

Reflections on What Might Be

“Revolt, yes, if revolt is understood as the demand of a turning point where time changes, where the extreme of patience is linked in a relation with the extreme of responsibility.”

- Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*

A well-known slogan from 1968 ran, “Be Realistic: Demand the Impossible.” The slogan is highly relevant to our current conjuncture, where the relation of the triad ‘realism, demands and impossibility’ has become a focal question for the Occupy Movement. On the one hand, the Movement is faced with calls to specify our aims, make concrete demands and occupy only until such a moment as those demands are met. On the other hand is the position that we should hold out to see what this movement becomes. In other words, the demand is simply that people come and take their place against unequal systems of distribution and decision-making.

In both cases, it is precisely the impossible that is being demanded: that 99% of the world stop what they are doing, refuse to allow a system to speak for them, and occupy spaces until lasting changes are made. There are two ways to understand the realism of this demand. This impossibility first becomes realistic in a linguistic register. That is, we are realistic here so long as “stopping” is understood as a fundamental change in the situation, not as literal cessation. We are approaching this crossroads where we must at once continue the stopping,

continue to be patient for others to join, while at the same time calling on everyone – even the 1%! – to be responsible, to *make changes*. The 99 vs. 1 must become 100 together. That is impossible, but it is only so *today*.

Hence, second, the impossibility becomes realistic in a temporal register. Because something cannot happen today, it is impossible. But our realism resides in the fact that we know that it can come to pass tomorrow, that time itself can change. What is impossible today – that the war should end – is possible tomorrow. What is unheard of today – that there should be health care for all – is a fact tomorrow. What we can hardly imagine today – that social equality and economic equality will be the foundation of our society – is the *only* thing that structures our lives tomorrow. That we will not succeed in an instant is not a failure, it is the condition by which we mark our approximation to the truth of equality.



Our time will change only so long as we heed this double injunction to patience and responsibility. The slogan of 2011 began in Tunisia: “The people demand the end of the regime.” The focused goal in Tunisia, in Egypt, later became the demands for the end of austerity measures in Greece. It mutated slightly in Palestine: “The people demand the end of the division.” In Spain “the indignant” had a banner at the front of their march to Brussels, “We are going slowly because we are going far.” In each instance, the balance is struck between patience and responsibility. Slowly, yet far. We will be here until the oppression ends. This balance in the Occupy Movement has been pushed to the extremes – our patience is indefinite, our demands are infinite.

The responsibility remains with us, to form the movement into a political force. We must unveil the impossible as illusion, we must show its reality over time. There is no purity of the movement that will be sullied by engaging with systems of power. There is only a force of the movement that must exercise *its power over power*. Demand the impossible: demand that you will not be corrupted by power, by bribes, by greed. Demand the tenacity to equality that has brought you the streets. Demand that this movement will not rise up and then fade silently. Demand *actual, specific changes for which you will be responsible, for which you will be patient enough to see them to their end.*

by Avi Alpert