contrary to the mainstream media narratives of well- (or ill-)behaved crusties and anarchists.

Because of the popular character of this movement in the USA, some considered it as an opportunity for developing political sophistication, analysis and leadership that would give more voice and power to the communities that in other movements and contexts, can usually only count on tokenistic representation as opposed to being involved in leadership roles (June 28, 2012 interview B). This argument is more akin to the earlier and European meanings of prefiguration that were more directly about participatory learning in struggle than the contemporary usage. Occupy also created local, national and international networks of people who shared the experience of a common struggle and were willing to stand up again (June 25, 2012 interview A; June 29, 2012 interview). The social and political connections between engaged groups were also expanded as the result of Occupy. In Oakland, for example, my interviewees claimed that thanks to the general strike, (and however briefly) the goals of the movement were connected to the working people in the US (June 27, 2012 interview A). Some of the political topics came in from the cold as well. Participants said that thanks to Occupy and its catchy slogan ("We are the 99%") economic disparity and inequality were at the centre of the debate again (June 26, 2012 interview).

All of the above contributed to a sense of expanding possibilities and encouraged people to take more risks in political action. As two participants from Occupy Oakland put it:

If you think about like five years ago, just occupy the building would sound just crazy in this country. Like

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you couldn't do that. You would just assume that you would get your ass kicked by the cops and who's gonna do that? And also like Occupy Oakland movement cause it dealt with ... so many like crazy ass police, people are like really really brave at this point ... It's like normal now to defy the police or something. (June 29, 2012 interview)

I think a year ago, certainly five years ago, nobody would respond to a threat of school closure by occupying the school... People would be like: 'are you crazy? What are you thinking?!' And now it's like 'yeah, that's what you do.' ... It really did change things. People ... were really amazed by what happened in Cairo with Tahrir and I think that Egypt just captured people's imaginations in a way that they saw that there is something really powerful about physical occupation and that can lead to something bigger rather than just the act of getting together to say that we agree with this or we disagree with that. OK, we're actually going to physically take the space. We're gonna defend it, we're gonna claim it and that can actually reverberate and create something larger. I think that people ... had very little sense of that here. When we did do occupations like all occupations that I have been part of were symbolic. They were like, you know, take over an administration building in a college to protest investment in South Africa... They weren't like we were trying to take over an administration building and use it for ourselves. It was like we were doing this and then we will get arrested or not and it was a symbolic thing and now people – I think – do see occupation as a more direct thing, as something, as a tactic. (June 26, 2012 interview)

The second participant also ties the growing sense of possibility to a particular shift in tactics that puts more emphasis on physical occupation of space. Similarly, other people also spoke about changes in activist culture in a way that focuses more on direct action and a sense of quantitative increase in the number of actions and campaigns after Occupy (June 26, 2012 interview; June 27, 2012 interview A).

Furthermore, direct democratic processes were also seen as an important part of politicisation in Occupy. Some participants felt that the tools and skills learned there could be reapplied whenever the need arises in order to foster the sense of ownership and help create and sustain a movement (June 26, 2012 interview). The GA format, however, was not only a decision-making model of a physical occupation but it was also considered an appropriate outreach tactic that could help prefigure direct democratic forms of organising in places that were not immediately connected to an ongoing encampment or action. Occupy Oakland, for example, organised a number of BBQ assemblies in various neighbourhoods (June 20, 2012 interview B; June 26, 2012 interview).

**BEYOND PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS  
AND TOWARDS LIVING TEMPORALITIES OF REAL DEMOCRACY**

Through its emphasis on practice, experimentation and direct action in such spaces of experience as the Occupy encampments and the movement as a whole, the current discourse of prefigurative politics makes meaningful social change palpable to participants. This is visible in the politicising effects that Occupy had. The camps were structured and operated in ways that could prefigure communities in which people would like to live in the future. The direct democratic ways of making decisions may provide some clues as to how to facilitate more democratic modes of self-governance. It is as Maeckelbergh put it that in prefigurative politics, “the struggle and the goal, the real and the ideal, become one in the present. Prefiguration is a practice through which movement actors create a conflation of their ends with their means. It is an enactment of the ultimate values of an ideal society within the very means of struggle for that society” (Maeckelbergh, 2009, p. 67).

I remain sympathetic to such an understanding of prefiguration and think that it is a helpful category to describe parts of movement practice. However, in this third step of this chapter, I am still concerned with reinforcing an insight that is not necessarily at odds with the contemporary usage of prefiguration but may be significantly lacking from the “prefigurative” picture of social movement struggles. Prefiguration in its current discourse creates a kind of confluence of time (the future and the present) that leaves out a lot of the messy processes that are going on on the ground. Furthermore, its basis is the power of (conscious) intentions and intentional actions, which also often assumes a good degree of unity of participants' intentions. This is problematic in so far as a lot of what happens in a movement situation is inconsistent or messy. Naturally, nobody *intends* this messiness and inconsistency. These characteristics of movement contexts are at odds with the current usage of prefiguration because they destroy the apparent confluence of time – of the ideal future in the prefigured present.

The complexity and inconsistencies of movement actions that are the central concern of this thesis are, however, what *really* happens in a movement. They should not be considered a failure, though. Instead, in order to create movement-relevant knowledge, one should ask: how do complexity and inconsistencies arise? What do they mean when they appear in a movement situation? And how to deal with them?

The contemporary framework of prefigurative politics does not have a lot to offer in this respect because it seems that a way forward from prefigurative politics is either constantly perfecting and disseminating already known practices or trying to approach an absent ideal of those practices i.e. preparing a “viable alternative” that can one day substitute for the current arrangements. As important as they are, they cannot by themselves, however, prompt a new social movement or start a period of political upheaval (Cox, 2001). Like Occupy, most political “moments of excess” (The Free Association, 2011) seem to burst out of nowhere and their rationale and genealogy are always supplied in the reality after – not prior – to the event. Does that mean that we should resign all efforts to understanding situations when fundamental breaks happen? I think not. Can we then predict them? I do not know that but I think that there is a way to learn something about them that we cannot simply learn by following the theoretical framework and narrative of prefigurative politics.

I refer to living temporalities when I talk about temporal and complex processes that unfold in a movement context. These processes involve a particular mixture of improvisation and a working out of participants' preconceptions. They are about taking risks in the face of uncertainty and rethinking one's own positions. Temporalities are also inextricably linked with time as well as practices and struggles as evolving and unfolding *in time*. As such, temporalities aim to capture and bring to light many temporal dimensions of movements that may otherwise be lost in historical or linear narratives of social processes. Temporalities are mostly about the things that are happening in the present of one's participation and in the now of the research process. But by being about the present, temporalities, in my understanding, also underline the reality of movement contexts where various actions, processes, interventions and opinions interact and exist simultaneously and/or parallel to each other; they may be intertwined and/or contradictory. Hence, the present that is caught in temporalities is multidimensional. Viewing temporalisation as a structure of responsibility (Derrida, 1988) helps us understand the actions and decisions of Occupy in a more comprehensive way. Living temporalities signify also a very particular generational time and a geographical situatedness of this research. Moreover, living temporalities engage with participants' bodily time and processes. Finally, as in Derridean and certain psychoanalytical understandings, preserving and recounting the complexity that these temporalities involve, is important because meaning is always accessible to people through events which are yet to come.

The representations of Occupy that this thesis necessarily creates are also positioned in the

same temporality as those of other Occupy participants. As was shown in chapter 4, this is because the analysis in this thesis was not purely intellectual and separate from active engagement with the movement. My critical theoretical practice (like the idea of real democracy that it arises from) was also embedded in movement temporalities.

### **Living temporalities and real democracy**

When Occupy happened, we tended to call *real* the ideal or prefigured version of direct democracy that we were practising. Paradoxically, however, by conflating the real and the ideal in the present, the current discourse of prefiguration to a large extent loses what is real about direct democracy. It glosses over many of the inescapably temporal processes that are at play simultaneously with prefiguration. These processes are embedded in relationally structured interactions of people from different social groups, cyclical time of embodied engagement, burnout and rest, the temporal time of spaces of experience, the push and pull dynamics of autonomous organising, the mechanisms of creating divisions, and times of critical self-reflection of all those involved. All of these processes engage people's memories, senses, bodies and make demands on their intuition.<sup>39</sup> By rescuing some of these temporalities of living real democracy, we can reveal many of the issues of the “day after” any political moment of excess or social change on a grand scale and, perhaps, find an alternative either to celebration of movements as they are or a cynical dismissal on the basis of the social contradictions they are trying to engage with.

An analysis of living temporalities also opens up the space for an exploration of real democracy. I propose a notion of real democracy that does not simply mean “substantive” as opposed to the “void” liberal representational form of democracy. In my usage, real democracy signifies the lived experience of people's political engagement that is radical yet riddled with inconsistencies and uncertainties. In the next section of this chapter, I describe real democracy as it was experienced by Occupy participants. This will reflect the various living temporalities in the movement and thus help do away with the reductive and unhelpful dichotomies (e.g. between strategy and transformation of culture or socialists and anarchists) that a lot of writing about movements espouses. I also hope that the description of living temporalities in Occupy will reflect in a more accurate way the real movement processes, as opposed to the

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<sup>39</sup> I am here indebted to Cerwonka and Malkki (2007) for their understanding of ethnographic temporalities.

universalising sense of “we” and “now” of a lot of journalistic commentary. The framework that I propose problematises approaches to prefiguration and movements in general that believe in the power of example or the power of individuals spontaneously acting in a similar way in order to undermine a particular power structure. Real democracy and people's living temporalities are notions that, I hope, may be part of a much needed theoretical and movement vocabulary around radical engagement with political and social realities in and beyond movements and – equally importantly – around inspiration and hope.

My aim in trying to highlight this aspect of Occupy is not to provide a list of issues where we need to start “next time there is a revolution;” it is not to supply the ground for a political action in the future, rather it may actually serve us better to think about doing away with any ground. All future experiences of living real democracy will be singular. Although they may bear some similarities to the issues that I will outline below, the answers that we find will have to be developed in their particular circumstances and time.

#### **LIVING REAL DEMOCRACY IN OCCUPY**

In this last step of this chapter, I describe movement's living temporalities. By focusing on living real democracy in Occupy, I attempt to present a more complex and fuller picture of the local lives of the movement which involve processes that are social, temporarily situated and usually non-linear in nature. By concentrating on this aspect of the movement, one can achieve two things. Firstly, the real of political action is brought back to the equation; all people's lived experiences are affirmed and valued as opposed to only those that fit a particular political framework or narrative. Secondly, my contention is that the complexity and inconsistencies of those temporalities is the field where all potential for real social change comes from. Unexpected situations arise where people's creativity has to be mobilised on the spot. Different viewpoints, facts and beliefs mingle in a way that is much more productive in responding to social challenges than any one political doctrine. In the current political and economic system, this mixing up of political outlooks and situations is precisely what there may be a need for:

I think that personally, it's a disservice to Occupy to say that Occupy is x, y and z and this is how it's run. That's people being just exactly as deeply embedded in like archaic or inflexible as our current system of government is. Like isn't that what we are fighting against? Then why would you stagnate something that

has the potential to be so fluid and evolve to really fit the needs of specific situations? I'm very irritated by people that are like 'this isn't Occupy!' and I think that in some senses, their feelings are valid but I think we need to have a sense of flexibility as a 'movement' because I'm sorry, things change all the time. We can't be static especially if you're trying, you know, to ostensibly bring down capitalism. (June 19, 2012 interview A1)

There are two immediate temporalities that are engaged in the following sections of this chapter: one is that of an unfolding action and the other marks the time of critical self-reflection and story-sharing in settings where I was the person with the recorder. As such, they reveal a wonderful panoply of the ways in which we construct and relate to our realities. There are moments of euphoria, hope, confusion, disappointment, quite a bit of strong language, self-critique, acts of taking sides and making excuses, articulations of burnout, sharing of rumours, explanations of contradictions, blurring of the line between conviction that something is possible and the fact that it actually happened. All of them are important because they shape people's actions in very real ways and contribute to the potential of social movements.

In what follows, I will try to outline a few aspects of living real democracy in the Occupy movement. First, I would like to highlight some of the issues connected to social problems and to interactions between people from different social/political groups within Occupy. Subsequently, there will be a short description of the temporality of physical engagement and burnout. I will then move on to briefly discuss the non-permanent character of the encampments. Before concluding with a reflection on the nature of radical political engagement, I will outline some of the controversies around the issues of autonomous actions and divisions within the movement.

Living real democracy in Occupy was challenging. Doing it as a participant-researcher was even more so. I have always been interested in the subjective realities of people's political engagement. What influences them? How do they respond in a challenging environment? I wanted to know what we can learn from our experiences of activism that will help us bring about real social change. Soon I realised that I would not be able to do this without talking about issues that are difficult, sensitive or in other ways, less convenient for the movement. In places where I return to such issues, this is not to rehash old tensions but to reaffirm our own imperfections, complexities of our life-worlds and necessary inconsistencies of our actions as valuable experiences that help us learn about how real change happens. And since it never

happens as an automatic implementation of an ideal plan, why not accept these complexities as an inevitable part of our struggles and learn from them?

### **Social problems and social/political groups in Occupy**

When Occupy opened up democratic spaces where everybody could have their voice heard, it revealed a lot of the things that are the results of the political and economic system that we live in but had been repressed or in other ways pushed to the margins of society. This was especially apparent with regard to homelessness and mental health issues. All of these issues informed the ways in which the occupations unfolded (Smith, Castañeda, & Heyman, 2012; Taylor et al., 2011).

Some participants claimed that these issues made Occupy dangerous places (to some groups). But they also make Occupy a deeply informative experience. It immediately made everybody aware that their individual ideas of what “society” was were perhaps not as accurate as they thought. And a grand social change will have to include everyone. Different camps had their own rules as to what they did with threatening or aggressive behaviour. Occupy Dame Street usually called the police to intervene – something that many of the participants always felt uneasy about. Occupy Oakland, on the other hand, did not allow the police into the camp. Hence, the participants realised that figuring out how to deal with people who were “difficult” without the help of a network of social programmes, state enforcement agencies, NGOs, charities or sheer day-to-day ignorance would be hard. But it would also be worthwhile if the break of the state system is to be achieved (June 28, 2012 interview B).

Aside from issues of security, the encampments provided a number of services that catered towards the homeless people such as the kitchen, medical tents etc. These were obviously not adequate and not enough, but as one occupier from San Francisco told me, it is still more than the government is willing to do for these people and simply “we have hearts and we have rules and here we are and what the fuck are we supposed to do?” (June 22, 2012 interview). The same person shared an anecdote with me where there was a woman who was stabbed (not in relation to Occupy) while the camp was still in operation. Instead of an emergency room, however, she asked to be brought to Justin Herman Plaza (where the encampment was) as she knew that they had a first aid centre there. So all sorts of people in need were gravitating towards Occupy because this is where many of them were finding community and a degree of safety. However, within the camp, there was an ongoing friction between the homeless and



other people pushed to the margins of society (such as alcoholics, persons with mental health issues etc.) and activist or more middle-class participants. One part of this tension was the debate about who is deserving and undeserving of the social position they found themselves in (Herring & Glück, 2011). Another aspect is that any encampment like that was bound to attract all kinds of “opportunists” - trying to sell drugs for example. Furthermore, in Oakland,

[t]here were rumours about different things that I didn't see, you know, like somebody pulled a knife on somebody... So there was lots of tensions a lot of people couldn't handle, you know. It was pretty rough. I think for some homeless people it might have been intense but it was like maybe like a step up cause there was food and there was like community ... The positive outweigh the negative for some people ... I would say that the dynamic was, the first day was maybe 90% - and I'm not sure that this is the best dichotomy but I think there is something to it – there was like 90% activists, 10% homeless and by the end of the two weeks it's more like 80% homeless, 20% [activists]. (June 27, 2012 interview A)

It would be problematic to ascribe the declining feeling of safety to some real threat from the homeless or other disadvantaged groups. But the tensions were there in spite of the fact that it was the centre of Oakland and drug dealing and violent interactions were happening in the plaza before there was an Occupy (June 24, 2012 interview B), so it would be unrealistic to expect the they would stop once the camp was there.

It cannot be ignored that the radically inclusive ethos of Occupy presented real problems for some participants because of the roles that they played. In Occupy Oakland, there was apparently a big man who was mentally ill and notoriously pulled knives on people, but he also became a very committed and influential occupier. He was symbolic in that he exemplified a real transformation through which people become politically engaged and respected members of a community despite our various life situations and struggles. It was a great story when everything was good and well but when the participants from the security committee had to come in to disarm him, they felt like the seriousness of the situation had been trivialised (June 18, 2012 interview). Other participants came to similar conclusions in terms of the limits of their ability to self-govern. Despite their horizontalist persuasions, they rejected the conviction that Occupy was a model that could meet people's needs better than the state can. Importantly, however, they also believed that some of these needs could be probably adequately addressed by directed campaigns and focused direct actions (June 19, 2012 interview A).

Other campaigns such as Occupy the Farm that was reclaiming the Gill Tract in Berkeley to

grow food and meet the needs of the local community, would downplay the needs of the homeless people – and quite consciously so. As two of the participants told me, their aim was not to create a tent city similar to one in Oscar Grant Plaza but to farm the land they were occupying. In order to make that statement, they would take down their tents every morning. This, unfortunately, created tensions within the group and left some people feeling disempowered (June 19, 2012 interview A1).

There was also uncertainty as to what to do with people and groups who were coming in with their own political agendas. Sometimes a single person would appear and would have some sort of a plan or a blueprint and be trying to persuade others to get behind an idea or a platform that so far included only that one person. Such encounters, however, were relatively rare and singular (June 27, 2012 interview A). In Dublin, visits of radical political parties or other groups had the ability to generate widespread paranoia as people feared that the movement could be hijacked by any one established political entity. After a few months in Occupy Dame Street, people of the Freeman on the Land persuasion gained considerable currency. They were central in many actions organised during that time but their ideas were also somewhat problematic when contrasted with the collective ethos of decision-making or safer spaces policy that the occupation adopted (May 7, 2012 interview). This was problematic in that outsiders could easily dismiss the entire movement simply because of the presence of a particular group.

There was also just the scary and hilarious randomness of what you get in places that are radically open to all. Several times while co-facilitating a GA and as a person with an Anglo-Saxon but not distinctly Irish accent, I was told to effectively shut up and “let the Irish speak.” Another member of the facilitation working group in Dublin was attacked with a plastic sword while simultaneously being made an offer he could not refuse, when one participant put forward a proposal that he will cut the facilitator's head off. But the US occupations were no less engrossing:

Occupy SF is kind of cool actually cause ... it was just like wild homeless people that started it and there wasn't activists involved at the beginning so they were really feeling their way through it. So they would go through each agenda item but they couldn't figure out how to make decisions generally and it was just wildly people doing the direct response signal back and forth and everyone freaking out at one another and no decisions were being made. And then there's the lady from Barcelona and she's like: 'I'm from the history of collective decision-making and listen to me!' ... And half of the people were like

'listen to her' and the other people were like 'forget about the Spanish lady' [laughs] (June 29, 2012 interview)

[I]t's like a junky down the square and suddenly you are fed and had a place where you could speak up and you wander around a GA drunk off your ass yelling like 'Michael Jackson' and just crazy ass shit, you know. That comes out. Every other person that nobody would listen to or like all that old form boom boom leftists who never had an audience for their hardcore Trotskyist fucking sermon so then they come to the fore. So like everyone was like – all the New Age shit – they come to the fore. So the GA cannot handle that, you know, especially when all expectations are placed within that vessel. ... So people still have to learn what the GA can be or should be... [W]e just have to put some means and procedural stuff in order to keep all the fruit loops and the bullshit communist party like solidarity statements and rubber stamps – like keep that in the wings. And there are a couple of simple rules out there that can [help do that]. Cause no matter what's people's intentions and what the greater political context unless you keep that shit at bay, there are only so many times that people are gonna come back to a four hour meeting on a cold concrete to listen to a total bullshit from a Stalinist. And for me, that's like once, you know. I had a lifetime of that shit. (June 25, 2012 interview B)

All of the above stories demonstrate the limits that the participants experienced in relation to the processes of self-organisation that is based on the premise of radical openness. It shows the difficulties that are involved in the practice of direct democracy in a context where it could not be expected that every participant will share the commitment or the same understanding of openness.

### **Burnout**

Many of the participants of Occupy experienced it as a moment of very intense involvement. Not surprisingly, most of them could not sustain that level of engagement and felt that they burnt out. There were three main factors that were often pointed to as responsible for this. The first was the limited numbers of people who were committed to do the work. In each case, a lot of it depended on just a few individuals who would be consistent in their involvement and determined to see their plans through (June 20, 2012 interview A). The constantly shifting participation did not prove conducive to promoting trust and attitudes of accountability to the group.

Another factor was that a lot of the participants had other significant work or family responsibilities. When being part of Occupy was put on top of these, it simply was not

sustainable. In some cases, what helped avoid burnout was limiting one's involvement to fewer roles or helping the camp develop rota systems that enabled people to contribute at a level that was not that overwhelming (May 4, 2012 interview). In other instances, however, the feeling of burnout coincided with withering enthusiasm and declining participation in general (June 19, 2012 interview B). It was not very likely that people who left for these reasons would come back once they felt more rested because the issue was only partially bodily and mental exhaustion.

The third and most prominent factor that contributed to burnout was the sheer roughness and challenges of the situation in which a group of people occupies 24/7 a space in the middle of a city centre – sometimes throughout the winter season. One participant of Occupy Dame Street even said that it was like a war zone – because of a feeling of being constantly under threat (April 24, 2012 interview). Or as another occupier from Dublin explained it, it was

[a] very challenging physical environment in which we had no electricity, no hot water, no, you know, it's lashing rain, it's windy, there is no computer. People are worried about their shelter, about their food, their safety. People are getting robbed, people are getting physically attacked on a nightly basis, people would come and throw rocks onto the tents... People would come and urinate onto people's tents, like passing strangers. You know what I mean? You're dealing with that kind of environment. You're trying to maintain life on a city street. Very quickly that sort of absorbed all energy and time of the people who were camping there. So in that sense it was just a feature of the nature of the physical environment. (May 4, 2012 interview)

It should come as no surprise then that when the encampments were no longer in place many of the participants expressed their relief that there was not as much activity for some time (June 29, 2012 interview). None of the post-Occupy groups in Ireland have been remotely as intense as Occupy. The experience of the Occupy encampment also made people aware of the amount of hard work that had to be put into it in order to make it work. While still recovering from the first wave of Occupy Oakland, one participant confessed that when there were plans for January 28<sup>th</sup> action of taking over the Kaiser Convention Center (dubbed the Move-In Day), she thought:

well, there might be an occupation but I kind of hope it doesn't work because I don't feel totally ready to start doing something and let my life being taken over by this, you know. Or I hope that it just lasts a weekend. And then I hope that they shut it down. You know what – it's just so much work. (June 18, 2012 interview)

### **Camps as non-permanent spaces**

One of the hardest things to imagine when you start an occupation is how it is going to end or even that it *is* going to end, eventually (O'Dwyer, 2011). Part of the reason for this is the initial enthusiasm and a firm belief that once – what at the time seems like the most difficult part – we got all the people together to form an encampment, we are onto a winner. However, in Occupy Dame Street as well as Oakland, it took just a few weeks for the participants to realise that it is a hard task (and one that requires conscious efforts) to sustain that initial enthusiasm and engagement.

Furthermore, after these first few weeks there was already more talk about switching to direct actions and issue campaigns instead of treating the camp as the only manifestation of the movement. For some participants, Occupy camps were to serve the purpose of developing political leadership, a degree of “political sophistication” and helping people experience alternative ways of living and making decisions. The encampments had to empower everybody in a process of mutual learning. They could not be permanent if their goal was to encourage people to go on to lead in their own communities (June 28, 2012 interview B).

Nevertheless, there were also people who remained deeply committed to the task of withholding the plazas. Once attempts at reoccupying proved unsuccessful, this overemphasis on the centrality of the camps turned out to be harmful to the movement. When the camps were gone, it left the participants with no particular issue or anchor from which to take the struggle to the next level (June 26, 2012 interview). Similarly, in cases where participants got rid of their camps themselves, there was a feeling that they “didn't have the juice to come back” (June 19, 2012 interview A).

Often the question of preserving the camp or letting it go encompasses a number of issues. One of them are interpersonal and political since any occupation that lasts more than a few days may face the challenges of long-term organising when all political differences and agendas start coming to the fore (June 24, 2012 interview B). Another issue is less apparent but has to do with the ethos of radical openness and the question of what to do when the camp loses its ability to live up to it.

With regard to the first issue, the encampments that drag on for months such as Occupy Dame Street take the problem of interpersonal and political differences to a wholly new level. After four months or so of Occupy in Dublin, the mix of people who remained active and their

political persuasions were different than at the start when most of the principles were agreed. By this point, it was difficult to say if the majority of the occupiers still shared the principles or to what extent they felt bound by them. The broader context was that there were many hurt feelings and new antagonisms were created because of interpersonal conflicts within Occupy. This made some of the original participants leave the camp and caused a few unpleasant confrontations outside the main encampments. In the end, there were only a handful of people who kept the camp going and nobody new was joining in at that stage. Several of the structures were still in place but some of the participants wanted to change a few directions that the occupation took at the start – especially in regard to its non-engagement with unions and political parties. This created a situation in which some people who were involved in the occupation at the beginning wanted it discontinued, while those still participating, thought it should be carried on. If at the beginning, the participants knew that this was going to happen and had time for this debate, it might have been helpful to agree in what circumstances we would finish the physical occupation (May 7, 2012 interview) instead of letting it continue and further deepen the divisions. Even if that was accomplished, though, there is no guarantee that that decision would be followed through.

As for openness, it was one of the main factors that influenced people's opinions about whether the camp should be closed down. In some cases, such as Occupy the Farm, the concern was that the occupation may turn into an "Occupy wildlife preserve" where people outside of a fencing put up by the police were observing those on the inside. "As opposed to what we had before which was the occupation was holding the space open for anyone to come and go" (June 19, 2012 interview A2). Eventually, the participants decided to end the occupation themselves. The argument that the camp was no longer a radically open space and hence should be disbanded was also used in reference to Occupy Dame Street but it was made by the people who were no longer central to the occupation at that stage (May 7, 2012 interview) so there was not any move to terminate the encampment and it was eventually evicted by the police.

