

A hand is holding a black frame over a landscape. The landscape features a green field, a fence, and trees. The sky is visible through the frame. The text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

*ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS  
AN ACT OF RESISTANCE*

*by Brian Gerald Murphy*

## THE MODERN DREAM IS A NIGHTMARE

Something isn't right with the world, and you don't need me to tell you. A long time ago, humans roamed the savannah. When chasing down gazelle and fighting off lions got tiring, they learned agriculture and set up camp in one place. If you live in a hut, when it rains, you get wet. Eventually humans learned to build castles and to use fire for heat. They learned how to channel fresh spring water into aqueducts to avoid muddy mosquito-infested standing water. Then came the machines: the printing press, the cotton gin, the electric light bulb, the telephone, the eight-track, the television. Henry Ford made automobiles widely accessible through assembly line production, but it still required humans. Now, machines make our machines. Many of us enjoy a level of physical comfort unparalleled in human history. We're supposed to be comfortable, life is supposed to be good.

Do you feel like you're living in utopia?

Me neither.



Humans are producing, consuming, existing at a breakneck pace, and it is unsustainable. 60,000 bags are used per second; in the time it takes you to read this sentence, that's 390,000 bags. *Seriously*. The average corporate worker sends and receives 156 emails per day. Are you overwhelmed? Me too.

And those are just first-world problems. If you are reading this, you must be connected to the internet. 69.8% of the world's population is off the worldwide grid. That's 4,835,049,149 people—a lot of people without internet. And one billion people live without access to clean drinking water. Can you even imagine how much one billion is? I couldn't. So I figured it out: one billion seconds ago, it was 49 years ago; one billion minutes ago, the Roman Empire ruled the land. One billion pennies in tight stacks and rows is the size of five school buses. One billion people without clean water is a lot of people. The materials needed to run our computers, our smartphones, and our grocery store self-checkout machines are harvested in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and other countries, destroying the natural environment, fueling a land grab, and inciting regional conflict.

Reading PDFs from the comfort of our homes or offices, we might be tempted to think, "Well at least the modern world is working for me." Is it? The corporate workday is longer, the age of retirement is higher, the benefits are slimmer, and the job security is shrinking. I was working for a television network when the recession began in 2008. Independent day traders worked on the same floor as my office in Manhattan. I remember watching them pacing back and forth watching CNBC on the TV in the lunchroom. Even in recessions people still watch television, so *our* business was fine. The markets



were tanking. These day traders, buttoned up in designer suits, would take a break from the television only to walk over to our floor-to-ceiling windows and peer out longingly. They'd stare at the ground twenty-eight stories below with sunken eyes. Jumping seemed like a viable, if dramatic, alternative.

Even in our thriving television network, my co-workers were unsatisfied. Danielle would commute an hour each way from New Jersey by bus. Then she'd walk fifteen blocks to our office. She'd do the same thing in reverse at the end of the day. And then, when she finally returned home no earlier than 8:00 PM, her life could begin. My co-workers and I would spend the morning talking about where to eat for lunch. We'd spend the next portion of the day counting down until it was time for a daily 4:00 PM ritual of playing "Silly Songs With Larry" on YouTube and singing along. Then we'd spend the remainder of the day either pushing emails around until we could leave without raising suspicion, or frantically trying to finish everything we didn't do during the day. The corporate culture of our parent company certainly didn't help—my friends at Google love their work, for instance—but our situation is not unique. Since I quit my job in the middle of that recession, I've heard the same story over and over again. *"I'm not satisfied with my job, I'm not satisfied with any job, I feel like I'm just putting in time until I can get out of work and really start living."* Your life should be more than weekends.

**We are not just trapped in the nightmare; we are creating it.**

## **WE ARE STUCK IN THE STATUS QUO, AND THE STATUS QUO IS DEATH.**

Our hyper-consumption isn't just killing the environment and exploiting under-paid laborers so that some of us might live in luxury. The puppeteers of this nightmare aren't just the corporations, conglomerates, and CEOs. Every time we participate in the-way-things-are, every time we refuse to resist the powers that be, we prop up this nightmarish system that does no good.

We drain the life out of ourselves every time we put off the trip to China, where our grandparents were born; or skip dance class because we are too tired after work; or miss our daughter's soccer match because a conference call ran late.

We design systems in an effort to make the world a better place. The Red Cross collects blood, the Food Bank distributes food, Habitat for Humanity builds houses, Goodwill sells affordable clothes. When something isn't right with the way things are, we have lobbyists, lawyers, lawmakers, and activists. Someone will fix it.

But here's the thing: charity doesn't work.

