

*Standing Somewhere and Nowhere: Buddhism, Performance, and Social Change*

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The Buddhist tradition, like its Hindu and Jain cousins, is famous for its love of *ahimsa*, or non-harming, which entered the Western popular imagination through Thoreau and Emerson's, then Gandhi's, reading of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Partly through the success — moral, ethical, political — of Gandhi's *satyagraha*, nonviolent protest became a core practice for Western activists in the twentieth century, taking on some of Gandhi's relationship to *ahimsa* as a spiritual virtue. *Ahimsa* is sometimes glossed as an expression *of*, or action arising *from*, compassion (*karuṇā* (Pali), defined in an early text as a shaking (*kampana*) in the heart, caused (*karoti*) by another's suffering). (Buddhagosa 318) Many contemporary Western Buddhist convert communities — those composed of largely non-Asians — are active in non-violent protest and many kinds of social action, often enunciated as “bearing witness” to atrocity or injustice. The historical roots of Buddhist activism include stories of the Buddha himself stepping in to avert violence, and both support and challenge current expressions of *ahimsa* and *karuṇā*. To discuss the relationship between Buddhist practice, social action, and performance, I'll begin with an “Occupy” story from the *Jataka*, a collection of early Buddhist teaching stories, in which the Buddha protests a war against his own people, but manages only to delay the violence.

[King] Viḍūḍabha once firmly established on the throne remembered that grudge of his [the Sakyas had once poisoned a river in his realm, killing many people and animals], and determined to destroy the Sakyas one and all; to which end he set out with a large army. That day at dawn the Master, looking forth over the world, saw destruction threatening his kin. “I must help my kindred,” thought he. In the forenoon he went in search of alms, then after returning from his meal lay down lion-like in his Perfumed Chamber, and in the evening-time, having passed through the air to a spot near Kapilavatthu, sat beneath a tree that gave scanty shade. Hard by that place, a huge and shady banyan tree stood on the boundary of Viḍūḍabha's realms. Viḍūḍabha seeing the Master approached and saluting him, said, “Why, Sir, are sitting under so thin a tree in all this heat? Sit beneath this shady banyan, Sir.” He replied, “Let be, O king! the shade of my kindred keeps me cool.”—”The Master,” thought the other, “must have come here to protect his clansmen.” So he saluted the Master, and returned again to Sāvatti. And the Master rising went to

Jetavana. A second time the king called to mind his grudge against the Sakyas, a second time he set forth, and again saw the Master seated in the same place, then again returned. A fourth time he set out; and the Master, scanning the former deeds of the Sakyas, perceived that nothing could do away with the effect of their evildoing, in casting poison into the river; so he did not go thither the fourth time. Then king Viḍūḍabha slew all the Sakyas, beginning with babes at the breast, and with their hearts' blood washed the bench, and returned. (Rouse 96)

This story is not considered to be historically factual (There is no reference to the massacre of the Sakyas in other early histories), contains mythic elements like pattern repetition (the action happens three times before shifting), and supernatural elements (the Buddha flies to the border), and is difficult to separate from its Victorian translation. The last image is particularly challenging, and raises hard questions about the Buddha's intentions. The representation of the Buddha engaged in embodied protest is what draws me to the story, and the beginning of the story is repeated by many contemporary teachers, but the end it reveals a teaching on *karma*, a teaching that points toward a view of action and result more complex and implacable than many protest movements might prefer. It is easy to judge the Buddha's abstention in the light of its deadly result, harder to accept that he saw the limits of his power to intervene — that his protest would be insufficient against the momentum of revenge. The story begins as an inspiring activist myth, and closes with an account of seeming passivity and tragedy. What is being taught here, since the *Jataka* tales are always considered teaching stories, usually emphasizing one aspect of the teachings or a particular noble virtue? The Buddha intervenes three times to stop a massacre, then makes what I can only imagine was a Very Hard Decision. How could he choose to sit back while so many people were killed? His decision, as the story tells it, hinges on his seeing the inevitability of *karma*, the law of cause and effect. *Karma* reminds us that all actions have consequences. The truth of this unavoidable momentum is one of the most challenging of the Buddha's teachings not because we disagree with the premise of cause and effect, but for two reasons: fixation on results, and fixation on causes.

