

# **The Rise and Transformation of the Occupy Wall Street Movement:**

**A social movement shaped by a multitude of shifting  
challenges and opportunities**

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## Acronyms

<b>ESWG</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>Environmental Solidarity Working Group</b>
<b>GJWG</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>Global Justice Working Group</b>
<b>ICTs</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>Information and Communication Technologies</b>
<b>TBL</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>Take Back the Land</b>
<b>NYABC</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>New Yorkers Against Budget Cuts</b>
<b>NYC</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>New York City</b>
<b>NYCGA</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>New York City General Assembly</b>
<b>NYPD</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>New York Police Department</b>
<b>OOH</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>Occupy Our Homes</b>
<b>OWS</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>Occupy Wall Street</b>
<b>USA</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>United States of America</b>
<b>WUNC</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>Worthiness, Unity, Numbers and Commitment</b>

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## Introduction

### The Year of the Protestor

According to *TIME Magazine*, the TIME's person of the year 2011 was the protestor (Stengel 2011). In 2011 people went on the streets to demand an end to corruption and repression in North-Africa, the Middle-East and Russia. At the same time people in Europe took the streets against austerity measures and the lack of democracy and accountability of their governments and the financial sector. Particularly Greece is witnessing popular uprisings since the beginning of the financial crisis in 2008, and Spain was confronted in 2011 with the rise of the *Indignados* (the outraged).

Although the United States of America (USA) witnessed widespread contention in Wisconsin in February, and saw local mobilization against budget cuts and unemployment, these campaigns of contention did not transform into sustainable social movements.<sup>1</sup> Until 17 September, when protestors, under the name Occupy Wall Street (OWS), took over a park in the financial district of New York City (NYC) with the purpose of a long term encampment. After initial low media coverage OWS came to the public's attention when images of police violence and arrests went viral on social media networks and forced the mainstream media to respond. Within a month the tactical performance of the occupation, the use of general assemblies and the framing of the 99% versus the 1% spread over America and the rest of the world (On 15 October) to hundreds of cities and towns. A new social movement was in the making.

### What Happened to Occupy Wall Street?

After 15 October the movement maintained intense media interest. This changed when the local governments in America started to evict protesters from the parks and squares they were occupying. One by one the occupations in America and the rest of the world disappeared from the scene. Some were cleared by the local authorities others were torn by internal conflict. With the loss of the occupations the movement vanished of the mainstream media radar and lost even more visibility. Where in most places of the world the Occupy movement fizzled out, the movement attempted to make a comeback in NYC. All resources and mobilization efforts were concentrated on 1 May 2012, also known as international workers day. However, the movement was not the same anymore, it had transformed. The occupations were gone, activists had left the movement, organizational structures had changed and new alliances had been made. It is precisely this change and transformation of the movement that requires further analysis and explanation. In order to understand the transformation

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<sup>1</sup> Definition of social movement: by social movements I mean sustained campaigns of claim making, in which the participants use an array of public performances as rallies and demonstrations to publically display their worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment, while drawing on the organizations, networks, traditions and solidarities that sustain these activities (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007:8).

of OWS certain questions have to be answered. The rapid growth of OWS as well as its rapid decline can only be understood by answering the questions of why and how social movements transform? And how this transformation specifically took place with Occupy Wall Street?

Explanations by popular media for the initial success and rise of the Arab Spring movements and OWS were linked to the use of social media and mobile phone technologies (Schillinger 2011; Beaumont 2011; Paul 2011; Economist 2011; Preston 2011a, 2011b; Waldrum 2011). Although one cannot deny that these technologies certainly played a role, like highlighting police violence, further analysis is needed to identify the real impact of these new information and communication technologies (ICTs). Can we explain the rise and transformation of OWS by solely looking at the application of new ICTs? Or are they just tools that are used in a wider social context?

To give answer to these questions I will provide a social-historical narrative of the Occupy Wall Street movement through five different phases of its existence, from the forming of the idea in June 2011 towards 1 May 2012. In these five different streams of contention I will focus on the story of modern day activism and social movement building in the USA and the challenges they are confronted with by using the case of the Occupy movement. The threefold goal of this research will be to (1) describe and explain the transformation of Occupy Wall Street, (2) to analyse the role of new information and communication technologies in this transformation and (3) to introduce new analytical concepts for describing and explaining social movements.

## Research Puzzle

In order to answer the above questions, achieve the goals of this research and to provide a clear structure for the social-historical narrative, I have developed the following research puzzle:

*How have the different processes of mobilization, framing and organization, of the Occupy Wall Street Movement in New York City, been transformed by the challenges and opportunities (police repression, media disinterest, international solidarity etc.) it faced throughout the different phases of its existence, from the diffusion of the original idea in June 2011, towards the call for a general strike on 1 May 2012? And what has the role of new Information and Communication Technologies been in overcoming these challenges or using these opportunities?*

For my research puzzle I have focused on the Occupy Wall Street Movement in NYC, the place where the movement was launched and where its presence has been one of the strongest throughout its existence. I will describe and explain five different streams of contention in which I identified changes in the processes of the Occupy Wall Street Movement. These phases usually start or end with an important event, like the eviction of Zuccotti Park, which led to changes in different processes like mobilization and organization. Throughout these different streams of contention I will identify



challenges and opportunities, as police repression and media disinterest, in which mechanisms can be identified that led to changes in the different processes. An overall side-question will be to explain the role of ICTs in shaping these processes and the possibilities and limitations that ICTs offer to use opportunities or overcome social movement building challenges.

## Academic Knowledge Gap

To provide answers to my research questions and accomplish the research goals I have used contentious politics and social movement theory. Particularly useful to answer my questions were the descriptive and explanatory concepts provided by Charles Tilly & Sidney Tarrow in their book *contentious politics* (2007). By using the concepts of contentious politics I was able to identify different processes and mechanisms within different streams of contention that helped to describe and explain the transformation and change in dynamics of the Occupy Wall Street Movement in NYC. Tilly & Tarrow mean by mechanisms “events that produce the same immediate effects over a wide range of circumstances,” which compound into processes, or “combinations and sequences of mechanisms that produce some specified outcome (2007:203).

While the use of mechanisms and processes helped me to analyse how the changes of OWS’s contentious action took place (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007:35), they failed to provide a clear answer on why these changes occurred in the first place. The main concept presented by Tilly & Tarrow to explain changes – next to mechanisms – is the concept of political opportunity structures (2007:49, 189). Yet the problem with this concept is – as the name implies – that it is focussed on opportunities and threats in the structural political context. These opportunities and threats usually arrive out of longer-term processes, such as the arrival of new allies in the political scene or the process democratization. To overcome this largely political, structural and long-term focus I will introduce new analytical concepts that have the purpose to overcome the focus on the structural political context in analysing the transformation of social movements. These new analytical concepts focus on process instead of structures and create more space for analysing shorter term changes during streams of contention. I will introduce these concepts in the paragraphs below and explain how they will help in filling in this knowledge gap.

## Analytical Framework

### Process Transformation

During my social-historical narrative the focus will be on three inter-related processes that have been transformed throughout the life-cycle of OWS. I have derived these processes from the observation of McAdam, McCarthy and Zald’s edited book that there are three main factors that help to explain social movements’ emergence, development and outcome (McAdam et al. 1996). They called these

three factors mobilizing structures, opportunity structures and framing processes. I have decided to change these factors to three processes that are more suitable to the analysis of the transformation of social movements, and to denounce the idea that transformation largely arrives out of structures instead of process.

Furthermore, I had three reasons to leave political opportunity structures out of these transformative processes. First of all, as explained above, political opportunity structures are principally useful in analysing opportunities and threats deriving from long-term changes in the political context. Second, political opportunity structures are more helpful in a comparative analysis of different social movement or occupy camps to explain the difference in contentious action. And third, I will still use the concept of political opportunity structures, but my focus will be mainly on one of the six properties of a regime that facilitate political opportunity structures. This mechanism will be “the extent to which the regime represses or facilitates collective claim making (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007:57),”

Also, I have decided to make an independent process out of the organizational structures, which were seen as a just a part of the mobilization structures in the book of McAdam, McCarthy & Zald (1996:3). Since the book was published in 1996, social movements have changed. Forms of organization have become more important, flexible and transformative than the time the book of was published. Therefore, based on this judgment and my empirical observations in the field I have decided to take organizational processes as one of the three processes next to framing and mobilization that shaped the OWS movement. These three processes are all broad concepts and hard to explain in one single definition. They consist of smaller and related mechanisms, processes and concepts and are at times highly interrelated to each other. Therefore I will start by giving three broad definitions of the three processes and go more deeply into the concepts during my narrative.

Broadly, mobilization can be defined as how people at a given point in time are not making contentious claims, start to do so, thereby enhancing the resources available to a political actor for the collective making of claims. This process is highly related to mechanisms as diffusion (spread of ideas/performances etc. from one site to another), brokerage (production of a new connection between previously unconnected sites) and smaller processes as scale shifts (increase in the number of actors and/or geographic range of coordinated claim making) (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007:215-217). Mobilization is a highly transformative process in the sense that new connections and alliance can be formed between different political actors and geographic areas at all time, which can lead to an increase in resources, but at the same time there are always periods of demobilization or remobilization because of the arrival of different challenges or opportunities to the scene.

As with mobilization, Tilly & Tarrow also give a broad definition of the process of framing. According to them framing is the adoption and broadcasting of a shared definition of an issue or

performance (2007:216). Challenges and opportunities in this sense change the way social movements frame an issue or a performance and change the success of broadcasting it. Since we live in a society heavily influenced by the media, the media is fundamentally connected with the process of framing for social movements. For my research I will focus largely on the interaction between Occupy Wall Street's alternative media and the mainstream mass-media in order to locate continued the change of power-relation between the two. Also, I will closely look at the inter-relatedness of the process of framing and mobilization, since they are closely related to each other. Since a powerful frame combined with a lot of broadcasting power can help social movements convince people to engage in collective action (Della Porta, 2006:61), or establish new allies through frame bridging, by connecting certain grievances under one frame (McAdam & Tarrow, 2004:129).

The last process that I will use to describe and explain the transformation of OWS is the process of organization. By this I mean first of all the different structures movements use to make decisions, represent the movement with and organize performances from. Secondly I am focusing on the way the different social movement organizations, allies and affinity groups are related to each other and coordinate their actions. The process of organization is also highly connected towards framing and mobilization. A change in the organizational form of a movement can heavily influence the ability for a movement to mobilize her constituents or disrupt or enhance the framing-power of a movement. Overall, the three processes are transformative in character and are influenced by different challenges and opportunities that arrive out of the social or political context or the actions of agents. The use of these three transformative processes as analytical concepts helped me to fill in the academic knowledge gap by providing broad interpretative schemes that help – in combination with other mechanism, processes and the analytical concepts of challenges and opportunities – to explain how and why social movements transform.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

In order to provide a thorough answer to the questions why and how social movements transform I will introduce opportunities and challenges as analytical concepts. In this paragraph I will explain what I mean by these challenges and opportunities and how they influence social movements like OWS. Furthermore I will shortly explain what role new ICTs play in all this.

Like mechanisms and processes, opportunities and challenges are broad analytical concepts and can be defined as: Conditions that arrive out of the social or political context that obstruct or facilitate political actors in the collective making of claims. New challenges and opportunities trigger a multitude of mechanisms and processes that influence the larger transformative processes I introduced above. Throughout this research I have identified the different challenges and opportunities that OWS faced in the different stream of contention, and described how they

triggered mechanisms and processes that transformed the occupy movement. In this way the analytical concepts of challenges and opportunities have been useful in explaining why and how social movements transform.

The OWS movement faced a multitude of different challenges and opportunities during the different phases it went through. In the first phase the challenge was largely to transform an idea on the internet into a reality on the ground. The success of this transformation was largely provided by the opportunity of different sites of contention and the presence of a local activist network. Other examples of challenges and opportunities that I have identified are the (des-) interest of the media, which provided opportunities for scale shifts, but also helped facilitating the demobilization process of OWS after the evictions in the USA and was a huge obstacle in the effort of OWS to remobilize towards May Day.

Additionally, in order to accomplish the goal of analysing the role of new ICTs in the transformation of social movements I have scrutinized how they have provided opportunities or helped to overcome challenges. For example, new ICTs helped to highlight the police violence against the OWS protesters in the first days. But the amount of videos put on the internet of every little push or shove of police-officers against protesters also diminished the spectacle and drama that the iconic movies of the first month did provide. Where the filming of police repression gave way to an opportunity in mobilizing and framing, it became a challenge to every process after the initial drama and spectacle ebbed away, and ICTs could not help in overcoming that challenge.

Altogether the OWS movement faced a lot of challenges and was provided or created a good amount of opportunities that all had certain impacts on its mobilization, framing and organizational processes. As my narrative will show, in some cases ICTs helped the OWS movement, sometimes decisive, sometimes just as a tool, but many times it could not help in overcoming challenges.

## Methodology

### **Emergence of New Concepts and Themes**

The original goal of my research was to describe and explain what limitations and possibilities new ICTs provided for the processes of mobilization, framing and organization. However during my time in the field new research concepts and themes came forward during participant-observation and in-depth interviews. From the data I had gathered I deducted the importance of topics as police repression and the physical occupation in transforming OWS, and the marginal role that new ICTs played as a whole. Because a qualitative researcher has to remain open to emergent concepts and themes and use the appearance of these themes as a strength instead of a set-back (Lewis, 2003:47-49). Therefore I decided to reject my old research design and to restructure my methodology towards the new concepts and themes I had identified.

### **New Research Questions That Required Data**

The step away from the impact of ICTs towards a broader explanation of the transformation of the Occupy Wall Street movement led me to an explanatory research approach. With this qualitative approach I wish to explain the context in which the Occupy Wall Street movement occurred and transformed by identifying challenges, opportunities, mechanism and processes that provide explanatory links. This research approach led me to three main questions:

1. Why did the OWS movement transform?
2. How did the OWS movement transform?
3. What role did ICTs play in this transformation?

In order to answer these questions I needed data to:

1. Identify the challenges and opportunities that hindered or facilitated collective action.
2. Describe and explain the change of conditions in the social and political context from which these challenges and opportunities arrived. In other words: How did these challenges and opportunities emerge?
3. Identify mechanisms and processes throughout the streams of contention.
4. Describe and explain how the challenges and opportunities triggered the mechanisms and processes.
5. Describe and explain how these mechanisms and processes transformed the three shaping processes of mobilization, framing and organization.
6. Describe and explain how ICTs helped to provide or overcome opportunities and challenges

### **Data Collection Techniques**

In order to gather the data to answer the above questions I used three data-collection techniques. All three data collection techniques mentioned below have been structured and interpreted through the analytical framework discussed before.

#### **Participant Observation**

Participant observation in a multitude of OWS settings and structures enabled me to personally experience and observe the transformation of the Occupy Wall Street movement and the setting in which this occurred.<sup>2</sup> Since I only participated within the movement for a limited amount of time, I

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<sup>2</sup> I have participated fulltime in two Occupy Wall Street working groups: Environmental Solidarity and Global Justice from 22 March 2012 till 16 May 2012. In both working groups I have attended meetings, joined performances and was presented at informal side-gatherings. From both working groups I got consent to join them and gather information for my research. Furthermore I have also joined many meetings and trainings in

could only use this technique to identify challenges, opportunities, mechanism and processes for the last phase of the movement (See Chapter 5). However the experience and observation of the transformation during this phase provided me further understanding of the social context in which the movement operated and helped me to apply the analytical concepts to the earlier phases of the movement.

### **In-Depth Interviews**

My original goal was to interview key-informants within OWS to gather information about how ICTs influenced the movement on different levels. When I changed my research design I decided to keep my focus on this research population. Nevertheless due my time limit and the decentralization of the movement it was impossible to gain a certain level of trust, needed for the kind of in-depth interviews I wanted to take, and to identify all the leading figures. Therefore I did interview three key-informants, but switched for my other interviews to opportunistic chain sampling. Though I had some basic qualifications for these actors. They had to be involvement in the movement from September 2011 onward, had to be unrelated to each other, and had to have different functions within the movement.

All these in-depth interviews were one to two hours long and conducted in a non-authoritarian matter. With this I mean, while I had a topic-list to guide my questions I gave my interviewees all the space to introduce topics that they found important and did not force questions upon them. These interviews provided me with detailed descriptions of personal experiences and perspectives of the movement that helped me to verify the importance of certain topics and concepts and could be used to describe and explain the occurrence of certain mechanism or challenges. By using the data gathered out of my interviews I was aware of my small sample size and only used it descriptive or to strengthen an explanation.

### **Documentary Analysis**

Finally my leading data collection technique has been documentary analysis. by studying existing documents, publications, articles released by quality newspapers, magazines, OWS and movement related media I was able to gather most of the data needed to describe and explain the phases discussed in Chapter 1-4. Altogether, the other two data collection techniques largely provided me with a sense of direction and helped to reconstruct my original research design by discovering new topics and themes of importance. Also, through participant observation I personally experienced the

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preparation for May Day (1 May was the largest public display of Occupy Wall Street in New York City in 2012), and joined multiple non-related side events.

transformation of the movement, which helped me to identify challenges, mechanism and opportunities in the earlier phases by conducting documentary analysis.

### **General Chapter Outline**

In the upcoming chapters I will describe and explain the transformation of Occupy Wall Street during five different phases of its existence. In each chapter I will identify the main challenges and opportunities during that phase and discuss how these concepts triggered a multitude of mechanism that caused a transformation in the processes of framing, mobilization and organization. The chapters combined illustrate that OWS is a highly transformative social movement that has been influenced by a diverse range of challenges and opportunities. Finally, the social-historical narrative also complicates the analytical concepts used, by showing interconnectedness between different processes and transformations from challenges to opportunities.

## Chapter 1: The Path towards September 17

The main challenge of the first phase of Occupy Wall Street was to transform an idea, launched in the virtual world, towards a physical reality. Although the path towards this transformation started on 9 June 2011, when *Adbusters Magazine* launched their idea to occupy Wall Street on the internet, the inspiration and success of the diffusion of the idea can be traced back to the on-going Arab Spring, Spanish *Indignados* and the Wisconsin uprising. When the idea to occupy Wall Street went viral on the internet, *Adbusters* contacted grassroots organizations in New York City who ultimately were crucial in materializing OWS.

### International Inspiration and Diffusion of Ideas

As mentioned in the small introduction of this chapter, there were multiple other protest and social movements before OWS that had used similar tactics and organizational structures that have been an inspiration to OWS. These ideas have been spread through cyber-space and interpersonal networks, which helped to connect different sites of contention and spread organization ideas, performances and tactics, hereby instigating the mechanisms of brokerage and diffusion that led to new coordinated actions and helped in the overall mobilization and organization processes. Three of the most inspirational events were the Arab Spring, the Spanish *Indignados* and the Greek anarchist uprisings. This global connection and idea diffusion has been described by Kalle Lasn, Co-Founder of *Adbusters Magazine* and one of the instigators of the original idea to occupy Wall Street:

‘What made Occupy possible was the kind of anarchist stuff that was happening in Greece, the *acampadas* in Spain where young people started to fight back against the kind of regimes that they live in, and then, the big moment, when Tunisia and Egypt exploded. I think that this occupy movement had a lot of fertilization from the bottom up. And it wasn't one event; it was one series of events... from Greece we got a kind of Anarchist inspiration, from Spain we got a whole bunch of way of organizing *acampadas*, and from Tunisia and Egypt we got this idea that you can get hundreds of thousands of people out on the street by using the social media, and pulling of a regime change. So you see, we learn different things from different places...In a way everyone feels part of a global swarm, you can feel part of movement of young people who feel that their future doesn't come. And every morning you get that feeling that unless you stand up and start living for a different kind of a future, you



won't have a future. And there are hundreds of millions of people who feel exactly as you do.'<sup>3</sup>

This quote clearly illustrates the mechanism of diffusion and brokerage: the Greek ideas of anarchist organizing, the Spanish tactical performance of camping out on public squares and the use of social media in the mobilization process in Tunisia and Egypt, hereby not only connecting different sites of contention with each other, but also using ideas successfully implemented from those sites. Sites of contentions are being connected faster than ever in our globalized world and ideas diffuse easily among different nodes of activism. Speaking about the role of *Adbusters Magazine* about this global connection, Kalle Lasn said: 'We are plugged into a global network of activism; we are one of the hubs of global activism.'<sup>4</sup> This explains not only the reasons why OWS used so many ideas from the other sites of contention, but also explains why it directly received so much support from global activists and other international sites of contention. To further explain these global connections I will highlight the relationship between the Occupy movement and the Egyptian and Spanish sites of contention

### **Egyptian Revolution**

Although the Arab Spring in general was an inspiration for OWS, Egypt in particular was an impetus for the early organizers of OWS. The mobilization through social media and the *Tahrir-Square* protests, which became the physical symbol of the Egyptian struggle—as Zuccotti Park would become for OWS—have been an inspiration for the original idea of Occupy Wall Street. However, in the months after 17 September the link between the Egyptian uprising and Occupy Wall Street would become more than just inspiration, since both movements would support each other in their struggles with public acts of solidarity.

