

Where the Sidewalk Cracks

John Halstead

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Part 1: Ricochet Resistance

And lend your voices only
To sounds of freedom
No longer lend your strength
To that which you wish to be free from
— Jewel, “Life Uncommon”

Will the Real Resistance Please Stand Up

In the wake of George Floyd’s murder, Black Lives Matter protests were organized in practically every town in the highly-segregated northwest corner of Indiana, where I live, near Chicago. In the midst of it, I was contacted by one event organizer, who asked me to attend his protest as a legal observer.

I’ve been serving as a legal observer for local protests for several years now. The role of a legal observer is not to participate in the protest, but to stay on the edges and watch the police, as well as any counter-demonstrators, and document any infringements on the rights of the protesters. Theoretically, I am there to serve as a witness in the event of police abuse. Practically, I serve more as a deterrent—I wear a bright green traffic vest and cap which say “Legal Observer” and “National Lawyer’s Guild”.

This protest was organized by a local group of anarcho-communists. I didn’t know the group, but always try to attend protests when invited to, because I am pretty much the only legal observer in a county of a half million people. In all, there were about a half dozen people. Later, they would be joined by a few more who had seen the event advertised on social media. With the exception of one young woman of color, the group was entirely White.

The protest was staged in a small, White, working class town that I’m very familiar with, because I attend the Unitarian Universalist church there. The group marched through the city park and into the downtown area, and then lined up along the street with their signs and started chanting. Periodically, one of the passing cars would honk in a friendly way. Other drivers flipped the group off or yelled profanities out their windows. The supporters and detractors (at least the vocal ones) were about evenly numbered.

The police were present, but inconspicuous for once. They stayed at a distance and around corners. But the really interesting part, for me at least, was not the protesters or the police. It was a couple of guys, locals, who were hanging around the protest.

Superficially, they appeared to hit a lot of the “redneck” boxes. I don’t know his name, but I’m going to call one of them “Joe”.

At first, Joe just watched the protest, about two blocks away. I watched him and his friend watching the protesters. I watched him screw up his courage and eventually walk up to the protesters. The organizers met him and an argument ensued. The back-and-forth was typical “All Lives Matter” fare.

To his credit, Joe was civil, albeit openly antagonistic. Most of the protesters gathered in a small crowd around Joe. Only a couple of people stayed on the corner holding signs and trying to engage drivers. After a few minutes, I walked up to the organizer and pointed out that he was letting this one guy subvert what they came there to do. He agreed, and the group returned to their signs and chants.

Joe walked away, but he continued to lurk around the edge of the protest. I had to hand it to him. Joe had remained civil. He had not backed down when surrounded by a half dozen angry BLM protesters. With very little effort, he had managed to distract the organizers of the event from their purpose. He had also created a situation which could have gone very badly for the protesters. I could imagine the headline in the local paper: “Black Lives Matter Protesters Assault Peaceful Pedestrian”.

But Joe wasn’t done. From somewhere—maybe one of them ran home—Joe and his friend came up with some improvised cardboard “All Lives Matter” signs. They took to the next block over (adjacent to, not across from the BLM group) and started engaging the drivers-by in a parallel fashion. Then, Joe and his friend rounded up some preteen local kids who, up to that point, had been riding around the downtown aimlessly on their bikes. Joe recruited them as fledgling counter-protesters.

Now the counter-protest was almost the same size as the BLM protest. They got as much encouragement from drivers as the BLM protesters did. And they seemed to be having a blast with their *ad hoc* chants. The counter-protesters kept it up, until the organizers of the BLM protest wrapped it up for the evening.

Frankly, I was impressed. I would guess that I would probably disagree with Joe on just about any political issue. But his on-the-spot organizing abilities were impressive. More importantly, I was amazed how a BLM protest could end up creating the conditions for a counter-protest and possibly even politicizing a group of people who may have never engaged in a political demonstration otherwise.

Something’s Happening Here ...

Now, lest you think I’m taking cheap shots from the peanut gallery, let me tell you about how the same thing happened at an event I myself organized, but on a larger scale, just a few weeks earlier.

It started with an outraged friend letting me know about a local Blue Lives Matter event on Facebook titled “Police Appreciation Day”. It was going to be a short parade, followed by a rally, and then food and entertainment at a banquet hall. The organizers

had done this event every fall for a few years (one of them was the brother of a former police chief). But this year, they moved the event up to the summer—no doubt, in response to the Black Lives Matter protests going on locally and nationally.

