2017: Days and Months of Climate Justice

John Foran
DEDICATION

For all of you, with love
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The real authors of this book are the individuals and organizations whose work is presented in each chapter – we are all in your debt.

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The Briefest of Conclusions…
THE BRIEFEST OF INTRODUCTIONS

– Here’s what I propose –

This book contains a series of essays written at the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017 on the theme of climate justice. They were meant to help reflection on the events of 2016 and to offer some of the climate justice movement’s best ideas and practices to itself in the current year.

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Maybe you’d like to read and meditate on, share and discuss one of these amazing stories every day for twelve days, or monthly if it suits you better.

Then let’s start a new year of 365 days of building a more powerful climate justice movement.
I heard a story from some acquaintances about their yoga session a day or so after the U.S. election of Donald Trump. The teacher was trying to find a way to help people cope and said something along the lines of: “Now, close your eyes and imagine a calm and healing place. Now, take a deep, deep breathe. Good…. Now hold it for four years.”
Bill McKibben – whom I once described as “the somewhat uncharismatic but lovable Bill McKibben” – is an American original: an old white guy (not unlike me) from one of the whitest areas in the world who has given his life to the sacred cause of working with all like-minded souls on the planet to save what we can by being loving, creative, bold, and fearless.

This piece – originally published here in The Nation and excerpted here – seems a good way to think and feel about the global and U.S. movements for climate justice in the new era. I’m referring to the dawning era of Trumpism, of course, not that other new epoch – the Anthropocene. Oh hell, I’m referring to both, I guess.

How the Active Many Can Overcome the Ruthless Few

The Inaugural Jonathan Schell Memorial Lecture

Nonviolent direct action was the 20th century’s greatest invention – and it is the key to saving the earth in the 21st century.

Bill McKibben

November 30, 2016

Illustration by Curt Merlo

I know what you want from me – what we all want – which is some small solace after the events of Election Day. My wife Sue Halpern and I have been talking nonstop for days, trying to cope with the emotions. I fear I may not be able to provide that balm, but I do offer these remarks in the spirit of resistance to that which we know is coming. We need to figure out how to keep the lights on, literally and figuratively, and all kinds of darkness at bay….
We are destroying the earth every bit as thoroughly as Jonathan imagined in the famous first chapter of *The Fate of the Earth*, just a little more slowly. By burning coal and oil and gas and hence injecting carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere, we have materially changed its heat-trapping properties; indeed, those man-made greenhouse gases trap the daily heat equivalent of 400,000 Hiroshima-size explosions. That’s enough extra heat that, in the space of a few decades, we have melted most of the summer sea ice in the Arctic – millennia old, meters thick, across a continent-size stretch of ocean that now, in summer, is blue water. (Blue water that absorbs the sun’s incoming rays instead of bouncing them back to space like the white ice it replaced, thus exacerbating the problem even further.) That’s enough heat to warm the tropical oceans to the point where Sue and I watched with our colleagues in the South Pacific as a wave of record-breaking warm water swept across the region this past spring, killing in a matter of weeks vast swathes of coral that had been there since before the beginning of the human experiment. That’s enough heat to seriously disrupt the planet’s hydrological cycles: Since warm air holds more water vapor than cold, we’ve seen steady increases in drought in arid areas (and with it calamities like wildfire) and steady, even shocking, increases in downpour and flood in wet areas. It’s been enough to raise the levels of the ocean – and the extra carbon in the atmosphere has also changed the chemistry of that seawater, making it more acidic and beginning to threaten the base of the marine food chain. We are, it bears remembering, an ocean planet, and the world’s oceanographers warn that we are very rapidly turning the seven seas “hot, sour, and breathless.” To the “republic of insects and grass” that Jonathan imagined in the opening of *The Fate of the Earth*, we can add a new vision: a hypoxic undersea kingdom of jellyfish….

Against this crisis, we see sporadic action at best. We know that we could be making huge strides. For instance, engineers have managed to cut the cost of solar panels by 80 percent in the last decade, to the point where they are now among the cheapest methods of generating electricity. A Stanford team headed by Mark Jacobson has shown precisely how all 50 states and virtually every foreign nation could make the switch to renewable energy at an affordable cost in the course of a couple of decades. A few nations have shown that he’s correct: Denmark, for instance, now generates almost half of its power from the wind.

In most places, however, the progress has been slow and fitful at best. In the United States, the Obama administration did more than its predecessors, but far less than physics requires….

Trump, of course, has famously insisted that global warming is a hoax invented by the Chinese and has promised to abolish the Environmental Protection Agency. His election win is more than just a speed bump in the road to the future – it’s a ditch, and
quite likely a crevasse. Even as we gather tonight, international negotiators in Marrakech, stunned by our elections, are doing their best to salvage something of the Paris Agreement, signed just 11 months ago with much fanfare.

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But the real contest here is not between Democrats and Republicans; it’s between human beings and physics. That’s a difficult negotiation, as physics is not prone to compromise. It also imposes a hard time limit on the bargaining; if we don’t move very, very quickly, then any progress will be pointless. And so the question for this lecture, and really the question for the geological future of the planet, becomes: How do we spur much faster and more decisive action from institutions that wish to go slowly, or perhaps don’t wish to act at all? One understands that politicians prize incremental action – but in this case, winning slowly is the same as losing. The planet is clearly outside its comfort zone; how do we get our political institutions out of theirs?…

“Nonviolence is the means by which the active many can overcome the ruthless few.” When the history of the 20th century is written, I’m hopeful that historians will conclude that the most important technology developed during those bloody hundred years wasn’t the atom bomb, or the ability to manipulate genes, or even the Internet, but instead the technology of nonviolence. (I use the word “technology” advisedly here.) We had intimations of its power long before: In a sense, the most resounding moment in Western history, Jesus’s crucifixion, is a prototype of nonviolent action, one that launched the most successful movement in history. Nineteenth-century America saw Thoreau begin to think more systematically about civil disobedience as a technique. But it really fell to the 20th century, and Gandhi, to develop it as a coherent strategy, a process greatly furthered by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his associates in this country, and by adherents around the world: Otpor in Eastern Europe, various participants in the Arab Spring, Buddhist monks in Burma, Wangari Maathai’s tree-planters, and so on.…

And we [in the U.S.] have by no means been the only, or even the main, actor in these efforts. For instance, indigenous activists have been at the forefront of the climate fight since its inception, here and around the world, and the current fight over the Dakota Access pipeline is no exception. They and the residents of what are often called “frontline” communities, where the effects of climate change and pollution are most intense, have punched far above their weight in these struggles; they have been the real leaders. These fights will go on. They’ll be much harder in the wake of Trump’s election, but they weren’t easy to begin with, and I confess I see little alternative – even under Obama, the chance of meaningful legislation was thin….
So, using Jonathan’s template, I’ll try to offer a few lessons from my own experience over the last decade.

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Lesson one: Unearned suffering is a potent tool. Volunteering for pain is an unlikely event in a pleasure-based society, and hence it gets noticed. Nonviolent direct action is just one tool in the activist tool kit, and it should be used sparingly – like any tool, it can easily get dull, both literally and figuratively. But when it is necessary to underline the moral urgency of a case, the willingness to go to jail can be very powerful, precisely because it goes against the bent of normal life….

Lesson two: These tactics are useful to the degree that they attract large numbers of people to the fight. Those large numbers don’t need to engage in civil disobedience; they just need to engage in the broader battle. If you think about it, numbers are the currency of movements, just as actual cash is the currency of the status quo – at least until such time as the status quo needs to employ the currency of violence. The point of civil disobedience is rarely that it stops some evil by itself; instead, it attracts enough people and hence attention to reach the public at large….

Lesson three: The real point of civil disobedience and the subsequent movements is less to pass specific legislation than it is to change the zeitgeist. The Occupy movement, for instance, is often faulted for not having produced a long list of actionable demands, but its great achievement was to make, by dint of recognition and repetition, the existing order illegitimate. Once the 99 percent and the 1 percent were seen as categories, our politics began to shift. Bernie Sanders, and to a lesser extent Donald Trump, fed on that energy. That Hillary Clinton was forced to say that she too opposed the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal was testimony to the power of the shift in the zeitgeist around inequality…

This is not how political scientists tend to see it – or politicians, for that matter. Speaking to Black Lives Matter activists backstage in the course of the primary campaign, Hillary Clinton laid out her essential philosophy: “I don’t believe you change hearts. I believe you change laws, you change allocation of resources, you change the way systems operate.” This is, I think, utterly backward, and it explains much of the intuitive sense among activists of all stripes that Clinton wouldn’t have been a leader.

By forever straddling the middle, centrist politicians delay changes in public sentiment. The viewpoint of the establishment – an appellation that in this case includes everyone from oil companies to presidents – is always the same: We need to be “realistic”; change will come slowly if it comes at all; and so forth. In normal political debates, this is
reasonable. Compromise on issues is the way we progress: You want less money in the
budget for X, and I want more, and so we meet in the middle and live to fight another
day. That’s politics, as distinct from movement politics, which is about changing basic
feelings over the great issues of the day. And it’s particularly true in the case of climate
change, where political reality, important as it is, comes in a distinct second to reality.
Chemistry and physics, I repeat, do what they do regardless of our wishes. That’s the
difference between political science and science science….

Some people are paralyzed by the piety they think is necessary for involvement. You
cannot imagine the anguished and Talmudic discussions I’ve been asked to adjudicate
on whether it’s permissible to burn gasoline to attend a climate rally. (In my estimation,
it’s not just permissible, it’s very nearly mandatory – the best gas you will burn in the
course of a year.) It has also become – and this is much more dangerous – the pet
argument of every climate denier that, unless you’re willing to live life in a dark cave,
you’re a hypocrite to stand for action on climate change. This attempt to short-circuit
people’s desire to act must be rejected. We live in the world we wish to change; some
hypocrisy is the price of admission to the fight. In this sense, and this sense only,
Gandhi is an unhelpful example, and a bludgeon used to prevent good-hearted people
from acting….

I will end by saying that movement-building – the mobilization of large numbers of
people, and of deep passion, through the employment of all the tools at a nonviolent
activist’s disposal – will continue, though it moves onto very uncertain ground with our
new political reality. This work of nonviolent resistance is never easy, and it’s becoming
clearer….

And yet the movement builds. I don’t know whether it builds fast enough. Unlike every
other challenge we’ve faced, this one comes with a time limit. Martin Luther King would
always say, quoting the great Massachusetts abolitionist Theodore Parker, that “the arc
of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice” – meaning that it may take a
while, but we are going to win. By contrast, the arc of the physical universe is short and
it bends toward heat. I will not venture to predict if we can, at this point, catch up with
physics. Clearly, it has a lot of momentum. It’s a bad sign when your major physical
features begin to disappear – that we no longer have the giant ice cap in the Arctic is
disconcerting, to say the least. So there’s no guarantee of victory. But I can guarantee
that we will fight, in every corner of the earth and with all the nonviolent tools at our
disposal. And in so doing, we will discover if these tools are powerful enough to tackle
the most disturbing crisis humans have ever faced. We will see if that new technology
of the 20th century will serve to solve the greatest dilemma of our new millennium.
Photo credit: Sunflower Alliance.
Ever optimistic, I wanted to end 2016 – a tough year for the planet – on a positive note, and it doesn’t get more inspiring than the story out of Standing Rock.

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Most of us would probably agree that the biggest step the U.S. climate justice movement took in 2016 is the #NODAPL movement at Standing Rock, Sioux Territory, in the U.S. state of North Dakota – a state not normally seen as a hotbed of activism or as the seedbed of something new. But (pleasant) surprises and astonishing accomplishments are precisely what we need to generate more of.

In the middle (or is it still the beginning after all these months? – it’s certainly not the end) of this precious gift, longtime indigenous activist Winona LaDuke evoked an Earth Warrior from the past in this moving essay on the present, excerpted here.
The Dakota Access Pipeline: What Would Sitting Bull Do?

Winona LaDuke

It’s 2016 and the weight of American corporate interests has come to the Missouri River, the Mother River. This time, instead of the Seventh Cavalry or the Indian police dispatched to assassinate Sitting Bull, it is Enbridge and Dakota Access Pipeline.

In mid-August, Standing Rock Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault II was arrested by state police, along with 27 others, for opposing the Dakota Access Pipeline. In the meantime, North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple called for more police support.

Every major pipeline project in North America must cross indigenous lands, Indian Country. That is a problem.

The road west of Fargo is rarely taken. In fact, most Americans just fly over North Dakota, never seeing it.

Let me take you there….

In the time before Sitting Bull, the Missouri River was the epicenter of northern agriculture, the river bed so fertile. The territory was known as the fertile crescent of North America. That was then, before the treaties that reduced the Lakota land base. But the Missouri remained in the treaty – the last treaty of 1868 used the Missouri as a boundary.

Then came the theft of land by the U.S. government and the taking of the Black Hills in 1877, in part as retaliation against Sitting Bull’s victory at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. In a time prior to Black Lives Matter or Native Lives Matter, great leaders like Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse were assassinated at the hands of police.

One truth: The Lakota people have survived much.

Forced into the reservation life, the Lakota attempted to stabilize their society, until the dams came. The 1944 Pick Sloan project flooded out the Missouri River tribes, taking the best bottom lands from the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara, the Lakota and Dakota. More than 200,000 acres on the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River reservations in South Dakota were flooded by the Oahe Dam itself, forcing not only relocation, but a
loss of the Lakota world. The Garrison, Oahe and Fort Randall dams created a reservoir that eliminated 90 percent of timber and 75 percent of wildlife on the reservations.

That is how a people are made poor.

Today, well over two thirds of the population of Standing Rock is below the poverty level – and the land and Mother River are what remains, a constant, for the people. That is what is threatened today.

Enbridge and partners are preparing to drill through the riverbed. The pipeline has been permitted in sections from the west and from the east. The northern portion was moved away from the water supply of Bismarck, into the watershed of Standing Rock. That was unfortunate for the Lakota….

The pipeline would span 200 water crossings and in North Dakota alone would pass through 33 historical and archeological sites. Enbridge just bought the Dakota Access pipeline, noting that the proposed Sandpiper route – Minnesota’s 640,000 barrel per day Bakken line – is now three years behind schedule.

The health of the Missouri River has been taken for granted.

