

spoke

**an experimental collective art project
presented by bj spoke gallery in huntington, long island
in partnership with occupy with art + art for humans
september 2012**

[1]

occupied artist

1. Cultural Citizenship

The Occupied Artist is engaged in carving out a space of creative detachment from conventional social structures without necessarily ceding the material advantages of middle class life, so far as it is possible for an artist to acquire a middle class life. In effect, the Occupied Artist is a citizen of two domains: the ordinary world of late capitalism, globalization, the two-party system, etc., and a cultural milieu of Occupied and other non-capitalist arrangements of actual and virtual resources designed to provide some relief from the limitations of corporate discourse. The artist pioneers affiliations and community structures that encourage non-commercial, non-judgmental, supportive and welcoming approaches to creative exploration. Magic Mountain, Occupy with Art, Hyperallergic, Poet Activist Community Extension, The Agit-Truth Collective: collaborative communities have proliferated in recent years, often bringing in artists of different media. The groups come and go; they are not intended to be permanent. The determination to grow another cultural milieu is permanent, however, and growing.

Such structures develop parallel to the usual forms of social engagement and not, so far as is practical, in conflict with them. Everyone has to make a living, and so long as corporate America continues to control our political and financial systems there is no contradiction in maintaining some balance of conventional and alternative ways of life. Nonetheless, the eventual goal is clear: to leave the world of rigged competition, financial decadence and political and not look back.

2. Development of an Alternative Art Economy

The Occupied Artist is part of an economic vanguard engaged in developing and applying an art economy from the structures of the so-called art world: white cube galleries; international art fairs; rich collectors; art media and fashion. In this world, money circulates among collectors, journals, advertising agencies, and artists, not to mention the low paid writers and support staff that keep the system in operation. It would be simplistic to claim that the art world is about money, but money is certainly very important. The role of the public in all this is negligible: mainly, supporting economies at several removes from the art world in the form of off the rack fashion and secondary businesses (restaurants and bars in gallery districts, art publications) and providing numbers at receptions and the like to generate buzz. Their opinions and their market force are dismissed; they, we, really don't matter. The Occupied Artist explores ways to do the reverse: include the %99, marginalize the billionaire collectors, develop monetized and non-monetized forms of art support, create new configurations and dimensions for art exhibition, and nurture forms of discourse and cultural exchange that work within and for the community, however that community is defined—it could an online

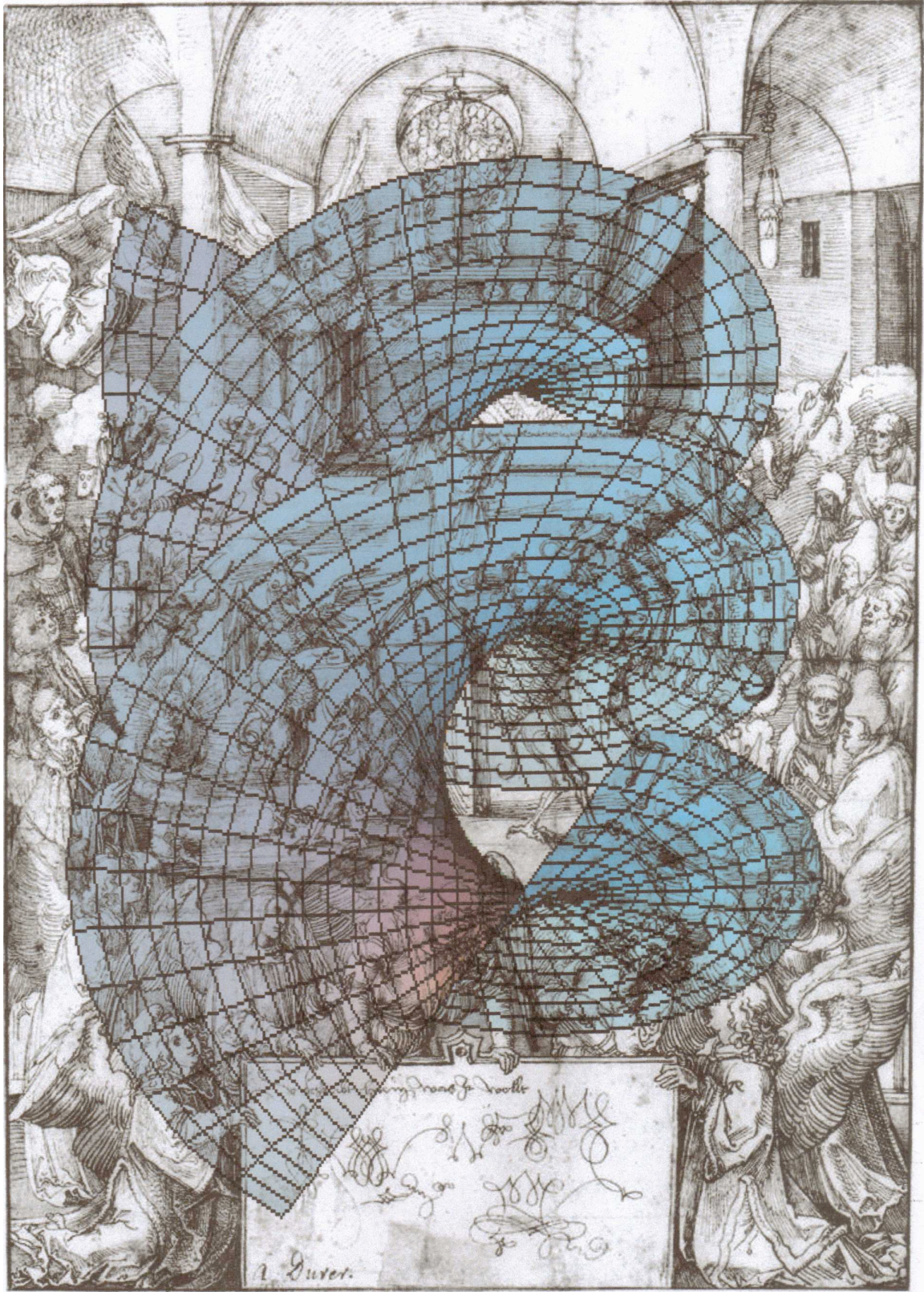
community, a neighborhood, a group affiliated with Occupy. Sometimes acquisition of given work will involve barter, labor exchange, work in kind, or co-op transactions. Sometimes there will be no need for a transaction, as in work placed on public walls or billboards, or inscribed on cans or boxes in a grocery store and left just to surprise people... Money is necessary of course: money for rent, utilities, phones, supplies... If you have some money, please donate (really, please donate). If you don't want to donate, come to a rent party and drop a few dollars in the jar at the door. There are all kinds of ways to raise money... Art work in this alternative economy can be rigorous and challenging or fun or silly, but it will not be extremely, scarily expensive, unless the community really wants it to be.

3. Spatial and Dimensional De-Limitation

The Occupied Artist resists the market considerations that restrict exhibition to certain spaces and the financial and logistical obligations that come with them. Art fairs, traditional galleries, auctions and private sales contain art and artist in a spatial and economic matrix, the matrix of global capitalism. Virtual spaces, squats, occupations, fugitive exhibitions, and communal organizations break out of that market and spatial limitation. They appear in places the traditional art world shuns: poor neighborhoods, uncool neighborhoods, bodegas, farmhouses, barns... By doing so, they encourage people, all kinds of people, to take part, often as participants in the making of a piece. None of this is easy, although it can seem like a fugitive show in an old gas station or someone's apartment just happens spontaneously. Quite the opposite; without the usual supports of financing and media drawing power, it takes a lot of planning, networking and organizing to move within this de-limited art world.

4. Humbly Occupied

Who wove the Bayeux Tapestry? Who turned and painted the urn that inspired Keats to write his ode? Who made most of the Native American art in museum collections around the country? In another world, the world envisioned by Occupy artists, it would be a simple matter to give up any prospect of celebrity for the chance to help weave something as wonderful as the Bayeux Tapestry. The Occupied art world would have no place for an Andy Warhol, as Andy Warhol, much as any Occupied artist admires him and values his critique of the postmodern image world. The Occupied artist is a revolutionary, not a celebrity. Attention, if it comes, is just a peripheral distraction. People have lost their homes, their jobs, and their pride. The climate is shifting alarmingly, unions are being outlawed, women assaulted in the media, anti-Gay bigotry celebrated in fast food chains and pulpits, young people impaled by college loans, banks and giant corporations are raping our constitution and demeaning our elected officials by paying for their votes. There is work to do. Cultural workers, Occupied artists, will do their part.



[2]

ENOUGH

[NOTE]: What follows is a first draft version of a proposal submitted to several entities who have invited Occupy with Art to participate in art events slated between now and fall 2012, spanning the first anniversary of Occupy Wall Street, and the occupation of Liberty Square. This draft is open to revision, refinement and is introduced for the purposes of community review.

ENOUGH! [BASTA!]

1

Derivatives

Illusion

Corruption

2

Origins

Truth

Innocence

Occupy with Art invites artists of all descriptions to participate in a multi-dimensional art eruption for our times. In anticipation and celebration of the one-year anniversary of OWS, Occupy with Art proposes a series of art actions that collectively proclaim "ENOUGH!" We will explore six related subjects through art: derivatives/origins; illusion/truth; and corruption/innocence. Think of these concepts as three coins with two sides.

ENOUGH!

[STATEMENT][BETA]: "Enough." "Basta." How much is enough? Capitalism cannot conceive of a world that is enough. This is a problem of always desiring more. As an exclamation, "enough" means "I'm fed up! I'm sick of this. I'm not taking it anymore." Shouting "Enough!" is a sign that you're making a stand. It is the root word of rebellion. As a positive expression, "enough" is an articulation of satisfaction, a precursor to gratitude. In community, "enough" is a guide for governance. A good commonwealth ensures that all within it have enough. Art has its own special relation to "enough." Art is blind to it, in the same way that breath is blind. For the artist, "enough" is conditional. Do I have enough paint, enough time to work, enough life left in me? The artist only in competition with herself can never be sure how much or what is enough, for vision, for the viewer, for history. For the critic, especially the critic of everything, nothing about enough can meet the expectation of the whole, and this must be explained.

