

# Art of Olive Green

## Towards Art, an Ethics & a Laugh

## Archives

### All posts for the month September, 2011

## OWS: Take Me to Your Leaders

Posted by *getraer* on *September 30, 2011*

Posted in: Activism, In the Field. Tagged: Cairo, Chris Hedges, Democracy Now!, IWW, Liberty Plaza, Michael Moore, occupy wall street, postal workers, TV news, Verizon. 1 Comment

We hear “take me to your leaders” a lot at Liberty Plaza. I heard it twice even before lunch today, once from a friendly bike messenger bringing several bags of bagels from a promotion, and one from the TV reporter who conducted the above truncated interview. Authority has been imposed from above for so long that a group of people taking individual responsibility and turning to facilitators only for ad hoc administration seems to tax today’s minds. At least something is being taxed!

I filmed that interview from the TV with with my phone set on “solarize” to remind the viewer at each refresh-flicker that this is not real. With solidarity from [Verizon workers](http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2011/09/29/18691741.php) (<http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2011/09/29/18691741.php>), [pilots](http://blog.alexanderhiggins.com/2011/09/28/united-pilots-protest-wall-st-uniform-occupywallstreet-occupychicago-occupyla-occupyseattle-union-71521/) (<http://blog.alexanderhiggins.com/2011/09/28/united-pilots-protest-wall-st-uniform-occupywallstreet-occupychicago-occupyla-occupyseattle-union-71521/>), [postal workers](http://www.rawstory.com/rawreplay/2011/09/occupy-wall-st-joins-postal-workers-in-budget-protest/) (<http://www.rawstory.com/rawreplay/2011/09/occupy-wall-st-joins-postal-workers-in-budget-protest/>), and the [IWW](http://www.digitaljournal.com/article/312091) (<http://www.digitaljournal.com/article/312091>), and formal acknowledgement from independent media like [Democracy Now!](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/9/19/occupy_wall_street_thousands_march_in) ([http://www.democracynow.org/2011/9/19/occupy\\_wall\\_street\\_thousands\\_march\\_in](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/9/19/occupy_wall_street_thousands_march_in)), Michael Moore and [Chris Hedges](http://www.rawstory.com/rawreplay/2011/09/chris-hedges-occupy-wall-street-is-where-the-hope-of-america-lies/) (<http://www.rawstory.com/rawreplay/2011/09/chris-hedges-occupy-wall-street-is-where-the-hope-of-america-lies/>), one shouldn’t sneer. Officer Bologna sneered until he couldn’t contain himself (<https://occupywallst.org/article/Officer-Bologna/>), and 80 were arrested ([http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/44656667/ns/us\\_news-life/t/arrested-occupy-wall-street-protest/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/44656667/ns/us_news-life/t/arrested-occupy-wall-street-protest/)) last Saturday for nonviolent, technical offenses. “Causing trouble?” Pix 11, that’s “bad apples” in the NYPD. And those who condescend or moan about “[demands](http://t.co/y4nWm13b) (<http://t.co/y4nWm13b>)” have spent 7-20 minutes rubbernecking on site, then lied and elided.

Donations from all over the country and world have supplied the movement with a substantial endowment, which it will need as it grows and does outreach. But the prickly leader problem will bedevil the details as Occupy Wall Street expands. The leadership question is clear from the General Assembly, where we recently spent 1/2 hour debating whether to spend \$700 on a network of Tracfonos for transencampment station communication, to the marches—where drummers sometimes vie for control of the rhythm instead of cooperate, especially with chanters. At what point, if any, will expediency force us to elect helmspeople? Will inclusion of other groups and agendas open our own (as it were) to steering? Must the movement's progress eclipse elective association and autonomy?

