



Contemplative Resistance: The Art of Non Dual Activism Holly Roach Knight

Today I am going to talk a lot about plurality and collective wisdom, so we will practice having numerous voices in the space and hearing from the wisdom of the room. Some people have readings that I will call upon to read so thank you for that. And I invite us all to practice stepping up and then stepping back, we do this so all others may also have space to step up and be heard.

I AM CURRENTLY A GRADUATE STUDENT PURSUING AN

M.A. IN CONTEMPLATIVE EDUCATION AT



- *AND* -



AN MA IN SOCIAL JUSTICE & COMMUNITY
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I ALSO SERVE AS CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT
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PEOPLE OF FAITH WITH
TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS



I am Holly Roach Knight. I am a life long student of social movements. I owe my life to the movements that broke my heart, burned me out and sent me off in search of contemplative practices to heal and sustain me over and over again. I spent two years studying with Father Richard Rohr at the Living School for Action & Contemplation. Becoming a practicing contemplative completely changed by activism. I am working to document what I've learned in two MA degrees and I serve as a sort of serve as a cross pollinator between movements, communities of faith, and contemplative education.

BEYOND SELF CARE: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS ARE MISSING A CONTEMPLATIVE VIEW



For the Benefit of All Beings Everywhere

-Richard Brown, Naropa

When contemplative practices have been offered to movements divorced from their spiritual tradition, practices were de-contextualized and the contemplative view does not often get transmitted. Social movements are seeking new mental models to undo the logic of oppression and white supremacy. A contemplative view changes everything in activism.



WHAT IS
CONTEMPLATIVE RESISTANCE?



Resistance is the adaptations and actions of living systems to protect and improve their quality of life, to stop oppressive acts and systems, and to replace them with the “practice of the better.”



“The best criticism of the bad is the practice of the better.”
-Father Richard Rohr

Quote 1: “The best criticism of the bad is the practice of the better.” -Father Richard Rohr

What are we talking about when we say living systems?

Living systems are "open self-organizing systems that have the special characteristics of life and interact with their environment.

This takes place by means of information and material-energy exchanges.

Living systems can be as simple as a single cell or as complex as a supranational organization such as the European Union."

-Dr. Elaine R. Parent, 1996

Quote 1:

My Aunt on my fathers side was an associate of James Grier Miller and applied living systems theories to her work in psychology. She was the first person in my family to graduate college and I really looked up to her.



Social Movement Influencer



Movements are becoming very influenced by emerging awareness of biomimicry and living systems theories from a book called Emergent Strategy by adrienne maree brown. Biomimicry is an approach to innovation that seeks sustainable solutions to human challenges by emulating nature's patterns and strategies. Has anyone ever seen the murmuration of the swallows?



Quote 2: Here's how it works in murmuration/shoals/swarm: each creature is tuned in to his neighbors, the creatures right around it in the formation. This might be the birds on either side, or the six fish in each direction. There is a right relationship, a right distance between-to close and the crash, too far away and they can't feel the micro-adaptions of the other bodies. Each creature is shifting direction, speed, and activity based on the information of the other creatures' bodies. -adrienne maree brown