### **Autonomous actions**

At the core of the notion of autonomous action is the conviction that decentralised self-organising is more efficient and conducive to human freedom and creativity than organising that is led by a central body. Autonomous activities and the related practice of diversity of

tactics are also vessels through which the complexity of the movement and the variety of actors involved are reflected. It is, therefore, a vital dimension of the movement's living temporalities. Strategically, autonomous actions translate into and support a multitude of struggles. There does not have to be a unanimous agreement on what issues are most important and which ways of organising are best. The point is to try out many because nobody knows which of them or what particular combination is going to strike a chord in the general population (May 7, 2012 interview).

In practice, however, autonomous action presents a real quandary for the place of the consensus process (as some of the experiences from summit protests also suggest). One of the roles of the GAs in Occupy was to debate and agree on the actions that would be undertaken under its banner. This was to ensure that people exercised democratic control over what was happening in the name of Occupy and that there was at least a degree of accountability for whatever action was taken; without that decision-making centre, there would be very little cohesiveness in the movement. It would also make it more difficult for new people to join in if all the work was done in committees and did not have to go through a broader approval process (June 24, 2012 interview A). On the one hand, it may be important that not just any action can claim to be Occupy. On the other hand, this can limit the role of the GA to providing a mere rubber stamp for an action (June 23, 2012 interview). What does it really mean that something was endorsed by or called Occupy and is it important what it is called? As one member of the facilitation and environmental justice committees pointed out:

So it's all kind of murky... What does it mean when Occupy Oakland actually endorses something...? It means that roughly 100 people [the quorum] were in that place and got convinced to endorse it. And we've endorsed ... some stuff that we know nothing about. (June 20, 2012 interview A)

Moreover, if a group plans an autonomous action, it is likely that it is going to happen whether it is or it is not called Occupy. This is also a position that Occupy Oakland seemed to reach after a few debates about the proposals to adopt some sort of non-violence policy against the rule of thumb embracing diversity of tactics. Even if any of these proposals were passed, that would not stop anybody from organising autonomous actions and engaging in property destruction i.e. a behaviour contrary to the agreed policy. This simply is not one of the things that could be resolved by making a collective decision about it (June 29, 2012 interview).

It would, however, be inaccurate (as many have done) to perceive this tension between autonomous action and collective decision-making as a tension between two groups of people

who prefer opposite modes of action or have different political inclinations. This tension is structural rather than merely ideological or personal. It is more than just “talkers versus doers.” In fact, there are many temporal factors that influence people’s decisions to take one side in this ongoing debate rather than the other. One participant who helped organise a number of actions in Occupy Oakland, for example, has always supported the philosophy and practice of diversity of tactics. When the proposal to adopt a non-violence policy in Occupy came up, however, he voted against diversity of tactics because he disagreed with the particular interpretation that was used and was disappointed by how the recent autonomous actions went down. They seemed to be organised as if diversity of tactics was synonymous with the everything goes attitude whereas for him, it should really be an attempt to find some sort of unity while recognising each other’s differences (June 27, 2012 interview A). Similarly, even the people who in Occupy Oakland were called insurrectionists and often chose not to attend the GAs, still recognised the importance of some sort of a central decision-making and deliberation body for the movement. Creating an indoor space where GAs could take place was one of the motivations behind the Move-In Day in January 2012 – an action that the “insurrectionist crowd” was key in organising (June 24, 2012 interview A2).

### **Divisions**

The topic of divisions within the Occupy movement is so rich that it would merit a separate paper. There were differences between people who were involved in the camps from the beginning and those that joined later on. Tensions emerged between the campers and the people who were active participants but slept off site. There were all sorts of frictions between persons who wandered off the camps to start their own campaigns and those who stayed in Occupy. In Ireland, the issue of nationalism and the various manifestations of republicanism regularly came to the fore. There was fear of being hijacked by a political party or the weak and corrupted trade unions on the one hand, and the old leftist mantra that they had to be central in any revolutionary struggle on the other. The lines of divisions were multiple, crisscrossing or overlapping and sometimes constantly changing.

Within any movement, various divisions reflect its internal diversity of interests, outlooks and life situations (as the section about social/political groups showed in this chapter). They are far more than just that, however. They are unfolding processes in living temporalities that make problematic any stark and rationalistic judgements about “who is with and against whom” like



in the following fragment about the insurrectionists in Occupy Oakland:

After these non-violence debates went away, so did they [the insurrectionists]. Even though I do not wholly agree with them tactically, strategically a lot of the times, *it's been like a kind of a vacuum beyond bodies...* It's like that radical, anarchist, political analysis like wasn't there. Like I mean it was there cause a lot of us were anarchists but it could have been more of it there in those General Assemblies so that those younger people ... would be mingling with them and talking to them, hearing the arguments, deciding for themselves like 'yeah, that's right, this black bloc over here right in the smoking section is like pretty smart, right?' (June 24, 2012 interview A2)

In the above, even though this member of the labour solidarity committee disagreed with the people using the black bloc tactic, he thought that their participation was an important part of the movement. Their presence brought developmental benefits for the younger activists and their political analysis constituted a vital radical part of the movement that helped make it what it was.

Couldn't the same effect be achieved through the use of the internet? Since the Arab Spring the mainstream discourse has been hailing the new opportunities for organising and communication brought about by the social media. "Virtual space," therefore, has to be a vital part of Occupy's living temporalities. The Occupy movement used the internet extensively and creatively to extend its reach and help people stay in touch with the movement. Most occupations had their webpages, Facebook profiles, Twitter and livestream accounts. Participants created innumerable mailing lists and online forums that all mirrored to some extent the horizontal ways of organising within the movement (Juris, 2008). What cannot be overlooked, however, is that the debates that took place on the internet were the most heated and negative. These debates had the ability to heighten divisions rather than strive for resolution. The online mode of these discussions also made some participants worried about the things that were being exposed about the movement and who they were exposed to. The worst part of it was that any such argument could feed many others, if a sentence or phrase was taken out of context and tweeted out with the aim of sparking the next controversy (June 24, 2012 interview A). In this context, the internet is far from a benevolent tool and as a platform of non-face-to-face discussion, it can be quite problematic in movement contexts.

There were, however, certain circumstances when many divisions were put aside. The most obvious of those were when the police cracked down on the encampments. At the GA after the camp in Dublin was evicted, everybody came out – even the people who were most embittered

by their experience on Dame Street and left the camp a long time ago. After the first eviction of Occupy Oakland, three thousand people gathered in front of City Hall and decided to have a general strike. In other instances such as Occupy the Farm, very clear ideological differences were disregarded when there was a lot of physical work that needed to be done (June 19, 2012 interview A). Furthermore, the beginning stages of all occupations tended to welcome differences rather than treat them as a cause for concern or suspicion.

#### **CONCLUSION, OR WHAT WE CAN LEARN FOR OUR FUTURE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT**

Political struggle is a never-ending endeavour. The roles that people play in it are varied and constantly shifting. A one-time window-smasher becomes an old codger and a patient one who advises younger participants how to avoid arrest. In periods of intense engagement, participants become more involved, only to fall back on their earlier identities and roles once these periods are over. New activists throw themselves into work for radical social change, get burnt out and leave with bitterness or swallow the pill of immediate dissatisfaction. They recognise the monstrosity of work that needs to be done and get committed to their struggle for the long haul. All of these are entirely normal processes that testify to the cyclical, protracted and sometimes unexpected ways in which social change happens.

When understood in this way, political engagement encourages attitudes that are humble and steer away from overstating a movement's influence and centrality. As one member of the anti-foreclosure group in Oakland pointed out, in movements this would mean opening oneself up to the dictates of reality. And the reality of Occupy is that it might be just one of the more formative moments of the war of position rather than manoeuvre (June 25, 2012 interview B). However, the truth is that there is no objective benchmark that one can use to prove or disprove that conclusion. If radical social change happens through constant perfecting of our radical forms of self-governance, through palpable experiences of alternative social systems, participatory learning, and through "discontinuous invention of a new form" (June 24, 2012 interview B), then all judgements about the reality of the movement are temporarily situated and prone to change in the future.

What is the formula for bringing about radical social change based on this understanding of the nature of political engagement? I think it is already visible in the recent movements such as Occupy and in some of the activities of the Anonymous, in that they are not primarily driven by

the quest to institutionalise some already worked-out, more democratic system of governance (or even one in the making, for that matter). Instead, they are protesting against the limits imposed on their political imagination (Graeber, 2011) and hence, enacting the distance between the current arrangements on the one hand, and ways of living that are beyond the coordinates of what we now perceive as possible on the other. This is why the participants do not know yet what ideas for a better society they might have had, had they not lived in the current system. Thanks to the experience of living real democracy, however, they may be much more aware that what they lost by the imposition of neoliberalism and liberal representative democracy was not some benign and problem-free unity of all people but rather an ephemeral, peculiar, ever-changing and inconsistent plurality that has not and will never go away (although one would hope that homelessness, alcoholism, xenophobia and many other elements of this plurality would disappear in a less dysfunctional society).

I also need to clarify that the messiness and complexity that I talk about does not designate merely the positive plurality of outlooks and interests as they co-exist in real society, but also the all-important fact that this plurality (with all its claims of what is real) is revealed at the points when it seems that a social change is about to happen and the hegemonic social construction fails. When I talk about plurality, I do not mean a sum total of people's "true selves," but rather all the inconsistencies that only come out in these moments of destruction of one social system and a creation of another. Messiness is not simply diversity with all its problematic connotations of persistent and self-identical identities. It is not there to be known and presented as the "truth" that gives shape to an ideal construction. Messiness is what is uncovered when there is a sudden crack in the dominant order – when I ask myself: "what just happened?"

Why is this understanding important? I think that it helps acknowledge that there is a structural failure at the heart of all systems of governance. Like the city hall in Oakland, it is always already cut off from its foundations and rests on an unstable ground. But it is hard to remember that that is the case if the dominant attitude of the day is business as usual, so that structural and inherent failure may remain a purely abstract idea.

In those rare instances that it does not, the collapse of the dominant structures creates a production that is never finished and it may even be substituted midway by another process.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Nilsen and Cox (2013) talk about this dynamic in relation to how movements from below may encounter offensive strategies of movements from above.

The real that is revealed in such moments of destruction and new construction “is neither better nor worse off as a result. In general it dusts itself off until the next crisis. Its momentary benefit is that it has refound its gloss. This would even be the benefit that one might expect from any revolution, this gloss that would shine for a long time in this always murky locus of truth. But there's the rub. This shine never again throws light on anything” and – as Lacan goes on to say – this is because “what is frightening about truth is what it puts in its place” (Lacan, 2007, pp. 186–187). In the place of truth – e.g. as a representational form of democracy and neoliberal economy<sup>41</sup> – is just a construction produced in temporary and contingent ways. And that is frightening – both that this is something that goes for what truth is, and also that all progressive struggles may one day amount to just that and nothing more.

What Occupy and some other movements of the day did, was that they ostentatiously rejected a lot of content that would give their message and demands a semblance of cohesiveness and super-consistency. They did say what they thought – capitalism and traditional forms of representative democracy were delegitimised. We wanted *real* democracy. What was it and how was it supposed to work? Well, we had our best go at it by prefiguring it in the ways of practising consensus, for example. That was not entirely “it” as the experiences of living temporalities in the movement show and we still remain (more or less) faithful subjects under the aegis of representative democracy.

The encampments, however, made something else plain clear – we saw it as thoroughly unfair that the powers that be could draw a line between what constitutes a legitimate and illegitimate form of protest. The issue is not about whether we would be allowed to go back to the plazas with tents and sleeping bags or would these items be prohibited. The question about illegitimate forms of protest is also one about transcending the rules of the day. An ethical social structure would in some way incorporate a recognition that one day the time will come when it will have to give in. People will call on its limits and demand that their political imagination be liberated and engaged in a new production. How do we keep space for that open at all times, or is it even sane to ask this question? I guess, if nothing else, there is no harm in mobilising the appetite for trying to answer it.

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<sup>41</sup> Or a new system of self-governance that is more democratic and responsive to the real needs of the population than the old one, for that matter.

## **REAL POLITICS IN OCCUPY:**

### Transcending the rules of the day

Looking down at the empty Peace Park at the junction of Grand Parade and South Mall in Cork (Ireland) from behind a thin layer of window glass, it seems so unreal that this small area overlooking the river Lee housed one of the longest running Occupy encampments in the world. Yet this unexpected occurrence was the reason why I was here, strolling carelessly around a warm flat as the town was waking up to a grim and wet morning. I have grown so used to Occupy's ethic of care that I did not even realise that there was breakfast being made for me in the kitchen. "We've all learned how to make these amazing smoothies in Occupy" – said a young woman handing me a glass of slightly mushy green liquid. Well-educated, bearing a certain amount of class guilt, she abandoned her upright body position and started bending toward a small coffee table when we sat chatting about Occupy. She looked focused, tilting her shaved head a bit backwards trying to remember what happened a year ago. She was not an obviously counter-cultural type – she had her hair cut to raise funds for the Occupy camp and, evidently, stayed that way. It was she who told me:

I have such problems with Ireland being called democratic when we have a choice of six political parties and all of them are the same. I felt really disenfranchised for the last three to four years and actively worked to get involved in campaigns that would fight against this force that made me feel very alone in this world. Occupy really did provide that for me and that's why I found it so depressing when I was leaving. *I found this base, these people to overcome that loss that was just created by the system that we are in right now. And I found it and then I foolishly broke away.* (March 9, 2013 interview A)

Since the 1970s, politics in the global North has been gradually turning into post-politics – depoliticised, professionalised governance where the divisions between dominant parties become diluted (Stavrakakis, 2007). Paradoxically, what was celebrated as a victory of liberalism, has for many actually meant an assault on democracy in the name of democracy (Derrida, 2005). Analysis to this effect has been made since the late 1990s. Various challenges to neoliberal politics have also been taking place elsewhere: in Latin America or recently in Tunisia and Egypt where anti-austerity protests turned into full-scale revolutions. A wave of anti-austerity dissent has also swept across Europe. From a historical perspective, when the Occupy movement formed in 2011, it was not the first or a uniquely significant challenge to

neoliberal politics – there have been many movements in all parts of the world struggling to delegitimise the system in their own ways. From a subjective perspective, however, the movement is significant and unique because many of its participants experienced it as such. They experienced it either as something new, their first or most important breach of post-politics, or a continuation of their earlier political involvement but in different group and strategic contexts. It is this embedded perspective of people's lived experience that this chapter adopts.

In a society of "commanded enjoyment" (McGowan, 2004), before Occupy, being post-political meant steering away from any reminders that the system in which one lives is not perfect and that certain problems with it persist beyond all reformist and charitable interventions. It meant actively forgetting that there is something that prevents society or democracy from being. As the quotation from the interview above demonstrates, the people who did not succumb to this attitude, experienced post-politics primarily as a *loss* or a lack that they strove to remedy. This loss of "real" democracy is also inextricably linked with subjects' feeling of "being alone in this world" or their repeated failures to construct their full identity within the restrictions of the current socio-political system. There are, then, two lacks involved here: one has to do with the lacking dominant social systems, the post-political symbolic space that forecloses real democracy; and the other with the lacking subject.

The role that the subject plays in the structures and processes at work in individual and social change is paradoxical. On the one hand, it is passive – political acts "happen to people," their consequences are never pre-planned and can only be determined as such retroactively. On the other hand, a "subject" designates the contingency of an Act that sustains the very ontological order of being" (Žižek, 2000, p. 160). A subject is not a free agent intervening in the determined ontological order, but it grounds this order, gives meaning to a chaotic multitude and makes it into a "social reality."

Such an understanding grasps the socio-symbolic dependence of subjectivity. This is done without foreclosing the subject as an empty vessel of objectivist determinations or imbuing it with a positive essence ("a true self") (Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2008). This is where Lacanian psychoanalysis and Derrida's thought become relevant for consideration of the political domain. They help explain the complexity of people's experiences in radical social movements better than celebratory or scathingly critical analyses. These types of analyses may tend to glance over the socio-subjective interdependence and universalise their own experience. The

political appropriations of Lacan and Derrida are not only concerned with voids in the subject and a social system, but also with people's continuous attempts to fill these lacks. It is their contention that despite our very best efforts, these lacks do not stop re-emerging (Lacan) or there is always an "impossible," aporetic relation between contingency and political organisation (Derrida).

The introductory quote captures this dynamic in recalling an apparently inescapable cycle of finding a remedy for one's lack and then breaking away from it. This phenomenon raises interesting questions about the nature of political activism and social transformation that I want to examine here. This chapter will analyse the Occupy movement in order to explore the mode of its participants' engagement with radical change. Firstly, I draw on Lacan's conception of an act and Derrida's notion of a decision in order to explain the characteristic features of this movement situation. By doing this, I will examine how Occupy was different from post-political reformist social activism. In what ways was it a "sign coming from the future" (Žižek, 2010, p. 363) – a practical exercise in participatory democracy and direct action that aimed to transcend the rules of the day? While it was still unfolding, why did it feel, as Naomi Klein (2012) put it:

like something has been opened up, a kind of space nobody knew existed, and so all sorts of things that were impossible before are possible now. Something just got kind of unclogged. All sorts of people just started to see their struggles in this, started being able to identify with it, started feeling like winning is possible, there is an alternative, it doesn't have to be this way. I think that's the special thing here.

Far from creating unilateral theoretical constructs, in the second part of this chapter, I will describe moments when the Lacanian "criteria" of an act and Derrida's decision fail to account for what actually happened in the movement. Subsequently, I show that in the context of social change, it can only make sense to speak about aporias that were endured in Occupy. Lastly, I discuss the question of whether it is inevitable that the lacks in the system and in subjects keep constantly re-emerging. What can this mean for future radical political activism?

#### **OCCUPY AS A POLITICAL ACT**

The Occupy movement can be understood in terms of a political act for a number of reasons.<sup>42</sup> Firstly, its scale and development was not something that was pre-planned, intentional or even expected. Secondly, one of its main aims was to question the very legitimacy of the status quo

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<sup>42</sup> For an extended theoretical discussion of an act, see chapter 3.

instead of lobbying or making demands to the authorities (or making such demands that no current government could accept). This required that Occupy participants took many risks and assumed real responsibility for their actions. Finally, Occupy accomplished something that seemed impossible – particularly in the USA – it momentarily suspended the neoliberal preconditions of the debate about economic inequality and it exposed the void at the centre of law and liberal democratic representation. Let me now consider each of these criteria of an act in turn.

### **Non-intentionality and hyperpoliticisation as depoliticisation**

One of the most frequently recurring themes in Occupy participants' stories is about how they did not expect it to be anything "bigger" (Taylor et al., 2011), different (June 28, 2012 interview Bp2), or more profound (June 19, 28, 2012 interviews B, Bp2) than any other protest they had joined or heard about before. Many occupiers "couldn't believe that this was going on" at all (June 20, 2012 interview B). For many participants, Occupy encampments were unique because they lacked any parallel comparisons on a national scale within the horizon of at least two decades. As one ODS participant told me:

The five months that we spent in front of the Central Bank – if you told anyone else in Ireland in the last fifteen years that people would have done that, they wouldn't believe you. Certainly the last twenty years I've been here. It's just unbelievable that it happened at all. (May 7, 2012 interview)

The scale of Occupy was also unprecedented, as this other ODS participant recounted on his blog in November 2011:

consider how crazy the idea would have seemed this time last year that a bunch of people would have camped out for a month in front of the Central Bank on Dame Street and that they would be part of a global movement of people doing the same in 1600+ cities around the world. Or that one of those camps would have called a general strike in Oakland that shut the 4th largest port in the US or that another could have organised a day of action in New York that involved 35,000 people. These are crazy times we are living in which means the unimaginable becomes not only possible but perhaps the only way to go. (Flood, 2011c)

Social movement scholars and political theorists were perhaps no less surprised when Occupy happened. In the 2000s, canonical movement researchers and scholars of revolution were pretty sceptical that there might be a radical mobilisation against global capitalism. Many of



them also still understood the character of this possible mobilisation in terms of a creation of a single revolutionary coalition (see for example scholars' discussions in Foran, 2003). Political theorists such as Žižek and Badiou also pessimistically claimed that the space for political acts was at least temporarily closed by the workings of liberal consensus (Hanlon & Žižek, 2001).

Yet, this apparent political malaise was not meant to last for much longer. Underneath all powerful liberal discourses and post-political complacency something was starting to boil. Obviously the role and inspiration of the Arab Spring could not be neglected in this context. One little example that can only now be interpreted as a sign of the upcoming wave of protests is a tiny book written by a 93-year old Frenchman – Stéphane Hessel. "Time for Outrage!" ("*Indignez-vous!*") sold more than 600,000 copies in France in less than three months at the end of 2010. The author spoke mainly to young people about the power of money and the political and moral corruption of governments. His call for outrage and active engagement was tied up in the UN rhetoric and required a strictly non-violent stance (Hessel, 2011). Hence, though he wrote the right book at the right time, even Hessel did not (and could not) anticipate the scope and specific dynamic of the upcoming wave of protests.

If nobody thought that Occupy was going to be this big and profound, or even expected that it would happen at all, how come it did happen? Part of the answer may lie in post-politics itself. Because it claims that all ideological struggles are over and celebrates expert management and administration of populations as the highest incarnation of democracy, it actually intensifies social antagonisms. With no outlets in the form of oppositional representative political parties, for instance, there must be a moment when these antagonisms come to the fore with all the more intensity the longer they had been precluded from the public domain. In other words, one has to "measure politicization in terms of the degree of depoliticization ... What would the symptom of neutralization and depoliticization ... reveal? In truth, an over- or hyperpoliticization. The less politics there is, the more there is, the less enemies there are, the more there are" (Derrida, 2000, p. 129).

Why is action a political act when it is non-intentional? The act is decisive, revealing of social antagonisms and deeply politicising – all characteristic of occurrences that are rare and seem improbable before they actually appear. There is then an inextricable link between non-intentional action and the broadest scope of political contention that aims to question the very basis of the current socio-political systems.

Political acts can also only be non-intentional because they are not carried out from a position that is beyond the current dominant systems. The overwhelming majority of the people who participated in Occupy (obviously to different degrees and in different ways) were part of the capitalist and liberal democratic models of governance or – to use Lacan’s terminology – they were part of this Symbolic framework (Žižek, 2007). Through Occupy, however, they became able to separate themselves from it. How was this possible and how was it achieved?

### **Traversing the fantasy and questioning the legitimacy of the status quo**

This radical separation from the big Other of capitalism and representative democracy was possible because people identified the fantasy at the heart of these systems and, through radical and direct action, questioned the legitimacy of the status quo.

A short detour to psychoanalysis may be useful here to briefly introduce some of the terms that I would like to use in this part of the thesis. Lacan claimed that fantasy is an imaginary construction that helps sustain the coherence of the big Other which is a set of social rules, norms and laws that govern individuals’ behaviour. Fantasy sustains our reality in that it fills the inconsistencies and lacks in the big Other – it provides an explanation of them and helps forget the (necessary contingent and indeterminate) origins of any established order; it temporarily closes its structural gap (Hoedemaekers, 2008; Lacan, n.d.).

Fantasy serves a function of setting people’s desire in motion. By attempting to fill the lack in the big Other, it aims to regain the big Other’s fullness, which is posited as a precondition for an ideal state of happiness, *jouissance*, the absence of further wants. As people’s constant attempts at perfecting their fantasies show, their desire is never satisfied and they are reminded that it can never be by constant cracks in this reality. What emerges through these cracks in the Symbolic is the Real – this part of our reality that escapes its schema and reveals the incoherence of our dominant constructions (Stavrakakis, 1999).

(Post-)politics can be understood as fantasmatic (based on the Lacanian understanding of fantasy) because its primary institutions and processes do very little to question fundamental assumptions that govern our everyday perception (Hoedemaekers, 2008). In a political act, on the other hand, one traverses the fantasy. He/she changes his/her position in relation to the big “Other as language” (place where all signification, law-making comes from) as well as the “Other as desire” (place where our desires originate) (Fink, 1995).

In Occupy, participants refused to continue believing that the current systems can come up with a solution that would respond to the needs and desires of the 99% of the population. The Occupy Wall Street (OWS) call to global action on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2011 read: “Neoliberalism is your future stolen ... This has to stop! We must usher in an era of democratic and economic justice.” Others spoke of the grim reality of the neoliberal promise (Rosenberg, 2011), and lies about financial capitalism that people have been told for at least the last decade (Graeber, 2011). Occupy was a break in the common trend (especially for many non-politicised individuals in countries where the movement was most significant) of “going along” with the status quo or, as an occupier from Cork told me, it was “a little break that said – this system is wrong. Financial capitalism is a rape-ish parasite and we need to talk about this” (March 9, 2013 interview A). Similarly, participants also questioned the workings of liberal democracy: “[as] society in the West we think about ourselves as democracy, or there is a lot of media push on that word but I'm not sure if it really is. There's no active participation in that democracy from most of the society” (May 7, 2012 interview). Many occupiers clearly sought to detach themselves from the dominant economic and political system as a site of any guarantees for their future. As one participant from Occupy Atlanta wrote:

We believe that the American political process is so corrupted by the influx of lobbyists, “free speech” corporate cash, and politicians beholden to both that it has failed us completely. Our only option left is to occupy public spaces in order to assert our right to freely assemble and to redress our grievances, rights guaranteed to us by the First Amendment. Exerting that right has ironically become an act of civil disobedience, a fact which points out exactly what the problem really is. We owe no obedience to laws which abridge our Constitutional rights. (Flank, 2011, pp. 122–123)

Through direct democratic practices and multiple acts of civil disobedience, Occupy participants did not seek to be recognised by the powers that be. Their aim was not to produce a list of wishes that could be negotiated with the government. They were against the traditional, representative ways of doing politics. By traversing the fantasy of neoliberalism and representative democracy, they did not engage in a “colonisation” of the Real but rather seemed to be possessed by it (Pluth, 2007). This feeling was shared throughout all Occupies that I know of. In ODS it was “like you didn't want to leave. It was hard to drag yourself away. There was so much happening. It was exciting, it was doing something. It was good people, interesting conversations, developing things together” (May 4, 2012 interview). In Occupy Oakland, many of the participants had a very intense identification with the Oscar Grant Plaza (the plaza in front of Oakland's City Hall where the occupation took place). As one of the

occupiers recalls: “people felt so attached to it, so identified with it because it was such a powerful experience. The kind of experience you will probably only have once in your life.” Being a part of it meant feeling a sense of support and possibility, and having something important to do together (June 24, 2012 interview B).