Well, this cannot go unanswered, I thought. So I created a parallel counter-event on Facebook to occur on the same day and in the same town. I appropriated and altered the graphics used by the Blue Lives organizers, calling it a “Police *Violence* Awareness Day.” I then contacted the local Black Lives Matter groups, and we organized a counter-demonstration. With their help, I organized a symbolic funeral procession, with a donated hearse, followed by a rally at the local police station, near the Blue Lives event.

On the day of the event, there were almost 100 vehicles involved. We taped signs to the windows with the names and ages of BIPOC victims of police violence. And we circled around the Blue Lives event until it was time to rally. We had several speakers, mostly people of color. It was very moving. It felt good to stand up to a transparently reactionary critique of the Movement for Black Lives. The local paper reported on it. And from the perspective of most of the participants, the Black Lives Matter demonstration was a success.

The demonstration took place in the predominately White, more rural, southwest corner of the county, which is actively avoided by many people of color, who live mostly in the northern, more urban, industrialized, and blighted part of the county. Many of the people of color who attended the demonstration were legitimately concerned about their safety, because of its location, the presence of the police, and the large number of White people gathered in support of the police. So just attending the event was a kind of triumph for them. That’s not something that should be dismissed.

But all along the way, in spite of being the principal organizer, I had misgivings. From the start, I noticed an unusual level of interest in the Black Lives Matter event from Blue Lives people. Almost as soon as I posted the event on Facebook, I had people from all around the country sending me antagonistic messages. As we approached the day of the two events, I monitored the Facebook discussion on the Blue Lives event page. It was clear that the Black Lives counter-demonstration was generating a lot of support for the Blue Lives event. I don’t know what the turnout in the past years had been, but I am confident that our Black Lives Matter counter-demonstration drew more people out to the Blue Lives event. In the end, the number of people who gathered in support of the police was several times that of the BLM event.

While everyone was congratulating me on a great event, I was privately wondering what success means in these circumstances. I am convinced now that the most significant impact we had was to energize and mobilize people on the opposite side who might otherwise have stayed home. That was the last demonstration I organized. Ever since then, I’ve been trying to make sense of what happened.

Ricochet Resistance

“Resolve to serve no more, and you are at once freed. I do not ask that you place hands upon the tyrant to topple him over, but simply that you support him no longer; then you will behold him, like a great Colossus whose pedestal has been pulled away, fall of his own weight and break in pieces.”

— Étienne de La Boétie

Vera Bradova, who writes as “Leavergirl” on her blog *Leaving Babylon* and at *Resilience.org*, explores the problems with popular forms of resistance and her journey to find an alternative. Among those problems, she lists:

1. There is a tendency for resisters to step into the shoes of the oppressors and become the new oppressors, especially if the revolution was forcible. Bradova calls this the “Logic of Power”.¹
2. Resistance is often co-opted and commodified, especially in capitalist systems.
3. Resistance “provides an anvil for the hammer of power”. In other words, the resisters make themselves targets.
4. Resistance helps the oppressor system evolve and become more adept at oppression.

¹ Bradova writes: “We cannot create a non-domination society—i.e. an autonomous and cooperative partnership society—by employing domination strategies wielded by groups that know nothing but domination and will perpetuate it if they succeed in reaching the seats of power.” This is a version of Audre Lorde’s observation that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” Or as the anonymous author of the 1999 “Give Up Activism” article wrote: “You cannot fight alienation by alienated means.”

Bradova draws on the writing of John Holloway, post-Marxist author of *Change the World Without Taking Power* (2002), who theorizes that revolution comes, not in the seizure of state power, but in everyday acts of refusal of capitalist culture (which he calls “anti-power”). Holloway explains that we cannot build a society of power-with by seizing power-over. “Once the logic of power is adopted, the struggle against power is already lost.”

“The idea of changing society through the conquest of power thus ends up achieving the opposite of what it sets out to achieve. Instead of the conquest of power being a step towards the abolition of power relations, the attempt to conquer power involves the extension of the field of power relations into the struggle against power. What starts as a scream of protest against power, against the dehumanisation of people, against the treatment of humans as means rather than ends, becomes converted into its opposite, into the assumption of the logic, habits and discourse of power into the very heart of the struggle against power. For what is at issue in the revolutionary transformation of the world is not whose power but the very existence of power. What is at issue is not who exercises power, but how to create a world based on the mutual recognition of human dignity, on the formation of social relations which are not power relations.”