Dammed in the Pick Sloan Dam projects, each project increases contamination and reduces her health. Today, the Missouri is the seventh most polluted river in the country. Agricultural run-off and now fracking have contaminated the river. My sister fished a gar out of the river, a giant prehistoric fish, only to find it covered with tumors….

While North Dakota seeks to punish the Lakota, Chairman Archambault expresses concerns for everyone:
From the *New York Times*: “I am here to advise anyone that will listen that the Dakota Access Pipeline project is harmful. It will not be just harmful to my people but its intent and construction will harm the water in the Missouri River, which is one of the cleanest and safest river tributaries left in the United States. To poison the water is to poison the substance of life. Everything that moves must have water. How can we talk about and knowingly poison water?”

In the meantime, North Dakota Gov. Dalrymple announced a state of emergency, making additional state resources available “to manage public safety risks associated with the ongoing protest of the Dakota Access Pipeline.” He may have exceeded his scope of authority and violated civil and human rights to water.

Chairman Archambault’s interpretation: “Perhaps only in North Dakota, where oil tycoons wine and dine elected officials and where the governor, Jack Dalrymple, serves as an adviser to the Trump campaign, would state and county governments act as the armed enforcement for corporate interests.”

There are a lot of people at Standing Rock today who remember their history and the long standoff at Wounded Knee in 1973. In fact, some of those in Standing Rock today were there in 1973 at Wounded Knee, a similar battle for dignity and the future of a nation.

I am not sure how badly North Dakota wants this pipeline. If there is to be a battle over the pipeline, it will be here. For a people with nothing else but a land and a river, I would not bet against them.

The great Lakota leader Mathew King once said, “The only thing sadder than an Indian who is not free, is an Indian who does not remember what it is to be free.”

The Standing Rock protest camp represents that struggle for freedom and the future of a people. All of us. If I ask the question “What would Sitting Bull do?” – the answer is pretty clear. He would remind me what he said 150 years ago: “Let us put our minds together to see what kind of future we can make for our children.”

The time for that is now.
2017: DAYS AND MONTHS OF CLIMATE JUSTICE

Full size painted Oil Drum by Wallace Piatt
Photo by John Foran
MARCH

IS IT POSSIBLE TO ACTUALLY “LIVE WELL”?  

December 30, 2016  

Pablo Solón and John Foran  

http://www.resilience.org/stories/2016-12-30/the-twelve-days-and-months-of-climate-justice-day-three-is-it-possible-to-actually-live-well/

Optimists trade on hope, and activists on visions. It seems good then, as we exit a year which lacked both with this hopeful vision of the future, rooted in a visionary dream from the past.

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We know some of the faces and forms of radical climate justice activism: they can be found on the front lines everywhere, occupying, blocking, lying down on the tracks, swarming over and past the machinery, disobeying all illegitimate laws in the name of militant nonviolent civil disobedience.

But when do we actually find the time to think about the alternatives to this world we reject?

Not often enough.
If we look carefully, however, all over the world we can just make out the thin green shoots of hope: in transition towns, on the website of the Next System Project, the meetings about degrowth, the myriad alternative economies, enterprises, and currencies, festivals of alternatives, ecosocialist autonomous zones, and much else besides.

From the Andean highlands of Bolivia and Ecuador comes the indigenous concept of Sumak Kawsay, translated as Buen Vivir or Vivir Bien in Spanish, and with more difficulty into English as Living Well [it's not a great translation, so think in Quechua or Spanish for the moment].

This past summer, Bolivian climate justice stalwart Pablo Solón took the time to give us this encouraging report from the future we seek: ¿Es posible el Vivir Bien?: Reflexiones a Quema Ropa sobre Alternativas Sistémicas (La Paz, Fundación Solón, 2016). It has been beautifully translated and introduced by Richard Fiddler here, from which these extracts are taken.

Is Vivir Bien possible?

Candid Thoughts about Systemic Alternatives

Pablo Solón

August 2016

Why systemic alternatives?

We are living through a systemic crisis that can only be overcome through systemic alternatives. It is not only an environmental, economic, social or institutional crisis that confronts humanity. It is a crisis of humanity and of the Earth as a system. It is a systemic crisis caused by a set of factors, an egregious one being the capitalist system’s relentless search for profits at the expense of the planet and humanity. This system is leading to the extinction of species, to major losses of biodiversity, to the degradation of the human being; it is exceeding the absolute limits of nature. It is not a cyclical crisis, or even a crisis of capitalism, which in the wake of a depression will recover to continue its expansion, setting new records of growth. It is a much more profound crisis which has extended to all aspects of life on Earth and which now has its own dynamic without the possibility of reversal within the framework of the capitalist system.

Our most urgent task, if we wish to stop this collapse of life, is to overcome capitalism. Far from imploding from its internal contradictions, capitalism is reconfiguring itself and will continue its pursuit of profit until it has squeezed the last drop of blood from people and planet. Everything can be commodified. Everything is converted into a
business “opportunity”: natural disasters, financial speculation, militarism, human trafficking, war, etc. Capitalism knows no limits. Super-exploitation, overconsumption and waste are the principal motors of this system as it pursues infinite growth in a finite planet. Increasing inequality and the destruction of vital cycles of nature are its legacy.

The alternatives to this system can only be constructed if we deepen our understanding of the process by which capitalism reconfigures itself. Capitalism has shown that it has great flexibility to adapt, capture, remodel and create ways out for itself. What begins as an idea or a progressive movement is co-opted, transformed and incorporated in order to maintain and reproduce the system. The challenge is to build alternative societies capable of breaking with the logic of capital and of avoiding co-optation by capitalism. The alternatives do not arise in a vacuum, they emerge in the struggles, experiences, initiatives, victories, defeats and resurgence of social movements. The alternatives arise in an often contradictory process of analysis, practice and proposals that are validated in reality.

There is no single alternative. There are many. Some come from the indigenous peoples, such as “Vivir Bien.” Others, such as “degrowth,” are being built in industrialized societies that have gone beyond the limits of the planet. The “global justice” movement is a reaction to the globalization of the transnational corporations. “Ecosocialism” is an attempt to rethink alternatives from a non-anthropocentric perspective. “Food sovereignty” is a proposal that develops the concrete alternatives originating among the small farmers, peasants and indigenous peoples. “Ecofeminism” contributes the women’s dimension that is essential to overcoming the patriarchy linked with anthropocentrism. The “rights of Mother Earth” are designed to construct new relationships with nature. The concept of “the commons” emphasizes the self-management of human communities. The “economy of solidarity,” the “economy for life,” the “economy of transition”… all of them contribute from various perspectives. Each has strengths, limitations, contradictions and points in common. All are ideas under construction. They are pieces in a puzzle that has many responses, and that will constantly change with the worsening of the systemic crisis. Our purpose is to understand these alternatives in their process of development, to identify their potentialities, and to look for the complementarity among these distinct visions in order to tackle the systemic crisis.

In what follows we will focus on one of these ideas: Vivir Bien (Bolivia), Buen Vivir (Ecuador), sumaq qamaña (Aymara) or sumak kawsay (Quechua). Our objective is to analyze the way in which the concept of Vivir Bien is constructed, to point to some of its essential elements in the construction of systemic alternatives, to assess how it has been implemented in Bolivia and Ecuador – with greater emphasis on the first country owing to the author’s involvement and knowledge – and attempt to reply to a question
that many are asking after a decade of progressive governments in the Andes: Is Vivir Bien possible beyond the indigenous community? After a decade of governments that embraced this indigenous vision, are we closer to understanding and implementing it? And if we have lost our way, how can we return to the path of Vivir Bien?

....

Vivir Bien Is Possible

If what we have experienced [in Bolivia and Ecuador] is the application of an extractivist-populist model in the name of Vivir Bien, what might have been a practical implementation of Vivir Bien more consistent with its principles and vision? Is Vivir Bien possible in the reality of one country? Where is the problem? In its inapplicability beyond the limits of the indigenous communities? In the lack of understanding of this vision? Is this proposition ahead of its time?

....

International complementarity

The experience of this decade shows us clearly that Vivir Bien is not possible in a single country in the context of a global economy that is capitalist, productivist, patriarchal and anthropocentric. If this vision is to advance and thrive, a key element is its articulation and complementarity with other similar processes in other countries. This process cannot be limited to the promotion of agreements for integration that do not follow the rules of free trade, nor can it exist merely at the level of states or governments. One of the biggest shortcomings of the last decade was probably the failure of alliances of social and indigenous movements to develop independently of the progressive governments. Looking back, the global justice movement in Latin America, instead of becoming stronger, was weakened by its inability to articulate its own independent vision of change. It confused its utopias with the political plans of the progressive governments and lost its capacity to criticize and to dream.

If the processes of transformation are to flourish, they need to expand beyond the national borders and into the countries that now colonize the planet in different forms. Without that dissemination to the crucial centers of global power, the processes of change will end up isolating themselves and losing vitality until they have repudiated the very principles and values that once gave birth to them.

To that extent the future of Vivir Bien largely depends on the recovery, reconstruction and empowerment of other visions that to varying degrees point toward the same
objective in the different continents of the planet. Vivir Bien is possible only through complementarity with and feedback from other systemic alternatives.
APRIL

WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO WIN?

John Foran, Bill McKibben, Ezra Silk

January 2, 2017

http://www.resilience.org/stories/2017-01-02/the-twelve-days-and-months-of-climate-justice-day-four-what-will-it-take-to-win/

One of the most original efforts to craft new ideas for change comes to us from The Climate Mobilization, a kind of strategy incubator founded by Margaret Klein Salamon with the help of Ezra Silk, Nicole Harris, Ashik Siddique, and other friends in 2015. Their foundational documents have inspired me to think in new ways about the potentials of scholar-activism.
The almost simultaneous publication in August 2016 of two influential statements calling on the United States government and public to treat the climate crisis as a “war-time emergency” that will require of us a “climate mobilization” equivalent to the country’s World War 2 effort to defeat fascism in Germany and Japan has sparked intense interest in just what it would take to somehow “win” the war against climate change. The idea even found its way into the Democratic Party Platform via Bernie Sanders’s insistence that Bill McKibben be on the drafting committee.

The two statements – Ezra Silk of the Climate Mobilization’s 100-plus page Victory Plan and Bill McKibben’s essay “A World at War” – have led to a healthy and vigorous debate about these ideas and their potential to play a role in the US response to the greatest global challenge of the 21st century.

This is a discussion that has now gone viral (in the small world I inhabit). Presentations about the idea, as well as critical responses and a lively on-line discussion can be found on the website of an innovative “nearly carbon-neutral conference” that I was involved in this fall called The World in 2050: Imagining and Creating Just Climate Futures.

Here are snippets from the two key documents, starting with Bill McKibben’s essay “A World at War,” originally published in The New Republic.

A World at War

Bill McKibben

August 15, 2016

We’re under attack from climate change – and our only hope is to mobilize like we did in WWII.

It’s not that global warming is like a world war. It is a world war. And we are losing….

The question is not, are we in a world war? The question is, will we fight back? And if we do, can we actually defeat an enemy as powerful and inexorable as the laws of physics?

To answer those questions – to assess, honestly and objectively, our odds of victory in this new world war – we must look to the last one.

For four years, the United States was focused on a single, all-consuming goal, to the exclusion of any other concern: defeating the global threat posed by Germany, Italy, and Japan. Unlike Adolf Hitler, the last force to pose a planetwide threat to civilization,
our enemy today is neither sentient nor evil. But before the outbreak of World War II, the world’s leaders committed precisely the same mistake we are making today—they tried first to ignore their foe, and then to appease him.

But what would that actually look like? What would it mean to mobilize for World War III on the same scale as we did for the last world war?

Turning out more solar panels and wind turbines may not sound like warfare, but it’s exactly what won World War II: not just massive invasions and pitched tank battles and ferocious aerial bombardments, but the wholesale industrial retooling that was needed to build weapons and supply troops on a previously unprecedented scale. Defeating the Nazis required more than brave soldiers. It required building big factories, and building them really, really fast.

Today we live in the privatized, siloed, business-dominated world that took root under McNamara and flourished under Reagan. The actual wars we fight are marked by profiteering, and employ as many private contractors as they do soldiers. Our spirit of social solidarity is, to put it mildly, thin. (The modern-day equivalent of Father Coughlin is now the Republican candidate for president.) So it’s reasonable to ask if we can find the collective will to fight back in this war against global warming, as we once fought fascism.

For starters, it’s important to remember that a truly global mobilization to defeat climate change wouldn’t wreck our economy or throw coal miners out of work. Quite the contrary: Gearing up to stop global warming would provide a host of social and economic benefits, just as World War II did. It would save lives.

(Just as World War II sped up the push for racial and gender equality, a climate campaign should focus its first efforts on the frontline communities most poisoned by the fossil fuel era. It would help ease income inequality with higher employment, revive our hollowed-out rural states with wind farms, and transform our decaying suburbs with real investments in public transit.)

There are powerful forces, of course, that stand in the way of a full-scale mobilization. If you add up every last coal mine and filling station in the world, governments and corporations have spent $20 trillion on fossil fuel infrastructure. “No country will walk away from such investments,” writes Vaclav Smil, a Canadian energy expert. As investigative journalists have shown over the past year, the oil giant Exxon knew all about global warming for decades — yet spent millions to spread climate-denial propaganda. The only way to overcome that concerted opposition — from the very same industrial forces that opposed America’s entry into World War II — is to adopt a wartime
mentality, rewriting the old mindset that stands in the way of victory. “The first step is we have to win,” says Jonathan Koomey, an energy researcher at Stanford University. “That is, we have to have broad acceptance among the broader political community that we need urgent action, not just nibbling around the edges, which is what the D.C. crowd still thinks.”

Had he won, it’s possible that Bernie could have combined his focus on jobs and climate and infrastructure into some kind of overarching effort that really mattered – he was, after all, the presidential candidate most comfortable with big government since FDR. Donald Trump, of course, will dodge this war just as he did Vietnam. He thinks (if that’s actually the right verb) that climate change is a hoax manufactured by the Chinese, who apparently in their Oriental slyness convinced the polar ice caps to go along with their conspiracy. Clinton’s advisers originally promised there would be a “climate war room” in her White House, but then corrected the record: It would actually be a “climate map room,” which sounds somewhat less gung ho….

Normally in wartime, defeatism is a great sin. Luckily, though, you can’t give aid and comfort to carbon; it has no morale to boost. So we can be totally honest. We’ve waited so long to fight back in this war that total victory is impossible, and total defeat can’t be ruled out.

