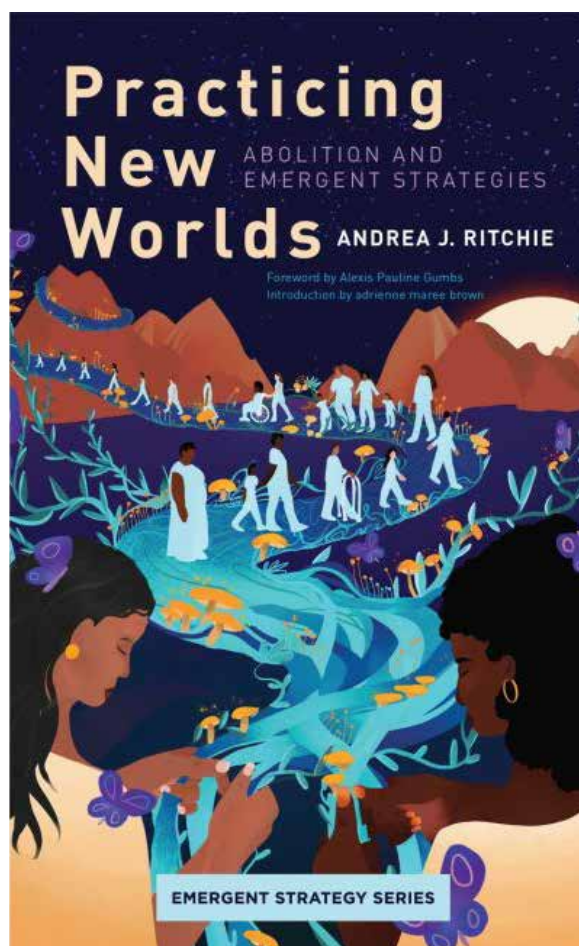


# Practicing New Worlds | Reading & Discussion Guide



AK Press Paperback | ISBN 9781849355117  
More information: [www.akpress.org](http://www.akpress.org)

## About the Book

An exploration of how emergent strategies can help us meet this moment, survive what is to come, and shape safer and more just futures.

*Practicing New Worlds* explores how principles of emergence, adaptation, iteration, resilience, transformation, interdependence, decentralization, and fractalization can shape organizing toward a world without the violence of surveillance, police, prisons, jails, or cages of any kind, in which we collectively have everything we need to survive and thrive.

Drawing on decades of experience as an abolitionist organizer, policy advocate, and litigator in movements for racial, gender, economic, and environmental justice and the principles articulated by adrienne maree brown in *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, Ritchie invites us to think beyond traditional legislative and policy change to create more possibilities for survival and resistance in the midst of the ongoing catastrophes of racial capitalism—and the cataclysms to come. Rooted in analysis of current abolitionist practices and interviews with on-the-ground organizers resisting state violence, building networks to support people in need of abortion care, and nurturing organizations and convergences that can grow transformative cities and movements, *Practicing New Worlds* takes readers on a journey of learning, unlearning, experimentation, and imagination to dream the worlds we long for into being.

## About the Author

Andrea J. Ritchie is a Black lesbian immigrant survivor who has been documenting, organizing, advocating, litigating, and agitating around policing and criminalization of Black women, girls, trans, and gender nonconforming people for the past four decades. She is cofounder of Interrupting Criminalization and the In Our Names Network, a network of over twenty organizations working to end police violence against Black women, girls, trans, and gender nonconforming people. In these capacities and through the Community Resource Hub, she works with dozens of groups across the country organizing to divest from policing and invest in strategies that will create safer communities. Ritchie is coauthor, with Mariame Kaba, of *No More Police: A Case for Abolition*, and the author of *Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color*. She is a nationally recognized researcher, policy analyst, and expert on policing and criminalization. Ritchie lives in Detroit, Michigan.

Art by [Amir Khadar](#). Guide written and designed by [Rachael Zafer](#).

## Foreword, by Alexis Pauline Gumbs

1. Who was Nanny of the Maroons?  
How did she and other maroons use emergent strategies to escape and resist slavery?

2. Consider Alexis Pauline Gumbs' closing words:

*the seeds are in the compost*

*the ancestors are in the soil*

*our love is older than any wall*

*the roots break through*

- ▶ How have you seen abolitionist organizing serve as seeds? As compost?
- ▶ How have you seen abolitionist organizing embody and practice love as presence?
- ▶ How have you seen abolitionist organizing break through walls?
- ▶ Which phrase would you like to embody in your own work?