— John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power* (2002)

5. Resistance gives energy to the oppressors, which is then turned against the resistance.

Much could be (and has been) written about each of these issues. But it's the last one I want to focus on here—how resistance gives energy to the oppressors—because it helps explain what I witnessed in the two stories above. Bradova explains how resistance can provide motivating energy to the opposition. “Resistance provokes counter-resistance, and the more successful resistance is, the more it alarms and energizes the opposition. Hence the saying, ‘what you resist, persists.’” (“Vive la résistance? Au contraire”).

Of course, that's not to say that resistance *creates* oppression. The civil rights movement may have energized White supremacists, but it didn't create White supremacy. The climate movement energized deniers, but it didn't create the carbon economy. And I may have helped energize some Blue Lives sympathizers to attend the police appreciation event, but I didn't create the police state.

Nevertheless, it seems true that “in your face” resistance tends to ricochet. Self-described “recovering environmentalist” Paul Kingsnorth² calls this “the self-defeating identity politics of protest.” There are times, of course, when we must stand up to power, when we have no choice but to defend ourselves, our communities, and the more-than-human world. But when we do have a choice, when we are considering possible strategies, maybe flocking to the barricades isn't always the best option.

Standard forms of resistance tend to put the focus on the oppressors and what we *don't* want, instead of on what we *do* want. Instead of challenging the dominator culture head-on, Bradova says we should starve it by depriving it of our energy: “Deny it its coveted fuel: your effort, your attention and interest, your money, your loyalty, your goodwill and your good ideas. Deny it your streams of energy, one by one. Direct them instead to the Lifeworld.” (“Pulling the Plug”)

“The job of guerrilla dissenters is not to resist the Leviathan, but to stop feeding it. Our job is not to resist the PTB [Powers-That-Be], but rather to grow another kind of power and another way of life. Because both will be vigorously undermined if done visibly and loudly, guerrilla tactics are called for.”

— Vera Bradova, “Guerrilla Dissent”

Bradova gives an example from her home country of Czechoslovakia, following the 1968 Soviet invasion. In contrast to the Poles who actively opposed the invasion of their country, the Czechs and Slovaks withdrew from public life. Initially, Bradova was disappointed, but she writes:

² Update: Over a period of a few years, Paul Kingsnorth's political orientation has shifted from Green anarchism to proto-fascism. While it is impossible to draw a bright line marking when this occurred, I do not endorse Kingsnorth's writing after the spring of 2020. COVID and his conversion to orthodox Christianity appear to have accelerated his slide to the right. See here for more on this. (Jan. 1, 2023)

“Now I see it as the sanest response they could have mounted. They withdrew from the system. They laughed at it in a million clever jokes. They worked as little as possible, they taught their own kids to look under the surface and see the lies, they believed nothing official but found their own sources of news, they created connected networks of craftspeople and others with useful skills to trade and get things done privately. And they put most of their energy into living. The system weakened; how could it not? ... It is a lot easier to harass a few dissidents than to go after millions of people who are most notable by ... doing as little for the system as they can get away with, just minding their everyday lives, and not believing anything you say.”

— Vera Bradova, “Pulling the Plug”

But having withdrawn our energy from the system, to where should we direct it? As John Holloway writes, “The real force of the *serve no more* comes when we do something else instead.” That something else, will be the subject of Part 2.

Part 2: Interstitial Insurrection

Guerrilla Dissent

“From this society—from this state of affairs, people must detach themselves. They must detach themselves quietly, without shouting or riots, indeed in silence and secrecy, not alone but in groups, in real ‘societies’ that will create, as far as is possible, a life that is independent and wise.”

— Nicola Chiaromonte

Having withdrawn our energy from the system, to where should we direct it? Bradova argues that our energy is best spent not waging war on the global industrial capitalist system, but growing a different way of life—resilient communities structured on a partnership model of relations, grounded in power-with rather than power-over. And I use the word “growing” here intentional, and not “building”, because it isn’t something that can be planned, utopian-style. It has to evolve through myriad experiments and adaptations, starting with the most humble of beginnings.

