

## Building the World We Want

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<http://www.mettacenter.org/blog/building-the-world-we-want>

***The spinning wheel, and the spinning wheel alone, will solve the problem of the deepening poverty of India. –Mahatma Gandhi***



Corporate domination of the world, or “globalization from above,” has done two things for us. It raised consciousness of world unity; inadvertently awakening “globalization from below,” and by progressively releasing all constraints on greed it finally squeezed the economic middle class, taking out from under them the false comfort of “a chicken in every pot and a car in every garage,” and thus reawakening, but in a new environment, the class struggles of the 1930s. Given enough rope, the 1% have begun to expose the inherent contradiction of an

economy based on wants (was it E.F. Schumacher who said, “anyone who thinks consumption can expand forever on a finite planet is either insane or an economist”?).

These are examples of what Walter Wink calls “gifts of the enemy.” And the recent evictions from New York’s Zuccotti Park, LA, Washington D.C., and other sites apparent setbacks, can also be turned to advantage. There is no question of stopping the movement at this, or possibly any point if it can move forward with the same energy but some greater sophistication. A New York participant has issued a “call to reoccupy;” but I am among those who think the movement should move beyond occupation of public sites. With the disaster of Tien An Minh Square still in my memory, I see the evictions as — in addition to a wake-up call on the militarization of America, for some of them have been rather brutal — a call rather to regroup, reframe, rethink what this movement is really about.

When occupiers approached Trinity Wall Street church in New York for permission to use a vacant lot recently, spokesperson Lloyd Kaplan had to deny the protestors demand but then added that he “supports the vigorous engagement of the issues” that concern them. Occupying public spaces is not really our goal; and city police departments are not our opponents.

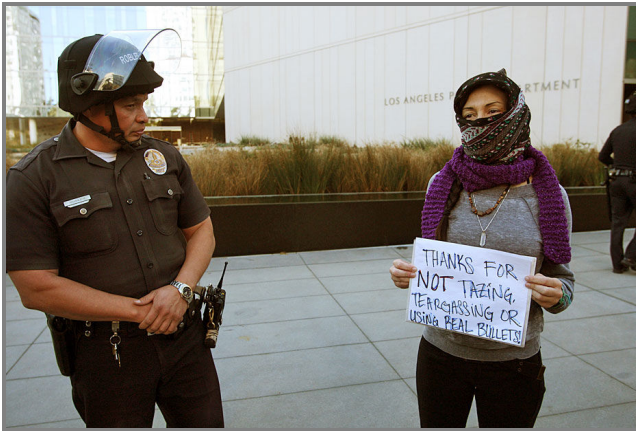
In characterizing 21<sup>st</sup> Century civil society, often the first thing that comes to mind is its use of technology; but one of the most interesting innovations of the movement’s encampment culture has been its use of non-technology: the human microphone. And one of the most dramatic cases of its use came after the movement spread to campuses. At UC Davis, some time after the egregious pepper spray incident, a small

number of police found themselves confronting a much larger crowd of students. Men heavily armed and afraid are always an acute danger. One of the students — “no designated leader” doesn’t always mean no leader will emerge — called out “mike check” and got the whole crowd telling the police in unison:

**WE ARE GIVING YOU A MOMENT OF PEACE**  
*(we are giving you a moment of peace)...*

**TO WITHDRAW** *(to withdraw).*

And after a tense moment, withdraw they did.

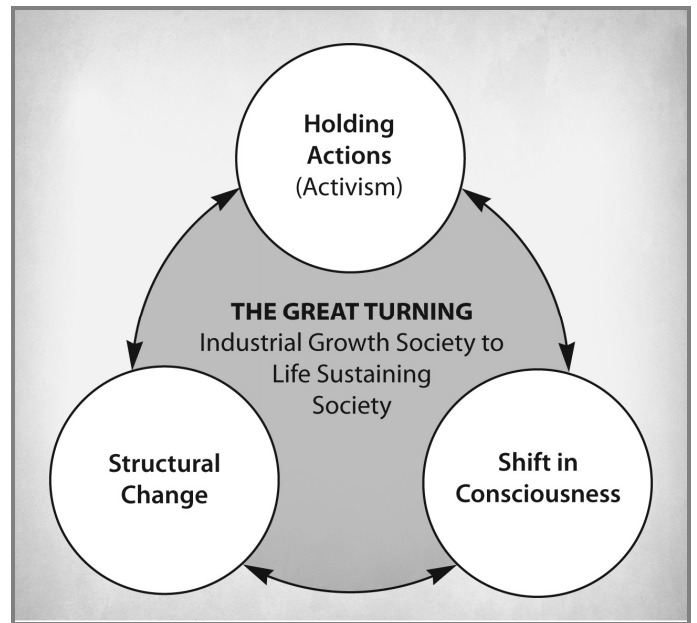


This episode illustrates not only that law enforcement is not the face of the enemy, necessarily; it also illustrates one of if not *the* most promising feature of the Occupy movement worldwide: its commitment to nonviolence. Within that commitment — and here is where I think some sophistication could be immensely helpful — lies the germ of victory for this movement.

