

“We just need to go Egypt on their ass!” The Articulation of Labor and Community Organizing in New York City with Occupy Wall Street

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Introduction

Most of the people who marched down Broadway on the afternoon of September 17, eventually claiming Zuccotti Park and renaming it Liberty Square, practice *activism* as opposed to *base-building campaign organizing*. The difference between these two approaches to social justice work is a crucial one for understanding the tensions and potentials in Occupy Wall Street, and for distinguishing the core of Occupy from the more institutional left, comprised of established labor unions and community-based economic justice organizations. Occupiers focus on direct action and tactics whose aim is to raise awareness about an issue, or to challenge the state and corporate power (most usually by challenging the police or by claiming and occupying both public and private space). The institutional left focuses on building issue-oriented campaigns and leadership development among communities directly and adversely impacted by economic inequality in order to deliver tangible results.

One of the things that makes Occupy unusual is that it is one of the few times outside of the global justice demonstrations in Seattle and work around the party conventions, that groups which practice the discipline of *organizing* worked with *activists*. Even more unusual is that organizers and activists have worked together over a sustained period of time and have moved from issue to issue and campaign to campaign. Some are very localized, such as work against stop-and-frisk policing in the South Bronx where Occupy Wall Street works with local neighborhood activists, to the Bank of America Campaign, where Occupy Wall Street activists are part of a national campaign where partners include the community organizing network National People’s Action and the faith-based federation of community organizations, PICO.

Some of the *de facto* leaders involved in Occupy Wall Street began to meet before the occupation of Zuccotti Park on September 17, 2011, though others joined at other points, both early in the occupation and after it was first threatened in October. The early leaders met during the summer, and during the month of August, met in various places, including Tompkins Square Park, to hold small General Assemblies in which a disparate group of activists engaged in a process that led to a commitment to “horizontal” or non-hierarchical decisionmaking procedures could plan an occupation of symbolically important public space in order to allow themselves and others to voice their outrage and indignation at the way in which contemporary capitalism and liberal, representative democracy, have colluded to impoverish millions and enrich the few. The people engaged in those first meetings came together from disparate places. Some came from the global justice (alterglobalization) movement; others from organizing groups and poor people’s campaigns in New York; some were neighborhood activists; some were part of the institutional left; and most importantly, many were individuals with little previous political or activist experience who were motivated by current economic conditions and the emptiness of mass consumerism who a place to connect with other alienated individuals and who wanted something more from life than a Frappuccino or the latest version of an iPhone.

Occupy's style of decisionmaking and its networks were drawn, at least in part, from the alterglobalization movement and the various independent left and anarchist currents that fed into it. As writer and activist Marina Citrin has written:

Our movements are not without precedent—quite the opposite. “One No, Many Yeses,” for example, is a direct quotation from the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico, who rose up in 1994 against NAFTA and what they called a death sentence for their country. The movement sparked the imaginations of millions of people around the world, and by the late 1990s other groups were emerging that also rejected the concept of hierarchical power, of looking to the state as the ultimate decision-maker, instead of looking to one another. The sorts of groups ranged from the Direct Action Network in the US, which emerged as part of the 1999 Seattle protests against the WTO, to the social forums in Italy and many hundreds more around the world (Citrin, 2011: 9).

Seen in this way, OWS may be understood as a moment in a larger movement. And in many respects, this makes sense. As Geoffrey Pleyers (2010) argues, the alterglobalization movement is composed of activists with two fundamentally different orientations, but often-consistent political views. On one hand are those who seek, through political action, to establish spaces and communities that are maximally autonomous from the commodifying logic of capitalism and from the circuits of capitalist production. They emphasize “being the change they want to see in the world”, to use Gandhi's expression, and their prefigurative democratic practices are centered on direct participation and consensus-building. As opposed to this “way of subjectivity”, the second tendency in the alterglobalization movement was toward “the way of reason,” focused on clear lines of decisionmaking, expertise, and developing political programs that could be fulfilled. To be sure, the movement's participants mostly lie between these extremes, but Pleyers proposes that these two “coherent logics of action” structure the alterglobalization movement as a whole, whether one is talking about French intellectuals or Mayan peasants.

This polarization of political styles is also typical of OWS, as many observers have noticed. If anything, however, the more autonomist, subjective style has dominated, and OWS has become known for its initial refusal to make specific policy demands, for the diversity of voices present during its occupation of Liberty Square, and for the generality of its core slogan, “We are the ninety-nine percent.” The genius of the initial occupation and its simple, open-ended message was its ability to enable anyone to look at the encampment ensconced amidst the canyons of the world's financial center and see a reflection of their own fears, concerns and criticisms about the current state of global capitalism.

Alongside this tendency for radical inclusion and an almost studied naiveté about the potentials of small-scale, horizontal organization and large-scale expressions of indignation, there is also a strong tendency toward suspicion of more “vertically” organized, bureaucratized and formal, and less directly participatory types of organizing for social change, such as trade unions. As Nikil Saval argues, “the occupations are in danger of treating labor the same way the Democratic Party treats it: as a source of bodies and money, a mere service that tends to be thanked and repudiated in the same breath. Labor, in this way, is like the homeless: it lends legitimacy to but also threatens the burgeoning movement” (Saval 2011: 112). The threat—one that certainly does not apply to the homeless—is the fear that “Big Labor” will overwhelm the

movement and channel OWS's militancy into finite and unimaginative marches and rallies that are more about fixing the system than changing it.

This paper is based on the idea that the picture just offered of OWS and its historical roots is one-sided, though not, in itself wrong. By shifting our viewpoint away from some of the activist elements of Occupy, we can better understand both the political moment that produced it, and the challenges of building a movement that can once again bloom in the spring, and also take advantage of the ongoing crisis in global capitalism to change the ways that majorities of people are governed and govern themselves. This alternative view begins with a longer history of labor and community organizing in New York City. When we consider this history—and even fairly recent history—and refract it through the events of 2011, we can get a clearer picture both of how OWS grew as it did, and much more importantly, what the key strategic questions are in the near future. Since the eviction of OWS from Liberty Square on November 15, 2011, the activists have had a harder time doing what they were able to do best during the occupation, namely, draw in the media and draw in many thousands of people curious and anxious to engage in a collective democratic project. The post-Liberty-Square period demands a different kind of activism, one that draws on the strength of the organizing model, but fosters its meeting with the strength of activism. This paper offers one perspective on the challenges of doing this.

In what follows, we present a stylized narrative about labor and community organizing and organizations in New York City that highlights the problems that they face with institutionalization and cooptation by a rapidly neoliberalizing state. In this story, several community-based, poor-people's organizations, as well as labor unions come into 2011 with a developing sense that they should become more militant in their tactics and less local in their orientation. Some are involved in pre-Occupy demonstrations and occupations of space and several maintain a presence at OWS during the occupation of Liberty Square. These groups' development, even as it intersects with and sometimes feeds and informs OWS, neither appears central to the broader narrative of the radicalization of politics in 2011, nor consistently articulates with Occupy. This paper, therefore, considers these areas of intersection and informing of OWS by existing labor and community organizing in New York City. As the poor people who are the constituents of these groups often say, their recession did not begin in 2008 and whatever happens with Occupy or any results that Occupy gains, they will have to continue their struggle in any case. Accordingly, the strategic questions about Occupy and even more broadly, about the present political conjuncture, look different from this viewpoint.

The particular strategic questions facing labor and community organizations, we will suggest, can be cast largely as questions of temporality—time and timing. In the next section, before going more deeply into the history of labor and community organizing, we will turn to the formulation of these questions so as to put them in the forefront of our analysis. After surveying the history of community and labor organizing in New York City, we then present an alternative chronology of 2011, and close with a reconsideration of the strategic questions facing organizers now.