## Introduction, by adrienne maree brown

1. adrienne describes emergent strategies as “how change has happened,” both in abolition work and throughout movement history.

- ▶ How do you think change happens in human societies? What are some of the key conditions and elements that must be present?
- ▶ How have you made change? What strategies and tactics have you used?

2. As you begin this book, what connections between organizing and emergent strategies are you looking forward to learning about? How can emergent strategies help us to create the conditions for the world we want?

- ▶ As we work to transform the world, why must we let go of some of our frameworks and tools for making radical change?

“Emergent strategies, by definition, require attention to emergence—what becomes possible under certain conditions when we start small and focus on critical connections, build decentralized networks, iterate and adapt with intention, and cooperate toward collective sustainability, rather than trying to control or impose change through law, policy, and other top-down strategies.”

Watch the [virtual launch](#) of *Practicing New Worlds* with Alexis Pauline Gumbs and adrienne maree brown.

## Introduction

1. Andrea begins *Practicing New Worlds* by reflecting on her past four decades as an organizer, policy advocate, lawyer, researcher, and writer and concludes with, "Over the past four decades, I have learned that the majority of the work to build the worlds we want happens outside of the structures that manufacture and preserve existing relations of power. I've developed a deeper awareness and understanding that we must step beyond what we know to experiment with, build, and practice new ways of being relationship with each other and the planet."
  - ▶ As you reflect on your efforts to make change, what have you learned? How has your work shifted your point of view and your practice?
  - ▶ How do current conditions shape your reflections and practice?
2. Andrea describes being deeply influenced by Grace Lee Boggs and the Allied Media Conference in her evolution as an organizer.
  - ▶ In this moment, how would you answer Grace's question, "What time is it on the clock of the world?"
  - ▶ What does visionary organizing look like to you?
  - ▶ How did you see emergent strategies and visionary organizing at play during the 2020 Uprisings? Now?
  - ▶ Learn more about Grace Lee Boggs and the [James and Grace Lee Boggs Center](#).
  - ▶ Learn more about the [Allied Media Conference](#).
  - ▶ Watch some of the plenaries and ceremonies from the AMC, including a 2020 plenary session called [From Dreams to Practice: Abolition in Our Lifetimes](#) with Andrea Ritchie, Rachel Herzog, and Mariame Kaba, and the 2018 session plenary session [Stories Become Movements, Become Stories: Ending Sexual and Gender-based Violence](#), co-moderated by Andrea.
  - ▶ Listen to episodes of the AMC podcast, [Critical Connections: Stories from 20 Years of the Allied Media Conference](#), including [Andrea's reflections](#).
3. Andrea describes Detroit as a key place of evolution and practice of emergent strategies. What are some of the things that make Detroit unique and created more possibilities for this to happen?
  - ▶ What characteristics does Detroit share with the places where you do your organizing? How is it different?
4. The introduction also makes connections between emergent strategies and Black feminist and transnational organizing. Where do you see some of those connections at play?





## Introduction (continued)

5. Have you seen emergent strategies misunderstood, applied incorrectly, or applied in harmful ways in organizing spaces? If yes, how?
  - ▶ Where do you see gaps in the framework of emergent strategies? How might these gaps be addressed?
  - ▶ How does the Right utilize approaches that could be characterized as emergent strategies?
  - ▶ Watch the Firestorm Books [event](#) on emergent strategies and the Right with Andrea and Shane Burley.
6. As you begin this book, what problems would you like to think about solving? What tools and resources do you hope to learn and connect with?
  - ▶ How can you approach this book with an openness to creativity and trying new things?

## Visionary Practice: Allied Media Projects Network Principles

1. Which of these principles resonates most with you? Do any of the principles challenge you?
  - ▶ How can you apply AMP's Network Principles to your organizing work?
  - ▶ Within your own network, where can you create spaces for listening?
2. Why does AMP focus on strategies rather than issues?
  - ▶ Where do you see opportunities within movements to shift focus from issues to strategies? How could movements benefit from this approach? What might be lost?

## Visionary Practice: Glimpses of Emergent Strategies

1. How did the Sailing for Social Justice workshop Andrea attended connect sailing with histories of decolonization and organizing? What lessons can sailing offer to movements?
2. What is one of your favorite things to do for fun? How can this activity offer lessons that help you in your organizing, relationships, and practice of connecting to yourself and with others?
  - ▶ What are some of the signposts and clues around you that serve as reminders that you are on the path to liberation?

