Occupy Wall Street's Challenge to an American Public Transcript

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OCCUPY WALL STREET’S CHALLENGE TO AN AMERICAN PUBLIC

TRANSCRIPT

by

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Abstract

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Adviser: Dr. Ira Shor

This dissertation examines the rhetoric and discourses of the anti-corporate movement Occupy Wall Street, using frameworks from political ethnography and critical discourse analysis to offer a thick, triangulated description of a single event, Occupy Wall Street’s occupation of Zuccotti Park. The study shows how Occupy achieved a disturbing positionality relative to the forces which routinely dominate public discourse and proposes that Occupy’s encampment was politically intolerable to the status quo because the movement held the potential to consolidate critical thought and action. Because the “soft” means of re-capturing public consent were weak in 2011 because of the 2008 economic collapse, the dominant figure in this encounter, billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York, led the way to instruments of “hard” persuasion, culminating in the orchestrated assault carried out on November 15th, an operation that saw the media sequestered, at night, in the dark, with no filmed images allowed or possible, and all street access blocked to supporters of Occupy. The use of “hard persuasion” by the authorities in response to Occupy’s discursive threat clarifies how reality is constituted through discursive and material action and suggests that alternative discourse and action has the power to reconstitute reality, redistributing power and working in opposition to human suffering and oppression.
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Introduction: the circulation of discourses in periods of crisis and disorientation

Before suddenly becoming a consequential movement with national and international support, Occupy Wall Street started in September 2011 as just another odd instance of marginal opposition by fringy New York City activists. But, in less than sixty days, the 2011 movement drastically changed the terms of national political debate. Occupy erupted from the margins into the mainstream where the loosely-allied elements delivered a heterodox message into the teeth of power, provoked a response, and accumulated large financial and material assets which required banking and warehouse services. As it gained material, financial, and political clout, Occupy produced and projected multiple unauthorized discourses against Wall Street financial firms recently impervious to militant criticism or streetside opposition.

The key Occupy themes of wealth inequality and economic injustice had been tacitly marginalized in American political discourse but Occupy dragged them to the forefront. Because of Occupy, mass anger at the vast power and wealth of Wall Street circulated in the streets of many cities and in the mass media for several months. As occupations spread to many towns and cities, and a protest camp in Lower Manhattan’s Zuccotti Park morphed daily into an all-purpose opposition center on illegally-seized
land, Occupy developed into a consequential threat to elite dominance. During this time, its narrative – that Wall Street steals money and opportunity from mainstream America – competed on the public stage with dominant narratives. A robust new discourse circulated against runaway economic inequality on a national level, offering new representations of what exists, what is good, and what is possible, to use Goran Therborn’s framework of how discourses in society develop our sense of the world and our place in it (18).

Figure 1: In the heart of New York City's financial district, a marginalized narrative reached thousands of daily visitors.

Occupy’s ability to reach a mass audience with its radical message set up a high-stakes scenario remarked upon by Congressman Peter King on October 7th, 2011. King, a Republican conservative who represents the 2nd District of New York, said to radio host
Laura Ingraham that “it’s really important for us not to give any legitimacy to these people in the streets.” He added, “I remember what happened in the 1960s when the left-wing took to the streets and somehow the media glorified them and it ended up shaping policy. We can’t allow that to happen” (Miller). King feared the emerging legitimacy of Occupy’s discourse, for good reason.

Norman Fairclough, a leading theorist of critical discourse analysis, argues in Language and Globalization (2006) that grave financial crises, like the one that the U.S. experienced in 2008, open the chance for oppositional ideas to gain legitimacy, because dominant narratives proposed from dominant groups often lose their capacity to explain events. Fairclough proposed an argument about the role of discourses in “social (re)construction” which lays out the high stakes for Occupy’s residency at Zuccotti Park:

…actual, real processes of globalization — what is actually happening as opposed to what is represented as happening — are highly complex, diverse, uneven and multidimensional (economic, political, social, cultural, ecological, and so forth). They are much too complex to be fully controlled by any human intervention. Nevertheless, as in any situation of major social change, various groups of people develop strategies to try to regulate, direct and control elements of these real processes, and if these strategies are successful they may inflect and partly redirect the trajectory of actual globalization. (24)

Fairclough stresses here that discourse has only a limited ability to shape the “actual” world. However, to the extent that material trajectories can be redirected, groups expend great effort to install their own narrative as the dominant one. For Fairclough, dominant narratives
represent and narrate what has happened in the past and is happening in the present, including why previous systems have failed, and imagine and advocate possible alternatives for the future, possible economic (social, political, cultural) orders which might overcome existing problems and offer better futures. (24)

The ability of such discursive representation to shape perception of what is good or bad for society gives these dominant discourses their controlling edge, that is, until a crisis creates what Swedish political theorist Goran Therborn called a "disjuncture" or what Fairclough named a “disorientation”:

In situations of disorientation and crisis, one finds a proliferation of discourses imagining alternative forms of organization for economy, state, and society...One central question for cultural political economy is about the variation, selection, and retention of discourses, that is, how certain of the many discourses which are circulating in a time of crisis are selected, and how they come to be retained (or institutionalized) and thereby come to be capable of having constitutive effects on real economic, political, and social processes. (24)

In the midst of grave financial crises, such as the one the U.S. experienced starting in 2008, dominant narratives risk ceding their dominance, their capacity to explain events; into the newly-opened social space, what Foucault called “disqualified discourses” and “subjugated knowledges” (Society Must Be Defended, 1-15) can flood in and gain sudden currency and legitimacy. In September 2011, for example, the domination of political discourse by mainstream forces – including the Wall Street elite – broke down with the broken economy, creating an opening to the left large enough for the insurgent Occupy to
pass through. Fairclough explains the importance of maximizing such openings, writing that

the mere existence of alternative discourses means little. It is only those which pass through the mechanisms and processes of selection and retention that can contribute to social (re)construction. (24)

Occupy’s alternative discourses turned out to be ones whose time had come – even though Occupy in ensuing months, as this dissertation will elaborate, could not consolidate its own breakthrough. Fairclough’s argument vis a vis the opening to alternative discourses at moments of profound crisis and disorientation raises several research questions:

1. **Why were Occupy’s anti-corporate, egalitarian discourses the ones selected for mass circulation?** The privileged discourses of the elite are usually the ones most able to “inflect and partly redirect the trajectory of actual globalization” (Fairclough 24) because financial elites control the corporate media in the U.S. In normal times, financial elites are able to quarantine anti-corporate, egalitarian messaging. Why not this time?

2. **After Occupy’s discourse had burst from the margins into the mainstream, what strategies did financial elites deploy in order to reimpose their discursive monopoly?**

3. **Why was a paramilitary police solution turned to in containing and dispersing Occupy?** In a constitutional republic such as the United States, soft means of repressing alternative discourses (i.e. official propaganda, densely distracting spectacles, marginalization, pervasive corporate media outlets, outright
censorship, standardized and regulated curricula in mass schooling, etc.) are highly preferred over hard means (beatings, evictions, arrests, jailing, prosecution, execution, etc.).

Roughly speaking, I aim to answer #1 in Chapter Two of this dissertation and address the latter two questions in Chapter Three. My five weeks of onsite observation at Zuccotti Park during the occupation, along with data collected from news reports, Occupy’s meeting minutes, and social media, provide the raw data for this dissertation on the discourses by and about Occupy. Chapter One will set the context for my involvement with this dissertation topic in the first place.

Chapter One Overview

Chapter One of the dissertation explains how I came to study Occupy Wall Street and the methods I used to study it. I narrate my experiences with New York’s Financial District in the years before Occupy demonstrators arrived in the area, how my life intersected with the movement on the streets of Manhattan in 2011, and how my doctoral studies incentivized me to closely follow and write about the demonstrations.

In addition to revealing how I was positioned as a researcher, Chapter One offers an overview of the 2008 financial crisis in the United States, which created circumstances conducive to what political ethnographer James Scott (1990) calls a “Saturnalia” of opposition against Wall Street and the status quo. I also indicate precursors to the Occupy demonstrations, such as the Republic Doors and Windows factory sit-in of 2008, the 2011 Arab Spring, and the demonstrations by Spanish Indignados also in 2011. Finally, I describe the layout of the encampment and how it evolved as a spatial discourse during my month of visits, before being destroyed by the New York Police Department which
returned the site to its prior status of a corporatized “public-private park” closed to social critics desiring to “speak truth to power.”

Chapter Two Overview

In order to set up Chapter Three, which addresses the tools that authorities used to push Occupy back to the margins, Chapter Two addresses the tactics that allowed Occupy to become a threat to elites in the first place.

I start out by acknowledging that a long-term, ongoing, but marginalized critique of finance capital and the preferential treatment by the government toward the rich already existed in the U.S. before the occupation of Zuccotti Park within progressive media outlets, groups, and contained sites of radical assembly like conferences. Only a few of these margin-based activities rose in consequence to require police suppressions, such as “The Battle in Seattle” in 1999, the police containment of protests in New York City in 2003 against the start of the second Iraq War, and the Republican Presidential conventions in 2004 in New York and in 2008 in Minneapolis. For the most part, it has not been necessary for authorities to use police suppression against the continuous but low-level, geographically limited and episodic protest actions in American life. Opposition groups, leaders, and discourses had been successfully sequestered from mass circulation or mass attention by the major corporate media and by the demanding routines of everyday life which compel most people’s time and attention. Even after the financial collapse of 2008 and the quickly-approved unpopular trillion-dollar bailout of private banks with public taxes (which gave opposition groups heavy ammunition to make their case), radical rhetoric against Wall Street had still not broken through to mass audiences or to mass action by the middle of 2011, nearly three years after the bailout.
In the first few weeks of its September, 2011 encampment at Zuccotti, Occupy qualified as only a more militant, more tenacious radical irritation to the authorities, still limited to small-scale consequence, not yet dangerously across the marginal line of other small groups which operate in the fringes of the legal left. During this time, according to Pew’s Project for Excellence in Journalism, news about Occupy occupied no more than 2 percent of the nation’s media coverage (Holcomb). However, things began to change in the first full week of October, when the protest coverage jumped to 7 percent of the aggregate news (Holcomb). Then, Occupy’s share rose to 10 percent the following week before leveling out at around 5 percent (Holcomb). Merely by the amount of coverage it offered, the news media signaled to its audiences that Occupy mattered, and that it had traction. Occupy’s unauthorized seizure of public space and its dogged ability to stay there and grow, provided something new, a movement which did not go home at the end of the day.

What were the conditions that allowed these oppositional utterances and actions to gain wider circulation and higher profiles? How did Occupy amplify the discontented voices of ordinary people? As I explore these questions in Chapter Two, I describe the communications strategies animating Occupy. Perhaps most importantly, camping out illegally on Wall Street amplified outraged voices of ordinary people by being long-term, not transient like a march or a rally. The Zuccotti encampment was a permanent facility for public address to large numbers of people who were walking by or who were drawn to the intriguing event. Because it was 24/7, in public – using the public sphere to promote the public interest, transforming commercial area into a public commons – it was simply always there, always broadcasting opposition. Such egalitarian speech acts
could not reach a large audience unless the occupation of Zuccotti took advantage of a national disjuncture in the economy to create a mass disruption in the status quo which then caught on and spread widely, compelling mass media to pay attention.

Figure 2: At Zuccotti park, tourists stopped to check out the many intriguing spectacles, like impromptu guitar jams by veteran activists.

Beyond the story of illegally occupying a physical space in “the teeth of power,” Chapter Two also recognizes the digital channels that circulated Occupy’s oppositional discourse. For instance, the unsupervised virtual world enabled sensational clips of police violence against non-violent demonstrators to go viral. Virtual channels fostered the circulation of compelling personal testimonials of real people, especially on the Tumblr blog named “We are the 99%.” By circulating moving images of police violence and personal narratives of bank foreclosure heartlessness, Occupy seized the moral high
ground and created conditions for decent people of all classes to stand together on the side of Occupy, thereby legitimizing and consolidating criticism of the financial elite.

When Occupy proved able to reach mass circulation through its own evolving social media and through coverage in the mainstream media, its marginal opposition began converting into a threat to the status quo, thanks to its ability to speak plainly and meaningfully to masses of Americans from the moral high ground. The encampments, then, were politically intolerable to the status quo, not merely an annoyance that could be ignored or ridiculed. The movement held the potential to consolidate and develop critical thought and action, breaking through the monopoly of dominant groups who control the national narrative.

**Chapter Three Overview**

Chapter Three distinguishes between the “soft” means and the “hard” means that authorities in this constitutional republic deploy to contain democratic opposition and to re-marginlize radical discourse, once that discourse has achieved mass circulation. Looking at the example of Occupy Wall Street in New York City specifically, I explain why the para-military solution of hard repression eventually won out over the discursive and negotiated means that are usually the default tactics of elites in a constitutional republic.

Occupy became a threat to state security because its public spectacle of opposition created a platform and tool for democratic, anti-corporate discourses to address millions of people, breaking out of the strategic marginalization of protest culture. In Fairclough’s terms, Occupy’s anti-corporate discourses were passing “through the mechanisms and processes of selection and retention,” which meant they had the potential to “contribute to
social (re)construction” (27). In the United States, media studies (like Ben Bagdikian’s *The New Media Monopoly*) indicate how the discursive tools of mass communication are monopolized by corporate entities with close relation to government. High-status policymakers notoriously circulate between government-military-corporate-university-foundation entities.¹ This mobile dominant class normally controls through government regulation (FCC statutes and Congressional law) as well as through media ownership what contents and discourses reach mass audiences. However, in late 2011, the oppositional intellectuals associated with Occupy competed with corporate-sponsored pundits for control of the national platform, threatening an elite monopoly on representation and persuasion.

Once Occupy’s anti-corporate rhetoric had spread widely and was on the offensive, the mainstream media took steps to derail the mass appeal of Occupy’s oppositional discourse by accusing it of incoherence and indecency. However, as Chapter Three explains, such “soft” means of re-capturing public consent were weak in 2011 because of the 2008 economic collapse, which had been provoked by Wall Street and which was followed by an unpopular trillion-dollar federal bailout.

With the status quo’s instruments of soft discursive persuasion weak, the dominant figure in this encounter, billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York, himself a Wall Street scion, led the way to instruments of hard persuasion — arrests, harassments, beatings, random grabs, and finally the orchestrated assault carried out on

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¹ One iconic example is the mid-century policy prince James Bryant Conant who cycled from the Presidency of Harvard to serving as High Commissioner of Occupied Germany to President of the Carnegie Foundation. Dwight Eisenhower went from the military to the Presidency of Columbia University to the White House. George H.W. Bush went from military service to the oil industry to head of the CIA to the White House.
November 15th, an operation that saw the media censored and sequestered, at night, in the dark, with no filmed images allowed or possible, and all subway stations and street access blocked to supporters of Occupy who a month before had streamed into Zuccotti upon news of an impending police action.

Figure 3: After the eviction, Zuccotti Park was very clean, but also deficient in vitality and civic engagement.

Chapter Four Overview

Chapter Four begins with polls suggesting that Americans appreciated the message of Occupy but were less enthused by the methods that Occupy used. However, even if Occupy’s militant methods alienated many Americans, I argue that this cannot be seen as a mistake because Americans were not Occupy’s only audience. By bringing the tactics of “the global street” (Sassen) to Lower Manhattan, Occupy successfully built connections with other heterodox groups around the world, a goal that David Harvey cites as crucial for avoiding and/or undoing global domination by financial elites.
Chapter One: Intersecting with Occupy

As David Graeber pointed out in his 2013 book *The Democracy Project*, the story of Occupy Wall Street “has been told in countless outlets already, from the *Occupy Wall Street Journal* to the actual *Wall Street Journal*, with varying motives, points of view, casts of characters, and degrees of accuracy” (4). Because such a sprawling story requires a series of books to capture it, like Graeber, I do not aim to write a full history of the movement in these opening pages. Instead, I aim to position myself in relation to the September 2011 occupation of Zuccotti Park in Lower Manhattan. Situating my point of view, I could say that I went from knee-jerk skepticism to naïve optimism before dialing down my emotions in order to study the movement from a rhetorical perspective. The inclusion of my narrative acknowledges the wisdom of anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who wrote that, “although one starts any effort at thick description…from a state of general bewilderment as to what the devil is going on…one does not start…intellectually empty-handed” (27).

Since 2001, I have lived in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, a once-gritty working-class district, setting for the epic stevedore saga *On the Waterfront* (1954), now quickly gentrifying, five miles northeast of Zuccotti Park, on the other side of the East River. I had moved to Greenpoint to be closer to friends from undergraduate days at Skidmore College and also because I wanted to be “in the thick of things,” surrounded by people, activity, and life in an area known for its funky allure. My interest in being in the thick of things was such that, a few months after I arrived in New York, on the morning when terrorists attacked and destroyed the World Trade Center, I crossed the Brooklyn Bridge on foot going into Manhattan, against the stream of stunned, dust-covered, occasionally
bloody men and women walking home from their offices in Lower Manhattan. My own office at the New York City College of Technology, in Downtown Brooklyn, had closed for the day. With subways out of commission indefinitely, and nowhere for me to be, I initially wandered aimlessly in the rain of paper and dust, until I found myself at the base of the Brooklyn Bridge.

When I arrived on the Manhattan side of the bridge (Figure 4), I aimed to keep walking toward the scene of destruction and then volunteer, possibly as a nurse’s aide, but a police officer stopped me and told me the area was off-limits. I noticed a woman beside me who had apparently had the same idea as me. “No need for volunteers right now,” the cop said to that woman and me. So I turned north on Manhattan’s suddenly empty streets, toward the Lower East Side, eventually walking the four miles back to my apartment in Brooklyn.

Figure 4: Walking into downtown on 9/11, on the morning of the terrible attacks, no subways running, thousands streaming out of Manhattan at police instruction.
9/11 was obviously an unreal day to be walking around in New York City, but regardless, walking around the City has always felt meaningful to me. When Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) workers went on strike for a few days in December 2005, I found that I enjoyed the 3-mile walk to my job at Long Island University in Downtown Brooklyn. So, a few months later, when the weather got better in Spring 2006, I resumed that pedestrian commute instead of taking the train 8 stops. My interest in walking the City streets does not make me unique whatsoever (Rundle et al.), but I bring it up because my proclivity toward “pounding the pavement,” while looking closely at the urban landscape and people, prepared me for deliberate observation of the camp at Occupy Wall Street. If nothing else, years of walking through the constantly transforming neighborhoods of New York City taught me that urban spaces are always “contested, polyphonic, and malleable, for better or worse” (Lugo).

By the time Occupy encamped at Zuccotti, I had been working full-time at a small college in Staten Island – a branch of St. John's University – for over four years. When I first began there in 2007, I had purchased a '99 Volkswagen for the commute on the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (BQE), but I quickly grew tired of the traffic jams, the sedentary lifestyle that caused me to gain weight, and car repairs costing thousands of dollars. When my car’s engine overheated on the BQE for a second time in the summer of 2009, I imagined getting hit with yet another $2,000 repair bill. I could have possibly scrounged up that kind of cash if not for a freeze in my salary and the elimination of my
academic travel funds, both of which had kicked in soon after the financial meltdown of 2008.2

So, I began studying mass transit maps for routes to get to Staten Island via public transportation. If I took the subway to the Fulton Street stop in Lower Manhattan, I discovered, then walked a mile to the Staten Island Ferry Terminal (S.I.F.T.), I could make it to work in around 90 minutes. I’d be doubling my commute, but at least, I told myself, I would be enjoying myself and would likely shed some pounds. All in all, my frozen salary and lost travel funds didn’t subject me to the same misery experienced by millions who lost their jobs and/or homes in the worst recession since the Great Depression (Goodman). I only lost my car and had my commute disrupted so I wasn’t feeling sorry for myself.

Starting in 2009, my daily commute from Northern Brooklyn to Staten Island took me through Lower Manhattan, in the vicinity of Zuccotti, a park that I often walked by but rarely thought about. After disembarking the A C E train at Fulton Street in Lower Manhattan, I meandered slowly down to the ferry, eating breakfast somewhere, getting to know the historic, tangled streets of the Financial District. Like many Americans, after the financial meltdown of 2008, I had become fascinated by “CDOs” (collateralized debt obligations), “overleveraging,” “discount windows,” and all the other buzzwords associated with the meltdown. Post-2008, walking past the key landmarks of New York’s financial district had a dark appeal for me, like being on a crime scene.

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2 St. John’s financial portfolio had seen a 30% drop in value between 2007 and 2008. When I learned that the president of the St. John’s, Rev. Donald Harrington, was on the Board of Bear Sterns when it collapsed in 2007, I didn’t know if his position would have made him more likely or less likely to see the meltdown coming.
Zigzagging down to S.I.F.T. on Lower Manhattan’s higgledy-piggledy streets (Figure 5), I lingered in the vicinity of men who looked like finance workers, listening in on the conversations they had at cafés, supermarkets, and on street corners. Most of it was irrelevant to me or incomprehensible.

Figure 5: My commute past Zuccotti Park to the Staten Island Ferry Terminal.

But one comment I overheard in the summer of 2009 sticks out in my mind, even years later. I was in Christopher Norman’s, an upscale chocolate shop, less than a block from the New York Stock Exchange, on a dark, mostly deserted alley called New Street.3 Because Norman’s also sold high-quality coffee and cappuccino, I went in there occasionally during my morning walk to the ferry. A forty-something guy in a nice suit

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3 In November 2011, Occupy secured a loading dock on New Street, which they used as a spot for their much needed Port-a-Potties.
was ahead of me in line and as he took his change, he waved goodbye to the store manager, and added with a sigh, “Gotta get back to my job screwing people over.” The comment seemed to hold within it equal parts self-loathing and self-pity. If he meant it to be a joke, the manager didn’t take it that way and replied, with more pity than loathing, “Aw, I hope it won’t be like that soon.”

I wanted to know: in what way was this guy “screwing people over”? There was no way for me to tell, once he exited the shop and blended back into the street traffic. But I pictured him 1) returning to his office or cubicle with his Christopher Norman coffee, 2) putting on his gameface and a headset in preparation for hours of cold-calls to seniors, and then 3) aggressively pitching, say, reverse mortgages while neglecting to mention the fees associated with them, perhaps suggesting that the loans were free money that could finance a long-coveted cruise (Silver-Greenberg).

2008 Financial Meltdown and Aftermath

In 2009, “Wall Street” brought to mind the practice of seducing people into “investments” – whose high risk they did not know and were not told – that they could not conceivably pay back. My impression of Wall Street practices took shape not from direct contact with financial firms but from financial reporting by mainstream publications like *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. I gathered from journalists like *WSJ*’s Kate Kelly⁴ and *NYT*’s Gretchen Morgenson⁵ that greedy, shortsighted thinking had made banks rich while putting the global economy in jeopardy.

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⁴ The “staff” of *The Wall Street Journal* was nominated as a finalist for the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for “its highly detailed coverage of the collapse of America’s financial system, explicating key decisions, capturing the sense of calamity and charting the human toll.”

⁵ Beyond the reporting she did for *NYT*, Morgenson teamed with Joshua Rosner to write *Reckless Endangerment*, a book explaining the skullduggery of the 2008 financial collapse.
This was the “common sense” analysis of the crisis distributed by even such establishment news outlets like *NYT* and *WSJ* and this nationalized mood would add greatly to Occupy’s legitimacy a few years after the collapse.

Before the collapse, going back to 2004, the housing market was in a runaway bubble racing to a cliff. But for a few years many brokers, investors, and homeowners enjoyed the happy delusion that house prices would continue to rise indefinitely. Homeowners got easy mortgages. Banks and mortgage companies felt secure lending the money because they could almost immediately sell the mortgages to Wall Street, thereby getting back all their cash plus a little extra for their trouble. The investment banks, in turn, charged massive fees for repackaging mortgages into fancy financial products like collateralized debt obligations (CDOs) and credit default swaps (CDS). Investors around the world benefitted from the then-phenomenal American housing market. For each of these groups, the immediate rewards obscured the dangers, which were more abstract and remote. (Bernstein and Eisenger)

But by mid-2006, the housing market was declining. Banks and mortgage companies had been lending blindly, while newly-minted subprime house owners had been taking out second mortgages and buying things they couldn't afford, certainly not when an introductory “teaser” rate of 5% went to 15% on a $300K house. In the aftermath of the meltdown, propagandists for Wall Street like CNBC’s Rick Santelli seized on this aspect as the genesis of the financial crisis – the “dumb poorer folks” not reading the mortgage instruments they signed – but such claims about who caused the crisis distracted attention from what really took down the banks and the economy.
Pundits like Santelli rarely talk about credit default swaps (CDS) because you can't blame them on people who couldn’t afford the subprime loans they were given, but all the big financial institutions were playing this very dangerous game – trading paper for easy money – and taxpayers ended up eating the accumulated risk in this game. The game goes like this: AIG provides a piece of paper – “a credit default swap” – to Goldman that guarantees that if Lehman ever defaults on their payments to Goldman, then AIG would cover the loss. In return, Goldman pays AIG a pittance, because, come on, is Lehman Brothers really going to go bankrupt? Not in this lifetime, right?