Time and Strategy

To think about strategy is to think in terms of a series of connected and related activities that build off of one another and that unfold in time. Two basic questions face any organizer, namely: What change needs to take place? and How do we go about forcing that change to happen? These can be elaborated to ask a range of subsidiary questions: Who can give us the change we demand? Do we have enough power to force that entity to give us what we demand? How do we move that entity to move to deliver on our demands? Who else do we engage to move that entity? How do we know when we are making progress toward our demands? What institutional arenas must be engaged? Which allies or potential allies can we work with or mobilize for our (common) goals? How do we change the way potential allies work so that they will work with us?

All of these questions have a strong temporal aspect. Because strategizing involves abstracting out concrete questions from the larger flow of events and arranging them in specific ways, how one defines and aligns long- and short-term goals moves through temporally patterned institutions, and negotiates with others shape an overall strategy. Alongside this activity of abstraction, however, is that of development as an actor, in which developing one's capabilities to act on the world, rather than just react to it—in short, learning—is a crucial outcome and process of strategizing.

For the larger social justice movement and its various actors, it is important to understand, for example, whether OWS is a movement unto itself or a *moment* in a larger movement or another identifiable break with the past that brings us into a new movement cycle. And, to take the title of a recent book, “It all started in Wisconsin” (2011), it is worth asking whether Wisconsin is the proper starting point, or Seattle—or San Cristóbal de las Casas, in Chiapas, as Citrin suggests. The answer one gives locates different people and different issues at the core of the movement. Or, for that matter, did 2011 simply see the confluence of several, mostly independent movements? Was it a radical break from past practice? Will labor and community organizers start acting and organizing differently? How much time will labor and community organizations devote to Occupy? How are the different styles of meeting—horizontal and consensus-based, as opposed to (more) vertical and professional staff-driven, in the OWS and community- and labor-organizing cases, respectively—going to affect the effort that the latter will devote to the latter?

Further, given that OWS is in the process of determining whether making demands on the state is something it will engage in, and labor and community organizing orients itself around winning demands, the strategic question for labor and community activists—and one centrally concerned with time—is how to mark time, development, and progress of the movement. Without being able to gauge progress in campaigns, movements are led to use other means, some of them more inward-looking, such as the milestones in creating and maintaining communities, or the regular pattern of group meetings, and some outward-looking, such as gauging the progress of a movement by the number of confrontations with the police, or the number of tweets, re-tweets, and website hits one gets for publicizing an action or an event.

Time and Political Explanation

Different ideas about temporality also permeate political and historical explanation in the social sciences. Disputes among historians have long simmered about whether historical change occurs gradually or suddenly, in cycles, trajectories, or breaks. Arguing for an “eventful” sociology, William Sewell, Jr. points to moments “after which nothing is ever the same”, events like the fall of the Bastille, which helped to define the category of revolution both within the

French context and afterward. The rarity of such events, whose significance can only be known well after the fact in any case, suggests that we might look at other “shapes” of historical change. Sewell points out, for example, that the long history of capitalist business cycles—boom-bust crisis dynamics—suggests that if we confine historical explanation to sudden shifts, we may miss some larger dynamics that occur alongside, and sometimes in conjunction with those shifts. The question raised earlier, “What kind of a moment is this?” expresses these analytic choices well.

There are concrete consequences to answering these political-historical questions. Howard Kimeldorf’s account of longshoremen’s unionism on the West Coast in the 1930s shows that a key “strategic pivot” in turning unionism toward radicalism was the decision of a group of Communist Party activists to reorient their propaganda newspaper to the present, day-to-day needs of the workers, and to soft-pedal the eschatological rhetoric of the coming revolution (on the indefinite horizon). Ann Mische (2003) argues that the divergent ways in which the youth activists she studied from the Workers’ Party and Communist Party understood the proximity of social revolution during the impeachment crisis of the early 1990s, and marked the steps needed to get there, impeded their ability to work in coalition with each other in spite of their revolutionary politics more than it impeded them from working with much more moderate coalition partners. The alignment of temporal orientations of action, what Mische calls “temporal cuing”, recognizes that the ways in which institutions or groups organize and orient their activity can “abrade” against those of others. This can, as Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek (1993: 321) have argued in a different context, create both “tensions and opportunities for...institutional change” (Pierson, 2004: 136; also see Armstrong and Bernstein 2008).

The Positions of the Institutional Left

To tell a story of Occupy, or of the moment in which Occupy emerges, from the standpoint of organizing and activism of longer duration is, therefore, to look at questions of strategic “cuing” and institutional friction, in order to probe its possibilities and potentials for an expansion of existing activism, and perhaps even its redefinition and reformation. The labor and community organizations that have interacted with Occupy have themselves been undergoing a gradual process of self-redefinition and revitalization over the past twenty years.

Labor

In 1999, Gus Bevona, the head of Service Employees International Union, Local 32B-32J (32BJ), stepped down under pressure from the national union, but with a \$1.5 Million golden parachute. He left behind a \$425,000 salary, which was about 15 times the pay of the 55,000 janitors and doormen upon whose dues he relied, and a penthouse apartment and office over union headquarters with marble floors and richly inlaid wood panels. A union boss of the old school, Bevona had become the highest-paid union official in the country, and one who ruled over his local autocratically. The same year, Stanley Hill, the executive director District Council 37 of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (DC 37) was forced to resign in the wake of a titanic corruption scandal (in which he was not directly implicated). The District Council—an umbrella group of 56 locals of public employees (“from Accountants to Zookeepers”) comprising 125,000 members—had seen twenty-four of its local presidents and its powerful associate director removed from office, indicted, or both after it came to light that they were involved both in a widespread embezzlement scheme and had stuffed ballots to fix the vote on the 1996 contract with the city.

Bevona and Hill represented a kind of more and less robust version of late-twentieth-century unionism. Bevona, who was not above hiring private detectives to spy on his critics, nevertheless bargained hard with the real estate owners of New York, and his members were better paid than other janitors around the country. Hill's predecessor, Victor Gotbaum, was known both for his public pugnacity and for his ability to compromise. Hill, on the other hand, was widely regarded as a nice, but ineffectual union leader whose appetite for compromise was heartier than his appetite for confrontation. Hill's members were constantly under siege: while the city workforce expanded during the 1980s after having been decimated during the fiscal crisis of the 1970s, by 1990 the Dinkins administration was being forced by bond-rating agencies to slash the payroll. The 1995-1996 master contract DC 37 leaders fraudulently passed contained two years of no raises (an effective pay cut) with raises only coming in the last three years of the contract. It also contained a no-layoff clause, though hospital workers were exempt because the Giuliani administration sought to privatize public hospitals.

Perhaps the most serious assault on public employees, however, was the expansion of the city's workfare program, the Work Experience Program (WEP). WEP required welfare recipients to "work off" their welfare grants at the equivalent of minimum wage. WEP worker worked mostly in city agencies, and did work that most often had been done by unionized municipal employees (most DC 37 members, but also members of Transport Workers Union Local 100, whose leader at the time enthusiastically supported WEP) before they were downsized in the early 1990s.

Community Organizing

In the early 1990s conservatives launched an attack on low-income people and the government programs that served them. Welfare recipients, and in particular mothers on welfare and their children, came under attack as the government sought to slash programs in the midst of the recession of the 1990s. Across the country, states cut and or ended welfare programs for single adults. The Bush administration allowed state-level waivers in how the federal welfare program could be run, and sowed the seeds of what would eventually become welfare reform. Then Presidential candidate Bill Clinton, a moderate Democrat who was backed by conservative wing of the party (the Democratic Leadership Council), proposed "ending welfare as we know it", which became a rallying cry for "moderate" Democrats, conservative Republicans, and even liberal Democrats and a hook on which to hang their proposals to at best revamp, and at worst, end programs for the poor.

In New York State, Senate Republicans set their sights on the state's Home Relief Program, the welfare program for single adults, and sought to cut key components of public assistance and Medicaid for families. In addition, an attack on recipients themselves began to take form through media and political advertisements which blamed welfare recipients for the state's budget woes. A coordinated strategy to raise issues of welfare fraud in the media and in public hearings led to the criminalization of welfare recipients, leading to calls for tighter controls on the application procedures and for systems to control welfare recipients' lives, including mandatory fingerprinting and drug testing. Welfare-bashing became the norm from both Republican and Democratic elected officials.

