

activism
culture
climate



LEADERS OF THE REVOLUTION

**WE NEED YOU!
YOUNG LEADER
RISE UP**

RISE UP!

**PHILADELPHIA
IS CALLING,
THE WORLD
IS CALLING**

RISE UP!

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WE NEED YOU!
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WE NEED YOU!

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Author's Note:

I don't want to be strangers anymore. I want to start the conversation. I want to listen and to be heard. I want to see and be seen. Don't we all? As much as we'd like to believe we are sustained solely through our individual workings, the recognition that we are part of a greater whole gives us power. Each one of us are an integral part of this living ecosystem we call home.

Through time we are passed down structures, remnants of a way of life, years of history compounding into the present moment – in this process there's a level of acceptance that is necessary to the routine functioning of our lives, but there's also a level of questioning and criticality we must confront about how we're culturally conditioned. Who decides what is right and wrong? Where do we learn to love and hate? When to work and leisure?

I don't have all the answers, this much should be obvious, none of us do. This life is anxiety-provoking and at times absolutely overwhelming. Yet! Part of me knows that a lot of us are thinking about the same questions, and somehow that gives me hope, maybe we're just not finding the time or space to talk about them as much as we should.

I found some semblance of peace and agency within relational activism, a back to basics approach to thinking about the relationships, communities, and routines that make up our daily lives.

So I embarked on a writing project as a process of learning more. Sinking deeper into the work of others while simultaneously carving out time for my own practice. I'm not writing as an expert but as an impassioned student, artist, and friend, hoping to spark more open dialogue and reflection. After years of interdisciplinary research into activism, social psychology, systems-based thinking, and the environmental crisis, I entered this work to channel a primer on ideas, not to create a comprehensive field guide to "all you can do to save the planet!" **PUBLIC SOCIAL ENERGY** is a place where activism, culture, and climate collide.

At this intersection, I see an environmental crisis and a cultural rift. What would it look like to use relational activism in pursuit of a path forward? The environmental crisis is fueled by dirty energy. In man-made industrial processes, fossil fuels release greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere, trapping heat from the sun and subsequently warming the

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planet. Even a few degrees can be incredibly disruptive to natural ecosystems and all forms of life globally, we've really been starting to see it already. According to NASA, the last 13 years have been the hottest we've ever experienced, and we've been recording since 1880. Intense forest fires, chaotic hurricanes, tireless droughts followed

by rising sea levels, there is a very real effect that the fossil fuel industry has on all of us. The question we face now is one of translation. How do we take this knowledge, that scientists around the world have been studying for decades, and translate it into practical political, economic, and social solutions?

The environmental crisis has relational

effects too. As a culture, many of us were raised on a paradigm that normalized the idea that humans are above, or separate from, nature. We were often taught or implicitly conditioned that humans are not of the earth but on the earth. This subtle difference leads us to believe that we have dominion over the "natural" world and all its inhabitants.

And to that end, we can use them like they are infinitely available. We can do what we want, when we want, where we want. Oh, and if someday we DON'T want, DON'T worry – we can just throw it away. The human exceptionalism paradigm has given rise to a culture that lives and dies by the ethics of ego, and the belief that our problems can be solved by pure human ingenuity and technology.

Don't get me wrong, I'm a pretty big fan of human existence, but I guess that's why it's more crucial than ever that we embrace some sense of brutal honesty and radical optimism under our current conditions. There is no single overarching way we're going to solve these problems, and in the words of Diane di Prima... **"NO ONE WAY WORKS, It will take all of us shoving at the thing from all sides to bring it down"**¹. Climate change presents the opportunity to radically alter the way we live our everyday lives on this earth, not only that, it's forcing us to adapt in ways that we haven't practiced or discovered yet. In the midst of this, Buen Vivir reminds us to live well without living at the expense of others. To imagine new ways of thinking about our structure as a society and what it means to live a positive, fulfilling, ecologically respectful life in community.

I wanted to explore how our culture is reacting to the climate crisis now, and what it may look like to use relational activism in pursuit of a path forward. The good news is, we have the numbers. The bad news? Doesn't matter. **We have the numbers.**

**RE
ACTION
AL**



**ACT
VISM**



HOW DO WE CREATE CHANGE?

