Appealing to "The Better Angels of Our Nature" to Make Love, Not War!

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ABSTRACT This review article comprises some free associations and reflections on a conference held last year by the organisation of Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility on the theme of "Occupying our Inner and Outer Worlds". Copyright © 2014 The Author. Psychotherapy and Politics International published by John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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Firstly, a great, big "Thank you!" to the organisers, conference presenters and participants for a most inspiring, fruitful meeting.

Saturday, 9 November, 2013 – a rather cold, grey and wet November morning; no, it doesn't start well for me. Walking out of King's Cross station, someone pushes a bicycle into my back, ploughs past me. "Can't you at least say 'Sorry'?" No response. Obviously, real men don't say sorry ... Even after having arrived, and in spite of a warm welcome by one of the organisers, I feel isolated – I hardly know *any*body – and out of place. What *am* I doing here?

Still not much of a change during Suzanne Key's introduction which was a bit hectic, and a bit too long, but, possibly, that's just me. I feel myself reacting against a split she presents between inner work (psyche, soul, therapist, *being*) and outer work (activist, *doing*), which she emphasises with a straight vertical line down a flip chart: left side, outer; right side, inner – for the twain never to meet?

I warm to Paul Maiteny's presentation, during which I feel touched by him speaking about selling his toys, as a boy, to be able to buy a small plot of land in a nature reserve in far-away

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Africa, so that flamingos may continue to occupy their proper home. I can't quite understand his grimace as he seems to be "confessing", because that's what seems to be the implication to a couple of years of his academic research. I ask myself, is there a bias here: *for* action, and *doing* in the outer world, and against *being*, occupying the inner world?

So, it's not easy for me to arrive, to warm up – body, mind, soul and spirit – but looking back, I'm so glad I was there! I feel full of ideas that excite me and, in the most positive sense, I feel left with more questions than answers. Isn't that how a good meeting should be, what it should do? Isn't that the most important thing to happen: that my creativity feels ignited? That is what the French philosopher and psychoanalyst Pierre Bayard said in his *How to Talk about Books You Have not Read* (Bayard, 2009) which, really, is a meditation/inquiry about the ideal meeting between reader (or not, as the case may be) and the author of a book. I just hope that in this review I'll be able to communicate, to pass on some of these ignited sparks; if not, well, just take Bayard's suggestion, and turn the page.

The third to present is a man from *Occupy London*, and he addresses the issue of "How can we be active in the outer world without burning out or hurting our inner worlds and vice versa?" He *gets* to me; I am *in*; I have arrived! What I find riveting is how he speaks of the risk of burn-out, a subject close to my heart (Heuer, 2011), but he specifically considers burn-out *prevention*, in his case up to two hours' daily meditation. "Of course", he suggests, "that's what helps me. There are other individually differing ways to release tensions during times of intense stress." In addition, he talks of helping with mediation and conflict resolution in the *Occupy London* camp, often on an ad hoc basis, whenever needed.

PAIRING UP

Throughout the conference I appreciate and enjoy the space given for airing differing views, the tolerance of mutual respect: a genuinely collective "plural psyche". After the initial plenary, it is suggested we choose a partner to work with during the day. I still feel somewhat shy, and, "Thank you, Nick" for choosing me. Before, in the plenary, you have shared how the location of the conference, in All Saints Street, London N1, is for you akin to the closing of a cycle, as you started your political life in a squat just around the corner. I reminisce that our friendship began almost 40 years ago in the same area, when you were running your anarchist bookshop Wicked Messenger just north of King's Cross. This makes you my oldest friend in this country - I mean in terms of the time we have known each other. I, too, psychogeographically, am coming back full circle to this part of London which has a particular meaning for me. In the mid 1970s, newly emigrated, it was in another squat, maybe just on the other side of the Caledonian Road from yours, that I met Peter Eedy, an Australian chef who was training as a body psychotherapist. At that time, having read Reich, I only wanted to have Reichian therapy. He suggested I go and see Gerda Boyesen (1922–2005), a Norwegian who had revolutionised body psychotherapy with her gentle approach, biodynamics, which aims at dissolving rather than breaking muscular armour. When I went to meet her, she asked whether I had ever considered becoming a therapist. (I never have.) This meeting becomes a pivotal, life-changing moment in which I find my vocation. Also in Caledonian Road, in the same squat (although I did not live there), I earned my first money in this country: £1.00 per hour, teaching German. Also, the Red Therapy Group, of which I was a member, met in the



same area in those years: a leaderless experiential therapy group, where we tried out on each other what we learnt in various training and body psychotherapy workshops.

