

"The Heart Wants What the Heart Wants: Thinking Occupy Wall Street"
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I am going to talk about a sign. I saw the sign, in a few versions, a few times, at Zuccotti Park. That itself was unusual – most signs were unique, and part of the power of the signs – the many many signs (you've seen pictures of the arrays) – was exactly their many-ness and their individuality. But this sign I saw at least twice, and maybe three times. It said, "The Heart Wants What the Heart Wants."

Now "the heart wants what the heart wants" is, of course, a tautology, and kind of sappy, and for both these reasons, the kind of thing that normally bugs me.

But somehow, "the heart wants what the heart wants" can, in the right context, like "it is what it is," reorganize disorganized thoughts and swirling insides, addressing or settling an excitement or confusion in some way that feels meaningful, even it remains hard to say more, or to say something non-tautological. "The heart wants what the heart wants" did this, for me, at Zuccotti Park, because what I saw at Zuccotti Park was what my heart had been wanting, without my knowing it. I've been thinking a lot about this sign, and about its relation to demands.

As is well-known, OWS has resisted issuing a set of demands. This has stumped some people. Some of the being-stumped has been disingenuous – there is a great Tom Tomorrow cartoon from Oct. 10 in which CNN-style anchors ask the first real live OWS protester they've had on the show what he is protesting, and fail, over and over, to understand the words he repeats, "economic injustice" – "Sorry, what was that? Still not getting it. His lips are moving, Wanda – but I can't understand a word he's saying!" They end up wondering whether he is even speaking English.

But of course, it really hasn't been obscure. The "Declaration of the Occupation of New York City," ratified and posted by the Zuccotti Park General Assembly on Sep. 29, 2011, is pretty clear: "we gather together in solidarity to express a feeling of mass injustice." The recent concentrations of wealth, the Declaration insists, and the resurgent power and license wealth has to make policy and control discourse hurts many of us directly and is destroying government of the people, by the people, for the people, around the world. The Declaration contains a long list of ways wealth and corporate power do this – predatory lending, unfair labor practices, labor market segmentation, political advertising, bank bailouts, etc. This was on Sep. 29, and the detailed charges making their way into public discourse just kept multiplying. There is a kind of willful ignorance when people claim not to know what OWS is about.

But it is true that OWS has resisted demands. Why? Demands are actually hard to formulate, for one. For another, resisting demands has helped the movement resist cooptation; it has, to some degree, kept the 'professional activists' at bay. At the same time, it is a way of trying to be inclusive: "We are speaking to each other, and listening.

This occupation is first about participation" (this from an Oct. 8 *Occupied Wall Street Journal* editorial defending "no list of demands"). And this is the thing: if you have been drawn to the conversations Occupy Wall Street has opened up – to the intellectual, political, and emotional space Occupy Wall Street has made and is occupying – you have been involved, and probably feel invested, and may count yourself an Occupier. If there had been demands, you might, instead, have just read them over and decided whether Occupy Wall Street had decided to include your issues, and you'd have decided whether to join. But Occupy Wall Street has wanted (in some complicated way) itself and us to do something other than decide in this sort of way. This is where the resistance to demands goes beyond tactics to something more interesting – to instantiating a form of politics that, I think, many hearts have been wanting.

In resisting demands, Occupy Wall Street has resisted a model of politics in which people only seek out the public sphere to secure resources to pursue ends they already have. On this model, human social, political, and economic life only really gets going after each of us has decided, more or less on our own, in whatever private spheres we happen to frequent, what we come to the public sphere to demand. The thought that we already know what we want, and participate in collective or cooperative activity just to get more of it, pervades economic theory, as well as much psychology and political philosophy. But it is wrong, both as a description of human beings and as an ideal for politics. Hopes and dreams and desires and plans of life are not fixed private stars that guide our public pursuits, but are themselves exquisitely sensitive to public discourse and possibilities that are collectively articulated. People don't always know what they want, but they *are* interested in talking about it, and in hearing what other people think, even if they end up disagreeing. There needs to be political room for this, and for the raw heart – the heart that hasn't yet sorted out or unpacked the details of what it wants, that isn't organized, articulated, fully strategized, or ready to be polled. The raw heart isn't these things, but it *is* responsive, in ways that give us clues about where we should go next. It is very full of energy and life, in ways we should not squander. It is also malleable, and can go wrong, in ways that require care and respect; the raw heart is not always right, and not all hearts are equally well-attuned. I don't really think the heart is even in any way ultimately distinct from the mind, the body, the eyes, ears, nose, or mouth, etc. I am not romantic enough to think the heart should be privileged over other parts of our elaborate systems for figuring things out. But the idea here is of the heart as an organ that is powerfully pulled in particular ways without always knowing why. It will never be enough just to say 'the heart wants what the heart wants' – it is a tautology, after all, even if it also feels like a real starting place. But we also want our hearts' desires to be legible to other people, to move them, to transform into a political program. Still, wanting without knowing what you are demanding exactly is not at all to be dismissed. The view of collective action that takes demands as given – or insists that they be named before discussion and negotiation can start – falsifies human desire (making us like corporations, in fact, which necessarily have financial profit as a fixed and overriding interest) and impoverishes politics before it starts, reducing us to our wishlists and the public sphere to a mere bargaining pit.

The decision not to press demands made room at OWS for all kinds of people to run with all kinds of ideas in all kinds of ways. People start figuring out what they want to say, what they want to echo, what they want to add, and no one owns the conversation or the options. I've already mentioned all the signs; the signs were amazing. Here are some more examples [show copies of *Occupied Wall Street Journal*, handout on *Citizens United*, subway flier, artistic broadsheet, local Democratic flier, union newsletter, etc.].

Besides being an indictment of plutocracy – which it absolutely and over-archingly is – Occupy Wall Street is a very serious invitation to do something other than endorse a list of demands and wave a sign that was printed up by someone else. It is an invitation to reclaim the public sphere as a space of collective self-determination. Refuse, it says, to live only with what you already know you know, intent only on negotiating for what you already know you want – resist, at least at the beginning, the starting point of demands, and the narrow model of politics it implies, and go for something bigger, for participatory democracy, and for letting your heart swell and try to speak, even if you can't quite say exactly what it wants just yet. You will be able to, soon enough.

(If there were time, I'd talk about how I think can Hegel could help me say all this in a more philosophical idiom...)

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Uleman recommends:

- Michael Kimmelman, "In Protest, the Power of Place," *New York Times*, Oct. 15, 2011.
- "Consensus (Direct Democracy@Occupy Wall Street)," video, widely available online.