

Occupy Wall Street, Urban Play and the Affirmation of Crisis

Fred Landers⁺ (USA)

Abstract

Since Occupy Wall Street's beginnings in September, 2011 on the streets of downtown New York City, play has been key to the success of this protest against corporate destructiveness and irresponsibility. In the initial weeks, Occupiers used play on the occasion of crisis to imagine a future beyond the exploitation of the 99% by the 1%. Having fun while taking responsibility attracted new Occupiers in large numbers and rapidly expanded the Occupy movement to more than 800 cities in the U.S. and worldwide. The author and groups of his friends, using a playful form of activism called Urban Play, improvised movements and roles in their interactions with other Occupiers. Toward the end of 2011, Occupiers became less able to access far from equilibrium states in play, instead turning their attention to how they were perceived in the media. Urban Players continued to imaginatively expand possibility by incorporating what initially threatened their capacity to play. From his experiences of Urban Play at Occupy Wall Street events, the author develops a theory of play as a form of activism. The author suggests that education, psychotherapy, politics, and other soft sciences would benefit from a greater emphasis on the affirmation, rather than the management, of crisis.

Keywords: *Occupy Wall Street, Urban Play, Crisis, Playability, Unplayable, Activism*

⁺ Dr. Fred Landers, Instructor, Institute for the Arts in Psychotherapy, USA. email: fredlanders@earthlink.net, website: www.academia.edu

Introduction

Beginning in the mid-20th Century, the hard sciences have come to respect crisis, or extreme disequilibrium, as the source of transformation in the universe, while the soft sciences, including psychology, education, and politics, have instead promised to manage crisis, and by so doing, to protect subjects from the threat that transformation poses to identity. In this paper, I will suggest that the affirmation of crisis, an occupation of the unplayable by the playable, expands the cloud of possible actions we have access to, while the management of crisis, including the identification of a perpetrator, diminishes our possible actions by preventing us from engaging responsibly and creatively with the unplayable actions we are unable to occupy.

I will develop the concept of the playable (Johnson 2009), and of the imaginative suspension that nourishes and sustains playability, through a discussion of play in the initial weeks of the Occupy Wall Street protest in New York City at the end of 2011. Early in the Occupation, an experimental alternation between occupation with counting and occupation without counting (Deleuze 1998) transformed identity when Occupiers incorporated attacks by the mayor, the police, and the media into what the media referred to as a “carnival” (Bellafante 2011, 1).

When the playful experimentation became compromised, and the imaginative suspension it supported went flat, such as when Occupiers caved in to the demand that they make demands, or began to devote time to planning an appealing storyline they would feed to the media for each protest, a suspension was still produced in the imaginative encounters between bodies that small groups of my friends and I improvised during Occupy Wall Street events. Incorporating movements, sounds, pretend objects, and roles in scenes, our practice of Urban Play (Landers 2011) served as a fixed element (Deleuze 1998) that allowed for experimentation with possibilities in the very areas in which the Occupation had become preoccupied with crisis management.

From our experiences with Urban Play, and drawing on process philosophy (Whitehead 1929/1978), poststructuralism (Deleuze 1998, Guattari 1995), and Zhuangzian Taoism (Lusthaus 2003, Watson 1968), I will propose what I believe will be a more ethical relation to method in the soft sciences. If subjective experience is created in an event involving varying degrees of imaginative suspension, and the subjectivity emerging in the event generates crisis as a gamble for high intensity at concretization, then whether an unplayable action becomes perpetration may depend on whether the resulting crisis is managed or affirmed. A method in the soft sciences is currently conceived as valuable to the extent it can generate an energetic process while controlling outcomes through the performance of a procedure. The affirmation of crisis I’m proposing requires a rearrangement of method, crisis, and process such that method is chosen by process as a bid for intensity in the creation of a crisis. By playing with a method that threatens playability, while only occasionally resorting to crisis management, we may not only increase the range of crises we are capable of affirming, but increase our ability to increase our playability.

