

Where are we now? Assessment and planning

Any hope for a restoration of civil society [in its function, if not its conception] will come from small, local groups and community organizations. They will begin with the mundane tasks of holding back the expansion of charter schools, enforcing environmental regulations, building farmers' markets, fighting for the minimum wage, giving sanctuary to undocumented workers, protesting hate crimes and electing people to local offices who will seek to mitigate the excesses of the state.

- Chris Hedges, "In the time of Trump, all we have is each other"

The move from Western monarchy and aristocracy to liberal democracy was a protracted negotiation of forces that -- with all its limitations and accomplishments, bloodshed and promise -- effectively transferred legitimacy from one political system to another. On the chance we are indeed living at such a moment now, I would generalize the predictions in the quote above to suggest that goals for **short-term strategies** might:

- Attempt to maintain economic, social and political rights on national and international level;
- Demand and protect access to state resources;
- Impede the advancement of policies and practices that are divisive and otherwise detrimental to our ability to order our lives together in such a way that provides for individual and collective well-being; and
- Participate in state systems in ways that are deemed strategically beneficial in the short or long term (not focusing on the mid term)

Long-term strategies include the building of communities, resources, communication skills, economic self-determination and complex economies through emerging political systems that are being shaped through the process itself. Goals here might be to:

- Confer power on institutions to the extent and in the ways that serve specific, strategic needs
- Build institutions that reflect the values, relationship between Self and Other, and ways of knowing and learning negotiated by its constituents

As a gesture **toward criteria for assessing strategy and making distinctions** in such a confusing and disorienting time I offer these questions: In what ways does an objective, strategy or tactic:

- limit the definition of what it means to be 'political' and therefore our strategies?
- compel people to organizing that in affect attempts to re-invigorate liberalism?
- give people permission to ignore/not prioritize the needs of the most marginalized?
- exclude the possibility of third-order change?
- ask people to rely on the state in particular ways that the state isn't reliable?
- reinforce a "challenge for power"?
- undermine coalition building?

To assess the transformative value of a reformatory political project, [Dean Spade](#) offers these **questions**:

- Does it provide material relief?
- Does it leave out an especially marginalized part of the affected group, creating "deserving" or "undeserving"?
- Does it legitimize or expand a system we are trying to dismantle (such as adding more oversight)?
- Does *how* we are winning it mobilize the most affected for ongoing struggle?

All around us, now, are emergent political systems that are also situated in a new kind of future and new kind of practice. They exist in an in between place, amidst whole realms of not knowing yet to be navigated. In such an environment, it is vital that we attempt to identify and learn how to nurture the democratic principles, practices and institutions capable of producing the culture from which a shared future might emerge.