



Occupy Wall Street in perspective

Craig Calhoun

Occupy Wall Street was a thrilling protest that briefly dominated media attention and reshaped American public life. As Todd Gitlin suggests, it was perhaps more moment than movement, but of course moments can be very important to movements.

Movements are relatively long-term collective engagements in producing or guiding social change. Indeed, in the nineteenth century, the term social movement was often used to describe the actual course of social change, especially change bringing broader social participation. The term is now used to describe all manner of mobilizations, but it is important to distinguish specific protests and other relatively short-term manifestations from longer-term patterns of action seeking to produce major changes. Movements often proceed in alternating phases of intense public action and seeming dormancy, and much of the work that shapes the long term is in fact done during what appear superficially to be mere spaces between waves of activism. The waves, moreover, are often conjunctures among multiple movements. In the 1960s, for example, people were mobilized not only around peace (or against a specific war), but also in the civil rights struggle, union struggles, the women's movement, the environmental movement and so forth. Likewise the Progressive Era saw a wave in which mobilizations for many causes around labour, immigration, women's suffrage and other issues reinforced each other in a field of movement activity. The same goes for the era of the Second Great Awakening with religious revitalization itself, temperance, labour, women's and above all anti-slavery movements.

So there is no shame in being more moment than movement. It is no denigration of Occupy Wall Street (or the Occupy movement(s) more generally) to say it may not have a future as such. It may be a shaping influence on a range of movements and on the course of social change even if there is no continuing movement under the Occupy name. Even at its height, it was a loose-knit coalition among activists with a variety of different primary concerns: labour conditions in Walmart, fracking and energy policies, financial

Calhoun (London School of Economics) (Corresponding author email: c.calhoun@lse.ac.uk)

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regulation and indeed inequality itself. The phase of intense shared mobilization has impacts on each of these as they are pursued separately as well as on the chances for renewed future connections.

In these remarks, I want to address five points about Occupy Wall Street (OWS). My analysis shares much with Todd Gitlin's. Gitlin offers an engaging narrative and helpful analytic points – both in his BJS lecture and in his book (Gitlin 2012). I am particularly appreciative of his ability to make some of the dynamism of the movement come alive and his use of photographs to make us recall its excitement and challenges. That said, I will emphasize points which I think deserve more attention or different emphasis from Gitlin's account (Gitlin 2013).

But one crucial point on which we agree bears restating. There may be interesting and important discussions about renewing Occupy Wall Street, about 'OWS 2.0', and about continuing 'the movement'. But for the most part there is relatively little reason to expect continuity in OWS as such. I will speak of OWS in the past tense – not because it has entirely vanished but because my focus like Gitlin's is on an extraordinary six weeks in 2011 and because the next wave of intense mobilization will likely come under a different name. It will not be just 'Occupy Again' but something new, sparked by its own exciting innovations, giving voice to new participants and new visions.

1. OWS was part of an international wave of mobilization

Gitlin narrates the story of OWS in almost exclusively American terms. This seems at best one-sided. The mobilization's roots, its tactics, and its ultimate significance were all international as well as domestic.

The 2008 financial crisis stunned people but initially brought little protest. Financial institutions had reaped fantastic profits. Their executives had been paid fantastic bonuses. And when the financial house of cards they devised tumbled, governments stepped in to bail them out with public money. Some firms used the public funds to pay another round of enormous bonuses even while many ordinary Americans lost their jobs or their homes or were threatened with layoffs and foreclosures. There were certainly howls of unhappiness, Republicans and Democrats sniped at each other over who had the better response, but there was little in the way of concerted collective action.

People poured into streets in protest and began symbolic occupations of public squares – but not immediately after the initial crisis and not in New York. Rather, this mobilization began in Europe. Initially continental Europeans had regarded the financial crisis as an American, or perhaps Anglo-American matter. In Britain, the sight of queues outside collapsing banks brought alarm. Government efforts to manage the crisis brought controversy. But there was little immediate organized protest. This began only in 2010 as the crisis spread to Greece, Spain, Portugal and other parts of the Eurozone.

