Occupy
Reflects

Melbourne, October 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE AFTERMATH

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

James Muldoon

The global Occupy movement was one of the most important political events of 2011. Beginning with Occupy Wall Street in New York on 17 September 2011, the movement triggered an unprecedented wave of uprisings in 951 cities in over 82 countries across the world. Melbourne, of course, was not immune from this upswell of resistance. Occupy Melbourne became the largest occupation in Australia, and indeed, the southern hemisphere. Like most truly novel historical events, the Occupy movement caught most people off guard. Politicians, the media and even hardened activists on the left initially dismissed the movement as an ephemeral and passing moment, a wave of energetic enthusiasm which would be as fleeting as it was exuberant. But Occupy persisted. As days turned into weeks and Occupy Melbourne remained a force to be reckoned with, people began to take notice of what was fast turning into a new social movement. And yet today, looking back, Occupy Melbourne sits awkwardly between the two categories, moment and movement, desperately attempting to escape the tagline of a "has been," but with not quite enough energy and support to keep going.

On 15 October 2012 we celebrate the anniversary of Occupy Melbourne and this collection of short essays has been published to commemorate the day. This journal grew out of an event planned and facilitated by community organisers, also entitled "Occupy Melbourne Reflects," which proved to be an incredibly fruitful and valuable experience. There was something remarkable yet uncanny about seeing the same activists but in a different (indoor) space, the same smiles, but no police, the same banter, but without the threat of violence; it was as if we finally had a chance to think. This journal, then, is a product of the success of that day, sparked by the insight that social movements need a space to reflect on what has happened. Reflection and critique are not just optional extras, but are essential parts of campaigning for social change.

The *Occupy Reflects Journal* is a chance for a community of activists to pause, take stock of the events of the past year, and reflect on their experiences. It is a chance to look back on events with fresh eyes, but also to create a collective memory as part of this process of reflection. This series of thoughts, we should not forget, may yet prove useful for future campaigns and struggles. If there is anything that constitutes a theme that unites the contributions in this journal, it is the observation that the Occupy movement was, for those involved, an intense, and sometimes traumatic experience. The texts themselves each perform certain aspects of the Occupy movement. One can feel the energy and excitement bursting from some, while others linger on the page, oozing

bitterness and a sense of lost opportunities. One thing is certain: they are raw. Some of them were hastily scribbled in the heat of political struggle, others were written with time to reflect, but all of them bear witness to the difficulties of politics and the fragility of collective social life.

With all of this talk of trauma and anguish, it should come as no surprise that the current experience of Occupy Melbourne is well captured by the psychoanalytic categories of mourning and melancholia. In many respects, the past few months have been a historical mourning for the failed birth of a new horizon of emancipation. Never have there been hopes that were so high yet so quickly and efficiently dashed. The process of mourning, as Freud described it, is the experience of integrating the realisation of a lost object into the psyche and moving on to something else. In this regard, many of those involved in Occupy describe their current experience as "post-Occupy" and actively participate in a number of affinity groups and campaigns that grew out of the Occupy movement.

On the other hand, Occupy Melbourne continues a phantom, ghost-like existence in the hearts of some remaining participants. Melancholia describes the inability to get over the loss of an object. When an object is shattered and there is no withdrawing of energies or turn to a new object, there is an empty identification of the self with the lost object, creating a traumatic cycle of melancholia. Occupy Melbourne suffered a traumatic death on the day of its eviction from City Square, but, like Hamlet's father, it lived on in an afterlife, sensing that it had unfinished business with the corporate and political elite. Moving from place to place, it then had to undergo a second, much more drawn out and painful death, as its spiritual and physical resources were gradually drained from it. Now, twice dead but still not yet departed, Occupy Melbourne floats in the phantom nether-region of online debates and in the minds of its believers.

The legacy of Occupy, to be sure, is still a contested and uncertain one. If we agree with Mao that "it's too early to tell" the full effects of the French Revolution, then certainly we must resist the urge to summarily judge an event that has occurred as recently as the Occupy movement. More to the point, the Occupy project remains an essentially open one. We still do not know what potential future events might awaken the beast from its slumber and rejuvenate the tired and dispirited activists. "To the tents!" will be the battle cry, as old allies become reacquainted with one another and new tactics and strategies are developed. With a financial crisis looming over Europe and the pending exhaustion of Australia's mining boom, another global wave of uprisings may be closer than one thinks, for in these crises we must hear the distant roar of battle.

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NOTES FROM THE OCCUPATION

THE EVICTION OF ONE SPACE, THE START OF ANOTHER

Nicola Paris

(written on the night of 21st October, 2011, following the eviction of Occupy Melbourne from City Square)

Firstly, I am so tired I should not be writing. I am not my most eloquent self right now. But I thought it would help me to sleep if I were to share some information about today.

I intended to leave the protest several times, to actually have a day job. I was intending to come down for the first couple of hours to support, but then the escalation continued. It is hard to walk away when you are scared for people's safety.

I expected the police to be difficult, but I was not expecting this. Nor were the many people of Melbourne who got swept up in the police's path. I personally escorted several elderly people out of the way of being trampled by police. A large number of other folks were also indiscriminately assaulted by police simply for walking on the footpath. I helped treat a number of people who were pepper sprayed. I had to rapidly relocate them to areas where they would not be subsequently trampled. I had many conversations with passers-by, some in tears, who were shocked by the police brutality they witnessed.

The police advised they would pick up all of the property from the camp and take it to a warehouse. This was negotiated in good faith between representatives from the Occupy movement and the police. I hear it is likely it has all been taken to the tip to be compacted. This includes such things as the kitchen facilities that were feeding everyone who needed a meal (including the homeless), and people's personal property and infrastructure, all which could have been put to good use.

The Police Commissioner yesterday spoke in our space, in front of the media, affirming that police needed to wear their name badges, and for us to report the ones who failed to do so. Quite frankly, this was probably not possible as there were so many instances of police without badges that it was impossible to catch them all. Unsurprisingly, the ones without name badges often seemed to be the ones who were hitting people, punching them in the head, pepper spraying them without reason, and in one case, punching someone and calling her "a fucking mole."

I was circling the perimeter on the outside of the barricade during parts of the eviction, checking in on the folks inside, and making sure people knew how to try and keep themselves safe for a peaceful arrest if they were choosing to stay. Someone passed me a camera and asked me to take a photo of the police with no name badges. As I was doing so the police decided to charge me with an

offence. Just me, one woman by herself between the police and the barricades. I was then carried off and arrested for breach of the peace. Whether or not that was because I was taking a picture, because they perceived me as some kind of leader in a leaderless movement, or because I happened to have helped facilitate some meetings, who knows.

I have heard a number of first-hand accounts of people being evicted who were punched in the head. Subsequently, as the protesters were pushed down Swanston Street many were pushed by horses and were assaulted. Respected activists were also specifically targeted by police who used special snatch squads to arrest them. There were many injuries.

Our response was simple but powerful: putting flowers on police cars and singing "always look on the bright side of life" as people were being trampled and pushed by police horses and the riot squad.

Gosh, that is some dangerous stuff!

What I am proud of is the commitment to nonviolence I saw from everyone: from the amazing young activists who so proudly stood their ground to defend the community space that grew up around them, to everyone I saw who was brutally picked off by police.

And what was the result? Many people arrested, but released without charge. If they were lucky they received some scratches and a few hours of detainment, while for others, it was hospitalisation. Finally, I would like to give a big shout out to the police. You have just radicalised a bunch of people and opened up the eyes of so many more to what others have been well aware of: dissent is quashed in our allegedly democratic society. That is just *one* of the reasons why we are looking for a new way. We are the 99%. We are peaceful, we are committed, and we are not going anywhere. And you just brought more people in to join us.

Whoops.

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CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING

Tal Slome

(written in early December 2011)

I have been involved in Occupy Melbourne for over forty days now. I showed up on Saturday 15[th]October, and have since been involved in a number of working groups. To put it bluntly, I have had, and continue to have, my fingers in many occu-pies! My major involvement has been in the Media and Facilitation Working Groups. Having sat in on what I believe to have been 50 plus hours of meetings, as well as having moderated quite a number of General Assemblies, I would like to share some thoughts on my perceptions of consensus building.