## What Is Abolition?

1. How do the core principles and political commitments of abolitionist organizing drawn from *No More Police* resonate with you? Which ones do you find challenging?
  - ▶ What does abolition demand that we deconstruct?
  - ▶ What does abolition demand that we build?
  - ▶ How does abolition demand that we create space for dreaming, visioning, and practice?
2. How does Sage Crump describe the role of cultural organizing and culture shift in abolitionist organizing? Learn more about cultural strategy through the [Cultural Strategy Toolkit](#) that Sage created.
  - ▶ Watch Andrea and Sage in conversation on [IG Live](#).
3. What are some of the ecosystems of community care that exist around you? How can you devote your attention and resources to interrupting and transforming the conditions that produce violence?

## Visionary Practice: To Build a Future Without Police and Prisons, We Have to Imagine if First, by Walidah Imarisha

1. How can visionary fiction help us to both understand and reshape the world?
  - ▶ When utilizing visionary fiction, why is it important to create unrealistic visions of the future?
  - ▶ How do visionary fiction and sci-fi operate as imaginative spaces that allow us to dream?
2. What is the liberated future you dream of? What is the world that you want?
  - ▶ Try the prompt from Walidah Imarisha:  
*Imagine it's fifty years in the future, and social justice movements have continued winning and advancing liberation. What would your life be like? What would your everyday routine be? You could write out your daily schedule, you could write a journal entry from the year 2070. You could write a letter to a loved one talking about the changes that have occurred over your life.*
  - ▶ Watch Andrea and Walidah in conversation on [IG Live](#).

## What Are Emergent Strategies?

1. How are emergent strategies drawn from the natural world? How do they reflect Indigenous ways of knowing and being?
  - ▶ Learn more about complexity science from [#ComplexityExplained](#).
  - ▶ Learn more from Indigenous abolitionists: [Leanne Betasamosake Simpson](#)  
[Morning Star Gali](#)  
[Klee Benally](#)
2. How have you seen planned strategies and emergent strategies at work in the world around you? In your organizing?
  - ▶ Where do you see critical connections? Communities of practice? Networks? Systems of influence? How do you see them shifting complex systems that may initially appear immovable?
  - ▶ How are emergent strategies shifting current conditions, from genocidal violence in Palestine to increasing authoritarianism in the U.S.?
3. Which principles of emergent strategy challenge you and which feel intuitive?
  - ▶ Revisit the emblems by Complex Movements (pages 75-80), designed to guide visionary organizing and shape complex systems. How did Complex Movements apply these emblems to their own organizing? How might you use them in your own organizing?

## Emergent Strategies and Abolition

1. How have you witnessed emergent strategies at work in abolitionist organizing? In anti-violence work?
  - ▶ How can small experiments and a willingness to move beyond linear processes move us closer to an abolitionist horizon? How could top-down, one-size-fits-all approaches take us further from this vision?
2. What are the abolitionist futures that you dream about? How can emergent strategies help you become the person you want to be in those futures?

Watch a [virtual event](#) on abolition and emergent strategies.



## Abolition Is Fractal

1. If change happens at the smallest level, why is it important to pay attention to how we talk to ourselves and interact with each other?
  - ▶ How do you talk to yourself? What are some ways that you can shift how you talk to yourself to reflect the world you want to build outside of yourself? How can you also practice self-accountability?
  - ▶ How can you expand this practice to your relationships, parenting, organizations, and institutions?
  - ▶ What does “small is all” mean in relationship to systemic change? Why is it important to connect small-scale experiments through communities of practice and networks?
2. What does it mean that complex systems are fractal? How can you identify the building blocks of a pattern? How might they look different but operate similarly at different scales?
3. How can you shift the ways you respond to harm, conflict, and need?
  - ▶ What questions can you ask yourself to make sure that you are transforming individual and collective conditions?
  - ▶ What spaces for practice exist around you?

## Visionary Practice: Relationships Evolving Possibilities

1. Learn more about Relationships Evolving Possibilities (REP) in Minneapolis. Check out their [website](#), and listen to the One Million Experiments [podcast episode](#) and [zine](#) featuring their work.
  - ▶ How do REP’s Radical Ecosystem Pods and Revolutionary Emergency Partners support the community while deepening relationships and communities of practice?
2. What lessons can you draw from REP’s fractal approach?
  - ▶ How can you root deeper into relationships in order to evolve the possibilities for transformation in your life and in the world?

