

## COCO FUSCO

The Occupy movement succeeded in forcing the issue of economic inequality into mainstream public debate in the U.S. on the eve of a presidential-campaign year. That in itself is an admirable achievement. Occupy won broad sympathy and quickly forged alliances with other interest groups because it focused on a widely shared dilemma—a rarity in an era of sectarian politics.

Occupy also claimed kinship with protesters of the Arab Spring. Although both movements are led by young, media-savvy adults and involve the collective takeover of public space, there are important distinctions in the political cultures from which they've emerged. Young adults in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and beyond contend with high rates of unemployment, but the focus of their protests has been on dislodging the intransigent leadership of their governments. Occupy challenged the legitimacy of Wall Street financiers who operate beyond the law with impunity, while their counterparts in the Middle East rose up against corrupt authoritarian regimes that use nationalist rhetoric and aristocratic lineage to avoid sharing power and resources.

There are many others in the world subject to similar conditions who have not (yet) taken their grievances to the streets, but not for want of political frustration. I invited two of Cuba's leading dissident bloggers, Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo and Yoani Sánchez, to join me on these pages so that they can share what Occupy means for activists in a country where, to this day, the plazas that could serve as stages for political action remain empty.

*Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo*

Paradoxically, in populist revolutions like Cuba's, despite the media hype about "the great masses of the people" who listen to and comply with the Maximum Leader, the streets remain boringly devoid of spontaneous expressions of popular will.

To occupy space in hard-line socialism is considered a threat to national security. As a result, the city does not belong to the citizens, who are accustomed historically to simulate a certain unanimous happiness before despotic power. The New Man was born apathetic, and thus reality is paralyzed and—again paradoxically—the community performs and is controlled as the private property of the political police.

Peaceful takeover of the heart of the capitalist world to publicly demand a more human social order in front of repressive forces engenders some hope and a lot of humiliation for Cubans. Occupy Wall Street has been a double lesson for nondemocratic countries like Cuba.

Hope, because no matter how high the economic indicators may be for a

highly developed nation such as the USA, it is obvious that no established elite should hold the hunger for justice of the majority hostage. Humiliation, because in five decades of status quo under the island's Communist Party, the true voice of the Cuban people has never known how to express itself with the same moral urgency in the face of the contradictions of our own system.

The utopia of the proletariat, as in all imposed paradises, maintains its revolutionary rhetoric in Cuba to cover its ultraconservative order. Occupying or simply being preoccupied with the actual Revolution today constitutes the worst crime.

*Yoani Sánchez*

We Cubans occupy our beds, the stairs of our homes, the bit of table that lies before us, the chair in front of the TV, the empty refrigerator, and the half-open shutters through which we look outside. All that and more before we take to the streets and public squares. We talk about sex as if we were crying at a demonstration, we dive into the black market as an expression of protest, and we get into rafts to cross the Florida Straits as our most daring gesture. We complain to ourselves in silence, uttering our dissent in a whisper out of fear that the sharp ears of the political police can hear us. Instead of obstructing sidewalks and streets, we hurl symbolic stones each day at the state by redirecting public resources and being unproductive. We don't rehearse impassioned slogans to chant at rallies, but we are skilled at apathy and masking our thoughts. Our most rebellious actions consist of practicing double standards and evading excessive ideological propaganda.

The terrain we have occupied is not visible, it is not outside a bank nor is it in front of a stock exchange where numbers enrich some and drag others into misery. No. We have barely taken possession of the territory between our skin and bones; the diminutive esplanade that conforms to our fears and the depopulated parks where all the paranoia and mistrust that we have been inoculated with since childhood reside. For that irritation to break out and materialize in a multitude that makes its demands on a street corner—to achieve that, the occupier hiding under his own skin must free himself of the policeman with whom he shares a body.