

The World Alethea Dreamed of: The Deep Shift We Need for a New Planetary Future

Keynote Address at the Global Summit: Building a Global Citizens' Movement organized by DEEEP (Developing Europeans' Engagement for the Eradication of Poverty – European Union), CIVICUS (World Alliance for Citizen Participation), CONCORD and GCAP (Global Call to Action against Poverty)
Protea Parktonian, Johannesburg, November 11, 2013

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Ladies and gentlemen, I have an announcement to make – a most momentous one, I think; it's certainly the most important thing I will say here...and it is this: recently, I became a father.

Well, if that doesn't endear me to you, then nothing I have to say ever will! Yes, my dearest 'entangled particle' – my life partner – Ej and I held Alethea, our daughter, in our trembling arms for the first time about three months ago – as oily, grateful tears streamed down our faces.

For those of you who are fathers, and have hopefully not forgotten the ecstatic bliss of those initial moments, you can understand how I feel.

Some moments remain with you.

I could never forget that evening, somewhere in a small maternity home in Chennai, Southern India. I waited in the sterilized, whitewashed hallway – paralyzed by the excruciating twilight-ness of been in-between the urge to rescue my wife from her pain and the impulse to run from mine. As Ej's bloodcurdling cries stole the atmosphere, I paced up and down the terrazzo floor, instructing myself – nay, begging myself – not to cry, my lips lubricated by free-flowing tears that obviously paid no heed to my pleadings. The night was not without its little hilarities, though. I vividly

recall the nurses laughing – intrigued by the skinny African fellow that didn't have a clue – so much for 'black power'; or when, moments after she was eventually born, I dragged my own box of clothes to the operating room to dress Alethea! I remember my Indian mother-in-law's quizzical glances – as she discovered afresh just how severely effeminate her only son-in-law was.

Alethea was born on Wednesday, the 10th of July, 2013 – behind a white door, and behind the gushy scree of my tears; she arrived at 6:37pm; the nurses clocked it at 6:33. Of course, I couldn't care a farthing about which was more accurate. All I wanted to do was burst through that rude white door, hold my daughter, and comfort my goddess.

And I did just that. My exhausted wife sighing by my side, I held Alethea and stared at her face – trying to make double sure she had as little resemblance to me as possible, and hoping she looked more like her beautiful mother. And she stared back approvingly – just before she broke into yet another series of bellowing wails for other kinds of attention.

You see, children enchant the world. They are the prime reason why I still find it plausible to believe the universe has not given up on us. They bring hope and light and play to our otherwise bland existences.

But not everything about children is happy and light and amusing. Children are not trivial; there is a depth and sternness to their play, a method to their chaos, an unwritten message in their apparent frivolities. A frown in their cute giggles. They are heralds of hard questions and difficult considerations. Children always arrive with some kind of disruption? On the muddy streets of colluding and conspiratorial silences, it is the voice of children that disrupts our long-winded speeches and pompous parades – as a little child once did for that fabled naked Emperor. They urge us to die to our fears, and prod us to embrace hidden possibilities too magical for our

sophistication to bear. If we would listen to them, we could unlearn today and take hold of tomorrow. The future always speaks ruthlessly through them.

So it was the case that the first time I held Alethea, I immediately started to contemplate the world we had brought her into, and the kind of world we wanted her raised in. I started to think about the future, but I wasn't so sure about it anymore.

The world of my teenage years – the one that accommodated my growth spurts and sullen fear of members of the opposite sex – was a markedly different place, a world without subtext. You might recognize it: it was the world of many convenient truths – such as the glory of fast food, the superiority of all white people, the rightness of my Christian upbringing, the irreconcilable boundary between good and evil, and the inevitability of schools, jobs and leadership. In that world, making money ultimately translated into living a good life – and the best chances for that life belonged to those who studied hard at school, graduated top of the class, earned a good salary, and followed the rules of society without questioning them. People were poor mainly because they didn't work hard enough, and the persons who were fabulously rich, famous and powerful were deservedly that way because they had worked their way to the 'top'. I remember my old obsessions with shiny books and their grinning Caucasian authors who preached about *that* 'top', that dazzling zenith of upward mobility where only the best specimens of humanity dwelled. Their stories promised me my place in the sun if only I learned to apply myself unsparingly to the principles of success and dominance. As I slowly internalized these parameters of perception, in ways that are often left unarticulated, I learned to take my experiences for granted, to trust that the world was singular – that there was no other way to conceive it. I learned to believe that value was in scarce supply, and that to be loved, appreciated and embraced I had to 'make something of myself' along the well-articulated trajectories of social conformity.