We will together consider what is enough. Can "enough" be framed as a game; art; economic policy; politics; or social practice? Beyond what is enough in society, and can we accept satisfaction at all? Is "enough" a spiritual matter, as much as it is a practical one? How? We will invite you

to participate in determining how much is enough and for what, if only for now.

We are living a moment when "enough" is approaching its crisis point, the critical mass(-es), when enough people conclude that the status quo does not provide enough for enough of us. At this time, we appear to be finding each other, naming ourselves (the 99%), binding together and deciding what needs to be done today, and for tomorrow. Simultaneously, the 1% are exclaiming that we, not they, must embrace a program of doing more with less (austerity).

"Enough," it is being discovered, as a conception contains tension, tension between "too much" and "lack." "Enough" applies to information: what is too much and what is insufficient, or incorrect. "Enough" applies to space, especially when the number of people exceeds the quantities of space that sustain life. "Enough" applies to energy, to security, to comfort, to food, to education, to freedom. Who decides how much is enough, for whom? Can what's enough be managed?"

"Enough" directs response. What is the proper level of redress, when a situation veers out of balance? What does it take to restore equity, to restore values - and knowing what is enough is a valuation, derived from evaluation - to restore promise, to restore peace, a condition of contentment, which emerges from needs being met and resources being shared fairly. Is "enough" a pronouncement of mercy? As a scenario, everyone having enough would seem to serve as a preventative measure against conflict, a provision against the circumstances that generate war. As we can see, "enough" is dimensional, and as such, difficult to reduce, except for the word, itself, as protest or proclamation.

If "enough" is a sensation, how does it stand up to an idea? Is "enough" emotional or perceptual? What do we do, when our concept of enough is in reality, not enough? What if our notion of "enough" is manipulated, over time, and shaped by force, or oppressed so that we accept what is unacceptable, what is not enough, even if we know better, in order to avoid harsh consequences? And what if - and this is a horrible thought - we have forgotten what is enough, or even worse, have never experienced it?

Are the parameters of "enough" so difficult to measure, because of the prevalence of addiction, the disease of

Never-Enough? Is "enough" not a settled matter, because of competition between the individual and the collective for all that constitutes "enough?" Does it boil down to society and individual functioning (or dysfunctional) in a cycle of not-enough, because, like a spoiled child, neither can accept being told "That's enough?" Is what's enough always negotiable?

Perhaps art is not the best medium for defining "enough." Perhaps art is better for representing "enough," once we, the people for whom art exists, from whom it arises, can achieve a consensus, which provides the artist with a working model for what enough actually is. Otherwise, is it up to the artist to suggest to the society, in its imagining "enough," what "enough" might look like? Is the artist to revert to painting Heaven, where all are afforded enough everlasting, or Hell, where enough is forever absent? Keep in mind, art itself suffers from an identity problem. Art, like "enough," enjoys no consensus. At such times, the artist and her art tend to establish a feedback loop that creates distance from the commons, which encourages the kind of disconnect prevailing between the art world and the world of people.

When it comes to "enough," maybe there's more to art and artists than the binary of individual and the group, hinging on representation, consensus and the imagination, or vision. Maybe art plays in a domain that is outside "enough," in a way, on a track that moves parallel to the human trajectory, or spirals with it, like DNA strands. If this is so, the art seam of the perceptual complex establishes a point not only of reflection, but of projection, and for witnessing, and for connection. Maybe, by taking on the conundrum of enough-ness, artists can help bridge the space separating the necessary-for-us-to-share and the desire-for-me-possess. It seems as if our survival depends on resolving this problem.

- OWA co-organizer Paul McLean

[DEFINITION][from Brainy Quote]:

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ENOUGH

Satisfying desire; giving content; adequate to meet the want; sufficient; -- usually, and more elegantly, following the noun to which it belongs.

In a degree or quantity that satisfies; to satisfaction; sufficiently.

Fully; quite; -- used to express slight augmentation of the positive degree, and sometimes equivalent to very; as, he is ready enough to embrace the offer.

In a tolerable degree; -- used to express mere acceptableness or acquiescence, and implying a degree or quantity rather less than is desired; as, the song was well enough.

A sufficiency; a quantity which satisfies desire, is adequate to the want, or is equal to the power or ability; as, he had enough to do take care of himself.

An exclamation denoting sufficiency, being a shortened form of it is enough.*

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* <http://www.brainyquote.com/words/en/enough160343.html> ... with lots of quotes containing "enough," from the likes of Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Einstein, et al.; e.g., "I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination." - Albert Einstein

[PROGRAM][BETA]:

EMPHASIS (Suggested only): Subjects/Themes for "ENOUGH!"

1

Derivatives - The market and the aesthetic state of the unoriginal

Illusion - Not real; the lie to truth

Corruption - Of the State, of the person, of meaning, of files...

2

Origins - Of humanity; as relating to the expressive of the human

(art, language, etc.)

Truth - (see Hegel, "absolute") ...As self-evident

Innocence

ARCHITECTURE:

1. Virtual>Actual>Virtual

2. As pre-determined by existing space

3. Visionary (models)

SUMMARY:

Drawing first from past collectives and projects, we will re-stage some already-tested elements and interventions to evaluate whether and how environmental change affects them or the transmission of them.

We will issue an open (international) call for participation.

We will establish some simple interactive exercises for those for whom this would be a first encounter with our methods, projects and aims.

The programming will include exhibition, performance, installation, new media, net-art, workshops, demonstration and the production of an archive.

Each element, as presented, will satisfy the conditions of locus, as site-specific; be situational, as time-specific; be attributed either to an individual or collective.

Nothing will be for sale, during the duration of the presentation. Gift exchange, barter, and other alternative economies will be considered.

Each element will be presented, as much as possible, mindfully and with care.

Art of the highest quality is welcome. Quality, in this case, will be informed by and/or attentive to Origin/originality, Truth/verifiability, Innocence.

We will ask, "What is enough?" We will answer with art, and artfully.

BUDGET: ø



[3]

CO-OP

OCCUBURBS

Among the most widespread and enduring forms of progressive organization in the suburbs are environmental groups, food co-ops, and politically oriented arts groups and small galleries. These work with the domestic ethos of home and garden rather than against it, and they do a lot of good. They support open space preservation and local farms, particularly organic farms, and establish neighborly micro-economies as alternatives to the mall and highway hegemony.

Much of what the Occupy Wall Street movement advocates in the way of human-scale, participatory, and sustainable social organization already exists amidst the country clubs and ranch houses of the suburbs. It is small in scale and particular organizations tend to struggle with the attrition of a difficult economy and, alongside that, the general drift toward the preoccupied life; people have kids to take care of, things to do. Nonetheless, the alternative economy persists, resistance is fed in the most seductive way by local honey, herbs, cheese, beer and vegetables, and in a more spiritual sense by local art, music, and poetry. Seduction is not revolution, clearly, but it is something not to be scorned.

In thinking about Occupying culture in the suburbs, then, the coop and the alternative arts space came to mind as institutions to enlist. The challenge is to introduce the dynamic of a vanguard social movement, Occupy Wall Street, into these institutions and, beyond that, to determine a format that would best encourage a creative exchange of ideas and approaches among the participants in a given project. This is partly a matter of striking a balance between contributions from local artists and those based outside the area. It wouldn't do simply to install an exhibition of Occupy-related work from downtown Manhattan in a suburban gallery; this would run the risk of being a show rather than an action. Similarly, one would hope that any event would advance the principles of the movement rather than support or illustrate them.

Occupy Wall Street is inherently transformative; it arose, and continues to arise outside of and in contradistinction to the parameters of party politics, class and social divisions, established forms of mobilization and resistance; it is a profoundly cohesive and inclusive civil rights movement, civil rights understood in terms of economic as well as political enfranchisement. If an expression of art and social activism in the suburbs is to reflect and engage the Occupy

movement, it should be internally transformative, not just another cultural event in the suburbs but one that is informed by the questions that have impelled the occupations and street demonstrations worldwide: what does democracy look like? What does art for the ninety-nine per cent look like? Is an occupied suburb possible, an occupied suburban culture and social expression?

Answers to these questions will come from many places and perspectives, from experiment and trial error. All one can do is make an attempt and submit the results, however determined and analyzed, to one or some of the many channels of discussion the movement generates. What follows is a proposal for an application of the co-op model to Occupy events in an art space. Not all that many people have experience with food coops, and there is some general confusion between various alternative approaches—co-op is not a csa, or share in a farm, nor is it an commercial organic market—so it might be helpful to begin with a brief overview of what the cooperative model.

The Cooperative

A co-op is a member owned and operated venture in which the community pools money and labor to support, as far as practical, locally produced, sustainable food and in the process reduce the costs and inefficiencies associated with various levels of the dominant economy. The same standards apply to goods that cannot be produced locally. As a collective it is able to purchase goods in bulk or close to wholesale, providing savings for members and a reliable market for local producers and conscientious national and international companies.

As a community the co-op encourages relevant ventures among themselves, be it small scale farming, cooking classes, health and nutritional education, or outreach to those in need. The co-op uses its purchasing power to support fair labor practices, conscientious farming methods and stewardship of the land and the environment.

Membership in the co-op is open to all, and typically non-members may shop at the co-op for a slight markup. Members contribute labor and contribute yearly dues to cover overhead and administrative costs of the co-op. They support the co-op movement and build relationships with other organizations, sometimes offering assistance

to startups and often collaborating with other co-ops on social concerns such as hunger and disaster relief.

A co-op is just that: a cooperative. Membership entails working together, building together, and not just using shopping privileges. It is an alternative association of neighbors and friends. It's kid friendly, pet friendly, and grownup friendly. It's friendly. Difficulties can arise when members become caught up in their lives and don't order or help out, but that is bound to happen. Membership in a co-op is an indication in and of itself that a person has goodwill and a social conscience.

