

practice something new, ask different questions, access again our curiosity about each other as a species.

And so much 'more.

I want us to do better. I want to feel like we are responsible for each other's transformation. Not the transformation from vibrant flawed humans to bits of ash, but rather the transformation from broken people and communities to whole ones. I believe transformative justice could yield deeper trust, resilience, and interdependence. All these mass and intimate punishments keep us small and fragile. And right now our movements and the people within them need to be massive and complex and strong.

I want to hear what y'all think, and what you're practicing in the spirit of transformative justice. Towards wholeness and evolution, loves.

## CREATING MORE POSSIBILITIES:

how we move towards life

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### Create:

1. to cause to come into being, as something unique that would not naturally evolve or that is not made by ordinary processes.
2. to evolve from one's own thought or imagination, as a work of art or an invention.<sup>1</sup>

**Possible/possibility:** that may or can exist, happen, be done, be used, etc.<sup>2</sup>

**Wavicle:** an entity having characteristic properties of both waves and particles.<sup>3</sup>

The **multiverse** (or **meta-universe**) is the hypothetical set of finite and infinite possible universes, including the universe in which we live. Together, these universes comprise everything that exists: the entirety of space,

<sup>1</sup> *Dictionary.com*, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/create>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/possible>.

<sup>3</sup> *Oxford Dictionaries*, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/wavicle>.

time, matter, energy, and the physical laws and constants that describe them.

The various universes within the multiverse are called “parallel universes,” “other universes,” or “alternate universes.”<sup>4</sup>

### grounding in nature

“From dead plant matter to nematodes to bacteria, never underestimate the cleverness of mushrooms to find new food!”

—Paul Stamets

“Last weekend I went on walk with my partner at the arboretum. There’s this little makeshift stream and all the trees along the stream had their roots in the stream. It just makes me think of how that happened and how long it would have taken for the roots to reach there and how that tree had to survive before it reached the stream. This helps me think about how, when we feel limitation, this is when we figure out how infinite our possibilities for us to grow out, around, thru to reach abundance.”

—Christlene DeJean

“I’ve learned to trust nature. If she can make my weirdo, genderqueer, capable self, she can make anything. Nature helps me reimagine and reform justice and hope like the ocean reimagine and reforms

4 *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiverse>.

itself when it washes back in from sand/  
mountains, faucets.”

—Jay-Marie Hill

“The plant people have taught me to be generous and not be shy about blossoming, that it is our nature. I think when others see us, it can inspire them to open up and blossom too and we can be a field ablaze with dignity and beauty together.”

—Brenda Salgado

Biodiversity is a beauty of the natural world, the variety of life. Whether you take the planet as a whole, or the ecosystems at a smaller scale—a forest, a pond, a puddle—life is constantly creating options. In our best human practices, we watch the systems of the world and follow them—permaculture. The natural world manifests life in ecosystems, not monocultures. One of my favorite ways of understanding nature creating more possibilities, is to watch water move through the world. Water creates the ways for itself, moving with gravity, moving around obstacles, wearing down obstacles, reshaping the world. When there isn’t an overt way forward, water seeps into the land, becomes a vapor in the sky, freezes into ice. When the time comes, water moves over the land in cloud form and nourishes elsewhere. And, of course, we humans are mostly water. And look how many ways we manifest.

“I’ve always been drawn to the water: oceans, lakes, rivers. In recent years, I’ve come to

recognize how this deep, spiritual connection to the water energy connects me to the rhythms of our planet and our peoples—it is a necessary form of healing. Living cradled in between the mighty Mississippi and the beautiful Gulf of Mexico, their water strength provides me constant nourishment. I've learned from this that my organizing practice must include healing, as nature's energy is one we can always tap into when we feel depleted or overwhelmed. Sometimes tides are high, and sometimes tides are low, but the waters remain in balance. And so can we. For me, to stay in the struggle for the long haul and keep going for another twenty years, this is critical."

—Jayeesha Dutta

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"I am a priest of Yemoja—the ocean is sacred to me. It's my place of worship, of home, of grounding. If I am drowning in my own stuff, because of the relationship I have with Yemoja, she reminds me that my salvation is in moving the way she moves. The ocean doesn't stop moving—it moves in different ways, with different levels of intensity—Coney Island looks one way, the Indian Ocean moves another more ferocious way, it's still all the ocean. Yemoja reminds me to not get caught up with this external calendar of production, or get caught up with the idea that visibility is the same as doing the work. When I am flowing and can hear that small but powerful voice say 'yes,' I feel a complete sense of calm, I know I am heading in the right direction."

—Joan Morgan

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"If Mama Nature teaches us nothing else, she teaches us that diversity is absolutely necessary for survival. Now, she doesn't mean some surface diversity, but a system where every single being is doing their part, pulling their weight. A homogenous, 'gentrified' eco-system would quickly die. If we are committed to organizing sustainable and liberating social movements they must be diverse, pulling especially from those who are the most impacted instead of suppressing their voices or using them as props."

—Nia Eshu Robinson

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"The world we want is one where many worlds fit."

—Zapatistas

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"When forced into a binary, you always choose wrong."

—Jelani Wilson

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**Creating more possibilities is my favorite aspect of emergent strategy—this is where we shape tomorrow towards abundance. Creating more possibilities counters the very foundational assumptions about strategy.**

The word "strategy" is a military term, which means *a* plan of action towards *a* goal. I want to really emphasize the "a"s in that sentence—there is a practice of narrowing down, identifying one path forward, one strategy, one way, one agenda, one leader, one set of values, etc. Reducing the

wild and wonderful world into one thing that we can grasp, handle, hold onto, and advance.

We do this in movement all the time. I have been in countless meetings where there was a moment of creative abundance and energy, and then someone said we needed to pick one thing to get behind, or a three- or five- or ten-point plan. What came next was sometimes very compelling and visionary. Other times—often times—it was reductionist, agreeing on the lowest common denominator, the least exciting thing, because that was the only place there was unity. There was often a general sense of dissatisfaction and collective shrugging into this unity that was not invigorating. Authentic, exciting unity takes time, and lots of experimenting.

The other tragedy of this quick narrowing is that people get left out, not just in a slightly hurtful way, but left out of how we construct every aspect of society, infrastructure and culture. We come up with incredible plans that don't account for crucial segments of our communities—I've witnessed this as well, unity that entails leaving behind people with disabilities; or trans, Indigenous, immigrant communities, and others.

It isn't that we never need sharp, directed, focused and even single-issue moments—we absolutely do. It's just that we live in a system that thrives when conditions are abundant and diverse, in a universe that holds contradictions and multitudes, and we often reject that chaotic fertile reality too soon, as if we can't tolerate the scale of our own collective brilliance.

In my observations of the natural world, there are examples of scale that offer another way—when we think about snowflakes, grains of sand, waves in water, stars—there is evidence that many possibilities exist for how we manifest inside our potential. Then there are wavicles—entities that are simultaneously waves and particles. Then there is quantum mechanics, which examines the smallest units of our universe and shows that everything we think of as solid and singular is actually fluid and multitudes.

## Excerpt from “Notes Toward a Theory of Quantum Blackness”<sup>5</sup>

By Sofia Samatar

### 2. Infinities

Blackness cannot be integrated with quantum mechanics at very high energies. At lower energies, it is ignored; to address energies at or higher than the Planck scale, a new theory of quantum Blackness is required.

To address vulnerability. To address a relationship to interruption. To integrate the vibration of urban backyards.

Blackness has been described as nonrenormalizable. Its behavior depends on an infinite number of independent parameters. Therefore, to develop a consistent theory of quantum Blackness one must conduct an infinite number of experiments.

The experiment of zones. Analysis of prison-flesh attraction. The experiment of the “Black smile.” Of the child.

Infinite kinship experiments. Infinite gestures.

A laboratory vast enough to contain the wall.

Sometimes we were so tired we couldn't lie down. We would take walks. We would buy nothing. We joked about the experiment of the corner store. The experiment of the fiercely freezing, neon-colored drinks. Of the red powder on the fingers. Fluorescent light.

5 Sofia Samatar, “Notes Toward a Theory of Quantum Blackness,” *Strange Horizons* 29 (February 29, 2016); with respect to the work of Black Quantum Futurism, <http://blackquantumfuturism.tumblr.com/>, reprinted with permission.

Take into consideration the presence of a curved background.

Consider imaginary time. Noncommunicative geometry. The “trapped surface.”

Consider the implications of the phrase: “cannot be integrated.”

Consider string theory, which introduced the concept of vibration.

Experiments in exhaustion. Consider that the problem of quantum Blackness will mean different things to different researchers. My colleague died of complications from a condition called “hood disease,” but she herself always referred to it as “white supremacy disease.”

It is possible that the Black force particle does not exist: that the effects we observe derive from a different mechanism.

As my colleague wrote before her untimely death: Only two words in this research have meaning, and they are not [Quantum] [Blackness]

At the human scale, in order to create a world that works for more people, for more life, we have to collaborate on the process of dreaming and visioning and implementing that world. We have to recognize that a multitude of realities have, do, and will exist.

Collaborative Ideation is a way to get into this—ideation is the process of birthing new ideas, and the practice of collaborative ideation is about sharing that process as early as possible. This is not to say there is no space for individual creation—I love the selfishness of closing the world out and unleashing the realm of my imagination and creativity. But how do we disrupt the constant individualism of creation when it comes to society, our shared planet, our resources?

The more people who cocreate the future, the more people whose concerns will be addressed from the foundational level in this world.

Meaningful collaboration both relies on and deepens relationship—the stronger the bond between the people or groups in collaboration, the more possibility you can hold. In beginning this work, notice who you feel drawn to, and where you find ease. And notice who challenges you, who makes the edges of your ideas grow or fortify. I find that my best work has happened during my most challenging collaborations, because there are actual differences that are converging and creating more space, ways forward that serve more than one worldview.

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“As a part of our liberation, the Earth teaches us that everything—E-V-E-R-Y-T-H-I-N-G—is connected. The soil needs rain, organic matter, air, worms and life in order to do what it needs to do to give and receive life. Each element is an essential component.

“Organizing takes humility and selflessness and patience and rhythm while our ultimate goal of liberation will take many expert components. Some of us build and fight for land, healthy bodies, healthy relationships, clean air, water, homes, safety, dignity, and humanizing education. Others of us fight for food and political prisoners and abolition and environmental justice. Our work is intersectional and multifaceted. Nature teaches us that our work has to be nuanced and steadfast. And more than anything, that we need each other—at our highest natural glory—in order to get free.”

—Dara Cooper

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That is how *Octavia's Brood* came to exist, because Walidah and I have radically different visions and work styles—Walidah pays attention to values-alignment in every detail. I skim, focused on patterns and magic.

I've worked with Invincible Ill Weaver over many years and we identified early that where they are gloriously thorough, I am fast and efficient. Where they seek research, how things happened in the past and lessons to apply forward—building a case—I feel things, mostly finding my attention on the present and future.

Projects with both of these collaborators have been able to accommodate tons of perspectives and mobilized lots of other creative work, in part because of the space between the collaborators at the core, and learning to communicate and ideate within that space.

Occupy and Black Lives Matter are two large-scale recent efforts that take this collaborative ideation to a movement level, proliferating futures from a place of possibility, of multitudinous paths forward towards a shared dream.

In our work for *Octavia's Brood*, Walidah and I articulated that "all organizing is science fiction," by which we mean that social justice work is about creating systems of justice and equity in the future, creating conditions that we have never experienced. That is a futurist focus, and the practices of collaboration and adaptation and transformative justice, are science fictional behavior. We didn't create this understanding, we observed it amongst the afrofuturists and sci fi writers and creators we grew up loving and being liberated by. Language changes with time, and sometimes the word for a people or an action comes centuries late. But I want to always remember and honor those who stayed and stay future oriented in the face of oppression.

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"There is nothing new under the sun, but there are new suns."

—Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Trickster*<sup>6</sup>

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6 This quote was shared by Gerry Canavan, the first researcher to go through the unpublished drafts of *The Parable of the Trickster* in the Huntington papers, via <https://lateviewofbooks.org/article/theres-nothing-new-sun-new-suns-recovering-octavia-e-butlers-lost-parables#!>

### Afrofuturism and #Blackspring<sup>7</sup>

We tend to think and speak of afrofuturism as the far off future, something beyond our current comprehension and planet. But now is the only moment. And we hope things will be different in the next now. And I must admit, I am excited about the near future.

What are we about to do after this winter of discontent?

We say, Black lives matter!

An afrofuturist assertion.

Because we see something other than the normative truths of this place...we see something that is not here...

We see the future, cast over this devastating present moment.

We see,

And we believe.

We know,

And we bend the world to assert and embody that Black lives matter.

That, to me, is the heart of afrofuturism, as I choose to understand it.<sup>8</sup> Labels don't excite me so much, but concepts turn me on. The concept of seeing and creating the future from a perspective that has the lineage of an African seed, of something older and other than western, feels healing to me.

We, of that displaced diasporic seed, who involuntarily reach back to the motherland in our dreams, have been scattered so far from each other.

And in spite of all the odds, we have been resilient.

I cannot speak emotionally about the journeys of the other seed clusters, though I am seeking stories all the time,

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<sup>7</sup> These are notes from my keynote speech at the Afrofuturism Conference, New School, New York City, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> In his essay "Black to the Future," Mark Dery defined Afrofuturism as "speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of 20th century technoculture." Read the essay at <https://thenewblack5324.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/mark-dery-black-to-the-future.pdf>.

reading Nnedi Okorafor and Ben Okri and Credo Mutwa and wanting to know more.

Lately I've been obsessing over the afrofuturism and justice orientation of slave-era Blacks, because our situation today feels so terrifying, and exhausting and sometimes hopeless, and there's so much trauma and grief to bear, and yet we survived that.

Not individually, but collectively.

Not all of those Black people were afrofuturists, but to focus on afrofuturists in the Black social-justice tradition, I would note that:

Africans leaping off of slaver ships were afrofuturists.

Slave-era parents teaching their babies a foreign alphabet in the candlelit dirt were afrofuturists.

Black women dissociating themselves through to tomorrow while being raped into motherhood were afrofuturists.

Those who raised the children of violence, and those who chose not to, all were predicting the future and articulating their choices.

Slaves who ran to freedom, and slaves who ran to their deaths, were afrofuturists.

It is the emphasis on a tomorrow that centers the dignity of that seed, particularly in the face of extinction, that marks, for me, the afrofuturist.

And of course there are the big ones, whose names have made it through the erasers of history books, into our mouths—Harriet, Sojourner, Frederick, John, Malcolm, James, Ella, Martin, Nina, June, Toni.

Octavia.

Now it is our work, and the exciting thing about this time is that we are learning to name ourselves, our distinctions and solidarities. Our afrofuturisms. Developing enough of a common dream language that we can be that much more explicit about the real futures we are shaping into existence.

We are touching the future, reaching out across boundaries and post-apocalyptic conditions to touch each other, to call each other out as family, as beloveds. "All that you touch, you

change. All that you change, changes you."<sup>9</sup> we are making ourselves vulnerable enough to be changed, which will of course change what Black existence means. Octavia Butler, who gave us that philosophical spirit poem "Earthseed" that I just quoted, is a bridge for many of us, between this world, and the narratives that pull us through to the next realm, or the parallel universe, or the future in which we are the protagonists.

We are creating a world we have never seen. We are whispering it to each other cuddled in the dark, and we are screaming it at people who are so scared of it that they dress themselves in war regalia to turn and face us.

Because of our ancestors, because of us, and because of the children we are raising, there will be a future without police and prisons. Yes.

There will be a future without rape. Without harassment, and constant fear, and childhood sexual assault.

A future without war, hunger, violence. With abundance.

Where gender is a joyful spectrum. Where my nephew would not be bullied for his brilliant differentness. Where each of our bodies is treated like sacred ground, whether we have insurance or not.

Visionary fiction (a term that Walidah coined) includes sci fi, speculative fiction, fantasy, magical realism, myth, all of it. In addition to this intentional genocide, visionary fiction intentionally explores how change happens from the bottom up,

How change works in collective ways, disrupting the single white male hero narrative,

Centering marginalized communities... Meaning we are the center of the story, as opposed to the sexy and unbelievably stylish sidekick. And visionary fiction is hard, and realistic, and hopeful. It's neither utopian nor dystopian, it's more like life.

Imagination is one of the spoils of colonization, which in many ways is claiming who gets to imagine the future for a given geography. Losing our imagination is a symptom of

<sup>9</sup> Butler, *Parable of the Sower*.

trauma. Reclaiming the right to dream the future, strengthening the muscle to imagine together as Black people, is a revolutionary decolonizing activity.

Some of the key practices that show up in Octavia Butler's work are collaboration, compassion, curiosity, romantic and sensual and non-possessive love, play, mediation, and the patience that comes from seeing ourselves in a much longer arc of time than we are encouraged to see in the instantaneous culture of the modern world.

What we are all really asking—what Octavia was asking—is how do we, who know the world needs to change, begin to practice being different? How do we have to be for justice to truly be transformative? Not them, that massive amorphous “them” that is also us, in our heads and hearts, or that loves us, or that is tired of this shit but is family to us... Not them, because maybe they don't recognize yet that these changes are the key to human survival. But *us*, us who are awake and awakening. How do we need to be for Black lives to matter? What do we need to heal in ourselves in order to offer a future of any real peace? Or to become the protagonists of this human story—and earn the flip of the page of all the sentient life in the universe? To claim the future as a compelling place for our miracles?

This is everything.

Science fiction is not fluffy stuff. Afrofuturism is not just the coolest look that ever existed. The future is not an escapist place to occupy. All of it is the inevitable result of what we do today, and the more we take it in our hands, imagine it as a place of justice and pleasure, the more the future knows we want it, and that we aren't letting go.

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“Nature also teaches me persistence and perseverance, because in the end ‘nothing stops nature.’ If a rose can grow out of the concrete, then so can we.”

—Micah Hobbes Frazier

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“I love bio-mimicry as a concept of human society learning from nature to make our lives better. In progressive arguments, we often point to examples in nature to prove our point. What's ironic is that the left often discounts religion, but what makes the “it happens in nature” argument so powerful is this belief that nature is created by some higher being or a force beyond us. I think that is my attraction to nature. Its somehow proof of faith. Something more powerful than us yet that we are apart of at the same time. The most powerful thing for organizers to have, I believe, is faith. This belief that we can win, that we can change the world, that we can all be better.”

—Terry Marshall

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# CONVERSATIONS



**I met Grace Lee Boggs when she was ninety-two, and slowly** grew a friendship with her, a friendship imbued with the mentorship that happens across a sixty-three-year age gap. We mostly built our friendship in her living room, but I also got to attend a Beloved Community gathering with her and Shea Howell, which remains to me of one of the most incredible and intimate experiences I have ever had with other humans. Grace was difficult, exacting, funny, furious, curious, and believed in her right to assert her ideas, her critiques, her visions in the world.

Grace had core questions, questions she asked for decades, of everyone she met. And she had many answers to these

questions, and with her eyes and her attention she would offer her judgment on how people answered these questions. And she kept asking. She would watch all of us grow as we answered her questions again and again.