Traditional activism is commonly associated with direct action in the public sphere. You might think of marches and protests in this light. While many revolutionary movements are built upon long histories (i.e. civil and Indigenous rights), the actual act of what we perceive as "traditional" activism is generally a short-term defense mechanism to a systemic problem. A reactive public outcry. An invitation for others to stand in solidarity with those affected and show support. There's no doubt this form of organizing is incredibly powerful.

In a very intuitive way, we know our bodies have power and our voices are louder together than they are alone. We strengthen our collective identity when we enter a space with those who share our values and our concerns. Yet, it's important to recognize that the energy generated from any public sphere action needs to be translated into long-term change through political, economic, and social solutions that correspond with the movement's goals and ideals for an equitable future. After the protests and the rallies, where does the work live? How do you further the cause?

IS THERE A FORM
OF ACTIVISM WE CAN
SEW INTO OUR EVERYDAY
LIVES?

RELATIONAL ACTIVISM

can be understood as a
long-term form of activism
that uses:

- *relationships*
- *local communities, &*
- *daily practices*

as the locus for social and environmental change. It doesn't pivot on singular events, but is a continuous mindset and practice that can permeate daily life —

We're social beings at the core. Relational activism imagines a way of being that brings us closer to that truth. I mean, isn't there an energy deep inside us that longs to create spontaneous connections?

From friends and family to mere acquaintances and strangers, I find hope in the idea that we're all human beings doing our best to navigate this clusterfuck of a life. Building the plane as we fly it, so to speak. If casual and community-driven relationships can bring us closer together and steer us towards more equitable futures, then a simple "good morning" is a risk I'm willing to take.

Our ways of being represent a broad set of ideas and practices about our culture and lived experience. How we use our time, who we use it with, and why.

Is your way of being something you think about consciously?

Should it be?

WHERE DO THESE IDEAS COME FROM?

In "Relational Activism: Reimagining Women's Environmental Work As Cultural Change", Sociologists Sara O'Shaughnessy and Emily Huddart Kennedy provide a starting point for thinking about the importance of relational activism while examining gender differences in environmental activism.² They reveal how narrow conceptions of activism limit what the work could, or should, look like.

Ecologically minded women were under-recognized as activists because activism was conceived of only in the traditional sense. After discovering this, O'Shaughnessy & Kennedy used exploratory interviews to better understand how 13 families situated themselves as relational activists.

How so?

By living low impact lifestyles and actively trying to reduce their material consumption.

What's more is that they understood the "environmental significance of daily practices." These families saw themselves as relational activists by

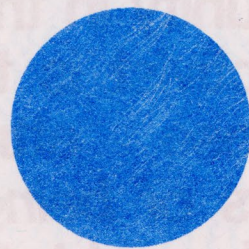
being intentional about shifting cultural norms towards sustainability in their daily life.

From food, methods of transportation, shopping habits, and the conversations that make up the very fabric of their social lives, modeling a sustainable way of being for others in their local community was an important form of activism for them.

By broadening our view of activism, we can appreciate how impactful this kind of work is, and begin to practice it ourselves.



GO CONNECT



CULTURAL CATALYSTS:

Communities are the cultural catalysts of social and environmental change, but what makes a community? I've found that my own sense of community can be very broad, and as I'm willing to approach others with an open heart and mind, they themselves open up in return.

Culturally, our ways of being are contagious. Have you ever noticed a word or phrase blend into your vocabulary after spending time with someone who uses it a lot? *I never used to say that, where did I get that from?* Contagious like that. Subconsciously, we absorb vocabulary, dialects, attitudes, values, and more of the people we spend time with, our communities.

Some communities are mediated by societal institutions, like school or work, yet we make meaningful connections with the people of these places that can last throughout the rest of our lives.

Others form more organically, groups of people emerging out of a shared experience or in response to injustice. I'm not sure it's helpful to specify explicit criteria of what "counts" as a community or not. Yet, it may be interesting to map out different communities in your life and look for connections, points of overlap, and relational qualities between them.

To understand community in the way of a relational activist is to recognize that these attributes of life, our *ways of being*, should explicitly be brought to conscious attention if we are to dismantle any oppressive system. Our communities are vehicles for this work, and allow us greater agency in creating change.



On the following spread is a community mapping exercise, with some examples and a list of questions that might get your brain going.

There are no right or wrong ways to do this. You could try to list every single community you're involved in, or just the ones that are most meaningful to you. Explore what feels natural or most interesting.