During our interview, Kalle Lasn explained that Egypt was an inspiration in the way they used social media to mobilize people. *Adbusters Magazine* used these techniques and inspiration from Egypt in the way they launched the idea to occupy Wall Street, heavily focusing on the use of Facebook and Twitter to diffuse the idea. Although this view doesn't really match the truth about the Egyptian revolution, it certainly acted as an inspiration for the way *Adbusters Magazine* made the idea of OWS go viral.

But it wasn't just the way *Adbusters* thought the Egyptian people mobilized, also the iconic pictures of resistance and revolution of *Tahrir-Square* provided inspiration and opportunity. *Adbusters Magazine* subtly used frame bridging to connect the Egyptian Revolution to their idea of

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<sup>3</sup> Author's Skype interview with Kalle Lasn, co-founder *Adbusters Magazine* and instigator of Occupy Wall Street. 23 January 2011. Utrecht, The Netherlands.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

OWS. An example of this can be found in the Tactical Briefing *Adbusters Magazine* put out on 26 July 2011 in which they call for a 'Tahrir moment' and an 'American Spring', hereby drawing parallels between the two sites of contention. In this way OWS was already connected to other international protest sites (Adbusters 2011a). This connection between Egypt and OWS was also recognized by Vlad Teichberg, who helped to set up Live streams for the Spanish *Indignados* and was an early organizer for OWS: "People think this started in New York on September 17, but that's not true. From my point of view, it started in Egypt (Chafkin et al. 2012)," or as one of my other interviewees said: 'I think the catalyst was Egypt. I think that set a model, obviously, what happened in Egypt was amazing.'<sup>5</sup>

This early connection between Egypt and OWS helped to facilitate a relationship of solidarity and information sharing. After 17 September, OWS held rallies in solidarity with Egypt and the Egyptians did likewise. Some of the leading figures of the April Six Youth Movement, which helped to organize the early protests in Egypt, visited Zuccotti Park in support of the movement and to hold teach-ins (Democracy Now 2011). Alexander Penley, a veteran activist and occupier from 17 September onward described what the solidarity of Egyptians with OWS did to him:

'Some of those activists actually came out here waving their Egyptian flag and said we are in solidarity with Occupy Wall Street, I mean what does that do with one's heart who is involved in that movement. I was wow thank you man. Cause you guys kicked butt. And you know I am with the second Egyptian revolution, because the first one didn't do shit. But they are out there in the street, and they are doing it. And I believe at one point they will win, I mean they are dying for it. All week, all year, occupy *Tahrir*!'<sup>6</sup>

So, not only did the tactic of mobilization through social media, and the powerful protests of *Tahrir-Square*, diffuse from Egypt to North America; the connection went deeper. Through frame bridging and brokerage both sites of contention developed a certain level of solidarity with each other, which became visible through solidarity rallies, face-to-face meetings and information sharing. The Egyptian revolution surely was one of the opportunities that helped to the idea to occupy Wall Street to become viral and inspired people to actually take to the street.

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<sup>5</sup> Author's interview with Mickey Z, an animal and environmental rights activist, author of eleven books and occupier from the end of September onwards. 10 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.

<sup>6</sup> Author's interview with Alexander Penley, a veteran activist, international lawyer and early occupier. 4 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.

## **The Spanish Indignados**

Although Egypt and *Tahrir-Square* surely acted as an inspiration and diffused the idea of cyber-mobilization to the headquarters of *Adbusters Magazine*, the organizational ideas came from the European continent where Spanish *Indignados* and Greek anarchists used horizontal, consensus-based decision-making processes and used the decision-making structure of the general assembly<sup>7</sup> to facilitate this process. These organizational principles and structures diffused to OWS over cyberspace and individual Spanish and Greek organizers who helped in the early organizational process of OWS. The shared use of organizational structures and codes, in combination with inter-personal contact, led to a tight connection, especially in Europe, between the *Indignados* and OWS.

On 15 May, the Spanish *Indignados* started their movement with occupations of a multitude of squares. Through the *acampadas*, as they called their occupations, they tried to give a physical face to their protest. This performance and organizational structure, together with the consensus-based decision-making process through the general assemblies diffused to the organizers of OWS through the internet and inter-personal contacts and networks (Andersen 2011). In Europe the *Indignados* had already tried to spread their idea of Real Democracy Now! to other countries. Although some countries held Facebook accounts and demonstrations under the banner of Real Democracy Now!, it never managed to gain the media attention that the Occupy Movement managed to attract. Still, the spread of the ideas of the *Indignados* and the online infrastructure they built on Facebook and websites (as: [www.takethesquare.net](http://www.takethesquare.net)) helped to facilitate the spread of Occupy from North-America to Europe. Daniel Leeuwenkuil, a Dutch activist both involved in both Real Democracy Now! and Occupy in the Netherlands described the spread of Real Democracy Now! from Spain to the Netherlands:

‘From 15 May onward you had this Spanish movement, and then a lot of activists in the Netherlands were closely watching that, and started up Dutch Real Democracy pages themselves. This all began somewhere between 15 May and 15 October. I think they already had their first demonstration in the Netherlands somewhere in July. So, shortly after 15 May

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<sup>7</sup> The type of general assembly used by the *Indignados* and Occupy Wall Street are consensus-based decision-making organs. Usually the people that participate in these general assemblies gather around in a circle, whether standing or sitting and use the performance of the human microphone when the group is too large to speak normally. Furthermore, the general assemblies are guided by facilitators that tend to circulate this job with each other all the time, in order to stimulate the impartiality of the facilitator. Agreements, disagreements and other comments are communicated through hand-signals by the crowd, which give a theatrical sight to the decision-making process.

the movement spread to the Netherlands. And that was a couple of months before Occupy began.<sup>8</sup>

The connection between OWS, Egypt and Spain can be explained with certain mechanisms, of which I have already mentioned some. The most basic mechanism that can be identified is that of attribution of similarity, the identification of another political actor as falling within the same category as your own (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007:215), as described by Kalle Lasn in an earlier quote in this paragraph when he is talking about the millions of young people who feel the same about their future. The step after identification is brokerage, in which the different sites of contention connect to each other by using frame bridging, whether through the internet or through inter-personal contact. This connection led to the diffusion of ideas about mobilization and organization, which has been co-opted by OWS. These mechanisms of attribution of similarity, brokerage and diffusion taken together have led to new forms of coordination, in the form of solidarity, or even coordinated action in the case of the *Indignados* and Occupy. As can be read in the tactical briefing of *Adbusters Magazine* of 16 August, in which they announce that the *Indignados* will camp outside the Madrid Stock Exchange on 17 September in support of OWS (Adbusters 2011b).

Together the events of *Tahrir-Square* and Spain have been an opportunity for OWS to use tactics and organizational ideas that had been configured and successfully implemented elsewhere. All three processes of mobilization, organization and framing have been positively transformed by the international inspiration, solidarity and diffusion of ideas. The successful way of using social media by the Egyptians was used in the mobilization process of OWS, the images of *Tahrir* and the Arab Spring led to frame bridging that helped to connect the different sites of contention and the anarchistic horizontal consensus-based organizational structures used by the *Indignados* also became the basic organizational structures of OWS in New York City. And finally OWS already became a node in an organizational network of global activism before the actual occupation on 17 September, because it was connected to multiple social movements around the world.

### Local and Regional Organizing of the American Left

At least as important as international sites of contention in the rest of the world were the streams of contention in America itself. These streams of contention had rejuvenated the American left, led to the practices of tactical performances and left behind interpersonal networks of activism. Especially the protests in Madison, Wisconsin, which were one of the largest protests of the last decade in the United States, played an important role in getting people of the American Left back on the streets.

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<sup>8</sup> Author's interview with Daniel Leeuwenkuil, Dutch activist, involved in *Real Democracy Now!* In the Netherlands, active in Occupy Amsterdam and Groningen and moderator of the Occupy Amsterdam Facebook group. 16 March 2012. Groningen, The Netherlands.

Furthermore in New York, Bloombergville was an important grassroots initiative that not only helped to practice some tactical performances, but also created a basic organizational structure and inter-personal network of local activists that would play an important role in the early organization of OWS.

### **Madison, Wisconsin**

Many months before OWS, a different stream of protests of the American Left spread over America. Not NYC, but Madison was the birthplace of this chain of events. The unrest in this region started halfway February 2011 when the Republican Governor of Wisconsin, Scott Walker, decided to cut the collective bargaining rights and benefits of public workers. The scales of these protests were bigger or the same size as the largest protests that OWS managed to pull off. The first week tens of thousands of people took the streets of the state capitol. At its height, approximately 100,000 people took the streets on 26 February and quickly spread to other neighbouring states and cities, from Albany to the West Coast (Oppel & Williams 2011).

Although these protests managed to get a lot of people on the street, they never really transformed into a real social movement. The issue quickly became politicized as a fight between the Union-backing Democrats vs. the Republicans that attacked the public sector (Cooper & Seelye 2011). Nonetheless, these events in Wisconsin were a rallying cry for the American Left and rejuvenated some spirit of activism. Also during the protests hundreds of people occupied the Capitol building and slept in the building for days, invoking similar images as those of *Tahrir-square* (Rothschild 2011). Even though the Wisconsin protests ended up in a political battle, the protests were a sign of growing unrest in the USA, and the growing urge of leftist activists in the USA to come back out on the street. Furthermore the occupation of the Capitol building displayed, as *Tahrir-Square*, the power of occupying public spaces to address political claims. The tactic of occupying public space certainly did not just diffuse from Madrid or Cairo, but had a powerful precursor in Madison, Wisconsin.

### **Bloombergville**

Bloombergville was a weeks-long encampment outside the New York City Hall to protest a list of budget cuts proposed by New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg. This encampment was organized by New Yorkers Against Budget Cuts (NYABC), a mix of workers, students and community workers, and Spanish New Yorker Real Democracy Now! members aligned to the *Indignados* (Bloombergville Now! a 2011). Bloombergville started on 14 June 2011 under the slogan: "No cuts! Tax the wealthy!" (Bloombergville Now! b 2011). And was of significance, because it was in a lot of ways Occupy Wall Street under a different name, against a different cause, but with a multitude of the same claims

against the same claim receivers. Signs on the website [bloombergvillenow.org](http://bloombergvillenow.org) show similar slogans that would be used for OWS in September, as: “Mind the Income Gap” and “Banks Got Bailed Out, We Got Sold Out.” Furthermore, not only was Bloombergville a real occupation as Zuccotti Park would become, it also used similar tactical performances and organizational forms as drum circles, a public library, people’s kitchen, twenty-four hour live streams to cover the protest and the practice of the use of general assemblies. When you look at these similarities it is not strange to hear that NYABC was contacted by *Adbusters Magazine* to help plan the occupation of 17 September. The planned rally, by NYABC, of 2 August, at the Charging Bull statue actually would become the starting point for the local organizing of OWS (Schwartz 2011).

Both Wisconsin and Bloombergville acted as opportunities for the success of OWS. They inspired, laid down organizational structures, networks of activists, created early alliances and generated a repertoire of performances. Where the Wisconsin protests largely acted as an inspiration for the American Left, it also provided the powerful images and strength of the performance to occupy public space, as did Bloombergville. The connection between the different struggles and the similar use of the tactical performance of the occupation has been made by one of the lead organizers of Bloombergville, Yotam Marom:

“We were very deeply inspired by the struggles taking place all over the world - from Madison to Madrid, not to mention all over the Middle East, Greece, the UK, etc...It was a genuine attempt to reclaim space in the process of a political struggle against austerity measures that would truly endanger the lives of working people all across the city (Roblin 2011).”

In the use of the occupation of public space, but also the use of, for example, drum circles and public libraries we can identify the mechanism of emulation.<sup>9</sup> All these kind of performances practiced under Bloombergville and the Wisconsin protests created a ready repertoire of claim making routines for OWS. Once more we can identify the mechanism of brokerage between the *Indignados* and Bloombergville and the mechanism of coalition formation,<sup>10</sup> between *Adbusters* and NYABC, which was a crucial step in the process of transforming OWS from the virtual world towards the physical. Both the processes of organization and mobilization have been heavily influenced by the opportunities created by Bloombergville and the Wisconsin protests. Bloombergville created the basic organizational structure and inter-personal network of local activists that formed the basis of the planning of OWS and helped facilitate the mobilization process; a mobilization process that was

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<sup>9</sup> By the mechanism emulation I mean the deliberate repetition within a giving setting of a performance observed in another setting (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007:215).

<sup>10</sup> By the mechanism coalition formation I mean the creation of new, visible, and direct coordination of claims between two or more previously distinct actors (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007:216).

helped by the growing unrest in the USA and the massive demonstrations that took place in Wisconsin.

### **First Phase of Mobilization, Organization and Framing**

In the above paragraphs I have described the context in which the Occupy movement was able to appear and explained how this created opportunities for the mobilization, organization and framing processes of the movement. International sites of contention were quickly connected to OWS and helped to diffuse ideas and created space for coordinated action and solidarity. At the same time national and especially local activism in New York City helped to pave the road towards OWS. In this part I will describe the first phase of mobilization, organization and framing of OWS, hereby recalling certain mechanisms and opportunities I have mentioned before. This first phase of mobilization, organization and framing has been largely dualistic with online mobilization and idea diffusion, combined with face-to-face gatherings of local activists, who did the organization, mobilization and framing on the ground.

#### **Adbusters**

As said before, the initial idea of Occupy Wall Street came from the Canadian-based magazine *Adbusters*, who inspired by the Arab Spring and other protests put the idea out on the internet. The first time the world heard about the idea to occupy Wall Street was on 9 June 2011 when *Adbusters Magazine* tweeted: “#acampadaWallstreet: Can we get 20.000 people to flood Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, a democratic assembly and occupy Wall Street?” Since *Adbusters* is a hub in the global activist network,<sup>11</sup> the idea quickly circulated through activist circles on the internet. The popularity of the idea helped *Adbusters* in further mobilizing, organizing and framing of the idea. On 13 July 2011 *Adbusters* put out a tactical briefing in which they set a date: 17 September, and the idea for a long time encampment in which one demand, in a plurality of voices, would be repeated (Adbusters 2011c). This clearer goal helped to increase the diffusion of the idea in a larger scale. From this moment onward activist websites started to pay attention to the idea of occupying Wall Street (Roos 2011; Schneider 2011a). One thing led to another, and soon Facebook pages, Twitter accounts and websites were set-up to facilitate the mobilization and organization for 17 September.

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<sup>11</sup> At the moment (10 July 2012) they have around 41.000 followers on Twitter and according to Kalle Lasn, the co-founder of the magazine their tactical briefings had an outreach to 80.000 culture jammers and activists.

## **Anonymous**

When the idea of OWS started to spread on the internet, it gained endorsement of other activists and groups through the mechanism of attribution of similarity and a step further, certification.<sup>12</sup> One of these groups was the Twitter- and web-driven US Day of Rage group that recognized the similarity of OWS and helped to promote the cause on digital channels (Schneider, 2011b:15). Although initiatives like this certainly helped the mobilization process, it was the endorsement of the popular hacktivist group Anonymous that helped OWS to go viral. Like *Adbusters*, Anonymous is an important hub in a global network of activism and use digital networks to spread their messages.<sup>13</sup>

Kalle Lasn himself said on the endorsement: “Anonymous came out of the blue with a video that was watched by a huge number of people. It gave us a huge boost; it gave us street cred (Chafkin et al. 2012).” But Anonymous did more than just recognize and digitally support the mobilization of OWS. After the occupation they actually went to Zuccotti Park to help in the physical action of street protest (Kazmi 2011) and thereby engaged in actual coordinated action and coalition forming with OWS.

## **Local Organizing**

Although *Adbusters* had put out the idea and Anonymous endorsed it, it was a small group of local activists that started meeting up to discuss the original organizational form, framing and mobilization of the movement. These meetings were joined by Spanish and Greek activists, NYABC and other activist organizations as Food not Bombs and would later decide to call themselves the New York City General Assembly (NYCGA) (Schneider, 2011b:15; Kroll, 2011:16). In these meetings the fundamental organization structure of the movement was laid out based horizontalism, consensus-based decision making, empowerment, and their successful implementation in Greece and Spain.

The very first meeting was on 2 August during a rally for NYABC at the charging bull statue. At this rally there were two different kind of groups, the anarchists who expected a planning session for OWS and labour and student activists who were having, as David Graeber, an anarchist academic and early organizer stated, “a familiar American protest with banners, lists of demands and speakers telling others what they were going to do (Toronto Star 2011).” The Anarchists decided to break off to hold a horizontal general assembly, which was slowly joined by more and more people from the rally until a group of around sixty people was formed (Schwartz 2011). This group (NYCGA) started to meet more often to organize for September 17, hereby taking over the leadership of *Adbusters* and transferring the gravity of organizing to New York City. During these meetings the NYCGA came up

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<sup>12</sup> By the mechanism of certification I mean an external authority’s signal of its readiness to recognize and support the existence and claims of a political actor (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007:215)

<sup>13</sup> As this YouTube video they put out in support of OWS: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-eFxCdX7Yw&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-eFxCdX7Yw&feature=player_embedded) (Accessed 10 July 2012).



with the framing of the 99% and did trainings in live-streaming and video-editing, this would, later on, play an important role in attracting mainstream media to the scene (Chafkin et al. 2012).

The online mobilization and idea diffusion of OWS by *Adbusters* and other actors was very successful. Multiple actors and organizations were mobilized in support of the Occupy Movement and certified its cause. Particularly the certification of Anonymous was important, since this opened up another big hub of global activism, with a large digital infrastructure that helped to get the idea to occupy Wall Street viral. Granting the online mobilization was very successful, the real organization and framing was done on the ground, by local activists, supported by Greek and Spanish anarchists and *Indignados*, who helped to implement the successful organizational structures of the general assemblies and consensus-based decision-making. Also the process of framing was largely transformed by the NYCGA, from one demand to a plurality of demands, the master frame of the 99% and the training of live-streamers, which would enhance the framing-power of the movement during the first phases of police repression.

### **Connecting the Local to the Global**

As mentioned, the main challenge of the first phase of OWS was to transform a digitally launched idea to a physical reality. An opportunity in overcoming this challenge were the inspirational protests in 2011 that helped in the early mobilization, organization and framing processes of OWS, by diffusing certain ideas, organizational principles and forming solidarity movements with each other (Della Porta, 2006:15). These connections between different sites of contention and between local and international activists are part of a bigger trend of transnational activism fuelled by globalization and new ICTs that promote networked coalitions. Still, a lot of events and challenges on the ground cannot be overcome by new ICTs, and we should not forget that.

### **Rooted cosmopolitanism**

The connection between local and international activists and the acts of international solidarity can be explained with the trend of rooted cosmopolitanism. In this trend, citizens and activists, who are usually focused on local or national problems, reach beyond their home bases to join with other people around the world (Della Porta & Tarrow, 2005: 228) in imagined solidarity: “the desire to express solidarity, through symbolic interaction, to similar or connected sites of contention (Pickerill, Gillan & Webster, 2011:50).” This interaction between local and international activism is reflected in the organizational structures of most modern day social movement organizations. OWS, the *Indignados* and other social movements have become a transnational coalition of social movement organizations, combined with local activist networks structured around global issues (Della Porta,

2006:235). This trend of rooted cosmopolitanism is reflected by Peter Rugh his view on the interconnectedness of OWS:

‘Well, we are all connected under global capitalism. And I mean it was very inspirational and moving in to see everyone in Cairo and across Egypt stands up in a country that no-one thought that would happen. And then seeing that spread to Spain and Greece and France and England. We are in an economic crisis right now, some global economic crisis. And the question is who is going to bear the burden of it. Right now the 1% wants the 99% to bear the burden of it.’<sup>14</sup>

The opportunity of international sites of contention thus can be explained with the trend of rooted cosmopolitanism. This opportunity diffused ideas to OWS that fundamentally transformed the processes of mobilization, organization and framing and centred OWS in a global network of international activism, connected through global problems and solidarity. And this connecting of localities to the global ICTs plays an important role, since they help activists to locate their actions within a much wider context (Pickerill, Gillan & Webster, 2011:53).