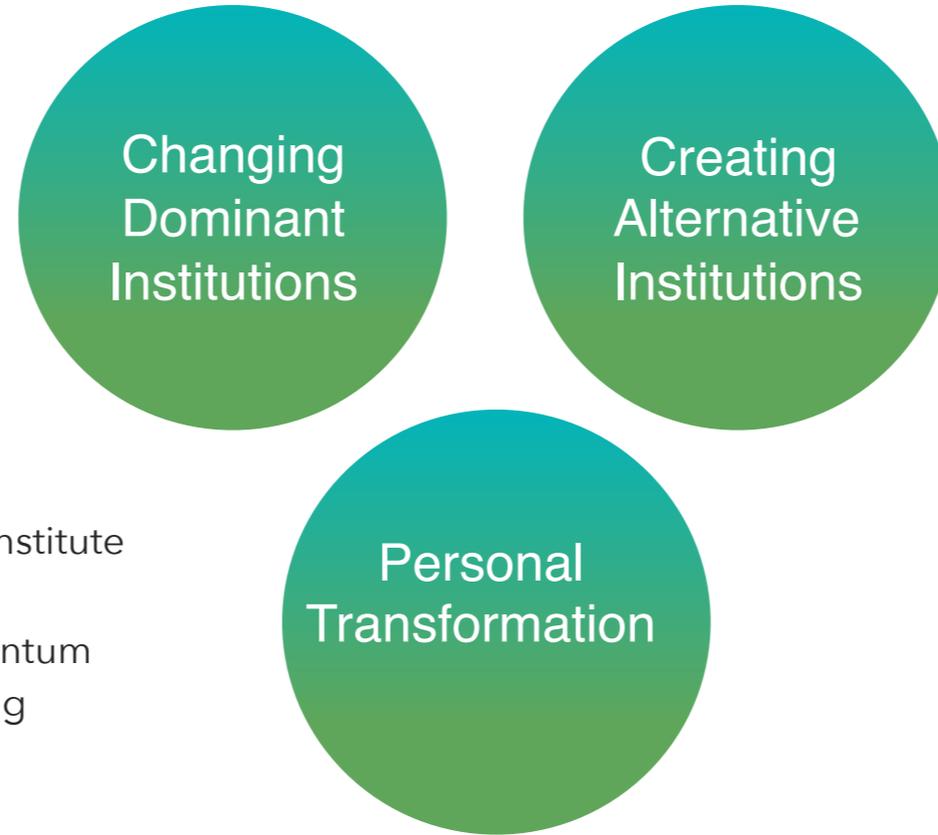
HUMANS SWARM TOO. Our survival depends on it. Here we have poor people, advocates, rebels, and organizers swarming together to call out systemic poverty. It's a diverse, intersectional movement called "fusion politics." It's one of the place I observe lots of diversity and lots of unity.



Interconnection and interdependence is part of movement DNA when it's healthy. A contemplative view helps us to remember to reconnect to our ultimate state of interconnectedness.

Quote 3: In nature everything works in collaboration. There are hummingbirds and flowers that are in such deep coordination they need each other for survival. How vibrant and alive and successful our movements could be the if we moved with such coordination and collaboration? -Karissa Lewis

Contemporary Theories of Change —————> How we make change
Understand that Movements Are Pluralistic



AYNI Institute
and
Momentum
Training

Contemporary Theories of Change Understand that Movements Are Pluralistic and are working with activist to help them accept that and navigate that.

Helping activists think about the movement DNA they are co-creating and thinking critically about how change happens.

Contemporary Theories of Change → How does change happen?

Understand that Movements Are Pluralistic

Holding
actions to stop
deportations

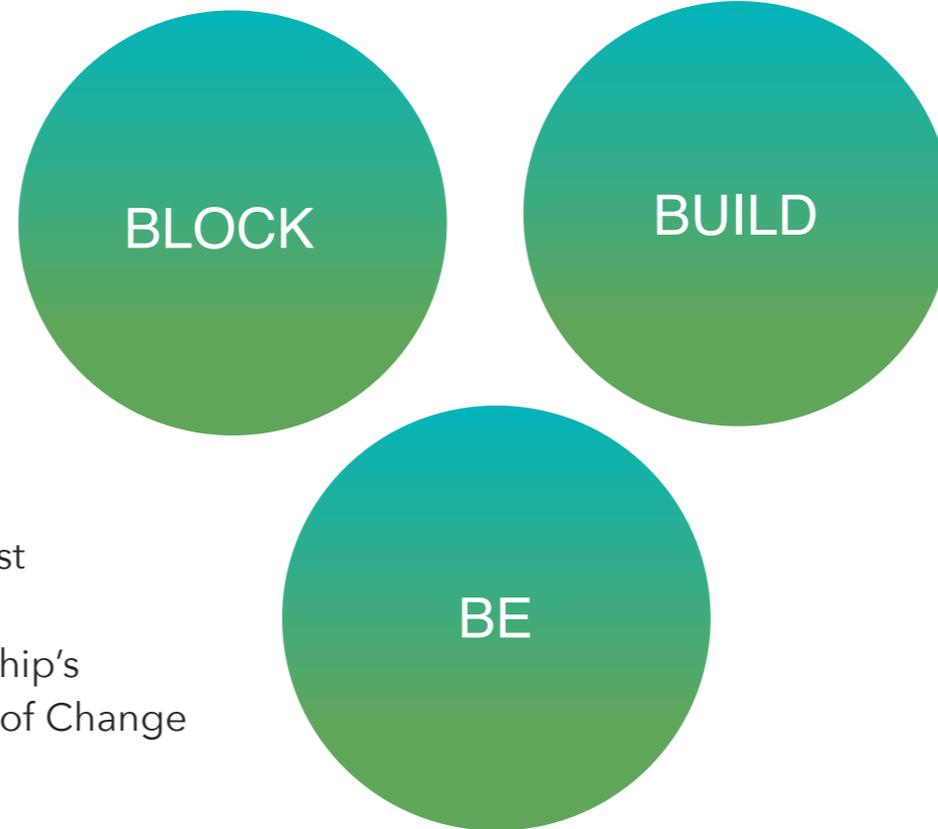
Mutual Aid
Networks

Getting inside
the system - get
elected

Mi Gente's
Theory
of Change
Inspired by Chilean
Trabadores' T.O.C.