One of her core questions was, "What time is it on the clock of the world?" My answer to that question has become, "Time to close the gap between vision and practice. Time for those of us who seek justice and liberation to BE just and liberated, to be of this place fully."

Emergent strategy is my answer to Grace.

One of the biggest lessons I learned from Grace in the years I spent sitting in her living room, reading her work, bringing loved ones to meet her (including my parents, whom she wrapped around her finger), and singing to her, is that conversation is a crucial way to explore what we believe and to make new understandings and ideas possible.

In my ideal world, we would sit down together and talk through all of these things. Instead I am going to share a series of conversations that I had in the course of creating this book, conversations with people whose work and ways of being excite me. I hope you can weave yourself into these conversations, which bring the various elements into the complex space of the human experience.

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"I love trees. big ass trees. trees weather all storms cuz they're rooted.

my organizing needs to be rooted. rooted in my principles, rooted in the love for the people, rooted in community and a vision that extends to the skies like big ass redwoods."

—Hiram Rivera

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"Our fruits are only as strong as our roots."

—Thenjiwe Tameika McHarris

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## A Conversation on Consensus with Autumn Meghan Brown<sup>1</sup>

**adrienne:** *Would you describe yourself as an emergent strategist?*

**Autumn:** Definitely. Over time, as I have learned about this approach (through your workshops and through experimenting), I have recognized that it feels not only aligned with my theory of change, but also that emergence has its own momentum, which means that it happens anyway regardless of how structured I attempt to be.

**adrienne:** *Beautiful. I think consensus is a beautiful way to be in emergent practice together. Could you share a bit about how you approach consensus?*

**Autumn:** I think part of my approach to consensus is that I recognize it as our normal human orientation. We are innately cooperative and social beings. I often tell my students that there is a reason humans are born unable to move, dress, eat on their own, unable to protect themselves. We are born into relationships of dependence and interdependence. It's what we long for, and we struggle within decision-making models and structures that don't support that deepest desire. So part of my approach to teaching consensus, over time, has been to ground it historically. Cause I'm also a history nerd, so that's how I get my nerd out.

**adrienne:** *Right. That is so important, to counter our socialization.*

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<sup>1</sup> Autumn is a member of the Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance (AORTA), and is a consensus trainer and facilitator whose movement roles have included Interim Executive Director at RECLAIM, founding member of Rock Dove Collective, and Board Member of Common Fire. She is a mother, theologian, writer, artist, and also one of my sisters.

**Autumn:** I share how differently consensus arises within culture vs. political/movement spaces, and the history of consensus practice in movement spaces as deeply related to feminist and Indigenous movement work. That it is work of collective liberation, no matter how often it is co-opted.

And then I make people practice and experiment with it, so they understand it as a practice that requires time to build skill, to drop into a different sense of time and space. For me, approaching consensus is very much about: Do we have the tools? Are we willing to fuck up?

**adrienne:** *Cause people generally feel it's too hard?*

**Autumn:** They do. And part of that is because they want it to be an antidote to power. And it's not. So that would be the other core aspect of my approach: recognizing that consensus does not mean or require equal status. It rather requires equal voice. But truly, it is also hard because our society functions less and less along the lines of what we need, as humans, to make good decisions.

**adrienne:** *How is equal voice possible without equal status (asking for a friend)?*

**Autumn:** Good question... I think it's possible when there is transparency, and when an understanding of status is grounded in a framework of systemic and institutional oppression. Folks need to understand that status or rank is both not accidental but also not individual, not in the way that we are socialized to think status is. When we are in the space of collectivity, we have to reckon with what we are consenting to and not consenting to. Once we get to that space, we see some forms of status fall away as people realize they don't have to consent to it. And then we see some forms of status remain as folks realize it's not a threat. When we can stand in knowing another person's power without feeling threatened,

that can be powerful in itself. I love that part of consensus actually. Being able to really see another person's expertise without being upset by it.

**adrienne:** *That feels so important!! Like—everyone isn't the same. But everyone is valuable.*

**Autumn:** Exactly! And I can really let go and let other people hold their expertise, and I can call it forward and learn. And that is healthy for a group. A group that is always making decisions isn't a group that is always learning, necessarily, but learning is an essential function of making good decisions. And in order to learn together you have to be good at humility and curiosity.

**adrienne:** *Does consensus happen in nature?*

**Autumn:** Oooh that is an awesome question... That I don't know the answer to... But I would imagine that a lot of sympathetic relationships between different species requires consensus because they require consent—"watering hole" consent. Like after a drought we all need to drink. So we can't be focused on eating each other in daylight. Let that be for the darkness.

**adrienne:** *That's beautiful.*

**Autumn:** Certainly you see a lot of mammalian communities where consensus is operative. Bonobos, meerkats...

**adrienne:** *I also think consensus is like water. Many paths, but the future is the ocean. Like we can resist, but it is inevitable, we will have to get together eventually.*

**Autumn:** It's where we are going, and not all of us will get there. Lol, my dystopic brain.

**adrienne:** *Well, that's also true. I keep pushing away from utopia. In nature it's more like we all get our day, our time. Nothing blooms 365 days of the year, someone told me that.*

**Autumn:** Yep. Oof. So real. And our gifts thrive in very different circumstances. I was thinking about that with my singing, like all of the times I have sung in public in the last few years have been by invitation; that I am not as likely to do it if there isn't a specific request. So I have a gift that thrives only upon request.

**adrienne:** *I love that. I only sing when shamed into it. Or as a joke song. Hmmmm. I have other gifts!*

**Autumn:** Isn't it funny? And we have really beautiful voices.

**adrienne:** *We really do.*

**Autumn:** But there are too many things that capture our attention.

**adrienne:** *Yes! Anything else you want to share about how nature has shaped your facilitation? Or about AORTA!<sup>2</sup>*

**Autumn:** AORTA uses some awesome nature-based metaphors for working with systemic oppression. They have this whole thing they do around giant hogweed. I'm still learning it so don't feel equipped to talk about it yet. I tend not to use nature metaphors, but that is because I tend to think of humans as a part of nature, and so I focus more on what is naturally occurring in our relationships. That's not to say that nature doesn't influence my work at all; just to say that it's not my go to. I tend to go to human family as example.

2 AORTA is a worker-owned cooperative devoted to strengthening movements for social justice and a solidarity economy. <http://aorta.coop/>.

Oh one thing—I think living with access to a big natural environment has completely shifted my approach to facilitation. Because I live in the woods and get this front-row seat to the dance of life and death and the big cycles and the way in which a lack of protection and relationship exposes us to danger. It also means I am more likely to go to breath. It means I am more likely to go slow and let things take up space where I used to rush. Living in the woods is teaching me to notice more. Because I can see how everything's survival is related to how it's tuned into the space it occupies, its ability to notice, to be noticed.

**adrienne:** *Hey one more thing—are you the reason Occupy knew how to use consensus?*

**Autumn:** Lol, I'm not the only reason. In fact, one of the folks I worked closely with to build the consensus curriculum that I taught for years, David Graeber, was on the ground at the beginning of Occupy, and I'm sure he had a lot to do with it. But I trained hundreds of those organizers in consensus over the years preceding Occupy, so I think of it as having a hand in preparing the way for that to happen. Like, Occupy wouldn't have been as successful and wouldn't have had that long-term multiplier effect across the country, if they hadn't been skilled and successful in using consensus, and they were because I trained them up. Does that make sense? And then I know my consensus tools were being used by other folks around the country who were creating Occupy spaces too.

**adrienne:** *Ok thanks for this—I feel so proud of this and brag on it but realized I hadn't actually asked you the deal, and you're humble about it :) love!*

### A Virtuous Cycle with Jodie Tonita<sup>3</sup>

**adrienne:** *What was the impetus for Social Transformation Project coming into existence? And has that changed with time?*

**Jodie:** We came into existence to help build a more powerful and effective progressive movement. Our work strengthens the movement's capacity for collaborative action. Initially we invested in leadership development and sharing methodology and tools that make transformational leadership and organizational change practices more accessible. Building on that foundation, our work is now focused on building functional self-organizing networks of progressive leaders who can think together, align around a common agenda, and act together to secure and sustain long-term social change.

**adrienne:** *Who do you work with?*

**Jodie:** We partner with leaders who are committed to building trust, cross-movement collaboration, and systemic change. At the heart of the growing network are twenty-two powerful movement leaders from across issue areas that have far-reaching influence and lead critical progressive institutions.<sup>4</sup> Since 2010, we have supported them to connect deeply, build trust, strategize, experiment, and collaborate in ways that build power and unite progressive voices. We know that to reach our shared goals we must grow and evolve the network. To expand, we will draw from the leaders' own

3 Jodie Tonita is one of my woes and teachers and friends. Born and raised in Canada, Jodie moved to the US to co-found and executive direct a movement support and strategy effort called the Social Transformation Project (STP), and because she felt the US was a critical place to invest organizing energy.

4 Some of the groups STP works with: National Domestic Workers' Alliance, NARAL, Forward Together, MoveOn.org, Right to the City Alliance, Service Employees International Union and many more.

networks, as well as our trusted relationships with the 500+ leaders of the Rockwood LIO National, Cross-Movement, and the Art of Transformational Consulting alumni networks that we connect and convene.

**adrienne:** *How have you decided what to do in the world?*

**Jodie:** When artful leaders have space and support to connect deeply and are challenged to strategize and work together in new ways, possibilities light up at the intersections. We create conditions for this kind of connection, challenge leaders to strategize in new ways and support the emergent ideas and collaborations that arise.

**adrienne:** *And when do you make adjustments?*

**Jodie:** We're supporting leaders to experiment with new ways of taking action together, and that requires continuous real-time adjustment. We're using a structured process to systematically track and evaluate their real-world experiments. We're aiming to create a virtuous cycle of aligning, acting, and learning that results in better ideas, strategies, and ways of working that increase our impact.

**adrienne:** *What have you learned that feels important for movement leaders and participants to hear?*

**Jodie:** Movement moments are emergent, but there are systemic ways to cultivate networks and collective capacity to strategize and act together in nimble and powerful ways when those moments arise. Leadership development is an important and strategic way to build relationships and trust while equipping leaders with the skills and practices to increase their impact and sustain themselves over the long haul.

Leaders across movements acknowledge that our strategies and ideas are still insufficient and our siloed efforts do not add up to more than the sum of their parts. Our approach

to change is too often reactive and haphazard. We are not leveraging knowledge and innovation from other sectors nearly enough. The structures of our organizations, campaigns, and coalitions don't support the kind of experimentation, coordination, and collaboration we need.

Our most promising leaders know all of this to be true and are finding the way, but they struggle to break out of old patterns. They lack the dedicated time, resources, and expertise to invent new systems and structures, and to practice in new ways. Without an engaged and self-organizing network to support their efforts, each leader is left to work alone within the constraints and limits of their own organization's resources and capacities.

Leadership development programs like BOLD, Forward Stance, generative somatics, Move to End Violence, and Rockwood are bringing leaders together across organizations and movements to seed the kinds of networks these leaders need. These programs cultivate leaders who are emotionally resilient and connected to high-trust networks that can act quickly with efficacy and integrity. Many of today's most promising movement-building projects are emerging from these efforts.

We're committed to growing the capacity of these high-trust networks. We want to see them evolve and develop into functional self-organizing networks that can deepen their shared analysis to fuel strategic action, align around long-term priorities, and experiment with collaborative action, learn, and improve their practice. We believe this is the way to build lasting power and make long-term structural change for a more just and sustainable world.

**adrienne:** *You've also maintained an organizing relationship with folks in Canada. What are you learning through that organizing?*

**Jodie:** In the US, I work with networks that are by design 50 percent folks of color and are led by women of color. In

Canada, the spaces I am in are predominately white, and power is often held by men. I'm finding I have no patience for it. I'm not interested in "convincing" people, who have no motivation and little interest in sharing power, to do so. I am much more interested in contending for power. There is a huge opportunity in Canada to invest in women of color leaders. To support them to build the power of their community organizations, to build a base that can eventually elect them to political office and hold them accountable. My dream is to support the development of a network of women of color leaders who move into positions of power and organize those institutions to work for their communities. I think if we did this well we could take over the country city by city. This strategy is going to make a lot of people uncomfortable. Getting there is going to be turbulent. Developing the capacity to navigate internal and external turbulence will be critical to our success. This is what leadership looks like in this moment.

**adrienne:** *What's on the other side of that turbulence? Why should people keep trying?*

**Jodie:** In the face of daunting challenges, we must summon the courage to believe we are the ones we have been waiting for, take risks, and experiment towards solutions. We're being asked to believe in our inherent capacity, step into the unknown, and challenge deeply held assumptions. For most of us, that's radically disruptive and contrary to how we've organized ourselves to succeed in life to date.

If you're reading this book, you're at least considering this path. Why do it? Because you will become the leader we need. Together we will become the leaders we collectively need. And in the process we will continuously grow and shift and change to meet each new challenge.

My colleague Eugene Kim has this great tool called the Strategy / Culture Bicycle. He says that developing an effective strategy and culture is about asking the right questions:

Where are we now? Who are we today? Where do we want to go? Who do we want to become? How do we get there? What I love about this is that where we are going and who we need to be to get there are married. We can't get to a new destination without shifting who and how we are. This is another reason why networks are important. They give us places to come together to see patterns, learn new practices (ways of being), and reach new heights.

**adrienne:** *How do you ground yourself in this work?*

**Jodie:** I have a commitment I repeat to myself in key leadership moments throughout the day. "I trust myself in the face of the unknown." While I say it, I focus on my breath, ground through my heels, feel my back, and remember that all of my skills and experience are available and have prepared me for just this moment. I have my woes, who know what I am aiming for, are tracking my situation, and will support and challenge me. Having peers who share the work of becoming the ones we have been waiting for is essential. And when things get turbulent I reach out for specific supports like acupuncture, therapy, and somatic bodywork.

Basically for Being a Human Being: Meditation with Dani McClain<sup>5</sup>

**adrienne:** *When did you begin meditating?*

**Dani:** I was introduced to formal meditation practice in 2004 or 2005 in Cincinnati—I started going to this little dharma center. I had never sat before—like on a cushion or chair—and have someone tell me to focus on my breath and identify

5 Dani McClain writes and reports on race, reproductive health, policy, and politics. She is a contributing writer at the *Nation*, and a fellow at the Nation Institute. She is also a new mom and one of my woes.

thoughts and let them go and give me formal mindfulness training. So that was my introduction. I got away from it for a while, I didn't have a daily practice. I stopped until I moved to Oakland and someone told me about EBMC [East Bay Meditation Center] and I started going to their Thursday night people of color sats. Spring Sasham hosted—she was the first person I would consider my teacher; she introduced me to Buddhism, not just mindfulness. This was '09—my practice began to deepen. In Cincinnati the sangha was very white and older, in Oakland it felt like people my age, and I related to Spring as a Black woman.

One thing that has always struck me was...this was my formal introduction. I have words for sitting, mindfulness, and meditation. But I remember—my grandmother died when I was seven, and I fully remember going on errands with her and she would close her eyes while we were waiting and I would say "Gram, why are you sleeping?" and she would say, "I'm not sleeping, I am resting my eyes." I think many people meditate—they might not call it that or see it as such. But most of us have a way of opening up to what's happening around us, turning inward, not engaging in every stimulus. Not everyone calls it meditation and that's fine.

**adrienne:** *I think for me so much of it is about landing in now. Stress behind, anxiety ahead, how do we put our attention on now, breath on now. What is your practice now?*

**Dani:** I don't have a daily practice right now. I had a consistent daily practice through a difficult period of my life, for about two years. I had a practice and then went through a breakup, and my aunt...she was sick and then passed away. During the time she was sick and going through treatment, I had a lot of fear and anticipatory grief—a term I didn't even know yet but I have learned is quite common—when you fear someone might pass away.

I try to go on retreat twice a year, silent retreat. So I would go on retreat, go to EBMC. Then I did this year-long weekly

program called “Commit to Dharma,” led by Larry Yang, someone I consider a key teacher. During that period, 2012–2015, I was very committed to a sitting practice. And I needed it to stay tethered to some semblance of being able to find joy, being able to function effectively, to take care of my life.

During the course of that practice, in 2014, it was incredible to have a community to practice with, and the sessions, and reflections with teachers. It’s not just mindfulness; it’s also learning about Buddhist philosophy. Learning what are called the heart practices—“lovingkindness, compassion, joy and equanimity”—was a focus of the class.

They say one way to think about the dharma is that they are two wings of a bird. One wing is the wisdom practices, the other wing is the heart practices. I think of the wisdom practices as being present in the moment, identifying my thoughts and letting them flow away. The focus is on the mind.

But the heart practices are all about the heart. When I sit, I can sit and do a lovingkindness or compassion practice. But meditation is a lot more about the mind. The heart practices are a lot more about the world around you. You practice compassion related to other people around you. In my aunt’s final weeks, I was practicing compassion, joy—trying to find moments of sympathetic joy in a difficult situation.

This past year of my life I have had a lot of changes and have been trying to find equanimity. So more recently I don’t have a daily sitting practice, but I am much more engaged in the world around me. And I am trying to consciously bring those practices into everything I do.

I would like to get back to a seated daily practice, because I think that is the foundation. But in the absence of that, a rooting in Buddhist principles and philosophy is helpful; it shows up even when I am not on the cushion.

**adrienne:** *Build a bridge for me between meditation and nature. (Humans dropping into our nature, etc.) Have these practices played into your life as you create life?*

**Dani:** I grew up in a rural environment. When I think of being a child I think about riding a bike, running all over the place, playing in the woods, fishing with my neighbor. Because of where I grew up, I am really drawn to forests, to sitting in natural places. Gives me a sense of calm. It’s easier for me to clear my mind. One reason I like to go on retreat is that they tend to be in these beautiful places, and if you aren’t in retreat you can go on long walks. Last year, I went on retreat in Joshua Tree and it was incredible to meditate in the desert—see jackrabbits, these huge black crows, the cactus—to feel like the natural world was my partner in my work, my mindfulness. My practice deepened in California. I have gone on retreat more often at Spirit Rock—the hills of northern California. It’s interesting that California has been where I have had the experiences of turning inward—not the environments I am from. But it’s nice to get away from traffic sounds, from lights so you can see the night sky, to smell the air free of fumes. The quiet on retreat is hard to come by where I live.

My experience being pregnant: acceptance. The four noble truths—there is suffering. Clinging is the cause of suffering. There is an end to suffering. There is a way out—the noble eightfold path. My pregnancy is a process of letting go... Clinging to anything, to fixed ideas of how things should be, how things are supposed to go, doesn’t work. I have had other lessons that showed me that, but this is a really focused way to learn. To be ok with uncertainty, not knowing anything, not knowing what the next day will be like, or next few months, the process of birth, what this person will be like, what their arrival on this plane will be like. There have been times when I am moving through uncertainty in the past few years, where my practice has helped me be ok with that, to not feel like I deserve to know, that none of us are promised that clarity. You’re not all that in charge.