### **Role of New ICTs?**

The role of new ICTs seems to have played an important role in the first phase of the Occupy Wall Street Movement. According to Bennett new ICTs contribute to the growth of international activist infrastructure and therefore helps to connect different sites of contention (brokerage) (2003:124). Yet technology alone does not explain the success of the first phase, since local organizing was crucial in the planning of the occupation, building of structures and resource mobilization. The role of ICTs was largely in the connection of the local to the global and spreading the idea over the internet. Kalle Lasn himself described the connection between ICTs and the connection to the global like this:

‘The people that feel this way are a global movement and have a way of talking to each other through the internet...So at the moment we not only have a hundred years of revolution tradition and the recent events in the Arab Spring, but we also have the power of the social media that is allowing us to do this...The power of the social media gets thousands of people into the streets, like in Tunisia and Egypt and like we did with Occupy.’<sup>15</sup>

New ICTs help facilitate rooted cosmopolitanism and large-scale mobilization because it has certain specific characteristics as: lowering transaction costs, stimulating the diffusion of ideas,

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<sup>14</sup> Author’s interview with Peter Rugh, facilitator of Environmental Solidarity Working Group of OWS New York City, member of Shutdown Indian Point Now and the International Socialist Organization. 11 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.

<sup>15</sup> Author’s Skype interview with Kalle Lasn. 7 February 2012. Harderwijk, The Netherlands.

connecting geographically dispersed persons, facilitate horizontal networks and help to coordinate and integrate different groups, organizations and networks for protest activities (Della Porta, 2006:95; Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2009:236-238). These characteristics helped OWS to be connected to a global network of activism and social movements by assisting the mechanism of brokerage, diffusion, coordinated action and coalition formation, hereby facilitating the opportunity of the presence of other international sites of contention that positively helped in transforming the processes of mobilization, organization and framing.

### **Materializing Occupy Wall Street**

Even though the internet and social media helped to diffuse ideas on organization and mobilization and placed OWS in a global network of activism, the step from the digital environment to the physical environment was crucial for success. As said before, the real effort in materializing the virtual idea of OWS was done by the NYCGA and its allies. So although new ICTs provided some groundwork in facilitating opportunities, one should not forget that local networks remain important for movement building and facilitating strong ties between its constituents (Pickerill, Gillan & Webster, 2011:49).

Finally, the real challenge was getting people to actually appear on 17 September and stay without being evicted. Most activists had great doubts about the turn-out and length of the occupation. Although the NYCGA had stocked up food, made bail arrangements and had circulated flyers, the doubts of success remained high, and nobody could predict its outcome (Schwartz 2011). These doubts were clearly expressed by two of my interviewees:

‘I thought it was a little bit far-fetched that this magazine *Adbusters*, who put out the original call, expected 20.000 people out there in the Financial District on September 17, and just putting this out on the internet.’<sup>16</sup>

‘And the amazing thing, for example about Zuccotti Park was how long it lasted. A lot of us New Yorkers, were thinking, do not bring your sleeping bags, because the NYPD is going to bust that shit up, and that is going to be over in a couple of hours.’<sup>17</sup>

So, although the idea of OWS had quickly spread over the internet and was endorsed and supported by a multitude of local and international organizations and social movements, some activists had great doubts about the real impact of online mobilization. In the end, some 2000 people showed up, a lot less than 20.000, but still a sufficient amount of people. And because the local organizers had

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<sup>16</sup> Author’s interview with Peter Rugh. 11 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.

<sup>17</sup> Author’s interview with Alexander Penley. 4 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.

prepared the initial organization and framing and innovated on the ground they managed to actually pull off the occupation of Zuccotti Park. Still nobody was sure if the occupation would last more than a few days.

## **Chapter 2: From Occupy Wall Street to Occupy Together**

The first challenge for OWS was to materialize the digital idea into a reality on the ground. The second challenge was to survive the first days. This challenge was first of all overcome by an opportunity factor in the law that prevented the private owner and the New York Police Department (NYPD) to evict the protesters out of the park if they kept to the rules. And second, public acts of defiance on the side of the protesters helped overcoming initial scepticism and facilitated the mobilization of more people to their support. After the Occupy movement had created a strong foothold in Zuccotti Park it was ready for the next step. This step was provided by a combination of opportunities and challenges. While the mainstream media did write some articles on OWS in the first days, it was not a trending topic or headline material. Meanwhile, the protesters heavily used the social media and techniques as live-streaming to promote themselves and inform their constituents. When a video of a group of women being pepper sprayed by a NYPD officer went viral on the internet, the mainstream media started to pay attention to OWS, hereby providing the movement first of all a national platform, and later on an international broadcasting platform.

### **Initial Challenges and Public Defiance of the first days**

Although OWS had managed to gather 2000 people in Zuccotti Park (by then renamed to Liberty Plaza), on 17 September, this did not mean that the occupation was a success yet. A combination of two factors played an important role in the continued existence of OWS in the first days. First of all there was a section in the city law that prevented eviction, while the public display of worthiness, unity, number and commitment (WUNC) by the protesters helped to attract more people to their cause and overcome initial scepticism.

#### **Opportunity in the Law**

Zuccotti is a privately owned public park, which means that because of an agreement with the city in 1968, the park does not have explicit closing hours. This meant that as long as the protesters kept strictly to the rules of the park, neither Brookfield Office Property nor the NYPD could legally evict them out of the park (Chafkin et al. 2012). Although this meant that they were not allowed to set up tents, or use amplified sound, these seemingly challenges transformed into opportunities by contributing to the display of WUNC, hereby positively affecting the mobilization process of OWS.

## WUNC

According to Tilly & Wood displays of WUNC help to create social movement distinctiveness and contribute to mobilization efforts (2009:4). Worthiness was expressed by Occupy Wall Street in the sense that the people who took over the park largely looked like ordinary citizens who were legitimate angry and wanted to change something. Second, unity was expressed with performances as the people's microphone and the general assemblies. The power of numbers was expressed in the constant stream of people in the park, combined with the commitment that they showed by staying while it was raining. These public displays of WUNC helped OWS to attract local support.

Of course some people staying at Zuccotti Park verified prejudices about, but there were also a lot of students and workers during the day time, which helped contribute to the display of worthiness. This interaction between protesters and workers was described by Alexander Penley, who was down at Zuccotti from 17 September onward: 'Now in the first days, there were so many people who were just workers. That would just go and sit down to have their lunch there and say hi. What is going on? What is this all about?'<sup>18</sup> Next to some classic displays of unity, as singing and chanting, Occupy Wall Street used distinctive performances and organizational tools like the people's microphone and the general assembly to show unity in its ranks. The people's microphone was first of all a tool to overcome the amplified-sound permit, but would later on become one of the most distinctive and powerful performances of OWS.<sup>19</sup> Especially the combination of the general assembly with the people's microphone displayed a strong sense of unity, by showing a group of people sitting in a multiple-layered circle, repeating each other words and making decisions. Although there was not a real power in the amount of numbers yet, this power was shown in the expectation of people that the protest would fizzle out, instead of grow. This expectation was expressed by Mickey Z, a New York City born environmental and animal rights activist: 'I have been to protests that have been one day things, this is a week later, and it has sustained.'<sup>20</sup> But probably the most powerful display of defiance was the commitment shown by the activists that slept over in the park despite the restrictions put up by the NYPD and the bad weather. The protesters were not allowed to set up tents and tarps were not allowed to be attached to anything, so had to be held up by people

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<sup>18</sup> Author's interview with Alexander Penley. 4 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.

<sup>19</sup> The people's microphone, also known as the people's mic or mic-checking is a performance used by Occupy Wall Street to spread a message to a large crowd without using amplified sound. The person who wants to speak starts with shouting "mic-check", which will be repeated by the people around the mic-checker, so everyone knows that he or she is going to speak. The speaker has to carefully use words in order to get the message through, and only speak a couple of words at the same time and then wait for the crowd to repeat it. At general assemblies that of a couple of thousand people it could take three waves of mic-checking before the whole crowd was reached. The performance of the people's microphone has also been used to disrupt speeches of, for example, president Obama and Governor Scott Walker. Here is a video of Obama being mic-checked:

<sup>20</sup> Author's interview with Mickey Z. 10 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.

themselves. Despite these rules, the rain and cases of hypothermia the people in the park stayed and managed to attract more and more people to the park by holding out (Chafkin et al. 2012).

The way that the challenge of holding ground was overcome, illustrates the interaction between structure and agency. The law provided both an opportunity and a challenge by allowing the occupiers to stay in the park, but not allowing them to set up tents. First of all, the structure of the law provided space for agency by letting the demonstrators stay in the park. The protesters used this space to initiate the process of self-representation.<sup>21</sup> This process of self-representation initiated by these agents helped again in transforming the challenge and mechanism of repression,<sup>22</sup> by the NYPD and the law, into an opportunity to show commitment that helped in the process of mobilization by attracting more and more people to the park.

## **Breaking the Mainstream Media Barrier**

Although Occupy Wall Street did get some media attention in the first days, it did not get a lot of media attention until the infamous pepper spray incident and violent arrests of 24 September 2011, followed by the Brooklyn Bridge arrests.<sup>23</sup> These events broke the mainstream media barrier and were the start of a substantial media campaign on OWS (see Appendix I for a research graph on this) (Holcomb 2011). The way these events hit the news give rise to questions about the ability of social media and movement alternative media to impact the mainstream media, but also on the role of the media for social movements in today's societies.

As the graph in Appendix I indicates, the mainstream media did report on the movement, even before the pepper spray incident. But why is this relevant? What role do the media in general play for social movements? According to Manuel Castells "the media constitute the space where power relationships are decided between competing political and social actors (2009:194)." In this way, the media can be instrumental for social movements in reaching the general public, acquiring approval, mobilizing potential participants and in providing psychological support for its members (Klandermans & Goslinga, 1996:319). Therefore the media has become the central terrain of contest for contentious politics and is it crucial for social movements to gain a certain level of influence or

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<sup>21</sup> By self-representation I mean an actor's or coalition's public display of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007:217).

<sup>22</sup> By repression I mean the action by authorities that increase the cost- actual or potential- of an actor's claim making (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007:215).

<sup>23</sup> On 2 October 2011 OWS wanted to march across the Brooklyn Bridge. At the bridge a small group of protesters decided to walk on the roadway to block the traffic, quickly followed by hundreds of others. The police formed a blockade on the other side of the bridge and started arresting the protesters on the roadway one by one. At the end of the day more than 700 protesters were arrested. As September 24, 2011 this incident was filmed by multiple cameras and mobile phones, put on YouTube, shared on Twitter and Facebook and reached national and international television coverage, further increasing the visibility of the movement.

framing-power over the media. However, particularly the mainstream media can also have a negative impact on social movements by obstructing mobilization by making fun of a movement and the logic of the mainstream media, which focusses on events, simplifications and spectacle, can undermine a social movements framing and goal achievement (Klandersmans & Goslinga, 1996:319). The relation of social movements with the media therefore is complicated. On the one hands the media are necessary for social movements, but on the other hand they can also turn against them.

The question nowadays is if social movements still need mainstream media or if they can solely rely on social and alternative media? The alternative media, from movement newspapers to websites, have always fulfilled the instrumental tasks I mentioned above, but usually are not able to reach out to the general public in the way the mainstream media can. Even with the pepper spray incident we will see that the social media is able to reach out to a certain public, but that the real power of the incident lies in influencing the mainstream media, since mayor news stories in newspapers or on television still reach a wider audience than Twitter or Facebook messages (Hutchins & Lester 2011:169). In the paragraphs below I will first describe the event that happened on 24 September and then further explain how this provided an opportunity that transformed the processes of framing and mobilization.

### **Pepper-Spray Incident**

On 24 September 2011 the police clashed with protesters during a OWS march. During this clash a police officer, later identified by *Anonymous* as Deputy Inspector Anthony Bologna, pepper sprayed a group of women who were encircled and had nowhere to go. This event and other violent arrests were caught on multiple mobile phone camera's and went viral on social media networks<sup>24</sup> (as can be identified in the YouTube statistics of the video I linked in the footnote) (Rawlings, 2011:14). One of my interviewees described the incident and the impact in the following manner:

'In some way I think, we have to thank Antony Bologna for pepper spraying someone. Because you see a video with him just walking down the street, pepper spraying everything, like the air and then finding somebody. And I think that pissed a lot of people off... There was maybe a blackout for this, but then the media blackout had to die. Because it was already going viral, so you could not pretend it was not going on. And in that way the media started picking up on it...I saw after Tony Bologna, pepper sprayed how many New Yorkers came down. They were like I was kind off interested, but when that happened; they were like: "do not fuck with a New Yorker. Now you are fucking with my people, sorry." And you know, tons

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<sup>24</sup> The YouTube video that went viral:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moD2JnGTTToA&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moD2JnGTTToA&feature=player_embedded) (Accessed July 25, 2012).



of people came out for that reasons. You think we are scared and run away? No, no, you want a battle? Bring it.’<sup>25</sup>

My interviewee Alexander Penley identified the pepper spray incident as an event that helped OWS in its mobilizing process and forced the mainstream media to cover OWS. As I will explain in the upcoming paragraphs, the social media did play an important role in mobilizing new participants by diffusing these videos that show the public displays of commitment and worthiness. Furthermore, the event helped to attract media coverage on OWS (Holcomb 2011), hereby providing an opportunity to a much wider national and international platform than the social media alone could give.

As said before, the mainstream media had already given a decent amount of attention to OWS, but the protesters had not provided the drama and spectacle to receive widespread attention. 24 September helped in two things: first of all the spectacle and drama helped to receive widespread coverage, in other words helped OWS to reach the general public. Second, the mainstream media had almost no coverage themselves so they relied on the mobile phone footage and YouTube videos uploaded by OWS participants. This coverage gap provided the movement with an opportunity to highlight the police violence instead of the actions of the protesters.

I have collected some of the news coverage of 24 September to indicate the framing-power of OWS in this particularly story. Firstly, all coverage included images of the arrests and pepper spray or gave hyperlinks to the YouTube videos. And second, the paraphrases and quotes that I selected highlight the police violence or the use of the movement’s videos:

*The New York Times*: As the police arrested a protesters in the street, an officer wearing a white shirt – indicating a rank of lieutenant or above – walked toward a group of demonstrators nearby and sent a blast of pepper spray that hit four women...Numerous videos and photos captured the aftermath: two women crumpled on the sidewalk in pain, one of them screaming. They were temporarily blinded (Goldstein 2011).

*ABC News*: Among the video clips on the Occupy Wall Street website is one that shows a police officer macing a group of young women penned in by orange netting... Another video has circulated of a police officer throwing a protester to the ground, though it is not clear why. The video shows the man standing in what seems to be a non-threatening manner before the incident...Another video shows police officers pushing male and female protesters off the street, and using a large orange net to move the crowd (Katrandijan 2011).

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<sup>25</sup> Author’s interview with Alexander Penley. 4 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.

*MSNBC*: The police were grabbing people for doing absolutely no reason, crushing them on the pavement and arresting them... Here is another courageous commander showing his men how to control the citizenry... and there was at least one unprovoked use of pepper spray (*MSNBC* 2011).

The events of 24 September even reached abroad news agencies, as the Netherlands, were the *NRC*, for who this was the second time they covered OWS, reported on the demonstration and violence and also gave a link to the pepper spray video (*Willems* 2011).

To recapitulate the story: On 24 September 2011, OWS protesters held a march, which was met by the challenge of police repression and led to massive arrests. The police used a more than normal amount of violence in these arrests and even pepper sprayed a group of women who were already surrounded by police. Since the mainstream media was not really interested in OWS yet, they had no coverage of these events. The coverage was provided by occupiers themselves who had caught the events on their mobile phone cameras and uploaded them on YouTube. When the videos started to go viral, mainstream media picked up the story and used the footage that was going viral on the social media to interpret the events, as can be indicated by the paraphrases and quotes above. Altogether the challenge of police repression became an opportunity, because it provided the spectacle and drama that interested the mainstream media, hereby providing a much wider audience to movement.

As in the first days, on 24 September, the mechanism of repressions was transformed into a transformative opportunity factor through the process of self-representation. Because the increase in media-attention, the audience for the process of self-representation was this time much larger than the first days. The public displays of commitment and worthiness by the occupy protesters on national and international media outlets and the social media networks, diffused the ideas of OWS through a much wider audience than before, hereby helping in the mobilization process. This particular event on 24 September also influenced the process of framing for OWS. It not only acknowledged the broadcast power of the alternative and social media in spreading powerful images when there is a certain lack of mainstream media interest, but it also showed that they were able to influence the framing of the media by doing so.

### **Becoming a Hub in a Network**

Interesting for the organizational process of Occupy Wall Street was the way it became an important hub in the activist network of NYC, the USA, and the world. When OWS started to grow after the first days, it became a physical hub of New York activism, where activists could plug into activities through working groups or other organizational organs. After the media started to pay more attention to

OWS, more occupations started to pop-up in America and abroad, hereby increasing the importance of OWS as a hub in global activism. As I will explain, especially for the national and international network forming ICTs have played an important role, since they promote horizontal networks of largely autonomous nodes.

### **Hub of New York City Activism**

Occupy Wall Street first of all became a hub of New York activism when multiple different organizations as NYABC and Food not Bombs joined together in the initial mobilization and organization of OWS. In the first weeks after the occupation, Zuccotti Park also became a physical hub of New York activism when different marches of then non-related organizations ended at Zuccotti Park, and of individual activists who started gathering at Zuccotti Park to plug into OWS. Hence, Zuccotti Park became a physical opportunity for the mobilizing and organizational processes by attracting more people to the cause and creating an organizational network structure.

This gathering of different movements and individuals was described on of my interviewees, Peter Rugh, a New York activist himself. He describes how a march against the death penalty ended up at Zuccotti Park and how OWS became a hub in New York activism:

‘So, the day that I really thought this (means OWS) was going to kick off was one day later or about a week later maybe. Troy Davis, who was a young black man, who was basically framed on murder charge on Georgia. So we have been up all night at this church, waiting to see if he was going to get executed...So the next day at Union Square there was a day of rage and a speak out against the death penalty. And it turned into a march...and we marched to Broadway and started marching down Broadway, took over the streets and were did we go but Zuccotti Park and Occupy Wall Street. Many different movements have gone that way, went that way, to Occupy Wall Street in recognition that the system that divides us, and is predicated on racism and environmental destruction... they kept the occupation going at Zuccotti Park. And it became a gathering of people involved in different movements, different struggles. Recognizing the overarching problem is the system that places profits before people and the earth.’<sup>26</sup>

As described by Peter Rugh, Zuccotti Park became a physical opportunity for OWS for the process of coalition forming. Zuccotti Park attracted new and or loosely connected actors to OWS to engage in coordinated action. One of the most important political actors that Zuccotti Park and OWS managed to attract after the first week were the unions. Multiple unions voted in support of Occupy Wall Street and started to come to the occupation sites and marches to support the movement (Sitrin,

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<sup>26</sup> Author’s interview with Peter Rugh. 11 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.

2011:29). These new coalitions that OWS managed to attract, in which especially the Unions helped in providing the power of numbers, made it quickly one of the most important and most active hubs in the network of New York activism.

### **National and International Scale Shifts**

Although, San Francisco joined New York in occupying on 17 September<sup>27</sup> it took a few days or weeks for other cities to follow. But when it started, the movement quickly spread over the USA to become local hubs of activism, linked towards the bigger hub in New York City and the websites [occupywallst.org](http://occupywallst.org) and [occupytogether.org](http://occupytogether.org) which became important in the diffusing of ideas, tactics and structures. In Europe the *Indignados* had already tried to spread their ideas of Real Democracy Now! and had joined in solidarity with OWS on 17 September, they did not really manage to pull something off beyond Spain. With the spread of OWS in America, they found a new rallying cry for their ideas and decided to follow America by using the word occupy and its master frame of the 99% versus 1%. 15 October was already planned to be a global day of action by [takethesquare.net](http://takethesquare.net) and DRY international (*Indignados* organizations) but this quickly changed to a global day of new occupations on an international level (Rawlings, 2011:200). In this way OWS also became an important hub in the international activist network, facilitated by the internet, where the *Indignados* organizations had already taken root.