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McKibben’s essay was followed within a few days by the Climate Mobilization’s more detailed Victory Plan, which you can read in full here.

Describing itself as “A policy document that tangibly demonstrates how the U.S. could eliminate net greenhouse gas emissions by 2025, contribute to a global effort to restore a safe climate and reverse ecological overshoot through a massive WWII-scale mobilization,” it goes into considerable detail as to “how a fully mobilized United States government could drive our economy to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2025, contribute to a global effort to restore a safe climate and reverse ecological overshoot through a massive WWII-scale mobilization.”
emissions by 2025, restore a safe climate, end the sixth mass extinction, reverse ecological overshoot – and revitalize America.”

As Ezra Silk points out:

This is far beyond anything proposed in today’s polite political debates about climate action. We believe that unless policymakers, advocates, and citizens envision what “victory” might actually look like when facing the complexity of our looming emergency, it’s impossible to determine a horizon for our ambitions that is in line with the increasingly stark realities of climate science….

And here is how The Victory Plan opens:

At a 1943 press conference, a reporter asked President Franklin D. Roosevelt to address a rumor that he no longer liked the term “New Deal.” He responded that a physician, Dr. New Deal, had remedied America’s “grave internal disorder” during the ‘30s. But the attack on Pearl Harbor had “broke his hip, broke his leg in two or three places, broke a wrist and an arm, and some ribs; and they didn’t think he would live, for a while.” Dr. Win-the-War had since stepped in to conduct orthopedic surgery and Patient America was now on the road to recovery: “He has given up crutches. He isn’t wholly well yet, and he won’t be until he wins the war.”

Although some have argued that a “Green New Deal” or “Green Marshall Plan” are needed today, this paper and The Climate Mobilization movement assert that the spirit of Dr. Win-the-War should animate America’s response to the climate emergency. Just as FDR shifted his approach to defeat fascism, it is an absolute moral imperative that humanity pivots comprehensively to fight off the existential threat of civilizational collapse and biological holocaust.

We face a series of time-sensitive existential emergencies that can only be overcome successfully with a drastic transformation of the entire economy (or orthopedic surgery, in FDR’s words) accomplished at wartime speed. All available social and economic resources and industrial capacity must be mobilized toward the primary objectives of restoring a safe climate and reversing ecological overshoot as rapidly as possible.

Marshall Plan-like international aid efforts and New Deal-style social programs may also supplement the Climate Mobilization, in order to increase the odds of victory and to preserve our highest ideals during this long emergency….
Unfortunately, there is one not-so-small problem: the Victory Plan was predicated on the anticipated election of Hilary Clinton, which as readers know, didn’t pan out.

For the latest discussion on what to do now, you can go to the Climate Mobilization’s website.

To read the full text of The Victory Plan, go here.
BEFORE THERE WAS INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE AT STANDING ROCK, THERE WAS BLACK LIVES MATTER (AND BEFORE THAT, OCCUPY, AND BEFORE THAT THE ZAPATISTAS, AND BEFORE THAT, MAY ‘68... AND AT THE BOTTOM OF EVERYTHING, THERE’S A TURTLE STANDING ON AN ISLAND).
Both Standing Rock and BLM at first seem primarily reactive to ongoing and historical atrocities and rooted in acts of defiant resistance. Yet just as each has shown remarkable resilience and activated a new, youthful leadership, both have at the same time spun visionary stories and issued a call to create new political cultures, prefiguring other possible worlds.

And both will be needed, and will need to connect with each other, and with many others, in the struggles that lie before humanity. Our racial and ethnic identities, gender, class, and nationalities, along with environmental resilience and human rights of many kinds are all now under attack as the Trump administration prepares to roll into power in the United States.

This larger struggle, this movement of movements is about intersectionality – you show up for me and I show up for you, and we both show up for everyone else. As the document below insists: “We are a collective that centers and is rooted in Black communities, but we recognize we have a shared struggle with all oppressed people; collective liberation will be a product of all of our work.”

The reasons for this are as simple as they are challenging: “There can be no liberation for all Black people if we do not center and fight for those who have been marginalized. It is our hope that by working together to create and amplify a shared agenda, we can continue to move towards a world in which the full humanity and dignity of all people is recognized.”

The activists of the Movement for Black Lives hail from “a collective of more than 50 organizations representing thousands of Black people from across the country,” notable for being leaderless, or more accurately “as Thenjiwe McHarris – a member of M4BL Policy Table – has described it, a ‘leaderful’ movement.”

In the summer of 2016 they issued this call to action. We need their vision now more than ever.

Image source.

A Vision for Black Lives:
Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom, and Justice
August 1, 2016

Black humanity and dignity requires Black political will and power. Despite constant exploitation and perpetual oppression, Black people have bravely and brilliantly been the driving force pushing the U.S. towards the ideals it articulates but has never achieved. In recent years we have taken to the streets, launched massive campaigns, and impacted elections, but our elected leaders have failed to address the legitimate demands of our Movement. We can no longer wait.

In response to the sustained and increasingly visible violence against Black communities in the U.S. and globally, a collective of more than 50 organizations representing thousands of Black people from across the country have come together with renewed energy and purpose to articulate a common vision and agenda. We are a collective that centers and is rooted in Black communities, but we recognize we have a shared struggle with all oppressed people; collective liberation will be a product of all of our work.

We believe in elevating the experiences and leadership of the most marginalized Black people, including but not limited to those who are women, queer, trans, femmes, gender nonconforming, Muslim, formerly and currently incarcerated, cash poor and working class, differently-abled, undocumented, and immigrant.

We are intentional about amplifying the particular experience of state and gendered violence that Black queer, trans, gender nonconforming, women and intersex people face. There can be no liberation for all Black people if we do not center and fight for those who have been marginalized. It is our hope that by working together to create and amplify a shared agenda, we can continue to move towards a world in which the full humanity and dignity of all people is recognized.

While this platform is focused on domestic policies, we know that patriarchy, exploitative capitalism, militarism, and white supremacy know no borders. We stand in solidarity with our international family against the ravages of global capitalism and anti-Black racism, human-made climate change, war, and exploitation. We also stand with descendants of African people all over the world in an ongoing call and struggle for reparations for the historic and continuing harms of colonialism and slavery. We also recognize and honor the rights and struggle of our Indigenous family for land and self-determination.

We have created this platform to articulate and support the ambitions and work of Black people. We also seek to intervene in the current political climate and assert a clear vision, particularly for those who claim to be our allies, of the world we want them to help us create. We reject false solutions and believe we can achieve a complete
transformation of the current systems, which place profit over people and make it impossible for many of us to breathe.

Together, we demand an end to the wars against Black people. We demand that the government repair the harms that have been done to Black communities in the form of reparations and targeted long-term investments. We also demand a defunding of the systems and institutions that criminalize and cage us. This document articulates our vision of a fundamentally different world. However, we recognize the need to include policies that address the immediate suffering of Black people. These policies, while less transformational, are necessary to address the current material conditions of our people and will better equip us to win the world we demand and deserve.

We recognize that not all of our collective needs and visions can be translated into policy, but we understand that policy change is one of many tactics necessary to move us towards the world we envision.

We have come together now because we believe it is time to forge a new covenant. We are dreamers and doers and this platform is meant to articulate some of our vision. The links throughout the document provide the stepping-stones and roadmaps of how to get there. The policy briefs also elevate the brave and transformative work our people are already engaged in, and build on some of the best thinking in our history of struggle. This agenda continues the legacy of our ancestors who pushed for reparations, Black self-determination and community control; and also propels new iterations of movements such as efforts for reproductive justice, holistic healing and reconciliation, and ending violence against Black cis, queer, and trans people….

Here’s the plank on the twined threats of climate chaos and environmental racism:

What is the problem?

- Black people are amongst the most affected by climate change. If we’re not serious about reducing emissions, the planet will keep getting hotter and Black people will continue to bear the biggest brunt of climate change.
- The U.S. military is the largest contributor to emissions (war economy drives fossil fuel economy).
- One-third of greenhouse gases are also caused by the industrial agricultural system.

What are the solutions?

- Divest from any industry that makes money on the production of fossil fuels.
• Divest from industrial use of fossil fuels and reinvest in community-based sustainable energy solutions to make sure communities most impacted (Black communities) are helping to lead that shift.
• Shift toward Black community control of more local sustainable energy and food systems.
• People directly impacted by climate change, particularly Black communities, know what the issues are most and should be at the forefront. Additionally, some of our people work in industries of extractive energy (power plants), etc. We can instead apply those skills to sustainable, clean energy production (like solar, etc.).
• Reduce military expenditures overall, particularly in the use of fossil fuel.

Read the whole Manifesto here: https://policy.m4bl.org/
JUNE

WHY CAN’T A POEM HELP STOP CLIMATE CHANGE, ANYWAY?

Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner and John Foran

January 4, 2017


One of the most powerful antidotes we have to despair – whether in the face of the climate catastrophe that looms menacingly on the horizon, or of the dawn of the Trump era in the United States – is our ability to resist and create, often simultaneously, through our cultural creation – our art, cultures, literature, movies, and music.
And of the many beautiful objects that could occupy this space, I offer the heart-wrenching poetry of Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, Marshall Islands poet, writer, journalist, and climate activist, who first came to the world’s attention when she narrated a passionate video-poem at the U.N. General Assembly in September 2014, on the occasion of the massive People’s Climate March in New York City and around the world.

Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner speaking at the U.N. in September 2014. Source: Vox

This is some of what she said:

dear matafele peinam,

don’t cry

mommy promises you

no one

will come and devour you

no greedy whale of a company sharking through political seas

no backwater bullying of businesses with broken morals

no blindfolded bureaucracies gonna push

this mother ocean over

the edge
no one's drowning, baby

no one's moving

no one's losing

their homeland

to the carteret islanders of papua new guinea

and to the taro islanders of the solomon islands

i take this moment

to apologize to you

we are drawing the line here

because baby we are going to fight

your mommy daddy

bubu jimma your country and president too

we will all fight....

hands reaching out

fists raising up

banners unfurling

megaphones booming

and we are

canoes blocking coal ships

we are

the radiance of solar villages

we are
the rich clean soil of the farmer’s past
we are
petitions blooming from teenage fingertips
we are
families biking, recycling, reusing,
engineers dreaming, designing, building,
artists painting, dancing, writing
and we are spreading the word
and there are thousands out on the street
marching with signs
hand in hand
chanting for change NOW
and they’re marching for you, baby
they’re marching for us
because we deserve to do more than just
survive
we deserve
to thrive

*****

I found this poem in her 2014 master’s thesis at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, “A History of Marshallese Literature.”

The letter B is for
baah (baham). From Engl. 2(inf, tr-e) 3,4,6(-i). Bomb.

Kobaah ke?

Are you contaminated with radioactive fallout?

*****

Here is her latest cultural intervention in the climate wars, from this year’s otherwise underwhelming U.N. climate summit COP 22 in Marrakesh.

Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner at COP 22. Source: Democracy Now!, Friday, November 18, 2016

At a climate change conference a colleague tells me 2 degrees is a just a benchmark for climate negotiations I tell him 2 degrees is a gamble at 2 degrees my islands, the Marshall Islands is already under water this is why our leaders push for 1.5 Seems small like 0.5 degrees shouldn’t matter like 0.5 degrees are just crumbs like the Marshall Islands
must look
don a map
just crumbs you
dust off the table, wipe
your hands clean of

Marshall Islands poet and climate activist. Source: Nuclear Age Peace Foundation
JULY

TAKE A LEAP FORWARD TOWARD CLIMATE JUSTICE

John Foran and Naomi Klein

January 5, 2017


If you know me, you know I tend to be optimistic about climate justice (some would say I’m in fact a hopeless idealist, or an incurable romantic, or even an insane utopian dreamer). Notwithstanding this (or is it because it’s all true?) I wanted to begin the year by taking this leap into the chartable waters of 2017.

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This is actually about something whose origins lie more than a year ago, but that doesn’t mean its past its use-by date.

The Leap sprang from a group of radical Canadian intellectuals and activists who share a common analysis with that articulated by co-founder Naomi Klein’s 2014 instant classic This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate. The only book I can think of on the climate justice movement that rivals it is journalist Wen Stephenson’s poignant cri de coeur What We Are Fighting For Now is Each Other: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Climate Justice.

The Leap is a manifesto that aspires to spark and inform a movement. I was one of hundreds who attended a meeting where it was presented to a global audience at COP 21 in Paris in December of 2015. There was real enthusiasm in a room of intergenerationalists, much of it for a chance to hear Klein and her husband Avi Lewis, whose film based on the book, and is also titled This Changes Everything, had just been released.

Rajiv Sicora, who edits the blog, now named The Leap: System Change on a Deadline, invites your participation, describing the blog as a space to “highlight a diverse range of voices – campaigners and frontline activists, theoreticians, policy wonks – writing for atypical audiences. We hope to offer a powerful platform for everyone from veteran writers who have yet to delve into the climate debate, to up-and-coming journalists, to longtime activists who don’t normally have time to write at all” [full disclosure: I have been published on the blog].

Rajiv also explains the origin of the name:

It comes from the conclusion of This Changes Everything, entitled “The Leap Years: Just Enough Time for Impossible.” This is the kind of leap Naomi writes about:

“A great deal of the work of deep social change involves having debates during which new stories can be told to replace the ones that have failed us. Because if we are to have any hope of making the kind of civilizational leap required of this fateful decade, we will need to start believing, once again, that humanity is not hopelessly selfish and greedy – the image ceaselessly sold to us by everything from reality shows to neoclassical economics.”

See what you think, and then imagine what The Leap would look like from your vantage points – be they national, generational, gendered, “raced,” class-based, or otherwise. Even better, gather a few friends together and try this!

Below are some highlights to give you a sense of its flavor. You can read the whole manifesto here.
The Leap Manifesto

_We start from the premise that Canada is facing the deepest crisis in recent memory._

We could live in a country powered entirely by renewable energy, woven together by accessible public transit, in which the jobs and opportunities of this transition are designed to systematically eliminate racial and gender inequality. Caring for one another and caring for the planet could be the economy’s fastest growing sectors. Many more people could have higher wage jobs with fewer work hours, leaving us ample time to enjoy our loved ones and flourish in our communities.

