



Someday We'll Be Ready, and We'll Be Enough

**Building
Anti-Authoritarian
Movements
With the Size
and Resilience
To Win**

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"Another world is possible," says the slogan on the old pamphlet. I ask you if you believe it.

"I don't know," you reply, squinting, hesitant. "I think so."

I tease you lightly for your uncertainty, but you're facing down, carefully preparing your words.

"It all just seems so far gone," you say. "It seems like there's so much wrong in the world, I don't know if I really believe it can be changed. I can say I believe it, but honestly? No...I just don't see it. It's too late for us. Pieces, yes; pieces can be improved. But the whole thing? It's just too big."

I'm looking down now also, nodding and listening. You continue.

"I've gone to meetings, I've gone to marches, I've wanted to change things for so long, but that's never how it works out. It's a grind. Chasing ideals grinds us down, you know? With the backlash we get, the constant uphill climb towards too few victories, the infighting, the feelings of guilt and judgment and misunderstanding...it gets so tiring. And that's just in fighting for those little pieces! Who knows if we'll win anything meaningful from all of it. So, people get burned out even in the planning stages of a project. They just stop showing up at meetings. If it's this hard now, while we're so small, focusing small, what reason or room is there for focusing big?"

"I don't know if another world is possible, but I do know that I get exhausted when I think about it."

You turn to me, and I look up at you. There is a recognition there. The same sadness, the same tiredness, the same dissatisfaction. And underneath all that, the same fiery desire. There was a time, and we both remember it, when just standing up and fighting was enough to keep us going. When the struggle seemed like this vast, open field, full of possibilities and strange new ideas. Names and dates and histories that we didn't quite remember, but were inspired by nonetheless. But after the bombardment of court dates and grant deadlines, after all the dysfunctional groups and the scathing political gossip, after all these years of the same marches on the same routes to the same buildings in order to hear the same speeches...

...we need something more to keep us going.

In our silence, there is a dialogue between us, as both of our minds circle around the same thought:

There was a time, at least a moment, when another world did seem possible. We wish we could get back to that.

Introduction

Right now, within our radical, anti-authoritarian social and environmental justice movements, I believe that there is a hunger for some new approaches. I believe that there are many people, just like me, who deeply want to believe again, or maybe for the first time, that another world is possible. I believe that there are many of us who are pining for our movements to become more personally sustainable; for them to develop ideas and practices that better energize and inspire us; and also for them to become more effective at making us effective at transforming—not just lightly tweaking—society. There is a burning desire for new ways of thinking and orienting ourselves, for new ways of organizing ourselves, and especially for new ways of relating with one another, both inside and outside of "the movement." Many of us want something more.

Yet, sadly, even with all of these desires pulsing within us, most of us have been too quiet about what we're wanting, talking only amongst our closest friends and colleagues, complaining, wishing—even talking shit about each other—but feeling too busy, too uncomfortable, or too insecure to speak up about what we need. While so many of us have our heads ducked behind the sandbags, always distracted by the urgency of the ever bright, ever loud NOW of growing crisis and austerity, even more of us stay hidden behind fear and self-doubt, unsure of how to articulate what

we wish for our movements, and unwilling to risk the rejection that might come from pushing for something beyond activist routine. Whatever our reasons, a silence overwhelmingly prevails. And being silent about the kinds of movements that we want—and deserve—only helps to guarantee that we will never see them become real. If we want something more, we need to talk more openly and energetically about it. Together. Then we must build it. Together.

So, taking my own fear and self-doubt shakily by the hand, I am here to present you—and anyone else you'd be kind enough to share it with—with a humble, yet lofty proposal. A proposal for something more, for something quite different.

In this piece, I propose a different way that we might approach radical, revolutionary, transformative politics. I propose experimentation with new and unique political spaces—both conceptual *and* physical—which hold closely to a belief that another world is possible; which use that hope to build for the long-haul and on a large scale; and yet which, at the same time, hold us, nurture us, and ignite us as real people as we struggle daily, yearly, *multi-generationally* to get where we need to go. I propose that these spaces must go beyond the traditional organizational styles and formats that we've become used to—be they campaign organizations and coalitions, non-profits, collectives, spontaneous mobilizations, cadre groups, or revolutionary parties. Instead, I propose rethinking many of the assumed conventions and truisms of Left movements, and reaching out even more widely into society and history—even into enemy territory—for lessons and inspiration.

What results from all this is a multifaceted, ambitious set of ideas that I believe to be potentially innovative, powerful...and perhaps a touch wacky. It is a proposal for a vision-centered, mass-based orientation toward building movements which, for short, I call a *mutual inspiration* approach.

The Structure of This Essay: First the Forest, Then the Trees

In the pages that follow, I will explain what this *mutual inspiration* approach is, why it might be useful, and how it might work. To introduce this approach well, however, is going to take some time, and so I have organized this piece into two parts.

Part One is kind of like the zoomed out, more theoretical view that grounds the proposal. It opens with a brief brush with grumpiness and negativity, taking time to name the dissatisfaction that has brought me out of my own silence in the first place. Then, it ventures to explain some of the bigger themes of what “something more” means for me. These themes are framed as four intimately connected needs that I believe are crucial to building stronger, healthier, and more transformative social movements:

- **Revolutionary Imagination:** We need movements that unflinchingly stake out and bring life to what we are fighting for.
- **Mass Scale:** We need movements that are built to grow, that open opportunities for anyone's participation, and that are enthusiastically prepared to move us from the fringe to becoming a mainstream counter-power.
- **Creative Militancy:** We need movements that greatly expand our tactical toolbox, allowing all of us to help build disruptive and constructive power and capture popular imagination.
- **Mutual Inspiration:** We need movements where we support each other as the people we are right now, while inspiring each other to grow over the long-haul of struggle.

After Part One has explored why these four needs are so critically im-

portant, Part Two will describe how a *mutual inspiration* approach might help our movements to achieve them. Through a series of ten linked proposals, I will offer a pretty unique mix of ideas, spaces, and structures, I will lightly sketch how they might work on the ground, and then I will offer some basic suggestions for how potential supporters can jump in and begin to contribute.

Although this writing is a bit lengthy, this is not meant to be a talking head piece. This is a detailed invitation—a proposal for a distinct approach toward movement building that some of us in Seattle hope to actively experiment with, starting right now in the fall of 2014. After you have traced the steps of these ideas, I hope you will have a clear sense of what's on the table and will feel moved to take it further.

PART 1: THE BIG IDEAS

The Problem That Got Me Off My Ass: A Long, Bitter Trail of Ex-Radicals

There is a problem that brings me here to write to you. There is something missing, something unsatisfactory, something not quite right about business as usual in our radical movements. Actually, it's more like a web of somethings that we each experience unevenly, but whose disparate threads of dissatisfaction twist into something bigger, a deep and disturbing trend that we need to address firmly from the start: for all the good that our current radical and anti-authoritarian movements *do* indeed do in the world, they are actually quite repulsive at their core. That is, they have a nasty tendency to push people away.

From Food Not Bombs to the Direct Action Network, from Seattle Solidarity Network and Take Back the Land to Critical Resistance and Occupy Wall Street, explicitly radical and anti-authoritarian forms of social struggle have shown a remarkable ability to capture the popular imagination. In the last 25 years alone, hundreds of thousands of people—perhaps even millions—have had positive flirtations with revolutionary, anti-authoritarian politics; people of all sorts of identities and backgrounds have entered, participated, and warmly entertained the possibility that

our entire society could be collectively remade.

But where are most of those people now?

Unfortunately, maddeningly, our movements have been consistently *unable* to leverage most people's initial attraction and intrigue into life-long commitment to radical work. Far, far too many are gone—most before even hitting their thirties. Far too many will never come back. How many do you know and remember? For me, I don't have enough fingers and toes to count.

We can blame dominant social systems and their repression, their ridicule and misinformation, their comforts, temptations, and coercion. We can mumble that the historical or material conditions just aren't quite right yet, that we are not in a “revolutionary period.” Thoughts like this carry truth, but we can't afford to let them be excuses. Our movements themselves, their structures and attitudes, their narrowness and cultural insularity, their straight-up meanness, pettiness, and violence are all just as much to blame as any outside forces for the ways that we are constantly shedding solid and well-meaning people. Because of all of the unhealed and unchecked pain that we ricochet at each other, because of all the stale forms of struggle carried over from centuries of past movements, we are caught in an ugly and predictable cycle of attracting people, grinding them down, then either hemorrhaging them away or numbing them just enough to keep them sticking around. All that hope, all that wonderful vision that we have to offer, like a shiny and colorful balloon, inflated with toxic air.

Droves of books, articles, and open letters have elaborated on the specifics. A non-stop crisis mode mentality that leaves little room for non-political needs, feelings, relationships, or commitments. Oppressive dynamics, abuse, and sexual assault within our groups—and the scorched earth of failed or sabotaged processes to address them. Campaigns and

initiatives that treat organizers like little more than names on a list. Projects that don't make the effort to connect to long-term visions or strategies. Attempts at solidarity across identity lines that devolve into patronizing charity or even painful betrayal. Insecure, jealous, or grouchy colleagues who turn simple personality clashes into pitched political battles. Jargon, jargon, then extra jargon. Facebook flame wars. Cultures so suspicious of leadership or differentiation that brilliant new ideas get sniped, denounced, or self-silenced before even being attempted. Intellectual and social pecking orders of who is more radical, committed, militant, politically developed, or some other euphemism for “cooler than you.”

These are just some of the problems that converge to form the bigger problem: movements that stay small and fringe and highly ineffective. Movements that lose people as fast they win them, and which thus keep us away from the actual goal of winning a better society.

As the tone should make clear, I'm unhappy with things as they stand, and I want them to change. More specifically, I think we need *movements, groups, organizations* that want these things to change, too, and which are structured to do that hard work.

Still, as cranky or critical as I might be, I am not a pessimist locked into a negative perspective. For each of the complex problems that hurt our movements and sap our growth, I recognize the numerous dedicated people trying to make radical work healthier and stronger. From the intense campaign and base-building organizations that still dedicate time for relationships, reflection, and long-term strategy; to the on-the-ground organizers working their asses off and taking risks to build multiracial and multi-sectoral alliances; to the small collectives working all sorts of different angles to support mental health and caring labor; to even smaller groupings and pairings of movement mentors and mentees struggling to grow together, I know that there is a clear striving for movements that can both

win *and* hold people.

But I write here because I think this problem of movement growth and retention is really quite big, and I fear that patchwork solutions are not enough. I believe that solutions to problems this big should be systemic, cultural, large-scale—that is, our movements probably need to face them in concerted and prolonged action together.

Even more, I believe that a good chunk of these problems actually share a common source that our movements must overcome: we are too caught up running on an intense, non-stop hamster-wheel of piecemeal resistance, while being too sheepish about unifying around our revolutionary visions and dreams. In a constant struggle for short-term, defensive wins, our movements are putting far too much of our energy into building movements based on limited—and cynical—forms of *disruptive* power targeted at elites and power-holders, and in that “pragmatism” we are neglecting, even hiding, what is actually our greatest strength—our radical imagination about the *constructive* power of millions of people to create a different kind of society.

So, feeling tired of the same unhealthy cycles, feeling unnerved by being a thirty-something radical almost completely surrounded by twenty-somethings, and sorely missing my old “sold out” and burned out friends, I feel like I really want to chime in. As scared as I am of derision or dismissal—and I’m terrified—I think it’s worth the risk to push for our movements to become healthier, stronger, and more capable of winning.

Let me show you what I mean.

Revolutionary Imagination

We need movements that unflinchingly stake out and bring life to what we are fighting for.

Let’s do a brief thought experiment.

For a moment, imagine a typical weekend at a nearby popular shopping area or mall that you are familiar with. Think first about how people get there, all the cars on the roads and freeways, the bustling seats on mass transit. Think about the crowded parking lots and parking garages, and all the awkward stopping and starting, the waiting and cajoling, the swearing at each other from behind glass. Think then about the inside of the shopping area itself, the store fronts and kiosks, the loud colors and mingled smells of pretzels and body lotions and fried whatever. Imagine the throngs of people, parents and kids pulling each other in different directions, small groupings of young people wearing the best they can afford of their particular chosen styles. Imagine catching patches of conversation: “Can you believe she just posted that?” “We can get ice cream after Daddy gets his ties.” “I love me some Jamba Juice.” “That rent-a-cop is following us again.”