With the privilege of engaging in direct democracy comes certain responsibilities. I have lost count of the number of times I have expressed this opinion, often at General Assemblies, but similarly during my many hours of meetings with my fellow occupiers. Many of us have never been exposed to or been directly involved in making democratic decisions, nor have we had the opportunity to have our voices truly heard. We have been delighted with our engagement in this refreshingly unfamiliar approach to democracy, and so we should be. Being able, and even encouraged, to express our feelings, thoughts and concerns in an Occupy forum is a unique experience for many, and can be extremely beneficial. It is exactly what we, and the global Occupy movement as a whole, are seeking.

However, while we bask in the glory of having our own voices heard, we must not shirk away from our responsibilities to the movement and to the consensus model as a whole. At the risk of lecturing, I strongly feel that it is the responsibility of each individual within the movement to actively contribute towards both the well-being of others, and to reaching consensus as a whole.

I will address working towards ensuring the well-being of others first. Often there are times in a meeting when discussing a proposal or trying to devise a working group mandate, where an issue arises which will make or break a person's involvement in the movement. They strongly feel that if this matter is not dealt with or decided upon in a particular manner, their values will be compromised beyond repair and they will be forced to leave the movement.

A recent example that springs to mind was a discussion regarding 51% versus 66% support for dealing with procedural issues or motions within the General Assembly. On a personal level, I would have been relatively happy with either percentage. However, there were a couple of people in

the working group that were adamant 51% was too small a majority to approve any change, regardless of its procedural (as opposed to ideological) nature. After countless meetings and at least five hours of conversation, I felt as though everyone in the group was given ample opportunity to voice their concerns. When it came time to test for support, myself and another member decided to favour 66%. We did not necessarily strongly agree with this number, but we were more interested in a couple of things; one, to support the feelings of our working group members so that they felt comfortable. Secondly, we were more interested in engaging in what we perceived to be more meaningful discussions on issues which would help the facilitation process grow and evolve rather than get bogged down in procedural issues.

When we spend what seems to be an absurd amount of time dealing with these issues, we are missing out on the bigger picture, which is our responsibility to create a safe, productive and inspiring space for people to engage in and grow in a direct democracy.

I would like to now address the issue of "blocking" consensus. I truly believe that if an individual has concerns, that these have been voiced, and that the members of the General Assembly or the working group in question have remained largely or entirely unmoved, it is the responsibility of the dissenter to take on board that reaction, and, in a humble manner, either adopt the current sentiments or at least to stop fighting so unilaterally for their own. This might seem harsh, undemocratic, or a whole number of other things you could throw at me, but consensus building is a difficult process. It should not be made more difficult by individuals who are unwilling to gauge and adhere to the feelings of the movement as a whole, once their concerns have been heard by the collective.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in both working groups so far. Yes, it is challenging. Yes, it can be drawn out. Yes, it occasionally makes me withdraw into my "happy place" just to get through the rest of a meeting or a General Assembly. But there is nothing better than seeing people empowered by an act as simple as having their voices heard, and compassionately responding to the voices, desires and apprehensions of others.

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WHERE TO NOW FOR OCCUPY MELBOURNE?

Cobina Crawford

(written in February 2012)

Next Wednesday, the Occupy Melbourne juggernaut will have existed for four months. In those months, we have been confronted with outrageous violence and intimidation and have met this head on with courage and dignity. Our actions have helped highlight a decay in our democracy – how the corporate and political elite are all but destroying our environment, our community and our futures.

We have shared incredible experiences, made lifelong friendships, and have persevered through many challenges: mental, physical, political, ethical – often all at once. We have managed to forge a community under extreme duress. Like any community, ours is far from perfect. If we do not act wisely now, we threaten to overshadow all of our achievements with disagreements that can only lead to bitterness and regret.

A scan of the Facebook pages of the Occupy Melbourne groups reveals deep disillusionment, conflict and disagreements – some of which is due to personal disagreements, tactical disputes, or both.

We are currently facing a critical turning point in the movement where our tactics are starting to demand too much from supporters and allies. The continuation of an overnight occupation is leaving people too depleted to organise effectively and, as a consequence, Occupy Melbourne as a whole has lost focus to such a degree that many feel it is no longer worth their time and energy.

But the Occupy movement cannot be entirely to blame. The Melbourne City Council and Victoria Police have pursued a strategy of constant surveillance and intimidation. This has made it difficult to build a sustainable community and has caused us to lose momentum.

We promoted the General Assemblies as a showpiece of direct democracy. People who shared our concerns about the corporate and political elite came to the General Assemblies in the hope of participating in a new form of collective governance. However, as these assemblies were dominated by proposals that determined the day to day running of the camp, discussion about the corporate and political elite were often entirely absent. Unfortunately, rather than engage in coherent political debate, these assemblies became dominated by disputes and, frankly, ugly personal conflicts. As a result, people stopped coming to the General Assemblies.

For these reasons, overnight occupation feels to me like a backwards step. It draws council, police and media attention at a time when we as a collective are unable to support its consequences. We will be able to support it when we have large numbers of supporters on the ground. If overnight occupation was going to draw large numbers, it would have done so over the last four months. Instead, the opposite has occurred.

Occupy Castlemaine is a great example of an overnight occupation that is building community effectively. If we could secure some land or space to build community and demonstrate compelling new models of collective governance, I would be down with my tent so fast it would make your keyboard spin!

As it stands, we are marching towards winter with the aim of retaking city square for overnight occupation - which is, in all honesty, likely to attract more riot police, and thus, more injuries (in the event that we ever regain the momentum of the first week). This is not a good tactic and promises to marginalise Occupy Melbourne even further.

I feel that we should move to a spokescouncil model so that affinity groups can share and cooperate as needed, and so that everyone can determine their own level of sustainable involvement. We have decentralised and our governance should reflect this.

I hope we can move forward, together. Let's not let the 1% win yet again.

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OCCUPY AS A WORK OF ART

Carl Scrase

(written in March 2012)

The Occupy movement burst on to the global scene in 2011 as one of the most exciting political events of the decade. After a little hesitation and scepticism from mainstream media, it became one of the most talked about political movements in the United States and worldwide. But few commentators have chosen to take off their political blinkers and view the Occupy movement from any position other than as a political movement. It is my contention that the Occupy movement was first and foremost an artistic movement, by which I mean that the protest itself consisted of the appearance and display of a collectively organised movement in a public space for the purpose of communicating a message and exhibiting a new form of social life.

Before I became involved in the Occupy movement, I had two "art" projects that I was working on. One was the "Empathy Virus," while the other was the "We Make Us Collective." Both were attempts to see how we as a society could better shape our social interactions and how we could learn to increase our empathy for others. I was attracted to Occupy because offered a vision of what I imagined these art projects might one day become. It occurred to me that the famous "social sculptor," Joseph Beuys, had similar ideas back in the 1970's, championing direct democracy as the ultimate artwork and force for social change. Beuys' radical thesis in many of his works is that art itself is not something that can or should be contained to the gallery. Art is inherently collective and social and is a project we are all engaging in all the time. In my opinion, the Occupy movement sought to channel this intuition and take it in radical new directions.

There was a great paper written in 2008 by Malcolm Miles, entitled "Society as a Work of Art." Miles gives an overview of the writing of Herbert Marcuse, talks about Joseph Beuys, and touches on the topics of utopia, revolution, the history of occupations and their relationship with art. He offers an interesting summary of the historical underpinnings of "art" and revolutionary social movements. In the question and answer session at the end of the lecture Miles talked about Beuys' work. He takes Beuys' famous phrase, that "everyone is an artist," and gives it his own spin: he takes it to mean that everyone has a creative imagination and can envisage new social as well as artistic forms of life. The definition of art dissolves into free forms of social interaction, i.e. life itself.

I find the following quote from Beuys, given in a 1987 interview, very illuminating for our

situation, over 25 years on:

"In the future all truly political intentions will have to be artistic ones. ...they will have to stem from human creativity and individual liberty. ...this cultural sector...would be a free press, free TV, and so on...free from all state intervention. I am trying to develop a revolutionary model that formulates the basic democratic order in accordance with the people's wishes...that changes the basic democratic order and then restructures the economic sector in a way that will serve the people's needs and not the needs of a minority that wants to make its profits. That is the connection, and this I define as Art."

My proposition is that everyone that was and is involved in Occupy Melbourne, especially in the first six days before the state oppression began, were artists: artists beyond the narrow confines of what current state institutions claim "art" could or should be. We were using direct democracy in order to co-create a new social form in the heart of the old. Direct democracy was our medium, method and message. I speculate the ultimate result would have been an empathetic civilisation. Hopefully we can find a way to co-create again outside of the outmoded status quo of individualism and greed.