**What would a thorough, mature, nonviolent movement look like?**

For one thing, it would emphasize what Gandhi called “Constructive Programme,” which would allow us to build cohesion and strength for major resistance campaigns which are unavoidable but for which we are by no means ready, in my view. It is good to have

in mind how much weight Gandhi, with his astounding energy and creativity, put on constructive action. A 1977 survey by the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi (Gandhi Memorial Fund) found 1,845 institutions in 22 states still functioning that were founded by Gandhi and his close associate, Vinoba Bhave. It is not that we don’t have constructive projects underway: *Yes! Magazine* has been reporting on them for years. But what we don’t have is a consciousness that these innumerable projects can be shaped into a coherent whole designed to create a world we want *and* put the most obnoxious features of the present one behind us.



In order to bring about this coherence, a model developed by Joanna Macy, which I will describe here in reverse order, is very useful. Her last, and my first step is **(3) change the culture**, and do so both spiritually, i.e. by each of us getting some kind of spiritual practice if we do not already have one, and then cognitively, i.e. by sweeping the old culture out of our minds by not patronizing the commercial mass media. It’s not a coincidence that OWS was touched

off by that quintessential counter-cultural organization *AdBusters*. But when we do this we should bring into being a new culture by learning everything we can about nonviolence, a vastly richer field of study and practice than we've been lead to believe. (Putting aside false modesty, I'd like to offer [our website](#) as a way into this fascinating culture). Let us add something here that may seem like a luxury, an abstraction, but I believe is of paramount practical importance. The dominant culture is based on an image of the human being. We are separate bodies, gratified by consumption — that is the “subtext” of every commercial message and we are exposed to them several thousand times a day. This image does great damage. Metta, accordingly, has been promoting an alternative vision; if this, or something like it, were to be the underlying “story” we adopt, everything we promote would resonate with that new story and gain persuasive power:

- Life is sacred — all of it, even after you're born!
- Life is an interconnected whole — including the nourishing planet
- We can never be satisfied by consumption, but by *relationships*
- We can never become secure by killing “enemies” or warehousing “criminals,” but by turning enemies into friends and restoring offenders to lives of dignity and meaning.

Next in Macy's scheme is **(2) creating new institutions**. OWS was called into being to change economic institutions, so devastating to the inner and outer environment; but many of us realize that cannot be expected to last without also bringing in restorative justice to replace the cruel, broken system that's disfiguring our society with its racial prejudice and sheer vindictiveness. Similarly, the war system must be replaced by a range of alternatives stretching from

world institutions like the International Criminal Court (ARE WE IN?) and the “Right to Protect” norm which opens the door for “outsiders” to intervene when a state fails to protect or even attacks its citizens to grass-roots organization like Peace Brigades International and Nonviolent Peaceforce that do that. And finally,

**(1) Stop the worst of the damage.** Without stifling the movement's creativity, on the contrary as a way of enhancing it, the time has come to give it some strategic shape. That shape would include — OK, not a list of demands, which presuppose that you're dependent on your adversary — an inspiring picture of the world toward which we insist on moving *and* a set of steps by which we intend to get there. At every step let us invite our adversaries, whoever they are, to join us; but let us put them on notice that we are prepared to launch telling civil disobedience if they try to obstruct (as of course some of them will) this precious progress.

IN THAT STRATEGIC PLAN, À LA JOANNA MACY, LET THE MOST URGENT THINGS LIKE GLOBAL CLIMATE STRESS BE LISTED FIRST. BUT YOU CANNOT BUILD A MOVEMENT, NOT TO MENTION A WORLD, ON THE CONTRADICTIONS OF A WRONG SYSTEM. THAT WE MUST BASE ON TRUTH, WHICH SEEMS TO ME TO DEMAND THAT WE BE CONSTRUCTIVE WHEREVER POSSIBLE AND RESISTANT WHEN AND WHERE NECESSARY.

We have knocked on the door of the financial citadel and have the ear of the public. Let's begin the conversation.