



Clamouring Out: Against the Privative Sphere

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OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF “CASSEROLES” *textes qui bougent au rythme du carré rouge*

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Clamouring Out: Against the Privative Sphere

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Every day we are living through an infinite number of protests and mobilizations across the entire country. Each of them raises different demands. However, there is a point in common: we are fed up with the political class and their consecutive dis-governments, their abuse of the trust of the citizens who voted for them, the Supreme Court of Injustice, the economic policies that ignored the ordinary citizen and supported big capital, most of it foreign. We owe ourselves a gigantic cacerolazo in the entire country, a cacerolazo that it would be impossible not to hear.

—El Cacerolazo, Argentina (Villalón, 2007.)

Cacerolazo is a strategy for clamouring out, for clamouring from the inside out and the outside in.¹ The stakes are high, as the Quebec government is turning the public sphere inside out, on its ear, forcefully. The tuition increases proposed in the last budget were justified under the rhetoric of “paying one’s fair share”. Fairness in this case has been parsed according to a balance sheet whose bottom line is neither negotiable nor available for public scrutiny. Indeed, under the zero sum logic of the Liberal government, the students’ intransigence in this matter has signalled their refusal to commit an investment share in the social contract, and thus a refusal to support a broader good. When the new Education Minister, Michelle Courchesne, tabled Bill 78, an “Act to Enable Students to Receive Instruction from the Postsecondary Institutions They Attend”, the spectre of this similarly ill-defined ‘public good’ re-emerged, in its second coming under the guise of “peace, order and public security”.

The proposed tuition increases and Bill 78 are cut of the same cloth, not simply because both legislate the terms of postsecondary education, but because both participate in an incursion on the very publicity of the public sphere itself. Under this neoliberal logic, the student him or herself is privatized – either a consumer of the service that is the classroom, or an investor in his or her education. Indeed, the logic that students ‘pay their fair share’ is underwritten by the return on investment he or she will receive in a future (and chimerical) labour market. The costs of the demonstrations also have been submitted to this economic calculus: the disruption to

businesses, to the thoroughfares of transit to and from work, the costs of increased policing and even of the enactment of repressive laws on the demonstrators themselves. All these involve the privatization of the very space of the public, the transformation of education from a training in society and citizenship – a training in the imagination that equips students for the very real unpredictability of a future to come – into a careerist advancement; the transformation of the public space of collective speech and action into a site for mapping a calculus of risk management.

This is what makes the *cacerolazo* such a powerful tool of resistance. In Chile and Argentina, the method of *cacerolazo* allowed people to protest from their own homes, producing spontaneous mass participation in the context of severe economic and political austerity. The pots and pans are not simply noise-makers but powerful symbols of domestic life, survival and sustenance, and (re)productive labour. In making noise, clamouring from the inside out, Chileans and Argentinians made evident the relation between shortages, economic crisis and daily existence. The Housewives' Trade Union in Santa Fe, Argentina (2002) wrote in a manifesto and call for action,

We are the women who work outside of the home and get the lowest wages, and those who work only in the home and get not wages. We are the women who have to send our daughters and sons to the soup kitchens because we have nothing to give them to eat, and those who still have something but don't know for how long. We are the mothers whose children have had to leave school, and those whose children stayed in school but now are leaving the country because the education they got doesn't help them to get a job. We are the women in the hospital queues early in the morning waiting to be seen, and the older people and the pensioners who may have social security but this has been bankrupted by successive governments.

In this powerful refrain (which takes up the first half of the manifesto), the repetitions of 'we are the women' clamour for social and economic justice, clamour across differential social positions, weaving through the contexts of labour rights, education, health care, domestic violence, racism, sexism, homophobia, exploitation, migration, and scarcity. The feminist language is itself a *cacerolazo*, a persistent beat tied to the very heart of the personal as political, by way of the very publicity of the private sphere. The *cacerolazo* is thus a special drumbeat – a beat that announces through the mundane materiality of kitchen tools the publicity of the private in the face of the privatization of the public sphere.

That the *cacerolazo* has been used most frequently both to demand economic justice and to demand educational rights declares – clamours for – the publicity of the ties that bind social justice, economic security, environmental responsibility and the right to education. Bill 78 casts a grid of intelligibility over the streets of Montreal. By

breaking down acceptable and unacceptable units of convergence and community, tracking the routes of demonstrations, arming the police with the tools of repression, and establishing a system of fines to dissuade organizational efforts, the Liberal government has writ large the neoliberal logic of the 'fair share' across the sequestered grid of the city. The ingenuity, then, of the cacerolazo is its spontaneous irruption on balconies and in homes, sounding out invisibly through entire neighbourhoods, announcing a collectivity that cannot be corralled or kettled behind a cordon sanitaire, spreading through social media, in micro-announcements across Canada and around the world. The twin forces of neoliberalism and global capitalism have put pressure on the public sphere, a pressure that seeks to enact the atomization of collective engagement. The cacerolaza however, is an atomic energy, one that enacts pressure at the very acute pressure points of the atomized society. The clamouring moves from the inside out – avec nous, dans la rue –and from the outside in, into the very heart of the privative private.

Notes

1. This reflection on interiority, exteriority, and economic subjectivity is marked by Jonathan Weiss's moving doctoral dissertation, "Politics from the Outside In: Toward an Aneconomic Reconceptation of the Subject" (2012).

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