A mix of already mentioned opportunities helped in triggering the process of upward scale shift. First of all, OWS was already part of the global network of activism before the occupation started on 17 September. This international network of activism helped to facilitate the spread of Occupy towards other countries and was further amplified by the increase in media attention that it received after the first week. This spread can be explained by the process of upward scale shift, which is:

“The increase in the number of actors and/or geographic range of coordinated claim making (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007:217), which happens when “localized collective action spawns broader contention when information concerning the initial action reaches a distant group, which, having defined itself as sufficiently similar to the initial insurgents (*attribution of similarity*), engages in similar action (*emulation*), leading ultimately to *coordinated action* between the two sites (McAdam & Tarrow, 2004:127).”

This process of scale shift that McAdam and Tarrow describe is facilitated by diffusion. In the case of OWS it was a combination of cyber-diffusion and mass-media diffusion that helped distant groups to

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<sup>27</sup> The call to occupy on 17 September 2011 in San Francisco: <http://www.facebook.com/OccupyFDSF> (Accessed July 26, 2012).

receive the necessarily information for the mechanism of attribution of similarity to be set off.

The upward scale shifts transformed the process of mobilization by first of all increasing the overall amount of occupiers and resources to its possession. And second, the local occupations gained network strength through solidarity (Sassen, 2005:81). The connections of the local occupations in the broader Occupy network helped the individual occupations to gain strength through solidarity with the connected agents. The process of scale shifts also transformed the organizational processes of OWS. Although it was already part of the global network of activism, it now became a central hub in the network and created its own organizational network of occupations, which increased its overall strength. If one occupation would fizzle out, others would stay strong or could take over a more central position in the network. How such a hub as OWS could work in mobilization or information diffusion was explained to me by one of the main-organizers of occupy in the Netherlands:

‘An example of an activist hub where every activist is connected to is Occupy Wall Street. There are like 500.000 people connected to its Facebook and not just New Yorkers. Maybe 200.000 New Yorkers, 200.000 other American and then 100.000 other occupiers from across the globe. When someone posts something there about Oregon, or a city in China, then the rest of the world knows that too in within two minutes...And if you have multiple of these hubs it can go really fast like: tak, tak, tak, tak to the smaller sites. If you know to find these hubs you can reach two million people within two minutes.’<sup>28</sup>

### **New ICTs Promote Networking Organizational Structures**

Just like the in the first phase of OWS, ICTs played a role in connecting the local to the global by facilitating rooted cosmopolitanism and upward scale shifts. For example, in order to diffuse ideas to other places across the globe, OWS and other related organizations, set up websites that shared information on how to set up occupy encampments, how to facilitate a general assembly or how to set-up an online donation system.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, new ICTs promote organizational networks that are loosely linked to each other and minimally dependent on central coordination, which we can clearly identify at OWS (Bennett, 2004:205). Although, hubs as occupywallst.org, occupytogether.org, nycga.net and some Facebook and Twitter accounts are crucial in the information diffusion, they do not have anything to say on for example Occupy related groups in the Netherlands or Australia, that have their own Facebook groups, Twitter accounts and ways of mobilizing and organizing. The

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<sup>28</sup> Author's interview with Daniel Leeuwenkuil. 16 March 2012. Groningen, The Netherlands.

<sup>29</sup> List of websites as: [http://occupytogether.wikispot.org/Front\\_Page](http://occupytogether.wikispot.org/Front_Page), <http://howtooccupy.org/>, <http://www.netaction.org/training/index.html>, <http://www.nycga.net/resources/general-assembly-guide/> and <http://takethesquare.net/2011/07/31/quick-guide-on-group-dynamics-in-peoples-assemblies/> (Last Accessed July 29, 2012).

occupations are loosely connected nodes, in a network of occupy, connected to each other through some central hubs.

Yet again these functions of ICTs should not be given too much credit. As said before, it was not just cyber-diffusion that initiated the upward scale shift of OWS, since the mainstream media also played an important role in this. And as I explained earlier, there was a lot of fertilization on the ground by the *Indignados* that helped to internationalize the occupy movement. For example, already in May some Dutch activists, inspired by the *Indignados*, tried to pull off a Dutch Revolution (#Dutch Revolution 2011). And finally, it is not just the technology but the social aspects of the technology that help to move easily between on- and offline relationships that makes the scale shift to transnational activism possible (Bennett, 2004:205).

### Successful Phase of Movement Building

Altogether, phase two of OWS was largely one of opportunities. Although the movement had to cope with police repression, it managed to transform this challenge into mobilization and framing opportunities. Public acts of self-representation by the movement on the ground, the media and the internet helped to increase the mainstream media interest in the movement and facilitated the process of upward scale shift, spreading the movement from NYC to hundreds of cities around the world. These opportunities were important for the successful mobilization process of OWS in this phase, and helped the movement to increase its framing power and strengthen its organizational structure by expanding its organizational network. ICTs played a role in both the diffusion of the ideas of occupy, promoting the network form of organization and enhanced the framing power of the movement. In the next phase of the movement the physical occupied space of Zuccotti Park would start to play a leading role in the transformation of OWS.

## Chapter 3: The Importance of Physical Space and the Road to Eviction

On its height the Occupy movement had more than a thousand active occupations.<sup>30</sup> These physical occupations became the core of the movement and provided multiple opportunities: the organizational structures were built around the occupations; they were a performance in itself and helped to build community. However, they also created challenges. In NYC the encampment was constantly surrounded by police, not just to provide safety, but also for intimidation. Also, although the camp was the hearth of the movement, it became harder and harder for the protesters to keep up with sanitation and to provide safety for everyone. The inclusive and open character of the movement also attracted people who were just in need of food and shelter and had nothing to do with the political goals of the movement. These challenges became the centrepiece of a framing battle between protesters and the local government. The protesters celebrated a victory in October, when Brookfield Properties backed off to clean the park, but ultimately got evicted on 15 November 2011 and lost their occupation.

### The Importance of Zuccotti Park for Occupy Wall Street

While Zuccotti Park was important for the movement from the start, it became even more important after the first weeks. It was the space where the organizational structures were built around, was a performance in itself and perhaps most important the place where community was built. The physical occupation was not just an occupation; it embodied a spatial struggle over the meaning of space (Juris, 2012:268). The occupiers imagined their own little world in the middle of the financial district of New York City; an alternative to capitalism in the belly of the beast.

#### **Zuccotti Park: Space for Organizational Building**

Almost all the organizational structures of OWS in NYC were formed according to the physical presence the protesters had in Zuccotti Park. The general assembly did not just meet in Zuccotti Park, it also made decisions about the occupation (As can be seen in the list of past proposals on [nycga.net](http://nycga.net)<sup>31</sup>), hereby gaining practical significance. Furthermore, there was a constant stream of people in Zuccotti Park, which usually provided the general assembly enough people to make decisions. Also other organizational organs were built around Zuccotti Park. Most of the working groups met at Zuccotti Park for their meetings and had their own little space in Zuccotti Park, where they debated and held their activities. For example, one of my interviewees helped to organize the

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<sup>30</sup> As can be identified on the website: <http://www.meetup.com/occupytogether/> (Accessed July 10, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Proposals include: Funding for sleeping bags, funding for bins and rules about noise. See: <http://www.nycga.net/category/assemblies/proposals-past/> (Accessed July 10, 2012).

OWS Think Tank, an open democratic discussion platform, and said that it was really important that they had their own physical spot in Zuccotti Park. In this way they could attract hundreds of different people, from tourists, bankers, families, activists to celebrities to join their platform for discussion. They were visible and open to everyone.<sup>32</sup> This was also true for the Environmental Solidarity working group (ESWG) who held multiple activities in Zuccotti Park:

‘Well originally, we (ESWG) wanted to raise some awareness and we had a home base. We had Zuccotti Park. So we had a few days of climate justice days, very organized teach-ins and speak-outs.’<sup>33</sup>

In sum, Zuccotti was the home base of the movement, it was the place where people went to if they wanted to participate and it was the place where most organizational structures of OWS were built around.

### **Zuccotti Park: An Alternative to Capitalism**

The occupation of Zuccotti Park was not just important for the organizational structures of the Occupy movement it also was a performance in itself. The park provided the opportunity to publically display an alternative to capitalism. The drum circles and public jam sessions provided a stark contrast to commercial popular music, the free food of the people’s kitchen challenged the idea that we have to pay for our primary necessities of life, and the people’s library represented the idea of free education for all. The protesters would later call these public performances under one single name: mutual aid.<sup>34</sup> Also in the area of technology did Zuccotti Park provide space for public displays of innovation and alternative practices. For example, Isaac Wilder and his team created the Freedom Towers that provided the protesters with internet access, outside government or corporate control (Wagstaff 2012). And when the cold set in at the end of October, and the city took away the gas generators, which were seen as a safety issue, they were quickly replaced with bike-powered generators that could also charge batteries (Chafkin et al. 2011). These performances not only helped in providing services in the park, they also helped to build community.

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<sup>32</sup> Author’s interview with Courtney Brooke, involved with OWS from 17 September 2011 onward and one of the organizers of the Think Tank. 4 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.

<sup>33</sup> Author’s interview with Peter Rugh. 11 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.

<sup>34</sup> In a flyer of the May Day Mutual Aid Cluster that was handed out in order to mobilize people for the providence of mutual aid, mutual aid was explained as: the voluntary, mutually beneficial exchange of resources and services. Everyone has something of value to offer in this society; instead of looking to corporations or the state, we can look to one another for what we need. This practice has existed for thousands of years in myriad societies as well as among nonhuman animals. Capitalism manufactures false scarcity – mutual aid creates cooperation not competition.



### **Zuccotti Park: Home of Occupy Wall Street**

The building of organizational structures and the public display of performances directly linked to the occupation, complemented with the earlier mentioned process of self-representation through public displays of WUNC at Zuccotti Park, created a place where people could build an inclusive, respectful, supportive and horizontal community (Gelder, 2011:9). Peter Rugh described the power of Zuccotti Park as a place for community and connection the following:

‘I am not one of those people who say that the occupation is the goal, but at the same time you could go to that, Liberty Square, and talk to everyone and there was no feeling of alienation, that you have in this city riding the Subway.... But in the park especially, you would just go there, and meet people and debate people. You really had a feeling that a transformation was taking place.’<sup>35</sup>

But the park did not just felt as place where people were building an alternative community, it actually looked like an alternative village according to Mickey Z:

‘There were signs up with this is sustainability, press, info and the drum circle. It was like you were walking in a village and even between the tents they had street names. So after a while you thought you were in this neighbourhood and that neighbourhood, you know who this people would be because they lived in that area.’<sup>36</sup>

Altogether Zuccotti Park provided an opportunity for OWS in New York City to strengthen its organizational structures, displayed an alternative way of living and facilitated the building of community. Although the opportunity of physical space did not drastically transform the processes of mobilization, framing and organization, it sure strengthened them. First of all, the public displays of self-representation in the park and the display of an alternative to capitalism attracted people and resources to the movement. Secondly, the organizational structures were directly linked and strengthened by the physical occupation of Zuccotti Park. And thirdly, the park as a performance in itself helped to strengthen in the framing against the capitalist system, since it actually provided an alternative. However, as the next paragraph will indicate, the physical occupation cannot be seen as just an opportunity, since it also provided ultimately decisive, challenges.

### **Under Constant Threat of Eviction**

Although the occupation of physical space was an important opportunity for OWS in NYC, it also became more and more a challenge throughout October and November. The park was not only

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<sup>35</sup> Author’s interview with Peter Rugh. 11 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.

<sup>36</sup> Author’s interview with Mickey Z. 10 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.

constantly surrounded by a massive police force, which presence in itself was a real intimidation and could hinder the process of mobilization, the park itself also caused safety problems, which led to a framing battle between adversaries concerning the negative impacts of the occupation. In the end, not totally unexpected, the camp got evicted, which dealt a huge blow to the movement.

### **One Park, Two Occupations**

I already mentioned in the previous chapters that the local authorities strictly applied the rules of the law to the protesters by banning amplified sound and the use of tents and tarps. However, that was just the start of the overall repression applied by the authorities. Although the police at a certain point tolerated the occupiers to use tents (Sledge 2011), six gas generators were removed just before the arrival of cold weather. Whether or not the mayor Bloomberg was right that they were safety hazards, it felt as yet another act of repression to the protesters in the park (Deprez & Mead 2011). Even more intimidating was the constant presence of a massive police force around Zuccotti Park, also called the second occupation of Zuccotti Park (Engelhardt 2011; OccupyWallSt 2011a).

When Tom Engelhardt (2011) visited Zuccotti Park he found the streets around the Stock Exchange barricaded and blocked off to traffic and saw police everywhere, whether on foot, on scooters or in paddy wagons. He found the park itself encircled by hundreds of police officers that sometimes almost followed the protesters with the same amount in numbers whenever they went on a march.

Though the behaviour of police helped the protesters to gain media attention, it also presented a real challenge to the process of mobilization. The large police presence, combined with the large amount of arrests – approximately one thousand occupy related arrests near the end of October (Deprez, E. & Mead 2011) – had an intimidating effect that potentially hindered the participation of people, by creating a general fear of potential arrest. Two of my interviewees' views on the police presence illustrate how intimidating the presence can be to certain persons:

'I am going to guess that nobody imagined this brutal and sustained and large of a police repression. I mean when you were in that park from September to November you were surrounded by nothing short of an armed presence. You know people would say isn't this wonderful a non-violent protest, it is not non-violent, look around you. We are surrounded by people with guns. And there is a tower videotaping, our conversation is probably being videotaped right now, if you want to define that as non-violent it is fine, but we are surrounded by violence.'<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Author's interview with Mickey Z. 10 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.

‘People that we want to come out, people that are black, people that are Hispanic, people that are immigrants, people that are traditionally attacked and most repressed in our society...They are being intimidated from joining this movement because they are afraid what the police response will be. And I think that is probably the most negative aspect the police intimidation has had.’<sup>38</sup>

In this sense the mechanism of repression increased the –actual or potential – cost of claim making, by presenting a boundary of intimidation that potential supporters had to overcome. The mechanism of repressions hereby obstructed the process of mobilization.

### **Framing of Safety**

From October onward the private owner of the park, with increasingly the support of mayor Bloomberg, tried to find a way to remove the protesters out of the park. This led to a framing-battle on safety and sanitation issues between the local authorities and the protesters. The protesters managed to fight off one eviction, but finally had to recapitulate when they were forced out of the camp on 15 November by the police.

On 12 October the city announced that the owner of the park, Brookfield Property, wanted to clean the park for sanitation. The protesters interpreted this cleaning as a scheme to remove them from the park to make an end to the occupation (Chafkin et al 2011). In reaction to this announcement they started cleaning the park themselves and assembled en mass the morning the park was supposed to be cleaned. Just before the clean-up mayor Bloomberg announced that the clean-up was cancelled by Brookfield Properties. This announcement was widely celebrated by the protesters that had come out to protect the park from cleaning (Barbaro & Taylor 2011). Although the protesters celebrated the cancellation as a victory, it was just the start of a battle between OWS and the authorities, whether or not it was save to keep the occupation going.

In the weeks after, Bloomberg stated, in response to unreported cases of sexual assault in Zuccotti Park, that he wanted all crimes occurring in Zuccotti Park to be reported to the NYPD, instead of letting the protesters use shaming tactics to handle the problems themselves (Coscarelli 2011). Later on he and NYC police commissioner Raymond W. Kelly claimed that the community in Lower Manhattan was distressed by the occupation of Zuccotti Park. The drumming violated the noise code and there were complains about cases of urination and defecation in the area (Schechter 2011; Chafkin et al. 2011). In response to these accusations the main OWS website<sup>39</sup> released multiple news articles to fight these accusations. First of all, they said that the park was cleaned

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<sup>38</sup> Author’s interview with Peter Rugh. 11 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.

<sup>39</sup> [www.occupywallst.org](http://www.occupywallst.org)

every day and that if Bloomberg really cared about the sanitation he should have supported the installation of portable toilets and dumpsters (OccupyWallSt 2011b). Secondly, they released a Good Neighbour Policy guideline, which included points as to respect sanitary regulations and a zero tolerance against violence and property destruction (OccupyWallSt 2011c). As for the cases of non-reporting of sexual assault, the protesters also went into defence. One of the victims of sexual assault said she was more victimized by the police, who let her wait for hours and blamed her for sleeping outside, than the actual assaulter (Schaprio et al. 2011). Correspondingly, members of the sexual assault survivor's team at OWS released a statement that laid the blame of non-reporting partly at the NYPD. Whose policy had undermined a lot of trust in the police among the protesters, what made it difficult for survivors of assault to feel confident in reporting assaults to the police (OccupyWallSt 2011d).

Both the amount of police presence and the framing battle on safety and sanitation issues indicate the increase of the mechanism of repression. An increase of this mechanism means intensification in actions that increase the costs of claim making for OWS. The police presence had the potential to scare people away from participation, as well as the framing of Zuccotti Park as an unclean, unsafe and unwanted place. First of all this increase of repression obstructed the process of mobilization, not just by raising the barrier for participation but also by increasing the resources to keep the occupation going. Second, the challenge of repression and eviction, fought over in a framing battle between the authorities and OWS, led to the mechanism of claim transformation.<sup>40</sup> Instead of focusing on the broadcasting and framing of demands on the original targets as Wall Street, corporations and banks, the protesters started to focus their claim making more against the local authorities, like the mayor and the police. The mechanism of claim transformation hereby changed the process of framing towards a more reactionary broadcasting of issues and performances.

### **From Opportunity to Challenge, From Occupation to Eviction**

In the weeks after 17 September Zuccotti became the centre stage of the movement. It provided OWS with an opportunity to strengthen its organizational structures, hereby further increasing the importance of physical space for the process of organization. It also helped in facilitating community-building and the public display of an alternative to capitalism, which both helped in the process of self-representation. This not only helped to keep the process of mobilization going, it also helped in the process of framing. By public displaying an alternative to capitalism, the broadcasting of their claims became more legit. Nonetheless, Zuccotti Park became not only the centre of a spatial struggle over meaning; it also became the centre stage for repression and endangered the

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<sup>40</sup> By the mechanism claim transformation I mean the indication of a transformation in claim making towards different actors and/or issues.

movement by providing framing opportunities to its adversaries.

The opportunity of the physical occupation was turned into a challenge. First of all the safety and sanitation of the park provided not just challenges on the ground, they also gave way to a framing battle that negatively influenced the movement. Both the repression and harmful framing negatively influenced the process of mobilization. The police presence, amount of arrests and framing of the park as an unsafe place increasingly criminalized the protesters, hindering the process of mobilization by obstructing participation and allocating resources away from collective claim-making. Furthermore, it transformed the process of framing into a more reactionary force. Protesters increasingly focused their framing on the mayor and the police instead of the targets of their original claims. Even though the park had increasingly become a challenge to the movement, it remained its home base. When the park got cleared by the police on 15 November, it destroyed the space on which the organizational structures of the movement were built around and where community was formed. Winter was coming and the occupy movement had just lost an important space of movement building. The next challenge for OWS in New York City was to cope with the loss of Zuccotti Park and reinvent itself.

## Chapter 4: Demobilization, Decentralization and Continued Repression

The Occupation was gone. Protesters had been removed from park together with their private belongings and around two hundred people had been arrested during the eviction. Bloomberg defended the eviction afterwards based on the arguments he had mentioned the weeks before the eviction: sanitation and safety (Barron & Moynihan 2011). The physical occupation was gone and OWS had to overcome a long list of challenges to reinvent itself without a home base. After the eviction, some had the hope that the loss of Zuccotti Park would be a blessing to the movement, since it would bring the narrative back to where it started, instead of a focus on cleaning and providing safety (Chafkin et al. 2012). However, the loss of the park and the start of the winter months initiated a process of demobilization,<sup>41</sup> decentralization<sup>42</sup> and heavily diminished its visibility. OWS in NYC had to find a way to remain relevant despite the continued repression and the loss of visibility. Finally, in spite of all these challenges the Occupiers stayed in contact with each other, joined in new tactical performances and relied on a large network of alternative media to stay informed.

### Continued Repression

Regardless of the pepper spray incident and large-scale arrests, the police had largely tolerated the existence of the occupy encampments in the USA. This changed in the week before the eviction of OWS in NYC with the eviction of large camps in Portland and Oakland (OccupyWallSt 2011e; Bell 2011). After this, a lot of cities followed by clearing the encampments out of their parks. The eviction of Zuccotti Park was a hard symbolic blow for the movement, but the crackdown on the other camps represented an increase of repression against the movement in general.