This sense of possibility and togetherness was definitely fostered by Occupy’s anti-political slant. To be sure, the movement itself was very politicised. What it was against was the traditional and representative ways of doing politics. In the second issue of the Occupy Wall Street Journal, they spelled it out very clearly: “We are not pleading with the Congress for electoral reform. We know electoral politics is a farce. We have found another way to be heard and exercise power. We have no faith in the political system or the two major political parties” (Hedges, 2011). This other way of exercising power was the GA process and participatory and direct democratic decision-making that were, as one ODS participant wrote, not “a way of controlling the politicians but of replacing them” (Flood, 2011b). Through these processes, the enactment of the impossible could begin in that all radical change had to be achieved in a bottom-up, leaderless way (Van Gelder, 2011a) – a way that challenged the traditional notions of political representation. Occupy’s anti-state attitude also extended towards its relations with other state agencies, primarily the police. The “Long live Oakland Commune and fuck the police” slogan was one of the clearest identifications of Occupy’s desire to self-govern and make a radical break from other forms of protest that may still be entangled in the state’s mechanisms of power.

It was not the movement’s explicit aim to ask anybody or any group for support. “Don’t look at us, join us!” said one of the most popular cardboard signs and chants in the early days of ODS. ODS refused to co-organise actions and cooperate with political parties and trade unions, claiming that they were corrupted and populist. However, many participants were not against the *idea* of trade unions or political parties per se. As a member of ODS explained:

I didn't believe in political parties or trade union organisations [but] I support the idea of trade unions. I'd defend anyone's right to be either in a trade union or in a political party. And if they were attacked for their just being in their existence, I'd defend them with a whole heart. [But political parties], I didn't even believe that they believed in the most cases in what they're doing. They've become very populist in Ireland [but] I think that's the case in many countries now. They're waiting on polls to tell them about what people wanted to hear so that they could then put that on a manifesto and encourage people to vote for that reason as opposed to being of a conviction to politics. And I've seen [this] less in the last twenty or thirty years. (May 7, 2012 interview)

*Real politics in Occupy*

Why is this distancing oneself from the state and established political entities important in a political act? This indifference to the Symbolic social reality, a refusal to play by its rules is already transgressive. However, in this negative rejection, a political act makes a leap of faith into the unknown – not to establish a new harmony (though this may also happen) but as a precondition for taking radical ethical responsibility for one's actions. People in Occupy were able to engage in activities and a production of meanings that was something that was experienced as new and/or different. It was signifying in a sense that its actions dictated the rule. Furthermore, distancing from the dominant power mechanisms helped the participants take real ethical responsibility for their actions.

At the subjective level, Occupy was creating something different precisely because it refused to accept any patronage of established political entities and thus, constituted a break with much of what participants had known about politics. Although there was a general agreement about the refusal of Occupies to cooperate with mainstream political parties for the reasons discussed above, working alongside other leftist groups or unions was treated differently in various Occupy camps. Some of the most successful Occupy Oakland actions involved quite tight cooperation with unions. In ODS, on the other hand, there was a lot of tension around its refusal to cooperate with unions and non-mainstream leftist parties – most of which was played out during the GAs where the proposals for cooperation with the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Dublin Council of Trade Unions (DCTU) was discussed. In the end, both of the proposals were blocked since the people who blocked it felt that there was a risk that ODS would be used as “a power towards something else and a power for good but only if it was within [the party's] doctrine” (May 7, 2012 interview). The fantasy that was behind the idea of cooperation is captured beautifully by this ODS participant:

We were doing something new. There was no naivety about the philosophy behind it. There may be naivety about the practicalities of it. [People from political parties] weren't arguing on those points. They were arguing about – we need to be associated with the unions, we need to be associated with parties. We're all one big happy family. But myself and L and several other people were aware that in anti-war groups and other groups in the past, political parties tried to control them, to control committees in them. And we didn't agree with them. (May 7, 2012 interview)

There was a danger that ODS would serve as a tool for applying the SWP's narratives about anti-capitalist resistance and that the diversity that that movement was trying to cultivate and cherish would be subsumed under the party's strategies of increasing its own membership and

influence, and its hierarchical ways of organising (“Monopolise Resistance. A look at Globalise Resistance, an SWP front group, as well as the Stop The War Coalition,” 2001). Some have criticised ODS’ refusal to cooperate with particular leftist groups such as the SWP. It did, however, cooperate quite successfully with community groups for example before the Spectacle of Defiance and Hope – an annual demonstration of the Community, Youth and Voluntary sector in Ireland. Critics point out that by blocking proposals to work alongside leftist groups, ODS lost an opportunity to engage in “inter-sectoral efforts.” Such a stance is often portrayed as being motivated by attempts to preserve the supposed “purity” of the movement, usually by a small, camp-centric, closed-in group of occupiers (Kiersey, 2014; Sheehan, 2012). This critique is limited, both because it is factually inaccurate with respect to claims about a small minority holding back co-operation with the SWP, and because it substantially misinterprets the reasons for scepticism within the camps.

Reflection on the reasons for the refusal to cooperate with the SWP, for example, should not rest at the inferential level: “ODS thought parties were bad. SWP is a party, therefore ODS must have thought the SWP was bad.” What is lost in such an analysis are the substantive debates and processes that were going on around that issue in ODS. It was not only important that the SWP was a political party; other considerations concerned who presented the proposal to cooperate with them at the GA, in what way that happened, what arguments were put forward in favour and against that cooperation, and so forth. Finally, throughout the occupation, Occupy participants also developed a meaning of what the SWP represented or could be associated with. These processes of meaning-making were partially driven by Occupy’s anti-hierarchical ethos and previous encounters with the SWP, but also developed through live interactions with the party members during GAs. Through these interactions, the SWP came to be associated with a confrontational debating style as well as with highly controlled and very specific forms of organising, where increasing membership of the party drove all strategising. This contradicted ODS’ consensus-based deliberation processes and its autonomous tendencies. Instead of becoming associated with any political entity, ODS participants often voiced their encouragement for all groups (including parties) to independently organise and strive for social change in the way they consider appropriate.

It is not surprising then that for the occupiers, there was not an easy compatibility between the SWP and ODS – this fact was dismissed by the party claiming that this contention is a result of Occupy’s naivety. By refusing to cooperate with the SWP, however, ODS might have actually

acted in defence of responsibility and real politics because it prevented “unity from closing upon itself.” This is because “separation, dissociation [should not be] an obstacle to society, to community, but the condition... Dissociation, separation, is the condition of my relation to the other. I can address the Other only to the extent that there is a separation, a dissociation, so that I cannot replace the other and vice versa... That is not an obstacle but the condition of love, of friendship, and of war, too, a condition of the relation to the other” (Derrida in Caputo, 1997, p. 14).

Far from poor strategising, then, this refusal to be associated with any established political entity meant that the movement took responsibility for what it was and recognised itself as only one way of struggling for social change. It was a hub, a network where people could gain political sophistication so that they would go and lead in their communities (June 28, 2012 interview Bp1). There were multiple struggles, localities and ways in which people could get involved and take responsibility for bringing about vast social change – also through parties and trade unions. By their participation in Occupy, however, all were encouraged to organise in a bottom-up and non-hierarchical way. By dislocating the previous discourses about representative democracy, by distancing oneself from its fantasy, desire was set in motion again. The emphasis on direct and participatory democratic organising can be seen as a result of this process and part of building a new discursive articulation. It was important because, as one of Occupy Oakland members said, “no one sought to route [it] into familiar and secure terrain, because [it] emerged organically” (Yassin, 2011).

This separation from the dominant structures of power, emphasis on new creations and taking responsibility for one’s position are part of a political act because they change one’s place with respect to the Other as language. These processes go in parallel with a repositioning with respect to the Other as desire. Firstly, after freeing oneself from a fixated dependence on the dominant Symbolic structures, people’s desire is liberated and enters the movement of signifiers in which it becomes more fleeting. As Lacan puts it, a subject can enter the realm of his/her drive which is a pursuit of enjoyment that exists separately from the Symbolic reality and takes shape in the Real (Hoedemaekers, 2008; Lacan, 1998). I take him to mean that in the context of subjects’ drive, we are encouraged to experiment, create, innovate, constantly circle round the place of a leftover, a remainder, left behind by the imposition of any Symbolic structure. What is transgressive in the notion of *objet petit a* – the name that Lacan gives to this leftover – is that he posits this structural remainder as the cause of the subject’s desire. In

an act, innovation and change are then directed towards that which is excluded from the dominant structures of power. Freeing oneself from hegemonic ways of knowing and the commands of the political and economic systems is only the first step. The next one is to start creating new ways of living collectively by placing the needs of those who have been excluded from the dominant systems at the centre of one's efforts (remembering that all new creations may eventually produce their own exclusions).

Derrida provides a temporal dimension to the above direction in his conception of alterity. There is an asymmetrical anteriority in answering to the other (chapter 5) that also marks temporalisation (chapter 6) as a structure of responsibility (Derrida, 1988). The asymmetrical anteriority comes from the fact that real responsibility that accompanies the political act can only be assumed on the basis that we cannot know or foresee what "other" we respond to (Diprose, 2006) but we always respond to an other. The other comes first; a response, assuming responsibility supposes an other in relation to a responder. In an act, people assume responsibility for what happens in the here and now without knowing who they would answer before for their decision and what the consequences of that decision would be. Essentially then, they have to make decisions without being able to foresee their consequences. They need to take a leap of faith, like during the GA debate, about ODS participation in a march organised by the DCTU and about the issue of party and union banners that had not been welcomed in ODS.

I think we should take a leap of faith. This is what they're doing in New York, in Wall Street. They've got the unions involved. When we go on this march, or if we go on this march, we're still gonna come to Dame Street, we'll still have our own beliefs, our own principles, you know. And the whole banner thing... a banner isn't going to occupy your mind. You're not going to come out on the other side as any different. So don't be afraid, take a leap of faith. But I'd also like to say that I'm gonna respect the consensus decision of the crowd tonight. If we decide not to go, that's all good and well because I trust you! Thank you! (November 14, 2011 notes)

This point is revisited here in a more theoretical perspective than in chapter 4 where it was used as an example of the action component of the PAR process. In a political gesture, this participant suggested that Occupy takes a leap of faith and accepts the invitation to join the march. He did not think that by allowing DCTU banners on this march (part of the issue with joining the march), Occupy's participants would need to change their beliefs, or at least he was ready to take that risk and see what happens. His insistence on the priority of group's decision



shows that he accepted the responsibility without knowing what the consequences of a decision of going to the march would be. Rather he built his confidence to take the leap of faith on the trust that he had in others. It was relatively easy to trust other Occupy participants in this way because of its non-hierarchical organising that essentially meant that all occupiers were in the same position and all needed to assume this kind of real responsibility.

### **Decisions and the violence of law**

Although the subject is always already thrown into the Symbolic order and its fantasy, in a political act, it has to “presuppose [itself] as the one who *posited* it” (Žižek, 2006, pp. 243–244). It has to assume responsibility for its alienation as if it created this order and set it in motion (as a precondition for separating from it, see chapter 3). This is an unlimited responsibility and an important dimension of a political act because it points to the “beyond” of the current political arrangements, deconstructing their “originary violence” and establishing undecidability as the condition of all decisions that achieve the impossible. By taking responsibility for one’s inherent alienation (in a similar vein, Holloway (2010) talks about the “social cohesion of capitalism” that may suck breaks with the hegemonic structures back into the system), one is also prompted to deconstruct the reasons why “things went wrong.” This helps uncover moments, decisions or actions, the assumptions of which turned out to favour a particular view or group and exclude other views or groups. This is the moment when “originary violence” was committed. At the same time, however, as striving to remedy that violence, a political act does recognise the fact that all meaningful decisions (that radically change the ways of social and political organising) are subject to such violence. This is because they are made under the conditions of undecidability – where there are no established rules as to what decision to make and the choice is riddled with contradictory demands.<sup>43</sup> As Derrida says, awareness of undecidability ensures that we “avoid good conscience at all costs” (1993, p. 19).

Political reality and politics are constituted at the level of the Symbolic. A political act, however, connects with the Real, that is the political (see for example: Mouffe, 2005; Schmitt, 2008). This is to mean that the act taps into the necessary alterity of society when there is a disconnect between the social lives of its members and the dominant socio-political structures. This

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<sup>43</sup> For a theoretical discussion of decisions and undecidability, see chapter 3.

disconnect becomes visible when those structures fail to satisfy the needs and desires of large portions of a population.

This helps explain why Occupy participants often appealed to something that is more just than the law or more democratic than the democracy that they had. In the Occupy discourse, many were framing this in terms of people waking up to something that was more real than the reality in which they had been living. Others said that it was morally wrong to obey orders which do not serve the good of their community or country (see for example: Flank, 2011). Social media were flooded with accounts of police misconduct and their brutality, such as famously, the pepper-spraying of peaceful students at UC Davis in California.

The police and municipalities' handling of Occupy in countries like the US demonstrated two important aspects of law and the authorities' relation to it. Firstly, they were quite hypocritical in applying the existing regulations. Mayor Bloomberg's statement on clearing the Zuccotti Park in New York assumed the priority of public's right to "passive recreation" in the park over protesters' right to free speech and assembly. In a peculiar political twist, he claimed to be protecting public space and citizens' First Amendment rights by evicting the Occupy camp from the park and prohibiting protesters from exercising the First Amendment because, as the Mayor saw it, it was about "liv[ing] outside the law" (Office of the Mayor, 2011). Mayor Quan in Oakland followed suit and evicted the encampment because of "safety reasons." Meanwhile, revealed documents show that apart from rumours about national "consultations" by the mayors of some of the biggest US cities about a planned crackdown on Occupy, there was very real cooperation against Occupy at the level of the FBI, Homeland Security Department and local police. They also expose the role of the Domestic Security Alliance Council that is a curious fusion of the above with private-sector actors ('FBI Documents Reveal Secret Nationwide Occupy Monitoring', 2012).

Another aspect of law that Occupy pointed to was that the existing regulations (or their particular interpretations by the authorities) turned out to be unjust and undemocratic because they did not serve the needs and interests of the 99%. Hence, protesters felt they had to break the law in order to be true to democracy and justice itself. Real ethics was understood as rebellious to the rule (Raffoul, 2010). The involvement of individual US marines and war veterans such as Scott Olsen who was shot by the police in Occupy Oakland, was also important in fostering this sense of righteousness.

The state, then, appealed to law and employed its enforcement mechanisms in order to uphold the status quo. The protesters, on the other hand, often referred to the same law (like the First Amendment) but in an attempt to open it up for an interpretation (or change) that would respond to the demands of a society and economy in crisis. The authorities also chose to close the space for protest even further by limiting the scope for action that would constitute a lawful protest. In the midst of Occupy Oakland for example, the City Council proposed (and later passed) a law banning the use of “tools of violence” during protests. These could mean such items as hammers and knives but also water bottles or tripods for cameras. This legislative proposal proved that it was very easy for those in power to make any form of dissent legal or illegal. This also means that there is an originary violence at the core of all power structures – a *coup de force* that haunts them. It “implies that right will never quite be entirely right, but always opened up by this movement of violence at its foundation” (Bennington & Derrida, 1999, p. 204). This “violence at its foundation” is at the same time regrettable and it alone allows change because it supplies movements with real reasons to challenge dominant structures of power. As the solidarity statement with OWS from Cairo read: “we are not protesting. Who is there to protest to? ... occupations must continue, because there is no one left to ask for reform. They must continue because *we are creating what we can no longer wait for*” (‘Solidarity Statement From Cairo’, 2011).

When the violent foundations of the dominant power structures are deconstructed, the undecidability that conditions all political acts is exposed (there is nobody to ask for reform and we are creating something ourselves but we do not and cannot know what it will be). Past undecidability is considered as violence while present undecidability constitutes a positive condition for a political act. It is also often experienced as a necessity, something that “we can no longer wait for.” In the context of grand social and political change, a decision that merits real responsibility cannot be made when it is dictated by knowledge about calculable consequences or deployed automatically following a pre-determined plan (Derrida, 2005). It also cannot be made by the subject in its traditional understanding (Derrida, 2000) because it would make the decision self-transparent. As Derrida puts it:

Between knowledge and decision, a leap is required, even if it necessary to know as much and as well as possible before deciding. But if decision is not only under the authority of my knowledge but also *in my power*, if it is something “possible” for me, if it is only the predicate of what I am and can be, I don’t decide either. That is why I often say, and try to demonstrate, how “my” decision is and ought to be the *decision of the other* in me, a “passive” decision, a decision of the other that does not exonerate me

from any of my responsibility. (Derrida & Roudinesco, 2004, p. 53)

Occupy participants often claimed that they were practising the impossible, that what they have achieved through the movement was impossible, that the fact that it happened at all on the scale that it did was impossible. This is not just discourse or propaganda. They were making decisions in the face of structural undecidability and taking responsibility for them, which is the recipe for a fundamental social change. This change is also impossible in a sense that one cannot yet imagine what it would entail and how the world might look like after it. It escapes the framework of current social reality. The genealogy of change can only be supplied retroactively and subjects' involvement in it can also only be recognised in that way.

### **OCCUPY AND ITS CHALLENGES**

Occupy was an overwhelming and unexpected phenomenon. The movement wanted to distance itself from established political entities and questioned the status quo in quite radical ways. For the participants, however, this was not the whole story. As one occupier from Cork told me when I was interviewing her in 2013: "it's very nice to talk about it, actually, because for the last year, I have been like cringing every time I hear Occupy, and I don't know where that's from" (March 5, 2013 interview). Apart from its ethos and just the thrill of taking part in something that is so big and important, there were also mundane and sometimes frustrating day-to-day realities of non-hierarchical organising. The stories of these temporalities make us aware of the complexity and multidimensionality of this movement situation (chapter 6) as well as the fact that the theoretical criteria of a political act discussed above do not tell the full story of Occupy. In the remaining part of this chapter, I take the analysis of these complexities a step further by highlighting their aporetic character and I attempt to explore what this feature meant for the movement.

During the Grassroots Gathering in Galway (Ireland) in October 2012 (the Gathering brings together people involved in different community campaigns and social movements), I co-organised a workshop about the biggest challenges faced by the Irish Occupies and the most important things that the participants learned for the future. I did not expect it to be very popular as I was well-aware of some of the cynicism and many hurt feelings or "cringing" that were circling around the name Occupy at that time. However, to my surprise (and relief) the room was soon swollen with occupiers from all over Ireland. More than thirty of them participated and through facilitated discussion, they identified twenty three different

challenges. In this section, I would like to explore those of them that I think give the fullest picture of the kind of tensions that are involved in the practice of political acts. Firstly, I would like to describe some of the challenges of the on-the-ground organising in a movement that claimed to be non-hierarchical. Secondly, the tensions between the autonomy of every individual and an ability to work as a group will be examined. I will then move on to discuss the interdependence between participants and the media/state. Finally, the questions about inclusion and exclusion in the movement will be described.

### **Challenges of non-hierarchical organising**

In the previous section, I claimed that the Occupy movement came about unintentionally – certainly when it comes to its scale and intensity. Importantly, however, this is not to say that it was simply a spontaneous outburst of repressed hyperpoliticisation. Occupy would not have happened if it had not been for the immense organisational effort of its participants. The movement put in place some very elaborate structures and processes in order to sustain itself and remain non-hierarchical and directly democratic (see for example: Szolucha, 2013). The two immediate concerns that were raised in this context were: first, do we as participants know how to organise to affect social change? And second, what is it that we want to achieve and do we have to have an alternative plan for a world “after Occupy”?

Regarding the former, the issue of informal hierarchies came out in all participants’ experiences. These hierarchies were usually experience-based (Deseriis & Dean, 2011), which meant that the more time and work a person was willing and able to commit to Occupy, the longer they have been camping out, or the more experienced activists they were, the more their voice was respected. As this member of the facilitation and alternative economies committees in Occupy Oakland told me:

There were certainly prominent voices at the GA – folks who you could tell that, when they spoke, that it meant more. I think there is something really subtle about the way it worked cause it wasn’t like there was some official recognition of these opinions... You could tell when certain people would like to promote something, you’ll be like “oh, OK – this is gonna be the thing.” Whereas if somebody who nobody knew came in and was like: ‘hey, I want to occupy a building tomorrow,’ everybody would be like: “yeah, right.” Whereas if the more established folks came and said: “all right, this is what we’re doing tomorrow,” everybody would be like: “OK, I got it. I’ll adjust my schedule to make sure to be there.” ... And part of it is that certain folks have a reputation for getting things done. I guess what I’m

saying is that it was a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy. If everybody thinks that they are gonna succeed, then everybody shows up and they succeed. (June 20, 2012 interview B)

The issue with informal hierarchies, however, was paradoxical. On the one hand, the challenge was that there were hidden hierarchies between its members. On the other – that there was a negative fetishisation of hierarchy. The occupiers did not want hierarchies and at the same time, they did want them (October 13, 2012 notes).

Certainly, part of this inconsistency can be explained by different political persuasions of the participants. Some seemed to be fully committed to anti-authoritarian ways of organising while others regarded hierarchies as strategically necessary. However, it was overwhelmingly the people who were committed to the non-hierarchical ethos that also to some extent accepted certain power structures, like this member of Occupy Oakland explains:

The other important thing is what is getting discussed in those meetings? There are really important topics that we need to decide but they are not being discussed in the meetings in general. I mean they sort of they are but most of the really important topics are either gonna be decided in committees or there is a camp meeting which is during the day when I'm at work and other people are at work. And so that's weird that here is this whole thing – we're all about direct democracy but, in fact, you quickly realise that there is like a hidden power structure. You know, *I knew that there was a hidden power structure but I wasn't all that sore about it exactly cause I kinda understood that there is larger things.* But you really realise that OK, that's what's happening and it's not that surprising but that's kind of what's happening. (June 19, 2012 interview B)

This member of Occupy Oakland accepted certain hierarchies because he thought there were other things that the movement wanted to achieve, so Occupy would not be harmed by temporarily turning a blind eye to these power imbalances. However, not everybody wanted to agree with this logic. As an occupier from Cork said: “that's why people got maybe annoyed at the end. They'd be saying that we have this space outside of capitalism... and yet this stuff is still happening. So people just assumed that it wouldn't... they assumed that because it was stated and... you wanted it to be different, that it was” (March 5, 2013 interview). There was then a real gap between the ethos and explicit organisational structures of the movement on the one hand, and how things worked in on the ground on the other.

People responded differently to this gap. Some accepted it and recognised how difficult it was in practice to organise in non-hierarchical ways. They also became aware that they did not really know how to organise this unusual form of protest that is a long-term occupation in a

city centre (March 5, 2013 interview). Others, however, wanted to overcome this non-ideal embodiment of direct democracy. Within the internal temporality of Occupy, this led in two directions: either towards deradicalisation of demands, or an insistence for a need to work out and propose a (grand) alternative plan for the reality after Occupy.

These different responses can be understood in terms of people's relation to fantasy, i.e. depending on whether you accept mundane pleasures and compromises or reject them for the sake of an anticipated ideal (Hurst, 2008), you will either accept or reject the claim that all meanings and institutionalisations always fail to measure up to our expectations and to the Real. "There is no Other of the Other" (Lacan, 2006, p. 688), which is also a very anti-authoritarian premise in that it acknowledges that no knowledge or a position of power can form the basis of a social construction, or at least not once and for all (Lacan, 1999). And as discussed earlier in sections about undecidability and the Real, Derrida and Lacan would claim that this is something positive and actually, a condition for progressive social change.

Throughout its existence, Occupy struggled with the question of what it was to achieve. Nobody actually knew. Some thought that the movement should define what it was and what its aims were. As one of the participants wrote after the 100<sup>th</sup> day of ODS:

[ODS] needs to be able to articulate a clear and coherent vision of an alternative to our deeply unequal and unjust society, or risk being left behind in the wake of those who can... #OccupyDameStreet has spent three months establishing its voice, now it needs to start using it. (Johnson, 2012)

Others were concerned that this refusal (or inability) to lay out a positive plan for change would make Occupy irrelevant. Naomi Klein (2012) said for example: "to make things better, there has to be a positive demand... My worry is that ... the movement risks defining itself by what it is not, rather than what it is or, more importantly, might become." Another challenge of non-hierarchical organising, apart from the inevitability of informal hierarchies emerging, was then that there was always pressure on affecting a temporal closure that would give a definite meaning and aim to our struggles

Part of the reason why it was so difficult to agree on a positive programme was the movement's emphasis on collective, non-hierarchical decision-making. Some have suggested that the refusal to formulate demands was not a strategic choice but reflected Occupy's organisational deadlock (Deseriis & Dean, 2011). This is only partially true because some of the Occupies such as in Dublin, Cork and Chicago did agree on a set of demands. Moreover, the

issue of demands has to be distinguished from the calls for a plan for affecting change on a grand scale.

ODS, for example, had four demands: they wanted (1) the IMF and the European Central Bank out of Irish affairs, (2) that the private debt burdened on the Irish population be lifted, (3) that the natural resources off the Irish coast be returned to the control of the Irish people, and (4) real participatory democracy for all. By formulating these demands in the early days of the encampment on Dame Street, its participants strived to define themselves and invite the rest of the 99% to a conversation about these issues. The demands were not explicitly directed towards any established political body. They were not a list of requests and they did not formulate a plan how to achieve any of their goals. So while it *was* possible for various Occupies to agree on a set of demands, the movement as a whole was far from proposing a plan of how to get what they demanded.

I imagine that the majority of Irish citizens would agree with at least some of ODS demands. However, there could be many ideas on how to actually accomplish any one of them. If there was one plan to do that, it would have to be agreed to by the 99%. Collective discussion and consensus decision-making were ideally supposed to facilitate that discussion.

### **Autonomy versus community of decision-making**

The Occupy movement was inviting the 99% to join the conversation about how to bring about real social change. It was also distancing itself from established political entities such as parties and traditional, representative forms of democracy. Consensus decision-making was based on the presumption that every person participated in it as an *individual* and not a member of any particular organisation or body. Each participant's voice was to be respected and the equality of all should be ensured.