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THE ANARCHIST ROOTS OF THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT

James Muldoon

(written in April 2012)

Within the tradition of modern political thought we can most accurately locate the Occupy movement as an heir to anarchism. There are good practical and theoretical reasons for this move. Firstly, there is evidence to suggest that many of the key organisers in the early stages of the Occupy Wall Street movement were themselves anarchists and hence had a significant influence over the structure and ideology of the movement. Notable among these is David Graeber, a well-known anarchist anthropologist, who is attributed with coining the phrase "we are the 99%."

In addition to these practical considerations, an examination of the key principles behind the Occupy movement reveals their close resemblance to the basic principles of anarchism. Anarchism involves a form of self-governance in which communities manage their own social and economic lives outside of the coercive powers of a sovereign state. It is a way of organising social life in a just and equitable manner that does not rely on the police, army and prison systems to enforce oppressive institutions and practices such as slavery, serfdom or wage labour.

Mikhail Bakunin, one of the key early exponents of anarchist ideas, argued that it is necessary to engage in class struggle and revolution in order to create a free society based on common ownership, self-management, democratic planning from below, and production for need, not profit. However, in opposition to communist beliefs, Bakunin argued that power should not be initially concentrated in the hands of the state and that the political realm should be based upon the voluntary action of free associations. Bakunin believed that the concentration of power and property in the hands of the state would mean that the dictatorship of the proletariat would lead to the dictatorship of the party and eventually the dictatorship of the dictator. Twentieth century history appears to have proved him right in this respect.

Moreover, there are three primary ways in which the Occupy movement can be located within the anarchist tradition:

1. The complete rejection of traditional political and legal sources of authority such as the state, local councils and police. Unlike certain reformist movements that attempt to work within current existing social and political institutions, the Occupy movement completely rejected the legitimacy and *de facto* power of existing political structures. Representative democratic institutions were

challenged for their lack of genuine participation from ordinary citizens, business leaders were challenged for having interests antithetical to those of the community and police and local council officers were seen as a coercive apparatus of the state that attempted to maintain the status quo as much as uphold abstract notions of justice.

2. The process of revolutionary transformation was based in everyday practices through the negation of the existing order and a commitment to experimentation with the new. This goes to the heart of the basic anarchist motto that we must aim to constitute the basis of a new society within the shell of the old. It is not a question of a once and for all emancipatory leap into an unknown beyond, where following one swift temporal act, we would suddenly be free and unencumbered by the previous disequilibrium in relations of power. Revolutionary activity must begin now, not when the conditions are supposedly right, and it must continue in our daily lives. The Occupy movement began creating new social arrangements within the camps themselves, creating places to feed people, to clothe them, to care for them, to educate them; they acted as if state power already did not exist.

3. The new society that the Occupy movement was attempting to create was a self-organised, consensus-based, direct democracy. It was non-hierarchical and relied upon a flat structure of organisation without any permanent leaders or a central committee. The General Assemblies ensured that all major decisions had to be democratically discussed and decided upon by all willing members of the movement, while the consensus-based nature of the decision-making ensured that a majority could not impose its will on a small minority.

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GENDER

FOR THE WOMEN OF OCCUPY

Helen Cox

I hope that one day I will be able to reflect on my experience of Occupy Melbourne in a more positive light, and no doubt at some point I will. It has been one of the most transformative experiences of my life and I am grateful for access to such an extraordinary moment of collective power and radical space. But if this particular publication is aimed at critical reflection, with the view to growing and improving the social movements and tactics that follow, I feel it would best serve the community and radical politics in Australia if I were to be brutally honest about women's experience of harassment and discrimination during overnight occupation within the Occupy movement. I will do this from my own point of view and from my observations of and discussions with other women in this environment.

As discussed in much of the literature on the Occupy movement, women occupiers were often denied full political participation by men who felt it necessary to play out their fantasies of heroic leadership of a "revolutionary" movement through unrelenting domination of political space that should, in theory, be inclusive and mindful of all voices and bodies. I would like to draw attention to one of the less obvious ways in which women's oppression was enabled outside of the typical interrupting, shouting, back-slapping, and long winded spiels of self-gratifying expert men. I am referring to the insidious presence of sexual harassment at Occupy Melbourne. This problem was compounded by the failure to properly address the issue when it was raised. On the occasions when sexual harassment was acknowledged, it was not recognised as a political issue and typically relegated to private space and marginalised as individual experience/s. I would argue that the depoliticisation of sexual harassment prevented many women from participating fully as political actors, or resulted in them leaving the protest completely.

I never occupied overnight. I never felt safe enough. From those women who did occupy overnight, I heard endless stories of how they experienced harassment, with no opportunity to rectify these issues. This is largely caused by the absence of any serious dialogue of a safer spaces philosophy in the early days of the occupation, a mistake that has been so terribly paid for by many women who were objectified by male 'activists' purporting the freedoms of sexual liberation and misguided anarchist ideology. Most problematically, discussion around safer spaces and women's participation was often silenced by weak, yet influential, arguments relating to the desire for absolute freedom and liberty and because of the association of the basic principles of safer spaces with an unpopular imagined theory called 'feminazism'.

I believe that a strong and coherent understanding of political inclusivity or, at the very least, a guarantee of freedom from harassment, is essential to building a strong and sustainable social movement. The issues of safer spaces, harassment and discrimination are, or course, not women's issues alone, nor are they simply a matter of social etiquette. These are the experiences that undermine the strength and longevity of social movements and need to be taken into careful consideration by organisers and tacticians as well as taken seriously by those who exert the most privilege and influence over social movements. It is not simply the case that these issues must be addressed by the oppressed in their struggle for equality; rather, these are the very political issues that will ground fundamental social and economic change.

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POWER AND PRIVILEGE AT OCCUPY MELBOURNE

Elizabeth Muldoon

The Occupy movement was supposed to smash the social hierarchies that shape our daily lives and determine the opportunities we have available to us. On the ground at Occupy Melbourne, many people assumed that as a grassroots movement of people committed to fighting for social justice, Occupy would, by its very nature, neutralise traditional markers of power and privilege, like gender, race, sexuality and class, to name a few.

However, it didn't take long for many women to realise that sexism in Occupy spaces was preventing us from participating on equal footing with men. With centuries of feminist theory and strategy to draw upon, women at Occupy Melbourne and other occupations around the world set up feminist and women's working groups to tackle this problem.

One of our tactics was to develop Safer Spaces policies to provide a framework for dealing with behaviour that perpetuated patriarchy and other forms of group privilege. The Safer Spaces policy encouraged people to respect each other's boundaries, actively strive to enable participation of people from marginalised groups and use nonviolent language.

Except for within a few working groups, the Safer Spaces policy was never officially adopted by Occupy Melbourne. This is because there were a number of people, predominantly white men, who strongly objected to the analysis of power implied in the Safer Spaces policy. Some were opposed to the mere existence of feminist and women's working groups, asserting that if sexism was a problem it was simply the behaviour of a few bad men who needed to be dealt with individually.

I often heard men decline to participate in the feminist discussion group with the statement: "I treat everyone the same." Yet even those who were not personally responsible for the frequent sexual harassment and sexist remarks at Occupy Melbourne, were beneficiaries of the social norms that make us more accustomed to men taking leadership roles, speaking publicly and acting without regard for the feelings of others.

At the time I was infuriated by how unwilling men were to acknowledge their privilege. Yet I came to realise that I too had been mostly blind to the way I was benefitting from my high level of formal education, which I now feel enhanced my ability to exercise power in General Assemblies and working group meetings.

I had been extremely hostile to the claims of some men that the restrictions on language and

behaviour outlined in the Safer Spaces policy, and advocated by the Facilitation Working Group, would alienate people with low levels of formal education.

Both sides in this debate felt so disempowered and personally vilified by one another that there was no chance of any mutual understanding or recognition. Were it not for the high levels of defensiveness of everyone involved, it may have been possible to collaborate to develop organisational practices that were accessible to people from a range of oppressed social groups.

Occupy Melbourne has taught me the importance of being proactive in addressing the impact of broader societal patterns of domination on the power dynamics within social movements, which requires everyone to be willing to recognise the diversity of experiences of oppression without feeling their own perspective to be undermined.

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PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

POST-OCCUPY

Kate Phillips

As I record some reflections of the Occupy movement I wonder if it is coincidental that I recently bumped into two fellow occupiers, both on public transport *en route* to institutes of higher education. Thinkers, and doers. Oh Occupy, such hopes, such dreams, such expectations. Perhaps that's why there is such bitterness in the post-occupy depression.