### Police Response: From Toleration to Confrontation

NYC was not the only city where the situation of the encampment had led to questions about safety and sanitation. In order to confront the problems of the occupations, the Police Executive Research Forum and the U.S. Conference of Mayors had organized multiple conference calls to discuss issues such as: safety, traffic and the fierceness of the demonstrations (Duara 2011; Kilkenny 2011). These conference calls seemingly helped each individual city to decide to clear the occupations in similar

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<sup>41</sup> With demobilization I mean the decrease in the resources available to a political actor for collective making of claims (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007:217).

<sup>42</sup> With decentralization I mean the transfer of authority from central nodes in a social movement towards smaller nodes that still operate in a network together, but become more loosely connected than before.

manners: after midnight and with overwhelming police force. In the weeks after the eviction of Zuccotti Park the police broke up encampments from San Diego and St. Louis to Philadelphia, including the two largest camps of Los Angeles and New York City (Gormille 2011).

This seemingly coordinated effort to clear the encampments was a huge blow for the movement's organizational capacities, despite the movement's form of organization that was segmentary, polycentric and networked (Gerlach, 2001:209). These forms of social movement organization are known to be adaptive because they are effective in fighting off suppression by authorities, since they consist of many autonomous groups that are largely self-sufficient and leaderless. So when one group dies or demobilizes other groups can take over and revive the movement (Gerlach, 2011:303-306). However, the attack was not just on one group or node in the network. The attack was on all big or significant nodes in the network and led to even more decentralization within the different nodes of the movement and the overall network.

The overall challenge of the crackdown on the Occupy movement in the USA had a large transformative impact on the processes of organization and mobilization. The overall attack on the network of OWS forced the movement into its defence and led to a further decentralization between and within the different occupations. They all had lost their space of organization, coordination and mobilization and had to reconfigure in a lot of ways. The movement was forced into defence and every node had their own problems to overcome. In the next paragraph I will describe and explain how decentralization and the loss of physical space transformed the processes of mobilization, organization and framing in NYC.

## **Restructuring Occupy Wall Street**

The first days after the eviction it appeared that OWS in NYC had gained momentum. The plans for massive demonstrations for the two-month anniversary of OWS were not cancelled and mobilized thousands of people to the streets (OccupyWallSt 2011f; CBS 2011). Nonetheless, quickly after the two-month anniversary the movement faced the problems of the loss of their home base. This loss had initiated a process of decentralization and forced restructuring of the movement. The restructuring led to new tactical performances as Occupy Our Homes (OOH), but also created problems for decision-making since the general assembly started to lose its significance. Furthermore, the loss of Zuccotti Park and the bad weather caused new challenges for the movement to be overcome. How to remain significant and visible without an occupation (Juris, 2012:269)?

### **Loss of Physical Space and Decentralization**

The eviction caused a lot of changes in the organizational structures of OWS in NYC. The general assembly started to lose its significance, and while most working groups kept meeting, they had become more autonomous in their decision-making. Other working groups were so bound to Zuccotti Park that they fully lost their significance (Myerson 2011a). Although OWS went on, the structure changed, working groups became more autonomous and the coherence of the movement started to crumble.

In an article in *The Nation*, Myerson (2011a) describes how the general assembly meetings changed after the loss of the occupation. The general assembly was still being held in Zuccotti Park, but it was not an occupied park anymore. Instead of tents and colourful protesters, metal barricades and black-clad security guards determined the landscape. Furthermore, the attendance of the general assembly meetings had dropped significantly, lost its practical significance and became a stage for fracture. Where Zuccotti Park had once helped in the basic needs of survival for many occupiers, many now felt left behind. For some the park had been everything, for others it was just a small part of the movement. In both ways, the loss of the occupation was an immense challenge to many. For example, Zuccotti had been vital for the Think Tank. Although they tried to start up again after the eviction, it was not inviting to join a discussion group while being surrounded by police and barricades. They tried to hold the Think Tank at different spots across Manhattan, but never felt as comfortable as in the time of the occupation.<sup>43</sup> Other working groups like ESWG decided to keep going despite the loss of Zuccotti Park. The inter-personal ties the group had built during the two-month occupation had created a sense of commitment that they could not just throw away. The group moved their meetings to 60 Wall Street and became more and more autonomous in their decision-making.<sup>44</sup>

So, the loss of physical space not only caused a process of decentralization, it also diminished the significance of some working groups and decision-making organs. This further enhanced the process of decentralization that transformed the process of organization to a more decentralized network. The loss of Zuccotti Park also caused what Tilly & Tarrow call disillusionment (2007:216).<sup>45</sup> Both the processes of decentralization and disillusionment served as mechanism in the process of demobilization. Overall, the loss of physical space became the biggest challenge to the continued existence of OWS. Nonetheless, the loss of physical space also helped to set off some tactical innovations.

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<sup>43</sup> Author's interview with Courtney Brooke. 4 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.

<sup>44</sup> Author's interview with Peter Rugh. 11 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.

<sup>45</sup> With the mechanism of disillusionment I mean the decline in the commitment of individuals or political actors to previously sustaining beliefs (Tilly & Tarrow 2007:216).



### **Tactical Innovation**

One of these tactical innovations was OOH. This project was meant to highlight the on-going housing problem in the USA and especially the injustice done by banks to home-owners. The project was also meant to promote direct action and resistance against foreclosures. With the launch of this new project OWS applied the mechanism of attribution of similarity to a multitude of organizations, such as: Picture the Homeless, Vocal New York (Myerson 2011b) and Take Back the Land (TBL) (Gottesdiener 2012). Most of these organizations such as TBL<sup>46</sup> were already using direct-action to stop foreclosures before the birth of OWS. Still, this new focus on stopping foreclosures helped in the restructuring of the Occupy movement and provided a new stage for coalition forming. Hereby preventing a further increase in disillusionment, thus halting the process of demobilization. The loss of physical space was used in this process to create new opportunities that could help to overcome the overall challenge of demobilization that the loss of physical space had created in the first place.

### **Failed Re-Occupation**

The amount of challenges and loss of significance that OWS faced after the loss of Zuccotti Park helped to facilitate calls for a new occupation. The first real attempt to re-occupy public space was on 17 December when OWS – with support of hundreds of faith leaders and elders of the civil rights movement (as claimed by OWS) – tried to occupy a vacant plaza owned by Trinity Church (OccupyWallSt 2011g). This attempt was meant to overcome the challenges that had arrived from the loss of physical space, and to show that OWS was still relevant. To quote Mr. Sky, who was interviewed by the *New York Times*: “Everything about this movement is momentum, we need to show people that we are still relevant (Baker & Moynihan 2011).”

In the end the re-occupation showed two things. First that the police had decided to continue the use of confrontational tactics. And second, that the relationship between Trinity Church and OWS had come under pressure. Where the church had given many protesters hot chocolate, blankets and a place to rest after 15 November, the clergy did not want an occupation on their private property (Baker & Moynihan 2011). When the occupiers, against the will of Trinity Church, tried to occupy the vacant area the two political actors grew apart. Or in other words, the mechanism of boundary activation was initiated.<sup>47</sup> Both the mechanism of increased repression and boundary activation negatively impacted the process of mobilization for the longer term. Where the call for a new occupation had brought people out again, the failure of the occupation obstructed the long-term mobilization process.

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<sup>46</sup> More information about this organization can be found on: <http://www.takebacktheland.org/>

<sup>47</sup> With the mechanism of boundary activation I mean the increase in the salience of the us-them distinction separating two political actors (Tilly & Tarrow 2007:215).

Altogether, the loss of Zuccotti Park had provided a lot of challenges, but also some new opportunities. First of all, the main challenge was to overcome the loss of significance, not just of some decision-making structures, but also of the movement as a whole. With new tactical performances such as OOH the movement tried to remain relevant. This new project did help to build some new alliances, but could not overcome the overall process of demobilization. In order to overcome these new transformations of the processes of mobilization and organization, OWS tried to occupy a new spot, to regain the visibility and relevancy. However, this action failed and backfired by activating a boundary between Trinity Church and OWS, which hurt the longer-term mobilization process of OWS.

### **Importance of the Media for OWS**

The eviction also created another challenge for OWS; how to stay relevant for the mass-media without having an encampment? After the eviction and the start of the winter months that brought bad weather, the movement lost visibility and caused less drama and action. Because social movements need media attention for mobilization, validation and scope enlargement (Gamson & Wolsfeld 1993:116), the loss of media attention further increased the process of demobilization and reduced the broadcasting power of OWS. One of the solutions of the movement to this problem was to keep the alternative media up and use the social media to keep people in contact with OWS. However, the overall diminishing of media attention for the movement indicates the asymmetry of power between media and social movements. Where movements depend on the media for survival, media do not depend on social movements (Gamson & Wolsfeld 199, 116).

### **Loss of Mainstream Media Attention**

According to a news article in *The New York Times* of 31 March 2012, the news coverage on OWS dropped quickly after the eviction and the arrival of the winter. The article quotes an analysis by the Project of Excellence in Journalism, which notified that in October, Occupy generated six per cent of the total news output in the USA. The number climbed in the middle of November to fourteen per cent, during the evictions, but quickly dropped to one per cent in December, January and February and continued decreasing in March (Schmidt 2012). We can conclude out of this research that during the winter occupy lost visibility in the mainstream media. Although the eviction and bad weather had not stopped OWS from organizing public performances, as OOH indicates, it had lost a lot of visibility. This drop in media attention points out the importance of highly visible protest and demonstrations to attract media attention (Hutchins & Lester, 2011:161), and verify social movement research analysis that when outward-oriented movements fail to get visibility that they tend to diminish, transform or fall apart (Rucht, 2003:32). That is what happened to OWS. The loss of visibility caused a

process of demobilization and loss of framing power. However, the movement did not fall apart, but it transformed in a number of ways.

### **Alternative and Social Media**

One of the reasons the movement did not fully dissolve and managed to survive through the winter was because of the alternative and social media. One of the most prominent ways for OWS to distribute their message has been through their own websites and social media. Although the mainstream media started to give less and less attention to the movement during the winter, the movement kept its websites, Twitter accounts and Facebook pages up to date. Also, activists used Facebook as a way to keep in touch with each other and learn about OWS events. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter did not only help in mobilization and information diffusion from central hubs such as the Occupy Wall St. Facebook group<sup>48</sup> or Twitter accounts,<sup>49</sup> but also through interpersonal networking. As described by Mickey Z:

‘Obviously the social media is huge. It's absolutely huge, because the more Facebook friends I have that I identify as occupiers, I just keep getting invited to whatever they are doing. So it just keeps you into the loop. Even when my life got busy, all I had to do was log on and I knew what was happening over the next three or four days. And then I could pick which ones to go to. And I tried to do as much as possible over the winter.’<sup>50</sup>

In the description from Mickey Z about how he kept in contact with fellow occupiers we can identify the interaction between offline and online community building. The interpersonal relations that OWS participants had built during the first phases of the movement were partly held together because of the social media. Although, the central hub of Zuccotti Park had disappeared, activists managed to stay in contact with each other through social media platforms as Facebook.

Overall the loss of mainstream media interest further enhanced the process of demobilization and reduced the framing power of the movement. The diminished interest of the mainstream media meant the loss of an important platform for mobilization. The loss of visibility in the media and on the ground both meant not only that it became harder for the movement to remain relevant and mobilize its constituents; it also meant that the movement lost broadcasting and thus framing power. On the other hand, alternative and social media helped to keep the movement from falling apart. It diminished the process of demobilization by informing OWS followers through

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<sup>48</sup> Link to the group: <http://www.facebook.com/OccupyWallSt>, approximately 400.000 people at the moment (July 14, 2012) have liked this group and by doing so can check the page and receive its news posts.

<sup>49</sup> Popular OWS Twitter-Accounts are: @OccupyWallSt, @OccupyTogether and @OccupyWallStNYC who have respectively 160.000, 36.000 and 120.000 followers at this moment (July 14, 2012)

<sup>50</sup> Author's interview with Mickey Z. 10 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.

their own websites and hubs on Facebook and Twitter, holding interpersonal networks of mobilization together. Finally, the social media strengthened the organizational process of OWS by strengthening inter-personal networks through networking in the virtual world.

### **Demobilized But Not Dissolved**

Most of the challenges in this post-eviction phase were caused by the loss of the physical occupation. The movement struggled to remain relevant and visible and only partly managed to overcome these challenges. One of the ways to remain relevant and visible was the effort to re-occupy. This time not Zuccotti Park, but a vacant spot owned by Trinity Church. When the movement in NYC tried to take this spot, they were challenged by the increase of the mechanism of repression that was a continuation of the overall crackdown on the movement in the USA. This overall crackdown had transformed the organizational process of OWS in general, by initiating a process of decentralization within and between the different nodes in the Occupy network. In NYC the loss of occupation had not only caused a process of decentralization, but also of disillusionment. These processes transformed the mobilization process, by serving as mechanism in the process of demobilization. The general assembly lost its importance, and working groups lost their visibility, disappeared or became more autonomous.

The challenge to become significant and visible again was further obstructed by the loss of mainstream media attention. This lack of mainstream media attention further increased the process of demobilization and influenced the process of framing by the loss of a platform to broadcast its message. Although the movement lost framing power, became more decentralized and was in a process of demobilization, there were some small opportunities that helped the movement to remain relevant and visible. For example, the loss of Zuccotti Park helped to set up now programs of public performances as OOH. With OOH the movement engaged in new forms of coalition forming and coordinated action. Also, the movement might have lost its visibility to the broader public but the social media provided a platform to keep interpersonal networks of occupiers together, which could be used for the mobilization of actions.

In sum, the loss of a physical occupation and increase of repression, and thereby loss of visibility and significance, had negatively influenced the processes of organization, mobilization and framing. Even though the movement decentralized, demobilized and lost framing power it never dissolved and fully lost its significance or visibility. With the spring in sight the movement was ready to re-organize and to remobilize itself to regain their lost visibility and significance.

## Chapter 5: Struggle for Remobilization

The Occupy movement had a hard time during the winter months to overcome the loss of Zuccotti Park as its home base. However, despite the decentralization and demobilization of the movement, it managed to survive and was ready to regain momentum (Eckholm 2012). In February, Occupy in NYC decided to innovate strategically to overcome the challenges of loss of visibility, relevance and demobilisation. While the winter was used to build relationships with labour unions and community organizations, the spring and summer were chosen to re-launch the movement (Schmidt 2012). Under the guidance of the working group of Direct Action,<sup>51</sup> the movement started planning a whole scale of actions for and towards 1 May (also known as May Day). This day of action was supposed to become the day that would remobilize the movement and regain visibility in the streets and in the media. Despite most resources and time during this period being spent on organizing and mobilizing for May Day, there was a general re-emergence of the movement after 17 March. On this six-month anniversary of OWS a group of occupiers went into Zuccotti Park to celebrate and re-occupy their birth place. Like 17 December, the police directly responded and cleared the area to prevent a new occupation of public space that could be used as a home base for the movement. In the time period towards May Day, OWS in NYC tried multiple times to camp out in different spots of the city, but were constantly met with the new confrontational police response. While Direct Action was largely focussing on May Day, other working groups were having their own struggles in their quest to remain relevant and visible. I will describe these struggles with two small case studies of the working groups of ESWG and Global Justice (GJWG) in which I have participated myself from the end of March until the 14 May. In this chapter I will first start with the quest of OWS to remain relevant and explain how they tried to do this.

### OWS and Its Quest for Relevance

The foremost challenge for OWS to overcome after the winter was to regain relevancy again. The loss of visibility in the streets and media had made the movement less relevant. One of the ways to regain relevancy through visibility were the attempts to re-occupy public spaces. Although 17 December was a big failure for the movement, just three months later it tried to take over Zuccotti-

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<sup>51</sup> The Direct Action Working Group of OWS New York City, is one of the most active (807 members on [www.nycga.net](http://www.nycga.net), accessed July 17 2012, which is the second highest amount of members) and prominent (main organizers of May Day) Working Groups of OWS. They describe their activities themselves as: "We plan and bottom-line actions including marches, rallies, flash mobs, street theatre, park defence and more. We also run direct action trainings for beginners and intermediates, as well as occasional special subjects. Recently DAWG has consented to focus entirely on May Day (this includes organizing for the day of, actions building up to it, and everything in between that makes a massive withdrawal from capitalism possible) (<http://da.nycga.net/info/> Accessed July 17, 2012)"

Park again during the six-month anniversary of OWS. Just as 17 December, the police quickly stepped in to remove the occupiers out of the park. The aggressive behaviour of the police on 17 March was probably even worse than 24 September, the day of the pepper spray incident. However, unlike 24 September, videos of a girl in handcuffs seemingly having a seizure did not manage to go viral on the internet or the news. Despite the continuation of police repression, the movement did two more attempts to occupy public places, Union Square and the sidewalks of Wall Street. Where Union Square became a sort of daily carnival that increased visibility on the street, the sleepovers on Wall Street managed to regain some vital media attention in the weeks before May Day. Meanwhile, because of the decentralization many working groups had their own autonomous struggle to remain relevant, remobilize and restructure.

### **In Search for New Occupations**

On the six-month anniversary of Occupy Wall Street on March 17, a crowd of a couple of hundred supporters gathered at night in Zuccotti Park. At a certain moment the police decided that the park was closed and let the demonstrators know that everyone who did not leave the park would be arrested. As a reaction the protesters reminded the officers of the November court order that allowed them to stay if they did not set up tents. In the end the police forcefully removed people from the park and made seventy-three arrests (Sacks & Brandt 2012). According to occupy media the police acted extremely violently, including tackling, punching, stomping and choking people (OccupyWallst 2012b), as can be confirmed by a video of a demonstrator being thrown against a glass window.<sup>52</sup> Even more shocking is a live stream video where a girl is seemingly having a seizure while being handcuffed with police officers standing around her.<sup>53</sup>

Yet, where the violent arrests and pepper spray incidents of 24 September went viral on social media and gained the movement a lot of framing and broadcasting power, the events of 17 March failed to do so. Where on 24 September most media outlets described the police actions in many details and gave links to videos on the events, the reaction on the 17 March events were more timid and diverse.

*The New York Times:* Scores of Occupy Wall Street protesters were arrested on Saturday night as police officers swept Zuccotti Park in Lower Manhattan and closed it...At one point, a woman who appeared to be suffering from seizures flopped on the ground in handcuffs as bystanders shouted for the police to remove the cuffs and provide medical attention. For

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<sup>52</sup> This action can be viewed at 3:40 minutes in the following video:  
<http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/21184748> (Accessed July 18, 2012).

<sup>53</sup> This action can be viewed at 6:50 minutes onwards in the following video:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AiNMAv2KI&feature=related> (Accessed July 18, 2012).

several minutes the woman lay on the ground as onlookers made increasingly agonized demands until an ambulance arrived and the woman was placed inside...One sergeant grabbed a woman wearing a green shirt by the bottom of her throat and shoved her head against the hood of a car. A moment later, another officer approached and forcefully pressed her head against the car before placing her into the back of a police truck (Moynihan 2012a).

*CNN*: Protesters attempted to re-occupy Zuccotti Park, the downtown plaza where demonstrators were encamped in the first two months of the movement, on Saturday. Police made 74 arrests as they forced them out of the park, the Manhattan district attorney's office told CNN. Protesters chanted "We are the 99%," and tried to set up tents in the park, which they occupied for nearly two months before they were roused by police in mid-November. Police carried handcuffed demonstrators from the park -- some of them struggling, others limp (CNN Wire Staff 2012).

*MSNBC*: Police arrested dozens of Occupy Wall Street protesters on Saturday night during a protest marking the movement's six-month mark at its birthplace in New York's Zuccotti Park...More than 100 officers pushed through the park crowd. Many protesters shouted and officers took out their batons after a demonstrator threw a glass bottle at a bus that police were using to detain more than a dozen protesters...When about 100 officers entered the park, dozens of protesters sat on the ground and refused orders to leave. They were then carried out in plastic handcuffs and put in police buses and vans. (MSNBC News Services 2012).

*Reuters*: When about 100 officers entered the park, dozens of protesters sat on the ground and refused orders to leave. They were then carried out in plastic handcuffs and put in police vehicles. The park was cleared within 20 minutes and by midnight no protesters remained in its boundaries (Francescani 2012).