When all these expectations were channelled through this vessel that is the consensus and the GA process, movement participants soon started to experience impatience, lack of trust (chapter 5) and respect for one another as failures of this model (Flank, 2011). As one of the facilitators in Occupy Oakland told me, people's need for autonomy consistently overshadowed their ability to agree as a group (June 23, 2012 interview). An ODS participant conceived of the drawbacks of consensus in Ireland in historical terms:



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consensus in Ireland historically ... what has that meant here? And what has leadership meant here? It means that one's right and one's wrong. Like the person in power decides whatever one has to come to consensus on. So that's why it's very difficult for people to give up to compromise, particularly political activists. (April 24, 2012 interview)

Perhaps there would not have been so much emphasis on individual autonomy if the movement had not felt that it needed to distance itself radically from the traditional ways of doing politics based on parties and representation. This led to the insistence on including everyone "as an individual," which exacerbated many tensions and suspicions around the participation of party and union members. Were they really there in their capacity as individuals, or did they come to promote a certain party line? These questions could also be extended to include circles of friends, as this occupier from Cork points out: "you felt a sort of loyalty or an allegiance to your friends but also ... in sort of search for political clarity there" (March 9, 2013 interview A). Since the dilemmas about the real degree of individual autonomy at any one point were impossible to solve, Occupy participants became aware of how abstract the demand for autonomy of each individual was. As this member of the food group in Occupy Cork said: "what I thought the GA was, was that you would come in and from this very organic, pure space, everyone debates their side. But it's not, because you're debating something else as well what's gone outside of it so everything has to do with what happens outside of the General Assembly too. It just doesn't happen in a vacuum" (March 5, 2013 interview).

In Dublin, the tension between individuality and collective action persisted. One of ODS members put it succinctly:

How are things going to change if we don't talk to people who have different solutions? That's great – we need different solutions. There's no one solution. If we can't come together – whatever it is called – Occupy Dame Street or Dublin Occupy Network [a group set up by some former members of ODS who walked away from the camp in November 2011]. Come together – my God – what's the point? Because then what you're doing is becoming political parties and fuck that! Really and truly! If that's what you're about – why don't you go and join the fucking Sinn Fein [Irish republican party] and the SWP? You'd be right at home. (April 24, 2012 interview)

The emphasis on individuality was perceived as exclusionary and contrary to Occupy's ethos of openness. As that participant claimed, unlike political parties the movement should not be fixated on one grand solution that everybody had to adopt. Importantly, she also thought that ODS would behave like a political party if it refused to include parties (like the SWP) in the

conversation. Paradoxically, through radical separation of ODS from political parties, Occupy was risking behaving like one.

A similar dynamic could be observed in Occupy Oakland with respect to the ways in which it wanted to distance itself from the state and its agencies. It so much wanted to delegitimise the actions of the police for example, that it re-enacted the roles predetermined for it in the mainstream narratives of senseless destruction and indiscriminate violence (June 25, 2012 interview B). The distancing of Occupy Oakland from the state was played out in Occupy's rejection of the principle of non-violence and its adoption of diversity of tactics. Ideally, diversity of tactics is not synonymous with the "everything goes" attitude. Rather, it designates a set of principles of collective organising that stress decentralisation, autonomy of every group and coordination. Diversity of tactics also makes use of the separation of time and space during protest actions (Graeber, 2009; Starhawk, 2002). In Occupy Oakland, diversity of tactics signified its little more antagonistic edge, when compared to other sister occupations, and was continuing the rich activist history of the area. The principle of diversity meant that targeted property destruction and other black bloc tactics were "allowed" and should be expected at different movement actions.

In a midst of a stand-off between the protesters and the police, however, both sides become so entangled in the situation that it is easy to forget what the primary goal of the action really is. "Our unwillingness to call it a day and risk the feelings of anticlimax and defeat was a real weakness. We need to be willing to make strategic retreats" ('Statement from the J28 Tactical Team', n.d.). This is how the Occupy Oakland tactics committee summarised its stance during the J28 action when the movement attempted to take over the abandoned Kaiser Convention Center. However, black bloc tactics were still being used under the banner of Occupy Oakland more than six months after January 28, 2012, when they were criticised again for being counter-revolutionary and becoming irrelevant and unintelligible to the needs of the 99% ('Boots critiques yesterday's Black Bloc action', 2012). It was a difficult balance to strike – to be radical and "outside the state" and at the same time, responsive and understanding of the immediate concerns and needs of ordinary people who have to deal with the agencies of the state on the day-to-day basis. Instead of making the state illegitimate and irrelevant, then, some actions of Occupy Oakland where diversity of tactics was employed, actually informed the media's prescribed spectacles and reinforced the state by making black bloc groups seemingly irrelevant to the 99%.

### **The 99% - the vicissitudes of radical inclusion**

The “we are the 99%” slogan that Occupy around the world adopted, originated as a statement of vast (and growing) inequalities in the US society (Henwood & The Congressional Budget Office, 2011). Already in 2006 the UN reported that the world’s richest 1% were also controlling 40% of global wealth. Subsequently the 99-1% division began to signify at least two more things. Firstly, it was a call for democratic control over the political process by the overwhelming majority in societies that have witnessed the increasing influence of money on politics. Secondly, it expressed the movement’s intention to be radically inclusive. By staging an open and self-governing occupation and employing participatory democracy, Occupy was supposed to be a space where “we accept all parts of our society and all parts of ourselves” (April 24, 2012 interview).

It soon became apparent, however, that it is very difficult to live up to this associational metaphor. Some of the challenges that the occupiers at the workshop in Galway mentioned in this context were: anti-social behaviour, problems with alcohol, personality clashes, dominance of men, security, questions about whether it was appropriate and sustainable to think about the camps as filling the gap in state services, and the lack of analysis of what the 99% actually meant (October 13, 2012 notes). There was an acknowledgement that if it was going to be the 99%, the Occupy space would have to include everyone. However, as this member of Occupy Cork said: “we have all these critiques of what capitalism does to people and then we come to Occupy and we’re like ‘oh my god, this person is crazy. How do we deal with them?’” (March 5, 2013 interview). If persuasion failed, one strategy was exclusion.

To be sure, whenever there was a discussion about excluding somebody from the camp, it would have to be for a significant reason. In ODS, for example, one male member was asked to leave the camp after he was accused of harassment. Other cases that were discussed concerned persons who for example: were under the age of 18, repeatedly anti-social, or with a past in organisations displaying fascist ideals. When it started, Occupy did not have any rules for excluding any of its participants. Soon however, safer space policies were drawn up in many Occupies in order to set some basic guidelines on how to make the encampments “a comfortable and positive space.” Their aim was to make people appreciate the fact that everybody’s actions have “an effect on the collective environment and others around you.” Safer space policies recognised different forms of oppression and discrimination from which people suffer. In ODS, they also asked that people’s emotional and physical boundaries be

respected and underscored mutual responsibility for maintaining the camp as a “platform for political discussion and organisation for everyone – everyone should feel they have a right to participate to whatever degree is possible for them” (November 16, 2011 notes).

Obviously, the safer space policy by itself did not eliminate drug dealing or violent interactions. In ODS, it was also not clear how it should be enforced or whether it could be enforced at all. For example, what to do when somebody who was asked to leave, came back to the camp a few days later? The policy was then more like a statement of principles but since it was adopted by consensus, it provided an explicit tool for flagging anti-social or discriminatory behaviour as unacceptable and harming to the movement. *Paradoxically then, it established limits to inclusion in order to keep Occupy as inclusive as possible, even if that meant excluding some of the 99%.*

Disagreements about the imperial and colonial connotations of the word “occupy” exemplify another dimension of the inclusion/exclusion conundrum. In November 2011, a proposal was put forward to change the name of Occupy Oakland to Decolonize Oakland in recognition of the rights of the indigenous people. Since the movement invited people who were experiencing all forms of oppression, adopting a name that was so insensitive to this particular type of domination, seemed highly inappropriate. The proposal did not pass the supermajority vote in the GA but the results still show that there was huge support for the name change (Oakland had a 90% threshold and the proposal gained 68.5% of votes). Nevertheless, there was a huge outcry after the Assembly and many accusations of racism were then thrown at the camp, as if it was a group of ignorant and privileged people and not a vast majority of GA attendees who understood and supported the concerns of the indigenous people.

At the core of this dispute was the question of how much actually can a name be a barrier to participation? As one member of the security group in Occupy Oakland told me, the entire debate seemed like a part of “who’s the most oppressed games.” The ones who proposed the name change did that from the position of racial and indigenous oppression, whereas those who accepted the results of the vote felt that the proposal was made from a position of privilege and high cultural capital. There was a feeling that people got too invested in the semantics (June 18, 2012 interview) and that the proposal did not resonate with the rank and file people of colour (June 27, 2012 interview Ap3).

This story exemplifies the complexity of the movement situation. It becomes virtually

impossible to conclude what the decision not to change the name from Occupy to Decolonize meant for its ethos of radical inclusion. What part of the 99% did the people who felt excluded represent? Did the name really influence participation of people of colour and indigenous people? A lot of these things were not clear but they testified to the fact of how difficult it was to find and sustain unity in this movement. It also demonstrated that the unity of the 99% cannot be just assumed but might need to be deliberately fostered and cared for. This, however, was far from a straightforward task.

Many GA attendees soon realised that the injunction to engage with every voice was deeply problematic. Since the movement was radically inclusive, it meant that decision-making was a long and laborious process that involved more or less heated deliberations where political views and personalities clashed frequently. It could be a chaotic space as this member of the facilitation committee in Occupy Oakland describes:

[we did not know] how to cope with a situation where there is somebody just acting out and, you know, our default is to allow people to have their voice be heard so how do we do that in a way that's not subjecting everybody else to a whole bunch of stuff that they don't want to hear or see? I don't come from a facilitation background so I don't know if there is a way to facilitate differently to make that kind of stuff not happen. I experienced a GA when somebody else was facilitating once, and they tried to be a little too responsive to the needs of the crowd and then the whole thing became just complete chaos... Something would happen and he'd be like: "well, OK. Let's see what the crowd wants to do here." So then it was just every step of the way, we'd have to stop and vote on something and at times we didn't even know what it was that we were voting on and what decision had been made because it just got so confusing. (June 25, 2012 interview A)

In order for the decision-making process to remain at least somewhat operative and productive, it became understood among experienced facilitators that they should silence the voices that were abusive, and respectfully "get over" the voices that were off topic, conspiracy theory or mainstream. This was to protect the democratic debate and allow it to go forward instead of going off on a tangent and discouraging everybody from participating, which could lead to a quick dissipation of the movement and be an impediment to democracy itself. Hence and again paradoxically, some voices were cut off in order to sustain the democratic debate and the movement itself.

### **OCCUPY AND ITS APORIAS**

Having outlined how the Occupy movement “fulfils” the criteria of the political act and subsequently, how it sometimes failed to fully live up to them, I will now discuss what this disjunction means for Occupy. I will analyse three aporias that the challenges described in the previous section point to. I understand an aporia to mean an impasse of undecidability usually between contradictory demands, premises or solutions. An aporia also marks the point at which the system undermines its own – seemingly stable – foundations. The three aporias that I want to analyse here are: (1) the ideal and non-ideal, and between closure/fixation and openness, (2) between autonomy and dependence, and (3) between unity and singularity.

#### **Democracy is to-come**

The Occupy phenomenon was unexpected and unintentional in that there was not any grand plan for a global wave of protest against representative democracy and financial capitalism prior to the emergence of this wave of which the movement was a part. Nonetheless, it involved immense human effort to organise it. Occupy claimed to be non-hierarchical, refused to make demands on the state, and articulated the needs of the 99% through a participatory and direct democratic process. The everyday reality of the movement was, however, more complex. Informal hierarchies soon emerged and prompted different responses that could not be simply understood by referring to a person’s investment in the ideals of leaderless organising. Moreover, there were many participants and sympathetic observers who urged the movement to develop a positive plan for social change, lest it became irrelevant. These were calls for affecting a kind of closure to the fluid deliberation and strategising processes in Occupy for the sake of entering the political process. The aporia that was endured in this case is one between ideal and non-ideal, closure and openness.

The experience of Occupy shows that the terms in each of these binaries are contaminated by their opposite. The structure of decision is aporetic when people find themselves caught up in a binary setup and try to do the impossible – to “act with equal justice to both sides” (Hurst, 2008, p. 325). Organising in non-hierarchical ways and remaining open to the diverse needs of the 99% by rejecting any blueprint for grand social change were two of the main characteristics of direct democracy. At the same time, they were seen as obstacles to the further development of the movement. Throughout its existence, Occupy negotiated between its uncompromising

commitment to direct democracy and an understanding that obsessive fixation on its ideals could be harmful to the movement and perhaps lead it to subside altogether.

The movement, then, had to make decisions in the absence of any clear directives, in the face of a choice between interdependent options, and this is what made its actions political and authentic. The act is not about a fulfilment of any theoretical criteria but the lived experience of enduring an aporia, not overcoming it or stopping at it (Derrida, 1993), but acting in the face of it.

Enduring the aporia was possible because Occupy did not want to take over state power. It did not portray itself as the only way to social salvation, but recognised different paths to change. It aimed to start a conversation, develop political sophistication and leadership, and empower people in radical ways. Temporalisation and an understanding that the political and social contexts are highly malleable and revisable may be recipes for enduring the aporia between the ideal and non-ideal. Importantly, this attitude is not synonymous with conformity. In fact, it lays bare the mutual dependence of conformism and utopianism. Every idealistic stance risks becoming a force that requires one to blindly apply certain predetermined rules to all situations. When ideological fixation makes its way to the positions of power, it then no longer questions the validity of its rules but enforces attitudes that are conformist to the newly established status quo. The experience of an aporia, on the other hand, accepts neither conformism nor utopianism as “better” than the other and by doing so, it draws one’s attention to the living temporalities of the movement, all that is excluded from the dominant systems, and the radical alterity of the other. It is like Derrida’s democracy-to-come that is not simply a regulative idea, but an urgent task that people inherit as a promise. It is worthwhile to quote Derrida at some length here:

It would be too easy to show that, measured by the failure to establish liberal democracy, the gap between fact and ideal essence does not show up only in ... so-called primitive forms of government, theocracy, and military dictatorship... But this failure and this gap also characterize, *a priori* and by definition, *all* democracies, including the oldest and most stable of so-called Western democracies. At stake here is the very concept of democracy as concept of a promise that can only arise in such a *diastema* (failure, inadequation, disjunction, disadjustment, being “out of joint”). That is why we always propose to speak of a democracy *to come*, not of a *future* democracy in the future present, not even of a regulating idea, in the Kantian sense, or of a utopia—at least to the extent that their inaccessibility would still retain the temporal form of a *future present*, of a future modality of the *living present*. (Derrida, 2006, pp. 80–81)

It is only possible to know that there may be progressive political change (democracy-to-come) when the current system fails, revealing the disconnect between politics and social reality. The concept of what democracy really is, is actually lacking. “Democracy is defined, as is the very ideal of democracy, by this lack of the proper and the selfsame” (Derrida, 2005, p. 34). Hence, democracy remains to-come.

Democracy is to-come not because it is constantly failing to live up to a set ideal. It is to-come not because all it needs is a few adjustments that could easily be made through the channels that are either currently available or will be in a “future present” – a little perfected version of the current system in the future. Instead, democracy is to-come because it is open to a redefinition of the political system as a whole, to a political act that it cannot know of before it has happened. Democracy is inherently temporal also because it is the only system that is based on the principle of constant perfectibility and self-critique. Hence, democracy’s intrinsic relation to historicity that stems from its always aporetic structure that in the case of Occupy was exemplified in the paradoxes surrounding the questions of hierarchies and grand plans for social change. Democracy is a constant play between various sedimentations and institutionalisations, and a radical openness to the unforeseeable political acts. By making decisions in the face of this structure of play without settling for any of the two sides, Occupy acted in authentically political ways.

### **Chance is retroactive**

From the beginning, Occupy questioned the legitimacy of representative democracy and the state. This was manifested in the way that the movement tried to distance itself from established political entities such as parties, and state agencies like the police. Participants valued individual autonomy instead of party allegiance, and diversity of tactics instead of state’s power that restricts allowed forms of protest. The lived experience of the occupiers, however, showed that complete individual autonomy is impossible and that opposing and isolating oneself from parties may be even uncannily analogous to what parties do. Similarly, using black bloc tactics may also play into media’s and state’s hands. The protesters may be reduced to pawns in a passion play prescribed by the media and have their radical tactics dismissed as irrelevant to the everyday needs of the 99%. Hence, another aporia that Occupy endured was one between autonomy and dependence.



The cases described in the previous section demonstrate how the movement chose autonomy instead of compromise but there were obviously examples when the opposite happened too. What is common to both is that this aporia follows the dynamics of real responsibility. Whether they chose autonomy or compromise, Occupy participants assumed responsibility for their decision. When they subsequently reflected on its outcomes, different occupiers would recognise the ways in which the decision was helpful or unhelpful to the movement. Their radical self-critique testifies to the fact that they took real responsibility for their decisions (Derrida, 2000).

Importantly, these judgements were made after, not prior or even during the event or action and as such their meaning is a historical product. It works like a signifier in a sentence – one cannot tell what it means before one hears the last word in that sentence. The meaning is then provided by the entire semantic context (Dor, 1998; Fink, 1995; Lacan, 1997). Logically, in an encounter with a political act, subject's involvement in it is also brought about retroactively. Taking real responsibility, the subject determines retrospectively which causes determined it and accepts them as its own (Žižek, 2006). The relation between autonomy and dependence, the outside and the inside of the dominant Symbolic system is then exploded. Traditional notions of individual autonomy fail in the face of real responsibility.

This is important for understanding the aporetic relation between autonomy and compromise because it brings to light the nature of how we may think about our scope for action. Firstly, the paradoxical intercontamination of autonomy and dependence in Occupy showed that the boundaries between them are fluid and blurred. By attempting to be outside of the system, one risks behaving like a part of it. Radical action is then never completely autonomous. Secondly, what the participants assumed responsibility for and posited as the causes of their actions, are actually results of ontological openness that can only appear retroactively. Contingency and probability emerge after the subject knows its actions; it is a case of "self-referentiality of knowledge" (Žižek, 2006, p. 208). The consequences of choosing autonomy or dependence as well as what each of them can actually become, are revealed to the subject only after the event. Thirdly, the aporia can never be experienced as such (Derrida, 1993). In Occupy, the aporia between autonomy and dependence was experienced as passion, resistance and an expression of a remainder that questioned the accountability of representative democracy and the power of the state. It was not endured as what it essentially is – an impossible deadlock. Rather, exposed to the realities of the movement, concrete

decisions were made on the spot and actions followed through. Even the aporetic choice between autonomy and dependence can also only be produced retroactively. In radical political action, there are no prior “opportunities.” Instead, chance is retroactive.

### **Real democracy**

The Occupy movement unravelled a whole range of challenges that radical inclusion raises. The unity that was proclaimed through the slogan “we are the 99%” was to account for the undemocratic nature of liberal representative democracy that casted that overwhelming majority to the margins of political decision-making, granting most influence to those with most money. However, what direct democratic processes and the realities of living in the Occupy camps demonstrated was that “the 99%” was far from homogeneous. The injunction to include everyone soon became a challenge that was dealt with by careful exclusion or facilitation. This dimension of Occupy signifies the aporia between unity and singularity.

One of the biggest weaknesses of the movement’s decision-making was that everyone could just show up and *sway the vote* (June 29, 2012 interview). This was why ODS stuck to the 100% consensus rule so that other groups could not just mobilise, attend a GA and fundamentally change the nature of the movement (Flood, 2011a). Whatever the method: exclusion, skilful facilitation, charisma, informal hierarchies etc., the participants were searching for ways in which Occupy would be democratic and yet radical and different. As this participant of Occupy Oakland put it: “What do you really want – do you want everybody to agree or do you want this to be really interesting? If everybody participated, it might have been a lot more moderate and less interesting” (June 20, 2012 interview B). These kinds of dilemmas are characteristic of democracy. This is because it is impossible to speak of democracy *itself* or an authentic democracy as its concept and practice are always contaminated by its opposite. As Derrida puts it:

must a democracy leave free and in a position to exercise power those who risk mounting as assault on democratic freedoms and putting an end to democratic freedom in the name of democracy and of the majority that they might actually be able to rally round to their cause? Who, then, can take it upon him- or herself, and with what means, to speak from one side or another of this front, of democracy *itself...*, that is presently and forever lacking? (Derrida, 2005, p. 34)

A state can either allow anti-democratic forces to seize power by democratic means or it may

try to prevent it using undemocratic procedures (Patton, 2007). Similarly, direct democracy in Occupy could only be protected by ensuring that *swaying the vote* was virtually impossible. Even if the possibility of swaying the vote was only hypothetical, it points to the internal limit to all unity and symbolisation. In Lacanese, it points to the Real. The tensions between unity and singularity are central to democracy.

There is no democracy without respect for irreducible singularity or alterity, but there is no democracy ... without the calculation of majorities, without identifiable, stabilizable, representable subjects, all equal. These two laws are irreducible one to the other... political desire is forever borne by the disjunction of these two laws. (Derrida, 2000, p. 22)

It is important that Occupy faced the aporia between unity and singularity because it helped its participants dispel the fantasy that if it was not for the corrupted political system and greedy bankers, there would be some ideal union of all people. The experience of Occupy shows that there is no easy community of the 99% that can just be taken for granted (and we have not even started to talk about the inclusion of those of the 99% who live in favelas or lack any political rights, for example). The movement made a huge leap forward in political debate by questioning the viability of people's blind attachment to representative, party democracy. By practising direct democracy, the movement revealed the hidden underside of all concepts of democracy, highlighting and negotiating the essentially ambiguous nature of any and all judgements about what the content of democracy actually is.

All of those aspects of democracy were brought to light in a moment when there was a sudden crack in the dominant symbolic structures, when the movement was tapping into the disconnect between the political system and its remainder. This is what I call real democracy. It was a moment when they encountered the Real – the people were overwhelmed by countless possibilities and impossibilities that came to the fore. There was a feeling that the time was ripe for a new beginning but nobody knew how it would look like, how to harness all that energy and effect that new beginning. Real democracy in this understanding does not merely signify “substantive” as opposed to the “void” liberal representational form of democracy. Instead of idealistic or pragmatic content, real democracy, in my usage, affirms various inconsistencies and uncertainties that are revealed through people's lived experience. It also points to the messiness, temporality and singularity where others would see or wish for unity.

**TOMORROW, IT'S BACK TO THE STREETS – AGAIN AND AGAIN?**

The lessons for future political engagement that the above aporias point to can be then summarised as follows:

- Be ideological but avoid ideological over-investment. Engage in a play of democracy-to-come. Be open to the unforeseeable.
- Appreciate that the scope for radical action is always broader than you may expect. Do not wait for an opportunity to arise but remember that chance is retroactive. Be prepared to take real responsibility for what comes and appreciate the fact that you are never completely outside of the system and individually autonomous.
- Remember that there is no “authentic” democracy and its practice is bound to be fraught with inconsistencies and a lack of problem-free unity. This is real democracy. Look at the world through the lens of the remainder of the dominant systems. Keep an eye on the cracks in the Symbolic and welcome new beginnings.

As the Occupy experience demonstrates, the above aporias do not signify a stalemate that paralysed the movement. Rather, they mark a limit through which that part of reality that is excluded from the dominant symbolic construction announces itself in an affirmative fashion (Raffoul, 2010). This is also the mode of what I have come to call real politics. Real politics connects to the Real of the political sphere, i.e. the political. It entails acceptance of its constitutive lack, antagonism and alterity. There are two ways of conceiving of this lack as there are two ways of understanding the Real. One is that it keeps re-emerging and disturbing the dominant socio-political structures and it is a limit to any totalisation because any finite system cannot master the infinite empirical richness of social relations. The other understanding of this lack, and one that Derrida and Lacan are more interested in, is that it re-emerges as a reminder that subjects are always already operating within a field that excludes totalisation (there is already an exclusion at the basis of the structures we are born into). The subjects are also always already alienated – by their immersion in the dominant discourses, power balances and in the last (Lacanian) analysis – in the structure of language itself. Lack is not a derivative of the infinite richness of social life because there is no centre that would be outside of social life itself to attest to this richness before the lack actually emerges (Derrida, 2001).

Lack re-emerges every time social and political structures are about to become destabilised

and dislocated. Lack, then, facilitates social change. If this re-emergence is inevitable, what does it mean for people's future political engagement? Does it mean that taking to the streets to enforce radical change will remain not only a prevailing and increasingly frequent (della Porta, 2013; Ortiz, Burke, Berrada, & Cortés, 2013) social phenomenon, but also the only way to enact real transformation? In other words, does that mean that tomorrow it is back to the streets again... and again?

A logical conclusion to this chapter would be to put the above sentence in the affirmative and assume the inevitable re-emergence of lack and subsequently, the Master signifier, i.e. a new system of social relations that claims full representation and institutes a new order of subjection. However, the analysis of the aporias that is performed from a place of an embedded subject and not from a centre or a position of gaze that is beyond and above the concrete situation and time, makes one appreciate the fact that social change does not happen automatically but requires immense human effort. This is why I would like to pose that sentence as a question here since the conclusion about the re-emerging lack has very real consequences for the nature of people's political involvement. If it is perpetually back to the streets, does it mean that we are doomed to a life of constant strife against conservative impulses? Or, if the re-emergence of lack is institutionalised, are we facing a prospect of living in a perpetual hyperpolitical state of mind and body? Would we like it? Would it be sustainable?

There is some debate on this topic within the so-called Lacanian left. There have been many attempts at marrying the insights from the political act with a radical democratic project. The aim would be to move beyond politics based on fantasy that has also proven quite unresponsive and insensitive to contingency of socio-political reality (Stavrakakis, 2010). Stavrakakis (1999) proposed post-fantasmatic politics as an example of democratic politics that would establish structures which would recognise their own limits and the impossibility of absolute closure. For this to become possible, however, a fundamental transformation would need to take place that would change the subject's relation to fantasy. In post-fantasmatic politics, the subject would need to distance itself from fantasy and all guarantees that accompany ideological over-investment. Additionally, there would have to be a shift in the subject's mode of enjoyment (Glynos, 2008). The question remains, however, can lack really "acquire a non-essentialist positive existence and an affective value able to attract and move" (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 278)?

For Stavrakakis (1999) and some others, this may be possible if we got rid of the ideal of harmony that is currently hegemonic in Western societies. An ideal, that he claims, is incompatible with democracy. The recognition of the contingent and transient character of all social constructs can also be enjoyed through what Lacan calls, feminine *jouissance* (Stavrakakis, 2007). It is partial enjoyment that accepts lack. By rejecting the fantasy of complete enjoyment, the subject has to learn how to enjoy its own lack (McGowan, 2004).