Occupy Wall Street: The Unbearable Lightness of Playing

If it was national and global crises brought to us by banks, corporations, and the corporate state in 2008-2009 that triggered the beginning of the playful protest at Wall Street on September 17th, 2011, and inspired the thousands who in the following weeks joined the protest in New York and in over 800 cities, it was not the mere crises that brought people out into the streets to play. If it had been, the Occupation would have started two years earlier. Rather, it was management of the crises by the state such that the crises were separated from the conditions of playability, blame was assigned with no one taking responsibility, and there was no imagining of how the future could go any differently. Occupy Wall Street was a response to the lack of an imaginative suspension. We were successful in exposing the repressive violence of the state and recruiting new activists to the extent we fostered and chose our actions from an imaginative cloud of possibilities, took responsibility for engaging with the crisis, and imagined a world to come.

Perhaps it may be seen as a sign of success in generating an imaginative suspension that the Occupiers of Wall Street were criticized from the start for playing too much. In some of the earliest coverage by the corporate media, the criticism was that our tendency to play compromised our chances of being respected and understood. Said Joanna Weiss of the Boston Globe, "It's hard to take a protest fully seriously when it looks like a circus..." (2011, 2). Ginia Bellafante in the New York Times expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of "air[ing] societal grievances as carnival," when the magnitude of problems under capitalism are "not easily extinguishable by street theater" (2011,1). Established activists, both inside and outside of the movement, offered their criticism of our playfulness in the form of advice, urging us to stop playing around and make some demands (Brookings Institution 2011, Hoffman 2011, Moore 2011).

Billionaire New York City Mayor Bloomberg, a high profile representative of both the 1% that controls the state and the state that is controlled by the 1%, has justified his violence against the Occupation by implying that the goal of play, enjoyment in particular and affective intensity in general, is not relevant to achieving social change. "It's fun and it's cathartic — it's, I don't know, it's entertaining to go and to blame people..." (Taylor 2011, 1)

Occupy Wall Street gave Americans and other westerners a way to express the outrage that many of us were feeling, but had no large-scale way to express. Occupy Wall Street made it possible for us to play with the horrible reality of the corporate ransacking of our country and of the earth. Said a sign in the first few weeks of the Occupation, "Capitalism is socialism for the rich." Said another, "I'll believe corporations are people when Texas executes one." Occupy Wall Street expanded the playable because it provided an imaginative suspension, a generation of possibilities for how our country and the earth are being destroyed by the 1% and what to do about it. The outpouring of possibilities was sometimes extreme, sometimes silly, but often joyful in spite of the suffering it brought into sharper relief. With the imaginative suspension the Occupation provided, our playability

increased. As the playable expanded, we became clearer about what we were and were not capable of playing with.

The Unplayable

The unplayable is generated from low or nonexistent imaginative suspension. A fantasy that does not develop and is thus increasingly distant from reality is eventually enacted in order to eliminate, even if only temporarily, the tension of the growing gap between it and reality.

Men who commit a series of rapes, for example, lack the ability to imaginatively suspend possibilities. Once a sexual fantasy has entered their minds, tension grows from the increasing gap between the fantasized act and their real experiences. Lacking a means of releasing the tension between fantasy and reality through a form of imaginative expression that would allow a fantasy to remain suspended as a possibility, the serial rapist understands that concretizing a fantasy in real action is the only way of releasing the tension (Gee et al. 2004). The greater the tension, the more the rapist soothes himself by entertaining the fantasy, and the more the fantasy becomes divorced from reality. The rapist may believe, if he is able to reflect on his actions this deeply, that concretizing the fantasy in real action is the responsible thing to do, since the passing of time will only make the fantasy more harmful to when it is eventually enacted. In other words, the rapist may believe he or she is preventing greater violence by releasing the fantasy in an enactment. The rape temporarily relieves the serial rapist of the tension, but does nothing to open the fantasy to multiple possibilities. Eventually, the fantasy grows again, along with the tension that eventually results in its next enactment.