Although *New York Times* gave a detailed description of the behaviour of the police, none of the four agencies above gave a link to video that shows the girl shaking heavily on the ground. And three out of four do not even mention the incident. After the 24 September events, almost every media outlet had given links to the YouTube videos of police making aggressive arrests or spraying pepper spray. This is one of the reasons that explain why the video of the girl having that seemingly had a seizure did not receive more than 40.000 views, while the pepper spray video was watched over one million

times.<sup>54</sup> The failure of the video to gain significant attention can also be explained by the change in circumstances. In September, Occupy was still new and the behaviour of the police against protesters seemed new and one-sided. During the months after the eviction the movement lost not only visibility, but also legitimacy. Seeing a protester related to occupy was not new anymore and could not provide the movement the attention and visibility it was looking for. Even though 17 March failed to revive the visibility of OWS to pre-eviction levels, it did help to launch a new phase of remobilization. Directly after the failed re-occupation of Zuccotti Park, demonstrators moved to Union Square. The same night as the failed re-occupation more than a dozen people slept in the park with sleeping gear and blankets (OccupyWallSt 2012c). Although the police went in the next day to clear the park and announced a night curfew for the following days, Union Square slowly became what some occupiers called 'The New Occupation' (OccupyWallSt 2012d). The weeks after, Union Square became a permanent stronghold of OWS during the daytime. Next to information tables and the use of coloured charcoal to display claims it became an OWS carnival. During the daytime I saw the small occupied space in front of Union Square transform into a free state where people handed out food, made music, did meditation, had discussions, or were holding theatrical performances such as ballet at the barricades.<sup>55</sup> Union Square provided the movement some extra visibility and place to assemble, even though the numbers hardly ever reached over one hundred.

Still, Union Square alone was not enough. The movement was searching for a real occupation, day and night. And what place could be better than Wall Street? Under the protection of a court decision,<sup>56</sup> occupiers literally occupied Wall Street for a couple of days from 10 April 2012 onwards (Moynihan 2012b). The occupation at Wall Street quickly grew and provided the movement with new visibility. However, after a few days the police decided that the protesters were not allowed to sleep on the sidewalk anymore near Wall Street (OccupyWallSt 2012f). The occupation at Wall Street did not become a permanent occupation like Zuccotti Park, but did give the protesters a crucial moment to become more visible again just two weeks before 1 May.

In their quest to become relevant and visible again, the OWS movement in NYC used the tactical performance of occupying public space multiple times. Every time they tried to occupy these spaces they were met with repression. Of all these three occupations, the one on 17 March 2012 was especially violent. However, unlike at the start of the movement videos of police violence failed to grab the widespread attention of the media or cyber space. Occupy was not new anymore, people

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<sup>54</sup> The statistics of both video can be watched at the following links:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AiNMAv2KI&feature=related> and  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moD2JnGTToA&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moD2JnGTToA&feature=player_embedded)

<sup>55</sup> Author's field notes on the occupation of Union Square from March 30, 2012 to May 14, 2012.

<sup>56</sup> 2000 decision *Metropolitan Council Inc. v. Safir*, which declared that public sleeping could be used as a symbolic expression protected under the law (OccupyWallSt 2012f).



were used seeing protesters being beating up and a lot of people had lost faith in the movement. This combination of the processes of disillusionment and normalization of repression can be seen as mechanisms that influenced the process of framing. Both disillusionment and normalization of repression decreased the framing and broadcasting power of the movement. And this same loss of framing and broadcasting power hindered the remobilization process that the movement was trying to accomplish. Still, March 17, the occupation of Union Square, and the occupation at Wall Street did help the movement in gaining some visibility in the quest for relevance and therefore helped in the overall remobilization process.

## **Loosely Networked Working Groups**

### **Global Justice Working Group**

In order to explain what kind of impact the decentralization of OWS had on the working groups of OWS I will describe the autonomous quest for relevance and visibility of two working groups. From March 28, 2012 till May 14, 2012 I participated in the GJWG and ESWG. By using participant observation techniques when attending their official meetings, their public performances and informal gatherings, I observed the impact of the decentralization of OWS on these two working groups. Both working groups had a different settings and different struggles, but both had to cope with the process of decentralization of OWS in New York City and had their own struggles for visibility, relevance and mobilization.

The first working group that I will discuss is GJWG. This group is a small working group of OWS working on social justice around the world. For this working group visibility did not necessarily mean being seen on the street, it had a wider conception on visibility. Since GJWG is just a small group it had a hard time in mobilizing people of OWS to their cause. Therefore the group strategically published articles, used the internet and built relationships to gain visibility and remain relevant.

Instead of focusing on large public performances GJWG members focused on performances as teach-ins, articles and Twitter. In this way a small amount of people managed to gain a certain amount of visibility and relevance. One of the ways for the group to publish articles is by using their blog on the [www.nycga.net](http://www.nycga.net) website<sup>57</sup> and making use of the occupy media.<sup>58</sup> Also the innovative way of using new ICTs helped the working group in gaining visibility and relevance. For example, during a rally in front of the Bahraini consulate the working group only managed to mobilize ten to fifteen occupiers to chant and hold signs. However, by using Twitter and photography, the rally, became an important act of solidarity towards Bahraini activists. A tweet,

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<sup>57</sup> Global Justice Working Group blog page: <http://globaljustice.nycga.net/> (Accessed July 29, 2012).

<sup>58</sup> Article on tear gas published in the Occupied Wall Street Journal: <http://occupiedmedia.us/2012/02/tracking-tear-gas/> (Accessed July 18, 2012).

with a picture of the rally, by one of the members of the working group was retweeted more than hundred times on Twitter.<sup>59</sup> So although the rally itself was small and insignificant, combined with online performances the rally became more visible and an act of solidarity. In comparison to OWS in general we see that the GJWG was not dependent on large numbers for to gain relevance and visibility. Likewise we can then see another form of promoting relevance in this solidarity rally for Bahrain by the Global Justice working group. The rally was organized in cooperation with The American Council for Freedom in Bahrain, Witness Bahrain, Campaign for Peace & Democracy and the Anti-war working group of OWS.<sup>60</sup> We can identify here not just a networking connection of the global justice group with Bahraini activists through Twitter, but also directly with local organizations on the ground and other occupy working groups. Because of the decentralization, the working group had the opportunity to build its own network of local and international organizations and activists. To conclude, we can identify the mechanism of attribution of similarity, coalition forming and new coordinated action within the GJWG. These forms of coalition forming towards new collective action helped the GJWG to become relevant and visible within their own network of interest.

### **Environmental Solidarity Working Group**

The ESWG was much bigger than the GJWG in the time period during which I participated in their meetings and actions. Because it was much bigger it had more capacity for direct action. However, the larger focus on direct action also created different challenges. These challenges were similar to the challenges that occupy in general had to overcome, such as police repression and mobilization problems. But the ESWG also had similarities with the GJWG. Both groups had become more autonomous and decentralized in their actions and space of operation after the eviction. Also a lot of the participants in the ESWG were members in other local or national activist organizations. These ties and space created possibilities for network building among individual activists and organizations, as I also identified with the GJWG.

The more focus on direct action by the ESWG can be directly linked to the kind of performances they organized. For example, on 21 April 2012 the ESWG had organized a melt-in<sup>61</sup> at Grand Central to protest the green washing of Earth Day.<sup>62</sup> Despite a large effort in mobilization, through distribution of flyers, occupy websites and inter-personal networks only thirty to forty

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<sup>59</sup> Author's field notes on the solidarity rally in front of the Bahraini consulate in New York City on April 5, 2012. The tweet was published on the same date by Radhika Sainath: "At NYC rally now for [#AlKhawaja](#) freedom! [#Bahrain](#) freedom protesters [@OWSGlobalJ](#) [@WitnessBahrain](#) supports you! [pic.twitter.com/N93ROIPt](#)"

<sup>60</sup> Ibid

<sup>61</sup> A melt-in is a performance similar to a flash mob, in which a large group of people try to grab the attention of the public by the theatrical act of melting.

<sup>62</sup> A video that shows the performance and the aftermath: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lzzlumYm5g> (Accessed July 18, 2012).

people arrived at the scene. Large enough to make an impact, but not as big as expected. Another challenge next to mobilization was the police repression (see figures in Appendix II) that indicates a large police presence, cameras and intimidation. Furthermore, the police seemingly knew about a planned banner drop, since the picked location was guarded by a cordon of police that did not let anyone near the balcony.<sup>63</sup> The presence of police in riot-gear, the cameras, the naming of one of the organizers and the quick response to the melt-in all indicate the mechanism of repression. Where the GJWG and their actions had little to do with this mechanism, it was a real challenge to the ESWG that focused on direct action.

As mentioned earlier, like the GWG, the ESWG became a hub in a network of occupy related activism. First of all, a lot of the people active in the working group were already environmental activists before OWS. This directly linked the group to a multitude of activist organizations, such as: NYC Friends for Clearwater, Shut Down Indian Point and n.o.n.u.k.e.s. Likewise, the working group also became a hub for NYC environmental activism and joined in solidarity with activist groups such as 350.org during my time of participation.<sup>64</sup>

To conclude, as the two different narratives of the working groups exemplify, although the movement as a whole was trying, different organization nodes had different challenges to overcome and different ways of doing this. Some working groups had a lot of capacity and connections, while others had little capacity but used this in an innovative manner to gain visibility and become relevant. Both working groups I discussed used the mechanism of attribution of similarity to initiate coalition formation in order to produce new coordinated actions. Because of this local network building, the working groups managed to remain relevant and visible in their own area of expertise and became hubs in those issue-based local networks.

### **Connected Under One Master Frame**

Both of these working groups had become very autonomous in their decision-making and in certain cases became really loosely linked to OWS. It was no surprise that both groups discussed their own future within Occupy during the last meetings I joined. Although both groups felt they had become more autonomous, they both wanted to remain aligned with the label of Occupy. In other words, it was still 'relevant' for them to stay connected to OWS. Why was occupy still relevant for both these working groups?<sup>65</sup> Occupy was still relevant for these working groups because it provided such a powerful master frame of the 99% vs. 1%. Master frames are important for social movements

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<sup>63</sup> Author's field notes on the performance of the melt-in organized by the Environmental Solidarity working group of OWS New York City on April 21, 2012.

<sup>64</sup> Author's field notes during a multitude of meetings and events of the Environmental Solidarity working group of OWS, New York City, March 28 – May 14, 2012.

<sup>65</sup> Author's field notes of the Global Justice working group meeting, New York City, May 9, 2012 and of the Environmental Solidarity meeting, New York City, May 11, 2012.

because they provide a sense of direction and an interpretive framework that connects different actors of different issues to each other (Van de Donk et al., 2003:12; Della Porta, 2006:63). Occupy and the 99% vs. 1% master frame helped the working groups of OWS to relate to each other, support each other and connect to other organizations by recognizing the overarching connection of different struggles. The power of the master frame of OWS was explained to me by Peter Rugh of the ESWG:

‘It [OWS] became a gathering of people involved in different movements, different struggles. Recognizing the overarching problem is the system that places profits before people and the earth. And is at its root exploitive, it exploits our labor and the profits that we create from our work, go to a small minority the 1%.’<sup>66</sup>

Thus, although a lot of working groups became more or less autonomous nodes in the overall occupy network, they remained attached to the movement as whole thanks to the powerful master frame of the 99% vs. 1% that helped the working groups to relate and connect to each other. In this sense, Occupy gave relevancy to the working groups.

### **Relevancy Through Public Visibility and Networked Connection**

In the struggle to become relevant again the movement used different tactics. Next to May Day, which I will discuss in the next paragraphs, the most important actions to regain relevancy through visibility were the acts of re-occupation. The three different occupation attempts did provide the movement some new visibility that helped the movement in its remobilization process towards May Day. Though it also indicated that the movement would have a really hard time in regaining its framing and broadcasting power to pre-eviction levels. Both the mechanism of normalization of repression and disillusionment had lowered the sympathy for the protesters and its actions, hereby hindering its framing and mobilization process. Meanwhile the decentralization had provided different challenges to the different working groups.

Still, for both working groups Occupy remained relevant and helpful in their own struggles by connecting them to each other in the overall Occupy network with the master frame of the 99% vs. 1%. This organizational connection through framing indicates the interrelatedness of the three transformative processes of framing, organization and mobilization. The process of framing strengthened the process of organization through its powerful master frame, which again helped in the overall mobilization process and prevented defection of working groups. In this sense OWS regained relevancy through visibility and network strength (by connecting various organizations to each other in a broader network) through solidarity (Sassen, 2005:81).

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<sup>66</sup> Author’s interview with Peter Rugh. 11 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.

## **May Day: Strategic Innovation**

The main focus of the Occupy movement to regain visibility and relevance was May Day. By deciding to concentrate on one day, the movement changed its strategy from concentrating on occupying public spaces to long term mobilizing and organizing for loose days of actions. Besides this focus on long-term preparation, May Day was also innovative because it was a coordinated effort between multitudes of political actors. Where other actors had largely supported occupy initiatives in the pre-eviction phase, with May Day they worked closely together for a coordinated day of action. The three main political actors working together towards May Day were Labour Unions, Immigrant Organizations and OWS, further supported by student and community organizations.

May Day was not only meant to regain visibility in the mass media and to reconnect people to the movement, it was also a strategic effort to build a stronger alliance of political actors and connect them under the master frame of OWS. Also on the tactical level May Day did provide innovation. For example, new performances were practiced in the weeks before 1 May in order to successfully implement them on the day of action. And finally the day itself was supposed to reignite an old performance for social movement and labour workers: the general strike. This ambitious call for a general strike on May Day forced the movement to engage in a struggle over the narrative on strikes to give legitimacy to this call, which once again exemplified the fight between mainstream media and alternative media on framing power.

## **Alliance-forming Through Coordinated Action**

May Day was meant to facilitate the process of coalition forming between a large group of political actors. The main organizers of May Day were OWS, Labour Unions and Immigrant Organizations, but also student and community organizations played an important role in the organization of events during the day. The extent of coordination was illustrated by a press conference held by a broad coalition of immigrant, community, and labour organizations, and OWS (OccupyWallSt 2012h). The different actors had already applied the attribution of similarity to each other, certified each other's claims or even joined the performances of each other. However, none had yet worked in such a broad coalition together and pursued such a large effort for collective action. The strategic goal of this coordinated effort for OWS was to build long lasting alliances with labour, immigrants, students and communities to widen movement support.<sup>67</sup>

## **Long Term Mobilization Effort**

In order to prepare for May Day, Direct Action had set up a sub-committee in January. This sub-committee itself was again divided into different clusters that largely worked autonomously, but

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<sup>67</sup> Author's field notes on a May Day meeting of OWS on April 7, 2012.

came together in central meetings for coordination. The clusters differed from Mutual Aid, to Outreach and Public Relations.<sup>68</sup> Where the planning for May Day can be traced back to January, the actual large-scale mobilization started in March when Occupywallst.org released a call for action (OccupyWallSt 2012a).<sup>69</sup>

This call for mobilization was followed by the start of the Spring Training sessions, which were meant to train and mobilize people for May Day. The Spring Trainings were held every Friday and had a different theme every week. During the Spring Trainings participants were trained in dispersing tactics, marching, and theatrical performances as chanting, singing and flash mobs. Every Spring Training ended in front of the New York Stock Exchange to perform the people's gong<sup>70</sup> in order to symbolically disrupt the closing bell of the Stock Exchange<sup>71</sup>.

The Spring Training sessions helped to kick off the long term mobilization effort to reconnect people to OWS and to regain some extra visibility on the street. Two weeks before May Day the real mobilization started with a large offline and online campaign to get the word out. In New York alone, ten thousands of flyers were spread in Manhattan and the other boroughs, mailing lists were used to contact people who once were at Zuccotti Park and a phone-bank was set-up to persuade ex-occupiers to reconnect on May Day. Thousands of posters, flyers (See Appendix III for some examples of flyers), stickers and Occupy newspapers were distributed in English and Spanish. Some posters even had Asian translations. Meanwhile Occupy websites and sympathetic independent media helped to spread the call for action in the online world together with the social media as Facebook and Twitter.<sup>72</sup> Altogether OWS used a large platform of offline and online media to mobilize people for May Day in its effort to regain visibility and significance and re-launch the movement in the spring and summer.

### **New Performances**

Also on the tactical level the movement did innovate with regards to May Day. Some of these tactical performances were a reaction to the loss of a permanent occupation, while others were directly linked to the new strategic focus of connecting with labour and immigrant organizations. A variety of

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> The call for action: "This winter, we refocused our energies on fostering ties with local communities, saving homes from corrupt banks and jobs from greedy corporations, and building and expanding our horizontal infrastructure. This #GlobalSpring, we will take the streets again. On May 1st, Occupy Wall Street has called for a General Strike. We are calling on everyone who supports the cause of economic justice and true democracy to take part: No Work, No School, No Housework, No Shopping, No Banking - and most importantly, TAKE THE STREETS (OccupyWallSt 2012a)!"

<sup>70</sup> This video shows the performance of the People's Gong: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F\\_XxBs6IGNA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_XxBs6IGNA) (Accesses July 19, 2012).

<sup>71</sup> Author's field notes on the Spring Training session held by the Direct Action working group of OWS on April 6, 2012.

<sup>72</sup> Author's field notes on May Day meetings I observed during the time period from April 7 to April 30, 2012.

these new tactical performances were practiced in the weeks before 1 May in order to successfully implement them. The Spring Trainings served as a platform to practice some of these new performances as staging picket lines.<sup>73</sup> I will shortly discuss some of the tactical performances that were used on May Day and relate them to the some of the challenges the movement faced and innovations they implemented.

One of the most significant new performances used by OWS on May Day comes out of the labour unions repertoire. In the weeks towards May Day OWS had set up '99 Picket Lines' in coordination with the coalition partners (OccupyWallSt 2012i). These picket lines and the ones that were organized for the morning actions on May Day can be seen as a move of solidarity by OWS towards the Immigrant and Labour organizations. That OWS started to use this performance can be directly linked to new strategic focus of building alliances with unions and immigrant organizations and is a clear example of collective action between these political actors.

Another performance during May Day that signified this new strategy towards building stronger alliances with the coalition partners was the solidarity march. The performance of the march itself was not new, however the way it was organized was. The march was organized by the coalition members, permitted (occupy usually did not asked permits) and was meant to provide space for all partners to hear their voices in solidarity with each other. As with the picket lines, the solidarity march illustrates the mechanism of coalition forming through acts of self-representation and collective action. The solidarity march was especially powerful in the public display of unity and numbers by the coalition partners. For OWS, the march was especially important to gain visibility, as it brought thousands of people into the streets (Newman & Moynihan 2012).

Finally, the performance of the pop-up occupation was of significance. As a march, this performance was not new, since it was used by OWS at events such as Occupy Town Square (Occupy Sings! 2012), but signified an innovation to solve the problem of the loss of permanent occupied space. During May Day OWS had set up a pop-up occupation in Bryant Park that provided mutual-aid and served as an organizing stage for picket line organization and mobilization. With the pop-up occupation OWS managed to publically display some of the atmosphere of the Zuccotti Park occupation and was clearly visible for people that wanted information about OWS or wanted to join performances.<sup>74</sup> The pop-up occupation illustrated a workable alternative to the permanent occupation of Zuccotti Park and created a lot of visibility for the movement on May Day.

Overall, some of the performances displayed on May Day were directly linked to the new strategic route OWS had chosen and others were reactionary to the loss of Zuccotti Park. The picket

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<sup>73</sup> Picketing and the set-up of picket lines is a historical protest performance largely used by trade unions during strikes to prevent people from entering the building or factory that is being picketed ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Picketing\\_%28protest%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Picketing_%28protest%29) Accessed July 28, 2012).

<sup>74</sup> Author's field notes on the pop-up occupation in Bryant Park on May 1, 2012.

lines and solidarity march express the mechanism of attribution of similarity, coalition formation and self-representation in the coordinated collective action of those performances. While the pop-up occupation displayed an innovative reaction to overcome the challenges provided by the loss of a permanent occupation.

### **Struggle over Narrative**

Social Movements produce frames in order to legitimize forms of collective action. By producing frames, movements try to mobilize people for their cause (Della Porta, 2006:61). When OWS called for a general strike for May Day, they knew that would have to legitimize this form of collective action. It was radical, it was ambitious and the reasons for such a drastic action had to be explained to mobilize people for this action. Through articles, flyers and teach-ins the Occupy movement tried to legitimize their call for a general strike on May Day. By doing this, it engaged in a struggle over narrative with its constituents and the media. Especially after May Day, the focus was on the framing of the general strike, which made it easy for media outlets to call May Day a failure, something occupy media did not agree on.