On the other hand, some seem to remain unconvinced by this theoretical programme for a post-fantasmatic politics. Žižek (2006), for instance, is sceptical about institutionalising a possibility of a direct contact with the Real. He seems to accept as inevitable the unending cycle of the political act and the establishment of a new order of representation and subjection. The only change that can be affected in this way would stem from the structural differences between the new and old orders and their fantasmatic supports.

Why such two divergent outlooks within one theoretical current? I think that the difference is a consequence of how Stavrakakis and Žižek understand the relation between impossibility (awareness of ultimate contingency and inescapably aporetic nature of democracy) and necessity (need for institutionalised social arrangements). For the former, post-fantasmatic politics is an attempt to reconcile the two in an ethical way. For the latter, there is no intrinsic “need” for sedimentations of social reality. Rather, it is simply already an a priori condition of our existence. There is no inherent necessity for human alienation but it is a fact of life as all are at least alienated in language. The post-fantasmatic politics, however appealing, may be a part of a dream for total transparency (Žižek, 2004, 2006). By institutionalising the recognition of real limits of any political system, are we opening the social space up for more political acts that have no external guarantee? Or, are we deradicalising the potential of the act, hyperpoliticising our lives and creating excuses for possible failures?

What does this dilemma mean for Occupy participants and others who are engaged in political activism? Was Occupy a political act-in-anticipation of a fundamental change in the nature of politics itself or a rehearsal before the establishment of a new system of social relations, based on some master discourse of the 99%, or none of those? It may be easier to get over some of “it depends” and “too early to tell” if one looks concretely at one of the defining aspects of the movement, namely direct participatory democracy.

Occupy very clearly challenged the dominant economic and political system in its entirety. The

system has also lost its automatic legitimacy and self-evidence to the extent that its critiques are now formulated by mainstream politicians such as José Manuel Barroso or President Higgins in Ireland, and indeed even the pope. The media discourse is if not anti-capitalist, then at least innately suspicious of capitalism. What used to be the mantras of embittered ideologues whispered in meetings of radicals, is now more often common knowledge. Occupy also aimed to provide a palpable experience of an alternative as practised through participatory democratic processes. Can direct and participatory democracy become an actual alternative to representative democracy? To what degree may it actually be universalised? Can it be one of the mechanisms of post-fantasmatic politics were it ever operationalised? Or is it only a mirage of self-transparent and non-alienated decision-making that cannot exist as such? As a way of answering and at the same time, leaving the issue unresolved, I would only note that in reality, participatory democracy is not a non-alienated and self-transparent form of making decisions. Where does that leave one with respect to the opening that Occupy has imposed on its participants? Perhaps there are already answers to this question but we have not yet come up with appropriate realities and categories to make sense of them.

## **DIRECT DEMOCRACY IN OCCUPY:**

### History, reality, future

From Tahrir in Egypt, Puerta del Sol in Spain and Syntagma in Greece to the Occupy movement in countless city plazas in the United States and other countries, in 2011 thousands of people assembled together to discuss and act in public. For many Occupy participants, the experience of taking part in direct decision-making was "new" and perceived as a radical break with most of what they had known about politics. In contrast to the inadequacies of representative democracy based on delegation, the rules of direct decision-making introduced in the movement were associated with equality, inclusion and transparency. Direct democracy aimed to restore the feeling that one was in control of one's life and that politics could be done without money and outside of party command. In this chapter, I wish to explore the idea that what is new about this revival of direct democracy is the *return* of an ambitious notion that participatory decision-making should describe a political system rather than merely a particular mode of movements' internal organising practices.

Direct and participatory democracy are not new concepts. Nor are they specific to the Western context. Among its modern influences are radical pacifism, the American civil rights movement, upheavals of 1968, radical feminism, anti-war, anti-nuclear, gay and lesbian movements, and the alter-globalisation movement. Elements of radically democratic self-governance were also present in the 1980 uprising in South Korea, Tiananmen Square protests in 1989, Argentina's popular assemblies and workers' cooperatives occupations around its economic crisis of 1998-2002, and in the organising of the movements of shack dwellers in South Africa. The values of direct democracy are also in line with the principles of Peoples' Global Action – a network for co-ordination of actions against corporate domination, inspired by the Zapatistas and set up in 1998 by grassroots movements from around the world.

Symbolic associations, as well as rationales of participatory democracy, shifted constantly throughout history and movements. Once seen in the US as pragmatic, political and black, it was later treated with contempt as ideological, individualistic and white (Polletta, 2004, 2005). Quakers practised consensus decision-making because they were motivated by their religious faith. For the civil rights movement, participatory democracy was a pedagogical and an



instrumental imperative. The alter-globalisation movement stressed its prefigurative rationale and connected it with the philosophy of direct action. Forms of participatory democracy are now seen as compatible not only with non-violent sit-ins but also black bloc tactics, for example.

The idea that participatory democracy could ultimately mean a society built on egalitarian participation of all citizens – although implicit in most of the above movements – was popularised in the USA in the early 1960s by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Their Port Huron Statement laid out the features of participatory democracy as a social system they sought to establish.

What makes Occupy particularly interesting in this context is that, in contrast to many of its predecessors, rather than simply seeing participatory democracy *primarily* as a set of rules guiding the internal organisational life of a movement, it also returns to direct democracy as a macropolitical vision of society-wide change.<sup>44</sup> In accomplishing this, it draws on, but also sets itself apart from, many of the analyses and repertoires of earlier social movements. The critique of corporations' impact on politics and the relentless assessment of liberal representative democracy have been there before Occupy and anti-austerity movements came about. It seems that a particular combination of Occupy's features and a specific set of emphases, however, made the movement an especially fertile ground for the expansion of political imagination about change to the grandest of scales.

#### **DIRECT DEMOCRACY IN OCCUPY FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

What direct democracy in Occupy did for the movement and its participants cannot be understood outside its organising context. The original *Adbusters'* call to action on the 17<sup>th</sup> September 2011, that started Occupy Wall Street, announced a global shift in revolutionary tactics that were to be based on "swarming" i.e. creating leaderless and self-governing public assemblies for demanding "democracy not corporatocracy." In fact, the idea that social change can be enacted not through a violent overthrow of the regime but by building the world anew from below or "in the shell of the old," in a way in which people's means reflect their ends, has been familiar to Quaker pacifists, the Zapatistas and a bulk of alter-globalisation movements.

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<sup>44</sup> In the context of Occupy, direct and participatory democracy were largely used interchangeably. Although they stemmed from the same or similar kind of principles and ethos, US movements in the 1960s usually referred to this type of direct decision-making as participatory democracy.

Similarly, the consensus decision-making process adopted by Occupy emulated many of the principles and mechanisms of prefigurative politics developed mostly within the autonomous sections of the anti-summit mobilisations. There is the practice of hand signals to foster participatory attitude in decision-making and the use of facilitators as neutral non-leaders of discussion. They also introduced the progressive stack of those waiting to speak that aims to compensate for social inequality giving priority to the marginalised groups. There has also been an instant feedback and accountability system through the report-backs of thematic working groups to the GA, the human mic that is a self-amplifying tool and a mechanism for deep listening, and respect for diversity that translates into diversity of outcomes and autonomy of action. Finally, the earlier alter-globalisation movements also made it apparent that it was possible to organise dissent on a global scale.

In the alter-globalisation movements, experimenting with consensus had a prefigurative rationale because it helped develop a system of horizontal decision-making that could replace liberal representative democracy (Maekelbergh, 2009). (Some of these consensus patterns connected to the practices of indigenous movements in Mexico and other places in Latin America.) Consensus was adopted in Occupy because the activist culture that it drew on (particularly in New York where there is the legacy of the Direct Action Network) was already imbued with values that made direct democracy seem attractive as a practice. Additionally, in European states where anti-austerity and Occupy protests took place, the direct democratic processes of the assemblies were also a way to assume popular sovereignty that the participants felt they were losing under the reign of the troika over their countries' economies.

Furthermore, throughout movement history, participatory democratic process has always facilitated innovation. In Occupy, the stunning multitude of working groups within each encampment and the sheer diversity of input nurtured novel and original tactics and structures. Prolonged occupation of city squares was one such tactical innovation. The astonishing range of tactics that protesters used meant that there could be a GA, a march, pots and pans in front of the parliament followed by a number of non-violent teach-ins in banks and government administration buildings, face painting for children and hot soup distribution during leafleting – all in one day! Not to mention such actions as the general strike called for by Occupy Oakland – first in the USA since 1946. Additionally, each occupation invented their own particular structures and roles. In Occupy Dame Street in Dublin for example, GAs were later alternated with Active Participants' Meetings – that dealt mainly with organisational issues and

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devising plans for actions. There was also a position of the camp coordinator – a rotational role created to ensure some oversight and campers' safety. In Occupy Oakland, a crowd advocate was introduced whose role was to count votes and act as an intermediate to the facilitator when somebody wanted to make a point of process.

Participatory and direct democracy have also usually had the capacity to affirm solidarity - particularly important in high-risk actions (Epstein, 1993; Polletta, 2004; Starhawk, 2002). They have been credited with giving everybody an equal voice and a stake in the decision, which ideally also means that they have a stake in the success of the action. Unlike majority voting, it is not based on a competition of individual viewpoints but a process where views are listened to, negotiated and engaged with in a discussion the outcome of which bears heavily on actions of the entire group. Occupy differed from its precursors in that lacking a common identity and the bonds of friendship or fellowship of an affinity group or movements, such as the SNCC, it found it challenging at times to sustain a productive and mutually respectful discussion. While some past movements demonstrated that trust could substitute for formal rules, Occupy raised the question if the opposite was also possible.

There was also one other function that participatory democracy played in the past but was relatively absent in Occupy. The advantages of the educational and developmental role of this form of decision-making were particularly appreciated in the SNCC that used it to create new leaders and a new basis of authority (Polletta, 2004). The need for employing participatory democracy as a method of training people to mobilise against the dominant political structures and to develop a set of political skills reflected the position of blacks in the 1960s America. The participants of the Occupy movement in 2011 were in a quite different situation. Many of them were well-educated and incredibly tech-savvy. They used the skills they already had perhaps more often than they learned new ones. They might not have known how to take on powerful politicians but nor was this their goal. They lacked political representation but unlike the SNCC, they were not trying to create a representation in the guise of the old model. This is not to say that Occupy participants did not develop their political sophistication or become more politicised through their involvement in direct democratic processes, but the main aim of this politicisation was not to provide people with an access to the conventional ways of doing politics.

#### **DIRECT DEMOCRACY AS A CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CHANGE**

It is somewhat paradoxical that participatory democracy as a political system rather than merely a set of internal organisational principles was popularised in the USA by SDS – a group that did not formally use consensus and had hierarchical structures (as participants recall, however, in its early years, decisions were being made in the spirit of participatory deliberation) (Polletta, 2004). In Occupy, commitment to direct democracy, as a political system, was both explicit in some of the movement's documents (although European Occupies were more likely than their US counterparts to include a straightforward demand for real democracy in their statements) and it could also be inferred from the features and principles of the movement, chiefly from its rhetoric of the 99%.

The movement claimed to be the 99% and not just act on its behalf. It appealed to the democratically legitimate majority base i.e. the cornerstone of liberal democracies, not in order to oppose underrepresentation and demand more inclusion. Rather, it challenged *non-representation* from the point of *majority's* opinion. Hence, its demands for an alternative and a more direct form of democracy were not only legitimate from the movement's own viewpoint, but also by the internal standards of representative democracy itself. Occupy questioned the rules of majoritarian decision-making not solely on the grounds that it was alienating the minorities but also because it was repressing the *majority*. The movement, then, forced liberal representative democracy to face its limits on its own terms, laying bare its irresponsiveness to the "will of the majority." If this form of governance was not working, something else needed to replace it.

This is how direct democracy in Occupy gained the status of a concept for social change rather than simply a set of internal rules guiding decision-making. The movement had a broad population base and attracted a diverse constituency. It aspired to speak with the 99% that differed widely in terms of socio-economic status, age, political outlook etc. In this way, it fared much better than the SDS for example, which only had a student base. Occupy's associational metaphor of the 99% - who had been locked out of political representation by the power of wealth – describes the largest number of people, a majority that has a right not only to govern itself in the communities created by the encampments, but also to collectively self-legislate on a much broader scale. Importantly, however, in contrast to prefigurative politics of sections of the alter-globalisation movement, Occupy did not make the argument that the internal democracy that it was practising was a model of a system that they wanted introduced at the

macro level. Unlike the SDS statement, the movement also did not work out explicit features of this future system. Occupy left it up to communities themselves to decide on the specific shape of democracy they wanted to establish in their own locality as well as the society at large. The movement supplied society with a general direction and a set of skills and experiences. The practice of consensus decision-making in Occupy, however, also made its participants aware of the tensions between unity and autonomy as well as the inconsistencies and possible non-transparent expediencies of non-hierarchical organising. In reality, direct democracy practised in Occupy never worked perfectly. In recognition of this fact, as well as each community's singular characteristics and needs, it should then come as no surprise that the movement preferred not to make any unequivocal recommendations about direct democracy.

Occupy was also a "rehearsal" of direct democracy as it might function in society because it attracted many people with no previous involvement in politics or political activism. Many encampments were set up by people who were complete strangers to one another. Participants often say that what struck them most when they joined Occupy was that there was such a random collection of people i.e. it was not an event run solely by activists.

The movement's inclusive ethos and its radical openness were definitely sources of its appeal. They were fostered by the tactic of city square occupations that allowed the previously summit-hopping protests to settle down in semi-permanent locations that were locally reachable for more people than a travelling caravan of alter-globalisation activists. The encampments not only reclaimed public space for longer than summit occupations, but they also took back from the politicians and international organisations the monopoly over political time. No longer did the dates they set up for meetings determine most of protesters' activity. Occupy made its own schedule and organised global days of action – most notably the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2011 when protests took place in more than 950 cities around the world.

Direct democracy was literally brought out to the streets, which meant that it was no longer confined to typically activist spaces. Instead, all passers-by were invited to join in and they could do so without the help of a friendly gatekeeper of an activist community. Unlike in the World Social Forum's processes, membership in a civil society organisation that opposed neoliberalism was not a prerequisite for taking part in Occupy. It was also not that instrumental for one's involvement whether one belonged to an affinity group or was just an individual. In Occupy, it was not expected that its participants would exhibit a particular activist culture or know-how. Although a specific alter-globalisation lingo and a set of microinteractional norms

such as the “politics of niceness,” a rejection of masculinist styles and an orientation to process were present, so was the will to transcend the distinction between activist and non-activist identities. All participants shared the responsibility for the movement and if direct democracy was to mean more than simply another activist repertoire of action, the whole separation between activism and life would have to be challenged.

This may be much more difficult than it sounds. Occupy grounded its calls for a social and political change in the failure of the liberal representative model of democracy. It also recognised that its demands cannot be met through a negotiation with institutions of democratic pluralism, chiefly – with political parties. Unlike SDS or some segments of new social movements in Europe, Occupy did not campaign for the creation of institutions of participatory democracy that would be complementary to the state’s representative structures. Any meaningful change that would be in line with Occupy’s analysis of the current political system would require a hyperpoliticisation of a vast part of the population in order to establish mechanisms of self-government distinct from the liberal democratic model. If communities should really be responsible for coming up with their own version of direct democracy and start practising it, the question of how to define and operationalise democratic participation may become all-important.

#### **FUTURE OF DIRECT DEMOCRACY ON A GRAND SCALE?**

Although the specific principles of participatory democracy as outlined in the Port Huron statement have not been implemented in our societies, its main premise has. SDS advocated “the establishment of a democracy of individual participation, governed by two central aims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; that society be organized to encourage independence in men [sic] and provide the media for their common participation” (‘Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society’, 1962). Much of this rhetoric has been utilised by non-radical political forces and civil society agents. Movements such as the SDS or the labour and new social movements in Europe aimed at a peaceful coexistence of a multitude of perspectives. The message, however, has been digested through the political system, deradicalised, enmeshed and trapped in the mainstream discourses.

Participation as the provision of citizen input or tokenistic inclusion were not SDS intentions.

The Occupy camps, however, showed that it may be problematic to define participation solely by presence and taking an active part in an assembly. Such an understanding of participation may be exclusionary towards working class people and people in the care services. Not only does the direct democratic process take a lot of time, but in all its openness, it does not solve the question of representation. As the Occupy experience showed, formal conventions of decision-making are always accompanied by unwritten rules that regulate such issues as – what is the quorum for a decision to be binding? It was not unusual for a group in the movement to defer a proposal, even if, it had quorum, where it felt that deciding at that particular time would undermine effective action, its open ethos or be unrepresentative of the group. In direct democratic processes, the issue of fair representation may, then, be still as important as it is unresolved.

Occupy taught its participants that regaining control over one's life through a participatory process could not be as easy and relatively non-intrusive into one's daily routines as elections or other mechanisms of representative democracy are since the latter do not die out because somebody has to go to work. The experience also made participants aware that direct democratic processes may not always be entirely self-transparent and completely non-alienating. At the same time, striving for an ideal in this respect may be debilitating and could indicate that the group is having problems with finding its course (like it did for some groups in the 1960s where the discussions about programme were played out as disputes over their decision-making structure).

The movement has also brought to light the discrepancy between stakes in social change within the 99% itself in that there were clearly some participants who could afford to wait for a gradual change to seep through all sections of society, while there were also people who drifted towards Occupy because they lacked not only political bargaining leverage but also food and shelter. Though massive in scope and scale, the wave of protests in 2011/2012 also had only tenuous to no presence outside of main cities (especially in the case of Occupy), leaving a substantial portion of popular voices and the specificities of their situation out of the main debate.

What does all of this mean for the future of direct democracy (at least in places where Occupy took place) as a concept of social change that social movements can bring about also through practising it in their internal organisational life? Occupy constituted a creative and self-governing outlet for people's desires to fuse with others in collective decision-making and

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action and counter their (a)political isolation. Importantly, however, it also laid bare the inconsistencies and faults of direct democracy as practised by popular assemblies. If what we are witnessing is a process of reinventing democracy, movements and entire populations will have to face the question of not only how to make direct democracy operational as a political system, but also how to change the rules of economic organisation and scales of governance accordingly.

If direct democracy is to become a focal point of a new kind of politics and it is to be meaningful as a concept of social change (beyond the merely technical models of assembly and popular vote), then it is in how it could “skew” the entire political system in favour of the marginalised groups. Its constant efforts for broader inclusion, fuller participation and institutional innovation could be directed not towards a numerical threshold but those who have been left behind, really excluded from the dominant structures. Naturally, such a proposal anticipates next cycles of disillusion and subversive effort but there are historical parallels to understand what it means.

In the recent past in Central and Eastern Europe, after overthrowing oppressive regimes, movements went on to help institute liberal forms of governance in their countries, though many of their participants knew that the failure of representative democracy was inevitable. The transformations that they initiated were giving people relative stability, promise of progress and prosperity, but also a pre-packaged set of neoliberal policies, discourses and values and a right to passive choice every four or five years. The people did not, however, get what they essentially fought for – the power to co-decide. But did the imminent prospect of losing the battle (either to the incumbent powers or in the unpredictable ways in which change was going to happen) stop them from fighting for democracy? No, they just went and did it anyway!



## **CONCLUSION**

### **SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENT**

In the literature review chapters (1-3) that opened this thesis, I argued that the main drawback of the emerging literature on Occupy is that it is not established yet and it largely consists of commentary and authors' ideological manifestos rather than detailed analysis of this movement. I also presented a critical appraisal of – what has become – the canon of social movement theory in order to demonstrate why it was not fit for this research. In particular, I argued that the canon of movement theory does not thematise the inconsistencies, paradoxes, uncertainty and complexity of movement action but tends to perceive them as failures of movement organising. I noted that such a take fosters the expectation that social struggles must fail and often do, which in turn reinforces the status quo. Lastly, I introduced some of Derrida's and Lacan's theoretical concepts that I found useful in the analysis of this research. I argued that those thinkers and their theories were shaped by movements of their times and they offered a nuanced conceptual toolbox for understanding contemporary movements and the workings of democracy as seen through the processes of individual and social change. In particular, their understanding of the "real" was very helpful in finding ways to analyse this research. "Real" is that which is impossible, not in the sense that it is ideal but "real" is that which is most sensible and fraught with contradictory demands, as most life situations are.

In the methodology chapter (chapter 4), I outlined the methods that I used in this research as well as three main approaches that I employed: militant ethnography, movement-relevant research and Participatory Action Research. I also argued that they responded to the needs of movement's participants and the aims of this project. The double role of a participant-researcher that I assumed, however, was challenging in that I did not want to reinforce hierarchies that are usually present between the researcher and the researched as well as between different kinds of knowledge (one type created in the academy and another in movements, for instance). I also claimed that an engaged mode of research is fully compatible with the changing model of scientific engagement in the contemporary world. Finally, I reflected on the situated nature of knowledge and the mutual dependence between knowledge and ignorance in movement action. This chapter concluded with an explanation of what my understanding of the Copernican principle in the context of social movements was. It speaks about humbly assuming responsibility for this part of reality that one can exert some

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influence on.

It is from this engaged, participatory and temporal perspective that I explored the Occupy movement in the findings chapters (5-8). The core research question was: how did direct democracy work in Occupy? One of the main findings of this research is that direct democracy as practised in Occupy was a real democracy, i.e. it was not always an ideal of non-alienating and completely self-transparent process that it is sometimes taken to be. This, however, should not be construed as a failure of the movement. Rather, it was an ordinary effect of what happens when a determined group of people taps into the major disconnect between social reality and politics and tries to do something about it. As a result of this, the movement situations were riddled with uncertainty and required that participants took real responsibility for their actions, not knowing what the consequences of these actions would be.

I argued that what Occupy and its democratic processes revealed was that once the yokes of financial capitalism and representative democracy were temporarily lifted in relatively autonomous spaces, there was no problem-free unity of all people that suddenly emerged. What did come out in the movement was rather a plurality of worldviews and experiences, paradoxes of non-hierarchical organising, autonomous action and inclusion/exclusion. I claimed that the complexity that characterised Occupy was a result of a disconnect that the movement tapped into – between the lives of society's members and the dominant socio-political structures. I called this moment a moment of real politics since it connects to the political as a sphere of constitutive lack, antagonism and alterity. Finally, I asked whether direct democracy can become an actual alternative for liberal representative democracy. I briefly explored the history of direct and participatory democracy in social movements for insights into how Occupy was similar or different from the earlier movements in the way that it envisaged direct democracy not only as a mode of internal decision-making and organising, but as a concept for social change. The thesis concludes by proposing how one can relate the experience and analysis of Occupy to the task of imagining a future of direct democracy on a grand scale.

## **FURTHER RESEARCH**

This project points to a number of further arenas of inquiry that may be pursued. Firstly, in order to further explore the meaning of the contemporary moment in the development of representative democracy, financial capitalism and a possibility of radical social change, one

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may examine the features of other anti-austerity struggles in North Africa and Europe and the wave of protests that they were part of. This project concentrated on two locations in the global North and accordingly, used European social theory to analyse the meaning of the Occupy experience for how one may understand the contemporary nature of political engagement and a potential for the scaling up of direct democracy. However, it would be immensely valuable to address similar questions with respect to social movements in the global South and using theories and frameworks developed in that region.

Furthermore, this project has only touched on another important aspect of Occupy that is rarely talked about but which all movement participants would be very interested in. Namely, a macropolitical and discursive analysis of how the movement might have influenced politics, public policy and mainstream media would be immensely valuable. It seems that many movement participants have a sense that Occupy did have an impact on national and international politics but this kind of influence is hard to quantify and pinpoint directly; yet, if determined in some way, it could give movements a real measure of their agency and a potential source of esteem.

Similarly, further research could also perhaps offer to measure precisely and analyse the scope and intensity of a range of initiatives that sprang up after or during Occupy. Such an analysis could help understand the real impact of Occupy on other activism – not only with respect to its frequency and extent but also in relation to such issues as how organisational and democratic lessons that were learned in the movement were carried over, negotiated, transformed or abandoned in those new initiatives and why. This might also tell researchers something about the real appeal of Occupy and the feasibility of the processes that it employed for the day-to-day activism and local possibilities for political engagement.

Finally, the possibility of establishing some form of direct democracy in the place of the current liberal representative model may not depend only on people's determination and a profound sense of disenfranchisement that leads them to stand up. A project that I am about to get involved in is to investigate other avenues for anticipating new forms of politics by examining the interplay between democratic politics, the needs of the future supply of energy and resistance that accompanies energy developments. This project marks also a shift in where I conduct my research: from public squares in big cities of the countries at the forefront of financial economy to the "democratic peripheries" of tiny villages and neighbourhoods in Central and Eastern Europe. As I have found out already, the people there are also addressing

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the failures of liberal democracies and financial capitalism – not as separate or additional issues but as aspects of their ecological and land struggles. They did not choose to get involved with these issues but have to tackle them out of necessity.

### **PROPOSED CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS RESEARCH**

This thesis had three main aims:

- to document and analyse the Occupy movement and its direct democratic processes of decision-making and organising collectively in Dublin and Cork, Ireland as well as Oakland, San Francisco and Berkeley in the United States;
- to offer an analysis of what lessons the experience of Occupy can teach its participants (and perhaps others) in terms of their future political engagement and the nature of radical activism in general;
- to explore direct democracy as a concept of social change considering the insights gained through the Occupy's practice of it.

This research contributes a detailed description and analysis of the local lives of the Occupy movement and the subjective realities of people's political engagement. Importantly, however, this thesis also tries to make a few more general contributions to knowledge:

#### **Theory**

In terms of theory, it appropriates Derrida's and Lacan's philosophical and psychoanalytical thought to develop the frameworks of real democracy and real politics that could be used for understanding the complexity, inconsistencies and paradoxes of Occupy. Since the focus of those theorists' work is on social and individual change rather than on any particular movement or organisation, one may expect that the developed frameworks will also be applicable to other social movements and situations when radical change is at stake.

#### **Methodology**

Methodologically and epistemologically, this project proposes a particular combination of engaged approaches to research as a way to make knowledge production movement-relevant and its process – egalitarian. During this research, the project made a contribution to the development of knowledge about consensus decision-making in Occupy in Ireland. It also

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underscored the importance of methodology for the study of movements “in reality,” i.e. not only in what is but also in what is only possible.

