

ARIANA REINES, JACKIE WANG, LARA WEIBGEN

Occupy Wall Street was not a movement, much less a mass movement. For us, Occupy Wall Street was a mass.

It was a mass for Troy Davis, murdered the same week Zuccotti Park was occupied, but it was not only a mass for Troy Davis. It was a mass for every person killed in the attacks on the World Trade Center ten years and six days before the birth of Occupy, for every person who died or was killed in their name in Afghanistan and Iraq. It was even a mass for Saddam Hussein, dying a million ignoble deaths forever on YouTube—a complete horror notwithstanding his evil; a complicated horror. And it was also a local mass: for the artists who made beautiful dreams in the wreckage of Manhattan, for everyone who died of AIDS, everyone crack killed, everyone meth kills, a mass for our friends dead of suicide and drugs. It was a mass for all the dead New Yorks that have haunted us, the Harlems and Alphabet Cities and Tribecas and even, dare we say it, the Williamsburgs and Bushwicks of the mind. It was a mass for Amadou Diallo, Ousmane Zongo, Sean Bell, and so many others killed by the NYPD, for the homeless whose social death no rat-racer can totally ignore, for the shine of all the souls that have died to become, perversely but truly, part of the luster of the city. The poet Filip Marinovich said it first, and beautifully: Occupy Wall Street was a mass for the dead. And yet—although it was grief and outrage that brought us to Zuccotti or rather Liberty Park, it was so sweet to be there.

Cornel West said it and the People's Mic echoed him: there was a sweet spirit in that place. This is what Occupy meant to us: a prayer for the peace of the dead and a prayer to lay to rest everything in this world that kills us, that kills all of us. A prayer for the soul of every person this culture has murdered, locked up, raped, evicted, deported, enslaved, genocided, driven insane, brutalized, tortured, harassed, humiliated, ignored, forgotten, and allowed to die. A prayer for dead imaginations, for our own feeble relationship to reality, for the fact that so many of us were sure, when we first saw the burning towers, the planes crashing into them, that *it was a movie*. A prayer for the nights and days of the living dead of America, for the undead, the socially dead, the zombified, and for the parts of ourselves that still kneel to worship dead ideas, dead fuels, deadly state and military and corporate power.

The spirit of Occupy was sweet when it was sad and nothing had been named yet, when we came in our grief with our prayers and found thousands of others grieving and praying too. We came for the spirit and the poetry. But as soon as we tried to turn our mass into a movement, to give voice to what had brought us together, we realized how different our sorrows were, and how hard it would be for us to sustain the feeling that they were shared. For the sake of a forced and false



*Occupy Wall Street protester. October 1, 2011.
Photograph by Bob Lee.*

image of unity, “the 99%,” we were asked to set aside the specificity of our woundedness, to see our traumas—relating not only to financial desperation, but also to racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, classism, ableism, and on and on, all the violence and misery of this world—as part of a single overarching traumatic condition called Capitalism. But wounds, like art, are an index of what is irreducible about a life, and a theory of pain, no matter how sophisticated, can never say what a wound really is, how it lives on the body, what it does to the mind and the heart of the person on whom it lives. We came to Occupy because people were gathering, because they seemed as sick of this murderous, carceral world as we were, and because they seemed to want to change it; in short, because we wanted to find and build community. But the 99% was not a community; it was only an idea of community, like America and New York—a fantasy of easy togetherness that ignored the real and cruel differences it sought to contain. Many of us were tired of seeing our lives reduced to one meaningless abstraction after another, and as the hardships of organizing across rifts of experience and analysis became clear, Occupy began to come apart at the seams.

What was Occupy—both the mass and the myth of a consolidated anticapitalist movement—is over. Some of us have gone back to sleep, but capitalism is still in collapse; we don’t need to rewrite the hundred thousand manifestos that have already eloquently clamored for or diagnosed its end. The question now is not how to build an army to “fight capitalism,” but how best to use the gigantic energies that have been and are being released—in many directions, all over the world, and from deep within the belly of the planet—as the old order sputters and lurches into its twilight.

We don’t know whether we’ll live to see the other world, the beautiful world, the dreamed-of world, but we know that the only reason we’ve dedicated ourselves to art is because we’ve been dreaming of it, dreaming and dreaming our whole lives. And now for the first time it feels possible to dream in a way braver than art, more hopeful than art, bigger than art, more radical than art, more beautiful than all our castles in the sky. It feels possible at least to try. So trying is what we’re doing. Trying to dream more hopefully, bravely, and *concretely*, which means trying to find ways of making that aren’t just dreaming anymore. Writing, yes, but also talking to one another in new ways; and doing with our bodies the things we write and talk about believing in. Making community. Making plans. Making spaces of witnessing, intimate and embodied witnessing, spaces outside expectation, where we can bear witness to the irreducibly different ways in which this great pain named Capital wounds us. Making room within ourselves for different kinds of pain, allowing the pain of others to enter and change us, learning to struggle against their pain while at the same time rooting ourselves in the power of *knowing the source of the struggle within us*. Making, trying to make, practicing, trying to practice, beginning, trying to begin a politics of embodied encounter and collective struggle animated by love.

Capital makes a spectacle of suffering in order to normalize it, but its insis-

tence on the beauty and purity of martyrs crushed by an inexorable machine—a formulation derived from our Judeo-Christian inheritance—is a climate of mind that privileges death over life. We refuse this. Our belief in the normality and even the glory of misery—our urge to live fast and die young, like all beautiful radicals—is what has allowed us to reconcile ourselves to the existence of war and prisons and police and the limitation of our little joy to the little spaces where joy has felt possible: art and friendships. In this world ruled by Capital and structured by violence, we are not meant to feel joy. We're meant to be miserable, self-loathing, competitive, suicidal, and above all resigned, or else stupefied by the shallow pleasures of television, the sinkhole of the Internet, or the deeper but melancholy or cynical and contained pleasures of art. So joy itself is a kind of resistance—as many great revolutionaries, from Emma Goldman to Audre Lorde, have known. This is why we need to dance and write poetry and make art and live our lives as magically as we can, while at the same time recognizing that our little joy is a little miracle flaming in a pit of violence and deprivation, and that the kernels of sweetness we've felt and known will never flower until we set ourselves and everyone else free. So we have to radiate. We have to be a vitality that gives and gives by allowing ourselves to break open and breaking others open so that this world can be broken open too. Now that we've seen the horizon, we no longer have the right to flame out in the excesses of our own brilliance and misery, to die of drug overdoses, or even to lean into the pantheon of noble martyrs cut down by evil systems. Cointelpro targeted the “messianic figures” of Black Power for assassination, exile, and smear campaigns. This time we all have to be our own messiahs, and one another's; what we need is not the leaderlessness of Occupy, but an infinitude of leaders. From now on, the only possible beauty, the only possible joy, is in the struggle to liberate and empower ourselves and one another—materially, psychologically, permanently. From Fanon we learn that it is not visionaries who make revolutions, but the process of revolt that makes visionaries; and that consciousness develops in the course of struggle, when people start to feel that they are taking back their lives. Mainly we want to be encouraging. This is why we got together to write this. We are trying to be here for you, and here for each other, with our words. We are trying to be here for you, and here for each other, with our bodies. Whoever you are, wherever you may find yourself.

ARIANA REINES initiated the Opening of the Mouth, a laboratory for worship and dissent.
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*May Day demonstration in Union
Square, New York City. May 1, 2012.*