First, because it is impossible to know what the results of actions will be for certain, it is hard to let go of clinging to results, fixating ideas of the future. I try to do good, but then obsess about success and failure, even though results always depend not just on what *I* do, but on the

momentum from innumerable conditions coming together. Engaging in this fixation, solidifying actions into performance rather than letting them hover in presence, in open process, I deny the complexity of *karma* and fail to observe Krishna's teaching in the *Bhagavad Gita*, so beloved to Gandhi and Thoreau: renunciation of the fruits of our actions. (Sargeant 12.11) Presence in action without solidifying ideas of result offers the activist the power of a deep equanimity as we learn to act clearly and vigorously without thinking that our actions necessarily will lead to a desirable end. We can't *make* positive change happen. We can only lean in, and then let go.

The second difficulty with *karma* arises because it is impossible to satisfyingly look backward. We understand that a corrupt leader will eventually fall, and may suffer punishment in harmony with his crimes. (Many recent dictators have experienced this first hand, while some currently in power seem to have forgotten...) But the threads of *karma* can't be traced into the past with any accuracy, which the Buddha acknowledged, saying that the precise unfolding of cause and effect was one of the "four imponderables", speculation about which would cause one to "go mad and experience vexation". (Bodhi 4.77) But we can't help it. Historical reflection buttresses our critique of current events, not without reason. And the ancient questions persist: what of the child born into poverty, illness, or abuse, we say, or the "good person" visited by misfortune? Does a sufferer always receive their suffering as a direct echo of their own actions, with the disabled infant somehow set up for her state by an imagined past life of iniquity? That conclusion is intolerable, of course, and not implied by the texts, despite its persistence in popular fears about the teaching. *Karma* has nothing to do with sin and punishment. The teaching is simply that many actions by ourselves and others have led to this exact moment, with exactly these joys and sorrows, and that all those conditions — including, but not limited to the actions of each individual — have influenced what's happening now.

The end of the story is tragic not because of the Buddha's choice, but because of the inevitability of the situation. In the simple logic of the myth (imponderability notwithstanding), the Sakyan people's destructive action (poisoning the river) planted the seed of their own destruction, and not even a Buddha could prevent that seed from growing to fruit. The lesson we might take from

this into our own activism is cold comfort. Sometimes actions can avert a great wrong, sometimes they can't. I remember clearly the three different jail cells I spent some hours in following my three arrests in January of 2003. So many of us were in the streets, all around the world, calling out for the U.S. to call off a clearly unwarranted invasion of Iraq. I sat in a cell with my teacher, Jack Kornfield, and other activists and friends I respected so much, sure that this time we could not be ignored. That February saw the largest simultaneous demonstrations the world had ever seen. And by the end of March, American troops were on the ground. What can the Buddha's story offer us as we hold what might be felt as a historic failure? And what can it offer those now camping in the darkening plazas at the beginning of winter? An action that might seem insignificant — someone insults a Tunisian fruit vendor — turns out to be the seed of incredible, immediate change. One that seems immense — thousands of monks walking silently through the streets of Rangoon — turns out to be just another crushed uprising, leading to no sudden change. But what is the “action” that is Occupy Wall Street, anyway?