In this environment, poor people's activists (mostly from the housing movement) social service advocates and institutions, progressive activists from the religious community, AIDS activists who were concerned about attacks on both public assistance and Medicaid, and one of the city's largest labor unions, 1199, came together, at first to fight the 1992 state budget which

proposed many of these cuts. and then continued and deepened their relationship to organize massive protests at the 1992 Democratic Convention in New York City. These partnerships and many of the people around that organizing table would in a few years continue their fight in a range of more traditional community organizations.

Nevertheless, in December 1994, at the end of Mayor Giuliani's first year in office, the longtime housing activist, Harry DeRienzo lamented the trajectory of the community-based housing movement in New York:

There was once a genuine housing movement intent upon social and political transformation via the physical redevelopment of inner city neighborhoods. Somewhere along the way, however, the social agenda got confused with the vehicles created to carry this agenda forward. Community organizations that once focused on the demands of neighborhood residents have now become "community development corporations" dedicated primarily to their own institutional growth (DeRienzo, 1994: p. 25).

Community groups were, DeRienzo argued, "managing the crisis", having largely been coopted by government service contracts and development fees into dialing down their militancy.

For at least some groups involved in housing and homelessness, WEP's major expansion beginning in the winter of 1994-1995 struck hard. Low-income tenants of community development corporations began to lose their welfare benefits for workfare-related infractions and rent rolls became unstable. For other groups, their growing specialization in policy advocacy seemed to produce little substance, as increasingly Draconian welfare practices proliferated under Mayor Giuliani and the state welfare agency, first under Governor Mario Cuomo and then under his successor, George Pataki. A small number of these groups turned to mobilizing and organizing WEP workers themselves in order to generate public pressure to defeat WEP, even as it was embraced with greater or lesser enthusiasm by the upper echelons of DC 37 and TWU Local 100. This put community organizations in the position of crossing over into labor organizing, and after a period of adjustment, they found that they were organizing workers who were not officially recognized as employees, and were therefore not entitled to coverage under labor laws or other protective legislation.

By mid-1996 two principal groups were organizing workfare workers, WEP Workers Together and ACORN. WEP Workers Together (WWT) was a coalition of three smaller organizations, the Brooklyn-based community development corporation and tenant organizing group, Fifth Avenue Committee; the Urban Justice Center's Organizing Project, a grassroots political education initiative of a group that began as the Legal Action Center for the Homeless; and Community Voices Heard (CVH), a grassroots organization of (mainly) women on welfare that spun off from the Hunger Action Network of New York State, an older, more established advocacy organization. ACORN was the New York City chapter of a larger, twenty-five year-old national organization of membership-based organizing initiatives to focus the power of poor and moderate-income people. It had come to New York City in the mid-1980s as part of a national squatting campaign to highlight the lack of affordable housing. The national organization had gained some experience in labor organizing alongside various service employees' campaigns, and ACORN quickly put organizers in the field to stake its claim to represent WEP workers citywide.

Alongside efforts to organize WEP workers, there arose other efforts to organize workers and agitate for the rights of workers who were otherwise not accorded the full rights of employees under labor law (whether by statute or by practice). Community-based organizations

such as the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAAV) began a domestic workers organizing project while other domestic worker organizing in the Asian community, Workers Awaaz, began under the auspices of a women's rights group called Sakhi for South Asian Women. Make the Road By Walking, an organization based in Bushwick, Brooklyn, was founded in 1997 as both a community organization and a workers' center, organizing around workplace issues on a neighborhood level. There were many other examples of immigrant labor organizing outside of the "regular" union movement, and the 1990s saw an increasing confluence between labor organizing and community organizing and social advocacy, reflected, as well, in the emergence of workers' centers and anti-sweatshop advocacy on one hand, and living wage legislation on the other.

Nevertheless, even though entry into low-wage and immigrant labor organizing played a revitalizing role for many community organizations in the 1990s, moving them from simply becoming adjuncts to the neoliberal workfare state, these groups have still played a strongly institutionalized game. Their organizing revolves around campaigns with finite goals, which are often developed in dialogue with their members, but are also, in the organizing tradition of Saul Alinsky, calculated to be winnable (even if they take time) and that do not go politically beyond the experience of the membership base. For example, CVH—one of the constituent groups of WEP Workers Together—worked with others to pass a "transitional jobs" bill in City Council. It took nearly three years for the legislation to pass, and it was then vetoed by Mayor Giuliani, who subsequently enacted his own program roughly on the model of that proposed by CVH. In spite of the fact that Mayor Bloomberg changed the program to slash costs—and pay for the workers in these jobs—Community Voices Heard continues to advocate for the program's expansion in large measure because it is better than WEP, which continues to be an alternative. Though the group also calls for the abolition of WEP, and has done so since its inception in 1995, the programmatic demands are far more limited.

Labor, Community, and the Revival of Revitalization

Several countervailing tendencies push against the institutionalization of the labor and community left in New York. One is that because organizers are often much farther to the left than their groups' demands, they have actively searched for ways to escape the trap of cooptation that made their organizational forbears so politically limited. As a result, few of the groups that emerged from the labor and community organizing in the 1990s have turned toward service provision. Second, as they encountered—and found themselves frustrated by—New York City's strong mayor system, these organizations began to build contacts and coalitions at the state level and to join coalitions at the national and even international scales. Under the strong-mayor system, the City Council—which has been dominated by political progressives since 2001—has very little power: it can neither legislate job creation nor tell city agencies how to conduct their business. These are all done by the mayor. Because New York City will have had two decades of Republican mayors by 2014, moving progressive programs through the City Council began to appear to be futile to many groups. Further, because New York State actually retains a great deal of power over the city (especially in matters of taxation and revenue), and because policy around rent regulation as well as policy around welfare are both the purview of the state government it no longer made sense for these groups to focus all of their activism at the municipal level.

Community and labor interest in state-level organizing is perhaps epitomized in the formation, in 1996, of the Working Families Party (WFP) by ACORN, and several local unions, including SEIU and the Communications Workers of America. Because in New York State,

parties can cross-endorse each others' candidates, WFP has largely been a pressure group pushing Democratic candidates to the left so that they can get the WFP's endorsement. Though it has run candidates independently of the Democratic Party in local elections, it has focused on becoming an electoral power in the state, where it has teamed up with the independent political operations of its sponsoring groups to pass important legislation on living wages for government-sponsored contracts (i.e., home-care workers) and, with the Teacher's union, union rights for home-based childcare workers.

Because many of the new community organizations that were formed in the 1990s came into existence as a result of national policy change—primarily welfare reform (including the law barring welfare for legal immigrants)—the new batch of community groups had an orientation to federal issues even before they were even formed. Once anti-poverty programs became the purview of state governments rather than federal government after the 1996 federal welfare reform, these groups became involved in state level policy campaigns. Even more traditional neighborhood community organizations like Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES) a neighborhood-based tenant organizing group, Community Food Resource Center, and Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) a Bronx social service agency, saw the need to engage in federal and state policy campaigns and oriented their work beyond the city.

The Center for Community Change's National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support, a national effort to impact welfare re-authorization in 2002, pass living wage ordinances locally, work on immigration reform, and move jobs legislation locally and federally was founded in 1999. It brought many of the players in New York City together to work on a national campaign including Community Voices Heard, New York ACORN, Make the Road By Walking and the newly re-constituted WEP Workers Together/Fifth Avenue Committee organizing project, FUREE (Families United for Racial and Economic Equality). In national meetings with groups from other cities and states, staff and leaders from New York City began to form or strengthen relationships not only with other groups from around the country, but also with each other, free of the silos and turf issues that sometimes existed on citywide campaigns.