By calling for a general strike on May Day OWS consciously tried to bring back the concepts of the strike and May Day back into in the American mind-set. From the original planning onward, the organizers tried to find legitimacy in the history of striking and May Day America.<sup>75</sup> In order to do this they spread a multitude of articles through their own websites and media to inform their constituents and the general public about the concept and history of striking (OccupyWallSt 2012a; OccupyWallst 2012g; Chomsky 2012; Ely 2012). Additionally, teach-ins were organized to tell about the history of May Day and the general strike, while flyers and gazettes that told the history of May Day and striking were widely diffused among occupiers and sympathising public (See figures in Appendix III).

However, this ambitious call and framing caused a struggle over narrative between some mainstream media and independent media. Where coverage *The New York Times* did not even mention the word general strike and focussed on the amount of arrests (Newman & Moynihan 2012), international relations professor Amitai Etzioni called May Day a fizzle and said it came nowhere near a general strike (Etzioni 2012). Also *The New York Post*, from which it could be expected, used the general strike frame to call May Day a failure. By stating that “the tens of thousands that OWS swore would fill the streets never showed” and “the first nationwide General Strike in US history was nowhere to be seen (New York Post 2012).” On the other side was the independent media, or more sympathetic media as *AlterNet* and *The Nation*. Where *AlterNet* was largely positive about May Day and saw it as an “reemergence of the Occupy movement” (Jaffe et al.

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<sup>75</sup> Author’s field notes on May Day meetings on April 7 and April 18, 2012.



2012), Allison Kilkenny of *The Nation* went head on by attacking mainstream media outlets. She accused media outlets of framing the protests on May Day as a failure because there was no general strike and blamed mainstream media for downgrading the number of protesters (Kilkenny 2012).

In sum, we can identify a battle of framing between alternative and independent media and the mainstream media. Despite the large efforts of the occupy media to legitimize their call for a general strike on May Day with historical narratives, they failed to influence the mainstream media with this. The examples shown above indicate that the mainstream media was not really affected by the movements framing power. In the end the movement made a mistake by calling for a general strike on May Day. By doing this it created a challenge of expectation for itself that could not be met, and only negatively influenced its process of framing, because the mainstream media did not adopt the movement's definition of May Day or striking in any way.

### **Overall Impact of May Day**

May Day was the main focus of the Occupy movement to become relevant and visible again. In order to overcome these challenges of regaining visibility and relevancy, the movement made strategic decisions that influenced the organization, mobilization and framing processes. First of all, the organizational process was influenced by the decision to build deeper alliances with labour, immigrants and students. By making these decisions the movement strengthened its network ties with these organizations through the mechanisms of coalition forming, self-representation and collective action. However, this also meant some trade-offs and tactical innovation for the movement, such as requesting a permit and engaging in new performances. In this sense May Day changed the way these different political actors were related to each other in the overall activist network that connected them. For the OWS movement this also meant engaging in decision-making structures with its allies that were not fully horizontal or based on consensus.

Second, May Day influenced the process of mobilization on different levels. First of all the changes in the organizational process through coalition forming and collective action helped to mobilize resources and constituents of the other political actors for the day of action. Also, because the long term planning ahead of May Day influenced the process of mobilization. For the first time the movement in NYC accumulated its resources and energy for one day. The long-term outlook was used to organize large-scale mobilization through offline and online media. Although the focus during this mobilization was largely on alternative media, ICTs played a marginal role in this overall information distribution. The focus was on the visibility of the movement on the streets and a display of commitment to the cause. Distributing flyers and occupy newspapers on the street were more suited for this goal. Overall May Day helped OWS to re-mobilize itself out of the winter period with a long-term mobilization focus and alliance forming towards May Day.

Third, both the processes of organization and mobilization were largely positively influenced by the strategic decision to focus on May Day, and this was more ambiguous with the process of framing. By choosing May Day and the call for a general strike, the movement raised lofty expectations for itself and the media. Although the movement tried to legitimize its call for a general strike on May Day with historical examples and narratives, it was a strategic mistake to produce this discourse for its remobilization process. The counter-discourse of May Day and striking produced by the movement led to battle between alternative and independent media versus mainstream media. The movement failed to influence the frames of the mainstream media and even provided them space for counter-framing the general strike as a failure. But May Day did not only influence the process of framing in a negative way, by engaging in collective action with the other political actors of May Day the movement connected them to their master frame of the 99% vs. the 1%, which strengthened both the processes of mobilization and organization.

### **Renewed Visibility, Relevancy and Mobilization?**

The loss of a permanent occupation and the bad weather were the main challenges of the Occupy Wall Street movement during the winter months. These challenges had led to a loss of visibility and relevancy of the movement and initiated processes of demobilization and decentralization. During these months the movement tried some innovative tactics and build some new small alliances, though these initiatives could not halt the previously mentioned processes. The movement decided to alter its strategic planning to regain visibility and relevancy to keep the movement from dissolving.

Through the re-occupations, but especially May Day, OWS managed to gain more visibility on the street again. Yet this visibility on the street did not directly transfer to a larger visibility in the media and public opinion. Where new ICTs such as live-streaming and social media had helped the movement in gaining framing and broadcasting power in the earlier phases of the movement, they failed to provide this opportunity again. As the re-occupations, May Day was unsuccessful in providing OWS renewed framing power in the mainstream media. This failure was largely the fault of the movement itself, because it had decided to incorporate a radical frame around the day of action that was initiated to revive the movement. On the other hand, the movement still had its powerful master frame of the 99% vs. 1% that helped to keep the decentralized working groups connected to larger movement and facilitated coalition formation through the attribution of similarity.

Thankfully for the movement the strategic decision to focus on May Day helped to remobilize and temporarily overcome the loss of visibility and relevancy. However, the focus of all resources and effort on one day is not enough for larger overall process of movement building. Therefore the most successful element of May Day can be identified as the building of deeper alliance between a multitude of political actors and the engagement in collective action with these actors. Ultimately,

May Day did not directly help in fulfilling the goals of the movement ( such as bank regulation, social equality) and can be seen more as a day of action that helped the Occupy Wall Street movement to survive by providing it some renewed visibility and relevancy.

## Conclusion

### **Social Movements are Shaped by the Social Context in Which They Exist**

The individual chapters that provided the body for this paper have all represented a different phase of the Occupy Wall Street movement. Through these streams of contention I have identified challenges and opportunities that influenced or transformed the processes of organization, mobilization and framing that shape social movements. Throughout my research I have not only analysed a changing of opportunities and challenges throughout the different streams of contention, but also saw challenges transform into opportunities or the other way around. Not only did these challenges and opportunities transform the different shaping processes of OWS, sometimes these processes themselves produced new challenges or opportunities and strengthened or weakened each other. In this concluding chapter I will first of all answer the first part of my puzzle statement: how have the different processes of mobilization, framing and organization, of the Occupy Wall Street Movement in New York City, been transformed by the challenges and opportunities it faced throughout the different phases of its existence? I will do this by shortly summarizing the five different phases.

#### **Phase One: Materializing Occupy Wall Street**

The first phase of OWS officially started with the tweet of *Adbusters Magazine* 9 June 2011 and ended on 17 September. Throughout this stream of contention the main challenge was to materialize the idea to occupy Wall Street. One of the main opportunities that helped overcoming this challenge is the global trend of rooted cosmopolitanism that help activists to connect to other sites of contention. The other main opportunity was the existence of a local network of activists that had engaged in similar performances and tactics as OWS before.

The opportunity provided by rooted cosmopolitanism helped to activate a large amount of mechanisms, from attribution to similarity to brokerage and diffusion. Hereby influencing the organizational process by placing OWS into a global network of activism and diffusing organizational structures that OWS emulated. The connection with other sites of contention also positively influenced the mobilization process by providing solidarity, inspiration and techniques that helped facilitating the mobilization process of OWS. Likewise it influenced the process of framing through the application of frame bridging, which helped connecting the different sites of contention to each other, thus supporting the other two processes of mobilization and organization. The process of organization was also shaped by the existence of a local network of activists who took up the idea to occupy Wall Street and built its organizational structures according to earlier experiences and idea diffusing from other sites of contention. Lastly these activists not only came up with the powerful

master frame of the movement but also used their own interpersonal network to help mobilization on the ground.

### **Phase Two: Upward Scale-Shifting**

The second phase of OWS began with the occupation on 17 September 2011 till the international scale shift on 15 October 2011. During this phase the overall challenge was repression from the local authorities. However this challenge was quickly transformed into opportunities for public acts of self-representation and was decisive in attracting the media attention that, together with the connection of occupy to a global network of activism, helped to facilitate upward scale shifts.

The transformation of repression into an opportunity positively influenced the overall mobilization and framing process of OWS. Through the public display of self-representation, created by the staging of repression, the movement managed to attract more people to Zuccotti Park and thus assisted its mobilization. The initial lack of media attention provided the movement broadcasting and framing power by the diffusion of displays of self-representation through digital channels that ultimately influenced the mainstream media. This increase in media attention facilitated upward scale shifts that indicate an increase in participants and resources (mobilization) but also influenced the organization process of OWS by strengthening its position within the global network of activism.

### **Phase Three: Increased Repression**

The next stream of contention was all about the occupation of Zuccotti Park and ended with the eviction of it on 15 November 2011. In contrast to phase two, a challenge did not transformed into an opportunity, but the other way around. In the weeks after 17 September Zuccotti Park was largely an opportunity for OWS; its organizational structures were attached to the park, it facilitated community building and helped in the process of self-representation. Yet it transformed into a challenge when the camp became less safe, an object of negative framing and target for repression.

The physical occupation strengthened all three transformative processes. First of all the organizational process was largely strengthened by the park because it formed a centre-stage and hub for organizing. Second, as a stage for public displays of self-representation the park attracted resources and people to the movement, thus strengthening mobilization. And lastly, it aided the movement's framing process by publically displaying an alternative to capitalism. When the park transformed into a challenge, both repression, unsafe conditions and negative framing damaged the process of mobilization by obstructing participation and allocating resources away from collective claim-making. Hitherto it negatively influenced the process of framing through reactionary claim transformation towards the police and local government.

#### **Phase Four: Demobilization**

Where the occupation of Zuccotti Park had become a challenge for OWS in the previous phase, the loss of it endangered the movement in the fourth phase. This phase covered the winter months from the eviction towards halfway March. The loss of Zuccotti Park had opened opportunities for new projects as Occupy Our Homes, but could not overcome the combined challenges of the loss of Zuccotti Park, winter weather and continued repression. Since these challenges had drastically lowered the visibility of OWS (in the street & media) and diminished the relevancy of the movement.

The loss of the occupation had dramatic effects on all three transformative processes of OWS. Combined with the continued repression it decentralized the organizational structure off the movement as a whole. Furthermore it had led to disillusionment, and loss of visibility. The loss of visibility negatively influenced the process of framing, because the loss of mainstream media attention lowered the broadcasting power of the movement. All these things together led to an overall process of demobilization, even though the loss of the park had also provided opportunities for new tactics that led to new coalition forming and coordinated action.

#### **Phase Five: Remobilization**

The last phase of OWS that I have discussed in this paper was largely centred around one day; the first of May. The challenge that OWS tried to overcome during this stream of contention was to alter the process of demobilization, by overcoming the loss of visibility and relevancy. To overcome these problems the movement strategically created its own opportunity; one day of action would have to positively alter the processes of mobilization, organization and framing.

Altogether May Day, and the process towards it, managed to alter the process of demobilization towards remobilization. The long term mobilization outlook provided by the opportunity of May Day helped to facilitate coalition forming and to mobilize people back on the street to temporarily overcoming the problems of loss of visibility and relevancy. Yet, the day of action did not fully manage to strengthen the process of framing. Although the master frame helped to keep decentralized working groups together and aided in the process of coalition forming, strategic mistakes linked to the framing of May Day had not positively altered the movement's framing power over the mainstream media. Finally the process of organization continued to decentralize, though May Day did strengthen its network strength by building deeper alliances with other political actors.

#### **A Marginal Role for ICTs**

The second part of my puzzle statement was focused around the question what role new ICTs had played in overcoming or providing the just mentioned challenges and opportunities. Throughout my

narrative I identified a few moments in which ICTs helped to overcome challenges (keeping inter-personal networks together) or provided opportunities (media attention). Yet in the overall story they play a marginal role and are largely connected to the broader context (facilitating rooted cosmopolitanism). By using a broad historical perspective I wanted to explain the transformation of OWS through different phases. When we look at the role of ICTs in these transformations and the overall building of the movement, they are just tools. Still social tools that can be decisive at certain times, but their use is bounded to the social context.

That the role that ICTs play for social movements are dependent on the social environment was illustrated by the different impact of YouTube movies of police violence on 24 September compared to those on 17 March. On 24 September Occupy Wall Street was new and had not received much media attention yet. The behaviour by the police in March was probably more violent than in September, yet failed to grab the attention of the mainstream and social media. I explained this by the mechanism of disillusionment and normalization of repression. Occupy was not new anymore, people had lost faith in the movement and had gotten used to seeing images of violence against protesters. The difference in the social context wherein OWS operated explains the space of influence for ICTs in providing opportunities or overcoming challenges. In this sense they are social tools that are dependent on the social context they operate in.

### **Shaping Social Movements**

By using next to mechanism and processes, opportunities and challenges as analytical concepts I have tried to introduce new analytical tools to help in the description and explanation of social movement transformation. These concepts of challenges and opportunities, in combination with the three transformative processes I identified, highlight that social movements operate in a social context. Due this social context is under constant change, challenges and opportunities also change over time, influencing social movements in this process. For Occupy Wall Street opportunities sometimes existed in the structural environment as the existence of similar sites of contention, and sometimes they created their own opportunities through innovation, like the last phase of May Day illustrates. Other times the opportunity was to be found in the structural environment, but had to be recognized by agents first before it became an actual opportunity. The existence of certain laws that protected the protesters to sleep on the sidewalks at Wall Street are an example of this. The interaction between these structures and agents create mechanism and processes that shape social movements.

By introducing these analytical concepts in combination with a social-historical narrative approach I have tried to illustrate the explanatory power of these concepts. Yet I recognize that opportunities and challenges remain broad concepts and seem to overlap with the mechanism and

processes approach a bit too much at times. Like the mechanism of repression, which sometimes acted as a challenge and other times as a mechanism. Besides these limits I hope I have illustrated that a categorical distinction between these concepts does provide a better insight in how and why social movements like OWS transform.



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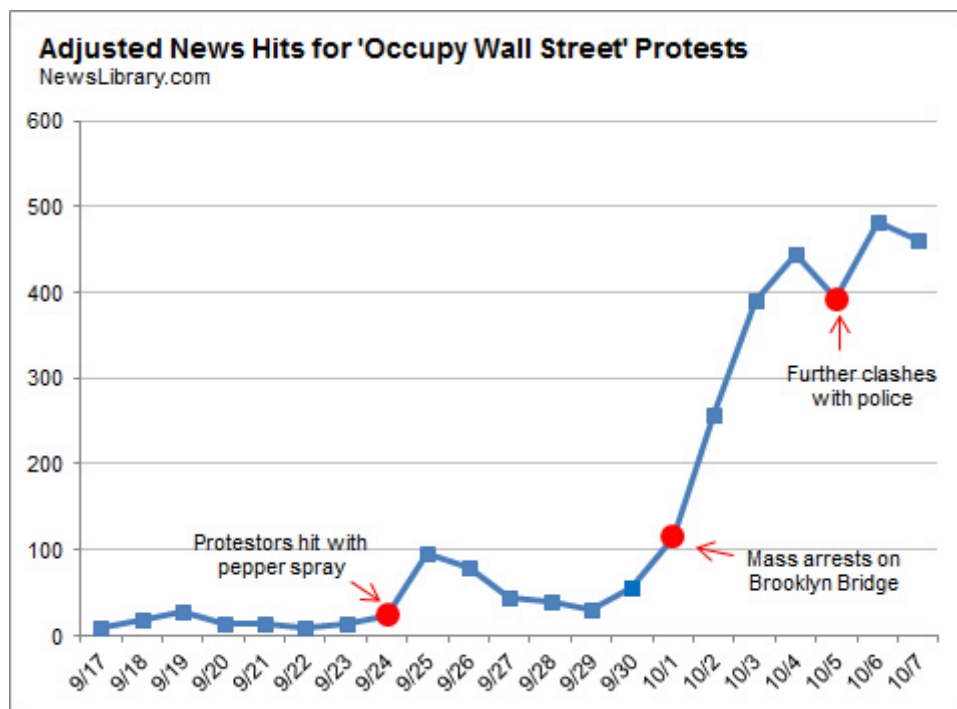
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## Appendix I

### Third-Party Media Coverage Research

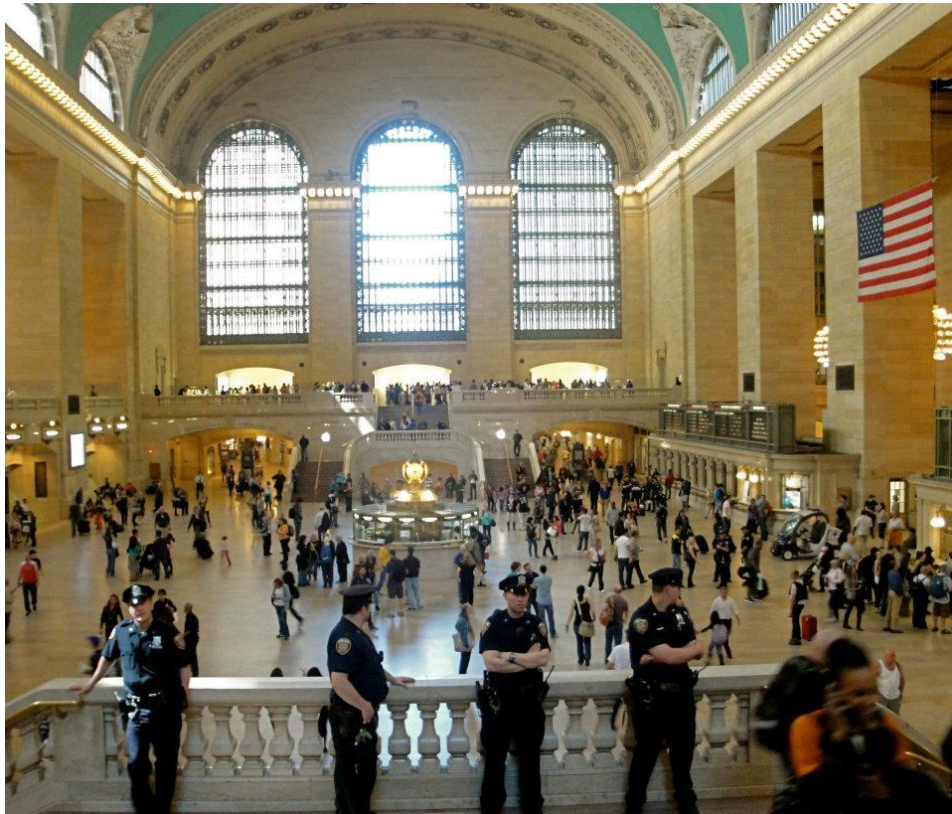
A Research done by Nate Silver, the author of *The New York Times* FiveThirtyEight blog, which is devoted to statistical analysis on different subjects, is represented in the graph below. Through the database NewsLibrary.com Nate Silver estimated the amount of coverage given to Occupy Wall Street Protests over a period van September 17 towards October 7.



**Figure 1:** On the horizontal axis we can see the dates and on the vertical axis the amounts of news hits for OWS protests (Silver 2011).