Occupy Wall Street (OWS), in a lineage of performative nonviolent resistance from Birmingham in 1963 to Cairo in 2011, is an assertion of corporeality in public space. The OWS encampments, as with many protest movements, rely on physical presence to maintain their momentum and critique, and in doing so take a stand against the deepening virtuality and disembodiment of daily life in the technocratic classes of the global north, as well as the occupation and colonization of indigenous and public land, by asserting urban parks and plazas as “the commons”.<sup>1</sup> In the *Jataka* story, the Buddha's protest method is to sit on the ground in the path of an invading army, in the full glare of the sun. As he chooses the less comfortable place to sit, the Buddha asserts his identification with place and people, refusing an available comfort in order to express tribal identity and demonstrate the love of a people for each other and their land. The OWS protesters rely on this same renunciation, strengthening and practicing community through the act of bringing their bodies to a public place — by law dedicated to transience, not residence — and staying, setting up the necessities of domestic life in visible, uncomfortable spaces. The Occupy encampments exist as an act of protest, but for the months of their tenure have functioned as sites

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<sup>1</sup> see, for instance, <http://onthecommons.org/>, (accessed 11/28/2011).

of community-building and self-care. Occupy Oakland planted an organic garden in raised beds. Camps have set up kitchens in which free meals are served to protesters and local homeless, health tents where free medical care is given, libraries, and spaces for spiritual and religious practice. Invoking themselves as kindred to the dispossessed — “We are the 99%”, imagined as a unity along economic lines — the protesters take a stand *as* the people, their bodies in public view, eschewing the safety and ease of private spaces. At a confrontation with police in New York City, protesters chanted to the NYPD, “*You* are the 99%”, inverting the subjective claim of their core slogan to create kinship, disarm oppositionality and perhaps prevent violent conflict, encouraging the police to disobey orders. Recognition of communality with the agents of oppression, as opposed to the architects of oppression, shows the maturation of a protest community that has seen significant conflict with police in recent years, and a softening of the tendency toward calcified subjectivity and isolation of identity-based communities from each other. Bodily occupation of public space, however, will always result in oppositional situations. The total loss of the commons in urban spaces is such that every piece of land is owned and subject to authoritarian control. To Occupy “public” space is always to trespass. While the Buddha sat on the land of his kindred, kept cool by their metaphorical shade, OWS in New York sat on land owned by Brookfield Properties, a real estate developer. Similarly, though, the “shade of [their] kindred” — manifesting as substantial public support for the action and agreement with the core grievances — shelters the OWS protesters, as they take refuge in kinship with the 99%, including, ideally, the police that act as their most visible antagonists. However, while physical presence in “public” spaces demonstrates engaged communality, it leads inevitably to conflict, as bodies engaged in self-care manifest an alternative to the centralization of power, and this self-care is happening on land claimed for corporate ownership and control. Despite “You are the 99%”, “99%” always will imply “1%” as its shadow and remainder, and cannot open its kinship to include the other without losing its identity, breaching the defining boundaries of the self. Expressions of communality that do not inspire polarization and conflict must then do so out of a differently constituted self. A Buddhist text from the *Prajñāparamita* offers in a description of the Bodhisattva — an awake (*bodhi*, the same root as *Buddha*) being (*sattva*), or “awakening being” — the possibility of a sense of self that is so unfixed as to have become “transparent”.

This ontological transparency, or non-rootedness, can then be a source of social action that does not create oppositionality because it does not cultivate a self-other dichotomy.

Subhuti: Through the inexhaustible power of Buddha nature, I will now demonstrate to any conscious beings who are prepared to listen how the Bodhisattva stands courageously in Perfect Wisdom. Simply by standing in the emptiness or transparency of all conventionally constituted self-existence does the bodhisattva stand in the Perfection of Wisdom. Armed against primordial metaphysical error with the great armor of emptiness, freedom and openness, the bodhisattva is not rooted, focused or established in the perception of material forms or in the experience of personal feelings, perception and impulses. The bodhisattva is not rooted, focused or established in any possible state of individual or communal awareness within the cosmic display of earth, water, fire, wind, space, and perspectival consciousness. The bodhisattva is not even rooted, focused or established in the practice of mindfulness and other contemplative disciplines, nor in their fruits, the supranormal powers. (Hixon 51)

