

TELLING MYTHOLOGIES



PASTS AND POSSIBLE FUTURES
IN ACTIVIST LITERATURE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own original work, and has not been submitted for any other award. Very early seeds of the ideas I explore here were developed in February 2005, in an essay for the Spiritual Activism module, entitled *Power of the Pen: The Role of Writers in Changing the World*.

Signed,

Myshele Goldberg

14 December 2005

ABSTRACT

Our perceptions of the past help shape our expectations for the future, which in turn shape our present actions. In this dissertation, I have examined the mythological dimensions of activist literature in order to better understand the deep motivations that drive activists, and what possible futures those motivations might bring about. In particular, I have questioned what books inspire activists, and whether the assumptions and mythologies implicit in those books match the politics and stated goals of ‘the movement.’ On the principle that small samples of cultural material will reflect the larger patterns of a culture, I have focused on five books, which were selected from activists’ responses to an e-mail survey.

Over the course of several readings, in which I focused on tone as well as content, I identified three interlocking core mythologies which were recounted explicitly or implicitly in all the books:

- *Fall From Grace*: Hierarchical cultures have ‘fallen’ from an ideal indigenous state, with social, economic, and ecological conditions becoming steadily worse, eventually leading to an armageddon. The role of activists is to prevent armageddon by creating utopia.
- *Entrapment*: We are trapped in the oppressive ‘system’ of our culture, which constricts our choices and turns all circumstances to its own advantage. Activists must either destroy the system or escape it, leading others away with them.
- *The Great Battle*: Activists struggle against oppressors to determine the fate of the world. ‘The masses’ are unaware of this struggle, but they must be saved from the oppressors and ideally be won to the side of the activists.

These stories reflect familiar elements from ‘mainstream’ Western mythology, as well as elements found in non-Western mythologies. However, they can often be traced to fear and inaction, and thus do not fundamentally support the politics of liberation that most activists subscribe to. I have concluded that activist writers must be more aware of the mythological dimensions of their work, and more fearless and visionary in telling radical stories if they are to inspire activists to build the positive futures they desire.

PREFACE

I have been a writer as long as I can remember. As a child in Connecticut I loved to write make-believe stories, and at thirteen I longed to be the youngest fantasy novelist in the world. I could never limit myself to make-believe worlds, though – my experience of the ‘real’ world was never quite coherent enough to accept without question. I was a working-class scholarship student at a wealthy Jewish primary school, and one of the few white students at a predominantly black high school. In both cases, I held a privileged position in the eyes of many teachers because of my academic abilities, but was excluded by fellow students. At university, I was once again a scholarship student, but in the context of a wealthy white university surrounded by a poor black and Latino neighbourhood, the colour of my skin placed me into a privileged group as soon as I stepped off campus. After university, I was embarrassed to learn that my wage as a union organiser far outstripped the wages of the healthcare workers I represented, even those who had been working since before I was born. My understanding of class and race has arisen from seeing and experiencing these contradictions and constantly questioning the power relations around me.

Perhaps it was these contradictions that led me to love world mythologies. The myths of my own culture did not seem to ‘work’ for me; my experience taught me to see through them. Adrienne Rich had a similar experience as a female poet in the 1950s: ‘The dissonance between these images and the daily events of my own life demanded a constant footwork of imagination.’¹ This ‘footwork’ brought me to the mythologies of other cultures, where I found a rainbow of different ways to understand the world, shifting and changing in kaleidoscopic patterns. I never subscribed to individual worldviews for long in my adolescence, but eventually realised that some truth might be found not in the mythologies themselves, but in the common spaces between them.

Mythology has been my refuge when the injustice of the world has become too much to bear. When I cannot make sense of the world, I turn to the multitude of stories explaining how others make sense of it, in search of some insight or comfort, for my journey out of make-believe worlds has revealed the enormous suffering of our own world and its inhabitants.

Unable to ignore this suffering, I pursued an undergraduate degree in cultural anthropology, hoping to make sense of injustice. I was convinced that if I could only understand ‘the human condition,’ I

¹ Rich 2001: 49.

could help end the suffering in the world. I never called myself an activist; I was only trying to help. But as I became increasingly involved with campaigns for social change, I felt that something was amiss. I threw myself headlong into activism, hoping that total immersion would quiet the uncertainties I felt, but there remained a twinge of doubt. In my studies at the CHE, I have realised that my discomfort with ‘activism’ comes partially from the assumptions and values of many activists, which often do not resonate with my experience.

And so I have turned again to mythology – this time, not to escape from the world’s suffering, but to better understand the movements to change it. I am still convinced that the way to change something is first to understand it, and I seek to understand activism at its deepest psychospiritual roots. In this way, I hope to become a more effective activist myself, help others become more effective, and continue to dedicate my words to social change.

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PART ONE



BACKGROUND

*We construct our world through the stories we tell about it, and the practice of magic is the art of cultural storyshifting, the conscious dreaming of a new dream.*²

Activists are engaged in building positive futures, in opposition to perceived deficiencies in the present and often deeply influenced by literature. Whether writers produce influential new ideas or simply articulate ‘ambient’ ones, activist literature provides a way of understanding the inner life of movements. Books³ can be artefacts for uncovering the motives, desires, and worldviews of this subculture. What are they *really* saying? Rhetoric and propaganda are the outer coverings of the deeper structures that drive movements for change, and all politics are built on assumptions fraught with contradictions. By peeling back the layers and unravelling the contradictions, I hope to assess the inner workings and deepest motivations of activism. By examining the words that inspire and inform activists, I hope to come closer to knowing what it means to be an activist in the present era, and where our future may lie.

Literature both expresses and shapes our inner narratives, reinforcing the stories that build our identities, and giving us new stories to incubate. According to bell hooks, ‘[w]e need to make sense of the world we live in; writing is a way to clarify, to interpret, to reinvent.’⁴ Mingled with the reality of lived experience, our tales about the past help shape our visions and expectations for the future. These visions in turn shape our daily actions, consciously or unconsciously intended to create desired or expected futures. For those concerned about the trajectory of activism, or of any cultural movement, clues to predict likely futures are embedded in stories about the past.

In this context, I seek to examine the mythological dimensions of activist literature. How are the origins of the current global crisis mythologized, and what ‘alternatives’ are presented? What connections and sequences of events have been marked as relevant, and what does their relevance

² Starhawk 2002: 264.

³ Increasingly, websites, e-mail postings, and other electronic forms of expression provide similar artefacts, but I will focus on books as the most solid format available.

⁴ hooks 1999: 13.

reveal about the visions of the storytellers? In short, I am interested in understanding the futures predicted in activist literature by examining their stories of the past and present.

Erich Fromm writes: 'Knowing means to penetrate through the surface, in order to arrive at the roots, and hence the causes... to strive critically and actively in order to approach the truth ever more closely.'⁵ It is interesting that we use the same word – 'causes' – to describe our various campaigns and issues. But at the heart of it, what *causes* people to act, and what are activists actually doing? I seek to provide constructive critique rather than destructive criticism. By deeply examining works that assess the status quo and the movements to change it, I hope to better understand how and why activism functions at its most fundamental levels.

To that end, I seek to explore the following research questions:

What texts are activists inspired by?

What mythologies are expressed in these texts?

What are the underlying assumptions of the mythologies?

Are the assumptions congruent with the politics of the texts?

On a broad political level, activist literature constitutes and is constituted by movements for change. As discourse analyst Norman Fairclough writes, '[d]iscourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning.'⁶ By studying activist discourse in the form of literature, we can catch a glimpse of the world activists seek to create, consciously or unconsciously.

⁵ Fromm 1976: 47-48.

⁶ Fairclough 1992: 64.

METHODOLOGY

Fairclough identifies seven categories for textual analysis: vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, text structure, force, coherence, and intertextuality.⁷ On the whole, I have chosen to forego the more quantitative categories of vocabulary and grammar (though I have examined word choice in a few instances), as qualitative methods match my aims most closely. Besides Fairclough's categories, in a preliminary reading of the six books, I noted the tone each was written in, as well as similarities and differences between the books in approaches, stories, metaphors, and supporting evidence.

Themes emerged from this preliminary reading, which I examined more deeply in subsequent readings. I have chosen to focus on stories about the past: broadly, the creation stories detailing the origins of present-day problems in our world, and directions for possible solutions. I believe that stories about the past are rich ground for uncovering the authors' assumptions about time, human agency, and how the world operates, which in turn form their expectations about the future. Yvonne Burgess holds a similar opinion in her book *The Myth of Progress*: 'culturally as well as individually, our expectations and responses are conditioned by our past.'⁸

Psychoanalyst Carl Jung writes that when examining literature, '[i]n the first instance the object of analysis and interpretation is a concrete artistic achievement, while in the second it is the creative human being as a unique personality. Although these two objects are intimately related and even interdependent, neither of them can explain the other.'⁹ I would go as far as saying that the artist and the work are both 'intimately related' to their specific cultural context – in this case, the subculture of activism – as well as to the wider contexts of 'mainstream' culture and history. Therefore, activist literature yields information about the author, the activist subculture, and mainstream culture as a whole, including its history. I believe that by examining several books produced in the context of modern activism, one can find patterns of this subculture's inner life.

From the first reading, it became clear that all six books held certain basic stories in common, and these have formed the subject of my analysis. I examined the stories themselves, as well as how they are situated in the books and the way they are told – structure, tone, metaphor, language, imagery, etc.

⁷ Fairclough 1992: 75.

⁸ Burgess 1996: 101.

⁹ Jung 1984: 86.

As each story is different, and is told differently in each book, I have dealt with each element as it emerged, rather than attempting to constrain the analysis into an external structure. Where relevant, I have related the origin myths to authors' visions of the future.

This project is not a statistical or quantitative analysis. Instead, I have sought trends, nuances, and subtleties, as my aim is to identify assumptions and beliefs *implicit* in activist mythology rather than hard structural patterns. I do not claim to touch upon every contradiction or examine every story. I have studied the themes that have emerged as most relevant in my reading, the similarities and differences that struck me as most profound, the tones, patterns and resonances that I have found most fascinating. Discourse analyst Teun van Dijk calls this kind of approach an 'intuitive form of semantic analysis.'¹⁰ I believe the patterns are solid enough that another person reading with similar aims would come to similar conclusions. It is beyond the scope of this project to carry out an exhaustive analysis of all the mythologies present in all pieces of relevant activist literature – instead, I seek to examine a small sample, on the principle that cultures are fractally self-reproductive, with small parts reflecting the patterns of the whole.¹¹

CULTURE, MYTHOLOGY, AND OTHER CONTESTED CONCEPTS

There exists a wide range of views about mythology and culture. What exactly are these nebulous concepts? How do they relate to one another? How should they be studied, and why? In efforts to build a coherent framework for examining the mythological dimensions of activist literature, I have investigated several different approaches to this debate.

Historically, anthropology has tended to view discrete cultures as groups with 'exotic' practices and beliefs from a Eurocentric viewpoint, presuming political neutrality while often reproducing the politics of colonialism. Sociology and particularly culture studies, on the other hand, have focused on the West as a field of inquiry, self-consciously examining the political dimensions of 'the popular.' All three have considered mythology to be an important medium for meaning, in various ways. Psychology has focused on the individual dimensions of experience rather than the collective, but psychological insights about mythology are nonetheless relevant to its wider role in social life.

¹⁰ Van Dijk 1985b: 10.

¹¹ Appadurai 1996: 46.

Folklore studies, while concentrating largely on the mythologies themselves, also sheds light on the socio-political contexts in which they have arisen. Somewhere in the common ground between these different disciplines, a holistic understanding of culture and mythology begins to emerge.¹²

CULTURE: OBJECT OR ATTRIBUTE?

Despite its common usage to denote particular social groups, the meaning of the word 'culture' has long been contested in the social sciences. Social theorist Craig Calhoun notes that in the discourse of capitalism and state-building, 'cultures and societies have been constituted as putatively bounded units.'¹³ While this view of tidy categorisation holds deep resonances with reductionist science, Calhoun argues for a more quantum view of culture:

We refer to [a culture] as though it constitutes a single thing... rather than a cluster of tensions, contradictions, and agonisms... thinking of cultures as integral, we tend both to hypostatise them and to direct attention away from the ways in which they are internally complex and continually reshaped by struggle.¹⁴

Even in his critique of typical ideas about culture, he still refers to cultures as objects – complex and dynamic, but objects nonetheless. Indeed, he lists a number of 'significant implications' in examining cultures as 'basic units of... comparative social science research,' but offers no viable alternative.¹⁵ This implies that as long as we understand the problems inherent in thinking about cultures as objects, as long as we keep their complexity, interconnectedness, contradictions and dynamism in mind, it is acceptable to continue using the word 'culture' to describe particular social groups.

Conversely, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai argues that 'culture is not usefully regarded as a substance but is better regarded as a dimension of phenomena... that attends to situated and embodied difference.'¹⁶ He sees value in speaking of 'an ideology as having a cultural *dimension*' in order to 'highlight points of similarity and contrast between all sorts of categories.'¹⁷ Still, if we understand 'culture' to mean all that differentiates one group from another – in other words, all that is unique, interesting, or relevant about that group – then we can use 'culture' and 'cultural' side by side.

¹² These perspectives arise from personal experience and broad study: I earned a BA in anthropology, have taken several sociology and folklore studies classes, have read a wide range of culture studies texts, and have worked with three mentors whose backgrounds were in psychology.

¹³ Calhoun 1995: 53.

¹⁴ Calhoun 1995: 53-54.

¹⁵ Calhoun 1995: 53-54.

¹⁶ Appadurai 1996: 12-13.

¹⁷ Appadurai 1996: 12 (emphasis added).

In this way, nearly any concept or point of difference can be regarded as cultural – practices, beliefs, ideas, languages, gender roles, kinship patterns, systems of exchange, styles of dress... In the context of this project, however, I will focus on the dimension of cultural difference expressed in stories: the stories and story-patterns which at their root serve to motivate, explain, and give direction and meaning to all other cultural patterns.

Different stories arise from different experiences of life. As social theorist David Schlosberg writes, ‘experience is constructed by situation.’¹⁸ At the same time, according to James Donald and Stuart Hall, different perspectives ‘produce different experiences and perceptions of [the world].’¹⁹ In other words, stories at once embody past experiences, present perceptions, and future aspirations. Therefore, I will consider people who share similar stories explaining the world and their place in it as belonging to a cultural group.

WHAT IS AN ACTIVIST?