Charity can bandage some wounds but it does nothing to disarm the weapon, to prevent it from happening again. The Salvation Army



may provide a warm meal at Thanksgiving, but how will you make your own meal next year? Save The Children provides basic necessities to children—why are children living in poverty in the first place? Habitat For Humanity may provide affordable housing—why are families homeless? When we rely on charity, we are met with the same issues day after day, year after year, decade after decade. It's a constant cycle of arbitrary and unguaranteed giving and receiving—donor and dependent. The haves must continue to have and the have-nots must continue to have not.

We're told that good politics is born out of cooperation and compromise. Give a little, take a little. I've been cautioned as an activist to build bridges, to seek small incremental changes, to go one step at a time. I'm not convinced that is a workable solution.

As I was considering a career change, I received lots of (unsolicited) advice. "Why don't you build up a side business and keep your job?" "Can you ask for a raise?" "But you have health insurance!" The counsel I received over and over again was to find small ways to improve my current situation. "*You don't need to be so drastic,*" was the overarching theme. But incremental change sabotages holistic solutions. When we settle for small fixes, we often ignore the larger, systemic problem. Sometimes, we *do* need a revolution.

*- the breaking point -*

In 2007, I took a break from working in the entertainment industry to travel across the country visiting colleges and universities that discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people. At Pepperdine University, we spent 24 hours on campus over the course of two days, engaged in presentations, small groups, class visits, open mics, chapel services, and shared meals. At Yellowstone Baptist, we spent five hours in the wind and rain, unable to even step onto campus or set foot inside. The other 14 stops fell somewhere along that continuum.

There is something transcendent when a student says "I feel safe now." There is something inescapable about being soaked and frigid, staring at locked gates and doors. The world I knew—television studio cameras, movie premiere red carpets, and Paris Hilton's faux pas—could wait.

When I returned from that experience, I settled into a comfortable job at a children's television network—a compromise I made with myself, between Hollywood entertainment reporting and a monastery. Two years later, I knew something had to give.

There is more to life than fluorescent lights and LCD computer monitors, leaving work after dark, stealing away for ten days of vacation, waiting for retirement to enjoy yourself.

Even within a status quo of death, we are our most powerful asset; we can strike out on our own.





## Entrepreneurship is an act of resistance.

In working for ourselves, we are able to opt out of exploitative systems. We no longer need to work for the company that only values what we produce. We are able to reconnect with the fruits of our labor. We aren't stuck in institutions that shortchange workers, women, people of color, immigrants, overseas-outsourced workers, and the environment. We no longer need to support the destructive corporate culture with our presence and action.

Instead, we have the ability to create and plug in to alternative structures. We can get our food from farm shares, share our TV (or car) with our roommates and neighbors. We can get our clothes tailored down the street and dine out at the family owned restaurant (which makes the best chili in town). We can do business as peers with other independent contractors.

I've collaborated on client projects with friends. A copyeditor worked over this manifesto before publication. I shop at small bookstores, such as Bluestockings on the Lower East Side, and get much of my business advice from a number of online experts and content creators. Sometimes I pay, sometimes I haggle down the price, sometimes I barter. We are creating our own economy.

When we work for ourselves, we gain more than just autonomy over our decisions, we gain autonomy over our time. This is perhaps the most valuable act of resistance. In *The Shawshank Redemption*, Red comments on life outside of prison, ***"Forty years I been asking permission to piss. I can't squeeze a drop without say-so."***



Are we so much different than Red?

Perhaps you can take a piss when you like, but can you meet up with a friend? Can you stay in bed all day to recuperate from exhaustion? Can you work from a park to be energized by the fresh air and sunshine? I'm writing this from a bench in Madison Square Park.

The truth is, our lives are controlled by others. We are required to be in school from 7AM – 3PM, Monday – Friday, September – June, ages 5 - 18. Then many of us go to college. Then most of us get jobs. We like to pretend we have it better than the factory workers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with their unsafe working conditions and their punch cards. Still, even "salaried" employees have obligations on when, where, and how they will work. What effect does squinting under nine hours of florescent lights, sitting in chairs, and staring at monitors have on the human body? On the human spirit?

When you work for yourself, you can take two hours for yoga or to play with your dog or lift weights or meet your son after school. We reclaim our time for personal use and we reclaim our time to have a positive impact on culture. When you aren't chained to your desk, you can sneak away midday to lobby the governor, volunteer at a school, or organize an art show (or a protest rally). The status quo wants us tied to our desk, unable to effect any change. *Break free from the status quo so that you can change it for everyone.*



## ANOTHER WORLD IS ALREADY HERE

Wishful thinking, good for lunch counter discussion and not much more, right? Will this ever work in your life, with rent and credit card bills and car payments and school tuition and college savings for the kids and maybe a little for a vacation next summer? Do you need to become a radical activist in order to embrace entrepreneurship as an act of resistance?

*Absolutely not.*

This is a revolution that everyone is invited to, one that meets us where we are. And one that you will win the moment you begin it. You don't need to wait for a change in government or even the passage of a congressional resolution. It all begins and ends with you.