They were all playing this game because it was barely-regulated easy money. Citi insures Merrill, Merrill insures Goldman, and on and on. These firms were leveraged to the hilt, meaning on average they had bought 30 dollars (sometimes more) worth of mortgages for every dollar of assets they owned. That amount of leverage works like a dream when asset prices are rising, but when asset prices drop, the losses are huge. Lehman Brothers was heavily leveraged on mortgage-backed assets (like CDOs) and when subprime owners started foreclosing, their assets had to be written down. Eventually Lehman got to a point facing bankruptcy.

A former Goldman CEO, Hank Paulson (rumored to have lingering bad blood with Lehman’s arrogant and incompetent CEO Dick Fuld), was the U.S. Treasury Secretary during this time (Salmon). Paulson decided not to bail Lehman out when they defaulted, some say in part to punish Fuld for his stupidity (Fishman), resulting in a huge crisis. Whoever was insuring Lehman now owed hundreds of millions to the institutions that had the stakes in Lehman. AIG, being the biggest player in this game, was

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6 AIG was the largest player in the CDS game. Merrill, Bear Sterns, Citi, and Goldman were deeply involved too. And of course Lehman Brothers.
completely encumbered to the point of bankruptcy, and Goldman Sachs had a CDS with AIG on Bear Sterns which was going down, so AIG was even more desperate. Whoever had a CDS on AIG was now also dragged by a vortex of bad debt into the black hole of desperation. The dominoes threatened to fall one after another around the world.

Figure 6: A Sign in Zuccotti Park impugns Wall Street for “taking bold risks with other people's money.” When the bold risks work out, the profits are claimed by the financial elite. When the bold risks turn sour, the entire population suffers and have to bailout the finance industry.

With market liquidity vanished, Secretary of the Treasury Paulson and Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke went in front of the Senate Banking Committee on Tuesday, September 23rd, 2008 to pitch a slim three-page proposal that would create a giant “revolving credit facility” called the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). TARP would allow the U.S. Department of Treasury to purchase or insure 700 billion dollars
worth of toxic mortgage-based assets from financial firms declared “too big to fail.” After purchasing the assets, the Treasury would repackage and sell them.  

Public outrage greeted the 3-page Paulson Proposal (see Figure 7). By Thursday, two days after the Paulson Proposal was circulated, Senator Dianne Feinstein's offices had received a total of 39,180 e-mails, calls, and letters on the bailout, with the overwhelming majority of constituents against it (Bensinger). A letter to Representative Linda Sanchez, which her office referred to as typical in its tone, read as follows: "The bailout legislation is being rammed through Congress in a matter of days. This is an illegal power grab by the White House and their richest friends on Wall Street" (Bensinger). On September 25, protests opposing the bailout occurred in over 100 cities across the United States (Schubert). The first attempt by Congress to authorize TARP failed because many legislators “were worried that a vote in favor would be political suicide" (Hulse and Herszenhorn). However, a modified version, loaded with perks for legislators who had been on the fence, was signed into law by President George Bush on October 3rd, 2008. The Democratic nominee for President at that time, Sen. Barack Obama, and his Democratic colleagues in Congress backed the bi-partisan bill.

7 In addition to TARP, the Fed enacted several lending programs that were very favorable to the banks. When you add up guarantees and lending limits, the Fed had committed $7.77 trillion as of March 2009 to rescuing the financial system, “more than half the value of everything produced in the U.S. that year” (Ivry, Keoun, and Kuntz). In the lending programs, the Fed took in toxic securities as collateral and loaned against them as if they were healthy ones.

8 The extent of such protests indicated the field of mass anger that Occupy would feed from and feed into 3 years later.
Just two months after the rescue package was signed into law, workers at Republic Doors and Windows (RDW) near Chicago seized on this topic of mass outrage – the $700 billion Wall Street bailout which had come amidst job losses and home foreclosures – to justify their occupation of an RDW factory which was planning to close and take away their jobs (Luo and Cullota). The workers’ complaint—“You Got Bailed Out, We Got Sold Out”— successfully tapped into widespread anger at the big banks. Nancy Welch, in her analysis of the rhetoric of the RDW occupation, pointed out that the workers’ beef was with Bank of America, who had refused to finance the continued operation of the factory, even though TARP had supplied BoA with $25 billion in the months preceding (221). Regarding the kairos of the RDW occupation, Welch writes,
In another period, under another national mood, these factory workers might have been vilified as “greedy” trade unionists or dismissed as “unrealistic” by press and politicians. Liberal commentators might have joined conservatives in tongue-clucking agreement that the use of the factory as a bargaining chip was an illegitimate and coercive form of persuasion. But with the takeover coming on the heels of sizable rallies against the corporate bailouts, and coinciding with the U.S. Department of Labor’s announcement that more jobs had been shed in the previous month than any time since 1974—prompting the Bush Administration’s first acknowledgment that the country was in a recession—public opinion stood firmly with the workers. (222-223)

In addition to coming on the heels of an extremely unpopular bank bailout, RDW caught federal authorities in transition from Obama to Bush, and benefitted from being in Obama’s hometown of Chicago, more or less obliging the President-elect to support labor.

A documentary filmmaker known only as “Anka,” who witnessed the RDW occupation and went on to participate in Occupy Oakland, cites the RDW event as a personal inspiration for her participation in the Occupy demonstrations. In the publication News & Letters, she cites the RDW occupation as the first successful occupation I had seen. It took five days to show that an action like that occupation is possible and successful. It got media attention from all over the world...It showed that occupation can be successful, that you can achieve specific goals. (Anka)
When Anka refers to RDW as a successful occupation, she is correct in the sense that the workers won what they were asking for – 60 days severance pay and earned vacation time. However, despite that victory, the tactic of worksite occupation did not spread to other U.S. locations in the 3 years leading up to Zuccotti, perhaps because other closing factories and shops with mass layoffs lacked the militant leadership which RDW developed so that they could occupy the site rather than to meekly walk away. Militant leaders skilled in activism and organizing were certainly among the small group that launched Occupy three years later, but until then, it appears the tactic went to sleep in the U.S. before coming back to life.9

A few months before Occupy launched, the Spanish Indignados movement provided an even more direct precedent and inspiration for the Occupy movement. In Spain, by May 2011, many people had become outraged by bailouts of Spanish banks with public funds, while austerity measures grew more draconian. Massive cuts to educational, social, and cultural programs “were enacted as part of structural adjustment measures promised by the Spanish government to international financial organizations like the IMF” (Castenada 310). As youth unemployment hit 43% (Younge), activists associated with the Indignados planted themselves in areas of major Spanish cities commonly associated with opulence and tourism. Widely-circulated photos from May 15th, 2011 showed close to 15,000 people gathered at La Puerta del Sol Plaza in Madrid (Castenada 310). The outstanding turnout and impressive photos “astonished the leaders within the Indignados as well as lifelong activists who had been sidestepped by this movement” (Castenada 310).

9 The role of leadership in the fateful 59-day occupation of Zuccotti would become one of the key fulcrums and disputes of later events, which I will discuss in coming chapters.
Ernesto Castenada, Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Texas at El Paso, was present for the occupation of Plaça de Catalunya in Barcelona. He describes the scene as follows:

Once the plaza was “occupied,” a small semi-autonomous town was born within it. People that camped in the plaza spent the night there. During the day, different committees met and discussed specific topics regarding education, health, migration, national finances, proposals for alternative national budgets, movement fundraising and accounting, internal security and so on. Different proposals were written carefully and formally, uploaded to the Internet, printed and distributed among the occupiers, who would later be asked to debate and vote them. Walking through the camp, one would see single and collective tents as well as booths hosting commissions, libraries and book sales. Participants often say that the goal of the movement was not just to ask for economic and political justice and accountability but also to create horizontal links between individuals in similar conditions and thus strengthen Spanish civil society. (312)

The Barcelona occupation prefigured what Zuccotti became, a functioning camp village of constant discussion, education, broadcasting, opposition action, and meetings. As well, the demise of the Barcelona encampment foreshadowed Occupy’s demise – police botched a first attempt at evicting the Indignados before succeeding on their second effort, with “cleaning the park” as the official reason, just like in New York months later (Castenada 314-316).

The Indignados had inherited hope and political imagination from the 2011 Arab Spring, a series of interconnected uprisings against repressive governments that stretched
from the West Coast of Africa to Iran and Southwest Asia. According to Peter Apps, political risk correspondent for Reuters, the protesters in Sidi Bouzid and Cairo – and later Barcelona and New York – shared in common the feeling that “the youth and middle class are paying a high price for the mismanagement and malfeasance by an out of touch corporate, financial and political elite” (Apps). To some degree, then, the Indignados and the Occupiers can be viewed as participants in the “global Arab Spring.”

Because of the renewed sense of hope in mass collective action offered by the Arab Spring, along with the austerity measures and bailouts of Spanish banks, the time had been ripe for the Indignados to burst on the scene, but the demonstrators helped their own cause with their rhetorical savvy. Plaça de Catalunya and other urban public spaces became long-term platforms for public address to large numbers of people who were walking by or who were drawn to the intriguing event that interrupted and reinvented public discourse. The Indignados were successful because they installed a spectacle on public space, addressed public attention with discourses relevant to the general crisis, and developed their own social media with a long enough life to attract attention of spectators and of the mainstream mass media, which helped the occupation root itself in the national political discourse and thus compete for the attention of Spanish audiences. Their anti-corporate discourse reached a national audience because their illegal encampment consolidated and amplified the accumulating rage of ordinary people.

In terms of James Scott’s frameworks for discourse in society, we could say that the Indignados burst out of the margins into “the public transcript” by boldly saying out loud what millions were thinking and feeling on their own in the “hidden transcript” of daily life. In Scott’s understanding, this migration of oppositional discourse from
sequestered margins to the center of public exchange signals the transformation of silenced individuals and invisible movements into “charismatic” consequence, by speaking truth to power in public against dominant authorities when such truth had been relegated previously to private margins among the dominated. (202-227)

Later in 2011 (from September 17th through November 15th), another long-term occupation of key space, Zuccotti Park in New York City’s Financial District, likewise challenged a dominant national discourse, this time in the U.S. Although mainstream media ordinarily marginalize anti-corporate messaging and protest politics, Occupy Wall Street’s sustained public presence enabled this opposition to break through the quarantine normally containing such radical discourse. Occupy’s 59-day encampment proved to be far more threatening to the status quo than any time-limited, temporary event like a rally or a march. Because of its duration and ingenuity, Occupy continued long enough to become a spatial discourse by its very physical construction whose alternative meanings circulated widely.

First Encounter with Zuccotti

Two-and-a-half weeks into Occupy, the camp at Zuccotti was flourishing with political activity and with media attention. That was the time when I had my first up-close-and-personal encounter with the movement. On October 4th, while walking through Lower Manhattan to an evening lecture – about “how Writing Studies might evolve into a field of its own” (Bradway) – I looked for a restroom, often difficult for a pedestrian in Manhattan where restaurants restrict their facilities to keep out the horde of homeless living on the street and the passers-by like me. In venues like Wendy’s or Burger King,
where the staff is paid poorly and the clientele non-elite, such restrictions are rarely enforced.

That night, one block from occupied Zuccotti Park, I stumbled on a McDonald’s. Although I presumed (correctly) that this would be the main restroom for demonstrators, I entered anyways and saw that – indeed – the line for the bathroom was at least 10 people long. When my turn came, I noticed a flyer on the floor beneath the sink – an “open letter to Occupy” from a Communist organization. Skimming this letter, I gathered that the Communist group was very supportive of the Zuccotti occupation but they also pleaded with the Occupiers to issue some concrete demands. In the months that followed, as I studied Occupy for this dissertation, I would encounter this time and time again – partisans within Occupy and advocates outside of Occupy pleading for a statement of demands (Hoffman; Zizek “Occupy First…”).

I went on to the lecture about Writing Studies, and didn’t put much more thought into Occupy that evening, but in the days following, my thoughts came back to a few things I had learned while walking hurriedly past the demonstrations. Even though Zuccotti was filled to the brim with activists holding anti-corporate signs, I wasn’t impeded nor really even slowed down. The campers, from what I could gather, were hostile toward Wall Street, but friendly toward us commuters on the sidewalk. This understanding buoyed me when time came to study the movement up close. Fact is, I have rarely participated in street activism, and I probably read as “bourgie,” “hipster,” or something along those lines, so I had lingering doubts as to whether I would be welcome in a park that had been occupied by anarchists and militants. But it seemed to me, in my first encounter with Zuccotti and later ones as well, that Occupy was genuine in its slogan
of “We Are the 99%,” and aspired to include people like myself and my “mainstream” friends and family members.

Field Study of Occupy

A week later, while watching television on the evening of October 11th, I found myself marveling at Occupy’s impact on national events. Charlie Rose, the moderator of a debate at Dartmouth College, brought up economic inequality to a group of Republican Presidential candidates, posing a question that I understood to be a nod to the demonstrations. Rose said, "I don't want the entire debate to transpire without even the mention of income inequality," and then asked Texas Governor Rick Perry if he viewed inequality to be a problem and, if so, what he might do to mitigate it. Perry's non-answer was that the Obama Administration’s policies have caused the inequality. Rick Santorum jumped in to say that the breakdown of families has had the largest role in the increase of poverty.

Earlier that day, Dr. Ira Shor had sent an email to Composition/Rhetoric students in the English program at CUNY’s Graduate Center, mentioning that he had “spent about 5hrs sun at occupy wall st,” and that it “looks like there's a dissertation and perhaps book for comp/rhet folks here.” Around this time, I was at a stage of doctoral work where I should have had an advisor and a topic for my dissertation all settled. Six months earlier, I had passed my oral exams “with distinction,” putting me in the infamous “all-but-dissertation” category. I had been imagining a dissertation titled “Macro-composition: The Anthology as a Genre of Writing” for several years but the faculty member who would have advised me on it (Dr. Rebecca Mlynarcyzk) had just retired the previous semester.
When one is “A.B.D.,” it isn’t good to be devoid of a formal mentor, but that is where I found myself in early October 2011. I needed to clarify my dissertation direction and the opportunity presented by Dr. Shor appealed to me for several reasons.

1. My morning and evening commutes put me within blocks of the park twice per day.

2. Secondly, I had studied ethnographic practices extensively, starting as an undergraduate majoring in Cultural Anthropology at Skidmore College. In 2006, just before starting at CUNY’s Graduate Center, I had put those studies into practice under the tutelage of Dr. Mlynarcyzk while writing an article for *The Journal of Basic Writing*, titled “Reflections on Collaborative Ethnography, The New Digital Ethic, and Test Prep.”

3. Third, beyond my background in ethnographic methods, I had developed, since 2008, a fascination with and rudimentary understanding of 21st-century finance, reading as many mainstream books about the 2008 financial meltdown (Lewis’ *The Big Short*, Stieglitz’ *Freefall*, etc.) as I could get my hands on.

4. Finally, perhaps most importantly, I had already studied under Dr. Shor in a course about spatial discourses (in *Star Trek* and on Earth), and wanted to benefit again from his mentorship.

For all of these reasons, I jumped at the opportunity Dr. Shor presented. Once I expressed interest in the project, he advised me to visit Zuccotti “as often as possible,” adding that I should
Take notes on all activities you observe, thick descriptions to inform an ethnography of the event. Sit in on the working group mtgs which happen regularly there. Take careful notes of how the discourse process works in those work groups as well as in the larger general assembly mtgs. Photograph the many handmade protest signs to compile a visual record of the creative language setting. Interview if you can a diversity of folks there to hear their own reasons for occupying the site. Collect all printed materials you can find there and figure out how to categorize them. Go online to familiarize yourself with the busy virtual discourses underway at various websites. Collect the mass media representations of ows to do a study of how the corp media portrays this anti-corporate event.

More or less, I stuck to Ira’s advice, starting October 13th through the eviction of November 15th.\(^\text{10}\) During the course of my study, I became a fringe member of the Library Working Group and the Education & Empowerment Working Group, participating in meetings occasionally during the months of November 2011 through February 2012. Frankly, I never felt quite at ease in these meeting because my own motives for being there were unclear to me. Certainly, I supported the aim of the Education & Empowerment Working Group – to facilitate free, democratic, life-long learning for anyone interested in participating. As a teacher myself, I was interested in participating and I felt like I had something to offer. However, while taking part in the meetings, I could never tell for sure how much my participation in the working groups was driven by my interest in gaining a credential – a doctoral degree – and how much

\(^\text{10}\) My research continued after Occupy was evicted from the park, into March of 2012, but in a modified form, because I had to chase the demonstrations from site to site instead of just showing up at their fixed headquarters.
was driven by my interest in improving the state of American education. Actually, both motives were always at work.

At times, I told myself that gathering materials for my dissertation while participating in meetings was not a problem because the movement prided itself on being transparent and public. The aspirations toward transparency were evident in the way that the working groups widely advertised their meetings and held them in a public space, 60 Wall Street, an indoor plaza designed to be open to the public (Figure 8). In the end, though, gathering information for personal gain while participating in these working groups did not feel right, so, while my participation in those groups continued, I ceased acting as a researcher when I attended and I do not turn to any notes from those meetings in the preparation of this dissertation.

Figure 8: Working Groups underway at 60 Wall Street.

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11 As I explain in more detail in Chapter Two, privately-owned public parks (PoPs) came into being in the 1960s when New York began issuing “zoning variances” which allowed builders to “exceed local height restrictions in exchange for the construction of a publicly accessible park” (Schrader and Wachsmuth 243). When builders wanted to exceed height limitations on their buildings, they were often mandated to create and maintain a PoP. The result is New York’s abundant “privately-owned public parks.”
What I rely on instead are the extensive first-hand notes and pictures that I took while positioned as a non-participant – for instance, when I visited the park, notebook and camera in hand, examining the spaces and images and words from an outsiders’ perspective. After I began formal study of Occupy Wall Street on October 13th, 2011, a routine locked into place, one that allowed me to spend a bit of time at the park each day, while not setting off too many alarms at my day job. I boarded the East River Ferry near my apartment in Northern Brooklyn at 8:19 a.m. and took the 20-minute ride to Wall Street/Pier 11 in Manhattan. During that ferry ride, I checked the Twitter feed on my Blackberry for accumulated news, links, and propaganda that had been issued by and about Occupy so far that morning. Arriving at Wall Street Pier 11 at 8:39, I walked west on Wall Street – past the former home of J.P. Morgan, past Federal Hall where George Washington was inaugurated in 1789, and past the newly-erected barriers in front of New York Stock Exchange – until I hit Broadway. Then I walked two blocks north to Zuccotti Park, getting there around 8:50.

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12 On the morning of October 17th, while checking my Twitter feed on the ferry, for example, I learned about the NYPD’s attempt to evict Occupy the night before and Jesse Jackson’s intervention.
Because I needed to reach S.I.F.T. by 9:30, and because the walk from Zuccotti to the terminal was around 10 minutes, that left me thirty minutes of on-site research time each morning. Those thirty minutes always went far too quickly. I raced to accomplish all the things that I wanted to do. The dynamics of the park changed so much from day to day, and I wanted to capture every new wrinkle. My first stop was usually the Occupy Welcome Desk, where I picked up any new pamphlets and fliers that demonstrators had put out in the last 24 hours. Most days, there were at least one or two new pieces of literature. Then, I descended three steps into the interior of the park, snapping pictures of anything that caught my eye – discarded signs from the previous night’s march, tourists
on the edge of the park, transformed structures.¹³ I made sure to walk through all the “neighborhoods” of the park in order to cover my bases. Demonstrators sometimes stopped me to talk or to ask a favor. Preferably, each morning, I would have time to sit down somewhere for at least a few minutes and soak in the big picture (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Demonstrators preparing for another day of anti-Wall Street activism in Zuccotti Park. In the foreground, the edges of an Occupy Library sign can be seen. The library began as a small number of books simply scattered on a bench to a large structure housing hundreds of catalogued books. See also Figures 15 through 20.

What I saw, while soaking in the big picture, was that Occupy had re-composed Zuccotti into a space for staging political opposition and for modeling democratic alternatives. By mid-October, the outdoor camp – built on a concrete space, only about

¹³ The light was almost always nice for photography at that time of the morning so I ended up with 1,354 Occupy-related photos in my Flickr set.
three-fourths of an acre – evolved to house hundreds of overnight campers, thousands of
daily visitors, and an array of services like free meals, free health care, free clothing, free
phone calls, free education, free books, free shelter, and even free cigarettes. On October
10th, the Kitchen WG announced they were serving 2000 people per day, rain or shine,
and therefore were desperate for more kitchen space (“NYCGA Minutes 10/10”).

Figure 11: Rain or shine, the Occupy Kitchen was always already serving breakfast to demonstrators by the
time I got to the park at 8:50 a.m.

I began my formal study 28 days into Occupy’s 59-day occupation, so the
situation in the park was already complicated. The absence of a singular leadership and
the absence of foundational principles allowed Occupy a wide appeal to a spectrum of
activists and therefore grew its membership. However, those same characteristics left it
unmoored, unanchored to common visions and practices, making it vulnerable to internal contradictions and infiltration by police spies and provocateurs.

Demonstrators never solved, for example, the problem of how many tents should be put up, in what section of the park they should be erected, and what kinds of tents should they be. According to meeting minutes for the October 19th General Assembly, a representative from Medical WG explained that the NYPD was “barely tolerating their medical tent.” She said that if more people put up tents, the NYPD would get even more fed up. (“NYCGA Minutes 10/19”)

Figure 12: Campers at Zuccotti Park were not happy when Occupy leaders unilaterally moved tents around (Shapiro).

Sleeping tents were supposed to be erected on the West Side of the Park, according to members of the Town Planning WG. However, many of the campers refused
to budge from their spots on the East Side, as I saw first hand during one of my morning visits. My field notes from October 31st document an argument between two men about the placement of a tent. The owner of the tent said that his tent had been in that spot for three weeks and that “no one better tell” him “where to move it.” The other man, who I took to be a Town Planning WG representative, tried to persuade him that it would be best for the overall community if all the tents were moved to the West Side. The negotiations went nowhere.

On November 6th, according to my field notes, two demonstrators who were chatting at the East Side Welcome Station reinforced each others’ sense of how undesirable “the West Side” was. I had been lingering at this Welcome Station, pretending to browse flyers, booklets, and pamphlets, but actually taking mental notes as a woman reported that someone had “pissed on all my stuff” the night before, and that she was no longer going to sleep on the West Side. Her pal agreed with her that “Trotsky Avenue” was troubled. “I used to sleep over there too,” he said. “But it’s a lot of drug users over there now, so I moved up toward Broadway.”

Lila Shapiro, a staff reporter at The Huffington Post, described the split between the West Side and the East Side of the Park, in a November 9th piece titled “Zuccotti Park's Burgeoning Micro-Neighborhoods May Indicate Deeper Divisions”:

At the northeast corner of the park is one of the tidiest regions of the Occupy Wall Street movement: the People's Library, with more than 3,000 volumes and staffed largely by professional book handlers. Just south of the Library, the General Assembly – the evening meeting where collective decisions are made – is held, close to many of the working group stations that are dominated by college-
educated professionals. Travel west, past the People's Kitchen…and you hit Camp Class Warfare, an anarchist group's table and tent…Also residing on the west side: more anarchists, the drummers, the spirit circle and a mass of private tents, which some say have harbored and encouraged extensive drug use, assault and theft.