Nick and I discuss the dichotomy which has arisen earlier between inner and outer, individual vs. collective/political, therapist/activist. Neither of us feels happy about this. I do not see these as opposites, rather somewhat identical. I am surprised that this splitting still exists. That the personal is political was a concept initially formulated some 100 years ago by Otto Gross (1877–1920), the first psychoanalyst to link personal/individual inner with outer, collective/political change, and later taken up by feminism, through which it became widely known. I assumed: "So, when I as an analyst have a thought, and communicate it to my client, then these are activist processes in which inner and outer, the individual and the collective/political merge." "Yes," Nick agrees, "but there are differences, like being female and feminist." "But the former without the latter's got something missing!" I reply. This leads to us deploring that, although the term "masculinism" does exist, unlike "feminism", it seems to have acquired mostly negative connotations. I say, "I was just thumbing through the October issue of *Marie Claire*, the women's magazine ..." – "As one does," Nick interjects with his inimitably wry humour – "... and at the back I came across this advert (above). "Certainly, we do need a male awareness equivalent to feminism!"

GROUP

Ingeniously, from a group-dynamics perspective, after the sharing in pairs, it is suggested the group divide into two halves, each of which is to form an inner circle of six chairs, five of which would be occupied by those who want to speak, while the rest groups around them. Anyone from the outer circle who wants to speak can occupy the empty chair; those who have spoken can vacate theirs to join the outer circle and thus make room for someone else.

Yes, right. I start out in the outer circle. Early on, paranoia comes up. A man says that therapeutic boundaries are an expression of fear. That's definitely not how I see them. The vicissitudes of the therapeutic process need a strong container to unfold for healing to occur. I'm remembering a supervisor saying that, apart from a few absolute boundaries that must not be crossed, mostly their function is to make us stop and think, to reflect on whether any specific one might safely be crossed or rather kept. But I'm not saying anything.

One man suggests that anger is a good motivating force, and there seems to be a general consensus on that. That gets me into the inner circle. I disagree: "Should not the way reflect the goal?" I ask, "Or, rather, as I believe that it always does, what will the goal be like if we act from anger which, I believe, cannot but lead to violence, inner and outer, against both self and other — Stalin's Soviet Russia, Pol-Pot's Cambodia, Gaddafi's Libya?" I recall a demonstration for some genuine worthy environmental cause years ago on the square at Hamburg's main railway station. The whole atmosphere was bursting with anger, rage, shouting and dissonant noises. All that did to me was that I wanted to get away from there as quickly as possible. Now I only remember the hate-filled air, *nothing* of the specific cause.

A woman suggests love as a better motivating force. Yes, I feel understood. Another says, angrily, "But that's what I mean! I'm motivated by *love*! But I won't have my *anger* taken away!" Love expressed as anger? Isn't there a contradiction? Isn't this akin to Eric Blair/George Orwell's (1949/2013) *1984* "Newspeak", where peace is war – the voice of an upside-down culture where anger can be celebrated as love, as in the current fashion for sadomasochism? Trauma specialist Peter Levine (1997) wrote: "Compulsive, perverse, promiscuous, and inhibited sexual behaviors are common symptoms of trauma – not just sexual trauma" (p. 32). Isn't anger an expression of the power and violence that creates just those dystopias (as above)? In the mid 1970s there was slogan spray-painted on the walls of London's Covent Garden: "Fighting for Peace is like Fucking for Virginity!"

I agree with Otto Gross (1919), who stated that the highest, essential goal of all revolutions is to replace the will to power with the will to relating, an early pre-formulation of the later slogan "Make Love, Not War!" Significantly, the title of this article is inspired by Stephen Pinker's (2011), The Better Angels of Our Nature, which, in turn, is taken from Abraham Lincoln's first inaugural address, given on 4 March 1861, a month after seven states ceded to form the Confederate States of America, which Lincoln talked about not being enemies but friends, and hoping that all would be touched by "the better angels of our nature".

