

The Discursive (Re)production and Transformation of
Social Life at the Occupy Wall Street General Assembly

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Abstract

This study focuses on a consensus-based deliberative practice, known as the New York City General Assembly (NYCGA). This practice, built on the values of inclusivity and equality of voice, is a key component of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) protest. While political commentators have criticized the protest's lack of a singular demand, such a critique ignores the matrix of values and interactional norms that underlie communicative events occurring at the OWS camp, particularly the NYCGA. Consequently, this critique risks overlooking the ways in which the NYCGA produces, reinforces, and potentially transforms social relationships and sociocultural subjects, both within the real-time of the assembly and beyond. To investigate these processes of (re)production and transformation of social life, I conduct a linguistic analysis of two different aspects of the NYCGA. Firstly, I analyze the textual archive of the NYCGA that comprises (1) written documents passed through the consensus process, and (2) how-to guides and minutes produced about the consensus process. Secondly, I analyze performances of this discursive practice reconstructed through minutes and video footage. I suggest the NYCGA is a pedagogic ritual that equips participants to disrupt, or more ideally transform, ongoing discursive interactions by recontextualizing them and thus shifting their norms and attendant values.

Résumé

Cette étude porte sur l'Assemblée Générale de la Ville de New York (AGNY), une pratique délibérative basée sur le consensus. Cette pratique, qui épouse les valeurs d'inclusion et d'égalité, est au coeur des manifestations des indignés de « Occupy Wall Street ». La critique de cette pratique générée par des commentateurs politiques et selon laquelle celle-ci ne fabriquerait pas de demande singulière néglige cependant la matrice de valeurs et de normes sociales qui sous-tend tout événement communicatif, tels que l'AGNY. Par conséquent, le risque de cette critique est qu'elle ignore les façons dont l'AGNY construit, soutient et potentiellement transforme les relations sociales ainsi que leurs sujets socioculturels, et ce non seulement pendant, mais également au-delà des assemblées. Afin d'explorer ces processus de (re)production et de transformation de la vie sociale, cette étude propose une analyse linguistique de l'AGNY en deux parties : dans un premier temps, un examen des archives textuelles de l'AGNY (composées des documents écrits retenus par l'assemblée par voie de consensus, et des guides pratiques et des compte-rendus qui décrivent ces assemblées) et dans un deuxième temps, une analyse du déroulement de l'AGNY au travers de ses comptes-rendus et de ses enregistrements vidéo. Ces analyses démontrent que l'AGNY est un rituel pédagogique qui apprend à ces participants à intervenir (par voies d'interruptions ou plus idéalement, de transformations) au cours de discours interactifs, modifiant, par un processus de recontextualisation, les normes et les valeurs de ces discours.

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Introduction

A Call to Action and the Call for a Demand

In the middle of the night, on December 15th, 1989, Arturo DiModica drove a large flatbed truck into the financial district of New York City, stopping outside the New York Stock Exchange. With the help of friends, he proceeded to unload a three and a half ton bronze bull that he had sculpted over the past two years. He placed the bull in the middle of Broad Street and drove away, leaving it there for New Yorkers to find in the morning light.

DiModica decided to sculpt “Charging Bull” after the stock market crash in 1987, and “declared it a Yuletide symbol of the ‘strength and power of the American people’” (McFadden 1989). The bull figuratively plays upon the expression “a bull market”, one marked by investors’ confidence and an impending rise of prices. While the police had the bull whisked away from the center of the street as soon as possible, it eventually found a “temporary” home in Bowling Green Park, just two blocks south of its original stomping ground. More than twenty years later, it remains in the park.

Charging Bull has today become an iconic fixture of the financial district, signalling aggression, prosperity, and drive. That it was originally an artistic guerrilla intervention, a light-hearted and celebratory installation, seems to have been lost. Indeed it has come to represent less the “strength and power of the American *people*”, as originally intended, than the strength and power of American *finance*.

On August 2nd, 2011, a group of people gathered by the bull for a People’s General Assembly. This meeting was organized by a group of students and union activists, New Yorkers Against Budget Cuts, in order to

prepare for an impending occupation of Wall Street on September 17th, 2011 (for timeline see Fig 1).

Among those in attendance at this August meeting was David Graeber, an anthropologist on sabbatical from Goldsmiths, University of London, whose research focuses on exchange and value, and specifically debt. In addition to being a professor, Graeber is an engaged activist and has written a richly detailed ethnography of North American “direct action” activist culture (Graeber 2009). Within direct action activism, the General Assembly (GA) is a common form of interaction, and, consequently, Graeber came to the park expecting to find a specific kind of practice with certain rules and norms of behaviour underway. Specifically, he anticipated finding a horizontally-organized form of consensus-based decision-making. According to an interview with *Bloomberg Businessweek*, Graeber was disgruntled to discover that what had been touted as a General Assembly was in fact “a traditional rally, to be followed by a short meeting and a march to Wall Street to deliver a set of predetermined demands” (Bennett 2011). The meeting was organized “vertically” rather than “horizontally”. That is, a small number of acknowledged leaders were in charge as opposed to a pair of facilitators managing the meeting, as Graeber would have anticipated.

In reaction, Graeber and his companions recruited others who were equally disgruntled with the way the meeting was unfolding and walked south to the other end of Bowling Green Park. There, they began what they understood to be a *true* GA. After a “tug of war” with the event planners, eventually all those present shifted from the rally to participate in the GA (Bennett 2011). This became the first “New York General Assembly” (NYCGA), a specific style of GA, which was to become the central collective decision-making process of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) camp, an

elaborate and extended occupation of Zuccotti Park that began on September 17th, 2011.

The gathering at Bowling Green Park had been organized in response to a call to action by Adbusters, a Canadian-based, not-for-profit, anti-consumerist organization. On July 13th, 2011, a post on their website (www.adbusters.org), the “Culturejammer Headquarters”, addressed “redeemers, rebels and radicals” saying

On September 17, we want to see 20,000 people flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades and occupy Wall Street for a few months. Once there, we shall incessantly repeat one simple demand in a plurality of voices (Adbusters 2011).

This call to action was soon accompanied by a now iconic poster portraying a ballerina delicately poised atop the snarling bull. At the time that the call to action was issued, a mass encampment at the symbolic center of American finance may have seemed implausible, but the call to action did not go unheeded. In fact, it was met with verve.

On September 17th, 2011, between 1,000 and 2,000 protestors charged into Zuccotti Park, a privately managed public space in the Wall Street financial district of Lower Manhattan. The protestors “gathered in solidarity to express a feeling of mass injustice... at a time when corporations, which place profit over people, self-interest over justice, and oppression over equality, run our governments” (NYCGA 2011b). As night fell, about 200 protestors remained, began to construct a campsite, and settled in for the night (Schneider 2011a). Throughout the first few weeks of the occupation, the number of campers stayed close to this figure, while marches and weekend events organized in conjunction with the occupation gathered significantly more participants. On October 1st, over 5,000 people marched to the Brooklyn Bridge, where 700 were arrested (Nessen 2011). Perceived

police brutality brought media attention to the occupation, and awareness grew of the two hundred people camping out on Wall Street. On October 5th, another march gathered an estimated 15,000 people, triple the number that marched to the Brooklyn Bridge a few days earlier (Wells and McVeigh 2011).

Throughout October, the campsite grew to include a kitchen, a library, a general information stand, a media centre powered by a generator, a childcare area with toys, recycling stations, a medical station with licensed first aid providers, a “comfort” station with staples like blankets and soap, a section for making signs and art, portable toilets, and, importantly, an area for the NYCGAs to be held.

Not only did the campsite grow within Zuccotti Park, but similar types of campsites emerged all over the world, created by like-minded protesters. Occupy Chicago began on September 24th. By October 1st, cities such as Boston, Washington D.C., and Los Angeles had joined what was now not just an occupation, but an Occupy movement. A week later, the movement spread nationwide and by mid October the protests spread to Central and South America, Europe and Asia, making the Occupy movement a worldwide phenomenon. On November 16th 2011, *The Guardian* had conservatively identified 750 Occupy sites worldwide (Rogers, 2011). *The Guardian's* data show that Occupy events occurred on each continent, even Antarctica. This growth was facilitated by a number of social media outlets and websites like Occupy Together (www.occupytogether.org), through which meet-ups can be organized and resources on building an occupation can be found.

But, by November, threats from New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg to clear the original Wall Street occupation site became

increasingly serious. Zuccotti Park was officially cleared of tents and any other temporary structures on November 15th, 2011, just shy of the two-month anniversary of the occupiers' arrival.

In many ways, the Occupy Wall Street camp in New York City became what Adbusters had envisioned: a months-long peaceful occupation, complete with tents and a kitchen. However, it differed in one significant way. Recall that Adbusters, in its call to action, urged protesters to “incessantly repeat one simple demand in a plurality of voices” (Adbusters 2011). The creation of a singular, simple demand was in fact envisioned as the central strategy of the occupation. In the same call to action, Adbusters urged Americans to adopt a tactic similar to that of the protesters who gathered in Tahrir Square in Cairo between January 25th and February 11th, 2011.

Tahrir succeeded in large part because the people of Egypt made a straightforward ultimatum – that Mubarak must go – over and over again until they won. Following this model, what is our equally uncomplicated demand?(Adbusters 2011)

The rest of the call to action insists on the importance of crafting a demand and suggests a number of possibilities: divesting money from politics, reinstating the Glass-Steagall Act, or showing less government tolerance towards corporate criminals. However, in the organizational stages of OWS, the soon-to-be occupiers made a decisive move *away* from crafting one demand and instead focused on developing the NYCGA as the activity around which the occupiers could unite.

It is the *lack* of a singular demand that has become the hallmark of the OWS movement, and a characteristic for which activists were derided by political commentators early on in the development of the movement. These commentators, whose critiques I will discuss in detail in the first chapter, are

supportive of the reasons for which the occupiers were protesting, yet dismissive of the manner in which they chose to communicate, that is, by holding NYCGAs rather than engaging in the act of making a demand. However, the absence of a demand is not the result of the occupiers' inability to form an organization that could issue a demand. Rather, the move away from the practice of crafting demands to a different kind of practice with interdiscursive ties to the deliberative traditions of American non-violent activism, the NYCGA, was a deliberate one.

An overview of the planning stages of the occupation illustrate the deliberate nature of the development of the NYCGA . Describing the aforementioned meeting by the bull that took place on August 2nd, Graeber writes that the people there, seated in a circle, contemplated how to create a “model for democratic assemblies we hoped to see spring up across America” (Graeber 2011). In response to the question of how such assemblies would actually function, Graeber explains that “ the anarchists in the circle made what seemed, at the time, an insanely ambitious proposal. Why not let them operate exactly like this committee [referring to the people gathered there]: by consensus”(2011). He explains that while consensus based decision-making has long been used in activist culture, it had never been employed in mass assemblies of the size they anticipated for the occupation. Yet, a GA based on consensus “most accorded” with the principles of inclusivity and equality of voice around which the occupation was to be based, and those present decided to attempt to move forward with the practice in which they were currently involved. This meeting became the first NYCGA (Graeber 2011).

In addition to Graeber, Nathan Schneider also participated in planning the September 17th occupation. Schneider is a writer and editor,

and the co-founder of Waging Non-Violence, a New York-based blog that gathers news, analysis and original reporting on non-violent activism. Writing for the *Occupied Wall Street Journal*, a newspaper created by the occupiers, Schneider explains that

In the weeks leading up to Sept. 17, the NYC General Assembly seemed to be veering away from the language of “demands” in the first place, largely because government institutions are already so shot through with corporate money that making specific demands would be pointless.... Instead, to begin with, they opted to make their demand the occupation itself—and the direct democracy taking place there—which in turn may or may not come up with some specific demand (Schneider 2011b).

There was thus a purposive move *not* to make crafting a demand a priority. Although Schneider acknowledges that a demand may eventually be produced, this is not the ultimate goal of the protest. Further, Schneider reveals that demands are attached to a certain kind of communicative practice. They are not produced extemporaneously, but through a whole matrix of interactional norms and conventions. The act of making, responding to, and negotiating demands, is undertaken, as Schneider states, by large corporations and government institutions. The relationship between these two entities is held by the occupiers to be corrupted, a source of injustice, and is in fact one of the main reasons for the occupation. The choice not to craft a demand marks an effort to not engage in this kind of communicative practice and especially the attendant, troublesome social relationships can engender. It is rather a bid to construct a different social reality based on the values of inclusivity and equality of voices. The NYCGA is clearly not just a decision-making body, but a mode of interaction that promotes a certain way of being, and a certain way of being with other people.

The critiques of OWS that lament the absence of a demand seem to fail to consider the sociocultural matrix of values, norms and relationships involved in, and fuelled or sustained by, the act of making a demand. For OWS, more fundamental than creating a demand is cultivating a different set of interactional norms and values through a collectively regulated communicative practice in which (at least in principle) no one voice is more privileged or more powerful than any other: the NYCGA. Given this, how does the NYCGA produce, maintain, and potentially transform social relationships and sociocultural subjects? Further, as a node within the larger interdiscursive history of collective deliberative processes, what is the role of both written texts and performances in the creation, development and passing down of the NYCGA, as a certain kind of sociocultural knowledge?¹

To explore these questions, I draw upon critical discourse theorist Norman Fairclough's (1992) tripartite Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. This framework is based on the notion that discourse and social structure are dialectically related. Discourse is a way of seeing language as a social practice. Linguistic interaction becomes not just a way of "representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world..." (Fairclough 1992, 64). I will seek to show that the NYCGA is not just a mode of communication, but bears many characteristics of a "discursive practice". In Fairclough's (1992) framework, discursive practices are mesosociological phenomena that mediate between the microsociological - written or spoken "texts"- and the macrosociological - larger social, political

¹ Given that the Occupy movement is a very recent, and perhaps not yet concluded phenomenon, the following analysis, unless otherwise specified, pertains only to the NYCGAs that occurred at the Occupy Wall Street camp between September 17th 2011 and November 15th, 2011.

and economic circumstances. Specifically, discursive practices are the social and institutional “processes of text production, consumption and distribution” (1992, 71).

In addition to Fairclough’s CDA framework, I rely on a detailed theorization of the contrast between “text” and “text-artifact”, as well as the processes of “entextualization” and “(re)contextualization” elaborated in the collected volume of linguistic anthropology studies, *Natural Histories of Discourse*, edited by Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban (1996c). These four concepts are key components of the reproduction and passing on of sociocultural traditions. They help illustrate the relationship between performance (understood broadly as any social interaction, but also ritualized enactment) and a textual archive. Further, in providing a more nuanced theorization of “text”, these concepts allow us to see the NYCGA as a discursive practice in two ways: firstly, as a practice involved in the production, consumption and distribution of “text-artifacts” (written documents), and secondly, as a stretch of linguistic interaction that is itself “entextualizable”, the site where a spoken “text” is formed by the participants.

In the following chapter, I elaborate upon Fairclough’s (1992) framework and the theorization of text by Silverstein and Urban (1996c) . I contrast these to an instrumental, message-focused model of communication, the “transmission model”, that I show to underlie the critiques that deride OWS for lacking a demand. Both Fairclough (1992) and Silverstein and Urban (1996) situate a message within its larger sociocultural environment, focusing on the relationships between this environment and the message, and between the participants engaged in creating, interpreting and exchanging messages. Their emphasis on process and relationships over a product (the

message in isolation) provides a much more fruitful model of communication from which to begin to explore the NYCGA because they situate “texts” within a matrix of values and interactional norms and conventions.

In the second chapter, I describe the NYCGA and situate it within a history of North American non-violent activist culture. This chapter focuses primarily upon the relationship between the NYCGA and two sets of documents, or “text-artifacts”, both of which are available on the NYCGA website (www.nycga.net). The first set includes the “Declaration of the Occupation” and the “Principles of Consolidation”, two documents produced through consensus during NYCGAs. I show how these documents embody the values of inclusivity and equality of voice, but also how these values can be at odds with the very nature of a text-artifact, specifically its intertextuality, fixity and finality. The second set of documents includes a number of manuals and minutes that were not produced through consensus during an NYCGA, but rather created in order to help render the NYCGA an identifiable, reproducible communicative practice. On a more abstract level, this chapter is an investigation into the role of text-artifacts in the (re)production of a ritualized communicative practice.

After having focused on how the guides and minutes impose a structure upon the NYCGA, in the third chapter, I turn to a consideration of how each performance of the NYCGA is a dynamic interaction. That is, although text-artifacts help to codify the practice, the structure of the NYCGA is always emergent and continually negotiated by participants over the course of its instantiation. Analyzing the NYCGA as it is enacted, I focus on two aspects in particular: the pedagogical role of the facilitator and the numerous participant frameworks superposed one on top of the other, compounded by the “human microphone”. The data for this analysis is drawn

from the collection of minutes and video footage of the NYCGA available online. Finally, I also consider the recent surge in performances of communicative acts characteristic of the NYCGA, which activists impose upon discursive interactions occurring outside of the OWS camp.