Of course, there were many urgent problems that needed solutions. But thanks to the power of science and technology, rational thought and moral might, we were

progressively filling up our empty spaces of ignorance about the material universe – and soon, we could replicate the same successes we enjoyed in unraveling reality in our attempts to build a society where no one would be left behind. As such, I believed that if we, eventually, built formal education institutions everywhere, championed the monologue of democracy, gave out our money frequently, managed how we created waste, and rigorously trained young people to handle the leadership challenges of our century more effectively and efficiently, we could build a more interesting world. *That* was the promise of my extensive education, the not-so-subtle civilizational message that motivated my commitment to my job tasks, and the clarion call I sought to fully surrender to. It would take a seismic shift in my thinking about the nature of truth, the politics of clinical practice, and meeting Ej, my wife, to completely erode the foundations of a world I once believed were immutably sure.

Today, old certainties are shifting, and the orthodox conception of the world we inherited from our collective histories is fast fading away. We are discovering that our planet and our ways of life are miles deep in an abysmal multidimensional crisis – one that has left a scar so profound that it can no longer be said with any assurance that we inhabit the same planet our fathers once did. Around the world, in puddles of resistance, in deconstructive spaces of indigenous reclamation, in sonnets of longing, more and more people are realizing that there's something fundamentally wrong about our globalizing civilization, something demonstrably atrocious about the narratives we have enthroned. There is a grim and sober awakening gripping people everywhere, who now realize that neoliberal market economics has not brought about a more socially just world, or guaranteed wealth for the many; that technological innovation has not somehow resulted in the utopian world promised by ancient capitalist lords, when they first began to convert our lands into factors of production; our stories into vestigial remnants of a superstitious era that needed saving; our relationships into commodities and our futures into colonized extensions of the present.

People are awakening to the consciousness that progress and development, however sustainable, will not summon a world that works for everyone, and that no collective enterprise that treats the earth as fodder for some imagined growth project, creates

urban centers and centrally planned cities of concrete and ash that do away with the very urgent human need for intimacy, converts wondrous work into jobs and artificial spaces of legitimized exploitation, homogenizes our unique cultural differences under the asphalted banner of globalization, drives human activity on the hegemonic lubrication of profit, entrusts decision-making to the ivory frameworks of giant corporations, big business, and nation-states, and preaches to us the insidious idea that we are never enough, is worth sustaining.

People are waking up to see that our schools and citadels of learning have not made the world better, and that the problem of ecological devastation is not a minor blip in the larger picture as our mainstream media narratives seem to suggest. It seems we will not easily recover from the wounds inflicted ironically in a relatively short period of modern human history, and that even if we found the existential rudeness to discontinue our modes of production, our efforts to convert the cosmos into commodity, and our obsession with growth for growth's sake, something deep has already stirred in the bowels of Mother Earth – something that cannot be returned to what it once was.

We are losing our faith in the once inspiring image of the tireless leader with arms akimbo – the corporate bureaucrat, the bespectacled technocrat and their dog-eared blueprints of salvation – leading us to the Promised Land. The old screenshots of world leaders gathered in conclaves of expediency, concerned about Africa, global poverty and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, no longer conjures the soaring feeling of hope they might have in the eighties or nineties. Today, what animates our pixelated surfaces, and inspires our hope for a different kind of world, is the anonymous sea of protesters flooding the Gezi Park in Istanbul, images of the Egyptian crisis, and the embodied Guy-Fawkesian faces of November 5th occupying Wall Street. These people have no blueprints, no final agendas, no lists of demands – yet their listlessness speaks to something buried within us, activates our political imagination for change, and reminds us that heroes are not what they used to be.