In each of these countries, occupation of prominent public spaces was a central dimension of activism. Syntagma Square and Plaza del Sol quickly became globally familiar names; images of rallies proliferated. As in New York, protesters came with different analyses and ideologies, passions and emphases. Some were anarchists, some came from more conventional Left political parties. Some were participants in efforts to build a new economy through cooperatives, barter, and alternative currencies. Some were employees of corporations shedding jobs. Some were students facing the future fearful there would be no jobs. Increasingly often they were national citizens angry at austerity imposed not only by their governments but also by global markets, the EU, and in particular its most powerful member, Germany. They were united by a sense of indignation – both in the sense that they were indignantly angry and in the sense that they were being treated with little of the dignity owed to citizens.

This linked the protests in European cities to those in the Arab world. In Cairo's Tahrir Square most famously, but also in Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Bahrain and elsewhere in Egypt people took to the streets and especially public spaces to complain of the indignities they suffered in daily life as well as lack of jobs and opportunities, elites who seemed more concerned about international business partners than the welfare of their compatriots, police brutality, and simple dictatorship. From the end of 2010, images of Arabs gathering to demand the chance to participate in their societies fully and with dignity spread globally, sparking protests as far afield as China, and mixing with European examples to influence the beginning of OWS.

That there was a world-wide wave of protests gave added weight and significance to each. Visual media shared images of urban occupations that brought inspiration and circulated tactical ideas. Even before this it is worth noting the prominence of Canadian activists in helping to start OWS. And it is crucial to see the background – of organizations, networks, and ideas – provided by years of mobilization against corporate-dominated forms of globalization. OWS did not spring into being spontaneously. It was made possible by a 'prehistory' that included the World Social Forum as well as a variety of domestic US campaigns.

The story of OWS thus needs to be seen as international not only interior to the US. This is partly a matter of parallels and similarities, partly a matter of more direct influences, and very much of a pattern of visual images. Indeed, these stretch back before Tahrir to Beijing in 1989 and Prague in 1968 among other instances of transformative popular mobilization in prominent public squares.

2. Occupation itself helped make and limit the movement

The assembly of citizens is at the centre of many protest movements. Crowds stand in for 'the people' at large. But in Zucotti Park as around the world,

occupation was an especially resonant symbolic tactic. It turns the stranger sociability of the crowd into an organized, located, and more enduring evocation of the people. Occupation is a medium of action, and at the same time a desired state of being. It manifests 'the people' or 'the citizens' occupying the public sphere. And for ordinary citizens to claim public spaces in protest is among other things to upset the usual symbolic control of those spaces by government and 'forces of order'.

This is a particularly salient symbolism in contexts where access to public space is inhibited or controlled. This was manifestly an issue in Mubarak's Egypt, for example, as security forces used violence to try to prevent all manner of public mobilization. But it was also an issue in New York and London, where increasing surveillance had been deployed in public spaces and where policing of protests had often appeared to deny citizens the right to public demonstrations or at least to sharply restrict their use of public space for such demonstrations. This had been an issue with police response to anti corporate globalization rallies (as, e.g., at WTO meetings) and indeed outside political conventions in the USA. Police worked to control where protestors could assemble, making some parts of what had previously been considered public space off limits. Urban public space has long been contested; parks are not just gifts of elites and urban planners but often realized by ordinary people who claim open spaces. And in New York and other cities, public spaces had been reduced, subjected to increasing securitization and management, and even architecturally transformed in places for traffic flows but not stationary gatherings in a quiet process over decades. Of course this happened partly for reasons like crime control that had widespread public support. None the less, this made the claim to public space a key theme for democrats.

The constriction of access to public space was reinforced by a trend to privatize public spaces. Zucotti Park was a product of this. It was a privately owned space presented as available for public traffic. But the space appeared as a park because a private developer had accepted responsibility to offer it for conditional public use in return for the right to erect private buildings with non-public space in excess of what zoning laws would otherwise have allowed. This happened alongside a reduction in completely available public spaces in lower Manhattan, and gave added symbolism to the occupation.

For OWS, as for many of its counterpart movements around the world, the right to public space was a crucial claim. It was part of a broader and even more basic cluster of claims: to be represented, to be considered in decisions, to participate, in short to be the public. Participants in these protests made the point that the public should not be identified with the state but with the people. They claimed legitimacy as a representation of the people – at large and assembled.

Occupation also offered a tactical advantage by providing a de facto centre to a mobilization that sometimes denied having centres. OWS famously

refused to authorize a set of leaders or state a political programme as desired by reporters and many others. It was not the product of a single organizational structure; it made an effort to manage its affairs by radical consensus and endless discussion. This was facilitated by being in the Square itself. Occupation gave the movement a more cohesive identity than the diverse ideologies of its members could do, including not least a visual identity to outsiders. It made a meaningful project of the simple negotiation of everyday decisions.