We know that the time for this great transition is short. Climate scientists have told us that this is the decade to take decisive action to prevent catastrophic global warming. That means small steps will no longer get us where we need to go….

Moved by the treaties that form the legal basis of this country and bind us to share the land “for as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the rivers flow,” we want energy sources that will last for time immemorial and never run out or poison the land. Technological breakthroughs have brought this dream within reach. The latest research shows it is feasible for Canada to get 100% of its electricity from renewable resources within two decades; by 2050 we could have a 100% clean economy.

_We demand that this shift begin now…._

The money we need to pay for this great transformation is available – we just need the right policies to release it. Like an end to fossil fuel subsidies. Financial transaction taxes. Increased resource royalties. Higher income taxes on corporations and wealthy people. A progressive carbon tax. Cuts to military spending. All of these are based on a simple “polluter pays” principle and hold enormous promise.

One thing is clear: public scarcity in times of unprecedented private wealth is a manufactured crisis, designed to extinguish our dreams before they have a chance to be born.
Those dreams go well beyond this document. “We call on all those seeking political office to seize this opportunity and embrace the urgent need for transformation”. We call for town hall meetings across the country where residents can gather to democratically define what a genuine leap to the next economy means in their communities.

Inevitably, this bottom-up revival will lead to a renewal of democracy at every level of government, working swiftly towards a system in which every vote counts and corporate money is removed from political campaigns.

This is a great deal to take on all at once, but such are the times in which we live.

And so we call on all those seeking political office to seize this opportunity and embrace the urgent need for transformation. This is our sacred duty to those this country harmed in the past, to those suffering needlessly in the present, and to all who have a right to a bright and safe future….

Now is the time for boldness.

now is the time to leap.

*****

You can get involved in the discussion here. Why not take the plunge, heart in hand, with your soul on your sleeve?

“Friends, time is not just short. We have run out of time. This is our historical moment. Let us not disappoint. The stakes are simply too high. Now is not the time for small steps. Now is the time for boldness. Now is the time to leap.” —Naomi Klein

Source: Common Dreams essay by Naomi Klein.
August

Trumpism – The Dirty, Ugly Reality (with a coda on the antidote!)

*John Foran, N.D.B. Connolly, Keisha N. Blain, and Van Jones*

January 6, 2017


*Source: The Young Turks* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWBZha_AXIk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWBZha_AXIk)

Ever the optimist, I thought it would be good to begin the year on a hopeful note, so how am I going to do that with THIS topic?

Well, given that we are going to need a slew of new ideas to confront the whole new dirty and ugly reality (Trump, neoliberal capitalism, climate catastrophe – OK, only the first of these is new), it probably behooves us to wrap our heads as clearly as possible around just who and what we are dealing with.
The Deep Background

So much has been written already about Donald Trump, the election of 2016, and the horrors that surely lie ahead of us, that it is impossible to single out just one piece to focus hearts and minds. Therefore, taking the long view — and why not? Heaven help us if it’s a day more than four years — here is some of the deep background that you might want to explore on those long winter nights that try our souls. The document below has links to a semester’s worth of “readings and resources from more than one hundred scholars in a variety of disciplines” — see you at the final exam! Don’t worry: I give high grades because for some reason, my students do really well.

And if you are looking for the lowdown on what lies ahead, here, courtesy of Grist, is the best overview of Trump’s key cabinet and other official positions so far.

It is noteworthy that some of the biggest pushback against the crazy meanness of the incoming administration will continue to be on college campuses, among many other places, as in the Democratic Day of Education” scheduled at my home institution – UC Santa Barbara – for January 18. For those who can’t attend, here’s the very serious, thoughtful, and frightening Trump syllabus. (Ooh, I hope they adopt this if they ever revive Rump University!)

It’s a long set of readings, but you can see what appeals! There’s a resource guide with links to a lot of the materials here.

As the authors, Johns Hopkins University Associate Professor of History N. D. B. Connolly and Keisha N. Blain, Assistant Professor of History at the University of Iowa explain, ‘Concerned less with Trump as a man than with ‘Trumpism’ as a product of history, this course interrogates the connections between wealth, violence, and politics. Though drafted in the summer, the syllabus remains fresh and relevant, as you will be able to tell from reading this insightful introduction to it.
The Trump Syllabus 2.0

N. D. B. Connolly and Keisha N. Blain

http://www.publicbooks.org/feature/trump-syllabus-20

June 28, 2016 – On June 19th, the Chronicle of Higher Education ran a web version of a mock college syllabus that sought to explore the deep historical and political roots of Donald Trump’s political success during the 2016 Presidential campaign. The syllabus suffered from a number of egregious omissions and inaccuracies, including its failures to include contributions of scholars of color and address the critical subjects of racism, sexism, and xenophobia on which Trump has built his candidacy.

In May 2016, Donald Trump became the Republican Party’s presumptive nominee for President of the United States. Not since Barry Goldwater’s 1964 bid has a major political party produced so polarizing a candidate. Many, including Trump himself, attributed the campaign’s success to factors unique to Trump, like his wealth, his celebrity, and his professed aversion for “political correctness.” Trump’s political ascendancy came, however, as his personal fortunes did: through inheritance.

This course, assembled by historians N. D. B. Connolly and Keisha N. Blain, includes suggested readings and other resources from more than one hundred scholars in a
variety of disciplines. The course explores Donald Trump’s rise as a product of the American lineage of racism, sexism, nativism, and imperialism. It offers an introduction to the deep currents of American political culture that produced what many simply call “Trumpism”: personal and political gain marred by intolerance, derived from wealth, and rooted in the history of segregation, sexism, and exploitation.

The readings below introduce observers to the past and present conditions that allowed Trump to seize electoral control of a major American political party. By extension, this syllabus acknowledges the intersectional nature of power and politics. The course emphasizes the ways that cultural capital like Trump’s grows best under certain socio-economic conditions. Trump’s open advocacy for race-based exclusion and politically motivated violence on matters both foreign and domestic cannot be separated from the historical and day-to-day inequalities endured by people of color, women, and religious minorities living in or migrating to the United States. Concerned less with Trump as a man than with “Trumpism” as a product of history, this course interrogates the connections between wealth, violence, and politics.

The weekly readings are organized by themes captured by Trump’s own statements on the campaign trail during the 2016 presidential election. The syllabus is built for flexibility. The recommended books may be used in whole or in part. Primary sources can work under one theme or across weeks. A collection of assignments to accompany this syllabus appears on the website of the African American Intellectual History Society – with the contributing faculty member’s name provided for attribution.

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Coda: The Antidote Starts Here

So, you may be asking: Where’s the hope? Go here to read an interview with the very astute and hope-positive U.S. social justice activist Van Jones called “Only a ‘Love Army’ Will Conquer Trump,” conducted by Rolling Stone journalist Tim Dickinson. Van is right on the mark here…

Van Jones: Only a “Love Army” Will Conquer Trump

December 6, 2016
Excerpts:

There were five things on the ballot on November 8th, 2016: the presidency, the Senate, the House, the Supreme Court and the character of the country. Progressives lost all five. But the thing that hurts the most is losing on the character of the country – the idea we’re going to be divisive as a country. So we have to start there, and reassert that we want to be an inclusive country where everyone gets treated with dignity and respect. I’ll tell you this: If you believe that “love trumps hate,” you can’t be marching around saying that and looking more hateful than Trump.

The problem is not the abundance of people with bad intentions; it’s the superabundance of people with good intentions who don’t know what to do yet. The Dream Corps is where I work, and we’re going to launch a campaign, #LoveArmy. We have got to bet on the good in people, including people who voted for Trump, and build up a big Love Army.

How do you do that? We’re going to do national teach-ins starting very soon – once a week, every week, standing up for the most vulnerable people: Muslims, the DREAMers, Jewish people, women, trans people, black protestors. And once a week, give the whole country a chance to show a whole lotta love – both to demonstrate and deepen a solidarity with those groups, all under one hashtag. #LoveArmy is an opportunity to reassert at a values level....
Everyone is going to want to fight – as they should – at the appointment level, the policy level. But it’s at the values level that we need to do a reset. And it has to be inclusive, by the way, of rural poor people, of people in coal country, red-state and industrial Heartland voters who are also going to be let down by Trump, who are also going to be in a lot of pain.

If you’re building a Love Army that includes all of the usual suspects that Trump went after and also people that Trump tricked, you start building a majority movement. That’s what I’m trying to do. The people that Trump attacked, but also the people that Trump duped….

Both political parties suck right now. The Democratic Party has become a hidey hole for all kinds of elite snobbery, and Democrats won’t confess to it and deal with it. The Republican Party has become a hidey hole for all kinds of bigots, and they won’t confess or deal with it. It doesn’t mean that every Democrat is a snob or every Republican is a bigot. What it means is that neither political party seems to respect all Americans – and that is a big fucking problem. And people need to deal with their own party’s crap. And that’s the challenge.
September

The Simple Logic of the End of Fossil Fuels (Again)

John Foran and Oil Change International

January 9, 2017


Sometimes, I urge my students to be “eyes-open optimists,” meaning to base whatever optimism they can muster on our (their) best understanding of the situation. This is a piece I would recommend for anyone interested in understanding the basic predicament we Earth Citizens face with respect to fossil fuels and
the urgency we are under to replace them with safe, renewable, and ideally community-controlled alternatives.

This is the basic energy information we need as we enter a new year of 365 days of building a more powerful climate justice movement.

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I’m a bit of a climate studies nerd, and I love those rare and powerful analytical pieces that lay things out fully and clearly: think Ezra Silk’s Victory Plan above, or Kevin Anderson’s amazing 2012 essay “Climate Change Going Beyond Dangerous – Brutal Numbers and Tenuous Hope,” or for that matter, Bill McKibben’s now classic “Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math: Three Simple Numbers that add up to global catastrophe – and make clear who the real enemy is” that in large measure got the fossil fuel divestment movement off the ground.

Following in these footsteps, and standing on their shoulders, what this next piece, collectively authored under the auspices of Oil Change International and its allies, does beautifully – starting with its clever title – is present an open and shut case that what the world needs now (besides love) is to leave the coal in the hole, the oil in the soil, the tar sand in the land, and the gas [use your imagination to fill in this rhyme]. It lays bare the logic behind Blockadia’s attempts to stop every pipeline, railway, port, refinery, seafaring oil rig, mountaintop strip mine, fossil-fueled power station – and so much more.

As the Executive Summary states: “Our analysis indicates a hard limit to how much fossil fuel can be extracted, which can be implemented only by governments.” It’s hard to be more clear and simple than that!

Except … it’s up to us in the global climate justice movement and our allies to force our governments to do this. In other words, to use the information and recommendations in this document, we have to nail our leaders to the wall and make them do this [metaphorically speaking, as we are of course, not violent).

Here are the main conclusions, brought to us by the excellent Oil Change International and its allies.

Since I’m willing to bet that even readers who have come this far will not devour the entire report, I present here the long Executive Summary. For the even shorter bottom-line takeaway (this will be on the exam), feel empowered to skip ahead to “A Managed Decline and a Just Transition.”
Executive Summary

In December 2015, world governments agreed to limit global average temperature rise to well below 2°C, and to strive to limit it to 1.5°C. This report examines, for the first time, the implications of these climate boundaries for energy production and use. Our key findings are:
• The potential carbon emissions from the oil, gas, and coal in the world’s currently operating fields and mines would take us beyond 2°C of warming.
• The reserves in currently operating oil and gas fields alone, even with no coal, would take the world beyond 1.5°C.
• With the necessary decline in production over the coming decades to meet climate goals, clean energy can be scaled up at a corresponding pace, expanding the total number of energy jobs.

One of the most powerful climate policy levers is also the simplest: stop digging for more fossil fuels. We therefore recommend:

• No new fossil fuel extraction or transportation infrastructure should be built, and governments should grant no new permits for them.
• Some fields and mines – primarily in rich countries – should be closed before fully exploiting their resources, and financial support should be provided for non-carbon development in poorer countries.
• This does not mean stopping using all fossil fuels overnight. Governments and companies should conduct a managed decline of the fossil fuel industry and ensure a just transition for the workers and communities that depend on it.

In August 2015, just months before the Paris climate talks, President Anote Tong of the Pacific island nation of Kiribati called for an end to construction of new coal mines and coal mine expansions. This report expands his call to all fossil fuels.

**ENOUGH ALREADY**

The Paris Agreement aims to help the world avoid the worst effects of climate change and respond to its already substantial impacts. The basic climate science involved is simple: cumulative carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions over time are the key determinant of how much global warming occurs. This gives us a finite carbon budget of how much may be emitted in total without surpassing dangerous temperature limits.

We consider carbon budgets that would give a likely (66%) chance of limiting global warming below the 2°C limit beyond which severe dangers occur, or a medium (50%) chance of achieving the 1.5°C goal. Fossil fuel reserves – the known below-ground stocks of extractable fossil fuels – significantly exceed these budgets. For the 2°C or 1.5°C limits, respectively 68% or 85% of reserves must remain in the ground.

This report focuses on the roughly 30% of reserves in oil fields, gas fields, and coal mines that are already in operation or under construction. These are the sites where the necessary wells have been (or are being) drilled, the pits dug, and the pipelines,
processing facilities, railways, and export terminals constructed. These developed reserves are detailed in Figure ES-1, along with assumed future emissions from the two major non-energy sources of emissions: land use and cement manufacture.

We see that – in the absence of a major change in the prospects of carbon capture and storage (CCS):

- The oil, gas, and coal in already-producing fields and mines are more than we can afford to burn while keeping likely warming below 2°C.
- The oil and gas alone are more than we can afford for a medium chance of keeping to 1.5°C.

**WHEN YOU’RE IN A HOLE, STOP DIGGING**

Traditional climate policy has largely focused on regulating at the point of emissions, while leaving the supply of fossil fuels to the market. If it ever was, that approach is no longer supportable. Increased extraction leads directly to higher emissions, through lower prices, infrastructure lock-in, and perverse political incentives. Our analysis indicates a hard limit to how much fossil fuel can be extracted, which can be implemented only by governments:

- No new fossil fuel extraction or transportation infrastructure should be built, and governments should grant no new permits for them.
Continued construction would either commit the world to exceeding 2°C of warming, and/or require an abrupt end to fossil fuel production and use at a later date (with increasing severity depending on the delay). Yet right now, projected investment in new fields, mines, and transportation infrastructure over the next twenty years is $14 trillion – either a vast waste of money or a lethal capital injection. The logic is simple: whether through climate change or stranded assets, a failure to begin a managed decline now would inevitably entail major economic and social costs.

