

Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan
Wood, Anton Vidokle
Editorial

e-flux journal #30 — december 2011 Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle
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01/02

Americans against capitalism? Arab nations toppling autocrats through peaceful protests? 2011 has been a year of massive popular uprisings – on a completely unexpected scale and from populations that were thought to have been thoroughly subdued. Commentators have predicted that discontent in the Arab world would soon come to a head for so many years that it was beginning to seem unlikely, just as others had begun to dismiss the political potency of popular demonstrations in fiscalized Western democracies. For those who started to think that large-scale, radical optimism was naïve or nostalgic, the events of the past year should be sufficient to prove them wrong.

But as winter takes hold in many parts of the world, another kind of doubt begins to set in, with a tinge of disappointment that circumstances in many places that saw the most intense uprisings have not actually been significantly transformed for the better. The removal of dictators has only peeled back the top layer of societies with endemic problems that must be addressed by a renewed sense of civic society. The 99% remains at the mercy of the 1%. The military crackdown in Syria remains unbelievably bloody. An enormous swell of hope that was felt throughout the world earlier this year now seems like it could be orphaned by setbacks, by the scale of brutal realities that seemed as if they were starting to crack open.

The weight of these unforeseen challenges have produced a peculiar moment of social upheaval marked by a nagging sense of stasis – a feeling that, in spite of constant pushing, nothing is in fact moving, or that we are collectively going in circles. This makes it necessary to reluctantly face up to a choice that the current situation poses: whether to religiously believe in a general historical movement towards a change for the better, or resolve ourselves with the fact that things will always remain the same. But this is a false binary.

Perhaps emancipation should not only be considered a matter of reclaiming power and occupying spaces, but of occupying time (as the work of Philippe Parreno helps us to see). A temporal, durational occupation is not only a matter of good intentions and radical gestures, but of patience and persistence – an integration of one's demands into one's own circumstances, with the hopes that those demands will one day be inscribed into law. Could it be that the secret technology of leaderless movements and occupations without clear lists of demands is precisely that they do not build themselves upon a single telos, and cannot be easily dissolved? If so, the strategy would be modest in the short term, but resilient in the long term. A moment of

stasis would not necessarily be a sign of failure, but part of a broader way of revolving with the revolutions, a way to occupy ourselves in the meantime and reclaim our own lives as we continue...

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