Take your time to picture it—for real, give it a try, or even go to a mall and read the rest of this in the food court—and then zoom out your view to the thousands of similar scenes playing out each weekend across the country. Think about all of those people.

If we, over here in our social movement corners and cubbies, believe that a better world is possible, what does that mean for all of those busy shoppers? What kind of different world are we imagining for them, what is their role in shaping it, and how will their lives be different as a result?

One easy, all too common response is, “well it’s not for us to decide, it’s up to all those people themselves.” That sounds so democratic, but I think

it can also be kind of a cop-out. It's like saying that there's a party, everyone's invited, but it's up to each person to decide where, when, and what to wear—which basically means there ain't gonna be a party. If we're willing to go so far as to say that a better world is possible, then people have a right to expect at least some cursory sketches, at least some hint of an invitation.

Here's my own cursory sketch. I imagine a world where hierarchical, competitive, and individualistic values have been washed away by *community-based values* like freedom, cooperation, equality, participation, creativity, curiosity, physicality, spirituality (of some sort or another), and ecology. I imagine a world where collaborative, democratic structures of free association have replaced all systemic forms of oppression, exploitation, and violence—be it capitalism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, religious domination, or ecological destruction. I imagine a world where a good majority of those mall goers—coming from their same original lives, relationships, and background interests—have embraced the creative challenge of transforming the stifling social barriers around them. I imagine those same youth, parents, and pushy cellphone vendors leading projects to redesign their schools, neighborhoods, and jobs. I imagine the Apple Store geniuses and loading dock custodians huddled together in neighborhood assemblies or workers councils, collaborating around how to improve major problems in their communities. I stagger as I try to imagine each person's unique and winding journey toward a personal empowerment that is interwoven with collective liberation across areas of gender, sexuality, race, ability, and work. I am humbled as I imagine these people giving up many of their favorite consumer goodies—from ipads, to the newest shoes, to cars—in a bargain to help ease the transition to a more just, non-capitalist economy. And, with a little kid grin, I am thrilled to imagine that same mall space taken over and converted into something like a free community university, or a vast community art studio, with those

thousands of people taking diverse classes, tending rooftop gardens, showcasing elaborate citywide graffiti exhibitions, or just playing a massive game of tag.

In short, I imagine a world that has been drastically remade—from the bottom-up, in an anti-authoritarian way, and ideally with as little violence from our end as possible. And because achieving anything like this vision would certainly require a process of both institutional and cultural revolution, I proudly consider myself a revolutionary.

I think the rest of us should proudly call ourselves revolutionaries, too.

In my view, radical imagination like this is one of our movements' most tragically under-utilized tools, and it's where this proposal finds its first footing.

I believe that social movements—especially radical movements—are strongest, and most long-lasting, when we seek beyond the narrow realm of scattered, short-term, defensive fights aimed at wresting reforms from power-holders, and instead root ourselves in a broader, bigger vision of what we are fighting *for*. One need only look at some of the greatest hits of historical social movements to see how a visionary scope and reach can open up room for transcendent political moments: the beloved community and the “march to freedom land” of the U.S. civil rights movement; the Industrial Workers of the World's call to “build a new society in the shell of the old;” the 10-point program and platform of the Black Panther Party and their free breakfast and healthcare survival programs “pending the revolution;” the Freedom Charter that galvanized generations in South Africa's anti-apartheid movement; the early Spanish anarchists' vision of a revolutionary worker's syndicalism that they called “The Idea;” the autonomist dream of a “world where many worlds fit” of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico; the simple yet earnest call to “occupy everything” that echoed through general assemblies across the Occupy movement. These move-

ments resonate and echo well beyond their limited times, places, and day-to-day struggles because they have dared to conjure a revolutionary imagination that we can still connect with today.

At their core, at their roots, our movements should be able to declare what they want with contagious verve and confidence, yet with broad enough brush strokes to avoid dogmatism and sectarianism, so that any person from any background—any shopper in any mall—can imagine shaping a meaningful place and meaningful contribution for themselves. Our revolutionary imagination, the fact that our hope actually has audacity, should be one of the first things that people know and whisper about us. Because once we get them even whispering, we've already invited them to ask, "what if?"

This bumps us up against a rather large problem, though. As it stands, far too many us—especially those of us who are older, more experienced, and actually often quite well-positioned to make big impacts—are far too timid about saying what we really want—the r-word, revolution—beyond our own close circles.

Currently, our movements, and the subcultures of activism and organizing that underlie them, are gripped by a deep cynicism that we rarely name or notice. This cynicism tells us that our society's general population is not yet politically developed or politically open enough to engage with and commit to big revolutionary ideas. Out of this cynicism, and an accompanying fear of rejection or repression, we try to be "strategic" in our activism and organizing by essentially hiding many of our core beliefs, goals, and motivations, and we put tremendous work into rationing out our politics into bite sized chunks of issues, campaigns, reforms that we hope—crossing our fingers and closing our eyes—might be gateways for non-activists into some vague pathway of slow radicalization. In the meantime, we end up reserving much of the good stuff, the rich world views that ac-

tually keep us dedicated for the long-haul—both our most beautiful visions and our most razor-sharp analyses of the interlocking oppressive systems at the heart of this mess—for only select and small groups of friends and comrades, creating small enclaves of self-importance and righteous isolation.

I think it's time to make a tough shift past this cynical outlook, by considering that maybe the biggest reason that non-activist people don't engage with our bigger, wilder ideas en masse—and instead usually only briefly participate in movements through short-term fights to win immediate gains in their lives—is because we aren't creating enough quality spaces and opportunities for them to consider, experience, and chew on those bigger ideas in the first place. If our public face—both in messaging and in the actual structures of our groups, meetings, and trainings—is *mobilize, mobilize, mobilize, campaign, march, picket, fight the target to win the demands, go, go, go*, but our more closed and exclusive private spaces are where the more rich, more personal, more visionary questions are explored, then it should be no surprise to us why our retention rate is so dismal.

Nonstop fighting for scraps is not fun; not for most of us. It's draining, it's often demoralizing, it's uncomfortable, it can feel humiliating when targeted around issues that are framed as our fault, and victories take too long while also usually winning too little. Who wants to stick around and keep doing that, *unless* they are involved and supported with a deeper community, with a longer-term vision and purpose that helps them muster their resilience and perseverance?

It's time to try a shift toward creating more movement environments that better trust people at all levels of political experience, consciousness, and capacity with considering, playing with, experimenting with the whole gamut of questions that spring from a revolutionary imagination. After all,

revolutionary imagination can only start making strides toward reality when it is owned and honed by people like those thousands of mall goers whom we have been thinking about.

This brings us to the second key idea that grounds this piece: building toward a scale that can allow millions of people to move us from revolutionary visions to revolutionized practice, and then onward to a revolutionized society.

Mass Scale

We need movements that are built to grow, that open opportunities for anyone's participation, and that are enthusiastically prepared to move us from the fringe to becoming a mainstream counter-power.

I believe that our movements are in need of a huge boost of imagination regarding who we consider “our people” and what we think they are capable of. I believe that building a better world necessitates massive, revolutionary movements that are actively *constructed* by hundreds of millions of people—and that’s just in North America—and I think that it falls on us who are already radically inclined to get better at nurturing the potential of ordinary people to develop their revolutionary vision, power, and capacity. If we want to settle for merely tweaking society as gadflies, then it’s fine to just engage what those bumper stickers (wrongly quoting Margaret Mead) describe as “a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens.” But if our goal is social transformation to end all forms of oppression, well, that’s going to require almost all of us. I think that building towards movements that big requires lots of creativity, quite a bit of gall, and some gutsy shifts.

First of all, I think we've got to get serious about just how big we really need to be, and what that logistically looks like. A great way to get started is by thinking backwards, tracing in reverse from the kind of revolutionary

changes we might broadly want, back to where we are right now. When we do this kind of backwards visioning, what we see might feel absurd, shocking, unobtainable, but I think it's rife with possibility.

In my own amateur estimation, given the realities of global systems of domination and their carefully tuned mechanisms of self-preservation—be it military force, cultural manipulation, or economic lever-pulling—there are actually only a few distinct avenues for how an *anti-authoritarian* revolutionary process could be successful in North America:*

A slow process of “non-reformist” reforms: over a period of decades, movements could rack up enough small wins that oppressive systems progressively lose more territory, which would be replaced by our own powerful alternatives. Eventually, with weight and momentum shifting toward our side, we could simply take over the functions of the old society. But somewhere along this kind of slow-burn path to a revolutionized society, one of these other outcomes would likely end up getting triggered first.

Electoral victory: an overwhelming slate of electoral initiatives and movement-accountable candidates could win victories so large that they would have the popular support to dismantle current systems in favor of radical, directly democratic policies. However, since this would mean using our existing corrupt systems as tools to destroy themselves, it would require almost magical levels of movement strength and strategy to survive with any integrity—which is why pretty much all previous radical electoral projects have eventually lost their integrity.

Rebuilding post-collapse: in the wake of economic, environmental, social, or military collapse, networks of communities could coordinate together to build anew from the ashes, using their daily collaboration and resource-sharing as vital practice for the evolution of a grassroots, participatory society.

*I am so opposed to authoritarian, top-down processes—such as coups or military takeovers—that I won't even honor them with consideration here. I believe that any revolutionary process that goes too far down the military road, however well intentioned, has already lost.

Claiming a smaller autonomous region: massive federations of anti-authoritarian communities could unite together as a bloc—either within North America or even across continents—to declare an autonomous revolutionary space where they could build their own independent revolutionary systems without the need to win over the entire world. However, as long as other world powers exist to compete and contest this autonomous space, they might never be entirely safe or stable.

Uprising, general strike, or other moments of seismic confrontation: revolutionary movements could find themselves with the size and confidence across enough strategic areas of society that they could use massive people power to shut down, occupy, reclaim, and take over administration of the infrastructure of our current society in order to transform it into something new. This could happen in rapid waves of insurrection or as a series of bursts or ruptures that steadily form into new forms of grassroots community control of society.

While pontificating and speculating about the probabilities of each these might make for a swell party trick, I think that any of these possibilities is too far off to accurately predict. Yet, for our purposes, what matters is what they *all* have in common: to take our society where we need it to go, all these scenarios require the development of a widespread, millions-strong counter-power of revolutionary culture and infrastructure.

Only real life practice can tell us exactly what a sufficiently strong anti-authoritarian counter-power would need to look like, but—admittedly pulling numbers off the top of my head—here's an estimate:

- At least 1/3 of the U.S. population (about 100 million people) at least passively supports the anti-authoritarian movement; another 1/3 is neutral or sympathetic but skeptical; the other 1/3 may be hostile. For example, if we do polls and surveys (which we should), at least 1/3 show support or sympathy with our anti-authoritarian movements...not just our values, *but the movements themselves*.
- There are GI coffeeshops and alternative institutions established near almost all military bases. (If you can't tell, I think the distinct nature and cultural hegemony of the U.S. military is a unique challenge for U.S. revolutionaries)

- We have built a cultural counter-power that provides diverse, rich, and daily whole-life programming at a mass level (tv shows, daily news and commentary, books, summer camps, intramural sports, hobby clubs, etc.). This counter-power has made special effort to reach and engage with armed forces personnel stationed across the globe.
- We are running popular community-rooted social services such as free meals, healthcare, childcare, sustainable energy, internet access etc. across communities in most major population centers in the country.
- We have built sustainable, practiced organs for directly-democratic decision-making and *the accountable execution of those decisions* at workplace, neighborhood, and school levels.
- We have built an active network of millions of people (let's say 10 million) who can mobilize and use a wide variety of direct action tactics (read: *not just protest*, but direct action) to defend the movement or push the movement forward.
- When asked, 100 million people have at least 1 daily contact point with the anti-authoritarian movement, such as participation in an assembly, accessing anti-authoritarian media, utilizing anti-authoritarian consumer options, or having daily contact with an organizer who they respect.
- The movement has at least 20-30 highly successful examples of workplace, neighborhood, and school direct democracy, with at least 1,000 more that are at least in embryonic form (the idea here is that if we have at least those good examples, their model can spread fast in a more heated revolutionary situation).
- On any given week, at least 1-2 million people are engaging in some kind of direct action across the country...and on following weeks, we see a different 1-2 million mobilizing. At least 1/4 of these mobilizations are in rural areas.
- At least 30 million people have participated in a strike, boycott, or walkout within, say, a year-long period of time.
- Our sources of strength are balanced sufficiently enough across rural and urban areas and key industries that we could generate the resources to sustain ourselves—at least for a time—even if the rest of the world and the country boycotted us post-revolution.