## Visionary Practice: Young Women's Empowerment Project

1. How did YWEP operate at a fractal level? How was the organization in a constant state of iteration and adaptation?
2. Consider the organizations that you are a part of. How do you iterate and adapt? What can you learn from YWEP?
3. Watch Andrea and Shira Hassan in conversation on [IG Live](#).

## Abolition Is Decentralized and Rooted in Interdependence

1. Where have you witnessed decentralization at the heart of complex systems?
  - ▶ What can we learn from ants, bees, and slime mold about decentralization? What can we learn from them about interdependence?
2. How have you seen decentralized, global movements make systemic impact? How can we apply learnings from anti-apartheid organizing to Palestine solidarity work? How does decentralization operate in decolonial movements? Organizing toward climate justice?
  - ▶ What elements are key to the success of decentralized movements?
3. How can you act from the knowledge that our existence relies on interdependence?
  - ▶ What relationships, networks, and communities of practice will help you connect and strengthen webs of care?





## Abolition Is Adaptive and Intentional

1. How do you react to change? How does it feel in your body?  
What is your instinct when you are faced with change?
  - ▶ If change is the only constant, why must we lean into the possibility of shaping rather than resisting change?
  - ▶ How can you adapt when change feels chaotic?
2. What does the principle of adaptation teach us about letting go?  
What is hard about letting go of a plan?
3. How does acting with intention help us recognize when adaptation is leading us away from our values, visions, and politics?
  - ▶ What is your intention? How can you resist normalizing conditions that perpetuate violence?

## Abolition Is Nonlinear and Iterative

1. How can acknowledging that we are operating within complex systems help us navigate the fact that change is nonlinear?
2. What is a progress narrative? Why is it important to let go of a ten-point plan when exploring expansive possibilities?
  - ▶ How can we simultaneously hold uncertainty and possibility?
3. How can you use iteration in your work to move toward your goals?
4. Why is it important to release a search for perfection?
  - ▶ How can iteration help us to see the gifts and lessons in failures?
  - ▶ What are some of the failures that have taught you and prompted you to iterate?

## Visionary Practice: Harm Free Zones

1. How have Harm Free Zones been iterating over the past two decades?
  - ▶ How have they helped build consensus, skills, and practices within communities to create community-based responses that don't rely on the police?
  - ▶ How might you apply the Harm Free Zones principles in the place where you live?

## Visionary Practice: Freedom Square

1. How did the 2016 Freedom Square Occupation in Chicago operate based on emergent strategies?
  - ▶ How did organizers effectively build a community without police?
  - ▶ How did Freedom Square function as a fractal?
2. How did Freedom Square's pursuit of a policy demand serve as both an adaptation and a reflection of interdependence? How did organizers center the people directly impacted by the police facility at the site of protest rather than themselves?
  - ▶ How does this example illustrate that emergent strategies aren't the plan or the strategy but can help to guide the practices that bring us there?

## Abolition Is Cooperative and Focused on Collective Sustainability

1. What are cooperatives and solidarity economies? How do they reflect emergent strategies?
  - ▶ How do they disrupt economic systems that produce and require policing?
2. Learn more about [Queer the Land](#).
  - ▶ How can you build collective sustainability through shared space and practice in your own life?
3. What new economic structures could we dream, build, and practice that could help us collectively control the means of production in service of sustainability?

## Abolition Builds Resilience and Fosters Transformation

1. What does complexity science teach us about resilience and transformation? What is required for true resilience? How can you watch for positive adaptation?
  - ▶ How can building skills and communities of transformative justice practice help to build resilient communities?
  - ▶ How can you build your skills in order to begin practicing transformative justice in your life and in your community?
2. Why does abolition require that we continuously exercise creativity?
  - ▶ How can you use your imagination in service of abolition? Could you practice writing visionary fiction or making visionary art?



