



Tishman Environment  
and Design Center



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# What Will Change: Nadia Elrokhsy on Policy and Resistance



*The next four years will prove to be unprecedented in the roll-back and dismantling of environmental protections. In our new series, What Will Change, Tishman Center Affiliated Faculty reflect on the environmental and social justice impacts of the election results from*

*the perspectives of their research,  
practice, and passion.*

**We>**

***By Nadia Elrokhsy***

**A personal look back to the events  
of this past week.**

With cautious excitement, we seemed to be edging our way to our nation's second and consecutive first, a woman as President-Elect. I have been an Independent since I was of age to vote in an election. The first generation in my family able to register, I was not convinced that my diverse set of values would be wholly served by voting along one political party line. Never wanting to cast a vote out into the abyss—I am too risk-averse for that—the 2016 election seemed different. I felt for the first time that it might be necessary and desirable to make the switch during the primaries. However, if Elizabeth Warren didn't think we, the United States, were ready to elect a Democrat who pushed further to the left then how would Bernie Sanders succeed? So, out of fear of losing any gains made in these last eight years, I drank the Kool-Aid. Yes, I did realize our job would still be challenging, but possible. I proudly supported Hilary Rodham-Clinton, and increasingly so, with each debate. Although, as the

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passing hour, what came to my mind was an excerpt from FDR's inaugural address, "that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." But we advanced to cut off our own limbs, maiming ourselves and not "the establishment." We have struck our first tipping point. "Snap," in the blink of an eye, our first, very real, climate change tipping point. We are, indeed, in brand new territory. I went to bed staring out the window, not knowing where to begin. Hillary was *supremely* qualified, brave, and capable of moving with the desire of the people!

**Hope and action staves off fear and retreat.**

Wednesday morning and I had to face my daughter. She's going to need hope. I didn't prepare her for this outcome. As I am prone to do at moments like these, a smile is where I started. I reminded her that we knew our job wouldn't have been completed with Hillary as President-Elect. What I didn't say is that our job had just got *exponentially* harder. The outcome is not good for climate change mitigation, a single issue that represents so many issues and unites us all. As I went for my morning walk I passed painful examples of why we cannot give-up,

or retreat waiting for another presidential election—one homeless person after another, huddled over the waste-heat vents of our inefficient infrastructure; the neglected and disenfranchised men and women that push large waste bins along our streets collecting single-use remnants of our over-consumption practices. We must continue the hard work, because “...our constitutional democracy demands our participation.....,” as Hillary reminded us in her concession speech that day. In need of more, so much more, Thursday, I went to the Johnathan Schell Memorial Lecture Series, with environmentalist and author [Bill McKibben providing the inaugural lecture](#) on the fate of the earth. I hadn’t planned on attending. It was a school night and my husband was at a meeting; my daughter would have to come with me—homework and Social Studies exam be damned. I got what I needed. McKibben asks us to be willing to take part in

### **Peaceful Civil Disobedience**

It had been haunting me for some time; I was going to have to do a lot of soul-searching on this one come these next four years. As a full-time faculty member, teaching at The New School, I made sure that any discussion of sustainability included policy. In the United States, we could

not afford to assume that policy was an integral thought of any triple bottom-line, three-legged stool, that served to define strategies for a sustainable development. We'd have to fight for it.

### **People + Planet + Profitable exchanges + Policy**

Policy that favors building infrastructure, job creation, health of our soil, water and air, will have to divest from fossil fuel extraction. PERIOD. The science and math are clear. I thought we were getting that message across, uniting across diverse fronts. If this President wants to make America great again then each and every decision he makes should be tested and mapped, in the short and long-term, against that goal of greatness. Greatness can only be inclusive; we must

### **Stand with Standing Rock**

Energy-efficient light bulbs and other best practices in energy-efficiency designed to reduce fossil fuel consumption will not save our planet from climate disruption. It's too late. Policy that keeps fossil fuels in the ground is our only robust chance of mitigating further global warming. However, we must remember that art and design can and will be instrumental in leading the way to comfort, health, and wellbeing as we

and in the future. Design must employ robust measures that address how we consume energy, water, and material resources (including food systems solidarity), to sustain life. Additionally, we must continue to make visible the invisible, use the technologies of the day to connect--people and issues--and give voice in productive ways. This is the role of not only art and design, but of all the fields of work represented at The New School.

### **Empathetic, systems thinking, ecological practices**

Friday was the [Jackie Brookner: Of Nature](#) Symposium. A day at Wave Hill in honor of one of our colleagues was something I was looking forward to before the election results, but now it was going to be cathartic. Surrounded by that wonderful urban ecology, the misogyny, racism, and xenophobia had no face. I was fortunate to have worked alongside Jackie and other faculty I so admire at The New School as we developed the Parsons first-year *common-core* course, Sustainable Systems [Art and Design for Ecological Resilience]. Jackie was instrumental in bringing awareness to the many and varied possibilities of community engagement and remediation. The symposium was a fitting memorial. Amongst Jackie's work on display was her quote: *Feminism is a route by*

*which all women and men, men and women can live with more courage and a fuller opportunity for growth and participation in society and with more courage to develop a fuller sense of personal freedom.*

-Jackie Brookner,  
“Art Journal,” Summer 199As the weekend drew near the text and email check-ins were fast and furious, and the marches continued. We all have our story to tell and this is a time for sharing. As I talked with friends about plans for the January 21<sup>st</sup> march on Washington’s Lincoln Memorial I was reminded of a story I read on the museum blog for the recently completed National Museum of African American History and Culture. “Why Should We March?” tells the story of a civil rights march on Washington, D. C., in 1941, that never happened, but provided lessons for the 1963 civil rights march. Looking at struggles to overcome through the lens of others inspire us to pull through. The human history of practicing dissent and resistance is long. Taking to the streets in great numbers is still a powerful way to unite us all and this action has been amplified with creative strategies and the use of social media. We must draw out in

even greater numbers and be super resourceful in defending our democracy.

### Women's March on Washington

You want it darker? No, but the voice, the words, the memorial of things and the weekend was a time to reflect, write, listen, be with friends, and yes, even sing and dance. So with its unnerving link to the unfulfilled election night stage, set for “breaking the glass ceiling,” and the Sunday church bells that ring in my neighborhood, which suddenly seemed to have turned melancholy, excerpts from Leonard Cohen’s Anthem lyrics repeated in my head.... *The birds they sang at the break of day Start again I heard them say Don't dwell on what has passed away or what is yet to be. But they've summoned, they've summoned up a thundercloud and they're going to hear from me. Ring the bells that still can ring Forget your perfect offering There is a crack, a crack in everything That's how the light gets in. That's how the light gets in. That's how the light gets in.* So now, it is our Monday morning. Let's get to work. [Nadia Elrokhsy](#) is an Assistant Professor of Sustainable Interior Design at [Parsons School of Design](#).