It was also in the Square and as a byproduct of material conditions that some of the mobilization's most memorable innovations took place. The 'human megaphone' for example was a response to the desire for a large number of people to carry on a discussion in a noisy place. They were deprived of the use of electronic amplification by a decision of the police and city government. But having each statement amplified by repetition in a wave that carried it outward from the centre (or sometimes in reverse from the fringe to the centre) made ordinary statements into ritual performances. The human megaphone evoked the decentralized, popular nature of the occupation; it made the group a demonstration of participatory democracy.

It was also in the occupation itself that connections were often forged among different kinds of people and different organizations. Sometimes to be sure there were offstage negotiations between more or less formally recognized leaders. But there was also a constant web of contact and mutual awareness. The person who thought fracking was a critical issue was not a distant ideological competitor to an occupier preoccupied with resisting corporate globalization; he was camped in the next tent.

The occupation was also an occasion to perform 'the people capable of spontaneous order'. This is an important theme for protestors claiming that government is illegitimate, unnecessary, captured by elite interests, or simply overbearing. Through orderly marches and other pageantry protestors have long sought to convey that they are not, as elites commonly portray them, a disorderly mob. In Tahrir Square protestors made a point of cleaning up after collective action. In Beijing in 1989 arranging tents in neat rows was a symbolic demonstration of the capacity of 'the people' to govern themselves. And so it was in Zucotti Park – though not of course with perfect success.

Occupation itself also provided the meeting point between what Gitlin has helpfully called the inner and outer movements. In the Square those interested in OWS but new to its protests could meet those more centrally involved. New recruits could quickly be incorporated into the role of dedicated participants. Leaders could lead more 'organically' or even unobtrusively than at the front of marches or in formally organized meetings.

Occupation was a brilliantly powerful tactic but one with limits. It made displacement a nearly fatal disruption. The movement had a very hard time regrouping. Its lines of communication and solidarity were dependent in

considerable part on proximity in space. As Gitlin suggests, this is where a greater degree of formal organization could have helped.

There is also fragility in the very project of representing the people by public gathering. This is all but ubiquitous to protest movements. Whether in an occupation or marches or sit-ins the participation of a crowd encourages the sense of being a part of something bigger than oneself, of acting not just as a small minority of the population but as 'the people'. Yet this also encourages the illusion that one has found much wider support than perhaps one has.

Occupations also had a tendency to drive a wedge between the protestors and liberals who were sympathetic to many of the mobilization's messages. They created sanitary problems, potential health and safety issues, and traffic problems. They made mayors and university presidents into enforcers of order. Many of these may have made the wrong call when they decided to evict occupations. In some cases, as at Harvard, this was done in a very early and pre-emptive fashion, not as a response to any manifest problem. This perhaps dramatized the difficult position of university presidents, whether personally liberal or not, as they have to manage multiple contending forces: students of different views, members of boards of trustees, donors. Mayors faced even more acute versions of this problem. They are responsible for the smooth functioning of urban systems like traffic and waste removal. They have diverse constituents. And so occupations of public spaces are a very immediate and practical challenge. In New York Mayor Bloomberg certainly had other options than to join in the decision to end the occupation of Zucotti Park. But around the country it was most commonly liberal mayors, black mayors, progressive mayors who found themselves trying to negotiate an end to the occupation and resorting to police force when this proved impossible.

So ironically the otherwise brilliant tactic of occupation divided the mobilization from key potential supporters. And it needs to be recognized that this is almost built into occupation as a tactic. It doesn't have a natural end point. Determined protestors can prolong it indefinitely, with new arrivals compensating for the loss of some exhausted participants. And of course sanitary and other conditions are apt to deteriorate over time. In the case of OWS, the absence of any centralized leadership made it hard to negotiate any departure. Even more, there was no next big tactic to take the place of occupation. The very name of the mobilization made this its central identity.

3. Police and media

In the case of OWS – as in many others – police response helped to make the protest flourish and make it visible to a broader range of citizens and indeed the world. One assumes that police do not do this intentionally. It is hard to believe that they are secret supporters of protest movements who engage in

harsh tactics only to provide symbolic demonstrations of the clash between order enforced by violence and the peaceful expression of citizens. Yet it is very often the case that police efforts to control or disperse crowds provide some of the most influential visual images in protest mobilizations. This is at least as old as the mad charge of the Manchester Yeomanry that turned a rally at St. Peters Fields into the Peterloo Massacre in 1819, but it is of renewed importance in an era when such events are played out before cameras and images circulated instantly by both broadcast and social media.