As Schapiro suggests, the East Side of Zuccotti Park came to be associated with more financially stable Occupiers who “spontaneously took charge on projects large and small,” while the West Side came to be associated with an urban precariat who didn’t “take direction well” (Klein), leading to tense political disagreements, shouting matches, and even physical altercations (Gruber). In the siege conditions of a hand-made camp surrounded by police, with the constant demands for maintenance of services like the busy Occupy Kitchen, deep resentments existing between the disparate opposition groups became exacerbated. Often, these groups had little or no history of collaboration, meaning they had not developed tools to negotiate conflicts with one another.

Some working groups tried to bridge the cultural and class divide between the East Side and the West Side. The Nonviolent Communication WG, for example, changed its name to “Mediation and Nonviolent Communication” and a representative explained what they offered at the October 18th GA:

We think it’s very important that our movement develops nonviolent and transformative ways to deal with conflict. Therefore our WG offers three things: we have an empathy table that is right behind the kitchen where you can come and just be listened to; second, we offer trainings in nonviolent communication and in mediation everyday from 12-2. We strongly recommend that we all come
and learn about these things to improve our skills. Third, we offer professional mediation if you have a conflict in your WG, or between WGs. Just come and see us. We also mediate, for example, between the drummers, the neighbors, and the GA. If you’d like to get in touch with us, come to the empathy table behind the kitchen or to one of our meetings: Wednesday 6pm, Sunday 3:30. (“NYCGA Minutes 10/18”)

The representative concluded by conceding that they were understaffed and needed “more people who want to contribute” (“NYCGA Minutes 10/18”).

Because there were so many individuals and groups learning to negotiate in this high-stakes environment, mediation was a substantial challenge. An acquaintance of mine in the Education and Empowerment WG, who was active in many working groups, reported to me that a large percentage of meetings devolved into shouting matches. He said that our Education and Empowerment WG was one of the rare ones that didn’t shout at each other. Mediators ought to have been present, he said, at all meetings, large and small, but there just weren’t enough people trained to do that work.

**Studying Occupy Off-site**

I read about yet more divisions among campers in a light-hearted October 19th article in *The New York Times*. The reporter, Sarah Maslin Nir, slept in the park to discover what Zuccotti was like in the middle of the night. Her article introduces a “cluster of self-described anarchists” and their thoughts on class relations among the Occupiers within the park. Passing around a can of Guinness, past midnight, one of the young anarchists said, "Even here, class hierarchy oppresses.” They claimed to be the
real poor, with no place to go home to, no place to shower and “no shiny laptops for blogging the revolution.” One remarked, "When I write, it’s with a pad and paper" (Nir).

As I traversed the park at 9 a.m. each morning, I was unlikely to cross paths with the Guinness-drinking anarchists profiled by Nir. They and their fellow night-owl demonstrators would be sleeping, but many campers were awake, eating, writing, chatting, and preparing for the day. Every morning, rain or shine, a line of people waited patiently at the Occupy Kitchen (Figure 8) for a helping of scrambled eggs, toast, and some vegan options to be sure. Although nine was not a very eventful time of day for Occupy, I liked to be there in the daylight, when all the contours of the park could be seen.14

Figure 13: In the morning at Zuccotti, some demonstrators used the peaceful hours to prepare signs for the day’s actions.

14 I felt vindicated in my decision to do my most focused fieldwork in the mornings after seeing this tweet on November 13th: “when u spend the night at @occupyla: not about late-night drum circles or random agitators. It’s about waking up w/ revolutionaries in the AM.”
At 9:20 each morning, I had to reluctantly depart the encampment in order to make it to my ferry. En route to the terminal, I picked up copies of *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Post*. During my 25-minute ferry ride to Staten Island, I skimmed both those newspapers for coverage of Occupy. The editorial and op-ed pages for these two newspapers (both owned by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation) frequently contained conservative coverage which painted unflattering misrepresentations of Occupy (as I discuss in Chapter Three), with the notable exception of the “Greater New York” section of *WSJ* which often provided in-depth, fair reporting, so, in this dissertation, I treat the untilted reporting of Andy Grossman and similar *WSJ* journalists as a reliable source about the demonstrations. Not so *The New York Post*, where the right-wing spin of the news articles about Occupy nearly matched the right-wing spin of the editorials (again, see Chapter Three for more on this).

![Figure 14: The New York Post used its front cover to undermine Occupy, and demonstrators posted those front pages so as to highlight what they were up against.](image)

15 There was an irresistible deal happening on the streets of Lower Manhattan, where newspaper hawkers presented *WSJ* and *NYP* as a package. Although *WSJ* cost 2.00 alone, and *NYP* cost .75 alone, if you bought them together, you only had to pay 1.25!
Once I arrived at work in Staten Island at 10:10 am, I typically began uploading the pictures I had taken that morning onto Flickr, a popular social networking site (recently purchased by Yahoo!) devoted to storing and circulating people’s personal photography. After uploading the photos, I tagged them with keywords – “oct22,” “signs,” “police,” “mlkquote,” etc. – and tried to get them into tentative order. I also spent some time filing and coding any other data that I had gathered: field observations, news reports, Occupy-related tweets, meeting minutes from Occupy General Assemblies, and press releases.

After finishing my filing and coding, I tried to focus on my duties as Associate Director of the St. John's University Writing Center. My interest in Occupy Wall Street kept me from attending to those duties until around 11:00 a.m. each morning, which became a problem for my supervisors and me. After a few weeks, my supervisor warned me that I needed to “fulfill all of the hours I am contracted to fulfill” and that the undergraduate writing consultants who staffed our writing center had been asking “Where’s Chris?” lately. My supervisor surmised what I’d been up to and supported my activities on one level, because he is himself a scholar of social movement rhetoric, but couldn’t condone it on another level, as the person I report to.

Although I continued to be quite distracted by Occupy for (at least) the rest of that semester, I was never on the verge of being let go because I did manage to sufficiently complete all of my duties in a few hours of work. It’s not that I am a fast worker. No, the thing was, undergraduate enrollment at this branch campus had gone into freefall ever since the financial meltdown of 2008. Fewer and fewer families in Staten Island were in a position to spend $40,000 per year on an education at a school with no science labs, no
art facilities, no sports teams, and that was plagued by plausible rumors that it would soon be closing. Given that the reputation of CUNY’s College of Staten Island (CSI) improved each year, Staten Island families increasingly chose CSI for a savings of tens of thousands of dollars.

The impact of this trend on me in 2011 was serendipitous: my writing center experienced declining traffic, which resulted in the hiring of fewer staff members. I therefore had fewer people to train, fewer student writers to consult, and fewer meetings to attend. Morale on campus had tanked, not only because of the rumors that the campus might close down, but also because administrators’ salaries had been frozen. Depressing as all of this might sound, the low enrollment and low morale did free me up to devote most of my mornings to research on Occupy.

Often, on my way home from Staten Island in the evenings, I would visit Zuccotti again and/or sit in on a working group meeting at 60 Wall Street. Although my morning visits to Zuccotti were structured down to the minute, evenings not so much. For example, on November 14th, the night before the eviction, I was hanging out at Zuccotti late into the evening, researching the movement, yes, but also just passing the time in an interesting environment.

That evening, I found the park to be cheerful and peaceful. The sounds of laughter and planning and story-telling filled the air. People gathered in the Occupy Library to browse books and compare notes. In New York City, partly because newer apartment buildings have eliminated stoops and other common spaces, the opportunities for stranger-sociability have declined. For this reason, the Zuccotti encampment had come to
feel like a natural and overdue addition to the urban environment, filling a gap in civic society that many of us sense but find hard to articulate.

It is true that there were unpleasant smells – think damp and dirty socks – if you went looking for them deep in the interior of the park, and occasional wafts of marijuana. But the park was not uncared for. On the night of the eviction, I was gently scolded by a member of the Sanitation WG because I was conversing with someone non-chalantly while a Cheetos wrapper lay at my feet. He thought I should have noticed it, picked it up, and thrown it away. He was probably right about that, but that’s beside the point: there were people at the park who were vigilant about improperly-disposed-of candy wrappers. Port-A-Potties had been made available for campers in mid-November, a few blocks from the park, so the waste management problems and associated relations with neighboring businesses were improving.  

No matter if Occupy’s national approval rating had declined to 33% by mid-November, as Public Policy Polling had indicated (Jensen). They still had the upper-hand, in my reading of the situation. I thought to myself, on 11/14/11, as I stood on the Broadway sidewalk looking in at the interior of the park, that Occupy had sunk roots into the social and material fabric of the city, into the concrete ecosystem. It had fully “re-written” (Dobrin 41) Zuccotti Park and I didn’t see how it could be plausibly excised from the space it inhabited.

The sense of permanence emanated partly from the structures which had grown taller and more complex.

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16 Occupy’s anxiety regarding the park’s cleanliness had been gradually escalating in parallel with the scores of media reports (described in Chapter Three) that exaggerated sanitation problems in the park. Leaders within Occupy knew that the Spanish Indignados had been evicted over sanitation and they had already fought off NYPD attempts along those same lines.
• On the eastern edge of the park, The Occupy Library (Figures 15 through 20) had evolved from 1) a simple tarp tied to some trees, to 2) a medium-sized camping tent with zippered doors to get in and out, to 3) Fort Patti\textsuperscript{17}, a 25x10ft structure housing over 5,500 books. “Trained librarians kept track of the books, which passers-by and participants were permitted to borrow,” according to The New York Times (Moynihan).

• The Sustainability WG had built a wooden structure on the northern edge of the park that served as a water treatment center. The Kitchen’s plates and utensils were washed on site, so Sustainability built a “gray-water” system that drew impurities out the soapy runoff through the use of mulch-like filters. When the wooden structure (Figure 21) appeared, I found it jarring to see nails holding the structure together instead of tent poles: the encampment would not be easily undone, so it seemed.

• By mid-November, substantial “public tents” for sleeping (Figure 22), which looked almost like army field barracks, rose up above the small, individual pup tents that were scattered throughout the park. These public tents slept dozens, retained heat better than the small private tents, and were tall enough to include bunk beds.

• The Community Altar made use of a circular set of benches in order to recognize metaphors of circularity present in a wide range of religious traditions. Religious artwork and icons from various traditions – Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism,

\textsuperscript{17} It had been donated by rock-and-roll legend Patti Smith.
Islam, etc. – mingled in the center of the circle. Two days before the eviction, a wedding took place in front of the altar (Figure 23).

- Licensed doctors and nurses took volunteer shifts in the medical tent (Figure 24), which was filled mostly with over-the-counter medications and herbal remedies. Although Pauly Kostora, a former licensed nurse, said Occupy’s medical station didn’t “pretend to be a hospital,” the volunteers there had on-call contacts in acupuncture, chiropractics, massage therapy, and psychotherapy.

As I looked at the encampment from the sidewalk on the night of November 14th, it looked less to me like a campground and more like a frontier village, not something that could be swept away without significant violence. As it would happen, that very night, after midnight, the NYPD sealed off the area and struck in force, destroying the camp and forcing out the Occupiers by nightstick. This violent police action put Mayor Bloomberg and the NYPD at risk to sink deeper into moral low ground and to elevate Occupy even further into moral high ground, especially since Occupy remained non-violent while its encampment was violently torn apart.18

In the hours before the eviction, I had been holding on to the hope that Zuccotti Park would become a permanent, evolving, miniature society, an incubator for alternative ideas and practices along the lines of Copenhagen’s Freetown Christiania (Thorn et al).

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18 Since the weather was pleasant on the night of eviction, it had crossed my mind that it was my best chance to sleep in the park, if I was ever going to do so, but the thought quickly passed because I had neither the proper clothes, the proper equipment, nor a suitable tolerance for discomfort. Looking back, I do wish I had been present when the police attacked the encampment, but it is hard to say how I would have responded. In my thirties now, I don’t have quite the same sense of invincibility that propelled me toward the burning ruins of the World Trade Center when I was 24. Would I, then, have followed the NYPD’s 1:45 a.m. instructions to evacuate the park for fear of being clubbed and/or arrested? Or would I have locked arms at 3:45 a.m. with the most militant holdouts in a final gesture of non-compliance? More likely, I would have tried to linger on the edges of the action with journalists for as long as possible.
However, I had underestimated how crucial it was for authorities to force Occupy’s anti-corporate rhetoric back to the margins and to extricate the settled campers from their public staging-ground in the heart of global finance. I had forgotten the lessons I had learned while reading Norman Fairclough’s work in Dr. Shor’s seminars. Fairclough argued that discourses which reach mass circulation have the potential to “inflect and partly redirect the trajectory of actual globalization” (24). Occupy threatened to do just that if it had more time to consolidate and evolve.

How exactly did Occupy come to threaten the monopoly on representation held by financial elites? What were the communications strategies that proved so effective? The next chapter, “Challenging the Public Transcript,” details the two communications strategies that I found to be most effective: 1) the creation of a physical encampment in New York’s Financial District, in “the teeth of power” and 2) the development of alternative media outlets which circulated discourse widely without mediation from the corporate media companies.
Figure 15: The Library Started off as an outdoor library but the growing selection and the threat of rain caused Occupy librarians to seek a structure to house the collection. Notice green leaves gradually turning yellow in Figures 15 through 20.

Figure 16: This tent didn’t last long because entering and exiting was a hassle. But it did keep the books dry during rainstorms.
Figure 17: Rock-and-roll legend Patti Smith came through by donating a suitable structure for book lending in an outdoor encampment.

Figure 18: “Fort Patti.”
Figure 19: On the night of the eviction, the Occupy Library was a place to socialize and browse books.

Figure 20: After the eviction, Occupy librarians kept doing their thing, now using umbrellas and Ziploc bags to protect the tiny collection, while under constant harassment from the police and Brookfield Security.
Figure 21: The Sustainability WG built a wooden structure that facilitated their water-treatment strategies.

Figure 22: Public tents, erected in mid-November, retained heat better and offered a potential solution to sex crimes and drug abuse.
Figure 23: The Occupy medical tent was staffed by licensed doctors and nurses. On October 15th, NYPD tried to take it down, but Rev. Jesse Jackson linked arms with demonstrators to thwart the police action.

Figure 24: Two days before the eviction, the couple in the foreground was married in a ceremony performed at the Occupy Community Altar.
Figure 25: Zuccotti encampment on November 10th, four days before the police attack and eviction.
Chapter 2: Challenging the Public Transcript

By October 2011, it had been established that Zuccotti Park was a highly effective staging ground for the production and mass circulation of radical, anti-corporate discourses. Critical discourses against finance capital had been openly asserted prior to OWS to be sure but the global context of mass uprisings, the national context of an economic collapse precipitated by Wall Street, and the immediate context of a popular illegal occupation of Zuccotti Park created optimal conditions for the legitimation of radical opposition to Wall Street. Dissatisfaction was widespread in American society at the same time that the preferred channels for managing discontent were vulnerable. Therefore, the movement’s egalitarian themes, actions, texts, and utterances gained unusually wide circulation and high profiles, amplifying the discontented voices of ordinary people, consolidated into the most famous meme of Occupy, “we are the 99 percent.”

Occupy had achieved a disturbing positionality relative to the forces which routinely dominate public discourse, becoming a subject of mass media coverage as well as source for the mass circulation of oppositional discourse. By emerging out of the marginal quarantine typical of opposition projects, Occupy threatened the monopoly on mass communications held in the U.S. by elites. This discursive threat to the status quo is perhaps the most consequential achievement of Occupy, which makes it a useful topic for studying rhetoric in politics. Close attention to the Occupy Wall Street demonstrations – which sank roots in a small park mere blocks from the greatest symbol of high finance three years after a massive financial crisis and enjoyed mass circulation for several weeks
– offers insight into what happens when knowledge “from below” (Foucault 7) begins “to challenge, struggle against, and rise up” (12) against authorized discourse.

Occupy’s discourses, if they had managed to establish themselves as long-term contenders in the arena of public discourse, could have had “constitutive effects on real economic, political, and social processes” (Fairclough 24). Such a leap into the mainstream would have been a huge victory for Occupy because, according to Fairclough, alternative discourses that circulate only in marginalized spaces (offstage) possess minimal potential for contributing to social reconstruction (24).

**What Occupy Was Up Against**

In their “Propaganda Model,” first proposed in 1988 before the fall of the USSR, Hermann and Chomsky suggested five “filters” that sustain the dominance of authorized, pro-business discourses in the United States: ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and anti-communism. During a 2008 interview published in *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, Hermann and Chomsky updated their views on these five filters in order to account for major geopolitical changes that had occurred since 1988:

**Filter 1. Ownership:** According to Chomsky and Hermann, “ownership of media outlets is even more concentrated and more globalized in 2008 than it was in 1988” because accommodating state policy has weakened anti-trust laws and has relaxed rules on market share limits and cross-ownership rights (14).

**Filter 2. Advertising:** Greater dependence on advertising dollars has led media outlets toward “a more intense bottom-line focus, a greater integration of editorial and business operations, more product placements, cutbacks in investigative
reporting and analysis, more controversy-avoidance, and greater manageability by governments and other power centres.” (14).

**Filter 3.** *Sourcing:* Also due to the bottom-line focus, media outlets source their offerings heavily from lower-cost “wire services, public relations offerings, and official and establishment-expert claims and press releases” (14).

**Filter 4.** *Flak:* The government has become even more aggressive punishing media deviations from the official line, according to Chomsky and Hermann. Furthermore, they note, flak from within the media, “including the numerous right-wing talk shows and blogs,” has produced “a right-wing attack machine and echo-chamber” (14).

**Filter 5.** The fifth filter, *anti-communism,* “has receded as an ideological factor in the Western media.” However, according to Hermann and Chomsky, the antithesis of communism, the “free market,” has proven to be “a strong co-replacement for anti-communism and the basis for the new world order of neoliberalism now in some disarray but without an ideological rival resting on any kind of power base” (15). Hermann and Chomsky may be wrong on this last point. Yes, “free market” is one replacement meme for “anti-communism” but “anti-terrorism” has an even higher profile in Western media.

Because pro-business interests are the ones most suited to pass through these filters, which are after all constructed and maintained by the corporate media, the discourses of the financial elites dominate representations of what has happened in the past, what is happening now, why previous systems failed, what possible alternatives exist, what economic orders are best suited to overcoming existing problems, etc. Radical, anti-
corporate discourse may pass through a few filters but rarely does it pass through all five in order to reach mass circulation. Even when an opposition group possesses heavy ammunition to make their case, as Iraq War opponents did in 2003, they don’t necessarily pose a threat to the status quo because their narratives are diverted to the margins before they reach wide circulation.

Kalle Lasn, founder of the Canadian alternative magazine *Adbusters* and a key instigator of the Occupy movement, suggested, in his 2000 book *Culture Jamming*, the degree to which corporate media dominate mass circulation: "the media giants have the means to produce a never-ending flow of social spectacles, and to nurture them, feed them, massage them, and keep them resonating in the public mind” (187). Therefore, it was potentially game-changing when Occupy broke through and gained a national stage and audience for its left-wing discourses; pro-business outlets and products do not typically have to compete with left-wing counter-products. In the U.S., conservative and right-wing discourse finds its way to the public through rhetors and authors who are published by, marketed by, and reviewed by major presses and major media; by almost-uniformly conservative talk radio hosts directed by corporate networks to national audiences; by selected cable and network television talk show stars like Bill O’Reilly, Joe Scarborough, Sean Hannity, and Neil Caputo; by advocacy groups financed by billionaires like the Kochs, the Waltons, and Gates; and through mass entertainment media, including high-budget Hollywood films emanating from major studios. The corporate-controlled communications system uses multiple channels and outlets to secure dominance in the circulation of discourses that conform to their interests. Molders of public opinion distribute stories which model ways to live and which represent the
meaning of events; they obscure or explain away blemishes and contradictions of the status quo; they generally orient people of all classes towards the logic of a dominant discourse which inhabits only a narrow slice of the political spectrum. The absence of dissident representations and a wider spectrum of political contents in mass media enables even the least-talented media pundits to get the job done; they are given choice time slots to address large audiences, as long as they adhere to the dominant discourse.

Well-funded think tanks, such as the Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation, do their part by grooming pundits who are dedicated to publicly defending the free-enterprise system, the values of the market place, and private-public arrangements. One intriguing new training center for such public relations operatives opened in 2013 just two blocks from the New York Stock Exchange, and two blocks from Zuccotti Park, in the very same space that Occupy had rented as their primary storage spot in 2011. This unit, called King’s College, initially presided over by conservative author Dinesh D’Souza and funded in large part by the direct-marketing fortune of Richard Devos, recently put the finishing touches on a new branch in Lower Manhattan.19

Promotional materials of The King’s College indicate D’Souza and Devos’ recognition that certain members of society have a special role in planning, decision-making, and control over public discourse. According to brochures for prospective students, the school, “an advocate for free markets and the moral case for capitalism,” seeks to “transform society by preparing students for careers in which they help to shape and eventually to lead strategic public and private institutions” (Clock). King’s aims to

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19 In October 2012, D’Souza was forced to resign after being spotted checking into a hotel with a woman who was not his wife (Kaminer). He was replaced by the more evangelical and more academic-minded Greg Thornberry, who remarked upon his appointment, “This is historic Christianity’s last and best shot to lead from the center of culture with Christ at the center” (Banks).
place young conservatives in leadership roles at “strategic institutions” such as “government, civil society, media, law, business, education, the arts, and the church.”

The arts of speaking and writing are especially emphasized in King’s curriculum because these are “the primary tools of shaping institutions.” Rhetoric courses at the college teach “imaginative realism,” which involves writing the world one would like to see and speaking that world into being.

As the mission and methods of The King’s College suggest, maintaining a “public transcript” (Scott 45-69) favorable to the elite requires long-term planning and meticulous execution by social and financial elites. When a renegade group displays the nerve required to ignore the standard script, elites deploy an arsenal of tools for preserving class loyalty. That arsenal was on full display after Jamie Johnson, an heir to the Johnson & Johnson pharmaceutical fortune, produced and circulated two well-regarded documentaries: “Born Rich” (2003) and “The 1%” (2006). In the documentaries, Johnson argues that today's wealthy have become increasingly isolated. Rather than recognizing “noblesse oblige” and using their wealth for good, they use it to amass ever more wealth by restructuring the economy, lowering their taxes, and cutting social programs for the middle and lower classes (Chaplin). Through interviews with fellow heirs and heiresses (some of whom said later that they didn’t know how widely the films would be circulated), Johnson provides access to what James Scott calls a “hidden transcript” of the 1%, including some embarrassing views regarding their own wealth.

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20 Financial scholarship forms for King’s College suggest eight buildings where graduates might find offices: The United Nations Headquarters (Government), Wall Street’s New York Stock Exchange (Business), The New York County Courthouse (Law), Times Square’s New York Times Building (The Media), The American Red Cross Building (Civil Society), The New York Public Library (Education), The Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Arts), and St. Patrick’s Cathedral (The Church).
The aftermath of the release of Johnson’s films offers insight into mechanisms by
which egalitarian billionaires might be hushed into silence by aggressive peers who don’t
have such doubts. Johnson’s family and friends tried to keep him from creating and
releasing the documentary because it is a representation of the elite that evokes doubt and
dissent rather than awe, envy, and allegiance. "There's a code of silence about wealth that
you're not supposed to break," Johnson explained when asked why he chose this focus for
his film. After breaking that code, he found himself at parties surrounded by "Ivy League
bankers from privileged families" who called him an "idiot" and a "traitor to your class."
One of the interview subjects “filed a lawsuit against Mr. Johnson and the filmmakers
demanding that his scenes be cut” (Chaplin). Instead of cutting the scenes, however,
Johnson featured the lawsuit in the film “as an example of what happens when rich
people talk about money” (Chaplin). In Johnson’s view, the harassment reflected the fact
that "most wealthy people want to live with this myth of equal opportunity and equality
in this country. I don't think they want to question their right to this wealth" (Chaplin).

**How Did Occupy Break Through?**

Just as certain mechanisms are in place to dissuade elites from breaking ranks, so
too do mechanisms (i.e. “filters”) exist for keeping opposition groups from circulating
their critiques on the public stage. The corporate mass media typically sort out
information produced by dissenting groups, thus quarantining it from mass circulation
and public perception (Hermann and Chomsky 2). Without a doubt, individual critics
have space to publish online or in print or to hand out flyers on the street, or even to yell
on a street corner, because the U.S. Constitution formally guarantees freedom of speech.
Oppositional groups perform isolated demonstrations and rallies, even large ones, but
elites are not threatened by these actions, which are not long-term, nor amplified, nor widely circulated, nor received meaningfully by large audiences.