A fitting coda to my two days at OWS was a car service home from a young Cairene from Russia. He's too busy driving and studying for a minerals & mining degree to have heard of Occupy Wall Street, so we talked about that a lot, and naturally Tahrir Square as well. His three years in the USA have been eye-opening, but he hadn't thought things had come to this pass. Most encouragingly, E. disabused me of the idea that Occupy Wall Street was nothing like Tahrir Square. I told him that people had been living in the square for two weeks, had formulated demands in a few days (as opposed to a fortnight); that the police had arrested over 100 (and zip-cuffs can be brutal if tightened), punched some, pepper-sprayed some, knocked out a tooth and destroyed things wantonly. He disagreed with the US media and said, involuntarily decelerating as if thinking of something else, "This is exactly like Tahrir Square. I can't believe this is happening in America."

## OCCUPY WALL STREET: Momentum

Posted by *getraer* on *September 28, 2011*

Posted in: [Activism](#), [In the Field](#). [Leave a comment](#)

Today was the first day I felt the winds of fate blowing to fill the sails of #OccupyWallStreet. (n.b.: I am only there during weekdays and sometimes on weekends.) General Assembly was thronged with new faces, things were in good order everywhere I looked (better delegation of responsibility perhaps, for example a dedicated kitchen crew), and a more diverse assortment of people were having serious conversations. Expressions of solidarity from outside supporters were also very easy to come by.

However, the guy complaining about Jewish control of everything was at it again. I got a better look at him: his eyes were both wild and rheumy, and he seemed a bit tetchy. The response to him was also not immediately suppressive, to everyone's credit. It's true, he has the right to free speech. It's true that even hate speech and hateful assembly are protected by the First Amendment, but the danger of onlookers confusing his aims with ours was the primary concern. He was heckled, sung down with "Kum Ba Ya, my Lord, we love Jews," (itself problematic, someone observed) and his sign blocked by others'. One guy made a sign pointing at him: "This Man is Crazy." It was an uncomfortable moment in which we, including myself, were sometimes not thinking clearly, but it was an important object lesson in management of adversity and diversity.

To that end, it was nice to see more underrepresented populations appearing and sometimes speaking out. An African-American speaking to the General Assembly said there need to be more addresses of the General Assembly from other than White men. I agree, but with a footnote: how exactly does anyone know who is a "White" person? Do we legitimize ourselves by declaring our racial background? People are sometimes not what they seem; but at least sex is usually easier to identify. The GA minutes show that on 9/26, 10 people were interviewed by news, and only one was a woman...that IS a problem.

The march was occasionally harder to coordinate (chants, drumming) owing to its size. I went North with the 1600 detachment. There were a couple of tense standoffs with the police when they tried to redirect the protest. The poetic moment was a tall woman with a

saxophone tooting a bar of “We Shall Overcome” *sotto voce* as a phalanx of cops closed in from behind her holding the orange nets they use to hunt The Biggest Game. Some conjectured that they didn’t want us to meet up with the [postal workers’ protest](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204010604576597234026272432.html) (<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204010604576597234026272432.html>), which we ultimately did. People in Manhattan at large were much more supportive than those I saw on Wall Street, and the moment of unity between the two resonant protests was a perfect closer for me before a rush hour train ride and a night of work.

## OCCUPY WALL STREET: Soak the Rich

Posted by [getraer](#) on [September 24, 2011](#)

Posted in: [Engaged art](#), [In the Field](#). Tagged: [engagement wall street](#). [Leave a comment](#)



(<https://artofolivegreen.files.wordpress.com>

[/2011/09/imag0824.jpg](#))

The Solidarity Tarp.

Yesterday the rich were soaked as well as everyone else. The rain was such that the gutters were rivers, and at Zuccotti Park a giant tarp was quickly raised by several people to cover an impromptu General Assembly. A separate Rain Committee was established to deal with the catastrophe such a volume of sudden rain could bring. I helped hold up a corner; ironically we had tents but could not use them because they are “illegal structures,” but a Solidarity Tarp is just the thing. If any one person moves a pole, arm or *vuvuzela*, many can be drenched.