Earlier, in 1913, Gross had written that

None of the revolutions in history have succeeded in setting up the freedom of the individual. They have fizzled out without effect, each a forerunner of a new bourgeoisie. ... They collapsed, because the revolutionary of yesterday carried within himself the [old] authoritarian [structure]. (Gross, 2012, p. 259; translation modified)

I'm thinking now: what if we understand burn-out as an angry form of self-neglect, or self-abuse? What if we cannot just be angry towards the outer without that anger also polluting the inner? I have an environmentally caring and concerned nephew who travelled to the dolphin reserve of Monkey Mia in Western Australia, where dolphins come into the shallow offshore waters to communicate with humans. He was, rightfully, horrified to witness a man putting the mouthpiece of a cigarette into one dolphin's breathing-hole. Yet, he is himself a smoker — a blatant discrepancy between care for the outer and care for the inner: instead, a concern for the outer and obliviousness towards self.

Did Ghandi not say that if we act from the basis of an eye for an eye, everyone ends up being blind? Angry, violent opposition is no better, really, than the countless revenge movies that our culture produces one after the other: they start with a traumatic injustice, such as a child witnessing the murder of his parents (and, yes, it's mostly a boy), and the rest of the movie is an orgy of vengeful violence, for a seemingly "justified" reason – but what if there is no justification for violence – ever?

DISCUSSION

In the discussion at the conference, love as a motivating force is immediately misunderstood, as I have frequently experienced it is, as an intention to turn a blind eye to the dark and threatening aspects of reality. Why on earth does, "You've *gotta* be realistic!" *invariably* refer to the negative? I am trying to clarify that this is certainly not what I have meant, and in referring back to paranoia, I forcefully state, "I don't want to be scared!" – Yet the majority of eco-psychologists do exactly that: "Twenty-four hours to save the planet!" This is not in any way different from the powerful fear industry of our culture, where in the daily TV news, for example,

Everything becomes a sensational non-stop crisis, full of incremental, horrible developments ... a hope-sapping broadcast from the depression-dimension, if someone simply reads a list of the worst events in the world ... a parade of fresh horror piled upon fresh horror. (Brooker, 2011)

Thus an inner depression is being projected onto the outside world: "the end is nigh" creates a fear industry caught in the vicious circle of an ever-increasing fatal dialectic with an addictive craving for misery, suffering and catastrophe. In sum, as Dugdale (2011) recently put it, there is "An insatiable appetite for evi" (p. 1).

Some 150 years ago the French poet Charles Baudelaire (1925) commented:

Every newspaper from the first to the last line is a web of horrors. And this disgusting aperitif every civilised European takes for his daily breakfast. I do not understand how a clean hand can touch a newssheet without getting cramps of nausea. (p. 356)

In the 1990s, Tony Blair did manage to scare me with his lies of weapons of mass destruction which could reach my home in London within minutes from Baghdad, not to mention mad cow disease, avian flu (Ebola!) and whatever other daily scares are being concocted. Never again! Yet, in the realm of ecopsychology, catastrophist views also abound, and many of their predictions in the last twenty-five years have not come true either. Shock tactics just

don't work with me. Do they, really, with anybody? For instance, Mary-Jane Rust and Nick Totton begin their recent book, *Vital Signs: Psychological Responses to Ecological Crisis* by quoting George Orwell: "The actual outlook is very dark, and any serious thought should start out from that fact" (Rust & Totton, 2012, p. xv), in response to which I do not feel invited to engage, but, rather, feel repelled because I just do not enjoy being driven into panic and paranoia. Are there not enough scary things out there? Does adding to their number with predictions of doom and gloom really help to change them? I want to face facts, not predictions based on the manipulation of computer statistics predicting a catastrophic future.

