

adrienne maree brown

'The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion.' – camus...documenting my liberation

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What is/isn't transformative justice?



Adrienne

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Uncategorized

Bill Cosby, emergent strategy, facilitation, grievance, mediation, movement, Ryan Li Dahlstrom, transformation, transformative justice

I've been thinking a lot about transformative justice lately.

In the past few months I've been to a couple of gatherings I was really excited about, and then found myself disappointed, not because drama kicked up, which is inevitable, but because of how we as participants and organizers and people handled those dramas.

Simultaneously I've watched several public take downs, call outs and other grievances take place on social and mainstream media.

And I'm wondering if those of us with an intention of transforming the world have a common understanding of the kind of justice we want to practice, now and in the future.

What we do now is find out someone or some group has done (or may have done) something out of alignment with our values. Some of the transgressions are small – saying something fucked up. Some are massive – false identity, sexual assault.

We then tear that person or group to shreds in a way that affirms our values. When we are satisfied that that person or group is destroyed, we move on.

Or sometimes we just move on because the next scandal has arrived.

I'm not above this behavior – I laugh at the memes, like the apoplectic statuses. I feel better about myself because I'm on the right side of history... or at least the news cycle.

But I also wonder: is this what we're here for? To cultivate a fear-based adherence to reductive common values?

What can this lead to in an imperfect world full of sloppy complex humans? Is it possible we will call each other out until there's no one left beside us?

I've had tons of conversations with people who, in these moments of public flaying, avoid stepping up on the side of complexity or curiosity because in the back of our minds is the shared unspoken question: when will y'all come for me?

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Writing my heart out for this blog takes thousands of hours a year - and I love every second of it. If you feel moved while you're here, please consider [becoming a member](#) and loving me back!

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ACTIVE PROJECTS

- [How to Survive the End of the World Podcast](#)
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The places I'm drawn to in movement espouse a desire for transformative justice – justice practices that go all the way to the root of the problem and generate solutions and healing there, such that the conditions that create injustice are transformed.

And yet...we don't really know how to do it.

We call it transformative justice when we're throwing knives and insults, exposing each other's worst mistakes, reducing each other to moments of failure. We call it holding each other accountable.

I'm tired of it. I recently reposted words from Ryan Li Dahlstrom, speaking about this trend in the queer community. But I see it everywhere I turn.

When the response to mistakes, failures and misunderstandings is emotional, psychological, economic and physical punishment, we breed a culture of fear, secrecy and isolation.

So I'm wondering, in a real way: how can we pivot towards practicing transformative justice? How do we shift from individual, interpersonal and inter-organizational anger towards viable generative sustainable systemic change?

In my facilitation and meditation work, I've seen three questions that can help us grow. I offer them here with real longing to hear more responses, to get in deep practice that helps us create conditions conducive to life in our movements and communities.

1. Listen with 'Why?' as a framework.

People mess up. We lie, exaggerate, betray, hurt, and abandon each other. When we hear that this has happened, it makes sense to feel anger, pain, confusion and sadness. But to move immediately to punishment means that we stay on the surface of what has happened.

To transform the conditions of the 'wrongdoing', we have to ask ourselves and each other 'Why?'

Even – especially – when we are scared of the answer.

It's easy to decide a person or group is shady, evil, psychopathic. The hard truth (hard because there's no quick fix) is that long term injustice creates most evil behavior. The percentage of psychopaths in the world is just not high enough to justify the ease with which we assign that condition to others.

In my mediations, 'Why?' is often the game changing, possibility opening question. That's because the answers rehumanize those we feel are perpetuating against us. 'Why?' often leads us to grief, abuse, trauma, mental illness, difference, socialization, childhood, scarcity, loneliness.

Also, 'Why?' makes it impossible to ignore that we *might* be capable of a similar transgression in similar circumstances.

We don't want to see that.

Demonizing is more efficient than relinquishing our world views, which is why we have slavery, holocausts, lynchings and witch trials in our short human history.