The relationships that were built at this national table were only strengthened with other formations and national meetings that were called to talk about national work to share skills and campaigns. Other convenings were called by Center for Third World Organizing and Applied Research Center, National Employment Law Project, and myriad of funders. In 2002, National Jobs with Justice, along with funders interested in global justice issues, invited community groups to attend the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, adding a global perspective to these groups' thinking and potential work. Successive trips to the other World Social Forums and national meetings about global justice issues including mobilizations to the WTO and FTAA, deepened groups' understanding of the importance of local-global connections in their work.

Third, unions have begun to be somewhat more confrontational than they have been since the 1970s, and, where some unions have hesitated to be militant themselves, whether because of institutional constraints, internal divisions, or fear, they have still supported groups that were. There is no question that especially in the public sector—where unions are now the strongest—most unions have been unwilling to strike. This is because in New York State, public sector workers are forbidden to strike, and are fined two days' pay for each day out, their leaders risk jail and fines, and their unions face fines and penalties unlimited by statute. The Transport Workers Local 100 struck for three days in December 2005 and has taken more than five years to recover from the financial pain inflicted on the union by the courts. Nevertheless, it is beginning to take more critical stances than it did in the past (an insurgent democratic movement within the

local finally won the leadership election in 2000, and a new reform leadership was elected in 2010). Rather than support the expansion of WEP among station cleaners, as the union did in 1996, it instead is working with CVH to propose transitional job programs in the Transit Authority as an alternative. Similarly, in order to signal the extent of the changes at DC 37, the administrator who was appointed by the national union to take over after Stanley Hill's resignation in 1999, began by roundly criticizing WEP. Though workfare itself is not a central concern to most unions, it is clear that the encounter both with workfare and the groups organizing around it, combined with internal reform dynamics within the unions, have led them to view solidarity with poor people and with people who rely on the services their members provide as indicative of union democracy and reform itself, regardless of the internal practices of the union in question.

A final tendency that pushes against institutionalization also reflects the increasing integration of organizations and issues with each other. The integration of these organizations' work is the result of a few key factors including the national gatherings such as those described above and their local manifestations, such as the Right to the City Campaign and PUSHBACK Network, and the leadership turnover in many of the economic justice organizations in the city. Much of the new leadership of these organizations had worked together previously at groups such as CVH and the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, and had both professional and public relationships alongside personal friendships. In addition, local intermediaries like Social Justice Leadership brought staff and leaders from these institutions together to build trust and stronger working relationships. Thus with the exception of New York ACORN, the leaders of the economic justice organizing sector in New York City had both personal and private working relationships that were strengthened through both common work and institutional support.

Moreover, even with the move of housing and homelessness groups into non-standard or "excluded" worker organizing in the mid-1990s, other, new organizations stepped into the breach to organize around housing and homelessness, and consolidated themselves just a few years later. The New York City AIDS Housing Network formed in the mid-1990s but incorporated in 2000 (it is now called Voices of Community Activists and Leaders, or VOCAL) to advocate around syringe-exchange, parole reform, and housing for people with AIDS. Like CVH, ACORN, and several other poor people's organizing campaigns, VOCAL has a staff of professional organizers and an active base of members who help to govern the organization. Picture the Homeless, a homeless- and formerly-homeless people's activist organization founded in 1999 (and with early links to CVH) follows a similar model. Like CVH, which defined itself against the advocacy model of experts speaking for poor people and the service model that seeks to implement solutions to poor people's problems, Picture the Homeless and VOCAL are pressure organizations that have increasingly used direct action to poor people's problems and to the larger political dynamics that create them. The groups' leaders all share organizational histories and, to a large extent, models of leadership development and organizing.

The Events of 2011: An Alternative Narrative

Pre-Occupy

It can also be said that labor and community groups' emerging focus on a picture bigger than narrow campaign claims is simply the product of accumulated frustration with the

dominance of austerity as the default solution to the current fiscal crisis of the state. As VOCAL's lead organizer said:

VOCAL got involved in the revenue fight when our flagship AIDS housing bill – which would have ensured that 10,000 low-income New Yorkers who are living with HIV/AIDS would not have to pay more than 30 percent of their income towards rent – was vetoed by Governor Paterson. Paterson had been supportive of the bill, but he said he couldn't approve it because it would cost too much, and the state couldn't afford it during a crisis. So then, we found ourselves stuck in these reactive fights to defend AIDS services in New York City. It was clear that these dynamics were only going to get worse – that we were going to end up focusing on defending a smaller and smaller pool of services – unless we fought on revenue issues (Organizing Upgrade: 2011).

CVH's director agreed: "Community Voices Heard started getting involved in organizing around revenue and the big banks about a year ago [in 2010]. Recovery funds were dying out very rapidly. Everything that we were demanding was based on a proactive plan that would require more money, but instead we were having to fight against budget cutbacks" (Organizing Upgrade 2011).

In early 2011, it was already clear that the governor, Andrew Cuomo, would push for severe cuts in the state budget, and was unlikely to ask the legislature to extend the so-called "millionaires' tax" surcharge on high incomes. Confronting this situation with their members, CVH and VOCAL organizers began to get a sense of their frustration. Discussions about revenue—usually more technical—were easier to have when it was clear that the Governor was set to forego taxing the very rich in favor of cutting services for the very poor. Henry Serrano, the lead organizer for CVH recalled a meeting in early 2011:

Our members' sentiments started changing after Egypt. We started to get calls from our leaders around these kinds of actions. I've been organizing at CVH for ten years, and this was the first time that our members started talking openly about being willing to take arrests. During a statewide strategy meeting, we talked about this spectrum of actions that went all the way out to more militant actions including civil disobedience. When we got to the point in the spectrum that talked about civil disobedience, at first everyone was silent. And then one woman stood up and said, "We just need to go Egypt on their ass." I saw a real change in the sentiment in the leadership during that meeting. They had been going through these long, slow struggles, and now they were ready to get more aggressive (Organizing Upgrade 2011).

In late January, CVH and VOCAL disrupted a gala of the Real Estate Board of New York to protest that group's support of the Committee to Save New York, a business-led group supporting Governor Cuomo's tax plan and budget cuts.

At the same time, the standoff between Governor Walker of Wisconsin and that state's Democrats over Walker's proposal to gut collective bargaining for state workers left the State Capitol occupied by demonstrators for nearly a month. Two weeks into the demonstrations, on February 26, MoveOn helped to organize a large solidarity rally at City Hall with many

representatives of labor unions and politicians as part of an effort to organize Rallies to Save the American Dream in all fifty states. Though it did not attract participation from community organizations, it did draw out both a large number of unaffiliated sympathizers with public workers in Wisconsin along with a sizeable contingent from labor unions (the crowd numbered several thousand).

Several days later, on March 1, CVH and VOCAL led a group of 150 demonstrators, including activists from the CAAAV, FUREE, Picture the Homeless, Queers for Economic Justice, and the Right to the City Campaign in a demonstration and civil disobedience at the State Capitol in Albany. Seventeen people were arrested. They followed this at the end of March with an overnight occupation of the building.

Throughout the spring, New York City's institutional left—community organizations and unions— mobilized together. Joining together in a large coalition, including students from the City University, immigrant organizing groups like Make the Road, and rank-and-file unions such as TWU Local 100, along with groups like CVH, VOCAL, and Picture the Homeless they held a week of small demonstrations and disruptions at events hosted by real estate interests and investment banks, culminating in a large march on May 12 on Wall Street. Though the march got little media coverage, the May 12 coalition involved a greater number of organizations than other coalitions formed for demonstrations, including participation from national networks such as the National People's Alliance. Among the unions central to the May 12 coalition was the usually moderate United Federation of Teachers (UFT). One of the main claims carried forward by the May 12 march on Wall Street was protest against Mayor Bloomberg's proposed layoff of thousands of teachers in his budget.

