

Laura Schleifer created the word 'artist' to describe her life's purpose as an artist-activist. A NYC-based writer, theater artist, and NYU Tisch grad, her work has spanned the Middle East, where she performed for Palestinian and Iraqi children on a theater/circus tour, to an NGO in Nicaragua, where she taught English through the use of theater, to off-Broadway, where she's performed her socially-conscious songs and monologues at theaters throughout New York with the Theaters Against War network, and worked with homeless and at-risk youth as an Artist Mentor. She also served as Outreach/Panelist coordinator at this year's Left Forum conference, and organized and chaired a panel on whether the USA should owe amnesty to undocumented immigrants fleeing from U.S. imperialism. Her original feature screenplay, *The Feral Child*, was a Sundance Screenwriters Lab finalist, and her short play, *Toyz in the Hood*, led to a NYC arts grant for the First City Theater Co. She also writes for several publications, including *Looking Glass Magazine* and *The Leftist Review*. Laura is currently developing a homeless 'survival guide' website at www.wheninneed.org. Schleifer is part of the OWS Alternative Economies Working Group.

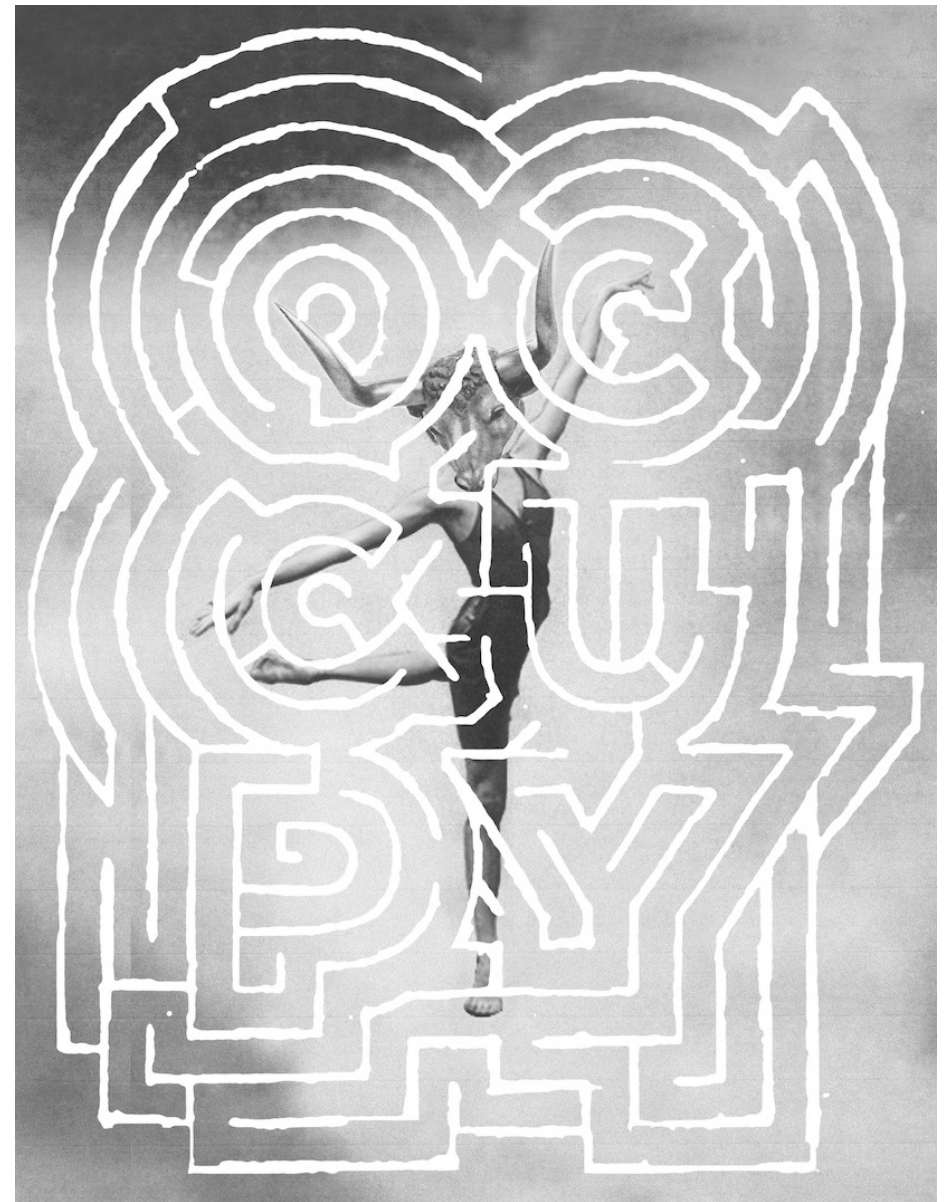
Unless otherwise stated by the participants, their comments today do not necessarily reflect the overall opinion of their respective Working Groups.