In this model the personal transformation piece is implicit in the culture of organizing and doesn't have to be broken out to be acknowledged.

Contemporary Theories of Change —————> How we make change
Understand that Movements Are Pluralistic

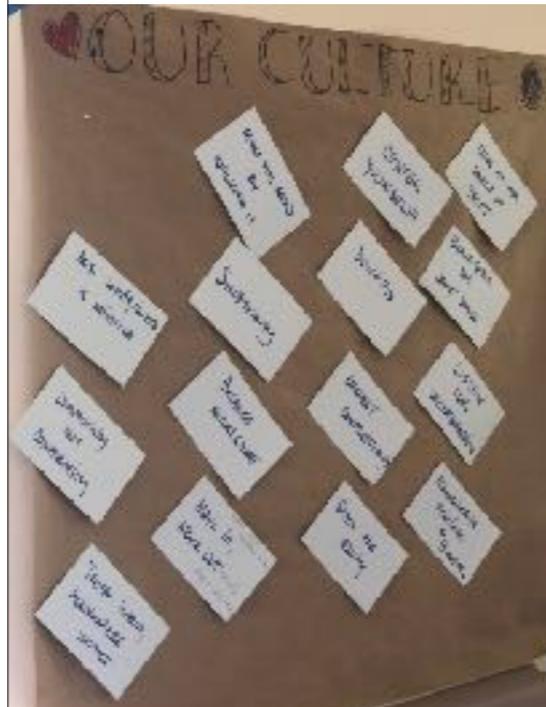


Buddhist
Peace
Fellowship's
Theory of Change

What all these are sort of getting at is that movements are inherently pluralistic and we know that pluralism can drive our ego bananas. So what are we doing about that?

MAKING FRIENDS WITH PLURALITY

So to help activists build their capacity to accept pluralism we use training modules designed to help them tease out the tensions of difference between silos and to explore their mutual interest.



Be OK with non-closure

Stop & give space for disagreement
before moving on - community not conformity

Trust intent, acknowledge impact

Don't fix others

Engage in brave space, not safe space

Move at the speed of trust

Embrace paradox

THE FOUR ROLES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

George Lakey / Bill Moyer

Helper



Advocate



Rebel



Organizer



I run a couple exercises in activist trainings that helps them to explore the inherent plurality of social movements.

There are different roles in social change. (Training for Change)

THE FIVE ORGANIZING TRADITIONS

M O M E N T U M T R A I N I N G



There are different traditions of social change. Most activists don't know that they are working in an organizing tradition. Most people in the world do not get paid to do activism, so there isn't the kind of succession training one would hope for in passing down traditions.

What gets in the way?

- ✓ 1- Silos - reactions to plurality (ego)

-there are so many roles and traditions of social change and so there are many possible orientations to oppression and thus there are many views, tactics and strategies. We have to condition our egos to accept the pluralities we encounter in organizing.

- ✓ Practices for ego awareness
- ✓ Learning to navigate triggers
- ✓ Holistic Leadership Development

What are the challenges and obstacles to our beautiful pluralistic people powered movement from flourishing and winning?

