

Reaching from NO towards a transformational YES

by Tom Atlee

Co-Intelligence Institute

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Dear friends,

As this vast destructive event that so many of us worked to prevent unfolds, it is time to re-center in the larger transformational role of our activism.

These intense times open space for change, even as they may close space for change. What we do -- and how we see our role and activity in "the big picture" -- will profoundly influence the size of the precious opening now available through the unfolding sacrifices of so many people -- activists, powerful people transformed, innocent Iraqis, human shields, whole nations punished for not accommodating the goals of empire... The list is long.

And we need to remember, as we reflect on these times, how this event drew us into greater involvement. As novelist Paulo Coelho wrote to President Bush, "Thank you, because, without you, we would not have realised our own ability to mobilise. It may serve no purpose this time, but it will doubtless be useful later on . . . Thank you for allowing us -- an army of anonymous people filling the streets in an attempt to stop a process that is already underway -- to know what it feels like to be powerless and to learn to grapple with that feeling and transform it."

And so the time has arrived for some of us to transform our NO into a YES so vast it will change the world -- even as others of us persist in voicing our collective NO on behalf Life, as a mother acts powerfully to protect her child.

If and as you find yourself inclined towards more affirmative activism, I hope the insights and tools given here -- as well as those on www.co-intelligence.org -- will help. I have chosen five pieces which explore the nuances of the YES and NO in whose embrace we currently find ourselves. May they be useful to you.

Coheartedly,
Tom

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1. The YES and the NO of activism

After the final no there comes a yes,
and on that yes the future of the world depends.
--- Wallace Stevens

We have known for a long time it is not enough to be against something; we learned it as we grew out of our adolescence and raised our children through theirs. "No" only defines us against the other; "yes" embraces the whole of our interrelated identity and reality.

I carry [a] message of promise and faith along with the "no" of my anti-war, anti-imperialism protests. The fact of the war in Iraq happening will not stop my anti-war work. But it gives me even more determination to move forward a positive vision for the future for my country and my planet.

--- Rabia (Elizabeth Roberts)
Letter from the Road #16 - 19 March 2003

2. What the demonstrators want

Protesters' Agenda is Clear to the Observant

By Richard A Stimson <stimso1@juno.com>

Before the recent anti-war protests, other protests for global justice have been held in cities where international meetings of the powerful were being held, such as Seattle, Quebec, Washington, and many cities of Europe.

The media quoted officials as not knowing what the protesters wanted. A recent analysis by the International Forum on Globalization reveals these objectives common to the diverse groups present:

1. **Democracy** -
going beyond merely electing political parties to governments serving people and communities rather than global corporations.
2. **Subsidiarity** -
local decisions and actions except when higher coordination is necessary.
3. **Ecological sustainability** -
protection of the environment for future generations.
4. **Common heritage** -
air, water, forests, fisheries, culture, knowledge, and public services that should not be subject to private exploitation.

5. **Diversity** -
cultural, economic, and biological.
6. **Human Rights** -
as in the United Nations Declaration in 1948.
7. **Jobs, livelihood, employment** -
including protection of traditional farming and fishing from corporate encroachment, and of the rights of workers.
8. **Food security and safety** -
as opposed to the erosion of independent farming and of food safety by agribusiness.
9. **Equity** -
reducing the growing gaps between rich and poor countries, within countries, and between men and women.
10. **The precautionary principle** -
restriction of potentially harmful products and practices rather than allowing them to continue until harm has occurred and can be scientifically demonstrated.

The recent book in which this is reported is *Alternatives to Economic Globalization* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2002) and is available in bookstores as well as through the publisher.

[Note: One of the reasons I like this list is that it places Democracy first. As focused as we get on specific issues, it is easy to forget that democracy is the only decent tool we have to handle all the other issues well. The higher the quality of our democracy, the better EVERY issue will be handled. That's why I've chosen to focus my own attention there. Furthermore, I expect democracy will rise into greater public and activist consciousness as the aspects of democracy people take for granted are increasingly challenged by efforts to concentrate power, silence dissent, control election outcomes, etc.]

3. Dimensions of "The Great Turning"

Excerpt from "Dimensions of the Great Turning"

<http://www.sevmedia.net/clients/gt/Main/Dimensions/expanded-def.html>

by Joanna Macy

I like to imagine that future generations, even as close as the 2030s, 2040s, will look back on this time and call it "the great turning."