**adrienne:** *Do you feel meditation and mindfulness is important for people working to create change in the world?*



**Dani:** If this is your life's work then yes, at some point, establishing some practice that helps you connect with yourself and center yourself is vital. Yes. For me it's meditation and Buddhist teachings. I wasn't raised super Christian but I grew up going to Sunday school, bible camp, things like that. I still go to church sometimes. There's something about prayer to me that is more devotional—you have to use your brain more. You have to think it through, be in conversation with god, it's wordy. But there is something in prayer and song that accomplishes what the heart practices do for me. What is important is to have something that brings me back to myself in the midst of a bunch of feelings, opinions, attitudes—in social-change work you are constantly exposed to other people's ways of doing things. I am very sensitive to other people's energies. It's very helpful to get away from that. I touch into what I think, what I feel. To understand that our minds are not real, that we are often projecting things that are not real. The practice helps me differentiate between foolishness, noise, things that are not me. Yes for social-change work—and basically for being a human being.

Finding a community of people to learn from—a teacher, people committed to practice—is really important. I had been curious about this, and what I had done was read books. That isn't the same—you can learn all the concepts, but if you're not practicing it's not the same. Finding a community, a *sangha*, is really, really important. One resource is [dharmafeed.org](http://dharmafeed.org)—it's a library of talks, guided meditations. It's something I think about a lot, having moved back to Cincinnati. There's still the dharma center where I learned mindfulness, but I feel so grateful to have spent time in Oakland. There is something really special happening there—teachers doing brilliant work around why Buddhism in the west is so white, and asking what to do about that, in terms of the teaching core, and making (welcoming) more diverse spaces, different sexual orientations, and gender identities. That's so important. If you live in a place like the Bay, NY, DC—you are lucky. You can find a *sangha* that is more like what this country looks like. If you don't—let's figure something out. Finding a practice community you feel connected to is crucial.

## ASSESS YOURSELF:

### your emergent strategy journal

#### You can use the following assessment in a few ways:

If you are reading and working through this book as an individual, use these questions for journaling (having a conversation with yourself) and personal assessment. Journal over the course of a few days, rereading your thoughts to feel for alignment in the body (the body never lies).

If you are reading and working through this book in a group, try starting with individual journaling and then have conversations around the answers, asking yourselves where there is alignment to move forward.

You can also use these reflections as a jumping off point, creating a baseline<sup>1</sup> to return to after you have read the book and start to play with the tools.

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Faster Than 20's Eugene Kim for teaching me this language of measuring theories over time.

### Assessment Quickie

Here is a quick tool for measuring your embodiment of emergent strategy at this moment. Feel free to take multiple times to measure growth.

	Yes	No	I don't know
Do you value small scale growth and change?			
Do you adapt easily to new circumstances?			
Are you comfortable with nonlinear growth and transformation?			
Do you experience conflict as a generative force in your life/work?			
Are you in community/relationship with people who can and do hold you accountable?			
Do you see change as an opportunity?			
Do you see yourself as a part of the natural world?			

**Mostly yes:** You are an emergent strategist! Teach us how you do it!

**Mostly no:** Each no is a place to grow!

**Mostly I don't know:** Let's learn together—get and stay curious.

### Assessment of Fractal

- o Are you a perfect living realization of your values and beliefs?
- o Is your group a perfect living realization of your collective values and beliefs?
- o What are you embodying in your daily life? In your work?
- o Individual: Interview three people you trust in your extended community to give you feedback about how you show up in the world. Share your purpose/intention with each of them and ask them to hold that as they answer your questions. Sample questions:
  - What is my impact in the world?
  - In three words, what am I embodying?
  - Where do you think I could grow?
- o Organizational:
  - Interview three people in the community your group/organization serves to give you feedback based on how y'all show up in the world. Share with them what you think you are embodying and have a brief discussion on how much you are or are not embodying that.
  - Can everyone in the organization state the vision and mission accurately, even passionately?

### Assessment of Adaptation

- o How do I/we respond to positive changes?
- o How do I/we respond to negative changes?
- o What is my/our intention?
- o How do I/we do at keeping my/our intention present during changes?

With an organization/team/network, have everyone separately rate the group on this scale. Share the ratings and have a discussion on how you made your assessment, and what adaptations are needed.

Our organization/team/network is (choose one)

- Too adaptive (we change for anything and lose touch with our purpose/intention).
- Highly adaptive and focused.
- Pretty adaptive (we could keep relaxing with and into change).
- Struggling with adaptation (we get really thrown off our focus/mission when change happens).
- Not adaptive (acknowledging reality is the first step).

### Assessment of Interdependence and Decentralization

Who do you lean on?

Who leans on you?

(Explore the places where those lists overlap, and where they don't. How can you increase mutual relationship?)

Are all of your needs met? If yes, how? If not, why not?

Did you answer either question above as if it's all your responsibility?

- o If not, try it. How does that feel?
- o If yes, answer again as if nothing happens with you alone.

Who makes work happen in your group?

- Me!
- A small core group of us
- Everyone shares the work

Does everyone take vacation time and weekends where you work?

Do you feel comfortable using the sick and/or vacation time you earn?

If you disappeared tomorrow (because aliens chose you as the ambassador from Earth to the Alliance of Evolved Planets, for instance), how would your organization respond?

- Close its doors
- Period of chaos and power struggle
- Redistribute my work and be overwhelmed
- Redistribute my work and adjust for capacity so that we're still on path

How does your answer to the question above feel?

What could you do to increase decentralized strength in your group?

### Assessment of Nonlinear/Iterative

What are you practicing? (Include *anything* you practice/repeat in your life, things you feel positive about, things you feel negative about—from meditation to burn-out, listening to interruption, community accountability to public takedowns, exercise, escaping, etc.)

We spend our lives in unconscious practices, practices that make us deny our true selves, our true power, our collectivism. It takes three hundred repetitions for muscle memory and three thousand repetitions for embodiment.<sup>2</sup> What do you need to practice?

What does your organization/collective/alliance practice? (Include all the things you practice in your collective work—conflict avoidance, glorifying burn-out, over scheduling, mission drifting, check-ins, retreats, active listening, community accountability, etc.)

What do you need to practice?

How long does it take you to understand your feelings and reactions?

How quickly do you (individually, collectively) translate experiences (successes or failures) into lessons?

<sup>2</sup> This concept is explored in Richard Strozzi-Heckler, *Leadership Dojo* (Berkeley: Frog Books, 2007).

### Assessment of Resilience/Transformative Justice

How often do you engage in personal reflection?

How often do you engage in group/movement reflection?

What are your individual resilience practices?

What are resilience practices you and your organization/group/alliance/collective do together?

Do you increase or decrease tension or dramatic moments that happen between you and loved ones (family/lovers/friends)? (If you aren't sure, ask them.)

Do you increase or decrease tension or dramatic moments that happen between you and coworkers/comrades? (If you aren't sure, ask them.)

Does your organization/group increase or decrease tension or dramatic moments that happen between y'all and partner organizations? (If you aren't sure, ask them.)

Do others ask you to mediate, or in other ways support them through conflict?

What is your first reaction to conflict? (Do you address it directly? Avoid it? Get defensive? Turn up? Other?)

How do you feel, and what do you do, when you witness:

Anger?

Joy?

Tears?

Depression?

Imbalanced power dynamics?

Have you or your organization/group ever been involved in a public fight (physical, digital, etc.)? A public takedown? What did you learn from it?

Have you or your group been practicing transformative justice? How could you increase this practice?

### **Assessment for Creating More Possibility**

What are all of your gifts?

Are you living a life that honors all of your gifts?

If yes, how did you create all this possibility for yourself?

If no, how can you create more possibility today? Tomorrow? This month? This year?

What are your organization's unique gifts?

Is your organization able to hold complexity?

## SPELLS AND PRACTICES FOR EMERGENT STRATEGY



**Emergent Strategy is about shifting the way we see and feel the world and each other. If we begin to understand ourselves as practice ground for transformation, we can transform the world.**

I have spoken about practice many times throughout this book, asking in many words: What is it we need to practice as individuals and communities to come more into alignment with the emergent practices of the universe we know as home?

My practices have included meditation, somatics, visionary fiction, facilitation, working out, yoga, intimate community on social media, check ins with woes/buddies, orgasmic meditation, sex, self-documentation (self-love selfies! Learning to see beauty and power in my standard breaking appearance), sugar shifting, sabbatical (big one in 2012, annual mini-sabbaticals since then), poetry, unscheduled time, moon-cycle rituals, tarot (I am such a fan of this practice that I have bought five other people tarot decks), sage and frankincense cleansing of my home, journaling. I love intentional periods of practice, daily practices, new practices, and even outgrowing practices.

I share in this chapter some areas of practices that can unlock the emergent potential we hold. There are also some spells—these are little poems that shift my state of being and power. I offer them to use, and also to encourage you to create spells for your own self-shifting work.

A lot of these practices and spells came to me, or were primarily practiced outside of an organizational context. But I have found that the work of cultivating personal resilience, healing from trauma, self-development and transformation is actually a crucial way to expand what any collective body can be. We heal ourselves, and we heal in relationship, and from that place, simultaneously, we create more space for healed communities, healed movements, healed worlds. What I offer here are the core ways I have tapped into my own power and wholeness, and ways I have supported others to tap into their own wholeness and transformation. And fractal strategy suggests wholeness in our organizers yields wholeness in our future.

I am a fan of being creative and self-directive with practices. What are the practices you need to line your life up with your values and beliefs?

### Woes/Coevolution Through Friendship

Did I thank the prolific and joyful Canadian rapper Drake yet for bringing the term “woes” to my attention? Woes

stands for “Working On Excellence,” and I’ve reveled in it as a way to note those people in my life with whom I am intentionally growing.

I have sets of woes—people who know my north star, who know my challenges, and who hold me accountable to my own development, celebrating my self-awareness and growth. And it’s all mutual. We are in daily contact, and we have intensive visits to check in on our development.

My sisters are one set of my woes, and for a few years now we have instituted a sister check-in during any family visits. Everyone else supports us with childcare and scheduling so that we get the time together to go deep. We each take a turn of sharing what has moved since we were last together, where we need support, and what’s coming up that just needs to be shared. Often the biggest support we need is to speak the truth out loud to those who will hold it with us from a vantage point of unconditional love.<sup>1</sup>

It’s friendship, but with a lot of transparency and intention woven into it. Another way of speaking about this is *coevolution through friendship*:

Coevolution is “the change of a biological object triggered by the change of a related object.”

One of the outcomes of the “Engage Community of Practice” year of building relationship and sharing of ourselves, was an idea articulated toward the end by participant Gibrán Rivera: *coevolution through friendship*. Meaning: we evolve in relationships of mutual transformation.

Since the community’s formal time ended, I have watched and felt this relational coevolution continue in a variety of ways, including close daily personal contact, occasional opportunities for mutual support, noticing and supporting each other’s work and growth from afar, and being more intentional about bringing this practice into the way we hold all of our relationships.

<sup>1</sup> See “Liberated Relationships” in the “Transformative Justice” chapter of this book.

I have been really aware of the power of coevolution through friendship as I have been in what feels like a growth spurt. Babies do this, suddenly overnight become taller, fuller, using new words, more confident in their bodies and complex in their communications. It's pretty incredible to watch—and to feel that the growth doesn't end even if it changes form. In this period, I have been supported, inspired, encouraged, and witnessed by a marvelous circle full of people in their own growth.

The very nature of this is iterative, so I am not writing any definitive guidelines up for y'all. But it is so delicious and impactful that I wanted to share some of what I am noticing, some elements of coevolution through friendship.

#### *Self-transformation.*

Both/all people in the relationship and community are committed to their own self-transformation. We see ourselves as microcosms of the world, and work to shift oppressive patterns in our bodies, hearts, minds, speech, interactions, liberating ourselves into purpose, liberating our communities into new practices. We each set the pace of our own transformation.

#### *Curiosity.*

We have curiosity about our own lives as learning labs for our values and figuring out what it means to be human at this moment in time. And we have curiosity about each other's lives, about why we do what we do, about the roots of our behaviors. We want to know if there are lessons and changes available in the reflection and action cycle of life. This curiosity ranges from philosophical to academic, historical, nosy, somatic. Our lives are our life's work. What matters is that we are authentic with the questions, that we believe the answers are important, and we listen to each other accordingly.

#### *Vulnerable reflection.*

We reach out to each other and say things like "something incredible is happening," "I don't know," "I fucked up," "I

think I hurt someone," "I'm overwhelmed," "I'm terrified," "I think I'm hurting," "I'm lost," "Am I falling in/out of love?," "\_\_\_\_\_ happened, what should I do?," "I want to do something new/different/marvelous/dangerous/that feels essential to my soul—help!," and so on. We ask others to be mirrors for us at our most vulnerable places, so we can see what we are learning, see new possibilities in our lives.

#### *Pattern disrupting.*

I know I am always whole theoretically, but I don't always feel that way, I feel half sometimes, I feel fragmented sometimes, messy. Being whole includes owning all of that as me. When I am feeling fragmented or limited, seeing any of my friends in their wholeness reminds me of my own capacity. And as I stand in my wholeness, which includes being more honest with myself and others about what I want and who I am in the world, it exerts a pressure on others, both to receive me and to become more whole in themselves. This disrupts those familiar diminishing patterns in my friends and in myself, the internalization of a world that has rejected every aspect of my identity at some point. Counter rejection. Still I rise. And new patterns become possible, more interconnected and interdependent patterns that rely on being open.

#### *Present and intentional.*

This is perhaps the biggest place to practice. Life is not happening to us. We are learning to be in the actual current moment, to recognize where we have choice... In a terrifying twist, it turns out we always have it. So the great question is: how to be intentional, in the present moment, to take responsibility for your state of being, and for your life? Another participant-teacher in the community of practice, Jane Sung E Bai, asked us to consider, "What if I am responsible for everything?" It's not a singular task, to be responsible for what happens in this world—we do not exist or transform in isolation. We are in this universe. We are actively reflecting on how to be in our lives, to best embody our greatness and to

yield a more liberated future for ourselves, and thus, in the fractal sense, for all of existence.

There is a lot to be careful of. We are not yet masterful, even though there are moments of collective genius. Sometimes we misread each other, push each other too hard, get defensive, or give unsolicited coevolution pressure.

Sometimes what is happening in the world is so terrifying and urgent that we forget our complexity, or wonder why we would spend time on ourselves or take time for our friendships when there is so much external work to do. What I am noticing is that it is not a privilege to practice coevolution through friendship—it is the deepest work.

I believe it is how communities have survived.

I believe it is Harriet Tubman going back to free others, because it wasn't enough to free only herself.

I believe it is Ubuntu<sup>2</sup> active in my life.

I believe it is the freedom that we are longing for, which will never be given to us, which we have to create, the pulsing life force of the collective body we are birthing, the rhythm of a shared heart.

### STOP HATING: A SPELL

let me pull the weed up by the root  
and notice the soil that i stand on  
is this a necessary vitriol  
is *this* what i choose now to rant on?  
is there nothing to build  
and nothing to grow  
no more to offer up  
nothing to know

2 Ubuntu is a Nguni Bantu concept that translates to "I am because you are"; <http://www.ubuntu.thiyagaraaj.com/Home/about-ubuntu/ubuntu-philosophy-meaning#TOC-Archbishop-Desmond-Tutu-further-explained-Ubuntu-in-2008>.

is there a way now  
that i could let go  
can i look in the mirror  
and love me more

### Authenticity chant:

Let me not posture  
Let me not front  
Let me not say yes to  
Lives I don't want  
Let me not use words that don't mean a thing  
Let me be fly  
as I am, no trying  
Let me good  
For my heart, not my rep  
Let me be still  
When I can't take a step  
Don't let me get too caught  
Creating my face  
Let me just love me  
All over the place

### Visionary Fiction

Art is not neutral. It either upholds or disrupts the status quo, advancing or regressing justice. We are living now inside the imagination of people who thought economic disparity and environmental destruction were acceptable costs for their power. It is our right and responsibility to write ourselves into the future. All organizing is science fiction. If you are shaping the future, you are a futurist. And visionary fiction is a way to practice the future in our minds, alone and together.<sup>3</sup>

3 "Visionary fiction" is a term coined by Walidah Imarisha, co-editor of *Octavia's Brood*.



Visionary fiction is neither utopian nor dystopian, instead it is like real life: Hard, realistic... Hopeful as a strategy. Visionary fiction disrupts the hero narrative concept that one person (often one white man, often Matt Damon) alone has the skills to save the world. Cultivate fiction that explores change as a collective, bottom-up process. Fiction that centers those who are currently marginalized—not to be nice, but because those who survive on the margins tend to be the most experientially innovative—practicing survival-based efficiency, doing the most with the least, an important skill area on a planet whose resources are under assault by less marginalized people. Visionary fiction is constantly applying lessons from our past to our future(s).

The best way to practice visionary fiction is to get to writing. The *Octavia's Brood* website offers workshops, and you can also write on your own, form writing groups, and share stories with others.<sup>4</sup> You have worlds inside you. You have permission to share them.

### Meditation

My meditation teachers include but are not limited to: Dani McClain; Angel Kyodo Williams; Jesse Maceo Vega-Frey; Thich Naht Hanh; Sam Conway; a spirit named Jai at Kalani; Robert Gass, Spenta Kandawalli, and Chris Lymbertos; Richard Strozzi-Heckler; a stream of yoga teachers; my nibblings and every baby I have every held; and many more.

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"My mother was a lifelong activist, and I truly believe that her fight for civil rights—and the traumas she suffered during that fight—cut her life short. So, to me, the ocean represents the importance of self care. My mother loved music, but ultimately I do not believe she had a quiet or steady enough

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4 "Collective Sci Fi Writing" at [www.octaviasbrood.com](http://www.octaviasbrood.com).

practice to counteract the negativity and anger she built up through her work. Staring at the ocean, or standing with one's feet at the shoreline to feel the vastness of the tide as it pulls away, would be a therapeutic practice for social justice workers—or perhaps even meditating about it, if no ocean is nearby. Life and true change are bigger than all of us. Like Martin, we may not all get "there" (there is no "there"), but we can see it on the horizon. We have to learn to count victories even as we continue to agitate. We cannot become so jaded that we lose joy in everything because the flaws loom too large. The journey is the work, the work is the journey. The ocean's ebbs and flows may remind us of this better than anything."

—Tananarive Due

I resisted meditation for so long. I said it just didn't suit my personality, or that I wasn't down to sit, that I could meditate while doing other things—active non-meditative things.

I was in good company with this, particularly in social justice spaces—everything we are working on is actually urgent—people are being hurt at every level, people and species are dying, the planet is being damaged. We are not making it up. Setting aside time from our work can feel violently selfish.

And yet! If we haven't cultivated mindfulness in our attention, how do we ever expect to break out of the cycle of crisis response? How will we ever put our attention onto solutions, put our attention onto the new practices we need?

Meditation kept waiting for me, around every corner, in every room. Grief was the gift that finally let me understand meditation.