I read a stance for social action in the phrase “stands courageously”, and the actions of “taking a stand”, “standing on principle”. This text, from the *Mahayana* (Great Vehicle) Buddhist tradition, consists of dialogues between the Buddha and several of his disciples about the philosophical/experiential practice called *Prajñāparamita*, or the Perfection of Wisdom, and revolves around the implications of *shunyata*, or the quality of “emptiness” that is the ultimate nature of all things. *Shunyata* is notoriously difficult to translate, and is glossed as “the pregnant void”, or infinite contingency — how everything is completely unfixed, never solid, always changing, and therefore “empty” of any solid, nameable identity or subjectivity. This passage is spoken by a Bodhisattva named Subhuti, who is giving instruction to disciples of the Buddha on how to practice the Bodhisattva Path. The traditional question that impels such instruction is about action: “How does a Bodhisattva stand, walk, and train in Perfect Wisdom?” But the answer dissolves even as it is heard. “Simply by standing in... transparency”, “not rooted...”. This “stand” seems to be standing nowhere. What is being proposed here? This is a training text, offering not direct instructions for practice, but material for experiential inquiry, problems for the mind to wrestle with. And this training, elliptical as it may be, is still a stance, still takes a stand, even as it is paradoxically “not rooted, focused or established in any possible state”. For western intellectuals wary of essentialist language, the passage may ring alarms, justly, because it

undercuts identity-based positionality. There is no place for feminism, anti-racism, or class-consciousness as states of “communal awareness” here, or for any -ism. What is left is a difficult promise: that if this substantial egoic release is practiced, a hitherto unavailable “courageous” stand — in transparency and presence, which are courageous because they imply the attenuation of ego and identity, very daunting tasks — becomes possible. This courageous transparency offers hints that both affirm aspects of contemporary social action (like the non-oppositional community self-care manifested at OWS) and challenge others (“We are the...”), while pointing to a more subtle engaged Way of being in the world. To open an example of social action arising in a deeply transparent ego-body, I will invoke performer Robert Steijn, remembering live performance’s ancient role as model of social behavior that an audience might apprehend, practice, and embody beyond the theatrical space. Steijn’s presence imprecisely and fruitfully hints toward transparency and emptiness of self in the body of the performer, and through his humility and generosity reveals possibilities for a post-oppositional activism.

Some local dancers bring Robert Steijn from Holland to San Francisco around Halloween/Dia de los Muertos of 2011. He performs a solo, *I am a reborn smoker, getting high in clouds of imagination*, in which he channels a dead friend, Sebastian, dances with him, and invokes a deer, his shamanic guide. Steijn talks throughout, explaining what he’s doing, offering narration and explanation between idiosyncratic dance sections. He is not a trained dancer, but dances. The piece feels casual, offered to a group of friends and students in an open dance studio, contains amazingly little pretense, and what trappings of theatrical convention remain he weaves in.

I put my shoes off. I put them off because once I did not, and the New York Times said, “He’s not a dancer. He even wore his shoes.” So I put them off now. So here is the dancer from Holland... [dances] When I dance on stage I want to be a soft man. I want to be as soft a man as possible. Is it possible to be a man and not to be aggressive? Not to be dominating? Is being on stage dominating the others who are sitting and watching? Is there a kind of exhibitionism in me, to dance without any training before, no dance school, only watching dance all the time? [dances]... Is there not a lot of embarrassment in the space, to see a man, 53 years old, dancing? (Steijn)

How might a performer stand “in the emptiness or transparency of all conventionally constituted