COMMUNITY MAPPING **YOUR SHOW WORK**

- local organizations
- geographic areas
- scenes
- clubs or interest groups
- small businesses or nonprofits
- school
- work
- family
- friends

What are the qualities of this community?

What kinds of social issues do they care about?

What kinds of conversations does this community have?

How does this community sustain itself?

Where/how/why did this community form?

Is the community inclusive? Exclusive?

What kinds of values or attitudes are exhibited in this community?

What are the social norms of this community?

What kind of leadership does this community have?

How is power distributed within this community?

What alternate methods are available?

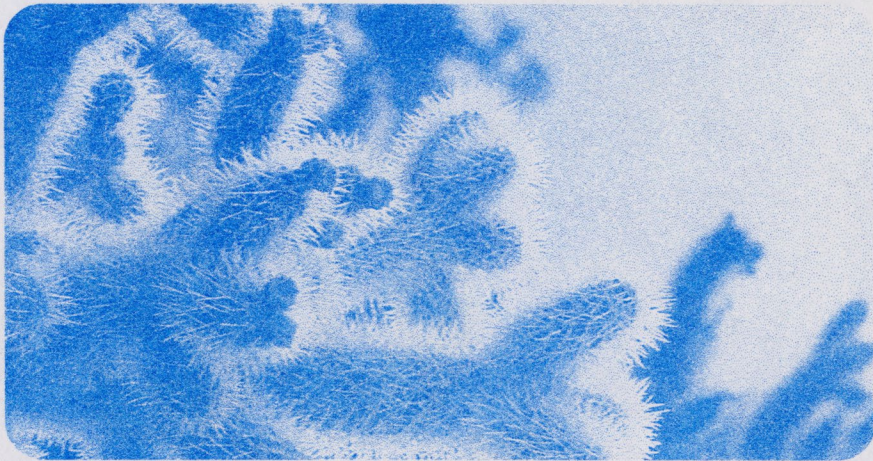


SO cial chan GE

When we think about “social
change” we tend to think

BIG

*This isn't always necessarily bad,
but in my experience, lofty goals
bring out the perfectionist in me, &
I get too busy building plans in my
head than truly understanding how
to actualize them in real life.*



This was a huge roadblock for me a few years ago as I started to think more about my role in cultivating change. It still is at times. Analysis paralysis sets in; the type of fear that sterilizes us when things get too complex. We're afraid that if we open up and be honest with what we're up against, the water will come gushing in and we'll be overwhelmed all at once.

This type of brutal honesty is often not encouraged, yet it remains key to addressing systemic problems at their root. Radical optimism is a necessary counterpart of brutal honesty, though it is rarely taught or talked about. Why is this?

Problems like climate change are urgent, global, and extremely intersectional. They're also tied to systemic forces that go beyond what one individual can control or influence by themselves. Dirty energy industries, the logic of consumer capitalism, cradle to grave design processes. There's a lot to be dealt with, and a million different entry points to engage with climate advocacy and activism.

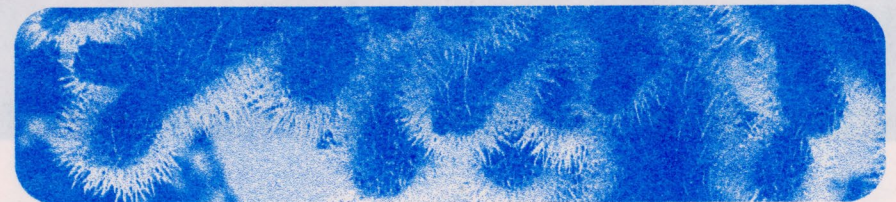
YES CAN OVERWHELMING SO, THIS BE

However, this mindset that we must tackle everything or aim for perfection is not what anyone is asking of us, and it can block us from actually starting. None of us have all of the answers nor will we be able to craft solutions that cover everything, that's why we need each other.

We are all works in progress. Starting small can have great significance, and cultivating a sense of brutal honesty with radical optimism is a powerful way of living as a relational activist.

Local, everyday change can be an antidote for analysis paralysis. When I say local, I mean, like, really local: because this kind of change starts with introspection. Looking inward, evaluating your values, peeling back layers of the self that make up your everyday way of being. Being reflective is part of the work. Asking questions about the way we live in a consumer society and where we find fulfillment. Finding the space to tune into that still, small, compassionate voice inside.

What does it call out to you? What do you care about? Why? How can you engage with these values through your community or everyday life?