Gitlin has rightly stressed the oddities in the behaviour of the New York police. These include not just violence or problematic crowd control techniques but a use of senior officers in white shirts rather than uniforms. Whether this reflected doubt about the willingness of unionized uniformed police to carry out repressive actions or some other rationale is unclear. What is clear is that police action reinforced the view that state power was lined up to defend the interests of corporate capital against the protest of citizens. Moreover, this made the state appear to be against assembly, against the very occupation of public space.

The same issue played out on college campuses, which have often been relatively 'safe' spaces for protests. Famously, the Chancellor of the University of California at Davis chose to use force against peaceful protestors – sending in police in riot gear. Some of the police chose to use gratuitous violence and indeed were filmed spraying pepper gas into the faces of protestors sitting huddled on the ground. Gitlin shows the famous photograph which rightly brought widespread condemnation.

Gitlin also rightly stresses that OWS was played out before and drew much of its sustenance from the media. OWS activists tended to see the movement as a mobilization sufficient unto itself but this was never really true. It was always at least in part a dramatic performance before audiences and cameras. This made the relatively small occupation – never more than a fraction of the size of crowds in Tahrir Square or Plaza del Sol – much more significant. But it also meant that it was hard for the movement to control its own message and self-presentation.

While social media circulated videos as well as commentary among participants and sympathizers, much more conventional broadcast media framed OWS for the broader public. These latter were slow to pay serious attention, and the social media actually helped to attract mainstream media. And of course the police made the story much bigger. Still, the mainstream media were just that – not precisely an extension of the movement, often confused by it, and largely organized in corporate structures the movement distrusted.

The occupation created a certain charmed community of participants linked by the charisma of co-presence. This helpfully insulated internal conversations against external pressures. But it also limited the further development of the moment into a movement.

4. OWS was the first mobilization that focused clearly on financial apparatuses that caused the crisis

Somewhat surprisingly, no major protests were occasioned directly by the massive market collapse of 2008, nor by the dubious and sometimes fraudulent practices that led to it, nor by the use of public money in ways that saved banks and rewarded their bosses and investors rather than directly helping ordinary people. When protests first emerged in Europe, they responded to financial debacle, but in a different way. Their immediate targets were usually national governments, particularly when these seemed complicit in saving financial institutions at the expense of citizens. Beyond this there was outrage at the role of ratings agencies, interpreted sometimes as though they were agents of the USA more than of global bond markets, and anger at the imposition of austerity measures by the European Union. And, indeed European discourse was quickly reframed as a matter of nations with different interests and indeed moralities rather than any common European citizenry.

But though the European protests were grounded in a sense of indignation the financial crisis greatly exacerbated, they generally did not target finance as such but government handling of financial issues. Occupy Wall Street shifted the focus. And while one can say many things about the ideological orientation of movement this basic matter of framing was crucial.

There was, of course, the famous claim to speak for the '99%' in contrast to the '1%'. This was brilliant framing. As the best slogans do, it concentrated the most basic issues into a phrase. That Wall Street represented the '1%' was of course an implication, but the frame also brought a more general inequality into focus.

There had been an enormous growth in social inequality during the decades since the 1970s when neoliberalism and finance capital had been ascendant. But to speak of neoliberalism framed the issue largely in terms of political ideology. This rightly grasped the complicity of politicians in promoting financial interests over broader interests of citizens, but it did not invite participants who did not share that particular analysis or its left-wing implications. To speak of the '99%' vs. the '1%', by contrast, was a populist message and as such much more powerful in inviting 'the people' to have sympathy for the mobilization.

The simple and straightforward focus on inequality united people who disagreed on other issues – including what to do about inequality. It elicited a visceral response from a wide variety of people, because it spoke at once to the giant bonuses of Wall Street traders, the struggles of workers and the middle class to hang on to homes and jobs, and students who would leave university saddled with debt and facing uncertain futures. As important, it evoked not only economic inequality but also the sense that power and participation in all manner of basic social institutions was organized on highly unequal bases. Politicians seemed a distant elite and political power organized to serve

corporations and the wealthy not ordinary people. And across sectors institutions from the media to academia seemed to be organized as structures of inequality and exclusion.