The good news is that there is already progress toward stopping new fossil fuel development. China and Indonesia have declared moratoria on new coal mine development, and the United States has done so on federal lands [Editor's note: this was written before the disastrous 2016 U.S. election]. These three countries account for roughly two-thirds of the world’s current coal production.

In 2015, U.S. President Barack Obama rejected the proposed Keystone XL tar sands pipeline by noting that some fossil fuels should be left in the ground, and there is growing recognition of the importance of a climate test in decisions regarding new fossil fuel infrastructure [alas, this too was written before the election]. There is an urgent need to make the coal moratoria permanent and worldwide, and to stop new oil and gas development as well.

Ending new fossil fuel construction would bring us much closer to staying within our carbon budgets, but it is still not enough to achieve the Paris goals. To meet them, some early closure of existing operations will be required. Every country should do its fair share, determined by its capacity to act, along with its historic responsibility for causing climate change. With just 18% of the world’s population, industrialized countries have accounted for over 60% of emissions to date, and possess far greater financial resources to address the climate problem.

Most early closures should therefore take place in industrialized countries, beginning with (but not limited to) coal. While politically pragmatic, the approach of stopping new construction tends to favor countries with mature fossil fuel industries; therefore, part of their fair share should include supporting other countries on the path of development without fossil fuels, especially in providing universal access to energy. Therefore:

- Some fields and mines – primarily in rich countries – should be closed before fully exploiting their reserves, and financial support should be provided for non-carbon development in poorer countries.

Additionally, production should be discontinued wherever it violates the rights of local people – including indigenous peoples – or where it seriously damages biodiversity.
A MANAGED DECLINE AND A JUST TRANSITION

Stopping new construction does not mean turning off the taps overnight. Existing fields and mines contain a finite stock of extractable fossil fuels. Depleting these stocks, even including some early closures, would entail a gradual transition in which extraction rates would decline over a few decades. This is consistent with a rate of expansion of clean energy that is both technically and economically possible.

We consider a simple modelling of world energy sources under two scenarios: 50% renewable energy by 2035 and 80% by 2045, both with a complete phase-out of coal usage, except in steel production. It is compared with the projected oil and gas extraction from existing fields alone.

We conclude that:

• While existing fields and mines are depleted over the coming decades, clean energy can be scaled up at a corresponding pace.

While this pace of renewable energy expansion will require policy support, it continues existing trends. In many countries – large and small, rich and poor – clean energy is already being deployed at scale today. Denmark now generates more than 40% of its electricity from renewable sources, Germany more than 30%, and Nicaragua 36%. China is now the largest absolute generator of renewable electricity, and expanding renewable generation quickly. In most contexts, the costs of wind and solar power are now close to those of gas and coal; in some countries renewable costs are already lower. The expansion of renewable energy will be harder where there are weak grids in developing countries, hence the importance of climate finance in supporting a non-carbon transition.

As for transportation, electric vehicles are now entering the mainstream and are on course to soon be cheaper than gasoline or diesel cars. With sufficient policy support and investment, the growth in clean energy can match the needed decline in fossil fuel extraction and use.

While there are clear advantages to clean energy – lower costs, greater employment, reduced local pollution, and ultimately greater financial returns – the transition will not be painless. Energy workers’ skills and locations may not be well matched to the new energy economy. Whole communities still depend on fossil fuel industries. There is a vital need for a careful, just transition to maximize the benefits of climate action while minimizing its negative impacts.
Governments should provide training and social protection for affected energy workers and communities. Where appropriate, they should require energy companies to offer viable careers to their workers in non-carbon areas of their business. Governments should also consult with communities to kick-start investments that will enable carbon-dependent regions to find a new economic life. Waiting is not an option; planning and implementation must begin now:

*Governments and companies should conduct a proactively managed decline of the fossil fuel industry and ensure a just transition for the workers and communities that depend on it.* (emphasis added)

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John: It’s not as if we just found out about this stuff yesterday, as the existence of this astonishing newspaper article from the Rodney & Otamatea Times in New Zealand explained the likely consequences of burning the world’s coal, back in … 1912!

*Science Notes and News.*

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**COAL CONSUMPTION AFFECTING CLIMATE.**

The furnaces of the world are now burning about 2,000,000,000 tons of coal a year. When this is burned, uniting with oxygen, it adds about 7,000,000,000 tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere yearly. This tends to make the air a more effective blanket for the earth and to raise its temperature. The effect may be considerable in a few centuries.

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*Source: from a Sustainable Business Network Facebook post, reported by Alex Kasprak: [here.](#)*
OCTOBER

BEING(S) FULLY ALIVE: THE NEW SCIENCE OF ENLIVENMENT AND THE STRUGGLE FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

John Foran, Andreas Weber, and Hildegard Kurt

January 10, 2017


As a person of joyful disposition, I thought it would be good to begin the year on a hopeful note, and the series I have been writing is an attempt to do just that. This I find this entry a particularly good example of something to marvel at, and to put humans in their proper place – not an easy feat!
And remember, to deny the insights of this new science is probably to prove it right!

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The Biology of Wonder

This coming revolution in the “natural” sciences first caught my attention when I came across Andreas Weber’s aptly titled new book, The Biology of Wonder: Aliveness, Feeling and the Metamorphosis of Science. Another illuminating read has been Stephen Harrod Buhner’s 2014 book, Plant Intelligence and the Imaginal Realm: Beyond the Doors of Perception into the Dreaming of the Earth. On how animals fit into the new science, two recent books that have caught my attention just now are Peter Godfrey-Smith’s Other Minds: The Octopus, the Sea, and the Deep Origins of Consciousness, and his reviewer, Carl Safina’s Beyond Words: What Animals Think and Feel.

The ways these works dovetail with spirituality – indigenous cosmovisions of Pachamama/Mother Earth, Gaia theory, the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth, Buddhism, and other traditions that open up a space for the wondrous and consider the possibility of the miraculous – offer us a profound and viable hope, yet again, for a science of radical social transformation.

It is also a stunning and to my mind compelling critique of the limits of Enlightenment thought and of modernity itself, of the putative objectivity, authority, and neutrality of science, and of the human-nature-culture triad that we have misunderstood so badly due to our own arrogance vis-à-vis nonhuman life in all its forms. As Andreas Weber and Hildegard Kurt put the matter in today’s essay:

If reality cannot be objectified, a value-free and neutral science is not possible. Our conception of the world determines how we treat it and how it changes. Accordingly, any position that assumes an objective, timeless, and value-free description of reality or a part of it is a violent self-authorization. Any seemingly neutral and presumably objective attitude cements invisible structures of power. Knowledge is not objective when produced in this manner; it is valid predominantly in the sense that it stabilizes the system from which it arose.

Any knowledge is already an implementation of certain standards of treating the world and each another. The task of living together on this planet therefore requires being attentive not only towards theory, but also toward scientific practice. When does science only produce results to satisfy the inner demands of a knowledge industry? When does it legitimate political, economic, or technological interests? We need to carefully scrutinize all reifications of scientific thinking and refrain from them in order to help science become more an authority that serves the unfolding of aliveness and helps humankind develop a self-understanding as selfhood-in-connection.
Linking science and spirituality more closely to our own and others’ worlds, and seeing these entangled worlds through the lens of poetic objectivity is challenging – and humbling – stuff.

And this essay, excerpted from the summer of 2016 offers a short, eloquent introduction to the new biology of wonder. I’m especially curious to know what those in the sciences think of it. Enjoy!

Andreas Weber and Hildegard Kurt. Photo source.

The Enlivenment Manifesto: Politics and Poetics in the Anthropocene

Andreas Weber and Hildegard Kurt

Kosmos

Spring | Summer 2016

Key Concepts

- The current ideology of dead matter, mechanical causality, and the exclusion of experience from descriptions of reality in ecology and economy are responsible for our failure to protect aliveness in our world.
- The challenge of the “Anthropocene” and the end of dualistic enlightenment-style thinking is to install a new “bios” into our concept of reality, putting aliveness, the world as a living process of mutual transforming relationships, subjectivity, and expression, at its center: an “Enlivenment” view.
- The scope of the “Enlivenment” perspective equals the shift in modern physics realizing that any observer is entangled with the system being observed.
Biological entanglement happens emotionally and experientially through sharing aliveness with and relating existentially to other living subjects.

- Findings in the life sciences, particularly in biosemiotics, cognition research, and developmental biology, show that it is necessary to view organisms as goal-directed agents, who bring meaning and experience into the world as physically relevant powers.
- We need a “policy of life” as a new political-philosophical attitude to make “deep sustainability” possible. It will supplant the idea of reality as iteration of “empirical facts” by an “empirical subjectivity” of shared aliveness and a “poetic objectivity” of describing and practicing relatedness and mutual transformation.

**Enlivenment in Brief**

Enlightenment thinking is coming to an end. The “Anthropocene” claims to step beyond the dualism of man-nature opposition. Culture is everywhere. This might be an opportunity for sustainable action: Saving nature becomes a cultural endeavour. However, the salute to anthropocene stewardship masks the silent enclosure of life within technoculture and bioeconomy. Civilization still operates as if reality is about organizing inert, dead matter in efficient ways. It is impossible to achieve sustainability with our prevailing “operating system” for economics, politics, and culture if the underlying “bios” – our unconscious assumption about reality – remains tied to an ideology of dead matter. On a profound level, nature is threatened by ignoring the principles of fertile, imaginative interpenetration, which shape existence. The real opportunity of the “Anthropocene” is to create a new bios for our thinking – an Enlivenment. This means to understand that man and nature pertain to a reality creating embodied processes of transformative relationships, expressive meaning, and true inwardness in biological subjects. The scope of the “Enlivenment” perspective is comparable to the shift in modern physics which realized that any observer is entangled with the system being observed. Biological entanglement happens emotionally and experientially through shared aliveness with other living subjects. The according “policy of life” strives for a civilization in which institutions and economic practices follow the maxim that life shall be. A policy of life struggles to liberate subjects from the colonization by the ideology of dead matter, granting them the right to embodied agency and to meaningful experience. This is not easily achieved, as it requires a deep change in our perception of reality. The “bios” of “Enlivenment” will require a long-term commitment comparable to the struggle for universal human rights….

A ground-breaking new vision of humankind is quickly spreading into the mainstream of our self-understanding. We are no longer standing apart from nature, so the new belief goes: We are enmeshed in it. Some authors even assert that nature and humans are one and the same. This comes not just as a philosophical claim but rather as an
empirical realization. The cultural image man has of himself has become a scientific issue. Traces of pesticides, nuclear fallout, and nitrogen fertilizer can be found in the Arctic ice crystals and in the soils of the Amazon. Climate change has proven that humans are inescapably connected to Earth and its systems.

These are the signs of the “Anthropocene,” or, as some call it, the geological “epoch of humankind.” “Anthropocene” was first coined as a geological term by atmospherical chemist Paul Crutzen. He argued that the extent of human domination over the biosphere has abrogated the idea that nature is separate from humans, thus ending the Holocene.

We still need to fully realize that the change in the geologic calendar named by Crutzen has heralded a distinctly new cultural epoch. In this new age, which has just begun, nature and mind are no longer separate. The duality between nature and culture, which stems from Enlightenment thinking, has been overcome, and this is big news. Dualism, which determined our thinking and actions for 250 years, has ended. The Enlightenment is over….

In one respect, we should feel relieved. The split in our thinking that opens between nature conceived as soulless resources and human agents as the rational actors was what started the ongoing environmental catastrophe, which includes global warming and the current “sixth extinction” wave of species loss….

Relief, however, is not due. The reconciliation between humans and nature, which is held by many who favor the Anthropocene viewpoint, takes place as a universal victory of culture, negating the possibility to understand and protect life and aliveness. What is saluted as the end of dualism is a hidden new self-aggrandizement of humankind, an attitude that again threatens to convert nature into a project of cultivation and control. Psychologists call such a situation a “double bind,” that is, to assert something but to do the opposite.

The philosophers Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno had pointed out this blind spot 70 years ago when criticizing Enlightenment-style thinking at the time. Horkheimer and Adorno claimed this thinking to be as “totalitarian as any system” and argued that its “untruth” lies in the fact that “the outcome is decided from the beginning. The world-rulership over nature turns against the thinking subject itself.” Horkheimer and Adorno wrote their analysis more in the first half of the last century. But has the situation really changed?

Leading proponents of the Anthropocene still interpret connections as “distinction-and-domination,” and reconnecting with other living beings is performed as a
dominance of humans over everything, even over ourselves. If all life is understood as culture, human superiority over nature has not ended. Instead, the human sphere has pervaded nature by a sort of hostile takeover.

Many proponents see the Anthropocene as revolutionary change. But much of its concepts thoroughly clutch to industrial modernism in the image of *Homo faber*, which controls nature by technical means. Current thinking increasingly emphasises all agency’s artificiality and “createdness.” The “cyborg,” even the “monster,” has become an often-used metaphor to understand our relationship with reality.

Though the bias toward technical control has superficially changed its face, it has endured in the depths, leading to an overall celebration of “hybrid structures” that reflects a profound bias towards the human-created artifact, such as consciousness enhanced by data interfaces, or ecosystems that have multiple roles as species museums and high-yield agricultural fields.

The idea of the Anthropocene as an epoch of humankind is giving new force to ideologies of objectification, manipulation, and control, whose true scope hides behind optimism and the “cool” rhetoric of communal eco-technological endeavours and “win–win” situations. In the wake of such marketing, industrialized countries are able to abuse the myth of a reconciliation between nature and technology in order to advance profit-oriented bio-economics, exploit global technology markets, and reify the economic and agrotechnological predominance. As has long been observed, such a move is even exemplified in the very term sustainability: from its origins as an eco-social concept, it has since mutated into a mere advertising catch phrase.

Even the “green economy” is stuck in this attitude. The monetization of nature, and the creation of leveraged financial instruments from “ecosystem services,” has put the green economy on the path toward privatization and scarcity, thereby obscuring the subjective dimension of living nature, and taking away a community’s right to enter into meaningful relationships with their environment.

If we believe that humans and nature can only be reconciled when technology dominates the Earth, and if we could admit presumed reconciliation, because we now have convinced ourselves that nature always carries a cultural stamp, we are prevented from seeing that every material exchange transforms the imaginative space of this world. We still disregard the interior and meaningful dimension of everything alive…. 