self-existence”)? (Hixon 51) (Hixon) The suggestion implies the complete cessation of ego identity, but leaving aside “all” and “complete” for now, I sense into how Steijn might be approximating this transparency. His self-effacement is vigorous and consistent, his performance persona humble, his interventions — words interrupting movement, movement appearing as if unthought, unplanned, interrupting words — never suggesting that he might be somewhere other than where he is. His actions hardly suggest that he is performing, though the context reads “performance”. When he asks questions about masculinity, dance, and aggression, he seems to really ask them, and not know the answers. His body is soft, large, not athletic, male: a non-normative image for American postmodern dance. To say that he is improvising still retains the subjectivity of the improviser. He moves away from this solidity, claiming that his work “is not an improvisation, it is channeling”, but immediately qualifies, “I don’t know the difference between improvisation and channeling.” (Steijn) The implication of “channeling” is that something else — other — is present in his actions. This possible disavowal of responsibility for his actions might appear either disingenuous or manipulative, but at every step in his halting lecture-demonstration, Steijn leans toward transparency, both by announcing what he is doing and by undercutting any gesture or action that might solidify into a stable sign. He “channels” with commentary, and his commentary disarms any assertion of supernaturally attenuated subjectivity. Steijn keeps reappearing. He announces that he will invite his friend Sebastian into the space, dance with him, and that Sebastian will speak through Steijn. As he moves, he tells stories about Sebastian, and his movements trace a second body in the space with him, as he verbally describes the personality of his friend. In the middle of the story his body jerks as if interrupted and he falls, crying out. But before the fall and cry can register as a new emotive dance being performed, he is standing up again and telling us about it, filling out the story of Sebastian’s suicide without any implication that Steijn’s fall was a representation, or a reaction to news, of the suicide. The gesture stands on its own. He recreates some of Sebastian’s own gestures, including a wide arm-flapping bird-shape, like wings, narrating the origin of the movement while embodying it. Where is Robert Steijn in this situation?

In eschewing “improvisation” for “channeling”, Steijn takes a stand beyond what the

*Prajñāparamita* text calls “personal feelings, perception and impulses”. Though the text describes a vast emptiness, it still claims that the Bodhisattva takes a stand. Transparency is not stillness or invisibility. It is being not “rooted, focused or established in any possible state of individual or communal awareness”. (Hixon 51) Steijn neither roots, focuses, or establishes a state, which would only solidify him as the subject and performer of that state. As he talks his way in and out of short movement phrases, his bond with the audience grows, even as he consistently dissolves the conventions of virtuosity and communication. He does not pretend that Sebastian is real even as he “invites him into the space”. Instead, he invokes imagination — the most traditional of theatrical invitations — through the Brechtian tools of narration, interruption, and direct audience address. He always breaks the spell of whatever he’s invoking, even as his way of being is casting a deeper spell. “When I get something in my imagination, when does it become real for me? When does it become real for you?” (Steijn) Constantly questioning the situation he has created, while taking it completely seriously, Steijn himself seems to soften more and more. By the time the deer arrives, I question nothing he says, even as I focus less and less on him as a person. Nothing is happening, and the audience is soft, relaxed, curious. The piece is boring. We are now in a space where nothing needs to happen. The possibilities that this opens up for those present as a social body are thus vast. Steijn takes a stand, but *almost* nowhere. His Occupation of space creates no enemies, only kindred, living and dead.

Steijn’s improvisation can both reveal ways for social action to unfold non-oppositionally, and is itself social action. How? Steijn, with his collaborator Frans Poelstra, enunciate a stance that is literally apologetic, activist, and humble, principled both in the direction of social change and of the place of aggression in the process. On their website, announcing themselves as “United Sorry”<sup>2</sup>, they write

we are sorry,  
we still feel the need to rearrange the world,  
without getting in the aggressive [sic] role, of the person who knows it all.  
(Steijn, Poelstra)

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<sup>2</sup> “US=United Sorry/Mister United alias Frans Poelstra/Deejay Sorry alias Robert Steijn”