This event was organized by **The Platypus Affiliated Society**
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OWS Think Tank Working Group

Platypus will continue to host these conversations with other organizers and participants in the weeks to come if you have feedback, comments, and/or suggestions, or if you would like to participate in or cosponsor these discussions please contact us at newyork@platypus1917.org

The Platypus Affiliated Society, established in December 2006, organizes reading groups, public fora, research and journalism focused on problems and tasks inherited from the "Old" (1920s-30s), "New" (1960s-70s) and post-political (1980s-90s) Left for the possibilities of emancipatory politics today.

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What is the #Occupy movement?

A series of roundtable discussions hosted by The Platypus Affiliated Society

Friday 7pm | October 28, 2011

Kimmel, room 406 | NYU 60 Washington Square S.

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The recent #Occupy protests are driven by discontent with the present state of affairs: glaring economic inequality, dead-end Democratic Party politics, and, for some, the suspicion that capitalism could never produce an equitable society. These concerns are coupled with aspirations for social transformation at an international level. For many, the protests at Wall St. and elsewhere provide an avenue to raise questions the Left has long fallen silent on:

What would it mean to challenge capitalism on a *global scale*?

How could we begin to overcome social conditions that adversely affect *every part of life*?

And, how could a new international radical movement address these concerns *in practice*?

We in the Platypus Affiliated Society ask participants and interested observers of the #Occupy movement to consider the possibility that political disagreement could lead to clarification, further development and direction. Only when we are able to create an active culture of thinking and debating on the Left without it proving prematurely divisive can we begin to imagine a Leftist politics adequate to the historical possibilities of our moment. *We may not know what these possibilities for transformation are.* This is why we think it is imperative to create avenues of engagement that will support these efforts.

Towards this goal, Platypus will be hosting a series of roundtable discussions with organizers and participants of the #Occupy movement. These will start at campuses in New York, Chicago, Boston and Philadelphia but will be moving to other North American cities, and overseas to London, Germany, Greece, India and South Korea in the months to come. We welcome any and all who would like to be a part of this project of self-education and potential rebuilding of the Left to join us in advancing this critical moment.

The Platypus Affiliated Society
October 2011

Questions

Discussants were asked to consider the following questions in their opening remarks.

1. There are striking similarities between the Occupy movement and the 1999 anti-WTO protests in Seattle. Both began in the last year of a Democratic presidency, were spearheaded by anarchists, were motivated by discontents with neo-liberalism, and were supported by organized labor. What, if anything, makes this movement different? How is it a departure from Seattle? What are the lessons to be learned from the defeat of the anti-globalization movement?
2. Some have characterized the Occupy movement as sounding the tocsin for "class war" (e.g., of the 99% vs. the 1%). Others recognize the fact of dramatic inequality, and want the Occupy movement to spearhead a set of economic reforms. Others see Occupy as transforming something beyond the confines of the "economic": for them, any movement that does not set out to transform the many practices and ways of thinking that reproduce domination is not revolutionary at all. These perspectives point to radically different directions for this movement. Would you characterize this movement as "anti-capitalist"? [Should it be?] If so, what is the nature of these "anti-capitalist" politics? In what way does the occupy movement affirm or reject the political ideas of anti-capitalist movements before it?
3. Some have become wary about the role of labor organizations in the occupy movement. Concerns point to the possibility of eventual "co-optation" into Democratic Party politics. What role should organized labor play in the occupy movement? What are the dangers involved in this form of engagement that observers and participants of the occupy movement are responding to?