Right now, this reads like science fiction, and it will remain just that unless we actually go for it. But how do we even begin to approach growing to that massive scale? How do we go from here to there?

Once again, real world examples have much to teach us, including examples from those who we would rightly consider enemies. Whether we look at the soviets (workers' councils) of 1917 Russia, or the embryonic nations-in-progress of the mid-twentieth century anti-colonial movements (such as Yugoslavia, Algeria, Chile, Cuba), the rise of the New Right and the daunting evangelical Christian counter-power that currently exists in the U.S., or even the shadow caliphates and alternative social systems of radical Islamists like al Shabab, Hezbollah, or the Muslim Brotherhood, we can see that they all have at least three common elements that are worth learning from—particularly if we hope to stand up to some of these groups' heinous actions. First, they offer each participant an *expansive and hopeful worldview*—of course, often based on violent falsehoods—that grounds their actions and the risks they take, which helps them make sense of their personal life struggles, which gives them a sense of making a difference in the world, and which allows them to identify with a project that's bigger than themselves. Second, they offer a wide range of *opportunities for involvement at all levels of experience, commitment, and capacity*, with initiatives and programs that reinforce their vision across all spheres of life. Third, they maintain *ongoing efforts to push against existing systems* through fights and campaigns that both build the capacity and confidence of participants and, at the same time, publicly demonstrate a direct alternative to the status quo. With these elements and years of persistence, every single one of the above movements grew from being laughable fringes to become significant historical forces. I think it's intellectually shortsighted to think that the growth potential of our movements is any different.

Unfortunately, the spaces and structures of today's social movements

are not currently offering these three common elements in an integrated and scalable way. In fact, our movements usually have alarmingly narrow, compartmentalized points of entry for non-activists. If you are new to activism and organizing, often the only way to get started is with some very specific fight or single-issue organization. From there, your ability to go deeper, become part of a community, and eventually connect that single-issue work with a larger worldview is almost entirely dependent on how much work *you*, the new person, are willing to put in and—let's face it—how popular you are in the subculture. If you are working full-time or double shifts, if you have family responsibilities, if living with disability makes it a challenge to leave the house, your opportunities for involvement often shrink down to attending an occasional rally, licking stamps at a mailing party, or just writing a check—even though you might actually have many more rich ways to contribute. And if you actually want to dive into passionate and nuanced revolutionary discussions, they are often gated behind gauntlets of study groups, conferences, social network bubbles, in-crowds, subcultural hangouts, and “politically advanced” collectives or cadre organizations.

I think our movements can, and must, do things differently to build toward a mass scale. With each section that follows, I hope to articulate more and more specifically what I have in mind.

Creative Militancy

We need movements that greatly expand our tactical toolbox, allowing all of us to help build disruptive and constructive power and capture popular imagination.

Think briefly about how many hours a day you are usually active and awake, then take a moment to estimate how many distinct actions you probably take during each of those hours of your life.

What proportion of those daily actions would you categorize as “political” or “activism” or “organizing?” Have you, like me, ever felt guilty about not doing enough to work for social change, wasting hours that could have been better spent making a political impact somewhere, somehow? Surely, I’m not the only one who’s ever skipped a meeting or protest to self-loathingly binge-watch a show on Netflix, right?

In the world of political activism and organizing, when we think about how active we’re being, or how committed to a cause we are, there is tendency to think in a kind of stodgy and linear fashion, with one end of the line starting at small actions like making a phone call or posting something in social media, progressing toward attending a rally, or writing a letter to the editor, to facilitating a meeting, or speaking in public, all the way to getting arrested for civil disobedience, getting rowdy in the streets, or joining an underground cell or something. Subculturally, it is undeniable that there is often even a feeling of accruing points—activist cred—as one moves up the ladder of involvement, which provides ever greater access to the more illustrious debates and social scenes. And when life circumstances, exhaustion, or wrenching interpersonal conflicts move us back down the ladder, we can feel low, like we’re “selling out,” and even end up losing treasured personal connections. I think this is a big part of where our movements lose people. I also think it’s a bullshit way of doing things.

I believe that there is ample room within our movements for vastly more diverse and creative militancy—and thus meaningful participation by *way* more people—but I think it might require straight-up exploding and then reworking what categories such as “activism,” “militancy,” or “organizing” even mean. I think a good start is to give extra attention to the time that we each have in our daily lives, every invaluable second, and then learn some lessons from quite the unlikely source: capitalism.

Cliché as it is to say, every moment in each of our lives really is precious.

Regardless of how mundane or mind-blowing any moment might end up being after it has passed, every next moment is still filled with the potential for discovery, growth, deep emotion, and unprecedented creation. Every moment contains the possibility of some powerful interaction with the world, the possibility that we might actually help shape the world through our participation in it.

This beautiful, even poetic reality is actually one reason why capitalism has become so breathtakingly strong. The fascinating and twisted genius of capitalism is that it has taken the power and potential that lies in each moment of our lives, and it has built a dense and intricate system around co-opting that potential for its own purposes. Capitalism is completely dependent on the harvesting of grand swathes of our precious moments into its workdays, by rigidly guiding our daily potential for meaningful interactions with the world—what Karl Marx called our labor power—into regimented actions that create products or services for profit, usually for other people. This is called working a job. Under capitalism, a job is actually the daily harnessing of our nearly infinite personal creative capacities to the yoke of someone else’s designs, usually in exchange for a wage or salary. By harvesting enough of our daily time and labor like this, the capitalist system has managed to hoard, accumulate, and crystallize the colossal and brutal global industrial system that currently surrounds and enmeshes all of us.

Here’s the thing, though: if capitalism can harvest our time and energy in order to build its empires, then, if our movements get more creative, we can also harvest and accumulate our time and energy to build something entirely different. Every moment of our lives is filled with tremendous revolutionary potential; our movements just need to get better at harnessing it.

I believe that the wellspring of meaningful militancy is any decision, by

anyone at any moment, to deny the dominant system even one minute of their creative power, and to *instead* freely siphon that precious power—that people power—toward a lasting revolutionary project. I believe that a key responsibility of revolutionary groups and structures, then, is to recognize all the ways that people's creative power can be used, at all different levels of time, interest, capacity, and commitment, and to build a movement infrastructure that is integrated, coordinated, and strategic enough to make good use of whatever people are willing to give—be it 5 minutes on the toilet or 12 hours a day of door-knocking.

However, whereas capitalism's infrastructure hands people pre-determined tools—the means of production—and steers people's time and creative energy into pre-designed areas of work, with pre-categorized divisions of labor; and whereas even many traditional social movements often try to steer people towards set strategic priorities using a redundant toolbox of fetishized tactics and struggles—the correct line, the key issue that we should all be working on—I see an opportunity to foster infrastructure that works much differently, with a vastly expanded strategic and tactical toolbox.

Taking inspiration from the wide open crowdsourcing of online social networks and the open-source software movement (Wikipedia and Linux are just two well known examples), and leaning on the traditional grassroots networking roots of anti-authoritarian movements, I believe that we should be fostering an infrastructure based on a mutually responsive *ecosystem of movements*.

In the computer world, online crowdsourcing and open-source software work by starting with minimal—yet firm—foundational structures and principles and then offering wide open opportunities for free and creative contributions by anyone who wants to help. Like any other project, they start with a specific purpose and at least a basic sense of identity (like,

“this site will be a community built encyclopedia,” or, “this app will let people become self-made taxi drivers”), and with that in mind they create a skeletal structure which serves as a container to accept and link people's free contributions. They also provide guidelines for what helpful and unhelpful contributions might be. From there, they opens the floodgates for anyone to decide what kind of creative contributions—big or small, straight-laced or eccentric—they want to make into that structured space. Over time, and with dedicated care to protect against sabotage and trolling, these spaces become ever richer repositories of information and creative energy—far beyond what any founders or professional staffers could have imagined or accomplished by themselves. Wikipedia has pretty much put professionalized, for-profit encyclopedias out of business and, internationally, Linux is giving Microsoft's Windows a good run for its money.

Our movements can—and in limited respects already do—work similarly. We can dismiss any old-fashioned need to form into some monolithic, rigidly united revolutionary force, but instead see ourselves forming an open ecosystem of issues, groups, identities, and social sectors. By deliberately linking together through skeletal structures of mutual solidarity and broadly shared vision, and by offering directly democratic guidance for the kinds of contributions our movements want and need, we can offer thousands of distinct opportunities for people to help grow our toolbox of tactics across all layers of society.

In Part Two I will propose some skeletal structures that could support a vibrant and effective ecosystem of movements, but here I first want to say something about the broad guidelines that should inform any growing menu of creatively militant action.

First, our movements should encourage militancy that *captures people's imagination* beyond the subcultures of the Left, and which attract peo-

ple to direct ever more of their people power our way. Since our numbers are still small and our time and energy are limited, our daily organizing should be guided not only by questions of short-term effectiveness or moral righteousness, but also by how well it demonstrates our beliefs, how welcoming and accessible it feels, and how much it inspires others with the courage to join in. This is a mistake that many of the radical movements—especially the white anti-imperialist movements—of the late-60's and 70's made: they successfully ended brutal wars and pushed numerous policy changes, but, at least in polls and surveys, the general public—especially older folks and people from white working class and middle class communities—saw the actual movements as less and less likable. This created a ripe opportunity for the New Right to exploit the identity-based privileges and prejudices of these people, creating a gigantic backlash that has dominated the U.S. landscape since the 80's.

Second, our movements should step up our encouragement of actions that stretch and grow our *constructive power*. Constructive power is when we put our time and energy into building or sustaining new social institutions, relationships, or physical, material things that actively make people's lives better *and* preview the world that we want to see. It can be anything from tending to a colleague who's in pain, to volunteering in a radical child care collective, to reweaving neighborhood relationships in the middle of an uprising against police brutality, or taking over a workplace and running it outside the capitalist economy. Constructive power is what we use when we're looking beyond what we don't like, and working to build what we want in its place. It is the key ingredient for a successful counter-power at a mass scale, yet it is also where I fear that today's movements are most underdeveloped. There's a lot of work to do here.

Third, our movements should encourage the ongoing, intense, yet more strategic use of actions based on *disruptive power*. Disruptive power is when we choose to put our time and energy into somehow pushing back

against the system, whether that's slowing down capitalist productivity on the job, or mass chanting outside of an immigrant detention center, or blocking an intersection, or putting a sledgehammer to an Air Force bomber headed for war. Any time that we try to raise a fuss or make it harder for oppressive systems to do their business, we are using our disruptive power. Disruptive power is far and away the primary type of power that today's activism and organizing rely on most. The tricky thing about disruptive power, though, is that since it's so outwardly focused on disrupting what we don't like, it tends to dissipate after it hits its target instead of accumulating into lasting infrastructure. Marches, protests, street fights, blockades, and even most occupations act almost like waves crashing against the walls of the powerful. We spend tremendous energy to make a forceful impact, but after it hits, our power just sort of recedes and drains away until the tides rise and we are ready to hit again. This kind of power is vital to defending ourselves against oppressive forces, rolling them back, and eventually overcoming them, but only if it is also growing the movement and working in tandem with efforts to build constructive power.

Ecosystem of movements. Capturing popular imagination. Constructive and disruptive popular power. At this point, I recognize that these ideas are still quite abstract. In Part Two, when we zoom in to the specifics of this proposal, I will offer more details and examples to help fill in the blanks.

But before we can talk any more about how we can blossom with new structures and creatively militant actions, we must slow down, look inward, and spend some time talking about how we should be treating each other within movement work.

Mutual Inspiration

We need movements where we support each other as the people we are right now, while inspiring each other to grow over the long-haul of struggle.