The social tools of Steijn's transparent presence are humility, conviviality, apologetics, and informality. He opens a space of activity that questions masculinity, and its normative elision with dominance and violence. "Is it possible to be a man and not to be aggressive? Not to be dominating? Is being on stage dominating the others who are sitting and watching?" (Steijn) He moves as if among friends, questions the performer-audience contract, both implying his intent to not dominate, and creates a processual textuality that operates not so much *outside of*, but *alongside* hegemony and oppositional discourse. He is interested in rearranging the world, but not through aggression or opposition. Alongside, in Lynette Hunter's gloss, describes a situated knowledge that is "interested in the ways in which knowledge is constructed by groups of people who find themselves in particular sites that are tangential to hegemonic systems". (Hunter 17) Alongside manifests when "the unsaid is made in the making of difference which is an unending process of making present". (Hunter 14) Steijn's meandering dance and talk conceals nothing, even as it shrouds a precision of semiosis and affect. Among a small, sympathetic group of witnesses, many of whom are dance-based performers who have attended his workshops for the last three days, he reveals his inner process as a "dancer", manufacturing an intimacy that is recognizable and comforting. As he explodes the definition of "dancer", dancing "without any training before, no dance school, only watching dance all the time" (Steijn), he moves tangential to the name. Judith Butler identifies "naming" as "at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm." (Butler xvii) Steijn reclaims the name "dancer" from its sex and age associations — "Is there not a lot of embarrassment in the space, to see a man, 53 years old, dancing?" (Steijn), not to destroy or coopt the norm, but to open a space of possibility for himself and his witnesses. He offers the possibility of embarrassment — his own or his witnesses — as a reasonable response to the situation, but the offering itself undercuts, so gently, the sting of the affect itself. I am suddenly *not* embarrassed, and my already slim resistance to his seeming non-virtuosity softens further, toward an affectionate admiration. (Could I be so soft?) And his self-revelations continue, making present his friend Sebastian, dead, invoking the invisible as possible, palpable. Steijn's speaking leaves much unsaid even as it says, creating the unsaid at every step. He makes no attempt to fill in the gaps. Does he "really believe" that Sebastian is in the space? Does he believe that this event might "rearrange the world"? He hangs much of his

justification on imagination, so *empty* (to use the word in the Buddhist understanding, as a transparent ontology). All possibility, not much substance, if substance is content, form, spectacle, meaning, position, beauty. But his intervention in the San Francisco dance scene creates a ripple, and participants talk about their experience in his workshop and performance for weeks after. Seeing his performance, I am surprisingly happy, as if I have been to a tremendous “show”. Why am I still thrilled, with the same emotions that accompany my witness of, say, physical virtuosity? Through my presence in the workshops and performance, I joined in Steijn’s alongside-ness, his movement through, and creation of, a self-sufficient space of communal understanding and empowerment. I was treated to a demonstration of a Way of Being that does not rely on fixated identity positions for its energy and *raison d’être*. Like the 5000 volume library at Occupy Wall Street that thrilled my heart, and like the passage spoken by Subhuti, so fully without anything to hold onto, or any reified state at all, Robert Steijn and a group of dancers in a San Francisco studio created a space, a moment, that does not depend on the movement forward or back of a front line in a war of political positions. This space/moment, tangential to many more solidified ones in which many of the participants also move, retains its power through its ephemerality. It is not a position because it evades fixation: it is merely a practice. The practice of presence that Steijn embodies requires only consistent (enough) application and transparency, both of which he manifests. It asks for the use of language — verbal and physical — to reveal a constantly fluctuating landscape of identities and positionalities, never solid for long enough to attack or defend. Like the Drunken Master of pop Kung Fu lore, the practitioner of this Perfect Wisdom eludes the blow by falling, stumbling, self-effacing. But even that is fighting. Maybe he’s more like the sage in the Tao Te Ching, who knows that “The softest of all things overrides the hardest of all things. Only Nothing can enter into no-space.” (Tzu 89) No-space is where Nothing-Steijn meets Nothing-Sebastian, not creating a new supernatural “space” where his channeling is “real”, but by, lighthearted, seeing a shimmer in habitual perception, and dancing around it, so hardly there. And each member of the audience is invited to meet/join this imagination in any way that works for them. Steijn establishes (again Lynette Hunter) a “disunified aesthetic”: everything/everyone is free to be/respond idiosyncratically with the situation, and the situation (mostly) does not solidify into a

shadow of the dominant paradigm. It is perhaps difficult for a man to avoid becoming a guru when creating such liberating situations. Such a status may be beginning to form around Steijn, and if it does, his rehearsal conviviality and explorative style may become more solid, more of a performance. If/when this happens, his textuality will be confounded by celebrity and the tendency of students to venerate rather than engage, and of teachers to coast and calcify.