Schlosberg writes:

There is no such thing as environmentalism. Any attempt to define the term in a succinct manner necessarily excludes an array of other valid definitions. ‘Environmentalism’ is simply a convenience²⁰

The same can be said for activism, even when applied strictly to the ‘left-wing’ end of the spectrum, or to the anti-globalisation movement. By using the word activist as a ‘convenience,’ I do not seek to imply a singular monolithic activist subculture, but rather to focus on the common stories that drive facets of several diverse movements. For clarity’s sake, in this project I have focused on the group I identify as the ‘target audience’ for the books I have examined. Members of this group tend to be white, middle class (and sometimes working class), and based in Europe, the U.S. and Canada. Activists in poor, non-white, and other marginalized groups, as well as activists based in the global South, tend to have different experiences, priorities, and narratives than their privileged and Northern counterparts. Their stories are told differently, often never making it to mainstream publication – a problematic pattern in itself, which I will go into more deeply in ‘Class and Activist Writers’ below.

¹⁸ Schlosberg 2002: 63.

¹⁹ Stuart and Hall 1988: 13.

²⁰ Schlosberg 2002: 3.

MORE THAN REAL: WHAT IS MYTHOLOGY?

What differentiates mythology from other stories? In its most common usage, a myth is a story that is untrue. But as Burgess writes, Westerners ‘tend to divide literature and life into ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ and so we don’t see how the most important things can only be expressed *between* these categories. Therefore we are ill-equipped to deal with myths.²¹ Myths are neither true nor false in the conventional sense: they encompass layers of meaning beyond categorisation. Joseph Campbell, widely regarded as the world’s foremost expert on mythology, jokes that ‘[t]he best things cannot be told, the second best are misunderstood. After that comes civilized conversation.’²² Yet beneath the joking tone we can see the fundamental basis for Campbell’s work: the best things cannot be told *literally*, and thus we have mythology, which is misunderstood.

Folklorist Mircea Eliade notes that as far back as ancient Greece, the concept of *mythos* ‘came to be used in contrast with *logos* and *historia*, thus coming to denote ‘that which cannot really exist.’²³ People of indigenous cultures in North America, Africa, and Oceania, in contrast, consider myths to be sacred ‘true stories.’ In these cultures, mythology holds the deepest truths, forming the fundamental basis for their worldviews.²⁴ But as folklorist Alexander Eliot puts it, intimately intertwined with all cultural practices, ‘myth eludes definition. It’s not something which we can isolate for a close look.’²⁵ Western mythologies are even more obscured: Burgess notes that ‘culturally-inherited thought patterns are not easily shifted, though they may be repressed, adapted, and overlaid with other ideas and constructs.’²⁶ Without the ritual retellings or periodic re-enactments that many indigenous cultures have, how are we to find the foundational mythologies amongst activists?²⁷

Campbell describes mythology as being like ‘the nest of a bird... fashioned of materials drawn from the local environment, apparently altogether consciously, but according to an architecture unconsciously dictated from within.’²⁸ This unconscious ‘architecture’ refers to Jung’s concept of the

²¹ Burgess 1996: 16 (original emphasis).

²² Campbell 1968: 84.

²³ Eliade, in Eliot 1976: 14.

²⁴ Eliade, in Eliot 1976: 25.

²⁵ Eliot 1976: 2.

²⁶ Burgess 1996: 43.

²⁷ It can be argued that activists engage in a form of ritual in the practice of holding demonstrations, meetings, campaigns, speeches, etc, but I believe that these ‘rituals’ are ultimately shaped by the written word – books, magazines, pamphlets, websites, blogs, e-mails, etc.

²⁸ Campbell 1972: 216.

collective unconscious, in which the symbols, patterns, and characters of mythology are expressions of universal human archetypes.²⁹ Eliade makes reference to Jung's work as well, writing that 'man... is forever the prisoner of his own archetypal intuitions,'³⁰ and Eliot argues that the 'same themes recur in myths all over the world. They form a manifold pattern or palimpsest which can reveal something of how human imagination works collectively and creatively to illuminate great questions.'³¹ Jung and Campbell meticulously catalogued dream imagery and indigenous mythologies, classing as archetypes those images that arose time and again in different individuals and cultures.

Similarly, we can class as mythology those stories that continuously repeat across different contexts in our own culture. Therefore, when I refer to a myth, I mean a collection of stories that follow a very similar structural pattern, expressed in a variety of different contexts. Myths are the stories we tell ourselves about the world, the constantly repeated self-fulfilling prophecies that colour our opinions, expectations, and choices. In the activist subculture, there are few special markers to identify particular stories as sacred, but their sheer repetition reveals their significance.

HOW TO BE IN THE WORLD: THE MYTHIC FUNCTION

Aside from repetition, activist mythology can be found in the stories that fulfil the role of mythology for activists. Burgess points out that 'we carry our history with us, and take it wherever we go – both as individuals and as a culture.'³² Similarly, Calhoun notes that 'there is no such thing as an understanding free from prejudices: we are always shaped by our origins, our thought is always situated, we are unable to think without taking some things for granted. What we take for granted is determined by our own cultural background.'³³

The way we learn 'our cultural background,' the way 'we carry our history,' is through mythology.³⁴ Campbell identifies four key functions of mythology: broadly, to stimulate a sense of awe and gratitude, to provide an explanation for the universe congruent with the lifestyle and knowledge of the culture, to validate and support that culture's moral order, and to guide an individual 'through the

²⁹ Jung 1984: 96-97.

³⁰ Eliade 1958: 433.

³¹ Eliot 1976: 60.

³² Burgess 1996: 48.

³³ Calhoun 1995: 58.

³⁴ It can be argued that we also learn our cultural background and history through action, but I believe that rituals and other repeated behaviours are performances of ingrained mythologies.

whole foreseeable course of a useful life.³⁵ In this way, mythology forms part of the blueprint for what it means to be a member of a particular culture: myths describe the world and how to behave in it. Indeed, Appadurai describes myths as contributing to a culture's 'conceptual repertoire' of 'social and moral maps,' and Eliot maintains that they 'serve to point the way that we ourselves ought to travel.'³⁶ Eliade writes that a myth 'provides the pattern for human behaviour.'³⁷ He goes on to liken the role of myth in 'archaic societies' to the role of education in 'modern societies' in the sense that it is both instructive and exemplary.³⁸

Because it tells us how the world works and how to behave in it, mythology is a key motivator for carrying cultural forms through time. Campbell argues that 'not authority but aspiration is the motivator, builder, and transformer of civilization. A mythological canon is an organisation of symbols... by which the energies of aspiration are evoked and gathered toward a focus.'³⁹

NOT GONE YET: MYTH IN THE WEST TODAY

Campbell later writes that 'in the past... people lived largely out of the visions [of myth].'⁴⁰ I would argue that this phenomenon is not limited to the past: modern Westerners live as much in a myth-driven world as our ancestors did. Burgess writes that 'human beings retain an imprint of our whole cultural history in the way we think, use language, relate to one another and see the world,' and Eliade maintains that 'the patterns that have come down from the distant past never disappear.'⁴¹ Rather, a myth 'changes its aspect and disguises its operations.'⁴² In our cultural context, mythology can be found 'disguised' in films, novels, commercials, and all manner of media – the modern Western ways we tell ourselves stories about our lives. I believe that mythology is also disguised in activist literature. As Eliade puts it, '[r]eading replaces not only the oral folk traditions... but also the recital of myths in the archaic societies.'⁴³ In this way, activists learn the workings of the world and their place in it, not from rituals and sacred tellings, but from the pages of the books that focus their aspirations.

³⁵ Campbell 1972: 214-215.

³⁶ Appadurai 1996: 58; Eliot 1976: 232.

³⁷ Eliade 1960: 23.

³⁸ Eliade 1960: 31-32.

³⁹ Campbell 1968: 5.

⁴⁰ Campbell, in Eliot 1976: 42.

⁴¹ Burgess 1996: 25; Eliade 1958: 431-432.

⁴² Eliade 1960: 27.

⁴³ Eliade 1960: 36.

SURVEYS

In July 2005, I sent short surveys to approximately 200 people on several activist e-mail lists, as well as several of my personal contacts, requesting that they forward the surveys widely to other activists. This grounded theory approach, often called ‘snowballing,’⁴⁴ allowed the survey to reach beyond my own contacts and into the wider activist community, and also allowed recipients to define activism on their own terms in who they chose to forward the survey to. In this way, I was able to collect opinions from a range of self-identified activists.⁴⁵

57 respondents listed 121 books as having inspired their worldviews as activists. From these, I selected the six most popular books published since 2000. These books were:

Days of War, Nights of Love by the CrimethInc. Collective

Powerdown by Richard Heinberg

A Language Older Than Words by Derrick Jensen

Beyond Civilization by Daniel Quinn

Hope in the Dark by Rebecca Solnit

Webs of Power by Starhawk

Ultimately, the purpose of the survey was to reveal a selection of books for analysis, rather than provide material to examine for its own sake. A summary of the survey responses and the selection process is located in Appendix A, and Appendix B contains a full listing of books mentioned by respondents, as well as other data from the survey.

Before embarking on the analysis, I will provide brief overviews of the selected books to give a sense of each work’s overall tone.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Personal communication, Alastair McIntosh, 9 December 2005.

⁴⁵ Ten responses came from activists I know personally.

⁴⁶ The books are all written by American authors in American English, but many of my reference books are written in British English. In order to avoid confusion, I have ‘translated’ all quotations into British English spellings.

CHAPTER TWO: ABOUT THE BOOKS

BEYOND CIVILIZATION

Daniel Quinn's *Beyond Civilization: Humanity's Next Great Adventure* offers a response to the cultural shortcomings he outlined in his popular *Ishmael* trilogy.⁴⁷ In a series of page-long musings, he counters criticisms and answers questions posed by readers, proposing a strategy for a 'New Tribal Revolution.'⁴⁸ He frequently quotes his other books, and *Beyond Civilization* is obviously intended as a culmination for readers familiar with his previous work. Similar to the *Ishmael* trilogy, *Beyond Civilization* provides imaginative rather than practical tools, stimulating the sense that Quinn is a theorist rather than a practitioner of social change.

Unusually short segments and bold, optimistic language give *Beyond Civilization* a fast and exciting pace. Although Quinn brings his personal experience and the experience of others into the narrative, his confidence sometimes crosses the line into self-importance. No one can accuse Quinn of being subtle. He uses numerous allegories and rhetorical questions to illustrate his points, which he often repeats with the enthusiasm of a preacher or salesman. In the context of the book's pacing, this repetition of ideas serves to solidify concepts where they might otherwise be lost in the flow. Another point of stability comes from his frequent clarification of 'slippery' words like 'civilization,' 'culture,' and 'tribalism.'⁴⁹

Quinn's stated goal is to solve the social inequalities of hierarchical society, not by reacting with programmes – which 'never stop the things they're launched to stop' – but by proactively building things 'the way we want them to be.'⁵⁰ His descriptions of both indigenous ethnic tribes and 'tribal' organisations found in a Western cultural context (circuses, urban homeless communities, a small newspaper, a theatrical troupe, and a coffee shop⁵¹) are simplistic, but they offer a starting framework for readers to expand upon.

⁴⁷ Quinn 1992: *Ishmael: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit*. New York: Bantam.

Quinn 1996: *The Story of B: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit*. New York: Bantam.

Quinn 1997: *My Ishmael: A Sequel*. New York: Bantam.

⁴⁸ Quinn 2000: 185.

⁴⁹ Quinn 2000: 7, 81, 5, 58.

⁵⁰ Quinn 2000: 7, 8.

⁵¹ Quinn 2000: 64-69, 121-136, 140-145, 155, 167.

Powerdown: Options and Actions for a Post-Carbon World is Richard Heinberg's pessimistic assessment of the current global crisis with 'peak oil' as the main focus.⁵² After an introductory chapter detailing the twin dangers of overconsumption and overpopulation, he describes four possible scenarios for an impending global resource collapse. However, two of his scenarios – 'Last One Standing' and 'Waiting for the Magic Elixir' – merely reiterate the problems and their likely continuation. The two scenarios that might lead to less catastrophic outcomes – 'Powerdown' and 'Building Lifeboats' – are countered at every stage by reasons they are unlikely to be effective. Aside from Heinberg's portrayal of their ultimate uselessness, most of his solutions are available to privileged classes only, requiring access to land, technology, leisure time, education, or political influence.

The overall tone of *Powerdown* is alarmist. Heinberg shifts back and forth between cold, abstract language and emotionally provocative descriptions, giving the book a roller-coaster feel. He describes the usual inventory of issues covered in activist literature – war, inequality, ecological collapse – with an added emphasis that the problems are worse than they seem, and probably insoluble. According to Heinberg, 'they constitute the most severe challenge our species has ever faced,' and 'the consequences are likely to be calamitous.'⁵³ 'If we refuse to power down, then *nothing* will help' 'the inevitable cataclysm.'⁵⁴

Charts, graphs, and scientific language, mingled with incendiary warnings, gives the impression that Heinberg wants to hold all the answers. He reveals authoritarian tendencies in his vision of a 'Powerdown' strategy forcibly implemented by the state: 'making human society sustainable will require... the use of mechanisms of authority to apply penalties and incentives.'⁵⁵ When he runs out of rational arguments, he discredits his rivals by connecting their arguments with subject matter fit for tabloids, twice mentioning 'invasion by space aliens.'⁵⁶

⁵² 'Peak oil' is describes peak productivity in an oil well, after which there is a sharp decline in that well's productivity. Most geologists agree that world oil production is likely to follow a similar pattern between 2005 and 2036.

⁵³ Heinberg 2004: 5, 10.

⁵⁴ Heinberg 2004: 137, 172.

⁵⁵ Heinberg 2004: 100.

⁵⁶ Heinberg 2004: 118; 165.

A LANGUAGE OLDER THAN WORDS

Derrick Jensen's *A Language Older Than Words* is a collection of vignettes addressing themes of interspecies communication and awakening to the global crisis. He continuously shifts between personal and political, comparing his abusive childhood to the destruction of the planet, cultural breakdown, and genocide. He also shifts between horrifying accounts of violence and heart-warming tales of connection, offering both as valid visions of reality. The 'nice' stories provide relief from despair, but he is relentless in naming the victims of 'our culture's genocidal impulse'⁵⁷

Despite difficult subject matter, his tone is warm, conversational, and meandering, giving the impression of sharing stories rather than imposing views. He integrates a number of interviews and conversations, raising other voices alongside his own. Whether in his narrative or the narratives of others, the book is very much about *feeling* – joy, sorrow, outrage, ecstasy, pain, frustration, exhilaration, comfort, despair, compassion, fear, surprise. Jensen faces and explores his own emotions alongside political analysis, and both become integral parts of his stories.