The important point is that a co-op takes one out of the usual relations of a business and consumer culture. There are no ads, coupons, sales at a co-op, no inducements to buy. One spends money at a co-op, naturally, but one doesn't shop in the usual sense, no more than one shops, quite, for a friend or a good story or a meal out with friends. Co-ops are small typically (there are some large exceptions, Park Slope Co-op being one of them). People know each other, or get to know each other through the organization and when people come together to make purchases or pick up orders the emphasis typically is on conversation more than food.

With all this said, a co-op model is practical and tough-minded. The usual business requirements, or most of them, apply: maintaining inventory, bookkeeping, stocking shelves, arranging work schedules and so on. Nonetheless, being practical need not conflict with being communal or cooperative....

Application to Culture

So how could all this apply to art? The word coop is sometimes applied to spaces that artists pay for collectively in exchange for the right to exhibit work. This model is focused on the artists; it would be more interesting, more consistent with an Occupy approach, to include the community. That is the approach we will consider. Also, the terms local, sustainable, and even organic are so important to the coop model that it would be interesting to consider whether they can be carried over in some way to visual art.

But before doing so, it would be helpful to bracket off at least one

point of conceptual tension in the greater art market or art world. If possible, and only in this limited circumstance, it would be preferable to hold off on concern with the question ‘what is art?’ Some objects that might end up in an Occupy exhibition—ephemera like signs, announcements with graphic images, clothing altered with lettering for a given event—might conceivably push at the boundaries of what some consider art, but what would be gained by stressing that term... Imagine, for example, replacing the word art with spice; what is spice? Who gets to say what is or is not spice? What is the importance of spice in contemporary life? Is spice only for some people, Mexicans for instance, or can anyone enjoy it? Is spice really necessary? The word art, in this context, is simply an expedient.

More pertinent are the kinds of questions and concerns that follow the ‘is it art’ issue: what kind of value does a given piece have and to whom? How is this value determined? What kind of discourse does the project speak to and who takes part in this discourse? Value, of course, is a matter of money and of qualitative, subjective experience. The two are intertwined, but since the financial aspects of the cooperative model are concrete and fairly well established, it would be best to begin with money.

Value

The question of value—what is the material worth of a work of art, how is this determined-- ideally would matter to everyone, but it is particularly important when one is a collector and patron of art. If art is to matter to the .99, is to speak to the .99, then perhaps the .99 should become art patrons and collectors. There are different forms and degrees of ownership: one can own the factory that makes cars, own a car, lease a car with an option to buy. In a co-op, members own a share of the company and buy what the company offers, usually at a discount to the owner-clients. In a co-op art model, members would have both partial ownership of the space, access to discounted work, and the third option, practiced in the Netherlands: an option to lease or rent a work for a given period, a year, say, with an option to buy.

Conversely, the artist might have different options in regard to the coop, ranging from membership with certain attendant privileges (exhibition rights, eligibility for commissions and various forms of paid work such as instruction) to submitting work as a non-member

to juried shows and the like.

As for determining price, one can envision different forms of artist-public collaboration and negotiation, probably but not necessarily in a committee format. The operative framework, however, is not the art market or art capitalism, but the co-op community. The art world will go on as always. Artists will still strive to be the next Damien Hirst, Maurizio Catellan, Kara Walker, etc. The co-op may well assist an individual artist's career, but the focus is on the well-being of the community. The incentive of speculative investment, so important in the art world—the hope that a purchased work will increase exponentially in value in the secondary art market—would be replaced, in the co-op, by whatever priorities arise in the discourse of the community.

Art for the .99

Who knows what art for the .99 would look like. It might be feasible, however, to begin to map out the conditions in which art for the .99 might develop. It is easy enough to identify the conditions in which art for the one per cent presents itself now: Art Basel Miami, Frieze, Art Cologne... All that need be said in this context is that the collusion of wealth, fashion, media and hipster social ambition at such gatherings place them at a distant remove from the lives and concerns of most people. Contrast such occasions with something like an artists' guild supported by member clients, one that contributes visual work to a demonstration or direct action, 'occupies' walls and other public spaces to encourage comment, cartoons, graphic work, graffiti (there is a statue in the Piazza Navonna in Rome that was set aside in ancient Rome for just such a purpose; it is layered in graffiti). The artists in such an organization might paint portraits of democracy or of new forms of the family and domestic partnerships, might introduce art into the ordinary places of life: grocery shelves, park benches, clothing stores, hospitals, parks...

The same sort of program of talks, demonstrations, lessons, exchanges one finds in a food co-op could be enacted in an art space. Membership contributions—payment of minimal yearly membership dues—by artists and the non-artist public could remove at least in some degree the oppression of selling and career that distorts the greater art world.

This is the general drift; how to get people in the door, how to induce cops and plumbers and teachers, ordinary people, to join is the key. But it can be done... If this is of interest I can expand on it. But since I have to grade finals and papers, I will stop for the moment and wait for some feedback.

Chris



[4]

The Festival of
Reason, the art of
Common Sense

By Christopher Moylan

Plans are underway for an Occupy arts festival in the suburbs: Occufest in the Occuburbs. The initial contacts with different cultural organizations have been promising. People are enthusiastic; there are promises of space and other resources. Over and over, however, certain questions arise; what is this—the festival and Occupy Wall street-- about? What is the connection between Occupy Wall Street and the arts? What point would a festival make? What would it do?

One response is to turn such questions back on the person asking them; what does the Occupy movement mean to you? What kind of connection would you like to see between the arts and the Occupy movement? What point would you want such a festival to make? That kind of exchange tends to go only so far. People are asking for information and background, not for a daily dose of empowerment. To be fair, however, the Occupy movement has received a good deal of publicity and news attention; one would expect that most people would be familiar with the movement and what it is attempting to do. The discussion, then, probably has more to do with expectations based on personal history rather than with social policy or aesthetics.

The subtext of such questions seems to be something like this; my experience with politics has been disillusioning, will this be any different? And, my experience with art --as in paintings, sculpture, installations, art in galleries--has been disappointing, and puzzling so will this be any better?

By way of attempting a constructive answer, one consistent with an inclusive Occupy spirit, the questions can be reframed to emphasize the central position of the .99 in everything that the movement does and attempts to do.

So, preliminary to discussing what an Occufest might be like, one might ask what does cultural democracy look like? Under what conditions might art for the .99 emerge, and how would we recognize such work if we saw it?

The questions are daunting and carry with them suppositions that would be difficult to defend: that art can be reliably associated with one social category or another, these days largely with the one per cent and that such art carries the markers somehow of this exclusivity so that most people walking into a gallery would know that this work is for the one per cent, that work for the .99.

There might be something to this idea, but who would want to take on the headache of assigning a Gurski large-scale photograph or a Murakami erotic drawing, to take a couple of examples, as belonging to the one per cent or the ninety-nine? A panoramic photograph of a department store addresses ordinary experience, and the Takashi Murakami riffs on manga and traditional Japanese forms asks is this ordinary or not? What does one make of all this kink and eye candy? The art world generates endless

plays and variations on reception, cultural ownership, identity, and art world politics. Try to drop a conceptual box of social and political critique over art practice and one will simply end up supplying artists with something new to embellish, distort, invert, or take apart.

But look at the price list for Gurski photographs and Murakami cartoon images, and one thing becomes clear; you can't afford one, not even a little one. Even the catalogue is expensive. Visit another gallery and it's the same story, and another gallery. Abandon Chelsea and go to Williamsburg and things are not much better.

It takes just a little knowledge of art world geography to locate the art spaces that attract wealthy and extremely wealthy collectors, others that are slightly more middle market though aspiring to sales in the five and six figure range. It is a lot more difficult to find galleries, legitimate galleries, which sell in the range of hundreds rather than thousands of dollars. Even at this low range it is unlikely that most ordinary people, people who put in lots of overtime or work a couple of jobs to pay the bills would want to spend that much money on a painting or drawing, or on any art object.

Money, however, doesn't seem to be the central issue, or the only issue, in this reluctance to buy. Many middle and lower middle class Americans, fewer than was the case five years ago but still, many, have some disposable income, some money to spend. A lot of this so-called disposable income goes toward the endless cycle of consumer culture; if you get the cool shoes you want the jeans, if you get the jeans you want the coat, and once you have the coat the shoes seem a little boring and so on. But all that doesn't quite get at it; if you'll buy a lamp (not that you absolutely need it...), why won't you buy a drawing? True, there are all kinds of reasons to buy the lamp, but nonetheless, why not buy the drawing? Part of the answer is that most people wouldn't know where to begin with art. They don't see the connections between themselves and...that. The threads, if they exist, that one might follow to get to that place where art matters for the .99, matters intimately and directly, aren't visible.

What is it like when ordinary people can trace such threads? To get at a more constructive vision of art for the .99, it might be useful to change the frame of reference and consider different kinds of visual objects, putting aside for a moment whether they are works of art or not. These would be publicly displayed works, not family photos or other personal objects. The point is to consider what seeing, experiencing the threads feels like. Start with a personal example from outside the art world, one that even Tea Party people might find acceptable, at least politically.

Paul Revere

For generations most kids growing up in Boston took the Freedom Trail at some point, usually on a grammar school field trip. Paul Revere was a central figure in this tour of historical sites; kids took in Paul Revere's house, the statue of Paul Revere in the North End, his grave in the Granary Burial Ground, and the Old North Church where the lanterns were hung to signal British troop movements. When they are older, the same

kids will be taken to the Museum of Fine Arts and will see Revere's silver, the Glibert Stuart portrait of a pensive Revere, and other paintings and examples of material culture from the Revolutionary War period. This was one traditional pathway into culture in the city. One was never expected to consider such questions as whether Revere the silversmith was an artist, or whether the public memorials to him had aesthetic value, or the paintings from the Federalist period register as illustration or as formal arrangements of tone, color and line. The Revere gestalt, including the Longfellow poem, became part of the cultural citizenship of the people of Boston. The paintings, drawings, silver work, public monuments traced back, in the experience of these public school, working class kids to the churches, gravestones, bullets and guns in glass cases, and brick sidewalks they experience on the Freedom Trail....