Initially involved as an observer, my employment contract ended just as Occupy was evicted from City Square. With time and energy to contribute, I found myself fully in the mix for a few weeks at the end of the year and I have been skirting around the edges since returning from a trip overseas earlier this year.

Occupy was my first real taste of activism, I don't know why, I've always been an activist at heart, outraged by the injustice of the status quo…I guess I just have not been terribly active. It somehow never really seemed an option; maybe I thought it wasn't effective, maybe I didn't think things were bad enough. And as I write I wonder if I have returned to this position but I know that things are not the same.

The Occupy movement was terrifying and invigorating. There were great people, great ideas, and a great deal of compassion. But it didn't live up to its promise. We didn't change the world; we just saw new breadth and depth to its original problems. Internal disagreements became apparent, splits formed, relationships and processes deteriorated. There was fear, and there was frustration. Mental illness and challenging personalities seemed to increase, or did the ratio just change as those with other commitments were drawn elsewhere or became impatient with the movement. I know I wasn't alone in feeling a pressure to stay and a futility of doing so, increasing with each new departure.

At a recent Occupy Melbourne reflection workshop, when considering what had changed in my life since occupy, I quickly shifted from an initial "not much" to a "pretty much everything." Although of course it's difficult to tell as things have a habit of changing anyway.

A few important threads spin out for me from Occupy. Through a seminar organised by a fellow occupier, I now regularly attend Aikido (Japanese Martial Arts). Engaging in my own art making and inspired by a series of public lectures on philosophy, I have also had my first solo art exhibition. While these are personal pursuits of harmony and creativity, they have a definite political flavour.

The other is rather hard to categorise, I thought of referring to it as the rest…it has something to do

with a shift in my mentality. Finding like-minded people, talking about what was going on in the world and learning so much about the various ways that people are resisting and collaborating was a reminder of what my values and concerns used to be, a reminder of what was important before I became duped and distracted by playing the capitalist game. Most importantly, I have developed a network of friends and fellow activists. I have renewed conviction that my role as an individual does matter on a global scale. What's next? I don't know. Will a period of assimilating what we have learnt, individually and collectively help us grow stronger, or has the momentum been lost?

I wonder, have I experienced burn out, compassion fatigue, depression, or perhaps a strange mix of anger, hopelessness and commitment is what has emerged through realising how oppressive modern western corporate society can be. Is this my ambivalence to the taste of freedom?

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THE FIRST AID AND CARE TEAM

THE SECRET ORIGIN OF AN AFFINITY GROUP

Jason Coggins

It was a hot and dusty afternoon in City Square as I reflected on the events of the previous night. When I offered my services as a nurse and first aider on Day 1 of the Occupation, I thought my remit would stretch no further than the application of a few band-aids and reminding asthmatics to take their inhalers. Unfortunately, the euphoria of a community coming into being masked something a lot more visceral than mere cuts and bruises.

In those first three days, I barely had an opportunity to rest. Fortunately, a post lunch lull momentarily embraced the Square. I sat in the makeshift marquee that the First Aid working group shared with the Legal team when I noticed a flash of a high-vis vest shoot by. At that point, the first-aid working group only numbered about four or five. I got to thinking about a mysterious name, which had materialised in curly-wurley calligraphy on our roster 24 hours before. This "Geraldine," as she was called, had claimed every AM, PM and nightshift on the roster. However, constant crisis management had prevented me from catching up with her and checking if she held a current first aid certificate. I reluctantly removed myself from the marquee's shade and followed her.

The young woman in the high-vis vest was fast. She darted in and out of the tents like a pixie on a mission. I idled through the encampment and found her standing on the green grass outside Brunetti's. She was brandishing a 1-litre bottle of water and confronting a group of Occupiers sitting crossed legged in the arches of their tents. I hesitated as she smiled and produced a bottle of sun cream. She gestured for them all to slip-slap-slop and wouldn't accept the bottle back until each protestor was plastered in factor 15. When they finished smearing, she shared her water and was off.

Now feeling slightly creepy, I followed her onto Swanston Street where she set about assailing literally dozens of occupiers and Melbourne citizens alike with offers of water and sun cream. I lingered 5 minutes before at last walking up to her and placing a hand on her shoulder. She wheeled around.

"You must be Geraldine," I said. "I like your style."

For me this simple encounter was one of the pivotal moments of Occupy Melbourne. Up until then the First Aid Working Group had been merely reacting to problems as they arose. However, watching Geraldine work that crowd I realised she was spreading a vital component needed to keep

any protest community thriving, namely: care.

Nowadays, our affinity group, Melbourne FACT (First Aid & Care Team), consists of many members from the old Occupy Melbourne working group. A dozen first aiders & carers decentralised from Occupy Melbourne's First Aid & Care Working Group when it became apparent that overnight occupying was no longer sustainable. 24/7 occupying is a radical revolutionary tactic but without the necessary resources, skills, leadership and infrastructure we felt protesters' safety was being compromised with little to no political or societal gain for the movement. Ethically and professionally unable to endorse this increasingly unsafe space, we decided to become a non-aligned affinity group. Melbourne FACT may no longer be aligned with Occupy Melbourne but we believe protestors old and new have a Right to Safety as they exercise their Right to Protest. Melbourne FACT acknowledge this right and that is why safety and prevention are at the core of what we do. Any rally, demonstration or direct action where we do not use any first-aid equipment is a success. Melbourne FACT retain the key Occupy philosophies of horizontalism, adherence to non-violence and consensus whilst lending our first aid skills to support social justice causes as varied as refugees in detention, environmental destruction and labour rights.

Caring is a political act. It can only strengthen our activist community.

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WHAT OCCUPY MEANS TO ME

FLEDGLING STEPS

Joel Kershaw

There is an ongoing and insidious war occurring between the 1% and the 99%. Underpinning this war is an imbalance in rights and power, which manifests in various ways, such as a disparity in health, education, political influence and opportunity.

The idea of democracy, defined broadly as power to the people, has in our society evolved into a mere illusion. Representative democracy is meant to address the imbalance of power between classes and create a sense of equality that allows everyone to express their voice at political elections and feel as if they live in an egalitarian society.

Democracy is defined by certain standards, amongst which are transparency and accountability of the decisions made by elected officials. These standards are 'not negotiable' and any deviation from them represents a failure by those in positions of power and responsibility and a step towards tyranny.

Occupy Melbourne was formed by people from all walks of life who were participating in a global collective narrative, which gave voice to an important dissent. It stated that 'something is fundamentally wrong with the system', 'enough is enough' and 'we're not going to take it anymore.' In particular, the Occupy movement sought to draw attention to the abuse of power by the 1% (essentially the 99% being treated as a commodity by the 1%, to serve their interests; and the lack of power of the 99% to change the way the system operated). To address this imbalance in power, the Occupy movement enacted a form of direct democracy.

A system of cultural hegemony by the elite and a lifetime of conditioning of the 99% has directed people towards keeping people docile and compliant, whilst competing against each other. This affects everyone to varying degrees. Essentially, the majority are caught inside a closed loop that undermines solidarity and serves the interests of the 1%. As such engaging in civil disobedience and political protest has achieved only minimal progressive outcomes so far. In my opinion, as important as it is to address the negative system failures, we will also have to work towards a progressive value/culture shift which favours affirmative action, social justice and human rights.

I was inspired to be a part of a grass roots movement that sought change, as opposed to remaining subservient. Amongst the positive outcomes that I believe the movement achieved was the fact that

it gathered like-minded people together, who were able to challenge the system and raise awareness in the broader community. It aimed to show that the system, far from being a fair and democratic one, had fundamentally failed in its duty to the people and that when challenged, it showed that it would resort to various forms of state sanctioned violence (both overtly and covertly), essentially unveiling itself as a fascist security state. This has been an important outcome. Another result has been that affinity groups have formed and evolved from the collective learning experience, as well as the broader activist community being reinvigorated by a number that are new to activism.

The fight for rights and freedoms continues. Solidarity.

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THREE LESSONS FROM OCCUPY

James Muldoon

1. The Failure of a Rights-Based Discourse

The first lesson I take from my experiences in the Occupy movement is the need to move from an analysis based on formal rights to one focusing on our actual capacities to act. Freedom must be measured according to its actual exercise in the world. The experience of the Occupy Melbourne legal case against the City of Melbourne and the Victoria Police taught me that a great number of forms of domination and oppression can be hidden within the language of formal rights. The central problem with formal rights is that one only realises how temporary and illusory these rights are when one attempts to exercise them. From the state authority's point of view, rights are all well and good in theory, but problematic in practice, particularly when they clash with other special interests and power groups. There are serious limitations of the court system's ability to protect individuals from the capricious powers of the administrative state. The courts are technically open to all, but various socio-economic barriers render this option an impossibility for the vast majority of citizens.

