For an artistic sense of protest

by Alexandre Dias Ramos

<http://issuu.com/estudiohybrido/docs/portifolio_subversos_ingles_baixa>

The 2008 financial crisis caused significant civil upheaval in both the USA and several other countries in response to the unjust liberal economic system that (rein)forces the exclusion of those who do not follow the market logic. Given that, from a social standpoint, the market is not entirely logical, most of the world’s population is starving or living in inhumane conditions. The Occupy movement, which began in September 2011, has mobilized a large number of people for an as yet undetermined period of time. It had no ready-made agenda or fixed requirements, calling only for change. Governments had no weapons to fight it because they did not know against whom the system should react.

Brazil, as usual, remained apparently apathetic, without any form of collective action to corroborate the movement. However, an increase in bus fares in the cities of Natal (August 2012), Porto Alegre (March 2013), Goiânia (May 2013) and São Paulo (June 2013) triggered a collective uprising, disproportionate to the original cause but entirely proportional to the population’s need to react against the arbitrary acts that governments impose on Brazilian citizens. The civil uproar took over the entire country. Whether in a cohesive or disorderly fashion, peacefully or violently, with legitimate or empty reasons, people took to the streets. The feeling of being part of the "revolution", whatever it was, motivated many of the demonstrators, resulting in protests across the country. Porto Alegre also joined the movement and among the countless events that took place during June and July, the occupation of the City Council was undoubtedly a remarkable episode. Naked demonstrators protested against public administration wearing masks, not only to avoid being identified, but also to signify that they represented "everyone". Anonymity has this ambiguous quality of being both collective and individual at the same time.

As usual, the result was that everything went back to the way it was before: the revolution came to nothing, the system did not change, councilmen did not reflect on their role in the City Council, and the protesters returned to their everyday lives. It is always worth rereading Voltaire or Clément Rosset on the subject of tragedy.

On the other hand, perhaps something has changed, and many of those who participated in or closely followed the demonstrations now maintain their outrage alive in their daily lives. A good example of this is the artistic work produced by Marcelo Monteiro, Giuliano Lucas, Vanessa Berg, Douglas Jung and Isabel Vissotto based on the episode at Porto Alegre City Council. The need to express themselves through art brought these artists together and resulted in two intense pieces called *Sub\_Versos (a pun with the words “subversive” and “verse”)*. The first of these is a photographic essay that revisits the physical situation of the masked and naked protestors on that day. The photo-essay clarifies the relationship between body and action, between a collective or private, individual political stance. The result is top quality photos, which elevate the discussion to the international field of art and the Occupy movement. The second piece is an installation displayed at Cabaré do Verbo, in which paintings, photographs, hymnals and objects have been used to portray religion as an ideological rite. The work discusses the frameworks of tradition, resistance to novelty and the sustainment of moralizing ideologies. The installation puts forward new elements that, in many respects, are connected to the vicious circle of the social and economic system that governs us.

Apparently, this discussion on the new, on breaking from tradition, and outsider art is quite modern and, in fact, very old; however, using Duchamp’s Fountain may well be largely suitable for a society that still prides itself on being traditional. Perhaps the naked body outrages audiences used to horses and flowers. And perhaps the suggestion of reading Nietzsche, Foucault or Rimbaud may represent a certain continuity for the protest that ended without concrete results.

The group’s photo-essay provides Porto Alegre with an opportunity to show that a local protest against the City Council is capable of generating global debate. The images in *Sub\_Versos* compel us to think of those who place their bodies at the forefront of demonstrations, that are beaten for defending citizenship, dignity and justice. What is done to the population in the name of Order and Progress? What is this order? There is no need to concern ourselves with progress, since we already know it is not coming. Nevertheless, order (including moral order) is often the excuse used by the City Hall to humiliate and exclude citizens trying to survive in these cities. There is no logic to be understood and, as such, religious fiction, hymnal reading and Duchamp’s irony might offer some salvation.

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