**As you read each of the pieces of visionary fiction that follow this chapter, ask yourself:**

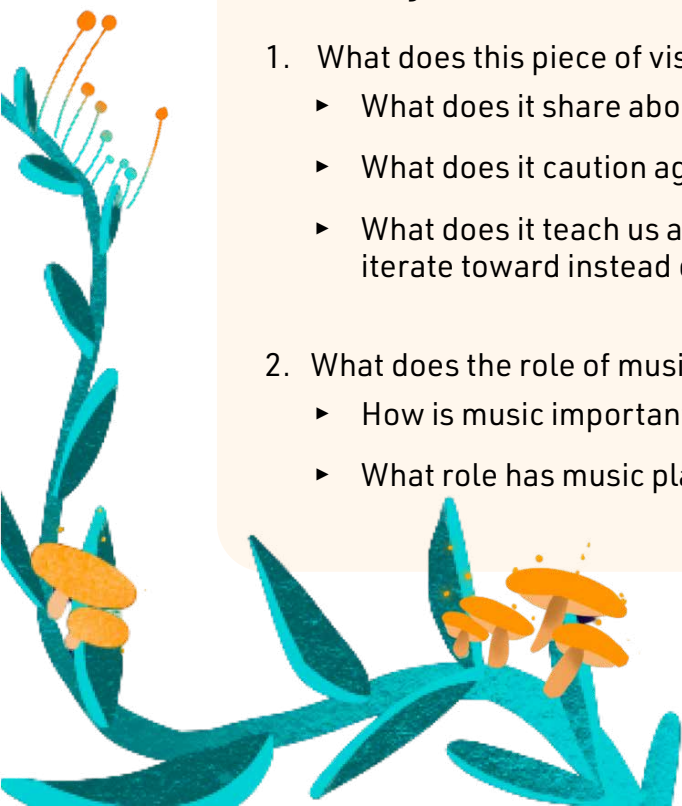
- ▶ *Are these responses truly transformative?*
- ▶ *Do they shift the conditions that make violence possible?*
- ▶ *Are they fully aligned with abolitionist politics and practices?*
- ▶ *Are they an iteration toward abolitionist horizon or a testament to the continuing hold that policing and punishment have on our imaginations?*

**Visionary Practice: Tending the Acre, by Shawn Taylor**

1. How can this piece of visionary fiction help us think about transformative approaches to accountability and harm?
2. How is trauma addressed in this story?
  - ▶ What does this story imagine about the reentry process?
  - ▶ What concerns do you have about the practices reflected in this story?
  - ▶ What possibilities excite you?

**Visionary Practice: Albina Zone, by Lisa Bates**

1. What does this piece of visionary fiction imagine in an abolitionist future?
  - ▶ What does it share about transformative justice?
  - ▶ What does it caution against?
  - ▶ What does it teach us about abolitionist futures as an ever-changing horizon we iterate toward instead of a final destination we arrive at?
2. What does the role of music play in this story?
  - ▶ How is music important in your life?
  - ▶ What role has music played in your movement work?



## Abolition Creates More Possibilities (That We Can't Currently Imagine)

1. How can visionary art and visionary fiction help us to practice dreaming of alternate futures? How might they help us see how policing and punishment are deeply embedded in our imaginations?
  - ▶ Why must we create more possibilities in order to manifest a future we cannot yet imagine?
  - ▶ What roles can artists play in this process?
  - ▶ What is the role of play in helping us to imagine and practice abolitionist futures?
2. Why must justice be a pleasurable experience? What could help you to embrace curiosity and creativity?
  - ▶ How can you cultivate more joy, pleasure, connection, and hope in your life? In your organizing?
  - ▶ What are 5 ways you can help make abolitionist movements irresistible?

## A Note on Wave-Particle Duality

1. What is wave-particle duality? Why is this principle important for understanding the importance of releasing certainty and false binaries?
2. Why is it important to let go of the need for certainty about what an abolitionist future looks like?

## Practice (A Conclusion)

1. What role has practice played in your life? How has it shifted what is possible for you? For people you were practicing with?
  - ▶ What skills and connections has capitalism and policing robbed from us? How can we practice toward creating new possibilities and building another world?
  - ▶ What is marronage? How can we learn from our ancestors to engage in present-day maroon practices?
  - ▶ What are you practicing now? What are your values, your intentions, and your commitments?
2. Learn more about the movement to [#StopCopCity](#). How are emergent strategies visible within this movement?
3. Watch the [recording](#) of the Charis Books launch of *Practicing New Worlds* with Micah Herskind and Kamau Franklin of [#StopCopCity](#).



## Visionary Practice: Pandowrimo

1. Choose one of [adrienne maree brown's Pandowrimo writing prompts](#) and try your own hand at visionary fiction.
2. As you begin to write visionary fiction, how can you practice writing alternate beginnings and endings?

## Visionary Practice: Surfacing

1. Why do you think Andrea Ritchie chose to end her book with this story? What do the sailor and the mermaid represent?
2. How did reading this vision for the future make you feel?