In the weeks preceding their brutal and coordinated 1am attack on the Occupy Wall Street encampment at Zuccotti Park on November 15th, the mayor, police, and media repeated the fantasy that the Occupiers were dirty, dangerous, and disorderly, the same images fantasized by the Freikorps and Nazis as precipitants to their torture and slaughter of the minority groups about whom they had these fantasies (Theweleit 1987). The projection of the fantasy by New York City officials and media may have contributed to creating the conditions described, such as when the police allegedly sent drug-using homeless people to the Occupiers' encampment, telling them "take it to Zuccotti" and indicating they would be fed and given a place to sleep there (Siegel October 30, 2011). It appears that the negligence the city's homeless represent became attached to the Occupy Wall Street encampment as a problem with the sanitation, food, accommodation, and system of self-governance that its volunteers were improvising on the stones of a city plaza.

The protesters' enactment of the corporate state's fantasy of dirt, danger, and disorder was the first layer of the unplayable, followed by the violent physical attack on November 15th. In keeping with the story that preceded the raid, Occupiers were treated like bugs to be exterminated, and most of their property was de-

stroyed. The fantasy did not pick up any imaginative suspension from the enactment, the media telling the story that since the protesters were creating a danger by their presence, it was for the good of the public that public officials removed the protesters and cleaned up the park they had been occupying.

When an imaginative suspension is lacking, the fantasy that is enacted has not been subject to a process of generating multiple possibilities, so only with great difficulty can it be incorporated into the playable. The military-style clearing of the encampment and sanitizing of the Zuccotti Park exposed the violence by which the corporate state maintains compliance. The Occupiers responded by staging people's microphone assemblies, in which one person's expressions of outrage and solidarity with others were repeated by everyone within earshot, in public spaces in all five boroughs and on the subways. The incorporation of the corporate state's violence into the Occupiers' playability caused a surge in numbers of people participating in the enormous protest rally two days later. The Occupiers' playability expanded by occupying the previously unplayable aggression of the state (Siegel November 16, 2011).

Urban Play

However, as Wall Street Occupiers were beaten, pepper sprayed, and arrested by police, and criticized by activists and the media for playing around too much when they should have been making demands, they began to lose their imaginative suspension, began to play less with crises, and instead devoted an increasing amount of time in meetings to marketing a "story," a representation of a problem and its solution. The multiplicity of play was flattened into a storyline as Occupiers increasingly chose to manage the crisis they had previously played with.

Urban Play (Landers 2011), which my friends and I practiced weekly at Occupy Wall Street events, picked up imaginative suspension in the very ways it was being dropped by the Occupation. In Urban Play, we track the affective intensity of our play together, repeating movements that present a high level of intensity and transforming them when a new movement captures our interest and shows intensity. Tracking intensity as we play, we ensure that the movements of our bodies are expressive of our impulses rather than obligated by practical considerations. Moving in relationship to the physical setting, each other, and the people around us, we define an imaginary context through pretend rather than accomplishing something in the world. Our movements have consequences in our play, but not in reality. In this sense, movement by players is always suspended from reality. Because it is based in the tracking of intensity, Urban Play is pure imaginative suspension.

My friends and I, three or four of us at any one time, played at the edges, and sometimes in the middle, of crowds of Occupiers. Moving to a new location in a crowd, we began by playing in our own group in order to raise energy among us that we hoped would attract passersby to join us. Some bystanders played with us for a moment, others for an hour at a time. Our Urban Play began to find crises, intensity, and multiplicity in the very places the imaginative bubble of the Occupy

Wall Street movement was flattening. By following the intensity in our play, we added buoyancy where there was sag.

Imaginative Suspension in Urban Play

Imaginative suspension is the individuation and distribution in space and time of singularities, or potential changes (Deleuze 1998). That the alternation that produces imaginative suspension was closed down in one direction within the Occupation was evidenced by the unpremeditated tendency in our Urban Play sequences to emphasize the opposite pole of alternation. Far from righting a balance, creating equilibrium, and managing crises, Urban Play's restoration of alternation raised the tension between different processes, highlighted the volatile relations between them, and generated far from equilibrium states, or crises.