*People are already doing this. Join us!*

We come under many names: mommy bloggers, lifestyle designers, independent contractors, digital nomads, small business owners, augmented humans, freelancers. Perhaps you want to combine your film school experience and your law degree into a career, or you want to sell most of your things and live in a different country every four months, or you want to publish a magazine, or you want to be a performer. Perhaps you just want to sell some t-shirts, jewelry, or music.



Maybe you want something more conventional: to keep doing the work you love but on your own terms. That's an option too. You can be an administrative assistant, a project manager, or therapist and still work for yourself. Whatever it is (even if you're not sure what "it" is yet), you can join others who have gone before you in striking out on your own.

No matter the path you want to take as you regain your freedom (and resist the soul-sucking status quo), the results are in: self-employment is a viable option. It's not just a viable option; it's a necessary solution. In taking back the fruits of our labor and the autonomy of our time, we participate in creating an alternate economy, one filled with compassionate individuals rather than enormous corporations beholden only to the bottom line.

As we enter into and build up these alternate economies, we invite others to join us, to follow the trail we have blazed ahead. We make it easier for others to follow suit, to regain their autonomy and to create themselves. In the alternate economy, there are no charity cases: there are peers, partners, collaborator, mentors, and students. In the alternate economy, we learn from and support each other; whereas in a charity-based economy, our hierarchies are reinforced.

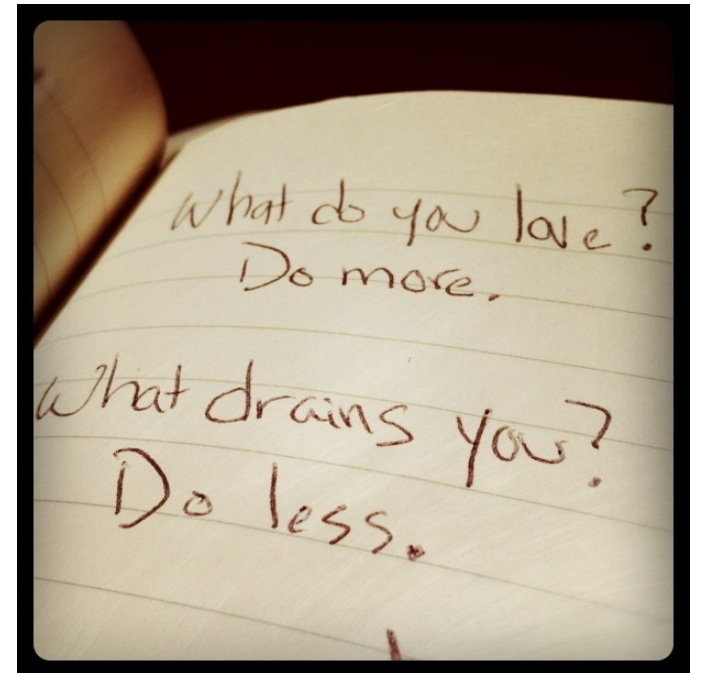


## Slow Down

What matters to you? How would you spend your time tomorrow if you had no obligations and no financial constraints? What matters—really matters—to you in life? You owe it to yourself to do more of those things.

*"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."*

- Maryanne Williamson



## Holistic Solutions

We're not looking for band aids here. This isn't about raising \$10,000 for the food bank or raising the minimum wage (both noble goals). Instead, this is about cultivating a holistic solution.

What you do is connected to where you do it, which is connected to how well you do it is. It's connected to whether or not you went to the chiropractor or if your allergies are acting up or if childcare is accessible.

We are taught to compartmentalize our lives: leave work at home, don't talk about sex with your parents, leave politics out of the workplace. Entrepreneurship as an act of resistance and creation challenges all of that. It invites us to bring our whole selves with us everywhere we go, to have a vocation we enjoy and are good at, to contribute to society and to be compensated for it, to live fulfilling balanced lives. Life, work, play, family, relationships. They're all a part of you. Revel in them all.