PRACTICE

COMPLIMENT SOMEONE:

Have you ever gotten a compliment that made your day? A small note, or a gesture, that made you feel appreciated? Sometimes a compliment from a stranger sticks with us longer than the kind words of a close friend. Why is it that we've fostered a culture where this straightforward act of kindness has turned into a taboo?

I've gotten into the habit of speaking up when something simple strikes me on the street, it comes out as naturally as, "I like your shoes!" or "your jacket is dope" only to continue walking. With earnest intentions, compliments are a great way to bring a little sunshine into someone's day, and they can also open the door into further conversation.

You don't have to assume the other person is going to take it the wrong way. At a foundational level, this act is simply about acknowledgement. You're saying, hey, I see you, and that shit's dope! A little reminder of the human in each of us, regardless of whether a formal relation has been established. We all need this.

START the CONVERSATION with an OPEN MIND:

We don't look up at the trees and spite them for sprouting different leaves from one another or from growing their branches this way or that. We don't question them. Why would we? We delight under clustered canopies and find comfort in their presence. We appreciate the unique beauty that each creates. When it comes to interacting with others in our daily lives, this same appreciation is possible.

Sometimes it's more interesting engaging with someone that has a different perspective or viewpoint than you do. You may disagree or just see things from a different angle, but this process is informative. It helps shape us into culturally sensitive beings that lean into the nuance of being human, rather than simple black and white binaries.

Whether they are family, friends, or total strangers. Coming into tough conversations with understanding rather than reactivity can help gain insight into their perspective, and the reason they think or act the way they do. If our goal remains creating solidarity in order to combat injustice, then a search for common ground will pay off. People most often change because they want to, or because they encounter a new way of thinking about things, not because you force them to.

When you sit down in class, when you ride the subway, when you walk into work. Everyone you cross paths with has a different history, experience, and wisdom that you won't find anywhere else. Open-minded engagement means rediscovering our innate plurality, rediscovering the common values that unite us at our core, and cultivating the social sensitivity that allows our differences to be appreciated without the constant push and pull of comparison to a dominant or minority group.



BUEN VIVIR: FINDING GRATITUDE & CONTENTMENT

Contentment can be hard to find. How do we practice gratitude with the things we have in spite of a society that tells us to find fulfillment by consuming more? We can reasonably assume we are swimming against the grain when we make choices that deny the logic of consumer capitalism in favor of contentment, but there's power in this. Could relational activism help us reshape the way we think about value?

In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer talks about how contentment can be a radical proposition in our modern era:

**“In a consumer society,
contentment is a radical proposition.**

**Recognizing abundance rather
than scarcity undermines an economy that
thrives by creating unmet desires.**

**Gratitude cultivates an ethic of fullness,
but the economy needs
emptiness...**

**Gratitude doesn't send you out shopping to
find satisfaction; it comes as a gift
rather than a commodity, subverting the
foundation of the whole economy.”³**

Relational activism enables us to find a richer sense of psychological fulfillment than we get through consuming material goods, steering us toward meaningful relationships, community, and ecologically sustainable ways of being instead. The effects of a large-scale shift in this direction are really exciting to think about, especially considering how dependent we've come to be on our material possessions. Knowing that our current models of consumption are unsustainable in light of the environmental crisis, could our culture turn away from this overindulgence in favor of locally based circular economies, with deeper relationships between provider and user?

When we do consume, we can engage with it critically and consciously. This takes shape in many forms. What does it look like? It can look like buying used or thrift whenever possible. There are so many sources for this kind of thing nowadays that it almost feels economically irresponsible not to check your local thrift stores or facebook marketplace before you buy. Using a reusable water bottle, and tupperware for home-cooked meals are simple ways to avert single use plastics and reduce waste. Plus, meal prepping can save you a lot of cash.

Not doing business with companies that have egregious ties to the fossil fuel industry, or rather, supporting companies with ecologically sustainable practices can be a big part of engaging critically with consumption. Practically speaking, there are few companies exempt from using raw inputs that come from fossil fuels in their production and manufacturing processes, but this doesn't mean we throw in the towel. This is where Diane De Prima comes into play, reminding us that it will take “all of us shoving at the thing from all sides to bring it down.” The message here points to action at multiple scales, to start doing what you can now, while also building capacity for revolutionary systems change. The goal is not perfection or a life stripped of joy, but a more mindful way of being that involves overall less consumption.