In teaching basic meditation at my Windcall Retreat, Black Zen teacher Angel Kyodo Williams once said that our access to the global scale of suffering has become immediate,

through technology, but we have not developed the capacity to be with that increased awareness of suffering.<sup>5</sup> I have felt the truth of this many times in my life, particularly as loved ones have transitioned beyond this life, and as I have been politicized, awakened to the specific and overwhelming suffering that is funded by US tax dollars: I have felt my small hands up against these giants of death, of imperialism, of my own hopelessness.

What my meditation teachers have shared with me is that meditation is about choosing where my attention goes. Training my attention. And that when I am overcome by sadness, loss, anger, joy, desire, restlessness, or other emotions, it helps to be able to drop into myself and choose—to be with the emotions intentionally, to listen for what is needed. This has been a path into emergent strategy—the more I listen, the more I understand the interconnectedness of the world, and my place in it, my insignificance, my wholeness, our collective potential and beauty.

There are many many many methods for meditation. I am going to share a few tips that have made meditation possible for me, and that bring me into deeper awareness of emergence.

1. Breath and sensation awareness is the foundational entry into meditation that works for me. Just noticing the breath coming in and out of my body, in through the nose, out through the mouth. Both the idea of the breath, visualizing nourishing breath moving through the body, and the sensations of the breath, the movement of the chest and abdomen, the air against the upper lip, moving through the mouth.

Bringing the attention back to the breath no matter how often or where it wanders.

Ursula Le Guin speaks to this: “To sit and be fully aware of the air going in and out of your nose, and nothing else,

5 Windcall is an incredible retreat for activists and organizers. To learn more or apply to attend, see [www.windcall.org](http://www.windcall.org).

this sounds really stupid. If you haven't tried it yet, try it. It is really stupid. Nothing your intellect can do to help you do it. “This must be why so many people for so long have used it as a way towards wisdom.”<sup>6</sup>

2. Reading the work of Thich Nhat Hanh and Pema Chodron has been helpful when relating to thoughts during meditation. I used to think I was supposed to be NOT thinking, and then I learned that many people who meditate, even those who have done it for years and do long silent retreats and stuff, are actually in the tug of war between thinking and being the whole time. Being aware that one is thinking, noticing when thought is happening, can be liberating. The content of the thoughts becomes less important, it is the choice to be thinking vs. breathing.

3. I have actually found the shivasana position in yoga is best for my body for meditation—laying flat on my back, palms up, sinking into the floor or bed. After years of trying to meditate sitting up and spending the entire time in pain, I noticed that the times I felt most capable of meditation were at the end of yoga classes. When I share this with people they always ask, “but don't you fall asleep?” I usually meditate in the morning, so I am already rested, but at night I will return to this often and meditate until I fall asleep. And it seems to be good for my quality of sleep and my dream life to head into sleep in a meditative state.

4. Silence is nice for meditation, but rare in my life. I like to make soundtracks for my meditations, energies moving up or down according to what I am seeking in the meditation. I have also recently gotten into guided meditations<sup>7</sup>—especially those that cultivate lovingkindness, or metta meditation<sup>8</sup>

6 Ursula Le Guin, *The Wave in the Mind: Talks and Essays on the Writer, the Reader, and the Imagination* (Shambala, 2004).

7 Using “Insight” meditation app.

8 Metta meditation is a very simple ritual of developing lovingkindness towards yourself and the whole world. As you meditate you say, to yourself or aloud, “May I be happy, may I be wealthy, may I be free

5. Use poetry! In our generative somatics courses, we often read poems at the beginning and end of our meditations. Some of my favorites for meditation are:

“The Prison Cell,” Mahmoud Darwish;

“The Journey,” Mary Oliver;

“Yes, We Can Talk,” Mark Nepo;

and everything from June Jordan, Adrienne Rich, Warsaw Shire, or Nayirrah Waheed.

6. Time the meditation! My woe Dani has been a gentle teacher and inspiration on my meditation path. One tool she offered me is the “Insight” meditation app, which I use on my phone. Timed meditation is a must for me, and the app marks beginning, end and interim time with bells. This allows me to relax into the meditation, not opening my eyes and looking at the clock desperately every thirty seconds.

I had to start very small, setting the timer for three minutes, which felt like forever. I have built up to a regular practice of forty-five minutes, with my longest continuous meditation at a hundred minutes the night that my mentor Grace transitioned. I consider my meditation practice foundational—I may add or subtract other practices based on what I need to focus on in a given moment, but meditation is a daily practice.

### Somatics

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“The dream of the cell is to become two. The evolutionary thrust surges through us as dreams, sensations, longings, images, and inexplicable utterances and gestures. We are constantly adapting, creating, filling, emptying as we become the dream. From the elegant simplicity of our cells

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from harm and suffering.” And then you repeat it for someone you love, someone you feel aversion to, and then for the whole world.

to the vast complex networks of our brain we are becoming more.

“In aikido we surrender to the spiral that lives in the blood and plasma of our veins, to our circulating breath, to our turning dance in gravity, to the galactic revolutions that spin in the heavens. Spirals that rise and fall as do civilizations, tectonic plates, to our standing and lying down every day.”

—Richard Strozzi-Heckler

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Somatics is the study of the *soma*, a Greek word that means “the living organism in its wholeness.” It is a methodology for transformation that helps us understand that change doesn’t come simply from thinking differently. The process involves shifting what we understand, what we can feel, and what we practice, reconnecting us with the incredible data and resilience of the body.

Somatics talks about the body as three billion years of evolutionary wisdom. It’s really more than the body in the “Cartesian” view—body as object or machine. Somatics brings an understanding and way to work with us as whole—mind, beliefs, emotions, relations, resilience, adaptations, biology, meaning, and actions... All within and through the body. And, that we are collective bodies as well. We transform both individually and collectively.

The lineage of somatics that I am in, generative somatics, puts an emphasis on somatics in the context of our social conditions, and our efforts to create collective justice. We are never just individual bodies, individual traumas—our lives and the ways we survive are interconnected.

I first came across the work in 2009–2010, through a collaboration called “Somatics and Social Justice.” There was clearly something really valuable in it, but also a lot of challenges about the course, and the trainers were transparent in sharing that it was an experiment, that they were figuring

out how to best bridge the distance between somatics and social justice. That sense of transparent experimentation was exciting to me.

In 2012, I was invited into another course, "Somatics and Trauma." The course itself was solid, and I was really blown away by the palpable transformation in several of the teachers. I have seen and experienced a ton of leadership development processes, and most of them ultimately seem oriented around reproducing one person's way of being, which inevitably fails. This course was one of the first that I'd experienced that seemed to truly unlock people's power relative to their own potential.

I can't really tell you much about somatics, because it isn't about what we can say to each other, it's about what we can feel—of ourselves, of this world we belong to. It's about the correlation between feeling more and thus having more choices. I can say that, when it comes to adaptation, resilience through decentralization, interdependence, and other key elements of emergent strategy, somatics provides the best framework and practices that I have come across. Some of the aspects of it I most deeply align with include:

- Somatics is about being a fight *for*, rather than a fight *against*. Being in a fight for myself has led me to be honest about what makes me feel happy, strong, like I am realizing my miraculous potential. I've also looked at my friendships and relationships, asking myself how can I be a fight for my loved ones? This means not just listening to them, but listening for the truth within them, listening for what they are longing for, for what they know they deserve, for what they need. And showing up with them in that fight for their dignity, life, health, joy, self-realization. I am, again, so glad to be alive and awake at this moment as Black people fight for our dignity to be recognized, our lives to matter. There is so much to fight against, so many people who want us to cower and shrink, or, when

we fight, to fight defensively, in isolation, against each other, to confirm some degrading concept of self, of Blackness, that has nothing to do with Black people, with evolving in our human purpose.

- Organizing and fortifying ourselves so that we can source from our longings, health, love, dreams, and visions, from our strength and our connections with each other.
- It is not about healing for the sake of individual wellness, though that is a radical act for any people slated for extinction. It is about healing trauma such that individuals and communities are not operating in reaction to oppression, and not relinquishing control over and over again because of changes outside their power.
- Increasing our agency is necessary—there is always going to be so much devastation to react to, especially for those of us on the wrong side of racism and oppression. The trauma won't stop. If we hope to advance, we have to find ways to move through and out of the vice grip of trauma that so drastically limits our choices.
- We say, "We don't practice to feel good, we practice to feel more."

As a student, I have done immense work on defining my purpose (including bringing these observations of emergent strategy forward), returning to my inherent dignity, and learning to stay present, open, and connected throughout my life.

As a teacher, I have watched room after room of movement organizers and workers drop into more authentic relationships with themselves and each other, increasing the transformation they can collectively leverage in their communities.

The aspects of somatics include somatic awareness, opening, and practices. It is an integrated way to change and become who we long to be, and be on an ongoing path. Generative somatics uses this work within movement organizations and

alliances, and the practices and processes of embodied change get to happen there in the collective. The practices include aikido and other martial arts, meditation, physical training and coordination, and building new skills that are embodied (this means new options for responses and actions). Getting somatic bodywork done regularly lets what's stored in the body—emotions, habits, and survival strategies—process through...changing so much. This is done in a course or means working individually with a practitioner. It works to increase your ability to transform your own trauma through your body, and engage your history, resilience, and purpose.

Definitely seek out a generative somatics (gs) course near you—as part of the training community for gs, I can say we are working to increase the ways people can access this methodology directly from us.

Getting a bodyworker is the other best way into somatics.

Lisa Thomas-Adeyemo is our generative somatics songbird and she once closed a session with this song, which keeps rolling through me:

We gonna rise with the fire of freedom  
 Truth is the fire that will burn our chains  
 Stop the fire of destruction  
 Healing is the fire running through our veins

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"Fear and craving and hatred and clinging are deep emotional protections against the unknown that enabled us to survive over millions of years of evolution, and while we need to see how they hold us back, and learn how to overcome them—individually and collectively—we shouldn't pathologize them. We actually need to respect them."

—Jesse Maceo Vega Frey

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### Intimate Community on Social Media

I have found social media to be a sneaky place—it can be so comforting, and so distracting. It is the news and it is a bunch of unfounded random opinions and rants and TMI. I have wanted less randomness in my social-media use, and more depth; I want social media to flow with my life, rather than against, away from or over it. So over the past few years I have done a few experiments. There is a group that is now over a thousand people who are interested in Octavia Butler and Emergent Strategy explorations.<sup>9</sup> I love the things shared in that space. I have two other experiments that have become homes on the Internet. Below is a bit more about them, in the words of the participants.

#### 1. *Sugar Shift, on Facebook*

##### THE INVITATION:

June 25, 2014: Welcome! My name is adrienne and I am a sugar addict with over thirty years in the game. This group is a supportive environment for myself and others who either self identify as sugar addicts, or in some other way recognize we need to be in active work to shift our relationships with sugar. That may include cleanses or longer term commitments to behavior change. This space is intended to increase accountability, process the real challenges, big up our successes, share recipes, and just keep learning. This process will follow emergent strategy because that is how I believe organic change happens. No failures, just data. Keep learning and self-loving!

##### PARTICIPANT TESTIMONIALS

(THE GROUP IS SECRET, BUT THESE LOVELY SHIFTERS GAVE ME TESTIMONIALS AND PERMISSION TO SHARE THEM!):

<sup>9</sup> Thanks squad! This is me blowing a kiss to all of you who have cultivated the fire of geeking about all of this stuff with me, and especially for that one day you got me through.

**Kenyetta Chinwe:** This is the first space (online or in real life) that I've felt safe enough to be honest about my food struggles. Other groups I've been in either bombarded me with false encouragement or enabled me to continue in the behavior I was trying to adjust. This space has allowed me to be honest on the days I struggle, without allowing me to remain complacent. I am sure it is because of you all and your honesty that I'm now at my healthiest both physically and mentally that I've been in probably ten years. I love that, in this space, it is about being healthy and loving ourselves, not necessarily a particular way of eating other than sugar reduction. There seems to be little judgment either. We're able to explore what feels good to our bodies and share that without discrediting another's experience. That's the most valuable thing in this space to me.

**Bilen Birhanu:** The level of vulnerability and honesty in this space encouraged me to strip down and face the core of my life-long and pervasive struggle with food, especially sugar. The driving force of this community is the notion of shifting—there is no static or set destination, but a continual process of exploration, testing waters and learning new ways. Always learning. And leaning into the discomfort that comes with it.

**Jane Brown:** I feel more balance and I like that. And I want to go even deeper into this question we all have of "How do I face the ups & downs of life without diving head first into foods or patterns that are not healthy?" So, onward into Year 2 of Sugar Shift! And it really does feel like a "life shift" ... I don't at all feel like I'm "dieting" ... It's been a lifestyle change that I'm embracing! It's okay to ask for what you need! It's okay to say NO and it's okay to say YES when you're being intentional about what you eat/do! It's okay to do this the way it makes sense for YOU! .

**Supriya Lopez Pillai:** adrienne and I haven't even seen each other in years. And, in this space of virtuality, I have grown

closer to her and a bunch of other women, primarily, I don't even know. What the heck am I talking about? Sugar shifting. Back in September I declared myself a dedicated guinea pig to the experiment of ridding my diet of sugar. adrienne read my declaration on Facebook and invited me to a private group called Sugar Shift. It preceded me, it may have had a common history amongst its original shifters (perhaps a shared detox) but what I stepped into was a fantastic space of support with many who share similar politics, with some folks on the wagon, others off the wagon, some barely holding on by a thread, some totally ambivalent, but all at least thinking about the role sugar plays in our lives and how we all work toward freedom from its hold. Addiction as a metaphor (and a reality) is often raised. The various methods everyone is trying are shared in bits and pieces. Our victories and sidesteps are shared. What I love about the Sugar Shift group is we say, I've fallen down. Sometimes we are ok with being off of it. Sometimes we fell off and in coming back on we declare how much better we feel being back on. Whatever it is, it's a reminder that we are in it together. We stumble, we trip, we fall down, we get up. We stumble, we trip, we fall down, we get up. The body transforms, the mind transforms, everything transforms. Some people start with the mind, some people start with the body, some people start with communities. Whatever the case is, where you start and witness transformation—take it into all aspects of your life. Let it seep in.

## *2. Am I the Artist or Am I the Art? on Instagram*

### THE INVITATION:

March 2016: I am inviting a small crew of women and gender nonconforming friends into an experiment with each other, to share daily portraits of ourselves in this private thread for a month as a liberation technology, and affirm each other's beauty. Interested?

## WHAT HAPPENED:

There were six of us. I knew each person and wanted to know them better—they mostly didn't know each other. We shared daily self-portraits with each other in the spirit of Frida Kahlo (I was somewhat inspired by a picture of her, painting, that is floating around the Internet with the words "Never Be Ashamed of Your Selfies"). And we kind of all fell in love with each other. Halfway through, I realized that the month exactly overlapped with my month of being pregnant the year before. I was unaware of being pregnant until I was in the hospital losing it, so it was a gift that I spent the anniversary of that month in a daily practice of body celebration and awareness. These women were so generous—we shared pictures of joy and sadness, times we felt sexy and times we felt spent. What emerged was a community, a safe space, that is still very active today. Jay-Marie Hill, one of the participants, gathered some the things we said in affirmation of each other:

**Jay-Marie:** Appreciating the intricacies of y'all's realness, glows, and especially moments of slight defeat.

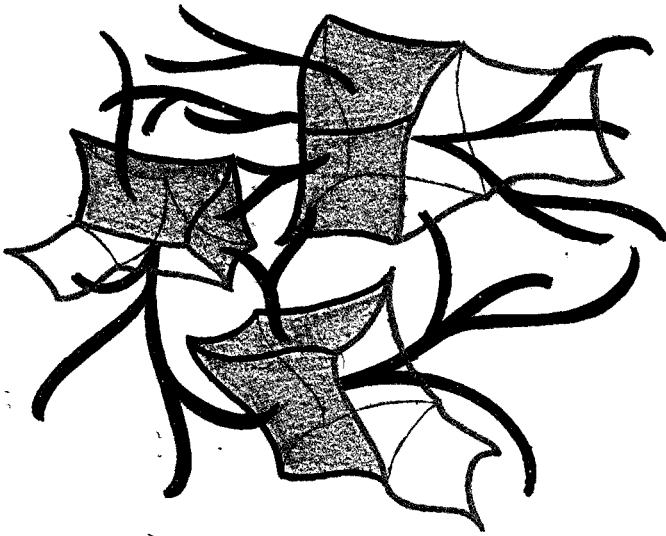
**Sham-E-Ali Nayeem:** It's a gift to share this space together in this moment in time. How fortunate am I to cross paths with each of you... I love you. Thank you for your gifts, creativity, and beauty.

**dream hampton:** I've really enjoyed being in community with y'all. Love to this whole beautiful crew.

**Aja Taylor:** I long ago stopped thinking of it as an experiment and more as a place I return to when I'm hungry for not food. It's just really wonderful being loved deeply in nonsexual ways. Perhaps the most beautiful shit ever. Especially when it's outside of people who are related to me by blood. It's my favorite part of life.

**Nicole Newman:** Do you know how powerful, how beautiful, how creative you are? Before the world beats no into your brow. Before heartbreak can be spotted in your eyes. Before your lips learn protection as a first language. Your creation was majestic. Your being enough. Do you know how enough you all are?

# TOOLS FOR EMERGENT STRATEGY FACILITATION



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"If you do not trust the people, they will become  
untrustworthy."

—Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*

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"I was very much interested in the way people  
behaved, the human dance, how they seemed to  
move around each other. I wanted to play around  
with that."

—Octavia Butler

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**In my mind, this is a book about facilitation. So I am ending with a last big evangelical burst of love for facilitation as a practice and toolset, a way of being with each other and in community in the world.**

We are about to enter the smorgasbord-of-favorite-tools-for-facilitating section. These can be used within organizations, collectives, alliances, networks, and other formations. All of the following tools are either explicitly tools for emergent strategy, or can be adapted to work with the elements of emergent strategy.

There are four universal tools—Trust the People, Principles, Protocols, and Consensus—that just feel foundational. After that, I have grouped most of these tools by emergent strategy element, but feel free to liberate them and use them in any way that works for you!

### Trust the People

One of the primary principles of emergent strategy is trusting the people. The flip of Lao Tzu's wisdom is: if you trust the people, they become trustworthy. Trust is a seed that grows with attention and space. The facilitator can be a gardener, or the sun, the water.

Often, facilitators seem to do the opposite of this. We sit with the organizers of a gathering and try to figure out ahead of time every single necessary conversation we want to see happen, and then create an agenda that imposes our priorities, or the organizers' priorities, on the people who we have invited to gather, ostensibly because we care about what they think, or about what they are doing.

Then, a few hours or days into the gathering, we are harried and desperate because the people have realized what we are up to, or simply aren't feeling heard, and/or we have missed something crucial that is at the center of the gathering. There emerges a sense of facilitators and participants working against each other, instead of everyone working in collaboration to meet the goals.

I have been experimenting with what it means to "trust the people" in practice.

