

Huggins, Trevor Ryan.
A Movement, Local Economy, and FOOD
ENVR: An Independent Study
Professor Kelley
5.11.07

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A Movement

A movement must be made that learns from the lessons of the civil rights and peace movements which takes up, in addition, the issue of the environment and bring “the authentic social vision, the long-term conviction, and the deliberation

Wendell Berry, *Think Little*

From the abstract to the real, into a practice and vocation; a lifestyle must be realized. What you imagine the future to be like is a premonition. If you’ve ever seen *Final Fantasy VII*, *Metropolis (the new animation, or the old classic)*, or *Titan A.E.*, we need to stop staring and bring this envisioning into the actions of our lives. It is time to see ourselves is who we hope to change, we cannot hope too change others unless we see them as part of our world. Our world we can change. For some of us it means we have to stop watching movies, for others it means that we have to start making movies, or both.

This change does not entail another march on the government, unless that march is composed of explicit, well-garnered, and articulated certainty. (Berry, 1970) Facts must be scrupulously withdrawn from their sources and presented to an attentive audience, aware that a space is being made and treasured for a societal realization. I sat in the senate chambers of our state capitol and watched a political event as a participating citizen of this democracy. In spite of this I still felt like an audience before stage and observed the opportunity for massive change¹, if partnered with other levels of actual transformation². This is a polydimensional version of farming, on the social level, where various modes of activity are functioning in a microcosm transfiguring justice. There is a vision in there and we have to stop consuming from it and begin to make it.

What is interesting about this vision is that it requires all of us to act in our own way, fulfill our role and essentially embody the popular phrase; “be the change you want to see in the world” as I’ve read from my roommate’s coffee cup. Apparently Mohatma K. Ghandi is quoted and known for saying those words, but they do not mean anything unless their meaning becomes

¹ Not to be confused or separated from the fascinating exhibit!

² See discussion of spectators in Augusto Boal’s *Games for Actors and Nonactors*.

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a part of you. It would do no good for me to describe my vision unless you were here to describe your part in it.

What is far more challenging is the network of communication that happens almost subversively, within the continuity of social discourse. Once the slowing of a movement begins to deride itself from the tracks of the path, a knowing presence is halting. Where this effect is most felt; a challenge to unfamiliarize us from the conventional way of going about things must be enacted. When age and experience have taught us to move a certain way and we are hurt by the injustice we see, the ignorance we are complicit with, we must become aware that within ourselves this must be expressed. Without this self-expression how can we be apart of this vision? (i.e. it is a vision but the eyes see it and are not a part of it) There is an ownership when the expressive role becomes inseparable from knower and actor. (Boal, 1979)

Marching in solidarity with the people for human rights is a part of this expression. Staging a 'die-in' at the pentagon is part of this expression. Participating in lobby efforts on the local, state, regional, federal, and global level is part of this expression. We can not struggle without knowing that struggle personally, just as we can not learn without being able to teach, exchange, or express that knowledge.

Nothing is so important to the church as human life, as the human person, and above all, the person of the poor and oppressed, who, besides being human beings, are also divine beings, since Jesus said that whatever is done to them he takes as done to him. That bloodshed, those deaths, are beyond politics. They touch the very heart of God.

–Archbishop Oscar Romero

With out this expression we do not live a just way of life and continue to benefit without sharing what we have and what we can. That is not a living, that is an exploitation.

If it looks natural for us to be doing what we intend to do, because we are convinced that it is just, fair, and peaceful, then there is little else for ourselves in the way of enacting wide social change that is instinctive for cultures and societies to follow. Corporate business has perfected the art of cool so much that the façade of it is unhindered by the social irresponsibility it has caused (e.g. car-culture, sweatshop culture, etc). This model should be seen as an example

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for how total and all encompassing this coolness has been implemented. From tax code to media blitz (Klein, 2001) it has totally reinvented the role of consumer, from that of self-sufficiency to dependency. Attempts to redefine 'cool' has been brought by an ever increasing minority, starting with the anti-imperialists in France to the anarchists of England all the way over the big lake to the punks, activists, culture-jammers, and hip-hoppers of the globe. (Lasn, 1999)

If you think, even for a moment, that this has been read, written, stated, or observed before than what are you doing, why are you here, what is it that from reading this will benefit you? Why have you not continued to be, to act, to embolden your vocation? Stop reading this now because it was not meant for you, its purpose is derived for a movement that requires no head, yet loses itself amongst the intricacies of understanding its opponent. A movement that has reached a stage of success yet needs to lead itself out from the beast's lair back home to celebrate the successful envisioning and creation of its mighty wind.