Chapter 1

Conceptualizing Communication: Transmission to Discourse and Text

In this chapter, I examine three different conceptualizations of communication. First, I introduce the “transmission model” of communication, which I show to be underlying a strain of early criticism levelled at the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) camp by political commentators. In reviewing the values this model espouses, as well as its limitations, I illustrate how seeing OWS through this lens is problematic. The NYCGA, held everyday within the OWS camp, is not a failed exercise in political demand-making, but a decisive move away from this practice. As such, the critics overlook the ways in which the NYCGA is a discursive practice that (re)produces and transforms social relationships and subjects.

Moving away from the transmission model, I offer two conceptualizations of communication that focus squarely on the relationship between communication and sociocultural life and thus offer a different starting point from which to understand the NYCGA. These are Fairclough’s (1992) Critical Discourse Analysis framework, and the processes of entextualization and contextualization as elaborated in *Natural Histories of Discourse*, edited by Silverstein and Urban (1996c). These two works draw our focus away from a *product* – like a message or a demand - to the sociocultural *processes* through which such products are created. Recall that the starting point of the NYCGA was not a demand, but rather a reshaping of the processes that underlie such a communicative act.

The Transmission Model

James Carey, a founding theorist of American Cultural Studies, was one of the first people to explore the connections between media, politics, culture, and society (Chakravarty 2009). In his essay “ A Cultural Approach to Communication”, Carey explains that the term “communication” first entered into common usage in America in the nineteenth century (Carey (2008 [1975]). Since this time, two very different views of communication have co-existed: the transmission view and the ritual view. The transmission view became by far the more dominant of the two. It derives from a “metaphor of geography or transportation” (Carey 2008 [1975], 12). This metaphor stems from the fact that in the nineteenth century, the movement of goods and people, and the movement of information, were both thought of as similar processes and could be described by the word “communication”. In the transmission view, “communication is the transmission of signals or messages over distance for the purpose of control” (Carey 2008 [1975], 12). Here, communication is seen as highly instrumental. It has the end goal of bringing about a desired action, or a change in someone else’s actions.

With the invention of the telegraph, messages ceased to be sent primarily by messenger or distributed through books or other written artifacts. Yet, notes Carey, the metaphor of communication as transmission did not disappear. In fact, the transmission model of communication was cemented during the post-war era through work on telephone cables and radio waves. Far from witnessing the transmission view recede,

Our basic orientation to communication remains grounded, at the deepest roots of our thinking, in the idea of transmission: communication is a process whereby messages are transmitted and distributed in space for the control of distance and people (Carey 2008 [1975], 13).

An important moment in the entrenching of the transmission view in American cultural thought was Claude Shannon's creation of what has come to be thought of as the archetypal transmission model (Fiske 1990, Ch. 1). Although his model is slightly more complicated, it came to represent the idea of communication as a message passed from a sender to a recipient. Claude Shannon was an engineer working for Bell Laboratories, researching how to use a channel (like that of a telephone cable or radio waves) most efficiently. His goal was to discover the maximum amount of information a channel could accommodate without overloading its capacity. His findings resulted in a model that was first published in 1948 in a paper in *The Bell System Technical Journal* entitled "A Mathematical Theory of Communication".

In this article, Shannon presented a linear model that involves a message moving from left to right, passing from an "information source" to a "destination". The sequence the message follows is:

information source – transmitter – (noise source) – receiver – destination.

Beginning on the left side, an "information source" creates a "message" that is passed to a "transmitter", which encodes the "message" and transforms it into a "signal". The "signal" then passes to the right side of the diagram, the reception side. On this side, the "signal" reaches a "receiver" that transforms the "signal" into a "message" again, which finally arrives at the "destination". The linear model is therefore completely symmetrical, with encoding and sending occurring on one side, and decoding and reception occurring on the other. In between sending and reception, Shannon allows for the influence of a "noise source", something that adds interference to the signal, making it harder to decode.

Although Shannon's model was created specifically to improve the efficiency of radio waves and telephone cables, in 1949 this model was

popularized in a book that Shannon co-authored with Warren Weaver: *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. Weaver, a mathematician and administrator, developed much of the philosophical expansion of the model within the book. The change in title from Shannon's earlier paper to the book is slight - from *A Mathematical Theory of Communication* to *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* - but the change from "a" to "the" is revealing. It encapsulates well the desire to explain a wide range of phenomena through a simple formula. According to Weaver, the model explains the broadest range of communicative acts including "not only written and oral speech, but also music, the pictorial arts, the theatre, the ballet, and in fact all human behaviour" (Shannon and Weaver 1964 [1949], 3). It even applies to mechanical communication, like airplane-tracking missiles. One model is therefore able to explain a world of communication, with little distinction between who or what the sender and recipient are in the interaction.

The transmission model illustrates the faith in empiricism, optimism in technical innovation and progress, as well as the need for control and coherence that marked this postwar period (Peters 1999, 22). A model originally intended to explain mechanical or technical communication comes to explain all different forms of human communication. Through a single formula, a complex reality is given order. The formula contains, controls, and renders comprehensible otherwise chaotic phenomena.

Further, when all manner of communicative acts can be described by the same formula, they can all be improved in the same way. Shannon and Weaver (1964 [1949]) acknowledge that Shannon's model "admittedly applies in the first instance only to problem A, namely, the technical problem of accuracy of transference of various types of signals from sender to

receiver” (6). Beyond problem “A”, Shannon and Weaver recognize that there are also problems “B” and “C”. Problem “B” is semantic, and corresponds to the question of how symbols convey a desired meaning. Problem “C” concerns “effectiveness”, and corresponds to the question of whether the message is able to affect conduct in the desired way. While recognizing that B and C may be more “philosophical” than “technical”, A is held to be the most important level (1964 [1949], 6). That is, solving “A” type problems, will also solve “B” and “C” type problems. Essentially, all potential communication problems are attenuated by improving the quality of a signal.

John Durham Peters, a highly-regarded American theorist of communication, links this postwar period in which the transmission model flourished to an earlier watershed moment in the conceptualization of communication in the twentieth century: the period following the First World War. Like the second postwar era, the interwar period was marked by a flurry of ideas about how to improve communication. One solution was to establish a more scientific, cleaner language. For example, the project to establish “British American Scientific International Commercial (BASIC) English”, a language with only 850 words, dates from this era. We see in this earlier period the same impulse to improve communication through focusing on the signal, which in this case results in a pared down, “clearer”, language, divorced from the “noise” of a large vocabulary in which words have varying connotations and only approximate, messy definitions. But, as Peters (1999) explains, “communication in this sense makes problems of relationships into problems of proper tuning or noise reduction” (5). It focuses solely on improving the signals from which a message is composed, without regard for the world in which the message is enmeshed.

When the transmission model becomes the dominant paradigm of communication, serious inadequacies emerge. The most evident is the lack of consideration of any kind for context or for the relationship between the participants engaged in communication. Recall in Shannon's model that the only outside influence upon the message is "noise", a negative influence that renders the message less clear. The message is taken to exist in a sort of vacuum and there is a failure to see the message as integrated into a socio-cultural world. Within the realm of human communication specifically, this model of communication leads one to neglect the many ways in which communication is both socioculturally constructed and socioculturally constructing.

The criticisms of the OWS camp that harp upon the lack of a demand or message likewise risk overlooking the complex sociocultural machinery involved in creating and sending messages. A closer examination of a few examples of these criticisms shows the transmission model, or at least the application of its characteristics, at work.

All of the following criticisms emerged within the first two weeks of the protest. Whereas many right-wing critics dismissed the movement immediately (Hannity 2011; Taranto 2011; Burnett 2011) each critic discussed below targets the ways in which the protesters communicate, not what they are protesting. In fact, each critic expresses support for the reasons behind the occupation.

Consider first the piece "Protests Work Better with Specific Demands" by Matthew Yglesias, a prominent voice in the political blogosphere. On September 29th, 2011, about two weeks after the beginning of the occupation, he wrote this post for ThinkProgress, a political blog affiliated with the Center for American Progress. John Podesta, who served

in the White House under Presidents Clinton and Obama, founded this organization in 2003. It has the mission to forward “progressive” policy ideas while critiquing those based on conservative values (Center for American Progress). The Center, based in Washington D.C., has strong ties to the Democratic Party.

As the title of Yglesias’ piece suggests, he criticizes the movement for lacking demands that are both specific and could be reasonably met. It is immediately clear that Yglesias espouses an instrumental view of communication, wherein successful communication involves sending a message in order to effect some kind of action or change. This is both precisely what Carey described as the core of the transmission view of communication, and also in line with the functioning of a lobbying group like the Center for American Progress. Yglesias writes

If we rally outside the HQs of the Dallas, Minneapolis, and Philadelphia Feds with signs saying “FISCAL AND MONETARY STIMULUS NOW.” Or perhaps more plausibly “AMERICA NEEDS JOBS.” I’ll cheer. If we do one down by the Eccles Building, I’ll show up. But when the lodestar of your movement is to say, “The one thing we all have in common is that We Are The 99% that will no longer tolerate the greed and corruption of the 1%,” it’s difficult for me to get excited.

Yglesias offers two different demands targeted at two different recipients. He does not try to promote one demand over another, but rather promotes the mere existence of a demand passed from a sender to a recipient. Note his use of the expression “lodestar”, a navigational aid used by ships. This word evokes the idea of communication as transportation from one site to another, which Carey also described as the foundation of the transmission view. The expression positions the occupation as a ship guided by a demand, or, as Yglesias is trying to show, *misguided* by the absence of a

demand. As Yglesias rightly points out, the occupation is not at all guided by a demand. Instead of transporting messages, it is more about fostering a community. But this does not make the occupation misguided. The kind of communication that builds communities is outside the discursive realm of the Center, which lobbies on behalf of a community, rather than creates them.

It is true that Yglesias' criticism is a commentary on what kind of communication is most pertinent for protests, rather than a comment on communication in general. There still remains, however, an unwillingness to look beyond the transmission model to discover what might be brought about at this occupation through a different mode of discursive interaction. This unwillingness to recognize that there are different modes of discursive interaction is common to the following three critics.

Lauren Ellis' piece, "Is #Occupy Wall Street Working?", appeared on the Mother Jones website, a liberal independent news source named after the turn of the century union activist Mary Harris Jones. Mother Jones is based in Washington D.C. and San Francisco, and encompasses both a website and a magazine published and supported by the non-profit Foundation for National Progress. Mother Jones and this foundation claim not to align with any political party.

Ellis' piece, published online on September 17th, 2011, presents four reasons why she believed Occupy Wall Street had been failing to gain traction in the media and with the general public. The first reason she presents for why OWS was floundering is labeled "The Kitchen Sink Approach". She mocks the idea of discussing what the demands might be during the protest, rather than deciding upon them beforehand. "There's something for everyone", she writes, " but no one clear message that can carry a movement forward" (Ellis 2011). Like Yglesias, she calls for a

singular message, and evokes the idea of passage or transportation. Contrary to this ideal example of communication, she notes that “ so far it’s been a whole lot of posturing, conch passing ‘mic checks’ and white noise” (Ellis 2011). Conch-passing presupposes a community discussion, and like Yglesias, Ellis also seems skeptical of the community-oriented aspect of the occupation. Further, she figuratively refers to the transmission model of communication by characterizing the occupiers as creating “white noise”: interference that renders unclear a message. Finally, to describe the protesters as “posturing”, suggests that their form of communication is somehow fake or unreal.

Ginia Bellafante of the *New York Times*, a centre-left American daily with one of the largest national circulations, doles out Ellis’ criticism in a stronger dose in her article entitled “ Gunning for Wall Street, With Faulty Aim”. Bellafante finds “unsettling” the group’s “apparent wish to pantomime progressivism rather than practice it knowledgably” (2011). Like Ellis, she characterizes the occupation as somehow less than real; it is “pantomimed”, merely acted, rather than “practiced”, undertaken knowledgeably. Pantomime is often a form of entertainment, and comparing the occupation to this turns it into a mere spectacle or joke. Further, pantomime is silent. The occupiers are rendered speechless because they do not adopt the sanctioned manner of communicating.

Finally, Doug Henwood’s piece provides the clearest example of dependency on the transmission model in his criticism of OWS. Henwood is a New York-based left-wing pundit. He started an online newsletter, “The Left Business Observer”, in 1986, to, as he explains, critique free-market economics and provide a missing a leftist opinion on American economics (Henwood n.d.). In addition to this newsletter, he is a contributing editor for

the liberal American weekly magazine *The Nation*, and frequently updates his blog, the “Left Business Observer News”. It is on this blog that his piece “The Occupy Wall Street Non-Agenda” appeared on September 29th, 2011. He writes “I’m both curious and frustrated by the inability of the organizers, whoever they are exactly, or the participants, an endlessly shifting population, to say clearly and succinctly why they’re there” (Henwood 2011). He is searching for clarity and concision, two values that were important for views of communication in the postwar periods, during which time the transmission model was cemented.

Further, Henwood is disgruntled by the difficulty of pinpointing a message and the senders. Accordingly, he offers an example of what protesters might use as their message. He suggests the occupiers say:

These gangsters have too much money. They wrecked the economy, got bailed out, and are back to business as usual. We need jobs, schools, health care and clean energy. Let’s take their money to pay for them (2011).

Henwood’s suggested message is surprisingly broad. Interestingly, he seems less concerned with the actual content of the message, than with its capacity to be quickly identified by those outside of the occupation. Within his blog post, he sets out his suggested message in quotes, and it seems that this is what he wants the occupiers to do as well: present a message that is easy to pinpoint. The elements of his suggested message are all expressed at the occupation, but they are not signalled out in quotes, so to speak. Finally, Henwood writes that there is at once too much talk at OWS and not enough: “there’s a strange silence – or prolixity, which in this case, amounts to pretty much the same thing” (2011). He goes so far as to characterize the occupation as “speechlessness”, as if speaking in a way that differs from the

model of recipient, sender and message is not speech at all. Speech, to Henwood, is something that only occurs through the transmission model.

These four political commentators all call for occupiers to craft a singular message or demand. They emphasize instrumentality, clarity, brevity, and directionality. Such a strain of criticism may have merit in that without a tidy sound bite or an official press statement, anyone may more easily misconstrue the reason for the occupation and the goals of the participants. Further, as the protesters have a multitude of grievances, hopes, and solutions, rather than a specific set of demands, it may be harder for politicians to support them for fear of undesired association with a secondary cause.

However, the above four critics are so intent on focusing on what is *not* happening at the OWS camp, that they seem to miss what *is* actually occurring. Or, perhaps it is better to say that these critics are unwilling to engage with that which is actually occurring: the NYCGA. In addition to sharing an ideal view of communication, they all seem disinclined to consider the possibility of a different kind of discursive interaction, characterizing the NYCGA (which occurs instead of the chanting of a pre-established demand) as somehow not real, a game, or a form of speechlessness. But the NYCGA is not just a site where “white noise” is created as the occupiers carry out an elaborate “pantomime”, as these critics would have it. Rather, this is a site where social relationships and sociocultural subjects are being produced and reproduced, as well as transformed. Focusing on the message does little to further understanding of how this occurs. A different model of communication that extends focus beyond the message to the relationship between the speaker and the hearer, and into the sociocultural life in which they participate is necessary.

Beyond Transmission: Ritual and Discourse

Although the transmission view has become the dominant paradigm of communication, Carey explains that this was not always so. In addition to the transmission view, Carey (2008 [1975]) presents the ritual view of communication, which he argues predates the transmission view, and has existed in its shadow. In the ritual view, communication is synonymous with terms like “sharing”, “participation”, and “fellowship”. Carey also emphasizes the etymological link between communication and “communion”, “community”, and “commonness”. For him, the “archetypal case [of communication] under a ritual view is the sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality” (2008 [1975], 15). The ritual view is important in providing an alternative to the transmission view, but it seems to overemphasize the healing power of communication. Communication in the ritual view not only soothes broken relationships, but maintains the status quo. Further, there also seems to be a tinge of primitivism to Carey’s championing of the ritual view and denunciation that the “concept of culture is such a weak and evanescent notion in American social thought” (2008 [1975], 16). For Carey, “culture” was lost when too much empiricism started to rule American social thought. Culture, however, is not a property to be lost or gained, as Silverstein and Urban (1996c) will show.

Carey’s own definition of communication is slightly different than the ritual view. He defines communication as “a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed” (2008 [1975], 19). Crucially, Carey does not posit that reality exists as a “mere function of symbolic forms” but rather that reality is brought to our apprehension

primarily through symbolic forms (2008 [1975], 20). This definition emphasizes that communication is a way of organizing experience. He elucidates this idea of organizing experience through a (different) geographical metaphor: “there are no lines of latitude and longitude in nature, but by overlaying the globe with this particular, though not exclusively correct, symbolic organization, order is imposed on spatial organization and certain, limited human purposes served” (20). This creation of a kind of organization of reality, specifically social reality, occurs through the NYCGA.