The language of rights is also potentially divisive within a movement, because as soon as one accepts the limitations of rights, that one is acting because they have the "right of free speech" and the "right of political assembly," one is accepting a certain power of the state to grant such rights, and hence, that it would be completely legitimate to curtail them if the state deemed it necessary. This was what allowed the Lord Mayor to justify the excessive use of force on the day of the Occupy eviction: the fact that as he had personally withdrawn our rights to be there we were therefore not a gathering of citizens but a dangerous and unlawful mob. This has the possibility of setting up a potential divide between those who accept these rights and attempt to act within the existing sphere of law and those who engage in civil-disobedience who are then acting "illegally," "outside of the law" and not respecting the "rights" of others. In this way, the media and state powers can create false divisions within protest movements between acceptable and non-acceptable forms of protest and deem certain modes of political expression and action as illegitimate. Ultimately, our "rights" only extended to a form of dissent that was tolerable within the system, not to a level that would seriously threaten the status quo.

2. The Failure of a Community of Love and the Need for a Politics of Solidarity

We need to move beyond the requirement of purely personal, affective bonds of love as the way in which people form political connections with one another to act in the world. One of the greatest

signs of failure of the Occupy movement was when it changed from a broad-scale political movement to a small community of people who all knew each other and professed a love and commitment to other members of the community. The problem with communities of love, as Hegel demonstrates in his early theological writings, is that they do not foster forms of relationality and communication that are possible to maintain within an expanding movement. As soon as one relies on personal relationships of trust and love one thereby severely limits the number of people who can be involved in a movement. Hegel shows how this was a problem for the early Christians who were ultimately unable to maintain their community of love if they wanted Jesus' teachings to be spread to the world. Their small community had to be transformed into the institution of the Church. Similarly with the Occupy movement, newcomers felt alienated from the strange cultish community that had formed within the movement. The occupiers had not taken heed of Zizek's famous comments made at Occupy Wall Street: that the occupiers needed to avoid falling in love with one another. The point of politics is not to form new friendships or a new family, it is to change the world. And this requires a different type of relation to others than affective bonds of love. It requires the political commitment of solidarity. It is solidarity, the idea of a shared commitment to basic values, a common political goal and potentially shared suffering and oppression, which is able to form bonds extending beyond those with whom one is able to maintain personal relationships. Solidarity is a political commitment to a cause and a movement that is not merely personal and can be extended on a broader scale.

3. The Importance of Bodies on the Streets: Against Virtual Occupation

The events of the past two years, both in the Middle East and the West, have demonstrated the continuing importance of physical bodies congregating in the streets for people to achieve real social change. In many respects, the fact that the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt were dubbed the "Twitter Revolutions" was profoundly misleading. Although forms of social media were facilitative of the protests in terms of their planning and organisation, the decisive power of the protest came from the persistence of human bodies pouring out into the central squares and refusing to go away. In this respect the first revolutions of the twenty-first century have more in common with the twentieth than we might have originally thought. This lesson means that arguments in favour of virtual occupations and occupying time rather than space seriously miss the significance of the real power produced through human bodies assembled on the streets.

In a 2011 lecture entitled *Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street*, Judith Butler discusses the ways in which bodies congregate, move and speak together, and lay claim to a certain social and political arena as public space. For Butler, the decisive aspect of public demonstrations is the way in which the appearance of the crowd together is an act which places in dispute the very public

character of a space. She argues that there is no basic natural conditions for public assembly and public speech, but rather, they have to be fought for and won. Despite the supposed guarantees of such formal rights, whenever they are exercised it is seen as something problematic and dangerous that has to be managed and controlled. Butler argues that assembly and speech reconfigure the materiality of public space and produce, or reproduce, the public character of that material environment. It is only through actual public discussions and demonstrations that we reinvent what it is to be a democratic citizen in a shared world.

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THE AFTERMATH

IT'S EASY TO LIGHT A FLAME, HARDER TO KEEP IT BURNING

Holly Hammond

I've had a fairly limited involvement with Occupy Melbourne, mostly by offering what I could in support of facilitation at General Assemblies (see "Facilitation at Occupy Melbourne" http://plantowin.net.au/2011/10/occupy-facilitation/) and more recently by facilitating two opportunities for reflection (Occupy and Beyond and Occupy Melbourne Reflects forums). I have also been a keen observer of Occupy Melbourne as someone who is committed to learning about effective social action, and sharing those insights with others.

I offer facilitation, training and mentoring to assist individuals, groups and campaigns to develop the skills and clarity to win change in the world. I work all the time with activists who work diligently to get people along to events and rallies and often struggle to attract new members or supporters. That is the everyday work of building movements.

The beginning of Occupy Melbourne was not like that everyday work. Suddenly hundreds of people popped up, seemingly from nowhere. Some had been active before, some were currently involved in activism, but very many had never been active before. The initial invitation to occupy City Square, following on from the example of occupation in Zucotti Park, New York City, was answered suddenly and emphatically.

I'm always fascinated by what draws people to get active. What was so appealing about that initial invitation? How much did people turn up ready to take action, and how much was it curiosity and a "wait and see" approach?

One thing about Occupy Melbourne in its initial days was that it was incredibly broad. The general gist seemed to be "something isn't right" and that was very inclusive. One just needed to agree that "something wasn't right," not necessarily what in particular wasn't right, who was responsible (beyond the sloganised 1%), or what needed to be done about it. There has been a lot of criticism of the Occupy movement for not defining specific demands. However, in the early days at least, this allowed for large numbers of people to connect with it.

It also looked to me that people were drawn to Occupy Melbourne by the attempt to do activism differently. Perhaps Occupy Melbourne, and the other examples of the Occupy movement around the world, seemed different enough from "run-of-the-mill" activism as to initially avoid some of the usual stigma and disillusionment, so people felt prepared to give it a try. In those early days,

Occupy Melbourne's emphasis on creating an autonomous space in the centre of the city gave people a heady taste of "something different" as an antidote to "something isn't right."

So that first week of Occupy Melbourne lit a flame of hope and engaged a lot of people. But where did all the people go? And how did so many people become so disappointed by Occupy Melbourne?

People experience a lot of barriers to getting and staying engaged in activism. Here are some of my observations of what may have got in the way of a sustained movement:

- Functional groups need a shared purpose. Although allowing each individual to have their own definition of Occupy Melbourne may have been empowering it didn't seem to foster collective action. People work together when they agree about why they should or need to. There were not adequate processes to allow development of shared purpose.

- The key tactic of Occupy Melbourne for a number of weeks was overnight occupation. That's a very high-barrier activity. Some people could rearrange their lives for the initial week but beyond that it's unsurprising the numbers dropped off. It's hard to sustain your relationships, work at a conventional job, study, look after a pet, or stay healthy when you're staying in a tent in a contested public space. Besides that, if signing up for overnight occupation means opening yourself to police harassment and violence, the numbers of people willing to do so are going to decline. It would take a very compelling purpose to get people over barriers that high and I didn't see one emerging from Occupy Melbourne.

- Occupy Melbourne's inclusive nature made it exclusive. That is, being open to all people, however challenging their behaviour, meant people who couldn't tolerate that behaviour or felt uncomfortable around it, stayed away. For example, allowing the continued involvement of people who aggressively disrupted meetings is likely to have alienated others.

- Although there was lots of opportunity for people to step up and contribute to Occupy Melbourne it was also a space where leadership, competence and taking responsibility were viewed with suspicion. Rebellious anti-authoritarianism can really be the enemy of creating functional and enjoyable groups! Occupy Melbourne's incapacity to foster leadership and take steps to develop structure and strategy was counter to it flourishing and having a broader impact.

- The will to get active is fragile and flighty. It would seem that many people's engagement with Occupy Melbourne ended the day after the eviction, when hundreds of people travelled around the city trying to find a place to settle, holding heated and difficult meetings. For

others it could have been a much more benign General Assembly that they went to, didn't understand, got bored, and so left. Or feeling unwelcome. Or being looked at funny. Or not having a place to fit in. Or thinking it sounded like a good idea and then not really seeing the point.

These, and a bunch of other factors, seemed to tip the balance for many people between the benefits of staying involved (like community and feeling like you're making a difference) and the benefits of leaving (like escaping surveillance, putting energy into other social movement projects or just being dry and comfortable).