A passerby strolled into the park and asked me what all this (tarps, ponchoed people talking in clusters) was about. Turns out she is going to SUNY Downstate (in Brooklyn) for a Master’s in Public Health, and working up in Harlem as well, so while passing through Manhattan she thought she’d drop by. She’s graduating in a few months and is anxious, but applying for grants. It was a tough day to look compelling after the lakeloads of rain. She seemed genuinely interested and unbiased, which was refreshing, and I gave her my take on the purpose of Occupy Wall Street, being careful to emphasize the autonomy and diversity that is central to the movement—no leaders, no party line, no fiat. All nonhierarchical dialogue and consensus.

I also chatted with some elderly folk who were real protest veterans, having been in the streets since the 60s. Because of the media characterizations I’ve seen, I said, “It’s nice to see someone who’s not a twentysomething or hippy.” They booed, because they had participated in the invention of hippy. One of them said that young people who weren’t there had been “promoted away” from activism or even awareness, their own personal success obviating any larger cultural concern.

N., the man behind the coin mask on Saturday, introduced himself to me because he thought I was Demian. (I hope he meant Max Demian.) I photographed him earlier because he was dressed professionally, which he said he’d done to do something different from his prior visits. Aside from the need for nationalized health insurance, we spoke about art’s role in political movements and protests, and how important it is for art to encapsulate the message for the wider world. N. indicated where he stood and how to avoid arrest by being masked alone. “Whenever I wear that mask, I pretty much just talk to the media,” he said, which was the most ringing endorsement of ideology’s expression in art that I’ve yet seen at Occupy Wall Street. The earnestness of marked-over chopped pizza boxes can be touching, but ours is a country that’s trained us to distrust what is not sleek and produced. It’s true the movement often has wanting “optics.”

I was nonplussed later to find N. heckling a drummer at the daily 1530 march. He stood against the corner of a yelled: “Get a job!” I



(<https://artofolivegreen.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/imag0837.jpg>)

Some people never outgrow caring. Note the gentleman in the center is clutching a smartphone with his cane.



([https://artofolivegreen.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/6160561771\\_d09e77ea3e\\_b.jpg](https://artofolivegreen.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/6160561771_d09e77ea3e_b.jpg))

N.'s coin mask. Photo: Collin David Anderson

laughed, but the drummer didn't, and N. repeated his imperative, looking well serious. Fingers and drumsticks were jabbed accusingly. The march pulled them apart.

Suspicion and fear of infiltration had come up (again) at the General Assembly a couple hours earlier, and one facilitator had repeated a saying he'd learned in Arabic in Palestine, where he grew up: "Trust does not eliminate caution."

*Subscribe to my YouTube channel for video updates from Occupy Wall Street here (<http://www.youtube.com/user/juotoob?feature=mhee>).*

*When I get to a computer I dump pics into Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/alexfethiere/>).*

*When I am on site, my Twitter feed (at right) updates my freshest info and uploads.*

*Just ask (<mailto:afethiere@gmail.com>) if you want to use photos or video.*

## OCCUPY WALL STREET: Day 5

Posted by *getraer* on *September 22, 2011*

Posted in: In the Field. Tagged: occupy wall street. Leave a comment

I cadged a few more hours to spend at Zuccotti Park protesting, chatting and piccing (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/alexfethiere/sets/72157627725560010/>) by asking one of my part-time bosses if a friend could work for me instead. The General Assembly had stopped using the PA when I arrived at 1300, because though another one had been donated by Lupe Fiasco, they weren't sure they could use it without confiscation. The People's Microphone heroically tried to parrot each speaker in the Assembly, as did I. Notable moments, which I tweeted as they were announced from the GA Stack, included 1) an email from Noam Chomsky stating his support and promise to champion the cause in his speaking travels, 2) the reiteration that the venerable I.W.W. (Industrial Workers of the World) Union would be supporting OWS on Thursday, and 3) that the Last Poets, who were in Paris, France sent their support.