How, then, did Occupy manage to put the dominant elite on the defensive? What discursive tools did Occupy deploy that allowed their oppositional themes and utterances to gain wide circulation and high profiles?

Physical Occupation of Meaningful Space

As I mentioned in Chapter One, data from The Pew Research Center, a non-partisan “fact tank,” show that Occupy’s radical discourse achieved mass circulation in the U.S. (Holcomb), but the polls don’t say how it managed to break through to that astonishing level. Obviously, Occupy had a potent message against income inequality and an unpopular target in Wall Street banks; the great questions were whether Occupy could fashion popularly-legible discourses on the crisis and whether such hand-made, in-process discourses would enjoy mass circulation when the movement itself was so loosely, quickly, and contradictorily organized.

The first communications strategy that I discuss, which I propose is most important, is the physical placement of a protest encampment on the streets of Lower Manhattan without official permission. Occupy had powerful ammunition for making the case against finance capital, but its rhetorically strong critique could only become politically powerful if it achieved wide circulation and support. This radical achievement of mass circulation was enabled by the sustained physical occupation. Occupy’s unauthorized, evolving public spectacle lasted long enough to attract attention in the very dense and managed field of media. By its rebellious, creative, and changing character, this protest occupation of public space in the heart of the financial district of the richest
and most powerful city in the world, Zuccotti Park thus competed with the standard menu of media attractions normally capturing the attention of American audiences.

In terms of the four main preoccupations of “rhetoric in society” proposed by Ira Shor — production, circulation, reception, and interpretation of discourses — the Zuccotti encampment was a sustained production site enabling continuous public circulation of opposition discourse to large numbers of receivers onsite walking by or stopping by, and offsite by tuning in. Because it was a 24/7, 59-day phenomenon of physical occupation, it was always there, always broadcasting opposition, constantly producing and circulating unauthorized critiques. By being long-term, not transient like a march or a rally, Occupy amplified production and interpretation of its own prepared opposition texts while simultaneously amplifying the spontaneous utterances of ordinary people who were outraged by bank bailouts amidst devastating unemployment rates and home foreclosures.

According to David Graeber’s chronicle of the earliest events, a core group of radical activists began the occupation of Zuccotti on September 17th, but they had been active in Lower Manhattan at least by September 1st. On that day, nine peaceful protesters were arrested for pitching tents in front of the New York Stock Exchange. This was a test run. The protestors — members of Occupy’s Tactics Working Group (TWG) — only pitched tents on the 1st to discover how authorities would respond to the real occupation planned for later the same month. After a few more dry-runs clued them in police
inclinations, on the 17th of September, several hundred activists set out to occupy Chase Manhattan Plaza, one short block from the Stock Exchange, but the police had surrounded the plaza with barricades. Unsurprised at the police’s prior knowledge of their plans because of constant NYPD surveillance and infiltration, TWG consulted their list of seven alternative spaces, identified weeks before in case Chase Manhattan Plaza proved unworkable. These alternative spaces were a closely guarded secret in the lead-up to the 17th, but when Chase was ruled out, TWG spread the word (quietly and verbally) that Zuccotti Park, a “privately-owned public park” three blocks from the Stock Exchange, was next on their list. (Graeber 47-54)

Demonstrators found Zuccotti free of barricades and moved in. To their surprise, police did not move against them, and they woke up the next day residents of the Park. Mitchell L. Moss, Professor of Urban Policy and Planning at New York University, explained the City’s inaction to a *New York Times* reporter: “The City had a policy for encouraging commercial developers to create open space in exchange for more height. But until now, no one has thought about the issue of what the rules are” (Foderaro). Occupy had stumbled upon a liminal hybrid urban space where the discourse of who owned it and policed it was unclear.

The core activists of Occupy, by poking at the downtown landscape, looking for fissures in the state-corporate spatial entente, engaging in what Michel DeCerteau called the bottom-up “tactics” of “bricolage” (29), had found a fissure they could pry open – a privately-owned public park with hazy rules and complex ownership. Such exploitation of ambiguous rules is at the heart of “culture jamming,” a term coined by Lasn, who encouraged fellow activists to be on the look out for “little fissures you can squeeze a
crowbar into and heave. When pressure is applied there, memes start replicating, minds start changing and, in time, the whole culture moves” (130). Occupy used the ambiguous legal standing of Zuccotti Park as an opportunity to start filling a public space near Wall Street with their physical bodies, tents, and protest actions, but certainly the group there could not know how long or effective this spatial opening would be as a tool to compose and distribute discourse to change minds and spread memes.

This fateful under-supervised space, Zuccotti Park, can be traced back to the development of the giant US Steel into a corporate conglomerate in the 1960s. By 1968, US Steel was becoming “central to leading sectoral shifts away from heavy industry, toward finance, insurance and real estate” (Schrader and Wachsmuth 243). Signaling its shift from metals to conglomerate corporate enterprise, US Steel would eventually change its designation from USS to USX. When it decided to build a skyscraper in Lower Manhattan, the corporation sought “a zoning variance” that would allow the building to “exceed local height restrictions in exchange for the construction of a publicly accessible park in the adjacent lot, Liberty Plaza Park” (Schrader and Wachsmuth 243). From zoning waivers like this one came the birth of New York’s abundant “privately-owned public parks” (PoPs). When builders wanted to exceed height limitations, they struck deals with a compliant, pro-development city administration to construct public amenities like small parks outdoors nearby and open atriums within the structure itself. In this way, a new form of corporatized urban space was invented, the publicly-owned private park.

Zuccotti’s private-public arrangement was an unrecognized political and security risk to authorities especially in a city like New York where the radical margins are large and busy. Still, in 1996, when Brookfield Properties, Inc., took possession of the space,
this new owner could not have then imagined that a protest encampment would expose
the legal contradictions. When it happened in 2011, both the city and the corporate
owners were caught off-guard by a bold initiative from a handful of militants. John
Zuccotti himself, the former Brookfield executive for whom the park is named, said, “We
basically look to the police leadership and Mayor to decide what to do” when
complications arise at the park, while Mayor Bloomberg explained that the Occupiers
weren’t evicted because Brookfield hadn’t requested it (Roberts). In other words, when
the Occupiers arrived on September 17th, both Brookfield Properties and New York City
officials incorrectly assumed that the other would respond. Neither did. Their buck-
passing gave Occupy a chance to open a camp that surprised all by its robust morphing an
alternative, independent micro-society.

Occupy leaders sought a spot in the immediate vicinity of Wall Street because
they identified banks as the place where people could assemble and target the financial
elites who dominate the economy and government at all levels, and who were responsible
for the 2008 collapse for which public taxes were required to bail them out. In the lead up
to the occupation, the “Anonymous” hacking group issued several communiqués arguing
that Wall Street was the place to gather because “the banksters” had cratered the national
economy and then rewarded themselves with bonuses paid for with taxpayer bailouts.
Anonymous addressed “the criminals” of Wall Street directly:

Perhaps you think you are at the eye of a storm, luxuriating in tranquility while all
around is ripped apart and made anew. But it is not so... You are at the center of
the crosshairs!...You have crystallized this country into a monolithic tyranny and
in doing so you made brittle the ties that bind people. We are here, gathered at the
steps of your butcher block four years later, frenzied and furious. Your crimes have united this great melting pot into a white-hot alloy of rage. (“Anonymous Press Release for Occupy Wall Street Action”)

With such a declaration, in the parlance of urban youth, Anonymous and other Occupy participants “recognized”; that is, they publicly acknowledged what is going on and who the central perpetrators were.

Occupy’s target of Wall Street resonated with many. Speaking at Hunter College in late 2011, Cornell West expressed support for the choice of Wall Street as the right target for protests because dominant control of society is in the private hands of finance whose power greatly influences the conditions most folks live. To support his claim of Wall Street dominance, West pointed out that, before the deregulation of finance, business, and industry by government began 30 years ago, the financial sector took in no more than 16 percent of overall profits but in the last decade this sector has taken up to 41 percent. He connected the financialization of our economy to American society’s "gangsterization" – putting profits before people. (West)
In their open-air space, Occupy participants asserted oppositional sentiments, radical social values, anti-market ideas, and even revenge fantasies which dared Wall Street financiers and the Mayor’s Office to stop them. Thousands of out-of-town tourists walking past the park could view “Wanted!” signs portraying criminal bank executives like Angelo Mozillo, a six-foot wolf puppet holding a sign that read “The Wolves of Wall Street Give Wolves a Bad Name” (Figure 27), and then take home with them newsletters devoted to reporting on “what the 1% don’t want us to think about.” Such carnivalesque expression could not reach such large audiences before the occupiers of Zuccotti took advantage of a mass disruption in the status quo—the economic collapse of 2008—which created an opening to the left.
The prolonged, unauthorized, creative, and visually-striking takeover of such prominent and iconic territory provided Occupy access to the mainstream media that ordinarily marginalize radical discourses but could not do so this time because of the nature and scale of the encampment there followed by many spinoffs around the nation. In an October 6th *New York Times* op-ed, financial columnist Richard Beales lauded Occupy for “picking a good spot,” saying that the crowds and street theater made for good television, and also that, because camping in front of Wall Street could be very costly to the demonstrators, their daring had won them notoriety. Even Judge Michael D. Stallman, who upheld the City’s eviction of Occupy from Zuccotti Park, recognized the importance of the space, saying, “Occupy Wall Street brought attention to the increasing disparity of wealth and power in the United States, largely because of the unorthodox
tactic of occupying the subject public space on a 24-hour basis, and constructing an encampment there” (Thrasher).

Figure 28: Occupy demonstrator critiquing the influence of corporate money on the U.S. government. This is an example of the do-it-yourself expression practiced at Zuccotti.

Despite widespread recognition that the physical space was part of Occupy’s argument, New York City officials dismissed the notion that First Amendment rights to free speech and assembly would protect a tent city. “The Constitution doesn’t protect tents,” Mayor Bloomberg said. “It protects speech and assembly” (Flegenheimer and Eligon). In the lead up to a first attempt at eviction in mid-October, Bloomberg claimed that the demonstration would be able to proceed after the Park had been cleared and cleaned. In an “open letter” to the NYPD, Jeremy Kessler, a student at Yale Law School, rebutted that claim:
Mayor Bloomberg and Brookfield Properties claim that the Occupy Wall Street protest will be able to continue the protest after the park has been cleaned. This is not true. The purpose of the Occupy Wall Street protest is to secure a public space at the center of the American financial system in which ordinary Americans can speak and be heard. When 20,000 protesters marched on Wall Street in May, nobody listened. (Kessler)

Kessler’s letter captures how physical consolidation of opposition into a camp makes such a larger statement than a protest lasting a few hours. Marching with placards can be safely hidden from mass circulation if corporate mass media refuse to cover the event, thus marginalizing the discourse or quarantining it from public perception. In contrast, the unauthorized encampment at Zuccotti Park spoke powerfully to thousands of daily visitors by acting out alternative ways of being, speaking, and living. The foot traffic going by Zuccotti is always substantial because Ground Zero is kitty-corner to the park and because the area is very densely populated with residences and businesses.

Even though Mayor Bloomberg proposed his own limits on the First Amendment, enforceable because he controlled nearly 40,000 police, the tent city hung on and kept evolving. At its besieged site in Lower Manhattan, under the constant gaze and intrusion of the NYPD, Occupy posed a threat to the status quo because it performed alternative social relations as well as critiquing existing ones. Instead of merely resisting capitalist “free markets,” anti-corporate activists within Occupy demonstrated “really, really free markets” (Milstein 68) in which material goods and services were distributed based on people’s needs and desires, rather than what they can afford.
As weeks of occupation went by, the camp evolved to house hundreds of overnight campers, thousands of daily visitors, and an array of free services like meals, health care, clothing, phone calls, education, books, shelter, even cigarettes. In this embodied and performative discourse, Occupy built a living micro-alternative to the market system and to the logic of capital that ruled generally everywhere else outside this three-fourths of an acre. This performed discourse of the camp became a challenging counter-discourse to the way-of-life of the status quo because at its best it showed human capacities to re-invent, re-think, and re-construct from the bottom up.
Figure 30: Symbolic of Occupy’s support for climate justice, stationary bikes attached to generators demonstrated an alternative to burning fossil fuels.

In addition to viewing the displayed and enacted alternatives, people walking past the Park could clear up doubts they had about Occupy and get answers about the movement. In this way, the living discourse of the camp was also an epistemic address to audiences nearby and online. It showed and taught an oppositional alternative to the status quo. To see one typical example of this epistemic outreach, on the morning of October 17th, according to my field notes, a jogger from the Prospect Park Track Club interrupted his run through Lower Manhattan to talk to a woman holding a sign that read "Wall Street Steals Our Jobs, Homes, and Future" (Figure 1). The jogger told her that he would like to help the movement but he didn’t want to risk getting arrested. The woman assured him that when people do get arrested it is usually a decision they make in
advance. She said that she never puts herself in position to be arrested but is still able to contribute plenty – for instance, by standing on the edge of the park with her sign.

The edges of the park, then, constituted a functioning “contact zone” for discursive exchanges that also took place in the park proper and Occupy participants recognized this importance early on. According to meeting minutes posted at nycga.net, the main website for Occupy Wall Street, the Outreach WG announced at the September 28th General Assembly that they needed additional "happy, diverse people" to staff their “Welcome Stations.” Outreach explained that the work "involves taking people off the street and getting them involved in movement." The Welcome Stations on the edges of the Park also distributed Occupy literature and pamphlets to the throngs of people – tourists, commuters, neighbors – passing by. (“NYCGA Minutes 9/28/11”)

Welcome Station workers were expected to ease newcomers into the park, especially those passersby who appeared to be "dipping their toes in the water" to see how it feels. I witnessed such recruitment in action on the morning of November 9th. According to my field notes, an elderly couple stopped on the sidewalk to peer in at the interior of the park. Since they were within shouting distance of the West Side Welcome Station, the guy working that station shouted out to them jovially, “Go ahead in! We’re not crazy like the news says we are!” The woman in the couple said, "Well, I know that!” at which point the couple ambled into the park to get a closer look at things.

Responses of passers-by to the camp surely varied, with some distinctly hostile. Some dressed in the suits of finance workers passing by Zuccotti were snide toward Occupiers, occasionally shouting, “Get a job!” Some even gloated in the faces of demonstrators on the mid-November morning after Occupy was evicted from Zuccotti
(Figure 31). However, other finance workers were sympathetic. According to my field notes from November 2\textsuperscript{nd}, a man in a suit, with a briefcase and a Russian accent, stopped at the Welcome Station to ask what Occupy's goals were. I figured at first that he was asking sarcastically. However, his apparent intention was to give Occupy some tips.

"Do you know about the 'up tick' rule repealed in 2004 by Bush?" he asked.

"No," said the guy at the Welcome Desk.

"Look it up," said the Russian man as he continued on his way. "The repeal has been a serious disaster."\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{Figure 31:} On the morning of the eviction, the gentleman with the grey hair gleefully congratulated police officers.

\textsuperscript{21} The “Up-tick Rule” was a law that required, before its repeal, that there be an "up-tick" in the stock price before an investor could short a stock. This was supposed to keep investors from coordinating their efforts to send a stock plummeting downwards.
Adults also used the encampment as a learning opportunity for kids (Figures 32 through 34). The sight of children being escorted through the park by approving schoolteachers on weekdays and by parents on weekends grew common by November. Occupy demonstrators worked to accommodate kids by adding a children’s section in the Library, by discouraging each other from cursing when kids were around, by providing fascinating puppetry and pageantry on Halloween, by having a table where the camp was built in Lego, by offering a make-your-own-button booth, and by improving walking lanes in the park. IndyKids, a popular print publication for children, came out with an “Occupy edition” including explanations of the movement and interviews with Occupiers (“Why Can’t We Share?”).

The growing attraction of kids to Zuccotti was perhaps another reason for authorities to feel threatened. Helaine Olen of The New York Times expressed amusement over a four-year old kid holding a sign promoting economic justice at Zuccotti Park, noting that four is “an age when girls are generally thought to be more interested in Disney characters than protest marches” (Olen). The increasing presence of children in the camp indicated that this protest village was viewed positively by families in the city; if Occupy deepened its family-friendly reputation it would be harder for the city and the major media to represent it as a filthy, dangerous drug den for lazy hippies who refuse to work or as simply an offensive imposition on the family neighborhood adjacent to it. As Professor Ira Shor often proposed in his seminars, political warfare is also rhetorical warfare, and rhetorical warfare is also a war of images and actions.
Figure 32: Students studying Occupy Wall Street at Zuccotti Park. Despite dark representations of Occupy by City Hall and by major media in the city, Occupy had a family-friendly reputation.

Figure 33: Students studying Occupy Wall Street.
In addition to all the commercial, artistic, and scholarly photographers documenting the site, tourists wandering Lower Manhattan – or riding by in double-decker tourist buses – snapped countless photos of Zuccotti Park, its inhabitants, and signs on display. These tourists passing by the Zuccotti encampment with their cameras augmented Occupy’s ability to bypass the mainstream media to gain wider circulation. Just in case they weren’t planning to already, demonstrators asked tourists to upload their photos to Facebook. An Occupier from China, for example, had a sign hanging from his neck reading "Protect Humanity's Peace, Freedom, Democracy… A Long Way To Go" (Figure 35). After tourists took his picture, he showed them a note on the back of his sign reading, "please post to Facebook." By encouraging tourists from the American heartland or from overseas to circulate their photos of the camp within their own social networks, Occupy showed the side of the operation which was sensitive to public reception and
outreach. The picture of a smiling, friendly Chinese man promoting a message with universal appeal competed with negative images of Occupy appearing in some major media, and with the decidedly less welcoming West side of the encampment.

Figure 35: This demonstrator – and his D.I.Y. discourse always hanging from his neck – could be found at the edge of Zuccotti Park nearly every morning that I visited.

**Occupy’s Unsupervised Channels for Circulation of Discourse**

Occupy’s camp in the Zuccotti Park generally attracted and appealed to thousands of visitors while its own media outreach built a large following; however, some major media effectively campaigned against it with malignant coverage. In addition, contradictions within Occupy divided the group in regard to major media. For example, on September 29th, a member of Occupy’s Press Relations WG encouraged people at that night’s GA to cooperate with a particular media outlet – *New York Magazine* – that was present that night, adding “it’s good if the press likes Occupy because they spread
Occupy’s message to millions. So try not to piss them off.” But a contradictory strain of thought within Occupy rejected the idea of courting the mainstream media because, in the words of one Occupy participant, “we’re fighting a system,” and the corporate media “is a part of that system” (Stelter).

**Major Media Treatment of Occupy**

Although such internal strategic division, by itself, would preclude Occupy from fully taking the rhetorical offensive, the deep distrust of corporate media by a bloc of Occupiers was understandable given some of the negative early profiles of the movement. The first analysis published by the *New York Times* was a September 23rd piece by Ginia Bellafante, who represented Occupy as ignorant, pitiful, and incoherent. She wrote that Occupy’s cause was virtually impossible to decipher. The group was clamoring for nothing in particular to happen right away — not the implementation of the Buffett rule or the increased regulation of the financial industry.

Bellafante lamented Occupy’s inability to land on a single grievance:

Some said they were fighting the legal doctrine of corporate personhood; others, not fully understanding what that meant, believed it meant corporations paid no taxes whatsoever. Others came to voice concerns about the death penalty, the drug war, the environment.

Bellafante also pitied Occupy participants for their incompetence in the face of such large challenges:

The group’s lack of cohesion and its apparent wish to pantomime progressivism rather than practice it knowledgeably is unsettling in the face of the challenges so
many of its generation face — finding work, repaying student loans, figuring out ways to finish college when money has run out.

Bellafante’s commentary on Occupy has been widely noted for its condescending tone and, ironically, for its lack of clarity (Steinhauer). The comments’ section beneath the online version of Bellafante’s article reveals the exasperation that NYT readers felt about the coverage of Occupy – 519 readers gave a “thumbs up” to the following criticism of Bellafante posted by an “HG”:

I'm interested not only in the poor reporting in this article but also an extremely unclear argument. What does "The group’s lack of cohesion and its apparent wish to pantomime progressivism rather than practice it knowledgably" really mean? What is your impression of knowledgeable practice of progressivism? That's a crazy claim when you didn't seem to do any actual reporting. Did you talk to more than the few more artistic, street theater folks? Did you actually listen to the other members of the protest: businessmen and women who are now protesting, educators, parents? Can you not imagine that a comprehensive and coherent critique is often difficult when the problems we face are so numerous, complicated, interwoven and disastrous to fit in an easy 10 second soundbite? And perhaps the narrow news narrative that barely stops to even acknowledge poor people and still only focuses on the newly poor and can't even address the real causes of our financial crisis is part of this problem of articulation?

NYT was not the only moderate New York publication to depict Occupy as unworthy of association. AM New York, The Daily News, and New York Magazine joined in on mocking Occupy as well. In particular, the aforementioned recommendation by Occupy
Press Relations to cooperate with *New York Magazine*’s survey seems regrettable because the data from the survey was deployed in a derogatory infographic.

The infographic – published October 2nd – portrayed the activists as unreasonable, anti-American, and ill-informed (Figure 36). Inability to distinguish the differences between the Volcker Rule and the Glass-Steagall Act, for example, was presented as ignorance, even though they have a good deal of overlap. The Volcker Rule, which went into effect in 2012, “bans proprietary trading for deposit-taking banks” while the Glass-Steagall Act, repealed in 1999, “separated investment banks from commercial banks” (Chatterjee 34). Both have been cited as tools for precluding government-backed financial institutions from taking on dangerous levels of risk (Chatterjee 34).

The *New York Magazine* survey also asked 100 Occupy participants to rank themselves on the following “scale of liberalism”:

- Not liberal at all
- Liberal but fairly mainstream (i.e., Barack Obama)
- Strongly liberal (i.e., Paul Krugman)
- Fed up with Democrats, believe country needs overhaul (i.e., Ralph Nader),
- Convinced the U.S. government is no better than Al Qaeda (i.e., Noam Chomsky)

The poll’s construction meant that those 34% who identified themselves as being “as liberal as Noam Chomsky” – whatever that might mean – were also roped into the claim that “the U.S. government is no better than, say, Al Qaeda,” an organization responsible for the deaths of 2,977 people less than a half a mile from where they stood.
Figure 36: Unfavorable infographic from New York Magazine, published on October 2nd, 2011. Ridicule and caricature were rhetorical tools used against Occupy in the major media. The police physically besieged the camp while the mass media rhetorically besieged it.

The New York Magazine survey results became ammunition for right-wing blogs and pundits to ridicule Occupy (Hart). In a New York Times column titled “Milquetoast Radicals,” the conservative pundit David Brooks cited the New York Magazine survey as evidence for his claim that a third of Occupy members “believe the U.S. is no better than Al Qaeda.”

Even before Occupy encamped at Zuccotti Park, there were internal conflicts over dealing with the media. In planning sessions for the September 17th occupation, David Graeber, a renowned anthropologist and a key strategist in Occupy’s earliest days, had lumped the corporate news media in with the police as two of Occupy’s main enemies. Graeber’s thoughts on “dishing to the media” emerged after an Occupy participant named
Will Russell griped to a *Village Voice* reporter about the anarchist tendencies of Occupy. Published online on September 15th, the interview was titled “On Saturday, 20,000 People Could Be Doing Yoga and Dancing to 'Thriller' on Wall Street.” In the interview, Russell criticized leaders within Occupy for not settling on demands. He told the *Voice’s* Rebecca Nathanson, that,

> at the last GA, the anarchists voted down the idea of having police liaisons and marshals because they don't like the idea of giving jobs to people. Their argumentation is extremely confused because they were saying we should have no police liaisons, but that we should have police liaison training. (Nathanson)

On the day after the interview was published online, Russell posted remarks in the comments’ section, expressing regret for the way he conducted himself in the interview:

> While I do stand by arguments I made, I recognize that the Voice was not the best place to air some of these differences, particularly the one about liaisons, which was inappropriate for me to talk about with a reporter. If I had fully understood the format of the article which was to be written, I would have refrained from discussing several of these issues and instead have focused on the more logistical issues around s17 and its promotion. (Nathanson)

The mea culpa satisfied most of Russell’s fellow activists but not Graeber. Graeber expressed his anger toward Russell in an email thread made public by Andrew Breitbart, right-wing investigative gadfly. In the section of the email thread where Occupy participants debated a response to the Russell interview, Graeber encouraged fellow activists to publicly shame Russell for breaking ranks, asking, “If he is willing to dish to the media, what makes you think he won’t dish to the cops?” Others recommended that
Graeber cool down, reminding him that Russell had recognized his mistake and that dealing with the media is difficult for those without media training. (“Re: [september17discuss] Re: can someone tell whoever spoke to the Village Voice”)

Being an inclusive but loose coalition – perhaps en route to becoming a coherent movement, perhaps not – the prevailing sentiment was generous: when folks screw up in their interactions with the media, it is best to bring them back into the fold so they can learn how to “talk to the press without being led by them” (“NYCGA Minutes 9/28/11”). Graeber agreed and backed off his animosity toward Russell.