I've been facilitating for a while, and although I know that the common wisdom is that every meeting has a flow of "form, storm, norm"—the group comes together, then explodes in opposition to what is happening and creates what they need, and then a norm emerges where there is a sense of accomplishment and deepening into their united identity—I have often wondered if there was another option, one that would save us time, resources, stress, division, and energy.

It's happening. Few of the meetings I have facilitated this past year have had a significant storm component. There has been tension, but it has been tension about the issues at hand, or larger interpersonal dynamics, the real struggles of movement. It hasn't been tension of people trying to find space to be heard and feel their time is well used.

To facilitate means to make it easy, and I feel like finally it is happening; it is getting easier for the participants and for me and my co-facilitators.

Here are some of the practices for trusting the people in practice.

#### 1. *Goal setting/intention.*

Why are we meeting? What can this group uniquely accomplish? There are always a ton of relevant conversations that could happen, but there is usually a very small set of conversations that a particular group, at a particular moment in history, can have and move forward, given their capacity, resources, time, focus, and beliefs.

The organizers should have this question at the center of their planning for the event. I also find that it helps to survey the group of invitees to sharpen the goals, the desires people have for their time. The goals should be transparent, on the wall, in the room, referred to before closing the meeting. The goals are the north star and the way to assess satisfaction.

The goal can be relationship building—this is often the most necessary piece of work in terms of strengthening a

group's resilience and capacity to move together. "Don't thin-gify," Taj offered me recently, when I was in a moment of pressure to produce "outcomes" at a large gathering. "Humanify! Shifting our way of being *is* our tangible outcome. Systems change comes from big groups making big shifts in being."

And remember, passion is a more valuable force for action and accountability than obligation, so let the goals be inspiring, uplifting what will inspire the most passionate conversation and participation.

### 2. Invite the right people.

We invite people to meetings for a lot of the wrong reasons—obligation, guilt, representation...even love. The questions to ask when shaping the invitation list are: "Who is directly impacted by this issue?"; "Who is doing compelling work on this issue?"; and "Who can move this work forward?"

Inviting the right people means we aren't wasting time by renegotiating the goals nonstop throughout the meeting and/or managing the dissonance that occurs (righteously in my opinion) when a participant, who shouldn't be at the meeting, tries to make it worth their time by derailing the process of advancing the stated goals. Everyone should be able to be themselves and move their own agendas in the space if the invitation list is right.

Now, right people doesn't mean *easy* people—conflict and difference are often an important part of advancing the work, bringing the real issues into the room. Trust is built when the right people are in the right room, and can bring their opinions and work into a container that advances their individual and collective goals.

Inviting the right people also yields stronger relationships—people know why they are in the room with each other and are excited to do deeper work together. The connection between the individuals is what makes the whole group/community/effort strong.

The right facilitation team is also key. I love co-facilitating with people more creative and meticulous than me.

### 3. Individual participant articulation.

There are real language barriers—both literal and cultural—that mean we often think we are hearing each other, but we actually have no clue what others are saying. We all have filters, only some of which we are aware.

In a gathering, this can create the utmost confusion. Folks are using different cultural references, different touch points and acronyms, coming from widely different experiences and passions—even if what they are saying is similar, they can't hear and understand each other.

Giving everyone room to say what they want to prioritize and discuss, and then synthesizing that set of topics as a group, grows the common tongue of the participants, and allows for genuine clarity to happen in the dance of organizing all of the desires into a manageable number of conversations. My friend Allen Gunn taught me a way to do this with post-it notes and a blank wall, and I just keep iterating off of that exercise to create self-generated agendas.

When trying to determine which articulation to prioritize, go with that of the most impacted people in the room—it is usually the most relevant, and often the clearest and most accessible.

### 4. A living agenda.

Develop a spacious, adaptable agenda so the participants can shape the meeting.

Again, our tendency is to make use of the precious in-person time of a meeting by filling up every minute, from the beginning to the end of the day, with formal session time, creating schedules that are hard to change when new information comes along. These agendas are often burdened by an unrealistic hope, an underestimation of how long conversations may actually take.

Most conversations need at least 1.5 hours to adequately cover a basic orientation around the content, identify what is needed, and identify clear next steps. And that's conservative. Add an introduction round and you have a two- to three-hour conversation.

A meaningful full group conversation needs roughly five minutes per person. Underscheduling the amount of time a conversation needs means that energy will start to build up as people look for a way to release their thoughts and ideas into the group. Pair this with the power dynamics that often emerge—that some people feel really comfortable talking, and others don't—and you have a frustrating waste of time on your hands.

Folks are so used to not being heard. So used to not getting their needs met. When people feel heard, the time starts to expand as people move past expressing and start to be able to listen.

It is a beautiful thing to give people space and time, and, within the agenda, also point continuously towards collaboration. In the United States, where I do most of my facilitation, there is a socialized tendency towards competition—"My idea is the best and I am just here to sell it!" Well...no, thank you.

What can we do together from our passions?

Collaboration can only be built on relationships and shared vision. Relationships have to be respectful ("Oh, I totally see why you are here and why I would want to work with you") and real ("What you just said offended/disrespected me, and I can tell you about it because I want us to grow!"). And shared vision doesn't mean a ten-point shared utopia—it means you can generally state that you are moving in the same direction.

In agenda development, look for places where you can open people up to each other, and get their whole selves in the room. In my somatic studies, I am learning an immense amount about this opening, getting present, and connecting. It changes what is possible when people take the time to acknowledge they are whole selves in the room. It changes what is possible in a room when there is space for deepening one-on-one relationships as a way to build the strength of the whole room, early and often. Even a one-minute pairing exercise can increase the possibility of the room.

One more thing: the spacious agenda often leads to ending the meeting early, or right on time. There is always enough time for the right work. Try it! It's magical.

### 5. *Listen with love!*

The participants absolutely mean to be listening to each other, but their own agendas might fill up their ears with misunderstandings or frustrations. Your work as a facilitator is to listen to the needs of the group, help the participants to be clear to and with each other, and make sure you actually understand what folks in the room need.

Listen to the feedback you request that comes directly, and to the other feedback that flows in from the edges, the participants who need something more. My confession here is that I have, at times, grown annoyed with those participants who tend more towards deconstruction, anxiety, or frustration... They are the ones often less able to state clearly what they want. However, if I can drop in and set my annoyance aside, those folks are sometimes trying to get at the heart of the matter, or name the root schism in the room—the thing that is unnamed because it hard to name. Taking time to hear the participants in the margins of the agenda can actually help get the event on point. And I can't count the number of times a disgruntled participant was actually just misunderstanding something that, when clarified, made them a star participant.

There is a conversation in the room that wants and needs to be had. Don't force it; don't deny it. Let it come forth.

### 6. *Know when to say yes and when to say no.*

Yes to those things that deepen the gathering—cultural grounding, local welcome, clarifying questions, learning in real time, suggestions to slow down. No to manipulative efforts to quiet others, pontification, ignorance.

Yes to singing, bio breaks (bathroom, fresh air, snacks, self care), ending early (when the group has run out of energy for the day), talent shows, parties, and efforts to synthesize.

No to judgment, delays, circular conversations, and people who are rejecting the process while offering no alternatives.

And yes to passion, no to obligation. Good ideas become great movement growth strategies with the touch of passionate hands and work. Ideas that emerge from obligation tend to go stagnate waiting for water.

### 7. *Don't hover!*

Give the group time to be in its own process, conversation, or small group without your intervention. Be available if needed, but make room. This allows the group to actually problem solve together, develop relationships, and cultivate each other's leadership.

### 8. *What you gonna do?*

Gibrán Rivera once articulated a question to me: "What is the next most elegant step?"

I love this question and use it to shape conversations all the time. Too often we come up with plans that don't take into account the fog on the horizon. Then we go off and the work doesn't happen, perhaps can't happen, and then we feel demoralized when our energy doesn't flow into action or desired outcomes.

An elegant step is one that acknowledges what is known and unknown, and what the capacity of this group actually is. An elegant step allows humility, allows people to say "Actually we need to do some research" or "Actually we need to talk to some folks not in this room" or "Actually we need a full day to build this plan out into something realistic and attainable."

In any conversation—and I would say in any moment in life—there is a next elegant step—one that is possible and strategic based on who is taking it and where they are trying to go. Find it and you cannot fail.

Develop a strategic direction moving towards vision, determining appropriate tactics based on the horizon you can see. Move forward with awareness. Develop strategic bodies and minds to adapt intelligently as the horizon changes.

"As humans we are part of nature. Our basic physical needs/instincts as mammals and our natural basic emotional needs are often in conflict with our abilities to think complex thoughts and build complex things. One way in which an understanding of human nature influences my organizing is that I've learned that, as humans, we are operating at the level of basic instinct more than we know. We are always ensuring that our basic needs are met and that our emotional selves are nurtured. We're often trying to escape our nature as we try to commune with technology, and these forces are in tension. In my organizing, I've learned to look for the simple, basic human that is at the core of every big vision and complex idea or system. Whenever someone I'm working with advocates for something complex, I pause and see them as the fragile human that they are, really fulfilling their nature vis à vis self preservation and healing. I understand that the project or idea is important to this person not just at the complex organizational level but at the deeply personal, instinctual level as well. This helps me connect with them and have increased empathy."

—Aisha Shillingford

## PRINCIPLES

My favorite way that adaptation with intention and interdependence get practiced is through shared principles. Having clear principles or intentions means, that as conditions change, there is a common understanding of what matters, a way to return to shared practice and behavior.

Allied Media Projects (AMP) has principles that have deeply moved me since I first heard of them—they represent adaptation in how they were created as well as in their

content. Here's what AMP says about their principles, followed by the principles themselves:

Since its inception in 2002 and going back to the initial conference in 1999, Allied Media Projects has been learning from its network of participants. Through the (annual) Allied Media Conference vision statement, case statement, and conference program, we attempt to articulate what we learn back to the network each year, continuing the process of listening and learning and speaking. We adapt our way of organizing based on what we hear and learn from the network.

Year to year, many things have changed and continue to change, giving our shared work and the conference vitality. Especially in the past few years, though, we have drawn certain lessons repeatedly, from a variety of sources. Together, we have tested, adapted, applied, and honed these lessons. At this point, some of the concepts are so consistent and widely practiced throughout the network, that they amount to a set of shared principles. We articulate these shared principles here, to the best of our ability, so that we can all more clearly understand the work we are doing together...

- We are making an honest attempt to solve the most significant problems of our day.
- We are building a network of people and organizations that are developing long-term solutions based on the immediate confrontation of our most pressing problems.
- Wherever there is a problem, there are already people acting on the problem in

some fashion. Understanding those actions is the starting point for developing effective strategies to resolve the problem, so we focus on the solutions, not the problems.

- We emphasize our own power and legitimacy.
- We presume our power, not our powerlessness.
- We are agents, not victims.
- We spend more time building than attacking.
- We focus on strategies rather than issues.
- The strongest solutions happen through the process, not in a moment at the end of the process.
- The most effective strategies for us are the ones that work in situations of scarce resources and intersecting systems of oppression because those solutions tend to be the most holistic and sustainable.
- Place is important. For the AMC, Detroit is important as a source of innovative, collaborative, low-resource solutions. Detroit gives the conference a sense of place, just as each of the conference participants bring their own sense of place with them to the conference.
- We encourage people to engage with their whole selves, not just with one part of their identity.
- We begin by listening.

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"The one thing I've learned from nature that influences how I organize the most is that I have to listen. The Allied Media Projects principles

begin with listening, but I think it goes farther than that for me. I have to listen to others who have worked on similar struggles to me for far longer than I have. I have to set aside my ego and my will and even my desire and listen to what the goddess wants, and when I do that I am living in my greatest purpose, which sometimes looks like radical self care and currently looks like a devotion to my own health and healing, but at other times looks like sharing my story, or like dreaming up new galaxies, or like working with others to birth new realities together."

—micha cárdenas

### Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing

There are many other sets of principles that are core to a lot of the work I do—here are the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing,<sup>1</sup> which many groups I work with hold core to our work:

On December 6–8, 1996, forty people of color and European-American representatives met in Jemez, New Mexico, for the "Working Group Meeting on Globalization and Trade." The Jemez meeting was hosted by the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, with the intention of hammering out common understandings between participants from different cultures, politics, and organizations. The following "Jemez Principles" for democratic organizing were adopted by the participants:

#### *#1 Be Inclusive:*

If we hope to achieve just societies that include all people in decision making and assure that all people have an equitable share of the wealth and the work of this world,

1 <http://www.ejnet.org/ej/jemez.pdf>

then we must work to build that kind of inclusiveness into our own movement in order to develop alternative policies and institutions to the treaties policies under neo-liberalism. This requires more than tokenism, it cannot be achieved without diversity at the planning table, in staffing, and in coordination. It may delay achievement of other important goals, it will require discussion, hard work, patience, and advance planning. It may involve conflict, but through this conflict, we can learn better ways of working together. It's about building alternative institutions, movement building, and not compromising out in order to be accepted into the anti-globalization club.

#### *#2 Emphasis on Bottom-Up Organizing:*

To succeed, it is important to reach out into new constituencies, and to reach within all levels of leadership and membership base of the organizations that are already involved in our networks. We must be continually building and strengthening a base which provides our credibility, our strategies, mobilizations, leadership development, and the energy for the work we must do daily.

#### *#3 Let People Speak for Themselves:*

We must be sure that relevant voices of people directly affected are heard. Ways must be provided for spokespersons to represent and be responsible to the affected constituencies. It is important for organizations to clarify their roles, and who they represent, and to assure accountability within our structures.

#### *#4 Work Together In Solidarity and Mutuality:*

Groups working on similar issues with compatible visions should consciously act in solidarity, mutuality and support each other's work. In the long run, a more significant step is to incorporate the goals and values of other groups with your own work, in order to build strong relationships. For instance, in the long run, it is more important that labor unions and community economic development projects include the

issue of environmental sustainability in their own strategies, rather than just lending support to the environmental organizations. So communications, strategies and resource sharing is critical, to help us see our connections and build on these.

#### *#5 Build Just Relationships Among Ourselves:*

We need to treat each other with justice and respect, both on an individual and an organizational level, in this country and across borders. Defining and developing “just relationships” will be a process that won’t happen overnight. It must include clarity about decision-making, sharing strategies, and resource distribution. There are clearly many skills necessary to succeed, and we need to determine the ways for those with different skills to coordinate and be accountable to one another.

#### *#6 Commitment to Self-Transformation:*

As we change societies, we must change from operating on the mode of individualism to community-centeredness. We must “walk our talk.” We must be the values that we say we’re struggling for and we must be justice, be peace, be community.

#### **Protocols Across Community and Formation**

Protocols are ways that principles look in action—the actual order, boundaries, practices, and paths towards being in principle.

The first time I heard about protocols was while working with Indigenous communities through the Indigenous People’s Power Project. I was so moved by the clarity of the protocols—in each community there are ways to honor and respect the culture, the elders, the leadership, the history, and the power dynamics.

I have also been pleased to experience protocols being practiced in intersectional ally work. Protocol for working

together,<sup>2</sup> protocol for taking action together. There was a set of protocols articulated by the team at Ruckus, protocols intended to shift the practices of parachuting in and out of communities, using communities as the backdrop of outsiders’ issues and campaigns. We wanted to center community in direct actions that grew their power. It’s thrilling to see how many hands and minds have shaped these protocols to suit this bursting forth movement moment.

Bay Area Solidarity Action Team (BASAT) and #Asians4BlackLives (A4BL) are two ally groups that both have really powerful principles and protocols that guide their choices and actions. I am including excerpts from both, and encourage you to visit their sites, read (and use) the full text!

First an excerpt from BASAT:<sup>3</sup>

This is a living document that will continue to evolve. The foundation for this protocol came from The Ruckus Society’s Action Framework.

#### **Protocol & Principles for White People Working to Support the Black Liberation Movement:**

Frontline Leadership

Solidarity is a Verb

Long Haul Relationships

Centering Blackness

Don’t Let Whiteness Get in the Way

Stay Human, Stay Grounded: Our own liberation is bound to the liberation of Black people. We will stay emotionally connected to the gravity of the war on Black people.

Visionary and Confrontational Action:  
We commit to taking action that holds space for community vision, aligns with national

<sup>2</sup> [www.ejnet.org/ej/workingtogether.pdf](http://www.ejnet.org/ej/workingtogether.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> To find the full protocol and principles for BASAT, visit [baysolidarity.wordpress.com](http://baysolidarity.wordpress.com).

demands from FergusonAction; and places our bodies in the path of injustice.

#### Tactical Discipline

Reflection  $\longleftrightarrow$  Action cycle: We will constantly evaluate and learn from our mistakes and strengths, and share learning with others.

#### Sustainability

And here are some excerpts from #Asians4BlackLives's principles and protocols:<sup>4</sup>

We are a diverse group of Asian voices coming from the Philippines, Vietnam, India, China, Pakistan, Korea, Burma, Japan, and other nations, based in the Bay Area. We are mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, educators and organizers, students and teachers, artists and techies, dancers and workers, youth and elders. We are immigrant and U.S. born, we are queer and we are straight, we are many genders, we are families. From our many walks of life, we have come together in response to a call from Black Lives Matter Bay Area (including the BlackOut Collective, Black Brunch organizers, Onyx Organizing Committee, and more) and the larger Black Lives Matter movement, to put forward these principles and protocols as a model for why and how we, as diverse Asian communities around the country and the world, can show up in solidarity with Black people in this struggle.

<sup>4</sup> To find the full protocol and principles for A4BL, visit: [a4bl.wordpress.com](http://a4bl.wordpress.com).

### PROTOCOLS:

#### *How we believe in doing this work*

##### Organize Our People

Strive for a strategic diversity of tactics so all who want *can* play a role

##### Build Trust & Practice Transparency

Move Boldly and Swiftly: Take Risks, Make Mistakes, Share Lessons

Embody self care & humility, community accountability, collective healing

We submit these principles and protocols with humility and openness. We don't have it all figured out, but we are committed to taking a stand, and learning as we go. We will not wait to be perfect, because we believe the time is now and we would rather be held accountable for our mistakes than forgiven our inaction.

#### *Group Agreements*

At the beginning of a meeting of people who don't work together regularly, it helps to set some agreements in place. If people are working together regularly, just have some standing agreements. Here are some of my favorites for emergent spaces:

- Listen from the inside out, or listen from the bottom up (a feeling in your gut matters!);
- Engage Tension, Don't Indulge Drama;
- W.A.I.T.—Why Am I Talking?
- Make Space, Take Space—a post-ableist adaptation of step up, step back to help balance the verbose and the reticent;<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Learned from Cinna, at Extreme Energy Extraction Summit, a twice yearly gathering of communities resisting extreme energy extraction around the globe.



- Confidentiality—take the lessons, leave the details;
- Be open to learning;
- Be open to someone else speaking your truth;
- Building, not selling—when you speak, converse, don't pitch;
- Yes/and, both/and;
- Value the process as much as, if not more than, you value the outcomes;
- Assume best intent, attend to impact;
- Self care and community care—pay attention to your bladder, pay attention to your neighbors.