Chelsea, who had a sign urging restoration of the Glass-Steagall Act, was very popular with older people, who knew what it was. (Two days prior her sign announced that Barney Frank had killed Glass-Steagall.) Some told her these were the smartest signs they'd seen.

Admittedly, many signs have not been pointedly topical, but that hardly warrants this [derisive dismissal](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/21/occupy-wall-street-protest_n_974693.html) ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/21/occupy-wall-street-protest\\_n\\_974693.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/21/occupy-wall-street-protest_n_974693.html)) from the double-agent Huffington Post. (It's funny almost a year later to think that The Huffington Post bussed participants to DC for Stewart/Colbert's Rally to Restore Sanity/Fear.) The Nation's blog [avoided ridicule](http://www.thenation.com/blog/163535/wall-street-occupation-continues) (<http://www.thenation.com/blog/163535/wall-street-occupation-continues>), and I think was even-handed. Dylan Ratigan promised to cover it, then spent most of the segment [yakking](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyWrjvN3hvA) (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyWrjvN3hvA>) with a Prohibition revenant from Verizon.

I ran into Solomon again, and thought I might have been too cautious in my estimation of him earlier. His sign said the problem is not capitalism, but corporatism, with which no rational person could totally disagree.

The march at 1530 was great fun. The value of percussion and shouting, so apparent in European protests, was realized there, and despite the din most faces looked flat, supportive or amused without discernible mockery. I borrowed a drumstick to hit Wall Street's ample metal, channeling early Einstürzende Neubauten with another drumstickler. Someone asked to carry my sign, and then passed it on to someone else, who politely left it at the head of the stairs of Zuccotti/Liberty Park where I could get it before going to work.

## OCCUPY WALL STREET: Don't Talk to Strangers

Posted by *getraer* on *September 20, 2011*

Posted in: In the Field. Tagged: fox news, general assembly, new york city, occupy wall street, protest. 1 Comment

I first attended Occupy Wall Street on Sunday afternoon, and was quickly committed to spending all of my free (and even compromised) time there. Rather than muse at length on the assembly and the quasi-governmental General Assembly's (GA) purpose,

I will summarize some of what I noted, shot, and videoed during my time. Other blogs can do the editorializing. This will be updated for as long as there is an encampment—for that's as long as I'll go. For updates as they happen/ed see [my Twitter feed](http://twitter.com/#!/alexfethiere) (<http://twitter.com/#!/alexfethiere>) (also to the right).

Some people stick out sharply, even in a spectrum ranging from libertarians to Trotskyists-Leninists. I haven't seen much online coverage of the real malcontents, so this is my first post in hopes that people will take caution and not talk to strangers (as it were).

On the subject of plants/*agents provocateur*, there was much discussion. I spent part of my first night speaking to a fairly suspicious man. He carried a megaphone that was broken, through which he'd planned to agitate with some exhortations. He introduced himself as Solomon, and had an accent I couldn't place but that had traces of British education—at least in English. I wanted to trust him, but couldn't quite, which was fine because he talked nonstop and had a standard spiel with which he approached everyone: "You should be wearing a black hoody and have a mask, I was thinking of ordering 4 or 500 V masks from China and selling them for \$5, they could be here in a few days." The point was to create anonymity in the event of a crackdown. Problem is, that kind of projection caused crackdowns [the very next day](http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/09/19/us-wall-street-protests-idUSTRE78I51D20110919) (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/09/19/us-wall-street-protests-idUSTRE78I51D20110919>).

I mightn't have been suspicious of Solomon alone, but for the appearance of a guy who tore down the signs, claiming he wanted to protect the encampment. The police had asked us to take down the signs attached to the low walls around the park at about 2100 on Sunday. He loudly declaimed against people's suspicions that he was from the police or the CIA as he removed a few signs. I could see his point, but the divisive effect was unmistakable.