As I take in these messages and widespread agitation for revolution, I remember that the stentorian voice of Martin Luther King once stirred the black nation to assert her place in history; the 240-mile Gandhi Salt March from Sabarmati to Dandi inspired thousands of Indians to resist their oppressive British overlords. And every day, an unprecedented number of not-for-profits, NGOs and civil activists' organizations are mushrooming into existence – fighting for a better world. The precious contributions of civil activists have helped sensitize people around the world about the oppressive and exploitative actions of states and huge corporations. Without these voices, many of our last strongholds would have been infiltrated by forces of totalitarian consumerism, by repressive governments that do not care for the wellbeing of their people. As the quest to actualize the Millennium Development Goals might suggest, these people are fighting for better schools, better healthcare systems, better work conditions, and cleaner, safer environments where human collectives can thrive in prosperity and peace. As NGOs and champions of human rights crystallize into the avant-garde voices calling for institutions to be better stewards of human existence, we are closer than ever to fulfilling these MDGs.

And herein dwells my greatest concern: I fear that the institutionalized quest for a better world demands a more profound, a more subtle shift in motivation, in priorities and strategies than is currently being appreciated by today's NGOs and civic societies. I fear that our corporate efforts for better systems are increasingly part of the problem.

In many ways, we have worked with the idea that we could make the system better, that we could task the herd-masters and hold their consciences to the light of our moral strength, and squeeze out good juices from the bad bunch. We convince ourselves that the poison is in the pot, and if we focused our collective actions well enough, we could extract the insidious fluids from the cauldron of our shared experiences. Some adventures of mine have however helped me realize that the alchemical transformation we need today is deeper, much deeper than cleaning out the pot.

Late last year, in my quest to explore my own people's approaches to healing mental illnesses, I sat at the stony feet of six Yoruba shamans – traditional healers and descendant-artists of ancient stories – to learn what Eurocentric paradigms could not teach me about being human and being well. It was my doctorate research into indigenous healing systems, and my objectives were to explore similarities between conventional psychotherapeutic methods and their non-Western counterparts. I asked one of them about how they defined and classified mental illnesses, how they identified psychopathological conditions, and how they intervened in these conditions. For most of the time, they struggled to situate their responses within the interrogative exoskeletons I had devised; then they stared at me, nonplussed, baffled by my questions. It slowly dawned on me that the ways I framed my inquiries betrayed deep Western biases and preferences for processing information: I expected them to have a neat classification of mental disorders – or at least I expected peer-reviewed definitions and organized intervention techniques. These men, however, had no easy definitions. In fact, they had none at all. They told stories, and invited me to draw my own conclusions. They didn't think of mental illnesses as molecular issues – as things that demanded sustained relationships with progressively smaller entities. My most profound epiphany came when I asked one of the shamans what he thought was missing in Western psychiatry and psychotherapy. His response shattered my academic impenetrability: "Nothing" he said. "What is missing cannot be merely added in piecemeal fashion. The way the Whiteman sees mental illness is different. They see it as something that is wrong with the brain; we see it as a dance with spirit." In the ways I interpreted them, the problem was our entire industrialized notion of mental illness, the stories we told – not so much the persons involved.

Those encounters enlarged my political imagination, and have pushed me to recognize that we invented the modern ethics of philanthropy and poverty eradication to escape the need to change a money system that is fuelled by the very existence of poverty and scarcity; we created an industry of 'waste management' that tempers our anger and numbs us to the fact that we abide in a cradle-to-grave, use-and-dump global economy - a behemoth that necessarily generates 'waste' by silently celebrating

planned obsolescence. We institutionalized illiteracy reduction programs and no-one-left-behind-schemes through our schools - conveniently forgetting that because of the politics of correctness, the dynamics of conformity and standardized assessment, our schools effectively create large populations of people 'left behind'. We legitimized 'environmental protection' - all the while shielding our ears from the subversive question echoing in the fringes, tugging at our collective imagination: why do we inevitably have to live in a world in which the 'environment' needs protection? The problem of poverty did not 'exist' until we introduced a monetary framework that reified scarcity, valorized ownership and celebrated property accumulation; the problem of waste was invented by the system that pretends to address it; ignorance wasn't certified until schools were invented; and, the health of our ecological systems will always be an issue - so long as we continue to perpetuate a civilization whose very foundation is the idea that 'nature' is a resource to be exploited for our fanciful whims. Clay Shirkey reminds us that 'institutions will try to preserve the problem they were designed to solve'; those Yoruba shamans I met would have put it differently: the poison is not *in* the pot, the poison *is* the pot.

This here is the crux of the matter.