In this project, I explored the paradoxical relation between knowledge and movement action in that although movements always seek reliable knowledge, most radical actions require a leap of faith into the unknown. This is in contrast to the dominant understanding of the possibilities for change that assumes that knowledge is a prerequisite for action; that if people only knew the “truth,” they would act. I think that such an attitude creates grounds for the emergence of a movement vanguard “who knows the truth” and ignores the complexity of political systems and people’s life situations that necessarily form the complicated and often confusing background to any action.

Finally, this thesis advances an understanding that the task of approaches and methods of movement research is to be geared towards real needs of its participants. An evaluation of such engaged research should be based on its relevance for the concrete situations in which researchers and participants find themselves. Outside of the immediate movement contexts, social movement research can remain relevant by asking questions that are of interest to participants and practitioners. This usually means investigating the meaning of movements’ experience for their future engagement and the possibility of change that they are struggling for.

### Meaning of the research for future political engagement

In keeping with the commitment to movement-relevant research, at the end of all empirical investigations in this thesis I tried to reflect on what the particular experience or analysis that I talked about might mean for people’s future political engagement and the future of democracy. In this way, the findings of this study may be significant not only for Occupy in the locations that I researched but also the movement as a whole, or indeed for other similar contemporary movements and the future development of democracy itself.

### Direct democracy in reality

This investigation showed that the practice of direct democracy in a movement may not be entirely non-alienating and self-transparent. It identified a number of paradoxes of non-hierarchical organising, autonomous action and radical inclusivity. Importantly, this analysis was not offered as part of a dismissive critique but from an engaged perspective that took into

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consideration the enormous complexities of the movement situations. The intended contribution of this analysis and approach was to counteract the mainstream “expectation of failure” of social movements by pointing to its “imperfections” as a completely natural and even positive occurrence that simply testifies to the fact that Occupy’s goals were radical in a sense that they were beyond what is considered possible in the current political arrangements.

What is possible?

The intended political contribution of this research stemmed from my own ontological position in that I wanted to contribute to a change in the dominant perceptions (within and beyond movements) of what is possible in terms of radical political action. I hope that this analysis sheds new light on how we may think about our scope for action in any circumstances. In this way, I wanted to contribute and give legitimacy to anti-hierarchical and anti-capitalist movements and struggles. There are many people in these movements who, like me, see direct democracy and anti-capitalism as two inseparable aspects of radical struggles in the contemporary world. By concentrating on direct democracy, I did not want to downplay the importance of anti-capitalist dissent; instead, I sought to highlight the intricacies involved in the practice of some forms of direct democracy as a reminder that arguments against capitalism and for the abolishment of labour are incomplete if they fail to consider the ways in which people do organise collectively outside of university, work and state structures. I believe that Occupy participants learned a lot through their involvement in the movement and my aim was to make a modest contribution by beginning the process of reflecting carefully on what it was that we learned from our experiences of activism and how it could help us bring about real social change.

On the face of it, the Irish post-Occupy context is not much different from what the state of social and community struggles was before Occupy. Some claim that it had seemingly little visible impact on the movements in Ireland. I think, however, that this is only part of the picture. The Occupy experience did change many of the movement's participants. They did “traverse the fantasy” and their approach was innovative on the scale and in the context in which the movement operated. My conviction is that it would be politically naïve to expect that this change that the participants experienced would be immediately and clearly manifested in the very first actions after Occupy. In fact, the meaning of the movement is still

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being contested. Its impact on the Irish movements may depend not only on how well its participants are able to transfer their knowledge and skills to the new struggles, but also on how much resonance the call for direct democracy will elicit in the general population, potential allies, etc.

I hope that Occupy was a beginning, a gesture of rejection marking a longer process of reinventing democracy in the global North. I may be mistaken in thinking – as the analysis in this thesis suggests – that this will entail an adoption of some form of direct or participatory democracy but I will leave it to history to prove me wrong on this one. I certainly hope that we would be able to move beyond the present liberal representative arrangements and financial capitalism and establish ways of co-deciding that foster equality of all and are responsive to people's needs and desires.

It would be inspiring to see villages, neighbourhoods and other communities come together to solve their own problems in democratic ways. It would be wonderful if we could use (or engage with) political institutions in such a way that without becoming co-opted, they facilitate that process instead of erecting hurdles in the way of direct democratic decision-making and even criminalising some forms of collective action. Perhaps we could use the mainstream positive valorisation of (in its current form, usually tokenistic) inclusion and participation by insisting on linking it with direct democratic decision-making and organising at local and community levels. Perhaps we could take the value of participation more seriously than the authorities want us to and use it to disturb the core of the hegemonic structures. Or perhaps we could do something else... In any way, social movements always make me hopeful because throughout history they never ceased in their creativity, courage, determination and just a simple joy of bringing about real change. This is never a smooth and easy process; quite the contrary. But this is what makes them such a fascinating phenomenon to study and be a part of.

## **APPENDICES**



### **Consensus – basic glossary**

Formal processes of consensus are often established to allow for diversity of participants and help facilitate decision-making in large groups and such movement situations as big occupations or anti-summit demonstrations. These processes require a specific terminology and a set of practices that are understood and followed by the participants. Here I provide a brief explanation of a few examples of “consensus lingo” that the Occupy movement adopted.

General Assembly (GA) is a meeting space where information is exchanged; participants voice their opinions, discuss issues, solve problems, and make collective decisions.

Human mic is a technique that allows communication among the participants of assemblies when there is no sound amplification system. The speaker pauses after every phrase to allow other participants to repeat his or her words so that other people standing further away from the speaker might hear everything.

There is also a mic check which is a similar mechanism but is usually used to grab the participants' attention when an announcement is being made or GA is about to begin.

Stack is a list and order of persons who indicated that they want to say something during a GA. With a “progressive stack,” person(s) managing it can move certain people up the list if these people have not been heard from before or come from a group or community whose views are usually underrepresented.

When at the end of GA discussion, facilitators check for consensus on a given proposal, the participants can show their support, stand aside, or block the proposal. When somebody decides to stand aside, it means that they do not agree with the decision and would not like to be bound by it but they are OK if other participants want to proceed with the particular action. When they block the proposal, this indicates that they would not agree and if the group chooses to ignore this, they will leave. The block should not be used on the grounds of somebody's personal preferences or ideals. It should be based on the conviction that if the particular decision is followed through, it will go against the principles of the group or it would cause substantial harm to it.

In order to facilitate the decision-making process, the Occupy movement (drawing on the practice of the alter-globalisation and other movements) adopted a few hand gestures. The most common was “jazz hands” or “twinkling” that is used to indicate support or silent

*Appendix 1*

agreement. In order to let the facilitators know that one wants to make a point, one has to raise a finger. Block is indicated by crossing forearms with hands in fists.

## Information on the Consensus Decision Process in #OccupyDameStreet

### What is consensus?

Consensus is a way of reaching decisions. It is a process which brings together the views of all members of a group but it does not mean that all have to agree on everything or abandon their personal values. Consensus decision-making requires that we share a common goal and are willing to work on issues together so that all concerns are addressed and we find a way forward. It is about creating an environment in which everybody feels welcome and safe to speak, get their views acknowledged and validated. In the consensus process, we share the responsibility for transforming our principles into meaningful change. Through the process, the group proposes amendments to the original proposals until everybody is comfortable with them.



**Raise a hand** when you wish to make a point.



**Raise both hands** if your point is a direct response to the current discussion. This allows you to jump to the head of the queue.



**Silent applause** when you hear an opinion that you agree with wave a hand with your fingers pointing upwards. This saves a lot of time as people don't need to chip in to verbally agree.

*Hand signals used in #OccupyDameStreet General Assemblies and other meetings*

### Why use consensus?

The best answer was perhaps given at the Direct Action Conference during the Berlin Climate summit in 1995:

“

Perhaps the strongest argument for the need for a "new" decision-making method is the world around us which has been created by the "old" methods. In a world governed by consensus, nuclear weapons, the genocide and mistreatment of indigenous people, the attack on the environment and the madness of war would be impossible - they would be blocked by you and me and millions of others.

”



The consensus process replaces competition with cooperation and ensures that all people who find themselves in a minority do not lose control over their lives. As a decision-making method, consensus is slow and has its limits but it never means a lack of action. Quite to the contrary, it makes action precise, sustainable and participatory. Decisions made by consensus are usually of a higher standard and speed up action rather than stall it.

Consensus decision-making works best when:

- we realise that it is not only **what** we do but also **how** we go about doing things that is part of **the world we want to bring about**.
- we share **common goals**.
- we **respect** the process and other speakers.
- we work to foster mutual **trust** and are ready to assume that people have **good intentions**.
- we are committed to work **collectively** and **creatively** on the decisions that need to be made.

Consensus decision-making does not work when:

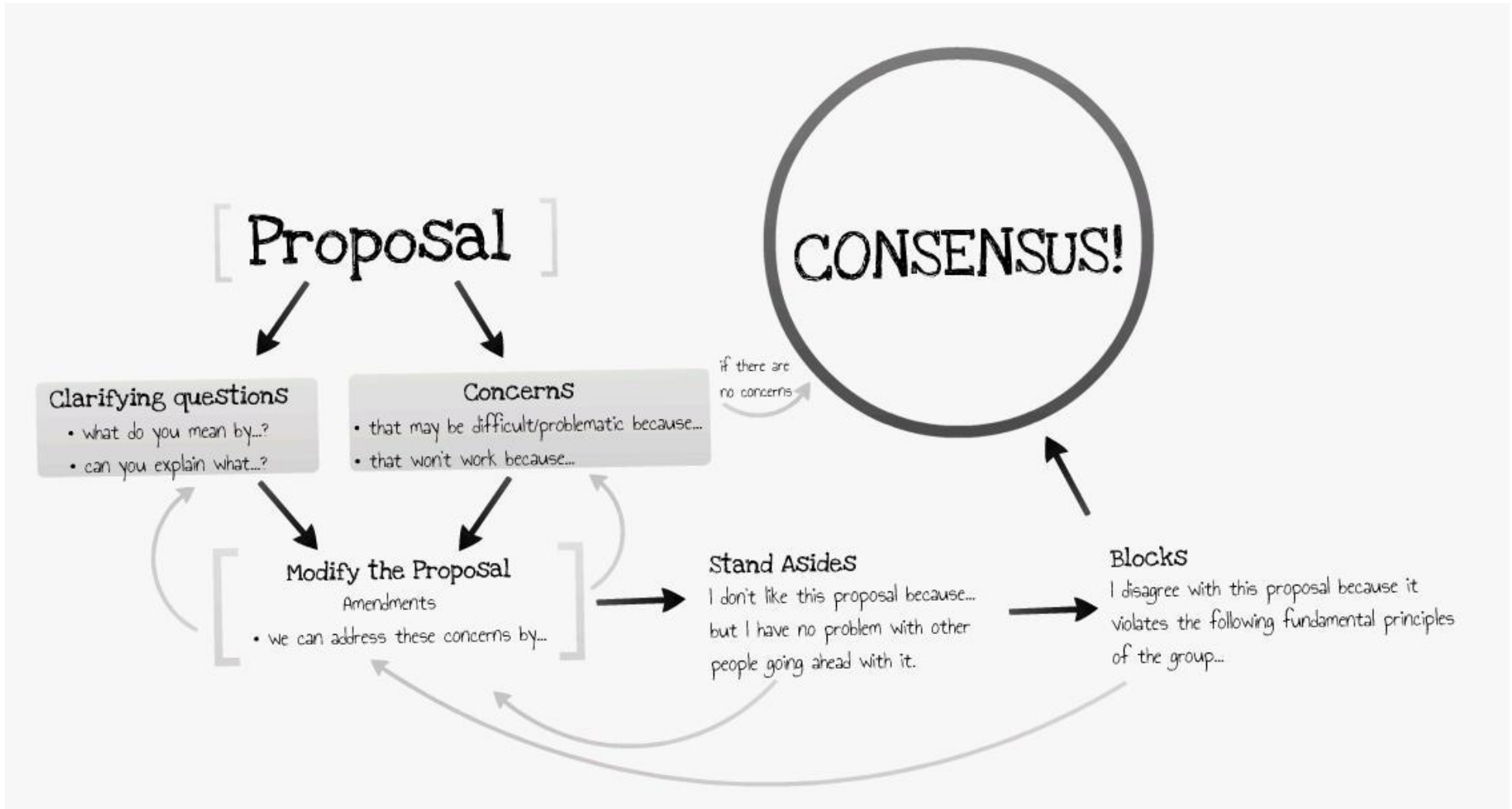
- we conclude that our individual worldview is not only correct but also the only way to think about the world.
- we are not willing to take time to unlearn the patterns of behaviour that we have come to accept as 'normal'.
- we are not open and trustful.

The role of facilitators:

- they do not have any agenda of their own beyond moving the meeting forward and helping to ensure that the process remains egalitarian, participatory and truly democratic at all times.
- they should extremely rarely express their own opinions and avoid using the hand signals.
- they are not chairpersons; they are not 'leaders' of the group.



Consensus map step by step:



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First workshop on consensus decision-making  
 Occupy Dame Street, Dublin

you can contact me here: [consensus.decision.making@gmail.com](mailto:consensus.decision.making@gmail.com)

**What is Consensus?** "It is the way that the assemblies make a final decision over each specific proposal. Consensus is reached when there is no outright opposition in the assembly against the proposal."

**Two ways of consensus decision-making:**

Adapted from the "Quick guide on group dynamics in people's assemblies" (takethesquare.net):

The following format must be applied to each proposal:

1. What is being proposed?
2. Why is it being proposed?
3. How can we carry out the Proposal if a consensus is reached?

A Direct Consensus is directly reached without opinions against it:  
 Proposal ▶ Consensus.

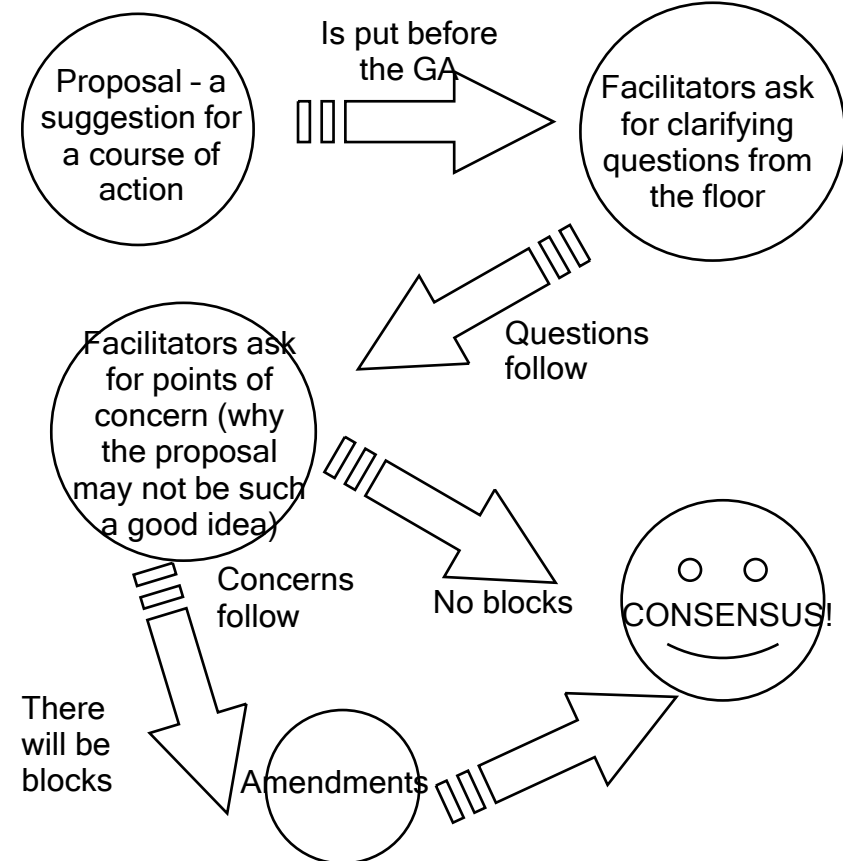
An Indirect Consensus that is reached after debating different opinions on a proposal which did not reach a Direct Consensus.

The following steps are taken to reach an Indirect Consensus:

- 1) What? Why? How?
- 2) After the moderator asks 'Are there any strongly opposed opinions?', and if there are, a queue for floor time is prepared.

The Floor Time Team and Coordinator(s) open the first round of debate. Three arguments for and three arguments against are allowed. After that, the Assembly is asked to show its opinion again through Gestures. If consensus is still not reached when asking if there are opinions against, the Moderator will ask the Assembly to discuss the issue for three to five minutes in small groups where they are sitting. After this small break a second round of interventions consisting of Proposals for Consensus takes place. If a consensus is still not reached after these two rounds, the following takes place: a) If the Proposal comes from a Commission or Working Group, it is returned in order to be reworked, b) If the Proposal comes from an individual, it will be taken to the competent Commission or Working Group so it can reach a consensus on its usefulness and present a reworked version of it in the next Assembly, where it will once again go through the same procedure. And so on until a Real Consensus is reached.

Adapted from [seedsforchange.org.uk](http://seedsforchange.org.uk) and the Direct Action Network



**Other materials about consensus**

**1. Active Listening**

When we actively listen we suspend our own thought processes and give the speaker our full attention. We make a deliberate effort to understand someone's position and their underlying needs, concerns and emotions.

**2. Summarising**

A succinct and accurate summary of what's been said so far can be really helpful to move a group towards a decision. Outline the emerging common ground as well as the unresolved differences: "it seems like we've almost reached agreement on that element of the proposal, but we need to explore this part further to address everyone's concerns." Check with everyone that you've got it right.

**3. Synthesis**

After discussing the issue freely move on to finding agreement on what needs to be done. During this stage, sometimes called synthesis, you need to find the common ground, find connections between seemingly competing ideas and weave them together to form proposals.

Start with a summary of where you think the group and it's different members are at. Then start building a proposal from whatever agreement there is. Look for ideas on how the differences can be resolved. Focus on solutions that address the fundamental needs and key concerns that people within the group have. It's not unusual for people to be willing to give way on some things but not on others which affect them more closely. The solution will often be found by combining elements from different proposals.

To make summarising and synthesis easier it is helpful to write up key issues on a flipchart as the discussion happens.

For more information read our in-depth facilitation and consensus briefings, available on our website.

*For more briefings and training workshops see:*  
[www.seedsforchange.org.uk](http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk)



# Facilitating Meetings

short guide



Meetings are a necessary part of working in any group – they give us the chance to share information, to reach decisions and to get jobs done. But too often they drag on and on, with tempers running high, people talking over each other, and no decisions being made. Bad meetings leave you wondering why you bothered turning up. Unfortunately this pattern is very common in groups. However by using some facilitation skills it's easy to turn around the style of meetings and actually make them an enjoyable and inspiring experience.

**What is facilitation?**

Facilitation is about helping the group to have an efficient and inclusive meeting. It's also about making sure everyone can be involved in discussions and making decisions. It combines a series of roles and tasks. Sometimes these are taken on by one person – the facilitator, however there's no reason why they can't be shared between one or more people in the meeting. Good facilitators stay neutral, winning the trust of everyone in the meeting and treating everyone as equals. At no time do they make decisions for the group or take sides in a conflict.

**Was the meeting successful?**

**Tasks** – What got done? Did you get the necessary results? Were problems solved, and were the objectives of the group met?

**Maintenance** – How did it get done? How did people feel and how will this affect morale and group cohesion? Did the meeting make good use of the pooled talents? Was it enjoyable?



[www.seedsforchange.org.uk](http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk)

2009

### Key facilitation tasks

- ✓ Help the group plan the meeting agenda. Think about timing and order of agenda items, and how to tackle each point.
- ✓ Prepare the room so it's comfortable and everyone can participate; sort out materials the meeting might need e.g.: paper, pens.
- ✓ Introduce the meeting, what it's about and how the meeting works (e.g. consensus or voting, handsignals, breaks).
- ✓ Keep the group to the agenda and decision-making process
- ✓ Keep the meeting focussed on one item at a time.
- ✓ Help everyone to participate. Keep track of who wants to speak. Draw out quiet people and limit those who talk a lot.
- ✓ Challenge aggressive or discriminatory behaviour and put-downs.
- ✓ Introduce techniques such as ideastorming, go-rounds and working groups to make the meeting more efficient and participatory.
- ✓ Clarify and summarise points, make sure everyone understands the discussion.
- ✓ Test for agreement and get clear decisions made.
- ✓ Ensure that action points and decisions are recorded.
- ✓ Keep the meeting to time.
- ✓ Help the group deal with conflict.
- ✓ Listen for underlying issues, concerns or emotions. Help bring them out so they can be dealt with.

### Co-facilitation roles at a meeting

Instead of just one facilitator you could have two or more people sharing the different tasks:

**Co-facilitators** can take turns facilitating and support each other.

**Taking hands:** the job of keeping track of whose turn it is to speak next and of giving appropriate time limits to speakers.

**Vibes-watchers** pay attention to the emotional atmosphere of the meeting. They watch out for individuals' feelings and intervene if necessary.

**The timekeeper** keeps track of the time and the agreed time frame for the different agenda points, negotiating extensions if needed.

**Notetakers or recorders** take minutes or notes, collect reports, and also draw attention to incomplete decisions – e.g. “who is going to contact so and so, and when?”

**The doorkeeper** welcomes people in, bringing them up to speed on the meeting and practical stuff.

### A facilitator's skills and qualities

**Good listening skills** to hear underlying concerns in the group. This includes strategic questioning to be able to understand everyone's viewpoint properly.

**Respect for all participants** and interest in what each individual has to offer.

**Understanding** of the aim of the meeting as well as long-term goals of the group.

**Neutrality on the issues discussed.** Avoiding taking sides or manipulating the meeting towards a particular outcome. If this becomes difficult, or you know in advance that you'll struggle to remain impartial try:

- letting someone else facilitate;
- making it clear when you're expressing your own opinion and when you're intervening as the facilitator

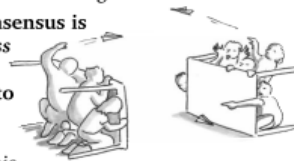
**Clear thinking and observation** – pay attention both to the content of the discussion and the process. How are people feeling? What is being said?

**Assertiveness** – know when to intervene decisively and give some direction to the meeting.

### Facilitating consensus

Many grassroots groups use consensus decision making rather than voting in their meetings. When working to reach consensus we bring together different ideas and try to find a proposal that is agreeable to everyone. Consensus is about participation and equalising power. Good facilitation plays an important role in helping a group to reach agreement.

The key to helping a group towards consensus is to help all members of the group express their needs and viewpoints clearly, find the common ground and find solutions to any areas of disagreement. Active listening, summarising and synthesis are three skills that help the facilitator with this.





## Some Facilitation Tools for Meetings

(For more tools see our briefing *Facilitation Tools for Meetings and Workshops*)

**The agenda** provides vital structure for the meeting. Either draw up the agenda at the beginning of the meeting, or prepare a proposed agenda in advance. Allow everyone to have an input. Start by collecting agenda items from the group. Estimate the time needed for each item. Think about priorities for this meeting – what could be tackled another time or in separate working groups? Be realistic: if the meeting is only an hour long, there should only be an hour's worth of items on the agenda! If the meeting is longer than 1½ hours plan in breaks. Think about effective tools for controversial topics. Write up the proposed agenda where everyone will be able to see it (on a whiteboard or flipchart, for example) or make copies to give to everyone.

**Group Agreement:** the group agrees at the beginning of the meeting what behaviour will help make the meeting a safe, respectful place for everyone. May include things like: switch off phones; no smoking; one person speaking at a time; no put-downs; respect etc.





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2009


**Go-rounds:** everyone takes a turn to speak without interruption or comment from other people. Go-rounds help to gather opinions, feelings and ideas as well as slowing down the discussion and improving listening. Make sure that everyone gets a chance to speak.

**Handsignals** can make meetings run more smoothly and help the facilitator see emerging agreements. Three simple signals should suffice:

 **Raise a hand** when you wish to contribute to the discussion with a general point.

 **Raise both hands** if your point is a direct response to the current discussion.

This allows you to jump to the head of the queue, so use it wisely and discourage overuse!

 **Silent applause'** – when you hear an opinion that you agree with, wave a hand with your fingers pointing upwards. This saves a lot of time as people don't need to chip in to say "I'd just like to add that I agree with..."

**Ideastorming** gathers a large number of ideas quickly. Start by stating the issue. Ask people to say whatever comes into their heads as fast as possible – without censoring or discussion. This encourages creativity and frees energy. Write down all ideas for later discussion.

**Paired listening** creates a space where everyone is heard, so participants can explore and formulate their own thoughts and feelings on an issue without interruption. In pairs, one person is the listener, the other speaks about her thoughts and feelings on the issue. The listener gives full attention to their partner without interrupting. After a set time swap roles within the pairs.

**Parking space:** when something comes up that's not relevant to the discussion at hand "park" it in the parking space (a large sheet of paper on the wall) and deal with it at an appropriate time later. This allows you to stay focused but reassures participants they will be heard.

**Small Groups** create safer spaces for people to contribute to the meeting. They can also make meetings more efficient – any topics are discussed more effectively in a smaller task group, and different groups can discuss different topics simultaneously. Explain clearly what you want groups to do. Write up the task where people can see it. If you want feedback at the end, ensure each group appoints a notetaker to report back.

**Talking stick:** people may speak only when they hold the talking stick. This makes people conscious of when they interrupt others.

**Throw back to the group** – many facilitators feel they have to deal with all the problems that arise in meetings. Where possible, let the group do the work. If someone asks a question, you don't have to answer it so throw it back to the group. Get them to make the major decisions about things like time, and priorities for the meeting.

For more briefings and training workshops see: [www.seedsforchange.org.uk](http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk)



Conversation about Occupy

**YOU ARE INVITED TO  
A CONVERSATION  
ABOUT OCCUPY**

**TUESDAY 15th  
3pm**

**WEDNESDAY 16th  
3pm**

**THURSDAY 17th  
8pm**

**[MEET AT OCCUPY DAME ST INFO TABLE]**

**WHY?**  
The aim is to create a space where reflective conversations about Occupy can take place. We hope that this will support the Occupy movement in Dublin to engage its community and supporters to reflect on the purpose, direction and future for the movement. It is an opportunity for us all to be present together, to share our hopes, fears, frustrations and joys. The conversations will be harvested and presented back to Occupy Dame Street at a General Assembly the following week (and online).

**WHO?**  
Everyone who has an interest in the Occupy movement is welcome to join these conversations. The facilitators are a group of individuals who work in education for local and global social justice in Ireland who have offered to host these conversations as a way of contributing to and supporting the Occupy movement in Ireland.