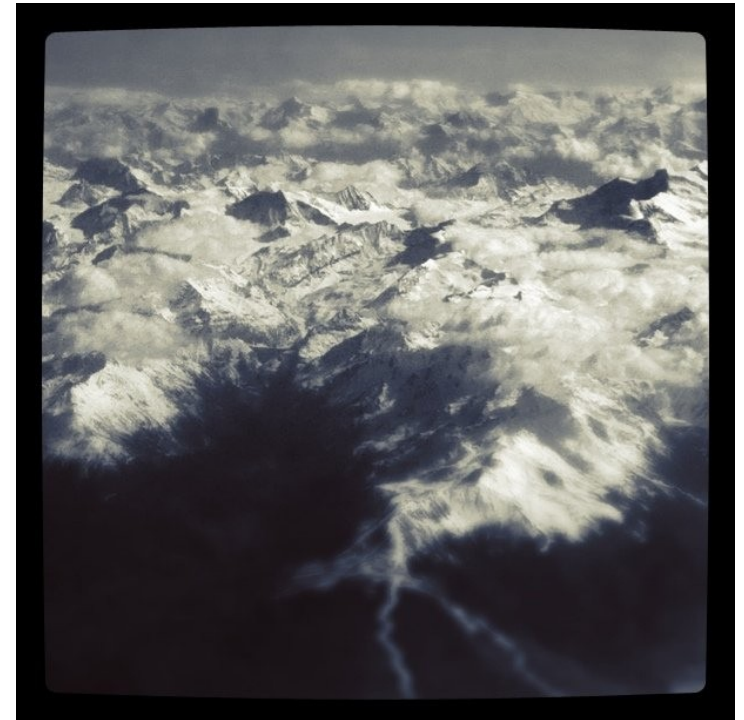
My good friend Allyson Robinson does a workshop on self-care. You can [download the most recent version of her worksheet](#) and work your way through it. As you imagine a new way of living for yourself, it must be one grounded in self-care, one that is sustainable for you and for our world.

## Long-Term Thinking

Twenty-four hour television news cycles and an endless barrage of tweets demand that we always pay attention to what's happening now, what's hot. Scandals fill the airwaves as THE MOST IMPORTANT THING before fading away after a few days to the next MOST IMPORTANT THING. It's easy to get caught up jumping from one talking point to the next, from one paycheck to the next, from one election cycle to the next.

What the world needs—what your life needs—is some longer-term thinking. How do your actions today affect your life tomorrow? What will our communal future look like? We're in the process of creating it right now, after all.

Globalization is changing the dynamics of supply and demand when it comes to labor and capital. The world becomes smaller and at the same time, our villages become even more important. Every job is outsourceable. If all you do is enter data or perform brain surgery, the world will soon no longer need you. The only job that can't be outsourced is the one of being yourself. In the end, we must all be ourselves. Tap into this long-term thinking to see the potential—and necessity—for working for yourself.



## You can do it too

In 2008, I quit my job at a television network to work for myself in the middle of a recession. I'm not the only one to do this, countless others work for themselves. You could be one of us. Believing in yourself is 75% of the struggle.

If you're ready to start acting differently, start. Begin to make your "priorities" real priorities. Begin acting on them.

[Queers For Economic Justice](#) hosts a monthly conference call about the state of our economy and the myriad forces that affect it and us. If you care about economic justice—or even just economics—check it out.

Tammy Strobel has a resource entitled [Simply Car Free](#) to empower you to live without a car. Selling my car in 2007 was one of the most liberating decisions I ever made. Of course, I didn't have Tammy's book, I just sold it and never looked back. If you are concerned about the logistics of your new car-free life, definitely check it out.

[Minimalist Business](#) by Ev Bogue is a quick and easy way to get started with a business you can run from anywhere. [The Spark Kit](#) by Danielle LaPorte is an immersive multi-media experience that guides you into the depths of your potential. These two products focus solely on businesses and not necessarily on creating positive social change through business. They are great resources nonetheless.



Are you interested in stepping out and working for yourself as an act of empowerment? I'm putting together resources tailored for visionaries such as you and your input in [this short survey](#) will help me serve your specific needs more effectively.

Take the survey at <http://www.briangerald.com/survey>

The world needs you—in all your glorious, complex, messiness—to embrace the potential within yourself and to strike out on your own. We need you to liberate yourself through entrepreneurship as an act of resistance—and of creation. We need you to opt out of the lifeless status quo we've been given and to breathe new life into a network of alternate systems and economies. This is all about you and at the same time so much bigger than you. It doesn't start with a business plan or even the first paycheck, it starts with a mental assertion: “I can do this.”

*Are you willing to take the plunge? I think you're ready.*

## About The Author

Brian Gerald Murphy is a filmmaker, media consultant, and social activist. He is the founder of a web design and social media consulting firm, Be Gee M: Design & Media, and manages the branding, marketing, and communications of several diverse ventures. He is the co-creator of the [Legalize Trans\\*](#) campaign and the co-founder of [Sanctuary Collective](#), an organization that inspires, empowers, and supports young LGBTQ adults and allies living and organizing for justice in Christian communities. Brian was a participant in the Soulforce Equality Ride in 2007, where he and a number of other young adults visited colleges and universities across the Western United States.

Brian conspires with visionary individuals and organizations to change the world through web and media. He writes on movement making at [briangerald.com](http://briangerald.com) and publishes a weekly email newsletter [Strategy + Action](#) for activists, non-profits, and world changers.

You can always reach him on [twitter](#).



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