What we crave is a society that affirms our hidden, subversive quests for a life of our own making - a culture that does not belittle our decisions to cook, to play, to sleep a little longer, to swim for endless hours, to stop producing needlessly in jobs that barely support us or allow us explore the magnificence of consciousness. But you see, NGOs, MDGs and civic society organizations - as they are presently articulated - will not bring us closer to those horizons. In many ways, civic liberties are the children of the very system we must begin hospicing today. Fighting for civil rights, in a twisted way, is what a corporatized world (with brands, sweeping narratives, and commoditized relationships) will have us do. Of course, there are exceptions to this - and I do not mean to be so abrupt and inconsiderate as to suggest that the history of civic participation is system-supporting.....what needs to be said however is that systems are not 'things', but living, breathing creatures we collectively summon. As such, like

other organisms, systems change, adapt, become more resistant, more intelligent. The system is highly adaptable, accommodating our angst, ingesting our disenchantment, and blending it into a pasty distillation of Trojan slogans, easy t-shirts, convenient policies and nonsense syllables. The dialectics of resistance often reinforce the thesis of normativity we strive to transcend. It must be said that the history of civil action has left uncontested the substructures of being that need to be uprooted today. Nothing short of contesting culture will bring us closer to the world our hearts tell us is possible.

Brothers and sisters, we need a shift of a profoundly different sort for a new kind of world, and this crisis presents us with an unprecedented opportunity to find the right amount of irreverence to make this happen.

A good friend of mine, Charles Eisenstein, puts this thinking in context by urging us to recognize that we are in the *space between stories* – a curiously engaging period between paradigms in which predictable orthodoxies and old stories no longer apply, and yet we still do not have a feel for new territories bursting into our consciousness. The old ways of relating with the world, the cognitive habits, the familiar methods with which we have processed and organized information, as well as the very nature of information become blurry, ambiguous and chaotic – demanding a new language to access hitherto invisible landscapes. Because our experiences have seemingly transcended our linguistic spectrums, we need a new language, a deeper shift that does not depend on our former ways of thinking about the world. We need different consciousness technologies and radically disruptive ways of perceiving the systemic challenges that greet us each morning.

Along with Charles and many other paradigm-disruptive voices echoing across the planet, silhouetted by the falling debris and ideological ruins of our civilization, I would like to softly suggest – hopefully without the cocksureness and certainty that defines academic practice – that a small number of considerations recommend themselves to us in this *space between stories*.

One, we can no longer afford to think of the system as an objective referent – a towering quixotic tower into which we can invest all our righteous antagonism, *for the system is us*. The ancient tales about enemies, conquest, domination and colonization served a paradigm that assumed we are separate from the other, distant from the earth, lords and conquerors of the elements. Nothing could be more important than realizing today that a new world will not arise by conquering the present one – for the new world is caught up in this one. If you have fought long and hard to stop corporate giants from stripping indigenous peoples off their lands, their sacred sites and their commonwealths, or to halt the murderous decimation of whales in our oceans, it becomes very difficult not to think about the world as a necessary duality, a field divided between good and evil. How then do we qualify the actions of ExxonMobil, Monsanto and the banking elite who are siphoning our wealth, except with those familiar binary designations? I do not know, and I am just as confused as anyone out there. But through the haziness of my confusion, I recognize that it is easy to rail against the evil machinations of an assumedly distant system, and list out all the wrongs of the much harangued 1 percent – the banking elite and global corporations exploiting humanity. It's even easier to slip into the complacency of innocence – of believing that if we ate less meat, switched off the light more often, planted a garden in our backyards, spoke more glowingly about a 'new world', and studiously observed our carbon footprints, we are more spiritual than the others. We are the good guys. While this may be so (and I cannot come to terms with how this is possible at the moment), while it may be true that we are apparently doing more than others to bring about a better world, I think it no longer serves to perpetuate those old oppositional versus statements and cute stereotypes – the most pernicious of which are the stereotypes about ourselves. We suppose we are somehow removed, separate and distant from the system – which is funny, for every time we use a toilet, walk on a pavement, or look at the clock, we are reinforcing the intricate mechanisms that lie at the heart of the 'system'; we are sleeping with the enemy. It is perhaps time for a different kind of activism – not the one that is summarily concluded on the angry surface of a placard, not the one that is fuelled by the caricature of a bureaucratic class,