**WHAT?**  
Each conversation will address the same simple but powerful questions: Why are you here at Occupy Dame Street? What does the Occupy movement mean to you? What potential do you see for this movement? How can we best realise this potential together?

**EVERYONE IS WELCOME**

For more information contact Eimear: [makehandstands@gmail.com](mailto:makehandstands@gmail.com) or Fleachta: [fleachta@gmail.com](mailto:fleachta@gmail.com) Or see [www.occupydamestreet.com](http://www.occupydamestreet.com) for more.

## Occupy: Lessons Learned

### Grassroots Gathering, Galway 2012

Occupy: Lessons learned was a discussion about the biggest challenges faced by our particular Occupies and the most important things that we learned for the future in terms of tactical approaches, political reflection and analysis, and ways of engaging in direct action. People from many Irish Occupies met to share our diverse experiences and learn from each other's perspectives. Now we are planning to have a follow-up to the discussion in the form of an independent publication, website or other.

#### Challenges:

- anti-social behaviour and the tension – how to keep the camps inclusive?
- differing views on aims and goals of Occupy, difficult to agree
- vagueness of message, fragmentation
- burnout, personality clashes (differing political views, newcomers to social change and experienced activists – imbalance of input)
- media framing
- alcohol – inside and outside of the camps
- question – should the camps be filling the gap in state services?
- effective and solution-focused communication
- (public) apathy
- hierarchies in camp because of who is there longest
- negative fetishisation of hierarchy
- security
- conflict between maintaining the camp and building the movement; finding time to do both
- consensus, procedures
- getting message out, creating our own media
- deciding when to move on
- creating a space to discuss issues
- division of labour in camp
- structuring General Assemblies
- who are the 99%? - breaking down the analysis
- being welcoming
- what is political? apolitical? party-political?
- patriarchy, dominance of men

#### Lessons:

- there should be a turnover of people
- patience is necessary
- acknowledging each other's contributions
- creating and maintaining democratic structures

*Appendix 6*

- success is hard to quantify
- we have changed the discourse
- a connection to everyday life is important
- importance of non-party political space to discuss issues
- organisation, structure is important
- legal support is very useful
- internal education is important
- empowering people
- having media connections or creating our own media
- frame the discourse, don't let the media do it
- media skills
- women's safe space
- city centre camping is not sustainable
- unlearning habits of parliamentary democracy

### Interview Consent Form

This consent form outlines my rights as a participant in the study of the possibilities for political action and decision-making within contemporary alter-globalisation movements, conducted by

Anna Szolucha  
Department of Sociology, NUIM  
[anna.szolucha.2012@nuim.ie](mailto:anna.szolucha.2012@nuim.ie)  
Room Q2, Auxilia Building, NUI Maynooth  
01 708 6557

Supervisor: Dr. Laurence Cox  
Department of Sociology, NUIM  
Auxilia Building, NUI Maynooth  
01 708 3985

This interview will take about ..... minutes.

I understand that

- a) Taking part in this study is entirely voluntary.
- b) It is my right to decline to answer any question that I am asked.
- c) I am free to end the interview and withdraw my consent for this interview at any time.
- d) I may request that the interview not be taped. This interview will/will not\* be taped. My full name (if stated) and identity will remain confidential in any publications and discussions.
- e) My full name will not appear on any tapes or transcripts resulting from the interview.
- f) The data will be kept by the researcher for the completion of all tasks for which the research data need to be used. The researcher is also planning to submit some of her work for the thesis to academic journals. Where appropriate, the knowledge and analysis gathered in the research will be presented to the groups researched.
- g) If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the National University of Ireland Maynooth Ethics Committee at [research.ethics@nuim.ie](mailto:research.ethics@nuim.ie) or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Date:

Signature of Interviewee:

Signature of Interviewer:

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\* Circle as appropriate

Appendix 8

**Interview coding**

**Oakland, 26<sup>th</sup> June 2012**

Concepts	Time start	Time finish	Description	Categories
His involvement	0:12	1:00	Regularly attended GAs, coordinating actions with friends, wasn't in any of the committees, but coordinating for autonomous actions.	
Independent, autonomous actions	1:00	3:59	How they coordinated them. Close friends, affinity group. Small-scale coordination, decentralised actions. Have the same level of risk tolerance.	Autonomy
Friends	3:59 11:11	8:28 13:15	Share similar political outlooks. When younger – more involved in organising. Now in his 40-ties. Now involved in second-order or second-tier stuff. Have agreements on what they're gonna do and not gonna do. Understandings – bailing each other out. Spots around town – earthquake area. Met through <i>Slingshot</i> . All involved with more formal decision-making together. Now informal because they're friends. Example – people's park – action.	
Disagreements	8:29	11:10	Different risk tolerances – f.ex. - how is that resolved? Make sure default to the lowest common denominator – for an action at the bank. Street stuff – checking when we're going along. How he feels about this lowest common denominator? OK. Most important – that have people who he trusts implicitly. 20 years of experience of them having his back.	Responsibility
Role of GAs for Occupy, learning direct democracy	13:40	18:30	GA – big part of what attracted him to Occupy. Direct democracy – as an anarchist – attractive. + direct action + economic injustice. Largely driven by younger activists, not his generation. When watching a GA – he'd be happy and cringing at the same time – people struggling with learning this process that we've been doing or year and years. A lot of time in confusion. St Paul's principles. A group of people who were almost intuitively gravitating toward this direct democratic process. Direct democracy – unfamiliar so hard and counterintuitive for many people.	Prefiguration
Role of GAs now	20:40	22:15	Proposal for a different kind of GA – action clearing house. What is happening is happening on the working group or action group level.	

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Changing understanding of GAs	18:31	20:28	Things started to contract. Unsure – why. Weather. Eviction – feeling unsafe. Debate about tactics and violence. Things went quickly from being focused on the GAs to being focused on the working groups. Made sense. Working groups – core organising people. A lot of decision-making shifted to coming out of the working groups.	Uncertainty
Effects of Occupy	22:15	24:02	GA format would revert to that when need arises. Becoming a default? It can happen again – using GAs on a regular basis to build and sustain a movement through that democratic process. Camps wouldn't be possible without this process (GA). Gave people ownership.	Prefiguration
	25:09	26:34	Sense of ownership over Occupy which fed the camps and the actions. Open, fluid, GA, big, important decision-making body. Questions about continuity and coherence. But inevitable. People now talk about economic disparities.	Ownership
	1:11:30 1:14:30	1:11:57 1:17:29	A year ago nobody would respond to the threat of closing down the school by occupying the school. There is something very powerful about physical occupation. Earlier occupations – symbolic. People would talk about economic inequality more. Normalise direct action. - potentially also dilute but short term loss, long-term gain perhaps.	Prefiguration
Talks about the Bay area	24:03	25:09	Hub of left-wing culture and activism. Traditional organising based on parties and coalitions, many hierarchical, very in-group. Alienating and not interesting.	
GAs	26:34	27:08	Process. Breaking into smaller groups. His friends would break up and go and talk in different groups. Allowed to see different levels and places that people were coming from. Glamour. He stopped going to the GAs because 3 times in a row they couldn't get quorum.	
GAs and coordinating for big actions	28:31	32:10	GAs – not a good place to plan actions but good for political decisions and large picture decisions – like port shutdown. But actual planning can't be done in GAs, and you need some continuity – weeks to plan an action. Problem with GA – sometimes feels like starting from scratch every time.	
Debate about diversity of tactics and problems with GAs	30:40	32:10	Before the camp happened, Occupy Oakland adopted diversity of tactics as a principle. St Paul – brought up – as a proxy, stacking on internet forum, GA format can be manipulated in that way. He didn't see that happen but people were talking about it and it could happen.	

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Relationships with the unions	33:10	35:10	The paranoia mechanism	Aporia – inclusion/exclusion
Social movements and disagreement	35:10	35:33	Are about when people who disagree on a lot of issues but agree about something and act together.	
Tendencies in Occupy Oakland	35:33	36:15	3 tendencies: radicals, progressives, general population (99%). For a while it was fine, but over time – differences (especially radicals and progressives)	Aporia – unity/diversity
Violence, property destruction and why people were leaving.	36:15	39:30	Understandings of violence – violence only by the police. The main difference between radicals and progressives. Property destruction – minor. Progressives tried to impose a restrictive tactical framework – they failed but this led to made Occupy feel less interesting and attractive to people who were not in either of the camps (radicals or progressives). It wasn't just these two groups but also people who are not super politicised. And that was unusual. Infighting started – people lost interest. Always after a difficult time (what people called violence) Occupy got bigger – not smaller.	Prefiguration
Who does it alienate?	47:33	50:52	Violence alienates progressives. Americans are not alienated by violence. We love violence. Violence – exciting for young people.	
GA process	39:48	43:00	Always explained the process – facilitation team. Small group discussion. For and against, stack. Vote. Modified consensus – good. Hasn't tried it before Occupy Oakland. Liked it because it made it more difficult for the process to be hijacked by an individual or a group of people. Solved the problem of the block tyranny.	
Tensions, identities	43:22	47:50	Issue – around identity politics. How to deal with that within a large diverse movement. Safer spaces committee. Attempt to keep it diverse. Occupy Oakland certainly didn't reflect that but still most diverse movement that he has seen in Oakland. Always – how can we get to be more diverse – this always leads to tensions about appropriate ways to diversify. Issues with who we're trying to include. Problematic assumptions – radicals often come from progressives. Radicals have this assumption that we get to the masses through the progressives. He thinks we don't. We need to be oriented toward the non-political population. Like violence – people saying that it alienates people – it doesn't – it alienates progressives.	Aporia – unity/diversity



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Differences	50:54	51:58	About tactics and how to present ourselves to the world. Based on assumption – to gain traction, you need to build all-encompassing movement that by definition has to embrace non-violence and this is rooted in this assumption that the way to the masses is through the progressives and he thinks it's the exact opposite. But most of his friends disagree with him on that.	
Tactics	52:00	54:10	More militant tactics aren't intrinsically alienating but some people alienated and some attracted. Like yoga. Radicals – not an extension of the left but our own thing.	
Support in the community Oakland	54:02 1:07:25	56:00 1:08:20	When Kaiser Centre, people were supportive. SF never had the same type of traction, community resonance.	
Why people left	56:02  58:05	57:33	Part – infighting, part – nobody really figured out what happens when the camps get evicted. We didn't know how to get to the next level. + it wasn't new anymore. Natural – things die out in time. Infighting – took its toll + not figuring out what to do without a physical presence. What we didn't realise was how important it was to physically defend the space (lesson from Tahrir). And in the US, we don't have much history or skill set for things like occupations. No big squatters movement.	Living temporality
Solidarity and inspiration	57:33	1:00:00	Letter of solidarity from Tahrir.	
BBQ assemblies	1:00:35	1:04:10	Brilliant idea and worked well. Might have been better – not a result of us contracting. We talked about it and I don't know why we didn't do it that – start neighbourhood GAs throughout Oakland. Outreach. Speak-out. Communities. Good idea but needed to be done earlier on a bigger scale. Why not earlier? People were worried about fracturing. The idea though was to have neighbourhood assemblies and bring proposals back to the larger GAs.	Prefiguration/living temporalities
Bay Area Occupy GA	1:04:10	1:05:09	Something we never did. There was Occupy SF, two Berkeleys, Oakland, OccupyCal. We could have done some good large area organising if we had had some more formal cross-pollination stuff happening.	
About now	1:05:28	1:05:56	Smaller, not issue-oriented but action-oriented – right thing to do given our energy.	
Good things	1:05:56	1:08:00	Focus on direct action. Our big street demonstrations were about around big direct action like the port	Prefiguration

Appendix 8

about Occupy and about the future	1:08:00	1:08:42	shutdown. It's gonna carry forward to the political culture of the area. People sense that this is a right thing to do. Targeted actions rather than big marches. Ability to mobilise people quickly. What the next spark is gonna be, I'm not sure but it's there. Future – focus on direct action and away from the traditional coalition building on the left.	
Fears about the future	1:08:42	1:10:00	That the lack of an immediate success will be demoralising to people who were newly involved in activism. We'll go to doing our own things and not cross-pollinate any more. He doesn't want to lose the resonance that we have in the general population. Occupy question at the Miss America pageant.	
Class	1:10:00	1:11:30	We don't talk about class in the US like they do in a lot of other places. Idea – that we're all middle-class.	
Personal meaning of Occupy	1:11:57	1:14:30	One of the most remarkable political moments in my life (30 years of experience). Gave people different concepts and language that we didn't have in the US. And he hopes that it permanently changed the activist culture to be more focused on direct action. But also current actions can dilute its radicalism.	Prefiguration

**Interview transcript**

**Dublin, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2012**

***ASZ: Why did you stay at the beginning? ... then why didn't you move away like some people did in November?***

– OK, let's talk about that and let's talk about maybe it's related – something about what brought me there and then also why I ended up staying cause I think that that's part of the story, I guess.

So I guess I would put myself, you know, involved in activism, writing about activism, being in activism but not completely but I would go on occasion like going on marches and stuff and would write a little bit about what happened not since like since sort of recession happened but prior to this as well. I would have been involved with people in alter-globalisation like 99-activism and 2001 kind of time and anti-war kind of stuff and a bit later than that in the States. So I would guess I would always have those kinds of views ... environmental issues, global justice issues, that's where maybe I would come. So there had been a number of you know various protests and there had been very few in that way in Ireland. It was kind of strange, you know. I went to an event just before that and it was like a hundred people maybe. You know, I'd been on union marches that had like 3-4 hundred people even at the height of what was happening. So it was just kind of interesting in that like – I would have been aware obviously of what was happening in the Middle East and North Africa ... and then with the Occupy Wall Street to some degree but I guess I would be more taken [inaudible] alter-globalisation ... I went there on the 8<sup>th</sup> literally, you know, mainly because my boyfriend said: 'Oh you know there is a protest at this time' and I was like OK I will go along to it. ... So we came along at like, so we were expecting just another event, you know. We kinda liked the fact that it was an event and not a march and that kind of stuff. So we showed up at whatever time it was – 2 o'clock or something and there was like 30 people there when we got there. And it was people sort of standing around and there was emo kids and goths and whatever and the skater kids and this kind of kids who are normally there. And then it quite quickly it builds up and then there was a hundred people and then that hundred [turned] to maybe hundred and fifty max, I'd say, at the peak.

But like what was really cool about this was just like you know people sort of just coming together. There seemed to be a few people who would kind of initiated it all. People were

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talking about the Arab Spring, people were talking about Occupy Wall Street, put down stuff on the ground. There was a kind of festive feeling. I immediately met a friend of mine and his little son who like we've been protesting together like 12 years previously against the IMF and the World Bank. He had one of the signs he had from that protests that he brought home and you know bumped into a couple of people we knew but didn't really meet like loads of people wasn't...

One of the things that was interesting about it was that it wasn't like the people you start to recognise, the usual suspects. There was a quite festive feeling, people had put stuff on the ground like pieces of carpet so it was like immediately occupying this space in a physical way and in a kind of pleasant way. Also the fact was that it didn't have lots of speakers and it really nicely very quickly formed into this like circle of people. You know, people sitting on the ground. And we had this wonderful weather bizarrely, and everybody was talking and people would just get inspired and jump in to say a few words and it was really random people and it was very free flow. So it was like a first assembly and it was really like an assembly – OK, like an open mic thing.

And that was really nice and now and you know we both came down to kind of take the photos, show a bit of support, end of story. We knew that there was that idea that people were gonna camp there or set up tents or whatever but didn't know those things would happen. So we were there and that was happening and people were really speaking from the heart about different issues so there was a really nice feeling. There has also been a variety of people of all ages and stuff like that and I think that was really one of the fundamental things that it was across of a lot of divides. There was people from a lot of different classes, people who were coming from different perspectives and it was totally equal feeling. There wasn't some platform with people speaking and everyone else listening or people shouting and all that kind of stuff. It was this kind of space.

And then like I bumped into a couple of people that I knew including S who I knew before and at some point somebody put up the first tent while we were standing there, having this kind of meeting. So it was that kind of active thing and it was just like it was this kind of laugh but it was also like by doing it, by exemplifying, there was a different symbolism, it was a different place to have it; it was at the heart of the current financial system. Just the presence there was important so it was sort of like we're already achieving something by simply having this on-the-street politics happening right now. And it was right from the start – that was the first hour of

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it.. OK so I bumped into S ... and she headed off and we said we had to head off to somewhere. We might come back later so we saw what was going on and that was kind of exciting, you know what I mean.

...That was like the first couple of hours. And then we were going to, I think we were going then to meet friends for dinner and to go to a gig so we did that and then with the friends who were up from the country, we drove by like at 11 o'clock. We drove past and we saw then that all the tents had had appeared, there was still lots of people and our friends were like 'oh, that's cool!' and we've seen it, right, and we were like 'oh, yeah, that's true' [laughs]. They dropped us home and we literally immediately grabbed stuff and went in to see what was happening. And the thing was again – there was this amazing energy. The people didn't believe that even they managed to stay that long at that point, you know. And then there was this process of happenstance, I guess. We didn't know anybody there but we went in there. There wasn't anyone ... like I'd say between 50 and 80 people – lots of people standing around and popping by. I'd say still there was this nice energy, lots more tents, set up in that first day area and I literally didn't know anybody. I was sort of chatting with people, finding that it was like, you know, I'd be more sociable than my partner would be so I sort of talked to people, he was like 'oh, I don't really know anybody [laughs] you know, let's just stay at the outside.' And I remember thinking that I will not... cause it was all like well, what's the legality of this really? I remember on day one I didn't want to sit on the carpets. I would be like this would be a declaration that I would be like crossing some kind of line, you know [laughs]. So I was standing, hovering on the edge of the carpet area...

### ***ASZ: Just in case...***

– Just in case. I don't know if the couch was already there. I think possibly couch has already appeared, I can't remember. Looking back at my photos, it's kind of amazing to see and also to see the people that were there. People were still there at the end who were the very first people. And it was a random collection – that was the thing. It wasn't like – there is a group of people and then there is some other people who came along and they all knew each other. It wasn't like that. It was like most people only knew two or three people there so it wasn't like this has been organised by this group and you're now an audience member.

### ***ASZ: You think that that helped the camp to stay for so long?***

– I think that it was just by chance in a way. It was very lucky that it was able to stay for so

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long. I think it was a benefit in that it wasn't for example some group that maybe the Gardaí or others were already watching or who they would already have a standard response to. And because there wasn't people that they would go: 'you're in charge, we want to speak to you' that kind of thing. I think it was just very lucky that some of the people who were involved from the start created that kind of vibe but also that it just happened together very well. It created a vibe that was open and welcoming and 'you could become involved.' But I also think that it also contributed to the chaos and the general disorganisation and lack of communication [laughs] was the fact that nobody knew each other. People haven't worked together before and people weren't in agreement on how they should work together. There wasn't a set of common policies or even understandings of how things could or should be done or anything like that. So that was also a big disadvantage in some ways. You may want people to develop this together but it's a bit messy.

But I think on this first day it was like, then I remember calling, I think I called or texted S to see if she was gonna come down cause she'd said that she's gonna come down later on and I was just chatting to various other people. And then she did come down and she was gonna camp there. We were not gonna camp there. Then her tent was not working. She'd borrowed a tent of somebody and it like would not have any poles or whatever [laughs] and she really wanted to camp and it was already going into like twelve or one o'clock in the morning at this point. So we would be chatting to various other people and we wanted to kind of do more stuff and then I was like OK, I'll lend you a tent so I went home again. Went home, got the tent, got a few other things like the tarp poles or a few other things, I think and brought back the tent for her and partially because of that I became much more involved because I was setting up a tent, helping other people set up their tents, then said how to use the marquee that was how my partner got involved. And because he went from like 'no, no I'm not gonna get involved' to someone, someone told him to hold this and he held a leg of the marquee and we were just laughing non stop and I was already more involved. He was still hanging back a bit. But we've been setting up the tents so it was like we've crossed a bit of that line and then just the energy was really really amazing. There was really nice, good people, interesting people. I had really good conversations, really talking about a lot of these issues, there was a sense of my relief, I think, and of solidarity, you know. Like finally, people have had those conversations. I had like maybe a dozen of conversations that first night and met lots of people that I could actually hang around with and talk with and who were concerned and knowledgeable about various issues. I must say that sometimes you go to things and you know like it's all very well but you wouldn't really

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wanna spend a huge amount of time in those people's company necessarily whereas I must say, very unusually, there was a large diversity of people who were becoming involved – many of them literally just stopped by on the street and then became more and more involved. And I felt like I could actually spend time with those people. Like this is really interesting and as I said, most of them didn't know each other. So I was talking to C, S, and M and O and W and a huge number of those people in that first couple of nights. It was just an incredible energy – like you didn't even want to leave really. I stayed there till like 5 or 6 in the morning on the first night. It was just amazing the fact that we were doing it – now effectively camped in the middle of the city, in front of the Central Bank was in itself this amazing kind of thing to have achieved and gotten away with doing that it was like how is this actually happening? As someone who has been on dozens of things probably over the ten twenty years, you just don't see stuff like that happening in Dublin.

So I guess, there was a huge amount of energy and that was we ended up staying and then we decided to come back and not being able to leave. I felt that that was a strong part of it in that first two weeks. It's like you didn't want to leave, it was hard to drag yourself away. There was so much happening, it was exciting, it was doing something. It was good people, interesting conversations, developing things together. You know, on Sunday night we ended up we said we needed some sort of coordination and I ended up sitting down with two other people drawing like the first things like what would a coordinator do and how would we rotate this and that kind of stuff. You know generating structures, building things. People were arriving all the time to camp here.

***ASZ: Can you actually tell me a little more about this? How did it actually happen that we set up this role of a coordinator?***

– Well, I know it was on Sunday night. [about documenting things...really intense] I remember there was more and more people. We had like 40 people or so staying there. People coming in with donations of like food mainly or other things, it was happening early on. Stuff was kind of rushing around but there were couple of assemblies. I think we had like at least one on the first day and one or possibly two on the second day but they were just sat down on the carpets and everything and a couple of chairs that we got and the couch there, you know. I remember on Sunday or maybe that was Monday, I think it was on Sunday we were kind of helping to facilitate something, which again I was still very nervous about this I was still very nervous, I don't know – I don't want to get too involved, you know what I mean. How illegal is

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this, all this kind of stuff. But ended up sitting on the couch with somebody else and they were kind of taking the session. It seemed like there was a few people who knew what they were doing to some degree, right? But I don't know how we actually decided that. There was again everybody was involved because there was only that number of people like 30-40 people maybe. A General Assembly was just all of those people sitting in the circle and whoever else just happened along. So all of those conversations people were talking about writing stuff and that kind of thing.

I think there was a lot of concern on the Sunday, particular Sunday afternoon and evening about whether we're gonna get moved on by the police and there was an expectation that that would happen. Everyone had expected that that would happen immediately. During Sunday it was like OK it was not gonna happen today but it's certainly gonna happen Monday morning. Everyone expected that early Monday morning, weekend is over, people are coming back into the work at the Bank, the police would arrive and make us move on. That was getting discussed a lot. I remember people were doing kind of livestreaming already then, someone came down to do a workshop. I ended up doing a legal workshop that night even though I know very little about that but I was like, it was like, you'd be chatting to somebody and said 'Oh I knew a bit about human rights, and they would be – brilliant you could give a workshop on this and I'd be like, well I really don't know about that', I really didn't want to be doing that but then like it goes from an informal chat to someone announcing it and there is like 20 people listening and people livestreaming it and I'm like I'm definitely sitting on the carpet now.

In terms of the decision about the coordination, I don't really remember. I do remember S sort of being like, seemed to think it was a good idea. She asked me for help and asked someone else. There was three of us that sat down and she was like – I think we should do this and I think that you know we had security etc. but we need some kind of organisation and some kind of notebook of what's happening cause already so much was happening and we couldn't keep track of it. She was supposed to be then coordinating and I don't remember very specifically but I remember that all that kind of stuff seemed to be happening quite organically in terms of people going like 'Oh, can you do that? OK, great!' Somebody needs to do whatever, you know, and there would be a kind of like the semi-pressure or someone would volunteer to take on something at least for a while but not very permanently. So we sat down and I remember that we decided we'd do 4-hour shifts and most of that for a shift was trying to work out what it would be that coordinating would involve and we wrote down responsibilities and revised them



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and then we were checking them and checking what seemed to be working reasonably well and then being able to brief the next person coming on and hand over meeting and that kind of stuff so that was what we were doing Sunday night and legal stuff. People were doing legal preparation. I don't remember completely clearly but by Monday like 2am we had a draft of the responsibilities for coordination and what they would have to do and [inaudible] to the books of contacts and stuff like that that we had already established at that point. But again I hadn't been involved at all in the initial parts

***ASZ: [Talks about how the decision to use consensus was made.]***

– Yeah, I know it's funny. I remember there was some thing about are we going to have consensus or not and people kind of went: 'Oh yeah, OK' and there as this kind of thing like 'oh yeah – does everyone seem to agree? Oh yeah, so it seems like everyone agrees, OK'. But then it was like, 'oh,' what was actually agreed was we'll have consensus but if agreements can't be reached, then we'll go to majority voting, right? If there was something really contentious, that we will work out the details of exactly what that would mean but it would be kind of like we would be trying to move to but if there was something that would have to have a decision made in a certain amount of time, right?

***ASZ: And when was that?***

– I felt that that was at that start, right? But I don't know if that was at that same meeting or if that was at a later but I do remember this getting said and it's certainly my understanding of what had been agreed was that there was consensus and that there would have to be efforts made to and it wouldn't be like just OK, if we can't have consensus initially then we just go to the majority voting. But more like if we really felt like all resources have been exhausted in terms of reaching consensus, then we can go to majority voting but exactly what level that would be at wasn't clear.