At some point in the future many people will emerge again, ready for action - excited, hopeful, complex, distracted and fickle people! Let's figure out how to tip the balance in the direction of a sustained movement that can create the changes we crave.

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LOST OPPORTUNITIES
POLITICAL ALLIANCES AND DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

Dawn Wells

In spite of the apparent similarities between the global Occupy movement and the Arab Spring, it is interesting to note a fundamental difference between them. The Arab Spring was a response to decades of totalitarian rule in countries where the vast majority of the population were *overtly* oppressed, and terrorised if they attempted to dissent from the ruling elite. In liberal Western democracies, on the other hand, elites tolerate and even encourage a certain degree of criticism of society's basic norms and institutions. The centres of power are specifically designed to withstand dissent by recuperating criticism back into the system. And so, while dissent is formally tolerated, criticism without clear strategy will simply be manipulated by those in power and prove ultimately ineffective.

The majority of people in Western liberal societies perform their democratic rights primarily in two spaces – the voting booth, and as casual political commentators, talking to their friends and family in the home or workplace. With little to no responsibility to participate in the affairs of public life outside of electoral politics, citizens' engagement is often reduced to the role of a mere voter at periodic elections. Genuine political participation of citizens, in the form of direct actions, petitions and political campaigns, is increasingly seen as the preoccupation of radicals and fringe dwellers. Meanwhile, multinational corporations, armed with strategies for success, are extremely active in the sphere of politics. As the decline of citizen participation becomes ever more normalised, it becomes increasingly important that citizens who do want to genuinely participate in the democratic process have strategies to make their political analyses meaningful to the mainstream public.

Political alliances are one major strategy for bridging the gap between a group of committed activists and the vast majority of people who work long hours yet still struggle to pay the bills. To enact social change of the order envisaged by the Occupy movement – the overturning of the global elite's monopoly of power – requires alliances across a broad spectrum of society. It is no surprise then that this is exactly what the Occupy movement called for. It is the failure of the Occupy movement to actualise these alliances that is my major constructive criticism of the movement.

Criticisms of a social movement, when they run rampant in the media, can become just as well known, and just as effective, as a slogan like "we are the 99%." Such has been the case with the "Occupy doesn't have a clear demand" criticism, rehearsed by many corporate media outlets. Perhaps we can argue that with greater networks and alliances across society, the Occupy movement

could have met this criticism head on. I am suggesting a broad range of groups here, both the interest groups I have mentioned above, as well as less politically inclined community groups such as rotary clubs, church groups, cycle and other sporting clubs. For without voices from these traditional corners of society where people spend much of their life, it is nearly impossible for a social movement to achieve its goals.

If one examines the different types of protests going on across Australia at the moment (teachers, nurses and construction workers striking, farmers conducting direct action against the coal seam gas industry etc.), one will recognise people who may not have engaged with the Occupy movement, yet are nonetheless involved in their own political struggles There is so much potential for commonality here! As painstaking as it is, direct group to group communication is vital and necessary. We cannot rely on a media machine to convey our message.

What we have witnessed over the past year is lost opportunities for political alliances. The fault I suspect lies as much with the Occupy movement as it does with other interest groups. But acknowledging this problem, and continuing to interrogate the nature of these potential alliances, will assist future social movements to enact the kind of changes that the Occupy movement called for.

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GENERAL ASSEMBLIES

AN OVERVIEW

The Baron

The General Assemblies, regular meetings of the Occupy movement held in public spaces and open to everyone, are one of the most distinctive features of the Occupy movement. They are the most exciting, transformative, yet deeply troubled institutions of the new movement. Below is a brief analysis of what we have learned from them.

Positives:

- The assemblies were inclusive, non-hierarchical and formally gave everyone a voice and the possibility of directly participating. Because of this formal inclusivity there was an enormous diversity of people who attended. Many of the most marginalised people in society, who would have felt alienated in other political settings, were able to attend the assemblies and participate in political activity.

- The consensus aspect of decision-making gave significant protection to minorities within the movement, as it was extremely difficult to pass decisions which met significant dissent. It was difficult for any faction to completely capture the direction of the movement or for a majority to dominate a minority. In Melbourne we required 90% agreement for a decision to be passed and we still attempted to attain full consensus where possible.

- The deliberative nature of the process meant proposals actually got worked on and improved within the assembly procedure. Rather than simply allowing a proposal to pass with significant opposition in a majority vote, the deliberative process allowed for dissent to be heard and potential amendments to be made that would alleviate the concerns of dissenters and improve the quality of the decision.

- The act of attending assemblies and physically sitting with other members of the community for the purpose of deliberating over questions of the common good enabled the forging of communal bonds. Sitting and listening to other points of view and the back and forth debate had a visceral effect on participants, which transformed their own views in the process.

▪ Finally, many participants who took part in assemblies have described the process as exhilarating. It is one of the few avenues of genuine political action in our society and it creates a space vastly different from current forms of hierarchical organisations.

Negatives:

▪ The most frustrating aspect of the assemblies was their time length. Assemblies at Occupy Melbourne could run for 3 or 4 hours with an inordinate amount of time often being spent on small trivial topics due to procedural constraints and the need to give fair and balanced consideration to all proposals.

▪ The assemblies were criticised from those both within and outside the movement for being too rigid and bound by rules and processes. They were criticised for fetishising the concept of consensus and procedural fairness over political outcomes. This criticism came from the political right who desired a more effective and technocratic form of governance and from the far left who desired a more direct and immediate form of action that did not involve the cumbersome procedures of assemblies.

▪ Another negative aspect of the assemblies was people's lack of experience with this new form of politics and the ability of individuals or small minorities to abuse the process. The assemblies relied on the good will and co-operation of its members. As every member has the ability to speak and make proposals it was susceptible to abuse by those who wanted a chance to soap-box or raise trivial idiosyncratic issues for the assembly to discuss.

▪ Assemblies found it extremely difficult to make decisions in either/or cases or to take decisive action. The consensus method that requires 90 or 100 percent approval of its members struggles to make choices between opposing alternatives that cannot be rephrased or sent back to a working group. In many respects, the beginning of the end for Occupy Melbourne was a traumatic General Assembly at Bowen Lane in RMIT in which, under great duress, the movement was faced with the decision of staying in RMIT and possibly facing trespass offences, or moving to State Library and bowing to university and police pressure. The debacle of the ensuing debate and division revealed the practical difficulties of gaining consensus on these hard issues.

- Although the assembly process formally allowed any member to participate it didn't eliminate power differentials between participants or really provide any means for these to be addressed. A certain type of person was always more likely to feel comfortable and willing to speak at assemblies and engage in leadership roles within the movement. Assemblies tended to perpetuate rather than address these imbalances in power.

The General Assemblies were an experiment with an alternative political form of governance that has opened the door to further experiments and refinements of this process. As people begin to experiment with different techniques it is important not to remain naïve to the limitations and challenges of these new models. General Assemblies are not yet in a position to replace existing forms of democratic governance. But nor should we underestimate their force. Forms of direct democracy such as the people's assemblies of the Occupy movement may prove as influential over the course of the twenty-first century as institutions of representative democracy were over the twentieth. We may just have to wait a while, for the best may be yet to come.

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PROMISE AND RESISTANCE

Nicola Paris

It is very easy to characterise Occupy Melbourne as a failure. I say hell no to that.

The one consistent theme that emerges in any current discussions of Occupy Melbourne is the "sense of community" that developed at the City Square encampment. For one happy week in October 2011, many people who felt disengaged, disenfranchised and without connection, believed that they had found their place.

As someone who has been involved in grassroots activism for a little while, I have been lucky enough to have experienced this sense of community through my work. Perhaps it is experienced by some people within close knit extended families, and by others in small country towns, but for many in the city, it is perhaps not a very common experience.

For folks who have not felt this before, it is a vital and powerful thing. However, I believe it was this need for community and hope for a better future that meant that those on the ground were unable to properly reflect on the political consequences of diminished numbers and hence review the tactics of physical "occupation" as it began to become dysfunctional and was jeopardised by personal conflicts. The problem that some protesters experienced is that they saw "occupation not as a tactic but as the substance of the political movement. Personally, I believe "occupy" is a tactic. It was a great one, and has changed the social and political discourse, certainly in the United States, and in places across Europe. Perhaps it can even be used again, but on the other hand, we may need to move on to something else. We need to grow and adapt so that we can build on the networks and experiences that we have shared.