and not the one that seeks to replace one tyranny with another – however benevolent. I would suggest that we think of this activism as a shared journey of reclamation – at least to escape the discomfiting feeling that I am recommending anything new. What are we reclaiming? We are reclaiming humility – a humble reappraisal of the limits and import of human agency in the grander narratives about a magical universe we inhabit, a universe that seems more intelligent, more conscious and more sensuously alive than we are; we are reclaiming our disenchantments, vulnerabilities and wounds – for they are silent town-criers pointing out pathways we never once considered possible; we are reclaiming our fabulous voices in all their flawed and broken imperfections – letting go of the need to be correct, holy or different; and, most of all, we are reclaiming the other – our inescapable intimacy with the stranger, our alliance with our own contradiction. If this project of humble reclamation does not lie at the heart of our contrived movements for a better world today, I fear we run the risk of perpetuating the very anxieties and ways of seeing we so assiduously resist today.

Secondly, in this *space between stories*, we must run towards the dark, probably much more than we are willing to situate ourselves in the light. It is perhaps a matter of small consequence – *but some consequence nonetheless* – that when people are dying, they speak about approaching the light. On the other hand, a seed unfurls in the soft compress of dirt; a butterfly is stitched and woven together by imaginal cells in the secret chambers of the chrysalis; a human baby is summoned in the shadows of a womb. Isn't it curious that life almost always begins in dark places? And if this reads true for us, what role does not-knowing, silliness, madness, serendipitous trust and uninstitutionalized play hold as we strive to enact a world our hearts believe is possible? The shamans I met spoke glowingly about losing one's way, and playfully embracing the world. It's a hard pill to swallow for people such as us *who want change now*, who see so much injustice on the streets, and who feel confident of making effective, long-lasting changes and building another world. However, we must not be so presumptuous as to suppose it is simply enough to build another kind of world – for though the edifices of our collective strength may stand resolute in severe storms and may meet the highest standards of 'quality', their hallways will always be haunted by

the ghosts of previous worlds, summoned again by the pride of calculated action...the itch of the final answer, the tyranny of the single manifesto. We are reminded over and over again by the bones of previous civilizations that the best of the universe often comes to us in moments we don't anticipate, in periods of silence, in the meantime. Imagine what the world would be like if we had to control everything or plan for everything – the progress and regress of waves, the occasional haste of a passing comet, the restless seasons, the fleeting promiscuity of a human blink, or the beating steadiness of our own hearts. Perhaps in losing control we reclaim security in a way that we could never do when we try to own and lord over the unexpected. Perhaps the space between stories is an invitation to drop Ockham's infallible razor, to let go of our linear rationalities and rectilinear assumptions, and fall headlong into the always mysterious festival of foreign light and dark that life is. Accordingly, we need stupid people, mad communities, esoteric mystics and babbling poets – persons who cannot be understood, whose crazed outbursts are a Medieval festival in the logical temples of today's curt civilization; whose very gaze undercuts the impenetrability of our cosmos. I cannot help but feel excited at the prospects of unspeakable treasures we will happen upon if we embrace the dark more preposterously, more generously.

And finally, in this *space between stories*, we *can* come to terms with the soft whispers of a rude idea now making the rounds across the fields of our shared awareness. This idea is the logical corollary of thinking about the world as a whole, instead of fragmented parts. Yet, it is probably the most uncouth thing that can be said about our work as activists, as volunteers, as thinkers, as fathers and mothers in a world gone wrong, and humans dedicated to a higher sense of justice than is probably available in our current institutions. It is this: *there is no injustice*.

Think about this for a moment – however repulsive the notion might be to you. What if what we conveniently call 'here' is intricately complicit in the existence of 'there'? What if our work is not about replacing the 1 percent with the 99 percent, but more about the 100 percent our imaginations hardly accommodate? What if the enemy is us? I am sure we can readily agree with the hidden nobility in such contemplations –

they are not new; the begging question however is: how do we construct human agency and enterprise so that these thoughts can be more amplified in how we approach the world?

Concomitantly, how can we make that crucial planetary shift towards a world our hearts tell us is possible? What would such a world that embodied our highest potential look like? How can we reframe civic action today so that we touch the heart of a new world? What do we need to do to live in a world that is beautiful for our children, our Alethea, your daughters and sons? Daniel Pinchbeck echoes the same inquiry when he says: "I suspect we would prefer to live in a society that is closer to a perpetual celebration and ceremony, where everyone was fully awake to their creative and erotic potential, where the present was the sacred origin, perpetually renewing itself. How would such a society sustain itself? There would be no borders, no bureaucracy, no shit jobs, no Panopticon. If we realize that this scenario is plausible given our current knowledge, how do we build the ladder that leads to such an outcome?" I do not know. I do not know the answers to these questions. And I not only suspect that we do not either, but that we do not need to.