4. One division taking shape among occupiers in the recent weeks has been along the call for demands. Some have taken issue with the content of the demands, arguing that if these are to be truly "representative of the 99%" they cannot assume a radical stance that would alienate a large section of the population. Others worry that demands focused on electoral reform or policy would steer the movement in a conservative direction. Some call into the question the call for demands in the first place, as these would limit--even undermine--the open-ended potential for transformation present in the occupy movement and could only close revolutionary possibilities. What, if any, demands do you think this movement should be calling for? And, more importantly, what kind of social transformation would you like to see this movement give rise to?

5. What would it mean for the Occupy movement to succeed? Can it?

Roundtable Participants

Phil Arnone is a grad student in NYU's Draper Interdisciplinary Program. He has been active in the anti-war and alter-globalization movements since high school; was an organizer with Students for a Democratic Society and a member of United Students Against Sweatshops while completing his undergraduate studies at the University of Mary Washington, where he was a student organizer for the campus living wage campaign which successfully won a living wage for all University workers in 2006. After college he worked as a boycott organizer for UNITE HERE, the hotel and food service workers union. He has been active in the Occupy Wall St. movement, and is working on linking up existing workers' and immigrants' rights organizations to OWS and connecting the OWS protests to the ongoing struggles throughout the city.

Jackrabbit began his political awakening as an anarchist in Philadelphia in the late 80s where he was a squatter and volunteered at the Wooden Shoe infoshop for many years. After hitchhiking across the US and Europe he finally ended up in San Francisco where after many years he would eventually obtain a Bachelor's in International Relations at San Francisco State University. Currently he works at a marketing agency in midtown Manhattan. Jackrabbit is a member of the Politics and Electoral Reform working group at OWS and is also involved with the inter-occupation communication initiative being developed at OWS.

Chris Maisano is a public librarian in Brooklyn, rank-and-file activist in DC37 Local 1482, and chair of the NYC local of Democratic Socialists of America and in solidarity with Teamsters art handlers' union at Sotheby's. He is a contributing writer for *Jacobin*. Maisano is part of the OWS Demands Working Group.

Lisa Montanarelli has been active in antiwar protests, community health activism, LGBT rights, and a variety of other causes since the late 1980s. She worked for California Prevention Education Project (Cal-PEP), providing HIV street outreach to people of color, sex workers and homeless youth. After earning her Ph.D. in comparative literature at U.C. Berkeley and teaching college level, she became more deeply involved in community health education—teaching for San Francisco Sex Information, and—as a hepatitis C patient for over 20 years—facilitating workshops for patients and healthcare providers. She co-authored *The First Year Hepatitis C: An Essential Guide for the Newly Diagnosed* and three other non-fiction books. Lisa is a member of the OWS Education and Empowerment and Think Tank Working Groups and helps the Coaching Working Group by interviewing occupiers and blogging at www.visionaries.co. She is also active in the Stop Stop-and-Frisk movement, and through the Interdependence Project. Montanarelli facilitates meditation sessions for OWS at Liberty Plaza.

Jordan Morrel has been at Occupy Wall Street for four weeks. At OWS he has served as a facilitator for the General Assembly, and has focused on Sanitation, Mediation, and having conversations with people about such typically taboo subjects as the connections between capitalism and democracy in the United States today, and the radical idea of building society based on respect, not fear, of each other. Jordan grew up in San Francisco, where he was a mental health and substance use counselor, worked at a non-profit volunteer-run collective "Bike Kitchen," and participated in Food Not Bombs, Reclaim the Streets parties, Critical Mass, and other silly activities. He plans to stay in NYC indefinitely.