I remember a lot of those things weren't clear but I also think that there was a mixture of hesitancy by people because you tend to think that somebody must be organising stuff so people sort of assumed that so they don't want to just make it up completely or make a totally new suggestion cause I think ... somebody here must know what's going on and it's not me so therefore there are some people over there who sort of look like they know what's going on. You know, they must have some good idea of how to run this thing that none of us has ever done before and some people did have that in that the real Democracy Now! people who had

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been very involved with initiating the whole thing but who were much less involved because there were so many other people once it got going. They had quite specific ideas about things like consensus, general assemblies and various other things. And a couple of other people who maybe would have been following Occupy Wall Street, you know, in depth had some very specific ideas taken from there or elsewhere but I think for example this commitment to consensus, you know, would that have just happened by itself? I don't think so. I think there had to be at least a couple of people who knew something about consensus and who were quite up for it to at least suggest that and who were themselves committed to it. I think it was very open to other things happening but I think there was definitely this kind of aspect of 'nobody really knows what is going on so everyone assumes that somebody else really knows what's going on' and stuff kind of just. People think there must be a system there where actually there isn't and if you show any level of competency or common sense or have some ideas, quite possibly those ideas will come to happen because others might have some other ideas but people will tend to maybe just accept things that people are saying. So I think this led to both on the one hand a good element that people could just come up with different ideas or different ways of doing things and implement them quite quickly and potentially and then on the other hand it had a negative side of people believing that like certain people are in charge or taking over or trying to impose their ideas or whatever whereas they may be just people who are more kind of vocal or whatever in their own views. So I could see that kind of dynamic happening. And I have seen it in many groups many times before and I see it in myself when people start coming and asking me things as if somehow I know about them [laughs] It's like 'I don't know'

***ASZ: At least when you don't know, you can probably do something about them. [Talks about the assembly after the eviction and how you went to change that a bit and make it work better.]***

– It's a tendency that I have. It's like, and sometimes to my own detriment, cause I see things and I see what needs to be done or at least I have some ideas of what could be done and then I'm like 'well, OK I should try and make that happen if nobody else is.' And sometimes it's not stuff that I am particularly interested in or good at either but it's kind of like we're just descending chaos here because nobody can hear one another. I have some idea of how we could maybe improve that and then I feel like I have to step in and that's not always good because again people can feel like 'oh' they'll tend to ... hmm what's the word I'm looking for

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here, you know, they'll tend to look to you or to other people who seem to have some ideas what to do to do things instead of doing them themselves. I thought that that wasn't too bad in this situation in general. People did tend to take things on themselves.

And another thing about the decision-making – at the start it was quite good because everything could be brought to the assembly and the assemblies were just like a meeting of everybody and everybody could speak and you needn't explain what's happening and people were just and also was very welcoming. And it was like OK if somebody wants to, we should have a meeting. We is anyone who is here and then it was like well, let's just make that happen and people were trying just the best they could. But I think in terms of what kept me there was like this is something exciting and different and vibrant and that's what it's exciting to be part of. And most of there was just so much to do, it was such chaos. It's like how do you go about trying to run an encampment in the middle of a city that is also a political and economic and social experiment. It's like there is a lot to do there, you know! [laughs] I think also the things like you know the fact that everybody assumed, there was so much tension on the Sunday night. I was really nervous about what was going to happen. Are people going to get arrested, or do people wanna risk arrest? Will there be any choices, will there be violence? People were very committed, another very important thing for me actually was that it was really committed to non-violence from the start. That's all I'm really interested in. I'm just not interested in being part of something that isn't explicitly committed to that and operating that way and not everybody understood what that meant completely but it was very strong and there was quite a few people who was very strong in that way. I think there was also quite a lot of women who were involved which also gave it quite a different vibe. At some times it was too male-dominated and even in terms of like running General Assemblies and other things, it could be but I think the women – almost all initial coordination was done by women. The first about 8 shifts seemed to be women, I think. But I think it gave it a different perspective than what you do tend to see a lot in that it tends to be men speaking, or it tends to be men who have the microphone and who are saying what's to do it can be quite aggressive in terms of its overall emotional feel in a quite a lot of things that are organised in Ireland. So I think this is something that went different. But you know what I was going to say was because there was so much tension about was it all gonna get shut down and that was expectation that it was gonna get shut down on Monday morning. When that didn't happen, there was a kind of sense of euphoria then. It empowered people more, you know, because that had not happened and because everybody had come together to try and prepare for that and then there was no threat

of that for months then after that till the legal case, like a month and half, till the legal case in November or the threat of the legal case.

***ASZ: OK, so can you tell me a bit about why you didn't leave?***

– Well, I did pull back quite a lot but I never completely left. I guess the first couple of week was very euphoric, I felt, and interesting and energising and I certainly did not intend to be so involved but became more and more involved. After the first sort of couple of weeks, even the second week, I was so exhausted. I spent like 15 hours at least at the site every day and had totally kind of stopped doing virtually everything else so my life had gone totally on hold for two weeks. Couldn't sustain that obviously. For some people they were in a position to camp there full time. I certainly wasn't. And at some point, I was trying to get time to reflect on it. I did feel that there was not enough time for reflection and that was one of the problems. It became so absorbing and also I became very involved with like the practicalities of things in that first week and after the first week. Literally, I ended up just working the entire time that I was there. After the two weeks, there was virtually no time for conversation happening. There wasn't any time for that. You ended up doing stuff, organising things all the time, coping with kind of mini-crises all the time. People asking you stuff or having to set up things. So after those two weeks I felt like I need to reflect on this a bit more which I still wasn't managing to get to do. I was kind of trying to withdraw more for like about a month, I'd say. But I was still down there a lot. I think day 15 or 16 was the first day that I didn't go. I took a day off from being there you know having been there every day prior to that as were many other people. But a lot of people had already vanished by that point because you would just kind of burn out, I think and for people camping out there even more so.

So I was trying to get more to a situation in which I wanted it to be in that I wanted to be involved, I wanted to be contributing but not where it didn't require that commitment of time and energy because it simply wasn't sustainable. I felt that that was one of the failings overall that it didn't evolve structures that easily enabled people to do that. We were trying to do that and it worked better to some degree - we had a good rota system going for a few different things – for food, for security, for even arts stuff, for coordination, for facilitation. Then people could come for that time only, come for two hours or four hours, do something useful. So it worked if you were able to come 3 or 4 times a week. It was probably just about doable but if you came once a week for a couple of hours, it was very hard for people to actually engage and do something useful. And that meant that people even maybe not so much by then but

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certainly soon were starting to just become irritated because it was so complex and the communication systems weren't good. So you couldn't really say, arrive having not been there for like 3 or 4 days or a week and then feel like you can catch up on what was happening and then do something useful. You could just ended up wasting a lot of time or not having a clue what was going on or things would happen and then two days later there would be no signs of those things having happened.

So I was still involved in quite a lot of stuff. I did end up doing a lot of coordination but also did some security and did other things around the camp. I didn't want to do the media stuff, got a lot of media requests to do media, just wasn't comfortable really doing a lot of media. At that point I kind of stayed around and I felt like I could be useful in terms of sort of documentation so that was something that I wanted to be doing and I also some stuff maybe with facilitation but even while I was doing the facilitation – that wasn't really my main focus. I did feel that we could help with doing sort of documentation of the kinds of things that needed to be done at general assemblies generally in terms of giving a basic introduction, those could vary. We agreed those things at General Assemblies – OK let's have that kind of stuff. So there wouldn't be that loss that was already happening after three or four weeks where it was like 'wait a second - did we already discussed that before or... work was done on that a few days ago or maybe yesterday and we need to hear about it.' So I kind of tried to move in to do more stuff to do with facilitation and documentation and produced a few documents like that like here is my perspective on what the system or the organisation of the camp is cause it seemed very much like we need systems or organisation and that was always, I felt like the biggest problem was communication and the second biggest problem was the lack of structure and ways of adapting that structure.

***ASZ: When you say communication, you mean communication between people in the camp or with people beyond the camp like as you said they were coming back after some time to know what was discussed already?***

– I think it was both – communication within the camp and within the larger movement. It was like to know basic things like the sound system is being delivered at 2 o'clock or we need a generator, or 4 more people have arrived at the camp or we're having a General Assembly at this time, or lunch is at this time, or somebody has offered to give food so communication among one another of people who are actually physically present, who were camping or who were involved about just the basic things that were happening. So the coordination was helping

with that and getting the rota systems and all. And then the larger communication – among like the media, and those kind of publicity kind of things, and then more importantly to the larger public, larger people who may want to get involved or who are maybe just following online or who were able to come down once a week, or come to a march, that kind of thing.

***ASZ: Why do you think it was so difficult? Was it because we didn't have enough people to kind of commit or...?***

– There was a few different factors. One was the fact that it was a group of people that were very eclectic and ad hoc and didn't have necessarily a long term commitment, didn't know one another, people didn't necessarily trust each other at the start. Nobody used second names. People wouldn't like to give their email addresses or phone numbers because of what we were doing was potentially illegal. Certainly in that first say two weeks I certainly didn't learn the vast majority of people's second names and that was a conscious decision for most people cause it was like people were nervous to put down their names on things because particularly in those first weeks it was like well, how potentially criminal is what we're doing here? Is it or is it not? We were never really able to find out.

It was clear after a while that probably nothing was gonna happen but it's been quite violent evictions at this point of other ones in other countries. So there was partially trust between people just like 'I don't know you, I've never met you, I met you yesterday'. People are showing up, you know nothing about them, there isn't some sort of a group that you are being accepted into by showing ... you are part of the group. I felt that, I felt like there was almost this sense of responsibility where you felt like 'well, I have to come again tomorrow. I can't just like...' But again there was no system to be able to go, 'listen here's this has been going on for three or four days and here is some of my knowledge that I can now entrust to within the system.' It was like if I leave, that knowledge wasn't gonna go to serve for anybody else.' So I was trying to maybe get stuff down to the coordination book.

I think people were very trusting but people went from being like considerably more suspicious at the start to being almost like insanely trusting 'Oh, I've never met you. Here why don't you manage all of the treasuries and take all of the money even though no one has seen you or met you till yesterday?' for example. Those kind of issues of who do you trust with what. I think there were those kind of basic issues and also this issue of like well, you never know if people are not an undercover cops. There is an assumption that there is at least one or two undercover

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police. There certainly were that we got to know. Some of them we worked with who would come and who would for example arrest people who were dealing drugs, you know what I mean? That was very clear and it would be ridiculous to think that there was not police presence – there had to be. And then we would see that and there was like, there was 4 undercover police that I was aware of for example, not within the core groups but who were around at various points.... So some people were very suspicious of that kind of thing and then some people would be suspicious about - is this person a member of a certain organisation, is it a person on some sort of power trip or is this person dealing drugs or something like that, you know those kinds of issues were definitely there. So there is a natural thing there that some people are distrustful. Another people have different things to lose like some people have jobs. The communication was more in the general situation among people who were there through the wider movement and people who were sympathetic or involved in some way – who has access to Facebook pages – admin access? People had done things like someone else would set up a YouTube stream – never put anything on it, was nothing to do with the camp at all apparently – stuff like that was happening all the time online where it's like how do we do things like approve together what goes up on Facebook, or what goes up on website when the website was set up? Who has access to the website? We didn't have structures to decide that kind of thing and we didn't decide them. And again you have to trust that person who volunteered to do the website is a reasonable person both technically and is not just gonna start posting whatever they feel like.

I think there was a lot of stuff around the media group. I think the media group did a lot of really good work and was trying hard. And again everybody is volunteering and it takes a lot of time but for example I think that people assumed that say the media group would do these things like also draft leaflets for example. They were not ever involved with that. They didn't see themselves at all certainly in the first weeks doing that kind of stuff. They saw their role as relating to the external media. I think that people who weren't involved with it didn't understand that the media team had to field constant requests for interviews, statements for press stuff, for things in the paper, for photo shoots and that was happening all the time and having enough people to do that and it is not enough to go 'Oh, yeah come down tomorrow, there might be someone to talk to or there might not be' - that's not how you can do that. There was misunderstandings around what people were capable of doing or what they even meant to be doing. So I don't think that the media team for example saw themselves as having to draft statements that would be internal or print up the leaflets – the media team doesn't

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think that this is what they're supposed to be doing when they are dealing with 20 interview requests a day and they don't have any funding to print out leaflets, you know. Who's gonna pay for the printing of the leaflets? And the same thing was about how do we decide how we're gonna spend the money on the generator or not?

So communication was one of the problems. and the other thing was just the very harsh environment that we were in, you know. The very challenging physical environment in which we had no electricity, no hot water, no, you know, it's lashing rain, it's windy, there is no computer. People are worried about their shelter, about their food, their safety. People are getting robbed, people are getting physically attacked on a nightly basis, people would come and throw rocks onto the tents, you know what I mean. People would come and urinate onto people's tents like passing strangers. You know what I mean? You're dealing with that kind of environment. You're trying to maintain life on a city street. Very quickly that sort of absorbed all energy and time of the people who were camping there. So in that sense it was just a feature of the nature of the physical environment that created problems with communication as well.

People did not know what they were doing. We all didn't know what we were doing. We made it up as we went along! [laughs]. Nobody had a plan, nobody had a template. It is very different from the Wall Street situation which is like the nearest comparator. I felt like a lot of those features were simply created by the situation. It would have been surprising for us to overcome them easily whereas I think quite a few people became so annoyed by these things that their either left or became really pissed-off and that's understandable. Most of it, I didn't think that there was very much maliciousness. There was definitely some. There was people that had a lot of interpersonal problems – that was another issue – interpersonal conflicts, starting to dominate social or political or philosophical debates. It was like 'you're not talking about politics any more. You're just annoyed because of the way such and such person spoke to you yesterday and that somebody did this yesterday or somebody came back drunk , this kind of stuff. So I think there was some stuff was about fights between individual people and some stuff was about people being angry about a particular group or groups of individuals did. But I felt like a lot of it was actually endemic to the environment in which we were functioning but people often didn't feel that. They felt like, they wanted to feel like someone has done this to them or has caused this problem as opposed to this problem has arisen because of the situation we are all in.

***ASZ: [...this interview to overcome binaries... creating oppositions within a space that was so***



***much more complicated.]***

– I certainly felt that. I never camped there but I always felt completely accepted, completely part of what was happening. Now that's a combination – I made myself part of that, I made myself part of, I had the confidence to go into the meeting and be like I have a right to speak at this or whatever but also I was explicitly welcome in that way and I never felt that 'Oh, I have a less of a role here because I haven't physically slept here'. I also felt that my role was different to some degree than somebody who was sleeping there and that my needs and my concerns had the right to be different. I think that things that were of issue only if you were physically sleeping there like where your tent was going to be or what was happening say with food were issues that were primarily issues for people who were living there. And that other people should be acting in supportive roles of that but they should not have a deciding role. It's not up to me or somebody who wasn't camping there, where somebody's tent was pitched or whether they had dinner at 6 o'clock or 8 o'clock unless I feel that that is massively impacting something else that was in the movement.

Sometimes people felt like there was this division between campers and non-campers whereas I didn't feel that division that much. There was some division between people who were like very involved and people who weren't, you know. But again part of that was because of the system. There wasn't a good way for somebody who shows up at Thursday night, wants to do stuff in a good faith. There isn't a system for this person to get to know what was happening. That created problems and that was exclusionary. But there was simply quite a lot of interpersonal conflicts. People just didn't get on personality-wise or because that there wasn't a very strong set of things that you had to sign up to to be part of Occupy Dame Street, meant that people with a lot of different perspectives on what's important or what needs to be done or what it was about ...

***ASZ: Did your own opinions of what this was about changed throughout the occupation?***

– I think they certainly did mainly because I didn't have very strong views on that. I felt like I was doing many different things altering over time and I felt like it was a very strong symbolic act of simply being present there. To maintain the physical presence, to occupy a public space that in itself I think is a very symbolic act and be in a particular location, to be facilitating actual politics happening on the street. People engaging in a political discussion, people coming up with solutions, people debating the problems that is also significant – to have

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examples of direct democracy, examples of participatory democracy, people making decisions about the things that affect them. Having that was very significant. Coming up with different ideas, raising awareness, engaging the public, becoming the focus where public anger, public action, having these other events that had thousands of people there, having the media presence that was getting this attention on these issues, simply being able to say that we don't all agree, we're not going to sit here and simply take the austerity measures or things that are being forced on people.

It evolved over time like for example – issues involving democracy became more important to me over time. The importance of being able to work on things having some shared sort of goals or things we were trying to achieve without having a defined purpose, I didn't feel that it was really bad that it didn't have a really strongly defined objective. I felt like that was a strength. I did evolve over time. I did find myself feeling seeing things around, the interpersonal interactions and how important they were and just looking at those things that were important to me at the start I think they became more important over what kind of atmosphere you create and how do you embody the principles you want to believe in on a daily basis and in different situation. And if you believe in non-violence, how you actually live non-violence on a daily basis and just how important it is. And how if you want to have a democratic system, you need to have structures that enable people who aren't very confident to speak or aren't the loudest or male in many cases. How you actually enable voices to be heard, how we all are responsible for that – those kinds of things which were important to me at the start became more and more important over time and other things around ideas of what's the minimum that you need to do to be involved. I felt like it was becoming a problem that essentially if you had a lot of time and energy, if you were physically quite able for example, then you could participate very well in Occupy Dame Street. If you were not any of those things, it became harder and harder, you know. I think those things are very important. You had people who were becoming very physically, very seriously ill. Some of the core people had multiple heart attacks, strokes, people being hospitalised, people being badly injured. It'd been very difficult for them to participate and that's not democracy – how do we overcome those issues?

In terms of decision-making, you know, that was at first very effective but overtime became less effective and again, this was in part because of the communication. We instituted systems like typing up the minutes, taking minutes, typing them up, getting them online within 24 hours. That was really important. Not everybody realised the importance of that. Deciding topics that

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will be at the General Assembly, in advance, having an open way for doing that at the general assemblies so everyone could participate in that, people understanding the importance of that? That these things are part of democracy, part of including everyone so everybody could participate on an equal footing in decisions. We didn't have ways of you know decisions would be made at General Assembly or indeed internally and they wouldn't be followed upon and people wouldn't even know that those things would have been decided. A week later nobody seems to remember that actually we had two or three discussions on this and such and such things were decided. I think there were those problems. I think there were repeated efforts I think from middle-end of November we had the threat of the court case which didn't happen then and that pulled people together again but I think things were already starting to disintegrate.

That was also around the second time the debate around whether to join the DCTU march. I think that was an issue. I don't think that was the issue but I think it was an issue and that we lost some people who wanted it to go that way and again there wasn't a good way for people to move forward. OK, that was a decision taken not to participate in the march that was happening at the end of November but then there was no way to actually say how are we going to continue on. Some relationship will develop this in some way that will either say 'well, we're not gonna have any contact at all or we can have cooperation on certain things' So that was starting to happen and then I think there was simply burnout and other things and lack of commitment or even development of those system cause I think there was only a limited number of people who were really interested in and maybe also had some of the skills to try and have those communication systems and those people couldn't do it by themselves and a lot of people weren't simply that interested in that. They were just like: 'we'll come along, we'll do our stuff'. You know, not everybody wants to tell other people that what they do or other people were interested to do it later if they are not around or can verbalise their political ideals that clearly and how do you overcome those issues? So you have those issue that people are burned out, people are tired.

Some time in December, I think December through January, we had a couple of really dubious people who kind of moved in in late December who were explicitly violent, who were not interested at all in the movement and they just saw this as a kind of easy pickings and were kind of say who were on the fringes maybe dealing drugs and stuff - that's what it seemed like and who were quite intimidating people. That was the only time, I think in January that I felt

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actually physically unsafe in that location. And I think other people had felt that prior to that. So I think we had a situation there that like there was that kind of decay but then there was reinvigorated from middle of January onwards but again there wasn't enough people, it was very hard to continue or to maintain systems. Myself I'd be much less involved from let's say November on, hadn't been around at Christmas. A lot of people wouldn't be around at that time but I'd be there around once a week. There were frustrations like that but there were quite a few people who tried to get things going. They were trying for example, you know, people repeatedly said things like 'we need to get the systems back that we had at the start'. That is what they were saying the whole way through January, February and there was a number of efforts made by small groups of people to try and get..

### ***ASZ: So systems like...***

– Like coordination, like rotas for security, like the times to pick up the food. You know food would be donated and for a whole period of time we were just not going to pick up that food from restaurants or whatever because there was no system in place to make that happen on time. The same with coordination – it only really happened consistently, I think for like a month and then it was occasional and sporadic and then it wasn't happening at all really in December and January and then people were starting to do it again. Things have evolved and it was hard to keep up with that. But at this stage so many people had left and a lot of people who were really critical of it weren't even there at all. You'd think it ended like in November or December when it went on till March. Some of the things that caused problems were there from the start and were better or worse at different times.

### ***ASZ: What are the lessons that we have learned from Occupy. What is it that we know now and if we were to do it again, we'll do it differently?***

– I thought about it a bit ... but I may need to come back to you on this. I think a lot of attention needs to be paid to systems really – to systems of communication, to systems of decision-making, systems of interaction, to how things are done and then how everyone understands how things are done. You need to either have some structures like that or some ideas of how those structures can be and then be able to present them and adapt them and all agree on them together or you need to develop them from scratch together. Even if you are developing from scratch, everyone is gonna be bringing their different ideas anyway ... but you certainly have to have a way of some level of formal communication structure which again can

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be adaptable, can be changed, it has to be democratic and open to change but needs to be there and needs to be written down. And if for some reason you don't want to write them down, you need to have some other way other than person to person communication to allow things to be communicated because otherwise you simply it's far too time-consuming and chaotic and things get forgotten and lost and nobody understands what's going on and it very quickly becomes anti-democratic because people cannot participate and you have an inevitable situation where knowledge becomes power much more so. You need to have the systems set up early on.

The other lesson is simply it's the time and energy that is required to do this kind of thing. The time and energy required to have any kind of social movement is potentially very large but the time and energy required to for example maintain a physical encampment in the city centre location that is another whole massive dimension. So you need to think carefully and I said this at the time, you know, there is a reason why physical occupations tend to be direct actions as in they tend to be physically preventing – actual living, physically being there is an important part of what is happening. So you're preventing the forest from being knocked down by living on the trees or you're chaining yourself to something to stop people getting in to the summit or you're blocking the roads so the oil tankers can't get through. Physical presence was important here in terms of reclaiming public space and also its symbolic location but it was not achieving the same things that an occupation ordinarily would or at least often has. You're kind of having all the effort and work of maintaining the physical occupation but for primarily symbolic ends so that's a huge amount of time, work, energy, people. We worked out that we needed at least 36 people a day just to maintain the very basic, minimal activities of the camp. That's a lot of people, you know, if you are trying to maintain that and you're not going to be able to have the same people tomorrow. You have to recognise that time the people, what kind of resources do you actually have, what can you call on. We had a huge lists of support, huge amount of public energy, thousands of people were involved at various times, probably into the tens of thousands, you know. 3-4 thousands would come on marches and you really had thousands of people on a weekly basis who were involved in some way. But you have to think about how can we best put these people, this energy and time and effort to best use or to effective use? What kind of energy and time is required to achieve... cause basically, people's ambitions within Occupy Dame Street were far outstripped in what we could possibly accomplish which is good at some points but sometimes you need to go and check what do we actually going to try to do, what can we actually do. So one lesson would be systems, another would be ensuring basic

communication systems are robust, present and written down and robust.

***ASZ: [Talks about an idea of a democratic lab...]***

– There was constant reinventing of the wheel at Occupy Dame Street and certainly, we need to try not to do that as much. At the same time we need to still enable more ideas and creative space to happen – that's crucial. But just to try to use creative space to create new things, I ... and to fix things that are not working as opposed to abandoning things that did work well. So I think we need to do that kind of reflection. I think this could be part of it – collating some of the writings that have already been done, photos, talking to people, the kind of reports and doing that kind of analysis and comparing it with others. I do think there is often a much – there is not enough practical answer-solution-based texts and writings out there where you read stuff and it's very theoretical about creating a new political system or an economic system...

***ASZ: [Talks about activist cookbooks...]***

– Yeah, you have those tool kits to some degree that you have – 'this is physically how you do these kinds of things. But I think what is missing a lot is not 'not there' but it's not as present as it could be or at least connections between the theoretical or the philosophical, sort of political ideas and then the more practical dimensions of that like for example 'if you believe in direct democracy, in my view, you also must believe in effective communication.' Lack of communication is anti-democratic. Not sharing knowledge and information is anti-democratic in my view. You need to practically speaking understand and be able to say – we're not just having minutes of the General Assembly because one or two people think it's like really like taking notes but it's actually part of operationalising your principles in action and I think we do not have enough – we have some – but we do not have enough written and understood about how those things can be done and how they can be done in difficult situations, in challenging situations.

And again it cannot be that those with the most education and those with the most experience and those with the most confidence and those who are most happy speaking in front of the group, that they are the ones who can somehow participate. It has to work and be incorporating the experiences and desires and knowledge of people from all of different walks of life and from all different educational or confidence levels etc. So we need to say that actually this is why we need to do these kinds of things or some options are, you know, if you're

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having a meeting, recording it in this way or doing this and doing this and here is like five different options of exactly how you do it and why you do it and then being able to... and in terms of other things that are really important – early tasks – and roles that are sort of fundamental to the survival of the movement in the early stages and what are things that are nice to have if we have enough time and energy. Because what we found here was people either were completely absorbed in the essentials or the essentials not getting done and then we don't get to do bigger things that we all want to do and we all or they are all folded on a small number of people which again is not just and is not in accordance with the principle of justice or fairness or of democracy if a few people are doing things that nobody else really wants to do and they're ending up doing it because they feel more responsible. I think that trying to connect those things and at the practical level, say these are kinds of things that can be done, these are things that as experiences have shown are often important. They may not be key in every particular situation. They may certainly not like you say 'here is the structure and you must implement it' but it's more to say this is what experience has taught to a lot of different people in a lot of different situations. 'These are essential things or these are the things that in 9 times out of 10 seemed to cause enormous problems if they are not done well or they're not done at all.

I think there needs to be a way of balancing those things. When you're focused on structure, it's easy to become totally absorbed in that and totally feel like 'oh, we haven't done that or we need to organise that or whatever.' And it's no, you also have to do stuff and you also have to have fun and you also have to be achieving things that are part of your larger goals. Having a very nicely organised movement that doesn't really do anything is not an achievement either. It's a balance between those things and at the same time some people became pissed off because not enough was happening and not enough was being done and not enough was happening politically and I think that's huge and I found that as well and I'm not even getting to discuss these topics or learn anything. I felt like the learning was a hugely important part of workshops of Occupy University and the knowledge you could get from interacting with different people, the events that would happen. I think also the fun and music and stuff like that was also very important. But in the end if you're not feeling like you're actually doing anything to challenge the economic system, why should you bother having you know an organising a working group? You're not just organising a working group for the sake of having a working group. You're organising it because you think it's gonna achieve something so I think it's balance as well, you know.

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