Just as this article is going to press, an interesting example of the Orwellian/Blairite "newspeak" appears in the UK *Guardian* newspaper, from none less than His Royal Highness (HRH) the Prince of Wales Himself, arguing against the above as if He's read it! In a recent address, as reported by Quinn (2014) HRH "launched an attack on climate sceptics, describing them as the 'headless chicken brigade' and accusing 'powerful groups of deniers' of engaging in intimidation" (p. 10). With near-religious fervour against potential heretical non-believers, he seems to regard sceptics and deniers as one and the same, and, no, here it's *not* the believers in an imminent catastrophe who scare us, but "All of a sudden, and with a barrage of sheer intimidation, we are told by powerful groups of deniers that the scientists are wrong and we must abandon all our faith into so much scientific evidence" (ibid., p. 10). *Yes*, Your Highness, *one* people, *one* faith, *one* church. He did add:

As you may possibly have noticed from time to time, I have tended to make a habit of sticking my head above the parapet and generally getting it shot off for pointing out what has always been blindingly obvious to me. (ibid., p. 10)

Now, now, Your Highness, no more violence. I would neither want to shoot your head off nor decapitate chickens, not even a blind one, but I'm afraid I very much agree (in just this instance!) with the former UK Conservative Chancellor Nigel Lawson, who last year, in response to similar sweeping statements, did accuse His Royal Highness "of engaging in 'apocalyptic rhetoric" (ibid., p. 10).

According to the Talmud, "We don't see the world as it is – we see the world as we are." (Rabbi Shemuel ben Nachmani, as quoted in the Talmudic tractate Berakhot, 55b) What if the Orwellian vision was just Orwell projecting his own depression into the future? (I have an older brother who does exactly that and has been expecting the imminent end of the world for a number years now.) This might be understood as a form of anger directed simultaneously both outwards as well as inwards. For Jung (1934/1964), "every psychological theory should be criticized in the first instance as a subjective confession" (para.1025; my emphasis). This is how I understand the doom-laden field of ecopsychology with its apocalyptic predictions for a future that, so I am made to believe, cannot possibly be other than catastrophic, without any possibility to save the planet.

In The Power of Now, Eckhart Tolle (1999) wrote:

[by] resisting what *is* ... you are creating unhappiness, conflict between the inner and outer. Your unhappiness is polluting not only your inner being and those around you but also the collective human psyche of which you are an inseparable part. The pollution of the planet is only an outward reflection of an inner psychic pollution. (p. 65)

Negativity is ... a psychic pollutant, and there is a deep link between the poisoning and destruction of nature and the vast negativity that has accumulated in the collective human psyche. No other life form on the planet knows negativity. ... Have you ever come across an unhappy flower or a stressed oak tree? Have you come across a depressed dolphin, a frog that has problems with self-esteem, a cat that cannot relax ...? The only animals that may occasionally experience something akin to negativity or show signs of neurotic behavior are those that live in close contact with humans. (p. 157)

[Y]our perception of the world is a reflection of your state of consciousness. ... our collective reality is largely a symbolic expression of fear and of the heavy layers of negativity that have accumulated in the human psyche. (pp. 164–166)

In "Fear of Breakdown" Winnicott (1989) described the psychic mechanism that we use to survive trauma, which, by definition, is the onslaught of overwhelming feelings: they get split off, but they do not vanish; the repressed returns to haunt us in the form of terrors, anxieties of *future* catastrophes. Winnicott understood these as the traumas of the past that we have already survived, at the cost of current depressions. These hauntings do have a purpose other than making our lives a misery: the feelings that were too much to cope with in the past demand to be dealt with, but passing them on like the proverbial hot potato by projecting, literally throwing them out, is no way to do that.

For me, an alternative lies in what the American philosopher and psychoanalyst Jonathan Lear (2006) calls *Radical Hope: Ethics in The Face of Cultural Devastation*, making it clear right from the start that this is not about turning a blind eye, but rather a hope that squarely does face reality, including all its Shadow sides and evils. Lear developed the concept of radical hope on the basis of the biography of the Native American Crow Chief Alaxchiiaahush (1846/7–1932) or Plenty Coups, meaning "Many Achievements". His lifetime nearly spans the century when the Native Americans faced cultural devastation and total annihilation,

not only the loss of their entire way of life ... but the concepts that made life meaningful beyond mere survival. ... The young future chief was called to dream on behalf of the tribe when he was nine years old. (Eyres, 2009, p. 22)