Figure 1. Urban Play - A joyful form of social activism that is rocking Occupy Wall Street. In Urban Play, a small group of friends improvise movements and roles together in a public place while inviting the people encountered to either join them in play or smile and watch. Playing freely and outside of social norms participants access an enormous amount of joy, inspiring many to take part. Urban Play creates a sense of community and helps people access an expanded sense of what is possible.

Occupation With Counting

Occupation with counting is what Deleuze (1998), perhaps presciently, called the generation of individuations that define singularities. *Occupation with counting* involves creating a series of actions whose duration is rationally determined. Usually produced through repetition, the actions in the series present variations that are common to the repeated elements and without which they could

not be repeated. Variations that emerge from *occupation with counting* identify individuations, without contributing to the stabilization of an identity.

The following three examples of *occupation with counting* occurred one after another on October 23rd, 2011, and were captured on video by a bystander, who posted his footage as the first two minutes of a longer video on the Occupy Wall Street encampment at Zuccotti Park (MrWatsonius 2011). Four of us playing in the video footage, the three women and I, were Urban Players, while the other two men were Occupiers who saw us begin to play and joined us, one for 45 minutes, the other for an hour.

In the first of the three examples, the steps we took, as we used our feet, knees, and hands to cross a length of sidewalk along a perimeter of Zuccotti Park, generated a series in which the many variations in our movements were accentuated.

One of us sinks to the cement from an overambitious stride and reaches out for help, while another balances first on his hands, with legs hovering above the ground, before surging ahead and leaning a hand on the back of the lead mover. One moves like a lizard, partially crawling along the wall to the left. Another, bent over in the lead, stumbling, takes someone else's hand, while yet another slowly gropes forward along the top of a police barricade on the right. A boy momentarily detaches from his family and joins the adults who are moving oddly along the sidewalk, then stops and turns to family members, apparently unsure whether to join or remain a bystander.

The task of stepping, whether with feet or hands, along the sidewalk determined a countable measure that pointed up the uniqueness of each performance of the task. Thus potential differences in movement common to all the steps were identified.

In the second example, each person swiped a finger in the pink chalk heart that the group had discovered on the sidewalk, and then on the face of him or herself or the face of someone else. This swiping of the finger and registering of an emotion in face and body became the new countable action that the group performed together. The variations in delight and embarrassment, the common element in the repetitions, were highlighted by the count's framing of the series of presentations of emotion.

As we make dustings of pink chalk on each other, our faces and bodies dramatically display surprise, eagerness, amusement, and a sense of becoming beautiful. A final series of variations registers first in the faces of Karen and Beth, who see Fred standing at a distance, consider approaching him with chalk dust, and then pull back with apparent trepidation, and then in the face of Milena, who goes ahead and swipes the dust on Fred's cheeks. Fred's face and mannerisms show embarrassment only partially covered over by an exaggerated gesture of delight.

The common element of variation between delight and embarrassment were apparent from the singular forms this variation took in each of our faces and bodies.

In the third example, the count was a movement of hands to a gentle pulse, the variations indicating a variety of individual responses to the feelings of embarrassment and performances of delight in the previous excerpt.

Although the pulse is subtle, there is a rolling tempo to the gestures of open hands, the gestures varying from self-soothing rubbing, to shows of receiving, to attempts to produce clarity and order. The extreme variation, effectively stretching the identifiable motif of hand gestures produced within a cyclical pulse, generates a strong sense that the group's collective movement is highly volatile and could take off in any of a large number of possible directions.

Occupation Without Counting

The singularities that are generated in *occupation with counting* are distributed in *occupation without counting*, in which durations that are not rationally determined define qualitative distances and proximities that cannot be broken down into smaller units, and that express the density or rarefaction of the singularities that they place in relation to one another. *Occupation without counting* maps when and where the potential action defined by a singularity may occur.