Somehow, I suspect that our children bear a crucial message for us in these transitory moments. I think that in learning to be with them, we not only find clues about the new world now demanding our attention, we find wisdom for catalyzing her emergence. Somehow, buried in their non-linguistic choruses of presence are the signposts to the disenchanting lands where we first forgot how to be human - how to be wild and free, how to be at home with and in the mystery that is silent...silent, humming reality. I do not mean to suggest that our children want us to be 'primitive cavemen'; neither do I think primitive cavemen were any less off than we are now. Our children are the portal to the worlds we long for. They will not live by the rules that have so defined us. Their innocent play disturbs us. They teach us that only in challenging the creeds and orthodoxies of our time will we find that many of our answers today are no longer needed, no longer suitable to our evolving aspirations, and therefore need to be retired. Only in hospicing those suitably 'old' sentiments will we

rise to the poetic challenge of our time, to the glory of our shared disillusionment, and to the amniotic moments itching to remake us for another kind of world. What children invite us to do is to turn to each other again, to attend to those little things that do not register on the spectrum of institutional imperatives. The shift we seek - the exodus from these cities of abuse to communes of fellowship - will not be borne on the backs of the most astute analyses, the most compelling historical survey, the loudest cries of our many activist-brothers and sisters, or the most correct answer. The shift we need is deeper, as we might already appreciate. There's more at our disposal than resistance, protests, advocacy and - more than we suspect. It is a turning to each other.

This is why Ej my wife and I, along with many friends from Nigeria, Mexico, India, Australia and the United States, initiated the Koru project. Koru is an emerging multi-vocational platform that seeks to connect neighbouring circles, their diaries of exploration, and emerging wisdoms on how to live more harmoniously and in shamanic intimacy with others, with ourselves, and with the planet. We think that it is in turning to each other again - in small circles of mutual affirmation and support - that the potentials for bringing about a more socially just world arise. We believe that our disenchantments with the world hold the greatest promise for transforming it. We suspect that the universe is more effusively complex and mysterious than expertise can ever condone, than theory could ever catch up with - and that when we are willing to lose control, trust in the serendipity of our experiences, even failure could be a portal to undiscovered ways of being. We think that the revolution we seek is already happening in small places, in untelevised ways, beyond the bureaucratic constraints of memos and annual reports - however important these might be. We believe that the system is not the cause - the system is a consequence of a deeper narrative. Making war with the system not only increases the violence, but it perpetuates its internal logic. And so we set out thinking about how to build a deinstitutionalized movement, an invisible revolution, which connected the miracles of consciousness emergence already afoot across the planet. Our aim was to connect people who are experimenting boldly with what it means to be human or part of a human collective. There would be

no imposed, top-down principles, no fixed outcomes, no pressure to succeed. We felt and still feel that under these circumstances, the once hard boundaries between activists and non-activists melt away. We feel it is a most commendable way to attract more people into a new story, to inspire neighbouring – the vital element necessary to the thriving of our species, and to systematically disrupt the programming of the status quo.

Our journey with Koru has only just begun, but I bring this logic to you today – with the modesty of a child fresh from the matrixes of the womb. I cannot answer – with any sort of finality – what tomorrow looks like. I sometimes find certainty to be repulsive, and vagueness to be advantageous and appropriate to the times; but, I believe we can – with fits and starts – continue with our poetic visions of the many kinds of worlds we would like to inhabit. A world without 9 to 5 jobs perhaps? A world without state boundaries and barb-wired fences. A world in which we can grow our own food – without the genetic-technological interferences of companies like Monsanto. A world without neoliberal economics and its assumptions of scarcity, violence and fear. A world without poverty and many pathways to health and wellbeing. Whatever the case may be, we must realize that the path to a radically different planetary culture will not be linear, comfortable, or predictable – but it will be more than worth our while. Top-down officialdom, adherence to bureaucratically determined benchmarks, better funding, more protests, more efficient ways of disclosing annual reports and data, flashier pamphlets and logos that more adaptable to Apple iPads will all not necessarily inspire these landscapes we seek.