### Efficient Consensus Decision Making

I love to say the words “consensus decision making” to people who use the words “efficient” and “ASAP” to describe everything good. The response face is similar to when a baby tastes lemon for the first time.

I think people imagine being in the movie *12 Angry Men* when they hear the word “consensus”—no bathroom breaks, endless hero sandwiches, wearing each other down to the least interesting decision.

What I mean when I say it is: make sure the people who will be doing the work agree on what is being done, why and how. This is the heart of efficiency—that there is nothing dragging or diverting the energy of the work. When people agree to work, but don't really understand it or support it, they slowly become a counterforce—doing the work slowly, or without their full positive attention, or explicitly sabotaging the work. A bit more clarity on the front end builds trust and alignment within the group.

These are core elements of consensus decision making that are crucial in resilient, decentralized organizations.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> I learned these tools from Autumn Meghan Brown, whose work can be found at [www.iambrown.org](http://www.iambrown.org). She is also interviewed on consensus and other things earlier in this book.

### Proposal-based decisions.

Those who have worked with me as a facilitator know that I can get too excited about proposal-based decision making. I am not ashamed. It hurts me to hear a group spin in a circle, unsure if a decision has been made, or if they even know what they are deciding to do, or if they are making a decision at all, perhaps it's just a conversation. Does this feel at all familiar?

#### EXAMPLE 1

“Hey I really don't like you using bottled water cause you know plastic build up in the ocean hurts dolphins, whales, and the future.”

“I feel you. I just don't trust the government to provide clean water and buying bottles is easier than using charcoal.”

“Can we just buy a water filter for the faucet though?”

“Probably Sue in HR could do that.”

Next meeting:

“I'm really angry you're still using bottled water. I guess everyone here hates the Earth.”

“Look, until there is a filter I am gonna drink clean water from this plastic bottle!”

“Hey guys, did one of you talk to Sue in HR about this?”

“No, I thought that guy over there was going to.”

“But he has a charcoal filter bottle and wasn't even in that conversation.”

Rage. Resignations.

It doesn't have to be that way. Here's another option:

#### EXAMPLE 2

“Hey everyone, I'd like to change our water system from bottled water to something more in line with our values.”

“Oh yeah? Let's have a brief discussion at this week's staff meeting to explore options and preferences to stop using bottled water, and you develop a proposal based on that. If you send it to us by Wednesday we'll review it and decide during next week's staff meeting.”

“Sounds good.”

“Great—make sure Sue will be at the meeting, this is her area of work.”

“Roger that, homeboyyyyy!” (Or however y’all end conversations.)

The proposal-based method has three basic steps:

1. Identify the area where a decision is needed and have an exploratory conversation to find out where the group’s preferences and concerns are.
  - Best practice: make room for brainstorm-level ideas from the group, saying yes to all the ideas. Some folks, more than will admit it, feel shut down if their ideas are being debated and shot down as they speak.
2. Based on that conversation and any additional research, one person or sub-group can develop a proposal that represents the discussion.
  - Best practices:
    - Structure a proposal that says what you want to do, why it serves the mission/ vision of the group, and who/what/when/ where/how it will happen.
    - Send out a written version of it for folks to review. (Giving people time to review the proposal ahead of time *really* helps reduce knee-jerk reactions and increase thoughtful, informed decision making.)
3. Review proposal together and make decision.<sup>7</sup> Once

<sup>7</sup> When getting started with this method, or if working with a large group, I recommend using a system called fist-five for voting, where people use their hands or call out a number from zero to five to indicate their level of agreement with the proposal. Anything less than a five calls for some discussion, and you move a proposal forward if the participants are all above a three, or above a four, depending on the

the proposal is reviewed in real time (in person or over phone/video), first get responses to any clarifying questions, then have a discussion of whether this proposal serves the group at this moment. The exploratory conversation before generating the proposal generally increases the chances of a successful proposal, but stay open to friendly amendments.

- There are a couple of possibilities for how things go at this point:
  - Outcome A: Everyone feels great about the proposal, it reflects the conversation and cares of the group. There is an affirmation of the proposal.
  - Outcome B: People feel mostly good about the proposal but have some amendments. In brief conversation offer these amendments.
    - Best practices:
      - Put the basic elements of the proposal up where everyone can see them with room to note the amendments. For some folks, having a conversation without something they can see gets really confusing.
      - If you are making the amendment, be clear in your self and in your words as to whether the amendment is a suggestion or a requirement without which you will not approve the proposal.
  - Outcome C: People have major changes or a different direction they want to go in.
    - Best practices:
      - have that person/group take

responsibility for developing a counter proposal.

- It also helps if there is a brief moment to examine what happened between the exploratory conversation and this moment. Does the proposal not represent the conversation? Did this person not speak up during the conversation? Learn from what happened to strengthen the proposal method moving forward. Be alert for these kind of participants...and try not to be this kind of participant:
  - "the people who have THE BEST AND ONLY IMPORTANT IDEAS and are not interested at all in being amenable, let alone compromising for the sake of finding a collective agreement"—thank you Clare Bayard for naming this so clearly;<sup>8</sup>
  - the person who was texting or otherwise occupied during all the crucial proposal considerations;
  - the wordsmith, who basically agrees with the proposal but wants to change all the words, or examine what IS is;
  - the lazy proposer. They bring a proposal but don't think it through, which means the work ends up back in the group's lap;
  - the Eeyore worrywart. This

8 This person should figure out work they can do solo that contributes to the movement :)

- person can only think in worst-case scenarios, their mind racing ahead of the conversation to that day in the future when it all inevitably goes to hell;
- the passive-aggressive person who won't come out and say they don't agree with proposal, but keep asking questions to delay decision making;
- the devil's advocate.<sup>9</sup>
- o Outcome D: Block! One or more people in the group block the process from moving forward. Blocks should be saved for moments when there is a real ideological struggle for the group, i.e. "This proposal would put us at odds with our core values." If a block happens in this process, it means there is a communication breakdown somewhere along the path and it's time to slow down and get to the bottom of it!

*Being honest about your level of agreement.*

We like to be nice, supportive, agreeable and stuff. In some places, politeness is the cultural norm. This sometimes leads to us saying yes to things that we actually don't agree with and have no intention of working on, or moving forward as a group on a proposal that we know is too flawed to work. That leads to inefficiency as things we don't want to do slip down our to-do lists, or as we run into problems that everyone could foresee, or in extreme cases, as we work against the very things we said yes to.

There are lovely and quick tools for measuring levels of agreement—thumbs up or down, or letting the number of

9 "Get thee behind me Satan!"

fingers you hold up correlate to level of agreement.<sup>10</sup> I highly recommend using these, at least initially. Like training wheels. Eventually in most groups, you develop your own rhythm and code for this. Some groups only move forward when everyone is all in. Others do modified versions of consensus. The key is cultivating transparency, honesty in the decision-making process.

### *A clear no.*

When a group is scared of saying “no,” it quickly ends up spread too thin. “No” is as important to realizing your vision as “yes.” There is a lot of work that is not yours to do. There are millions and millions of people at work. “No” creates the space for your “yes.” “No” also creates the space for other groups to do the things you can’t, and to do them with enough time and focus and expertise to do them well.

After reading an early draft of this book, Clare Bayard added this, which feels important: “This section could set up a false expectation that if you write a good proposal, it should be hella smooth—and even that smooth is the goal, so if there is contention, that means you/the group failed. Consensus, at its best, is a process that helps a group to do its best thinking—in that way that all of us know something and together we know a lot—and sometimes arriving at decisions, solutions, or plans is complicated (and I want people to anticipate that with joy!)...”

## Facilitation Tools for Adaptation

### *Developing Strategic Intentions*

Think of strategic intentions as a north star. I see strategic plans as maps through territory—maps that can be out of date the moment they are written down as the political,

<sup>10</sup> You can find additional resources and visuals for consensus decision making at <http://i.imgur.com/FEEpW.png>.

economic, or social landscapes shift like tectonic plates. It’s great to have the map and apply past wisdom and experience to planning how to get from point A to point B, but there are larger systems that are less mutable, that are like stars, grand and steady in the landscape. Why not use those as a directional guide as well, a way to adapt in real time while still holding direction?

While she didn’t use this exact language, Jidan Koon, a comrade facilitator, taught me a lot about strategic intentions while I worked at Ruckus.

First, she helped us as an organization see that we needed to prune, to get to our essential work. She literally drew a tree that was clearly overgrown and having a hard time holding itself up, each of the branches representing parts of our work. Then she drew a tree that was spare, balanced, solid, deeply rooted.

We had a long-view vision of communities experiencing power, liberation, and sustainability; and we had a clear mission, meaning we knew how we would achieve our vision—radical direct action by, with, and for directly impacted communities. Jidan helped us identify values aligned with our work, values that we needed to grow within the organization’s practices and partnerships—our strategic intentions.

Our core strategic intention became sustainability—we assessed the entire organization based on how sustainable each aspect of our structure and work were, and came up with an organization-wide plan of action, a standard we could hold up in decision making. Over time, this led to focusing our programs, downsizing the staff, investing more in the network of trainers and organizers that are the backbone of the organization, and developing an action protocol about when and how we entered a community.

It didn’t all happen at once, of course, but with time it emerged from the strategic intention to embody sustainability.

Since then I have facilitated many groups in this kind of strategic intention setting. Here are the basic steps I use:

### Vision

The vision of an organization is the furthest it can see. It is looking into the future, dreaming together, predicting impact, flexing the imagination muscle, and saying aloud what we long for. I cannot overstate this—the more people who deeply share a vision, the more possible that vision becomes. Build the vision across your group.

When new people come in, make sure they are already deeply aligned with the vision (they could easily say “This is MY vision”), or take the time to orient and align. If you bring on a number of new people, it may mean revisiting the vision. I recommend an annual check in on the vision—is this still the furthest we can see?

*Octavia's Brood* has been leading Collective Sci-Fi Writing workshops around the country, and these are one way to get a group of people to articulate a shared vision: by picking an issue and writing visionary fiction for it as a medicine.<sup>11</sup>

You can easily search for visioning exercises. I love the time-travel newspaper headline exercise for finding the common ideas that bring everyone together.<sup>12</sup> I also love having people draw their visions with crayon and colored pencils, place them together on a wall or table, and then articulate the patterns they see in the drawings as a group.

What I will add is that I think it's really important to also clarify the places where there is *not* alignment on vision—be

11 You can book workshops at <https://www.alliedmedia.org/octavias-brood/booking>.

12 You imagine yourself in the future (set a date that people can imagine—twenty years out, say), walking to work, and you see a newspaper. You pick it up and the headline is celebrating the work of your organization/group/movement. Recreate the front page: What paper is it? Is it a hologram? What is the headline? Picture? Leading article? Put the front pages up on a wall where everyone can see each other's vision—discuss the patterns and longings that your future headlines unveil.

really clear about what is and what is not part of the shared collective vision of the group.

In a migration metaphor: if everyone else is set on migrating to Mexico, and you really want to end up in Chile, you may need to find a different flock eventually, and it's good to know that. I am a fan of multiverse theory, that there are parallel universes for everything we can imagine, or every choice we make. I reject the idea that there is ever only one way forward at an individual or collective level.

That said, an organization is a specific and strange thing, like a *Flintstones* vehicle—it moves based on the aligned energy of those powering it from within. So, know where you're heading.

Technically, this means that however you do the visioning work, once you brainstorm the elements of vision in a way that everyone can look at the ideas together, ask the group to do the brave work of crossing off those words that don't represent their vision. Only the words that remain will grow, because those are the places of actual alignment.

Some groups get caught up in attending to the places where they aren't aligned. What I have seen work best over the years is for groups to be aware of where they aren't aligned, but to focus on and grow the areas of alignment. The larger the alignment is, the more room there is for contradiction and difference. And, if need be, for moving in different directions with integrity.

A small point on this—we can only see so far, literally and in our collective imaginations. So it's also good to be aware that you may be setting your vision based on the horizon you can see, and as you move towards it, it will change.

The gift is, it keeps going.

On this planet there are as many horizons as there are places to be (stand, sit, fly, etc.) x 360 degrees x seconds of the day. I am not fluent in math, but that seems to be a pretty massive number of horizons! So hold the vision, and know that as you grow, as you move towards it, the vision will adapt too.

Example: One of my favorite visions of all time is from Generation Five, working to end childhood sexual abuse in five generations. They fleshed out their five-generation vision with outcomes for each generation, and it feels so thorough, so achievable.<sup>13</sup>

### *Mission*

Once you identify the vision, you want to choose the vehicle. Is it the Flintstone's Cadillac or the Flintstone's Rav4? A bike? A mindmeld?

For example, your vision is a world with no prisons. You can approach that with policy-change advocacy work, with direct action inside and outside of prisons, with education, with mediation circles in the community, or many other options. In truth, all of those methods in combination are needed. But they are very, very different methods, and it might be hard to do all of those well in one vehicle. Identifying what your group can do well, is passionate about, and is needed—that's the sweet spot.

That's your mission.

Your mission should be brief and clear, so that you can refer to it at moments of decision, at forks in your organizational road. It should resonate with everyone in the organization, a compelling statement that makes everyone want to show up and kick ass.

Here are some good mission statements:

"Movement Generation Justice & Ecology Project inspires and engages in transformative action towards the liberation and restoration of land, labor, and culture. We are rooted in vibrant social movements led by low-income communities and communities of color committed to a Just Transition away from profit and pollution and towards healthy, resilient and life-affirming local economies."

<sup>13</sup> You can read the full vision at [alliedmedia.org/esii](http://alliedmedia.org/esii).

"The Ruckus Society provides environmental, human rights, and social justice organizers with the tools, training, and support needed to achieve their goals through the strategic use of creative, nonviolent direct action."

"Allied Media Projects cultivates media strategies for a more just, creative and collaborative world. We serve a network of media makers, artists, educators, and technologists working for social justice."

"Black Lives Matter is a chapter-based national organization working for the validity of Black life. We are working to (re)build the Black liberation movement."

"BOLD (Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity) is a national Leadership Training Program designed to help rebuild Black (African-American, Caribbean, African, Afro-Latino) social justice infrastructure in order to organize Black communities more effectively and re-center Black leadership in the U.S. social justice movement."

### *Strategic Intentions!*

"Water has taught me how to be in the flow, to release and cleanse what no longer serves me or us. There is power in letting go what is not ours to carry, or what others in their unskillfulness, have tried to place upon us."

—Brenda Salgado

What do you need to do or be great at to embody your vision as you fulfill your mission? Brainstorm a huge list of things, go nuts.

Cluster those things. You might have sustainability things, or stuff related to conflict resolution, community leadership, decision making, financial management or fundraising, visibility and communications, or totally

other stuff. Clustering helps you get a first glance at what is showing up.

Now prioritize the clusters.

The biggest clusters may not be the most necessary, just the most obvious. You want to be intentional as a group, and I like “dotmocracy” for this—everyone gets two or three “votes” in the forms of a sticker (a dot, a star, a unicorn), or just a mark. Everyone goes up and marks their top priorities (with one sticker per choice, or putting all their marks on their top choice). Prioritization is important because even if you *know* all the things that would create perfect vision embodiment, unless you are a crew of gifted superhumans, you can’t *do* all the things at once. If you try that, your default behaviors will easily resist your efforts to change.

Prioritize for what I call the “first domino” cluster, the thing that, if you achieve it, will begin to move the whole pattern.

Example: I mentioned that for Ruckus one of our strategic intentions was sustainability. This was because, in a state of organizational burnout, nothing else was achievable. I suspect many organizations are like this, needing to get a sustainable internal culture both because it aligns with long-term vision and because everything else is impossible from that state of perpetual flame.

Task it out. Yes this can be a work plan! For the work you can foresee, what needs to be done? Who will do it? By when?<sup>14</sup> Get it mapped out to your heart’s content—just know it may change.

### *Guiding statements or questions!*

Guiding statements or guiding questions can be really helpful for adapting while staying intentional. These are the

14 Throughout this book, I touch on shared work management systems that liberate the information about where tasks are in organizations. See especially the “Tools for Emergent Strategy Facilitation” chapter in the section “Tools for Increasing Interdependence and Decentralization.”

words that remind you to look up, look ahead, your north star words.

For Ruckus, part of growing our sustainability was working with groups that really wanted our presence, rather than expending energy trying to push into spaces where we weren’t invited. We learned as a national organization that it was more sustainable and more aligned with all of our values to trust local work, and to come when we were called, rather than parachuting in on the strength of our own interests. When potential action opportunities came up, we asked each other, “Who is calling for us?,” making sure the directly impacted community actually wanted us there.

For the Detroit Narrative Agency, a project dedicated to shifting the common narratives about Detroit away from “blank slate/canvas” and “violent crime city” to “popular resistance against injustice” and “resilient long-lasting communities,” with the understanding that the future of a place follows the stories we tell about that place.<sup>15</sup> As we have moved through the work we keep asking ourselves, “What is the narrative being uplifted here? And who is sharing that narrative?”

## Facilitation Tools for Nonlinear/Iterative

### *Post-it Planning*

This is so simple and so exactly what it sounds like. I am a big fan of having a visual and written depiction of shared work. What is the task, when will it be done, who is doing it? Being able to quickly look at a shared plan can reduce confusion and conflict once the work begins.

The key to embracing non-linear and iterative work is being able to easily shift the moving parts. And some wonderful person created post-it notes for this purpose.<sup>16</sup> When making

15 Learn more about the work of the Detroit Narrative Agency at <https://www.alliedmedia.org/dna>.

16 Arthur Fry co-invented the Post-it Note.

a plan with others, use a wall or a big piece of paper as a timeline, and use post-its for each task, event, milestone. This way the timeline can easily be adjusted when change happens.

While I was at Ruckus, my coworker Hannah Strange once set this up with handmade horse-shaped post-its that were each separate projects racing through tasks towards a finish line. Get creative.

### *Circular Agendas*

I started using these as I became more comfortable with emergent strategy because I was tired of having tight time-bound agendas that pretended the work we were doing could be predicted ahead of time, and then inevitably changed because humans showed up for the meeting.

What I have found is that, if we are doing the right work, the timing works out. We structure the time, and we protect the time we have together by cultivating a culture of starting and ending on time, but inside the time, the time expands and shape shifts for the work that is needed. The clarity is around the goals, and the arc of the work.

The circular agenda shows that there is a continuous arc to the work we are doing, and presents the suggestion for when and how that arc will flow, but it also allows for things to move and for everyone to focus on the importance of the flow more than on the time slots.

Before developing the agenda at all, I work with as many people in the group as I can access in order to get a solid grasp on the goals/intentions for the meeting. Often the agenda gets disrupted because there are divergent intentions in the room, and not enough space provided for alignment work. So getting clear on the shared intentions (often called goals) and places (or hot spots, turbulence, bumps, landmines, or other explosive words depending on the setting) where we can expect discussion will be needed for alignment.

I advocate for an agenda that is spacious. This often means negotiating with the group/organizers about what

can and cannot be accomplished in the time they have set aside for the meeting. Giving an agenda adequate space and room for human interaction and discussion often leads to significantly more ground getting covered in an authentic way in the time available.

