

The ‘People’s Microphone’

By Pablo Ouziel

With the current ‘Audacity of Hope’ entering its terminal phase, Americans engaged in social movement activity are finally catching up with their brothers and sisters in other parts of the World. What took a long time to flourish – despite the numerous calls from academics and activists from within the United States and from outside of its shores – has finally erupted into what is rapidly becoming the turning point in the relationship between people and markets (and people and government), at the heart of America’s unstable empire.

Wall street is now occupied and global indignation against plutocratic rule has reached its climax, it has come face to face with its source. Where things will go from here nobody can predict, that is the wonderful thing about civil disobedience, once its praxis enters the realm of actuality, it takes up a position in the social space, and it brings to life a dormant public domain, in which a multiplicity of voices dialogically determine collective creative actions to undertake.

It is the resurfacing of this dormant public domain, which makes for the headline – which makes what is happening in Wall Street worthwhile reporting on. Not the mundane details of whether there are 200, 2,000, or 20,000 protestors. Or whether they have media centres setup with the latest technologies and expensive computers. Not even the fact that Noam Chomsky, Cornell West, Chris Hedges, Michael Moore, Susanne Sarandon and Alec Baldwin have shown public support for the movement. Although these elements together add much-needed strength, the important thing to acknowledge, is that after ten years of slumber some courageous Americans have grabbed the bull by the horns and are determined not to let go. That a genuinely democratic space has been nonviolently pried open in the heart of the empire is the real news, that is the space of hope.

A space which is open to anyone and everyone; a space of dialogue where ideas about this world, about the workings of our societies, about possible futures, about the meanings of democracy, about the workings of capitalism, about imperialism and war etc., are exchanged by people of all social classes, all races, all nationalities, all genders. An exchange, which understands as its source of power, the fact that there can be unity without uniformity (unity through plurality) – perhaps a true representation of what Gandhi defined as enlightened anarchism when referring to the kind of society we should be striving towards.

This public domain which in its present embodiment opened up first through an ‘Arab Spring’, and quickly mutated into a ‘European Summer’, is now living its ‘American Fall’, and despite understandable and wonderful differences, it clearly offers a glimpse into the specter of a global people’s revolt. In its current phase, in the Arab world and Europe it has dispersed, the squares are no longer occupied there. In America, it began with New York and it has quickly spread to over fifty cities. It will most likely disperse at some point, but there lies its power. People momentarily occupy the social space, announcing their autonomy, and then disperse in order to ignore any structure which can stabilize them. In the meantime, through the process the power of the people has been reaffirmed, and an array of innovative tactics has been presented, which are then available to all of us.

From Egypt, social movements across the globe have learned of the power of camping together in city squares; from Spain the movements have learned to make decisions in large assemblies of thousands of people, by agreeing or disagreeing with specific proposals made by speakers via the use of sign language; from America, the most striking tactic has been the use of the ‘people’s microphone’. After a ban on using megaphones, the people at *Occupywallstreet* have taken to using this tactic in order to allow everyone in the crowd to hear the speaker. It simply involves the crowd repeating all the words of the speaker in order to collectively magnify his or her voice. It seems like a minor issue to focus on, but the reality is that it unites by getting people to relay information to others while also saying something to themselves, and in addition, it shows the limitless power of creative civil disobedience.

Pablo Ouziel’s articles and essays are available at pabloouziel.com