Carey’s (2008 [1975]) definition of communication bears many similarities to Fairclough’s (1992) definition of discourse, even if the latter thinker focuses more narrowly on language than on communication. In both definitions, discourse or communication is not just a method of representation, but implicated in processes by which reality is made and altered. Fairclough differs from Carey in that he is concerned primarily with the development of inequality and the possibility of gaining privilege and power over others through discourse. To this end, he both expands and refines the definition presented by Carey by explicitly tying discourse to social structure, tension, and change. He writes that

Discourse contributes to the constitution of all the dimensions of social structure which directly or indirectly shape and constrain it: its own norms and conventions, as well as the relations, identities and institutions which lie behind them (Fairclough 1992, 63)

There is therefore a dialectic relationship between social structure and discourse. But just how does this dialectic function? How does language, either spoken or written, (re)produce and transform social life? Fairclough (1992) proposes that these processes of (re)production and transformation can be seen through a social theory of discourse that involves three interrelated components.

The first component, text, is embedded in a discursive practice. This discursive practice is in turn embedded in a social practice. We see immediately that Fairclough is looking beyond what is said or written, that is, the message or the text. He expresses the importance of not just focusing on the text, but of “ analysing the relationship between texts, processes, and social conditions” (1989, 26). Although Fairclough’s framework separates out three dimensions for analytical purposes, it is clear that these three dimensions are inextricable. A “discursive event” involves a text, which is also an instance of discursive practice, which is an instance of social practice. However, although the dimensions are all related, each involves a focus on different questions and therefore a different kind of analysis.

Focusing on the text dimension means attending to microsociological phenomena. Fairclough gives a loose definition of text as “spoken as well as written language”, and explains that the four main components of textual analysis are vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and text structure (Fairclough 1992, 71, 75).

Focusing on discursive practice means attending to mesosociological phenomena. This kind of analysis involves paying attention to “processes of text production, distribution, and consumption” (78). If the first dimension focuses on the analysis of a text in itself, this second dimension focuses on a text-in-use; that is to say, how a text is engaged with by people, both its creators and readers, whom it draws into a relationship. This dimension is also concerned with how texts relate to other texts through different patterns of distribution. But we might also see distribution as part of the process of production, since a text is always intertextual, “full of snatches of other texts”(Fairclough 1992, 84). Text creation, interpretation, and dissemination are all social and bound by conventions. Specifically, it is the idea that these

processes are regulated and regulating that is at the heart of discursive practice. Through discursive practices “the readership is guided to a ‘preferred’ reading” (Gillies 2009). That is, discursive practices in part engineer our understandings of the world. The capacity of discursive practices, not just messages or demands - essentially Fairclough’s text dimension - to (re)produce and transform social life is precisely what the critics risk overlooking.

Finally, focusing on the social practice dimension means attending to macrosociological phenomena. Fairclough is especially interested in ideology and hegemony in the larger social, political and economic environments that influence the conventions of discursive practices, and even which discursive practices can exist in the first place.

The NYCGA bears many characteristics of a discursive practice. It is a form of routinized collective action involved in processes of creation and distribution of written documents. However, as a stretch of talk, the NYCGA itself constitutes a spoken text. Fairclough (1992) makes little distinction between spoken and written texts, and, given the hybrid nature of the NYCGA, a more nuanced theorization of text, like that provided by Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban (1996c) in *Natural Histories of Discourse* is helpful. This more detailed theorization of text also helps to better show how the NYCGA is at once a practice involved in the creation and dissemination of text-artifacts and itself a spoken text created and interpreted in the real-time of interaction by its participants.

From Text/Context to Entextualization/Contextualization

“Texts” as conceptualized in *Natural Histories of Discourse* are “the precipitates of continuous cultural processes” and “represent one, “thing-y”

phase in a broader conceptualization of cultural process” (1996a, 1) . Like Fairclough (1992), Silverstein and Urban situate texts within larger sociocultural processes. However, Silverstein and Urban draw a fundamental distinction between “texts” and “text-artifacts”. A text-artifact is a physical object, like a book, a script, a film, a recording of an interview, or a poster. Text-artifacts can be archived, and they have some permanence. A text, on the other hand, is never something permanent, but rather ephemeral, and emergent. It lives and dies in the interactional real-time, but may produce effects that carry beyond.

A text-artifact can trigger the production of a text through a process known as “entextualization”. For example, in reading a book, the reader “entextualizes” the alphanumeric lines within, starting to form an understanding. This understanding, what the reader has gleaned by engaging with the author via the artifact or object, is the text. In other words, “the text is not here on the page for you to see; it is a structured projection from what you see” (Silverstein and Urban 1996c, 331). It is the result of an intersubjective engagement, be it with a spectral author, or with a physically present interlocutor. Indeed, it is not just text-artifacts that are entextualizable, but also stretches of linguistic or semiotic interaction. In regards to stretches of talk, the text is not what is said, but rather the structured unit intersubjectively produced between the participants, so that the interaction becomes a graspable thing: a “conversation”, a “fight”, an “interview”. Entextualization describes the process by which we make sense of interaction, rendering that which is otherwise fluid into a something graspable. Texts are emergent, they require interpretation and engagement with another person’s utterances, be they written or spoken. So in a

conversation, the text is not what each person is saying, but the way the utterances congeal into a structured unit².

The process of entextualization might be thought of as involving both the production of a text as well as its interpretation. This is because as the text is formed, it is also a kind of understanding or interpretation of the event underway. The way an interaction is entextualized both depends on and creates the social relationships between the participants and their sociocultural subject positions, as an analysis of the NYCGA will demonstrate.

The central question in relation to the NYCGA therefore becomes, how is the NYCGA entextualized? How do participants create a text out of this stretch of linguistic interaction? Further, what role does the NYCGA's textual archive play in the entextualization of this practice? Although I will briefly discuss the NYCGA as something that produces text-artifacts, it is more fundamental to understand the NYCGA as itself a spoken interaction, continually entextualized in each performance by the participants.

Along with entextualization is the opposite, but simultaneous, process of "contextualization". This process is "the ever-changing "appropriate to/effective-in" relationships that concurrently develop between text and nontext" (Silverstein and Urban 1996c, 15). This definition stresses that context, like text, is produced through interaction rather than already extant. In this view, contexts of communicative acts are not a stable backdrop, but rather come into being as they are negotiated in the course of social interaction (Bauman and Briggs 1990, 68). There are, of course, some

² In this situation, a text-artifact would be the recording of the conversation, or transcription.

elements of context that are not created. The physical setting in which a conversation occurs does not change. What is subject to negotiation, however, are which elements of the setting may become relevant to the interaction. While context may encompass a potentially unlimited number of elements, virtually anything that is not itself the text, the aspect of context that is most relevant for this thesis is the participant framework, or the different configurations of parties present and their roles within the interaction.

Although entextualization will be the more fundamental concept for understanding the NYCGA, I will draw on contextualization, particularly the creation of participant frameworks, while examining how subjects come to inhabit different roles and relationships throughout the duration of the NYCGA. Further, the way in which a context is created will come to the fore when I reflect, at the end of the third chapter, upon the ways in which elements of the NYCGA have been introduced into new and often seemingly inappropriate settings.

Natural Histories of Discourse is centered on theorizing entextualization and contextualization, two *processes*. This work forms part of the shift within research on social/cultural interaction, tradition, and performance from a focus on the products of discursive practices to a focus on processes (Bauman and Briggs 1990, 67). Earlier theories of the relationship between text and culture, exemplified by Ricoeur (1973), hold texts to be static physical entities – what Silverstein and Urban refer to as text-artifacts. Such theories attribute the role entextualization plays in sociocultural life to text-artifacts (Silverstein and Urban 1996a, 2). In such a view, culture becomes an entity to be possessed by those who accumulate text-artifacts or products. In the more process-based view, culture is

something that emerges through entextualization, through social interaction. This is not to belittle the role of text-artifacts in cultural life, but to see them rather as elements of a process through which culture is created, and not the site where one may find culture contained. Further, a focus on products instead of processes is compatible with the transmission model. Just as attention is focused on the text-artifact at the expense of entextualization and contextualization, the transmission model focuses on the message at the expense of the relationship between the speaker and hearer.

Silverstein and Urban (1996c) and Fairclough (1992) have different points of departure and stem from different disciplinary traditions. Silverstein and Urban (1996c) take as their point of departure the concept of culture, interrogating the ways in which it emerges through linguistic or semiotic interaction/engagement, and then is passed down, with varying degrees of fidelity or distortion. Fairclough's (1992) work, on the other hand, stems from an exploration of power and social structure, and how these are maintained, reinforced, or altered through discursive practices. However, both Silverstein and Urban (1996c) and Fairclough (1992) clearly move away from an instrumental view of communication and look outward from the message to its sociocultural influences and consequences. They both situate language as the site of (re)production and transformation of sociocultural life, and explore the tension between these two processes, seeing language as at once constraining, but also as a potentially change-inducing.

Although the contributions of these theorists reveal how reductive the transmission model can be, it still holds sway in journalistic and popular thought as the critics and commentators described above illustrate. However, it is also present in social movement theory. Downing (2008), a leading communications scholar of alternative media and social movements,

identifies a gulf between, on the one hand, work on social movement theory carried out by sociologists, political scientists, and historians, and on the other hand, research and analyses conducted by media studies scholars. He notes that in research conducted by the former group, found in the journals *Mobilization* and *Social Movement Studies*, “very often, media are defined simply as technological message channels rather than the complex *sociotechnical* institutions they actually are” (emphasis original 41). This definition of the media is in accordance with the transmission model of communication: they simply *relay* messages. Downing (2008) thus identifies a tendency to fall back on the transmission model within social movement research. Further, the way that the aforementioned critics, who yearn for a demand, approach the protest is precisely how these social movement researchers view media. The critics see the protest as a “message channel”, and fail to acknowledge its social and institutional characteristics.

Rethinking the way in which NYCGA is not merely white noise, but a way of (re)producing and transforming social life, responds not only to the demand-seeking political critics, but also aids in filling a gap, identified by Downing (2008), in social movement research. In the next two chapters, I explore the relationship between the NYCGA and its text-artifacts, and also analyze the NYCGA in performance. In doing so, I draw out the productive tensions between text-artifacts as physical, material objects with some permanence and texts as the ephemeral precipitates of linguistic or semiotic interaction. It will become clear that both text-artifacts and texts are essential to the (re)production and transformation of social relationships and sociocultural subjects.

Chapter 2

Codification and Text-Artifacts

In this chapter, I focus on the relationship between the NYCGA and its textual archive. After describing in detail the NYCGA, and sketching the history of this discursive practice in North American non-violent activism, I turn to an examination of the production of two text-artifacts, “The Declaration of the Occupation” and the “Principles of Consolidation”. Then, I examine a different kind of text-artifact: manuals and minutes that serve as guides to the NYCGA. These text-artifacts have not been produced through consensus at an NYCGA, but rather describe the NYCGA. I will argue that it is partially due to these specific kinds of texts, and to specific characteristics of text-artifacts in general, that a stretch of interaction becomes identifiable and interpreted as a specific activity, the NYCGA.

The Interdiscursive History of the NYCGA

The NYCGA was not developed ex-nihilo during its first session in Bowling Green Park on August 2nd, 2011. As I mentioned, David Graeber came to this meeting with expectations of the basic characteristics of a GA. These include horizontal organization; facilitators who uphold the process but have no decision-making power; group consensus; and the possibility of an individual vetoing any proposed action. But, in practice, how are these principles put to work? Before delving into the history of the GA in North American non-violent activism, I present a description of the NYCGA, pieced together from the minutes, available on the NYCGA website

(www.nycga.net). This description represents an ideal or standard NYCGA³, pieced together from the minutes available for the period between September 17th and November 15th. For this two-month period, the minutes from forty-three NYCGAs are available.

The first NYCGA held at the OWS camp took place the first day of the occupation, September 17th, 2011. Minutes from September 19th announce that the following day two NYCGAs will be held, and on September 28th, there were also two assemblies. However, for the vast majority of the occupation, there was a single daily NYCGA. Originally the time fluctuated between afternoon and evening, but by the last few days of September, the NYCGA was held at 7:00pm each evening in the northeast corner of Zuccotti Park.

The length of a typical NYCGA varied depending on the issues discussed and the number of proposals put forward. External conditions like inclement weather, organized marches or emergency activities were also factors. The shortest NYCGAs were about an hour long, while the longest were more than seven hours. For example, the NYCGA on September 18th started at 3:00pm and did not end until 10:00pm, and the NYCGA on October 21st began at 7:00pm and ended far into the night, more than seven hours later, at 2:20am. Generally, however, as quiet hours were imposed at 11:00pm, assemblies did not often exceed four hours.

All the NYCGAs that occurred in the two months under consideration follow a similar format involving three parts: the agenda,

³ By NYCGA I mean either an individual meeting or the communicative practice, not an organization. I use “NYCGA” instead of “GA” to signal, as will become clearer, that the NYCGA is a specific style of GA, and my description pertains only to this kind of GA.

working group report-backs, and announcements. Each of these three stages of the assembly has a time frame that may be extended if the attendees wished. The “agenda”⁴ is established by the facilitation team in advance of the assembly and usually consists of a number of proposals. Occasionally the agenda includes surveys or brainstorming activities. The proposals presented at an assembly would ideally have been brought to the facilitation team twenty-four hours in advance, but at times emergency proposals are put forth if they concerned something that requires immediate action. Anyone can present a proposal, but usually the proposal is presented by a member of a “working group”. I will return to an explanation of working groups shortly.

During the course of an assembly, after a proposal is presented, the assembly attendees may ask “clarifying questions”. To do so, one must get “on stack”. The stack is a list of people wishing to speak. A “progressive stack” is used at the NYCGA, which means that voices that are traditionally marginalized, such as certain ethnic groups or women, are encouraged to speak so as to be heard before other voices. When an attendee poses a clarifying question, the group or individual with the proposal responds directly. Next, “concerns” about the proposal are voiced. Again, anyone with a concern must get “on stack” to be heard, and their concerns are addressed directly by the bearers of the proposal. After concerns are completed, it is then time for “friendly amendments”, which are suggestions for changes to a proposal meant to appease the concerns previously voiced. Finally, once clarifying questions, concerns, and friendly amendments have been discussed, the facilitator, whose role I will explain shortly, takes a “temperature check”.

⁴ See glossary for definitions of NYCGA terms.

This involves checking how the assembly feels about the proposal to see if consensus will likely be reached.

Following the temperature check, if there is not significant support for the proposal it is “tabled”, meaning that the proposers will further refine or change it with the option to propose it again at a subsequent NYCGA. If there is significant support, the facilitator will ask if there are any “blocks”. Blocks are considered very serious, and not to be used unless one has a deep ethical or safety concern with a proposal. For example, a block suggests the proposal is detrimental to the group, not just personally displeasing. Someone blocking must be prepared to walk away from the movement if the proposal is passed. After an attendee explains why (s)he blocked, the group with the proposal may respond. The blocker then has the opportunity to retract. If all blocks are retracted, the facilitator will check for consensus and if no further blocks are put forth, the proposal is passed and added to the list of proposals maintained on the NYCGA website.

Consensus is reached not when there is wholehearted support by each member for the proposal, but rather when there are no blocks, meaning that every member, if not completely in agreement with the proposal, nonetheless finds it satisfactory. If the case arises in which there are blocks that are not retracted, the assembly may pass into modified consensus. This means that a 9/10 majority, rather than unanimity, must be achieved for the proposal to pass. Modified consensus is only resorted to when a proposal has been through several drafts and has been presented to the attendees of the assembly several times. This process of proposal presentation, clarifying questions, concerns, friendly amendments and blocks must occur for each proposal put before the group. During the length of a single NYCGA there may be several proposals on an “agenda”.

Following the agenda items, the next section is the “report-backs” from the “working groups”. These report-backs have a time limit of one to two minutes, and the reporters “get on stack” in order to speak. Working groups are formed through the initiative of individual protesters or groups of protesters. Anyone may join a working group and there are as many as 70 of them at OWS. Working groups address logistical concerns in the camp like first aid, comfort (blankets and soap), food, and facilitation. In addition, there are “thematic groups” whose concerns are less involved with everyday logistics. For example, a group working on the visions and demands of the movement falls under this category, as does a group interested in societal problems like housing or education. Finally, there are also “caucuses”, which are groups of people who are often discriminated against or marginalized in some way⁵.

Returning back to the NYCGA, after the agenda items have been presented and the report-backs have been heard, there is time for announcements. Announcements are meant to be factual, rather than personal opinions or speeches. They might include calls for a new working group, a request for help with a specific project, or attempts to locate a lost item. After the announcements have concluded, the NYCGA formally ends. It is followed by a period known as “Soapbox” during which, as the name would suggest, anyone can make a speech expressing his or her opinion on any subject. These are not formally facilitated like the NYCGAs.

⁵ Report-backs may be made by thematic groups or caucuses, not just working groups, even though they are always referred to as working group report-backs. Further, the three categories (working, thematic and caucus) were accurate as of October 21st, but, later on groups became divided into Operations Groups and Caucuses. The thematic and working groups were combined to form the Operations Groups.