The point is not to suggest that such a particular arrangement or gestalt can be reproduced, or that it should or can replace anything—Gurski, Cristo, anyone—but to look at the interrelationship of painting, material or artisanal culture, public art, preservationist work in building and to see how all this folds and turns and layers over time into the foundational mythos of a city, and to some degree of a nation... To the extent that an analogy to Occupy Wall Street holds, one would hope that any further loss of archival material from the movement be opposed at all costs, that some curatorial process be applied to the creative things that the movement produces—signs, posters, clothes, photos and so on--, that the movement look to its occupied and formerly occupied spaces as sites of origin or narrative beginning and to each as a creative nexus for the community in which the occupation takes place.

It didn't take long for the sites of conflict and decisive action to be taken up into the reflexive process that accompanied the shooting and speechifying in the American Revolution, for paintings, prints and placards to reconstitute those sites as sites of creative discourse. In France, choreographed rites of cultural and political transformation—David's orchestration of the march accompanying the internment of the remains of Voltaire, the public viewing or remnants of the Bastille around the nation after the prison was destroyed, the Festival of Reason David had a hand in designing and realizing—memorialized and democratized revolutionary change. Everyone who took part in the rite was, in theory anyway, changed by it; everyone who came to see a relic of the storming of the Bastille was taken up, emotionally and spiritually, for want of a better word, in that revolutionary moment.

Likewise, at some point the Occupy movement will have demonstrated its coherence and stability often enough for the people within and outside the movement to recognize that this is real, that it won't go away. As of now the hold on the movement on its participants and followers, the threads, are largely emotional. But that is a lot. That is important.

There are no monuments to the Occupy encampments except in the mass grief that followed the police assaults in New York, Oakland, Boston, and around the country. No one who felt that grief has entirely recovered from it; the violence to our sense of fairness and justice was too great, the sense of inevitability too sad, for anyone to experience it unchanged.

Art will and must respond to that grief in formal terms, restoring what was lost and the experience of loss to the status of a collective possession, something we the .99 have that they can't take away.

The Festival and the Desert

To turn to another extreme, that has nothing to do with patriots and history: Burning Man. This Dadaist, vaguely Situationist mirage in the Nevada desert is in some ways a precursor of the occupation movement and in others the apparent antithesis of it. The event certainly has its counterculture and political aspects but the general atmosphere is ludic, sexy, and fun. The threads in this example go back to Woodstock, Haight Ashbury, Paris '68, and occasional creative, anarchic outbursts back to the early years of Modernism; one could argue that the cultural precursors go back thousands of years.

The connection to Occupy has to do with Burning Man has to do with just that: occupation, situating a large group in a place and making that place a demonstration of a certain ethos. Of course, the burners aren't occupying the commons or sites of power. They're constructing an alternate reality. Then they take it all down, and burn that statue. .. Taking it down can be seen as a new age gesture acknowledging the illusory nature of the material world, as well as an evocation of pagan ritualized burning of devil figures, and all that this implies of a New Age identification with the earth, the environment, the cycles of life and death. But it is important to note that Burning Man has its defiant side; the artists and architects involved build a city for thirty thousand people, just as they want to, and without any clothes on some of the time, then remove it. They, a varying but consistently like-minded they, have done so for twenty years or so and they will continue to do so. This is an exercise in power: the power of organization, intelligence, and defiance. It is impressive, in its own way.

Imagine if they were to build a city, in the most inhospitable environment, and stay.

And consider how powerful Burning Man would be if the festival were to acknowledge just what the desert is. If you aren't going to acknowledge suffering in the desert then you might as well go to the beach. If you aren't going to confront temptation and decadence in its many forms, then you might as well go to an amusement park.

The desert, for the Occupy movement, is the site of oppression: Wall Street, most notably. It is the site, moreover, of the seduction of power and greed. Buy in to the terms the investment banker offers, for it has been given to me and I shall give it to anyone I choose at attractive rates and for a limited time...Now the parallels between Zuccotti and Burning Man diverge. There is a gap in the annual narrative of the gathering of burner tribes in the desert, their construction of a new age fantasia, and the culminating rite of Burning Man. The Real of an arbitrary, cruel Law is missing here, and it is all too present in the narrative of the Occupy Movement. Thus the whimsy and eroticism of Burning Man are just that; for better or worse the enterprise seems more pre-Raphaelite than post-

modern. There are no images of police applying pepper spray or handcuffs to burners, nor is it likely that there ever will be. Yet the images of police brutality in downtown Manhattan or in Oakland were embedded in the narrative of the movement before they even occurred; this pattern of protest and violent over-response has played out over and over, through history. The process would be almost mythic in its ritual aspects were it not, among the occupiers, so reflexive and thought out; the movement watched itself on Youtube and live feeds, adapted the images of oppression to its ends, and grew. This is a political process of self-creation, material and spiritual, encampment site, and terms of social and economic identity. As in, we are the .99, and this is what democracy looks like.

The ludic aspects of the Occupy movement—zombies, street theater, anarchist masks, drum circles, tribal invocations, costumes of all sorts, and, of course, the encampments—are strategic, deliberate, and utterly serious. They map out public space in terms of conflict and assign social values to different positions: lots of us, few of them; we in the streets, they in the office towers; we speaking out, they quietly controlling from within. The Occupy Movement is not a repetition of impromptu outbursts, anarchic venting, or self-indulgent marching-in-place-of-working as the movement has sometimes been described. Occupy is a tactical, methodical deployment of reason and social practice, of argument and occupation... To use an old fashioned American term, it is a mass mobilization of common sense.

Anyone could see that it was not the noise or the alleged unruliness of the crowds that brought out the pepper spray and plastic bullets, it was the affront of the message the crowds conveyed. The message made too much sense for the powers that be to tolerate it. Clarity is anathema to authority.

Art in the obvious, the plain as day

When Republican Congressional leaders and right wing radio talk show hosts attacked the occupy encampments as sites of drug use, dirt and “outdoor sex,” the surface aspects of the fantasy were interesting—the projection of an anarchic sexual impulse on the .99, the association of shame with protest, sexual guilt with political engagement, sexual exposure with encampment. The right wing phantasm of protest, this smutty hallucination with its dated tropes from the sixties, gives a keyhole image of where the Right is coming from. But we don’t want to open that door. One can assert with full confidence that the .99 is not interested in all that.

The nightmare of the right wing, the fear too powerful for them to express publicly or ‘outdoors,’ is that the other (the .99) is not similarly warped by shame, impulse, and self-loathing (who is more explicitly bizarre, in this respect: Donald Trump or Newt Gingrich?) but is, in fact, responsible, articulate, and self-possessed. The right-wing nightmare is that the other (the .99) is quite willingly penetrated by reason and not by the instruments of oppression. It is excited by the power of information not by the seduction of dismissive slogans—get a job, take a

bath, occupy a desk... The passion of the Occupy movement is not sexual. It is moral, and this is moral outrage propelled by information, research, and logic—anyone marching in an Occupy demonstration can discuss global warming, income disparities, concentration of power, and mortgage backed securities.

The primacy of reason over (and yet, within) the particulars of person, place, and identity in the Occupy movement changes everything in American political discourse. This country has seen different groups claim their dignity and power: African Americans, women, union workers, the LGBT communities, and so on; the consequences in each case have been momentous, and these struggles continue and are embraced by the Occupy movement. But here comes something different, an over-arching, worldwide social and economic cry of enough is enough. Enough of rightwing crazy-making inversions; guns make you safe, evolution is a lie, global warming is a myth, poverty is the fault of the lazy poor.

Occupy Wall Street is, if nothing else, a movement to reclaim the obvious. Look at the concentration of wealth in the one per cent. Can't you see it? Look at the corporate stranglehold over Congress. It's there, plain as day. Check out what BP did to the Gulf. Look at it! Yet another family values, homophobic politician has been outed on the social network or caught in a public restroom soliciting men. Hasn't that agenda been discredited by now...? On and on it goes. What is the opposite of this empowering critique of the apparent, crazy-making abuse of fairness and truth, one in which those who ruin the economy and lay off millions give themselves huge bonuses, because how could we do without these highly trained experts?

Of course, the obvious was obvious before Sept. 2011, and arguments for resisting abuse of privilege and power have been made for decades. It took the Bush recession, a right wing assault on truth (relentless propaganda that Obama is a Muslim, a Marxist, a 'foreigner') and an attendant coup in the House of Representatives (paralyze the federal government, damage the economy, stop federal appointments, block all legislation, even when it originated from the right wing) to provoke a mass response.

Now the aggregate, the .99, is claiming its dignity and power, its claim to what is verifiable and real in public life, and how else can one describe this but as revolutionary?

The art that emerges within such an environment will be nurtured by and will nurture this transformative claim on self-respect, dignity and empowerment. The art needn't be obvious, far from it. It needn't be anything in particular: not David or Lissitzky, the WPA or the Leningrad School. Art does what it does. One can imagine that, on occasion, art may have a certain illustrative or programmatic quality: things to accompany or be part of a protest, a direct action, and so on. But there will be many, many other approaches and contexts. The important thing is to encourage art congenial to or simply congruent to the concerns and goals of the movement. No need for a drawing to have an Occupy label...

The Occupy arts festival, as a nascent institution, is one way to accomplish this. I have written previously about the idea of a new approach to cooperative 'Occupy' galleries, modeled on food coops. Collaborations are underway even now between Occupy artists and more conventional galleries.

Whether inside or outside such contexts, art that dwells in what is the case, in the socially and politically apparent (or obvious), for want of a more precise term, occupies a place of strength. The artist who declares himself, perhaps only to himself or herself, for the .99, occupies a position of strength. Making art that raises awareness, which reinforces and deepens the common sense approach to what is right there, is a good thing to do to people. And people who have been treated well in this way will be good to the art and artist. That is the hope.

Socially inventive and vital art is going on all around us, anyway, it should be said. To take a couple of random examples: New York artist Jonathan Calm's "Scratching Chance Grids," and the videos from which they derive, consist of nothing more, or less, than shots of hands scratching at lotto cards. We don't see the faces, just the hands held at midsection as they scratch at the surface of loss and disappointment. On the videos we hear voices, but, again, with no connection to the rest of the figure. Over and again we hear a moment from a biography of loss and no luck, delivered usually with a laugh. In Northern Ireland, Willie Doherty photographs a bridge and we see a geography of division and hatred. In South Africa, William Kentridge layers drawings, erasures, marks of one kind or another and we see social and racial struggle anew. There is no dearth of work or of vision. What has been lacking for some time has been a collective, self-aware environment in which to gather such work: a movement.