I often work with the co-facilitators and organizers of the meeting/gathering to create a detailed step-by-step planned out agenda and hold onto this as a facilitation agenda, which I can refer to throughout the process and make sure we are covering all the bases.

In the room, I structure the agenda on butcher paper like a clock, beginning at the top (midnight/noon) and circling around clockwise. (It doesn't *need* to be a circle, but that does seem to help people see the space of the meeting as a finite time within a larger arc of change. And it's such a sacred shape in our universe—it's an orbit, a moon cycle, time.) I use large chunks of time—morning, afternoon—and place in those chunks the work that will most likely happen during that time. I often check off pieces of work as we go, so there is a transparent understanding in the room of what we are moving through.

The idea is to make room for the conversations that need to be had—to look ahead as clearly as possible, to tune into the feelings of unity or tension in the room, and to consistently be lining up the work with the intentions of the group and of this particular meeting. Taj often says that for each group, each convergence of people, there is a conversation or a set of work that only *that* group can have or do, and the work of the facilitator and group is honing in on that specific work and doing it, having those conversations.

### *Individual and Collective Reflection*

Taking the time to reflect on the changes that are taking place is crucial for understanding nonlinear and iterative growth. It may seem like nothing is changing, and then you look back and see that you have become a different person, or group, entirely.



Cindy Wiesner<sup>17</sup> once spoke of this as digestion time. We were working with a group that was trying to reach consensus about a complex proposal, and she suggested scheduling in periods of reflection after each segment of the proposal in order for folks to digest what they were working on.

A lot of conflict and discontent in organizations comes because we don't build in time and space for this digestion—to really understand each other across difference, to understand ideas and opinions that are not our own, to move past the initial knee-jerk reaction, shaped by our unique socialization and experience, and into reflection.

This is cellular, the individual or collective body is constantly renewing, new understanding is attained through repetition of practices, change is constant.

I recommend that any group of people working together over time schedule regular time for reflecting on and evaluating the work done, harvesting the lessons and applying them to future iterations of the work.

For organizations, I recommend three or four annual advances. (Calling them “retreats” when they are work sessions is disingenuous. Plan retreats too! Just don't confuse them.) One can focus on reflection and evaluation; one can focus on applying lessons from reflection to the next period of time (planning); and one can be about big vision, meta discussions of the work, the field, the patterns emerging, skill development. Looking back, looking ahead, looking up and down.

You can also mix these together so each advance has these elements. Just stay in touch with the whole vision inside the work.

17 Cindy is one of the most dynamic organizers of our time. Her work is primarily around climate—she works at Grassroots Global Justice, is part of the Climate Justice Alliance—and I had the opportunity to work with her on the second US Social Forum in 2010.

### *Flow and Toolbox*

When I am facilitating small groups (less than ten people, who are fairly familiar with each other), I often use a method I think of as flow and toolbox:

- List the topics that need discussion.
- For each section I have participants write/reflect/draw their thoughts on blank paper.
- Have participants briefly share their reflections, then discuss it all as a group, pulling out patterns, themes, principles together.
- As it makes sense, I draw things out of my toolbox to offer up and support the group. For instance, we might pause to review consensus, or I might show them how Basecamp or OpenOffice works (online work management tools).
- At the end of the discussion of each topic, we generate take-aways and identify someone to turn our conversation into a clear proposal for next steps.
- At the end of the day, review and balance next steps, making sure the load is shared amongst the group.

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“One time I went walking among the Redwoods in this park. There was all of this information about how the trees take care of themselves. You could see how every species living in the area was related to and reliant on each other. The whole place was full of triumphs, sacrifices. Full of beauty accumulated over centuries, and the remains of unexpected disasters. A true collaboration of all the elements that all living things need to sustain life on this planet. So many living things thriving and so many dead things being absorbed back into the earth. That is a powerful system, older than anything I know. It has to be saved from poachers or it wouldn't exist in these times. I learned to try

to organize in collaboration with what is around me and to try to leave something useful for those yet to come. I have to live, organize, work with a consciousness to the environment around me that sustains life.”

—Toshi Reagon

### Tools for Increasing Interdependence and Decentralization

#### *Study Groups/Learning Community*

This one seems so simple and old school, but having community to learn with is actually really crucial for human development. It means we learn to see ideas, not just through our own singular and limited perspectives, but to see how different experiences create different ways of thinking about things, of comprehending and applying ideas.

Loretta Ross teaches us that, “When people think the same idea and move in the same direction, that’s a cult. When people think many different ideas and move in one direction, that’s a movement.”<sup>18</sup> Studying together with a respect for our ecosystem of ideas is movement.

I love to innovate in isolation, but when I try to exert those isolated concepts on others, I can become oppressive and controlling pretty quickly. Luckily I have good people around me who attend to or ignore me appropriately until I grow my ideas with others.

The more people who grow understanding and vision together, the more people who will feel at home in the resulting experiments. Right now we are living inside the results of

18 Loretta is one of the co-founders of the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, and one of the creators of the term “reproductive justice.” This quote is from an interview in *The F-Word 3: A Feminist Handbook for the Revolution (Outlaw Issue)* (Oakland: PM Press, 2008).

other peoples’ imaginations—people who couldn’t imagine Black people being free, fat girls being sexy, disabled people being leaders. People who could only imagine their own power and dominance. When more people imagine together, and then step from imagining into thinking through the structures and protocols of a society together, then more needs are attended to. Responding to common text is a great way to do this. And it doesn’t have to be just a reading group—it can be a group that watches films, listens to music, or compares experiments in changing movement practices.

I am part of many learning communities—in addition to the communities of practice I’ve mentioned, my generative somatics community is a learning ground. And I am currently part of an ongoing circle of facilitators studying how we create conditions in which movements can practice emergent strategy within the current dynamics of funding and non-profit structures. I learn so much every time we talk.

I also think learning circles are a great way to engage things in the broader culture that intersect with movement work and thinking. I have done a few circles and many, many events to encourage people to read and examine Octavia Butler’s work from a strategic perspective, which has led to books, zines, collectives, and other tangible forms of loving Octavia.

One of my other favorite subjects of collective study has been Beyoncé. In 2014, I hosted a conference call with other social-justice-minded people about Beyoncé’s self-titled visual album. In 2016, I hosted a screening of her second visual album, *Lemonade*. I have enjoyed gathering people, especially women, and especially Black women, to discuss this artist’s growth in the public eye. Beyoncé is in a learning environment that is a result of her grind and her goals, but the cost includes an audience that has a low tolerance for nuance or privacy. I prefer to create spaces that are voice-to-voice or face-to-face when engaging complex conversations around things I love, given the current practice of groupthink vulture mode on the Internet.

I honor my own transformation, and I am grateful it is largely happening without a demanding audience—when I share my growth or lessons I am affirmed by my community and I keep moving.

Learning in community helps us see how our own ideas are shifting over time. Hopefully we develop and change with time, applying life experience to our way of seeing the world. It seems a sign of immaturity to hold fast to one position regardless of new information.

Grace actually spoke of this in her autobiography. For a long time she thought the most radical thing she could do was to hold tight to her political ideas.<sup>19</sup> And at a certain point it dawned on her that if she held one idea as conditions changed around her, her ideas would no longer be relevant. And that, in fact, the most radical thing she could do was to keep evolving her ideas as new information came her way. Community is an incredible way to get access to information you might not come across on your own.

### DARCI

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"I was looking around the forest and truly grasped the importance of each plant and organism having its own role and I was reminded of how critical it is that we each play a role with our talents and strengths in movement work. I realized that some of the work my organization had been participating in was about creating uniformity. It clarified why I had felt discomfort. In simplified terms, are we training organizers to be moss when they might be canopy trees or lichen?"

—Andrea Quijada

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DARCI is a grid that allows you to organize the decisions in your group, organization, network or alliance, clarifying

19 Boggs, *Living for Change*.

the Decider/Delegator, and who is Accountable, Responsible, Consulted, and Informed about decisions. DARCI is the ultimate "play your position" tool. I have seen many, many versions of the DARCI tool, which was originally developed by organizational/leadership teacher Robert Gass. And dear lord it helps make things so much clearer in any group!

I have seen a lot of resistance to actually taking the time to do it. I bring it in here because when used correctly it really has the best results I have seen in clarifying work roles and decision-making structures. The investment of time on the front end saves groups from confusion and inefficient conflict later.<sup>20</sup>

### Agenda Templates

Streamlining the iterative aspects of the work allows the bulk of organizational attention to be focused on big decisions and live work. Many groups experience meeting fatigue simply because every time they sit down, they are swirling in circles around which conversations to have, sharing too much of the wrong information and not enough of the necessary information, confused on whether they are making decisions or not.

Creating an agenda template of the most common content you cover means you have a regular structure to your time together and you can spend it on the things you are passionate about.

### EXAMPLES:

#### EXAMPLE 1: A STAFF MEETING AGENDA

- Check-ins
- Scheduling Updates
- Financial updates (budget, fundraising, etc.)
- Important Programmatic Content:

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20 Here is my favorite write-up of the tool, from Social Transformation Project: <http://www.stproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/darci-accountability-grid.pdf>.

- news on prior decisions (brief updates of relevant news related to past decisions)
- conversation on current decisions (discussions of content that isn't ready for a decision yet)
- decision time<sup>21</sup> (decisions on things that have been discussed and proposed)
- Clarifying next steps, assignments, and deadlines
- Closing with gratitude/appreciation

## EXAMPLE 2:

EMERGENT STRATEGY BASED GATHERING AGENDA<sup>22</sup>

- Welcome (honor the Land, the place, the people)
- Introductions
- Overview of Goals, Agenda, Agreements
- Framing plenary: Why Us, Here, Now?
- Emergent Session Generation (generate ideas for sessions, organize by priority and interest)
- Emergent Sessions, 1 (vote with feet, ID facilitator and note taker)
- Emergent Sessions, 2 (for each subsequent session have a quick review for extended sessions, merged sessions, new sessions or other adaptations)
- Emergent Sessions, 3
- Harvesting<sup>23</sup>
- Making Meaning/Closing Plenary
- Closing with appreciations to each other and to the Land

21 See the section in this book entitled "Efficient Consensus Decision Making" for more on this.

22 See "Emergent/Collective Agenda Development" above for details on Emergent Session Generation.

23 The World Café model works really well for harvesting. World Café involves setting up a series of small conversations that a group can cycle through, getting to build understanding through intimate conversations. Learn more at <http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/>.

(Add more plenaries or emergent sessions as time permits, as well as game night, no/mo' talent show, local tours and other relationship-deepening activities)

*Succession Planning*

Yes! The horizon for your group should include leadership transitions, as well as plans for what happens if any members of the team are suddenly unavailable for any number of reasons (a movement moment requires their attention, they get sick, someone in their family gets sick, etc.). Everyone should have an exit strategy from the day they walk in.

Too many organizations suffer because they expect one person, or a core group, to stay in place forever. Some groups even lose their shape and focus trying to make everything work for one person, or a core group of people, instead of planning for succession and change.

In the longview, the whole organization should be able to imagine its own conclusion—not working to perpetuate your current structure, but rather to perpetuate justice.

*Technology to Support Shared Work*

Basecamp, OpenOffice, Yammer, Whatsapp, Secret Facebook groups, cel.ly, internal blogs, shared calendars—there are *a lot* of apps and resources out there to support shared work. Figure out which ones will be most helpful to you.

Transparency about who is doing what work helps the group relax. And "a relaxed body is the most powerful body."<sup>24</sup>

The more mysterious the work is, the less resilient the group is.

The main resistance I hear to transparency is that it takes time to get the systems in place, and that people have their own ways of managing their work. What I usually find is that people resist because they don't have systems or don't have effective systems for tracking their work. They just react

24 This incredible wisdom comes from Liu Hoi-man, generative somatics teacher and gifted healer.

to what's right in front of them. And they don't want others to know that. Been there, done that! That approach to life works pretty well if you are working alone and don't have any ambition. But if you are working in a group and want to have impact, eventually it will be important to create well-used systems of shared work. It's about the group being able to have enough information and contact to experience interdependence and adaptation. The key here is to do research and pick the right technology for your group, spend adequate time getting the systems started and to have a training-wheels approach for the first few months—bring it up at every meeting, really get good at using the technology as a group.

### *Capacity Assessment*

My Ruckus coworker Megan Swoboda once had us compute the number of work hours we collectively had to apply to the upcoming year of work. We prioritized the program work we had to do and distributed our hours accordingly. This was so exciting that I now include it in most of my organizational development work.

The capacity a group has is actually a finite number—it can be measured. Maybe you're a forty hour/week type place—plan for that. And if your staff is all young people with no kids or dependents or social lives and want to do eighty to a hundred hours/week, that's fine, plan for that. But don't try to stuff the work of a hundred hours/week employee into the time of a forty hours/week employee. Same for the overall organization.

Know what your number is, and plan the work you can do within that number.

### *Brag and Swag Wall*

At the beginning of a gathering of people after some time apart—particularly in an alliance or network setting, particularly if it's a regular meeting (annual, biannual), do a Brag and Swag Wall.

The Brag Wall can be filled up with post-it notes from

the people in the room. It should include good news and celebrations related to the work that has brought everyone together. This should also include lessons (things that could be interpreted as failures, but are lessons for the group). In my experience the most successful walls also include major personal achievements like falling in love, or a transformative breakup, or a graduation. Looks like this:

Name  
Location/Organization  
Achievement  
Links for more information (if relevant,  
available)

The Swag Wall can include anything the people and groups in the room created related to the central work of the gathering—t-shirts, banners, flyers, reports. So often we are doing important local work and we come together and try to share it all in words. It helps to see the ways we are speaking to our communities, the beautiful things we create.

This can be done in a half hour to two hours. As always, more time allows more stories, more depth. This can create real intimacy in a group if people are encouraged to share more than just pitches about their greatness, but share lessons.

To get really fancy, have a wall that runs the length of the space you are in and have a past, present, and future section. Let the Brag and Swag portion be in the past. Let the meeting notes accumulate as the present. Then put the next steps and agreements and decision of the meeting be the future.

I have also done events where I added a Wall of Opportunity in the future section, also populated with post-it notes, but on these post-it notes people put projects and campaigns that they want to invite people in the room to learn about and participate in. These post-its can be formatted like this:

Name  
Location/Organization

## Opportunity

Contact information to get involved

Surround yourself with your collective achievements. Let the work be tangible, and loosely linear, in a way that shows how the work builds over time.

## Tools for Fractal

*Personal Practice*

We are always practicing something. Without intention, we are usually practicing what the dominant society wants us to practice—competing with each other to be cogs in a system that benefits the owning class, vaguely religious, vaguely patriotic. The invitation here is to “transform yourself to transform the world” inside your collective or group work. Name your personal practices to each other within your group. This may include practices around decolonizing your life; studying Black feminist thinkers; living a zero-waste existence; practices around mindfulness and spirit, body health, and exercise; focusing; organizing life, or practices around being present with friends, family. Make it so that the relationships and formations you are in are places to practice liberation.

*Organizational Alignment with Vision*

The vision should be a north star for an organization or group, not as a destination, but as a way of being in the world. Whatever future we have articulated that we want to create, we have to practice it in as many aspects of our current life and work as possible. This brings our vision to life. A great way to assess this is to look at how the vision shows up in various aspects of the work.

How does your collective vision show up in:

how you hire?

how you fire or transition staff?

how you handle grievances and conflict?

how and where you raise funds?

how you handle budgeting the work (is it sustainable, abundant?)?

how you make decisions (is this how you envision decisions being made? What do you need to be practicing?)?

how you provide benefits and how empowered the group feels using them?

## Transformative Justice Tools

*Generative Conflict Relationship Prompts*

Conflict is natural between any two people. We all come from different life/family/world experiences—so even when we love each other, even when we are building movement together, we will have different opinions, different ideas on what is right. Here are some conversations that help clarify approaches to conflict and difference:

- What are our individual ways/practices of conflict?
- How did conflict happen in our families?
  - In past (romantic, familial, friend) relationships, what are the best ways we have handled conflict? And what are the worst?
  - What emotions are we most comfortable with? Least comfortable with?

How would we handle conflict and difference in our ideal world?

Specifically:

- When would we have conversations around potential tension or difference? (ASAP? During staff meetings? During a set “relationship date” time [some lovers hold a couple of hours once a week for concentrated time—babysitters, different/private space, etc.]? Before going to bed? Other?)

- Where would we have these conversations? (At the office? At a neutral location? At home? Away from home? Outdoors?)
- How would we have these conversations? (How do we want to feel during these conversations? Are there behaviors or words that would make the conversation feel unsafe or disrespectful?)
- How important is resolution to us?

A lot of times, conflict is an invitation to deepen, to learn more about each other. How do we best learn?

Possibilities:

- I learn best from reading/watching stuff and reflecting together.
- I learn best from conversation (Calm conversation? Heated conversation?).
- I learn best by being given something to reflect on, and adequate time to reflect on it.
- Other.

Finally, pay attention to what's already in motion in your pairing or group—there is a pattern in place already in most cases, understanding it will give you more agency in shifting it. Ask yourselves: What do we notice as our patterns right now?

### *Talking/Peace Circle*

This might be one of the earliest tools ever developed by humans for deepening relationship and resolving conflict. I have participated in circles that overtly traced their methods to Indigenous peoples around the world, using a talking item to hold the sacred intention of the circle, passing it around to indicate whose turn it was to speak.

I have also been a part of circles that came together organically out of a need for people to listen to each other and be heard. I think this one is in us, and the simple act of forming a circle, a

wholeness, together, then putting our truths in the center of that circle, is strengthening, clarifying, and can be healing.

The basic form is to sit in a circle with as little as possible between you (if you have a circle without a table in the middle, or without a bunch of technology and personal belongings, that helps. Clear space, a clear circle to hold whatever is spoken). Imbue an item with the power of words—the item can be an object of meaning for the group (a stone from the community garden you started), or something the group gives meaning to for the circle (in my facilitation bag, I keep a few stones and crystals—mostly turquoise and rose quartz—which have their own qualities for calming or energizing a conversation).

Ideally you can go around the circle, untimed, as many rounds as it takes to get everything spoken. If you have limited time, set a timer for each speaker, or limit the rounds. To conclude, the facilitator can ask if there are any action items based on what was heard. Most of the time, the honest words and deep listening are the only thing that is actually needed.

One note on the form: it helps to release attachment to the way things currently are, or to a singular outcome. People share differently when they are attached to an outcome that in some way involves perpetuating the current reality, such as “We have to make this relationship/organization work no matter what.” I have facilitated many mediations where the first round of sharing was hampered by fear, fear that everything would fall apart, fear of a breakup or dissolution. What is true is going to continue to be true whether you say it or not—if you have a feeling that could lead to dissolution or breakup, it isn't going to disappear because you don't articulate it. But the possibility of a solution that actually works for everyone (which may include being apart!) is actually possible if everyone is honest.