The moment on October 23rd when the two men joined the four of us Urban Players shortly after we had begun playing that day, appears to be an example of *occupation with counting*. After all, we repeated the word, "sorry," and generated variations of it. However, our play did not so much produce individuations as define various tolerances and limitations to the proximities we were entertaining. There was a high level of affective intensity in the scene, as we lingered on the verge of numerous boundaries representing the limitations of our ability to tolerate our excitement at being in sudden proximity with like-minded strangers, and the limitations of a noise-regulating committee's toleration of our noise.

Four of us Urban Players danced among people and objects in the encampment that was becoming filled up and difficult to move inside of anymore. In a narrow space between objects, a bearded man joined us, and a minute later an acrobatic man. The six of us began to say "sorry" loudly as we moved quickly in the small space, barely able to avoid each other's movements. "I am terribly, terribly sorry," someone said. "Sor-REE, sor-REE!" said another. We were very loud. Nearby, about six Occupiers were meeting. A participant in that meeting very politely expressed respect for the fun we were having, but asked that we either use less volume or move elsewhere. We tried repeatedly to quiet down, but our excitement was great and no one of us in charge, so our volume increased again, and there was another request that we move away or quiet down, and another. During the third and final request, we were told, "We're actually trying to see to it that the sort of thing you're doing can continue to happen here." Much later, we learned that a committee of Occupiers was formulating rules of self-governance that they were proposing the encampment follow because

there were complaints, trumpeted in the media and possibly instigated for political reasons, from the neighbors about the noise made by the drummers at the western edge of the park. So the meeting that our loud repetition of “Sorry” interrupted was apparently of the very committee that was attempting to provide the encampment with guidelines for self censorship.

Our play appeared to be occupation with counting, the production of individuated variations on the word “sorry” as countable unit. However, our play did not define individuations so much as distribute already-present individuations in relation to one another. In a small physical space, our energetic movement and repetition of a word facetiously expressing regret at the effects our movements were having on each other, at the moment when the two Occupiers’ energetic entrances into our play had affirmed our very purpose in playing at the Occupation, expressed that we were together at an exciting edge of our ability to tolerate the excitement that our proximity was producing in us. Our play expressed the joyful tension we felt together at a moment of crisis and defined the moment as holding great potential for transformation.

Alternation Between the Two Occupations Creates a Diagram of Possibilities

It is through experimentation in play that *occupation with counting* and *occupation without counting* alternate, many series of actions presenting individuations which irregular experiences of proximity and distance in relationships distribute. Action both presents this map and, by concretizing possibilities, alters the singularities. Map and action thus mutually affect one another, and what is presented is a diagram, an index of possible actions that transforms as the possibilities it indicates lose their potential and become concretized in action (Guattari 1995). The diagram maintains a cloud of possibilities, only some of the possibilities making it to action. For further discussion of the diagram in Urban Play, see Landers 2011.

The fact that our Urban Play tended to demonstrate *occupation without counting* much more than *occupation with counting* may indicate that the Occupation’s imaginative suspension was collapsing in the direction of *occupation with counting*, as the counting, of numbers of participants, of coverage by the media, of other details, over-defined the specialness of Occupy Wall Street at the expense of the Occupation’s ability to transform as the situation it was a response to shifted. There were many instances when the boundaries of the encampment, policed both by police and by Occupiers, became the sites of Urban Play that tended to exhibit *occupation without counting*, as if to restore buoyancy to the imaginative suspension in a place where it had shut down on a violent self-regulation

In the following example from November 6th, when approximately half of the people in the Zuccotti Park encampment may have been there for the free food and place to sleep, rather than out of commitment to the Occupation, the alternation in our play between individuating variations and the distribution of these individuations as potential changes seemed to be at odds with the current tensions and flattening of imaginative suspension in the encampment.