'Why?' can be an evolutionary question.

2. Ask yourself/selves: what can I /we learn from this?

I love the pop star Rihanna, not just because she smokes blunts in ballgowns, but because one of her earliest tattoos is 'never a failure, always a lesson'.

ARCHIVES (WEB AND MAGAZINE)

- Bon Appétit Interview (2019)
- By Any Means Necessary
- Can Whole Foods Co-exist With The Homegrown Food Movement (2012)
- Chicago Tribune Interview (2019)
- Cook, Eat, Talk: Midwifing Movement
- Corporations Ain't People (with Dani McClain)
- Dramatizing the "death" of environmentalism doesn't help urban people of color, or anyone else
- Dream Beyond the Wounds
- Everyone Is My Teacher: A Journey Towards Spiritual Leadership (pg 24)
- Generation Mixed
- If The Dead Could Spit (Saul Williams Interview)
- ILY interview on love and relationship
- In 2019, Let's Resolve to Organize With Love in the Face of Apocalypse
- Interview for The Creative Independent
- Interview with Zenobia Jeffries at Yes! Magazine
- Love & the Apocalypse (Yes Magazine Roundtable)
- NTV Interview
- On Ursula Le Guin for Yes! Magazine
- Sublevel: Report – Recommendations for Right Now From a Future
- Thank You, Egypt
- The Lit Review Podcast on Emergent Strategy
- The Lit Review Podcast on Octavia's Broad
- The Pleasure Dome (Bitch magazine column)
- This Valentine's Day, Let's Choose Love Over Borders
- Transforming Ruckus: Actions Speak Louder
- Trauma Makes Weapons of Us All – Interviewed by Justin Scott Campbell (2018)

FOR THE CULTURE

- Playlist: 2010s Shuffle!
- Playlist: Queer Appalachia Virgo Playlist (raising funds for Mutual Aid)

LISTEN TO AMB

- Air Go Interview (2019)
- BBC Radio on Brecht poem: Pleasure
- Chicago Humanities Festival conversation with Charlene Carruthers (2019)
- Collections with Michelle Brown, Interview (2019)
- Critical Connections (Allied Media Conference 20 Year Anniversary Podcast)
- CTZN Well Podcast Interview (2019)
- Femme Too Deep Interview (2017)
- For the Wild Interview on Emergent Strategy (2018)
- For the Wild Interview on Pleasure Activism (2019)
- Fortification Podcast (2018)
- Healing Justice Pleasure Activism Book Club with amb and Amita Swadhin (2019)
- Healing Justice Podcast Interview (Emergent Strategy)
- Healing Justice Podcast: Cast a Spell with amb (2017)
- Healing Justice: Imagination and Connection (2017)
- In Conversation with Chani Nicholas
- In Conversation with Omkari Williams
- Interview for Down for Whatever Podcast
- Interview for Hurry Slowly Podcast
- Interviewed by Bitch Magazine

If the only thing I can learn from a situation is that some humans do bad things, it's a waste of my precious time – I already know that.

What I want to know is, what can this teach me/us about how to improve our humanity?

For instance, Bill Cosby's mass rape history is not a lesson in him being a horrible isolated mass rapist. It's a lesson in listening to women who identify perpetrators, making sure those perpetrators are not able to continue their violence but experience interventions that transform them, make that injustice impossible. If the first woman raped by Cosby had been listened to, over 40 other women could have been spared.

What can we learn? In every situation there are lessons that lead to transformation.

3. How can my real time actions contribute to transforming this situation (vs making it worse)?

This question feels particularly important in the age of social media, where we can make our pain viral before we've even had a chance to feel it.

Often we are well down a path of public shaming and punishment before we have any facts about what's happening. That's true of mainstream take downs, and it's true of interpersonal grievances.

We air our dirt not to each other, but with each other, with hashtags or in specific but nameless rants, to the public, and to those who feed on our weakness and divisions.

We make it less likely to find room for mediation and transformation.