Movements Silos



Broken circulatory system



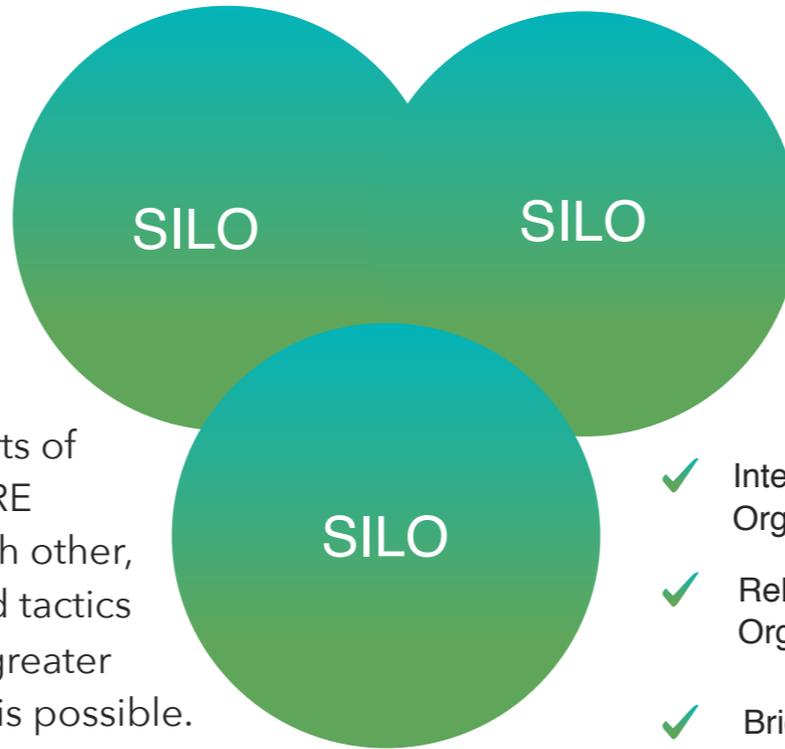
When the parts of the system aren't talking to each other, there is *dis-ease*.

Living systems "take place by means of information and material-energy exchanges."
(Parent)

Movements Silos



Functioning circulatory system



When the parts of the system ARE talking to each other, strategies and tactics overlap and greater coordination is possible.

- ✓ Intersectional Organizing
- ✓ Relational Organizing
- ✓ Bridging Work

B A S I C G O O D N E S S  D E E P S O L I D A R I T Y

The whole thing should be seen as resting in basic goodness. Not everyone is going to be there, but if we are there, we are going to be able give of ourselves more and respond with greater skillful means. We affirm the basic goodness of all humanity in contemplative movements.

THE FOUR ROLES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

George Lakey / Bill Moyer



We want to be in chorus with the people around us and trust that they will be in chorus with the people around us, so we can do that maturation dance like the swallows do.

What gets in the way?

- ✓ Correct line thinking
(Mao's "correct line" from the people)

"If you try to build unity around shared doctrine (or correct line), you will have to agree on a set of ideas. There will be an ongoing tension between the wideness of your agreement and the wideness of your coalition. . . In the process, you may stifle the kind of provocative questions and alliances with unusual suspects that can produce some of the most creative and effective strategies. You may even end up fighting against each other with more passion that you give to the common struggle against your opponent."

✓ Covenantal Agreement

Alexia Salvatierra, 2012

In the 60's and 70's Maoism became a prevalent radical political organizing tradition in the US. Maoism introduced a kind of logic that infiltrated social movements that we can trace back to Mao's idea of having a "correct line from the people." In Mao's view, having a correct line meant that you were connected to the needs of the most impacted and affected, the political platform was defined and the agenda set by that direct line to the people. People argued intensely about what constituted the most "correct line" and eventually the most impacted people were lost in the process and what was left was this idea that we all have to agree on everything to move forward with anything.

What gets in the way?

- ✓ White silence on anti-blackness & structural racism

In Parker Palmer's latest book entitled *On the Brink of Everything: Grace, gravity and getting old*, he writes, "I'm not on a guilt trip here, just acknowledging the inner roots of a social pathology that, if it goes unconfessed and unaddressed, will make people like me a continuing part of the problem. No disease in the United States is more in need of a cure than racism---which breeds irrational fears that, in turn, breed the worst of political evils. As long as I draw breath, I want to be part of the solution. That requires a close examination of my own heart and dealing with whatever pathogens I find there. If I want to help heal the world, I must heal myself."

- ✓ Contemplative Anti-oppression Pedagogy

What gets in the way?

✓ Trauma - oppression is trauma

"We cannot fully create effective movements for social change if individuals struggling for that change are not also self-actualized or working towards that end. When wounded individuals come together in groups to make change our collective struggle is often undermined say all that has not been dealt with emotionally."

-bell hooks in *Sisters of the Yams*

✓ Healing Justice

What gets in the way?

- ✓ Trauma - oppression is trauma

“While discomfort is a given when we enter many group settings, our movements should not be spaces where the same systemic harms we work to transform are allowed to persist. The movement should allow and create spaces for healing, with the recognition that we cannot do it all.”

-Charlene A. Carruthers in *Unapologetic: A black, queer, and feminist mandate for radical movements*

- ✓ Adopt healing justice as a core organizing value and practice

In movements, folks are trying to figure out how to:



- share power equitably
- to be aware of our habitual roles and reactions
- to collaborate embracing paradox and plurality
- to communicate mindfully
- to respond, not to react
- physical embodiment and healing
- be able to stay in difficult emotions
- have courageous conversations

Do any of these things sound like contemplative endeavors?