During an NYCGA, there are a number of specific roles that must be taken on by participants. The most important role is the “facilitator”. Each assembly has two facilitators. Facilitators are not supposed to be leaders, but are rather present to assist in upholding the procedures of the NYCGA. Anyone can undergo facilitation training, which occurs each day in the camp. However, the role of the facilitators is not easy, especially, one can imagine, during one of the marathon seven-hour assemblies, like the one that occurred on October 21st.

The facilitators are essentially curators of the NYCGA process. They announce the beginning of the assembly, explain how it functions, and work to keep speakers on track and on time. They announce when the “stack” is open and closed for each section, check in to see how the group feels about specific proposals, and diffuse any tensions that might arise. Often, one of the facilitators will summarize the concerns or friendly amendments when the time for asking for consensus or blocks arrives. The facilitators may also call for a break if tensions run high or the group seems dispirited.

In addition to the facilitators there is a “stack keeper”, a “stack greeter”, someone taking minutes, and occasionally a “vibes checker”. Often, only one person is in charge of “stack” rather than two. The stack keeper maintains a list of the people on stack, prepares them to speak, and then calls on them. The stack greeter welcomes those who wish to speak and organizes them into a progressive stack. The minute taker is responsible for transcribing what transpires during the assembly and minutes are posted online afterwards. Finally the vibes checker is responsible for assessing the spirits of the group and intervening to suggest stretching, a minute of silence, or a rallying cry. While there are always facilitators and at least one person

attending to the stack, a vibes checker is not indispensable and often the facilitators keep track of the morale themselves.

Even if one does not speak at an NYCGA, everyone is encouraged to express him or herself through a variety of hand signals. This is a way for everyone to react to a speaker while still staying quiet so as not to overpower him or her. To express agreement, participants hold their hands up in the air and wiggle their fingers. This is known as “twinkling”. To express a tepid attitude towards what is being said, fingers are wiggled with hands pointed out in front horizontally. Fingers wiggled while pointing down at the ground expresses disagreement. If one wishes to “block”, arms are crossed to form an X.

There are four additional ways a participant may intervene without speaking. First, holding one’s hands up in the air in the form of a triangle signals “point of process”. This means that whoever is speaking is somehow violating the procedural conventions of the NYCGA. In some cases when the speaker sees many participants in the audience making this sign, (s)he may self-correct. Otherwise, the person signalling the point of process may be called upon to explain the infraction. Secondly, a finger held in the air signals “point of information”. This means that the person has helpful information pertaining directly to what has just been said. Thirdly, a finger pointed up in the air, with the arm moving up and down signals that one is unable to hear, that the volume needs to be “turned up”. Finally, if the speaker is dragging on too long, one may rotate one’s hands in a circle to suggest that the speaker come to a conclusion quickly⁶.

⁶ There is also a “clarification” gesture, the hand formed into a C shape, but this is used less and less.

There is a final aspect of the NYCGA known as the “human mic(rophone)” or the “people’s mic”. During the first few NYCGAs, the speaker used a megaphone to amplify his or her voice; however, this requires a permit in New York, so it was soon abandoned. The human microphone is first mentioned in minutes for the September 21st NYCGA. It is a way to amplify sound that entails the crowd repeating the speaker’s words back. If the attendees are particularly numerous, there may be several “generations” of the human microphone, which means that the speaker’s words are echoed more than once so as to reach the ears of those furthest away. Sometimes there are designated individuals who serve as human microphones repeating what the speaker is saying, at other times the whole crowd acts as a human microphone. This creative solution has provoked interesting effects that change, to some extent, the nature of participation within an NYCGA, which I will discuss in further detail in the following chapter.

The NYCGA clearly has a formal structure and rules of participation. But how did these conventions come to be? The expectations Graeber brought to that first meeting by the bull on August 2nd, 2011, stem from his participation in the New York Direct Action Network (NYCDAN), the centerpiece of his extended ethnography of direct action activism. The Direct Action Network (DAN) was formed in 1999 in conjunction with the organization of the protests against the meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle. The DAN continued after the protests, with the goal of continuing to “organiz[e] actions against neoliberal institutions” and to be “model[s] of consensus-based, decentralized direct democracy” (Graeber 2009, 210). One of the primary ways in which the DAN modelled this “direct democracy” was through GAs, the consensus-based decision-making practice of the various North American chapters of the DAN. As Graeber (2009)

describes, NYCDAN meetings were conducted as GAs, although there were many informal meetings among compatriots. But, the GA in fact has a much longer history that predates the DAN and the World Trade Organization protests.

Tracing an interdiscursive or intertextual history is always a process of constructing that history as opposed to merely relaying it. In situating the NYCGA within the larger history of collective deliberative processes, I focus on this practice as a part of social movements in North America. This necessarily leaves out many ways in which the NYCGA may be connected to other discursive and social practices. Francesca Polletta, a sociologist who studies the culture of social movements and democracy, traces the different kinds of deliberative styles that have underpinned groups of activists throughout the twentieth century in America. She provides several milestones by which one can witness the development of collective deliberative processes into a codified, formally structured practice, the NYCGA.

An early form of collective deliberative process was used by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) during the 1960s. SNCC grew out of a coalition of students in the American South, who organized many sit-ins and freedom rides for civil rights in the early part of the 1960s. For these activists, consensus was understood to be a majority vote, something that in fact contradicts the principles of more contemporary GAs. For SNCC however, consensus decision-making was “more an ethos” than a carefully constructed practice (Polletta 2004, 49). Although by 1962 SNCC was a staff-led organization, with a hierarchy of positions, they still tried to secure consensus at meetings, which involved long discussions. However, when consensus was

not reached, it was ultimately the staff-members who made the decisions (81).

Students for Democratic Society (SDS) was similarly active in the American civil rights movement, and their deliberative style, according to Polletta, was inspired both by SNCC, and by religious pacifists, especially the Quakers. However, Quakers did not actively promote their egalitarian organizational and deliberative structure, and in fact they were reluctant to discuss or teach it at all, even as late as the 1950s. In their view, consensus was reserved for groups with a common, religious bond, and was not to be imposed upon others. Like SNCC, SDS had a more conventional – hierarchical – structure, but still promoted “participatory deliberations” (Polletta 2004, 131). However, as early as the mid 1960s, some chapters of SDS experimented with formalizing the ethos of participation and inclusivity into a structured deliberative style by rotating leaders on a regular basis.

By the late 1960s, consensus decision-making began to pose problems for these two groups. Focus on deliberative style was thought to be taking precedence over action, and it came to be associated with indulgent thinkers, not *activists* or doers. Also, as these groups formed strong bonds of solidarity, it became more difficult for new members to join in (Polletta 2004, 104).

The Women’s Liberation movement in the late 1960s and especially the 1970s, introduced a deliberative style that is closer to the GAs held at NYCDAN as they are described by Graeber (2009). These activists explicitly rejected hierarchical and adversarial organizational structures, and supported collective decision-making. “Feminists in the late 1960s and early 1970s made the internal life of the movement the stuff of political experimentation and innovation” Polletta writes (2004, 149). This resonates with a comment by Nathan Schneider, a participant in the early NYCGAs held in anticipation of

the occupation: “ What one mainly hears at the General Assembly... is not a demand so much as an *experiment in method* (emphasis added) (2011a). By method, Schneider seems to mean methods of organizing discussions, social relations and interactions. For the feminists, this experimentation and innovation took the form of tightly knit circles, where women informally undertook different tasks as suited their skills. Despite the lack of formal structure, however, leaders or core members of the different circles did emerge. Again, there was the challenge of at once creating strong bonds between members, but not to the exclusion of welcoming new members.

The next step in the development of collective deliberative processes into an explicitly structured practice came during this same era, the 1970s, with the anti-nuclear power movement. It was at this point that a codified practice congealed from the consensus-based deliberative processes that had been developing across different social movements. The Clamshell Alliance, a group of New England activists, invited Quaker activists to one of their early meetings. The Quakers taught the Clamshell Alliance about their form of consensus decision-making (Polletta 2004, 195) . The Quakers introduced key components of the formal structure of the GA like the role of the facilitator as an uninterested party in the debate, as well as the “block”. Further, George Lakey, a Quaker activist, produced a number of handbooks and manuals, and also held many training events to teach interested activists a form of consensus decision-making.

Amongst the different activist groups discussed thus far, the DAN activists developed the most formally and explicitly structured deliberative practice, termed the GA. The GA of the DAN activists is very similar to the earlier deliberative style of the Clamshell Alliance, except for the addition of the distinctive set of hand gestures (that have been carried forward to the

NYCGA). A number of people active in these earlier movements, especially the anti-nuclear movement, were involved in the formation of the DAN in 1999. Polletta explains that because they had a “common language”, “ DAN activists [were] thus able to draw on a culture of democratic decisionmaking that was simply not available to the 1960s activists” (2004, 195). Of no small importance in the dissemination of this “common language” was the existence of a textual archive. Since the 1970s, this archive has only grown. Nowadays, “ there is a whole literature on consensus-based decisionmaking... available in handbooks and pamphlets, on websites, and in periodicals” (Polletta 2004, 191). It is partially through these text-artifacts that a formalized *practice* was created from what was originally an *ethos* of inclusion and participation. The NYCGA, which marks the next milestone in the ongoing development of a culture of consensus-based decision-making, has spurred the production of many new text-artifacts, which render this archive all the more rich. The rest of this chapter focuses on the relationship between the NYCGA and its textual archive.

The “Principles of Consolidation” and the “Declaration of the Occupation”

At the NYCGA on September 23rd, 2011, one of the agenda items was a proposal to post the second draft of the “Principles of Consolidation”⁷ on the NYCGA website (www.nycga.net). This list of unifying principles was created by the working group on Principles of Consolidation. The proposal met with a number of concerns and blocks. One individual blocked because he or she felt strongly that the document be “open source”, that is, freely

⁷ The title was later changed to the “Principles of Solidarity”.

accessible and redistributable⁸. This received much support from the assembly at large and was accepted by the proposers. Additionally, many individuals expressed concern over what would be included in these unifying principles of the occupation. Finally, there was also dismay that a draft, rather than a finalized version, would be posted online with a potentially large audience and sphere of distribution. To these last two concerns, the working group on Principles of Consolidation emphasized that it would be “a living document”. This means that the document is subject to continual revision and editing over time (OWS Minutes 2011a).

The idea of a living document, however, is not just a way to add further principles to the list. It speaks to how the creation of a text-artifact can be a fraught process for the NYCGA. The tension evoked by one of the assembly members of distributing a draft, a work in progress, through the NYCGA website, an official forum, is part of a larger tension between process and finality. With so much emphasis on conversation and process within the NYCGA, distributing a text-artifact, an object marked by completeness, can be problematic. On the one hand, a text-artifact can be responded to, re-issued or updated, engaged with, “entextualized”, and so on. In this sense it is never static or complete. However, a text-artifact is also an object with some finality. When distributed on the website, the “Principles of Consolidation” can be downloaded in the current form, and kept or archived. No matter how one insists that it is a working draft, the quality of a text-artifact as an object cannot be undone, and its consumption can only be controlled to a certain extent.

⁸ The document is indeed accessible to the public, with the caveat that one has access to the Internet, of course.

The production and distribution of a text-artifact provokes problems in another way. As I have explained, there was strong pressure from the media and segments of the public to craft a demand. The occupiers, however, expressed reluctance to be defined by the discursive norms and habits of contemporary American politics. As I mentioned, there was a decisive move away from engagement in the “language of ‘demands’” (Schneider 2011b). Creating a text-artifact could be perceived as capitulating to these pressures, and participating in the sanctioned mainstream discursive practices of political expression (like those championed by the political commentators), rather than remaining true to an insurgent discursive practice.

Along with these potential drawbacks of producing a text-artifact, there are a number of advantages. The proposers of the “Principles” expressed that it is through the creation of such text-artifacts that the movement could connect with “the online community and the world at large” (OWS Minutes 2011a). The proposal finally came to consensus because “the importance and urgency of getting something to the public was stressed” (OWS Minutes 2011a). Indeed, text-artifacts facilitate connection over time and space.

We can perceive three characteristics of text-artifacts from this discussion so far. Firstly, text-artifacts have the tendency to give a project a sense of completeness, to “fix” something in writing. Secondly they make possible dissemination and circulation of ideas to a wide public. Thirdly, beyond the denotational content of the text-artifacts, such objects embody and express the discursive norms of their creators, a point hinted at by the concern that the document be open source. In other words, text-artifacts are instances of the discursive practices through which they were made. This last

point will become clearer through the following closer examination of the “Principles”.

The “Principles of Consolidation” (Fig 2), available on the NYCGA website, is framed by two bolded disclaimers that are highlighted in red. The first disclaimer states: “ what follows is a living document that will be revised through the democratic process of the General Assembly” (NYCGA 2011a). Despite setting principles down in writing, the first disclaimer virtually cries out that this is not an attempt to define with finitude the aims of OWS. The final disclaimer states:

This is an official document crafted by the Working Group on Principles of Consolidation. The New York General Assembly came to consensus on September 23rd to accept this working draft and post it online for public consumption (NYCGA 2011a).

This final disclaimer reveals a set of contradictions within the document. On the one hand, the document is characterized as “official” and there is reference to two authoritative-sounding bodies: the “Working Group” and the “New York General Assembly”. Yet on the other hand, it is a “working draft” and “posted online”. The first set of characteristics suggests formality and authority, while the second set suggests informality. The document needs to be a serious text-artifact, but it must neither look like a demand, nor a piece of legislation, nor a press-release, if it is to be a product of the NYCGA - a carefully and purposely cultivated discursive practice distinct from those that create press-releases, legislation or demands. This, however, is problematic since authority can be expressed in part through intertextual connections to canonically authoritative texts.

Some features of the document, like the reference to the date upon which it was approved by an official body, do evoke the genre of legislation. On the other hand, this is undone by the characterization of the document as

a working draft. The use of the verb “post” is too casual for legislation as well. Although the document is being distributed on the official website of the NYCGA, the verb “post” draws the document away from a press statement which would be not posted but “released” or “issued”. The document is found under the “Resources” tab of the NYCGA website, emphasizing the document’s educational purpose, and that it is not a response to media pressure.

The four characteristics of text-artifacts that the creation of the “Principles” illustrates (the question of finality, the ability to connect over time and space, the embodiment/expression of norms, intertextuality) again arise with a subsequent proposal to create a text-artifact, the “Declaration of the Occupation of New York City” at the NYCGA on September 29th. Members present at this assembly raised two main points for the proposers to address. Firstly, there was concern over the wording of certain phrases and a call for further edits. Countering the participants who called for revision of the document, the proposers again expressed a sense of urgency, saying “This needs to get out there because there’s always going to be people not here. We want those people involved” (OWS Minutes 2011b b). The idea that text-artifacts mediate communication with a wider public and enlarge the movement was again evoked, but with the added desire to help others in starting their own occupations by providing them with documentation of the current occupation. Secondly, as with the “Principles of Consolidation”, there were also number of concerns about points that were excluded from the document, and a call to stipulate that it is an “ongoing” or “living” document. The proposal reached consensus and the “Declaration” was posted on the NYCGA website. It does not have a striking disclaimer like the Principles of

Consolidation, but there is another way in which it subverts the fixity a text-artifact can impart.

The “Declaration” is written in accordance with standard grammar and style, composed of paragraphs and a number of bullet points (NYCGA 2011b). Below the Declaration however, is a “visual representation” of the same document (Fig 3). This visual representation is a large concept web with bubbles of written text joined by arcs to other bubbles. Blocks of written text vertically and horizontally frame the document. The juxtaposition of the conventionally written “Declaration” with its visual representation is a reminder that any text-artifact is the result of an act of inscription bound by conventional rules. Text-artifacts are products that promote a certain kind of understanding or knowledge, that is, a certain “entextualization”. For example, two bullet-pointed ideas of the “Declaration” may be associated merely by the fact that they are placed in proximity, or one may seem more important than another, if it appears earlier in the list. The visual representation, in contrast, completely eschews the standards of grammar and style. It foregrounds different connections, and forces us to read in a different way, therefore inviting a different kind of consumption and understanding.

The “Principles” and the “Declaration” illustrate the ways in which text-artifacts are instances of discursive practices. They both reflect the values of the NYCGA, like participation and inclusivity, and also strive to engineer and promote a certain kind of consumption. The entextualization of a text-artifact can never be completely controlled by the author, but there is a clear attempt to influence the way that the reader approaches the text in both the “Principles” and the “Declaration”. Through the text-artifacts it produces, a certain discursive practice may disseminate and inculcate, to

varying degrees, its values. But, in the case of the NYCGA, the readers of these text-artifacts are only penumbraally involved in this discursive practice compared with those who participate in the daily NYCGA. Although readers of the text-artifacts are nonetheless drawn into the discursive practice, it is the actual enactments of the NYCGA that more fundamentally impact social relationships and subjectivity, as I will discuss this in the following chapter.