We make less of ourselves.

Again, there are times when that kind of calling out is the only option – particularly with those of great privilege who are not within our reach.

But if you have each other's phone numbers, or are within two degrees of social media connection, and particularly if you are in the small small percentage of humans trying to change the world – you actually have access to transformative justice in real time. Get mediation support, think of the community, move towards justice.

Real time is slower than social media time, where everything feels urgent. Real time often includes periods of silence, reflection, growth, space, self-forgiveness, processing with loved ones, rest, and responsibility.

Real time transformation requires stating your needs and setting functional boundaries.

Transformative justice requires us at minimum to ask ourselves questions like these before we jump, teeth bared, for the jugular.

I think this is some of the hardest work. It's not about pack hunting an external enemy, it's about deep shifts in our own ways of being.

But if we want to create a world in which conflict and trauma aren't the center of our collective existence, we have to practice something new, ask different questions, access again our curiosity about each other as a species.

And so much more.

I want us to do better. I want to feel like we are responsible for each other's transformation. Not the transformation from vibrant flawed humans to bits of ash, but rather the transformation from broken people and communities to whole ones.

- Interviewed by Radically Selfish podcast (2018)
- Interviewed on Call Your Girlfriend
- Interviewed on Hope and Hard Pills Podcast
- Laura Flanders Show
- Living In This Queer Body, Interview (2019)
- New Years Practice: Cast a Spell with amb
- Parables in Iteration (Conversation with Toshi Reagon, Shayna Smalls, Alexis Pauline Gumbs and Manju Rajendran) (2018)
- Plant Yourself Interview, (2019)
- Pleasure Activism on The Laura Flanders Show (2019)
- Possibilities Podcast Interview (2019)
- Raising Rebels Interview, Hey Auntie! (2019)
- Relationship Alive! Podcast, Interview (2019)
- Sex Gets Real Podcast (interview with amb) (2019)
- Strong Feelings podcast interview
- Tactile (amb interviewed Sage Crump for LANE)
- The Call, Interview by Erica Williams Simon (2017)
- The Lit Review, Interviewed on the Earthseed Series (2017)
- The Matriarchitects Interview (2019)
- This is Hell Radio (2019)

PUBLICATIONS (BOOKS)

- Dear Sister
- Detroit Sci-Fi Generator
- Dreaming in Public
- Emergent Strategy Handbook
- Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds
- How to Get Stupid White Men Out of Office
- Octavia Butler Strategic Reader
- Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction from Social Justice Movements
- Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good
- Reflections on Octavia Butler's Earthseed: The Books of the Living
- Stay Solid
- Stop the Next War Now!
- Transformative Justice Sci-Fi Reader
- We Got Issues!

WORK

- AMC
- BOLD (Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity)
- BYP100
- Emergent Strategy Ideation Institute
- generative somatics
- Movement for Black Lives
- Radical Doula
- RSS my blog
- self love twerk out

TAGS

- allied media conference
- apocalypse
- audre lorde
- baya
- beyonce
- black liberation
- blacklivesmatter
- Black organizing for leadership and dignity (bold)
- BOLD
- Detroit
- dream hampton
- e---
- emergence
- emergent strategy
- generative somatics
- grace lee boggs
- grief
- healing
- love
- meditation
- music
- nanowrimo
- nanowrimo 2017

I believe transformative justice could yield deeper trust, resilience and interdependence. All these mass and intimate punishments keep us small and fragile. And right now our movements and the people within them need to be massive and complex and strong.

I want to hear what y'all think, and what you're practicing in the spirit of transformative justice.

Towards wholeness and evolution, loves.



Author: Adrienne

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): Your uprising against the forces of darkness has got to do more than say "no." A fierce, primal yes should be at the heart of your crusade. (rob brezny, long ago) [View all posts by Adrienne](#)

music | rapovvinnic | rapovvinnic 2017

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ARCHIVES

- [August 2020](#)
- [July 2020](#)