Many of these stories shed light on 'alternative' ways of living: rejecting factory farming and the wage economy, communicating with non-humans, teaching unconventionally, engaging in political activism. However, by and large he follows the problematic pattern that many activist writers choose, offering few tangible solutions. Instead, he writes, 'if you listen carefully enough you will in time know exactly what to do.'⁵⁸

He also holds a class bias common amongst activist writers, mystified that so many people 'walk down paths of wage labour, toiling away [their] lives for some chimerical goal of fiscal sufficiency,' likening those 'paths' to Nazi firing squads in the Warsaw Ghetto.⁵⁹ He accepts that most people participate in wage labour in order to eat, but after coming from a well-off family, he makes the assumption that people can simply 'walk away' from the wage economy.⁶⁰ For further discussion of these issues, see 'Class and Activist Writers' below.

⁵⁷ Jensen 2000: 48.

⁵⁸ Jensen 2000: 372.

⁵⁹ Jensen 2000: 259.

⁶⁰ Jensen 2000: 260; 270, 315-16, 324; 261-265.

HOPE IN THE DARK

*Hope in the Dark: The Untold History of People Power*⁶¹ is Rebecca Solnit's response to 'two great waves of despair' following the invasion of Iraq and Bush's re-election.⁶² In a series of short essays, she illuminates positive developments in the past century as a 'counterweight' to the 'defeats and disasters' which form 'the only story many leftists know how to tell.'⁶³ However, it lacks a unified tone. In often-confusing sentence structures, Solnit oscillates between high-register words – 'pernicious economic doctrine,' 'excoriating,' 'obdurate impenetrability' – and coarse casualness: 'since it is not all good it must all suck royally.'⁶⁴ Interspersed with sarcasm, lyricism, and political commentary, it is difficult to keep up with her awkward shifts in emotional register.

She structures the book in two parts: describing five moments that mark cultural shifts at the millennium, then examining features of the new era. She gives solid, concrete tales of victory, from the abolition of slavery to the legalisation of gay and lesbian partnerships, in ways that are easy to remember, and she draws on activist traditions from around the world. As such, *Hope In The Dark* is very much written for activists. It assumes that readers are working for change and are seeking strategies for improvement. However, in *tone* it seems as much a critique of modern activism as a call to hope, ironically placing her book into many of the categories she maligns.

She accuses activists of telling 'the underside of the dominant culture's story,'⁶⁵ but often her narrative seems to tell the underside of the left's story. If all activists are selfish and ineffective as she would have us believe, then how have they achieved the long list of victories that are the focus of her book? She states that 'a gift for paradox is not the least of the equipment an activist should have,'⁶⁶ but her contradictions often cause her arguments to cancel themselves out. The theme of the book is hope, but her attitude holds a strong undercurrent of pessimism.

⁶¹ Other subtitles for different editions include *The Never-Surrender Guide to How the World Gets Changed* (2005, Edinburgh: Canongate Books), *The Never-Surrender Guide to Changing the World* (2005, Edinburgh: Canongate Books), and *Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities* (2004, New York: Nation Books). The latter contains different chapter headings than the edition I have analysed, and might contain different essays. www.amazon.com, accessed 7th November 2005.

⁶² Solnit 2005: 7.

⁶³ Solnit 2005: 15-16, 28.

⁶⁴ Solnit 2005: 11, 27, 30, 13.

⁶⁵ Solnit 2005: 28.

⁶⁶ Solnit 2005: 22.

Starhawk's *Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising* is a collection of essays, many of which were written during and directly following the large-scale protests of 1999-2001.⁶⁷ Originally distributed on e-mail lists, the essays '[chronicle] the growth of a movement,'⁶⁸ while a number of more theoretical pieces analyse its ethics and tactics. Starhawk gives a sophisticated analysis both of corporate globalisation and activists' response, examining contradictions in a way that manages to critique without complaining. Her descriptions of the problems in the dominant culture are invariably followed by achievable alternatives, and she illuminates important splits in 'the movement' without taking sides. In this way, *Webs of Power* is an accessible and engaging model for the kind of visionary attitude Starhawk encourages.

Structurally, she begins by describing the circumstances in which she wrote the essays, an outline of how the book is structured, and notes on her own background. This contextualises the essays and gives the reader a sense of what to expect in what might otherwise be a confusing volume. She builds on ideas from her earlier works, but avoids quoting them overmuch, making *Webs of Power* accessible to new readers. Also, she provides useful definitions up-front, although many descriptions are repetitive for readers familiar with the institutions in question. Similarly, having multiple stand-alone essays on the same themes inevitably leads to stories being repeated.

She brings a variety of other voices into her essays, quoting both friends and other writers and responding to internet postings by arguing without attacking. Starhawk's tone is generally conversational, shifting between first-, second-, and third-person voice and often beseeching the reader to take action. She covers a range of emotions – fear, frustration, joy, exuberance, calmness, urgency, tenacity, faith, sorrow – and uses the conventions of poetry and oratory to enhance her narrative. However, she also provides lists of bullet-points to convey information quickly, with occasional measures of satire. *Webs of Power* is intellectual enough to be challenging, yet grounded in the reality of action and connection to place.

⁶⁷ Including: demonstrations against the World Trade Organisation's ministerials in Seattle in November 1999 and Genoa in July 2001, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank meetings in Washington DC in April 2000 and Prague in September 2000, and the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in April 2001.

⁶⁸ Starhawk 2002: x.

DAYS OF WAR, NIGHTS OF LOVE: CRIMETHINK FOR BEGINNERS

Days of War, Nights of Love: Crimethink for Beginners is a haphazard collection of essays, poems, letters, lists, drawings, photographs, and flyers, by a members of a 'centreless, amoebic, invisible' collective.⁶⁹ Challenging dominant publishing conventions, sections are printed upside-down or sideways, pages vary in typesetting, margins, and visual styles, and hand-drawn notes abound. Similarly, the tone flickers between the reasonable and the ridiculous, the insightful and the ironic, leaving much ambiguity as to whether and when the authors are 'kidding.'

The CrimethInc. Collective's central argument is that the oppressive limits of our society must be resisted by any means necessary, since 'many of us feel as though everything has already been decided without us, as if living is not a creative activity but rather something that happens *to* us. That's not being *alive*, that's just surviving, being undead.'⁷⁰ To correct this state of affairs, they advise readers to 'accept only the rules and values which really make sense to [them],'⁷¹ and propose a radical programme which includes rejecting marriage and monogamy, avoiding jobs and mainstream forms of work, rejecting gender identities, forgetting history, not bathing, falling in love, ignoring or co-opting the media, avoiding less radical social movements, plagiarising, squatting abandoned buildings, and shoplifting.⁷²

Over the course of several readings, it became clear that the CrimethInc. Collective expresses the perspective of a subculture within a subculture. The two survey respondents who listed *Days of War, Nights of Love* identified themselves as anarchists, and it is certainly clear that this book was written by and for 'punk' anarchists. Several of the other books discuss the philosophies and tactics of anarchism, but from my own experience as an activist, both critique and defence arise from the reality that most activists (particularly the 'target audience' for the other five books) do not take punk anarchists seriously. Whether this bias is justified or unfair is beyond the scope of this project, but I will perpetuate it because I aim to examine the shared narrative terrain of activism, rather than the territory of one fringe group.

⁶⁹ CrimethInc. 2001: 9.

⁷⁰ CrimethInc. 2001: 275.

⁷¹ CrimethInc. 2001: 125.

⁷² CrimethInc. 2001: 52-53, 201-203; 74-82, 245-256; 106-108; 115; 121-125; 151-156; 159-165; 168-172; 179-185; 205-211; 235-241.

Additionally, *Days of War, Nights of Love* meets the same criteria as the other books selected for this project (i.e. it was listed by two survey respondents), but its style and format pose difficulties in analysing it alongside the other five books. While it could be argued that it follows a similar structure to the others – narrative and prose building a set of arguments that detail problems and possible solutions – its lack of cohesiveness and irreverent tone make it impossible to compare with ‘serious’ activist literature. Therefore, I have chosen not to include *Days of War, Nights of Love* in this analysis.

A FURTHER NOTE ON STYLE

One important dimension to examine in activist literature is discursive style. Authoritarian conventions – such as overly technical language, impersonal scientific tone, passive voice, and universal statements – are useful tools to employ sparingly, but their overuse can be disempowering. In order to manifest the transformations sought by activist literature, empowering discursive conventions must be employed. Throughout many of her books, hooks stresses the importance of accessible language and personal anecdote, ‘to share ideas in a manner that makes them accessible to the widest possible audience.’⁷³ She notes that ‘the telling of one’s personal story provides... a way for folks to identify and connect’ and that ‘the work of critical thinking and theorising is itself an expression of political praxis.’⁷⁴ In other words, political writing is a form of social change in itself.

This perspective is echoed in the realm of discourse analysis. Fairclough writes that ‘discourse is a mode of action, one form in which people may act upon the world and especially upon each other.’⁷⁵ I believe that the culture of activism is changing, moving away from authoritarianism and universalism towards more inclusive, organic power structures. With this change comes a shift in discursive style. According to Fairclough, ‘[c]hange leaves traces in texts in the form of the co-occurrence of contradictory or inconsistent elements.’⁷⁶

In activist literature, we see this ‘co-occurrence’ in varying proportions. Texts that rely more heavily on ‘old’ authoritarian conventions come across as subtly reproducing the status quo, despite their radical content. There is a striking parallel here with a larger dichotomy between the stated goals of ‘the movement’ and its actual structures. In contrast, more personal, familiar, accessible, and poetic styles (as well as horizontal power structures) subtly come across as ‘new’ and ‘libratory’ simply by virtue of their break with mainstream convention. This trend is most obvious when the authoritarian writing styles of Heinberg and Solnit are contrasted with the more conversational styles of Jensen and Starhawk, with Quinn’s style falling somewhere in the middle. These stylistic differences in turn set the stage for differing interpretations of similar materials. It may seem in some instances that I have been overly harsh on Heinberg and Solnit’s books, but any bias against them comes from my sense that their writing styles do more to reinforce the status quo than to subvert it.

⁷³ hooks 1999: 40.

⁷⁴ hooks 1989: 77; hooks 1999: 43.

⁷⁵ Fairclough 1992: 63-64.

⁷⁶ Fairclough 1992: 97.

CLASS AND ACTIVIST WRITERS

Class is much more than Marx's definition of relationship to the means of production. Class involves your behaviour, your basic assumptions about life. Your experience (determined by your class) validates those assumptions, how you are taught to behave, what you expect from yourself and from others, your concept of a future, how you understand problems and solve them, how you think, feel, act.⁷⁷

While it is beyond the scope of this project to identify the class backgrounds of all authors listed by survey respondents, I should note that four of the five authors I have focused on have similar stories about money, vocation, and activism. Starhawk's mother was a psychotherapist whose popular book is 'still a classic in the field of bereavement.'⁷⁸ Daniel Quinn writes about the 'small inheritance' he received that supported him while he wrote his best-seller, *Ishmael*.⁷⁹ Rebecca Solnit comes from a family of intellectuals and activists, and also received a small inheritance, though she had to work her way through university.⁸⁰ Derrick Jensen's family was comfortably established in the magazine business, and he was supported by his mother into his thirties.⁸¹ I was unable to find information on Richard Heinberg's family and class background, but many of the implicit assumptions in *Powerdown* mark him as middle class as well.

What these authors have in common is a base of support, moral or financial, from which to write – and more importantly, to believe that their words and ideas have value. As Solnit points out in her own narrative, 'being politically engaged means having a sense of your own power.'⁸² A family history in the cultural industries, a middle-class upbringing, access to education and access to funds smoothes the path to becoming a writer or an activist. Conversely, in *Where We Stand: Class Matters*, hooks describes the experience of 'students from nonprivileged backgrounds,' who 'often had nervous breakdowns' at affluent universities: 'They could not bear the weight of all the contradictions they had to face. They were crushed... their take on the world was assaulted by an elite vision of class and privilege.'⁸³ In *Remembered Rapture: The Writer at Work*, she writes: 'most of what is published comes

⁷⁷ hooks 1984: 5, quoting Rita Mae Brown, 'The Last Straw.'

⁷⁸ Starhawk 2005.

⁷⁹ Quinn 2000: 87.

⁸⁰ Personal communication, Daniel Solnit, September 2005.

⁸¹ Jensen 2000: 270, 315-16, 324.

⁸² Solnit 2004: 14.

⁸³ hooks 2000b: 37.

from an educated elite who are either from privileged class backgrounds or are aspiring to enter privileged classes.⁸⁴

I do not seek to accuse activist writers of having ‘an easy time of it’ or somehow co-opting the efforts of less privileged authors, but rather to acknowledge a pattern of which they are a part. People from middle class backgrounds have a disproportionately high representation among writers and other professions that manufacture cultural capital. Margo Adair and Sharon Howell describe these trends as

cultural patterns of domination and submission that find their way into our lives, perpetuating themselves despite our best intentions. These patterns of power are a reflection of the larger inequities in society as well as a stumbling block for those who want to change it.⁸⁵

In the struggle for justice and equality where many writers complain that ‘the movement’ is too white, too male, too heterosexual, too middle-class, where are the marginalized voices? As Adair and Howell point out, ‘[o]nly by making all realities visible can we break the imposed consensus.’⁸⁶ In order to do this, we must acknowledge the structural barriers that maintain the status quo, and examine *why* the movement is too white, too male, too heterosexual, too middle-class. What Campbell describes as a set of ‘functioning mythological symbols’⁸⁷ holds deep prejudices about race, class, gender, and sexuality. Because of this, we see phenomena such as those Burgess describes:

Working-class children... learn two cultures – their own, and the dominant middle class one; just as rural African schoolchildren learn their own culture at home and a new post-colonial one at school and in town. Members of the ruling culture are less likely to learn two sets of rules: their own is usually enough to get by.⁸⁸

This is why, according to hooks, it is easy to ‘describe and define experience in a language compatible with existing images and ways of knowing, constructed within social frameworks that reinforce domination.’⁸⁹ These are the frameworks to which we are accustomed, and only by questioning and examining them can we work to transcend them.

⁸⁴ hooks 1999: 97.

⁸⁵ Adair and Howell 1989: 219.

⁸⁶ Adair and Howell 1989: 222.