So far in this essay, I've been talking about revolutionary politics and the desire for a better world in big terms. Radical visions. Mass scale. Global transformations. If we always stay floating at those lofty heights, we will miss out on what are easily the most critical elements of this whole thing. At the center of any authentic revolutionary project, the absolute bedrock of everything that we are talking about, is something that is actually very personal and intimate: the striving that we each have to be better people, to lead better lives, and to share in better relationships.

When a person looks at the world as it is and still chooses to believe that things could be drastically better, that people could treat each other, themselves, and the planet in drastically better ways, that person is connecting with something inside of them that usually goes beyond cold political calculation. To hold on to radical levels of hope, and to work from that hope even in the face of constant resistance is a highly philosophical, even spiritual stance, which we each have to consciously renew all the time. In Love and Struggle—a memoir of his personal journey from liberal Jewish teen activist, to clandestine revolutionary with the Weather Underground, to political prisoner—David Gilbert talks about how, in the political underground, one of the most effective ways to ferret out undercover government spies was to all take turns sharing the stories of their politicization and radicalization. It was often easy to spot the fakes, because earnest processes of political awakening, of choosing to hope and choosing to fight, are almost always lasting memories full of emotion, and that showed as people told their stories. It's a soulful thing, to dream of a new society.

Holding all of this hope, and feeling so individually connected to it, then,

it's especially heartbreaking the first time we get hurt by someone in the movement. Harsh criticism, rudeness, rejection, gossip, violence, abuse are all things that we expect out there in the world, but it feels like such a punch in the gut when it comes from within our own groups and subcultures. A fair share of new people just up and leave right there—even if their bodies stick around for a while longer. “How can you talk about changing the world,” goes the constant refrain, “if you can't even treat each other well in your own little groups?”

It's a good question, so simple that it feels obvious and rhetorical. But actually the answer is complicated. No, we can't change the world if we can't learn to treat each other well, but really the only way that we might all learn to treat each other well is by changing the world. The world is what made us like this. In the mean time, we must come to movement work as we are, and we have to learn and fumble painfully with each other as we grow through struggle.

Nonetheless, I believe that it is long past time for our movements to not only become nicer and more supportive, but also something more. I believe our movements need to help us more effectively balance our outwardly focused political work with our more inwardly focused processes of learning, growing, healing, and striving. While we are working collectively to push against oppressive forces and build visionary alternatives out there in our communities, we also need to be working together to help each other recognize our potential, build our skills, work through our mistakes, pain, bad habits, and shameful acts, and find mutual inspiration in each others' lives and achievements. Underneath the noise and spectacle, authentic revolution looks like all of us learning millions of things together, and from each other.

It's not easy work to balance effective public activism and organizing with creating deep spaces for personal growth and mutual care. In fact, the

many traps that accompany that balancing act—emergency timeouts from an important campaign to call out oppressive dynamics, declarations that personal needs will have to wait until after some pressing action is wrapped up, community accountability processes that fracture an already fragile community while bringing very little true accountability—have been the undoing of too many movements to name.

But difficult doesn't mean impossible, and I believe that this is another key area where an approach based on an ecosystem of movements can be a big help. I think one of the biggest causes of friction between outward facing organizing work and inward facing personal work—beyond the gender, race, class, and other identity dynamics that are both quite real and yet also too easily rushed to as the sole explanation for some of these problems—is that we are too often trying to force too many different types of change work into structures that just aren't made to work like that. Many of us, hungry and impatient for every group to be the embodiment of all our revolutionary ideals, expecting our campaign group to also help heal our depression, or pushing our jovial once-a-month study group to “step it up” and quickly shift to intense activist projects, put too much load onto spaces that just can't take it, and groups fall apart under the weight. But in an ecosystem of movements, different groups and structures can hold different positions, specializing in different areas of need and playing deeply supportive roles for one another, so long as they all share that critical root structure of mutual solidarity and commitment to a common struggle.

Even with an ecosystem approach, though, I think the need for personal growth, self-improvement, and a robust politics of care is too universal and too important to just be thrown out there to be taken up by just any old small initiative among many, to be self-selected by only touchy-feely process types, while the all-business, hardcore action-heavies stay 500 yards away, uninvolved and unaccountable. That would just be choosing

fragmentation and calling it balance.

Instead, I think there is a need to design unique and specialized spaces to populate our ecosystem of movements. These spaces would mingle intellectual growth and political education with revolutionary imagination, with personal growth, and with mutually inspirational relationship building. I believe that these spaces should actually be prioritized as foundational, as hubs, as political home bases that are so vital and vibrant that all movement members are encouraged—not forced, not manipulated, just encouraged—to join, and which serve as the open and welcoming entry points that a mass-based movement needs.

These would be spaces where everyone knows your name and your hobbies, where people ask and genuinely care about how your kids are doing, where you might go for advice about a conflict or a major transition in your life, and where you can trust that the people who call you out for some oppressive act will still be there the next day, sharing the same revolutionary values and wanting to grow toward them with you by their side. These spaces would also just as easily serve as ready-made launchpads for coordinated action whenever a big need—an emergency mobilization, a general strike, a natural disaster—might arise.

These spaces make up the centerpiece of this proposal for a *mutual inspiration* approach.

I think we're ready to start diving into that now.

PART 2: THE PROPOSAL

I opened this essay with the claim that many of us want something more from our radical social and environmental justice movements, and in Part One I took time to lay out the bigger pieces of what “something more” means for me. To summarize using slightly different words, I long for the creation of more movement spaces and organizational forms that:

- Publicly, imaginatively put forward a revolutionary vision, and work towards it
- Are capable of supporting memberships of hundreds, or even thousands within an area, across multiple issues and all identities
- Are recruitment friendly, warm, and accessible to non-activist people
- Are capable of providing a democratic and nourishing political home to both hardcore activists and busy, tired working people—without making the hardcore people feel held back or “dumbed down,” or making the busy people feel tied to the vanguardism of a well-studied elite
- Support approaches to movement building that see organizers as whole people with the need for balanced and healthy lives, and which give us tools to care for and mutually inspire each other
- Are simultaneously building grassroots infrastructure to boost our capacity for disruptive action, for personal growth and political education, and for developing constructive counter-power
- Are strategically spry and allow for the transience of populations and the quick shifting of social, political, and economic realities

I don't just long for these qualities in our movements because they will make organizing more enjoyable and sustainable, or because I think they will give radical politics a popularity boost. I long for these qualities because I want to win. Because social movements, and the structures and groups within them, are vehicles—they drive people forward into new historical possibilities—and I am tired of us mostly just cruising around the block, or breaking down by the side of the road. I want so passionately for our movements to get at least some future generation to our destination, to a reality where hundreds of millions are collaboratively and freely building a better world together.

Here in Part Two of this essay, I will offer a set of interconnected proposals that form an approach to organizing and movement building that I think might move us faster and more effectively toward that destination. I have said that this is a vision-centered approach to movement building and, true to that description, this proposal begins with vision, and scaffolds itself in multiple directions from there.

(Re)Establish “The Idea” as a Broad Political Rallying Point

I propose that our movements stake out political space around a broad vision of grassroots social transformation, spending time and energy to flood mainstream culture with the questions and possibilities that such revolutionary imagination brings to the surface.

I take this as a social fact: every day, at every moment, all of the people of the world have the opportunity to rise up together, to occupy their communities and workplaces, and to completely halt many oppressive systems where they stand. All it would take is one big, collective refusal, a “No!” stretching from the ports to the prisons, from the bedrooms and kitchens to the schoolyards and barracks, followed then by what the Zapatistas have called the many yeses that spring from grassroots collaboration.

This is a power that just lies there, underneath our feet all the time, dormant but breathing, and which usually only comes out in brief spurts,

spontaneously, somewhat chaotically, and not very successfully. In order for this power to be used successfully in a lasting, deeply democratic way, a critical mass of people need to not just recognize their collective power (both disruptive and constructive), but feel ownership, comfort, and confidence with it, with a strong sense of where they want to take it and how to avoid its many pitfalls. Essentially, I think we win when hundreds of millions of people, through conscious practice and preparation, have reached a point where they feel their people power as an old and trusted friend.

Taking inspiration from the anarchists of the Spanish revolution, I call this “The Idea,” the utopian and incendiary core that, in my opinion, makes revolutionary imagination so powerful and appealing. I sum up “The Idea” as this:

Together, the vast majority of people on this planet could rise beyond the hierarchies and oppressions that bind us.

Together, we could build a more free, just, and cooperative world.

There will come a time when we are enough, and when we are ready.

Until that time, we will prepare.

I believe that this idea, stated even as simply and broadly as this, should be staked out as a political pole, as a rallying point for organizers and movements. Like so many political positions in history—“Are you a Communist?” “What’s your take on abortion?” “Do you believe in human-caused climate change?” “We are the 99%”—I think this idea should be popularized and flooded into daily discourse, a potential stance that anyone could expect to be asked about on a first-date or at a family barbecue.

I believe that a rallying point this clear yet wide open, a tent this big, is much more useful than the endless squabbling and cat herding of trying to get 21st century people to all commit to Anarchism, or Participatory Socialism, or Multiracial Feminism, or any other more specific and nuanced brand. All of those ideas are still there—as are their critical debates—to develop and draw from, but history has shown again and again that mass

counter-power comes from popularizing and unifying around a bigger idea than any one ideology allows.

Concretely, then, how do we establish this idea as a political pole and raise awareness of it? While I do dare to say that we can learn and apply some pointers from the marketing and public relations industries—repetition, constant presence, authentically warm emotional associations, messaging that can go viral, attractive and memorable symbols and imagery—I think the deeper answer comes from how we organize ourselves and frame our work in social movements. I try to address this in each of the next sections of this proposal.

Utilize Our Groups to Keep Revolutionary Imagination Alive and In the Air

I propose that our movements adopt bold and imaginative statements of vision and values, and hold those visions at the center of both their internal processes and their public work.

Because I believe that revolutionary imagination is such a unique, compelling asset for radical social movements, I think it is vital that we are inviting more people to participate in our imaginative world views at every appropriate opportunity. Yet, because revolutionary imagination has proven easy to try on—especially for young people—but harder to maintain as a lifelong fit, it is equally vital that committed radicals understand our responsibility to accompany people as they consider the possibilities of social transformation, that we consistently model a grounded and gritty hope, and that we relentlessly seek out creative possibilities even in harsh and desperate circumstances.

I believe the easiest and quickest way to model visionary thinking and to invite people to join in is to incorporate it at a base level of our groups’ work, no matter what that work is. Whether our groups are fighting to halt construction of a youth jail, or working with tenants against a negligent landlord, or organizing a food drive for newly arrived refugees in the

neighborhood, I believe there is a place for stating—in writing and face-to-face, at least when welcoming participants—how our work fits into the bigger picture, and what our groups' ideal systemic solutions or outcomes would be beyond the boundaries of present-day realities.

These statements could start out as simple as a sentence like, “we consider our group to be one small part of a larger movement for a more just and equal society,” but it's better if they point more specifically to what the group actually envisions at the “end of the rainbow” of their chosen issues—how tomorrow's youth might learn from their mistakes in a world without prisons; what it could be like to live without any landlords and bosses; or how a non-capitalist society could build robust mechanisms for community solidarity that make door-to-door food donations unnecessary.

To avoid the cheapening of these written statements—after all, the corporate and non-profit worlds have already deadened many of our senses with all their framed plaques of “mission and vision” statements—I think they must have some space to breathe and live within the democratic cultures of our groups. This could mean invoking different pieces of our visions and sharing personal reflections during meetings or when morale is low, or maybe holding ourselves accountable to our visions with data-driven evaluations during strategic debriefs, or regularly refining our vision by making a habit of comparing and contrasting with the visions of other groups. The specifics of what these statements dream up and how our groups might keep them at the center is up for experimentation—for me, the point is that they should exist across as many groups as possible, they should inform both the inner and public work of our groups, and they should be continuously refreshed and sharpened as our groups evolve and connect to each other.

Make Our Visions Actionable, Not Just Hypothetical, By Naming Our Needs

I propose that our movements specifically articulate what forms of power need to be reclaimed, fortified, or invented in order to win our visions in the real world, so that current activism can custom build scaffolds toward that power.

