

Concluding passage from Paul Hawken's *Blessed Unrest* on the global movement for a sustainable future

I once watched a large demonstration while waiting to meet a friend. Tens of thousands of people carrying a variety of handmade placards strolled down a wide boulevard accompanied by chants, slogans, and song. The signs referred to politicians, different species, prisoners of conscience, corporate campaigns, wars, agriculture, water, workers' rights, dissidents, and more. Standing near me a policeman was trying to understand what appeared to be a political Tower of Babel. The broad-shouldered Irishman shook his head and asked rhetorically, "What do these people want?" Fair question.

There are two kinds of games—games that end, and games that don't. In the first game the rules are fixed and rigid. In the second, the rules change whenever necessary to keep the game going. James Carse called these, respectively, finite and infinite games. We play finite games to compete and win. They always have losers and are called business, banking, war, NBA, Wall Street, and politics. We play infinite games to play; they have no losers because the object of the game is to keep playing. Infinite games pay it forward and fill future coffers. They are called potlatch, family, samba, prayer, culture, tree planting, storytelling, and gospel singing. Sustainability, ensuring the future of life on earth, is an infinite game, the endless expression of generosity on behalf of all. Any action that threatens sustainability can end the game, which is why groups dedicated to keeping the game going assiduously address any harmful policy, law, or endeavor. With no invitation, they invade and take charge of the finite games of the world, not to win but to transform finite games into infinite ones. They want to keep the fish game going, so they go after polluters of rivers. They want to keep the culture game going, so they confront oil exploration in Ecuador. They want to keep the hope game alive in the world, so they go after the roots of poverty. They want to keep the species game happening, so they buy swaths of habitat and undeveloped land. They want to keep the child game going; consequently, when the United States violated the Geneva Conventions and bombed the 1,400 Iraqi water and sewage treatment plants in the first Gulf War, creating sewage-, cholera-, and typhus-laden water, they condemned it as morally repugnant. When the same country that dropped the bombs persuaded the United Nations to prevent shipments of chlorine and medicine to treat the resulting diseases, the infinite-game players thought it hideous and traveled to the heart of that darkness to start NGOs to serve the abandoned. People trying to keep the game going are activists, conservationists, biophiles, nuns, immigrants, outsiders, puppeteers, protesters, Christians, biologists, permaculturists, refugees, green architects, doctors without borders, engineers without borders, reformers, healers, poets, environmental educators, organic farmers, Buddhists, rainwater harvesters, meddlers, meditators, agitators, schoolchildren, ecofeminists, biomimics, Muslims, and social entrepreneurs.

David James Duncan penned a response to the hostile takeover of Christianity by fundamentalists, with advice that applies to all fundamentalisms: the people of the world do not need religious fanatics to save them any more than they need oleaginous free-trade hucksters to do so; they need us for their salvation, and us stands for the crazy-quilt assemblage of global humanity that is willing to stand up to the raw, cancerous insults that come from the mouths, guns, checkbooks, and policies of ideologues, because the movement is not merely trying to prevent wrongs but actively seeks to love this world. Compassion and love of others are at the heart of all religions, and at the heart of this

movement. “When small things are done with love it’s not a flawed you or me who does them: it’s love. I have no faith in any political party, left, right, or centrist. I have boundless faith in love. In keeping with this faith, the only spiritually responsible way I know to be a citizen, artist, or activist in these strange times is by giving little or no thought to ‘great things’ such as saving the planet, achieving world peace, or stopping neocon greed. Great things tend to be undoable things. Whereas small things, lovingly done, are always within our reach.” Some people think the movement is defined primarily by what it is against, but the language of the movement is first and foremost about keeping the conversation going, because ideas that inform it never end: growth without inequality, wealth without plunder, work without exploitation, a future without fear. To answer the policeman’s question, “these people” are reimagining the world.