The Festival of Reason

Each direct action by the Occupy movement is a festival of reason in all but name. Were the Occupy movement to convene in Woodstock, gathering in the hundreds of thousands, the event would inevitably be different from the original festival, music or no music; the movement has too much to say and too much to do to return to the garden. The .99 is pragmatic rather than utopian.

With that said, it remains true that the rituals and forms of festival in this movement have yet to coalesce. Occupy is a powerful verb, the .99 a pithy abstraction, but no rituals and symbols have emerged to accompany this grammar of protest.

It may seem too soon to attempt anything so audacious, so celebratory as an Occupy festival. The movement has yet to achieve a concrete political or structural victory; no one has gained or lost office as a result of the protests, no fundamental change to the economic or political process has been achieved. Yet the festival as an institution can celebrate something more fundamental: a movement of the spirit. This is a movement toward social justice, respect for the common woman and man, true enfranchisement, true civil rights for all. This kind of festival, however it takes shape, would probably involve teaching, information

sharing, and identifying of people resources.

Above all, and this is probably something the artist must address, such a festival might envision in a positive way what the new person to emerge from such a program would look like. That is a large task. Most of us have been trained and indoctrinated to look down on ourselves and to look up, at the risk of neck strain, at the one per cent. The Occufest will urge us to look squarely at ourselves and at the situation in which we find ourselves: what is wrong, what we want, what we will do to fix it. This is Ben Franklin time; he invented everything and so can we. This is Tom Paine time; he discovered common sense and so can we.



2012
Huntington, NY



occufest
AN OCCUPY WITH ART PROJECT

[5]

Occufest

[A Media Proposition]

By Chris Moylan

Occupy Wall Street has been relentless in demonstrating the structural, legal and financial dimensions of a systematic and well-financed process to corrupt Congress, paralyze the executive branch, manipulate the courts, and weaken financial regulations to allow speculative banking and investment practices ruinous to millions and exorbitantly profitable to the few. This calling to account extends to environmental practices, war policy, food production and marketing; the list goes on.

It stands to reason that harm to art and culture has paralleled harm done to economic and political life. On a practical level, when millions lose their homes and their jobs the arts suffer in varying degrees along with other elements of a society. However, detecting changes in discourse, as opposed to changes in attendance or viewership or the like, is difficult and to a large extent requires the wisdom of hindsight. We can track accurately how many people are attending what kinds of movies, but it can take some time to determine what a given cluster of comedies or action movies says about the zeitgeist at given time. It can take time for the effects of social trauma to manifest themselves in fiction, movies, tv shows, not to mention more ambitious or serious undertakings in music, visual arts, poetry, and dance...

We can, however, identify some of the egregious forms of damage being inflicted on the public psyche right now, leaving the more subtle analysis of cultural artifacts to another time and context. In particular, the working poor and lower middle class people are subject to insult in the guise of entertainment and degradation in the guise of advertising. The Occupy Wall Street ambition to build a better world might include the task of defending and supporting the dignity of those who would inhabit. In particular this is something that artists and writers associated with OWS can do.

Meaning It

Has the one per cent inflicted cultural harm (assuming one can identify what constitutes cultural harm) on the ninety-nine? If so, and of course that is a large if, is it possible to demonstrate intent? If a television show is degrading to women or working people or African Americans, or all of these combined, does it matter if one can demonstrate that the writers and producers of the show intended to do this, or if they knew that they were following genre formulas (the fat bumbling worker with a fondness for beer and chesty women; the nosy, hilariously dumb secretary who can't get a date)? Probably not; when a sportscaster lets slip a racial insult the 'I didn't mean it, that isn't me' excuse is hardly ever sufficient. The point is that one can identify harm and wrong without concern for whether media collude to inflict it, or resorting to conspiracy thinking (the corporations are out to control and pacify us, turning us into compliant, uninformed consumers), meta-critique and art or media teleology.

TV shows, for example, are just trying to sell ads and ads are just trying to induce consumers to buy things. This is just capitalism, a system as vast as the weather and as blindly reliable as the ebb and flow of the tides—except. The marriage of capitalism and culture, imposed shotgun-style during the Reagan administration, with the elimination of federal support for arts organizations, has resulted in the commercialization of cultural life to the extent that it is rare to encounter any manifestation of creativity that does not carry the intro “brought to you by...” This commercialization carries with it a power imbalance in the relationship of seller to consumer. This imbalance results in a sickness that even the shield of iron and the armor of market savvy are scarce able to protect us.

Bathtubs and Scratch Cards

It’s fairly common for people to take a chance on the lotto, not so common to take a chance on, for example, a book of poetry.

Imagine coming up to the guy you see on the train to work every now and then, someone you don’t know much about, and saying ‘I think there’s a poet you should read.’ It would make as much sense as telling him there’s a trout he should look at.

Yet, most of us know that poetry has intrinsic value, even if this value is difficult to identify precisely, whereas (many of us know) playing the lotto has just the opposite: negative value, in a mathematical sense. The purpose of the lotto is to make you lose. Revenue is derived from losing tickets. There is no ambiguity in this. Playing the lotto to make money is like going to church to become pope. Walk down the aisle and tell the congregation, “You never know until you try.”

The lotto is designed so that all of us (except one or two) will lose always. The exception of the one who wins confirms the rule of the millions and millions who lose every time they play...Likewise, the current economic structure is designed to make us lose. An economy of falling wages, declining benefits, vanishing jobs, and all but nonexistent job security is a bad bet for most of us, and the tax benefits, loopholes, income shelters and Tarp bailouts allow the wealthy to rig the table for themselves... The purpose of the tax structure is to make us losers, and to make the wealthy winners; winners—through enormous bonuses, and other “merit-based” schemes, even when they make disastrous investment bets for their companies...

The word “loser,” of course, is provocative. People have a right to play the lottery. Not every investment of a dollar or two has to be rationally calculated. But when the lotto is played, week after week, as if it were a game that the player could reasonably expect to win, then it is an apt symbol, I believe, for other systems, campaigns, cultural forces that manipulate us into participating - as if we didn’t know we are being taken

and mocked while we are being taken. We are conditioned to feel powerless and inferior, to say, “What’s the point of voting or reading a newspaper or taking to the streets to protest? Not because things always stay the same, etc., but because we the little people get what we deserve: to lose.

Susan Boyle

Music contests are fun, and there is a long history of such contests through the history of the television age and before. But why are such contests interwoven now with celebrity judges giving bland psychological analyses and reassurances that even Bugs Bunny would be too proud to parody? Doesn’t such quasi-psychotherapeutic talk - ‘I’m so proud of you for being brave enough to take a chance on the cha-cha. You’ve grown so much in the past two weeks on this show!’ - induce at least momentary delirium in the viewer rather than address performance anxiety in the contestant? Whom are the judges protecting and soothing this way? - Certainly not the contestants. The numbers are so staged and elaborately produced, the contestants often so thoroughly professional in their training and approach, that the sentimental pep talks can’t be intended for them. Clearly they are meant to reassure the audience.

Everything on the show is lovely. Even rejection is pleasant and mildly affirming. The contest show is a fantasy of a fantasy, a distanced and screened dose of attractive performers faking it one after another while we watch. So what does that say about what the producers of such shows think of us?

This is not to deny that there are occasional moments of transcendent beauty and achievement on contest shows; Susan Boyle comes to mind. Yet the reaction of the judges to her famous performance (which became a viral video on the web with millions of plays) - nods of utter disbelief, bulging eyes, standing ovation, rapturous shock— were altogether so extreme as to encapsulate and minimize just who Susan Boyle is or was in actuality. That is, Susan Boyle is in one way her own audience; lots of people look like her. My mother could have been her twin. The ‘Oh-my-God-can-you-believe-an-overweight-middle-aged-lady-can-sing-like-THAT’ reaction carried with it the implication that, indeed, what happened made no sense, that it was insane. Susan Boyle delivered the shock of the real, of an impossible reality—we were supposed to mock, boo, paralyze her and through her, ourselves—then she sang. Whose voice was that?

When that Voice becomes ours, the revolution will begin.

At some point, perhaps soon, the trap doors will open beneath the feet of contestants on debasing quiz shows and the contestants will stand there, in mid-air, refusing to fall.

But before that revolution, time for a commercial interruption: “...Erectile

Dysfunction?”

What’s up with four-hour sex in separate bathtubs, and why bathtubs?
What’s the subtext of bathtubs on porches?

Advertising is an easy target, and ads for erectile dysfunction are easier still, despite the important clinical benefits they provide for most men who take such drugs. But the interest here is not in the vulgarity, intrusiveness, and other annoying qualities in the ads, but in the support the ads provide for the ‘You are powerless and small and not good enough’ subtext of much popular culture.

Commercials often are simply demeaning. They tell you to buy your beloved an expensive car for Christmas when you can’t afford the rent. They tell you that anyone who watches national and international news requires a diaper and medicine for gas, medication for clogged veins and a remedy for shortness of breath. If you listen to Brian Williams you are going to die. They sell remedies for illnesses that don’t exist, and construct the body as a site of stench, stains, pains, infections, dental necrosis, bacterial colonies, and virile hostile takeovers of the gums, brains, feet, teeth, genitals... Many Ads - OK, maybe not all - sell self-loathing. And yet the attractive men and women who slip into the leather interiors of luxury automobiles are as immune to such concerns as scientists in hazmat suits are to infection. They are happy and gentle as sunbeams, they are semi-divine. If only we could be like them.

The problem is, for many of us, this is out of the question.

The post-coital image of a married couple (a close-up of the wedding rings is inevitable) relaxing in separate bathtubs offers the reassurance that clinically delivered fucking is clean, sanitary and somehow chaste. The further implication is that references to erectile dysfunction and the anxiety of not being ‘ready’ insert such a moment of stress into the evening’s TV entertainment, such a heavy dose of the explicit, that the viewer requires an antidote of a cleansing, soothing soak in the absurd—a man and a woman on a porch in two bathtubs. The commercial regulates the fantasy—just a random touch of the hands, and you are handsome and virile, and she is lovely, and you have great sex! ...Enough of that: into the bathtub!

