

NETWORKED:

Dialogue & Exchange in the Global Art Ecology
Triangle Network Conference
26 & 27 November 2011

Networks and Activism and Solidarity – text by Todd Lester

The revolution to be made in the US will require the masses to make material sacrifices rather than acquire more material things... That great transformative and humanizing experience still lies before us. --Grace Lee Boggs

Monday, September 17th 2012 marks the one-year anniversary of [Occupy Wall Street \(OWS\)](#) as well as the first week of the [New York City Triangle Workshop](#). Therefore, I am reminded of [NETWORKED: Dialogue & Exchange in the Global Art Ecology](#), the November 2011 Triangle conference in London. After all, our very meeting in the Bloomberg space benefited from the largesse of the financial sector that OWS is contesting, and merely passing through the venue's security gave us pause to take in one of London's Occupy encampments in the public square just opposite its entryway. During these past months, I've taken part in the OWS movement by helping to organize a [matching system for visiting occupiers](#) to find host families in New York City. In fact, one of the current NYC Triangle Workshop participants, [Niki Singleton](#), illustrated a handy [Do-it-Yourself guide](#) for the [Host an Occupier \(HaO\)](#) initiative.

Throughout the course of implementing this project, I oft considered abandoning the horizontal framework of the OWS movement to resituate myself into a hierarchy, thinking that I know best how to set up a hosting mechanism drawing from my experience with [freeDimensional](#). These urges – and their suppression – helped me to understand why a movement such as OWS is important. The process I was going through of thinking I knew better is – at the micro level – the same process endemic to the political sphere of many countries and locales in which the [Occupy movement](#) has cropped up... there is this self-fulfilling [Hobbesian notion](#) that if someone isn't in power that order will be disrupted, a notion so strong that the promise of a newer, more equitable order is perpetually eclipsed.

Back in June, I attended a meeting of the [Social Justice and Peace Philanthropy working group](#) entitled The Global Crisis: Movements for Economic Justice. The representative of a prominent environmental organization stood up to reiterate the concerns of that sector. All heads were nodding in affirmation, that 'yes, the environment receives the brunt of this crisis'. All I could think was how would a representative of the arts community contribute to this wringing of hands? What would I say if given the floor? I decided not to raise my hand. Later that month, the [Theatre Communications Group 2012 Conference](#) boasted the title Model the Movement, without exactly detailing the movement it references. In [one of my blogs](#) leading up to the [Triangle conference](#), I decried such dangling modifiers, the meaning slide of organizations masquerading as networks and movements. Since then, however, I've become less inclined to critique institutional form. I've been inspired by ideas such as those combined in Ted Purves' [What We Want Is Free: Generosity and Exchange in Recent Art](#). I have a hankering to do something rather than to write about something.

The idea behind the [Host an Occupier initiative](#) is to encourage new forms of sharing; to do something voluntarily at a time when most exchanges of value are compulsory; and simply to support those willing to commit professional time to the [OWS movement](#) through the age old act of welcoming and being hospitable ... a transaction that does not require money to exchange hands. I've noticed that frustration over the

distribution of funds regularly stymies OWS assemblies. While some [corporate funds](#) (e.g. Ben & Jerry's) have come into the movement, evolving into the [Action Resource Fund](#), other [OWS assets have been frozen](#) (no pun intended). [Consider the Lilies](#), an article in [Tidal – Occupy Theory, Occupy Strategy](#), gives a historical filter to the practice of crowdfunding, remembering the Civil Rights Movement and Bayard Rustin organizing black steel workers in Birmingham to send their second cars to Montgomery for carpooling boycotters. One OWS [protester remarked](#) “that at just one year old, there is still a lot of growth ahead.”

I am an optimist. I think something is changing with capital, and while I'm not sure exactly what form the change will take, it is a moment of great opportunity, while remaining one of caution. “To say whether Occupy was a success or a failure depends on how you define it. Occupy is a network. Occupy is a metaphor. Occupy is still alive. Occupy is dead. Occupy is the spirit of revolution, a lost cause, a dream deferred” [equivocates an Associated Press reporter](#) trying to make sense out of the past year. These days, the unexpected network – and new articulations of network – dominate my attention outweighing the action of joining or subscribing to something formal. Here's a few that have caught my eye:

[Governing by Networks](#), [Participating Artists Press Agency](#), [The Egyptian Revolution on Twitter](#), [The Geography of Trust in Social Networks](#)

Over these same few months, I've been developing a new project called [Lanchonete](#), a time and site-specific artist residency & human mobility project, with an underlying focus on economy. While it is still at a nascent stage, I'm quite certain that it will grow to reflect these ideas on art, society, and exchange in our networked lives as it unfolds. I welcome your input... thanks for reading!