

MAY 2nd.



Solidarity, June 30, 1917. The Hand That Will Rule the World—One Big Union.

After leaving the site of the rally yesterday I kept thinking about what bothered me from it? On the one hand, there is the comfort of the known, the known chants, the repeated by heart slogans, the same cardboard signs that you have carried over and over to each demonstration. But, the comfort of those carrying the signs and chanting the chants, may be discomfort for those who also attend, who also care about the same injustices, who also believe that things can and should be changed but by creating new approaches to old problems instead of repeating an strategy that may still be political but not effective. Those people may want to come to a rally to feel that their ideas have power, to reach some energy that make them believe that things can happen, a place where to look for ways to express their political views. But instead they may encounter a saturated ambiance with symbols becoming clichés and dispersed enthusiasm.

If I were a passerby and saw the event from a distance would I want to stay and join in? Would I want to listen to the messages? Would those messages would make me think differently? What would one learn from a rally?

People come and go, in groups, making of their presence their statement. But to whom? To people who think alike? To the people who are part of organizations that ritualistically return each year and repeat the same gestures? To the small group of people who are looking for something to do with their disagreement? There are no surprises, there are no challenges. My discomfort comes from that place, from the place where the rally is symbolic and does not become interesting as an event nor does it relate to change itself. It is just a series of adepts who come and go creating an amorphous form that dissolves here and there. What does it means that people who care, leave or just come for a few minutes? What does it means when live out of the rally is more attractive and seems more important?

The fact that we were in the square in front of the courts where judges make the decisions about immigrants issues was a nice touch but the fact that it was on a Sunday, when those judges are with their friends or spending time with their family or preparing for a case on Monday, thinking exactly the same way they did the day before, there in lies the problem. I believe more in an individualized protest where you talk to someone you do not know and may think differently. I prefer to talk to an Armenian on the train that is against immigrants, than to a "comrade" who will not challenge the happiness of a shared thought. Formalism is a mode of non-productive inertia. Happiness should come from defies not from the assurance of a temporary populism.

What is the goal of rallies if they repeat the same message we all already know, in the same way from last year and with the same energy, with the same symbols and their same meaning? What happens when sensitive problems become a repetitive litany? What is the goal of rallies if they do not create any context, if they do not produce any change? Why are my roommates from Ecuador not interested in going if they have the same problems they are talking about there? The rally was scheduled from 1- 3pm, but what about doing one that starts and does not finished until the law for immigration reform has been changed? What about learning from Tunisia and Egypt? There, the rallies were demonstrations of direct democracy not pure representation of disagreement. I would like to see the issues shown in a way that they sensitize us again, although that may need to show a creative and maybe not so nice "face" of things. Once a friend was telling me about the force of Unions as agents of tough negotiations and real changes for workers and how different they were now. I wonder how long it takes for the mainstream to learn how to use our disagreement in their favor and, how much is it helping that we are repeating ourselves each May 1st.

I think that we need to create strategies that take by surprise people in power, strategies that makes them not having an automatic pre-programmed response to our demands, strategies to paralyze them so it makes them pause and rethink their reactions and maybe their ideas. But re-enacting the same strategies over and over not only do not put pressure in the issues and have the risk of transforming into self-parody, it becomes the noise you do not hear anymore because you think you know it by heart, which is different than feeling it.

And then, I came back home to learn that Osama Bin Laden was killed. I knew about it by looking at images of young people who took the streets with the fervor, unity and intensity I wanted to feel at the May 1st rally and I was completely confused and sad that such immediacy, urgency and energy was coming from an act of death rather than an act of life.

-Tania Bruguera, Corona, Queens, after May 1st