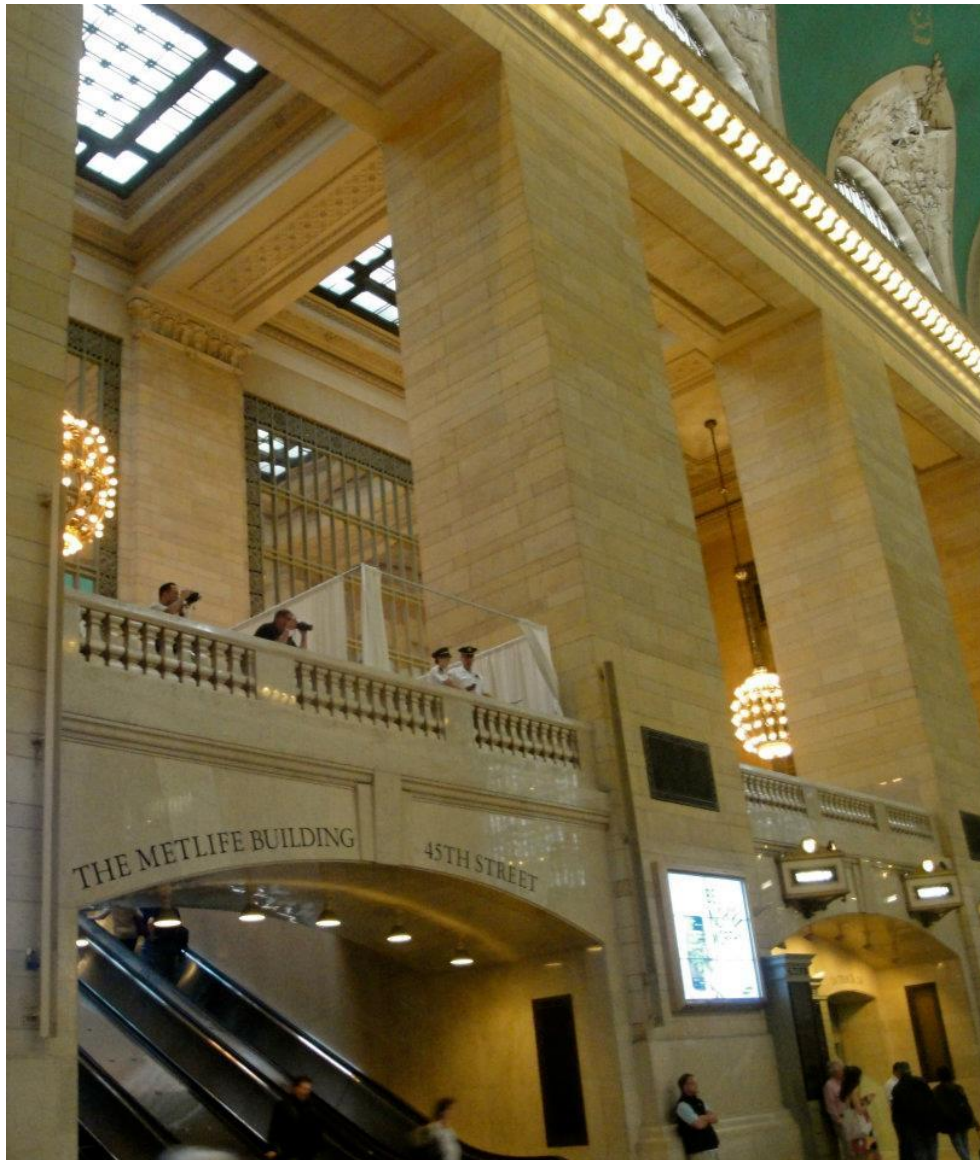
## Appendix II

### Pictures Occupy Earth Day 21 April, 2012: Grand Central Melt-In

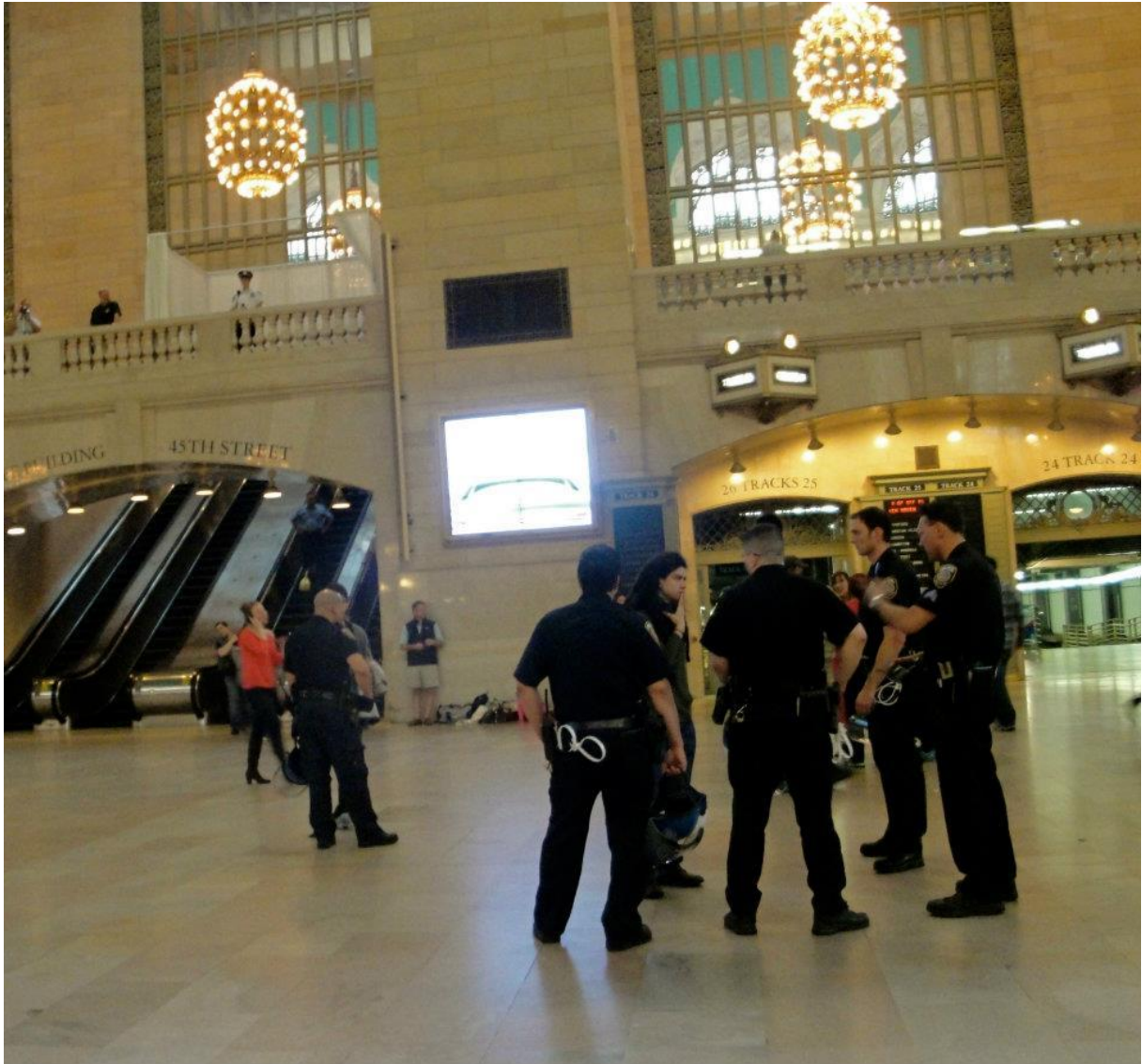


**Figure 1:** Heavy police presence before the actual performance of the melt-in on 21 April 2012. Grand Central, New York City, United States of America. Picture taken by Mickey Z (used with permission).





**Figure 2:** High ranking police officers (indicated by their white shirt) ready to film the performance of the Environmental Solidarity working group of OWS on 21 April 2012. Grand Central, New York City, United States of America. Picture taken by Mickey Z (used with permission).

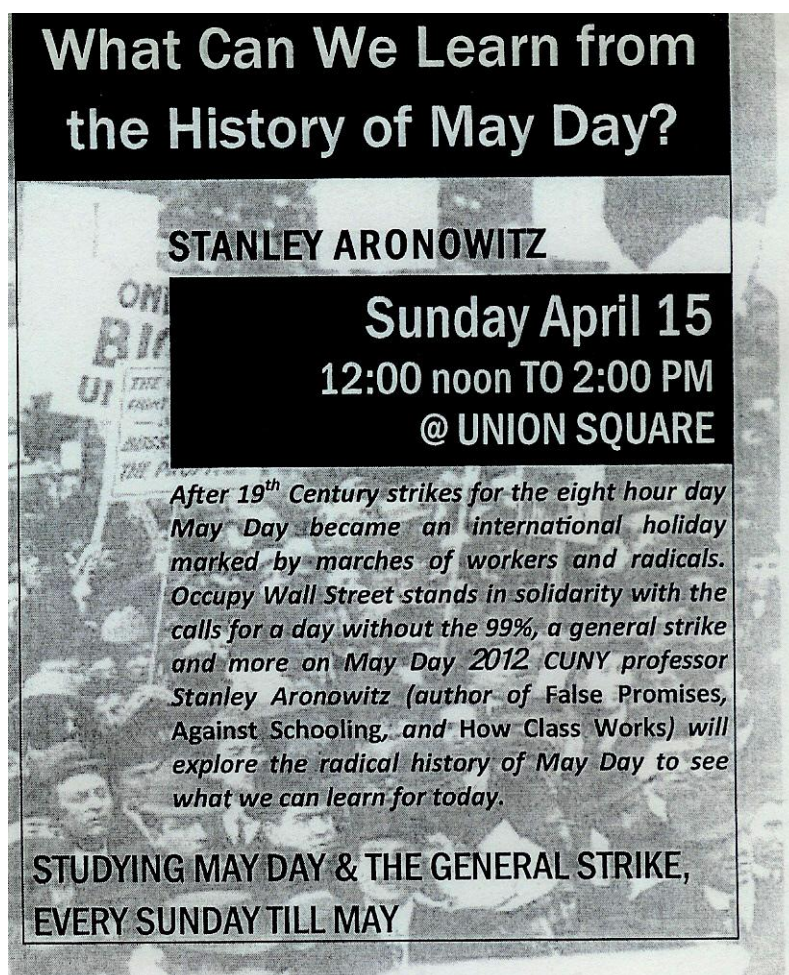


**Figure 3:** Occupier intercepted and called by his name by four police officers before the actual performance of the melt-in on 21 April 2012. Grand Central, New York City, United States of America. Picture taken by Mickey Z (used with permission).

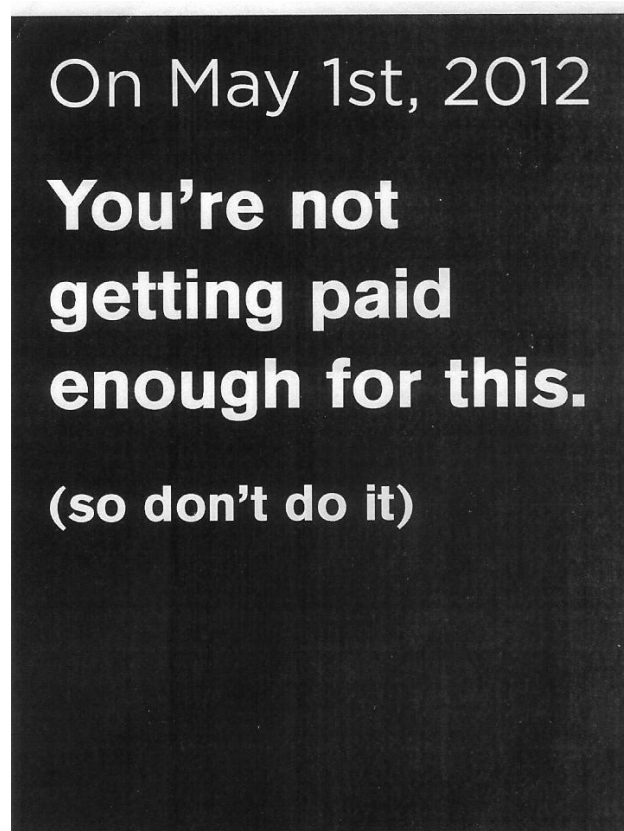


## Appendix III

### Pictures of the Flyers Distributed by OWS to Mobilize for May Day



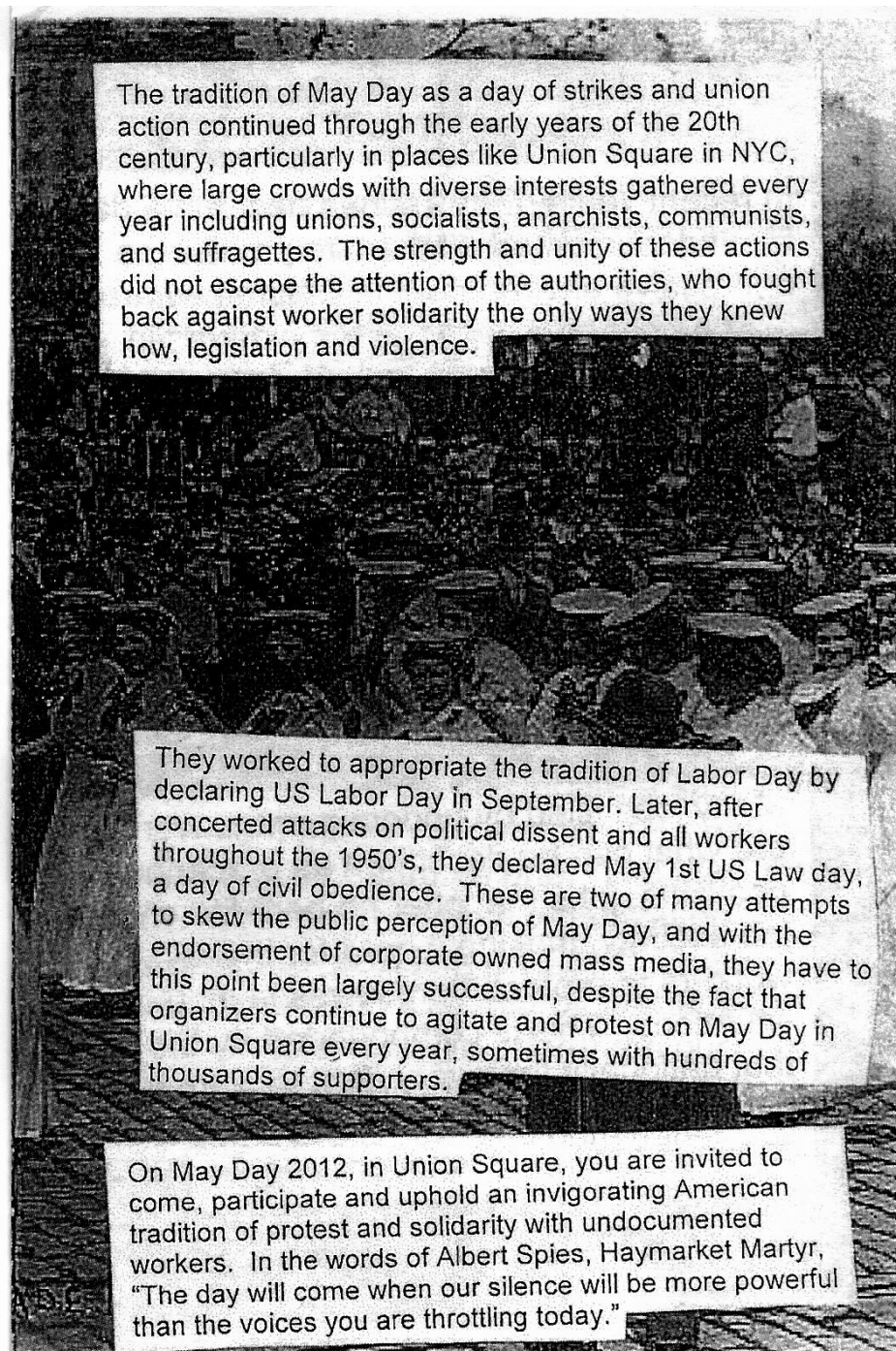
**Figure 1:** Invitation flyer to join a public class about the history of May Day and the General Strike. Distributed on a May Day preparation meeting on 7 April 2012. New York City, United States of America.



**Figure 2:** Front page of a mobilization flyer for May Day distributed in the weeks before May Day 2012. New York City, United States of America.



**Figure 3:** Back page of the above mobilization flyer for May Day distributed in the weeks before May Day 2012. New York City, United States of America.



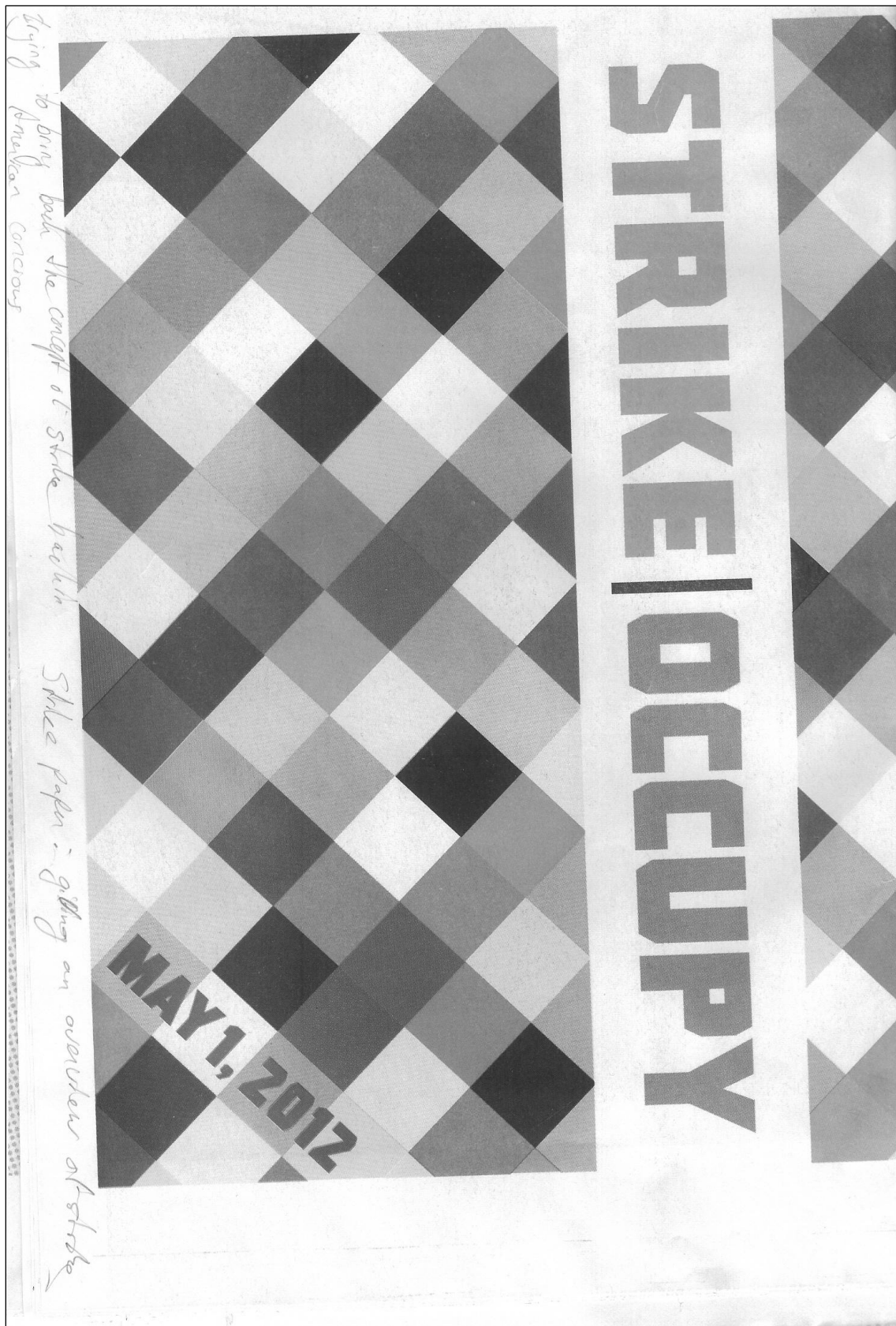
The tradition of May Day as a day of strikes and union action continued through the early years of the 20th century, particularly in places like Union Square in NYC, where large crowds with diverse interests gathered every year including unions, socialists, anarchists, communists, and suffragettes. The strength and unity of these actions did not escape the attention of the authorities, who fought back against worker solidarity the only ways they knew how, legislation and violence.

They worked to appropriate the tradition of Labor Day by declaring US Labor Day in September. Later, after concerted attacks on political dissent and all workers throughout the 1950's, they declared May 1st US Law day, a day of civil obedience. These are two of many attempts to skew the public perception of May Day, and with the endorsement of corporate owned mass media, they have to this point been largely successful, despite the fact that organizers continue to agitate and protest on May Day in Union Square every year, sometimes with hundreds of thousands of supporters.

On May Day 2012, in Union Square, you are invited to come, participate and uphold an invigorating American tradition of protest and solidarity with undocumented workers. In the words of Albert Spies, Haymarket Martyr, "The day will come when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you are throttling today."

**Figure 4:** A single page that is part of a bigger flyer by DIY Office Production, that was distributed to inform people about the radical history of May Day, its purpose and the mobilize for 1 May 2012. New York City, United States of America.





**Figure 5:** Front page of the Strike Gazette. The Gazette gave an overview of historical strike examples. Distributed in the weeks before May Day 2012. New York City, United States of America.

