

October 4, 2011

To the General Assembly and Affinity Groups of Occupy Wall Street,

14 months ago, a group based in New York, on Beaver Street, a few blocks south of your occupation sought inspiration and new cultural forms by visiting the US Social Forum. This trip into one of the nodes of contemporary social movements was not just symbolic. Pulsing through this journey to Detroit, a site which encapsulates the apocalypse and abandonment awaiting anyone who believes capitalism and our planet can both survive this crisis, was a question which asked where does and how can art reside within social movements.

2011 has brought us into a new era and we have tried to look around us. Those who believed that change will only come from without have been shown that even those working inside this machine are ready to revolt. How better to understand phenomena such as Wikileaks and all of those who have risked their lives to reveal that at many scales, the systems we inhabit are corrupt. Then the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt were a call that we have truly entered another epoch. And those who stand against the emancipatory struggles resisting a global mafia, that has sought to privatize and financialize everything from our homes to the wheat in our bread, stand against history.

Left to a previous era are the suicides of 'martyrdom' operations which revealed their impotency (in confronting racism, poverty, inequality and new enclosures) by only emboldening a worldwide security state, armed and ready to build new walls and designate any resistance to its rule as terrorism. This era has brought us the convergence of bodies that fight not in the name of any afterlife, but for life here and now. What else could one expect when the basic subsistence of millions is daily exposed to the fate of a senseless pseudo-market, which has become the playpen of bloated vampires who go by names like 'hedge fund manager' 'billionaire investor' or 'chief executive officer.' Those same vampires have held up an untenable equation to us: Privatize gains yet socialize losses.

A revolutionary wild fire has spread from Libya, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen, Jordan, Occupied Palestine, even to Israel. The sparks have spread to Portugal, Greece, Spain, back to Greece again and to the streets of London. Now they have landed in yet another one of the capitals of capital, maybe THE symbolic capital of this financial mafia, Wall Street. In all of these sites, we have heard different variations of ENOUGH.

And you have put a number to this: 'the 1%.'

You have used every means available to find a language to utter these words in a process that gives potential meaning to democracy. As opposed to the false oppositions between parties who vie for the power to govern how the ship should sink or the train should crash: you are asking to stop the train or bring the ship to shore. We need to change our coordinates: the numbers don't add up, and the equations seem to always miss the most elemental of things.

Your lack of demands acknowledges the multiplicity of demands and commands that our imaginaries yield to daily. Your lack of demands leaves space for a discussion to emerge and for ideas to grow through a common time. Your lack of demands refuse to recognize that there is anyone manning the ship other than abstract algorithms and economic laws which miraculously always seem to benefit only the 1%.

Thus your hand-made placards, your communiqués, and pamphlets are not simply a call to a sovereign pleading for new privileges, rights or protections. They are beacons of hope, of love, of refusal, of solidarity, poetry for a multitude to construct a common space in one of the centers of Empire and to rethink what a common horizon could become. Our forests, our water, our air, our soil, our seas are our commons. Our labor, our ideas, our words, our relations are our commons. These cannot belong either to a state or to private enterprise, as they cannot be contained by any border nor controlled by any single entity; they are the basic components of life. Yet, what we have been asked to accept as our common destiny has been toxic debt and toxic waste.

Joseph Beuys once claimed that everyone is an artist. And Robert Filliou once asserted that art is that which makes life more interesting than art. In these and many other terms, we can understand you as artists. But we would like to add another proposition to these statements: art can also be that burst of creation which does not properly belong inside the domain in which it first emerges. And though we are clear that, what you and the millions behind you and with you, from Tunis to Cairo from Athens to Madrid, are doing is politics; we also see these actions as a deterritorialization of the politics we knew over these last decades.

We have heard of efforts to bring artists to Wall Street in the name of an Occupenial. While we support all efforts to bring attention and legitimate your undertaking, we believe that we must not miss this opportunity to recognize the artists and artistry within this emergent movement. Art is not outside or separate from this movement, it is taking place each day you persist to build this common space/time.

We should not abandon or overlook what this moment of history calls from us. We don't need recognizable artistic names to add legitimacy to this movement, we need the multitudes, the whatever singularities, the dark matter, the hackers, the day laborers, the 'service providers', the precariat, the cognitariat, the caretakers, the general intelligence that is and has been cultivated across multiple virtual, material and invisible networks- to translate their specific know-how and know-what into political action.

How to translate this massive collective and common intelligence into political action? This has been a critical question of this young century. The nascent processes taking shape globally, which you are a part of, are an attempt at an answer. The art that aspires to become political, especially in moments of upheaval, must have the capacity, awareness and grace to become imperceptible, become part of a movement.

In a lecture on February 22, 1969 Michel Foucault, concluded his remarks on the 'Author Function' by speculating that at the very moment when our society would be in the process of changing, the author function would disappear, and invoking Samuel Beckett, concluded by asking "What difference does it make who is speaking?" Today anonymity calls us out of a tyranny of naming, which runs the risk of subsuming every political action or statement into someone's property or a spectacular game for attention. And all of you, who have anonymously and collectively plastered with texts and occupied the streets of Tunis, Athens, Madrid, Cairo, London, New York and beyond have introduced a new game to politics. No authors for this movement and no leaders. And whatever new rules belong to this game remain to be explored. Certainly, the old tricks of trying to subsume or reduce molecular processes to individuals or parties will have no place here.

This is not solely a game of appearances, but also of consequences. And the most significant political actors as well as artists of this new century recognize this fact. The fate of a planet and all forms of life and culture which inhabit it, hang in the balance.

We remain inspired by your ability to spread across continents and build up the consistency of a new socio-cultural-political movement. And if politics has an aesthetics then you are the aestheticians of an emergent politics. And thus, a potent contributor to an emergent force not only in the politics, but also the political art of this new century.

In solidarity and singularity and multiplicity,
and ... and ... and ...