**Toward More Aliveness**
Most of the problems of our culture have a common origin: We view reality as dead. The economic, political, and educational mainstream see a world made of simple, nonliving building blocks. We can be enhanced – without limit – by analyzing the underlying elements and reconstructing them using technological, economic, or ecological means.

However, scientists increasingly understand reality as a meshwork of mutually transformative and meaningful relationships, which are experienced by subjects. From this vantage point, creativity and poetic expression, which since historical modernity was previously only reserved for the cultural sphere, become fundamental elements of reality.

This approach is not utopian. It is starting to find root in the current revolution of biological thinking, similar to the revolutions in physics roughly 100 years ago through relativity theory and quantum physics. Humans and nature are one, because creative imagination and feeling expression are natural forces – the only way to unite the lone spheres of matter and culture….

To preserve the biosphere, we need to focus our actions on the image of a living reality. We need to conceive a new “bios.” On the most profound level, nature is threatened not only by the disruption of bio-geo-chemical circulation and species balances, but also by ignoring the principles of fertile, imaginative interpenetration, which shape our existence. Traits of this threatened but necessary aliveness are openness, diversity, potentiality, the exchange of gifts, transformation, and the existential paradox of isolation and unity.

Experiencing the world as alive helps us to rethink our relationships to other humans, to other beings, and to matter. We can stop fashioning these connections into a means of exploiting resources. We will only decently survive the Anthropocene by realizing that humans not only pervade nature but consist of something not consciously made by man: a self-organizing aliveness profoundly enmeshed with ecosystems in terms of metabolism and metaphor.

The creative power inherent in reality cannot be turned off. To misjudge or disregard it, as we have done and continue to do, is dangerous and ultimately destructive for life. Ignoring reality always will generate violent encounters with it. Therefore, the most important task in the Anthropocene is to rethink and regenerate aliveness….

**Science as a Practice of Empathy**
The scientific community has a crucial task of re-shaping the relationship between humankind and the remainder of creation. Climate change has demonstrated how scientific methods are indispensable in the search for new ecological standards, and these methods have always shown our interrelatedness with nature, even when we believed otherwise.

Meanwhile, throwing more and better scientific techniques to resolve all open questions has proven futile. What we can “know” has structural restrictions – reality is not a closed system. We are giving up the idea of a biology that follows linear and objective laws, like in Newtonian physics. In biology, as analogous to quantum physics, the researcher is entangled with his research subject, although this entanglement is not quantum but experiential. Both are alive and connected in an emotional relationship….

In the Anthropocene, any form of science must consciously incorporate its particular values and interests, as well as explicitly naming them. It must reflect on its inevitable entanglement and creatively work upon it. Instead of producing merely functional knowledge, science should also focus on meaningful orientation, thereby carefully observing the world not from the perspective of a cybernetic system, but also as a meshwork of relationships with the power to bring forth aliveness. Through this, a culture of meaningful connection between humans and the remainder of creation can arise. It can be conceived as an art of embodied consciousness, as an ecological “Art of Living.”…

A policy of life preserves the necessary Enlightenment values – such as individual dignity, justice, and equality – while reconnecting them with their roots that rest in the co-creativity of everything alive. It does not substitute rationality with life but regards it as the quest to unfold a culture that is aware of, and responsible for, the potential imaginative aliveness in all living things.

A policy of life searches for alternatives to the dogma of growth and addiction to consumerism. It does not seek technological control but pursues the creative negotiation between equal participants in an ecosystem that all need to preserve. It strives to promote the experience of aliveness. It creates economic productivity through ecological stability and meaningful actions.

A policy of life strives for the following:

- A global ecological agriculture, which secures yields by enhancing biodiversity and human existential experiences (meaning and joy); which integrates and does not separate.
• An economy that does not support the “use” of resources in a “market” built on “objectivity” and separation but enlarges the possibilities to participate in a shared planetary metabolism of commons economy and is guided by an understanding of economic exchange as the shared household of the biosphere.
• A culture that no longer functions according to the income-generating model of private economics but participates in a cocreative process of production.
• A biology that understands organisms not only as ecosystem-service providers and molecular toolboxes but also as creative subjects, and which sees humans as a metabolic part of a biosphere enmeshed with life and feeling.
• An education that teaches an Art of Living and Connection; that does not follow only a standard of abstract knowledge, functionalistic technology, and “dead world” thought; that reduces valuations and judgements.
• A policy that understands regional administrative entities as self-organizing commons and does not follow rules of universal abstraction and selfish market interests.
• A shared livelihood with other beings in line with the South American creation ethos of “Buen Vivir “ or the idea of “Conviviality “ by Caillé et al., that is, a solidarity of existence with all beings.
• A regenerative transformation of the fractures and contradictions inherent in any connection, creation, and in life itself, in line with a bravery of being and an imaginative practice of aliveness with “manners, grace and style” (Gary Snyder).

A policy of life makes explicit what implicitly keeps us alive while actively nourishing it. It is pluralistic, dialogical, and mediating. It understands reality as a commons in which all beings co-creatively partake. It assumes responsibility for reality and supports us on the way to ourselves, acknowledging that this way is never achieved and can only be laid down by walking. Only when our new loyalty with everything alive becomes our cultural desire, the Anthropocene will truly merit the name of the “time of humankind.”

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Every living organism has a rhythm and a connection to the greater world around it. Photo credit: UnderClassRising.

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That moment of humble, powerless unknowing where the sadness of an ongoing loss washes through us and we cannot escape into facile solutioneering, is a powerful and necessary moment. It has the power to reach into us deeply enough to wipe away frozen ways of seeing and ingrained patterns of response. It gives us fresh eyes, and it loosens the tentacles of fear that hold us in normality. The ready solution is like a narcotic, diverting attention from the pain without healing the wound.

You may have noticed this narcotic effect, the quick escape into “let’s do something about it.” Of course, in those instances where cause and effect is simple and we know exactly what to do, then the quick escape is the right one. If you have a splinter in your foot, remove the splinter. But most situations are more complicated than that, including the ecological crisis on this planet. In those cases, the habit of rushing to the most convenient, superficially obvious causal agent distracts us from a more meaningful response. It prevents us from looking underneath, and underneath, and underneath.

When we transmit to each other our love of earth, mountain, water, and sea to others, and stir the grief over what has been lost; when we hold ourselves and others in the rawness of it without jumping right away to reflexive postures of solution and blame, we are penetrated deep to the place where commitment lives. We grow in our empathy. We come back to our senses….

Is this “the solution” to climate change? I am not offering it as a solution. Without it, though, no solution, no matter cleverly designed a policy it may be, is going to work.

As we approach the end of this series, I am left wondering what I myself can say that would offer hope and value to the discussions to come in this new year.

I am a sociologist who studies movements for radical social change. For twenty-five years I devoted myself to learning what I could about the great revolutions of the twentieth century, and especially what it was that brought them about. I thought that doing so would be of use to people who wanted to see a better world come about in our lifetimes.
And I did learn a lot, and was especially drawn to trying to understand what compelled “ordinary” people to do extraordinary things in the name of something better. This focused my attention on the importance of culture, emotions, the siren song of ideologies and the power of more popular, accessible ways of articulating grievances and a vision, and on how people found ways to come together and turn these deep, existential sources of action into the effective practice of changing their world.

As the first decade of the twenty-first century unfolded, I felt a need to do more than study and understand the world, and I turned from doing what might be called “radical scholarship” to something altogether different that is sometimes confused with it: scholar-activism (see my 2010 manifesto on this). Scholar-activism is not my favorite term, as it implicitly elevates scholars and activists above others, but it is a useful coupling that suggests that what we think we know about radical social change and how to bring it about means nothing if we don’t actually put it to some useful purpose (for scholars, this is an “experiment,” while for activists it means actual social change). And in doing so, we are quickly humbled by the limits of what we know and the fruitfulness of what others, being and acting together, can know and do.

And as the global justice movement against neoliberal corporate capitalism scored victories in places like Seattle, only to be derailed by George Bush’s war in Iraq into repurposing itself to deal with the terrible consequences of that war, and then was followed by a new radicalism in the Occupy movements and Arab Spring of 2011, a new upsurge of hopefulness about the possibilities for radical social transformation was placed back on the agenda and within reach of scholars frustrated by doing only analysis in academic settings that are both constrained by their own peculiar culture and hermetically sealed off from the movements themselves.

The ah-ha moment for me came when almost by chance and favorable circumstance I decided to go to Copenhagen in December 2009 and saw the global climate justice movement come of age against the backdrop of a miserably failed global climate negotiation by the world’s political and economic elites at the expense of both the planet and the people who live on it.

From then on I was hooked, and started travelling along a new path, doing whatever I could to support and be part of this movement. And Resilience – especially my amazing editor, Kristin Sponsler – has been kind enough to help me reach so many like-minded writers and readers and learn so much more about the prospects for surviving this crisis or at least fighting to maintain that possibility. I am immensely appreciative of this wonderful space.

So below I offer my own thoughts on how to move closer to the worlds we want, based on much comparative reflection on the stories of people everywhere who have acted in the name of radical social change, which for me, means something like “deep transformation of a society (or other entity such as a community, region, or the whole world) in the direction of greater economic equality and political participation, accomplished by the actions of a strong and diverse popular movement,” a definition loose
enough to encompass both the great revolutions of the twentieth century and the new paths to radical social change of our own.

The piece that follows is a bit academic-y. I no longer write so much for an academic audience, but I have always striven to make my work as accessible as possible to any interested audience. The “big idea” here is that to make radical social change in the twenty-first century, we may need to rethink what a political party is and create an unbreakable bond between whatever new kind of party we come up with and the social movements that fuel it and make it possible.

For those who are never going to grapple with this essay in its entirety, I provide a summary and some key extracts below, and for those who wish, here is a link to the whole essay, which was published in Studies in Social Justice in 2014.

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Beyond Insurgency to Radical Social Change

The New Situation

John Foran

The Arab Spring and U.S. Occupy movements surprised the world in 2011, showing that movements for radical social change remain viable responses to the intertwined crises of globalization: economic precarity, political disenchantment, rampant inequality, and the long-term fuse of potentially catastrophic climate change. These movements possess political cultural affinities of emotion, and historical memory, and share oppositional and creative discourses with each other and with a chain of movements that have gathered renewed momentum and relevance as neoliberal globalization runs up against the consequences of its own rapaciousness.

Three paths to radical social change have emerged that differ from the hierarchical revolutionary movements of the twentieth century: 1) the electoral path to power pursued by the Latin American Pink Tide nations of Ecuador, Bolivia, and Venezuela, 2) the route of re-making power at the local level as in Chiapas or seeking change at the global level as does the climate justice movement, both of which bypass the traditional goal of taking state power, and 3) the occupation of public space to force out tyrants, as in Tunisia and Egypt.

This paper assesses the strengths and limitations of each path, arguing that social movements and progressive parties together may possess the best chances for making radical social change in this new situation. These threads of resistance may also point
toward a future of radical social change as we imagine their enduring results, self-evident and more subtle.

**Political Cultures of Opposition as the Threads of Creation**

In my 2005 *book* *Taking Power: On the Origins of Revolutions in the Third World* I proposed a hypothesis about the origins of revolutions that brought together the economic and social dislocations of dependent capitalist development, the political vulnerabilities of dictatorships (and, paradoxically, of truly open polities where the left could come to power through elections), and a conjunctural economic downturn accompanied by a favorable moment in the world system where leading outside powers did not (or could not) intervene. Looking at the world since 2009, we see versions of each of these: the glaring contradictions of neo-liberal capitalist globalization, the persistence of personalist regimes (especially in the Arab world, and now, in 2017, in the United States) and wide disenchantment at the hollowing out of representative democracies in Europe, North America, and Latin America, the deepest and most dangerous global economic downturn since the 1930s, and finally, the attenuation of U.S. power due to the military occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, growing public debt, the rise of Asian economic centers, and the financial bubbles that brought on the great recession.

In the twentieth century, when all of these more or less structural conditions presented themselves, the final, requisite piece for fundamental social change was one of agency and culture: the ability of revolutionaries and ordinary citizens to fashion powerful political cultures of opposition capable of bringing diverse social groups to the side of a movement for deep social change, as happened in the Mexican, Russian, Chinese,
Cuban, Nicaraguan, and Iranian revolutions. It should be noted that there are also political cultures of legitimation that states draw on, and that these can fray for many reasons, so that in a Gramscian sense there are always multiple political cultures on both sides of a particular state/civil society divide, whose proponents constantly maneuver for position, and ultimately for hegemony.

In the twenty-first century, the nature of movements for what we might now call radical social change rather than revolution has itself changed, as activists, reformers, dreamers, and revolutionaries globally have pursued nonviolent paths to a better world, intending to live and act as they would like that world to be. That is, the ends of justice are no longer held to justify the means of violence, but the means of non-violent resistance reflect and guarantee the ends that they seek. In this, they embody and illustrate the virtues of “prefigurative politics” and in particular, horizontalist ways to realize them.

I have recently begun to call these positive, alternative visions “political cultures of creation.” Movements become even stronger when to a widely felt culture of opposition and resistance they add a positive vision of a better world, an alternative to strive for to improve on or replace what exists. In this sense, some of the differences between old and new movements for radical social change seem to include the attempt to get away from the hierarchical organizations that made the great revolutions and move in the direction of more horizontal, deeply democratic relations among participants; the expressive power of using popular idioms more than ideological discourses; the growing use of nonviolence; and the salience of political cultures of creation alongside political cultures of opposition and resistance.

More than 100,000 march in the streets of Copenhagen, December 2009 under the banner of System Change Not Climate Change. Source: Climate Justice Action Network.
Problems and Prospects

The obvious political question is: *Can* these new political cultures of opposition produce – or at least contribute to – some type of global transformation of the sort that is needed to deal with a world in crisis? These cases have shown their ability to move beyond ideology in favor of the strengths of popular idioms demanding social justice and have shown us some of the advantages of horizontal networks over vertical hierarchies. But how to fashion large-scale popular spaces for democracy, and how to articulate the discourses that will bring together the broadest coalitions ever seen onto a global stage constitute great challenges....