The police removed a few signs too. It had the effect of dividing the group into two separate assemblies, each one yelling with a People's Microphone because the police had ordered amplification off. The main Assembly called for discussion, and the Stairs/Sign Debate/That Guy Assembly didn't want to move from the disturbance. (A People's Microphone is when a speaker addresses a crowd in short bursts, which are then parroted by a group that shouts to those further off.) It was a chaos quickly contained, but in that moment it was easy to see how cohesion gives way. This guy was there Monday too, wearing a purple top but otherwise innocuous.

Also on Monday, some asshole with a sign advising vigilance against "Jewish bankers" turned up, and one of the guys close to the GA marshaled a large group over yelling "He does not represent us!" The sign was folded up in a crush of people by police or protestors, and apparently the guy was told he could free his speech elsewhere (I was about 10 meters back).

Fox News turned up and engaged in some predictable baiting. There was some very lucid commentary from interviewees even under the camera's glare and the mic's probe. At times, subjects ranted as though it were a live feed, which would make for great manipulative edits later.

I had lots of conversations that made me feel there was latent focus and intelligence in the group, but it needs time to cohere. The occasion had been constructed to be non-hierarchical and encourage autonomous free association.

We Need You there, especially New Yorkers. Even a walkthrough or an afternoon helps—show up and form your own opinion, then tell even a couple of people.



(If it's even a tenth of Tahrir you'll feel like a knob for missing it.)

## A Real OG

Posted by *getraer* on *September 13, 2011*

Posted in: Self-Sufficiencies. Tagged: driver, engineer, flooding, Lithuania, New York, olive green, rain, Soviet Army. Leave a comment  
The professional qualifications of cab drivers is a trite New York City observation: who among them was *not* an engineer or doctor in his country? I learned a few things last week from a hired driver who was not only a mechanical engineer, but an original gangsta of olive green: he served in the Soviet Army.

We started out talking about the catastrophic plane crash in Russia that killed all but two of the Russian hockey team Lokomotiv Yaroslavl (<http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/europe/09/07/russia.plane.crash/>), as it had just happened that day. (All eventually died (<http://sports.yahoo.com/top/news?slug=ap-russia-crash>).) He had some pointed opinions about the plane, which was supposed to be retired in three weeks.

This conversation was interrupted by the obtusion of a small pond on the Grand Central Parkway; it had been raining for weeks in NY and that night's rain had nowhere to go but the highway. Grigory slowed and steered around it, ridiculing the SUVs that hit the gas to blast through it. "Hit that fast, flood your engine. You hit it after braking hard, you warp your rotors. Then when you try to stop the car, it won't brake regularly. You can cut them down, but then they're thin here, thick there, and could crack or fail completely any time."

I asked him how he knew this and he explained, "I served in the Russian Army." No former Soviet I have talked to uses the S-word, but he was old enough that it had to be the USSR. "I drove an Army truck when I was 18, and going through a river, you have to take the belt off the fan and you can drive through water almost up to the hood. You don't, the fan sucks up the water and sprays it over your spark plugs, so the engine dies in the river. You can go a few miles with no fan cooling your engine, so get to the other side and put the belt back on." He then told me something about how to steer in a flood, which I lost when I told him he'd missed my exit.

The rain worsened, but it slicked off his windshield. "People don't know, you drive on roads and so many cars are leaking. The oil, fluids, antifreeze get on the road, the rain brings them up and the cars drive through them spraying oil mist all over your windshield. Then the rain just smears around and your wipers oily too. To clean windshields, we would break two cigarettes in a napkin, fold it up and wipe the windshield down. Then rain flew off like a duck. This is a treatment from the carwash, but we used to do that in the Army."