⁸⁷ Campbell 1972: 213.

⁸⁸ Burgess 1996: 98.

⁸⁹ hooks 1989: 14-15.

PART TWO



MYTHOLOGIES

INTRODUCTION TO CORE MYTHOLOGIES

The five authors offer many differing opinions about what is wrong in the world and what should be done about it. Ideal solutions in one author's narrative are pressing concerns in another's, and often strategic and philosophical contradictions arise from one chapter to the next of the same author.

But when the details are stripped away, we are left with a set of stories that are essentially the same across all five books. In my experience of 'the movement' and activist literature, these stories are not anomalies but core mythologies (*i.e.* groups of stories with similar structures) upon which politics and ideologies are built. Indeed, when I describe these myths to other activists, their eyes light up with recognition. Once core mythologies are made explicit, it is possible to examine their interwoven manifestations in discourse of all kinds. By doing so, I hope to clarify the deep motivations and desires that drive activists, and question whether and how these motivations can bring about the positive futures they struggle for.

Following are brief outlines of the three core mythologies that I have identified. It should be noted that I am not arguing for or against any particular myth; I am simply reporting what I have found to be the most pervasive stories in the selected books.

Fall From Grace: *There was once a time when things were better. They might not have been perfect, but the most pressing problems we see today were nonexistent. An event or series of events precipitated a fall from this more favourable condition, and things have been growing worse ever since.* **Possible Futures:** *armageddon or utopia*

Entrapment: *People are by their nature good, but the structures of an oppressive system compel them to behave in evil ways. Some elements of the system were built by people who sought power and wealth at any cost; other elements were built by people with good intentions, whose efforts were flawed, corrupted, or outdated. Either way, the system has trapped us and constricted our choices, making it nearly impossible to act in any way that does not benefit it.* **Possible Futures:** *escape or breaking the system*⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Two hypothetical possible futures, not strongly represented in the selected books include eternal entrapment and transformation (rather than destruction) of the system. In most accounts, however, the former was implied to facilitate a catastrophic collapse, and the latter was explicitly argued for, but not supported by underlying assumptions or tone.

***The Great Battle:** There are three groups of people in the world: the evil oppressors, the virtuous activists, and the ignorant masses. As long as anyone can remember, the former two have been engaged in an epic battle to determine the course of human history. The masses are important elements in this struggle, for their support confers advantages to either side. However, they are largely unaware of the battle, and unwilling or unable to fully engage in it, despite their suffering at the hands of the evil oppressors. The goal of the virtuous activists is to save the ignorant masses from the destruction wrought by the evil oppressors. **Possible Futures:** ‘the future is now’⁹¹*

Obviously, different authors identify more strongly with different sets of mythologies. Solnit and Heinberg focus most on the Entrapment and Great Battle stories. Starhawk and Quinn retell the Fall From Grace and Great Battle stories most often, while Jensen concentrates on the Fall From Grace and Entrapment stories. However, traces of all three mythologies can be found interwoven in all five books. Far from being mutually exclusive, they complement and reinforce each other, as I will show below.

⁹¹ Of course, activists could either ‘lose’ or ‘win’ definitively, but these two futures generally imply armageddon or utopia. The battle could also go on forever, but this is the presumption upon which this story is built: the battle has been raging forever (at least since the birth of civilization) and is likely to continue forever. See ‘Heroes, Villians, and the Masses’ below, particularly discussion of Hegel’s theory.

CHAPTER THREE: NO GOING BACK TO EDEN THE FALL FROM GRACE STORY

One of the most familiar stories of our culture is that of the Fall From Grace. In the biblical version, the first man and woman are banned from God's garden paradise because of an irreversible transgression, and they are condemned to toil, pain, and mortality. By the time they realised 'how good they had it,' it was already too late. Their folly was their downfall, and while a snake provided temptation, they had no one to blame but themselves.

Versions of this story present themselves throughout our culture and in many others. Eliade describes at great length how '[i]n more or less complex forms, the *paradisiac myth* occurs here and there all over the world.'⁹² The major difference between indigenous versions of this story and the biblical version is their conception of time.⁹³ The majority of other 'paradisiac myths' are set within a cyclical notion of time that describes 'progressive degradation of the cosmos, ultimately necessitating its destruction and re-creation.'⁹⁴ Rather than a single paradise, fall, and final reckoning, non-Judeo-Christian paradise and cataclysm myths invoke a continuous cycle of life, death, and rebirth. Even when all is lost, the 'return to chaos... is always followed by a new cosmogony [creation story] with the appearance of a virgin earth.'⁹⁵

Paulo Freire attributes our linear understanding of time to literacy: 'In illiterate cultures, the 'weight' of apparently limitless time hindered people from reaching the consciousness of [linear] temporality, and thereby achieving a sense of their historical nature.'⁹⁶ He writes that '[t]he dimensionality of time is one of the fundamental discoveries in the history of human culture,' and Eliade calls it 'an innovation of the greatest import,' because it appears in virtually no other culture.⁹⁷

In many indigenous cultures, during the 'profane time' of mortality in the present, shamans can ritually reconnect with the 'sacred time' of myth, overcoming limitations of the present human

⁹² Eliade 1960: 59 (original emphasis).

⁹³ Perhaps because of this fundamental difference, anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss portrays indigenous myths of humans losing immortality as having no parallel to the biblical myth of the fall (Lévi-Strauss 1964: 149-163).

⁹⁴ Eliade, in Eliot 1976: 29-30.

⁹⁵ Eliade, in Eliot 1976: 29.

⁹⁶ Freire 1973: 3.

⁹⁷ Freire 1973: 3; Eliade, in Eliot 1976: 31-32.

condition to bring vitality to the community.⁹⁸ Judeo-Christian based cultures, in contrast, have lost access to that sacred time, and can only wait for the ‘end of time’ to experience paradise again. This resonates deeply with the Western idea of ‘progress’ in which conditions develop in a linear fashion, moving *forward* in time,⁹⁹ whereas in a profound way, indigenous notions of time hold that the future *is* the past; there is no meaningful difference between them. Eliade maintains that ‘by analysing the attitude of modern man towards Time, we can penetrate the disguises of his mythological behaviour.’¹⁰⁰

In activist literature, the Fall From Grace story takes many forms. Authors imagine a pre-hierarchical indigenous paradise, sustainable farming communities prior to industrialisation, a coherent, effective ‘movement’ and oil abundance in the 1960s, and glory days of direct action between Seattle and 9-11. Whether gradual or instant, imposed by external forces or triggered by mistakes, inaction, or fatal flaws, each of these tales holds the sense that ‘good times’ were in the past, and there is no going back. However, Eliade points out that ‘[e]very mythic account of the origin of anything... narrates and justifies a new situation – new in the sense that it came into being only as a result of certain actions long ago.’¹⁰¹ Therefore, I will focus on the original (and most common) version of the Fall From Grace story, in which our culture has ‘fallen’ away from its indigenous roots.

TRIBAL PARADISE

Adrienne Rich defines ‘the exotic’ as a ‘way of viewing a landscape, a people, [or] a culture as an escape from our carefully constructed selves, our ‘real’ lives.’¹⁰² In many ways, the tone and language used to describe indigenous cultures in activist literature holds hints of the exotic, inviting activists to fantasise about utopian tribal life. In the historical vision of Quinn, Jensen, and Starhawk, an ecologically sustainable human Paradise existed before the rise of civilization, ten thousand years ago. One of Jensen’s accounts is the most romantic:

I think back to a time I’ve never known... A time when humans and nonhumans conversed, and when the world and all in it were not resources to be consumed but friends and neighbours to be loved and enjoyed, and even when killed and eaten to be

⁹⁸ Eliade 1960: 47-56; 60-68.

⁹⁹ It can be argued that in the myth of progress, conditions grow better as we move forward in time, whereas many Judeo-Christian traditions argue that conditions are steadily growing worse. However, these worldviews hold in common the sense that conditions change in a linear fashion.

¹⁰⁰ Eliade 1960: 34.

¹⁰¹ Eliade, in Eliot 1976: 26-27.

¹⁰² Rich 1993: 228.

perceived with a sense of gratitude and wonder. Times like that I think back to when men did not rape women, nor did they rape children, and when fathers did not strike their sons nor daughters.¹⁰³

Quinn describes this time similarly:

Tribalism worked well for [humans] for millions of years, but there came a time when they decided to experiment with a new social organization (called civilization) that was hierarchical rather than tribal. Before long... the masses living at the bottom of the hierarchy... worked and lived like pack animals, struggling just to stay alive.¹⁰⁴

Starhawk makes a point of indigenous sustainability, by way of example:

[The First People of California's] interaction with the land was so elegantly attuned that the European invaders missed it entirely, believing they had found a wilderness untouched by human intervention (and open for their exploitation), when what they had actually found was more in the nature of an exquisitely cared-for wild garden.¹⁰⁵

What these three accounts have in common are not only positive language and imagery to describe human life before civilization, but a way of putting the positive elements of tribalism in direct contrast with the negative elements of Western culture. Love, enjoyment, gratitude and wonder are set against overconsumption, rape, and child abuse. A system that 'worked well' is usurped by one in which 'the masses' are 'struggling just to stay alive.' Elegance and an 'exquisitely cared-for' landscape meet 'invaders' bent on 'exploitation.' None of the authors seek to put indigenous cultures on pedestals – indeed, they explicitly condemn idealization.¹⁰⁶ However, the fact remains that tribalism and the lifestyles of indigenous peoples are the most commonly cited counterexamples to the problematic elements of our culture, and they are described in almost universally positive language and tone.

To contrast our culture's 'psychotic' social structures, Jensen details how 'the social forms and institutions of nonaggressive cultures positively reinforce acts that benefit the group as a whole.'¹⁰⁷ Starhawk draws attention to our difficulty connecting with the land and points out that '[i]ndigenous myths and ceremonies reflect thousands of years of careful observation, codified into songs and tales and rituals that tell us what is supposed to be going on, and when.'¹⁰⁸ Juxtaposed with our dysfunctional leadership patterns, she notes that '[i]n most indigenous cultures, elders wield a great

¹⁰³ Jensen 2000: 319-320.

¹⁰⁴ Quinn 2002: 3.

¹⁰⁵ Starhawk 2002: 162.

¹⁰⁶ Quinn 2000: 61; Starhawk 2002: 163.

¹⁰⁷ Jensen 2000: 214; 212.

¹⁰⁸ Starhawk 2002: 164.

deal of power-among [*i.e.* influence] because of their greater experience.¹⁰⁹ Quinn goes on to note that '[t]ribes have leaders... but leadership carries little or nothing in the way of special benefits that are denied to other members of the tribe.'¹¹⁰

By consistently examining tribal successes as counterpoint to civilization's failures, by shining an almost uniformly positive light on a way of life that is most often perceived as being in the past, these writers describe a better world as something long gone, something we (in hierarchical society) have lost. Quinn even points out this attitude as an obstacle to 're-tribalising' the world:

In our cultural mythology we see ourselves as having left tribalism behind... decisively and irrevocably. This is why it's so difficult for us to acknowledge that tribalism is not only the pre-eminently *human* social organization, it's also the only unequivocally *successful* social organization in human history.¹¹¹

Solnit critiques this attitude: 'Activists, even those who decry Judeo-Christian heritage as our own fall from grace, are as prone to tell the story of paradise, though their paradise might be matriarchal or vegan, or the flip-side of the technological utopia of classical socialism.'¹¹² However, she presents her own vision of paradise here: 'Bioregionalism was an attempt to return to what human life had been for most of history, ecologically and socially... with a sense that this could also be the future, that it was the only viable future.'¹¹³ That her narrative embodies the very Fall From Grace story she so harshly critiques reveals the depths to which it is buried in our collective psyche.

Modern activists are by no means the first to idealise indigenous cultures. Eliade traces the 'nostalgia for a simple and sane existence in the bosom of Nature' back to the Middle Ages and Renaissance, with a resurgence in the age of colonialism.¹¹⁴ This was sparked by the tendency for 'the journals of travellers in the newly-discovered countries... [to describe] a blissful humanity which had escaped the misdeeds of civilization and provided models for utopian societies.'¹¹⁵ He argues,

Idealists and utopians seemed to be infatuated with 'savages,' especially their conduct in regard to family life, their just and equitable division of labour, their beatific existence in the bosom of Nature. But this... was but a revalorisation, in radically secularised form, of a much more ancient myth – the myth of the earthly Paradise and its inhabitants in the fabulous times before History... Were we to believe the idealists

¹⁰⁹ Starhawk 2002: 175.

¹¹⁰ Quinn 2000: 73.

¹¹¹ Quinn 2000: 91 (original emphasis).

¹¹² Solnit 2004: 113-114.

¹¹³ Solnit 2004: 144.

¹¹⁴ Eliade 1960: 39-41.

¹¹⁵ Eliade 1960: 39.

and utopians of the Renaissance, the loss of the Golden Age was the fault of 'civilization.'¹¹⁶

Clearly, activist writers are reiterating an older story when they fail to mention that the lives of indigenous peoples are no more paradisiacal than our own. As Burgess puts it, '[o]ne of the prices we Westerners pay for wielding absolute power over other people is the constricting of our imaginations about them and their lives.'¹¹⁷ This constriction is taken into account, however, in another element of the story.

INHERENT FLAWS

In contrast to the Tribal Paradise story, Heinberg often argues that humans were in no better state prior to civilization. He speaks of humanity as a species, of civilization as 'the human project,'¹¹⁸ rarely differentiating between destructive and benign cultures the way that Jensen, Starhawk, and Quinn do. The way he describes it, '[h]umans seem genetically hardwired to react to problems on only a relatively immediate basis.'¹¹⁹ As a result, violence, greed, and ecological destructiveness seem inherent to the human condition: 'in even the simplest human societies, wars are often fought over resources... Motives for war appear to remain fairly constant throughout social evolution, but the *scale* of the violence has steadily increased over the past several millennia.'¹²⁰

He goes on to describe how humans have encountered the 'dilemma' of resource depletion, population pressure, and habitat destruction:

Every time we humans have found a way to harvest a dramatically increased amount of food or fuel from the environment... we have responded by increasing our population, and correspondingly, the load on the environmental systems that sustain us. Each time, we have ended up degrading the environment and creating the conditions for a crash.¹²¹

Starhawk emphatically argues the opposite:

we as human beings do have the capacity to meet both our needs and those of the nonhuman beings around us, in ways that actually increase diversity, habitat, balance,

¹¹⁶ Eliade 1960: 39-41.