To be sure, the list of groups supporting the May 12 action included other coalitions composed of many of the same actors (endorsement lists like this frequently do a little double-counting). Among these was "New Yorkers Against Budget Cuts" (NYABC). NYABC grew out of the May 12 coalition, but hoped to exert continuous, rather than sporadic pressure on the Bloomberg administration, and criticized the May 12 coalition as being too dominated by unions. Drawing inspiration from both the May 15 movement of indignados in Spain and the protesters in Tahrir and in Madison, NYABC planned an indefinite occupation of City Hall Park in June, when the City Council votes on the budget. NYABC brought together groups such as Picture the Homeless, rank-and-file activists of TWU Local 100, and a significant number of student activist groups and smaller left groupings like the Freedom Party, the International Socialist Organization and the Organization for a Free Society. Smaller, by far, than the May 12 coalition, it occupied a sidewalk across from City Hall for three weeks, from June 16 to July 5, from the time that the City Council began to consider the budget about a week after its passage. Bloombergville maintained a small presence—about fifty people, with some turnover—in its camp and mustered about 150 for several larger demonstrations held over the course of the three weeks.

Bloombergville was, in certain respects, a dry run for Occupy Wall Street, and the latter was begun with many of the same activists and networks. Among the poor people's organizations involved in May 12, Picture the Homeless was most involved in Bloombergville, and brought in to help "run security." Because Picture the Homeless had extensive experience with direct action, and in 2009 had even occupied—though for hours, not days—vacant lots owned by Chase bank, it was charged with coming up with a security plan for the encampment. It was also, therefore, involved in the General Assemblies held to make decisions for the encampment once it began. Within the NYABC group, there were differences with respect to the

balance of strategic demands and revolutionary fervor. One Picture the Homeless activist recalled that “The ISO and others, they were saying, ‘we want to have a movement, we want to do what Egypt did,’ and we were like, ‘we’re with you on the movement, but...let’s get through this thing [and the impending budget cuts] first.’” Bloombergville also had to figure out how to bring together a diverse group of people to live together in a tight space, in frequent rain, and amid cultural differences. While a Picture the Homeless activist said that they had to “secure the perimeter...and keep undesirables out”, problems also arose from within, as racial and gender tensions flared over an alleged incident of sexual harassment that was understood differently by different groups present.

While Bloombergville disbanded after the City Council passed Mayor Bloomberg’s budget (49-1), NYABC continued to meet throughout July and planned a “People’s General Assembly” for August 2nd by the Bull statute on lower Broadway near Bowling Green. Shortly thereafter, a call to occupy Wall Street was put out by Adbusters, a Canada-based journal. NYABC joined their call for an assembly with the Occupy call for September 17, and, after some initial disagreements with the more anarchist activists associated with the Adbusters call, began to use the General Assembly model as the main organizational vehicle to plan for the occupation.

In the meantime, on August 1st CVH and VOCAL, both members of the National People’s Action network, joined other NPA groups for civil disobedience and disruption in Congress. Both this action and the August 2nd General Assembly were organized to coincide with a congressional vote on the debt ceiling, and to protest calls for more cuts and austerity in order to offset the debt. Further, CVH began working with New York Communities for Change, the Working Families Party, the union-sponsored Strong Economy for All coalition, and the SEIU-sponsored United NY, to plan a Billionaire’s tour of New York for October 11. This was envisioned as a roving demonstration, visiting the apartment buildings where some of the city’s richest residents live on the Upper East Side.

Occupy

In the early afternoon of September 17th, protesters who were mostly younger, whiter, more from middle-class origins, and more autonomist or anarchist in their politics showed up at Broadway just below the Bull and in front of the downtown branch of the Museum of the American Indian. While their goal was to march to Wall Street and attempt to take it over and set up an encampment, a tactical team of protesters had scouted a number of alternative locations to set up camp. Many people who engaged, and ultimately who took over the park, were motivated by the Adbusters call to action and were not part of any organized group or network. They simply showed up. Some came for the weekly GA meetings, and some for the march, and for a variety of reasons: some to express general anger at Wall Street and frustration with the political process, some for a space for building not only new institutions but also community, and others because of the vague call of action itself.

The initial occupation of Zuccotti Park in lower Manhattan on Saturday, September 17 differed from the growing protests of the first eight months of 2011. First of all many of the people who were engaged were not from the traditional world of organized communities in New York City. Groups like Picture the Homeless had, by September, gotten somewhat fed up with what they considered a lack of focus and obsession with process in the NYABC group, and though there were still some rank-and-file union activists involved, the core of OWS was composed of a mix of autonomists and anarchists (many from out of town) and activists (often students), from NYABC. Among the most significant differences between OWS—even in its

first days—and the organizing that had previously occurred in New York City was its refusal to issue demands and its focus on creating a non-hierarchical space for public deliberation. Much like the activists pursuing what Pleyers calls “the way of subjectivity” in the alterglobalization movement (and with some overlapping networks), OWS actively sought to avoid being dragged into policy discussions, preferring instead to call the entire system that decided and enacted policy into question by modeling an alternative.

OWS, however, quickly acted as a kind of magnet for other protests. Four days after the initial occupation, Georgia executed a prisoner, Troy Davis, whose guilt had been called into serious question by the retraction of witness statements to the court. The following day, a flashmob protest at Union Square was met with a large police response including some arrests that were fairly violently done and whose videos were spread through Youtube. The following Saturday, another march from OWS to Union Square was met by more police, this time using plastic netting to herd protesters and make them easy to arrest. A video of a police supervisor spraying pepper spray in the face of a woman who was already behind the netting and protesting nonviolently—followed by other videos of police brutality—also went viral. This, combined with a string of celebrity solidarity visits to Liberty Square focused attention on OWS, and attracted more people to spend time—sometimes overnight, sometimes just for several hours—at the square.

By this time, some of the groups that had been involved in the May 12 coalition, including Picture the Homeless, CVH, VOCAL, the Working Families Party, New York Communities for Change, and labor unions—led by TWU Local 100, a member of whose executive board remained involved in NYABC—increased their presence at Zuccotti Park. Some groups, such as the Working Families Party and New York Communities for Change tasked organizers on their staff to be present at and participate in OWS. In addition, MoveOn and Rebuild the American Dream, two other national organizations, also put staff and resources into the occupation. This increased presence, and the money and resources it brought to Occupy was critical in organizing a large anti-police-brutality march to Police Plaza on September 30 and in organizing a more traditional, and permitted, labor rally in Foley Square, also in lower Manhattan, on October 5.

By this time, the OWS slogan, “We Are the 99 Percent” was well established, and other Occupy occupations had sprung up around the country and in Europe. In just four weeks, the movement had grown sufficiently that a global day of demonstrations was planned for October 15. OWS activists marched to Times Square and held a rally there, while other marches fed into it, with upwards of 6,000 people and likely many more than that. There were nearly 75 arrests and more instances of police overreaction, again galvanizing the sense that corporate greed and limits on free speech were related. By this time, too, there was much more in the mainstream media on income inequality. A good deal of commentary in the media—and even within some sectors of OWS—questioned how long it was useful for OWS to eschew making concrete demands, now that attention was being paid to some of the core issues that motivated OWS.

Interestingly, neither the unions nor union-sponsored groups (in spite of widespread fears among the autonomists that they would coopt the movement with their resources) demanded that OWS make demands. Nevertheless, there were loose factions within OWS who remained interested in how OWS could further their own organizational goals or at least parlay its energy into something more tangible than a very attractive slogan. There was also a concern among these activists that more energy was spent organizing and mediating conflicts around the

communal life of the encampment than in reaching out to groups that had not yet gotten involved with OWS.

Another point of articulation between existing labor and community organizing and OWS came on October 11 with the Billionaire's Tour of the Upper East Side. Though it had been planned well before the occupation, one organizer pointed out that "[OWS] "gave us scale that we wouldn't have had otherwise." Though earlier actions by CVH and VOCAL to disrupt the Real Estate Board of New York and other supporters of the Committee to Save New York had gained coverage in the business press, their actions did not garner attention in the mainstream press. The Billionaire's Tour "got defined as an Occupy event, which was fine with us, because they brought the scale and the media with them."