So far, Steijn retains a compelling humility, and manifests as an activist: a model of and guide toward freedom, though I doubt he would use either word. As a moving toward, and in, change, Steijn “rearranges the world” by observing the Tao: “Drop humanity, abandon justice, and the people will return to their natural affections.” (Tzu 39), which is a bright instruction for realizing the transparency of which the *Prajñaparamita* sings. He brings his guide, a deer, into the space in the same way that he invokes Sebastian, not through heavy-handed neo-tribal (orientalist/colonial) shamanic imagery and a requirement to suspend disbelief, but through the softest invitation: to just imagine — without any sense that to not perceive, or believe in, the deer reveals any lesser investment in the space. Everything is offered, nothing demanded. The OWS protesters hinted at such a liberating transparency in a response to the constant requests for their demands. “We are our demands”, one response quoted in an article about the movement, softens the oppositionality of a contentious list into simple presence. (Schwartz) People themselves, creating kitchens, libraries, healing spaces, and decision-making rituals, in the full heterogenous disunity that “the 99%” names, are the demand. Not the camping itself, which now may be in transition to more winter-flexible protest methods, but the shelter of kindred. And shelter itself is the Way, as the campers know, their symbolic method being both sign and signified. But can they *be* “real” change alongside a metastasized corporate-hegemonic system? As long as change is conceived as a gesture from without that affects the within in a manipulative or evolutionary way, even for the “better”, OWS cannot “change” the system (as Steijn likewise cannot “rearrange the world”). To do so OWS would become part of the system, and aspects of it have already done so, hopefully to good effect.<sup>3</sup> There is nothing wrong with a well-intentioned

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<sup>3</sup> Barack Obama’s “Teddy Roosevelt” speech in Osawatomie, Kansas on Dec. 6, 2011 used many OWS tropes, including a focus on income inequality and terms like “the 1%”, clearly responding to and taking up the concerns voiced by the Occupy movement.

activist group working to effect change while maintaining a clear identity, policy platform, and relationship with the government and funding systems. And there is likewise a place for performance that situates itself in direct relationship with a tradition, within audience and genre expectations, in confirmation of social roles. But the strength of the OWS movement, like a cellular network, is in its disunification. Every camp, every cohort, is independent. There is no Occupy Movement. Refusing to solidify into a new political party, or a narrow set of policy goals, Occupy — What is it? Who is it? — can remain dynamic. Nobody knows exactly what it is or what is happening, not least the occupiers themselves. What is possible when members of a social movement, or bodies in a dance studio, take a stand not in any ontological “place” but in full transparency, not rooted in the personal, nor even in any communal awareness, contemplative discipline, or state of mind? What becomes possible is what is happening right “here”, in indefinable “public” space, with exactly the people who are here now. The *Prajñāparamita* vaults toward its conclusion sloughing off the remnants of any fixation on any structures whatsoever. As hyperbolic as it reads, I offer another slice of Lex Hixon’s ecstatic version as a closing prayer that such transparency as I feel in aspects of Occupy Wall Street and Robert Steijn may amplify and mature, *being* the demand for justice, being justice itself, and as the Tao says, abandoning justice, so that the people return to their natural affections.

There is the door which opens instantaneously piercing through all possible structures, or ontologically transparent manifestations, with the pure light of insight. There is the door which, as it opens, places the final seal on the cessation of the notion that structures evolve, devolve or intrinsically transform in any possible manner. There is the door opening into the ocean of wisdom, in which all structures are submerged, losing their false appearance as solid, separate, independently evolving self-existences... Then the door swings open which leads beyond the tangled, dangerous jungle of partial perceptions and the selfish actions they generate... Then the door to the emancipation from every limited signal, sign, definition, doctrine, or description... The door whose attraction is absolutely irresistible... (Hixon 226-27)

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