

## Interview



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**Q: How much of your time have you been spending down at the Occupy movement?**

A: I've been trying to head down every few days to check it out.

**Q: How much is climate on the agenda of the folks down there?**

A: From my anecdotal experience, maybe 20 percent are really focused in on climate and environment as one of the key pieces of what they're talking about.

**Q: Are you surprised at how much response there has been for the Occupy movement?**

A: I'm sort of surprised that the tactic they are using is getting a lot of play because people have occupied a lot of different things recently without getting that much press. That said, the fact that there is staying power, that they're really not leaving, is a great lesson of the Occupy movement. It's clear from having talked to folks down there, that a lot of folks really don't have other places to go to—they're students who are living with their parents because they can't afford to get their own place or they might be union workers who are out of a job. That's the reality we're dealing with right now and they're bringing it right to the doorstep of the people in power, the folks who are controlling our political and economic system.

**Q: So what can you as a climate organizer learn from how this has been organized or not organized?**

A: They're not just occupying, which is civil disobedience to begin with, but they're sticking it out. It's a lesson we learned earlier this year when we did the tar sands action in Washington DC where people got arrested every day for two weeks and we got a ton of press and it was really successful. I'm guessing that in some small way that those lessons were internalized by some of the Occupy Wall Street folks.

Another lesson is that we need to take action at the scale of the issue. So it doesn't really help us much to do an email petition to the Citibank CEO; that's not at the scale of the issue--folks are out of work getting foreclosed on, Wall Street financiers are financing climate-denying companies. Clicking on a button isn't going to get us anywhere; we need to really start putting our bodies on the line, showing our commitment.

Another really important lesson that 350 and a lot of organizations have tried to be is a non-hierarchical network organization. That's the kind of thing that they're doing at Occupy Wall Street. It looks pretty different than 350.org, but there is a lot that is similar, in that we listen to our network, we don't try to do a lot of top-down messaging, we try to support organizers that are working on projects that are broadly within the climate movement context.

**Q: Were you surprised that Occupy started happening in so many places?**

A: I'm not surprised that that happened; it's something we've been doing the past three or four years with our climate stuff. I'm surprised at the level which people are engaging in other cities. In Occupy Boston, for example, they weren't just doing a solidarity march in support of Occupy Wall Street, they were ready to put bodies on the line too. The kind of tactic that is replicable everywhere that doesn't require very much in terms of organizing experience is the kind of model that's going to succeed and I think they've hit on one. So I think that's where we can learn a lot from an organizing perspective.

**Q: How successful was your Moving Planet event last month?**

A: We had events in almost 180 countries, including some events with 5,000 people. Politically it wasn't focused on a hard ask, which is tough for some folks to understand. It did have a lot of the same open-sourced themes as Occupy Wall Street. From an organizing perspective and from a coalition-building perspective, I think Moving Planet was a great success, but obviously different from Occupy Wall Street in terms of scale and political efficacy.

**Q: What do you see as the opportunities for the climate movement to take advantage of the linkages or be part of the coalition with Occupy?**

The Occupy movements are really decentralized; it's not like Occupy Wall Street is calling the shots for Occupy Boston, for example. This is a really great task for our network. Many of our organizers and supporters are already engaged in these occupations. That's what hit me—I went down to Occupy Wall Street to see who are these people and I immediately met some folks who told me 'we're on 350's email list, we love 350, come hang out with us' and that's when I realized that a lot of the Occupy Wall Street folks are 350 people also. It was surprising at the moment, but now it's really not surprising at all, because a lot of people who are feeling injunctive of the economic situation are also concerned broadly about climate and corporate influence over the environment. So I think there are real linkages to be made to continue the narrative we've been using this year, that corporations—oil, gas, and coal companies—are stopping us from taking action on climate and we need to use government but also people power to stop them from abusing people and abusing our planet.

**Q: Because you just had so many events in so many places, 350.org seems particularly well-positioned to make those sort of linkages.**

A: That's the exciting part. We don't have tons of field organizers, we don't have staff in every place, but we have great volunteers who are really great at connecting with people in their communities, that's what they've been doing the past few years with us. We've already seen them going to these occupations and lending their organizing skills to helping the 99 percent really rise.

**Q: Does Occupy Wall Street have a different feel than Moving Planet or other 350.org events?**

A: The majority of Moving Planet events weren't civil disobedience, and there's a certain energy that comes with doing civil disobedience, so that's one piece. Because the pent-up issues that the Occupy folks are talking about is so wide, broadly corporate influence, it's sort of neutral ground. Whereas SCIU and 350.org might be on opposite sides of a fight over the tar sands, we're definitely on the same side when it comes to reducing corporate influence over our government. So it's neutral ground for us to talk to those folks.

**Q: Are you planning to continue being part of Occupy Wall Street?**

First it was me individually going and exploring Occupy Wall Street when there were just a couple hundred people there a few weeks back. Now that it's bigger and spread around the world, I'm trying to figure out how to work with our volunteers and organizers to add value to the other thousand plus occupations that are happening.

We just sent out an email to our U.S. list and our global list encouraging people to take the energy that they're feeling with the Occupy movement to go down to the occupations, to talk about what they care about and start a working group to engage in democracy and then to show up on Nov 6 at the White House where we're doing a rally to encircle the White House ahead of Obama's decision on the tar sands pipeline. The tar sands issue can be the connective tissue between the Occupy Wall Street movement and the climate movement.

**Q: It seems like quite an exciting time and opportunity.**

A: There is a lot of talk about co-optation and whose message is whose, but the reality is that some of the people that are part of this movement care about the tar sands issue, care about climate and the environment. And I think we can do this in a distributed way, where we have volunteers talking to Occupy movements everywhere and taking part in really engaging and not just layering our message on top—making sure that we're not co-opting, but adding value. I think that's where the sweet spot is going to be, to use this energy to stop the tar sands pipeline but also to add energy and people and make sure that the movement more broadly is successful.

**Q: Anything else that's going to affect you and your work as you go forward?**

A: It's chaotic and that's what's really exciting about it, nobody really knows where it's going to go and it's a little unpredictable. And that's what scares the pants off the politicians. And I think that's really exciting.