**Occupy’s Own Channels for Circulating Discourse**

Although Occupy participants generally didn’t trust the mainstream media to circulate their message in an accurate and fair manner, mass circulation and mass appeal were undeniably necessary in order for Occupy to become a consequential movement. Since mainstream channels did not usually treat Occupy’s message favorably, Occupy was prepared to develop its own channels for circulating discourse. One of Occupy’s most famous tools for circulation was *The Occupied Wall Street Journal (OWSJ)*, a hand-distributed print organ that riffed off *The Wall Street Journal* but disseminated news and opinion from the point of view of the protesters. The idea for the OWSJ came about because, according to editor Arun Gupta, “we didn’t think there would be much in the way of coverage of the event, so we thought it was important that there be a media outlet that reflected what was under way” (Carr). Besides hawkers distributing this alternate broadside at Zuccotti Park and at off-site rallies, its circulation occasionally copied that of the major dailies in New York City. For example, at the height of the movement, I was

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22 *WSJ is the largest daily paid circulation of any newspaper in the U.S.*
able to find stacks of *OWSJ* sitting alongside stacks of the *New York Post* and *New York Times* at a convenience store in the neighborhood where I live, 5 miles from Zuccotti Park. Such a distribution effort was a considerable achievement for a hastily-assembled media tool by a loosely-organized movement.

Occupy developed online channels as well as print ones. Within Zuccotti Park, activists constructed a “Freedom Tower,” composed of two modems and six radio antennas. The tower distributed wireless Internet access to everyone who visited the Park. The excellent wireless access in the park aided Occupy’s Twitter campaign as they blasted out pro-Occupy and anti-Wall Street messages every minute of every day (Figure 37).

The Twitter campaign began before the first activists even got to the park. In the days leading up to September 17th, activists urged each other to “get tweets out there every few minutes.” Then, on September 17th, the first day of encampment, Occupy participants and their supporters coordinated an effort to propel the hashtag #TakeWallStreet onto Twitter’s “trending” list. The list below offers just a sampling of the hundreds of tweets employing #TakeWallStreet that day:

- At 7:37 a.m., @takethesquare started things off by writing, “Twitter's trend algorithms favour novelty over popularity. Use #takewallstreet instead of #occupywallstreet!”

- Later in the day, @CharlesBivona, a poet from New Jersey, added, “This new gen of 20-somethings may actually change things. This is more than a protest. #IMHO #takewallstreet.”

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23 When a hashtag makes it to the trending list, Twitter users around the world see it listed among all the other trending hashtags, an outcome that greatly amplifies a social media campaign (Parker).
• @OccupyWallStreet, the official Twitter handle for Occupy, quoted “Luis from Spain” in a Tweet that read "I'm here b/c I want 2 see the collective liberation that I saw in Spain last May #takewallstreet #sep17 @acampadelsol.”

• A user named @littlelisa used the #TakeWallStreet hashtag as well, in a tweet that said, “Just want to thank all of those who were w me today! It was great! Amazing experience! I'll be back to #OccupyWallStreet. #TakeWallStreet.”

Although I don’t know whether #TakeWallStreet ended up making the trending list (there is no public archive for trending hashtags, yet), I know that the hashtag got enough traction to recruit the famous right-wing pundit, Erick Erickson, into the conversation. Erickson tweeted, “An angry horde of freeloaders wanting out of their financial responsibility has decided to #TakeWallStreet and dumb down the place.”

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24 Occupy’s Twitter campaign remained strong into 2012, even after the camp had been shut down. On nights when I could not make it to a General Assembly, I could follow the proceedings via Twitter.
Journalists, bloggers, and Internet commenters were also recruited to get the message out. MSNBC talk show host Dylan Ratigan was one prominent media figure who seems to have been recruited to use his platform to circulate pro-Occupy information. Ratigan had prominently primed the pump for Occupy with an August 2011 rant about corporate control of both major political parties. The rant, titled “Guy just fucking lost it on air,” had been viewed over 1 million times on YouTube as of August 2013. In the unearthed Occupy email thread cited earlier, Max Berger, a member of Occupy Wall Street’s Movement Building WG, wrote that Ratigan is “a huge friend of the movement, and wants to collaborate with us however we see fit…I could help get the ball rolling / make intros.” Based on these bits of evidence, a journalist for Andrew
Breitbart’s blog has charged Ratigan with “instructing Occupiers on how properly to present their demands and messages while simultaneously appearing on television reporting ‘objectively’ on the story” (Loesch). Such media forays, skirmishes, and D.I.Y. inventiveness indicate both an intense need by Occupy to secure circulation of its discourses and an intense need of major media to control the mass reception of Occupy’s image.

Occupy’s development of alternative channels for circulation yielded positive results. Social media, in particular, helped fuel the protests, connecting like-minded groups locally, nationally and worldwide. Ricken Patel, co-founder and executive director of Avazz.org, an online citizen-action group, told WSJ's Andy Grossman, "Social media have been able to demonstrate widespread solidarity, which has made it harder for these actions to be dismissed" by political leaders and the mainstream media.

Mass awareness of the Wall Street camp escalated after the Occupy Media WG circulated videos of a disturbing violent attack on an Occupier by the NYPD during a September 24th march to Union Square uptown from the camp. The videos showed several marchers who had been kettled by orange police netting into a sidewalk area and who were standing in place, not trying to force their way out. Among them was an apparently non-violent young woman named Kaylee Dedrick. The videos, “made by several protesters at different vantage points” (Baker and Goldstein), show Dedrick being suddenly and purposely pepper-sprayed in her face by NYPD Deputy Inspector Anthony Bologna, causing her to collapse in shrieks as Occupy medics rush to help her. The sensational and troubling video went viral and aroused new sympathy for Occupy and

25 When Ratigan’s contract was up at MSNBC in 2012, he left the show and now devotes his time to hydroponic gardening in upstate New York (Stelter).
hostility toward the NYPD from people outside the movement. According to a *New York Times* report on September 29th, the videos have prompted a level of criticism of the police rarely seen outside of fatal police shootings of unarmed people. The independent city agency that investigates accusations of police abuse said that about 400 people had complained, many from out of state. (Baker and Goldstein)

Through its own channels, Occupy was able to circulate the pepper-spray video and force into national attention what was going on in Lower Manhattan. The major media were not able to quarantine the wave of sympathy that this filmed incident provoked.

In the same week that the pepper-spray video circulated, a Tumblr blog containing personal testimonials from diverse working people – “We are the 99 Percent” – took off. The blog allowed users to upload a picture of themselves holding a sign describing their situation. One typical post consisted of a thirty-something man looking tired and sad, with a sign that reads,

I lost my job in 2009. Then I was diagnosed w/ diabetes. Then my insurance dropped me. My drugs went from 20 → 200$/mo. Now I am in grad school for the insurance and loans it provides. I also work 30+ hours/wk now. My wife does too. Our second child is on the way. We have no savings. We are scared of losing our house. We are the 99%.

Visitors to the blog read such wrenching personal accounts of the damage caused by vast economic inequality and often added their own words of support for those who have documented their struggles. In addition to becoming yet another effective channel for
circulating oppositional discourse, the Tumblr blog utilized a powerful discourse genre: the personal testimony of real people, autobiographical anecdotes.

The use of personal stories to exemplify big political claims is a familiar technique of mainstream politicians and major media, which provide such anecdotal narratives to effect identification of the audience with the ideology of the representation. When Occupy struck on this tool, it was able to personalize the appeal of its message through social media. The personal stories distributed via Tumblr, the coordinated and prodigious Twitter campaigns, *The Occupied Wall Street Journal* print organ, the videos shot by Occupiers and circulated globally via YouTube – each of these offers an example of Occupy taking up available, pervasive, and inexpensive media tools to compose and circulate its D.I.Y. discourses. Because of the moment of general crisis in which it was acting, those discourses had a mass relevance which managed to achieve large audience exposure.

**Escaping Sequestration**

The banking collapse of 2008, which was followed by the unpopular bank bailout of culpable financiers, created an opening to the left for oppositional discourse and action but it took three years before any advocacy group was able to use this opening to some militant and mass effect. The moral high ground had been waiting for some force to climb up and seize it. Finally, Occupy did, aided considerably by the pepper-spray clip and the Tumblr testimonials – ugly police brutality and indecent impoverishment of decent people were discursive pictures worth a thousand words. Both the pepper-spray video and the Tumblr blog were tools of oppositional discourse produced and circulated
from the bottom by a movement whose bold tactics at a moment of crisis enabled it to unexpectedly escape the typical media quarantine of radical messaging.

In the U.S., as I have argued, many opposition groups live and sometimes thrive in the margins, but rarely reach mass circulation. In its earliest form, just before and just after its unauthorized encampment in Zuccotti Park, Occupy was just one such marginal group. When I witnessed small bands of Occupiers marching down Wall Street in mid- to late- September, I didn’t view it as anything especially remarkable; the actions hadn’t distinguished themselves from other small oppositional actions that frequently erupt from the margins of the legal left on the streets of Manhattan. Just a few weeks before I began to see the small bands of Occupy activists marching on Wall Street, in fact, I had walked past a much more organized and much more sizable demonstration in Bowling Green Park led by a different left group. In its first few weeks, then, Occupy existed alongside many other marginalized protest groups and was limited like they were to minimal effect and circulation.

However, an avalanche of unsupervised, horizontal communications online and onsite along with the viral exposure of police violence on September 24 provoked the mainstream media to begin covering the movement more energetically in the first full week of October. En route to mass recognition and circulation, Occupy as a news item garnered 7 percent of the nation’s collective news coverage that week (Holcomb). Occupy’s share of the national news jumped to 10 percent in the second week of October before leveling out at around 5 percent. My own curiosity about Occupy spiked around that time, as I described in Chapter One. The news media had signaled to me and others,
merely by the amount of coverage it was supplying, that Occupy was important, that it mattered, and that it had traction.

In addition to gaining wider circulation among ordinary Americans, Occupy had gained the support of several mainstream figures. By circulating images of police violence and narratives on bank heartlessness, Occupy created a moral high ground upon which decent insiders of the status quo could stand; this enabled Occupy to play its own version of “divide-and-conquer” when public figures took the side of the movement. For example, after visiting the Park in late September, *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof broke from the conventional wisdom about Occupy’s “disorganization,” and wrote that

The protesters are dazzling in their Internet skills, and impressive in their organization. The square is divided into a reception area, a media zone, a medical clinic, a library and a cafeteria. The protesters’ Web site includes links allowing supporters anywhere in the world to go online and order pizzas (vegan preferred) from a local pizzeria that delivers them to the square.

Additionally, in early October, Jared Bernstein, a former advisor to Vice-President Biden, offered his support, saying the protests were an indicator of broader sentiment in the country and that Occupy’s themes “resonate well past the folks on Wall Street” (Landler).

By early October, Occupy was internationally known. Strong public support for the movement meant that New York City officials could not peremptorily remove it without seriously harming the credibility of the police and the Mayor. A Quinnipiac poll of New York City voters released in mid-October found that nearly three-quarters said that they understood the protesters’ views at least fairly well, two-thirds said that they
agreed with those views, nearly 9 in 10 said that it was O.K. “that they are protesting,” and nearly three-quarters said that as long as the protesters obey the laws that they should be able to remain as long as they wish. Nationwide, the support was just a bit less, hovering around sixty percent. (Muskal)

In “normal” times, corporate, political, and media elites select the themes, images, and stories that circulate nationally, regionally, and locally. However, after the crisis of 2008, and the subsequent unpopular public bailout of private equity firms pro-business narratives stumbled and pro-corporate politicians and leaders were vulnerable. The door was open for radical politics, but only a right-wing anti-government but pro-corporate “Tea Party” ensemble emerged. Then, after three years, a left-wing insurgency led by Occupy caught fire, enabling anti-corporate and anti-government opposition on a mass scale. Occupy’s militant squatting and ingenious use of social media created platforms and tools to compete at the center of public discourse.

In the terms of critical analyst Norman Fairclough, Occupy’s anti-corporate discourses were passing “through the mechanisms and processes of selection and retention” (24), which gave them the potential to “contribute to social (re)construction” (24). Occupy’s ability to reach mass circulation while speaking from the moral high ground gave it a threatening consequence against the status quo. The next chapter, “Restoring the Public Transcript,” examines the dominant elite’s efforts to reassert control of mass representation and public discourse in the face of a non-violent movement’s challenge to the dominant media’s pro-business orientations.

26 In the words of former Governor of New York Elliot Spitzer, Occupy was “redefining and rebalancing our political discourse.”
Chapter 3: Restoring the Public Transcript

I argue in this chapter that the continuous, widely-distributed mass communications by an oppositional group in the United States, described in Chapter Two, interferes by definition with the top-down monopoly on mass communications normally enjoyed by financial and corporate elites with close ties to government policy makers. Chapter Three, then, examines the elite’s efforts to reassert control of mass representation and public discourse in the face of a non-violent movement’s challenge to the predominant circulation pro-business narratives.

According to Scott’s framework of “the hidden transcript” and “infrapolitics of the dominated” (202-228), offstage opposition is always underway in all societies, whether republican states or repressive dictatorships. The difference is that, whereas authorities in a pre-democratic society may routinely turn to violence to suppress opposition without jeopardizing their claim to rule by law, authorities in an open society cannot afford, in most cases, to suppress opposition through arrests, “disappearances,” or mass beatings. Here in the United States, the legitimacy of “government” is based on the rule of law—fairness, justice, due process, etc. – and a constitutional framework guarantees protest rights among many rights. Liquidating these legal rights by violence is a often a high-risk maneuver for any elected authority.

However, while stating that authorities in the United States generally prefer to use “softer,” discursive means of controlling opposition, I do not wish to downplay ongoing violence connected to racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia, which Angela Davis remarked upon in remembrance of the 50th anniversary of the 1963 Klu Klux Klan church bombing in Alabama that killed four girls at Sunday school, Denise McNair (11
years old), Carole Robertson (14), Cynthia Wesley (14), and Addie Mae Collins (14). In those remarks, Davis asked that we “not labor under the illusion that this church bombing was an anomaly.” She pointed out that Robert Chambliss, who was eventually convicted of carrying out the Birmingham bombing, had been responsible for bombing black homes and churches for many years, so much so that he was known as “Dynamite Bob” in white communities. Davis also asked that we “not pretend that we are celebrating the end of racist violence and the triumph of democracy.” In her remarks on how racist violence endures in the United States today, Davis cites official violence by state officers – racist incarceration practices in the United States, racist application of the death penalty – as well as unofficial violence by vigilantes – in the murders of Oscar Grant and Trayvon Martin, for example. (“Terrorism is Part of Our History”)

The creation of the New York Police Department’s “Demographics Unit” in the aftermath of 9/11 offers another example of the state of constant repression laid on communities of color. The Demographics Unit has riddled Muslim communities with undercover police officers and informants, placing surveillance personnel and/or surveillance technology in mosques, restaurants, and Muslim student organizations. Despite the fact that these operations have produced zero leads, the operations continue, with little public outcry. (Goldman and Apuzzo)

One way that some advocates for racial justice neutralize the violent tendencies of police and courts toward protests by people of color is to involve celebrities in the protests, an approach that garners press coverage and puts police in the public eye. Mass media will generally cooperate with this celebrity strategy of racial justice groups to control the police. But such events are infrequent. More common are the everyday
activities of “stop and frisk” which typically targeted young men of color in the twelve years of the Bloomberg administration (2001-2013).

In general, mass media under corporate control have a symbiotic relation to the corporate politicians in office, so they represent events in ways compatible with interests of local and national officials. In one seminal study of this media control, *Manufacturing Consent*, a book which analyzes the series of filters that corporate media use to sort and circulate discourse, Edward Hermann and Noam Chomsky write that

the dominant media firms are quite large businesses; they are controlled by very wealthy people or by managers who are subject to sharp constraints by owners and other market-profit-oriented forces; and they are closely interlocked, and have important common interests, with other major corporations, banks, and government. (14)

Hermann and Chomsky offer a layered portrait of the mechanisms by which money and power marginalize oppositional discourse produced by dissenters, thereby silencing opposition or making it invisible (2). In their detailed studies, they also show how, when alternative discourse does manage to surface in the mainstream media, it is quickly marginalized by presenting it as incomprehensible, or illegitimate in some other way (243). As they ignore, dismiss, under-report, mis-report, ridicule, or mis-represent oppositional discourse, mass media simultaneously circulate images and stories that herald the elite’s powers and potentials, or they trade in “mis-direction” by distracting the public gaze away from dissident actions towards various safe topics or events, thereby undermining the oppositional potential of its mass audiences.
The first strategy for re-marginalizing Occupy – ignoring the very existence of the demonstrations – did not succeed, first because Occupy managed to maintain and expand its tent village at Zuccotti and several other key sites, and secondly, because Occupy had leveraged its own digital talents and resources to circulate its anti-corporate message to a wider and wider audience. When Occupy didn’t simply fold on its own, a second elite strategy – tarring Occupy as unworthy of association – had only limited success because Occupy’s message against economic inequality and Wall Street had mass legitimacy after the trillion-dollar bank bailouts in 2008. In addition, the tent village at Zuccotti had positive appeal as a combined popular carnival of protest with its own ingenious alternatives to the status quo, like free food, books, and medical services as well as a drumming circle, pedal-power electricity, and “horizontal” meetings.

What were the authorities to do, then? Simply tolerate the anti-corporate opposition with its growing delivery system for mass circulation and mass appeal? No, the encampment’s expanding base and competing circulation had crossed a line into (non-violent, mass) opposition which threatened elite authority at a moment of vulnerability because of the Wall Street collapse of the economy. This confluence of mass insurgency, physical occupation, online command, and growing militance proved to be intolerable to Mayor Michael Bloomberg, a billionaire scion of Wall Street who was at the eye of the storm with an enormous asset — almost 40,000 police under his authority. Therefore, after some “soft means” for re-marginalizing Occupy – e.g. downplaying its significance, ridiculing its methods – were ineffective, Mayor Bloomberg set an example for municipal authorities in other occupied cities by turning to “hard means” – police violence.
Plan A: Ignoring or Downplaying Occupy

The effectiveness of the mass media’s filtration system relegates the bulk of oppositional discourse and activity to meager circulation in the dark corners and unobserved margins of American society. Discourse not adhering to the premises fixed by the elite is unable to pass through all the filters that sanitize mass communications for the benefit of those in power (2). Viewed through the propaganda model set forth by Hermann and Chomsky, it is not surprising that the mass media initially ignored Occupy Wall Street during its infancy – the demonstrators’ discourse did not adhere to the pro-business narratives fixed by elites who have special access to the tools of mass media.

“When the Occupy Wall Street protests began three weeks ago,” Paul Krugman wrote in his October 7, 2011 column in The New York Times, “most news organizations were derisive if they deigned to mention the events at all. For example, nine days into the protests, National Public Radio had provided no coverage whatsoever” (“Confronting the Malefactors”). Data from The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, which charts how national news coverage is distributed between different topics, supports Krugman’s claim that “most news organizations” did not mention Occupy. Although Occupy’s Lower Manhattan first “scouting” actions began in early September (“#Occupy Wall Street September 17”) and the outright occupation of Zuccotti Park launched on September 17th, news about Occupy amounted to at most only 2 percent of the nation’s collective coverage during that month (Holcomb). For most of September, Occupy coverage was too scant to even register in the Pew rankings (Holcomb).

Those few members of the mainstream media who covered Occupy during its first few weeks often depicted the movement as incomprehensible or insignificant. I already
discussed one good example of such analysis: Gina Bellafante’s derisive September 23rd article (discussed in Chapter Two). Bellafante’s second piece on Occupy, “Every Action Produces an Overreaction,” published October 2nd, is telling as well. She argues there that nothing remarkable was going on at Zuccotti. “The most threatening thing happening at this disorganized affair,” she wrote, was that people were “reading Orwell.” The article goes on to critique the NYPD for being Occupy’s best public relations tool because police stoked public outrage with “pepper spray on docile protesters” and by positioning helicopters “above a harmless occupation.” She advises the NYPD to “remember that when people are carted away by law enforcement merely for carrying cameras — as one seemed to be in another well-circulated image — more cameras are sure to come.”

Then, when videos of Deputy Inspector Bologna pepper-spraying Kaylee Dedrick (also discussed in Chapter Two) went viral, editors at The New York Daily News (NYDN) strenuously defended Police Commissioner Ray Kelly and Mayor Bloomberg in an October 7th editorial, suggesting that no one, in fact, had engaged in cruelty toward the demonstrators. NYDN editors used their platform to downplay violence committed by the police and dismiss the outrage expressed by Occupy participants and their supporters. The editorial, titled “Occupy Wall Street protesters need to start living in the real world,” downplayed police assaults, referring to “squirts” of pepper-spray and “less-than-bruising whacks of a nightstick on a backpack.” The Daily News editors recommended that “the whiners” of Occupy do a Google search for “videos of Chicago Police outside the 1968

Bellafante’s advice to the NYPD recognizes a principle elaborated by James Scott in Domination and the Arts of Resistance: when unauthorized discourse bursts to the surface, violent rebukes by the authorities can work in favor of the dissidents if they make the authorities look cruel or if they indicate that the dissidents are on to something (227).
Democratic Convention” to see what harsh police violence looks like compared to the comparatively mild police action toward Occupy.

One month later, in yet another editorial show of support for the NYPD, Daily News editors again ridiculed Occupy demonstrators as “tots throwing tantrums,” thereby reinforcing an important meme that Bellafante and others had been circulating throughout October – that Occupy participants are spoiled juveniles “protesting for protest’s sake.” A few more examples:

- A letter from a doctoral candidate in political theory at Boston University, specially featured in the October 15th edition of NYT, said, “Having a large mass of unidentified people discussing their concerns is a great blog or Tumblr technique, but in the practical political arena it just lends itself to confusion and the lack of a clear message.” The writer expressed concern that “without a clear agenda, leaders or policy goals, Occupy Wall Street will be a fruitless exercise with only a sense of nostalgia (or annoyance) for those involved” (Bohanan).

- On October 20th, when Nathan Hubbard, the CEO of Ticketmaster, appeared as a guest on “The B.S. Report with Bill Simmons,” Hubbard referred in passing to an “OWS perspective.” Simmons interjected facetiously, "They have a perspective? I thought they just wanted to occupy stuff."

- In a podcast released on November 1st, Gordon Deal, host of The Wall Street Journal This Morning, closed his account of Occupy’s purportedly self-indulgent activism by saying with concerned voice, "It kind of reminds you of that whole ‘entitled’ thing this generation is often accused of."

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28 As of 2012, the B.S. Report averaged 600,000 downloads per episode (Greenfeld).
On November 17th, while giving a talk to a crowd that included billionaire media mogul Rupert Murdoch, Mayor Bloomberg received laughs for quoting a supposed chant from an Occupy rally: "We don't know what we want! But we want it now!" (Taylor) Bloomberg had made the same joke on November 8th during an MSNBC interview (Cohn).

In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, Scott noted how dominant groups prefer in some instances to downplay or ignore opposition: “When it suits them, the dominant may elect to ignore a symbolic challenge, pretend they did not hear it or see it, or perhaps define the challenger as deranged, thus depriving his act of the significance it would otherwise have” (205). The next aggressive step of the dominant after simply ignoring opposition, is to refer to it via ridicule, mis-representation, or dismissal, which mainstream media apparently reached by Occupy’s completing its first month of encampment.