He dreamed of the annihilation of the different Native American people and their way of life in the form of all the trees of a forest being blown down by a mighty storm, except for one: the tree that housed the chickadee, "the most insignificant of all forest creatures. The chickadee made up for in mental strength what he lacked in physical power: the chickadee was a great listener, willing to learn from others" (ibid., p. 22). The interpretation given by the tribe's elders was that "the Crow [people] should learn from the wisdom of the chickadee; not succumb to despair or go down fighting in a blaze of glory" (ibid.), as some of the neighbouring tribes did. The path Plenty Coups chose, based on his childhood dream and with an immense courage, was to find an alternative to the tribe's warrior tradition and to arrange themselves with the overwhelming might of the whites. Fully facing their cultural devastation, his radical hope "wagers a visceral trust that there is enough goodness in the world for things to turn out ... alright" (ibid.), even if there is nothing rationally knowable on which to base such trust.

This touches the spiritual realm, and I am surprised about the shyness of another woman in the discussion group when she suggests the importance of spirituality, as if she is using a "dirty word" she expects most of those present will find unacceptable. It must be well over twenty years ago that Andrew Samuels started to urge a re-sacralisation of politics, formulated later, for example, in an article "A new anatomy of spirituality: clinical and political demands the psychotherapist cannot ignore" (Samuels, 2004) (published in an early issue of this journal). Samuels' initiative breathed new life into ideas that Gross and his anarchist friends Erich Mühsam (1878–1934) and Johannes Nohl (1882–1963) had first formulated over a hundred years ago, when they conceptualised a mutually embracing, dialectical relationship between individual relating, radical politics, and spirituality (Heuer, 2009). Does the work of Martin Luther King (1929–1968) or Desmond Tutu not amply demonstrate the vital role of spirituality in achieving political change?

BACK TO THE CONFERENCE

Back in the concluding plenary, Viola Sampson gives a moving account of her work supporting activists, including a description of a harrowing injury suffered from police brutality. I feel moved – and torn. Of course I want to help, but, GOD! This *is* a complicated issue! Will you misunderstand me? I don't respond, but I'm thinking: can risking life and limb, literally, in the example given, truly help the cause, whatever it is? Again, as with the Hamburg demonstration, right now, only four days later, I can remember neither aim nor cause of that activist demonstration, just, in this instance, the horrific nature of the injury. Yet, with *all* due respect to the injured, might I still be allowed to voice doubts? For me, there appears to be an aspect of this where the magnitude of the sacrifice – crippled for life! – silences any questions, questions like: "Do martyrs really further 'the cause', whatever it may be?" "We don't need another hero" – do we need another martyr? Of course I feel concern for the activists in a freezing Russian prison, but it does not increase my concern for the Arctic.

I am reminded of a meeting at the Globe Theatre, London, last year, of the AZ Theatre (www.aztheatre.org.uk), rallying support for their project "Opening Signs" about theatre work with traumatised children in Gaza. One of the deeply moving contributions was a reading of letters from an imprisoned Palestinian on hunger strike. There was something about the violent implications in his determination to risk all which jarred with me. What message does he not just give to me, but to his wife, and his children?

I grew up without a father myself – mine died of natural causes when I was but a toddler. Before that, however, a teacher in Nazi Germany, he was denounced by a neighbour for remarks which were seen as "wehrkraftzersetzend", that is, undermining the power of the German army. Interrogated by various Gestapo officers, he at last found himself vis-à-vis a former pupil of his who told him to go home for the time being, although he said that he doubted that he could continue to protect my father after the "Endsieg", the final victory. This was when my mother was pregnant with me. For a long time I have thought that my family exaggerated the danger my father and we all were in. I know now that people were murdered for lesser offences, and that whole families were put into concentration camps. I feel somewhat proud and relieved, but also angry; was my father not aware of the risk he took in expressing in public a hope for a quick end of the war which could only end in defeat? Did that former pupil save my life before I was even born?