What, then, lies between or beyond direct action and elections? One idea is to combine electing “progressive” governments and forging social movements to push them from below and beside to make good on their promises, and to make links with other movements, nations, and organizations everywhere. In other words, rather than the dichotomous choice between seeking to change the world through elections versus building a new society from the bottom up, the future of radical social change may well lie at the many possible *intersections* of deeply democratic social movements and equally diverse and committed new parties and political coalitions....

Conclusions

It will take time for these open-ended revolutions to blossom and reach their full potential. Important to this process will be the articulation of powerful political cultures based on participatory (not formal, representative, elite-controlled) democracy and on economic alternatives that challenge the neo-liberal capitalist globalization that created the conditions for their flowering in the first place – namely, we will need to nurture powerful and attractive political cultures of creation as well as opposition.

The people in each of these places – the most radical ones, the younger ones, the most savvy – reject the dysfunctional social and political systems they have inherited. They are not about renegotiating anybody’s ruling bargain. And they are succeeding. Or at least they haven’t failed. And, like their counterparts everywhere, they are not done yet.
A very special announcement

And – you heard it first and you heard it here – I am considering – both seriously and with a healthy dose of whimsy – running for president of the United States in 2020…

My proposal is that we beat Trumpism and the poisonous, fatally compromised neoliberalism of the Democratic Party with a new plan: the creation of a new kind of party-like organization that comes out of and exists alongside all of the new movements for radical social change – Occupy, Black Lives Matter, Standing Rock, the Sandernistas, the Dreamers, the climate justice movement, and so many others. That we bring a slate of candidates from these movements and from organizations such as the Green Party and the Socialist Alternative and the Working Families and independents everywhere in 2020 (and in 2018 if we can), that is younger, more diverse, more working-class than anything ever seen before in the US – because it will be a convergence of many forces, not led by any of them, or by any individual and certainly not under some all-encompassing grand ideology, but rather united by a set of shared values – deeply democratic, cooperative and egalitarian, in tune with the rhythms of the earth, and committed to the provision of free education, health care, shelter, social security, and meaningful work, where no one is left out, let alone behind.

That’s a long sentence – but you get the idea.

This basic program is easily paid for by deep cuts to the military budget and steep increases in taxes on the wealthy and on corporations.
This is a movement that as yet has no name. But it has a future. If such a thing could be accomplished, I would be honored to stand for president (let’s have a little sense of humor about all this, and some fun too while we’re at it) in the election of 2020. I am open to working alongside anyone who wants to go in this direction, which is the only way through the crises that now plague us. We must do so quickly, because the inexorable warming of the planet is poised to condemn us all if we don’t rise up NOW and act in the name of humanity, with our sisters and brothers all over the globe, in the greatest, grandest intersectional, intergenerational, international wave of like-minded people ever seen, powered by compassion, community, and communication.

I’d be pleased to hear from anyone for whom this resonates deeply. Let’s resolve to do this, for ourselves, our families, our communities, our shared existence with all living creatures everywhere, and for the future of all — in fact a future much better than the present — because if we can dream it, so might we build it, together.

All thoughts and suggestions on what would be this ultimate test of scholar-activism, simultaneously and experiment and a real revolutionary process — in all its ridiculous immodesty — are most welcome!

Is the world ready for this?
December
The Best Climate Justice Movies and Videos of the Year

John Foran

January 12, 2017


“What strikes me especially,” an interviewer once noted to Deleuze, “is the friendship you have for the authors you write about.” “If you don’t admire something,” Deleuze replied, “if you don’t love it, you have no reason to write a word about it.”

Michael Munro, The Communism of Thought (punctum books, 2014)

*Ever the optimist, I thought it would be good to begin the year on a hopeful note, and just at the end of writing this series, I came across Kim Stanley Robinson’s Foreword to Everything Change: An*
Anthology of Climate Fiction, from whom I have also taken the enchanting future imagined above.

KSR writes:

There’s a certain kind of joy that can emerge out of intense and meaningful situations; in an emergency, what to do and how to live become questions with clear answers. So it is that even the angriest and most cold-eyed of these stories give reasons for hope, because the writers have not flinched from the huge problems we face, and neither have their characters. Read on and enjoy learning more, knowing more, living more.

If that’s not an invitation to read cli-fi, I don’t know what is.

And as the editors of the Anthology note, Margaret Atwood observes “It’s not climate change – it’s everything change.”

Novels, short stories, photos, art, music, and performance are just a few of the ways we are telling and intend to tell more of the stories of climate justice around the world. This last essay explores the power of another medium for telling stories, and presents some of the most compelling recent film and video work that tells us on some profound plane of existence what we must do about the huge problems we face.

Now is most certainly the time for eliciting in ourselves and in and with others that kind of joy that can emerge out of intense and meaningful situations.

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OK, NOW Let’s Watch Some Stuff on Netflix

If you have made it to here, well congratulations! Your reward is that you get to watch some powerful films and shorter videos. Here is a very partial (no doubt in both senses of the word), annotated list of some of the best films and video shorts for climate justice that I have seen this year!

Let’s start with a few of the best feature films of 2016…

Demain

I had the opportunity to screen this film – which I had been unable to see on the internet [but now that may be changing, as this site, which seems legitimate, screens it in French with French subtitles, and a fair number of the interviews are in English; to see part two, click below part one].
I can only concur with what transitionista Rob Hopkins, who appears in it, says in this review. Keep an eye out for it!

The unstoppable rise of ‘Demain’

Rob Hopkins

February 5, 2016

The film Demain (Tomorrow) is proving to be one of the most remarkable catalysts for Transition and other bottom-up approaches that has ever been made. I recently saw it described by a friend of mine as March of the Penguins for localists”. Mention of it often pops up in emails from people who have seen it. One recently said “Demain is working really well in France, it is a crazy phenomenon, never a documentary has touched so many people in France”.

The film, created by Cyril Dion and Melanie Laurent, was premiered in Paris during COP21 [in December 2015], and has since been seen by 560,000 people in France alone.

Its inspiring message has really hit a chord with people. As Cyril told me, “we are receiving every day messages from people launching projects or using the movie to support current initiatives”.

A review in Le Monde described the film as “a phenomenon of society” [JF: in English, we’d probably say, interestingly enough, “a phenomenon of nature’]. It added:

In a France darkened by crisis and terrorism, this documentary is a “breath of hope” … (it) presents the spectators with people who are not in the [spot]light, but who create, invent, and are preparing for the future. It takes them out of the impasse.
Another, in *La Vie*, wrote that “this was a rare thing: the audience actually spoke to each other, before and after the movie! Indeed, many of them were there for their second or third viewing of the film”.

**Beyond the Red Lines: System Change Not Climate Change**

*After I watched the feature-length documentary, Beyond the Red Lines: System Change Not Climate Change, I wrote some friends: “There were so many familiar people and events, things seen or read or taught about, it was like watching a home movie – feelings of nostalgia, pride, and love for these people and their efforts on behalf of ourselves and all creatures on this planet.”*

You can watch it [here](http://cinemedia.com) at cinemedia.

Here’s what it’s about:

From the lignite mines in the Rhineland, to the port of Amsterdam or on the streets of Paris during the World Climate Summit, the struggles for climate justice are fought at more and more fronts. Beyond the red lines is the story of a growing movement that says “Enough! Here and no further!” and commits civil disobedience taking the transition towards a climate just society into its own hands.

The year 2015 was marked by human induced climate change increasingly spiraling out of control – and the struggle for climate justice taking place at more and more fronts. In Paris a global climate agreement was adopted. But was it really about saving the
planet? While negotiations and greenhouse gas emissions are in full swing, there are worlds between what would be needed to avert runaway climate chaos and the measures actually being taken.

This film portrays three initiatives before and during the World Climate Summit. It shows 1,300 people entering a lignite open cast mine and putting their bodies in the way of giant coal excavators in order to paralyze Europe’s largest source of CO2 for one day (Ende Gelände) [JF: more on this below]. We hear the voices of people that block the import of fossil fuels at the harbour of Amsterdam (Climate camp “ground control” & “Climate Games” [JF: also the subject of one of our video shorts]). We meet people on a 5,000 km bicycle ride to Paris, providing on their way a common voice for a climate just world to countless local initiatives (Alternatiba).

The film also documents how tens of thousands take the streets of Paris during the World Climate Summit despite the proclaimed state of emergency. Meanwhile the largest climate change mobilization recorded in recent history unites more than 785,000 people in 2,200 events in 175 countries.

In the midst of giant machines, raised voices and apocalyptic landscapes, the logic of a system based on endless growth and its “green” crisis management is questioned.

Beyond the red lines is the story of a growing movement that says “Enough! Here and no further!” and commits civil disobedience taking the transition towards a climate just society into its own hands.

**Before the Flood**

*The most publicized climate change film event of 2016, Before the Flood – whose title I keep misremembering as After the Flood! – is narrated by celebrity climate champion and U.N. Messenger of Peace [!] Leonardo DiCaprio [I say this in earnestness and with all due credit].*
I watched it for free when it came out in November, and liked it very much. It is the best of the sub-genre of celebrity-made films on the climate crisis, and I feel DiCaprio is a genuine spokesperson for climate change action.

You can now rent it at its very informative website [here](#), where you will find the following teaser and much more besides, including knowledgeable analyses of the crisis, some suggested solutions, and various ways to get involved:

If you could know the truth about the threat of climate change – would you want to know? *Before the Flood*, presented by National Geographic, features Leonardo DiCaprio on a journey as a United Nations Messenger of Peace, traveling to five continents and the Arctic to witness climate change firsthand. He goes on expeditions with scientists uncovering the reality of climate change and meets with political leaders fighting against inaction. He also discovers a calculated disinformation campaign orchestrated by powerful special interests working to confuse the public about the urgency of the growing climate crisis. With unprecedented access to thought leaders around the world, DiCaprio searches for hope in a rising tide of catastrophic news.

From Academy Award®-winning filmmaker Fisher Stevens and Academy Award®-winning actor, environmental activist and U.N. Messenger of Peace Leonardo DiCaprio, *Before the Flood* presents a riveting account of the dramatic changes now occurring around the world due to climate change, as well as the actions we as individuals and as a society can take to prevent the disruption of life on our planet. Beyond the steps we can take as individuals, the film urges viewers to push their elected officials in supporting the use of alternative energy sources such as solar and wind power. “We need everyone to demand bold action from their political leaders and to elect representatives who have their best interests at heart, not the interests of corporations to perpetuate a cycle of greed and destruction,” says DiCaprio. “This documentary shows how interconnected the fate of all humanity is – but also the power we all possess as individuals to build a better future for our planet.”

**Time to Choose**

![Source](#)
The film I liked better than After the Flood was Charles Ferguson’s *Time to Choose*, billed as the place where you can “Hear Rex Tillerson say: ‘The fear factor that people wanna throw out there that just says ‘We have to stop this [i.e. climate change],’ I just do not accept’.”

Film critic Roberto Montiel did the film justice when he wrote:

*The main variable in *Time to Choose* is, as in all of Ferguson’s work, time; now, however, he is looking into the future from the present continuous, rather than into the past from the present perfect (as is the case of his two previous documentaries, ‘No End in Sight,” “Inside Job’). It is the same story, though: You have all the information available, everybody who knows anything is warning you, and you did (are doing) nothing, you continued (are continuing) business as usual. Thus for the first time, a different verbal tense appears in Ferguson’s voice: The conditional. Should things continue this way . . . The race against time is thus, really, a race against power. The technology for clean energy, for alternative ways, is there, but not the power to move it forward, nor the will to change our ways.*

Montiel also wrote these beautiful sentences in the same review: “Climate is the only tangible news we have of the emotions of this Earth. Once it really turns moody, it will claim back the coastlines we once claimed as ours to found almost every major city currently existing on Earth, turning all harbors into havoc.”

*The movie also comes with a rich [website](#) of solutions and resources.*

*You can screen *Time to Choose* for free on Amazon Prime or pay $4.99 to see it [here](#).*

**Where to Invade Next?**

![Source](source)
Technically, this is not so much about climate change per se but instead it revolves around the slew of problems whose fallout the climate crisis exacerbates. Michael Moore’s film is nothing like its title; it’s not about U.S. militarism but rather about how a range of countries, mostly in Europe, have solved major social challenges that the U.S. has not. Maybe Bernie Sanders was onto something with his embrace of “democratic socialism” (by which he means European social democracy at its heyday, sadly no longer robust in Europe itself, and something which would be downright revolutionary in the U.S. context).

As Peter Travers explains in a review in Rolling Stone (source of some of our best climate writing):

In Italy, he meets a couple who get 30 days paid vacation each year with no loss in productivity. Their bosses encourage two-hour lunches at home, where families can connect. In France, Moore is astonished by school kids who are served nutritional food, including several kinds of cheeses (Camembert, *mais oui!*), and are horrified by the slop washed down with sugary soft drinks in America. They drink water. In Slovenia, college is free – even for foreigners – and students go on strike if anyone even thinks about charging tuition. (Take that, American students who start life burdened with staggering college loans.) In Finland, students attend school for shorter hours, are rarely given homework and still rank among the best in the world.

On a visit to a Norway prison, the worst felons are treated with compassion, with sentences capped at 21 years, even for murderers. Yet the crime rate is low, as is recidivism. In Tunisia, women win free health care from a hidebound Islamist regime. And a female activist complains that selfish, me-first Americans won’t even make the first move to learn about her culture. And get a load of Portugal, where using drugs is not a crime, but rehab is offered to those who want it. “I have cocaine in my pocket right now,” Moore jokes to a cop, who couldn’t care less.

A trip to Iceland finds that the bankers who brought economic ruin to their country are thrown in jail instead of being bailed out. And the saviors of society are the skilled female leaders who reject testosterone as a fuel source.

Still, it’s the Germans who most inspire Moore. They don’t run from their shameful backstory; they use art and public forums to remind citizens of the Holocaust. Back home, our vicious history with Native Americans and African slaves is mostly ignored, even as recent events echo the past through gun culture and racial violence.

Check it out, it will lift your spirits about what is possible and actually going on right now somewhere in the world – definitely Michael Moore’s best film, in my book, the book of climate justice!
Cowspiracy

This is the most “impactful” as – my students sometimes say – of all the films I have screened in the classes I teach at UC Santa Barbara: Earth in Crisis, Climate Justice, and The World in 2050. The first time I screened it, upwards of ninety percent spontaneously pledge to turn vegetarian or vegan! This proved to be harder than we had realized…

Although it overreaches when it says that industrial agriculture in one way or another accounts for fifty percent of greenhouse gas emissions, the real number, somewhere between fifteen and twenty percent depending on how you calculate it, still points to a crucial piece of the problem, and the film also presents some of the alternatives, particularly the insight that the single most effective thing an individual can do for the environment (besides dedicating their life to the climate justice movement) is simply to stop eating meat and dairy products.