The message here? The chemical delivers the potency.

The ads are a response to market demographics, of course; people of a certain age range and medical status are likely to watch the news. Capitalism has no conscience; neither, more often than not, do those who serve it. And those who produce ads cannot be expected to know that an ad for impotence will follow a report on bludgeoning of protestors in Tahrir Square. Fine. But if the profit motive demands the placement of a Viagra or Cialis ad in the news or a football game, can’t the ad be

whimsical or funny or tender? Is it not plausible that an ad of that sort would be as effective, perhaps even more so, than images of bathtubs and waterfalls and the ideology of repression that employs them?

The capitalist idea of culture—market response should dictate the success or failure of a cultural enterprise or offering—has become a power relationship so one-sided and insidious that we pay for a punch in the face as if it were a beauty treatment. The car commercial that appropriates a sixties rock anthem of freedom and rebellion isn't merely exploiting nostalgia and a dated sense of cool, it is using that music as a funeral dirge for an identity and way of life, and enlisting us as accessories in the murder of our own fantasies of escape, rebellion, and self-assertion. The ad for fast food that employs a cast of young African American men and women with a vaguely hip hop soundtrack is selling a largely white largely suburban audience the imaginary that Blackness can be bought at McDonald's, with a side of fries, and selling the idea to its African American viewers that McDonald's is their thing—as if this were a good thing. Yet such ads are models of respect and understanding compared to the endless representations of blue collar men and women, of all races, as semi-literate, overweight, uninformed, and inarticulate.

The Wizard of Us

In the penultimate scene of “The Wizard of Oz,” Toto jumps out of the basket of the balloon that was to carry Dorothy and the Wizard back to Kansas. Dorothy chases after Toto and the Wizard sails away, leaving Dorothy stranded once again in Oz. The story ends happily, of course, with Dorothy tapping her ruby red slippers three times, at the good witch Glinda's instruction, and repeating “There's no place like home.” There's a certain cruelty to the scene. Dorothy is reduced to tears. The Wizard, who was a fraud, after all, drifts away to Kansas while poor Dorothy, who has done so much good and has been so brave throughout her journey, is left behind, only to learn that she could have spared herself hardship and bewilderment merely by incanting that hypnotic formula...

That moment of Dorothy abandoned and in tears is a last, unsettling return to the glimpses of a grim, sometimes violent other-world running through the film: Depression-era Kansas in black and white, the neighbor turned witch crushed under a house, the flying monkey creatures tearing the Scarecrow limb from limb. If Dorothy is always home, as the good witch implies, then home is, in a sense, ‘no place,’ a faded screen that can be penetrated at any moment by a grotesque Other, something that can rip a house from its foundations, send it skyward to fall with a crash onto the (Capitalist?) yellow brick road and its attendant little people. It would be simplistic to reduce this terrifying something to the Depression or to the earlier economic issues that concerned the author of The Wizard of Oz series, L. Frank Baum (the gold standard), but something of the ambient anxiety and distress of the times has entered the movie and magnified and distorted within the narrative.

Compare this to the media treatment of an actual case of a child jumping off the basket of a hot air balloon before it took flight. In Oct., 2009 a six year old boy named Falcon Heene was reported to have stolen onto the basket of a homemade hot air balloon. According to the boy's parents, the balloon accidentally slipped from its mooring before they discovered that their boy was missing. The balloon sailed at 7,000 feet for 50 or 60 miles trailed by television helicopters. Federal and local officials became involved...Live coverage of the story was picked up on television stations, radio, and the internet around the country. When the balloon landed and it was discovered that the basket was empty, media attention turned to the search for the body... There was none, of course; the story was a fraud concocted by the boy's parents.

In the postmodern version of the balloon story, the child is the fantasm, the hallucinatory trick that draws us, the little people, on a journey, one in which the intermittent motif of cruelty or even sadism in the movie has become the dynamic of an all-encompassing, fascinated gaze: sadism everywhere, without commercial interruption. The story, as it was presented to the world, wasn't that of a child's flight to home and warmth but a child's (possible) slow death of exposure and oxygen deprivation. The house doesn't fall out of the sky, the child does.

There is nothing new in this phenomenon of a collective timeout as social resources are given over to the delirium of spectacle. One could draw analogies to carnival, ancient tragedy, or even to medieval mystery plays with their coordination of guilds in presenting religious stories. Of course, these were performances. And the child in the balloon story was not performing, except, oddly, in agreeing to hide out somewhere while the drama played out. Yet the event was framed by performative and narrative devices—split screens, flash of 'breaking news, news crawl on the bottom of the screen, commentary by journalists hardly differentiated from actors. This was an 'event' with production values and corporate implications (market share, advertising revenue).

What does this incident, with its coincidental parallels to that scene in "The Wizard of Oz," suggest about cultural discourse and the prospects of art for the ninety-nine? A couple of things. First, the central concern in this incident is not what the TV and internet audience imagined it was witnessing but in whose eyes they saw themselves as witnessing it. Clearly, the extent and magnitude of the attention devoted to the story was out of proportion to the importance of the event—incidents even more harrowing occur in war zones and famine zones and poor areas around the world, all the time—it was a story of privilege and command, of the power to suspend all interests except that of one family, to command the resources of government at all levels to address this incident. As was true of the parents, for those caught up in the story, the child was a pretext for a fantasy of stop-the-world-and-summon-the-aircraft privilege. The audience identifies with pharaoh and not the boy in the basket, with Herod and not the child in the cold: in other words, with

the one per cent.

In Whose Eyes?

Thinking back on images of working class dads on television, scarcely any one of them resembled my father. The stupid, beer-swilling, oversexed, inarticulate fool on television didn't resemble the men in the working class neighborhood where I grew up. Most of the mothers on television didn't resemble the mothers I knew, either. The mothers on TV were too wise or too shrill, too pretty or too haggard. They were constructs more than characters or types. They were constrained, polite vehicles with which to sustain interest sufficiently to sell ads. Some dads in my neighborhood - a few - drank too much, some mothers were shrill, some pretty, but they were not like those people on television. The men went off to work early in the morning and came back home tired nine or twelve or sixteen hours later. They had skills, they spoke in paragraphs, they, or a good many of them, read books and newspapers. The tribe of blue-collar oafs from Ralph Kramden to the King of Queens (peripheral smart or hip characters on these shows excluded) never made it to (or in) the real neighborhood I knew. This is not to exalt or idealize working class people. They had faults and limitations, in some instances tragic or violent shortcomings. They were just people. But they were not television people.

The debasement contests and adventures that take up so much air-time now dispense with the pretense of insight or sympathy. Over and again the premise of contemporary programs is to establish a vulnerable group in a position of command or judgment over another vulnerable group: gay men refashioning uncomfortable straight men; a 'third grader' pitted in a general knowledge contest against a cheerily dumbed-down adult; an admitted sexual offender united on stage with several of his victims. Those of us watching at home are enlisted in this configuration either through our supposed ironic detachment (look at those idiots on TV; they're a riot!) or our consciously voyeuristic curiosity and enjoyment (we can learn something about people watching the serial rapist discuss his life history).

Can one imagine members of the one per cent, or of even not quite one per cent, consenting to such a structure; here are four traders on Wall Street (identities concealed) baring their souls to a marriage counselor on TV, or a panel of lobbyists discussing their sexual proclivities with, say, a sex therapist or the retired madam of a high priced brothel... Such programs could conceivably draw large audiences, but they will not happen. Ordinary people will watch any level of humiliation of people like us on TV. TV is the marketplace of middle class self-loathing. Not only does it sell us things that contribute to problems with weight, lack of exercise, social anxiety (Am I attractive? Do I have an odor? Are my teeth bright enough) and so on, but it makes a comfortable evening ritual of decadent self-mockery. The ancient Romans watched slaves and war-prisoners fight in the arena; we watch ourselves knock each around

emotionally and psychologically.

Greed is Soul Murder

Every major holiday these days, and some minor ones, provide an occasion to buy expensive things, if the corporate world has any say in the matter: diamonds for Valentine's Day, a luxury automobile for Christmas, Prada for Easter and champagne for Thanksgiving. In America, the sentiment is, apparently, 'I love Jesus so much I will buy a Lexus for His birthday.' Capitalism, American-style, is undertaking a form of normative reprogramming in such instances, shifting the emphasis of a holiday from charity and simplicity to material pleasure to the patriotic obligation to spend (boosting the GDP) to competitive pressure to spend lots on that special someone in your life. Induce people to buy cars as Christmas presents and the baseline for a respectable present shifts to computers, flat screen TV's, and so on. Those who cannot afford such spending, or who feel uncomfortable with the whole premise, are so marginalized as not to be acknowledged in public life, anywhere. To exist is to spend, and to spend beyond your means, so to exist is to incur more and more debt...

Similarly, a rite of passage for college students, even high school students, is to get a credit card. It has been established that kids in this age range have yet to develop the neurological basis for an understanding of the long range consequences of their actions. To exist is to exist now, for these kids, and to exist now is to spend and incur debt....

Thus, we begin young adulthood, many of us, from a position of material deficiency and obligation. Consumer debt and college loans compound our anxiety and our longing for comfort and ease, a state that the economy defers to retirement, if that... It is little wonder that the fantasy of achieving abundance, real wealth, becomes reified, for so many people, becomes a precious something we must protect, honor, and defend, despite all evidence that for most of us achieving such wealth out of a position of want is becoming increasingly rare... The system of debt and desire, of longing for things and racking up credit card debt to get them, becomes a familiar kind of self-torment, like drinking and drugs and overeating, a destructive feedback loop that starts to feel familiar and comfortable even though we know it is hurting us.