Having focused on the NYCGA as process through which text-artifacts are produced, in the remainder of this chapter, I examine the inverse of the relationship between this discursive practice and text-artifacts. That is, I will examine not how the NYCGA produces text-artifacts, but how the NYCGA is produced by text-artifacts. The textual archive of the NYCGA does not only include documents that have passed through its consensus process, like those which I have just discussed, but in fact a number of text-artifacts that describe the NYCGA. These contribute to the formation of the NYCGA into a codified, reproducible, and identifiable activity, rather than an undifferentiated stretch of interaction.

The NYCGA Guides and Minutes

The websites associated with the Occupy movement (occupywallst.org and occupytogether.org, among others) collect a wide range of how-to guides, manuals, and instructions for organizing and participating in a GA. As I am focusing on the NYCGA specifically, I will discuss here the guides disseminated through the NYCGA website (www.nycga.net). In the Resources section of the website, one finds the “NYC General Assembly Guide”. The “Guide” is in fact a short tri-fold pamphlet (Fig 4). It is undated, but was likely created in September 2011. On the cover of the pamphlet is the image, created by Adbusters, of the ballerina atop the bull

with the caption #OCCUPYWALLSTREET. The inside of the pamphlet has four different headings. Under “Background” there is a brief description of the reason for the occupation. The remaining three headings, “How it [the NYCGA] Works”, “Groups”, and “Hand Gestures” focus on the NYCGA specifically. Under “How It Works” the pamphlet outlines the general procedures and how proposals are passed, emphasizing that the NYCGA involves decision-making by consensus. Next, under “Groups”, is an explanation that there are a number of working and thematic groups that are open for anyone to join. Finally, under “Hand Gestures”, the pamphlet explains the significance of the different hand signals. For our purposes, this will be the most relevant part of the text-artifact.

The “Hand Gestures” section of the guide shows an image of a gesture, accompanied by a gloss of that gesture. In some cases, for the “point of process” and the “block”, there is a metapragmatic description as well. A metapragmatic statement reveals what might be achieved by an utterance, how it “imputes a particular social contour to the speech event” (Agha 2007, 21). The point of process is characterized as an “interruption”, a specific kind of act, and the block is explicitly laid out as “an action that will stop a proposal from being accepted”. These metapragmatic descriptions differ from the metasemantic ones found in the second guide, the “Hand Gestures Guide”.

In addition to the trifold pamphlet, the NYCGA website offers the more elaborate “Hand Gestures Guide”. This was likely produced in accompaniment to the pamphlet, as it is missing a few key hand gestures. In this second guide, seven gestures are laid out: Agree, Disagree, Neutral, Clarification, Information, Process, Block. Each word is accompanied by an image of the relevant gesture and an explanation broken into the categories

“description” and “meaning”. This is, in essence, a dictionary for newcomers to the NYCGA, but rather than providing a word and a gloss, there is a gesture and a gloss.

As opposed to the pamphlet discussed above, this guide is more metasemantic. Metasemantic statements are those that specify the semantic property of a lexeme. For example, X means Y or X is Y. The “Hand Gestures Guide” focuses not on the consequences of the particular gesture (an interruption, a stoppage, an addition) but more narrowly on the semantic value of the gesture. For example, “Block” here is characterized not as an interruption, but as strong disagreement. However, although this is a metasemantic document, it is by no means merely a descriptive text.

The “Hand Gestures Guide” renders the reader a participant as it describes the gesture. Each explanation⁹ is written as a directive for the second person. For “Agree”, the gloss reads: “Description: Hold *your* hands up, palm open, and fan *your* fingers back and forth. Meaning: *You* agree with the proposal or like what *you* are hearing” (See Fig 5). This could have been written with the third person, “one”, as the subject. Usage of the second person is a way to recruit members. In reading the guide, the reader is invoked directly and drawn into the process, as if (s)he was already at the assembly, participating and carrying out these movements.

This guide creates the equivalent of professional jargon. While these gestures do not appear to be “technical” in the same way legal or medical vocabulary might be, they are certainly specialized speech. In defining this specialized speech, the guide helps to create an identifiable marker of the NYCGA participant. Just as lawyers or doctors speak in a certain way, so do

⁹ The exception of the “meaning” for the “process” gesture in which no subject is explicitly named.

participants of the NYCGA. The guide codifies a “register”. Registers are “repertoires used in utterances by particular sociohistorical populations” (Agha 2007, 149). That is, they are cultural models that link certain behavioural signs (a gesture), with a certain kind of person. For example, there can be legal registers, medical registers, youth registers, polite registers, and so on. What the “Hand Gestures Guide” does then, is to help to establish and fix an NYCGA register that is accessible to the public, or at least recognizable by the public¹⁰.

In addition to the guides already discussed, on the “About” page of the NYCGA website, a link to a “Quick Guide to starting a General Assembly” is offered. The link leads to www.takethesquare.net, the website of the uprisings that occurred in the spring of 2011 in Puerta del Sol in Madrid. This “Quick Guide” describes the same general GA values that are expressed in much NYCGA literature, like equality of voices, participation, open membership, inclusivity and collective action. However, logistically, the assembly described by this “Quick Guide” is completely different than the NYCGA. There are different kinds of procedures for reaching consensus, different roles for the participants, different names for similar roles, and different hand gestures. A person having read this guide in preparation for the NYCGA would surely be confused.

One might wonder why the NYCGA website would provide a link to this “Quick Guide” since the GA it describes is strikingly different from the NYCGA. But, establishing a connection with the Puerta del Sol GAs allows the NYCGA to be part of a larger intertextual chain. This bolsters both

¹⁰ The association of a way of speaking with a specific social identity *must* also occur in practice, through the actual performance of NYCGAs, for this register to become socially identifiable, inhabitable and effective.

events, giving the previous one continuity, and the current one a history. It is partially through text-artifacts that a discursive practice can gain sociohistorical continuity. One can imagine a similar future distribution and consumption of the two NYCGA guides, as they serve as a resource in some subsequent occupation.

Beyond the intertextual connections that creating a text-artifact facilitates, it also allows for specificity and differentiation. In the guide from *takethequare.net*, there is an enumeration of the steps of one of their assemblies. One of the points is “Reminder of the gestures used in an Assembly and suggestions of how to express oneself verbally in concordance with the *15th May Movement style*, as approved by the General Assembly” (emphasis added) (Carolina 2011). So, within the larger category of GAs, there can be different styles. The NYCGA guides help to define the specific style of GA at the Occupy Wall Street camp, distinguishing it from other possible styles. It becomes the *NYCGA* as opposed to simply a GA.

The act of creating one’s own guide, rather than solely relying on previous guides is also important in relation to authority. To understand how the guide crafts authority, the notion of “orders of indexicality” is useful (Silverstein 2003). Indexicality is the property that linguistic or other semiotic signs-in-use have of pointing to their contexts of occurrence. Consider the example of deference entitlement. As Silverstein (2003) notes, using polite forms of speech - like the formal second person “*vous*”, as opposed to the informal “*tu*”, in French, or the formal and refined speech level “*alus*” in Javanese - indexes an asymmetric social relationship in which the speaker defers to the addressee. This signals the addressee’s higher social status, power over, or refinement. In terms of the NYCGA, the existence of a guide points to, indexes, the fact that the NYCGA is a complex activity practiced by

a group with a degree of specialized knowledge. This, like the asymmetric social context signalled by the deference entitlement, is an example of first order indexicality. However, there are also *subsequent* orders of indexicality. ‘*Alus* is as *alus* does’, Silverstein writes (2003, 216). “To know how most subtly to speak with these indexical systems is to manifest – aha! – to index one’s own Speakerly ‘*alusness*’” (216). That is, to be able to speak in the most refined manner, one must, necessarily, be refined oneself. If we translate this idea to the realm of the guide, beyond signalling that the NYCGA is a specialized practice in need of explanation, it also signals something about the creators of the text-artifact. Who has the ability or the authority to write a manual, a conventionally authoritative text-artifact? Only someone with expert knowledge. The guide, written not by a singular person, but by members of the NYCGA, reflects their authoritative knowledge as a group. The occupiers at OWS are not only putting on a version of the Puerta del Sol or Tahrir Square GAs. They are carrying out their own defined practice with authority. The guides help position the NYCGA as a serious undertaking, not, as some detractors would suggest, a “pantomime”.

However, the guide’s capacity to project authority is in proportion to the quality of the guide itself. In this vein, consider the language of the “Hand Gestures Guide”. In more casual parts of the website, like the forums, the agreement gesture is known as “twinkling”. In the minutes, the hand gestures are routinely described as “wiggling fingers”. Compare this to the wording of the guide: “ Hold your hand up, palm open, and fan your fingers back and forth”. The tone here is serious, suggesting that this text-artifact is indeed meant to be official and authoritative. Twinkling or wiggling would be inappropriate for such a text-artifact.

To briefly summarize, the NYCGA guides accomplish two main things. Firstly, they both instruct and initiate potential participants, therefore inviting newcomers to the practice. At the same time, they fix the NYCGA as a discursive practice carried out by participants with in-group knowledge. They strike a balance between welcoming anyone to join, yet also creating a sense of in-group membership. This balance between fostering in-group solidarity, which necessarily implies contrasting outsiders and welcoming newcomers was a tension Polletta (2004) identified with earlier forms of collective deliberative process. Secondly, the guides help to codify and make publicly known a certain register, the NYCGA register, through which members of the NYCGA can be identified, even by outsiders. Across a larger timescale, these documents add to the textual archive of collective deliberative processes that started to form in the 1970s, and helped to codify the GA in the first place.

In addition to the guides, the NYCGA website has an extensive collection of minutes. As I have mentioned earlier, there are minutes for nearly every NYCGA in the period with which this thesis is concerned, the actual occupation from September 17th to November 15th, 2011¹¹.

Whereas the minutes of the first two NYCGAs are brief summaries, from September 19th onwards, the minutes are detailed and follow a similar format. General information like the time, date and place is always given, along with the names of the facilitators. Then, the agenda is laid out. For example, the minutes from the NYCGA on October 10th, the twenty-fourth day of the occupation, begin as follows:

¹¹ Minutes continue to be posted on the NYCGA website at the time of writing in February 2011. Many also now include an audio recording.

NYC GENERAL ASSEMBLY DAY 24
Meeting Date/Time: 10/10/2011 / 7pm EST
Location: Liberty Plaza
Facilitators (F): Craig, Daniel

AGENDA

- 24.1. Agenda Items
- 24.2. Working Group Report Backs
- 24.3. Announcements

A transcription of the particular NYCGA follows this general information. The facilitators' overview of the standard NYCGA process is sometimes only noted as having occurred, instead of actually transcribed verbatim. However, there is an attempt to transcribe each utterance made subsequently. Each utterance is numbered according to when it occurs. For example, the first announcement would be 24.3.1, reflecting that it corresponds to the NYCGA on the 24th day of the occupation, that it pertains to the 3rd section of the Agenda, and that it was the first (1) announcement made. If there is a response to the first announcement, it will be marked 24.3.1.1. The second, unrelated, announcement would be marked 24.3.2. The actual transcription of what has been said, however, is much less systematic. At times it takes the form of reported speech using the third person, and at other times it is directly quoted in first person. Often the minutes switch back and forth between third and first person.

The Minutes working group, the group of volunteers responsible for taking the minutes and posting them on the website, created guidelines for taking minutes on November 4th, 2011. According to them, the minutes serve several purposes. Firstly, they are “ a historical preservation of GA proceedings”(Minutes Working Group 2011). Through the minutes the guidelines explain “ we're helping ourselves make history” (Minutes Working

Group 2011). There is thus an acute awareness of posterity and the desire to create a material archive that will be read in the future. Secondly, the minutes are “essential not only for written record, but for GA accountability and transparency”(Minutes Working Group 2011). They also have a more internal use for the current participants of the movement, too. Beyond these two functions, however, the minutes also serve to codify the NYCGA, and, as I will illustrate, to promote a certain entextualization of the NYCGA.

According to the guidelines, the minute-taker is supposed to remain objective, accurate and thorough; ideally, (s)he is to “ aim for a neutral, comprehensive record of GA proceedings” (Minutes Working Group 2011). The guidelines contain the tip to “ aim for a verbatim transcript”, warning minute takers not to add material from memory because “ the idea is [transcribe with] historical accuracy” (Minutes Working Group 2011). Yet, at the same time, there are certain elements that are meant to be excluded, like outside conversation as well as common procedures that are reviewed at every assembly. Within the very guidelines, the directive to exclude certain elements of the interaction being transcribed undermines the goals of objectivity, neutrality and accuracy. It is clear from this alone that the minutes are not merely a reflection of the NYCGA, but a certain construction of the NYCGA.

In addition to the emphasis on objectivity, neutrality and comprehensiveness, the guidelines encourage the minute-taker to capture the mood and dynamics so that “anyone can get a “feel” for the meeting as if they were there, by reading the minutes” (Minutes Working Group 2011). The purpose of the minutes however, is not at all to convey the “atmosphere” of the meeting. The ideal format delineated in the guide essentially precludes this. Rather than capture something of the feel of the NYCGA, the minutes

are meant to make the various instantiations of the NYCGA comprehensible as bounded events. They turn the stretch of interaction into an event that may be grasped¹². Consider, for example, the numbering system. It is unlikely that any attendee perceives the meeting as unfolding in such an ordered way. The frequency with which the facilitator reminds speakers that they are off-topic or voicing a concern when it is only time for questions attests to this. We might consider the minutes as functioning similarly to a city map. Rarely does one actually experience the city as a network of roads and public transportation links, with nodes along these conduits. Yet, a birds-eye view is often the way a city is represented as an aid to make the city navigable.

The minutes contribute to the standardization of this form of interaction. There are numerous potential ways to break down or represent a NYCGA, and to entextualize it. Entextualization, recall, is formation of otherwise fluid social interaction into a graspable entity, if an ephemeral one. It is a momentary reification, or “structured projection” (Silverstein and Urban 1996b, 331). The minutes promote a certain skeletal outline of the NYCGA, and in doing so influence the entextualization that participants will produce. That is to say, the minutes constrain the participants’ possible entextualizations, narrowing the potentially unlimited ways one might interpret the NYCGA as unfolding. However, this, of course, only holds if the participants have read the minutes.

The first set of documents, the “Principles of Consolidation” and the “Declaration”, showed that the NYCGA is a unique discursive practice that differentiates itself from more mainstream political or public relations discursive practices. But, the second set of documents, the guides and

¹² There are mechanisms within the performance of the NYCGA itself that signal its bounds too, as I will discuss in the following chapter.

minutes, which are products of discursive practices of a specific kind of collective, serve to associate the NYCGA with a kind of collective. Families or friends do not create these documents, neither do fleeting social groups. It is rather businesses, corporations or organizations of some stability that engage in these discursive practices. Accordingly, through the minutes and guides, we can perceive that the NYCGA is not just an assembly of people, but also a constellation or system of norms and conventions that perdures even if its participants change. It is partially due to these text-artifacts, and to the textual archive that started to amass in the 1970s through George Lakey, that we can speak of the NYCGA in the abstract. The NYCGA exists as a genre, as a nameable discursive practice, as opposed to merely existing as NYCGAs, a number of regularly held assemblies.

The properties of text-artifacts that the “Principles of Consolidation” and the “Declaration” strove to overcome, like fixity and a sense of finality, are advantageous in regards to the guides and minutes. Whereas the “Principles of Consolidation” and the “Declaration” are emphatically signalled out as living documents, perpetually unfinished, the minutes convey finality and wholeness, and it is important that they do so. Are the minutes, as text-artifacts, something that undermines the principles of the NYCGA, a discursive practice?

Unlike the “Principles of Consolidation” or the “Declaration”, the minutes were not actually produced through the NYCGA. However, as I have shown, the minutes do affect the consumption of the NYCGA, as do the guides. A discursive practice is not only tied to the text-artifacts it directly produces, but to a larger web of text-artifacts. What the guides and the minutes reveal is that the NYCGA is *itself* entextualizable as a stretch of linguistic interaction. It is not just a mechanism for producing text-artifacts

that are then entextualized. *Texts*, and not just text-artifacts, are produced at and by the NYCGA.

In this chapter, I have focused primarily on the ways in which text-artifacts promote “preferred ways of reading” (Gillies 2009), as well as on the ways they constrain and shape our entextualizations of social interactions. The guides, and especially the minutes, codify the NYCGA by both aligning it and differentiating it from other GAs, past and present, and these two kinds of text-artifacts also serve to emphasize a certain entextualization over other possible ones. It is through text-artifacts like the guides and the minutes that the NYCGA comes to be repeatedly performed with the same structure, and entextualized by participants in the roughly the same way.

Fairclough writes however, that a discursive practice “contributes to reproducing society (social identities, social relationships, systems of knowledge and belief) as it is, yet also contributes to *transforming* society” (emphasis added)(1992, 65). For example,

the identities of teachers and pupils and the relationships between them which are at the heart of a system of education depend on a consistency and durability of patterns of speech within and around those relationships for their reproduction. Yet they are open to transformations which may partly originate in discourse: in the speech of the classroom, the playground, the staffroom, educational debate, and so forth (65).