Although leading factors in the media misrepresented Occupy as insignificant, immature, and/or lacking a comprehensible message, one might say that Occupy followed the media discipline of staying on message. That is, it focused its critique on the great inequality of wealth and power in the United States. Activists had gathered to protest issues quite meaningful to mainstream Americans in the wake of the Wall Street meltdown of 2008: corporate influence in American politics, a federal response to financial crisis that was heavily biased toward the rich, war profiteering, declining access to education, loss of homes, etc. Despite the widely-circulated “protesting for protest’s sake” meme of the major media against Occupy, there is evidence that members of the American public were not having a difficult time deciphering Occupy’s message.
• According to one poll released by Quinnipiac University on October 17th, 72% of New Yorkers understood the demonstrators’ views “fairly well” or “very well” (Oresmus).

• By mid-November, according to a nationwide poll conducted by Public Policy Polling, 78% of people understood the goals of Occupy well enough to offer an opinion on them (although only 33% said that they supported those goals).

Widespread understanding of Occupy could only emerge because the movement had broken through sequestration to reach a mass audience. A *National Journal* poll of Americans, conducted between October 13th and October 16th, found that 65 percent of respondent said they “heard ‘a lot’ or ‘some’ about the rallies, while 35 percent had heard or seen ‘not too much’ or ‘nothing at all’ about the demonstrations” (Cooper). The same *National Journal* poll indicated that 68 percent of Americans favored a “surtax on millionaires as a way to pay for federal efforts to create jobs,” (Cooper) a sign that people believe the wealthy have gotten off easy during the financial meltdown and that the government should redistribute resources away from the wealthy and toward “the 99%.”

Allowing Occupy to continue was thus a political risk for the status quo, risking further mass dissemination of critiques about economic inequality that elites preferred to marginalize. Systematic, sustained, and widely-circulated critiques of wealth inequality and economic injustice had been tacitly marginalized in American political discourse but Occupy managed to drag them to the forefront. Although the movement had been launched by a relatively small group of anarchists and other dissidents, it attracted and consolidated various popular and unauthorized discourses against the status quo. In
addition, because Occupy had secured the moral high ground by circulating evidence of police violence and bank heartlessness, some decent members of the status quo had been able to desert the elite and stand on Occupy’s side.

**Plan B: Undermining Opposition Once They’ve Reached Mass Circulation**

By mid-October, with Occupy’s discourse circulating heavily through major and self-made media, defining the movement merely as “unclear” or “insignificant” would not suffice to silence or discredit it. Re-marginalizing this robust opposition to Wall Street required a new strategy. As it turned out, major media campaigned to redefine Occupy in the public mind as dangerous fringe elements, or, in the words of *New York Post* columnist Steve Cuozo, “anarchists, vagrants, and zanies” driven “by a nihilist impulse to disrupt life and commerce” (Cuozo).

![Figure 38: At Zuccotti Park, demonstrators displayed *The New York Post*’s latest smears against them. On this single page of *The Post*, Occupy is painted as burden upon taxpayers, violent revolutionaries, and anti-Semitic. Up top, City Councilman Vincent Ignizio argues that the protests are harmful to City coffers and therefore taxpayers too. On the bottom left, right-wing pundit Charles Gasparino misrepresents Occupy as Marxist traitors. On the bottom right, Alana Goodman, claims that Kalle Lasn, early progenitor of Occupy, is anti-Jewish.](image-url)
Although planning for such a rhetorical offensive might be expected to occur behind the scenes – an offstage “infrapolitics of the dominant,” as Scott would call it – Republican Congressman Peter King, who represents the 2nd District of New York, went public on October 7th with a plea for the media to undermine Occupy’s credibility. “It’s really important for us not to give any legitimacy to these people in the streets,” King said on Laura Ingraham’s right-wing radio show, adding, “I remember what happened in the 1960s when the left-wing took to the streets and somehow the media glorified them and it ended up shaping policy. We can’t allow that to happen” (Miller).

Rep. King’s proposal to undermine the legitimacy of Occupy resembles schemes that authorities often deploy, according to Scott, in order to keep opposition groups from gaining “the status in public discourse they seek” (206). In unequal societies, Scott has found, control of mass communications enables elites to “assimilate the opposition’s acts to a category that minimizes its political challenge to the state” (206). Scott points out, for example, that “there is little doubt that it often serves elites to label revolutionaries as bandits, dissidents as mentally deranged, opponents as traitors” (206). Authorities can thereby sustain their claim to rule with reason and moderation on behalf of public order against the disorderly.

In the context of United States history, authorities have often read and represented gatherings of ordinary people as “mobs” or “rabble,” whose dispersal would be a service to the general population, a service to everyone’s quality of life (Chomsky 24-25). For example, in 1967, J. Edgar Hoover, FBI Director at the time, made the following remarks about civil rights demonstrations:
Riots and anarchic demonstrations which leave devastation and ruin in their wake place a tremendous burden on law enforcement officers. Already hampered by undermanned staffs, police authorities are forced to marshal their strength in expected trouble spots and leave other neighborhoods without proper police protection. In fact, enforcement officers spend much of their time protecting and guarding marchers and petitioners. However, police officials as well as the general public are becoming weary of persons who, for self-aggrandizement and monetary gain, exploit noble causes and agitate peaceful groups into rioting mobs.

*The New York Post* circulated similar narratives about Occupy, portraying the movement as a drag on ordinary people’s quality of life. For instance, on October 16th, City Councilman Vincent Ignizio published an op-ed in *The Post* arguing that “we cannot keep footing the bill for these protests,” which he said cost the city millions of dollars in overtime for police officers and which might force cancellation of a new police-academy class scheduled for January.

Ignizio’s commentary represented just a single shot at Occupy in a volley of discharges from *NYP*. On the day after Occupy was evicted from Zuccotti on November 15th, reporters for *The Post* admitted, “*The Post* has led the charge to shut down the Occupation – after exposing how a large number of the park’s OWS inhabitants were freeloaders and ex-cons who were not supporting the cause. The paper called on city leaders to return the space to its intended purpose” (Gregorian, Sutherland, and Fredericks). *The Post’s* editorial board added a statement in the same issue, boasting that their reporting had played a big role, saying “only *The Post* noted that the encampment
had been hijacked by criminals, vagrants and other loons.” In the same celebratory piece, titled “Well Played, Mr. Mayor,” *NYP* editors wrote,

Zuccotti Park was looking spiffy yesterday afternoon — and for that, kudos to Mayor Bloomberg and Police Commissioner Ray Kelly. And, if we may be so immodest, to this newspaper, as well. To Bloomberg, for taking the decision to fumigate the park. To Kelly, for the flawless execution of the operation. And to us — for relentless reporting on what the Occupy Wall Street demonstration had devolved into over the past two months, and for repeatedly demanding that it be shut down. Thank you, Mr. Mayor, for listening.

*The Post’s* contribution to the negative depiction of Occupy included front-page color spreads referring to the Zuccotti demonstrators as a looming threat to New York City’s dignity (November 3rd) and as “animals” that have “gone wild” (November 4th). Legitimate problems in the camp – including sanitation and drug use29 – were exaggerated in order to create a negative public narrative in pictures and words. Articles within *The Post* suggested, among other things, that demonstrators advocated bloody revolution (Saul et al.), that they were led by an anti-Semite (Goodman), and that the park “smelled like an open sewer” (Cartwright and Fredericks).

For Todd Gitlin, a professor of journalism and sociology at Columbia who helped to organize the first national antiwar protests in the 1960s (Stelter), the expressions of disgust by commentators in *The New York Post* were to be expected. Gitlin wrote in a *New York Times* op-ed:

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If some aspects of the Occupy Wall Street protest feel predictable — the drum circles, the signs, including “Tax Wall Street Transactions” and “End the FED” — so does the right-wing response. Is it any surprise that Fox News and its allied bloggers consider the protesters “deluded” and “dirty smelly hippies”?

Perhaps more surprising were the smears against Occupy that emerged from seemingly non-partisan news outlets. For example, a free newspaper called Metro New York ran a front page article on October 23rd which claimed incorrectly that core Occupy activists were hoarding hundreds of thousands of donations and using the money for luxuries like “gourmet dinners, down blankets, and flat-screen televisions” (Epstein).

Financial elites had advocates on the streets of Manhattan as well as the airwaves and newspapers. Ever since 2009, when I began walking in the vicinity of Wall Street regularly, I had often crossed paths with a rather captivating guide (Figure 39) who offers walking tours of the Financial District to tourists. I only caught bits and pieces of his spiel as he and his groups walked past me, but we crossed paths often enough for me to appreciate the guide’s deep knowledge about the history and architecture of New York’s Financial District.

After the occupation of Zuccotti began, I lingered longer in the vicinity of his tours, to hear what he would say about Occupy. He told tourists, mostly Europeans who had paid a fifty-dollar charge for the tour, that Occupy was to blame for the erection of metal barriers up and down Wall Street and Broad Street. The legitimately bothersome barriers helped the tour guide advance The Post’s narrative that Occupy was "driven

30 The police had placed the barriers around the Stock Exchange to keep activists from gathering near the target of their protest (Figure 9). The barriers had the unintended consequence of forcing street vendors from their usual spots on the cobblestoned tourist destination. The barriers also annoyed some pedestrians in the area, such as myself. On the first day that barriers forced me to alter my walking route,
mainly by a nihilist impulse to disrupt life and commerce" (Cuozo). Since Occupy purportedly forced the erection of the barriers, the guide was able to finger demonstrators for ruining the “nice symbiotic relationship” between Wall Street tourists and Wall Street vendors. The guide told tourists:

The street you see here used to be lined with vendors but now there’s only barriers. It’s the little guys – guys like me – that Occupy hurts. Please, people. Occupy isn’t hurting the big guys. Get real. The big guys in Midtown don’t even notice. People don’t realize that very little actual trading happens on the floor of the stock exchange. It’ll be nothing more than a museum in a few years.

According to the guide, the street vendors had been able to make a few bucks and tourists had been able to get tasty snacks and neat souvenirs – until Occupy ruined it for everybody. According to my field notes from October 21st, one tourist asked why the huge American flag wasn’t affixed to the face of NYSE, as he had seen in pictures. The guide speculated the flag had been taken down over fears that Occupy activists would throw eggs at it.

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before I really knew what Occupy was, I huffed and puffed about the extra 5 minutes it would take me to get from the Staten Island Ferry Terminal to the A-C-E subway station on Fulton Street.
A Hidden Transcript in the U.S.

As I have tried to show, the mainstream media first tried to downplay the significance of Occupy by ignoring it or representing it as “protest for protest’s sake.” But that couldn’t keep Occupy’s message from gaining mass circulation, so members of the mass media tried a second technique – undermining Occupy’s legitimacy by depicting the group as unworthy of association. However, both of these tactics yielded limited success in re-marginalizing Occupy. By mid-November, public support for Occupy had weakened but not drastically. One poll from Gallup (Figure 40) indicated that support for Occupy barely changed between mid-October (their supposed peak popularity) and mid-November (when the public had supposedly soured on Occupy). (Saad)
Further evidence that Occupy’s support had not declined drastically comes from a Pew Research Center poll, released December 15, 2011. It indicated that, a month after the eviction from Zuccotti, favorability toward Occupy remained high. The poll found that 44% supported the Occupy Wall Street movement while 35% opposed it. (“Section 2: Occupy Wall Street and Inequality”)

It appeared the discursive, “soft” means for re-marginalizing Occupy could not, on its own, push Occupy’s discourse back to obscurity. Dominant elites, led by Mayor Bloomberg, had to either 1) come up with a third approach or 2) simply tolerate the anti-corporate opposition group that had developed a functioning delivery system for mass circulation. Bloomberg chose the former. After “plan A” (ignoring) and “plan B” (undermining) failed, authorities – with Bloomberg leading the way – turned to a third strategy, police violence.

Before addressing the implementation of “plan C,” which culminated in the violent, middle-of-night clearance of Zuccotti Park by police in riot gear while journalists
were forcibly detained far from the action, I first try to explain, here, why the discursive means for re-marginalizing Occupy were ineffective. In order to do so, I need to elaborate Scott’s concept of “the hidden transcript.” My proposition of an *American* hidden transcript helps to explain why authorities had to turn to violent means to silence Occupy.

Scott’s *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* proposes three categories of discourse typically functioning in society as a result of unequal power relations: 1) the public transcript, 2) the hidden transcript of the dominated, and 3) the hidden transcript of the dominant.

The *public transcript* refers to discourse that typically occurs “onstage” in public or in official encounters closely regulated by authorities, where the powerless or subordinate are most vulnerable so they risk as little as possible, avoid deviating from stock or scripted responses, and take few liberties with language. If we took the public transcript of formal encounters at face value, Scott points out, we might conclude that subordinated groups are willing partners in their subordination. However, Scott proposes that ordinary people play along with official transcript only to ensure safety in the face of power and to secure a living from powerful. Out of prudence, fear, and desire to curry favor, subordinates shape their public performances to appeal to the expectations of the powerful. The public transcript, then, is a script enforced by the dominant on the dominated.

What happens when commentators deviate from this “public transcript”? For one thing, their texts or utterances are denied mass circulation to prevent mass reception of dissident narratives. For another, they are often vilified or ridiculed. As the conservative pundit Ben Stein wrote in 2006, whenever people try to raise issues of economic
inequality, they are “accused of fomenting class warfare.” And, as David Harvey explains, “To depict something as ‘class war’ is...to place it beyond the pale of serious consideration – even to be branded a fool, if not seditious” (161). The straightjacket on acceptable political discourse remained in place even after 2006, despite the fact that respected billionaire Warren Buffett had spoken out about a class war underway by the super-rich against all other classes in America. “There’s class warfare, all right,” Buffett said, “but it’s my class, the rich class, that’s making war, and we’re winning” (Thaler).

Given that discourse about economic inequality is marginalized, rationalized, or explained away as “lack of education,” or “bad parenting,” or “failure to work hard,” can we assume that ordinary Americans, surrounded by such representations, consent to vast economic inequality? No, that assertion is one that Scott’s framework corrects. For Scott, the great mass of ordinary people are indeed dominated and even exploited, but they are not beguiled into false consciousness by dominant narratives about why the world is the way it is. Onstage, in the public sphere where the dominant have the power to reward and punish behavior, the dominated play by the rules. Offstage, out of the gaze and earshot of authorities, they produce and are produced by a counter-discourse which denies the claims of the dominant. Thus, they are not fooled into self-denying ideology nor do they need to be intellectually led forward by vanguard revolutionaries. Domination, then, generates a hegemonic public transcript as well as an offstage discourse, a hidden transcript of what cannot be spoken onstage in the gaze or presence of authorities.

In safe sequestered settings, according to Scott, the dispossessed compose a culture of their own based in satire against the powerful, cynicism about government and authority, informal cooperation, solidarity, and a shared if unarticulated critique of
domination. Even though subordinated people don't ordinarily dare to openly confront authorities to contest the boundaries of the public transcript, their social existence outside the immediate purview of authority is saturated with grousing and scheming to beat the system – not robotic consent to inequality or “false consciousness.”

In contrast to Antonio Gramsci, Scott denies that subordinate classes are "socialized into accepting a view of their interests as propagated from above” (Scott 19-20). For Gramsci, hegemony shapes the onstage and offstage discourses and choices of the subordinated, and therefore the extant discourses of working-class movements must be re-shaped by critical reflection led by organic intellectuals of the left, embedded into communities, factories, schools, organizations, unions, associations, etc. These organic opposition leaders are special agents not regular participants in a hidden offstage transcript among other participants but rather intellectuals who shape discontent into deepened understanding of why things are troubled and what to do about it. These organic intellectuals offer articulated critique while also evoking and developing such critique from those they work among. (“The Intellectuals”)

To Scott, leadership is spontaneous and even accidental. He proposes that members of the oppressed become charismatic leaders by bursting into the public transcript with the widely-shared grievances of a furtive hidden transcript. That hidden transcript to Scott is always alive and circulating, just not within earshot of the dominant. Unlike Gramsci, Scott proposes that oppositional discourse is always already being elaborated in the hidden transcript and does not require the special agency of embedded organic intellectuals.
The speed and breadth of Occupy’s spread offers empirical evidence for Scott’s thesis, namely the existence of an offstage hidden transcript. Two months after Occupy participants planted themselves in Zuccotti Park, “echo” occupations had popped up in 70 cities and 600 communities across the United States. Scott would argue that, when an outburst catches fire like this, it derives from offstage elaborations invading the public stage from their private margins. Viewed within Scott’s framework, Occupy’s message was received and relayed with such enthusiasm because it spoke from and spoke to discourses already circulating offstage among ordinary Americans and marginalized opposition groups in response to control by the financial elite. Further, the corporate-controlled media’s discursive mobilization against this oppositional movement yielded only limited success because Occupy’s “revulsion in the face of a perverse economy” was shared “by many respectable people: unemployed, not yet unemployed, shakily employed and plain disgusted” (Gitlin, “Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party”).

Still, there is a compelling dimension to Gramsci's thesis here as well. Those who moved first and most to occupy public spaces were already-radicalized left oppositionists, not exactly ordinary folks from the neighborhood. Zuccotti was initially seized and then operated by radical cadres. In a sense then, Occupy is a synthetic moment of failed rebellion, in which discourses marginalized to offstage inconsequence were thrust onto the public square by radicals whose pronouncements spoke to, from, and with the grievances and aspirations of the disposessed millions who knew they were being ripped off by “big finance” but still did not join the uprising en masse.
The Root of Occupy’s Charisma

The profound popular anger at Wall Street for the crash of 2008 is more or less the common theme that unites what is in essence a very diverse 99%. As I discussed in Chapter One, Wall Street firms’ insatiable appetite for paper assets to bet on – any mortgages or securities no matter how they had been bundled – fueled a boom in subprime lending between 2003 and 2007. When those bets turned sour, financial firms found themselves with trillions of dollars of toxic assets on their books. They asked for and received trillions of dollars in taxpayer bailouts. In the end, after years of reaping outrageous salaries and bonuses while inflating the housing bubble (and playing a very dangerous game with “credit-default swaps” and “collateralized debt obligations”), the financial sector was largely shielded from suffering when the bubble burst (Cassidy). For those who needed proof, this scenario displayed that American-style capitalism allows profits to be privately hoarded in good times while losses are publicly socialized in bad times.

Aaron Ross Sorkin, financial columnist for NYT, recommended that his readers “consider the protests a delayed reaction to the financial crisis that has now reached a fever pitch as the public’s lust for scalp has gone unfulfilled.” What was happening in this “delay” between the financial crisis in 2008 and the demonstrations in 2011?
Based on the speed with which Occupy inserted economic inequality into the national conversation, it seems that a rich hidden transcript had been co-produced between 2008 and 2011 by ordinary Americans in concert with marginalized opposition groups. Occupy, then, didn’t invent the anger at Wall Street but forced it onstage. Alexander Stille, Professor of International Journalism at Columbia, wrote, in a *NYT* op-ed published on October 19th, 2011:

In an era in which money translates into political power, there is a growing feeling, on both left and right, that special interests have their way in Washington. There is growing anger, from the Tea Party to Occupy Wall Street, that the current system is stacked against ordinary citizens.
Polls support Stille’s contentions. In February 2011, for example, seven months before the occupation of Zuccotti Park, a Gallup poll found that 67% of Americans were dissatisfied with “the size and influence of major corporations in America today” (Saad). A New York Times/CBS poll taken in October 2011 found two-thirds of Americans want wealth to be distributed more equally while the same amount object to tax cuts for corporations (Zeleny and Thee-Brenan). According to Stille, Americans had been holding their noses on the topic of inequality when it appeared to be accompanied by mobility but recent studies of economic mobility have found that it is getting harder and harder for American to jump from one economic class to another. One study by Markus Jantti, an economist at a Swedish university, found that “42 percent of American men raised in the bottom fifth of incomes stay there as adults,” indicating “a level of persistent disadvantage much higher than in Denmark (25 percent) and Britain (30 percent)” (DeParle).

Widely-held dissatisfaction with corporate power and economic inequality tends to be filtered out of the public transcript by the corporate media (Collins 10), so when Occupy brought this grievance to the belly of financial power, I contend that much of the
larger American public felt that Occupy was speaking for them. Occupy marched to the center of high finance, denounced the nation’s financial elite, and encouraged others to do the same. According to Scott, this is what charismatic leadership does – it acts against and for things that speak to the orientations of masses of people who can’t or won’t act on those orientations publicly. As a movement, Occupy put into words and actions “the essence of thousands upon thousands of bitter jokes, resentments, and outrage accumulated around kitchen tables, in small groups, in beer halls, and among close companions,” which James Scott described as the amplifying effect of the hidden or off-stage transcript bursting into the public or onstage transcript (226).

A popular sentiment came out of the margins to publicly denounce high finance and, as charismatic moments often do, others were encouraged to come out of the margins as well. By giving a public voice to the previously voiceless and by protesting against powerful finance which has so far only been coddled, Occupy assumed a charismatic posture, perhaps even becoming national heroes not only because their tactics were bold and clever, but because they made the first public declaration of what so many had been saying offstage without the amplification of mass media or mass movements.

Beyond the 2008 bailouts, there was plenty for Americans to be outraged about. Two very costly and unnecessary wars had been waged during the Bush and Obama Administrations, with 4,500 American dead in Iraq alone (Nagl), while taxes on the rich were dropped to the lowest they’ve been in 80 years (Krugman, “Long Run History…”). Social mobility has been on the decline (DeParle), untempered, it seems, by the one-trillion in student-loan debt that remains outstanding (Mitchell and Jackson-Randall). The bank bailouts were just the final straw, then, after the decades of class war that billionaire
Warren Buffett claims has been conducted by the rich against the rest of America (Folbre). In October 2011, the Congressional Budget Office reported statistics supporting Buffet’s claims that the rich are winning the class war:

- Between 1979 and 2007, the income of people in the top 1 percent grew by 275 percent, while the incomes of the poor and middle-class rose 18 percent and 40 percent, respectively.
- The richest 1% own 35% of nation's wealth and control $20 trillion.
- The top 1 percent of Americans possesses more wealth than the bottom 90 percent.
- While the minimum wage has dropped since 1990, CEO pay has increased 300%. (Pear)

Further, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, American corporations sit on $4.75 trillion in cash (Livingston), a fact that makes it even harder for Americans to swallow newly-imposed austerity measures.

According to economists Paul Krugman and Robin Wells, the “distorting effect” of inequality yielded both the 2008 crisis and a response to the crisis that was heavily biased toward the rich. In a piece titled “The Widening Gyre: Inequality, Polarization, and the Crisis,” the husband-wife team write, “We’re not going to have a good macroeconomic policy again unless inequality, and its distorting effect on policy debate, can be curbed.” The Great Recession of 2008 demanded a Keynesian solution, they wrote, “but Keynesian ideas had been driven out of the national discourse, in large part because they were politically inconvenient for the increasingly empowered 1 percent.”

Letters to newspaper editors published during Occupy’s 59-day stay at Zuccotti Park
suggest that Krugman’s deflated belief in democratic debate is shared by many Americans:

- Jessica Bonanno, a music teacher from Orlando, Florida, wrote the NYT that her attempts to join with others and fight against inequality have been fruitless because “no matter how many letters to Congress we wrote, we could never compete with the indomitable influence of the 1 percent.”

- Robert Clark from Oklahoma City wrote in to The Oklahoman, “While The Oklahoman wants us to believe that OWS is about turning the whole country over to the government, OWS is really about wresting control of the government out of the hands of a few corporations that have the money to pay politicians to implement policies that boost their own coffers whether or not they create jobs or help the economy.”

- Philip Winn told NYT editors that “poverty, failed schools, and crumbling families and communities…are the direct result of a society in which the elite have rigged our government and economy in a successful campaign to preserve their wealth and power at any expense.”

- Adam Devlin wrote to the editors of Downtown Express, a small newspaper for residents of Lower Manhattan, to say, "The issue that Occupy takes with the idea of 'legitimate means' is that whatever you classify those as, they are no longer an option to a majority of citizens. Corporate interests and political in-crowds have essentially formed a closed loop of politicians and the wealthy."
• Grant Petty of Fitchburg, Wisconsin, also writing to NYT, said, “We want our elected officials to belong to us, not to wealthy campaign donors. We want economic and regulatory policies to be determined by what’s good for the country, not by those who can spend the most obscene quantities of cash to buy the politicians and the media.”