And it is nothing less than a whole new way of life that is called for. Most revolutionary programs of today suffer from the same flaw as revolutionary programs of the past: The problem isn’t that they are too ambitious; it’s that they’re not ambitious enough. Writing in 1969, at the height of the American counterculture movement, Theodore Roszak observed how old-guard radicals condemned young people for withdrawing into bohemian communities. “Be responsible,” they urged, by which they meant giving energy to political action, organizing laborers and political coalitions, registering voters, sitting-in, demonstrating, etc. The problem, observed Roszak, is that these activities aren’t enough to constitute a way of life.

“The activities are noble enough. But they are, at best, only episodic commitments. Run them together as one may, they have not the continuity and comprehensiveness demanded by a way of life. And it is a way of life the young need to grow into, a maturity which may include political activity, but which also embraces more fundamental needs: love, family, subsistence, companionship. Political action and organizing cannot even provide a full-time career for more than a handful of apparatchiks, let alone a pattern of life for an entire generation.

“So how do you grow up? Where is the life-sustaining receptacle that can nourish and protect good [community]? The answer is: you make up a

community of those you love and respect, where there can be children, and, by mutual aid, three meals a day scraped together by honorable and enjoyable labor. Nobody knows quite how it is to be done. There are not many reliable models. The old radicals are no help: they talked about socializing whole economies, or launching third parties, or strengthening the unions, but not about building communities.”

— *Theodore Roszak*, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (1969)

As much as possible, this work should be done under the radar of the dominator overculture. The best defense, says Bradova, is the defense of a revolution that has already come. There will still be times when we must stand up and fight openly, even when there is no hope of winning—for honor, for love, just for the sheer sake of being human. But this is inadequate as a strategy, much less as a way of life.

In an era when the power of both the state and non-state capitalist actors vastly overwhelms the power of any resistance, Bradova invites us to consider the successes of guerrilla campaigns of the past. Historically, states have been ineffective at responding to guerrilla warfare. “Guerrilla dissenters”, like guerrilla combatants, would first of all choose the ground they want to fight on and then withdraw when the conditions become unfavorable to resistance, knowing that it is better to live to fight another day.

Adrienne Maree Brown, former director of the Ruckus Society and author of *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, suggests we learn from the example of mycelium, the vast interconnected underground network from which mushrooms emerge. Mycelium connects to the roots of trees and other plants, allowing them to share nutrients and information to the betterment of the entire ecosystem.

If we adopted a mycelium model, then we would see public forms of dissent as necessarily ephemeral and contingent, like mushrooms that pop up unexpectedly when the conditions are right and disappear just as quickly. Meanwhile, the real work would be going on underground, spreading quietly, making connections, even—especially—during times of public inactivity.

The form guerrilla dissent takes would also reflect this subterranean structure. Rather than reflecting the world which we want to resist, it would reflect the world we want to grow: “The vaster the mycelium, the more extravagant the fruiting bodies arising from the fertile undergrowth. Freed from the need to make the show into something big and lasting, we can play.” Bradova imagines “guerrilla theaters, carnivals, flashmobs, encampments, and many other unique happenings ...

“Forget about boring marches and angry, futile protests. These showy, one-of-a-kind, playful excrescences bring fun and creativity to the streets, and draw people from all walks of life to join in. They are a play of light and color and sound; ephemera. Cut loose, cut loose from the dreary quotidian! Just like we have taught one another when and how to use nonviolence, we

can teach each other to spark joy. Show the passers-by you've got something special; contagious, ebullient, irresistible."

— Vera Bradova, "Mycelium Wisdom"

Viewed from this perspective, the Occupy protests of 2011 take on new meaning. The movement has often been criticized for a lack of a coherent demand and for failing to achieve political change. But perhaps these are the wrong measures. Perhaps what was important about Occupy wasn't whether it "accomplished anything", but what changes it signaled which were happening beneath the surface, beneath the notice of the established political channels. What might the Black Lives Matter event I organized have looked like, if instead of being a reaction to the Blue Lives event, it had grown organically out of a real community of diverse people supporting each other in every aspect of their lives?

In the Cracks

"Everywhere the concrete of control paved over the goodness of the heart, the Dandelion Insurrection sprang up through the cracks."