Now, you are excused from finding yourself between a rock and a hard place. We often find ourselves returning back from whence we came if only to nourish ourselves, most of us make a regular habit of it; making food and eating it, ritually fashioned, three times a day. Some claim to be better readers of the human body and only eat when they are hungry or only certain types of foods a certain way, but these differences hardly sway the comfort found in a familiarity of place, of practice, of actualizing our need for a certain justice. Some have even claimed to know that god wants this from ourselves at least once a week(e.g. Sabbath) if not more in which a ritualistic observation of similar content is visited year after year in some kind of built holy place. Some only need the sweet honey in the rock.

I leave you the reader to decide, if upon reading you find these words were not meant for you, or you have read them or their content before, and you are still reading, then there is this; write or speak these words, or of their content yourself, originally. Actualize their meaning from your being because they are not your words just as they are not mine, they are ours; we share them upon reading them. I struggle to live out their direction and their purpose, to fully realize their meaning because I was not meant to solely understand them, as I do myself. But I find myself hard pressed to turn down another interpretation of something I have seen the similarity of because there may be something I missed or, having gone over back again, could learn from because I didn't have the time or the age and experience the first time.

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It strikes me that this may be boring for what is exciting about doing things as we have always done. When these things we're doing, however, are restricting ourselves for furthering a world of justice and peace then something needs changing. How can the work to change an injustice be boring? It may not be as exciting as watching an entertaining spectacle, but even that has been practiced for over and over in preparation for performance and so there is an element of boredom compounded for your speculation. Social change contains an element that challenges the instinctive nature of ourselves and calls for us to respond so deftly that it's very nature is an art form, more dance-like than any ballerina, demanding more practice than any musician, though the combination of the two rivals any state of the human being in nature and begins to define what we call the divine, or angelic³. There is nothing about this that is left out from the craft of artisans and local economists participating in the indisputable craft of living in harmony with the state of community. A local farmer invariably inflects their expertise in this by becoming the closest observer of local nature and determining when the time is ripe, or when their crops are ready to be grown.

It is from this that I must describe what it is that I envision and concurrently what I have begun to see. Because you see, I have already begun to practice what I preach and parts of this have gone to make up the whole. In detail it can only be seen in picture after picture, frame after frame, what actually comes about, in experience it must be lived, but for the sake of a movement it is a description that when read must first encapsulate feeling. There is a certain feeling when a vision like this is seen and this feeling must be followed like a hunt for tonight's supper, which, if gathered, purchased, or cooked, is the essence of it. A vision is, similarly, envisioned. This envisioning doesn't prepare you to stare, watch, or observe, it prepares you to become its modifier, like an actor of a play, its part.

In you must become the struggle, the hurt, the hypocrisy, the long-slow learning of doing it a better way so that a future of which you envision can be realized by you, otherwise there can only be parts, never a whole, only a half realized future where others still live in a world unchanged that you wish, not envision would change. A world unchanged comes, in part, from the form of an awareness of feeling because it is just like someone is watching, life lived apart

³ See *Angelic Organics*, a farmer who left the family farm to educate himself as an artist and then returned.

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from the mainstream of your instinct, your traditional way of going about things, your natural grounding is so different from a part of yourself that it cannot help but watch and, stammered by what it has seen, cannot help but remain amazed by someone living differently. Social theorists, philosophers, theologians, even local rapper of LOS NATIVOS, Felipe, see this as dualism. Until the world changes by you or someone else, it will always be this way. The more proficient your expression, or your talent as an actor, the less this feeling is farther from yourself, the less your expression is ungrounded in who you are.

There are certain things we belong to, one is essentially the result of the other. I came to the university because my math teacher in high school showed us a list of salaries in which engineers were paid upwards of six figures (much higher than the doctor, the lawyer, etc) I came to school wanting to become an engineer I said to people, not really realizing that I was telling them I wanted to understand a profession that would make me a lot of money. I came to school to satisfy my greed. Little did I know, there are other things that distract greed from me and, yet, I could still be satisfied. In essence that my greed was for quantified wealth, the other was that the list I was shown by my math teacher in high school can now be seen by the analytical eye in a way that debases any desires the list created and instilled in the observer. I have learned to remember that list in a different way, but still, how does our society justify higher pay for an engineer that can devise a weapon of mass destruction, than that of a farmer whose profession guarantees the furthering of the survival of human beings? I would not want to be paid by that society, nor would I want to be furthering the part I play in that society.