It is dangerously easy to pump out dazzling visions of remade societies that flash briefly and then fade into disappointment, their only tether to reality being phrases like, “if only we all...” or “if everyone could just change to be like this.” We cannot get lost down the alleys of baseless utopian schemes or naïve daydreams. Our visions, though they should be colorful and wild, really need to connect the dots from where we are to where we want to go, being honest and clear about the distance to get there.

As I said in an earlier section, I believe that backwards planning is a terrific tool for connecting futuristic visions to the on-the-ground circumstances we face right now, and a particularly useful lens for this kind of backwards planning is the question of power. How might power need to shift and be exercised differently if we want to achieve a world without prisons? What power do bosses and landlords currently have that needs to be transferred or abolished to achieve a workable non-capitalist society? From what twisting matrices of power do white supremacy, patriarchy, and heterosexism replenish themselves? What interpersonal power and social skills do all of us need in order to collaborate effectively in a vast participatory democracy?

I think that as our groups, coalitions, and larger movements pick their initiatives and fights, our internal planning processes should specifically point toward these longer-term questions of power. Beyond the immediate disruptive people power we need to push power-holders to meet a given demand, what are the more systemic types of people power that we would need in order to make the power-holders completely irrelevant,

and how far away are we from getting there? What are our specific and concrete power needs—like, let's actually make lists!—and what are the barriers to meeting them?

Here we need to be extra clear about something, though: at this point I am *not* suggesting that groups need to plot out complete strategies for how to achieve what could be decades or centuries long struggles for new types of power. That comes through time, work, experience, and collective reflection. What I am proposing is that groups do their part to get us on the right track by naming and listing the power *needs* that it would eventually take to reach their ideal outcomes.

By doing this, group by group by group, and publicly sharing our findings, what we will end up creating will look like a huge wish-list or help-wanted ad for diverse forms of popular power—a perfect catalyzing agent for a crowdsourcing, ecosystems approach to creatively militant movement building.

Use a 3-Pronged Strategy to Make Today's Projects and Campaigns Serve Tomorrow's Visions

I propose that our movements organize their present-day work in order to consciously move their visions forward along any of these 3 prongs:

- 1) pushing back against oppression (disruptive activism and organizing)*
- 2) expanding knowledge, relationships, and popular imagination (education and cultural work)*
- 3) working to build power and meet needs through alternative structures (constructive counter-power)*

By naming—from the bottom-up and based on our own different contexts—both our visions of change and the varieties of power required to realize those visions, I believe that our movements will be better situated to choose daily actions that match up with a larger struggle. The hope is

that today's activism and organizing can steadily intertwine and weave together toward forming an anti-authoritarian counter-power, an alternative social structure that can someday rival, resist, and replace today's dominant systems. To help us even more consciously and consistently build toward that counter-power, I think our groups, campaigns, and coalitions should discuss and organize our work along three strategic prongs: pushing back against oppression; expanding knowledge, relationships, and popular imagination; and working to build power and meet needs through alternative structures.

I have already touched on these three prongs in earlier sections, but a brief example might be helpful. Using this three-pronged orientation, the group fighting against a new youth jail might organize linked initiatives such as, 1) a feisty, noisy, and joyful direct action campaign that pushes lawmakers to redirect funds toward education and social supports while also harassing potential private prison contractors to back out of the deal; 2) a longer-term program of relationship building and grassroots skill-sharing that regularly brings families of incarcerated youth together with each other and with less directly affected families, and which also brings non-incarcerated youth into regular contact, trust-building, even letter-writing with incarcerated youth; and 3) a partnership with schools and grassroots neighborhood assemblies to experiment with bottom-up, cop-free systems of restorative or transformative justice, which might eventually take over jurisdiction from the prison system.

I am aware that organizing like this across all three strategic areas of struggle requires a lot of capacity and human energy to do well, and thus that pushing our groups to always cover all three prongs can spread us needlessly thin. We can end up sucking much needed resources from one really strong project in order to prop up the wasted husks of weaker projects that we just can't seem to get off the ground. But this is where we must take a breath, step back, and realize that we're not all alone and iso-

lated in our groups. We have an entire ecosystem of movements to tap into and, with a crowdsourcing approach to activism and organizing, we can come to expect contributions to our projects from all sorts of previously unlikely sources.

Embrace the Ecosystem of Movements That Already Exists, and Strengthen Its Root System

I propose that our movements ground their understanding of their work, and the success of that work, in relation to their contribution to a larger ecosystem of movements, and that they strengthen this ecosystem using 3 specific communicative and collaborative tools:

- 1) *points of unity*
- 2) *solidarity call and responses*
- 3) *questions of tension*

Because I believe that winning over the long-haul means eventually ending all systematic forms of oppression in every single state, city, and neighborhood in our country, linked with similar revolutionary changes all over the planet, any anti-authoritarian counter-power worth its salt must be holistic and widespread. With care, time, and attention, we really do need to build holistic, liberatory cultures and institutions in almost every state, city, and neighborhood. The vast majority of people in each of these locations will need to be actively participating in directly democratic ways. Liberation doesn't mean having kick-ass multicultural alternative schools in Boston and then having to go all the way to Houston to access effective and empowering support for mental health and healing from trauma. Liberation must be understood as having structures that serve all people in every single location where people live their lives.

While it may be useful for some single-issue movements, the all-too-common leftist mentality of a linear march toward revolution simply won't work for building this kind of a counter-power. We cannot possibly

achieve the wide array of changes that this approach demands within a movement that is trying to move in one straight, neat line, with certain issues, people, or parties in the lead (as revolutionary subjects), and with all the rest of us following behind (as more or less objects or instruments). We need a more open and productive way of thinking about our struggles. Instead of trying for a singular, grand, unified Movement, I believe revolutionary counter-power should be built by a massive, diverse, *ecosystem of movements*, organized around a politics of solidarity.

In an ecosystem of movements, there is no front or back, there is no margin or center, and there is no one revolutionary subject like the proletariat and peasants of old, or the third-world nationalists of the 60's and 70's. Rather, every one of us is a revolutionary subject, and every aspect of our lives is a possible site of revolutionary struggle. Every single authentic attempt to undermine and replace the current system should be celebrated as a part of the ecosystem, and we should recognize how vital it is to always have activists, organizers, and movements who are called to different issues and different styles of fighting. After all, diversity is fundamental to any healthy ecosystem.

Lucky for us, this ecosystem already exists. We already have thousands of groups and issues and campaigns all over the place, almost all at least lightly linked through social and subcultural ties, and sometimes even more formally gathered through inspiring spaces like Social Forums. What really needs a boost though, is the root system underlying our ecosystem—our mechanisms for coordination and for mutual solidarity.

Up to this point in these proposals, I have mostly described ways that individual groups or coalitions can better integrate revolutionary visions, needs, and strategies into their own areas of work. That is, I've mostly been proposing ways for groups to strengthen their *individual* positions in the broader fight for a better world. But how do all these different groups,

with their disparate imaginations, priorities, styles, and strategic approaches, form and coordinate meaningful, durable links? How do we escape the silos that currently divide us in our different niches of the activist world?

I want to describe three tools that I think can help unlock the nascent potential in our ecosystem of movements, if used regularly and with fidelity: points of unity, solidarity call and responses, and questions of tension.

Points of unity are the easiest to grasp because they are used all the time to form coalitions and alliances. They are usually relatively concise and clear statements of all the areas where multiple groups politically agree and wish to work together. This is where different groups can sort through their various visions and values, acknowledge power needs that they share in common, and work toward integrating and overlapping their projects to more robustly cover multiple strategic areas of focus. Once points of unity are established, then any group that agrees with them can sign on, and as situations evolve those points of unity can be updated or even dissolved if they end up wearing out their welcome.

With points of unity politically uniting multiple groups, there are all sorts of structures for these groups to coordinate together, such as general assemblies, conferences and forums, spokescouncils, or smaller strategic meetings with directly accountable representatives. Points of unity provide a backbone of trust that opens a lot of political space for experimentation.

While points of unity can help us delineate what we agree on within our ecosystem of movement, *solidarity call and responses*, the second proposed tool, guide us on how to back up our agreements with action. Currently, when a movement is heatedly engaged in a struggle, it will often put out a call for solidarity, explaining the context of its struggle and how other movements and individuals can help. Maybe it will call for people to

make phone calls to local representatives, or participate in an international day of action, or send supplies to a place of particular need. I think that this tool should be stepped up, made more dynamically interactive, and adopted as a common practice for all times, not just for intense fights. In addition to groups and movements making their individual *calls* for the kinds of solidarity they can use, groups should also get in the habit of publicly *responding* with their capacity and commitment to show solidarity for others. Moreover, when groups know that they have particularly unique skill-sets, capacities, or access to resources, they can make preemptive offerings of solidarity before anyone has even asked. To briefly use the language of capitalism, it's like a sharing of our movement wide supplies and demands for solidarity. This might sound cumbersome, and even ten or twenty years ago it would have been, but with modern online tools, people do exactly this kind of coordination and sharing for all sorts of things, from baby registries to fantasy football leagues, to getting schools supplies privately donated to poor schools.

Further, solidarity call and responses allow the groups that are most affected by an issue (the ones calling for solidarity) to lay out what is most helpful and unhelpful, while at the same time allowing those who are offering the solidarity to have ways to express themselves if they feel like they are being taken for granted, underutilized, or have new ideas for how to help. Through this, solidarity can become a much more ongoing, dialogical process of coordination—ideally previewing and practicing the back and forth coordination needed for a non-capitalist future.

The third proposed tool, *questions of tension*, is aimed at what our movements are usually way too touchy to talk about: all the places where we differ and disagree. I believe that as groups are working out areas of unity and solidarity with each other, instead of completely shying away from areas of tension, they should actively take the time—and even use specially reserved spaces and processes—to reflect and write down their

tensions, in the form of shared questions that they can't yet agree to answering in the same way, but which will remain in the air as challenges for the future. For example, a coalition that feels itself strained by disagreements about non-violent direct action vs. property destruction or even armed self-defense might include an agreement to “respect a diversity of tactics” in their points of unity, while also acknowledging a potential question of tension around “how do we decide what tactics to consider off-limits in our work for liberation?” Having been put out into the air, willing groups can then make time later to further explore questions together, get help from grassroots researchers and other experienced movements, or even ask for conflict mediation to help settle things.

I should emphasize, though, that these questions of tension are most useful for what groups can acknowledge as political or philosophical disagreements, and should be differentiated from more interpersonal or stylistic issues. Thus a bad example of a question of tension would be “why do you have so many racist and macho assholes in your group?” While a question like this does suggest genuine political disagreements about how groups should practice liberatory behaviors and hold members accountable, there is some more direct and individual conflict that would need to be hashed out and resolved before any mutual investigation into differences would be possible.

With these tools in hand, I think that our movement groups should be calling each other, setting up gatherings, engaging each other in wide-spread processes of rapprochement. We should see a constant flurry of common points of unity and solidarity call and responses flying up on websites. We should see our precious—and way underutilized—movement researchers poring over requests for help with ongoing questions of tension between groups. Over time, we should see the currently informal and frayed roots of our movement ecosystem flourishing into solid and vast webs of mutual agreement, solidarity, and debate that criss-

cross the globe.

Over time, I imagine the evolution of a kind of alternative nationalism—inspired less by the identity-based or geographically centered nationalism of past decades, and more inspired by attempts to build grassroots autonomy, as many indigenous movements are doing. As statements of vision and values link and strengthen into multi-movement points of unity, they can then evolve into even stronger declarations, even a constitution, for a kind of alternative nation—a project of constructing a functioning parallel society right here and now, all over the place. This wouldn't be mere symbolism, but a concrete project of identifying all of the structures that an alternative society would need, and then actually supporting people to build pieces of those structures now, to whatever capacity they have. The lone radical bike project, for example, wouldn't be a lone bike project, it would be the autonomous transportation or ecology arm of a much larger project; and it would actually be accountable to the needs that such a project entails, not just the subcultural proclivities of people who like bikes and hate cars. Same for the community accountability collectives or self-healing groups—they would be understood as accountable to and preparing for the society's needs for safety and defense.

Use Crowdsourcing to Open Activism and Organizing to People of All Levels of Time, Skill, and Commitment

I propose that our movements put effort into creating numerous avenues and opportunities for people to contribute in both large and tiny ways.