They'll look back at us and say, "All those ancestors back then, bless them. They were involved in the great turning, and they didn't know whether they would make it or not. At times it looked as if it was hopeless, futile. Their efforts seemed paltry, darkened by confusion, and yet they went ahead and they took part in it." And I'm imagining that they'll look back with almost a kind of envy, seeing more clearly than we can now the

high adventure that it represents, this great turning from a growth-addicted, unsustainable society to a stable, life-sustaining one.

Lest I sound too wildly optimistic, let me acknowledge that we don't know if this great turning is going to happen fast enough or fully enough to stop the unraveling of the systems supporting complex, conscious life forms on this planet. It's not clear yet whether we're going to pull it off. There's no guarantee.

You know, when you make peace with that, you realize something. It liberates you from having to be braced all the time against bad news and constantly feeling you have to work up a sense of hopefulness, which can be very exhausting. That's one thing the Buddhists have taught me. There's a certain equanimity and moral economy when you're not continually trying to evaluate your chances of success.

Yet we can certainly see the great turning happening now, and most clearly if we look at three particular dimensions of it. These three are interdependent and mutually supportive.

The FIRST I call "holding actions." These are the many forms of legal, political, legislative, and regulatory activities by which we are slowing down the destruction caused by the industrial growth society. To be included also are the many kinds of direct action -- blockades, boycotts, civil disobedience, tree sitting. Through these we are managing to save some species and some ecosystems, save some lives, save some genetic material for the life-sustaining society that's coming.

These holding actions can be exhausting, though. It's good to know that it's OK to step back. Many of us, if we step back when we feel bruised and bent out of shape from being there in point position on issue after issue, feel as if we are abandoning ship. We feel guilty about it. But we need to know that the great turning is vast, and if we step back, it's like the lead goose dropping back from point position to fly in the windstream of the others. We're not abandoning anything. We don't cease being who we are, and we don't stop being deeply allied with the ongoingness of life.

The SECOND dimension of the great turning comprises the new structures, institutions, agreements, and ways of doing things. It is extraordinary how swiftly these are springing up like green shoots through the rubble of our dysfunctional civilization. I don't think there has ever been a time in human history when so many new ways of doing things have appeared in so short a time -- from ways of owning land, to co-housing, to eco-villages, to cooperatives, to new local currencies, alternative schools, alternative modes of healing. They reveal an amazing degree of ingenuity, an awesome readiness to experiment and create. Even though these emergent and often embryonic systems sometimes look fringe, perhaps, or marginal, they are the seeds of the future.

Yet these new forms will wither and die unless they're deeply grounded in our values. So the THIRD dimension of the great turning is in the way we see things and understand our connection and requirements for life. There is a revolution going on in our grasp of what we really need, and it is quietly spreading now in the simple living

movement.

I teach general living systems theory because it helps us understand that our true nature is in relationship. Deep ecology, which is also very important for me, is the moral and intuitive expression of this systems view, where we give up clinging to some special status as the crown of creation and rejoin the earth community. Then we can experience our own specialness in ways that allow us to see the specialness of every other life form.

4. Guidelines for Power Politics, Cooperative Politics and Holistic Politics

by Tom Atlee

(For my full "spectrum of politics" see "Transformational Politics"
http://www.co-intelligence.org/CIPol_TransformPol1.html)

Here are some guidelines to help us explore the extent to which any particular political (or activist) activity involves power politics, cooperative politics, and/or holistic politics:

1. To the extent that

- a. someone loses
and/or
- b. people are working *against* something or someone

adversarial power politics or activism is involved.

2. To the extent that

- a. everyone involved benefits or has their basic needs met or their legitimate interests satisfied
and/or
- b. people are working *with* each other, or *with* the realities of the situation *

cooperative politics or activism is involved.

3. To the extent that

- a. the community as a whole benefits -- ending up more healthy, prosperous, secure, wise, sane, capable, etc.
and/or
- b. the full range of relevant perspectives, stories, resources, types of people, etc., are creatively engaged,

holistic politics or activism is involved.

These three modes of politics and activism are not always separate. For example, most political coalitions are (or strive to be) groups that are cooperative on the inside and adversarial in their engagements with their opponents. And it is possible to fight for something -- environmental health, strong democracy -- that benefits the whole community, thus using adversarial means for holistic ends.

Gandhi helped clarify this by saying he was fighting against undesirable conditions while cooperating with the deepest truth in his opponents. He used cooperative or holistic politics on the people even while he used adversarial politics on the issues.

Non-adversarial and co-intelligent activism

To the extent politics or activism is cooperative and, especially, holistic, it can be considered non-adversarial.

