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## Preparing for Resistance

### Contribution to GTI Forum [Which Future Are We Living In?](#)

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Amidst the global polycrisis, the instabilities pile up: the Russian war on Ukraine is compounding the economic instability caused by COVID pandemic. The rich keep on living life as usual (profiting even!), while the poor often see the infrastructure on which they depend grind to a halt. As long as economic inequalities and the break of the social contract are tolerated, we will head towards a [Fortress World](#), where, as Paul Raskin [notes](#), “despots, charlatans, and authoritarians feed off the chaos.” The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can alleviate entrenched inequalities, but they are far from sufficient.

Until we face up to *realpolitik*—that we need to create, through action, large disincentives for the powerful to hoard resources—we will continue to be trampled over. We need to embrace a commitment to *ahimsa* (in the original, Sanskrit meaning of the world), which requires more disciplined active resistance. Understanding that *ahimsa* is routinely mistranslated as “nonviolence” is crucial: there is always some violence involved in life, but a harm-reduction approach according to a public health model means that it is morally imperative as a form of nonviolence to remove those who are doing massive violence to present and future generations as well as the more-than-human world.

Skillful means and discernment can help us focus on reducing structural violence by whatever means are most effective, while not devolving into dehumanization, cruelty, or normalizing violence. Facing the moral and political cowardliness of pacifism means that we need to start learning how better to say “no,” individually and collectively, to foreclose the slow violence of industrial neoliberalism.

From a public health perspective, avoiding major harms through social acupuncture (making elites fear engaging in antisocial omniscidal behavior) is a well-known method of achieving social aims. We don't let smokers smoke anywhere they want, because the externalities of their actions (secondhand smoke making others sick, and the social burden of their personal smoking-related illnesses) harm themselves and others. So why do we do nothing against structural and slow violence? The question then becomes, if [Market Forces/Conventional Worlds](#) and [Barbarization](#) (especially Fortress World) are systematically reducing the freedom for self-determination and closing down pathways towards a Great Transition which is based on solidarity writ large, what can we do to turn the tide?

Clearly, we cannot fight in the traditional ways in which previous liberations have been fought (via war), as the state (now corporate controlled) has the monopoly on legitimate violence. But there are many other ways to muck up the gears, or precisely target those most responsible for large-scale suffering. We have much to learn from the power of organization from those who have successfully deposed their despots, be they in Chile or Sri Lanka. Our hope must remain that we can grow global networks of solidarity and peace faster than mutual heart-deadening dehumanization fills the gap.

As we stop polluting as much, move away from combustion engines, and move towards a circular economy not requiring our new infrastructure to use raw resources based on slave labor, we can more quickly than we imagine find ourselves living in a world that prioritizes human and environmental health and integrity. We don't need to reinvent the wheel in dreaming up what needs to be done; we just need to implement and enforce.

More immediately, I find the most hope in youth movements like Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for the Future, and quixotically, in fiction like Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* and Starhawk's *City of Refuge*. Neither of those books include wholly nonviolent action. Some sort of principled, militant intervention is present, and increasingly seems to be required. But no group has as of yet started putting despots and ecocidal billionaires in their places, shifting the balance of power. Both Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi's peace movements would never have been successful without their militant, violent counterparts, allowing them to play good cop to these bad cops, giving their overlords a choice of whom they preferred to deal with. So, far there

are no such counterparts to Extinction Rebellion or Fridays for the Future. But these groups will come, one way or another. And when they do, we should not condemn them. For they are doing the hard work of no-saying, multisolving through a *via negativa*. For now, the pressing question is, how can we translate our passion and vision but reticence for shared sacrifice into a more courageous demonstration of physical action and solidarity?

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## About the Author



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