As discussed earlier, capitalism knows how to ruthlessly and efficiently exploit people's free time and capacity—their labor power—to build massive wealth. Similarly, traditional electoral campaigns and big reformist activist machines like labor union campaigns and environmental groups have developed all sorts of sophisticated ways to get even non-activist

people to lend a phone call, a check, or even a house party of friends and family. Radical movements are bad at this, partly for the good reason that we don't want to instrumentalize people, but also because we have that cynical, often subconscious elitism that tells us that if people aren't equally down with all the political details and aren't willing to make the same time commitments, then we just don't have much to throw their way. But what if we operated from the assumption that even busy and activism-phobic people might still have revolutionary leanings? What kinds of spaces could we open for them to lend a quick hand?

The reason I laid out the five proposals above is because, woven together, I believe they create a skeletal structure for opening up huge avenues of creative activism and organizing to more people through crowdsourcing. We create rich points of access for all sorts of people—even if they have only 30 minutes a week to give toward any cause—to draw inspiration from our visions, sign on to our points of unity, look at our calls for solidarity, and think seriously about where they might fit in. But it's up to us to open up the potential spaces for their contributions.

What about a smartphone app that lets people anonymously put in the addresses of abandoned buildings that might be ripe for occupying, or for uploading and tracking where ICE immigration agents are patrolling? What about downloadable guides of non-awkward conversation starters about various topics that people can use with their friends, families, co-workers, or on the bus? Or fun yet subversive discussion guides for people to host viewing nights of popular—and seemingly non-political—tv shows, movies, or televised events? What about a “meeting pal” program that let's people with free time agree to take notes or set up video chats at meetings for people who can't leave their houses for reasons of ability or life commitments? Or a “refreshments for revolution” website that allows kitchen-lovers to sign up and simply deliver delicious homemade goodies to pickets or occupations? What about a postal stamp-sized sticker craze where

anyone can write little stories or quotes on tiny stickers and paste them all over public spaces? What about piggy bank projects that let thousands of people drop in their loose change for a year and then put it toward explicitly constructive revolutionary projects? What about a “neighborhood narratives” project that offers a template of interview questions that anyone in a neighborhood can answer and post, telling stories of their hopes, struggles, strengths, and needs?

These are potential experiments that come from just 5 minutes of brainstorming. They may or not be useful, and likely some already exist, but the point is that there are a ridiculous number of possibilities for how people can genuinely and creatively support our movements at all levels of capacity, skill, and commitment. We just need to set the parameters and invite the help.

I think it's worth exploring the bike project example a little bit further here. So-called “lifestyle” projects like bike collectives, community gardens, and food pantries are common amongst many fellow radical type folks, but in the current landscape they can kind of waste of a lot of revolutionary energy because they are isolated from a bigger movement infrastructure, and often evolve into future professionalized non-profits or even vanguards of gentrification in the poor neighborhoods where they usually start. At the same time, I don't think we're going to convince people to stop working on them. Instead, I think they can easily be helped to work toward a more revolutionary purpose.

If a more or less inactive but sympathetic person walks into a radical bike project, and it's just framed as a bike project, what is the potential for inspiring and harnessing that person's creative activity toward revolution? Beyond reducing their consumption and carbon footprint—which is at least something—not much. They might be inspired to take a tire patching class, or even to become an occasional volunteer, but it kind of ends there.

But imagine if that project—with the same enthusiastic bike activist volunteers putting in their same creative work and hours—was branded as, wedded to, and at least lightly accountable to a larger project of building a counter-power society. On the wall there would be explanations about the larger project, sign-ups and notices about other linked projects, invitations to mass assemblies, etc. When the inactive person walks in to get their bike fixed, they are also told (in a respectful and non-pushy kind of way) about how the bike project operates and how it's rooted in this vision for a new society. There are clearly presented volunteer opportunities, event opportunities, and crowd-sourcing activities. This person may say no to all of this stuff, but they came in to fix a tire and they leave having at least briefly engaged with a transformative vision for society. And if it was done in a responsible and friendly way, it won't push that person away in the future, either.

If that same stuff is happening at the food pantry, conflict mediation center, radical mental health center, with shared branding (like a little logo on all the fliers and brochures that says “member of the new society building project”), each and every day that these projects are providing their alternative services, then there is a substantial opportunity for engaging thousands of people a month—especially in a big city like my home of Seattle. And if these were all linked to a common volunteer management system, a common internal education system, and a shared donation or income-sharing system, there could be really effective harnessing of people's activity. And if these projects were even further linked and accountable to mass-based decision-making assemblies, this could truly crystallize into mass-level popular power. Moreover, if this project were linked or federated at the national or international level, it could also allow people to continue and link their work as they travel or move, instantly hooking up with projects in other locales.

What's special about this approach is that it turns our small scale pro-

jects—and their distance from our large-scale vision—into an asset rather than a liability. When we have a clearly articulated vision for the structures our communities need, when we see the gaps from what we have and can communicate that openly and transparently, then people who are inactive will perceive a clear, concrete invitation to not only be active, but to think creatively to solve meaningful, potentially revolutionary problems.

Another strength of this approach is that it doesn't ask people to change their interests to suit a singular, linear Revolutionary Strategy. It doesn't tell the bike activist, “hey, you're wasting your time and you should study more Marx,” (which they won't do anyway, they'll just think you're a jerk, I can personally assure you). Instead, it actually takes people's existing interests and even their hobbies and it invites them to connect with a more revolutionary edge—something they are often yearning for anyway. And it would even give existing alternative projects an opportunity to link in and affiliate themselves without too much muss and fuss.

In the end, it's all about expanding our capacity for collecting, moving, harnessing, and crystallizing people's powerful human activity, so that we can rival and replace the heartless and senseless empires that currently use our energy to rule over us.

Create Home Bases for Personal Growth and Mutual Inspiration Over the Long-Haul and on a Mass Scale

I propose that our movements experiment with a new and unique mass-based form of revolutionary organization, which I call the revolutionary congregation.

This is where we arrive at one of my favorite proposals, which I also anticipate will also be the most controversial. For this one, though, I must ask your patience as a reader as I take some to describe it a little more

carefully than the ideas in other sections. I think it deserves the extra attention.

While a crowdsourcing approach might help foster more creative militance at a mass scale, there still remains a need for spaces for people to gather and grow together; open spaces for mutually inspirational relationship building and political growth; spaces that transcend the subcultural narrowness of collectives, study groups, and affinity groups as well as the unnecessary exclusivity of cadre groups and revolutionary parties.

I have a proposal for a novel, openly revolutionary form of mass political organization, which I tentatively call *revolutionary congregations*. In order to first understand this idea, I need to ask radicals to take a humble breath and step out of the traditional activist sphere to look for new insights from yet another unlikely source: evangelical Christianity.

In the United States, evangelical Christianity is one of the strongest and most well-resourced mass movements out there, a critical pillar of the rise of the Right, and a growing resource for progressive and sometimes even radical causes. They offer a comprehensive worldview and whole life programming that helps tens of millions of people make sense of the ups and downs of their daily realities. They have developed a sophisticated and multi-layered infrastructure that very much resembles a counter-power of their own, almost entirely through grassroots funding. They put incredible effort into spreading leadership development throughout their communities through bible studies, youth camps, women's groups, grassroots ministries, and thousands of other projects. And what many people don't know is that this huge, evangelical America has also spawned the rise of its own internal Left, even with their own anarchist and anti-imperialist activist currents existing almost completely separate from the non-Christian Left. Similar to how the Black church offered key cultural and structural lessons for movement building in the 50's-70's, I think the evangelical

church movement can offer abundant lessons for how our movements can better structure our organizations, if we're willing to learn.

I imagine that you might be putting two and two together. Revolutionary congregations? Learning lessons from evangelical Christianity? Is he going to suggest that we all start building churches? The answer is no, but it's a soft no. What I want to build are powerful, relevant, and scalable revolutionary organizations. Yet we can't get around the fact that evangelicals and faith-based groups have a lot of structures that are well worth adapting and making our own. Admitting inspiration from church formations, I want to propose something that is quite new and different, a unique kind of revolutionary mass organization.

As I've said, I call this proposed organizational form *revolutionary congregations*; that name works for me because it's clear and simple, but we could just as easily call them "revolutionary base communities" or "communities of people in resistance," taking inspiration from the Guatemalan liberation struggle, for example. But since they do learn lessons from church traditions, I think there is some value to claiming some right to that excellent word, congregation, and all its connotations of purposeful gathering, of joining together to building something bigger than ourselves. Still, take the name or leave it, what matters for me are the ideas themselves.

Overview

The core purpose of the revolutionary congregation is to serve as a stable, geographically grounded community for people who condemn the current organization of our society, who want to believe that a wholly different, participatory organization of society is possible, and who want to gather together and fight for that new society right now. The most fundamental goals of this particular formation are:

- 1) To provide a consistent, warm space for participants to reflect, internally and interpersonally, on revolutionary ideas as a comprehensive worldview, and on the implications of those ideas not just for society but for our lives as whole people.
- 2) To build infrastructure across cities and neighborhoods for mutually inspiring personal growth and study, shared action, and shared counter-institution building, which can then also be shared with broader movements.
- 3) Provide opportunities for a rich variety of programming that allows people to connect with revolutionary politics from a variety of different angles, education levels, capacity levels, and personal needs.

Rooted in "The Idea," as Expressed in a Foundational Political Statement

The foundation of the revolutionary congregation is a basic statement of beliefs and aspirations. This statement wouldn't be more than 1-2 pages long, and it would express, in as accessible of language as possible, the core principles, analysis, and vision of the congregation. It could be as general or specific as each formation wants, depending on what kind of base-level political agreements they want from the beginning, but it should at least link itself with the broader political pole of the revolutionary "Idea" that I proposed above.

The critical thing about the document is that it should honestly spell out what ideas people are seeking to congregate around; it should express both analysis, vision, and strategy; and it should articulate the need for both personal change (including a changing orientation to our power, privilege, and material relationships to the world) and institutional transformation.

This statement would form sort of the essential compact of trust be-

tween members of the congregation. There would be an understanding and trust that anyone who keeps coming, no matter what their level of education, level of time commitment or particular interests, believes in those core beliefs. There would be a regular celebration and recognition that all participants are fueled by these ideas and hopes, and that though we are each walking individual paths towards transformation, and at different speeds, we still all broadly share the same destination. As the Zapatistas have said, "We walk at the pace of the slowest," and these congregations would allow for that kind of patience with each other's personal journeys.

I should point out that this foundational statement is *not* meant to be a wishy-washy, catch-all document. Being simple does not have to mean being vague or simplistic. For example, the opening line of the Industrial Workers of the World's (IWW) preamble is, "The working class and the employing class have nothing in common." It's simple, it's accessible, but it names the system (at least capitalism) honestly. It's not some watered-down platitude.

The foundational statement is critical because the entire revolutionary congregation model is based on a belief that "The Idea," at root, is pretty simple, and that we can build large fighting organizations that allow people to build skills and take action at all levels of education and dedication, so long as they agree with those simple ideas. It holds that this is a sufficient foundation from which revolution minded people can build a rich and nourishing community. This differs starkly from many past and current examples of capital-R Revolutionary organizations that seem to believe that they need to come to careful and detailed political agreement before they feel like they can settle into building a political home together.

The Weekly Gathering

While straightforward political agreement with the foundational state-

ment would be the most essential requirement for membership, another important piece of membership would be attendance and participation in the weekly gathering. The weekly gathering is the most basic and consistent building block of the revolutionary congregation. Different from a mass meeting, or a decision-making general assembly, or a weekly workshop, this would be a 1 ½ to 2 hour convening in which people experience well-planned, peer-led programming that might include songs, poetry, and art, opinions and reflections about current events and revolutionary ideas, and especially connections between movement realities and values and people's daily lives and struggles. More than anything else, these gatherings would be designed to broaden relationships, refuel our fighting spirits, and keep our minds energized after a week of having to survive in our absurd society. They are not spaces for intense business and planning, for long lists of event announcements, conspiracy-laden tirades, or for parades of the same speakers time after time. They should be a vibrant, hopeful, safe-ish (even if they politically push our comfort zones), weekly point of contact for anyone who feels like they want to feel connected to a larger movement.

Sometimes congregations could even have “street gatherings,” in which, instead of meeting at their usual location, participants gather and carry out their program in particular sites of struggle—like a picket line or in a squatted building. The gatherings could also offer occasional opportunities for traveling guests to come and share about movement experiences elsewhere.