Still, coordinating campaign work with OWS remained difficult, largely because of the openness and leaderlessness of OWS. While on one hand, the "institutional left" recognizes this as the "genius" of OWS, its essential participatory nature means that everything works on the basis of face-to-face meetings and on the building of relationships. While this might not seem anathema to community organizations—in many respects, that is what they do—existing organizations often try to build relationships and coalitions with other existing organizations. The antiorganizational strain of OWS means that, "It's hard because Occupy is not one thing; it's whoever we have relationships with. . . We had to figure out how to look at this thing without looking at it through our lens: Who's the person to talk to? There *is* no person to talk to." As a CVH organizer said, "We spend a lot of time thinking how to strategically engage with this movement" and came, eventually, to the conclusion that "members have to make decisions for themselves in terms of whether they want to stay involved as an individual and as an organization."

The difficulties were felt on both ends, though. Though unions were critical in mobilizing thousands of people to defend OWS against a planned clearance of the encampment on October 14, after the occupation was finally cleared from the park by police a month later, many OWS activists were disappointed that a permitted, and very large, union-sponsored rally at Foley Square on November 17 did nothing to challenge the tightly managed and policed protest routines that limit the militancy of demonstrations. Yotam Marom, an autonomist-socialist activist who was involved in Bloomborgville and in OWS from the start, wrote of OWS that

We hit the streets fiercely, abandoning the metal barricades they once contained us in, rejecting the marching permits they offered us, refusing their sidewalks. We were dragged, handcuffed, into the front pages of people's minds, and brought with us a story many were trying to silence – a story about the profit of the tiny few through the exploitation of the many, a story about deep and systemic economic, political, and social injustice. We danced in the streets and parks we reclaimed, and then in the jail cells they took us to when they realized we weren't going home (Organizing Upgrade, December 20, 2011).

That, just two days after the eviction of OWS from Liberty Square, and on a day in which several civil disobedience protests had been carried out by OWS activists, the unions could only muster an orderly demonstration—however huge—was an indication to many OWS activists that the institutional left was hopelessly . . . institutional. Moreover, it disappointed many OWS activists that the institutional left would revert so quickly to distancing itself from more militant tactics as soon as Liberty Square was restored to Zuccotti Park. Without justifying or celebrating his own

position, a union activist who was instrumental in getting his union to endorse OWS echoed this: “They’ll do what they do, we’ll continue doing what we do, and where we can support each other, great.” And as a community organizer observed: “It got to the point where Occupy just realized that they don’t want to do this for hire, that they didn’t want to just bring scale—they have to be more strategic” and that “we came to the realization that [our collaboration] had to be very loose without much expectations.”

The question of expectations was also raised during OWS-associated events that occurred outside of Liberty Square, both during the occupation and after the eviction. Several groups that had been involved earlier in Bloomingville and OWS activists concerned with the barriers that communities of color had in participating in the protest decided to experiment with decentralization, and to bring Occupy into the neighborhoods to work on issues of common concern. Occupy the Bronx, for example, began to agitate around police brutality and especially around “stop-and-frisk” practices that targeted African American and Latino young men. In East New York, Brooklyn, Occupy Homes worked on doing a public occupation of a foreclosed home to highlight the problems of having people without housing alongside housing without people. Groups like CVH, VOCAL, and Picture the Homeless, as well as New York Communities for Change, and FUREE all were involved in this to varying degrees. On December 6, backed by a march of hundreds, Occupy Homes moved a family (a VOCAL staff member’s) into a home, and Picture the Homeless did a workshop on site about a bill they have proposed to the City Council that would mandate a count of vacant property.

And yet, there was no long-term plan about what to do after the occupation, and soon, the family moved out, but some of the OWS activists stayed. One organizer pointed both to the ways in which community groups judge success and to the ways in which OWS activists often did not realize the actual militancy of some of the tactics of the institutional left.

A funny moment, you know, after we took over that house that night...Even how we judge success, which is very different...the next day us, our staff, some of our leaders, we were sort of evaluating, and “Cool...this was really successful. We got a bunch of media hits, we did this. This is great.” It’s very pragmatic. And that night in the house, when I slept over...[Another person there] was like, “We changed the world.” And we’re like, “One fuckin’ house. We took one fuckin’ house.” And then...one of our board members was there, and this...occupier, was talking to him—you know, cause their whole frame is mostly “you guys should join us, we’re doing all this great stuff”—and...our board member’s talking about us getting arrested in the House of Representatives...and the guy was like “Oh shit? When was that? When was that Occupy thing?” and he was like, “No. That’s some shit *we* did,” and he was like “Thanks for joining us.”

Finally, an attempt to reoccupy space on December 17 exposed divisions within the OWS movement and raised questions about decisionmaking processes within it. The “D17” call to action proposed occupying a lot owned by Trinity Church (a supporter of the movement *and* one of the largest downtown landlords). The lot was the site to which Occupiers marched after their eviction on November 15. The Direct Action working group (DA) called the action. Some people regarded reoccupation as strategically critical to the movement, while others disagreed with the space, the timing and the challenges with working with DA. External to the movement, allies in the left—particularly labor and the religious community—were concerned about going after a

target that was a church and supporter of the movement. While internally to the movement, even detractors ended up supporting the action in solidarity, albeit with grave concerns and anger about the process, externally to OWS activist core, support was thin or non-existent. As opposed to Occupy Our Homes, where a number of groups supported the takeover of the house in East New York, D17 and the re-occupation action only engaged core OWS activists and some clergy from churches who were working in the movement. Thus, it was illustrated again that OWS would have a fluid relationship with the institutional left: sometimes there would be joint work and collaboration, and at sometimes none at all.

Strategies and Time, Revisited

There seems little doubt that OWS had a major impact on public political discourse in the United States in the fall of 2011 and up to the present. Appeals to the 99 Percent have given unions a way to talk about their importance that goes beyond the anodyne “standing up for working families” formula that had so dominated their claim-making for the last ten years (and which had little to say, therefore, to families where joblessness was normal, or to non-family households). Democratic politicians—even those who support policies that support the wealthy—often use the rhetoric of the 99 percent, as well. The point is that income inequality has gone mainstream and the essential injustice of the results of neoliberal capitalism, at least as concerns income distribution, is no longer simply a whispered complaint among battered Keynesians.

But what *is* Occupy? To ask this question in terms of social movement studies would usually be to reify it as the “Occupy Movement”, define it as beginning in the summer of 2011 in New York and then spreading to other cities. Inevitably, others would quibble, often claiming it for their own preferred group of activists (whether they acknowledge this or not): OWS can then be part of a global movement for real democracy, whose first major shots were fired in Tunisia; or a movement for greater equality and labor rights in the US, whose first major shots were fired in Wisconsin; or part of a longer trajectory of building new ways of doing politics along autonomist and anarchist lines, a trajectory that begins with the alterglobalization mobilizations and perhaps, in Chiapas, in January 1994. Our locating OWS in a longer trajectory of labor and community organizing in New York City is not meant simply to pile on to this theoretical mess, though a strong case can be made that OWS’s success in growing when and as it did has a good deal to do with these historical precedents.

Instead, we argue that it is more important to understand that Occupy is a conjuncture in which multiple histories converge. In this, it is one aspect or moment of a larger movement, just as, for example, the sit-in wave of 1961 was one aspect of a larger movement, which itself was shot through with multiple histories from communism and socialism to Garveyism, and postwar liberal Protestantism and Gandhism, and Black church traditions and American constitutional legalism. And like the sit-ins, Occupy is anything but spontaneous, even though it is common to hear people talk about it as if it just “happened.” Whether or not the period between September and December 2011 will in retrospect be seen as a turning point or sudden break in the practice of all of its various strands, or even whether it lastingly changes a national conversation from a fatalistic embrace of neoliberal austerity to addressing economic inequality does not just remain to be seen. Whether or not changes are lasting depends a good deal on the decisions that people make, and these, in turn, depend to some degree on the potentials and limits that each of the influences of OWS brings into the present moment.