Co-intelligent activism *tends* to be non-adversarial. In particular, it focuses on increasing the capacity of human systems of all kinds to respond sanely and intelligently to changing circumstances. Efforts to enhance "wise democracy" can significantly enhance that capacity (see "A Call to Move Beyond Public Opinion to Public Judgment" [http://www.co-intelligence.org/CIPoL_publicjudgment.html] and *The Tao of Democracy* [www.taofdemocracy.com]).

However, sometimes adversarial events can provoke a system (group, community, nation) into cooperative or holistic activity. We saw this in the global response for peace triggered by the US drive for war in Iraq. So co-intelligent activism is motivated by holistic ends and may use any or all parts of the political spectrum in ways that elicit the life-serving energy of the whole system to heal and transform itself.

*FOOTNOTE: "working with the realities of the situation" means working with the opportunities, tendencies, resources or energies present in a situation. This is the spirit of Aikido which uses the energy of an attacker to neutralize him. This is the spirit of permaculture, which claims that all problems can be viewed as opportunities and resources; it is up to us to creatively see and use them as such. When the forces of death and degradation prevail, their extremism can be used to wake up people of good will. When mistakes are made, lessons can be learned. When two adversaries are negotiating, a smart facilitator can help them see their conflict as a shared problem they can both work on to solve together for mutual satisfaction. These are all "working WITH the realities of the situation" rather than fighting them.

5. The Third Side

-- a creative bridge between cooperative and holistic politics

www.thirdside.org

As the old African proverb goes, "When spider webs unite, they can halt even a lion."

No more critical challenge faces each of us, and all of us together, than how to live together in a world of differences. So much depends on our ability to handle our conflicts peacefully - our happiness at home, our performance at work, the livability of our communities, and, in this age of mass destruction, the survival of our species.

The Third Side offers a promising new way to look at the conflicts around us. The Third Side is the community - us - in action protecting our most precious interests in safety and well-being. It suggests ten practical roles any of us can play on a daily basis to stop destructive fighting in our families, at work, in our schools, and in the world. Each of our individual actions is like a single spider web, fragile perhaps but, when united with others, capable of halting the lion of war. Although the Third Side is in its infancy in our modern-day societies, it has been used effectively by simpler cultures for millennia to reduce violence and promote dialogue.

We cannot eliminate conflict - nor should we. Conflict is a natural part of life. It brings about change and confronts injustice. The best decisions result not from a superficial consensus, but from surfacing different points of view and searching for creative solutions. If anything, we need more conflict, not less. What the Third Side enables us to do is to transform conflict, to change the form it takes from bitter arguments, power contests, violence, and war into dialogue, negotiation, and democracy.

The idea of the Third Side and much of the text of www.thirdside.org are drawn from *The Third Side: Why We Fight and How We Can Stop* by William Ury (Penguin 2000).

The Third Side is:

- People from the Community
- Using the Power of Peers
- From a Perspective of Common Ground
- Supporting a Process of Dialogue & Nonviolence
- Aiming for a Product of a "Triple Win"

Here are these five elements in more detail:

People from the community - Unlike the ultimate arbiter in the form of a king or authoritarian state, the third side is not a transcendent individual or institution who dominates all, but rather the *emergent will of the community*. It is an impulse that arises from the vital relationships linking each member and every other member of the community.

Using the Power of peers - The third side possesses the power of peer pressure and the force of public opinion. It is people power. It uses the power of persuasion. It influences the parties primarily through an appeal to their interests and to community norms. In every conflict, there usually exists not just one possible third party but a multitude. Individually, we may not be able to intervene effectively, but collectively we are potentially more powerful than any two conflicting parties. Organizing ourselves into a coalition, we can balance the power between the parties and protect the weaker one.

From a Perspective of common ground - While most issues in contention are presented as having just two sides - pro and con - there usually exists a third. From this third perspective, the truth of each competing point of view can be appreciated. Shared interests often come to loom larger than the differences. People remember that they all, in the end, belong to the same extended community.

Supporting a Process of dialogue and nonviolence - Silently or loudly, the Third Side says "No" to violence and "Yes" to dialogue. Thirdsiders urge disputants to sit down and talk out their differences respectfully. They focus, in other words, on the process. To them, how people handle their differences is just as important as what outcome they reach.

Aiming for a Product of a "Triple Win" - Thirdsiders strive for a resolution that satisfies the legitimate needs of the parties and at the same time meets the needs of the wider community. The goal of the third side is, in other words, a "triple win."

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<http://www.ratical.org/co-globalize/whatnext.html>