¹¹⁷ Burgess 1996: 58.

¹¹⁸ Heinberg 2004: 52.

¹¹⁹ Heinberg 2004: 45.

¹²⁰ Heinberg 2004: 56.

¹²¹ Heinberg 2004: 52; 134.

and beauty. If we fail to do so, it is because of a flaw in our attitudes, our observations, our goals, or our actions, *not* our inherent being.¹²²

Quinn links the inherent-flaw argument to our culture at large: ‘Our cultural excuse for failure is that humans are just ‘naturally’ flawed – greedy, selfish, short-sighted, violent, and so on, which means *anything* you do with them will fail.’¹²³

As Heinberg describes it, our species is flawed. As the others describe it, our culture is flawed. Either way, the concept of a fatal flaw is a familiar element of the Judeo-Christian version of the Fall From Grace story. Cultural or biological, we are the only ones to blame for the suffering of our world. This attitude bears an uncanny resemblance to the concept of original sin.

When describing cultures, Heinberg personifies them, assigning them certain characteristics and making abstract entities the actors of his narrative, rendering individual members invisible. For instance, he notes that ‘stable social and ecological environments tend to produce self-limiting human societies, while contact with the unstable dynamism of global industrial commerce causes traditional societies to shed their self-limiting cultural behaviours.’¹²⁴ He fails to mention just how these ‘traditional societies’ happen to ‘shed’ their behaviours, neatly avoiding the topics of colonialism and genocide. But deeper than that, by personifying ‘traditional societies’ and ‘global industrial commerce,’ he pushes cultural interactions outside the realm of the human, giving the impression instead that we are talking about chemical reactions or animal behaviour. This impression is amplified by Heinberg’s often detached scientific tone.

In the context of this scientific viewpoint, his allegory of the global crisis – ‘This Is How I Feel Sometimes’ – seems extremely out of place. It offers another dimension of his assumptions about tribal versus ‘civilized’ life:

You notice now that the [leaking, overcrowded] raft is surrounded by many sound-looking canoes, each carrying a family of indigenous fishers. Men on the raft are systematically forcing people out of the canoes and onto the raft at gunpoint, and shooting holes in the bottoms of the canoes. This is clearly insane behaviour: the canoes are the only possible sources of escape or rescue if the raft goes down¹²⁵

¹²² Starhawk 2002: 163 (original emphasis).

¹²³ Quinn 2000: 12 (original emphasis).

¹²⁴ Heinberg 2004: 92.

¹²⁵ Heinberg 2004: 12.

Rather than reinforcing his argument that humans are inherently flawed, this parable resonates with the flawed-culture arguments of Jensen, Starhawk, and Quinn. It reveals a deeper set of assumptions buried beneath the scientific language, surfacing when Heinberg thinks mythologically. Further, despite his criticism of humanity as a species, he contends that '[i]n order to save ourselves... we just need to change our culture.'¹²⁶ Here is where Heinberg's underlying statements about fatally-flawed humans begin to fall apart, for if humans were inherently flawed, even the 'indigenous fishers' would be doomed to unsustainability and war. Not surprisingly, the logical extension leaves us with yet another manifestation of the Fall From Grace story: if indigenous people are sustainable and we are not, if these changes happen culturally over time, if most indigenous cultures existed in the past (and have since 'shed their self-limiting cultural behaviours') then we all must have lived sustainably once, and civilization or industrialisation marked a fall.

POSSIBLE FUTURES: ARMAGEDDON AND UTOPIA

Western writers are embedded in the Judeo-Christian context of linear time, so implicit in the Fall From Grace story is the sense that time cannot repeat, that the beginning happened only once, and the end will be just as singular. Solnit argues that '[p]eople have always been good at imagining the end of the world, which is much easier to picture than the strange sidelong paths of change in a world without end.'¹²⁷ However, in the context of most indigenous mythologies (as described by folklorists), people imagine neither a singular end of the world nor eternal existence, but rather cyclical destruction and rebirth. According to Eliade, 'among primitives... [the] end of the world was not final but was just the end of one human race or one period in history, followed by the appearance of another.'¹²⁸ A linear understanding of time, particularly in a Judeo-Christian context, brings a sense that a singular future is coming, likely to be either completely positive or completely negative. Even without explicit reference to the future, armageddon and utopia are *implied* by the pervasiveness of the Fall From Grace story.

However, Solnit's juxtaposition of 'the end of the world' and 'a world without end' brings to mind armageddon and utopia, particularly because she consistently describes her vision for 'a world without

¹²⁶ Heinberg 2004: 93.

¹²⁷ Solnit 2004: 47.

¹²⁸ Eliade, in Eliot 1976: 29.

end' in a utopian tone.¹²⁹ Going beyond utopian tones, Jensen uses biblical language to describe the state of the world and its future: 'Hell is the too-late realisation that everything and everyone are interdependent. This realisation is our only salvation.'¹³⁰ The implicit message here, combined with the implications of the Fall From Grace story, reveals the true nature of activists' work: to resist the coming armageddon and work for a utopia; to be guides down the 'strange sidelong paths' of 'salvation.' Messianic overtones are echoed in the Great Battle story (see below).

With such widespread representation in world mythology, it is no surprise that the Fall From Grace story occupies a prominent position in activist literature. In an ideological sense, this story serves to naturalise and reinforce notions of time, and also to provide a model for behaviour. In the Judeo-Christian telling, the model is negative, warning against temptation and sin. Augusto Boal identifies a similar cautionary function in Greek tragedy, which through catharsis achieves 'the purgation of all antisocial elements.'¹³¹ However, the activist retelling resonates with indigenous versions in that the 'paradisiac' condition is a model for how people *should* live. Tension arises because in a linear sense of time, that condition is impossible to reproduce, even ritually. In this way, the activist retelling of the Fall From Grace story seems to have taken on an indigenous element that does not 'fit' into its own Judeo-Christian context.

Still, the dissonance of unrequited nostalgia is absorbed by the wider context of the prevalent mainstream worldview, in which 'there is no going back.' In this view, a 'better world' can only exist in the future, after civilization and therefore after history, to mirror the paradise that existed before history. As noted above, it is the activist's core work to manifest this post-historical paradise. Of course, this is an impossible desire, and measured against it, any victories or gains will seem hollow and incomplete. But it is built into the mythological structure of what it means to be an activist. Burgess notes, rather sardonically, that biblical and Marxist ideals 'amount to massively deferred gratification.'¹³² The same can be said for post-Marxist activism. With no reclaiming the past and an unachievable ideal future, is it any wonder that activists experience despair?

¹²⁹ Most of Solnit's *explicit* arguments predict neither armageddon nor utopia, but something in between. However, I would classify the overall tone of her visions as utopian.

¹³⁰ Jensen 2000: 51.

¹³¹ Boal 1979: 46.

¹³² Burgess 1996: 35.

CHAPTER FOUR: DOUBLE-BIND THE ENTRAPMENT STORY

If activist literature imagines a Fall From Grace, where the present is much worse than the past, it must also imagine how and why this negative state can perpetuate and maintain itself. It is not enough to know that we have fallen; there must also be a reason why our fallen condition persists. One explanation for this is the Entrapment story. It is built on a belief that people are fundamentally good, but they are shaped by a society that rewards greed, violence, and corruption. Even the most kind spirits are caught in a complex, self-reinforcing system in which the only options perpetuate its dominance. An emergent property from the deadly mix of hierarchy, industrialism, corporate capitalism, and globalisation, 'the system' maintains its structures on many levels, inflicting inner psychological maladies, imposing external economic and social constraints, and manifesting in our culture's every institution, from education to entertainment to governance. It is nearly impossible to perceive, and even harder to change.

DIFFERENT METAPHORS, SAME STORY

Quinn states emphatically that 'the flaw in our civilization isn't in the people, it's in the *system*,' and Jensen notes that the 'problems inhere in the structure and functioning of our society.'¹³³ Relating to more specific issues, Heinberg critiques the 'effective propaganda system... of the advertising and entertainment industries,' and Starhawk argues that the 'oppressive systems that shape society also shape our personal relations.'¹³⁴ But besides being destructive, how is that system imagined? The authors necessarily use metaphor to describe such an abstract concept, and we are left with a sense that 'the system' is simultaneously a web, an invisible substance, a monster, a prison, and a machine.¹³⁵

Starhawk describes the 'systems of prejudice and oppression' as 'interlocking and intertwined. They reinforce and feed upon each other,' 'maintained by the police and military powers of the state.'¹³⁶ Where she focuses on social issues, Heinberg uses similar language to describe the problems inherent

¹³³ Quinn 2000: 171 (original emphasis); Jensen 2000: 260.

¹³⁴ Heinberg 2004: 101; Starhawk 2002: 181.

¹³⁵ Other lesser-used metaphors include 'dead weight' (Solnit 2004: 162), 'the cannibal sickness' (Jensen 2000: 222), 'a double bind' (Jensen 2000: 371), 'a complex of memes' (Quinn 2000: 82), and 'the spells that bind us' (Starhawk 2002: 58).

¹³⁶ Starhawk 2002: 186; 187.

to overconsumption, oil depletion, and ecological destruction: ‘These problems are related to one another in complex, often mutually reinforcing ways.’¹³⁷ Jensen connects the social and ecological by writing that ‘the cruelty, the pollution, the exploitation, the debasement – all are tied together in this convoluted web that is the modern economy... a complicated web, sticky in every thread.’¹³⁸ These accounts give the sense that ‘the system’ is a net that binds us – altering or removing a few threads offers no escape from the larger trap. Or, it might be seen as an advantage for activists, since changing one thread inevitably changes the others it connects to, and ultimately, the entire web.

Adding to this web’s entanglement is its sheer scale. Its reach is global – according to Starhawk, ‘[a]ll over the world, people are struggling with the same issues out of their different histories and circumstances.’¹³⁹ In many places (particularly the U.S.), the web is so densely woven that its threads are all we can see. Solnit writes:

This country often seems like a train heading for a wreck, with a gullible, apolitical, easily distracted population bloating itself on television’s political distortions and repellent vision of human life, with the runaway rates of consumption, the violent interventions around the world, the malignancy of domestic fundamentalism, the burgeoning prison and impoverished and crazy populations, the decay of democracy, and on and on.¹⁴⁰

Jensen explains this scale by noting the system’s pervasiveness:

As water is to fish, as air is to birds, so coercion is to us. It is where we live. It is what we drink. It is what we breathe. It is transparent. So deeply inured are we that we no longer perceive when we are coercing or being coerced. Grades. Wages. Jobs... On a more grand, though no more outrageous, scale, napalm, penitentiaries, deforestation: all these manifest this need to coerce others.¹⁴¹

This web or ubiquitous substance can be personified, as it is by Heinberg, who portrays it as a monster with preferences and intelligence and the ability to act: ‘we find ourselves in a social [and economic] system that knows only how to grow, and that would rather violently explode than deliberately contract.’¹⁴² ‘[T]he system, in grooming its most prominent caretakers, selects for [certain]

¹³⁷ Heinberg 2004: 5.

¹³⁸ Jensen 2000: 279; 281.

¹³⁹ Starhawk 2002: 65.

¹⁴⁰ Solnit 2004: 159-160.

¹⁴¹ Jensen 2000: 244.

¹⁴² Heinberg 2004: 171.

behaviours; it carefully fosters some personality types and excludes others.¹⁴³ '[The] system is currently spreading a message essentially the opposite of what is required.'¹⁴⁴

Still another set of metaphors is architectural. Quinn describes 'the prison of our culture' as having been 'arranged to suit the warders,' and also 'maintain[ing] formidable defences against attack.' He writes that '[t]he walls of the prison are economic... the need to make a living keeps us inside, because there's no way to make a living on the *other* side.'¹⁴⁵ Jensen notes that we have 'surrounded ourselves with images of ourselves, and... silenced all others' in a 'false-front world,' again giving the sense that 'the system' is a physical place in which we are trapped.¹⁴⁶ He goes on to write that inside this prison, we are '[i]solated from the rest of nature, isolated from each other by walls of fear, isolated from our own bodies,' and 'trapped... in an alley with two dead ends.'¹⁴⁷ Solnit describes the system's architecture as 'monolithic,'¹⁴⁸ and Starhawk's commentary reinforces the prison metaphor with her experience of jail:

here all the workings of power are perfectly clear. There is no more disguise, no more pretence that this system is working in your interest. And when you get out of jail, you will see where the jail is thinly concealed in the shopping mall, the school, the television programme.¹⁴⁹

Several authors use mechanical metaphors. Heinberg writes about 'the system's operating instructions,' its 'basic parameters,' and its having been 'designed' and 'highly resistant to change.'¹⁵⁰ Jensen states emphatically that 'it is imperative to throw off the *myth* of the machine... [as well as] the machine itself.'¹⁵¹ Quinn notes that '[w]hen things work, the forces that *make* them work are invisible,' while Starhawk argues that 'the system can be dismantled,' and that our 'whole ideology of 'efficiency' and 'integration' is aimed at shoring up [our] economic system,' implying that the machine is broken or flawed.¹⁵²

This abundance of metaphors might suggest that the authors – or the movements whose visions they voice – do not have a firm grasp on the system's structure or functions, or a firm idea of what they

¹⁴³ Heinberg 2004: 168.

¹⁴⁴ Heinberg 2004: 101.

¹⁴⁵ Quinn 2000: 173; 107; 95; 173 (original emphasis).

¹⁴⁶ Jensen 2000: 99.

¹⁴⁷ Jensen 2000: 346; 222.

¹⁴⁸ Solnit 2004: 147.

¹⁴⁹ Starhawk 2002: 27.

¹⁵⁰ Heinberg 2004: 171; 170.

¹⁵¹ Jensen 2000: 278-279 (original emphasis).

¹⁵² Quinn 2000: 11 (original emphasis); Starhawk 2002: 58; 165.

seek to describe and ultimately resist. But across the different metaphors, a particular set of qualities are attributed to the system. Starhawk describes it as fundamentally fragile: 'Power-over seems invincible, but ultimately it rests upon the compliance of those it controls... If we refuse to comply, if we call the legitimacy of the system itself into question, ultimately the system cannot stand.'¹⁵³ However, it is much more commonly described as being well-defended, interconnected, all-pervasive, and invisible. Solnit describes its power implicitly by contrasting it to 'delicate' and 'helpless' activist victories that have not yet 'been consolidated into the culture's sense of how things should be.'¹⁵⁴ She chides activists who 'abandon'¹⁵⁵ these victories, implying that the dominant system is so powerful and vigilant that it will immediately reassert itself as soon as activists look the other way. By using a number of different metaphors and ways of describing this formidable system, authors present its different elements and give the sense that it is no simple obstacle for activists to face.