In addition to writing to newspapers, many angry Americans joined Occupy in Lower Manhattan and used Zuccotti as a stage to voice their own anger. On September 25th, in Zuccotti Park, for example, I witnessed a student journalist from Fordham University interviewing a man in Nebraska Cornhusker gear (Figure 43). He told the young journalist that he had been recently been laid off from a job at Verizon in Los Angeles. He had come to Zuccotti after finding out that Verizon hadn’t paid any taxes that year and that they had outsourced thousands of jobs. He said, “What do I want from 1%? I want them to give some of that money back.”
Figure 43: A journalism student from Fordham University interviews a man who had been laid off by Verizon.

Figure 44: On a pay phone next to Zuccotti Park, an admirer of Occupy Wall Street thanked the demonstrators.
Brooklyn-born Peter Gavaghen also joined up with Occupy because of anger at the greed of large corporations (Buckley). Gavaghen, “who is grizzled and lanky and working on 2 World Trade Center” (Buckley), first went to Zuccotti with his 12-year-old daughter for her school project about current events, but then found himself returning. His own father had saved $250,000 to pay for his childrens’ college tuition, but it was lost when Lehman Brothers collapsed, and the government bailout of banks continued to bother him. He felt “like a victim” for the first time in his life (Buckley).

Several media pundits recognized that Occupy’s discourse served as an amplifier for already existing dissent. Paul Gilding, author of a climate-change polemic *The Great Disruption*, told Thomas Friedman,

> Our system of economic growth, of ineffective democracy, of overloading planet earth — our system — is eating itself alive. Occupy Wall Street is like the kid in the fairy story saying what everyone knows but is afraid to say: the emperor has no clothes. The system is broken. (Friedman)

Charles Blow explained the attraction of participating in the eruption of the autonomous discourse from below, writing:

> They are all drawn together by the excitement of animating a muscle that many thought had atrophied: demonstration and disobedience in the name of equality. This has energized two groups who are notoriously apathetic and lacking in civic engagement — the young and the poor — and has done so outside the existing architectures of power and politics.

Gail Collins, Blow’s colleague at *NYT*, chimed in as well, writing, “We all complain, but they showed up.”
Gilding, Blow, and Collins address a feeling that Scott discusses in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* – the vicarious pleasure that people feel when others speak the hidden transcript openly, thereby breaching “the etiquette of proper relations, breaking the apparently calm surface of silence and consent” (8). For Scott, understanding charismatic acts like the occupation of Zuccotti requires appreciation of how the gesture represents a shared hidden or marginalized transcript that no one had yet had the capacity or the courage to declare in the teeth of power. To the extent that Occupy skillfully improvised when they got on stage, there was also extensive elaboration of an alternative elaborate vision of society that had been carefully prepared offstage, including in the low-scale organized margins, where counter-hegemonic media, culture, and education flourish mostly out of sight.

The notion of a hidden transcript helps to explain why the discursive tools of mass communications were ineffective in re-marginlizing Occupy and why the NYPD had to block all street and subway access to Zuccotti on the attack night of November 15th to prevent public supporters off-site from fortifying the park as they had on October 15th (an event I will address at the very end of this chapter). Occupy was speaking not just for themselves but for tens of millions of Americans outraged by inequality structured by and for the 1% who have special access to organized wealth, power, and communication.

Occupy spoke for “people before profits,” and also demonstrated those egalitarian values in its illegal camps. The encampment embodied Occupy’s socialist argument that it is not banks but regular people who are too important to fail. The kitchen served free food. The comfort station distributed free cigarettes, clothing, shoes, and toiletries. The medical tent provided no cigarettes but health services to anyone who needed them. The
library made books available to all. The community altar welcomed all devotional items and all religious traditions. The park's wifi required no password. Important policy decisions were debated publicly and often endlessly, not behind closed doors. Teach-ins were free and open to all, in contrast to developments at The City University of New York, where tuition had been rising at a record pace and where working-class black and Latino enrollment was declining at the elite branches.

Occupy’s ferocious circulation of anti-Wall Street discourse from its unauthorized staging area uniquely consolidated, propelled, and projected popular opposition to a financial and political system that was at its most vulnerable moment, a financial collapse revealing how the status quo socializes risk and privatizes profits, that leaves some bankers wealthy and many citizens indebted.

**Plan C: Turning to the Monopoly on Violence**

Until opposition to the status quo consolidates and mobilizes en masse, authorities in a constitutional republic are free to keep their police violence limited. However, when “soft,” discursive means are not working for the status quo, elites resort to their monopoly on the instruments of violence. The “soft” means of organizing consent from the public were weak in 2011 because of the economic collapse precipitated by Wall Street, followed by the trillion-dollar federal bailout, as I discussed in my preceding description of an American hidden transcript. In the aftermath of financial collapse, government policy favored the elite and restored them to wealth and power; millions of disgusting Americans were available as an audience for radical rhetoric emanating from Occupy. Economic collapse compelled authorities to turn to instruments of hard persuasion – arrests, harassments, beatings, random grabs, and finally the orchestrated
assault on November 15th,
an operation that saw the media censored and sequestered, at
night, in the dark, with no filmed images, and all subway stations and street access
blocked. No visual documentation was permitted of the most violent police action of this
whole 60-day episode.

Figure 45: The Zuccotti encampment after Occupiers were violently cleared by the NYPD after which the tents
and stations were trashed and the area cleaned by the Sanitation Department after midnight on November 15th.

Yes, it’s misleading to suggest that “hard means” of re-marginalizing Occupy
only began on November 15th. When Occupy showed up on Wall Street in September
2011, the City first erected barricades around Chase Plaza, the planned destination, and
offered a “free-speech zone” on the steps of Federal Hall, within shouting distance of the
New York Stock Exchange, but activists chose to take over Zuccotti instead. The
authorized free-speech zone – a “freedom cage” in the parlance of Occupy – was
distinguished from the surrounding blocks, which NYPD designated “soft zones.” “Soft
“soft zones” are seemingly normal public streets with no barriers restricting pedestrian entry to them, but First Amendment rights are not fully recognized there. (Gillham, Edwards, and Noakes 95-96)

The designation of official “soft zones” and “free speech zones” indicates how officials exert control over where and when public gatherings and public marches can happen and how space can be used. Officials systematically deny unofficial groups from occupying prominent social sites that would serve as staging grounds for circulation of counter-hegemonic discourse. If an individual displays protest behaviors while located within a soft zone, he or she can be arrested or physically removed to an authorized free speech zone. Enforcement in the soft zones of Lower Manhattan in late 2011 meant that police arrested activists for using chalk on sidewalks, wearing masks, taking pictures, using a bullhorn, and displaying a sign. One demonstrator named Isaac insisted on his right to march forward on a public sidewalk while police were trying to divert him into a free-speech corridor. Isaac, unwilling to swallow the city’s framework of soft zones and free speech zones, argued that he had the right to continue walking and talking on a public street, but his argument didn’t help him and he was arrested. (“Four arrests on Wednesday”)

Before clearing Zuccotti Park on November 15th, police used the logic of soft-zones to incapacitate lesser-profile assembly spaces in the blocks surrounding Zuccotti. When authorities determined that a given spot was a habitual, convenient meeting place for Occupy working groups and caucuses, metal barriers blocking access to the spot soon were erected. For example, a red sculpture at the southeast corner of the Zuccotti (known as "The Red Thing" in Occupy parlance and "Joie de Vivre" officially) and the red cube
across the street from Zuccotti had become landmarks for Occupiers to find each other. People who wanted to locate activists with similar concerns piped up during a General Assembly to say, "Meet me at ‘The Red Cube’ after the GA if you want to talk about (x,y, or z)." However, on October 11th, as one WG representative began to announce a "Red Cube" meeting, a fellow GA participant interrupted to report that, the day before, her WG had been shooed away from that space by corporate security guards ("NYCGA Minutes 10/11/2011"). A few days later, metal barriers were erected to surround both the red cube and the red sculpture to enforce the ban on meetings there (Figure 46).

![Image](image.jpg)

**Figure 46:** After "the red cube" had become a gathering space for Occupy's Working Groups, police erected barriers denying access. When Working Groups tried to meet here, security guards forced them to disperse.

Erecting barriers around a site was one way for corporate owners to shut down unauthorized use of public space. Another method was creating a new set of rules that restrict activism.
• Occupations in Denver and Nashville were hit with curfews. When demonstrators broke the curfews, they were beaten and arrested. (Johnson)

• In Zuccotti Park, Brookfield Properties created a new set of rules prohibiting all the things Occupy had been doing: erect tents, sleep in the park, use amplification, etc.

• Owners of another privately-owned public park (PoP) in Lower Manhattan, at 3 William Street, took such rule-changing to a somewhat comedic level. After realizing their PoP was being used occasionally for General Assemblies, managers of 3 William developed and posted an expansive list of rules to make sure no political assembly could ever occur there. One of the twelve new bullet-pointed rules said simply “No Noise.”

As private owners of public spaces placed new controls on physical spaces, NYPD took steps to control or confiscate the technology that Occupy used to circulate discourse online. On the rainy morning of September 20th, for example, the NYPD confiscated tarps being used to protect Occupy’s media equipment from the rain. When a demonstrator sat down on the tarp to protect the transmissions that were going out around the country, he was arrested. (Easilydistr)

Authorities also targeted video cameras that documented clashes and bullhorns that augmented speech (Easilydistr). Occupy managed to turn the confiscation of the bullhorns into a short-term advantage by developing the People’s Mic, which amplifies the voice of the speaker without the need for amplification equipment as the people gathered around the speaker repeat in unison what the speaker says. In the short-run, the People’s Mic benefitted Occupy because its innovation drew favorable press coverage as
well as visitors to the park who wanted to see the novel approach in action. In the long-
run, though, reliance on the People’s Mic made large meetings excessively long and
drove participants away. When hundreds of people showed up to GA, each phrase of a
proposal had to be repeated two or three times before moving on to the next phrase.
Although the novelty of this amplifying technology was exciting for newcomers and
tourists, the tedium of repeating every phrase two or three times drove away many
regular participants who preferred to participate in smaller working groups.

Beyond confiscating amplification tools, authorities in New York City deployed
techniques for heightening the exasperation of those gathered in unauthorized spaces. The
use of provocateurs, for example, can make a social space not only scary, but also tedious
and demoralizing. Provocateurs disturb proceedings, grind them to a halt, bait activists
into violence, and have the potential to turn movements in directions that few people
would want to be associated with.

According to my field notes from November 7th, a provocateur entered Zuccotti
from the west side and immediately begin to pick fights with any black occupiers he
could find. One of the targeted activists called for a “mic check” and asked fellow
demonstrators to help him come up with a solution to this problem. “This guy shows up
every day trying to stir shit up,” he said. “Somebody is going to end up in jail if we don’t
deal with this collectively.” His appeal was not received well. Around me, I heard people
muttering to themselves, “It’s not illegal to be a jerk” and, “We can’t expel people from a
public park.” After getting the cold shoulder from his fellow demonstrators, he finished
by asking, “is this a social movement or not?”

One Occupy participant (who claimed to be 18 but later turned out to be 34) did
not initially seem like a provocateur but, as the weeks went by, she almost single-handedly incapacitated the entire New York chapter of Occupy by conducting violent outbursts at nearly every General Assembly, and at nearly every WG meeting that she sat in on. The long meetings about how to deal with one disruptive participant distracted attention from planning for actions and discussion of other concerns that had brought citizens to the movement. “Nan,” who had been sent out to handle media requests in the first few weeks of the occupation, understood the bureaucracy of Occupy inside and out, and used her knowledge to exploit every loophole. For example, she created and received funding for working groups in which she was the only member and she overused the block maneuver when proposals were offered by people she had been feuding with.

By November, Occupy, a movement with purported global resonance, was spending a large portion of its meetings trying to decide how to deal with outbursts from this one woman. Purists within the movement, even those who seriously disliked Nan, rejected any attempts to exclude anyone no matter how disruptive, but, finally, Nan’s attempt to smash someone over the head with a chair was caught on tape, so the movement consensed around banning her for breaking with principles of non-violence. On the day after she was banned, Big Journalism, the right-wing blog run by Andrew Breitbart ran a story reveling in the delicious irony of an opposition movement allegedly banning someone for dissent. “Once again,” Big Journalism’s Lee Stranahan wrote, “the actions of the official #Occupy movement appear to be just as corrupt and petty as the society they supposedly eschew.”

**Surveillance and Intimidation**

Once Occupy chose Zuccotti as its central space for horizontal discourse,
surveillance of that space escalated heavily. Surveillance included a 25-foot mobile “watch tower” with a 2-person observation booth equipped with darkened windows, flood lights, video cameras, a permanent closed-circuit television camera positioned near the park, and a mobile surveillance vehicle with a camera affixed to a 20-foot boom (Gillham, Edwards, and Noakes). There were also the eyes and ears of uniformed police surrounding the park and The Technical Assistance Response Unit (TARU) who were responsible for gathering intelligence and documenting protester/police interactions.

NYPD “special ops” officers hovered near Occupy working group meetings at 60 Wall Street. During the WG meetings that I sat in on at 60 Wall Street (the indoor courtyard where most working groups held meetings), uniformed “special ops” officers routinely approached to investigate materials lying on the table. The mischievous smile on one officer’s face as he poked his head into a meeting suggested to me that his intention was not to gather information but to intimidate and/or provoke.

One Occupy demonstrator made the cover of *The Economist* with his clever allusion to surveillance’s silencing capacity (Figure 47). He taped a twenty-dollar bill over his mouth and held a sign that read, “I could lose my job 4 having a voice” (Whitwell). Demonstrators on the edges of Zuccotti Park tried to assuage such participation-anxiety for passersby who were interested in getting involved. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, I witnessed a middle-aged jogger interrupt his morning run to speak with a demonstrator holding a sign that read “Wall Street Steals Our Homes, Jobs, and Future.” The jogger was drawn to the movement, he said, and he wanted to help out, but feared that an arrest would hurt his career and/or family. The woman holding the sign encouraged him to join in on the demonstrating, mentioning that activists were rarely
arrested unless they planned to be (for strategic reasons).

Her claim is mostly true, but the jogger did have reason to be concerned. On some occasions, police plunged into lines of protestors and arrested anyone within reach. Other times, they snared protestors walking away from marches who had become isolated from the crowd. In addition to the arrests, NYPD engaged in random acts of violence. Kemberly Richardson, a reporter for Eyewitness News on Channel 7 WABC-TV, reported that, as she covered a day full of Occupy actions on November 17th, “It didn’t matter who you were, police were acting with force and taking down anyone who was in their way” (Huff) Even if a citizen isn’t punished for participating in demonstrations, the sure knowledge that she could be looms over her participation.

Figure 47: An Occupy demonstrator made the cover of The Economist with his clever allusion to the silencing power of surveillance.

Eviction

In an official letter to Police Commissioner Ray Kelly, Brookfield’s Chief
Executive, Richard B. Clark, asked for Occupy to be evicted from Zuccotti Park because sleeping protesters were blocking walkways “at all hours of the day and night.” He added that there had been neighborhood complaints of “lewdness, groping, drinking and drug use” and that the company had not been able to perform its daily maintenance. “We fully support the rights of free speech and assembly,” Clark wrote, “but the matter in which the protesters are occupying the park violates the law, violates the rules of the park, deprives the community of its rights of quiet enjoyment to the park, and creates health and public safety issues that need to be addressed immediately.” (Hartacollis)

In the aftermath of the eviction, I overheard a different story about the need to evict from a manager of the Brookfield Security team. According to my field notes from December 5th, the manager was speaking with a middle-aged couple who had stopped to discuss the occupation. Instead of “banging drums all day,” the couple lamented, the demonstrators should have organized a jobs fair. The park manager agreed, adding, “Instead of looking for jobs, they are talking about free food, free health care, free this, free that. That is socialism and it doesn’t work.”

“Unfortunately, that is the direction our country seems to be going in,” the husband replied.

“Well, not in my house,” the manager promised.

This Brookfield manager’s promise not to allow socialist discourse to dominate Zuccotti Park offers support for a claim made by David Harvey, who writes that “The Party of Wall Street” uses “the monopoly on violence that all sovereign states claim to exclude the public from much of what passes for public space and to harass, put under surveillance, and if necessary criminalize and incarcerate all those who do not broadly
accede to their dictates” (160). In the United States, the public transcript dictates that pro-business narratives are the ones that circulate, but Occupy had used Zuccotti Park as a platform to disrupt the public transcript from below.

After soft means for re-marginalizing Occupy failed, Mayor Bloomberg turned to violence in order to retake control of Zuccotti Park. The first attempt was on October 14th – Mayor Bloomberg had moved to clear the camp but the Mayor and the police had telegraphed their plans, allowing the opposition to prepare for what seemed like a daylight raid, with journalists attending. The attempt failed, thwarted by 1) mass support for the camp expressed in many calls and emails to the Mayor from liberal politicians and others, 2) the onsite civil disobedience of Jesse Jackson who linked arms in the park with occupiers when a police attack was rumored, and 3) the many hundreds who came downtown to physically defend the encampment (Barbaro and Taylor). In a NYT report, Michael Barbaro and Kate Taylor wrote, “By 6 a.m., just before City Hall announced the cleanup was canceled, the crowd had grown to more than a thousand, their numbers swelled by Internet pleas for reinforcements.” The idea of a violent battle between the police and 1000 Occupy participants didn’t seem like a good idea to many powerful politicians in New York. Barbaro and Taylor added that

Behind the scenes, interviews suggested, the change in course was fueled by an intensifying sense of alarm within city government, shared even among some of those who work for Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, that sending scores of police officers into the park would set off an ugly, public showdown that might damage the reputation of the city as well as its mayor. Clearing Zuccotti Park required that
the city win the image wars, and the October 14th attempt was not equipped to do so.

However, Mayor Bloomberg learned his lesson well. On November 15th, the NYPD won the final battle of the park by totally controlling the visual images and press reporting. Police and Sanitation destroyed the encampment in the middle of the night, with all news media quarantined and no live coverage permitted. As Al Baker and Joseph Goldstein wrote in the *NYT*, “There could be no repeat of episodes in recent weeks, like the pepper-spraying of protesters, that violated department rules and created a firestorm of public sympathy for the squatters.” Reporters in the park with press passes were forced to leave and restricted to a “free-press zone” (Gillham, Edwards, and Noakes) where they were unable to witness or collect video on the confrontation.

According to Police Department Spokesperson Browne, the creation of the free-press zone was for the journalist’s own safety, comparing the perimeter for the press to perimeters created around crime scenes and calamitous events. Mayor Bloomberg said that the media was kept away “to prevent a situation from getting worse and to protect members of the press.” But several journalists and journalism groups spoke out against the police tactics.

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31 Bloomberg may have learned as well from the experience of Spanish authorities in dealing with the Indignados. On May 27th, 2011, the Barcelona police failed in their attempt to remove demonstrators from an occupied plaza in the middle of the night and many people were injured. Ernesto Castenada reports that, in response to police brutality, “the support amongst different social groups in Barcelona increased. People who had not taken the time to stop by the plaza and inform themselves, who were opposed or ambivalent about the Indignados, felt themselves some indignation after seeing the videos of police aggression to unarmed peaceful city dwellers” (316).
• The New York Press Club said in a statement that “the brash manner in which officers ordered reporters off the streets and then made them back off until the actions of the police were almost invisible is outrageous.” (Stelter and Baker)

• Andrew Katz, who was writing for The Brooklyn Ink, said that the police “wouldn’t let us get anywhere near Zuccotti.” (Stelter and Baker)

• The Managing Editor for DNAInfo.com, Michael Ventura, said that one of his journalists was “doing his job and was arrested for that.” (Stelter and Baker)

• Lindsey Christ, a reporter for NY1, a local cable news channel, said that, as the police approached the park, they did not distinguish between protesters and members of the press. “Those 20 minutes were some of the scariest of my life,” she said, adding that police officers took a New York Post reporter standing near her and “threw him in a choke-hold.” (Stelter and Baker)

• A writer for The Village Voice told a police officer, “I’m press!” to which the officer responded, “Not tonight.” (Stelter and Baker)

If these writers had been able to witness the police attack, they would have seen that a massive force of police in riot gear descended unannounced after midnight, backed up by sanitation crews dumping the mountain of debris left in the wake of the police sweep. Police arrested over 200 people, including a few journalists. Officers in riot gear beat campers with batons, tore apart their built environment, littered the floor with their books, tents, medical supplies, food, religious artifacts, and personal property.
The operation started right after midnight, when police trucks took positions along Zuccotti Park’s perimeter. Officers set up a perimeter with a one-block radius in order to keep supporters away – supporters had been streaming into the area when word of the police action spread via Twitter – and they arrested 28 people who tried to bust through. At 1 a.m., police turned on the klieg lights and loudspeakers; officers spread leaflets ordering demonstrators to leave. Those who did not leave by 1:45 a.m. were dragged out. (Baker and Goldstein)

Sanitation workers followed, picking up any belongings left behind. It took 150 sanitation workers from all five boroughs to haul out 26 truckloads of clothes, tents, musical instruments, books, sleeping bags, and electronics (Gregorian, Sutherland, and Fredericks). At 3:30 a.m., the last group of demonstrators locked arms in the Occupy Kitchen, refusing to let go of the park. Two demonstrators chained themselves to trees. Police beat this core group with batons in order to get them to delink, and then arrested them. By 4:15 a.m., the park was clear. (Baker and Goldstein)

After the police power of the state erased the material base of anti-corporate opposition, Occupy was left with no physical center to develop and display alternatives to the market system. Demonstrators were reduced to far less effective strategies than occupying physical space, forced to rally for a few hours and disperse, or march a few blocks and disperse. These strict limits on protest effectively ended the self-evolving, self-recreating village camp. Without a fixed and charismatic operational base, they were forced to make their arguments with speeches at rallies which had no home base, words unattached to an evolving, unauthorized alternative camp. Reduced to verbal or printed utterances, Occupy lost its charismatic appeal, partly because Occupy had previously
refused to offer itemized demands or an easily digestible agenda. Their message was easily garbled and distorted by the mainstream media but the camp had spoken for itself, an embodiment of opposition to the market system. Without such an embodiment centering oppositional ideas, the public pulled back support and participation. In the months after the destruction, the movement’s national profile declined steadily, as did material support from donors.

By January 3rd, 2012, when the Occupy General Assembly finally achieved consensus around a specific demand – a Constitutional amendment to end corporate personhood – the public had largely stopped paying attention. By the one-year anniversary of the occupation, Occupy’s horizontal decision-making bodies had long since stopped meeting, their website was no longer interactive, and they had still not settled into a central replacement camp. However, despite little or no media attention, Occupy activists continued with “pop-up” one-day occupations in public parks around the city, with protests against home foreclosure, and with weekly marches on Wall Street. Their focus on economic inequality has smartly shifted to a focus on debt, whether it be student debt, consumer debt, or the debt that small nations owe to the World Bank. Off-stage now, activists still oppose economic inequality, but, without mass circulation of their discourse, they are no longer positioned in a way that would allow them to contribute to “social (re)construction” (Fairclough).

On the day after the Zuccotti encampment was destroyed, Mayor Bloomberg issued an official statement that Occupy’s encampment was “an intolerable situation” and declaring that “inaction was not an option” (Halbfinger and Barbaro). Bloomberg ostensibly referred to problems with safety and sanitation in the park, but my analysis
suggests that the violent eviction of Occupy was intolerable to the City primarily for reasons having nothing to do with public health: Occupy’s oppositional discourse had reached mass circulation and mass legitimacy and the soft means for marginalizing the movement were very weak because of the 2008 bank bailouts which were heavily biased toward the rich.

Figure 48: After November 15th, barriers kept demonstrators from re-establishing their encampment.
Occupy Wall Street Photo Album

In the U.S., oppositional groups thrive in the margins, but rarely reach mass circulation. One of the reasons that Occupy reached such wide circulation was that it held a permanent encampment in the heart of Lower Manhattan. In their open-air public space, Occupy participants asserted oppositional sentiments, radical social values, anti-market ideas, and even revenge fantasies which derailed Wall Street financiers and the Mayor’s Office to stop them.
Goals: Activists gathered at Zuccotti Park to protest corporate greed (right), police brutality, and deep inequality (bottom right), among other things. One suggestion for "healing America" was to tax Wall Street (bottom left).