We suggested earlier that several questions dealing with time are central to strategic concerns in movements, and these provide the contours for the potentials and limits that the groups and individuals involved—and formed—in the Occupy moment. We will deal with three of these here: time spent as a resource, marking time and monitoring development, and temporal cuing of institutional patterns and political expectations.

Time as a Resource

There are at least two ways in which time is a resource for activists. First, it is a finite resource; one only has so much time in a day. Second, it can be a resource in experience. Several aspects of the gulf that opens between community organizations of poor people and Occupy lie in the issue of time as a resource, though there are, of course, other quite important differences. Importantly, these differences are often parsed as the difference between horizontal, participatory structures, and more vertical ones. If, as one activist in Students for a Democratic Society said in the 1960s, “democracy is an endless meeting” rings true to activists today, it is partly because the consensus-based process of Occupy is quite time consuming. Said one organizer from a poor-people’s community group:

It’s been hard, trying to organize with the organizers at Occupy Wall Street. They’re still trying to do it, but it’s kind of a culture clash, in the sense that our members are used to focused agendas, coming to a decision, deciding on next steps...and that doesn’t happen in a lot of these meetings. ...their values are not being so predictive and sort of organically letting things happen which is fine. It’s a different model. But our members are used to “We’re going in and sit down for a few hours, and we’re coming out with a plan. And they’re not seeing that in these spaces with occupy. It’s a cultural challenge....What do we get from being engaged in this?

Another agreed, but also suggested that part of the problem was that the openness of the process could lead to needless wasting of time:

The reason that the meetings drag on is that there has to be consensus for everything. So as long as one person doesn’t gel, the meeting will last for hours. It’s extremely frustrating when folks choose to debate and talk about little simple things just because they want their input on what is going to be on the flyer, what color the flyer is... There was a [People of Color Direct Action] meeting where there was an hour discussion on what color the flyer was going to be. Folks who have the leadership will start something, but then folks who want to have their input will start debating and start talking and then you can’t leave until everything is fleshed out.

Another organizing director recalled telling a staff member:

“You cannot spend time with any more of those people during work time.” It is shocking the amount of...time these people will waste to talk about it again, to organize a call at 9 pm that night, and then to set up another one for 10 am the

next morning...because they all think they all have to have a say about everything.

Several distinctions drive this difference in orientation toward time. First, there is a political distinction between those seeking self-fulfillment and authenticity in their political action and those who want something concrete and immediate out of their time. If participation in collective decisions is itself understood as a key part of the “replacement” of current, hierarchical institutions with more open ones, it makes sense that people who seek this as a good in itself would also be inclined not just to contribute to each decision, but would be disinclined to discontinue a conversation even if (in former David Dinkins’ words) they “have gotten to that point in the meeting where everything has been said, but not everyone has said it.” Second, organizing professionals (those we interviewed for this project) treat time in the way that we tend to when we are working, i.e., as defined by discrete tasks and their accomplishment. Professional activists do not have the same orientation toward time as do those who are taking their “own” time to become involved. But equally, one’s ability to take the time depends on one’s life situation, and if one has a lot of other claims on one’s time, but is still seeking to affect collective decisions, the constant revision of decisions and the length of meetings can have the effect of shutting people out of the process. As one organizer pointed out, in the post-Zuccotti phase, activists are “meeting constantly at *night* in the atrium. Not necessarily at 5 or 6 or 8.”

Experience is another way time is a resource, but like time spent at meetings, it can be double-edged. Organizers spoke of having to talk through the initial frustration members felt with the attention given to OWS, given the often-long experience community organizations’ activists have had in trying to raise the issue of inequality: “We’ve been doing this for years; we never get any media attention.” A union organizer laughingly spoke of some of the OWS activists as seeming as if they thought that they had invented politics, and then said that this was normal for “the young.” The episode related to the Occupy Homes home takeover in the previous section, is another indication of the tensions caused by a mismatch in experience, and particularly by the mismatch of experience and public attention.

On the other hand, organizers affirmed that, especially in the wake of the eviction of OWS from its permanent encampment in Liberty Square, OWS activists have looked to them for guidance and advice: “We’ve been involved in various of the workshops that OWS has had...we’ve been around for 12 years and we have experience so they usually look to us to either participate in the workshops or lead the workshops.” Another said that the *de facto* OWS leaders have “an understanding of the worth of experience in organizing; you know, that you’ve been doing it for a long time.”

A final wrinkle in the distinctions we have been making here is that several of the larger national advocacy and activist groups, community organizing and labor groups have assigned staff members to OWS since nearly the outset and they have occasionally hired emergent leaders of OWS for special mobilization projects. At the same time, these professionals are fully embedded in OWS, so to speak, and can let their more campaign-oriented employers know when it is best to let Occupy’s more open processes take their course, rather than coming on too strong with a specific group’s agenda.

Marking Time and Monitoring Development

Earlier, we spoke of the importance of learning and monitoring in strategic action, and signaled the difficulty activists can have when they do not have concrete, campaign-oriented, programmatic goals to achieve. This is, as we have suggested, partly a product of different political styles and goals between some of the more autonomist “replace” activists and even the more militant “reform” organizers who have come together in New York.

The organizers whom we interviewed marked the development of OWS by two means. The first is by talking about various campaigns in which they were involved. For this reason, every organizer began their stories well before July or August 2011. Said one:

The reason I started the story in October 2010 is that we started thinking the same things. Where’s the revenue coming from? So that’s why we started moving to the bigger questions. We can’t go back every year asking for money for transitional jobs, public housing, and they’re there telling us they don’t have any money. So that’s why we got involved in those bigger fights.

The narrative we presented earlier of labor and community organizing in the run-up to OWS draws largely on these accounts. But the larger point is that each of these campaigns has its own markers for success or failure, its own markers of potentials for expansion and indications of stymied progress. The markers of progress are pragmatic and action-oriented, but still measured against tangible, longer term goals. One organizer involved in Occupy Homes argued that because of a “lack of lack of long-term visioning... nothing came out of the occupation.” He continued,

Because of the eviction from Zuccotti Park, they needed some more long term goals, long term visioning. It became more than just raising hell, highlighting the problems of society. You need something to actually do, something to accomplish to progress, otherwise it’s just a five month long protest without having any tangible solutions.

Nevertheless, for other OWS activists, envisioning the outcomes of a campaign is precisely what leads existing labor and community organizing into its moderation. Said one organizer, reflecting on the way in which groups like his are seen by OWS: “We have slow processes, more mainstream; we’re looking at a particular policy rather than overall, systematic change... Reform as opposed to replace. They’re right. I’m good with that. We’re working on getting 25,000 transitional jobs. I mean, that’s not going to change the system, right? They’re talking about income inequality. That’s a much bigger issue.”

On the other hand, one danger of eschewing workaday institutional markers for development is that they sneak in through the back door. Any observer of the OWS Livestream feeds, of the viral videos circulating during the two months of occupation, and any watcher or reader of mainstream news could see that an alternative marker of time in OWS was the interaction between activists and the police. While the police are emblematic of the coercion that lies at the heart of any system of government, and confrontations with the police therefore strongly symbolize the commitment of activists to systemic change, they are nevertheless no less institutionalized interactions with the state than are futile lobbying efforts. And while they may hold some attraction to young activists—often white, with middle-class origins—they also have

costs in terms of broadening the movement if they become the means by which even sympathetic and organized bystanders also monitor the movement's development.

One organizer spoke of his members as being hesitant "about getting engaged at Wall Street...media attention was around arrests, arrests, arrests...The way it was perceived by people was that it was wild, random arrests going on." Even though the group had done some civil disobedience, it was contained and planned, and the confrontations with the police that OWS marches provoked became a disincentive for involvement rather than a prod to reconsider the justice of the system as a whole (that issue had long been settled!). Further, the eviction of OWS from Zuccotti meant a general dialing down of tensions with the police, and this led even active members of community organizations who had kept a distance from the police violence associated with OWS to think that OWS was finished.

