

New York

Evaluation of a movement is never an easy task. Emphatically not so, when it is ongoing and moving in confrontation with power, going through ups and downs, gains and losses. Historically there are many examples in which the loss of one achievement or a digression led to a gain or advancement elsewhere. Development is never linear. The same movement may be thought of differently from different perspectives: even when a movement appears hopeful, with full potentiality from a longer and wider perspective, things tend to appear messy in shorter and more detailed views. Occupy Wall Street (OWS) has been the epitome of such a thing.

As of 15 November, OWS lost its physical space for communal living: Zuccotti Park. The initial symbolic achievement is lost. The stable basis is lost. Now the movement is destabilized. This might have damaged the movement, but the impetus has not disappeared. The destabilized impetus is more in flux and flow, released into the entire urban space. Now, its object of occupation is literally everything and every space, inside and outside.

Within the context of the USA, the movement is putting an end to the climate of the 'war on terror' and the rule of the Right, dominant since 9/11, and replacing it with a door to transformation, loaded with our

anger, anxiety and hope. There is a global significance to the fact that from the heart of the empire on Wall Street, a massive force to denounce and decompose it has appeared, inspired as it has been by the movements in Egypt, Spain, Greece and elsewhere. The global impetus to oppose the current domination will not be easily dampened at this point. But OWS involves a lot of difficulties and problems – not only in the day-to-day struggle against oppression and the crackdown, but also due to internal fissures.

Since the time of the preparatory General Assembly, on 2 August, there have been antagonisms. Most schematically put, they can be placed at two poles of a spectrum: at one pole is a tendency towards building a party by concentrating the impetus into one political organ with one demand; at another pole is a drive to enrich and nurture internal multiplicity towards creating a new social space–time complex. These have been embodied in various aspects of organizing and action such as the tensions between rally/General Assembly, localism/internationalism, consensus/dissensus, politics from above/below, formality/informality, legality/illegality... Sometimes overlapping, dividing, layering or criss-crossing, these tendencies have been creating internal dynamics whose destination is unforeseen.

What does 'occupy' mean for the present movement? The term 'occupy' inexorably reminds the majority of people of experiences of having been invaded and occupied by colonial powers. So it is admittedly a



little bit confusing, especially for those living outside the USA. The practice of occupation is an organized attempt to mobilize squatting to its limit, in terms of scale, number and speed, within a range of legal and illegal activities, as well as through negotiation and confrontation. But what this 'occupy' designates from a broader perspective is our act to recover the commons – from environment and natural resources to our minds, bodies and labour – something that was long ago taken away from us by capitalist privatization. The target of the occupation is no longer just physical space or objects but everything, everywhere – including ourselves, to begin with. The impetus of the occupation thus cannot ultimately be subsumed into politics in the conventional sense. It derives from the immiseration of the conditions of life on the part of individual participants. So it is also about everyone for herself, her own problems, anger, anxiety and hope. The movement has created innumerable slogans and banners made by individuals, with their wealth of idiosyncrasies. When individuals walk different walks and yet strike at the same time, the movement involves the desubjectivation of individuals – a process through which we are becoming something unknown even to ourselves.

This is an open-ended movement whose goal is not and cannot be determined by anyone in any sense. The impetus to occupy consists largely of an interaction between the building of collective intelligence and the trying out of mass action. Collective intelligence is in the constant process of being built by way of general assembly, spokes-council and ever-expanding Internet/media communication. Not without discrepancies, dissonances and conflicts, this might be seen as a practice of the so-called mass intellectuality revolutionizing itself. And here one cannot ignore the role of anonymous intervention in information warfare against power. It is this anonymity that has laid the ground for our commonality.

Mass action has been expanding its boundaries step by step – from registered and permitted actions to various degrees of experimental and guerrilla practices: snake demos, taking over of the Brooklyn Bridge car road, sit-ins in front of NYPD headquarters, Times Square mass rally, breaking the barriers of the finance centre under curfew, attempts of new occupations... In spite of having suffered police brutality and mass arrests, the expansion has been empowering the movement from within – it is these that have encouraged more participation and the appreciation of major unions and intellectuals, and not vice versa.

Even before the violent eviction from Zuccotti Park, there were at least two unsuccessful attempts

at occupation: at the Guggenheim BMW Pavilion and at Artists Space. Many of us felt the need not only of new space(s) but also to develop a second stage of the Occupy movement. After the eviction, there have been three attempts: at a Trinity Church-owned lot on Canal and 6th Avenue, at a New School building, and at one commercial space near Zuccotti Park. The New School occupation that took place on 17 November, supported by a mass mobilization, has so far been successful; there have been General Assemblies, planning various projects involving both inside and outside participation. We are at the stage where we must affirm this orientation of decentralization, fluidity and an ongoing continuation of occupation attempts, wherever it leads us to. After the symbolic has been ousted, a multiplication of occupations has become inevitable. A multiplication of those who commit themselves to new occupations and new developments is the coming course. Now it is our task to decentralize the impetus and speed up the attempts to occupy everything and everywhere.

Among us, the 99 per cent, fury and anger are our commonly shared affective investment. Many of us feel that this struggle announces the point of no return. That is, we cannot imagine that the everyday routine we were living before OWS was launched could simply return. We know that the same is true even with capitalism itself. That is the way of the world now. Capitalism is experiencing its crisis. While it has been privatizing the commons, it has also been socializing or imposing upon us (and all life forms on the planet) the waste of its operation, or the negative commons: servitude, violence, war, debt, epidemics, industrial wastes, pollution including radiation. The commons from which capitalism absorbs its source of consumption are terminally exhausted, having been corroded by their negatives. Existential crises are the sign of this almost apocalyptic situation. So-called disaster capitalism, which utilizes each and every opportunity of disaster, be it natural or man-made, for discriminatory reconstruction and profit-making, may be aware of its limit, yet it cannot stop itself. The increasingly violent reaction of state power to the occupations protects the suicide attempt of capitalism, which would take us and the commons with it.

The mass impetus of the occupations is our desperate response to stop a planetary suicide. But inasmuch as it is an impetus, it cannot and should not have a single demand or goal. In all of these senses, the occupation movement is both hopeful and critical.

Sabu Kohso