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A Protest's Ink-Stained Fingers

By **DAVID CARR**

At the [Occupy Wall Street](#) demonstration in Zuccotti Park, you'll find all of the essentials of a state-of-the-art protest: drum circles, cheeky and plaintive handwritten signs, and, next to a thrumming generator, a hub of social media activity, including [live streaming](#) of the proceedings.

But amid the accouterments of modern political action, you will also find, of all things, a broadsheet newspaper, The Occupied Wall Street Journal. It is not some tatty, hand-drawn piece of protest samizdat, but a professionally produced, four-color, four-page document of the demonstration, which began on Sept. 17.

"Get your newspaper, get your free Occupied Wall Street Journal!" shouted one barker. Getting something in the hands of your average New Yorker is a pretty tough sell, but The Occupied Wall Street Journal was eagerly received, even by the people who just came to gawk, in part because it answered the question of what all the hubbub was about.

Forgive an old newspaper hack a moment of sentimentality, but it is somehow reassuring that a newspaper still has traction in an environment preoccupied by social media. It makes sense when you think about it: newspapers convey a sense of place, of actually being there, that digital media can't. When is the last time somebody handed you a Web site?

"The act of one person giving another person a newspaper is important," said Arun Gupta, one of dozens of people who helped put together The Occupied Wall Street Journal. "We wanted to come up with something that was beautifully designed and well-written that gives a tangible form to what is under way." A call for the financing of the pop-up, instant newspaper [went out on Kickstarter.com](#) at the end of last month. An ad hoc group set out to raise \$12,000 and has now surpassed \$75,000. The initial print run of 50,000 was augmented with an extra 20,000 copies as the money rolled in, with promotional assists from Michael Moore, Andy Bichlbaum of the performance artists the Yes Men, and others. Mr. Gupta edited the newspaper, along with Michael Levitin, a former Associated Press journalist, and Jed Brandt, a writer and activist, was the lead designer. Dozens of other people pitched in. A second issue hit the streets on Saturday, along with

a Spanish edition of the first issue.

Mr. Gupta is a longtime newspaperman, having published *The Independent*, a free, left-leaning newspaper that circulates to 20,000 readers in print and online, primarily in New York, 16 times a year.

The *Occupied Wall Street Journal* is not the “official” newspaper of the protest because nothing is official in the world of Occupy Wall Street. Mr. Gupta said that consensus was the core principle governing the protest, but something more entrepreneurial was required to get an actual newspaper out.

Although the sentiment and some of the informational anarchy of the event is reflected in the newspaper, it is produced by experienced, if far from objective, journalists. (You can get a PDF of the newspaper at bit.ly/qio5ls.) “We didn’t think there would be much in the way of coverage of the event, so we thought it was important that there be a media outlet that reflected what was under way,” Mr. Gupta said. “A newspaper is tactile, engages all of the senses, and leads to more immersive reading than what people might do online.”

While some of the recipients of the paper clearly saw it as little more than a souvenir, an artifact that demonstrates that they were present, many others opened up the paper and were reading it when I visited on Thursday.

Katie Trainer, who came from Lebanon, Pa., asked for a newspaper and suddenly found herself drafted to circulate some copies.

“This provides people information about a historic event,” she said. “It is a professional document, not just a sign.”

Christopher Guerra, working an informational table at the protest, is a fan of the newspaper, and newspapers in general.

“A Web site will come and go, but this could be here 100 years from now if the mold doesn’t get to it,” he said, holding a copy. “People say that newspapers are dying, but there is something about its physical properties, the fact that when you hold it in your hands, you end up with ink on them, that serves as a reminder that this all is real.”

Handsome as it is, no one is going to mistake *The Occupied Wall Street Journal* for its namesake — “the name just seemed like a natural,” Mr. Gupta said. (A spokeswoman at *The Wall Street*

Journal declined to comment on the appropriation of the newspaper's name.)

In the lead piece, Mr. Gupta writes, "For over two weeks, in the great cathedral of capitalism, the dispossessed have liberated territory from the financial overlords and their police army." Not the kind of sentence you will see Peggy Noonan writing anytime soon, though Mr. Gupta said an artist who had done a stipple drawing for the real Wall Street Journal, had also contributed an illustration for the back page.

But the newspaper is not just a broadsheet version of "Anarchist Basics" either. There is a well-designed timeline of recent protests dating to the Arab Spring and continuing through the demonstrations in Wisconsin and protests in Europe. The first issue also included a charming photo essay on protest signs and the people who carry them, along with a call to action from Chris Hedges, a former reporter for The New York Times.

The writing can be flowery and the rhetoric a bit crunchy, but a piece titled "Occupations for Dummies" offered a carefully constructed document about how the protest came together (the group AdBusters put out the word in July); the limits and power of a leaderless movement ("really hard, frustrating and slow"); and the lack of a central demand.

Print and protest are frequent fellow travelers. It's worth pointing out that at the beginning of the Arab Spring, the protesters in Tahrir Square in Cairo also produced a newspaper called Liberation Square.

Jeremi Suri, a professor of history and public policy at the University of Texas at Austin, said that newspapers would continue to play a durable role in social movements.

"In a newspaper is an element of analysis that you don't get in a sign or a pamphlet," he said. "In both the '20s and '30s, and during the protests of the '60s, underground newspapers played an important role in bringing people together to create something in common."

The rest of us in the media have had trouble catching up with Occupy Wall Street, in part because it refuses to live in a pigeon hole. Like all nascent social movements involving myriad interest groups, there are inchoate, atavistic impulses at work. So, are they the anti-Tea Party, the old guard lefties in new clothing, or just disenfranchised Americans engaging in some new form of pushback?

Rather than a neat list of demands, the group tends to ask questions. Then again, who among us has not wondered if the capitalistic fundamentals of choices and consequences were suspended in

order to bail out Wall Street banking firms?

The country is just coming to grips with an episode in which some financial institutions, through fecklessness and greed, all but tipped over the American economy, and the arrival of the occupiers in the financial district presents a complicated subject.

Media coverage has tended to focus on civil disobedience because that is where the action is. Much was made of the thrust and parry between the protesters and police, [most recently on Wednesday night](#), in which an attempt by some protesters to march down Wall Street was met with pepper spray and 23 arrests.

That melee was at distant remove by Thursday in Zuccotti Park. There were people taking naps, and occasional chants sprung up, while some of the police officers and protesters talked along the periphery. One of the cops took a proffered copy of The Occupied Wall Street Journal.

“What’s the harm?” he said. He opened the broadsheet to its full dimensions, and added: “I’ll give them one thing. It’s a pretty good-looking paper.”

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