Great stuff came out of Occupy Melbourne. When we got together and reflected on the successes and failures, there was an enormous list. For me it showed what was possible, and displayed a promise for the future. We have witnessed the formation of new affinity groups such as the Melbourne First Aid and Care Team, a citizen media collective, an artist collective which has organised the event "Global Noise," a direct action group that has organised actions in relation to Wikileaks and other issues, and a supportive legal team that has meticulously documented complaints and taken our fundamental rights to assemble and dissent to the Federal Court.

Sadly, during the actual encampment, there was no time to build the systems, trust and social cohesion we needed to hold us through a brutal eviction. But we can build on what we have now

and we can take the next opportunity, or make the next opportunity, if we have the skills, resources, connections, and trust in each other to do so. This is what I am working on now. Please get in touch if you are excited about connecting, resourcing, supporting, and training activists for strategic, creative, nonviolent resistance. I want this resistance to continue. I want to build and support it. I want the next opportunity, the next moment, the next fragment of time, when we come together – I want it to be real, and purposeful, and to live out its potential.

As you read this, there are likely hundreds of thousands of people gathering somewhere in the world – throughout Europe, in Japan, in India, in Yemen… and so many other places, people are rising up to speak out for environmental and social justice.

In the words of Arundhati Roy, "Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing."

Yep.

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OCCUPYING THE LAW

J.D.

The law is, as radical lawyer and activist William Kunstler argued, "nothing other than a method of control created by a socioeconomic system determined, at all costs, to perpetuate itself by all and any means necessary, for as long as possible." Why then do some progressive political movements, such as Occupy Melbourne, place such faith in the law as an instrument to protect them from state oppression? In this essay I examine the legal strategies adopted by the litigants and their legal team on behalf of Occupy Melbourne. I aim to offer some initial reflections on the dangers of legal strategies for political movements considered more broadly. My main argument is that the legal strategy of Occupy Melbourne had the effect of stifling and foreclosing diverse and more radical modes of political action. It is my hope that this analysis will encourage greater reflection by social movements on the appropriateness, risks and potential pitfalls of different legal strategies. My central question will be what is a radical and political but also strategic engagement with the law?

After the eviction of Occupy Melbourne from City Square on 21 October 2011, the ongoing occupation moved to Treasury Gardens. The Treasury occupation was subjected to constant visits from Victoria Police and Melbourne City Council authorised officers who imposed a strict interpretation of local by-laws which the Council alleged prohibited "camping" and having "advertising signs" or "other things" in public spaces without authorisation. The precise definition and scope of these concepts was disputed by the protesters of Occupy Melbourne. In response to this strategy of constant police and council harassment, a litigant on behalf of Occupy Melbourne sought an injunction in the Federal Court to prevent the Council from enforcing these laws. The litigant argued that the strict interpretation and enforcement of these local by-laws breached the freedom of political communication protections in the Australian Constitution and also rights relating to free speech and assembly in the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic).

The central problem with the way in which this injunction was sought in the Occupy Melbourne case was the potential effects it could have had on the social movement. Insofar as the application for an injunction asked the Court to clarify what were "legitimate" and "legal" protest tactics and activities, it had the possibility of becoming a double-edged sword. On the one hand, if it succeeded in opening a space of "legitimate" political action, it could have stopped the almost hourly harassment by the police and local council. On the other hand, the same ruling had the potential for determining the maximum (legally sanctioned) rights of the political movement. For example, in the

initial application for an interim injunction, the Court was asked to rule that a specified number of tents with a specified number of people sleeping in them, and a specific sign with approved wording, was protected under the constitutional freedom of political communication. The problem with the Court making such a decision is what happens when the political needs of the movement require this amount to be exceeded? For instance, if there is a desire to have a *larger* camp, with *more* tents and *more* people, and to proudly display banners with messages that would offend the law.

There is a risk that social movements can internalise the law and start to police themselves and each other so as to stay within court approved parameters. This is no abstract fear. At Occupy Austin, a community of anarchists were excluded from the movement for raising a single tent in defiance of an agreement between the more reform-minded organisers of the movement and City Hall that allowed for a temporary, purely symbolic, yet legally permissible, encampment there. There is a danger that a court injunction which determines the limits of legal protest tactics and methods risks in practice operating as an injunction on the movement itself. In conversations with members of Occupy Melbourne, many confessed that after the legal strategy was instigated they felt that the group as a whole became more timid in their tactics. A common argument against doing things like pitching tents was: "no we can't do that now, because it might jeopardise the legal case." The fear that "disruptive" actions could damage the legal case in this way acted as a conservative force on the movement, stifling enthusiasm and maintaining the status quo. Moreover, this fear of harming the legal case precluded political discussions about the relative merits of particular strategies in order to achieve the group's overall objectives.

The articulation and defence of rights continues to be an important political tactic for social movements. However, it is important not to underestimate the limits of a rights discourse in liberal capitalist democracies. The right to protest in a liberal state extends only to a level of dissent that the system can tolerate, not to political criticism that fundamentally threatens existing social and political institutions. It is equally as important to be aware of the dangers inherent in discourses of "legitimate protest." The question of what constitutes a legitimate form of protest is not a question that can be determined in the abstract. It is the reflection of a particular historical and cultural context and, as such, forms part of a normative framework which movements seeking social change have always sought to contest and change.

I write these thoughts in order that we can keep pushing ourselves and each other to keep thinking about how we can use law and legal tactics, without having any faith in law, even in its more "progressive" guises such as its promise of "universal human rights." In order to challenge ourselves we need to be conscious of the way legal language, and particularly the language of

rights, has become central to the way in which social movements articulate their demands. We should ask ourselves whether this vocabulary still, or indeed ever, could provide the most effective way to challenge global violence and inequality. We need to ensure that decisions about the directions and tactics of movements for social change are collective, political and strategic decisions. That is, that decisions are made with knowledge of the law and the legal consequences of particular decisions, but that decisions are not determined by the law. And finally we need to continue ensuring that the normative horizon of our collective politics is not set by the legal system but rather that our normative horizon is created by our dreams of resistance and of our lives in common.

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A SOCIO-POLITICAL ANALYSIS OF OCCUPY MELBOURNE

James Muldoon

In this contribution I offer an analysis of the constitutive groups that were involved in Occupy Melbourne. Every political movement differs according to the specific assemblage of politically and economically divergent subjectivities which constitute it. The types of people involved and the ideologies to which they adhere, have a profound influence over the direction of the movement. My basic argument is that, at its peak, Occupy Melbourne could be divided into three basic groups of people: (1) revolutionary socialists, (2) neo-romantics and (3) social democrats. Obviously, this crude characterisation is a simplification of the multiplicity of different subjects involved in the movement, but a certain degree of abstraction is always necessary for analysis. My hope is that through a clear picture of these three groups we will be able to make better sense of who was involved and what happened. In particular, I will draw out the respective strengths and weaknesses of each political ideology so that we will be better placed in future struggles concerning our tactics and strategy.

1. Revolutionary Socialists

Basic political beliefs: Socialists adhere to the fundamental analyses of Marx's political and economic writings. According to the standard view, society is divided into two antagonistic classes, one comprised of the workers, who own nothing but their labour and who are exploited by a capitalist class, this class owns the means of production and rule through the dissemination of a hegemonic ideology. The capitalist system of wage labour is corrupt, dehumanises workers and supports other forms of oppression such as sexism, racism and homophobia. The solution is to push the antagonism between the workers and ruling class to an extreme in order to bring about a revolutionary situation where the workers will be guided by a vanguard party comprised of professional revolutionaries to overthrow the capitalist system and institute a democratic form of organisation of the economy.

Role in the movement: During the early phase of the movement the socialists were among the key organisers. Being accustomed to political speech and action the socialists dominated floor time in General Assemblies and meetings and had considerable influence over the direction of the movement. Socialist groups also tended to pre-caucus before meetings which enhanced their influence and power by voting in bloc on key issues. The presence of the socialist organisations

within the Occupy movement was a source of constant tension, as many other occupiers disagreed with their tactics and their perceived attempts to co-opt the movement. These concerns ranged from the sheer organisational aptitude of the socialists, who always had the most visible presence, the largest banners, the most persuasive orators, to more serious concerns that socialists were seeking to undermine key aspects of Occupy Melbourne, such as the consensus process of the General Assembly, for their own ends. The fear of co-option, regardless of the truth of the claim, was perhaps the key division in the movement at City Square and one of the main obstacles that undermined collective action. The major criticism that the socialist groups had of the Occupy movement was its tendency to be, in their eyes, 'non-political'. For the socialists, to be classified as a political movement, Occupy had to adopt a Marxist analysis that highlights the essential class antagonism as the source of all political problems. They were critical of other occupiers' tendency to ignore the class elements of the conflict and focus on lifestyle choices over revolutionary action. They were also critical of the Occupy movement's lack of party structure and lack of hierarchical organisation. To win the battle against capitalism, requires discipline, a structured organisation and a certain acceptance of party hierarchy.