It is clear from the guides and the minutes that the NYCGA has both “consistency and durability of patterns of speech”, which are necessary for the *reproduction* of social life. However, as Fairclough suggests in the above citation, these patterns are always subject to *transformation* during interaction. The NYCGA, no matter how it may be codified in texts, is an assembly that involves dynamic social interaction between the participants.

The NYCGA as social interaction, itself entextualizable, is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Pedagogy, Participant Frameworks, and Performance

In the last chapter, I situated the NYCGA within an interdiscursive history of collective deliberative processes. However, the NYCGA in fact differs significantly from these earlier processes in that, during the occupation, NYCGAs were performed with unprecedented visibility. The fact that the NYCGAs took place outdoors in Zuccotti Park, in the middle of Wall Street, potentially provides not only activists with what Polletta (2004) termed a “common language”, but also, in conjunction with the guides and minutes, makes this discursive practice available and familiar to the mainstream public to an unmatched degree.

In this chapter I focus on the public enactments of the NYCGA as entextualizable events. Firstly, I consider the role of the facilitator as the curator of the conventions of the discursive practice. Secondly, I move on to consider the ways in which different participant frameworks are laminated one upon the other in the NYCGA, focusing on how the human microphone affects these frameworks. These first two sections are primarily concerned with the (re)production of social relationships and sociocultural subjects, as well as a kind of cultural knowledge. Thirdly, I come to consider the transformation of social life more centrally, reflecting upon the ways in which characteristics of the NYCGA have infiltrated other discursive events like the speeches of politicians or formally organized lectures.

Metapragmatic Reinforcement During the NYCGA

The NYCGA is an extremely self-aware practice. The norms and conventions it instills are not at all dissimulated. If we consider the main features of the NYCGA, many of the characteristics of the social

relationships it cultivates are evident. There are no assigned roles that one maintains over multiple NYCGAs. Every participant may be a facilitator and thus manage the meeting, every participant may present a proposal, and each participant may “block” it. Because of this, there are no fixed discursive roles. No one is capable of inhabiting a discursive role that another person could not also inhabit at a subsequent NYCGA.

None of these characteristics of the NYCGA are hidden or could possibly be overlooked by participants. Participating in the NYCGA is a commitment, at least for the time of interaction, to these rules, which can render the interaction a tedious process:

Working toward consensus is really hard, frustrating and slow. But the occupiers are taking their time. When they finally get to consensus on some issue, often after days and days of trying, the feeling is quite incredible. A mighty cheer fills the plaza. It’s hard to describe the experience of being among hundreds of passionate, rebellious, creative people who are all in agreement about something (Schneider 2011b).

This illustrates how the NYCGA can be transformative on an individual level. Both Polletta and Graeber echo this sentiment, noting how participants often experience the GA as liberating and transformative (Graeber 2009, 331; Polletta 2004, 163). They both also note, however, that this feeling is often fleeting and that it is hard to maintain consensus-based decision-making within a collective for a sustained period of time. Yet this does not mean that this kind of experience is without value. Polletta (2004) explains that such experiences are developmental and pedagogical, and therefore potentially transformative across a larger time-scale. The possibilities of transformation both within and beyond the duration of the assembly is the focus of this chapter.

Despite the structure set forth in the minutes and the guides of the NYCGA, it is impossible to completely dictate an interaction. During the course of a NYCGA, the facilitator plays an important role in guiding its entextualization. At the beginning of each NYCGA, the facilitators introduce themselves, and emphasize their role: they are not leaders but only curators of the process. Their introductions mark a shift, changing the context from casual chatter to that of the NYCGA. Often, the facilitator will shout “mic check”, a phrase that the entire assembly repeats back. The attendees’ echo signals that the human microphone is “on” and that the crowd is being responsive. It is often used as a sort of rallying cry when morale is low in the assembly or to remind people to participate in the human microphone, repeating back the speaker’s words so those out of earshot can hear¹³.

To further mark this shift into a new discursive setting, at the beginning of each NYCGA, the hand signals are reviewed. A compilation of footage from different NYCGAs shows the beginning of one assembly in which the facilitators introduce the hand signals, simultaneously miming the gestures: “This one here means speak up. This one here means I’m not feeling it... but it’s not a block”” (jsrubby22 2011). This review is for the benefit of newcomers, and explicitly instructional. However, it also helps establish the context of the assembly, marking it off from other kinds of interaction by specifying what is appropriate and what is inappropriate. When contexts shift in everyday interaction, they are usually not marked by such an explicit laying out of the indexical values of speech. For example, in transitioning from discussion amongst colleagues to the start of a board

¹³ Mic checks, however, are not used uniquely in the GA. If one needs to make an announcement in the OWS camp, it is possible to shout his phrase to attract the attention of those around.

meeting, the way people talk to each other will surely shift, but rarely will it be *explicitly* stated what is appropriate in the new context, unless perhaps there was a flagrant violation of norms that was disciplined.

Beyond this introduction, the role of the facilitators seems to be essentially one of metapragmatic correction. They are constantly reminding participants of what kind of utterance they have made, and whether or not it was appropriate. For example, the facilitators will often interject when an utterance is made in the wrong section of the NYCGA. Consider the following examples, all uttered by a facilitator:

That was a great concern, [but] it is now time for information questions (OWS Minutes 2011c).

That's a great concern but not a point of information (OWS Minutes 2011g).

That would be a friendly amendment. We will do that after questions and concerns (OWS Minutes 2011h).

That is a suggestion – not an amendment (OWS Minutes 2011f).

The facilitators rarely intervene in reaction to the content of an utterance but more often because the utterance is not appropriate to a given part of the NYCGA. These interjections are both metapragmatic and pedagogical. In all the examples above, the facilitator categorizes what kind of utterance the speaker made, be it a concern, friendly amendment, suggestion, point of information, or clarifying question. Then, the facilitator reminds the speaker, and the entire assembly, what kind of utterances are currently being made. During meetings when the proposals being discussed are especially

contentious, the facilitator is almost continually issuing these correcting statements. Further, these statements are not just made one-on-one between the offender and the facilitator. Perhaps to avoid engaging in direct conflict or making the offender uncomfortable, the facilitator never addresses the person, but always comments on his or her utterance. There are never corrections employing the second person, for example, “ You just made a suggestion and but we are addressing concerns”. In this way, the corrections are addressed to the entire assembly, not just the offender. The facilitator is pointing out to all present what is occurring and why it deviates from the proper process.

Through these metapragmatic statements, the facilitator is also partially determining the entextualization of the event. That the facilitator guides participants to a certain understanding comes across even more clearly with an example from the NYCGA held on October 21st. At this point in course of the assembly, the facilitator has just asked if there are any blocks and five people have blocked. The facilitator notes this and says:

What we did was we heard the proposal, then we heard concerns, and those concerns were addressed. And then we asked for friendly amendments, and then the structure working group accepted two friendly amendments. And now they’re asking this body to pass the proposal in your hand¹⁴. Temperature check says people feel good. So we move to consensus. And when we move to consensus, we’re counting blocks (OWS Minutes 2011e).

The facilitator recapitulates what has occurred up to the point of asking for blocks. In doing so, employing the inclusive first-person plural, (s)he establishes how the participants of the assembly at large should interpret or

¹⁴ The written proposal had been distributed.

understand the event in process. As these metapragmatic statements are issued throughout the course of the assembly, they reinforce a common understanding that is (ideally) shared by all the participants.

Through the daily NYCGAs, the constant correction of the facilitator in regards to the participants' utterances would seem to concretize the roles of facilitator and participant. But, no one person can be invested with the authority of the facilitator over a timescale longer than a single assembly. Further, within the NYCGA, the facilitator is occasionally challenged upon his or her interjections. Anyone in the assembly may signal a "point of process", and explain how a speaker is failing to conform to the NYCGA conventions. The duty of correction does not lie solely with the facilitator. However, although the facilitators rotate, within the span of a specific NYCGA, the facilitators do wield considerable authority, as it is they who are charged with constantly promoting an entextualization of the event.

The Human Microphone and its Distortion of Participant Frameworks

While the facilitator does wield authority within the span of an assembly, the relationship between the facilitator and the assembly members at large is complicated by the use of the human microphone. The human microphone, as I have explained, is used to amplify the voices of speakers during the NYCGA because electronic amplification during demonstrations requires a permit. The human microphone involves repeating verbatim what the speaker has said. This can take two forms. At times it is the entire crowd that repeats back what is said, and at other times, there are designated individuals who serve as human microphones. In exploring how the human

microphone displaces person reference, I will focus primarily upon the case in which the entire crowd serves as a human microphone.

The human microphone renders the attendees a chorus of sorts that all speaks together as one. This heightens the sense of collective participation. Further, as each speaker's voice is repeated back, he or she receives confirmation that his or her voice has been heard. The human microphone makes it more difficult to attend the assembly passively. Even if one is only participating in a sort of mechanical repetition without much thought, at the very minimum, the act of collective repetition, hearing one's voice meld into potentially hundreds of others, remains. Further, the act of repeating distorts or bends person reference so that the different roles of speaker and addressee, and facilitator and attendee, are blurred, as are the relationships between these roles.

I described earlier that the facilitators begin each meeting with a review of the hand signals. But this does not merely consist of the facilitators stating what each gesture means. A compilation of footage of a number of NYCGAs shows the assembly repeating back the directions, and many attendees are also miming the gestures. Further, during this time of relaying directions, the footage shows the facilitators switching between the inclusive second person plural, "we", and the first person plural "I": "This is our agenda. We'll begin with announcements...This right here means speak up. This here, means I'm not feeling it. But it's not a block" (jsrubby22 2011). This switch is reflected in a number of the NYCGA minutes too. The examples below offer a fuller view of this movement between "we" and "I". I have coded them to reflect the different kinds of roles and person reference at play. Underlined portions correspond to the use of an inclusive "we", one that refers to the whole assembly. Bolded portions correspond to the use of

an exclusive “we”, one that refers only to the two facilitators. This exclusive “we” results in reference to the audience through the second person plural, “you”. Italicized portions correspond to the use of “I” in which the pronoun does not necessarily refer to the speaker, but is part of a kind of reported speech. Capitalized portions correspond to the use of the pronoun “I” to refer to the speaker. Uncoded portions do not have personal reference.

Example 1

We use hand signals so we don't have to yell but can still express how we feel. *Twinkle fingers means I feel good, I like what I'm hearing [Fingers wiggled upwards]. Next, not so twinkly fingers, but not disappointed [Fingers wiggled horizontally]. This, is I don't like what I'm hearing [fingers wiggled downwards]. It doesn't mean shut up, just means I don't like it. Next, is Point of Process [fingers held in a triangle shape]. Use this when your neighbor starts asking questions when it's not time to ask questions. This [Fingers in a rolling motion] means someone is talking too much and has already made their point and we understand their point and we want them to wrap it up. We use this with great compassion and understanding. We use this [a C] to say I have a question, a clarifying question. It's used when we are discussing a proposal and have opened stack for CQ about that proposal. This is point of information (PoI) [one finger in the air]. This is used when you have factual information pertaining to the proposal which we are discussing and not some other proposal. The last symbol is a block [arms crossed]. This means that you are morally opposed or have significant safety concerns with what is happening. We use a block if we are seriously opposed, morally or for safety (OWS Minutes 2011i)*

Example 2

During this general assembly we use a series of hand signals to communicate with each other how we're feeling and about process so that we don't have to speak over each other but we can still communicate. The first one is this. Hand up – fingers wiggling. *This means, "I like what I'm hearing. I agree with this. I'm happy."* The next hand signal is this – hands out in front of you, fingers

doing a dance. This means that I'm not really jazzed about what I'm hearing but I don't totally disagree. This one – hand down, fingers' dancing means I'm not jazzed. I don't like this. I disagree. This is a point of information . One finger up. *This means that I have factual, again, I REPEAT, factual, information that pertains to what we're talking about right now.* **This is not to address a concern, ask a question or give an opinion. If you have a question, and you need clarification, throw up this sign. It's a C for clarification. This is a block. This means that you have moral, or safety concerns about a proposal that are so strong that you would consider leaving the park or working with OWS. This is serious. The next one is this. A triangle. This is point of process. If you feel that the conversation has strayed, if someone is addressing a concern but we are at the point of asking for questions, that is an appropriate use of point of process. With point of process, and point of information, we ask that those are non-verbal. So you don't have to also say point of process. When one of us sees that, we will halt the process to have that addressed. If you cannot hear, please do this. Make sure it's moving so we know it's not a point of information. Please do not yell "mic check." please let the facilitators do that (OWS Minutes 2011j).**

In both of these excerpts, drawn from the minutes of the NYCGAs held on November 8th and 12th, 2011 respectively, the facilitator begins with the inclusive “we”. This both aligns him or her with the audience and establishes an in-group that includes all those present. Next, in discussing the primary gestures, those that involve wiggling fingers – agreement, disagreement, mixed opinion – the facilitator employs the first person pronoun “I”. But this “I” does not in fact refer to the speaker. Urban (1987) helps elucidate how this is so. Building upon Benvenistes' work on pronouns and subjectivity, Urban (1987) explores the variety of “I”s that exist in discursive interaction. He lays out a range of five subject positions that can be inhabited by the use of the first person pronoun. First is the “indexical-referential” “I”. In these cases, the “I” indexes the speaker of the utterance,

the everyday self. For example, telling a friend “ I went to the store” would fall under this category. On the other end of the spectrum is what Urban terms the “projective” “I”. This indexes the “non-ordinary self”, and involves a process of “ total immersion in another “I”” (1987, 38). This would occur, for example during a trance-like state or in a deeply felt re-enactment. Urban gives the example of ritual myth performance, in which the actor “becomes” the character. In moving towards the projective end of the spectrum, the possibility of an internal experience of an other increases. The facilitator’s use of the “I” falls somewhere in between these two extremes.

Between the two ends of the spectrum - marked by the indexical-referential “I” on one end, and the projective “I” on the other - there are three further “I”s: the “anaphoric”, “de-quotative” and “theatrical”. An example of the anaphoric use of “I” includes reported speech. For example, in discussing a previous conversation, one might say: “ She said, ‘I don’t know’ ”. In this example, both “she” and “I” refer to the same person, who is not the speaker. Here, the speaker is clearly distinguished from the “I”, which refers back to the pronoun “she”.

The de-quotative and theatrical “I”s are similar. It is the “I” of “representational performances, wherein speakers use the first person pronoun to point to themselves, but not as the individuals they are outside the performance context” (Urban 1987, 36). The “I” points to “themselves as the concrete representation of a character in discourse” (1987, 36). The difference between anaphoric and de-quotative or theatrical “I”, is that the grammatical clues of the former, which suggest that the “I” does not index the speaker (like the third person “she” in the example above), are replaced by contextual clues in the latter. So, for example, instead of saying “She said, ‘I don’t know’”, one would say, “I don’t know” while taking on some

behavioural characteristics of the female whose speech is being relayed. The difference between de-quotative and theatrical “I” is merely one of degree; in theatrical “I”, the representation is all the more elaborate and deeply felt.

Applying this to the NYCGA, we can see that in employing the first person singular while miming the gestures, the facilitator is adopting the role of the assembly attendee through a de-quotative/theatrical “I”. This is cued in part by the hand gestures, as facilitators do not participate in reacting to speakers with these hand gestures, only the attendees do. Further, it is clear that the facilitator is enacting an “I”, because in Example 2 when explaining the gesture for point of information, the facilitator says, “This means that I₁ have factual, again, I₂ repeat, factual, information”. Here there are two different “I”s employed. I₁ is de-quotative/theatrical; it is the facilitator-as-attendee. But the facilitator breaks character, so to speak, employing an indexical-referential “I” when (s)he says “again, I₂ repeat factual”. This is a warning and (s)he is almost scolding the audience in advance for their misuse of this gesture.

In addition to the inclusive “we” and the different “I”s, the facilitator can take on a third subject position: exclusive “we”. The facilitator in Example 1 employs the inclusive “we” much more than does the facilitator in Example 2. Use of the inclusive “we” reduces the distance between the audience and the facilitator such that they are all part of the same collective. Both the facilitator(s) and the audience occupy the same subject position, “we”. On the other hand, the facilitator in Example 2 employs the exclusive “we” drawing a distinction between the attendees, “you”, and the facilitators, “we”. This helps more clearly define the separate roles of the attendees and the facilitator. It is not necessarily the case, however, that the exclusive “we” signals authority, while the inclusive “we” signals solidarity. In using the

inclusive “we”, the facilitator purports to speak for everyone present, and not just as a facilitator. While the inclusive “we” may foster collective spirit, it does evoke a sort of didactic inculcation. I will elaborate upon this shortly.

In this small stretch of interaction, there are several different subject positions that the facilitator may take on, and project upon the rest of the assembly. We can see clearly what Irvine (1996) describes as “multiple deictic fields or participation frames superimposed, as it were, on one another” (143). There are (at least) three different frames of participation at work that form a spectrum from most distance between facilitator and audience (exclusive “we”), to toggling between the two roles (through the enacted “I” of the facilitator), to no distance between the two (inclusive “we”). These different subject positions or participant roles are rendered all the more fluid when the effect of the human microphone is taken into account.