I find the discussion below, found at the film’s website, to be accurate. The website also contains a wealth of information about agriculture and climate change.

Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret is a groundbreaking feature-length environmental documentary following intrepid filmmaker Kip Andersen as he uncovers the most destructive industry facing the planet today – and investigates why the world’s leading environmental organizations are too afraid to talk about it.

Animal agriculture is the leading cause of deforestation, water consumption and pollution, is responsible for more greenhouse gases than the transportation industry, and is a primary driver of rainforest destruction, species extinction, habitat loss, topsoil erosion, ocean “dead zones,” and virtually every other environmental ill. Yet it goes on, almost entirely unchallenged.
As Andersen approaches leaders in the environmental movement, he increasingly uncovers what appears to be an intentional refusal to discuss the issue of animal agriculture, while industry whistleblowers and watchdogs warn him of the risks to his freedom and even his life if he dares to persist.

As eye-opening as Blackfish and as inspiring as An Inconvenient Truth, this shocking yet humorous documentary reveals the absolutely devastating environmental impact large-scale factory farming has on our planet, and offers a path to global sustainability for a growing population.

It’s a great film to provoke discussion with friends and family over holiday meals, or with just about anybody at any time. Cowspiracy came out in 2014; the filmmakers are working on a new one called What the Health, which you can learn about here.

The following wonderful films were also nominated by friends and editors:

**Occupied.** Imagine this: the EU/NATO invade Norway after that country’s next-generation thorium reactor is so successful that the government shuts down Norway’s oil exports, thereby upsetting the economic basis of those other Rich World countries who are dragging their feet in making their own transition to renewables [and no, I am not in favor of nuclear energy as a viable alternative energy source, for the record]. The multipart drama is available on Netflix, and there’s a good review of it by Sharon Burke in Slate, here.

**I Am.** Filmmaker Tom Shadyac, of Ace Ventura: Pet Detective and Bruce Almighty fame asks two profound questions after a life-threatening bicycle accident causes him to re-evaluate his purpose on the planet: What is wrong with our world? and 2) How do we fix it? Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, Desmond Tutu, David Suzuki and many other wise people who may not be quite as famous, attempt to provide answers. Find it here – it’s really very good!

*****

**Shorts**

And now let’s turn to a tiny slice of the best short videos made on the theme of climate justice in the course of 2016 (with one or two from earlier years thrown in…).

**Ende Gelände: Here and No Further**

This mind-boggling direct action took place in 2015, when some 1,500 mostly young, mostly European activists clad in white jumpsuits swarmed past police to enter the world’s biggest open-pit lignite coal
mine and biggest single emitter of CO₂ in Germany — and briefly shut it down. It contains valuable lessons (and suggests some of the limitations as well) about how to do this, punctuated by beautiful words and faces in direct action.

It can be glimpsed at a variety of sites, in a variety of languages; all of which add something to one’s grasp of the significance of this action, which is a dramatic enactment of Blockadia.

Try any of these:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eExgsVt2nMo
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6wEd20WTNQ
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-gZ13cGS5E
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vC5Faqbw0Hg

The German version is even more powerful, showing some of the police violence on the way to the mine, and this clip has a brief interview at that juncture with Tadzio Müller, one of my favorite veteran climate justice radicals.

Part 1: Overcome the Motorway

Part 2: The Way to the Mine

Part 3: In the Coal Mine

Part 4: Activists overcome last police cordon

Part 5: Keep it in the ground! Activists block the coal excavator for 7 hours

The Future Starts Today

In this quite endearing video, told by an old woman who lived through it as a young girl growing up, our better selves get it together and keep the world under 1.5 degrees by 2090. All this in only ninety seconds!

This was made for Earth Hour – March 21, 2016 – which you can read about here, and see unfold across Asia here.

Capitalism is Just a Story

If only this were true… see it here.
Global Wealth Inequality in Four Minutes

Resilience drew my attention to this video, which is embedded in the accompanying article which tells it like it is:

Of every dollar of wealth created, 93 cents goes to the top one percent since 1998…. Understanding that every dollar of wealth creates inequality, and every dollar of wealth heats up our planet – because we have a fossil fuels extractive-based system – you realize that there’s no way that reforming this current system is going to change the quality of life for the majority of humanity. Quite the opposite. The more we improve the system, the more we’re keeping in a vampiric system whose logical outcome will be the destruction of the planet.

Paul Hawken: ‘Best Video Ever Made on Climate Change’
This is what Stephanie Spear of EcoWatch reported on this video of Italian composer Ludovico Einaudi playing the piano while floating on an iceberg past the glaciered floating mountains of the Arctic. Greenpeace took him there, off northernmost Norway in the summer of 2016. Paul Hawken, author of Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Social Movement in History Is Restoring Grace, Justice, and Beauty to the World and director of Project Drawdown, concurs.

Best ever? You decide. One of the most haunting? For sure.

The Trail of a Tail

I’m also sneaking in this 2015 short from Portugal that won Action4Climate’s documentary competition that year. As told by EcoWatch/Climate Nexus,

*The Trail of a Tale* by Portuguese filmmaker Gonçalo Tocha, is captivating as the narrator tells us, the stranger, how things went right. Society gathered with a fundamental belief that the “purpose of the economic system is to improve the well-being for all within the limits of what the planet can sustain … We had to deal with overconsumption first. The prices we paid for things had to reflect the social and environmental costs…”

Its young maker, Gonçalo Tocha, puts it in proper perspective, with grace and dignity: “I am humble about its impact. It is just a simple film that does not intend to preach. Its images are open to multiple interpretations. We do not have to take the world for granted, as it is now. Let’s just imagine another solution. Let’s be strong and poetic. Life is many things, including markets and economics, but why do we have to allow these two dimensions to rule our lives?”

The Climate Games

Source.
The Climate Games took place while Paris was locked down under a state of emergency in December 2015 because of the historic COP21 climate negotiations [I am implying causality here]. We I, and the thousands of activists who were there, had to find ways to circumvent the new “law” that gatherings of more than two people with a political message were now illegal. The glossy, breathless trailer is here, and its self-introduction goes like this.

Billed as “the world’s largest Disobedient Action Adventure Game!,” proposing itself as the people’s response to “the Mesh” – austerity-dictating politicians, fossil fuel corporations, industry lobbyists, peddlers of false solutions and greenwashers – [who] are converging to solve the climate catastrophe. Or so they tell us.

We are not convinced.

Your objective is to join the global movements swarming to shift the game against profit and in favour of life.

The Climate Games are where action-adventure meets actual change. Anyone can play this real-time, real-world game and turn Paris and the world into a giant, direct action playing field for climate justice. We have everything to play for – but time is running out.

Meanwhile, to those (many of them my friends and comrades in this struggle) who say the Games and the Paris protests in general didn’t accomplish much, or that anything presented in these twelve days of climate justice is not “radical” enough, or lacks the “correct” [or even any] class analysis, or by itself won’t overthrow capitalism and create the utopias we want, I can only say: “What did you expect? Do you think there is a magical analysis or one-size-fits-all strategy or some one-shot direct action that can do that?”

I tend to agree with scorchedan9el 2 months ago who commented twelve months ago: “Thanks everyone for showing how joyful it can be to give a shit! Merci à tous pour montrer la joie de se soucier de la planète!”

Here’s an exuberant look at some of the seriously playful whimsy as the Paris Climate Games wrapped up.
What you need to know about presidential candidates’ climate plans

Speaking of someone who does give a shit and shows the joy that comes from telling the truth about the state of the planet and its people but does so with grace and a sense of humor, here’s the provocative Seattle-based Grist journalist Eve Andrews [my secret eco-crush], presciently taking the Democratic and Republican (or is it the Republocratic and the Democantic?) presidential candidates to task last April.

Hello, it’s election season, which means we’re all living in a seemingly unending nightmare! Who’s saying what? Who do you pay attention to? How do you know what to believe, or what actually matters? Why are so many of your Facebook friends so angry?

These are complex and even unanswerable questions, so we’re going to tackle a much simpler one: What are our (remaining) candidates’ plans to deal with a warming climate? Watch our video to find out.

#ShutItDown
Relive a big but underreported moment in climate justice civil disobedience for the climate that took place on October 11, 2016 when activists managed to simultaneously shut down all five pipelines that transport Canadian tar sands into the U.S. through Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, and Washington. “If people are not acting as though there’s an emergency, people don’t believe that there is an emergency,” activist Leonard Higgins says in the video.

You can screen the video here, and visit the #ShutItDown website for continuing updates.

Seeing Wetiko

Like a fractal, wetiko operates on multiple dimensions simultaneously–intra-personally (within individuals), inter-personally (among ourselves), collectively (as a species), as well as trans-personally (in a realm beyond our personal selves). Those afflicted with wetiko consume, like a cannibal, the life force of others–human and nonhuman—for private purposes or profit, and do so without giving back something from their own lives. ~Paul Levy

Source.

The video is a piece by author and spoken word artist Alixa Garcia profiled by Kosmos in the summer of 2016.

Before getting to it, let’s briefly explore the indigenous concept of Wetiko, with the help of Paul Levy, who calls it “the greatest epidemic sickness known to humanity.”

Quoting indigenous philosopher Jack Forbes, Levy goes on to say:

“This disease, this wetiko (cannibal) psychosis, is the greatest epidemic sickness known to man.” We, as a species, are in the midst of a massive psychic epidemic, a virulent collective psychosis that has been brewing in the cauldron of humanity’s psyche from the beginning of time. Like a fractal, wetiko operates on multiple dimensions simultaneously – intra-personally (within individuals), inter-personally (between ourselves), as well as collectively (as a species). “Cannibalism,” in Forbes’s words, “is the consuming of another’s life for one’s own private purpose or profit.” Those afflicted
with wetiko, like a cannibal, consume the life-force of others – human and nonhuman – for private purpose or profit, and do so without giving back something from their own lives. One example that symbolizes our self-destructive, collective madness is the oil companies’ destruction of the Amazonian rainforest, the lungs of our planet. This is literally a full-bodied revelation showing us what we are doing to ourselves. Another literal example that is symbolically illustrating the wetiko complex in action is Monsanto genetically engineering terminator seeds that do not reproduce a second generation, thus forcing farmers to buy new seeds from Monsanto for each year’s new crop. This makes survival for many poor farmers impossible, which has triggered a wave of suicides among farmers, as Monsanto grows richer from the process.

This is how Alixa Garcia and Naima Penniman see the antidote to Wetiko, which could well have served as the epigraph for this final essay on the twelve days of climate justice:

Creativity is the antidote for violence and destruction. Art is our most human expression, our voice to communicate our stories, to challenge injustice and the misrepresentations of mainstream media, to expose harsh realities and engender even more powerful hope, a force to bring diverse peoples together, a tool to rebuild our communities, and a weapon to win this struggle for universal liberation.

This Changes Fuck All

I hesitated, but only briefly, to introduce tender-natured readers to the news presentations of “the stimulator,” but I find them stimulating (in fact) and I like their punchiness [if I may be permitted the violent term]. Beware that you will encounter harsh language and even harsher criticism of the powers that be if you venture here,
where in June 2015 the Vancouver-based (we think) newscaster covered “the NGO led spectacle called the people’s climate march plus a look at Peru’s spectacular resistance against a copper mine, and the call from the east to disrupt oil extraction and infrastructure. On the music break, Ontario based hiphop group Flowtilla with Line 9. We wrap things up with an exclusive interview with Sea, an inhabitant of la ZAD, Europe’s largest post capitalist occupation.”

Rex Tillerson – characterized as one of the “well-paid and professional fucking liars of the extractive and manufacturing industries” – makes a cameo appearance at 1:42!

**What is Environmental Justice?**

![Environmental Justice Cartoon](image)

*Source.*

Want to learn or teach someone else about environmental justice in “just” [get it?] three minutes? Check out [this Grist video.](source)

**Message to the World**

*And to end this lifelong journey of hope on a touching note…*

*These are my beautiful students who had this to say at the end of Sociology 134EC: Earth in Crisis in December 2013, after filmmaker and class teaching assistant Summer Gray and I returned from COP19 in Warsaw. The video was shot, edited, and made possible by the creative genius of Summer and the students in the class’s final discussion sections of the year.*

*The last student depicted of curse received an A+ for the course…*

**134EC Message to the World video**
Click here to watch the video.
Sense8

And now, for a well-earned break from watching so much serious (if engaging) documentary work on what the ever-growing movements for climate justice around the world are doing about the climate crisis, feel free to binge watch Sense8 on Netflix!

The final words of this twelve-day preview of climate justice for 2017 come from an unexpected source who wrote them almost a hundred years ago in another time of political and social turmoil.

Politics is a strong and slow boring of hard boards. It takes both passion and perspective. Certainly all historical experience confirms the truth – that people would not have attained the possible unless time and again they had reached out for the impossible. But to do that people must be leaders, and not only leaders but heroes as well, in a very sober sense of the word. And even those who are neither leaders nor heroes must arm themselves with that steadfastness of heart which can brave even the crumbling of all hopes. This is necessary right now, or else we will not be able to attain even that which is possible today.

– Max Weber, in the final paragraph of “Politics as a Vocation” (1919)
System Change Not Climate Change.

Here.

Now.

For ever.
THE BRIEFEST OF CONCLUSIONS

Whether these pages have aided readers’ reflections on the events of 2016 or made clearer and energizing some of the climate justice movement’s best ideas and practices to itself in the year of struggle that lies ahead is of course in the thoughts and actions of the beholders.

Other than this, there is no conclusion. For now.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Foran is professor of sociology and environmental studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is a co-founder of the Climate Justice Project [www.climatejusticeproject.org] and of the International Institute of Climate Action and Theory [www.iicat.org]. He is the author of Fragile Resistance: Social Transformation in Iran from 1500 to the Revolution (1993) and Taking Power: On the Origins of Third World Revolutions (2005). A member of System Change Not Climate Change, the Green Party of California, and 350.org, he now studies movements for radical social change in the 21st century, with special focus on the global climate justice movement.