Also, of course, there is yet again, the issue of self-care: if I put my health and life at risk for the sake of a cause, where is the self-care then? Where is the boundary between truly serving a collective cause or the potentially addictive thrill-seeking of an adrenaline rush? What is the extent of preventative efforts? If I had a client engaging in extreme sports like running in desert endurance races, base-jumping, free-climbing, and so on, it would certainly be a grave concern. Levine (1997) wrote: "Unresolved trauma can... lead us around in evertightening circles of dangerous re-enactment, victimization and unwise exposure to danger" (p. 32). Can questions like these be raised and considered within the Activist Trauma Support Network (https://www.activist-trauma.net/) or would I, too, be denounced as "wehrkraftzersetzend", undermining, in this instance, the power of the resistance? Important links between these questions and activists' risk-taking are being mentioned. I am not questioning the cause, just suggesting that we need to consider the motivation(s). which might well also contain aspects of compulsively recreating earlier traumatic situations. I see it as one of the most important tasks of activists' support to prevent such acting-out, and not only to heal wounds suffered. As with soldiers dying in Afghanistan and elsewhere, I feel deeply troubled by their deaths, but also question as to what made them volunteer in the first instance, if not a culture which continues to celebrate anger and violence in most movies and video games, in most newscasts and newspapers? As Eckart Tolle (2005) put it:

If you were not familiar with contemporary civilization, if you had come here from another age or another planet, one of the things that would amaze you is that millions of people love and pay money to watch humans kill and inflict pain on each other and call it "entertainment". (pp. 152–153)

ANNIVERSARIES

At the conference, one day before Remembrance Sunday, and two days before Armistice Day, there is also mention of the commemorative red poppy badges, and that some now wear a white one for peace, available in Housman's political bookshop down the road. Someone says that these white poppies also allude to the white feather, given during the Great War to shame conscientious objectors. I immediately think, "Oh, I'll get one on my way home", but then again, I feel torn. Yes, I am against war, but do I support the hesitations regarding military intervention in Syria? For the conscientious objectors, I'd wear a white feather anytime — maybe one could have a badge like that. Synchronistically, I later discover on one of the leaflets at the conference that someone (William Bloom) has already thought of



this, although not as a badge but as a logo – for a certificate course in Spiritual Studies and Companionship (see http://www.williambloom.com/spiritual-companions/).

I'm thinking of what must surely be one of my favourite TV moments of all times. More often than not, in the BBC series "Who Do You Think You Are?" (http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b007t575), people, movingly, discover fathers or grandfathers who were heroes in the two great wars. Then one of the subjects, the comedian and chat-show host Alan Carr, found that one of his direct ancestors was a deserter in the Great War; back home on furlough after weeks at the front in northern France, he "disappeared" under an assumed name, married his fianceé, and was never found out. Realising that, without this, he might well never have been born, Carr, punching the air in delight, exclaimed, "He was a lover, not a fighter!"

Speaking of anniversaries, in the past's presence today, I remind participants at the Conference that 9 November was the day, in 1919, on which the anarchist Erich Mühsam was the first to proclaim the Bavarian Soviet Republic, the short-lived attempt to establish a socialist state in the form of a democratic workers' council republic in the Free State of Bavaria. (In 1934 Mühsam was murdered in Oranienburg concentration camp.)

I also mention in the plenary that today, 9 November 2013, is the 75th anniversary of the first nationwide pogrom in Germany and Austria (one country at the time), the so-called "Kristallnacht" and I say that this term should never be used without inverted commas, as it is a Nazi euphemism, "crystal-night", suggesting a night of champagne and chandeliers. Even the English non-literal translation, "night of broken glass", remains euphemistic, as infinitely more than glass was broken then: nearly one hundred Jews were killed; thousands were taken from their homes and incarcerated in concentration camps; 267 synagogues were destroyed; and some 7500 Jewish-owned shops were smashed and looted. There is an article today in the Guardian by Jones (2013), where "Kristallnacht" has no inverted commas, accompanied by another, co-authored by the same author, about the rise of anti-semitism across present-day Europe (Jones & Syal, 2013).

To my knowledge, an earlier anniversary has passed unmentioned. 2013 is also the 75th anniversary of the infamous international conference in Evian, France, in July 1938, just four months before the November pogrom, convened by President Roosevelt, who invited representatives of 33 countries (Western Europe, the Americas, Australia) to put strict limitations on immigration of Jewish refugees from Germany. Implicitly, the Nazis understood this as a tacit acceptance of their genocidal plans (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89vian_Conference).

With regard to the earlier point I made about the artificially constructed dichotomy of therapists/activists, at the very end of the conference, Nick comes up with the felicitous term "people with different forms of activism"! Again, *Thank You*!

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