Even though the exclusive “we” and the de-quotative/theatrical “I” serve to align the facilitator with the assembly, it remains that the facilitator is physically set apart from the participants, standing at the front while the audience sits. This relationship has the potential to give the facilitator a patronizing or condescending air when (s)he employs the inclusive “we”, and the human microphone is in use. The repetition of the first line of Example 1, “We use hand signals so we don’t have to yell but can still express how we feel”, when enunciated by an entire chorus of participants can be either a unifying and affirming expression, or one that verges on inculcation, depending on one’s belief in the utterance, and the attitude of the facilitator. Further, the repetition of facilitators’ utterances with the de-quotative/theatrical “I”, such as “ This means, ‘I like what I’m hearing. I agree with this. I’m happy ’” underlines the cult-like aspect of the NYCGA. Audience members are repeating utterances that are ostensibly about how

they feel, but they did not formulate these utterances. Rather, the utterances were dictated to them. This is very much a process of indoctrination.

But, the participants are not only repeating the facilitators' utterances with the inclusive "we" and the de-quotative/theatrical "I". The attendees also repeat the utterances in which the facilitator uses an exclusive "we". In these utterances the attendees are positioned as "you" and there is a distinction between the facilitator and audience, unlike with the inclusive "we". In Example 2 for instance, one of the facilitators says, "you don't have to also say point of process. When one of us sees that, we will halt the process to have that addressed". The division normally marked by the exclusive "we", however, is distorted when these utterances are repeated back by the entire audience. The exclusivity this "we" signals is attenuated by the fact that a whole chorus of people utter it at once.

In repeating such utterances, the echoers aid the facilitator in relaying his or her message, but also become a sort of proxy facilitator for those out of earshot of the appointed facilitator. Therefore, the echoers inhabit the role of the facilitator, just as the facilitator earlier inhabited the role of the attendees with the de-quotative/theatrical "I". The attendees are not just repeating messages, but in fact being trained in facilitation. While the constant metapragmatic corrections of the facilitator render the NYCGA a pedagogical process, the human microphone renders it all the more so.

It is interesting to note too, how different the NYCGA could be if the human microphone were only employed for certain kinds of utterances. For example, if the only the inclusive "we" utterances were repeated, and the facilitator alone employed the exclusive "we", this would completely change the relationship between the facilitator and the attendees. The facilitators

would be able to distinguish their role much more clearly, and the inculcating aspect of the assembly described earlier would be much stronger.

Of course, it is also not only the facilitators who address the assembly, but any attendee who wishes to present a proposal, make an announcement, voice a concern or a clarifying question, etc. Unlike the facilitators, who are not supposed to present their opinions, but rather uphold the process, these speakers are generally presenting their own ideas or a cause in which they believe. The human microphone repeats back these speakers' utterances, and therefore the attendees do not only hear the speakers' words in considering their beliefs or opinions, but the attendees must actually form and utter these beliefs or opinions as well. This act of forming the words of another, and for a moment inhabiting their position is significant. But, just how far does the human microphone go in rearranging subjectivities?

Clearly the human microphone, while a mechanism for repetition, has an impact upon the different subject positions the participants of the NYCGA inhabit, and the relationships between these different participants. But, reported speech and storytelling are a common part of everyday interaction. The human microphone does not collapse subjectivities in such a way that the speaker becomes indistinguishable from the audience repeating his or her words. The context of the assembly, in which the facilitators stand in front of an often seated audience, renders this impossible. But, the human microphone does mean that participants must at least enact different subject positions. It therefore facilitates what Greg Urban terms "iconic otherness" and "referential otherness" (Urban 1987, 46).

"Referential otherness" simply signals the existence of another possible subjectivity, which Urban finds to be a fundamental element of social life. Recognizing that an "I" exists, other than oneself, acknowledges

the existence of different subjectivities in the world. “Iconic otherness”, on the other hand, is when behavioural patterns of the other are assumed, thus creating a relationship of iconicity between two subjects. Urban states that “explicit signaling of the “I” as the “I” of another ensures an awareness of the assumed character of the “I”, but simultaneously does not interfere with its occurrence as an actual embodied iconic otherness” (Urban 1987, 48). That is to say, a sort of embodied otherness can still occur, even if it is clear that the speaker is only assuming the voice of another.

Further, in examining different participant roles and reported speech, Irvine (1996) discusses the possibility of slippage while one “‘animates’ the persona of another, taking on another subjectivity for the duration of the reported speech” (147). She gives the example of woman quoting an obscenity spoken by another person. This woman, although clearly reporting the speech of a different person, still asks “God’s forgiveness for the obscenity, even though it is not “hers” ” (149). Animating the speech of another can lead to slippage between the everyday self and the enacted self, even if this experience is not one of a grand subjective transformation. The NYCGA, and in particular the human microphone, certainly makes possible this slippage, as a final example illustrates.

A similar occurrence to the one described by Irvine (1996) occurred at the NYCGA on October 18th, 2011. During the time for agenda items, a proposal was brought forth berating the conduct of the police towards the occupiers. It was not made clear whether the speaker was presenting a proposal to craft a statement or making a declaration. He stated: “I... am affiliated with the Stop & Frisk. We the Occupiers of Wall Street wholly challenge the New York City Police Department’s unconstitutional, racist, and inhumane Stop & Frisk policing practices” (OWS Minutes 2011d). After

this, one of the participants signalled a “point of process”, explaining that the proposal seemed like “ a solidarity statement” which was an inappropriate use of the human microphone. Another point of process was signalled in return, and the person suggested that this was simply a draft being read in order to gauge whether there was support to craft a statement. The participant who voiced the first concern stated that, as not just an NYCGA member, but as an occupier who sleeps in the park, she or he maintained a “special relationship with the police”. (S)he continued, “I don’t feel safe repeating statements about the police that I haven’t already read myself”(OWS Minutes 2011d). This reveals that the human microphone is more than just a relay mechanism. It is true that the statement purports to speak on behalf of all of the occupiers, but the participant was uncomfortable even uttering the statement as a form of reported speech. This seems to be akin to the slippage that Irvine describes, in which it is difficult to separate oneself from an enacted self.

The NYCGA is often touted as a leaderless process. This is both true and untrue. The foregoing analysis has shown that not only are all voices heard, they are *inhabited*. Therefore, during the assembly, every participant takes on every possible subject role, and the fluidness of subject positions due to the human microphone is striking. However, subject positions and the participant framework are determined by more than pronoun usage¹⁵, and it is clearly the facilitator who has the most influence over the entextualization of the interaction. Yet, at the same time, the NYCGA is a strongly pedagogical process, and all attendees are continually being trained to be

¹⁵ For example, it is possible to subvert any speaker’s words by throwing in an extra word or using a different intonation to distort the utterance.

facilitators because of the human microphone. The NYCGA seems to be a process that almost guarantees the conditions for the possibility of its own perpetuation. The NYCGA indeed seems to be, essentially, a training ritual. Further, while guides and minutes are kinds of pedagogical documents as well, reaching across space and time, educating people unable to participate, the public nature of the performances of the NYCGA is significant. Before OWS, General Assemblies had been held in North America, but always without fanfare. They were discreet, indoors, and “underground”. But now characteristics of the GA are publicly recognized in ways they were not previously. Characteristic elements of the GA are routinely being transported to different settings.

Occupy Everywhere?

Thus far in this chapter, I have shown that much of the facilitators’ role involves establishing the context of the NYCGA, and then trying to promote a specific entextualization of the interaction so that all the participants arrive at a similar understanding of the event as it unfolds. However, in examining the different participation frames involved in even a small stretch of interaction, it is clear that no single entextualization can ever be imposed. This is especially true with an event like the NYCGA. Although it has a codified skeleton, it always involves different speakers and different content. The NYCGA, as social interaction, is always partially improvised. It is a process of dynamic negotiation between the parties involved. Even something like using different pronouns can affect the way the different members align and relate. In fact, improvisation and negotiation are at the heart of the concept of entextualization, as this concept suggests that participants create the structure of the interaction as it unfolds. This also

suggests that there is always the possibility of transforming a discursive interaction as it occurs. But it is not only the emergent text that can be changed, but in fact the emergent context.

The act of influencing the contextualization of a given stretch of interaction can be seen through the various ways in which kinds of speech associated with the NYCGA have travelled out of the occupation sites. One especially prominent occurrence is known as “mic-checking”. In this situation a band of people interrupt a speaker. One shouts “mic check” and proceeds to deliver a short speech, echoed by the rest of his or her fellow interrupters. A number of these incidents occurred in November 2011. For example, on November 3rd, 2011 Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker was “mic-checked” during a speech in Chicago. Part way through his speech, at a breakfast with paying guests, a member of the crowd yelled “mic check”, and then delivered a previously written speech that was echoed by others in the room. The interrupters were affiliated with Occupy Chicago and Stand Up! Chicago, which is a coalition of labour, religious and civil rights groups. The mic check caused Walker to stop speaking for several minutes, but he eventually resumed his speech to the applause of his supporters (Balde 2011).

Several similar incidents occurred throughout November. Karl Rove, President George W. Bush’s senior advisor, was mic-checked on November 15th during a speech at Johns Hopkins University. He reacted with anger and frustration, telling the protesters to “shut up”, and calling them “buffoons”. Some of the protesters were asked to leave and others were forcibly removed. Rove’s speech continued on after this (Jilani 2011a; Butler 2011). On November 22nd, Chicago mayor Rahm Emmanuel was mic-checked while attempting to deliver a speech about new lighting features in downtown Chicago. Emmanuel continued to deliver his speech, attempting to talk over

the interruption. However, he cut his speech short and left, while the protesters continued to command attention (Jilani 2011b). Finally, on this same day, President Barack Obama was mic-checked during a speech at a New Hampshire high school (Martin and Abad-Santos 2011). Obama stopped speaking and listened calmly, however, the protesters were quickly drowned out by Obama's supporters, who chanted his name and other slogans affiliated with his presidency.

On each of these occasions, the mic check was used to interrupt a situation in which one person is authorized to speak to an audience of many, who are expected to listen without comment (unless there is a question and answer session following the speech). The mic check in each case was a planned act, meant to take the speaker by surprise. These mic checks seem to use the human microphone to completely different ends than those in which it is used within the NYCGA. During these mic checks outside the camps, the human microphone is meant to be an interruption, and to deny someone's right to speak. But these interruptions are also an attempt to recontextualize the discursive interaction, in particular imposing a different participant framework than that which was, up until the mic check, being reinforced.

The concept of contextualization presupposes that context is both flexible and reflexive. The process of contextualization involves that which can "make relevant, maintain, revise or cancel any aspect of the context thus far established which is responsible for the interpretation of an utterance in its particular locus of occurrence" (Auer 1992, 21). That is, we might see these mic checks as an aggressive attempt to *revise* the context thus far established involving a single speaker before a silent audience, by *cancelling* this framework. The speakers who continue to talk over the protesters are attempting to *maintain* the context thus far established, while the protesters

are attempting to transform it. In most cases, the protesters are unable to truly affect the contextualization of a discursive interaction by introducing a different set of norms of interaction. In many cases, the already established context is maintained as the protesters are drowned out or leave, although sometimes they succeed in ending the event altogether. These interventions certainly draw attention to the cause that the protesters are promoting, but usually in a negative way.

However, a mic check occurred during a lecture event on January 27th, 2012, at the Grande Bibliothèque, the main public library in Montreal, that evolved differently than those discussed above. The keynote address of this event was given by Chris Hedges. Hedges is a Pulitzer-prize winning journalist and author, who writes on politics and armed conflict, especially concerning North America and the Middle East. He also authored an article for the first issue of the *Occupied Wall Street Journal*. His lecture, organized through Media@McGill, a research hub of professors affiliated with the Department of Art History and Communication Studies at McGill University, was part of a larger event, “Media, Politics and Protest Camps in the Occupy Social Movement”, that included daylong series of workshops. As the title suggests, this event focused specifically upon the intersection of media, politics, and society. At the keynote address, in addition to a talk by Chris Hedges, there were three panellists: Anna Feigenbaum and Patrick McCurdy, both professors whose research involves media and social movements, and Nathalie Des Rosiers, the General Counsel of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. The panel was moderated by Media@McGill member, Professor Darin Barney, currently the Canada Research Chair in Technology and Citizenship.

The event was intended to begin with Hedges' address, followed by a panel discussion and period for questions. However, due to a late flight, the evening began with the panel discussion. About forty minutes into the panel discussion, a mic check occurred. Darin Barney had just put a question to Nathalie Des Rosiers about the police actions in the camps, and she began talking about the influence of the media on the police, when an audience member yelled "mic check" (Transcript 1)¹⁶. A number of the audience members repeated back "mic check", as did a slightly taken-aback Nathalie Des Rosiers. The mic-checker goes on to state, in line 6, "we're talking about media control here and dissemination of information. the media came (.) from occupy (.) is trying to film the event and were just told that we're not allowed to film and I'd like your comments on that"¹⁷. The mic-checker thus points out that while this event is addressing the Occupy movement, and seems to be largely supportive of it, the media from Occupy Montreal are nonetheless being forbidden from filming the discussion. Although the mic-checker's statement about filming is not echoed, there is laughter and much clapping from the audience. This mic check was not at all a planned interruption with a supporting entourage. While the panellists and moderator are conferring on stage, the same individual then states, in line 12, "in general, how about controlling information and not allowing people(.) to actually film? in order so that ma:ny more people who are not able to come here to have access to this uh discussion and debate". The moderator

¹⁶ Please note that I was in attendance at this lecture, and my analysis derives from both my observations and a podcast of the event, available through the Media@McGill website.

¹⁷ See appendix for transcript conventions.

responds, in line 13, “sure. thank you very much for that uh (.) uh (.) question!”.

Note how this interaction (lines 6 and 12-13) is an attempt between the mic-checker and the moderator to renegotiate the context of this discursive interaction. The mic-checker originally addresses the panel and moderator asking for comments on a statement. He then rephrases this complaint into an observation about media control in “general” so that it could be reinserted into the discussion that he had just interrupted. The moderator characterizes his utterance as a “question”, therefore weaving it into the context thus far established: an interaction during which the moderator puts questions to panellists who respond. The participant framework shifts slightly, so that the audience is not merely listening, but contributing to the questions the moderator puts to the panel. A sort of compromise is achieved.

However, the moderator is again interrupted (line 11) by a different audience member aspiring to return to the problem of disallowing the Occupy Montreal filming to occur. The moderator attempts to smooth this over, stating that he has no knowledge of the circumstances regarding filming, and tries to return to the context of a panel discussion. He states, in line 12, “but I will take, I hhh would like to take our friend’s direction and ma::ybe::, uh, ask, even in the context of the question that I’ve asked you Nathalie, about what we might expect going forward (.) about uh (.) about about uh (.) c-control of the(.) the mediated representation of occupy etcetera”. Here, he even makes an attempt to weave the mic-checker’s comment back into the question he had originally asked of the panellist before the discussion was interrupted. He reformulates the mic-checker’s question into a more scholarly tone, therefore combining it into the context

established before the mic check. This at once acknowledges the complaint, but is also a bid to return to the previous context in which the audience remains silent, while the moderator and panellists are sanctioned to speak in turn.

The moderator is interrupted yet again (line 13-14), and, a second time replies by drawing attention to the question he has posed to the panellist (line 15). A clash of contexts is therefore unfolding as some audience members try to establish a direct conversation with the moderator and a move away from the panel discussion, whereas the moderator attempts to weave these concerns into the panel discussion.

Next, an audience member calls for a vote (line 18), evidently in reference to the question of whether the Occupy media team should be allowed to film. This marks the definitive move away from the context of a panel discussion and into something that resembles a GA. Picking up on this, another audience member calls for a “temperature check” (lines 21-22). Whereas voting is part of many discursive practices¹⁸, a “temperature check” is unique to the GA register. Recall that temperature checks are held by the facilitator to gauge audience response, and evaluate whether consensus will be reached. Another audience member turns the original complaint into the form of a proposal in line 23, saying “can he film? yes or no?”. Then, another audience member asks if there are any blocks (line 26). These are all standard procedural steps at GAs. The audience members have succeeded in shifting the context to one in which a different mode of discursive interaction, with a different participant framework, occurs.

¹⁸ In fact, many GAs try to avoid the term “voting” because it implies a resultant unhappy minority, not a satisfied consensus.

Note that when the audience member asks for any blocks, the room erupts with laughter. Their laughter signals that the audience recognizes these characteristic elements of a GA and intuits the mismatching, or competing contextualizations at play. A GA is not normally held during a panel discussion, but members of the audience have recontextualized the discursive interaction in such a way that this can occur.

The crucial moment of this interaction occurs in line 28. After an audience member asks if there are any blocks, the moderator replies, “in response to the question of is there a block:: (.) I suppose there might be one coming”. Whereas before he attempted to weave the concerns of the audience members into the context of the discussion panel, reframing the questions and insisting upon returning to the question, here he shifts into the language of the GA, framing a potential action as a block. This marks a change. The moderator is no longer reframing utterances to fit into the context of a panel discussion, but rather reframing an action to fit in with the context of a GA. Whereas previously he reformulated the mic-checkers question into a more scholarly tone, here he shifts registers, adopting GA vocabulary.