Guiding this process are conservative politicians, preachers, and affluent people who insist that greed (euphemistically called free enterprise, the free market, and so on) is a utilitarian good, a force to push all of us to work hard and enjoy the benefits of our labor. How often have we been told that a certain billionaire or multi-millionaire 'worked hard for his money' and 'deserves' all the money that is coming to him or her, as if some formula or scale of 'hard work' were actually operative in this country, so that those who worked hard would be rewarded with riches and those who were lazy would have to content themselves with little?

The subtext is much simpler, though no less deluded; everyone wants to be rich and the rich inspire us to work hard or do whatever is necessary to have that kind of life. In this theory, unlimited greed, or making and spending in the tens and hundreds of millions, inspires unlimited ambition and hard work.

On the contrary, I argue, the extreme disparity in wealth and material comfort between the one percent and the ninety nine has encouraged a culture of self-loathing, self-destruction and self-abuse, particularly among those who do indeed work hard for their money. Some are immune to such influence, but many are not. We eat too much, drink too much, spend too much time online or watching TV, we surf for porn, we troll for things on EBAY, we don't climb enough mountains.

But the 1% do climb mountains, and swim in crystal waters in the Caribbean, do yoga, eat sushi, get their teeth whitened, take their libidos out for weekends in the Hamptons.

Greed is not good. Greed is soul murder. Greed degrades, mocks, and diminishes those subject to its influence. Greed doesn't empower us; it puts down men and objectifies and exploits women. It may inspire on occasion, but not nearly as often or as powerfully as the intrinsic interest of a given subject or pursuit, be it mathematics or computer graphics or teaching, police work... How often have you encountered greed as a motivation for a teacher? Yet, who works harder, and to greater effect, than a second grade teacher?

In whose eyes do we see ourselves? Those of the Democrats and Republicans, the one per cent, the corporate owned media... In secular America, it can seem that there is nothing else...

Constructive Response

Road Runner paints a tunnel in hard rock and escapes into it. We can do the same. Neo takes the blue pill and follows Road Runner into the playground of the Matrix. We can do that as well. In both instances, the empowerment comes with a refusal to accept the premises given.

Can you imagine a waste treatment plant or chemical plant blowing up near an expensive private school in the Upper East Side? Or a bus depot moving to Chappaqua and one in three children in the town developing asthma? In post-Reagan America, environmental racism is but one form of toxic classism. The media construction of working poor and blue collar workers portrayed as vulgar, crude, semi-literate and politically and culturally passive assists a social process in which environmental racism and other injustices may go unnoticed, until a crisis occurs that is so severe it cannot be overlooked. Conversely, the construction of the affluent as accomplished, intellectually and socially superior, beautiful and gifted contributes to a social process that makes it unimaginable for them

to be exposed unnecessarily to pollution, toxic chemicals, fumes...

What does it feel like to be the kind of person for whom such scenarios are unimaginable, the kind of person whose sense of self-worth and place in the world is so unassailable and culturally protected that such scenarios just don't occur? One premise of the Occupy movement is, I hope, that everyone in the ninety-nine per cent should feel emancipated this way.

Is it appropriate to apply this premise to artistic expression in the Occupy movement, to consider work in film, photography, poetry and fiction, etc.? Does a given work contribute to this sense of dignity and self-worth or detracts from it? To the extent that this approach can be applied it will be an advance on typical practice in a great swath of social discourse now. As an illustration of this, a short film by Occupied Cinema follows a whimsical direct action that culminates in the projection of the silhouette of the dancer Pavlova dancing in projected light over the walls of Grand Central Station, stepping people short with its beauty and simplicity. One fellow quite obviously falls in love for a few seconds. A public interlude of such elegance requires daring, the daring to respect the intelligence of the ordinary people walking through the station...

The Pavlova event was, of necessity and by design, free. Certain art forms—poetry, for example, and to a large extent dance—have for all but a very few practitioners lost any practical connection to making money. Yet impromptu and improvised forms of poetry—spoken arts poetry, slams and so on—enjoy enormous popularity. The zine world, as another example, is a place utilizing academic forms in innovative ways, and this world is as large as ever. Alongside the commercial and corporate venues of culture, another world is not only possible - it is here, available Now. We will see if Occupy Wall Street will encourage an alternative or counterculture artistic upsurge analogous to the one that happened in the sixties, the Beat era, the Harlem Renaissance, and so on. Perhaps it is already well underway, with peace gardens and untold numbers of Youtube Occupy videos, Occupy art shows, the bat projections during the Brooklyn Bridge march in November, posters and paintings, silk screen t-shirts, blogs and public readings. The spirit of this work is inclusive, dignified, engaged and generous. If this kind of work can help ordinary people—me, you, the people who repair your car or do your manicure or serve your food—to see ourselves as the people who matter most in this country, this will be a great thing.



[6]
WTF,
America?!

By Paul McLean

WTF, America.

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LIBOR.

The whole loan and interest game is rigged the world over, we discover. Then, the corporate media does its best to blackout the story, you know, the one about THE BIGGEST FRAUD CASE IN HISTORY.

JP Morgan Chase. MF Global. Standard Chartered. HSBC. Goldman Sachs. Terrorist-funding, drug cartel money-laundering, investor-swindling banksters-gone-wild. Who's in jail? Bradley Manning. Who's on the run from authorities? Julian Assange.

Disneyland. Anaheim. Cops gunning down and unleashing dogs on unarmed citizens, then responding to protests with cops geared-up like soldiers in Iraq. WTF.

THE BIGGEST PROTESTS IN HISTORY, all over the world, all summer long. Others, it seems like a new one every day, springing up like wack-a-moles, everywhere. Mexico. Spain. Canada. Italy. Syria. Greece. Russia. South Africa. Nepal... If you relied on the New York Times for your one-stop news, how would you know? WTF.

How about the Republican Presidential ticket? Romney apparently is a tax evader, and accidentally remained CEO of Bain Capital for years after he wasn't CEO anymore. Ryan is accused of using his office for insider trading during the Crash. Those stories? Meh.

News Corp executives on trial for bribing cops, for wiretaps – and no Department of Justice prosecution. Wal*Mart, paying bribes in Mexico. The Facebook/Wall Street fiasco. Revelations of surveillance networks in Manhattan, the new Jim Crow laws, Stop and Frisk. Chalking artists, like heroic burning banks painter Alex Schaefer, tossed in the slammer. Same deal. WTF.

And on and on.

Who even wants to get into the complete irresponsibility of Congress? It's a disgrace. The cruelty of politicians preaching proven-failed Austerity, while they protect corporate profits and 1% tax boondoggles, is astonishing. To make matters worse, we have drought, the likes of which has not occurred since the Dust Bowl. The statistics on American "quality of life" standards, labor conditions, student prospects, medical care and such, are depressing. The 2012 Summer Olympics, sponsored by McDonalds, BP and other destructive enterprises, barely put a dent in the malaise. WTF.

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I was talking to my friend Don - a Vietnam combat veteran, a retired doorman, a grandfather, a widower – asking him what he thinks about America, right now. His answer was surprisingly optimistic, if qualified. Don thoughtfully asserted that America is going to be alright. He went on to say that he didn't think we need a President anymore. He voted for Obama, believed him to be a good man. Don had reached the conclusion, having studied the lives of many US Presidents, that the job might be too big now for one guy, and anyway, that we as a people could get along without a President and Vice-President. He wasn't impressed, to say the least, with Romney and Ryan. Congress? Forget about it.

Myself, I'm going to cast a ballot for Bernie Sanders and Alan Grayson.

∞

Can art fix this ginormous mess? Oh, sure (ROTFL) – but that won't stop us artists from suggesting helpful alternatives, right? The proverbial field, however, may not be receptive to seeding, currently, seeing as how Romney would love to put arts funding to the thresher. WTF.

So, on the home front, Occupy with Art is morphing into the Occupational Art School. We concluded the spring's programs like "Wall Street to Main Street" and "Low Lives: Occupy!" and are moving on to "CO-OP/Occufest" and the Occupational Art School. For a variety of reasons, tactical and ideological, across the arts and protest topology, our efforts have been marginalized. With a few exceptions, the art world, as such, is busy folding Occupy Art into its 1%-oriented status quo. No surprise there.

OWS focused its waning organizational juice and its budget on May Day, 2012. The protest was a humdinger, and the posters were great, as was Guitarmy. Since that largely peaceful party, Tax Dodgers got into the Baseball Hall of Fame with their hilarious and poignant antics. Some terrific videos have emerged, and a healthy, robust theoretical discourse, which percolates into mainstream threads and vehicles periodically, especially in the Guardian. The Soul of Occupy has been examined and great thinkers, including Zizek, Hedges, Wolf, Graeber and Chomsky, have proffered prognoses. I've thrown in my two cents.

People approach me to ask, "What's going on with OWS?" It happens a lot. I'm supposed to have an inside story, and sometimes I do. What I tell them, though, is "You are Occupy. This is not a spectator sport. Democracy is not a spectator sport." Scanning galleries of photos and archives of videos from the occupation regularly, I come across reminders of the directness of the Occupy message, which was plentiful and dimensional. One of the Grannies who protested in the park early on wore a sandwich-board sign with the "spectator sport" message. WTF, America, you still don't get it.

Occupy wasn't Jesus come to rescue you from the sins and sinners of Capitalism. It doesn't work that way. OWS was never something you could get by following on Facebook. The occupation wasn't and isn't a struggle, mission and task your fractional proxy could accomplish by volunteering in your stead. Most importantly, the problems OWS erupted to

confront have not improved. They've gotten worse, and for almost anyone who might be reading this text, much worse.

WTF, America? What are you going to do? What are we going to do?

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This is your historical moment. The problem is, it doesn't look, taste, smell or feel anything like what you might have expected. It never does. It doesn't read like a book. It doesn't look like a program on the History Channel. It's not the 60s or the Big War, or the Great Depression. It's different.