After the gathering, there would be a food and relationship building period—maybe free and unstructured or maybe sometimes planned to mix people up with ice breakers and games—as well as resource booths, action bulletin boards, and sign-up opportunities for people to check out—sort of like a weekly resource fair and potluck.

Again, the gatherings would be planned thoughtfully, with a multi-issue emphasis, by member-run committees, not by any permanent leadership. That is, there would be no pastor or single congregational leader. We'll discuss the leadership question in more detail shortly.

Opportunities to Go Deeper

In addition to the weekly gathering—and maybe duplicate gatherings at other times for people with different work schedules—the congregation would offer groups, programs, and action projects throughout each week. Multiple levels of study groups (from beginner-friendly topics to more heavy reading groups), action committees, counter-institution committees, solidarity committees with various struggles, healing and self-care groups, caucuses and personal change groups, children and seniors programs, art classes, and more would be available.

These programs could be in-house within a single congregation or shared between multiple groups. A lot of these opportunities would also be open to the broader public, and many congregation members would probably spend their weeks involved in other, non-affiliated movement projects, not just congregation projects. The idea would be to offer opportunities for growth and action directly to members, but also to encourage building and actively participating in the larger movement.

I think that this kind of model helps our radical movements solve a major problem: the tendency for many of our sharpest and most dedicated revolutionaries to split-off and seek comradeship and a political home base in their own like-minded collectives and cadre groups, while all the rest of us are left without a stable, *openly revolutionary* home base of our own. As I see it, cadre organizations—self-selected groups of especially dedicated organizers and militants—usually exist to 1) give committed revolutionaries a space to feel safe and not alone in this harsh world, 2) do in-depth theoretical development together, 3) create finely honed strate-

gic interventions in movement work. I believe that the congregation model allows #2 and #3 to happen in small mid-week groups, just the same as a cadre model, but people can meet their needs for #1 through the weekly gatherings that include potentially hundreds more people—people who agree with the politics but don't have time for the intense theory or strategizing. This would actually overcome the primary problem of cadre organizations: that they create insularity, and the lonely righteousness of being more “serious” than everyone else in the movement.

Building Revolutionary Infrastructure

At the weekly gatherings, financial offerings would always be requested and expected, and that money would first be used to build a space—I imagine that first congregations would start by meeting in existing schools, non-profit spaces, or labor halls, just like fledgling churches do—and then furnish that space with resources like a childcare area, a gym, a playground, an arts and media lab, a kitchen, a music setup, a stage, and even our own schools.

Along with building congregation-specific infrastructure, additional money could be put towards supporting counter-institutions that serve the larger movement, as well as action campaigns that the congregation believes in. This part excites me because evangelical churches generate a lot of dollars, and they put a lot of those dollars toward international mission work. I'd really like to see what kind of solidarity revolutionary congregations could support with that kind of money on a global level.

The Leadership Question

Leadership development is a big priority of the revolutionary congregation idea. The goal would be to offer consistent, structured encouragement and opportunities that move people from their first curiosity about the group, to their attendance and agreement with the core beliefs, to their

active membership in the congregation, to their committed action and organizing, to their conscious democratic participation in the core leadership of the organization—which would probably happen at regularly scheduled general assemblies.

Rick Warren's Purpose Driven Church is really helpful here. He has a diagram that shows the flow from the larger community, to the curious crowd, to the congregation, to the committed, and then to the core



All self-identified congregation members would be welcome to participate in decision-making and in all committees. But what I like about this model is that the hardcore people have lots of opportunities to delve deeply into analysis, theory work, experiments in strategies and actions, but all in committees where they are bolstered and held accountable by the larger congregation that they belong to. Similar to the Zapatista idea of “governing obeying,” where the leadership makes tactical decisions that are accountable to the larger directives of the masses that bolster them, those who don't have the time or interest to be full-time revolutionary organizers or theorists are able to be in weekly communication and have direct oversight over the work that their more intense comrades are doing. This is the reverse of the traditional Left (even anarchist) model, where the professional revolutionaries concoct their revolutionary ideas first, and only then decide when and how the masses are prepared to see them.

Geography and Size

I imagine that revolutionary congregations would start as singular, geographically amorphous entities in all areas but, especially in big cities, the ideal would be to get them as local and neighborhood-based as possible. After all, the typical city has a different church, temple, or mosque every couple of blocks. I think 90-150 people congregations would be great, but smaller or slightly larger would be worth experimenting with also.

The Question of Power

The revolutionary congregation would not have the goal of becoming a mechanism of popular power in itself. It wouldn't be trying to form a shadow government for a fledgling counter-power or anything like that. I personally think that's the role of even broader community and workplace assemblies that might evolve out of our movements. The goal of the revolutionary congregation is to provide what George Lakey has called a "base camp" for people to learn, grow, reflect, and take care of themselves between their interventions in the larger sites of struggle such as workplaces, community councils, etc. In this way, they have a very similar role to the FAI (Federation of Iberian Anarchists) and ateneos—neighborhood educational and social centers—in early 20th century Spain or even to the old IWW labor halls. They are places for people to nurture and nourish their sense of people power while they get ready to flex that people power in outside struggles.

Still, because of its infrastructure and resource base, in moments of crisis, social collapse, or insurrection, this model does offer the flexibility for like-minded congregations and sister counter-institutions to quickly federate and become sovereign communities—if that's what the conditions demanded. This is exactly the capacity that right-wing evangelicals are building. It's a structure that allows us to be prepared at a moments notice for revolutionary opportunities like the Spanish anarchists had in

1936, like the Bolsheviks had in 1917, and like we've seen recently in places like Egypt, Tunisia, and Greece.

Recruitment and Group Composition

Because the revolutionary congregation isn't religious, and is advocating for a down-to-earth, democratic approach to the problems of daily life and the world, participants should have no qualms about spreading the word about their congregations—or at least the ideas that inspire them. What's more, because the center of the congregation's life is the weekly gathering, entry-level activities are foundational and they are consistently available to new people week in and week out—a far cry from the Left's typical tendency to sparsely offer entry-level opportunities, and then often drop them when intense organizing heats up. However, because this is a model so similar to a church model, people would need to be careful about not copying the annoying tendencies of both Christian and socialist evangelicals (the paper peddlers). We might invite people to come to check out gatherings or special events with us, but we don't need to proselytize them to join our specific congregations.

Typically in our movements, there is great anxiety and tension around issues of the demographic makeup of groups, and some groups—especially those that are stacked with young, white, and middle class activists—get frozen into inaction or into tricky allyship-only activities because of who is in the membership. I believe that the identity politics of membership do bring with them real and important issues that must always be addressed, but I don't actually think the congregation model absolutely depends on the need for, for example, always multiracial groupings, or cross-class groups. I think it's possible, though not ideal, to form even relatively homogenous congregations—especially in relatively homogenous neighborhoods—that are honest with themselves about that reality, and then seek to build relationships of trust, solidarity, and shared resources

and action with other congregations and organizations. I can even imagine congregations that form and differentiate from each other solely based on the lifestyle and cultural preferences of members—some congregations being heavy on a particular type of singing, for example, while others prefer to celebrate differently.

Building a Revolutionary Movement to Scale

Because revolutionary congregations would be both growth oriented and focused on building their activity around the whole lives of their participants, I think they could be uniquely capable of building revolutionary ideas, culture, and counter-power to the scale that we need to be a threat to the system. In concert with the other elements of this proposal, I think that this model helps fill in some of the most elusive missing pieces of that “something more” that many of us are looking for, and I think it at least deserves some time in the sun for us to try some experiments with it.

Claim One Day a Week (or at least a month) for the Movement

I propose that our movements within each locality agree to one day a week—or at least a month—where they will commonly hold events and actions, in order to consistently taste and practice a revolutionary mass culture within the context of these non-revolutionary times.

Here's a proposal that I think is fun, worth at least experimenting with, but also kind of wacky.

For me, some of my favorite, most lasting memories within social movements have been my opportunities to attend large festivals, gatherings, conferences, and especially Social Forums. When one is at that kind of event, where there are all sorts of things going on at once, and people are all around you talking about different things, there is a certain energy in the atmosphere that is really special. Even though—maybe even be-

cause—there are all sorts of things competing with each other for your time, and you can't possibly go and experience all of it, the overall atmosphere is electric. That kind of energy doesn't exist when people just go to one meeting a week here, or one event on a weeknight there. When we're away from those big gatherings for too long, real life can start to break us down and alienate us. The dominant culture drags us back into its clutches.

I think our movements in any given locale could agree to do something really simple that could more regularly create that charged and thrilling atmosphere, giving us an extra little break from the system. Our groups could commonly agree to schedule at least one event, congregation gathering, assembly, march, picket, picnic, training, concert or anything else on the same day of the week, every week—or at least once every month. Probably unsurprisingly, I suggest Sunday.

While this idea may seem to defy logic by forcing groups to step on each others' toes in terms of attendance, I believe that is actually a sort of perpetual scarcity way of seeing things—like we don't have enough people to go around. With a growth-oriented perspective that looks past our own particular issues and projects to the bigger picture, including the entire general population as potential participants, this idea could help us create a powerful “Revolutionary Sunday” (or Monday or Thursday) culture, where people couldn't possibly attend all of the events that they wanted to, but where that was actually a sign of strength. Regardless of your pet issues, or your chosen activities, by simply being out in the movement on that day, you could help the movement feel more alive. Kind of like a farmer's market or flea market on a Saturday morning—even if you don't buy anything from all or any of the booths, just walking around helps create a bustling vibe.

I think it could be so powerful if we could eventually reach a point

where just asking, “hey, what are you doing this Sunday?” could become a lively political question across our movements.

Be Ready to Snatch Up Opportunities to Crystallize Our Counter-Power

I propose that, as our movements network, build trust and shared politics, and begin to integrate power across our own spaces and institutions, we prepare to grasp every possible opportunity to permanently shift resources and jurisdiction away from dominant systems and towards our structures.

A common theme—or more like a trajectory—that I have tried to repeat throughout these proposals is the progression from visions and actions at the individual and small group level to ever larger connections, relationships, alliances, and integrated projects that stretch across social movements. What may for years end up looking like a random snap, crackle, and pop of all sorts of different groups doing all sorts of different things in the name of the same big movement (pretty much what we have now) would eventually become more integrated, coordinated, and widespread across different areas of life. As this happens, as our collective strength grows, I think our movements need to be ready to not just irritate or even rival the system, but to actually replace it and even scoop up its resources.

This means that in practice, no matter what specific work we're doing, our movements must maintain at least a pilot light of confrontational spirit ignited within them. Especially at a mass scale, if we are building comfortable and warm spaces for personal growth, and we're building alternative institutions that meet a variety of needs, it will become tempting to settle in to our gains, to pull back from the exhausting friction of trying to undo the brutalities beyond our walls. We must be conscious of that temptation and resolve to keep that friction as a durable part of our culture, because in the end, some level of confrontation will always be necessary

until systemic oppression is gone for good.

Just thinking in terms of ending capitalism, for example, building our own alternative economic structures will never be enough in the long run. Start-up workers coops or mutual aid markets or alternative currencies can only take us so far. At some point, wealth is going to have to be taken back from the corporations and the super-rich to be redistributed in our communities, and that is not going to happen voluntarily. We are going to have to seize it from them—ideally by workers and communities directly seizing and taking over their workplaces. This will require confident and militant—though ideally non-violent—direct action. But to get to that point, we must be ready, we must always recognize it as a possibility—an eventual necessity—that exists under the surface.

Strategically, then, one job for our movement researchers and thinkers is to pay attention to the larger landscape of power, to notice opportunities and weak points, to suggest areas of need or contradiction where our fledgling counter-power can seriously shift the balance in our favor. And when events spontaneously erupt—for example, the movement that toppled Tunisia's dictator and launched the Arab Spring was sparked by the public suicide of one street vendor—we all need to be prepared with mechanisms of mutual alert and readiness to hit the streets and push at the edges of the system, seeing what victories we can grasp.

Prepare for Resistance that Tests Every Bond, Every Pledge, Every Value

I propose that our movements put effort into preparing for all manner of resistance, and develop plans and best practices that can maximize our stability, longevity, and effectiveness while maintaining our most prized visions and values.