As we approached my house, Grigory saw some pine trees. "In Lithuania there was a time we were very poor. People were shooting pigeons to survive. My father used to gather pine needles and boil them down in a pot. There was no sugar, you drank it like that. There were vitamins in there, vitamin C. If you went a month without taking it three times a day, your teeth would loosen and fall out of your head like sunflower seeds."

*Like sunflower seeds.*

As I got out, I told him he should write these things down. "Why? You can't make money selling these," he laughed. "My wife says I could be dropped on the moon with a shovel and I would survive."

## Market Moksha\*

Posted by *getraer* on *September 2, 2011*

Posted in: Culture crit, Self-Sufficiencies. Tagged: American Apparel, Bangladesh, Beacon's Closet, Gap, H&M, moksha, secondhand, sweatshop, Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, Uniqlo, Zara. Leave a comment

I had a couple of minutes to kill in after visiting the scrapyard and working at my internship yesterday (and before going in to the city for my night job), so I visited Beacon's Closet to poke through secondhand clothes. I used to live in Bushwick, Brooklyn in the Streetlightless Years of Feral Dogs & Carfires, so it's nice to see what's left.

I'm always taken aback by how much Gap and H&M crap Beacon's buys. Hennes & Mauritz AB is an inevitability in New York, and I have a few of their fitted basics. Fitted basics are a big market here. The problem is the ethical entanglements that inhere to this price-sensitive market.

Uniqlo's single-source Chinese and now Bangladeshi production raises questions about human rights (<http://shirahime.ch/2010/10>



[/what-is-uniqlos-csr-track-record-part-4-supply-chain-monitoring/](#)). Zara claims to be vertically integrated (itself producing everything from raw materials to finished product in retail facilities), but in the same presentation says it makes 60% of its own products (<http://www.slideshare.net/irwanarfandi/zara-retailing-vertical-integrated>) (?!), leaving little question as to where the balance could be produced on the cheap. American Apparel occupies a higher price bracket for their touted “sweatshop free” manufacturing, but recently almost a third of its Los Angeles workers were found to have improper legal work documentation (<http://www.dailyfinance.com/2009/07/01/american-apparel-the-downside-to-sweatshop-free-labor/>)—and its owner famously treats AA employees as sex vending machines ([http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/24/business/24bias.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/24/business/24bias.html?_r=1)). H&M makes a lot of clothing in Turkey, which has a big child labor problem (<http://www.globalmarch.org/worstformsreport/world/turkey.html>) (to be fair, it’s largely agricultural in practice), but I groaned when I saw that some suitable H&M jeans in Beacon’s were made in Bangladesh.

A December 2010 fire started by crap wiring and/or short circuits roared through a Dhaka, Bangladesh factory making clothes for American Eagle, Sears, and The Gap (inter alia). It killed 21 workers because the exits were b/locked (to “stop garment theft”). Dangerous electrical conditions are not unusual to That’s It Sportswear (*indeed!*), Ltd. Scores of the 2.5 million underpaid sweatshop workers in Bangladesh are killed every year (<http://ilcaonline.org/content/triangle-shirtwaist-fire-present-day>) by such fires. In a fabulous irony of time, this happened almost 100 years after the famous Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in New York City, where 146 poor immigrant women were killed working under almost the same circumstances.

It’s a century later, and I’m in New York looking at Bangladeshi jeans of possible blood and fire. But the circle cannot complete: They’re second hand. H&M has already reaped its profits, and I am only supporting a local second-hand retailer. In the same way that I minimize market culpability by buying military surplus, I trust that the cinders and tears were washed out of the jeans by the previous owner.

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\**Moksha*, in Buddhism, is the transcending of the cycle of suffering that is birth, life and death, or *samsara*. I thought if I clumsily deployed some Oriental (*things* are Oriental, *people* are Asian) concepts in this post it would help my search engine indexing, given that the Buddha is the un-ironic marketing coup (<http://www.copyblogger.com/buddha-marketing/>) of the past two decades.