The enemy is not going to appear in a uniform that says "ENEMY" on it. Your enemy is a successful CEO, a banker, and a wealthy industrialist or heir. The cops are not what hundreds and thousands of TV shows convinced you they are. You aren't safer, now that your civil liberties have been dissolved with pen strokes and normalized lawlessness. The goals of the megalomaniacal enemy are, however, the same as they ever were. Evil psychopaths want to rule the world. They want you to acquiesce. They will insist you accept lives enslaved to their will, to their mad visions. They possess the means and desire to destroy your world, your society, your family, in order to create a New Order that situates them at its pinnacle. In that New Order the best you can be is a manager, a collaborator, a guard, a lackey, a technocrat, a shill or an entertainer. In their universal scheme, they are the stars, and you are nothing more than dark matter, expendable, a human resource and human capital – an adjective-laden euphemistic human.

∞

What options do we have "on the table?" The very public OWS "diversity of tactics" discussion in Occupy is a good start at rationally answering this unavoidable question. Eventually, the conclusion will have to evolve into the range of "by any means necessary." From an arts perspective, the response conjecture would suggest consideration of the Dalai Lama's definition of art as "skillful means." This is because the enemy, who is dimensional in nature and practice, has settled on that course. Whether anyone wants to admit it or not, World War 3 has begun. The enemy is a now-global, syndicated plutocracy, which in one form and scale or another, has been a bane on humanity for thousands of years. Compared to these guys, the Taliban are the Three Stooges. Your enemies, 0 99%, have the long view. They are willing to do, say, pay for anything to attain, maintain and sustain power, prestige, and a dominant position over you and your valuable lives. They don't care about you, your dreams, art, truth, beauty, your soul, your kids, your water, your church, your love, your humanity. Their greatest achievement, creatively, is the modern multinational corporation, an artificial infinite personhood, focused solely on the bottom line, equipped with armies (literally, now), the best lawyers, accountants, politicians money can buy, and millions of indentured servants, even straight-up slaves! You don't even want to know what they do for pleasure (or maybe you do).

The iteration of the corporation they fashioned is Caesar. Its name is on the Coliseum. Everything in Heaven & Earth has been monetized under its rule. Birth, death, food, weather, sex, youth, sickness, conflict, breath... It foments its own art and political movements. It educates the people. It secures them in their (ha!) property and possessions (ROTFL). It explains why, how and who is necessary for good life, all life, to function effectively. What it doesn't know, it will, eventually. It owns the demos, the democracy. It can read your thoughts, which it databases forever, in secret archives. It has the power of life and death, of silence. It is bigger than Nature. Bigger than God. It has destroyed demons, created new ones to terrorize you, and supplanted those even with itself. It is its own cosmology. It will send itself into space. It will solve the mysteries of everything, and it will do so because it is the great owner of TIME.

And it is a LIE.

∞

WTF, America. How long are you going to be willing to put up with this? You've been robbed blind, swindled, hoodwinked. The goon and grifter who took you didn't look like a cinema wise guy. Who cares! Your kids are being wasted in the deserts, of the Mideast, of the Midwest, of their own addictions, in a land increasingly devoid of meaningful opportunity, in the prisons of America, corporatized prisons, for profit. Your people, the real ones – their loss is the enemy's gain!

What's keeping you in your cave? Is it that there has been no resounding call to arms? Forget about those permissions and summonses. They are not coming. The enemy figured out you might be waiting for a calling and has made sure it won't be happening. Are you waiting for your neighborhood to mobilize? Have you walked in your neighborhood recently? Are you expecting it to form teams and get on the job? I had that thought for a minute a few months ago, before I woke up.

Are you waiting to get ahead on your debts? Hah! Are holding out for a good job, with benefits, a pension? Just look at Wisconsin, and think of the men, women and children gunned down by cops with machine guns in Marikana. Remember that battle has been raging for 500 years (see Cerro Rico) in every "New World" the extractors and exploiters discover and see an opportunity to "order."

∞

WTF. America, if you could beat the Nazis, the Imperial Japanese, AND the Fascists of Italy in four years, all at once, don't you think you can defeat these scumbags? Are you smart enough? Strong enough? Tough enough? Do you have the endurance? Do you have the will? Is God - whatever your conception of God is, because THAT'S America - on your side, or theirs? By the way, they don't care about God. The enemy believes they are gods, more or less.

America, if you could turn the tide of Russian and Chinese Communism and/or Socialism, and set it upon itself, don't you think you can do the same for the Pimps of Davos? Like Jesus cleaning the money lenders out of the Temple, right? As they say in Bushwick, (preceded by fist-bump) "Boom goes the Dynamite!"* Get the bums out of Washington! Don't quit until the job is done! Rally under the flag of your fathers!

∞

Or sit on your couch and get high. Go to your therapist. Buy a new CD. Rent a movie. Go to church on Sunday. Get in your 60 hours at the office to keep your job. Take the meds for your anxiety and heart condition. Stop at the bar, go on vacation, get some fishing in, head to the mall, take a drive. Jerk off to porn. Hook up with a co-worker. Play with the kids. Sue somebody. Whatever.

This is your moment in history. You idolize the Greatest Generation. Fair enough. You pine for the hippie free love of yore. Fine. You celebrate emancipations, one after another, in our country's troubled but great history. Compared to the tremendous struggles we've faced in the past – I'm sorry to be the bearer of the news – ours today is of the gravest consequence. The fact is, though, I think that's always the case.

∞

The objective is to reclaim Time. I know. That notion seems awfully abstract, even conceptual. It's real.

Time, your time, has been stolen from you, or you've willingly surrendered it, with or without much of a fight, if any. Maybe you grumble about it. Until you and we realize how precious time is, what a gift it is, no one will have an idea of what we're actually fighting for.

∞

The Bomb in the 50s was the most fearsome weapon on Earth. Today, it is and it isn't. The greatest threat to civilization, to freedom, today is the derivatives market. If you're not willing to figure out why that is, you won't understand the 2007-8 Crash, LIBOR, the London Whale, or much of the international news that is, whether you accept it or not, gravely affecting your past, present and future.

The prime players in the world game called "You Bet Your Ass (or his, or theirs-)" have faces, names, houses, countries of origin, personal histories and dramas. Some of these players you may be familiar with (like Bloomberg and Jamie Dimon) and others you may not. It's more possible than ever to uncover the invisible hand of greed, which is lodged so far up your ass, it's waving "Howdy" out your kisser. Occupy has and continues to do a lot of that discovery work for you, which is why the movement has incurred such persistent and brutal repression. If you needed verifications of NYPD's policy of tyranny against OWS, the

report by the law clinics of NYU, Fordam, Harvard and Stanford catalogued them for you. Or you could just search YouTube for “OWS” and “Police Brutality.” WTF.

∞

One thing I’ve learned over the past year of occupation is that Revolution isn’t what you expect. It doesn’t always evolve in directions you personally might advocate. Revolution may not ask or want your opinion. It may not respect your gifts, and you can’t own it. Sometimes, it will whip around and bite your ass. Ask the French. They had a lot of good ideas and intentions. They perfected execution by guillotine. Robespierre is a case study in Revolutionary dynamics.

A lot of sane people are very cautious about pushing revolution for that very reason. Many more people will justify apathy or fearful self-removal from conflict for the very same reason. Hitler and Germany – and all their enablers - demonstrated forever why accepting the unacceptable is, finally, unacceptable. At some point down the line, people usually will have to explain what they were doing, while Evil was growing and then consuming their society.

∞

WTF, America – what have you been up to, while the treasure of your nation, both material and immaterial, was taken from you, by wicked people through subterfuge or direct action? More to the point, what are you going to do about it, now that the cards are on the table, the jig is up, and you’ve been called?

We still have time to pull ourselves together and put down the Hun, but not much. Time will go on, regardless. The same cannot be said for American democracy. America will sustain, as a bottom-up proposition of freedom – not to be conflated with a free market, which has been shown unequivocally to be a lie – only if we individually and collectively commit to protect and preserve it. Obviously, there are millions, even billions of people around the world, who are ready, willing and able to join us in that task, who want essentially the same for themselves. Democracy, like the Granny said, is not a spectator sport. It has to be chosen. Many Americans have bled and died to defend this democracy – not for the Rockefellers, Gates, Broads and Fricks – but for themselves, their families, their buddies, their towns, their futures, their freedoms, which they believed democracy could best, if not perfectly, insure.

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If we succeed, we’ll enter a new dimension. If we fail, the future appears Apocalyptic, right? WTF, America. Do it: do it one more time. It won’t be easy, but you’re worth it. Don’t choose slavery.

After that, you can recede into the dusk of history happy, sleeping comfortably in your own bed, cancer-free. The 1% and their derivatives are a cancer. Cut them out, burn them,

poison them, like modern medicine prescribes for most cancers. Then, if you survive, try the 99% new agers modus operandi, with their wellness and preventative measures, their homeopathics, whole natural foods, massages and meditation, and such. Choose to be indigenous, a native. Choose to be happy, joyous and 100% free. Sure, that sounds fantastical. But if you finally manage to remove the vampire squid from your face, you might just look upon the world with new eyes, and realize all along you were living on a spaceship called Paradise, and each one of us is a captain, or whatever we want to play today.**

WTF, America. Think Rip van Winkle and wake up, now. For all we know, correcting the 1% problem may take a thousand years, but people will come around. We at least have to try. Perhaps the first step would be STOP IDOLIZING 1% ROBBER BARONS. They are, as a class, as a syndicate, as a substantially criminal enterprise, inflicting terrible harm on everything and everyone they touch, like Midas in reverse.

If we win World War 3 - the one against the global 1%, the one they started and have waged for as long as people can recall - like we did the first two Big Ones, we can take more road trips, eat more terrific meals (that don't contain GMOs), make more great art, and more babies, in peace.

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***Disclaimer No. 1: This literary usage of colloquial exclamation is in no way intended as an incitement of you, dear reader, by the author or any agent of the Brooklyn Rail, to apply explosive devices to the current upheaval, as a civic solution. For the author's actual desired exclamatory effect, in a pop art referent, think Roy Lichtenstein's paintings, like "POW! Sweet Dreams Baby!" or "BLAM."**

****Disclaimer No. 2: Again, please dear reader, do not infer from the metaphor, linking the 1% and their derivatives to cancerous disease and its general treatment, as advocacy by the author or any agent of the Brooklyn Rail, for you to commence a literal program of cutting out, burning or poisoning any actual persons, personhoods, artificial or real, or their derivatives (markets).**

