

well-organized, run through people's mic and a "progressive stack". Cops at the park entrances warned arrivees of its midnight closing time.

Debate raged over whether protesters could hold the park and whether it was a good target. One NYU student suggested that if everyone took the park, NYU students would emerge from the surrounding buildings to help. Eyebrows shot upward. Consensus seemed to be emerging that the park was too big to hold, so I took a little wander around as the midnight hour of confrontation drew nigh.

There were little contingents of blue-jacketed NYPD Community Affairs people all over and white shirts who made periodic announcements reminding the assembled protesters of the curfew. But the spectacle of force was under the white triumphal arch on the north side of the park. Several rows of helmeted police stood in formation, ready to march into the park at the stroke of midnight. It was tiring to see all this again, probably tiring for everyone, and most protesters headed peacefully out of the park, many marching back to Liberty Plaza to maintain the occupied space. "Let us raise a standard to which the wise and the honest can repair," reads the arch. "The event is in the hand of God." Thus spake George Washington to the Constitutional Convention, another discursive assembly of sorts, albeit with a considerably less progressive stack and no anarchists. It was a pleasure to see protesters disperse not swept before a wave of pepper spray, but for tactical reasons, after reaching a thoughtful and reasoned democratic consensus, or as near one as possible, and trucking back to home base to fight another day.

## DAY 29 OCTOBER 15

### Onnesha Roychoudhuri *Scenes From an Occupied New York*

1) \$700 billion dollars of taxpayer funds went to bail out failing banks. 14 million Americans want jobs but can't find them. Corporate profits just hit an all-time high. CEO pay has gone up 300 percent since 1990; "production worker" pay has gone up 4 percent. The top 1 percent of Americans owns 42 percent of the wealth and 50 percent of all stocks and bonds. Glance just slightly further down the top of that food pyramid and you find that the top 10 percent owns over 90 percent of stocks and bonds while the top 20 percent owns 93 percent of the wealth.

Being accurate does not always make you interesting. You may be good at math yet miss the fact that you are part of the statistics. (You, after all, have a microwave, coffeemaker and refrigerator. You are doing just fine.) Knowing how to parse inequality does not

necessarily equip you to fight it. You count sheep to go to sleep. You count until you start to get the sense that you may be one of them. Then, you go to Liberty Plaza to occupy Wall Street.

2) We are a slow-moving thing. Necessarily so. Microphones, speakers and bullhorns will get you thrown in prison for up to 30 days. The human microphone system requires people to speak in fragments that can be repeated to the ends of the crowd amassed in Liberty Plaza. We collectively speak someone else's words before deciding whether or not we agree with them. Many of the signs, too, are meant to be read with patience. There's a density of text that won't be picked up by cameras hungry for a sound bite. They attest, in irregular lettering, to a singular life lived, and the financial challenges that cause a sputtering, a sleeplessness, an unrecoverable grappling. Or, conversely, they advertise a home owned, a life lived, a happy retirement. An endangered species marching behind barricades to testify to its near-mythical existence.

3) What are your demands? We understand that solutions can be expensive. At the store, we are faced with choices constantly. Organic, free-trade, products sold under the moniker "If You Cared." If we cared, we'd open our wallets just a little bit wider. All the options veil a terrifyingly narrow conclusion: You cannot afford to be a good person. Worse: In an era of corporate personhood, it's

possible that you cannot afford to be a person at all.

4) Liberty Plaza is a fleshly now. A jostling of bodies in an as-yet solutionless spectacle. The truth being testified to, for now, rests in the recognition that there are no easy solutions. The refusal of the channels for redress available to us. None of the above.

New York City has the highest population density in the United States. Yet we are an incredibly well-behaved bunch. We take our trains to work, and go home to our small apartments to face off with the resident roaches or the leaden footsteps of upstairs neighbors, occasionally stopping off first at the local bar for a drink with friends. But something interesting happens when we do not return to our apartments. We become visible. If there is one thing people across the world have come to expect, it is for people to lose interest, for things to come to an end. But the carnival, the spectacle, the autonomous zone of immediacy continues.

5) Picture this: A young woman's face, her dark hair pulled back so that we can better see the glitter on her face. Her fist is in the air, her mouth open in a chant. She is young, beautiful, her face rigid with conviction. But pan out and you'll see what illuminates her: the lights of Times Square. An icon for Facebook lodged behind the crown of her head like a co-opted thought bubble, and, in front of her face, the outsized

gamine legs of a lingerie model. That thousands of people should converge on Times Square with its giant billboards, the Mecca of American consumption, seems fitting for a movement sparked by the culture-jamming periodical, AdBusters. Yet there's a palpable treading of water here, a reckoning with the ambiguity and inclusivity of the movement. Tourists get corralled inside the barricades, taking a few photos before trying to maneuver their shopping bags through the protesters. Some occupiers of Liberty Plaza have made their way here in suits. The classic call and response starts: "Whose streets?" but some reply "Wall Street" instead of "Our streets." At the barricade's edge, a chant begins, directed at the police who have gathered on horseback: "You. Are. The 99 percent."

6) Outside the throngs, on Broadway at 48<sup>th</sup> street, two women from out of town make their way back to their hotel. "All they are is a nuisance with no fucking jobs."

This seems entirely the point of the protests. Though they are undoubtedly part of the 99 percent, the women do not identify with the protesters, their cynicism palpable.

7) Contemporary cynicism is a kind of universal skepticism, elevating disbelief to a kind of blind faith that no faith can be had. Think of its presence, then, as an important indicator of the health of a democracy, a reflection of the inability of social and political institutions to fulfill the needs of the people.

Now, think of the groups of citizens around the world gathering to perform the kind of democracy those in power have come to think of as a naïve fairytale, laying a trail of breadcrumbs to what is necessary, what must be.

8) As the sun sets, the lights from ever-changing advertisements washes faces in the crowd with streams of shifting colors. As if to draw a line between the real and artificial, the flesh-and-blood bodies and those photoshopped bodies scaling the sides of buildings, sparklers are lit, and held above heads. A song breaks out: This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine. Then, the human mic clears its throat: "Mic check!" The message conveyed goes like this: The police would like everyone to relocate. "We will accommodate them," we chant in waves. "We want to go." Except, many don't, and even as we serve to amplify the message, people look at each other, wondering where this message originated. Some sit down on the sidewalks, the momentum suddenly diffused. In the distance, smaller clots of the disbanding crowd continue to chant, the sounds bleeding together, a kind of slowing heartbeat proclaiming "Now, Now, Now" and, in the quiet between the beats, another word seems to take shape: "What? What? What?"