In another interpretation, the many metaphors used to describe the system may give it the properties of a shape-shifter, another key figure in many mythologies. Jensen even describes 'this culture's destructive urges' as a 'nightmarish shape shifter.'¹⁵⁶ If the system is seen as an enemy, its multitude of forms present a complex challenge to activists who seek to change it. If it is a web, it must be untangled. If it is a monster, it must be slain. If it is a poisonous substance, an antidote must be found. If it is a prison or a machine, it must be dismantled. Symbolically, this shape-shifting quality identifies the system as a daunting enemy, requiring an activist's deepest cunning and skill to face.

THE ENTRAPMENT STORY IN MAINSTREAM CULTURE

At first glance, the activist Entrapment story seems to lie in direct contrast with the dominant mythology (particularly in the U.S.) that tells of limitless opportunities and individual self-determination. hooks describes 'the belief that the United States is a class-free society – that anyone who works hard enough can make it to the top.'¹⁵⁷ Burgess reveals the more negative side of this belief, in the metaphor of 'the ladder of power and influence which, unless we climb it, or knock it over, will forever tower above us, reminding us of our inadequacy and failure.'¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ Starhawk 2002: 7.

¹⁵⁴ Solnit 2004: 88.

¹⁵⁵ Solnit 2004: 88.

¹⁵⁶ Jensen 2000: 216.

¹⁵⁷ hooks 2000b: 5.

¹⁵⁸ Burgess 1996: 45.

Mainstream mythology never denies the existence of an all-pervasive ‘system,’ it simply portrays this system as benevolent. There is the sense that it encompasses all desirable opportunities, and that it facilitates the manifestation of social, economic, and technological gains, thus constantly self-evolving into better and more beneficial forms. Chronicling the development of this worldview, Burgess points out that the ‘notion of Progress demands the notion of ‘backwardness’ to offset it’¹⁵⁹ – a role easily filled by the inverse of the Tribal Paradise story, in which indigenous peoples are ‘savages.’

In my experience in the U.S. and Scotland, most non-activists subscribe to a less grandiose version of the Progress story, in which the system is neutral, natural, and inevitable. In the face of the political, social, economic, and environmental upheavals of the twentieth century, members of recent generations have rejected elements of the story that paint the system as wholly benevolent, replacing them with a sense instead that the system isn’t necessarily wonderful, but it’s the best we’ve got. Its limits are largely taken for granted: most people are too occupied with just getting by to worry about changing the rules. Although it has lost standing on a conscious level, the ‘benevolent system’ story persists in the realms of political discourse and advertising, perhaps adding to the reluctance of non-activists to challenge it.

The Entrapment story found in activist literature can be seen as simply a reversal of mainstream mythologies about ‘the system.’ Rather than being simple and straightforward – ‘anyone who works hard enough can make it to the top’ – it is complex and tangled. Rather than being beneficial, it is malicious. Rather than constant evolution to improve the lives of everyone, its evolution benefits the rich and powerful.

However, the entrapment story can also hold deeper meanings. Similar tales are common throughout world mythology, often as part of what Campbell calls ‘the hero’s journey’ of departure, initiation, and return.¹⁶⁰ In conjunction with the Fall From Grace story, the Entrapment story can be seen as the condition between paradise and armageddon or utopia, Eliade’s ‘profane time’ that must be transcended to connect with the ‘sacred time’ of myth. In this way, the ‘trap’ in which we are caught can be seen as fundamentally expressing the frustration of nostalgia for a paradise rendered inaccessible in the context of linear time.

¹⁵⁹ Burgess 1996: 89.

¹⁶⁰ Campbell 1972 [1949].

POSSIBLE FUTURES: ESCAPE AND BREAKING THE SYSTEM

If we are trapped in an unacceptable system, any transition to a better future (utopia) must involve either escaping from the system or breaking it, or a combination of both. Jensen argues that participating in culturally-sanctioned atrocities ‘may require little more than a simple unwillingness to step outside the flow of society,’ which implies that in order to *stop* the atrocities, we must ‘step outside the flow of society.’¹⁶¹ Heinberg makes almost the same argument: ‘attempting to maintain business as usual during the coming decades will merely ensure catastrophic collapse.’¹⁶² Therefore, to prevent ‘catastrophic collapse’ we must avoid ‘business as usual.’ Solnit writes that the ‘best way to resist a monolithic institution or corporation is not with a monolithic movement but with multiplicity itself.’¹⁶³ The central argument of Quinn’s book is that we must go ‘beyond civilization,’ that ‘there’s no need for global change.’¹⁶⁴

However, abandoning the system is not always enough. According to Starhawk, the system ‘is unjust, unbalanced, and unsustainable, and it causes untold suffering... We have no recourse but the streets, no alternative but action [against it].’¹⁶⁵ Jensen maintains that ‘[t]hose who destroy won’t stop because we live peacefully, and they won’t stop because we ask nicely.’¹⁶⁶ He goes on to argue that the ‘only way to defeat a double bind is to obliterate it.’¹⁶⁷ For Starhawk, the best way to resist the system is to disrupt it: ‘Systems of power maintain themselves through our fear of the force they can command, but force is costly. They cannot sustain themselves if they have to actually use force to accomplish every normal function.’¹⁶⁸

¹⁶¹ Jensen 2000: 42.

¹⁶² Heinberg 2004: 15.

¹⁶³ Solnit 2004: 147.

¹⁶⁴ Quinn 2000: 115.

¹⁶⁵ Starhawk 2002: 37.

¹⁶⁶ Jensen 2000: 190.

¹⁶⁷ Jensen 2000: 371.

¹⁶⁸ Starhawk 2002: 119.

CHAPTER FIVE: HEROES, VILLAINS, AND THE MASSES THE GREAT BATTLE STORY

If we have fallen from a state of pre-hierarchical grace into a system that has trapped us, then what is the role in this state of affairs for activists? In their narratives, activist writers imagine a Great Battle that has been raging for at least a century, and particularly the past few decades, in efforts to counteract the negative influences of the system. In this worldview, there are three types of people: evil oppressors, virtuous activists, and the ignorant masses. The former two are engaged in a struggle to determine the fate of the world, a struggle of which the latter is largely unaware. In some cases – most notably, *Hope in the Dark* and *Powerdown* – the narratives imply that a battle is occurring not only between oppressors and activists, but also between good activists and bad activists. However, regardless of whether ‘the enemy’ is portrayed as evil oppressors or bad activists, readers are invited to identify with the heroes of the story and ultimately join the ranks of the good activists.

Eliade identifies a similar pattern in Marxism, where he identifies a mythological Golden Age that ‘lies at the beginning and the end of History.’¹⁶⁹ As modern activism has roots in Marxism, his observations from nearly half a century ago hold relevance today. According to Eliade,

Marx has enriched this venerable myth with a truly messianic Judaeo-Christian ideology; on the one hand, by the prophetic and soteriological function he ascribes to the proletariat; and, on the other, by the final struggle between Good and Evil, which may well be compared with the apocalyptic conflict between Christ and Antichrist, ending in the decisive victory of the former.¹⁷⁰

These kinds of messianic overtones, implicit in the Fall From Grace story, are made explicit in the Great Battle story. They also resonate with the philosophy of Marx’s predecessor Hegel, here described by Burgess: ‘Any given state of affairs, the status quo (or *thesis*) would gradually produce a force opposed to it (*antithesis*). When these forces met and joined battle, whether by reform, revolution, or whatever, the resulting new order (*synthesis*) was set to become the next *thesis*, and so on.’¹⁷¹

Campbell argues that all cultures have battle mythologies, as a result of natural selection: ‘it has been the nations, tribes, and peoples bred to mythologies of war that have survived to communicate their...

¹⁶⁹ Eliade 1960: 26.

¹⁷⁰ Eliade 1960: 26.

¹⁷¹ Burgess 1996: 35 (original emphasis).

mythic lore to descendants.¹⁷² However, typically it is highly-stratified societies (e.g. ancient Greece, Israel, Persia, Egypt, China, Japan, and India, as cited by Campbell¹⁷³) which ascribe to mythologies of war as opposed to mythologies of battle. In the former, opponents are annihilated, whereas in the latter they are simply defeated. Indeed, Campbell writes that '[w]ar is the natural duty of princes, and periods of peace are merely interludes.'¹⁷⁴ This may be true for many cultures, but neither princes nor war are universal to the human condition. It is interesting that in arguing for the destruction of 'the system,' writers draw upon a mythology foundational to the warlike culture they hope to transform.

However, heavy reliance on a battle motif is not surprising, considering that one role of activist literature is to inspire more people to become activists. Hero stories abound in our cultural mythology, stimulating the desire to 'fight the good fight.' Presenting a battle in which readers can imagine themselves as heroes offers a seductive entrée to a lifestyle which can be confusing, challenging, and exhausting. Starhawk writes:

Every action tells a story, and we carefully craft the tale we want to tell... What we're saying is 'Look! A new force is rising up in the world, so creative, so vital, so full of life and passion and freedom that no system of control can withstand it. And you can be a part of it. Yes, you'll face great risks and danger, but you will have friends with you, amazing, wonderful, mythical, magical comrades all around the globe. And you will be part of creating the most amazing transformation the world has ever seen.'¹⁷⁵

Ironically, this embodies a shortcoming of activist literature: if readers can imagine themselves as heroes (*i.e.* activists) through the act of reading, where is the motivation to go beyond reading? Each of the books advocates action, yet inadvertently provides an outlet for fantasy. In the context of blurred lines between the 'realistic and fictional landscapes' of modern media, it becomes easy for readers to construct from activist literature what Appadurai calls 'chimerical imagined worlds.'¹⁷⁶ In telling tales of a great battle, does activist literature become just another genre for adventure stories, inviting readers to vicariously participate in the Movement? Is this legitimate? After all, reading itself can be seen a kind of action if we consider 'the battleground of the imagination.' This kind of conundrum raises questions about what it means to be an activist, the purpose of activist literature, and the production of cultural capital.

¹⁷² Campbell 1972: 169.

¹⁷³ Campbell 1972: 174-198.

¹⁷⁴ Campbell 1972: 200.

¹⁷⁵ Starhawk 2002: 234.

¹⁷⁶ Appadurai 1996: 35.

HOW THE BATTLE IS IMAGINED

Heinberg describes the current ecological crisis as ‘the most severe challenge our species has ever faced’ and ‘one of the most momentous events in all of geological time.’¹⁷⁷ The struggle to counteract this crisis is mythologized in similarly epic terms. Even prior to describing the combatants in depth, the battle imagery is clear. After a particularly intense experience, Jensen describes being ‘ready to continue the fight.’¹⁷⁸ Starhawk illustrates antagonism between protesters and police: ‘the two groups, each perceiving themselves as righteous and the other side as potentially violent, are squaring off on the streets of our nation’s capital.’¹⁷⁹ Upon returning home, she writes that ‘I still have... the sense of having been through a battle in a war most of my neighbours are totally unaware of.’¹⁸⁰ Quinn recognises the familiar battle imagery, but challenges it:

We can’t afford to wait for David [activists] to finish off Goliath [the system], because obviously David *never* finishes off Goliath. The two of them have been standing toe to toe for thousands of years – and they’ll still be standing there a thousand years from now. We don’t need to defeat Goliath. We need to change the way he thinks.¹⁸¹

But even to ‘change the way [Goliath] thinks’ expresses an element of the Great Battle story; Quinn merely advocates psychological warfare, diplomacy, and economic sanctions rather than conventional warfare.¹⁸² His position is echoed in Solnit’s narrative:

an army assaults the physical world and takes physical possession of it; activists reclaim the streets and occasionally seize a Bastille or topple a Berlin Wall, but the terrain of their action is usually immaterial, the realm of the symbolic, political discourse, collective imagination.¹⁸³

Jensen synthesises the two positions, insisting that the battle must include both physical and psychological action:

Any revolution on the outside – any breaking down of current power structures – with no corresponding revolution in perceiving, being, and thinking, will merely further destruction... Any revolution on the inside – a revolution of the heart – which does not lead to a revolution on the outside plays just as false.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁷ Heinberg 2004: 5.

¹⁷⁸ Jensen 2000: 108.

¹⁷⁹ Starhawk 2002: 40.

¹⁸⁰ Starhawk 2002: 93.

¹⁸¹ Quinn 2000: 100 (original emphasis).

¹⁸² His descriptions of ‘going tribal’ can be seen as enforcing economic sanctions against hierarchical institutions, and his vision of showing civilization-dwellers the wonders of tribal life closely mirrors many styles of psychological warfare and diplomacy.

¹⁸³ Solnit 2004: 92.

¹⁸⁴ Jensen 2000: 288.

Once the authors have set the stage to imagine activism as a Great Battle – the ground is the whole world, particularly the streets, the forests, the corridors of power, and the inner realms of imagination and dreams – they can introduce the fighters. Readers are invited to take sides, and the story serves to familiarise them with their potential opponents and allies.

WRONG HEARTS AND MINDS: THE EVIL OPPRESSORS

While the ‘enemy’ is sometimes portrayed as the system itself, more often the enemy is presented as a group of people and institutions, including ‘elites,’ corporations, ‘exploiters,’ the ‘Right Wing,’ the Bush Administration, etc.¹⁸⁵ As they are, in the words of Heinberg, ‘people who identify with the system and the status quo,’¹⁸⁶ they share many of the qualities we have seen associated with the system. They are described as powerful, ruthless, cruel, greedy, short-sighted, single-minded, persistent. Starhawk argues that ‘our democratic institutions are corrupted by the interests of corporate wealth,’ and according to Solnit, the Bush Administration’s agenda is based on ‘blind patriotism driven by fear.’¹⁸⁷ Jensen characterises them as ‘indecent’ and ‘cannibals,’ whose ‘hearts and minds are wrong,’ and Quinn notes that even when revolutions seek to overthrow the oppressors, ‘in every case... the hierarchy merely changed hands and went on as before.’¹⁸⁸ In the web metaphor, oppressors are strands that hold it together; in the machine metaphor, they are cogs; in the prison, they are guards.

