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# Planet Occupy

By [Nathan Schneider](#)

*Imagining an Occupied world*

I recently learned about a revolutionist pamphlet published last year in Spain called *La Carta de los Comunes*. It begins with an intriguing conceit. Set in 2033 in a magical-realist Madrid, it tells of a population whose bodies became physically hunched over in submission to a wealthy few. At last, with their livelihoods nearly eviscerated, the people rise up and take over their city. They resurrect the medieval notion of the commons, creating a domain of shared resources apart from the market and bureaucratic oversight. They learn to stand upright again. The pamphlet then presents a Magna Carta for their new society.

Nathan Schneider is a writer living in Brooklyn. His story "[Some Assembly Required](#)," which traces the birth of Occupy Wall Street, appears in the February 2012 issue of *Harper's Magazine*. Schneider previously blogged for *Harper's* about [the General Assembly process](#) at Occupy Wall Street, and [whether Occupy encampments should be covered by the First Amendment](#).

I can't resist applying a similar futurism to Occupy Wall Street, the phenomenon whose origins I describe in the February 2012 issue of *Harper's*. Even the most hopeful young occupiers are starting to realize that their revolutionary dreams might take longer to achieve than a semester's leave from school—and justly so. As I noticed during the planning process, and have continued to see in the movement thus far, even those most centrally involved are constantly discovering for themselves where it is leading.

The question of what Occupy Wall Street is really about has been notoriously thorny from the outset. The movement's attempts to craft agreed-upon "demands" have generally fallen flat. Nevertheless, a set of quite interesting but rarely discussed texts have withstood the consensus-building process at local general assemblies. Reading them closely, and with an eye to the praxis in the occupations themselves, I see no quick-and-easy legislative, executive, or judicial patches for the problems the movement means to confront. I came to think, instead, that the movement's lasting contribution could be something substantially more ambitious: a wholesale rethinking of political life, more akin to the promulgation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in revolutionary France than, say, the introduction of a financial-transaction tax or the revocation of the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision in the United States. (Unlike the Declaration of the Rights of Man, mind you, the Occupy documents rarely refer to property, law, or patriotic sentiment. They don't even mention borders.)

It isn't crazy to think the time has come to go back to the drawing board, politically. The constitutions of most Western nation-states were dreamed up during the late

Enlightenment, long before anyone could foresee such realities as globalized mega-corporations profiting from chronic personal and national debt, Internet companies possessing more private information than the average diary, and undeclared wars being fought by drone aircraft—which have all contributed to what Occupy Wall Street describes as a “feeling of mass injustice” in its Declaration of the Occupation of New York City, approved on September 29 and now available as an attractive pamphlet. Our familiar, Lockean governments have come to seem inept, powerless to oppose the incorporeal profit machines that can, as the declaration adds, “achieve the same rights as people, with none of the culpability or responsibility.” The Declaration of the Occupation is addressed not to governments—no hope there—but rather “to the people of the world,” urging communities everywhere to “assert your power.”

“We are creating an exemplar society,” states Occupy Boston’s Declaration of Occupation. That being the case, let’s attempt some Occupy sci-fi: What would the world look like if the Occupy revolution were carried through to completion?

“No one’s human needs go unmet,” continues the Boston declaration. Planet Occupy, like last fall’s occupations, provides food and shelter for everyone, no questions asked. It also ensures health care, mutual education, childcare, legal representation, and a large, meticulously catalogued library. Sounds like a good social democracy—except that, in the words of Occupy Wall Street’s Principles of Solidarity, the basic unit of political life is not the ballot box but “autonomous political beings engaging in direct and transparent participatory democracy.” Though they might be wired to the teeth, the political beings of Planet Occupy carry out their democracy face to face, in well-coordinated small groups that operate by consensus. It’s “participatory as opposed to partisan,” adds the Statement of Autonomy, suggesting that the aim on Planet Occupy is for all voices to be heard, rather than for one party to prevail over others. Those with “inherent privilege” defer whenever possible to others. The consolidation of power is discouraged, and resisted when necessary. Policing troublemakers becomes the job not of cops, but of assertive, well-trained listeners.

The movement’s documents contain fewer hints about Planet Occupy’s economy. The Principles of Solidarity calls for “redefining how labor is valued,” which may look something like the worker-owned cooperatives currently being developed at the Freedom Plaza occupation in Washington, D.C. Broadly speaking, human needs prevail over claims on profit. Companies are chartered for the public good, not private gain. Participatory democracy prevails in workplaces, neighborhoods, and other productive groupings. Many aspects of the economy—food, especially—remain local. This is necessary partly in order to preserve and sustain the natural environment. Everyone on Planet Occupy knows, after all, that if they don’t protect the planet, there will be nothing left to occupy.

Even with its inhabitants’ passion for local autonomy, though, Planet Occupy is a globalized place. People and their ideas travel freely, creating new opportunities and partnerships wherever they go. Assemblies share their plans and innovations over Interoccupy. (The movement’s conference-call network will have supplanted the original Internet, which was overrun by corporate advertising.) Following the urge in

the Principles for “the broad application of open source,” all ideas are common property, and these collective resources are, according to the Statement of Autonomy, valued more highly than money—if money still exists at all. SOPA-style censorship in the name of ownership is *not* okay.

Also not okay is using violence to resolve conflicts. Almost every Occupy document makes some statement to this effect. Occupy Boston’s Memorandum of Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples envisions “a new era of peace and cooperation that will work for everyone.” When conflict occurs, as is inevitable, people resist injustice through “non-violent civil disobedience and building solidarity based on mutual respect, acceptance, and love,” in accordance with the Principles. Every such struggle is both local and global.

Is this anarchist utopia realistic, or even desirable? It’s at least a little out there. Perhaps a lot out there. But the Declaration of the Rights of Man, drafted while Louis XVI still had his head, wasn’t easy to comprehend in its time. The circumstances of our world exceed the politics we’re used to imagining for it, and the politics that are really necessary might therefore seem impossible. “We have come to Wall Street as refugees from this native dreamland, seeking asylum in the actual,” explains “Communiqué 1,” an article in the movement journal *Tidal*. “We seek to rediscover and reclaim the world.”

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