To build a movement of real consequences, to reconnect with people at the rawest places of their lives, to build a planetary force of real stories, we cannot continue to rely on the eminence of expertise, the papacy of our ‘consciences’, or the comfort of consensus. It is high-time we retired into sanctuaries of possibility, in neighboring circles that inspire us to live differently. Our placards have served us well; now, more than ever, we must gather them together, and reward them with a burial ceremony they deserve – on pyres, aflame, under the superintendence of the moon. There we

will burn them and create nightly bonfires, around which we would summon sanctuaries of re-enchantment. The heat of our togetherness will heal us of the syndrome of *activistia*, which I fancy is the all-too-familiar and nagging despair that we are not doing enough to change the world – owing to the myopic assumption that we ought to change the world, that we must be perfect images of the worlds we prefer or that we are not complicit in perpetuating the present one, and that we are the only agents to be reckoned with.

This is not at all to say that we must immediately close up shop and begin singing *kumbaya* on the streets. I hope that is not the picture you are painting in your heads. What I recommend is a shared process of deinstitutionalizing our efforts for a new world. What I urge is that we revisit the concept of civic action, and adopt a new politics of engagement – thus exploring a larger palette of thrilling possibilities. The tenuous outlines of my thoughts might be made a little more definite and resolute if our various civic society organizations forged a common alliance, a trans-local network that tapped into the meta-intelligences of multiple neighboring sites. The alliance would be non-linear and multi-cosmological – a kaleidoscopic recalibration of consciousness at many levels of social expression – thus embracing indigenous neighboring platforms, psychedelic communities, experimental communes, storytelling groups and small local support unions that are unhinging themselves from the grid of a broken civilization. What would characterize these circles of exploration are people, coming together, supporting each other in exploring disruptive ways of living, scripting their experiences in shared diaries of exploration, and sharing insights with similar groups across the planet – connected not only by the internet, but by other resources of consciousness we are now becoming aware of. We can use current technology and indigenous systems – a renewed shamanic affinity to earth and spirit – to form these networks...not mass movements spread thin, but compelling collectives weighted by nodes of power and voice. This network could also be comprised of helpers, who like imaginal cells in the chrysalis, inspire people to turn to one another – in indigenously appropriate and contextually relevant neighboring groups – for their greatest support.

What would these people do when they come together? How do we attract them to this meta-network of rejuvenation? Not with employment letters and promises of attractive salaries; not with glitzy campaigns that warn people to turn off their lights more often. A movement of consequence will connect with people at very carnal levels, at the visceral domain of their most unarticulated disenchantments and fears, at the subconscious level where they have internalized stories about themselves, others and the world. Engaging people must be a sustained effort – people with people – without final agendas or top-down objectives. The network will support them only in terms of connecting them to other nodes of reclamation.

Such an alliance would be more powerful than any protest or any policy change, because at its heart would be a recognition that unless we uproot the substructures of this civilization by *turning to ourselves*, we do not stand a chance at summoning a better tomorrow. We can start reclaiming territory and unlearning our distant, alienating corporatized lives run by fossils and fast food; we can start learning to be people again. Ej and I, in our own experiments and hopes of reclaiming terra firma, and being free from the corporatized world recognize that the promise of revolutionary change and the motivation to usurp is probably the system's trickiest ploy to reinstate itself. If we need a movement at all, then it cannot be a movement of brands and flashy ads, a movement of heroes and cheap polemic. At its heart would be the humble realization that there are many ways in which we can prepare – and yet, in more ways than we can imagine, we are being prepared for the 'next steps' in consciousness.

In my travels around the world, from Chennai to the high-spirited atmosphere at Gezi Park, from Penang and Wilderswil to the hippy culture of Byron Bay, I am sensing this strong tidal wave of untamed potential crashing through the barriers of our normative experiences. I am seeing how small collectives are reclaiming their cultures, affirming their abundance, acknowledging their vulnerabilities, sharing their disenchantments, celebrating their failures, learning to see strangers as brothers and sisters, learning to laugh and cry without judgment, learning to question their

assumptions about the world, learning to act and be acted upon – all in the soft intimacy of merely being together. I am seeing amazing persons like Manish in India, whose walking out of today's job culture, is rekindling in others close to him a new appreciation for the value of work; I see Irma in South Africa, whose very feminine resistance of the status quo and insistence on a world that works for her and her daughter (whom she has also called Alethea) has inspired countless people around the world – including me; I see Mark Boyle in Ireland, whose bold experiment to live without money is rousing a new generation of people to question their stories about abundance and survival. These are the heroes we must turn to. They remind us that the guru is not a new blueprint, not a new policy, not a new theory hatched in the ivory towers of our land; the guru is us – fully embodied people with names, with identities, rousing and spectacular.