However, unlike the system, which is portrayed as having a brutal cleverness, oppressors are often portrayed as ignorant and foolish, blindly following the Orwellian Big Brother of the system. Starhawk argues that the ‘mostly men running the governments and the corporations and the economic institutions of the world seem incapable of grasping reality,’ listing the ecological and social crises they ignore.¹⁸⁹ Heinberg writes that ‘they are constitutionally incapable of questioning [the system’s] fundamental assumptions.’¹⁹⁰ The combination of cruelty, loyalty to the system, and ignorance makes the oppressors uniquely qualified for their role of destroying the world, and also particularly difficult foes for activists to face.

¹⁸⁵ Heinberg 2004: 168; Starhawk 2002: 37; 183; 215; Solnit 2004: 78.

¹⁸⁶ Heinberg 2004: 168.

¹⁸⁷ Starhawk 2002: 37; Solnit 2004: 78.

¹⁸⁸ Jensen 2000: 355-356; Quinn 2000: 77.

¹⁸⁹ Starhawk 2002: 89.

¹⁹⁰ Heinberg 2004: 168.

Some authors explain how oppressors came to hold their positions of control. Heinberg describes how the system ‘carefully fosters some personality types and excludes others,’ while Jensen notes that ‘our cash economy... can do no other than reward selfish behaviour.’¹⁹¹ Quinn asks, ‘[w]hen all we demand from [leaders]... are instant, short-term gains, why would they suddenly begin thinking like global visionaries?’¹⁹² There is the underlying sense that oppressors cannot help themselves, reinforcing the Entrapment myth’s supposition that they are not bad people, but are simply caught up in a bad system.

Indeed, some oppressors are portrayed as victims to be pitied, immature or naïve, hoodwinked by the system to do its bidding despite their good intentions. In Jensen’s narrative, good intentions go hand-in-hand with destructive ignorance. He cites the benevolent intentions of Nazi doctors who killed their patients and timber companies that destroy forests, noting that ‘if our hearts and minds are wrong, it doesn’t matter what we do, nor what justifications we emplace to buttress our decisions, our actions will further destruction.’¹⁹³ For Starhawk, good intentions are ruthlessly exploited by the system:

Within these institutions are good people who sincerely desire to protect the forests, to help the poor. Yet whatever efforts they make... injustice is embedded in the very structure of these bodies, in the procedures that must be followed, in the questions that can and cannot be asked, in the way the debate is framed.¹⁹⁴

CRUCIAL TO OUR SURVIVAL: THE VIRTUOUS ACTIVISTS¹⁹⁵

Regardless of whether oppressors are kind-hearted or cruel, ignorant, selfish, or simply evil, they are the enemies of activists in the Great Battle story. As Quinn puts it, ‘Mother Culture teaches that a saviour is what we need,’¹⁹⁶ and in this story, activists are the saviours, selflessly fighting the evil oppressors’ attempts to exploit and destroy. First and foremost, activists are people who care about the state of the world and want to ease or end suffering. The first step to becoming an activist is looking squarely at the problems. Jensen writes, ‘if I pretend [atrocities] do not happen by not writing

¹⁹¹ Heinberg 2004: 168; Jensen 2000: 141.

¹⁹² Quinn 2000: 98.

¹⁹³ Jensen 2000: 355-357.

¹⁹⁴ Starhawk 2002: 47.

¹⁹⁵ Starhawk 2002: 137: ‘the movement... is crucial to our survival as a species.’

¹⁹⁶ Quinn 2000: 152.

about them, and you pretend they do not happen by not reading about them, the horrors themselves will not go away.¹⁹⁷ Using Campbell's 'hero's journey' model,¹⁹⁸ acknowledging the problems that are denied in mainstream society can be seen as a moment of departure, where fighting the oppressors and the system can be seen as initiation, ultimately allowing the activist to return by way of sharing the benefits of victory (e.g. sustainability, social justice, etc.) with their community and the wider world.

Descriptions of activists and their work appeal to a sense of compassion and morality, and give the impression that once you know about the troubles of the world, the only ethical course is activism. Starhawk argues that '[w]e have the power and the responsibility to be part of the reshaping of our world to reflect our values of life, love, diversity, justice, and true abundance for all.'¹⁹⁹ Obviously, activism is not for everyone. Quinn advises that '[a]ll dedicated pyramid-builders should stick with civilization. The rest of us just want something else, and it's high time we had it.'²⁰⁰

Victories in achieving this 'something else' must be celebrated. In keeping victories alive in the imaginations of activists, writers take on the role of bards.²⁰¹ There are the iconic leaders – Heinberg writes that 'Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King confronted entrenched patterns of social inequality... by perseverance, and by moral example and persuasion, they prevailed.'²⁰² There is also the force of sheer numbers, and persistence: according to Starhawk, after 'two years of [large-scale] protests... the major institutions of globalisation were on the defensive.'²⁰³ She goes on to write that '[d]eep transformations take time. Regeneration arises from decay.'²⁰⁴ Solnit writes that 'though [the movement] has achieved countless small-scale victories around the world, what its creativity and its power will achieve is yet unimaginable.'²⁰⁵

Even defeats are described in positive terms. According to Heinberg, 'a good case can be made for taking the moral high ground and fighting the good fight for peace, social justice, and environmental protection, even if many battles along the way are sure to be lost.'²⁰⁶ Similarly, Starhawk writes,

¹⁹⁷ Jensen 2000: 241.

¹⁹⁸ Campbell 1972 [1949].

¹⁹⁹ Starhawk 2002: 24.

²⁰⁰ Quinn 2000: 85.

²⁰¹ McIntosh 2001: 68.

²⁰² Heinberg 2004: 173.

²⁰³ Starhawk 2002: 2.

²⁰⁴ Starhawk 2002: 48.

²⁰⁵ Solnit 2004: 162.

²⁰⁶ Heinberg 2004: 183.

'[e]ven... if nothing we do does make a difference, courage and passion are a better place to be than hopelessness, cynicism, and fear... If we see our dreams ripped out of our hands, that's better than never daring to dream at all.'²⁰⁷ Activism might not achieve all its goals, but it is better than apathy.

DUMBED DOWN: THE IGNORANT MASSES

While the fate of the world hangs in the balance and activists engage in an epic struggle against the oppressors, the masses are too absorbed in their daily lives to notice. Burgess critiques use of the word 'masses,' calling it 'contemptuous... In revolutionary politics, the word 'masses'... lacks any tone of respect for the people referred to.'²⁰⁸ Although most authors do not actually use the word 'masses,' they do reflect this kind of attitude in their descriptions, so I will use the word as a shorthand for the idea they illustrate.

Heinberg describes most people as 'so 'dumbed down' by television that they have little or no awareness of what is happening to them.'²⁰⁹ According to Quinn, '[religion] keeps them quiet and submissive, the promised inheritance of the meek remaining firmly and forever *in the future*.'²¹⁰ Solnit calls them 'lazy and detached,' undeserving of participation in the 'tremendous gamble for the highest stakes,' which is, of course, activism.²¹¹

In blissful ignorance, the masses often do not see themselves as victimised. Starhawk notes that it is 'in the interest of exploiters... to keep the oppressed thinking that their problems are purely individual and that the solutions lie in individual efforts to change.'²¹² Quinn argues that despite 'all the indicators of misery we live with... most people in our culture are thoroughly convinced that our way of life simply cannot be bettered by any means whatever,' and Heinberg concedes that perhaps 'the folks in charge are right: maybe we *can't* handle the truth... Most of us do seem to enjoy our pleasant illusions, after all.'²¹³

²⁰⁷ Starhawk 2002: 157-158.

²⁰⁸ Burgess 1996: 32.

²⁰⁹ Heinberg 2004: 75.

²¹⁰ Quinn 2000: 76 (original emphasis).

²¹¹ Solnit 2004: 5-6.

²¹² Starhawk 2002: 183.

²¹³ Quinn 2000: 86; Heinberg 2004: 7 (original emphasis).

If ordinary people are so ignorant and oblivious, what role do they play in this story? Besides moral obligations to help the victims and a potential site for recruitment, why are activists interested in them at all? In this battle, the masses are the key deciding factor, despite their shortcomings. Like the archetypal unaware hero, the masses are coveted by both sides: activists must 'win' them over, in part to prevent further destruction when they follow the oppressors' lead, and in part to gain more power and leverage. Quinn considers them part of the problem, stating that activists should be 'alarmed by the... ninety-nine percent [of people] who are hoping to live like lords of the universe.' He goes on to argue that if 'we don't give them something better to want, we're doomed.'²¹⁴ Conversely, Starhawk sees them as potential allies: 'those people working in McDonald's and eating at McDonald's... might come to be on our side,' if we can 'think clearly about how we might win them over.'²¹⁵ According to Heinberg, 'the primary incentive' for 'movement leaders... must be to attract the interest and loyalty of the multitudes,' and Solnit emphatically states that activists 'need a broad base... to speak to and for.'²¹⁶ Taken together, these statements present the masses as both a problem to overcome and a resource to be utilised. Extending the metaphor of a battle, they are a potential army to be led, once they have been awakened to the war raging around them.

GOOD ACTIVISTS AND BAD ACTIVISTS

Parallel to the narrative of 'winning over' the masses and struggling against the oppressors is a narrative of deep division in the ranks. For several of the authors, 'bad' activists present a problem almost as threatening as the oppressors. Starhawk identifies this trend explicitly:

Radicals often spend much time and energy arguing with each other over what the correct form and aim of the struggle should be, who we should associate with, whether we are being co-opted by mere middle-class reformists or led astray by impractical extremists, what lessons we should take from the past. [But] revolution is not an exact science... We inevitably draw different lessons from the same events.²¹⁷

While this is a valid critique rather than a strict narrative, it follows a pattern found across several of the books. It is the *pattern* of good/bad activists that constitutes a mythological element, rather than any particular critique. For instance, Quinn and Heinberg hold completely divergent opinions on the subject of rural intentional communities. Quinn sharply criticises this 'paradigmatic utopian scenario'

²¹⁴ Quinn 2000: 111; 172.

²¹⁵ Starhawk 2002: 59.

²¹⁶ Heinberg 2004: 173; Solnit 2004: 124.

²¹⁷ Starhawk 2002: 257.

as a 'weary old fantasy' that 'requires no imagination.' He writes that 'to advocate it as a general solution for six billion people would set an all-time record for inanity.'²¹⁸ Heinberg describes a nearly identical scenario, with the position that 'if there is a sane path... to a truly sustainable future, these folks have surely found it.'²¹⁹ Neither of these opinions is mythological in itself; it is each statement's underlying assumptions that embody the myth of the good/bad activist: that some activists are smart, strategic, pragmatic, and sane, while others are naïve, misguided, impractical, and foolish.

Similarly, a few authors express antagonism towards activists with whom they have ideological differences, revealing the assumption that certain activists are somehow 'better' than others. Heinberg, Quinn, and particularly Solnit deflate their arguments against oppressors and the system with harsh critiques of fellow activists, deflecting blame from oppressors. This is not surprising, considering that it is easier and far safer to attack allies than enemies, or to diffuse attacks on enemies with similar attacks on allies. Heinberg accuses the movement of 'tailor[ing] its utterances for maximum public-relations effectiveness, just as the elites do, [with the result that] politics trumps truth.'²²⁰ Quinn accuses activists of wanting to 'wait until we have a world that is already perfect' before doing anything to change our fundamental lifestyle, and generally speaks of them as being short-sighted, unimaginative, and overly attached to ineffective programmes.²²¹

While Heinberg and Quinn indulge in a few instances of attacking their allies, Solnit is by far the harshest critic of her fellow activists. She derisively states that 'one exciting opportunity the left offers is of being your own prosecutor,'²²² but the sentiments and tone throughout *Hope in the Dark* indicate that she is far more interested in prosecuting other activists. She accuses them of being 'indulgent,' 'selfish,' 'Puritanical,' and 'in love with... failure,' of 'gazing so fixedly at [the] problems that they cannot see beyond them,' lacking 'clarity' and 'imagination,' 'grandstanding,' and engaging in 'gratuitous despair.'²²³ Ironically, through her own critiques and pessimistic tone, she illustrates many of the patterns she criticises. Her narrative implies (and sometimes states explicitly) that ineffective activists have actually caused the problems we see today, rather than merely failing to solve them. For

²¹⁸ Quinn 2000: 117.

²¹⁹ Heinberg 2004: 184.

²²⁰ Heinberg 2004: 179.

²²¹ Quinn 2000: 99; 182; 117; 7-8.

²²² Solnit 2004: 8.

²²³ Solnit 2004: 14; 9; 29; 27; 24; 24; 26; 24.

instance, she argues that ‘freeze era’ activists ‘didn’t push hard enough or stay long enough to collect the famous peace dividend, and so there was none.’²²⁴

Conversely, Starhawk manages to identify problems in the movement without being so accusatory: ‘Just as unconscious racism was carried into relationships within the movement, so conscious and unconscious sexism characterised the Civil Rights, Black Liberation, and antiwar movements.’²²⁵ Even in naming the movement’s shortcomings, she consistently turns the blame back onto the oppressors. For instance, she argues that focusing on details to the exclusion of broad issues serves to ‘reinforce the system’s focus on individuals as isolated actors instead of encouraging us to ask, ‘How do we collectively take power?’²²⁶ Similarly, she speaks against the infighting whereby some groups are excluded: ‘You can’t dismiss the black bloc and other militant groups as ‘negative rebels’ or immature adolescents acting out.’²²⁷

POSSIBLE FUTURES: THE FUTURE IS NOW

Because one of their central goals is to motivate people to action, authors encourage people to act as soon as possible. For them, a ‘better world’ can and should begin today; the future is now. There is the sense that other ‘revolutions’ have erroneously aimed for a better world in the future, and have therefore never achieved it. Quinn contends that because ‘we don’t expect to overthrow governments, abolish world capitalism, make civilization vanish, or turn everyone in the world into walking buddhas, we don’t have to wait for *anything*.’²²⁸ At the same time, one wonders whether this sense of urgency arises in part from the ambient mainstream culture, which worships speed and action.

There is an undercurrent that we are approaching, or are in the midst of a final battle, that we don’t have time for another. Heinberg emphatically asks, ‘[h]ow many warnings do we get? Isn’t it reasonable by now to assume that we are living on borrowed time?’²²⁹ Starhawk is even more explicit: ‘I want to win this revolution. I don’t think we have the ecological and social leeway to mount another

²²⁴ Solnit 2004: 3.

²²⁵ Starhawk 2002: 181.

²²⁶ Starhawk 2002: 222.

²²⁷ Starhawk 2002: 125.

²²⁸ Quinn 2000: 99 (original emphasis).