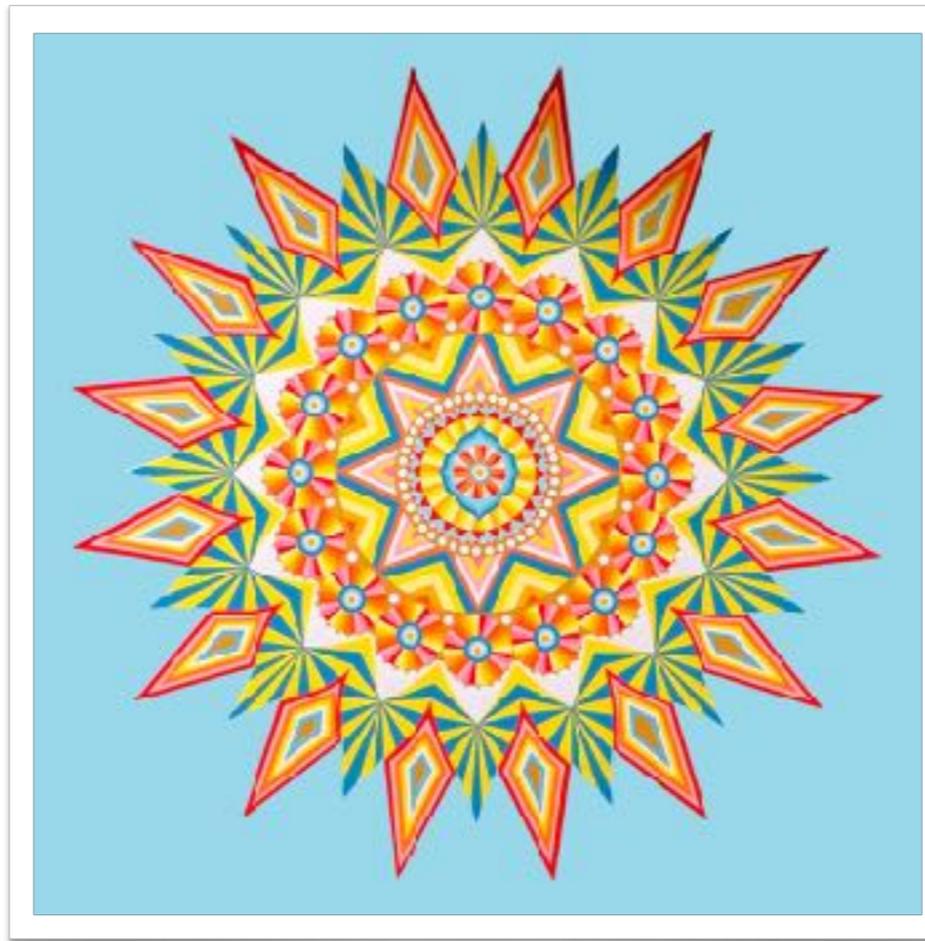
Rev angel Kyodo williams says we are not embodied or we would all rise up and go take the White House back.

THEY ARE ALL CONTEMPLATIVE ENDEAVORS

Activism is
Changing

But don't take
my word for it. . .

Listen to
Movements



Quote 4

I am a cell-sized unit of the human organism, and I have to use my life to leverage a shift in the system by how I am, as much as with the things I do. This means actually being in my life, and it means bringing my values into my daily decision-making. Each day should be lived on purpose. -adrienne maree brown

Quote 5

It has meant getting in touch with my body and feelings in real time, and learning to express them. I am learning to engage in generative conflict, to say no, to feel my limits, making time to feel my heartache when it comes. -adrienne maree brown

My Theory & Proposal

- ✓ Contemplative awareness is NOT something that we contemplatives need to bring to activism. It is naturally arising in the human dignity and struggle of transformative social movements. It is something we join in on.
- ✓ Social movements are good training grounds for contemplatives to practice compassionate action, off the mat, off the cushion and beyond the classroom.
- ✓ We can encourage the naturally arising non-dual moments of love and ego transcendence that are already happening without attaching to them.
- ✓ Contemplatives have the ability to be uncomfortable and stay in tension (you fall out of the pose you get back into it) and can lead in this by example.
- ✓ We can become grounding rods of NON-JUDGMENTAL presence in social movement spaces AND deepen our compassionate action practice by serving.

Thank you!

Find us online at transformnetwork.org