As the three of us Urban Players danced along a narrow aisle between tents, we were greeted by several young men who appeared to be high, one of whom asked us, "Who are you guys?" As we always did when asked this question, we responded in as playful a way as possible, making the continuation of the play our first priority and avoiding allowing the play to be shut down in verbal explanation. I asked the three guys who were now standing around us, smelling of old sweat and dirt, to back up and, with the three in our group, make a circle, saying I would show them who I was. Then I went into the center of the circle, said "I'm this," and danced a clumsy dance in which I almost fell to the ground repeatedly, but caught myself each time. The three Urban Players applauded the performance and the young men joined in clapping. Karen then said, "I'm this," and did a dance in the center, also followed by applause. Now one of the men said the words, "I'm this" and did a clumsy dance. Applause. I noticed that at a table publicizing the oppression of Native Americans, manned by two men who appeared to be Native American, one of the men was talking to the other about the group of us. I asked him what he thought and he said the young men now dancing were spiritually immature and needed guidance. Returning to the circle, I announced that I needed guidance, and danced another clumsy dance.

We individuated clumsy movements that showed who we were while taking countable turns occupying the center of the circle. We distributed these individuations in a narrow physical space allowed us by the highly populated encampment, and in a narrow social space where homeless drug users tolerated a play process instead of a verbal explanation and Native American Occupiers tolerated spiritually uncommitted homeless drug users. Possibilities for free movement and toleration were diagrammed and transformed for a few moments, in spite of the narrowness of the space in which the diagram of possibilities was created.

Reaching the Edge of the Playable

There must be a certain amount of imaginative suspension as a precondition for expanding it through play. The Occupation's suspension was tending to collapse toward *occupation with counting*, counting and measuring too much, accounting for too much, becoming preoccupied with accounts, with narratives, the explanation of what was being experienced. Processes were not allowed to run their own course, to change when internally necessary, but needed to be explained and narrated before, during, and after, to make sure all was understood. *Occupation without counting* was being sacrificed, nothing allowed to happen that didn't have a reason, so that everything Occupiers did would count.

If Urban Play was able to counter this tendency somewhat, with a tendency to play more at *occupation without counting*, as if to restore the Occupation's alternation, there were also limits to Urban Play's ability to do this. At times our avoidance of being trapped in the Occupiers' preoccupation nonetheless trapped us in a too-rigid avoidance that limited our capacity for alternation. At these times, the preoccupation with counting became unplayable for us. The following is an example of an alternation *between occupation with counting and occupation*

without counting in which I responded to instances of counting that I found unplayable by managing crisis and thus stopped the imaginative suspension as I withdrew from a situation in which I could not play.

At 6th Ave and Canal Street, a thousand Occupiers gather on a cold morning on December 17th to occupy a new site, a vacant lot owned by a wealthy church. At one side of the crowd, three of us Urban Players begin to leap around, crisscrossing an empty area in the crowd that expands in size in response to our movements. Three young men dressed in black, who appear to be high, say we are doing a satanic ritual and continue a running commentary on our movements as devil worship. As the three of us warm up, we take off our outer layers of sweaters, jackets, and scarves, throwing them in a pile on the gravel. We begin to take turns leaping over the pile in various strange ways that make us laugh. The three young men speak in more of a rush, and I cannot hear much of what they are saying. In our movement, we begin to swing our heads sideways, the rest of our bodies following. A man runs out of the crowd and joins us, dropping his scarf in our pile. The four of us begin to walk toward each other in pairs until our heads are touching, before moving apart and touching heads with someone else. We come together so all of our heads are touching and we are bent over the clothing pile with our heads together. We are still moving, but in a mass, a blob of us bobbing up and down and sideways. The narration by the three young men continues. Suddenly, a dozen photographers who are here for the Occupation event surround us and snap pictures of us from all sides. One even thrusts his camera under the group of us and shoots a picture of our faces from below.

I realize I am feeling that our play is violently being pulled into something other than play, a performance, a representation of the current state of the Occupation. I imagine that the frenzy of photography at the moment we have our heads together in a huddle has been triggered by the photographers' recognition of an image they want to use with a headline such as: "Occupiers get their heads together" or "Occupiers plan their next occupation." Between the imaging and narrating, I feel that our play has been stolen from us, and we are only performing for the justification of other people's fixed perspectives.