Let us leave aside the gratification of the familiar and recognize that the world has to be wildly re-imagined and re-created to suit the needs of people and planet in the 21st century. This is not an either/or, past/present battle either. It is about negotiating, re-negotiating, and re-structuring. It is not about managing bits and parts wither, but rather a re-structuring of the whole--a matrix of transformation. I am confident that the next stages of human evolution will be borne on the backs of bold adventures into the frontiers of failure – by people walking out of old stories, by people refusing to create enemies out of others they disagree with, by people who recognize the poverty of our global systems, by people who are comfortable with the paradox and mystery of the universe, and by people who understand that tomorrow happens because today fails.

The world we want is not univocal – it is not a literal machine we can summarily fix. This is why a mere historical analysis will not suffice...the deep shift needed today must go deeper than leveling the playfields, scoring points, or tipping the scales. Around the world, experiments like Mark Boyle's are probing the mass stories that govern our perception. It seems unthinkable to imagine education without schooling, work without 'bullshit jobs' that exploit us and steal our radical humanness, sacredness

without institutionalized religion, wealth without money, or social coherence without the state. But people across the world are contesting the orthodoxy of those ideas. Today's transformation imperative is not merely a call for new blueprints and elaborate models. At deep levels, it is a call to a deep sensitivity, a call to serendipity, a call to relinquish our hold on the buttons that control outcomes. It is a call to play. Expertise, though good for obvious reasons, might be one of the very last impediments to true transformation - and that is because of a growing collective consciousness about how interconnected we all are, how chaotic intelligence really is, and how wise stupidity potentially is.

Let us reimagine civil action as the nerve to tell another story – however stuttering and unsure its first lines are. Civic participation must begin to take on poetic tones of quiet irreverence...for when we turn to each other, we find our deepest power.

I apologize if my talk has contained hasty conclusions, uncomfortable generalizations and easy contradictions – I am but a playful poet, a dilettante with a hunger; and like Walt Whitman, I am large – I contain multitudes. I tried to figure out why I was invited to give this speech. After failing to do so, I decided to settle for reasons *I wanted to speak*: I speak for those who have taken the road less travelled as well as those on the highways of social conformity, the waitresses who are caught in the guilt of believing their lives are small and not great; the ones who are content with getting by and surviving; those who stay up every night waiting for something to happen – just so they can be vindicated; those whose voices are only heard through the ventriloquism of the corporate world; the forgotten, the displaced, the subdued; those whose magnificence are only validated by Facebook posts – to whom reality and the urgent tyranny of a memo or a job always seems unkind. I speak for those whose gaze remains transfixed on the skies – awaiting something to descend; for those who have no seats in heaven – whose voices have been snuffed out by the stentorian din of conscience; for those culture-mutants, who can no longer find the desire to be ranked, scored and weighted by high achievement. I speak for the 99% as well as the 1% - each imprisoned in a dyadic game of sides and knights.

I speak for Alethea, through whose eyes I have glimpsed traces of a possibility I dare not keep silent about. A story the rumors of which I first heard in that maternity home, behind that rude white door, when I held her in those primal moments, and looked into her eyes. She stared back, softly – and just before she cried out for nourishment, I thought I heard a curious greeting drifting through my inner space. I did. It was Alethea’s voice. She said one word: ‘Welcome’.

Bayo Akomolafe is a clinical psychologist, lecturer and author from Covenant University in Nigeria. His is an emerging voice in the world calling for a multi-dimensional shift in consciousness and systemic reification by turning to each other in small ways, and reconnecting with our ‘shamanic effusiveness and utter magnificence’. Co-founders of a network called Koru, Bayo and his ‘life-force’, Ej, are currently on an enchanted (and vulnerable) journey to reclaim their lives and intimacy with the earth, with others and with a larger palette of possibilities. He is writing his second book, ‘And We Shall Dance on the Mountains’ and a novel, ‘The Boy Who Stayed Outside’. Ej and Bayo are ecstatic parents of a beautiful girl, Alethea.

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