— Rivera Sun, The Dandelion Insurrection

But what does it mean to operate "under the radar" in an era of mass surveillance and ubiquitous capitalist culture? To where should guerrilla dissenters withdraw in an age when there are no frontiers? How do we walk away from Babylon (to use Bradova's term), when Babylon is everywhere? There is "no exit."

The experience of Ted Kaczynski is a cautionary tale. Kaczynski, before he became the Unabomber, was a young assistant professor of mathematics at UC Berkley. In 1969, he resigned and moved to a cabin he had built in a remote part of Montana with the intention of living off the grid and reading political philosophy. When he felt there were still too many people near his remote cabin, he would go for a two-day hike to a favorite spot, a plateau that opened onto a view of a beautiful ravine with a waterfall. But in the summer of 1983, he discovered that a road had been built through the spot. Civilization had found him. In that moment, the Unabomber was born.

In his book, *Crack Capitalism* (2010), John Holloway writes about spaces which exist within the capitalist overculture, but within which an alternative way of life might still grow, a life which is not subordinated to the logic of capital. To borrow the language of many religious traditions, these "cracks" are *in*, but not *of*, capitalism. These spaces already exist. "The world, and each one of us," says Holloway, "is full of these cracks." We must find ways, he says, of recognizing them, expanding them, and connecting them.

What are these cracks?¹ And can they actually exist within a capitalist hegemony where everything and everyone is commodified, even resistance? We might think of temporary autonomous zones, spaces where a different world may be prefigured, spaces like Occupy, Burning Man, or Rainbow Gatherings. But I think these are more like the dandelions and fungi that can grow out of the cracks, not the cracks themselves.

In *Seeing Like a State* (1999), James C. Scott writes about the capacity of empire to understand the cultures it assimilates. He calls this “legibility”, and it gives some insight into the character of Holloway’s “cracks”. When empire can “read” another culture, then it can assimilate it. When empire cannot “read” the culture, then it works to render it “legible”. The process of making something legible means simplifying, abstracting, and standardizing it according to a utilitarian and universalist logic. In modern times, that means the logic of capitalism.

One of the examples Scott gives is the attempts by states to “sedentize” nomadic pastoralists. Another example is the transformation of wild forests with a rich diversity of species into orderly stands of only the most marketable of tree species. In other words, it is monoculturization, applied both to humans and other-than-human beings. These attempts inevitably fail, at least in the long run, because they don’t account for the complexity of human and more-than-human nature. And that’s when the cracks appear. And as the inexorable collapse of global industrial capitalist civilization continues, these cracks will grow.

Interstitial INsurrection

”That’s how we’re gonna win. Not fighting what we hate, saving what we love.”

— Rose Tico, *Star Wars VIII: The Last Jedi*

¹ Paul Kingsnorth articulates what I think is the same question somewhat differently: “What languages does the Machine not speak?” His answer:

“... ways of seeing and communicating which Machine culture downplays or ridicules, but which every traditional society before modernity’s advent understood and worked with. That means myth, religion, practical expertise founded upon physical work, rooted imagery, holistic conceptions of life, communication with non-human beings, poetry, complexity, questions that do not have answers, questions which are not questions at all. It means seeing time as a circle, not a line, life as a process, not a puzzle to be solved, death as a part of that life, not an enemy to be defeated. Sometimes—horror of horrors—it means embracing unknowing. It means learning to stop and be silent.”

Paul Kingsnorth, “The Language of the Master”

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It's in those cracks that we live our authentic lives. They are characterized by specificity, locality, diversity, complexity, holism, embodiment, relationality, sacrality—all of the things that are illegible to the capitalist state. And the life that grows there is both fragile and resilient, like a dandelion, both common and mysterious. It is irreducible to mathematical formulae or objectifying language. It is uncontrollable, wild. It is ubiquitous, and yet practically invisible to capitalist eyes. These cracks are the spaces which emerge when two or more people genuinely connect and form a relationship free from exploitation and domination. When we are in those spaces, we are outside of capitalism—whatever our actual spatiotemporal location.²

It's not that our authentic encounters cannot be transformed into exploitative relations by capitalism. Capitalism spreads everywhere because we carry it within ourselves. "The real power of capital is right here in our everyday lives—we re-create its power every day because capital is not a thing but a social relation between people ..." ("Give Up Activism"). Friendships are turned into social media connections and professional networks. Sexuality is turned into sport, eroticism into pornography (from the Latin *prone*, to sell), and sensual pleasure into stimulation. Sharing your life with another person is turned into a legal contract and patriarchal control. Meaningful labor is turned into bullshit jobs. Communion with the more-than-human world is turned into suburban lawns and tourism for the privileged. Religion (from the Latin *religare*, to bind together) is turned into megachurches and New Age spiritualities-for-sale.