To salve the world’s wounds demands a response from the heart. There is a world of hurt out there, and to heal the past requires apologies, reconciliation, reparation, and forgiveness. A viable future isn’t possible until the past is faced objectively and communion is made with our errant history. I suspect that just about everyone owes an apology and merits one, but there are races, cultures, and people that are particularly deserving. The idea that we cannot apologize to former enslaved and first peoples for past iniquities because we are not the ones who perpetuated the evil misses the point. By receiving sorrow, hearing admissions, allowing reparation, and participating in reconciliation, people and tribes whose ancestors were abused give new life to all of us in the world we share. Making amends is the beginning of the healing of the world. These spiritual deeds and acts of moral imagination lay the groundwork for the great work ahead.

The movement is not coercive, but it is relentless and unafraid. It cannot be mollified, pacified, or suppressed. There can be no Berlin Wall moment, no treaty to sign, no morning to awaken to when the superpowers agree to stand down. This is a movement away from the maximization of anything that is not conducive to life. It will continue to take myriad forms. It will not rest. There will be no Marx, Alexander, or Kennedy to lead it. No book can explain it, no person can represent it, no group can stand at its forefront, no words can encompass it, because the movement is the breathing, sentient testament of the living world. The movement is an outgrowth of apostasies and it is now self-generating. The first cells that assembled and metabolized under the most difficult of circumstances deep in the ocean nearly 40 million centuries ago are in our bodies now, and we are, in Mary Oliver’s words, determined, as they were then, to save the only life we can.<sup>29</sup> Life can occur only in a cell, and a cell is where all disease starts, as well. In Franklin Harold’s book *The Way of the Cell*, he points out that for all its hard-bitten rationalism, molecular science asks us to accept a “real humdinger...that all organisms have descended...from a single ancestral cell.” This quivering, gelatinous sensate mote is the core of everything we cherish, and places us in direct relation to every other form of life. That primordial connection, so incomprehensible to some yet so manifest and sacred and incontestable to others, links us inseparably to our common fate. The first gene was the password to all subsequent forms of life, and the word gene has the same etymological root as the words kin, kind, genus, generous, and nature. It is our nature to cultivate life, and this movement is a collective kindness produced over the course of 4 million millennia.

I believe this movement will prevail. I don't mean it will defeat, conquer, or create harm to someone else. Quite the opposite. I don't tender the claim in an oracular sense. I mean that the thinking that informs the movement's goals will reign. It will soon suffuse most institutions, but before then, it will change a sufficient number of people so as to begin the reversal of centuries of frenzied self-destructive behavior. Some say it is too late, but people never change when they are comfortable. Helen Keller threw aside the gnawing fears of chronic bad news when she declared, "I rejoice to live in such a splendidly disturbing time!" In such a time, history is suspended and thus unfinished. It will be the stroke of midnight for the rest of our lives.

My hopefulness about the resilience of human nature is matched by the gravity of our environmental and social condition. If we squander all our attention on what is wrong, we will miss the prize: In the chaos engulfing the world, a hopeful future resides because the past is disintegrating before us. If that is difficult to believe, take a winter off and calculate what it requires to create a single springtime. It's not too late for the world's largest institutions and corporations to join in saving the planet, but cooperation must be on the planet's terms. The "Help Wanted" signs are everywhere. All people and institutions, including commerce, governments, schools, churches, and cities, need to learn from life and reimagine the world from the bottom up, based on first principles of justice and ecology. Ecological restoration is extraordinarily simple: You remove whatever prevents the system from healing itself. Social restoration is no different. We have the heart, knowledge, money, and sense to optimize our social and ecological fabric. It is time for all that is harmful to leave. One million escorts are here to transform the nightmares of empire and the disgrace of war on people and place. We are the transgressors and we are the forgivers. "We" means all of us, everyone. There can be no green movement unless there is also a black, brown, and copper movement. What is most harmful resides within us, the accumulated wounds of the past, the sorrow, shame, deceit, and ignominy shared by every culture, passed down to every person, as surely as DNA, a history of violence, and greed. There is no question that the environmental movement is critical to our survival. Our house is literally burning, and it is only logical that environmentalists expect the social justice movement to get on the environmental bus. But it is the other way around; the only way we are going to put out the fire is to get on the social justice bus and heal our wounds, because in the end, there is only one bus. Armed with that growing realization, we can address all that is harmful externally. What will guide us is a living intelligence that creates miracles every second, carried forth by a movement with no name.