This was a unifying frame for the mobilization, but it did not signal an ideological consensus. As Gitlin rightly notes, OWS had an inner core and an outer range of more or less active participants. Occupation was important partly because it was the place the two met. But even in the inner core there was not so much agreement on all the issues as alliance among people with different priorities. Where journalists complained that the movement wouldn't state a simple list of demands or programme, in fact part of its brilliance and a source of its success lay in refusing this in favour of a much broader evocation of outrage.

Yet, the refusal of the most centrally involved activists to state a programme left the field open to a variety of others who declared themselves to be legitimate representatives of OWS. Occupation itself was of course a tactic readily spread to other sites. And indeed there were occupations in a range of US cities and on university campuses. These extended the mobilization's reach. They also encouraged a continuing diffuseness of message. Each occupation could claim to be its own instantiation of radical democracy and the voice of the people. And the people spoke in different places with different messages.

OWS was in this sense a populist mobilization. It tapped into a widespread sense of *being* the people, being the legitimate basis of society, and being ignored. Different issues offered different doors into a shared sense of being the people disregarded, the people treated with contempt. This is where OWS was joined to the international mobilization of the indignant; its participants were also *indignados*.

Inequality in the USA had long been ignored. Indeed it was an issue activists found almost impossible to get onto the public agenda. Partly this was because it so easily sounded 'socialist' and this was a taboo word, easily manipulated by opponents. Americans also believed that some level of inequality was legitimate, a reflection of different levels of personal effort and social contribution. Behind the success of OWS was growing sense that the level of social inequality had become far too great and that the distribution of goods and power lacked legitimacy. This had begun to come to the fore in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. This had exposed the deep inequalities in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, their racial character, and the extent to which they shaped both life chances and the helpfulness of government response. Accounts of Wall Street bonuses and the salaries of corporate executives – even those driving their companies into bankruptcy and laying off workers – drove this message home and made it seem national not local. OWS built on and enduringly framed the broad issue.

Of course, OWS was about more than inequality. The brilliant slogan about the '99%' and the '1%' almost swallowed the movement. It was hard for any

more particular issue to compete with it. And at the same time, it was diffuse enough that it could be claimed by actors with very different agendas. I actually heard it taken up by Henry Paulson, the former Treasury Secretary and head of Goldman-Sachs – who was not precisely advocating for OWS.

OWS, like many movements, was clearer about what it was against than what it was for – beyond the most general values of more inclusion, equality, and democracy. Having effectively challenged the legitimacy of large-scale financial capitalism, however, OWS was naturally faced with questions about what alternatives it would favour. And here the proposals ranged from government regulation to shareholder activism to reliance on barter rather than cash markets. Which was the potentially scalable alternative to existing capitalism was not really addressed.

Of course there were many particular issues and interests represented in the loose-knit alliance. In a sense, OWS represented all of them; at least it embraced all of them but in a sense that meant it prioritized none of them. For core activists sometimes tacitly acknowledged the importance of links to some other, more focused mobilizations. But overall OWS resisted formal organization and formal structures of alliance.

This suggests a limit to one of Gitlin's generalizations. He suggests that OWS was in essence grounded in the radical social thought of the Enlightenment. He sees this manifested in the core democratic freedom that OWS did clearly claim: freedom of assembly. But it seems to me that this is only an aspect of Enlightenment thought. Enlightenment radicals were not necessarily hostile to formal organizations. But at least as importantly, the Enlightenment stressed the importance of print-mediated public argument. The project of rational decision-making was scaled up to large publics of strangers by the circulation of print media. Moreover the very idea of public reason was grounded as much in reading as in public speaking.

Some Enlightenment claims like freedom of assembly were important to OWS. But OWS was at least as much shaped by Romantic thought. It was dedicated to the direct expression of feelings, to the importance of passion, to a concern for nature both in the sense of the environment and in the sense of being true to human nature. And OWS was populist in its invocation of 'the people' as the decisive locus of moral authority. All three of these strands are combined in what we might call the American Revolutionary tradition, and this was evident throughout OWS.

5. OWS was less an organizational effort – a movement – than a dramatic performance

To resist formal structures of organization was in some ways a strength, and it was a basic sensibility for OWS. But it was a liability for building an enduring

movement. It is part of what makes OWS more moment than movement. Lack of an organizational structure can deprive a mobilization of staying power.