In our daily lives, we can explicitly demonstrate that alternate ways of being exist than the ones we are taught through capitalism -

- We can speak with compassion, honesty, and kindness to one another.
- We can lead by example, shed the taboo, and bring important topics (like climate change and our economic system) into common dialogue.
- We can acknowledge our interconnectedness to all living things, engage critically with the systems we were born into, and use radical imagination in the creation of equitable futures.

What else are we to do with our time here?

The important thing to remember is that you have the power to create change now, from exactly where you are. When you start, know that others will pick up the cue and start doing the same.

Kindness begets kindness.

A simple question or compliment breaks the tension on the surface, and it ripples out like a stone skipping across a pond.

It's here in this space that we are not defined or disempowered by the systemic forces against us.

It's here that we ground ourselves in locality and find joy in the process of relationship building that are necessary for movements to form.

It's here that we see sprouts of resistance defying the odds, reaching for sunlight through the asphalt.

It's here that the voices of dissent are louder than ever. Though at times they weep, there is a hopeful clarity in the radical nature of their being.

Calling to us, over and over.

CAN YOU HEAR THEM?

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YOU!
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REFERENCES & GRACIOUS OBLIGATIONS

In Text Citations

1. Diane De Prima, *Revolutionary Letter #8*, 1968-1971
2. Sara O'Shaughnessy and Emily Huddart Kennedy, *Relational Activism: Reimagining Women's Environmental Work As Cultural Change. Published in the Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 2010
3. Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (pg. 111), 2013

Photographs by Philippe Bourseiller

The following people, books, articles, and local organizations have inspired me greatly & helped shape the way I think about many of the topics in this zine. I'm incredibly thankful to anyone who spent the time to talk to me about this project while it was ongoing and the ones who lent their hand to help bring it to life.

Books/Articles:

Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*
Ruben Pater, *CAPSLOCK*
Violet Plantz, *Sentient Psychology*
Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*
Ram Dass and Paul Gorman, *How Can I Help?*
bell hooks, *All About Love*
Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage*
Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, Katharine K. Wilkinson & more, *All We Can Save*
Sara O'Shaughnessy and Emily Huddart Kennedy, *Relational Activism: Reimagining Women's Environmental Work As Cultural Change*
Philip Cushman, *Why the Self is Empty*

Organizations:

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NOTES:

& GRACIOUS OBLIGATIONS

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1. Diane Dwyer, Allison Kerner, Amy Dwyer, Allison Kerner, Allison Kerner
2. Sara O'Shaughnessy, Rachel Kennedy, Fieldwork Activism: Reimagining Women's Environmental Work As Cultural Change (PhD Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2010)
3. Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass (pg. 171), 2013

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The following people, books, articles, and organizations have helped me greatly & helped shape the way I see the world. The topics in this book are heavily influenced by their work. The time to talk to me about this book is a gift, and the time who lent their hand to help me write it.

Books/Articles

- Naomi Klein, *The Change Everything*, *The Climate*
 Ruben Piller, *CAPSLOCK*
 Victor Plante, *Social Psychology*
 Peter Singer, *The Fifth Disciple*
 Ben Davis and Paul Gorman, *Love Can Wait*
 Neil Hartrick, *All About Love*
 Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Message*
 Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, Katherine Hayhoe, & more, *All We Can Save*
 Sara O'Shaughnessy and Rachel Kennedy, *Fieldwork Activism: Reimagining Women's Environmental Work As Cultural Change*
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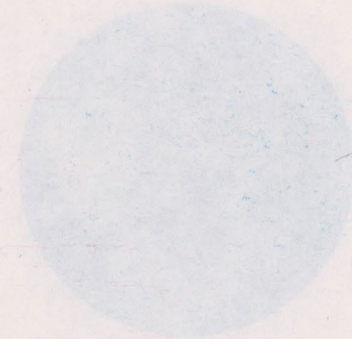
Organizations

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Swedish Movement Philadelphia

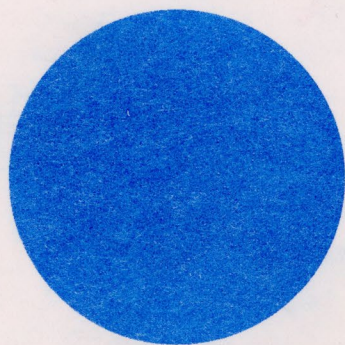
Save The Urban Farming Community (www.saveurbanfarming.org)

This could be your starting point



made w/ love in philadelphia, PA

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