I contend that this shift is as significant as the subsequent authorization of the Occupy Montreal media to film the event. Several audience members managed to transform the context of the event, shifting the participant framework. This was precisely the point of the NYCGA: to experiment with a different way of interacting, transforming top-down discursive practices into horizontally-organized practices. After the authorization is granted, the moderator quickly draws the audience’s attention back to the panel discussion, with the statement “thank you very much for that helpful and democratic intervention”. By characterizing the

previous interaction as “democratic” he signals the legitimacy of the context just created, but in thanking the audience, and characterizing it as an “intervention”, he also signals its end. More precisely, he signals the end of that kind of discursive interaction and a return to the previous kind, albeit slightly altered.

Although the rest of the event unfolded without other attempts to alter the context, there were some changes in the audience. Within the audience was a group of supporters of, and participants in, Occupy Montreal, all seated together. They had been tentatively “twinkling” at certain points in the panel discussion to express their approval at certain statements. But, after the mic check incident, an increasing number of audience members began twinkling or wiggling their fingers at the floor. These are signs that index approval or disapproval, but also signal that a GA is underway. This is a minor gesture, but one that prolongs and sustains the participant framework of the GA beyond the moment of intervention.

This mic check was witnessed by no more than an auditorium of people. However, it is worth considering the circumstances that led to the possibility of this mic check occurring at all. Firstly, the whole lecture and daylong event was based on the Occupy movement. Even without a demand or a message, the movement has managed to spur a series of lectures and discussions. Secondly, the mic check could not possibly have been carried as far as it was had the GA not become an identifiable activity with a recognizable repertoire including behavioural signs and jargon. It should be noted that much of the audience was likely sympathetic to the cause of the Occupy movement, as were the panellists and keynote speaker. But, this potential goodwill towards the Occupy movement does not detract from the effects that the mic check entailed.

As Polletta explains, when DAN activists developed the GA, they were able to come together with a “common language” (2004, 195). This marked a turning point in the history of collective deliberative processes. The creation of the NYCGA also marks a turning point in this history. The NYCGA, a particular style of GA, has brought this “common language”, or rather this discursive practice, to not only more activists, but also to the public at large. This increased public awareness of the practice has also increased its potential to transform the contexts of mainstream discursive interactions.

Conclusion

Discursive (Re)production and Transformation

In their original call to action, Adbusters urged future occupiers to “incessantly repeat a single *demand* in a plurality of voices”(2011). But, instead, it was individual *voices*, not demands, which were repeatedly echoed at the OWS camp. Instead of crafting demands, the NYCGA crafted relationships between different voices.

Discursive (Re)production

The NYCGA produced social relationships between its participants through a set of explicit rules of participation whereby facilitators rotated daily, and whereby participants undertook to express themselves according to shared norms meant to ensure that no one voice had more authority than any other. Ideally, the NYCGA provided a platform through which all ties fostered between participants were horizontal rather than vertical. The human microphone underscored this horizontality, as attendees enacted the voice of the facilitator and vice versa, and as each different speaker’s voice was enacted by each attendee.

It is through continually reproducing these social relationships that the NYCGA produced sociocultural subjects. The text-artifacts like the guides and minutes helped to codify and standardize the structure of the NYCGA, making it a reproducible practice. Likewise, the facilitator’s incessant metapragmatic corrections during the real-time of the NYCGA help to cultivate the same entextualization amongst all participants, reinforcing a common understanding as well as the values of inclusion and equality of voices. Finally, the ritual regularity of the NYCGA, combined with the text-artifacts’ standardization and facilitator’s corrections, ensured

that these relationships and subjects were continually reinforced throughout the duration of the occupation.

Indeed, the ritual regularity of the NYCGA bears continued investigation, especially in relation to other facets of daily life at the OWS camp during the Fall of 2011. Despite the flux of incoming and outgoing occupiers, new and unforeseen logistical challenges, and the constant threat of eviction, the NYCGA was a daily activity that always occurred at the same time and place, with the same basic format. Although I have focused narrowly on the NYCGA itself, and not the ways this practice relates to other aspects of daily life in the OWS camp, these connections merit development.

Discursive Transformation

The NYCGA was transformative on several levels. Firstly, the explicit rules of participation likely engendered a different way of engaging with others than habitually occurs in everyday interaction. Additionally, in participating in a chorus of voices, sometimes numbering in the hundreds, and enacting different “I”s, personally transformative moments may have been produced. But the NYCGA was not just a complacent self-congratulatory process. Although each consensus was indeed a minor victory, each process of coming to consensus was equally important. It trained participants to treat each other with patience and openness, and perhaps more importantly, it trained participants to raise their voices, and intervene if they felt strongly enough. It trained them to be cooperative, but not submissive. The subjects of the NYCGA have the knowledge to go on to intervene in settings beyond the physical camp, and potentially recontextualize ongoing discursive interactions, be it through mic checks or through less conspicuous acts of refusal to defer to the discursive status quo.

These recontextualizations may then go on to contribute to the formation of different social relationships based on the values of the NYCGA, like inclusion and equality of voice.

The NYCGA is by no means a perfected practice. As Polletta's (2004) historical analysis shows, the collective deliberative processes of social movements have developed slowly, over decades of experimentation with different modes of interaction. NYCGA is at once the culmination of this history, and also merely another node from which the next collective deliberative practice can be developed.

The NYCGA is a budding site for further study, even beyond the timeframe on which I have primarily focused, the Fall of 2011. For researchers interested in cultural tradition, language and semiotics, and communication more generally, one aspect of OWS to follow will be the continuing occurrence of the NYCGA meetings, despite the closure of the camp. Further, beyond the official meetings themselves, a second subject for deeper study is the ways in which elements of this discursive practice travel out of their expected or appropriate contexts of use and infiltrate new ones, possibly engendering recontextualizations.

Appendix

Figure 1

Timeline of Occupy Wall Street

July 13 th , 2011-----	Adbusters issues their call to action
August 2 nd , 2011 -----	First NYCGA held by the bull in Bowling Green Park
September 17 th , 2011 -----	The occupation in Zuccotti Park begins and the Occupy Wall Street camp is built
September 23 rd , 2011 -----	The “Principles of Consolidation” is passed through consensus
September 24 th , 2011 -----	Occupy Chicago protest begins
September 29 th , 2011 -----	The “Declaration of the Occupation of New York City” passed through consensus
October 1 st , 2011 -----	Occupy Boston, Washington, and Los Angeles have been established
	Over 5,000 people march across the Brooklyn Bridge and 700 are arrested
October 5 th , 2011 -----	15,000 people gather for a march organized in conjunction with Occupy Wall Street
October 17 th , 2011 -----	One month anniversary of Occupy Wall Street camp
November 15 th , 2011 -----	Occupy Wall Street camp cleared of physical structures

Figure 2

The “Principles of Consolidation”. Note that the name changed from “Principles of Consolidation” to “Principles of Solidarity” when the document was posted on the NYCGA website.

Principles of Solidarity

What follows is a living document that will be revised through democratic process of General Assembly

On September 17, 2011, people from all across the United States of America and the world came to protest the blatant injustices of our times perpetuated by the economic and political elites. On the 17th we as individuals rose up against political disenfranchisement and social and economic injustice. We spoke out, resisted, and successfully occupied Wall Street. Today, we proudly remain in Liberty Square constituting ourselves as autonomous political beings engaged in non-violent civil disobedience and building solidarity based on mutual respect, acceptance, and love. It is from these reclaimed grounds that we say to all Americans and to the world, Enough! How many crises does it take? We are the 99% and we have moved to reclaim our mortgaged future. Through a direct democratic process, we have come together as individuals and crafted these principles of solidarity, which are points of unity that include but are not limited to:

- Engaging in direct and transparent participatory democracy;
- Exercising personal and collective responsibility;
- Recognizing individuals' inherent privilege and the influence it has on all interactions;
- Empowering one another against all forms of oppression;
- Redefining how labor is valued;
- The sanctity of individual privacy;
- The belief that education is human right; and
- Endeavoring to practice and support wide application of open source.

We are daring to imagine a new socio-political and economic alternative that offers greater possibility of equality. We are consolidating the other proposed principles of solidarity, after which demands will follow.

¹ The Working Group on Principles of Consolidation continues to work through the other proposed principles to be incorporated as soon as possible into this living document. This is an official document crafted by the Working Group on Principles of Consolidation. The New York City General Assembly came to consensus on September 23rd to accept this working draft and post it online for public consumption.

Figure 3

The visual representation of the “Declaration of the Occupation”.



Figure 4a

The cover and back panels of the NYCGA pamphlet.

**NYC GENERAL ASSEMBLY |
IMPORTANT INFO & CONTACT**

Official NYC General Assembly Site
nycga.cc

General Inquiries: general@occupywallst.org

Press Inquiries: press@occupywallst.org

To Mail Donations and Other Support Items:

The UPS Store
W. Occupy 108 Street
138A Fulton St. #205
New York, NY 10038

Money orders only please, cannot cash checks yet.
Non-perishable goods only. We can accept
packages of any size. Wine currently low on food.

JOIN US IN LIBERTY PLAZA
(corner of Broadway and Liberty St.)

Help & Directions: +1 (877) 861-3020

Nearby Subways:

- N R** Canal St.
- 4 5** Wall St.
- A C J Z** Fulton St.

**Online Partners Working in Solidarity
with NYCGA:**

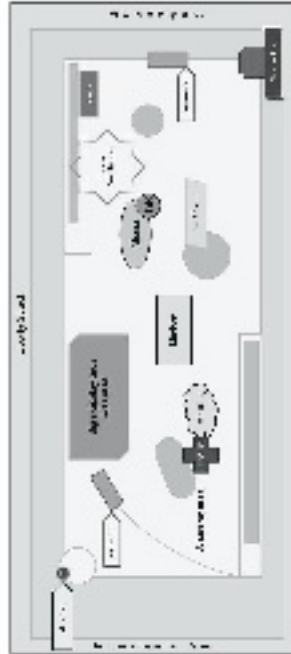
occupywallst.org

occupytogether.org

nycga.cc/resources/global-revolution-tv/

flickr.com/photos/occupywallstreet

**NYC GENERAL ASSEMBLY |
MAP OF ACTIVITIES AT LIBERTY PLAZA**



NYC GENERAL ASSEMBLY



#OCCUPYWALLST

Figure 4b

The inside panels of the NYCGA pamphlet.



Figure 5

One gesture from the "Hand Gestures Guide".



Description: Hold your hands up, palm open, and fan your fingers back and forth. **Meaning:** You agree with the proposal or like what you are hearing.

Transcript 1¹⁹

ND: Nathalie Des Rosiers (panelist)

AM₁: Audience member₁ (mic-checker)

AM: Audience member

AM+: Multiple Audience members

DB: Darin Barney (moderator)

AF: Anna Feigenbaum (panelist)

1 ND: I think that what the counter-media strategy was (.) was about playing up the fear of disorder. very deep and hhh so (.) so that created a sense in which (.) what the police were told to do (.) were tol- was presented as being the upholder of the rule of law. You know? hhhnobody can sleep in the park! uhh why (.) why can- you know (.) next year why can't I just hhh not pay my fee to go to Algonquin Park or why can't I just sleep in the park. so there was this thing about saying I want the law for everyone so it [it-]

2 AM₁ [mic check!]

3 AM+: **mic check!**

4 AM₁: **mic check!**

5 ND: mic che-

6 AM₁: we're talking about media control here and dissemination of information. the media came (.) from occupy (.) is trying to film the event and were just told that we're not allowed to film and I'd like your comments on that.

7 AM+ o::::h
((clapping))

8 ND: O:::h
Why not ?

¹⁹ The transcription conventions I have used are listed following the transcript.

- 9 AF: who has the answer to that? =
- 10 ND: =who has the answer to that?
- 11 DB: Uhhhm
- 12 AM₁: () in general, how about controlling information and not allowing people(.) to actually film? in order so that ma:ny more people who are not able to come here to have access to this uh discussion and debate ()
- 13 DB: sure. thank you very much for that (.)uh- uh- (.) question! hhh all I can say is I'm happy I didn't make the decision to disallow the Occupy media (.) folks to do the filming. uh- (.) uh- (.) But I think this- sorry?
((Indistinct interruption))
- 14 AM: () who did?
- 15 DB: well, I-I'm just not sure (.) because I've (.) I've been up here. so hhh. so. but I will take, I hhh would like to take our friend's direction and ma::ybe::, uh, ask, even in the context of the question that I've asked you Nathalie, about what we might expect going forward (.) about uh (.) about about uh (.) c-control of the(.) the mediated representation of occupy etcetera

((Indistinct audience noises))
- 16 AM₁: he's the one that wants to film.
- 17 DB: alright. well. as I said (.) hhhI don't know why he was told he was not allowed to film and I-I can't either authorize him or-or not authorize him to film. but if- if- we want to put the gentlemen's question to the panel we ca-, we can certainly do that (.) about the question of uh the control of media representations and the circulation of information.

((Indistinct noises))

18 AM: let's take a vote!

19 AM+: vote! vote!

((Laughter))

20 ND: let him film. I-let him film. let him film.

21 AM: temperature check! (male voice)

22 AM: temperature check! (female voice)

23 AM: can he film? yes or no?

24 AM+: yes! (repeated several times)

25 DB: ((Aside to panellists)) Do any of you have an objection?

26 AM: is there a block?

((Loud laughter and clapping))

27 AM: () adopté²⁰
((more clapping and hoots of approval))

28 DB: uh, in response to the question is there a block:: (.) I suppose there might be one coming. we're just waiting to hear... but uh, my sense is that we're uh probably moving in the direction of uh of allowing uh allowing our friend to turn his camera on (.) so if we're just patient for a moment(.) I think we might get there.

²⁰ “Adopted” in French.

29	AM: if not everyone should start filming at the same time. ((some laughter))
30	AM: he can film! ((clapping))
31	DB: alright thank you very much for that (.) helpful and democratic intervention

Transcription Conventions

These transcription conventions were adapted by Jennifer Roglà from Gail Jefferson and are available at <http://courses.unt.edu/jrogla/transcriptconventions>.

.	Sentence-final falling intonation
Boldface	Emphasis
hhh	Audible aspiration
(.)	Short pause
-	Word or sound is cut off
::	The preceding sound is extended
?	Rising intonation at the end of a phrase
!	Forceful intonation at the end of a phrase
[]	Overlapping talk, participants talking at the same time
()	Stretch of talk unable to be transcribed because inaudible or indecipherable
(())	Transcriber's descriptions of talk or behaviour

List of Abbreviations

DAN – Direct Action Network

GA – General Assembly

NYCDAN – New York City Direct Action Network

NYCGA – New York City General Assembly

OWS – Occupy Wall Street

SDS - Students for a Democratic Society

SNCC – Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee

Glossary

Terms from the New York City General Assembly.

Agenda – The plan of an NYCGA established in advance by the facilitation team.

Block – An intervention that expresses moral or safety concerns regarding a proposal and may prevent it from being passed. It is signalled by arms crossed over the chest.

Caucus – A group of protesters who feel that they are subject to discrimination or marginalization (mainly outside of the camp) and thus have a unique set of problems to address. (ex: women of colour)

Clarifying question – An intervention used when an attendee has a question concerning a proposal. It is signalled by forming the fingers into a letter “C”.

Facilitator – A person who manages the assembly, keeping speakers on time and on track, stating when new sections of the assembly begin and end. There are always two facilitators, who are of different genders.

Human microphone – The manner in which voices are amplified. It involves either all attendees or designated attendees repeating back a speaker’s words.

People’s mic – See human microphone.

Point of information – An intervention used when an attendee needs or has information pertinent to the proposal under consideration. It is signalled by holding one finger up in the air.

Point of process – An intervention used when an attendee feels that the conventions of the NYCGA are being broken. It is signalled by forming a triangle with the index fingers and thumbs of both hands.

Progressive stack – A way of organizing of the list of people who wish to speak by prioritizing marginalized voices.

Report-back – A brief summary of the actions a working group, thematic group, or caucus has recently taken.

Stack – A list of people who wish to speak.

Stack greeter – A person who welcomes those on stack, informs them of when to speak, and organizes the order in which they speak.

Stack keeper – A person who maintains the list of people who wish to speak.

Thematic group – A group of protesters who focus on solving specific problems or accomplishing specific tasks that are not necessarily logistical and may not only pertain to the camp. (ex: housing, education, visions of OWS)

Twinkling – An expression of approval made by wiggling fingers up in the air.

Vibes checker – A person who monitors the morale of the assembly and may suggest pauses, stretches, or rallying cries.

Working group – A group of protesters who focus on solving specific problems or accomplishing specific tasks, usually related to the logistics of the camp. All working groups have open membership. (ex: first-aid, NYCGA facilitation, food)

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