Strengths and weaknesses of the ideology: The socialists' discipline and organisation made them some of the most skilful organisers of the Occupy movement. Their focus on politics enabled them to avoid the traps of mistaking the Occupy movement for a moral argument about corporate greed or an alternative lifestyle movement. The primary weakness of the major socialist organisations, in my eyes, was their inability to move beyond a crude orthodox Marxist analysis of contemporary society and the traditional tactics of building a vanguard party. There was a profound disjuncture between the attempts of many of the occupiers to institute new methods of political organisation and the tactics of the socialists.

2. Neo-Romantics

Basic political beliefs: By the term neo-romantics I am attempting to draw together a number of different individuals and groups under a unifying heading. Unlike the socialists groups, the neo-romantics did not belong to a single party or organisation. Indeed, any such party structure would have been completely antithetical to their beliefs. Neo-romantics include all of those who form part of a broad spiritual counterculture, those who believe that our money-driven corporate society has failed us and has given us consumerism over community, false advertising over wisdom, and cheap quick-fix solutions over deeper healing. This group includes a broad array of deep ecologists, spiritual activists, alternative energy organisers, anarchists, libertarians, cyber activists and those

championing a global festival culture. They believe that the ideas that we put up to divide humanity into different groups have to be broken down so that we can see the commonalities and oneness that unites us all and connects us to the planet as a living ecosystem. During the Occupy movement they were most associated with the phrase, "Occupy with love."

Role in the movement: The neo-romantics saw the Occupy movement as a rejection of mainstream society and creation of an alternative lifestyle through love and compassion. Occupy was a way of living and understanding the world rather than simply a political movement. As many of the neo-romantics were able to commit large amounts of time to the movement they became some of the most integral members. Unsurprisingly, they congregated around the kitchen working group, the healing and care working group and the outreach working group. One could say that these people formed the heart and soul of the movement, developing strong friendships and bonds of community between people and making the space feel like a communal shared project. Most of the art and cultural activities came from the neo-romantics such as banner making, face painting and the children's corner.

Strengths and weaknesses of the ideology: The major strength of this form of neo-romanticism is the way in which it tended to unite people around occupy both as an ideal and as a lived community. In a way, we all had a little bit of this neo-romantic in us insofar as we were all taking a chance on something new, rejecting the dominant values of our culture and participating in a counter-cultural movement. However, the neo-romantics distrust of politics made it very difficult to organise with them in political campaigns because short-term strategic aims and goals would be rejected in favour of utopian projects. Very little attention was given to the way the Occupy movement was being perceived in the media, what our political aims and objectives were and how we would practically go about achieving them. Secondly, this political naivety at times actually perpetuated forms of hierarchy and oppression through its unwillingness to confront political problems within the movement. There was a widespread belief that as we should all be considered equal, we no longer have to interrogate ourselves concerning notions of gender, race and class, which were all perceived as part of the old established order. This "forgetting" of how relations of power play out within social movements resulted in these hierarchies re-establishing themselves within the movement, as white, educated men took on the majority of leadership roles. As a result, the movement suffered enormously with a large number of female, indigenous and certain other marginalised groups simply dropping out.

3. Social Democrats

Basic political beliefs: Under the category of social democrats I include all of the left-liberal oriented, Greens or left-Labour voting, environmentally concerned, inner-city dwelling, students, academics, teachers, nurses etc. whose primary political activity prior to Occupy might have been going to public lectures after work, handing out how to vote cards for the Greens on election day, writing letters to the newspaper and chatting to their friends about the politics of the day. As a group they are largely committed to forms of liberal democracy although they see the need to reform certain aspects of the system. They believe in the need for government to have a role in redistributing wealth, upholding certain social values such as refugee rights and marriage equality laws, and providing a support system for the vulnerable and margnisalised in society.

Role in the movement: This socio-political group was one of the hardest to get involved in the Occupy movement due to their acceptance of the basic social and political institutions of our society and critical attitude towards protest movements. They were also the quickest to become disillusioned and drop out. When they did get involved, these people tended towards the more organisational roles such as the facilitation team of the General Assemblies, the media working group and the legal support team. These people tended to have previous skills working in political campaigns or organising events. The social democrats were also highly involved in the ideological aspects of the movement, helping draft statements of beliefs and press releases.

Strengths and weaknesses of the ideology: The social democrats acted as a useful counter-balance to some of the more utopian tendencies of the socialists and the neo-romantics. The social democrats concern with concrete political goals kept the movement on track and their organisational skills helped keep core elements of the movement functioning. However, this acceptance of the mainstream media's agenda was also quite limiting as it maintained itself within the current status quo rather than changing the rules of the game. The social democrats were also far too accepting of the police's role as a neutral upholder of justice, when in fact they were continually attempting to undermine and destroy the movement.

This is by no means a comprehensive description of all that was going on at Occupy Melbourne. It is a brief attempt to sketch out some of the major political forces that were at play within the movement so as to understand what happened and how it could have been otherwise. If the Occupy movement is to become a progenitor of future social movements, understanding the complex political stakes involved will be a key to later success.

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WHAT IS POSSIBLE NOW?

Nick Carson

The Occupy movement has been a timely awakening for Australians. The movement undoubtedly reignited desperately needed conversations within Australia, but it also proved to the rest of the world that some Australians are interested in the growing call for a *real* democracy, i.e. a more participatory and grass-roots system of governance. We mobilised in solidarity with countries facing worse political and economic situations than ours, and if only for brief moments, we rediscovered long-lost egalitarian values.

Many of us have friends and family in countries like Italy and Greece, and cities like New York and London. We know how difficult it is becoming for people around the world under ever-increasing corporate-state exploitation. One of the biggest effects of the Occupy movement from my perspective was a growth in the sense that we all belong to a profoundly inter-connected world. As the struggle continued, we all shared our problems with one another, allowing us rapid exposure to the latest ideas emerging from the global struggle against corporatism, inequality and oppression. From people's assemblies in Madrid, to facilitation training in New York, to non-violent resistance tactics in Athens; our collective lessons were shared instantaneously.

This desire to abandon neoliberal competition and rediscover how to share knowledge, skills and experience, is allowing us to operate with a sense of a global humanity in our struggles. The Occupy movement in Australia opened up this space to a broader community beyond the established activist networks. While calls for real democracy have not yet found a responsive audience within Australia, our exploration and adaptations of these ideas is evidence of a growing unrest beneath our casual facade.

We harbour a deep sentiment that something is wrong, and we know we have to do something about it. The Occupy movement has been just one of many steps on the road to a more resilient, cohesive and passionate humanity, both in Australia and around the world. As we begin to open discussions and share knowledge, and as we begin to empower individuals within their communities and neighbourhoods, we will abandon the ideology of our oppressors and change will begin to sweep through this ancient continent. Indeed, it has already begun.

I put forward this optimistic position, not to paint a rosy picture, but to give voice to the unheard narrative of resistance of a global democratic awakening. The rapid growth in local food co-ops, the myriad fruitful 'coffee shop' discussions, the resilience and strength of the creative arts, the

emergence of an everyday bicyclist culture, these are just some of the changes happening before our eyes. We are enjoying this rediscovery of our ability to participate, share and enjoy, and as these actions become more numerous, they become intensely political. We are challenging the corporate-state and institutions that exploit us, and this is a challenge mounted in large part by communities who do not self-identify as political activists.

If a comparatively small number of people with no activist experience could rally thousands in three weeks to participate in Occupy Melbourne, the corporate-state will be in for a shock as greater numbers of people discover the radical ideas behind this new movement. These ideas point towards a future in which we will collectively denounce the illegitimacy of corporate and state institutions en mass. This vision is not only on our horizon, we are helping each other create this vision today.

However one chooses to view the Occupy movement in Australia, it has taught me that we must continue to listen to one another, to help each other and participate in achieving the shared goals of our communities. This does not begin with asking for concessions from the privileged and powerful. Nor does it begin by assuming established hierarchies will place good and honourable people in power. It begins with you. Indeed it has already begun. Anything is possible now.

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