At first I told myself that I would respond to the imperceptive, oppressive forces I used to trust for my perception had hidden from me its systematic injustice (e.g. *Weapons of Mass Deception*). I switched my studies from engineering to Justice and Peace studies, because like a denizen of the woods, my eye adapted to a practice that didn't restrict my vision, so I could see more. Yet hidden just beyond my reach was greed, a force that belonged to no one, and how would I pay for school struggling against a system of oppression that, now, did not want to perceive me. This system, a military industrial financial complex makes it its product to 'do-away' with the strugglers against it. So rather than fighting I chose survival and where else should I turn but to *food* only to find the most powerful faction of this system makes its place amongst the incredibly oppressive might of a global food system reaching back into the annals of

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history; where greed pastured land away from the pastoral context of agriculture in an apparent separation of the two (*Guns, Germs, and Steel*), and into the future where the belief that food is only found at the shelves of the consumer station threatens the growth of young children.

Local Economy

Sitting here at the neighborhood café⁴ near the corner of the neighborhood I currently live in, I am struck by the contrast from the neighborhood I grew up in. The corner store my friends and I walked to for quick errands and a candy bar was mainly an establishment⁵ that centered on gasoline. From its fuel pumps to its petroleum-based packaging of food, this place wasn't a neighborhood-friendly establishment; in fact I see it as a stop for travelers, truckers, and tourists. I did not think it supported the local commercial fishing, nor did it serve as an engine for providing other local foods, much less a neighborhood that would prefer to remember not abandon the past it has thrived from. Its food, brought by truck, is the result of a long commodity chain. Without where I'm sitting to provide a contrast, a vision for a local economy would not be possible. It is not possible to sustain this kind of distribution system. A different infrastructure must be envisioned⁶.

Envisioning this brought me back to that little grocery store with my brother for an Easter dinner. I walked up to the butcher's counter and asked about getting some of the locally harvested fish. The butcher is somewhat of a dying art within the larger grocery stores and I was happy to find the butcher traditionally making meat cuts on the board behind the counter. Local fish at this time of year was only available smoked, as I was humbly informed, "the nets are all in right now" he stated. I debated the choice between whitefish, herring, and trout and chose the trout, which added a wonderful flavor to the potato, wild rice, and onion ingredients in our soup. This revolutionized my perspective of the rural neighborhood grocery store. It really is about making up the value lost in buying packaged food, ready to make and eat by substituting a few links in the commodity chain with the abilities employed at home in the kitchen. But what of the past when the food was available just a few hundred feet away on the now long forgotten and

⁴ A made from scratch [bakery and café](#) that reminds me of my mom's kitchen, or what I would call Minnesota cookin. If America had a cultural distinction for food this would be it.

⁵ North Shore Market and Bottle Shop.

⁶ See *The Angry Trout* for an excellent example of a sustainable business where I grew up.

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crumbling docks of the big lake, Gichi Gami, or the potential unrealized future for a rooftop garden on top of the grocery store, community based agriculture, and locally harvested value-added products from local producers.

Commodity chain infrastructure can be expensive⁷ as it significantly adds to the cost of items seen by producers and distributors further distanced from the targeted consumer. Its expense drove my mom to make a habit of getting groceries when she went to the city, once or twice a month. The city was an hour and a half drive from where I grew up, but I went to school a half and hour's bus trip away and didn't think twice about traveling that much farther to the city, especially if it would save my parents some money. I'm not sure how much money they saved, but it seems peculiar to me that there wasn't a better option. When you factor in the true cost⁸ of it, it is a lot of money and leaves the consumer in a conundrum of sorts. My parents were taking steps to reduce cost by substituting the links of distributional transportation and marketing. Most trips to the city were made for other necessities and grocery getting merely diversified the meeting of needs even more. Our food system is a complex problem that includes numerous factors, which cannot be reduced to a simple solution. Its perception and continuing evolution will further our definition of value and how that vote will be worth as much in the ballot as with the dollar.

Local food seems like a novelty when you explore the idea of it more, yet the novelty is not one of price, but, rather, affordability. If you can afford local food, often you do not have to pay the price of higher health care costs. This is not only because local food is often organic, free-range, or held to your own standards, since you are close enough to find out how your food is grown, but local food does not have to travel as far before it reaches you, making it fresher and more nutritious⁹. Our distance from local food availability was already strained, but the trips to get groceries in the city often substituted these local options and potential support for local

⁷ Each item bought in the city amounted to a ten-cent price increase if bought at the rural corner store. This doesn't seem like it would amount to much, but when you get down to it, my mom would buy enough for two to four weeks. The car would be packed with foodstuffs when she came home.