I get out of the huddle and tell the players I want to enter the crowd and find another place to play. Julia argues with me, saying we should trust that if we're following our own impulses, no one can stop our play. I say it is my impulse to move somewhere else. I move into the crowd and Karen and Julia join me.

Individuations in the countable tasks of leaping over a pile of clothes, moving our heads, bringing our heads together, and bouncing in a huddle were distributed in the enlargement of the space our activity occupied at the edge of the crowd, the man's joining of our group, the photographers' sudden intense interest in photographing us when we got in a huddle with our heads touching, and the boundary of my tolerance of the narration and photographing of our play. A crisis was created, for me at least, when a situation that I found unplayable arose from conditions that felt way out of balance to me. At a certain point, I became unable

to continue incorporating the unplayable into the playable. Instead, I began to manage what was for me a crisis. I left the play and brought the other players with me into the crowd.

Incorporating the unplayable into the playable until it is no longer possible to do so, then withdrawing from the interaction is the method of Zhuangzi in his originating text of Taoism (Lusthaus 2003). When there is a certain level of disagreement in public discourse, Zhuangzi, as a character in his text and as the writer of his text, playfully takes extreme positions in the argument to the point of crisis, making aporias, impossibilities, of the extremes in order to encourage critical thinking and suggest a rational way to navigate the dispute. By playfully showing the unplayability of the extremes, Zhuangzi incorporates the impossible extremes into the playable. However, when there is real division, and individuals are only defending their points of view without any openness to other perspectives, he and his namesake in the text pull back, maintaining their own wisdom but not engaging with the divisiveness. Zhuangzi's method is to use crisis to encourage an imaginative suspension of varying points of view in discussion when imaginative suspension is possible, but to refuse to participate in the defending of closed positions when imaginative suspension is not possible. In other words, the playable may occupy the unplayable until crisis management intervenes, separating the unplayable from the conditions of playability.

Expanding Playability

Everything that happens in the universe may be the product of a creative gamble, a gamble that is catalyzed by and produces possibilities of unequal individuation. The gamble is to assemble a subjective experience from contrasting concretizations of previous experiences in such a way as to maximize the intensity of the resulting subjectivity without assembling more intensity than the resulting subjectivity can hold (Whitehead 1929-1978). If each of the choices that together concretize a moment of subjective experience has the potential to add to the intensity of feeling at the moment of concretization, each choice has this intensifying power, and the process may be a creative adventure, because it is a risk, and may fail.

The gamble of selecting and assembling the products of previous concretizations can fail in either of two ways. If the emerging subjectivity assembles elements with too little contrast, there is little intensity of feeling at the moment of concretization. If the emerging subjectivity assembles elements with more contrast than it can contain, an experience fails to concretize. Since subjective experience resulting from this process immediately becomes available as a possible ingredient in the assembling of new subjectivities, failures of intensity or concretization result in an uneven distribution of differentially individuated possibilities. Objects that lack intensity will not be taken up in subsequent assemblings, and objects that fail to materialize because the emerging subjectivity overshot its capacity will also not be available for incorporation in future creative gambles.

This process, which is the imaginative suspension, therefore generates a cloud of possibilities that has a certain shape, a shape that is continuously changing. This shape is not only the outcome of imaginative suspension, but acts as a catalyst, presenting certain possibilities and not others. Thus it is a diagram, not only determined by events, but catalyzing events to come (Guattari 1995). The imaginative suspension, if conceived as a cloud of possibilities in continual transformation, is not all encompassing, but rough, with holes and protuberances.

In play, this catalyzing cloud of possibilities is playability, which is always specific to the relationships it involves, and beyond which lies the unplayable, also specific to the relationships between players and conditions in which they play. If playability is bounded by anything, it is the overreachings and underintensifications of gambles that did not pay off in intensity for the subjectivity they were in the process of concretizing.