Cuing Patterns of Institutions and Expectations

The idea of temporal cuing raised by Mische suggests that even groups with similar political ideas can have difficulty in working together if they do not share similar understandings of the proximity or distance of their goals or the steps involved in getting there. That clearly applies to sectarianism on the left, but indicates a more general and important matching problem in strategic coalition-building.

A community organizer and labor organizer we interviewed shared some misgivings about the actions on November 17, two days after the eviction from Zuccotti Park. Both shared a sense that the institutional left of which they were a part, misjudged the importance of directly confronting the "rules of the game" that day. Initially, OWS had planned on a takeover of the Brooklyn Bridge, reprising one of the actions that brought it so much early attention. But labor unions then planned a solidarity rally that ended with permits—a permit to rally in Foley Square, and a permitted march across the bridge—thus gutting the Occupiers' hope to confront authority more directly, especially in the aftermath of the massive show of force and destruction of Occupiers' property by the police two days earlier. Accordingly, OWS activists spent the day in roving protests and confrontations. Said one organizer: "November 17, they forced the cops to shut down Broadway; that evening, it was half an hour of speeches by labor leaders and then a nice walk across the Brooklyn Bridge. It's how the two institutions function."

At the same time, the same organizer had a hard time consistently understanding OWS as an institution, in part because of its own anti-institutionalist bent. Because OWS does not have designated leaders or plan campaigns (as opposed to short-term actions), "We weren't dealing with like institutions...it didn't mesh together. We don't approach it as an institution; we approach it as individuals in an institution." Thus, in order to aid the cuing of OWS and his organization, this organizer said that his group relies on "whoever has the relationship with the individuals."

The temporal disconnect between OWS and the institutional left, therefore, has led labor and community organizations to adapt their own involvement to OWS, though with some measure of frustration. The only way to get involved in OWS is to go to meetings and develop relationships. While community and labor organizers credit OWS with "push[ing] people to be more militant", the personal form of politics that it pursues raises the question of whether "these guys are a majority movement or a minority movement? Their tactical decisions don't sometimes match up with what they want to do...From a movement point of view, it's the wrong people doing it." In other words, the time commitment for meetings, the time spent finding out who can actually make decisions or move other participants, and the time spent developing personal

relationships with them (and the marking of time through confrontation with police) can be understood as luxuries that the majority of people cannot afford.

At the same time as they are critical of a style that requires organizers and rank-and-file members to spend a great deal of time building relationships with political novices or with people who do not set clear goals for their political action, they appreciate the flip side of this: “The most brilliant thing that Occupy did was not do any demands...[and they did this to] leave space for unions and other people to get involved in this.” One labor organizer argued that the ambiguity that the lack of demands creates means that “There’s this mystery to OWS now” and this has opened up space for unions to be more militant and more creative, notwithstanding their still-frequent failures to do. On the other hand, he affirms, “not only did they open up space for unions, unions have opened up space to them” and have contributed a great deal of time and space to OWS for meetings. As a result, “there is very real, open dialogue happening at union halls” across the city.

Even as labor and community organizations were crucial to both the development and maintenance of OWS, they often view OWS as something unto itself, and therefore define their relation to it as “kind of like a partnership”. In the distinction between campaign-oriented organizing and attention-seeking activism, they affirm that community organizations and labor organizations have done little of the latter, but that OWS is “not going to be able to do what we do, either.” Another said, “What they can do is what they are doing. If we call them up, we can say, ‘Let’s do this action together.’ And they do.” Temporal cuing of expectations and institutional patterns, therefore, affects what the different actors in this moment understand to be the potentials of working together. Each affords the other some space, and they do not seem interested in a tighter partnership than they have already.

A final aspect of temporal cuing is that of expectations, and this also has to do with the different backgrounds of many labor and community activists and those who predominate at OWS. Said one organizer, unlike his poor constituents,

middle-class white youth don’t have an institution...for them to be organized, for [us] to be able to work with them in solidarity is extremely valuable. They get more empathy...it could’ve been someone’s daughter who got pepper sprayed instead of some public housing resident who doesn’t deserve their home...They have a different sense of entitlement than what our members have and it turns out that they’re a really valuable constituency to work with.

Middle-class entitlement, often understood as negative, is here cast by this organizer as a set of assumptions and expectations about the future. Indeed, experience with adversity can be a liability both because those usually subject to oppression begin to expect it and can become fatalistic (as can seasoned organizers), and because when they get actively oppressed, it is not often newsworthy. If, on the other hand, one expects to be able to pay off student loans, or to get gainful employment after graduation, whether or not this relative deprivation propels people into action (as suggested by an older tradition in the analysis of collective behavior), it does turn into a grievance that is both different, and potentially resonant, with the grievances of those who never realistically had the same hopes to be disappointed in the first place.

Conclusion

There is no question that 2011 saw a great upsurge in protest globally, and that its potentials were taken seriously by more people than they had been in a long time. Movements tend to develop their own origin myths that highlight some aspects of their formation and

obscure others. In one of the best known examples, Rosa Parks had years of activist experience and nonviolence training, but is often portrayed as innocently tired and annoyed at being displaced from her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Similarly, specifiable “micro-mobilization” processes enabled the sit-ins in 1961 to spread “like a fever” (Polletta, 1998). As observers of the Arab Spring have indicated, too, the influence of Twitter and Facebook, and of Otpor’s nonviolence training, though important, should not obscure the longer-term influence of labor organizing and solidarity work in Egypt as critical to the development of the revolutionary moment in January and February 2011. And it is not only a matter of giving credit where credit is due. Instead, it is a matter of understanding how the various strands that come together in heightened moments of conflict do so, and how this coming together might be prolonged.

To approach OWS from the standpoint of existing labor and community organizing is not to deny other aspects of it, such as the remarkable speed with which occupations spread across the country and across the globe, the role of Adbusters and anarchist networks, or the influence of alterglobalization activism on the methods of the movement. But in choosing this focus, we also hope to highlight some central tensions, and in particular, OWS’s articulation with parts of the 99 percent for whom getting left out of capitalism’s bounty is nothing new.

At the same time, writing off OWS as a flash in the pan, as the histrionics of scruffy white boys in late (or prolonged) adolescence, or as simply a public self-indulgence is both horribly mistaken and misses its enormous contributions to shifting public debate in the US away from the necessity of austerity, towards inequality, and towards the possibility of imagining that there *is* an alternative. It would also miss the most interesting part of the problem: How *can* interracial, intercultural, and cross-class organizing occur? And can it be done by supplementing the work of existing institutions on the left, or will these institutions have fundamentally to change? Alternatively, will the emerging institutions of the libertarian left as expressed in OWS simply become sectarian and lose their majoritarian focus?

In addition to presenting a partial narrative of the Occupy moment through the work of labor and community organizing over the course of 2011, we have also argued that at least some of the gaps that have emerged among OWS activists and labor and community organizers can be understood in terms of temporality. Activists’ own stories about the Occupy moment, with their diverse starting points and endpoints, affect how they understand their own relationship to the other groups involved. The way that they encounter and create time patterns in their institutions and meetings leads to differential ability and willingness to participate in the kind of open process advocated by OWS’s core. The expectations they have from their lives, their political horizons, and their use of different metrics to mark time and chart their own political progress all affect the ways in which the new activism and existing organizing fit together or not. The organizers we interviewed suggested that the relationship between OWS and longer-term labor and community organizing was likely to remain one of occasional alliance and support, rather than something more integral in large part because of these strategic-temporal differences. The question, then, is whether this may prolong or impede the current moment’s radicalism, and whether, if the latter, organizers need to become more like OWS activists, or OWS activists need to become more like organizers.

References (to come)