And yet, we know better. Deep down, we feel that something is lost in the translation. Something essential. But it can be recovered. Because, just as we carry capitalism within ourselves, we also carry the cracks within us too. "The world, and each one of us," says Holloway, "is full of these cracks. ... In one respect we are, in effect, people who have to sell their labour power in order to survive. But in another, each one of us has dreams, behaviours and projects that don't fit into the capitalist definition of labour."

Finding these cracks requires withdrawing, turning away from the Spectacle (even when the spectacle is protest), away from our screens and myriad distractions (even political news feeds), away from business and busy-ness (even when the busy-ness is activism), refusing the logic of capital and power-over (even seizing power for the proletariat), and opening our whole selves to the vulnerability inherent in every encounter with another being, whether human or other-than. This is what Martin Buber calls "the most intimate of all resistances—resistance to mass or collective loneliness".

"Open up more and more power-sharing spaces between you and other human beings. Some for a few minutes, some for a lifetime. Open up the

² This is similar to Mikhail Epstein's concept of "transculture", which is the experience of dwelling in the lacunae, the spaces between cultural demarcations, from which a new culture may emerge. According to Epstein, exploiting these lacunae requires shifting from a "vertical" paradigm focused on grand narratives and power(-over) to a "horizontal" paradigm focused on the ordinary and everyday and on collaborative creativity. See Mikhail Epstein and Ellen Berry, *Transcultural Experiments: Russian and American Models of Creative Communication* (1999).

realm where souls connect. That is the new frontier—explore it together. Such relationships, rich in attention and trust, wield magic and restorative power of their own. Such relationships are the embers of another way of being with each other, waiting to be stoked into flame.”

— Vera Bradova, “How to Leave Babylon”

I admit, talking about spaces for genuine human connection as a form of resistance can seem touchy-feely, naive, or even counter-revolutionary. But everything I have experienced as an organizer over the last decade leads me to believe this is essential—and it is often what has been missing in my own work.

“Why speak of thriving and love where there are so many massive, urgent problems that need to be confronted? To write about the potential of trust and care, at this time in history, could seem like grasping optimistically at straws as the world burns. But durable bonds and new complicities are not a reprieve or an escape; they are the very means of undoing Empire.”

— Nick Montgomery and carla bergman, *Joyful Militancy* (2017)

Far from being a quietist or introversionist retreat into the “private sphere” (if such a thing even exists under late stage capitalism), this is rather a politicization of all of our interactions, even the most quotidian.³ It is a breaking down of the barrier between organizing and everyday life. Holloway writes that social change is not produced by activists, but by ordinary people. It is “the outcome of the barely visible transformation of the daily activities of millions of people.” It is not the work of global movements or the nonprofit industrial complex. It is small work. It is intimate work. It is the work of a lifetime, or several.⁴

³ This is the realm of what James C. Scott calls “infrapolitics”. In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990), Scott argues that oppressed groups employ strategies of resistance that often go unnoticed by their oppressors. While they may appear to be acquiescent in public, beneath the surface they challenge their domination in myriad ways, largely invisible to the powers-that-be.

“If formal political organization is the realm of the elites (for example, lawyers, politicians, revolutionaries, political bosses) of written records (for example, resolutions, declarations, news stories, petitions, lawsuits), and of public actions, infrapolitics is, by contrast, the realm of informal leadership and non-elites, of conversation and oral discourse, and of surreptitious resistance. ...

“Infrapolitics is, to be sure, real politics. In many respects it is conduct in more earnest, for higher stakes, and against greater odds than political life in liberal democracies. Real ground is lost and gained. Armies are undone and revolutions facilitated by the desertions of infrapolitics. De facto property rights are established and challenged. States confront fiscal crises or crises of appropriation when the cumulative petty strategems of its subjects deny them labor and taxes. Resistant subcultures of dignity and vengeful dreams are created and nurtured. Counterhegemonic discourse is elaborated. Thus infrapolitics is ... always pressing, testing, probing the boundaries of the permissible.”