Playability is therefore inevitably exceeded. The exceeding of the playable occurs from a gap in the imaginative suspension, a place where there is only a collapsed fantasy, one not refreshed by new assemblings, but carried forward with relatively little updating by new events. Action from outside of playability, from a collapsed fantasy, is not yet perpetration. If playability incorporates, or, more accurately, occupies the unplayable action, playability expands to include the unplayable action. In this case, there is a creative engagement with the crisis the unplayable has caused, a responsibility for and to the crisis, and an imagining of how the future may come out differently. When playability is unable to occupy the unplayable, but must instead withdraw, there is disengagement from the crisis, a disavowal of responsibility for the crisis, and often a blaming or identification of a perpetrator. In this case, playability does not expand, and may even diminish, since avoiding responsibility limits the imagining of new possibilities.

What Occupy Wall Street did well in its initial weeks, and Urban Play was able to do much better, was to take up the national and global crisis and make it our own, while at the same time imaginatively keeping the crisis suspended, via the unbearable lightness of play, as a source of possibility, our own possibility. When Occupy Wall Street flagged in its ability to own the crisis as a means of accessing a possible future, it was because Occupiers began to treat the crisis as a fantasy to be enacted and managed, rather than imaginatively suspended. Urban Play not only continued to expand playability when Occupy Wall Street could not, but in its play highlighted the very ways Occupy Wall Street's management of crisis needed to lighten up. Urban Play naturally owns the conditions in which it finds itself, and submits all experience to imaginative suspension, because to do otherwise, to believe in and enact crisis as collapsed fantasy, would make the play come to an end by removing all intensity. While Occupy Wall Street and Urban Play both utilize play as a means of protest, Urban Play goes much further as a form of activism because it never stops owning crisis and addressing perpetration in an urban context by submitting collapsed fantasies to imaginative suspension, making them sources of possibility. Urban Play has much to teach us about the

affirmation of crisis. At this time in history, expanding playability, and expanding our ability to expand playability, may be the only ethical thing we can do, and the one task we need to be engaged in.

Conclusion

In the soft sciences, methods of crisis management produce impasses. Affirming crisis, and thus making the most of these impasses, will require changing the relationship between method, process, and crisis that currently dominates fields such as education, healing, management, and social activism. In these fields, we tend to conceive of method, wielded by a subject, as facilitating participation in a process, the degree of participation depending on how strongly participants are motivated by a crisis. We value a method in which a procedure controls outcomes in order to generate an energized process, one that verges on crisis for the participants, such as a teaching method that engages students in an exciting learning process within a well-controlled classroom by challenging them to the limits of their abilities.

In order to affirm crisis, we will need to relate method, process, and crisis in a different way: I am suggesting that process chooses method, rather than the reverse, and that this choice is made in order to maximize crisis, increase affective intensity, and guarantee an ongoing multiplicity of possibilities. By process, I mean everything that happens (Whitehead 1929/1978). By method, I mean the way someone does something (Watson 1968). By crisis, I mean the challenge posed to identity when contrasts are assembled within a single entity (Whitehead 1929/1978). With these as my definitions, I am suggesting that process chooses method as a bid for intensity by way of the crisis that the choice implies.

By playing with a method, a way of doing something, that threatens playability by occupying the unplayable, and resorting to crisis management as little as possible while playing with this playability-threatening method, we may increase not only the range of crises we are capable of affirming, but our ability to expand this range. When we do Urban Play at Occupy Wall Street events, Occupiers take the distance they need from us according to how unplayable our playful method of interaction is for them. Many simply watch us play amongst ourselves, perhaps smiling or laughing to see us behaving so freely. Some repeat a movement that we have initiated while they walk past the place where we're playing, taking in our method a little further. Others join us in improvising movements and roles, sometimes for a few minutes, sometimes for much longer. In all of these cases, Occupiers not only occupy unplayable actions and thus expand their playability, but also occupy unplayable methods and thus expand their ability to expand their playability.

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