⁸ "True cost is such a revolutionary idea because in a true cost marketplace, the price of every product tells the ecological truth. Every purchase, every market transaction rewards the "good" and penalizes the "bad." See truecosteconomics.org

⁹ Local food does not travel the average 1500 miles of an average commodity chain. See http://www.misa.umn.edu/Why_Eat_Local.html

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economy with the immediately available option. Our family settled in the habit of frozen pizza, box cereal, and packaged foods while local foods became a novelty in meals for visiting relatives to the area and canned, dried, and preserved foods from the summer were limited to the jams, jellies, sauces most treasured. We were then able to afford the rising health care costs at the expense of not knowing whether we would have to pay for them if not for the decision to get our nutrition from distant sources.

Where I am sitting a buyers cooperative¹⁰ provides the majority of food to this café, its sources extend to the outer reaches of the rural food system and beyond, ensuring a person to person base of recognition of a certain quality of food. Though the food might not necessarily be local, since Alaskan salmon cannot be gotten anywhere but from the coast of Alaska, consumers can be sure of their food's sustainability. Ensuring sustainable food becomes easier. The less links there are in the chain, the less chances any worth or value is needlessly withdrawn from the product. Instead of a label, or densely packed shelves, or other, more nonpersonal way of interacting with food, buyers are linked directly with sellers in a way that allows them to know who it is that is providing their food. The impetus for setting up a buyer's cooperative is to provide a fundamental demand for the sustainable production of food. It also extends a certain trust between customers and producers, which a distribution chain loses entirely. The anonymity of the commodity chain is sufficiently replaced. The consumer, now empowered and aware through his or her own resourcefulness to contact the producer/harvester/farmer in a very human exchange, ensures an equal dependency in the business transaction. The local knowledge that can be read about in independent, third party written news article reveals due skepticism for the competition's attempts to advertise a better alternative and furthers a balance of community dialogue in intelligent and democratic public discourse.

F.O.O.D.

True, humans have been experimenting with pesticides for centuries, but synthetic chemicals are a recent phenomenon. Many were born of war. [...] Within a year of its introduction into the civilian market in 1946, DDT was being used widely in U.S. agriculture.

Anne Lappé, *GRUB*

¹⁰ In this case [Whole Farm Coop](#)

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Time and time again, evident within history, is an indisputable link between food and war. Most recently this link has introduced disputable and contested developments concerning the growing and production of food. An insatiable drive to produce food a certain way has brought a market, which started benefiting from the labors of war, to direct its focus on technologies derived from war-driven profit, translated to benefit from the profit guaranteed by the appetites of consumers of food. In this way an entire food system was industrialized, continuing from the mechanization of agriculture resulting from the first world war, in which banks, tractors, and financing drove an entire structure of traditional family farming into the urban areas as an expendable workforce, to that of the second world war, which furthered this mechanization through inputs, price supports, and systemization.



What we see, theoretically, is a cause and effect relationship that is characteristic of a cycle of violence¹¹ The technological developments brought about by war are systematically institutionalized into the end phase, in which a dependency develops and causes a need to ensure continued extraction of resources, a beginning phase for continued technological development, thus the cycle repeats itself. The institutionalization allows for integration but the beginning and end phases do not allow for adequate societal response to factor effects of continued technological development and resource extraction. Partner this with moneyed interests, or financialization¹² and you have the root causes of poverty, unsustainable global climate change, and violence.

¹¹ A term used to denote how violence begets violence. Oppression answered by rebellion, brings repression, or an effective suppression. The main argument for a nonviolent way of life.

¹² [*In Debt We Trust*](#)

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Mohatma K. Gandhi brought an Indian movement for liberation from Great Britain to the Sea to harvest salt. “What many people don’t know is that salt was crucial to their diet” (Father David Smith) This salt broke enabled their stomachs to break down the food they were eating and Gandhi had seen how the British extent of control extended all the way to their stomachs, thus the impetus for the march to harvest their own salt. Currently, most of us don’t realize this because the food we are eating is heavily processed, packaged, microwaveable and ready to eat. MREs, or meals ready to eat, “is”, according to wikipedia, “a is a self-contained, individual field ration in lightweight packaging procured by the United States military for its service-members for use in combat or other field conditions where organized food facilities are not available” The most important part of this definition is, “where organized food facilities are not available”. Gandhi organized a movement around food and I think it is important to realize that his death has not brought an end to his movement.

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