This is a theme Gitlin emphasizes and he is right. As he says, OWS had a near 'phobia' about formal organizations and political parties. It didn't want to be one or really associate with any. In fact many organizations were represented informally by members who became involved in OWS, but not in a formal structure. This reflected the OWS attempt to be maximally open and inclusive, but also a certain disdain for formal organization and more conventional sorts of politics which many participants saw as unable to produce radical change.

Participants in OWS – and many others engaged in social movements and activism today – prefer to speak of networks rather than organizations. These networks may be both strengthened through social media and activated by social media. For OWS, favouring a network structure meant avoiding hierarchy while building lateral ties. Recruitment to OWS, as to many other recent mobilizations, was itself a matter of networks. Activists sometimes speak of a contrast between organizations and seemingly free-floating individuals. But in fact, people tend to be drawn into mobilizations along with friends, classmates, neighbours, and those they knew from previous mobilizations. OWS was no exception. Social media are effective partly because they amplify such connections, not simply as a substitute for them.

In OWS, preference for lateral networking over hierarchical organization joined with commitment to a notion of democracy as including not prioritizing – making sure the issues and values of all were heard and refusing to rank these in some order of greater and lesser importance. This emphasized one dimension of democratic legitimacy, that all the citizens count equally. But it did so in a way that made for challenges in building an enduring, effective movement, especially on a large scale.

This orientation also led to some immediate practical problems for OWS. The spread of self-declared extensions of OWS at distances from Wall Street produced different occupations claiming equal right to speak for the larger mobilization – and speaking differently. Some of these chose tactics at odds with efforts to appeal for broader support. In Seattle, for example, the Occupy protestors decided that a good tactic would be to shut down the port. They made this decision unilaterally. That is, it was democratic – but only among those who happened to be inside their meetings on the relevant days or nights. It was a decision that amounted to an attack on the livelihoods of all the workers in the port – workers already suffering since the financial crisis. Whether from enthusiasm for their own internal democracy, or intoxication with the idea that they represented 'the people', or their distaste for formal organizations, the Seattle occupiers did not see a need to try to reach common cause with the trade unions representing the port workers. And thus not surprisingly, the Maritime unions – which in Seattle have a strong tradition of left politics and critical analysis as well as labour militancy – all opposed the

occupation plan. This is of course, just one example, but the mobilization was repeatedly limited by failures to build alliances beyond those implicit inside its inner community.

Gitlin is acutely conscious of the absence of organizational structure and effective alliance-building. He is right about this. But it also needs to be said that OWS did not try and fail in this area, it tried something else. In a sense it was like nineteenth century utopian socialists who tried to demonstrate their ideal of a better society by organizing communes. It was like 1960s street theatre, possibly influenced by Brecht or the Living Theatre, but much more about the dramatic performance than the socialist programme. The anarchism of the movement could be fused with ideals of direct action to build a different society and an alternative, cooperative economy. But it also lent itself to the gesture, the idealist moment, the performance rather than permanence.

This is perhaps misunderstood partly because of the large number of people who deeply hoped for a movement – any progressive movement – and fell in love with what they thought was the potential of this moment when it arrived. Among interpreters of OWS, members of the 1960s New Left have been prominent, and Gitlin (third president of the SDS) is one of these. Gitlin's view is generally sensible, but it has a perspective (one I partly share). But we need to be careful not to interpret OWS only in terms of a kind of movement it was not.

Again, some of the strength of OWS lay in the same approach that limited it. The bases for flourishing quickly and spreading widely are not the same as the bases for enduring.

Conclusion

Gitlin is right that there is not likely to be a direct extension of Occupy Wall Street. It has happened. It was made possible by brilliant invention and innovation. OWS was less an organizational effort – a movement – than a dramatic performance. This leaves open the question of whether its successor will be a movement – with action organized to endure over time – or another moment of inspired innovation.

In a certain sense, trying to reignite the OWS flame of a year ago is actually contrary to the spirit of the mobilization. This stressed a certain spontaneity. Perhaps it is not continuity that matters, but rather the next brilliant innovation, the next spark that moves people to action. This can build on OWS, but if it is to endure, it will have to build beyond it.

The Occupy Wall Street mobilization may have been temporary but not without enduring effect. Its most important impact may lie in culture not movement organization. It may lie in readiness to look seriously and critically

at inequality and at the question of whether actual democratic institutions are really working. It may lie in changing, at least a little, what people think is possible.

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