— *James C. Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990)

⁴ In an interview with *Emergence Magazine*, Paul Kingsnorth speaks about the very small ways people challenge things:

“The real demand of all insurrectionary movements is the transformation of the world and the reinvention of life. ... Revolution is made everyday despite, and in opposition to, the specialists of revolution. This revolution is nameless, like everything springing from lived experience. Its explosive coherence is being forged constantly in the everyday clandestinity of acts and dreams.”

— Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life: Impossible Realisation or Power as the Sum of Seductions* (1967)

This is a different kind of resistance, an “interstitial insurrection”—from the Latin *interstitium*, meaning “the space between”, and *insurgere*, meaning “to rise up”. We pagans know something about these in-between spaces, the liminal (though we are not immune to capitalism’s counterfeits either). It is in these spaces which we must root our resistances, and to that we must continually return to find our resilience.

These spaces are not sufficient by themselves. This cannot be emphasized enough. We must grow them into another way of life—small resilient communities, capable of adapting to the shock of environmental change and economic collapse, each one experimenting with alternative ways of doing what we need done: co-ops, gift economies, communing, community governance structures, permaculture food systems, community gardens and community meals, alternative birthing, alternative education, child-care networks, sewing circles, re-skilling and skill trades, barn/house raisings, community festivals—all rooted in a culture of partnership. But all of this begins with the “cracks”, the interstices, which open when a few people decide to be together in a different way. Without this, nothing is sustainable.

Interstitial insurrection isn’t susceptible to the same problems as other forms of resistance, which Bradova lists (see above). It’s not a power-grab, so there’s no danger of stepping into the shoes of the oppressors. It can’t be commodified; though capitalism continually manufactures shallow and insidious substitutes, the real thing can be discerned. The myriad manifestations of interstitial insurrection can (and will) be

“I think actually that that’s what the work is—people doing things at really quite a small level—at a personal level—doing their small work.

“I think that what I used to believe (arrogantly, probably)—that we could work together to create some grand new story for humanity—was just foolish. But that doesn’t mean that lots and lots of small stories don’t come together to form something bigger, which I think is probably how it always works. If enough people are questioning the way the world works and the values we have and the stories we tell ourselves, then what they will start to do instead will start to add up to something. ...

“I always come back to the same answer, which is that those of us who can do what we can should just do it without any expectation that it’s going to lead to a quick world-changing solution, because I don’t think it is. It’s more a sense that—those of us who can, building refuges, protecting what we can protect, telling the stories we can tell, trying to look for truth—if that’s what we’re doing—and hoping that that can be passed down generations as things go on. It’s a long process. ...

“I don’t think that this is something that we are going to turn around in a generation or two. I think it’s just slow work, so we will just do what we can do.”

— Paul Kingsnorth, “The Myth of Progress”

smashed by the powers-that-be again and again, but its real work is going on underground, largely invisible to power. And it does not give energy to the opposition—as so much of my own activism has—but instead feeds a different way of life we want to grow.

The capitalist state will continue its colonization. It will try to cover the world in concrete. And yet, inevitably, the cracks will open and the dandelions will emerge. The capitalist state will come along periodically with its fossil fuel-powered lawnmowers to cut them down. But the cracks will remain. The cracks will grow and multiply. And one day, the dandelions will inherit the Earth.

John Halstead is the author of *Another End of the World is Possible*, in which he explores what it would really mean for our relationship with the natural world if we were to admit that we are doomed. John is a native of the southern Laurentian bioregion and lives in Northwest Indiana, near Chicago. He is a co-founder of 350 Indiana-Calumet, which worked to organize resistance to the fossil fuel industry in the Region. John was the principal facilitator of “A Pagan Community Statement on the Environment.” He strives to live up to the challenge posed by the Statement through his writing and activism. John has written for numerous online platforms, including Patheos, Huffington Post, PrayWithYourFeet.org, and Gods & Radicals. He is Editor-at-Large of NaturalisticPaganism.com. John also edited the anthology, *Godless Paganism: Voices of Non-Theistic Pagans* and authored *Neo-Paganism: Historical Inspiration & Contemporary Creativity*. He is also a Shaper of the Earthseed community, more about which can be found at GodisChange.org.

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