Heal America
Tax Wall Street
National Nurses United

Signs of Opposition: Thousands of people walking past the park could view signs calling Verizon "the poster child of corporate greed" because it "pays zero taxes" and "outsources middle class jobs overseas." Another sign, not shown here, listed the damage done by U.S. wars since 9/11: more than 6,500 American soldiers have died, 950,000 civilians abroad have lost lives, and $1 trillion has been spent. Such statistics likely prompted display of the sign on the bottom right: "We the People Say U.S. Military Out of Everywhere: Out of Afghanistan Now." On the bottom left, the sign reading "Students Make Banks Rich" criticizes the system of financial aid in the U.S. which benefits banks at the expense of students from families with modest incomes. Such egalitarian materials could not reach such a large audience before the occupation of Zuccotti created a mass disruption in the status quo.
Anger at Wall Street: Occupy tapped into widespread disgust regarding corporate influence. The widespread anger at Wall Street for the crash of 2008 is more or less the common theme that unites what is in essence a very diverse 99%. Wall Street firms, including Goldman Sachs, developed an insatiable appetite for mortgages to bet on—any mortgages, no matter how they had been manufactured. This fueled a boom in subprime lending between 2003 and 2007. When the bets turned sour, financial firms found themselves with millions of dollars worth of toxic assets on their books. In the end, after years of reaping outrageous salaries and bonuses while inflating the housing bubble, the financial sector was largely shielded from suffering when the bubble burst. For those who needed proof, this scenario displayed that American-style capitalism allows profits to be privatized but liabilities are publicly socialized in bad times.

Tourists: Tourists wandering Lower Manhattan snapped countless photos of Zuccotti Park, its inhabitants, and signs on display, thereby augmenting Occupy's ability to bypass the mainstream media and gain wider circulation. Just in case they weren't planning to already, demonstrators asked tourists to upload their photos to Facebook. Ideally, tourists from the heartland or from overseas would circulate these photos of Occupy within their own social networks. On the edges of the park, Occupy's Welcome Station workers were expected to ease newcomers into the park, especially those passersby who appeared to be "dipping their toes in the water" to see how it feels.
**Spectacles:** Occupy demonstrators were successful because they installed a spectacle on public space. Musical performances, press conferences with novel intellectuals like Cornell West and Christ Hedges (bottom right), and even weddings (bottom left) attracted attention of spectators, adults and children alike. Occupy demonstrators strove to accommodate kids in particular by providing fascinating props and pageantry on Halloween (right), by adding a children’s section in the Occupy Library, by discouraging each other from cursing when kids were around, and by improving walking lanes in the park.

**EVENTS SCHEDULE:** Updated daily, this chalkboard informed visitors about workshops and teach-ins happening. On October 19th, the chalkboard listed an immigrant training session and a teach-in about credit unions (right). On October 27th, a discussion called “Human Rights not Corporate Rights” was listed (bottom right). On November 5th, a meeting for the Nonviolent Communication WG was listed (bottom left).
**Working Groups:** For those who wanted to become more deeply involved in the operations of Occupy, working groups such as the Environmental Solidarity WG (right) met regularly at 60 Wall Street (bottom left). Former diplomat Carne Ross led the Alternative Banking WG (bottom right).

**Interacting with Media:** As these photos suggest, reporters from mainstream news outlets descended on the park in droves starting in the first week of October. During that week, coverage of Occupy jumped to 7 percent of the nation’s collective news coverage (Holcomb). Occupy’s share of the national news jumped to 18 percent in the second week of October before leveling out at around 5 percent.
Tension with Conservative Media Outlet: The New York Post’s contribution to the negative depiction of Occupy included a front-page color spread referring to the Zuccotti demonstrators as a looming threat to New York City’s dignity and as “animals” that have “gone wild” (right). Articles within The Post suggested, among other things, that demonstrators advocated bloody revolution, that they were led by an anti-Semite, and that the park “smelled like an open sewer.”

ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS: Since mainstream channels did not usually treat Occupy’s message favorably, Occupy developed its own channels for circulating discourse. In order to exert control over the representations of Occupy, photographs of Occupiers (above) were staged and distributed in print and online. Occupy’s most famous print tool for circulation was the Occupied Wall Street Journal (left), a hand-distributed print organ that riffed off The Wall Street Journal but disseminated news and opinion from the point of view of the protesters. The idea for the OWSJ came about because, according to editor Arun Gupta, “we didn’t think there would be much in the way of coverage of the event, so we thought it was important that there be a media outlet that reflected what was under way” (Gupta).
UNIONS: The presence of union members among the Occupy demonstrators at Zuccotti Park was mutually beneficial. Occupy benefited as a movement because support from unions greatly increased its credibility. Unions looked to Occupy as a way to energize their approach and latched up with them at times.

Echo Occupation: After Occupy reached mass circulation, 750 echo occupations popped up in places like Maine, Birmingham, and Peru.
Exile: After the police power of the state erased the material base of anti-corporate opposition, Occupy was left with no physical center to develop and display alternatives to the market system. Demonstrators were forced to rally for a few hours and disperse or march a few blocks and disperse. These were very different material conditions in comparison to a self-evolving, self-reinforcing village camp. Without a fixed and charismatic operational base, they were forced to make their arguments with words unattached to an incitement alternative camp.
Chapter 4: Conclusion

In the 59 days of Zuccotti’s General Assembly, specific calls for concrete, economic reform were repeatedly rejected by a powerful bloc – associated with Occupy's "anarchist strain" (Hoffman). Those sympathetic to this bloc felt that specific demands might jeopardize relationships with oppositional groups who fundamentally disagree with that demand. Further, many demonstrators suggested that they should not rest until leaders addressed all the demands of the 99 percent. According to the Occupy FAQ, (online at www.nycga.net/resources/faq):

We are not simply asking for an end to the war (we have already done that). We are not simply asking for equal rights for one group or another (we have already done that). We are not asking for respect for the earth and its remaining resources (we have already done that). We are not calling for changes to existing labor laws, or trade agreements (we have already done that). We are not even calling for an overhaul of the Securities and Exchange Commission or the Federal Reserve, or an end to corporate personhood. We are calling for all these things and more!

Instead of issuing demands which would be legible and meaningful to masses of ordinary Americans and selecting articulate, diverse leaders, Occupy demonstrators, in their effort to gain public attention, created camps in public parks near the center of power, without permits, in defiance of the governing authorities. They temporarily redefined the spaces they inhabited and, in doing so, challenged the political discourse of public space in urban areas while holding off the official control and impacts of these spaces.

“If you want to know what we want,” Occupy participants suggested, “just look at what we are doing” (Ramsay). Inside the occupied spaces, demonstrators aspired to
"model the kind of society in which everyone has a right to live" (Occupy FAQ); they constructed a basic micro-society consisting of a General Assembly to facilitate decision-making through direct democracy, “horizontalism,” and free services like sleeping space, food, first-aid health care, library books, internet access, and education to people without regard to how much anyone can afford to pay. They exhibited a primitive form of socialism which modeled a society of sharing rather than one of profiteering. In its tent city format, the public space also became carnivalesque, which added to its appeal, bringing in many tourists to see the spectacular transformation of a once-corporate park.

In the United States, unauthorized squatting or unapproved occupying are not part of legal or constitutional rights of protest; permitted protest or allowable ways of speaking up within the system’s approved channels do not include unlicensed settlement on public or private space. However, participants in Occupy and supporters of Occupy justified the unorthodox approach by arguing that traditional methods of speaking out no longer work because they have been drowned out by messaging systems of the financial elite. The major media have become so aggressively monopolized and tilted to the demands of the market system in the years leading up to Occupy that the power of money has drowned out all voices not backed by the business community. On November 2nd, 2011, in a letter to The New York Times, Jessica Bonanno, a music teacher and supporter of Occupy from Orlando, asserted that she and her peers have attempted for years to use accepted, authorized channels in their fight against inequality but all such inside attempts have been fruitless. “No matter how many letters to Congress we wrote," she said, "we could never compete with the indomitable influence of the 1 percent.” Her letter argues
that playing by the rules and using the system’s channels to redress grievances were not working, justifying the radical step of occupying Zuccotti.

Occupy’s turn to extra-legal seizure of public space relate to a theory of middle-class dissociation put forward by David Graeber in *The Democracy Project* (2012). Graeber suggests there is a growing feeling among Americans that the institutional structures of society are not really there to help us – or worse, that the surrounding structures are “dark and inimical forces” (xxi). As that feeling of vulnerability and alienation grows among Americans, according to Graeber, the middle class necessarily shrinks because the sense that one is middle-class, for Graeber, cannot be separated from the sense that “everyday institutions like police, education, health clinics, and credit providers are basically on one’s side” (xxi). It follows, then, that the morale or allegiance of the middle class has been decimated by the financialization of capitalism. Schools, banks, mass media, health care, energy policies, transportation issues, foreign policy, the food chain, the police and so on must cater first to the needs of the rich, “which sometimes requires that they scam ordinary people” (xxii), and then down the ladder to the other subordinated classes. In 1999, for example, the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act allowed closely-regulated commercial banks to become largely-unregulated investment banks, one key factor leading to the crash of 2008. Such collusion between government and financial institutions has resulted in a larger and larger proportion of citizens – 1 of every 7 Americans is being pursued by a debt collection agency – falling deeper and deeper into debt (xxii). Debt undermines hope for advancement and buries optimism for a good life in the status quo. When optimism collapses with the economy, the middle-class feels under siege.
Americans Dubious about Occupy Methods

Despite the trends identified by Graeber, Occupy’s unapproved channels for speaking out made many Americans uncomfortable. As I explained in Chapter 3, Occupy garnered healthy approval rating when polls started coming out in October, and continued to receive support two months later, in December 2011, even though they had, by that time, lost their camps. One October poll conducted by Public Policy Polling suggested that 35% of Americans supported Occupy's goals while 36% did not, and 29% did not know enough to say. Two months later, in December, a Pew poll found that 44% of respondents supported the Occupy movement compared to the 35% who said they opposed it.

However, when polling organizations like Gallup and Pew asked about Occupy’s methods – “the way in which the protests are being conducted” – respondents expressed significantly less support for Occupy. Although some demoralized Americans like Jessica Bonanno supported Occupy's unorthodox methods, and although polling on Occupy's message and goals was generally favorable, the American public was ambivalent about the demonstrators’ methods.

- A Gallup poll, conducted between Oct. 15 and October 16th, found that only 25 percent of Americans approved of "the way the protests are being conducted," compared to 20 percent who disapproved. At this juncture, only weeks after the mainstream media began reporting on Occupy, 55% of respondents did not know enough to say.

- By November 19th and 20th, the percentage of people approved of Occupy’s methods dropped to 20%, according to Gallup, while 31% disapproved. 49% did not know enough to say.
In December, on the 7th through the 11th, Pew Research Center asked Americans whether they approved or disapprove of "the way the protests are being conducted." Only 29% said they approved while 49% said they disapproved.

Additionally, several sympathetic commentators – including Noam Chomsky, Matt Taibbi, and Slavoj Zizek – concluded that Occupy had clung too tightly to the tactic of occupying. Ostensible supporters in positions of authority, such as Boston Mayor Menino, unsurprisingly concluded that permitted tactics – choosing leaders, making demands, conducting marches with proper permits, delivering speeches, running for office – were called for because they would likely elicit more approval from the American public ("Hours after Raid").

In regard to the aforementioned polling numbers, however, it is important to emphasize the most glaring limitation in the polls by Pew, Gallup, and Public Policy Polling: the polling organizations, understandably so, only measured the attitudes of the American public. Language in Occupy’s “FAQ” indicates, however, that the demonstrators measured their success, not only based on approval ratings from the American public, but also by the degree to which the Occupy movement was strengthening connections between participants in "the workers’ rights movement, the women’s movement, the civil rights movement, the feminist and queer liberation movements, the environmental movement" (Occupy FAQ). These are movements that span the globe.

Although polls suggested that Americans did not broadly support Occupy’s methods, I contend that it is just as important to consider how diverse heterodox groups
around the world received Occupy’s methods. By creating an encampment close to a major center of power, Occupy participated in a shared blueprint for these heterodox groups, who constructed at least 750 "echo occupations" in October and November of 2011 ("Occupy Protests Around the World").

Occupy’s international inclinations rendered Occupy opaque to many Americans, according to social theorist Saskia Sassen. Sassen’s essay, "The Global Street: Making the Political," places Occupy's methods within a discursive space she calls "the global street," a space which she claims is rawer, less ritualized, and more action-oriented than “the classic European notion of a ritualized spaces for public activity, like the piazza and the boulevard.” She writes:

Street struggles and demonstrations are part of our global modernity. The uprisings in the Arab world, the daily neighborhood protests in China’s major cities, Latin America’s piqueteros and poor people demonstrating with pots and pans—all are vehicles for making social and political claims. We can add to these the very familiar anti-gentrification struggles and demonstrations against police brutality in US cities during the 1980s and in cities worldwide in the 1990s and continuing. Most recently, the over 100,000 people marching in Tel Aviv—a first for this city—not to bring down the government, but to ask for access to housing and jobs; part of the demonstration is Tel Aviv’s tent city, housing mostly impoverished middle-class citizens. The Indignados in Spain have been demonstrating peacefully in Madrid and Barcelona for jobs and social services; they have now become a national movement with people from throughout Spain gathering to go on a very long march to EU headquarters in Brussels. These are
also the claims of the 600,000 who went to the street in late August in several cities in Chile. These are among the diverse instances that together make me think of a concept that takes it beyond the empirics of each case—the global street.

Within Sassen’s framework of "the global street," I argue that the occupation of public space in Lower Manhattan represented a performance of an evolving, inherited, globalized language of protest. Through its performance, Occupy strengthened connections with potential partners – in Spain, San Paolo, Cairo, Tel Aviv, Tunis, Santiago, and elsewhere – who might emerge as partners in decades to come.

Occupy’s emphasis on strengthening connections is consistent with Ernesto Castenada’s assertion that Occupy explicitly modeled itself on the Spanish Indignados, who sought not only “economic and political justice and accountability” but also “horizontal links between individuals in similar conditions” (Castenada 313). Occupy’s approach to strengthening global connections also aligns well with advice from David Harvey, who recommended in Rebel Cities (2012) that Occupy “forge broad coalitions with…the alienated, the dissatisfied, and the discontented,” those who have been “plunged into immiseration by unemployment” as well as “students, immigrants, underemployed, immigrant domestic workers, restaurant workers who slave for almost nothing” (162).

Although Occupy's methods may have failed to integrate effectively with the American public, the 750 echo occupations indicate, first, that the urban precariat named by Harvey is indeed substantial and international, and second, that those same methods successfully forged connections with people around the world who are ready now to act
in militant opposition because they "feel the system created by the party of Wall Street is barbaric, unethical, morally wrong, and broken" (Harvey 162).

**Reverse Distinction**

Occupy's refusal to tailor its tactics to the “respectable” or “conventional protest” expectations of a large segment of the American public is congruent with the movement's practice of "reverse distinction," a “world-upside-down” ideology that recognizes prestige in people marked by fewer, rather than greater, traditional symbols of status. Reverse distinction is an inversion of Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of “distinction” – markers of status related to class, gender, race, height, body shape, wardrobe, educational levels, etc. Through distinction, individuals are unequally marked in society economically, culturally, and socially. Those with the markers of high positive distinction – great wealth, white skin, maleness, tallness, control of the legitimate language, stylish hair and dress, Ivy-league degrees, posh residential addresses – typically belong to the most affluent groups whose vast economic capital enables their privileged access to the markers which count the most. Those marked by low or negative distinction typically display lower-class incomes, homes, dress, accents, educations, along with what Bourdieu would designate as secondary markers like femaleness, dark skin, shortness, etc.

Occupy, by systematically “opening the floor” to speakers marked by low-status – women, people of color, people with accents or non-standard usage, etc. – consciously installed a “world-upside-down” protocol for rights to public address which explicitly attempt to democratize its civil deliberations. Protocols promoting reverse distinction represented a counter-hegemonic practice or systematic correction to the unequal
hierarchy always already in place whenever people interact. Occupy’s counter-practice to everyday distinction recognizes that discourse in society is always already hierarchical, structured to privilege some speakers of the legitimate language and to disempower other speakers, based on the typically unrecognized prior conditions of class, race, gender, physical ability, and nationality.

Occupy’s protocols aimed to actively over-privilege those who are systematically under-privileged. To accomplish this in practice, facilitators for the Occupy General Assembly often referred to a guideline known as “step up and step back,” which encouraged participants from traditionally privileged groups to leave space for minorities (by stepping back), while encouraging participants from traditionally marginalized groups to fill the voids (by stepping up). The principle was pointedly announced at the beginning of the General Assembly. Even at such a late moment of the Zuccotti occupation as day 44, it was phrased yet again as follows by a GA facilitator:

“If you feel you have been traditionally encouraged by society to speak up and have your voice heard, consider stepping back if what you have to say doesn’t need to be said. If you feel you have traditionally been discouraged by society from speaking, considering stepping up and saying what you would like to say.”

(“NYCGA Minutes 10/30/2011”)

To enforce this reverse rule for democratizing discourse, the facilitation team for general assemblies included a “stack taker” who intervened in the speaking order to ensure that “white men” (especially) did not automatically dominate the stage. The stack taker’s intervention sought what Occupy called a “progressive stack,” which prominently re-positioned minorities and others traditionally marginalized as speakers. On day five of
the occupation of Zuccotti, for example, a stack taker noticed that the list of upcoming speakers was mostly male so she moved a female up to the beginning of the queue (“NYCGA Minutes 9/21/2011”).

Other working groups, beyond the Facilitation WG, fostered “reverse distinction” as well. By offering coaching for people with soft voices, shyness, or social anxiety, Occupy’s Non-violent Communication WG lent aid to voices that might otherwise be drowned out (“NYCGA Minutes 10/4/2011”). Step-up/step-back, the progressive stack, and the promotion of soft-spoken people comprised an alternative democratizing rhetoric which Occupy deployed to counter the problem of aggressive, dominant, or selfish speakers who make it difficult for others to be heard. Stack-takers shuttled marginalized individuals to the front of the line to speak at GAs, and the Non-violent Communication WG specifically invested rhetorical training in them.

While proactively privileging marginalized speakers is an important process for oppositional democratic discourse, the principle of reverse distinction has a second consequence for alternative discourse: It applies to audience selection as well to speaker selection. Just as discourse habits in an unequal, hierarchical society are structured to privilege some speakers and disempower others, it is also structured to privilege some audiences over others (Kynard 12). Paralleling how some middle-class white men within Occupy presumed that they should speak often and with authority, some middle-class whites outside the movement presumed that their families and friends would naturally be the primary audience that demonstrators wanted to win over (Wright). Widely circulated polls that charted the feelings of the American public only reinforced such presumptions.
However, in an era when the ranks of middle-class America is arguably in decline (Graeber xxii) and as digital technologies foster stronger connections between disparate heterodox groups around the globe, oppositional movements must and do reconsider audience. Appealing primarily to the values of the American middle-class, hoping that that demographic will identify with and support the movement may not be the only legitimate way forward, especially if the middle-class lacks power, is shrinking, or is vastly outnumbered by the diverse, heterodox populace which David Harvey refers to as "the urban precariat." As I will explain in the concluding section of this dissertation below, much of Occupy’s discourse catered to the discursive norms and aesthetic rules of “the urban precariat,” as well as to the norms and rules of global capitalism’s “living dead” (Zizek), and to activists identified with Sassen's "global street."

**occupying and Occupying: discursive practices needing no explanation**

Occupy defied expectations by tailoring the movement’s communications in a way that would resonate with audiences not traditionally catered to, thus challenging the idea that “the keys to glory” (Kynard) are best accessed by catering to the discursive norms and aesthetic rules of white middle-class Americans. Occupy, in that sense, brought reverse distinction to bear not only on *speaker* selection – “who speaks first?” – but also on *audience* selection – “who are we addressing?”

As I conclude this chapter and this dissertation, I broaden Sassen’s “global street” to encompass an even wider array of oppositional rhetors worldwide. In doing so, I intentionally conflate 1) the “urban precariat” referred to by David Harvey, and 2) global capitalism’s “living dead” referred to by Slavoj Zizek. For Harvey, the “urban precariat” is a cross-class, cross-race, cross-gender, and cross-national formation that is
“fragmented and divided, multiple in its aims and needs, more often itinerant, disorganized and fluid rather than solidly implanted” (xiii). This mixed-identity class formation consists of insecure, often part-time, and disorganized low-paid labor which crucially perform the work of making and sustaining urban life (xiv). It contains recent limited-English immigrants who fill low-wage jobs in city restaurants and low-wage recent Phds who adjunct because they cannot find full-time faculty jobs. “How such disparate groups may become self-organized into a revolutionary force,” Harvey writes, “is the big political problem” (xiv).

Zizek similarly explores the potential for uniting those made vulnerable by global capitalism, a population that Zizek calls, not “urban precariat,” but instead the “living dead” of global capitalism, those rendered “useless and obsolete” in such far-flung places as the US, India, China, Japan, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, Western Europe, and Eastern Europe (156). Like Harvey’s urban precariat, global capitalism’s “living dead” are "disparate and speak different languages," but they are “not as few as may appear” (156). The greatest fear of the global elite, according to Zizek, is that these voices will start to “reverberate and reinforce each other in solidarity” (156). Such reverberation may lead to a “moment of irruption,” according to Harvey, when “disparate heterotopic groups suddenly see, if only for a fleeting moment, the possibilities of collective action to create something radically different” (xvii).

The urban precariat and the living dead inhabit the same social strata no matter what nation or language they speak. Capital has installed a singular class hierarchy in all nations and in this recent era, the financial wing of capital has taken over the global economy, depressing more people into the bottom ranks, creating a worldwide strata of
immiserated labor. This is what creates a common condition in far-apart nations. More so than holding common dialects or specific political causes or geographic proximity or ethnic singularity, I argue, disparate heterodox groups hold in common some of the same practices for creating and defending discursive spaces for the elaboration of dissident discourses. In order to sustain themselves, marginalized groups must develop techniques for clearing and defending spaces where they can elaborate heterodox views (Scott 120-134) because heterodox spaces are a prerequisite for the development of autonomous traditions existing outside the control of dominant elites (Nunley 14-15). For Sasken’s global street, Harvey’s urban precariat, and Zizek’s living dead, Occupy's primary tactic would have required no explanation because marginalized groups always struggle with dominant groups over how space is to be regulated, by whom, and in whose interests. The global street, then, encompasses groups that always already have no choice but to occupy.

My attempt to conceive of a global community of practice linked by shared discursive tactics derives in part from the overlapping visions of David Graeber and David Harvey. Both Graeber and Harvey argue that activists don’t need to start from scratch in the creation of a more equitable and free society. In Rebel Cities, Harvey maintains that spaces for the elaboration of heterodox views are already quite common – they simply come into being as members of the urban precariat go about their business (3). Similarly, in The Democracy Project, Graeber claims that countering the dominance of finance capital only requires that citizens expand (albeit exponentially) the "zones of freedom" that already exist (295).

By sharing and modifying the practices that they use to Occupy key spaces onstage in Saturnalian moments and occupy offshore spaces outside the gaze of the
authorities, disparate heterodox groups 1) increase their repertoire of discursive tactics and 2) strengthen the social links that connect them. Sharing practices, according to James Scott, is one of the best ways to strengthen social links: "Over time, modes of collective action become part and parcel of popular culture.” Scott adds that modes of collective action become a scenario “enacted by a large repertory company whose members know the basic plot and can step into the available roles” (151).

Each new scenario adds to the growing complexity of the global street, a complexity that need not be complicated, as Sidney Dobrin pointed out in a 2013 address to the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Evidence that simplicity can yield complexity come from two prominent features of Occupy, the People’s Mic and the 750 echo occupations, both of which were analog tools for amplification, and both of which relied on the simple rhetorical device of “repetition.” One can also look at the uprisings in Tunisia, which began when an unlicensed fruit peddler was routinely harassed and beaten by police in 2011; the uprisings in Brazil 2013, which began with protests over rise in bus fares; and uprisings in China 2013, which began over harassment of an unlicensed watermelon seller. Each of these apparently inconsequential moments ignited mass opposition, providing evidence for David Harvey’s claim that, when informal constellations gain complexity, “the spirit of protest and revolt” can “spread contagiously through urban networks in remarkable ways” (116). How those contagions will be harnessed by activist groups and suppressed by authorities is a great question for 21st-century study of rhetoric.
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