As much as I love to imagine it, I know that none of these overlapping proposals for counter-power and alternative structures and mass scale

will ever exist in the idealized forms that I describe, cleanly and purely buzzing along toward victory. That will not be reality. To prepare for reality requires first imagining all these different ideas, and then crunching them against everything we have seen done to Muslim communities, to police saturated communities of color, and to the more militant wings of anti-war, ecology, and anarchist movements. To prepare for reality means expecting non-stop electronic surveillance and drone fly-overs, stop-and-frisk harassment, pre-emptive arrests and indefinite isolated detention, intensive cultural misinformation and destabilization campaigns, lurid threats and blackmail, middle-of-the-night raids and hooded drives in the back of nondescript vans, targeted assassination, and attempt after attempt to wedge us, buy us off, split us up, or get us to turn on each other.

We live in an empire. Empires will protect their interests.

On an optimistic note, I do believe that trying to build mass support now—winning people to our vision and ideas before we're even close to being a significant material threat—is helpful because it preventatively provides safety in numbers before repression gets really bad. And, in all honesty, if mass organizations—which actively practice mutual solidarity—find the kind of foothold in young, white, middle class and professionalized communities that I think is possible, that would provide even more of a buffer, for a time.

Still, eventually, I know that boots will come marching for us, while agents will come whispering.

Here I believe that some of the best lessons for how to handle repression comes from the non-violent organizing tradition, especially the non-violent direct action of the civil rights movement. Regardless of what your overall philosophies are around non-violence vs. armed struggle, it can be agreed that the purpose of non-violent resistance is never to be passive, but rather to actively, militantly stand firm according to ones hopes and

values, refusing to stoop to the dehumanizing level of the oppressive forces. In doing that, not just once but consistently and in large numbers, this resistance can not only physically disrupt business as usual, but it also acts as a mirror for any act of brutality that comes our way, reflecting back at both bystanders and the oppressors themselves, hopefully giving them pause and sapping their will to continue. By keeping our eyes held on what we are fighting for, on building and strengthening our vision while refusing compliance with the system, then the system's thuggishness and manipulation can be exposed for what it is: the pettiness of a minority of elites squandering to hold on to their privileges.

This isn't easy, though. Not by a long shot. That's why I think that our movement cultures should be steeped in awareness of and preparation for heavy resistance. We should document, track, know, and name every act of subterfuge and hostility. We should compile and devise responses to every dirty trick we see or can even imagine. We should get out our megaphones and our most media-savvy tactics and blow the whistle on every attack, especially those against our most marginalized communities. We should tie and braid a long chain of memory, publicly recognizing and celebrating each lost life, each traumatized comrade, each jailed soul—and this must include structures for relentless support and accompaniment for each political prisoner and their loved ones.

To avoid the paranoia and fatalism that can so easily overcome us, though, all of our preparation for resistance should be wedded to our constructive project, and especially to our more interpersonal processes of growth and mutual inspiration. With each heinous act, a soft hand on each others' shoulders, a reminder that we will retain our dignity. With each suspicion of a spy or a misinformation campaign, a calm and sturdy reconnection to our commitment to openness as we take concrete steps to unearth the truth, even if it means sometimes slowing down to sort through questions of tension. Here once again, I believe that revolutionary

congregations could create a helpful venue for maintaining hope and community while simultaneously trying to survive and heal from repression.

While I think it is impossible to weigh in definitively about the non-violence vs. arms debate, I do feel the need to say here that I am quite unconvinced by any attempt to imagine a military path through the repression and to the other side of liberation. I do not believe that the current dominant array of armed military and police forces can be overcome militarily, even through protracted guerrilla warfare. Even more, I think that any possible victorious revolutionary army would be so twisted and distorted by the violence, that any *anti-authoritarian* revolutionary project would be shattered from the start. While maybe some contexts in some places will necessitate skirmishes of armed self-defense, in the long run I think our only hope of winning is for a critical mass of military and police to put their weapons down, demoralized, de-spirited, and haunted by lengthy campaigns to destroy communities that are not only non-threatening to them, but actively appealing to them. In the end, then, I think we win through the attrition of cultural and moral force, not through military power.

Conclusion: Come On Out and Dance

Here is a sad truth about this essay. It has taken me more than ten years, with dozens of abandoned attempts and scuttled drafts, to find the courage and motivation to write and share this piece with you. This is not because I've been spending a decade quietly preparing, polishing, honing. Not really. It has taken me ten years because I have been wracked by my fears of the often toxic cultures of discourse that this writing would send me into, and I have been worn thin by the pain and loss that I have experienced over and over again in movement work.

But after ten years of licking open wounds, and watching as a new generation of organizers has risen and then suffered many of the same internal blows in the wake of Occupy, I felt compelled to try and say something.

With this piece, I am placing a kind of bet, that with whatever skepticism or indifference that I might receive for trying to say so much about so many things that I want our movements to do differently, that there are at least a few people who have shared my same dissatisfaction, my same longing, who will come out and say that they agree. From there, we get to work.

I have taken the time here to lay out what I feel is a relatively comprehensive and unique proposal for movement building toward a better world, a mass-based, vision-centered approach to building revolutionary communities. I have explained why I want movements that exercise revolutionary imagination, that seek to work at a mass scale, that are open for creative militance, and which foster mutually inspirational relationships. I have offered specific proposals for structures and tools that I think can help us reach these ideals: from the broad rallying point of "The Idea," to written statements of vision, to a strengthened ecosystem of movements, to revolutionary congregations, and even "movement Sundays." After 50 something pages, I'd hope that you have many questions, many sugges-

tions for improving these ideas, but also some sense of whether or not you agree with the overall position. If you do agree, at least for the most part, then the proposal continues with some more steps.

Beyond any specific engagement with me or with this piece, there is other work as well: reflecting on and articulating your own personal vision for revolutionary change; discussing visionary ideas with your friends and groups; reaching out to strengthen the roots of solidarity between movements in your locale. This piece is full of holes and gaps, and you are strongly invited to contribute to patching and extending them.

Right now, in the fall of 2014 and into the future, my local comrades and I want to raise awareness of this approach across our movement subcultures, and we want to start experimenting with some of our proposed models in daily practice—beginning with the revolutionary congregation idea. We want to invite you in to these efforts, whether through dialogue and parallel experiments if you're far away, or through direct collaboration if you're near Seattle. How to get started? Send us an email or message us on our social networks; contribute to the discussion on our website, www.mutualinspiration.org; or try to forge your own path if that feels better to you for some reason. Meanwhile, we will continuously update our website—www.mutualinspiration.org—with additional articles, resources, and news.

In a society that fosters so much loneliness, isolation, and self-doubt, even the sharing of a simple knowing glance can keep us going for another day. A nod on the bus. A honked horn as you drive by a protest. Even a “like” on Facebook. This essay is me, stretching myself out of my own loneliness, trying to make eye contact with you, even briefly. I hope you'll look back this way.

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Curious about what a 1-2 page foundational statement of a revolutionary congregation might look like? Here's a sample that a few of us sketched out as a test.

Roots in the Movement, A Revolutionary Congregation – Mission and Values

Together, the vast majority of people on this planet could rise beyond the hierarchies and oppressions that bind us. Together, we could build a more free, just, and cooperative world. There will come a time when we are enough, and when we are ready. Until that time, we will prepare.

Our Mission

Roots in the Movement is an open community of people who congregate together around our shared desire to build a transformative social justice movement. Through popular education, relationship building, and cultural activities, we aim to support and mutually inspire each other in the long and difficult struggle for a better world. We consider ourselves as just one part of a much larger liberation movement.

Our Common Values

We believe that another world is possible. The global society that we all currently share has never been inevitable. It is the product of thousands of years of history—thousands of years of human relationships and human activity. And so, through human relationships and human activity, our society can be changed. It can be vastly improved. Working together, we can build a global society that better fulfills our common needs, dreams, and desires.

We are radical. Radical means to go to the root. To truly build a better world together, we believe it is necessary to look at the roots of what does not work in our current world. What we see when we look with this radical lens is a society that is built on unfair, oppressive social systems, which demand to be replaced.

We reject the hierarchy and domination of our current society. When we look closely at the injustices of our society—now and in the past—we see time and again that there are systems which divide us all into different categories, which create hierarchies that favor a few over the rest, and which impose constant, often violent patterns of domination and exploitation. We reject all of these systems of social privilege and oppression, including the systems of capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, heterosexism and transphobia, statism, imperialism, ableism, ageism, ecological domination, and religious oppression.

We embrace complexity. When we look at these many social systems at the roots of our society, we recognize how incredibly complex they are, and how they reinforce and tie themselves together on personal, interpersonal, and institutional levels. We recognize that these systems are infused into every aspect of our lives and our communities, and that none of us are immune to their dangerous effects. We are not afraid of this complexity; instead, we wish to face it directly together, not shying from how it might affect us as individuals, as groups, and as whole social movements and communities.

We are committed to community-based values. We believe that people are happier and healthier when they live in social structures based on community-based values like freedom, cooperation, equality, participation, creativity, curiosity, physicality, spirituality (of some sort or another), and ecology. We believe the primary mission and responsibility of society is to support and strengthen communities, with structures that nurture the healthy growth of empowered, passionate, inspired, and community-rooted individuals. This means that we will work for a future society structured around: the equality of all sexes and the fluidity of gender and sexuality; racial justice; social ownership and participatory control of the economy; individual freedom without fear of incarceration; participatory democracy; global confederation; religious plurality; youth and elderly dignity and empowerment; and a sustainable, interdependent relationship with the planet.

We will confront oppressive forces. History and daily experience show us that the road to a better world is not an easy one. The mechanisms of oppression are strong, and many of those who are invested in their status and privilege will savagely attack and misdirect us. This is why we recognize the importance of always maintaining a warm yet confrontational spirit. As long as oppression exists, there will be a need for protest, agitation, direct action, sabotage, and occupation, and we wish to stand with those efforts wherever appropriate.

We have our roots in the movement. As individuals and as an organization, we draw strength from the histories of all of our peoples' various movements for social and environmental justice. Our collective stories of resistance and liberation stretch back many thousands of years, to the very beginnings of humanity, and we believe that being rooted in these histories can be one of our greatest strengths. We strive to infuse our movement roots into our daily organizational practices, so that all of us can understand how our actions are connected to an ecosystem of movements that stretches far beyond ourselves and our generation.

We believe in the strength and wisdom of our own communities. We are a neighborhood-based organization. We believe that our neighborhoods are fertile fields for the development of new community leaders, new community institutions, and new levels of community power that can eventually become city-wide power, county-wide power, state-wide power, and eventually even national power. Our neighborhoods contain the life, the spirit, the beauty, and the collective history to be foundations for building and strengthening our larger social change movements.

We are only whole when all are participating. The process of building a new society is really a process of building new lives for ourselves, lives that are based on cooperation and mutual inspiration. We can only build these kinds of lives by working together, in organizational structures in which all of us can participate, be challenged, and grow. Leadership by representatives or committees may sometimes be more efficient or even necessary in quick, narrow circumstances but we hold direct, participatory democracy and authentic diversity to be our core values. Further, we seek to sustain ourselves through the commitments of our entire, active membership, not through the professionalized channels of the non-profit system. Finally, we hold accessibility, childcare, youth programs, and elders programs as ongoing priorities.

“There is a burning desire for new ways of thinking and orienting ourselves, for new ways of organizing ourselves, and especially for new ways of relating with one another, both inside and outside of “the movement.” Many of us want something more.

“In this piece, I propose a different way that we might approach radical, revolutionary, transformative politics. I propose experimentation with new and unique political spaces—both conceptual *and* physical—which hold closely to a belief that another world is possible; which use that hope to build for the long-haul and on a large scale; and yet which, at the same time, hold us, nurture us, and ignite us as real people as we struggle daily, yearly, *multi-generationally* to get where we need to go. I propose that these spaces must go beyond the traditional organizational styles and formats that we've become used to—be they campaign organizations and coalitions, non-profits, collectives, spontaneous mobilizations, cadre groups, or revolutionary parties. Instead, I propose rethinking many of the assumed conventions and truisms of Left movements, and reaching out even more widely into society and history—even into enemy territory—for lessons and inspiration.”