### *Mediation 101*

I think of mediation as a focusing from the talking circle model. Mediation is when two or more parties receive

support from a third party to resolve a conflict. Often the third person is there to give permission for everyone to speak the truth. I love doing mediation work, and I am grateful to have been held by others through conflict in ways that have helped me understand that conflict is often a sign that there is a chance to transform.

Here are some very basic tips for mediation:

- Ideally the third person is neutral, impartial, though I have found that the more important thing is that the mediator has the discipline to create a neutral space for the mediation, regardless of their natural biases.
- Both/all people or groups in the mediation are there of their own choice. No surprises or forced mediations. If either/any party isn't ready for mediation, leave the door open for future mediation.
- Keep breathing and, as the mediator, pay attention to what's felt, not just what's said. I was in a moment of tension with a loved one recently and our mediator actually had us just feel each other, past all the words. Sometimes we talk to move away from the truth.
- "How people are in the relationship is how they will be in the break-up." My woe Jodie Tonita taught me this, and I have found it to be very useful in mediations. Not all mediations are "break-ups," but they are usually a transformation of the relationship in some way. It helps to set aside any expectation that the other party/ies will instantly transform in some way that eliminates "problematic" behavior.
- The "beef" is not always about the content that is initially brought up. The majority of mediations I have facilitated have come down to the ways people are communicating, and/or to people or organizations that feel unseen, unheard, or undervalued.
  - Sometimes, it *is* about the content that is initially brought up.

- One metaphor I use for mediation is that there is a wall, and the goal is to get on the same side of the wall, and look at it together. Sometimes to do this each side has to take turns "visiting" the other side of the wall. People may decide to stay on their side of the wall, but it helps to understand that the wall is not a forever wall, it can be crossed, circumvented, or even brought down. I will also encourage people to stop "building the wall" by looking for additional places of discontent.
- Another metaphor I use for mediation is the "river of time." I often find that people's attention is flowing along the river of time. One person or group's attention is flowing towards the past, towards what has already happened. They can't see the present, or turn towards the future. Meanwhile the other person or group's attention is flowing towards the future, and they don't understand why things can't move forward. Everyone generally thinks they are standing still, being present, in the present. Once people come into awareness of which way their attention is flowing, they have increased agency. There is usually stuff in the past that needs to be resolved to be able to look towards the future. Or their river needs to diverge into two or more channels of water. It's ok...it's all flowing towards the sea anyway.
- Have some clear agreements at the end. What happens next? There may need to be multiple mediated conversations, so create agreements about how to interact in between sessions.
  - As the mediator, it can be merciful to offer solid suggestions for agreements, especially if the parties are still at odds, or tender. I learned this one through error, reaching the end of a powerful



mediation and then, in setting agreements, accidentally reopening all the areas of pain and difference by asking the three parties for next-step suggestions. As you are mediating, pay attention to whether these people are going to need some time apart, some space, some new boundaries, some personal practices, etc. I have learned to really trust my gut about the ideas and suggestions that come forth; there is internal synthesizing happening beyond just what we are thinking in our brain. My gut has come up with some of the most powerful next steps, things that seemed out there but really worked for the group. I think a lot of us ignore our guts, so this is another place to practice.

#### *The Four Agreements*

Basically, read Don Miguel Ruiz's *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom*. Rooted in Toltec wisdom, I would say everything in the book is necessary for a good life and a healthy group dynamic. These are universal agreements that I have found immensely liberating for facilitating and living in an interdependent system where we hurt each other all the time:

Don't make assumptions.

Don't take things personally.

Be impeccable with your word.

Always do your best.

The book goes into detail about the why and how of these and other agreements, and all of it resonates. These agreements will change the nature of your group if lived into.

#### *Dialectical Thinking/Humanism*

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"The essence of dialectical thinking is the ability to be self-critical. Being able to see that an idea you had or an activity you had engaged in which was correct at one stage can turn into its opposite at

another stage; that whenever a person or an organization or a country is in crisis, it is necessary to look at your own concepts and be critical of them because they may have turned into traps."

—Grace Lee Boggs

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Understanding that you can be wrong, have been wrong, helps to increase the compassion needed to work through the emotional and material impacts of being wronged by another.

We often think that we must hold our position, regardless of what we learn or feel. But in fact, the opposite is true. We must learn to develop positions together, adapting to the changing conditions around us—sometimes this means we must relinquish our positions, to voice our feelings and thoughts, and hear and be influenced by, other people's opinions and information. Dialectical humanism suggests that mature humans actually need to be able to adjust beliefs and plans in the realm of changing conditions.

I know there is this idea that we grow less radical as we age, and that relinquishing radical positions is a way this manifests. This keeps people from allowing themselves to be open to their own new emotions, their new understandings. I think the truth is that, as we age, we realize the world is more complex, and we allow ourselves to get woven into that complexity. I am more radical now than I was ten years ago, although it may not look like it. I am more radical in my body, I am more radical in my clarity about the apocalyptic future and my belief that connection to each other is the most important thing to cultivate in the face of hopelessness—we don't want to cling to outdated paradigms; we want to cling to each other and shift the paradigms.

The world is changing all the time. Octavia teaches:

Why is the universe?

To shape God.

Why is God?

To shape the universe.

## Facilitation Tools for Creating More Possibility

*Collaborative Ideation*


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"I was attracted to science fiction because it was so wide open. I was able to do anything and there were no walls to hem you in and there was no human condition that you were stopped from examining."

—Octavia Butler

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*Ideation* is just the verb for coming up with ideas. We are socialized to come up with ideas in isolation and compete with them, to have the *best* idea and get rewarded for it. But if we want a world that works for more people, we have to get into the practice of ideating together, letting others as close as possible into the intimate space where ideas are born.

My teacher Richard Strozzi-Heckler says the dream of the cell is to become two. I think the same is true of an idea—that an idea wants to be shared. And, in the sharing, it becomes more complex, more interesting, and more likely to work for more people.

Practice saying "yes" to the ideas that come from others, growing the idea with yes after yes. When you are tempted to say "no," try asking "how?" instead. Often a "no" is a way of expressing a fear or worry that something can't work. "How?" is a collaborative question, inviting the creation process to keep going, to come up with a way for the idea to grow to the next stage.

As described above, *Octavia's Brood* leads workshops for collective sci-fi writing, which are collaborative ideation extravaganzas.<sup>25</sup>

25 You can book workshops through <https://www.alliedmedia.org/octavias-brood/booking>.

*Low Tech/High Tech*

One of the ways we reduce possibilities is by requiring a high level of technology for participation or facilitation. When it comes to community brainstorming, or a meeting, or an application, having low- and high-tech options increases the number of people who can participate.

Every workshop/meeting I facilitate can be run with just the people and a space to be in. If we have projection, speakers, options to phone in, ways to virtually broadcast, etc., yay, that's cool. But the quality of the session depends on the relationships that exist and can be built in the room.

*Emergent/Collective Agenda Development*

I was fortunate for many years to get to work with a brilliant man named Allen Gunn, who is on the board of The Ruckus Society. Both in that space, and in a session with Allied Media Projects, he used this method for generating the agenda for our shared time together. It was so simple and clear. I have used it in many spaces and it mostly works (when it doesn't, it's because there isn't adequate time for group process, or something is off in the composition of the group).

This can be used to generate an entire agenda, or a section of an agenda. The content generation part takes 1–1.5 hours depending on the size of the group.

Here's how it goes.

**You need:**

- A wall or floor space
  - Post-its (scraps of paper and tape work in a pinch)
  - Big blank paper, whiteboard, or chalkboard
  - Writing utensils
  - People with ideas
- o Develop a skeletal structure for the agenda.<sup>26</sup> How many days, how many sessions, how long are the

26 See "Agenda Templates."

sessions, how long are the breaks and transitions, when are meals, etc.? Some tips on this:

- A good conversation between five and fifteen people needs 1.5 to two hours. Sessions where people are trying to dive deep or resolve something in thirty, forty-five minutes, even an hour, often result in frustration.
  - Account for transition time: ten to fifteen minutes where people will often use the restroom, stretch, try to have phone meetings, and continue processing the content of the meeting. One of my weaknesses as a facilitator is forgetting transition times—I'm learning.
- o Distribute post-its to the people.
- My usual math is that I give people the number of post-its that equals the number of sessions/conversations they can be part of. If there is time in the agenda for three periods of conversation (sessions) then I give each person three post-its.
  - Ask them to write clearly and concisely a topic that they would like to discuss. It can be a declaration or a question, as long as it's clear.
  - One topic per post-it.
- o On the wall (or floor if there isn't enough wall space), have people put up their post-its. I prefer doing it the way Allen did, in columns across the wall, each topic getting a new column. I also sometimes do amoebic clusters, especially with groups that have a strong hierarchical tendency and can get thrown into competitive mode by something as potentially linear as columns.
- Be aware of people who can't post their own post-its and support them to place their topics up.
  - The first person creates the first columns/clusters. The next person reviews what's up there and either adds their post-its to one of the existing columns/

clusters, or creates new columns/clusters.

- Invite participants to:
    - add to an existing column/cluster if it's part of the same conversation, even if the wording is different.
    - Start a new column/cluster if nothing on the wall is part of the same conversation you want to have.
  - This will get chaotic for a moment as people cluster and arrange and rearrange and confer with each other. That's good; they are self organizing.
    - A less chaotic way to do this is to introduce the emergent session generating wall a few hours or days beforehand and start taking suggestions.
- o Review what you have (I typically read through each column and invite the group to name each column, posting the name above the column nice and big). This takes a while, the bulk of the time. It is important to really take time to hear the longings of the room.
- As the group reviews what's on the wall, write the column heads, the big topic areas, up on a big paper/whiteboard/chalkboard. Write really neatly!
- o Now, prioritize the conversations, using dotmocracy: Each person gets two votes, or three (again, I usually give people as many votes as there are sessions, with the framework that they are creating their own agenda with these votes), to prioritize which of the emerging conversations feels most important for the group to have.
- This is important—every conversation with two or more votes can be had, but you want to make sure that when you move these onto the agenda, you don't pit the top priority conversations against each other.
  - Prioritizing helps the group focus in on the unique content they can cover and advance together. It

moves them away from having conversations out of a sense of obligation, and into having the conversations that are actually alive in the room.

- o Once the conversations are clear and prioritized, ask for a facilitator and notetaker to volunteer for each session, and write their names up on the big paper/whiteboard/chalkboard!
- o Give the group a break and move the conversations into the skeletal agenda. Voila! You have an agenda of conversations people really want to have, organized such that the top priority conversations can have good turn out.
  - At the end of this process, as you begin to head to sessions, here are the people to expect to show up, and for whom you can just offer compassion and help them choose the right place to be:
    - Someone who is unhappy because they can't be in multiple/every conversation.
    - Someone who is confused. This process is new for most people and we all learn in different ways. Take time to slow it down and get clear on what is confusing for them.
    - Someone who stepped out for a phone meeting and wants to make a counter suggestion at the last minute.
    - Someone who wants to talk with you about the process instead of going to session (offer to do this later—it is a great way to learn with people, but in the moment you are usually juggling management of the sessions).
  - In terms of the sessions, the goal is to articulate together the next most elegant step. That may be more conversation, or a clear action, or some research. There is always a next step. People often make the mistake of trying to create an entire work

plan of what should happen. As a facilitator, keep bringing people back to the next most elegant step they can and will take, keeping it tangible and within their capacity.

- Adaptations:
  - Check in briefly between session blocks to see if there are adjustments. I used to resist adjustments because they take time, but I am growing, finding that these can really increase the group's ownership of the session and thus the outcomes. Typical adjustments include:
    - » A session feels incomplete and wants to continue into the next block of time;
    - » A session that seemed necessary has already been addressed and can be removed;
    - » A new session has emerged, and people want to add it to the schedule.
- One last point: space matters for this. Having adequate wall space to develop the agenda is important. And having lots of options for where people do their sessions is also key—I often like to use big ballrooms or other massive spaces with lots of small conversations. Access to the outdoors also really helps!

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"River Lesson: Living in a port city whose very existence has been changed and shaped by the course of a river, I've learned to listen to the water's lessons. Sitting at the water's edge, I'm reminded of the thousands of tributaries that crisscross the U.S., making their way to this rolling mass of water now flowing through the heart of New Orleans and into the Gulf of Mexico. All these streams and rivers making their way back to the source, to the goal, to the collective vision of the sea. In building our

movements, we learn this: we come from different places across the country and world, we face different obstacles, paths, twists, and turns—some of us reshaping the very rocks beneath us, some of us moving the rocks with our combined strength, and some of us going around them when they can't be moved and finding another path to our desired goal. I've learned that those of us with the same dreams can find each other, and in finding each other, we can learn to move together, to build together, to shape the world together, to flow together, and maybe, just maybe...together we can reach the sea."

—Desiree Evans

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## OUTRO

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"We the unappeased, the unaccepting continued looking, filling in the silences with our own wishes, fears and fantasies. Driven forward by the fact that no matter how empty the world seemed, no matter how degraded and used up the world appeared to us, we knew that anything was still possible. And, given the right circumstances, a new world was just as likely as an old one."

—Steve Fitch, *Waking Life*

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### **We are almost done.**

I went for a walk today—I am working on this book on a northern shore of Oahu, sitting next to the ocean all day. I went in even though it had been raining and cloudy all day, so the water was a little chilly. It felt good, it made me really alert. Then I walked down the beach, slick with salt water, rain falling on me.

While writing this book I learned I have early onset arthritis and a torn meniscus, and I have been healing. What used to be an easy walk is now an effort, balancing as the sand moves beneath my feet, leaning into the slope of beach. I was so glad my body was feeling strong enough to do this. And when I turned to walk back, I looked for my footsteps. And in spite of the effort of the walk, my footsteps were gone, smoothed by the waves—it was as if I had never walked this length of sand. My walk was both meaningful and insignificant.

This was exactly the humbling experience I needed in order to finish this book. I am putting in so much effort, wanting to get it right. But given what I know of how human creations diminish, it is most likely footsteps on the edge of the ocean of human experience. There will be a time, who knows how long, when there will be no visible trace of this work. And yet the walk happened, the work happened. It has shaped me, shaped those I am living my life with, and hopefully shaped you, dear reader. It changed the world; even if it is/was only in tiny ways that can't be seen, measured.

I could work on this book for many more years—every time I speak about emergent strategy, every time I facilitate, every time I read anything, every conversation I have shifts something in what I understand about emergence and how we can apply it to our existence and our radical work. The reason I pulled it together now, as an offering of experiential learning, is because I am excited for this conversation and these practices to keep going and growing. I have created a project called the Emergent Strategy Ideation Institute to continue this learning and sharing.<sup>1</sup>

I hope by now it is clear that I am not the beginning or creator of the ideas in this book, nor am I the only one thinking this way. I don't want to become a bottleneck in any way to these concepts blossoming, particularly in the realm of social justice. I want to be a good conduit.

More precisely, I want *conduit* to be a sacred role between generations, and between ways of knowing. My intention is to be a good conduit of these observations, of this wonder, to grow it. I want our generation to be a good conduit of the world we received, the life. This is why I invited so many of my teachers to share their words in this book.

I am still sitting with so many questions, questions at the scale of our species: Do we have enough time to do anything

<sup>1</sup> There is another book's worth of additional content, reflections, conversation, and tools there related to emergent strategy. Check it out at [alliedmedia.org/esii](http://alliedmedia.org/esii).

that matters? Can we do something that matters for enough people? How do we relinquish victory and loss? Can we evolve beyond a construct of constant enemies, constant crisis? Does emergence mean eventually leaving Earth—or never leaving Earth? How are we resilient during apocalypse?

What is our most compelling future? Octavia Butler showed us lots of hard futures, compelling because humans were still there, learning together. The invitation of this work is just that: let's keep learning, growing, and evolving together. Let's make the future compelling.

It feels important to end this book with an admission. It is possible that this whole book is about love. My love of this planet, my love of human beings and creatures and the idea of there being a future in which this planet is still a home to living things. My love of the humans who have taught me to be awake and to feel the world around me, and clued me in to both caring more about life and being less attached to the outcomes of life. My love of Black people and Detroit and liberation.

This is, finally, a book about the preciousness of time. It's limited and it's so sacred, friends. And everything we do, every single thought and action and relationship and institution, everything is practice ground. So practice emergent strategy, yes, but only as much as you understand that it is a way to practice love. For this, for all of this.

#### Soundtrack

Anohni, *Hopelessness*

Beyoncé, *Lemonade*

Bon Iver

Chance the Rapper, *Coloring Book*

Fetty Wap

Frank Ocean, *Endless/Blonde*

Gallant, *Ology* and "Blue Bucket of Gold"

Gwen Stefani, "Make Me Like You"

*Hamilton: The Musical*

James Blake, *The Colour of Anything*

Jazz Singer playlist featuring Nina Simone, Billie Holiday,  
Dinah Washington, Etta James, Sarah Vaughn, and  
Edith Piaf

Jenifer Lewis, Roz Ryan, Brandy, "Ain't Nobody Got  
Time for That"

Kanye West, *The Life of Pablo*

Moses Sumney

Nao, "Adore You," "Like Velvet"

Prince

Rihanna, *Anti Deluxe*

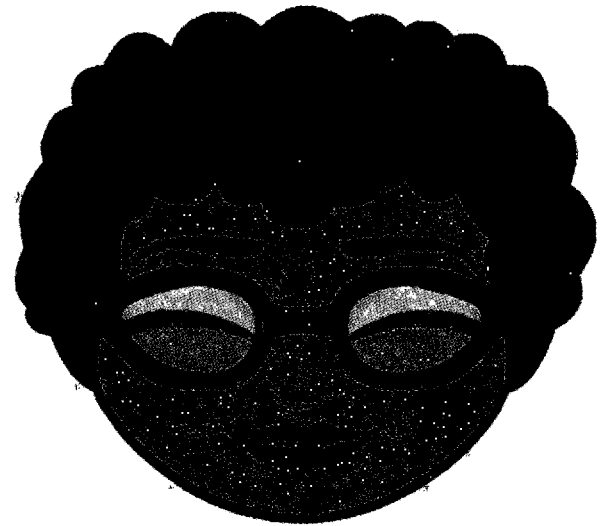
Sam Dew, "Desperately"

Savages, "Adore"

Snoh Aalegra, "Emotional"

Solange, *A Seat at the Table*

St. Lucia, "Closer Than This"



## THANK YOU

My family, for being my first and most constant teachers.  
To all my babies and nibblings, I became better with each  
of you.

My woes, for holding me accountable to my highest self.

My loves and lovers, for all the magic and pleasure and joy  
and room to grow.

Everyone who has ever worked with me in any way, for  
your patience.

All my teachers, for your generosity.

Sierra Pickett, Toni Mocerì, and Nandi Comer for the  
life-saving support of my logistical life during the period of  
this project. And Allied Media Projects for years of growing  
together and for being the fiscal sponsor of all my dreams.

Charles Weigl and the entire team at AK Press for being  
willing to support me getting these ideas out to more people.

And of course, you, dear reader. Thank you for engaging  
with this work.