²²⁹ Heinberg 2004: 8.

one if this fails.’²³⁰ Quinn adds, ‘[t]his time it’ll be different. It’d better be.’²³¹ However, in the philosophy of Hegel, if activists manage to overthrow the system’s *thesis* with their *antithesis*, the result will simply become the new status quo, and the battle will go on forever. The concept of a final, static ‘better world’ resonates with the Judeo-Christian concept of utopia, even when attempts to bring the future into the present can be seen as a strategy to refigure a linear notion of time.

²³⁰ Starhawk 2002: 127.

²³¹ Quinn 2000: 182.

PART THREE



CONCLUSION, REFERENCES AND APPENDICES

*We write to find secrets in experience that are obscured from ordinary sight: to uncover hidden coherences in what seems to be a mere jumble of unrelated events and details.*²³²

At the outset of this project, I identified four key questions with which to explore the mythological dimensions of activist literature:

What texts are activists inspired by?

What mythologies are expressed in those texts?

What are the underlying assumptions of the mythologies?

Are the assumptions congruent with the politics of the texts?

By carrying out an e-mail survey that was spread by ‘snowballing,’ I discovered that activists’ literary inspiration comes from far and wide. I selected six books, written since 2000 and listed by multiple respondents, on which to focus my analysis. After several readings, I deemed one book unsuitable for the project, and concentrated on the remaining five.

Using an interdisciplinary approach, I identified three key mythological structures, made conspicuous by their repetition across all five books. In a functional sense, these stories provide a framework for understanding the world and activists’ roles, as well as a set of values and a model for behaviour.

The Fall From Grace story is found cross-culturally, but the activist version holds elements of an indigenous notion of cyclical time in the framework of a Judeo-Christian concept of linear time. Activists are nostalgic for a tribal, pre-hierarchical paradise, in which they see an ideal human condition. In many indigenous worldviews, ideal conditions are accessible through ritual, but in a linear understanding of time it is impossible to reproduce. Despite explicitly refusing to idealise indigenous cultures, positive elements of tribal life are juxtaposed with negative elements of hierarchical life, implying that the former are superior or more ‘natural.’ Another element of this pattern is the sense that humans or hierarchical cultures are inherently flawed, evoking the Judeo-Christian concept of original sin. Embedded in this story are two possible futures, armageddon and utopia, and it is the role of activists to prevent the former whilst working for the latter.

²³² Joan Cocks, *Theory’s Contemplative Relation to the World*, quoted in hooks 1999: 40.

From a pre-hierarchical paradise, we have ‘fallen’ into a state described by the Entrapment story in a wide range of metaphors: we have become trapped in a web, a prison, or a machine. We are surrounded by a ubiquitous substance, or pursued by a monster. The common features of these metaphors are scale and complexity, and propensity for violence, greed, and subjugation. Although people are characterised as being fundamentally good, their choices and actions are constrained by the system, and they perpetuate its evil structures. This trapped condition can be seen as our fate between paradise and armageddon or utopia, particularly since destruction of the system is depicted as manifesting a utopian society. Entrapment (and particularly escape) can also be seen as forming one stage in the ‘hero’s journey.’

The work of destroying the system, in turn, forms the main thrust of the Great Battle story, in which activists and oppressors struggle to determine the fate of the world, with the ignorant masses both being pawns and playing a decisive role. In this story, the messianic overtones of the Fall From Grace story become explicit, with activists cast as the natural saviours of the masses. However, within the battle between activists and oppressors, the shortcomings of ‘bad’ activists undermine the effectiveness of good activists, giving good activists another enemy to face. Of the three stories, this one speaks most directly to readers, calling them to action and inviting them to choose sides – but it also opens the possibility for vicarious fantasy rather than action. By encouraging immediate action, authors attempt to bring a utopian future into the present and achieve a positive conclusion for the Fall From Grace story.

WHY ARE THESE MYTHS SO PREVALENT IN ACTIVIST LITERATURE?

There are several ways to understand why these particular stories are so prevalent in the five books I have examined. These stories can be seen as descended from ancient archetypes and a universal longing for Eliade’s notion of ‘sacred time:’ ‘primitive spirituality lives on in its own way... as a *nostalgia* which creates things that become values in themselves: art, sciences, social theory²³³ – and activism. But I believe this describes only one facet of activist mythology, and does not take into account the socio-political climate in which it arose.

²³³ Eliade 1958: 433-434 (original emphasis).

In another interpretation, activist myths can be seen as inversions or distortions of dominant mythologies: paradise as unity with the land rather than with the Judeo-Christian God; an oppressive rather than a benevolent system; the Powers That Be cast as villains rather than heroes. Indeed, what mythological elements can authors use besides the elements of the dominant paradigm? For mythology to 'work' it must be understood and accepted on an unconscious level,²³⁴ so it cannot stray too far from the familiar. But as Antoinette Fouque writes, '[i]nversion does not facilitate the passage to another kind of structure.'²³⁵ This poses a 'catch-22' where familiar myths are not radical enough, and radical myths are not familiar enough. I believe that the first step to overcoming this dilemma is for authors to become more aware of the mythological dimensions of their work.

Beyond structural considerations, these mythologies can be seen as coping mechanisms. Burgess identifies a trend in mainstream Western culture that can easily be applied to activism: 'our habit of deferred gratification and our idea of a grand plan of history with a happy ending and ourselves in the starring role seem like attempts to mitigate psychic and social suffering.'²³⁶ Perhaps the difficulty of engaging in activist work with no end in sight is eased by belief in the great importance of the battle and a post-historical victory. Perhaps imagining such a formidable enemy eases the pain of defeat and burnout. But both of these scenarios seem fundamentally rooted in fear of defeat and of the world growing steadily worse. According to Brenda Ueland, fear facilitates inaction: 'often the idle man does not act, not because he is lazy but because he is afraid in some way... He thinks action is painful and hopelessly hard and almost certain to end in failure.'²³⁷ hooks carries this idea further, arguing that fear primarily works against liberation: 'Cultures of domination rely on the cultivation of fear as a way to ensure obedience... Fear is the primary force upholding structures of domination.'²³⁸

Clearly, fearless, radical work is dangerous; it threatens the status quo. hooks notes that when 'we dare to speak in a liberatory voice, we threaten even those who may initially claim to want our words.'²³⁹ If writers are too radical, they risk rejection from their readers, and if activists are too radical, they risk rejection from their bases of support. However, facing this risk is crucial, for each foray outside of mainstream conventions and ideas opens space for others to expand, while maintaining the status quo only constricts that liberatory space.

²³⁴ Campbell 1972: 213.

²³⁵ Antoinette Fouque, quoted in hooks 1984: 7.

²³⁶ Burgess 1996: 36.

²³⁷ Ueland 1987 [1938]: 60.

²³⁸ hooks 2000: 93.

²³⁹ hooks 1989: 18.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTIVISTS AND WRITERS

As Burgess writes, '[u]nmasking the ironies of Western self-righteousness does not deflate the authenticity or significance of activist effort.'²⁴⁰ Most activists are not involved in activism for consciously selfish ends: they want to change the world. But hooks describes a common pattern:

Young progressives committed to social justice who had found it easy to maintain radical politics when they were living on the edge, on the outside, did not want to do the hard work of changing and reorganizing our existing system in ways that would affirm the values of peace and love, or democracy and justice. They fell into despair. And that despair made capitulation to the existing social order the only place of comfort.²⁴¹

How can writers help prevent, rather than advance the kind of despair hooks describes? One way is to close what she calls the 'gap between the values they claim to hold and their willingness to do the work of connecting thought and action, theory and practice to realize these values and thus create a more just society.'²⁴² Quoting Grace Lee and James Boggs, she writes:

Revolutionists... need a revolutionary ideology, i.e. a body of ideas based on analysing the main contradictions of the particular society which they are trying to change, projecting a higher form of reality in which this contradiction would be resolved, and relating this resolution to a social force or forces responsible for and capable of achieving it. It is only after you have arrived at the correct ideology that it makes sense to develop your revolutionary politics.²⁴³

As Donald and Hall note, 'there is no direct, unmediated access to 'reality' except through the cultural categories and classifications we use... we use ideology to make sense of reality.'²⁴⁴ Conversely, Jean-Paul Sartre writes: 'If literature is not everything it is worth nothing... What is the literature of an epoch, but the epoch appropriated by its literature?'²⁴⁵ Literature shapes and is shaped by the culture, history, and politics in which it is written, and mythology explains the universe in a way that matches (and influences) a culture's lifestyle and moral order.²⁴⁶ Therefore it is the role of activist writers to develop an ideology, a literature, and a mythology congruent with their politics and values.

²⁴⁰ Burgess 1996: 81.

²⁴¹ hooks 2000: 121.

²⁴² hooks 2000: 90.

²⁴³ Grace Lee Boggs and James Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the 20th Century*, quoted in hooks 1984: 113.

²⁴⁴ Donald and Hall: 12.

²⁴⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Between Existentialism and Marxism*, quoted in Williams 1989: 77.

²⁴⁶ Campbell 1972: 214-215.

Part of this literature must include visions for the future, for as hooks writes, '[w]hat we cannot imagine cannot come into being.'²⁴⁷ Donella Meadows elaborates on this principle: 'A vision articulates a future that someone deeply wants, and does it so clearly and compellingly that it summons up the energy, agreement, sympathy, political will, creativity, resources, or whatever to make that vision happen.'²⁴⁸ Similarly, Rich describes 'the energy of desire, summoning a different reality.'²⁴⁹ This 'energy' must be fuelled by stories: fearless, radical stories that shift the contours of our collective imagination, providing inspiration to bring new dreams into the material world. These kinds of stories are dangerous, but changing the world is never a risk-free venture. Activist writers must be the first to embrace the dangers of telling new stories if we are to make space to imagine new configurations of the world.

In this project, I have uncovered and examined some of the mythological foundations of activist literature. I hope that these patterns will be of use to other activists and writers, to build upon or act upon as they see fit. Shaping the future is a collaborative venture, and we build solidarity through the stories we share. May those stories grow ever wilder and more beautiful.

²⁴⁷ hooks 2000: 14.

²⁴⁸ Donella Meadows, 'Chicken Little, Cassandra, and the Real Wolf: So Many Ways to Think About the Future,' quoted in hooks 2000: 106-107.

²⁴⁹ Rich 1993: 242.

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1989: *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (ed. by Robin Gale). London: Verso.

APPENDIX A: SURVEY RESPONDENTS & RESPONSES

Over six weeks (20th July – 31st August 2005), I received 53 survey responses via e-mail and was able to interview one activist by phone. I also visited a table set up by the Stop The War Coalition on Princes Street in Edinburgh, and interviewed three activists there.²⁵⁰

GEOGRAPHY

Among 57 respondents, 48 gave their geographic locations: nine were based in the UK, two in Canada, one each in Germany, Israel, and Japan, and 34 in the US. Of these, 24 were from California, which was likely a bias of who received the survey – most of my contacts are in the Los Angeles and San Francisco areas.

Aside from asking for respondents' geographic location, the three survey questions were:

1. How do you identify yourself as an activist? i.e. What 'kind' of activist are you?
2. Do you think the world can change for the better? Please explain your answer in 100 words or less.
3. What three books (title & author) have most influenced your worldview as an activist?

IDENTITY

Interestingly, most respondents listed specific tasks, issues, or tactics in response to the self-identity question. These included broad categories like 'social justice,' 'human rights,' 'anti-racist,' 'online activism,' 'education,' 'politics,' and 'direct action,' as well as specific examples, such as supporting Ohio steelworkers, securing living wages for campus janitors, personally resisting a ban on female clergy, shutting down San Francisco after the invasion of Iraq, and working to ban genetically modified crops. Similarly, many wrote about lifestyle choices, such as vegetarianism, consumer activism, permaculture gardening, driving biodiesel cars, and acting with compassion towards the people in their lives. Still others considered spiritual practice to be their activism, and vice-versa. Many were unable to concisely articulate their identity as an activist, instead writing lengthy life

²⁵⁰ Details of responses in Appendix B.

histories in efforts to describe *why* or *how* they are active. In the minority were respondents who gave succinct labels like ‘feminist’ and ‘anarchist.’

Three respondents expressed discomfort with the word ‘activism,’ preferring instead ‘organiser,’ ‘change-agent,’ or ‘anarchist.’ Another five stated that they did not consider themselves activists at all, despite my introductory note requesting responses from ‘people who consider themselves activists.’ Four offered scathing critiques of *other* activists, defining their identity in opposition to what one respondent called ‘passivism.’

VISION

The purpose of the second question – *Do you think the world can change for the better?* – was primarily to move respondents’ thinking towards the ‘bigger picture,’ as well as towards what inspired their worldview. Since so many responses to the first question were practical rather than ideological in nature, this shift was doubtlessly necessary. With one exception, responses to this question were positive, although many respondents seemed to read the question as ‘do you think *you* can change the world for the better?’ There was a range of perspectives on how, when, and why the world will ‘change for the better,’ as well as a variety of challenges to that phrasing. Many respondents listed recent social and environmental victories, while just as many expressed dread at how far there is to go.

LITERARY INSPIRATION

In the third question, 121 secular books were listed by 124 authors.²⁵¹ From children’s books like Dr. Seuss’ *The Lorax* and Trina Paulus’ *Hope for the Flowers* to such ‘classics’ as Marx and Engel’s *Communist Manifesto* and Mary Wollstonecraft’s *On the Rights of Women*, respondents have been influenced by a staggering range of literature. Eleven people listed four or more books, unable to choose just three, and others simply listed ‘all books’ by twelve authors. In contrast, four respondents wrote that books have not influenced their worldviews as activists, and one respondent was thoroughly hostile to the idea of literary inspiration: ‘I didn’t have a sudden conversion after reading Noam Chomsky or Abbie Hoffman. That only happens to straight white guys in college.’

²⁵¹ Additionally, two collectives, one unknown author, and five magazines were listed.

Seven biblical and Christian worship books were listed, along with several other examples of Christian spiritual literature.²⁵² Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist, and Pagan perspectives were also represented, with respondents listing the Bhagavad-Gita, Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance*, Alan Watts' *Tao and the Watercourse Way*, and works by Gandhi and Thich Nhat Hanh. While it is not my intention to discriminate on the basis of religious content, strictly spiritual literature falls outside the scope of this project. In the statistics that follow, I have not included anonymous religious works (e.g. the Bible, the Bhagavad-Gita, the Book of Common Prayer, etc).

Not unexpectedly, there was a clear gender imbalance amongst the listed authors. In 124 individual authors, 31.5% were women and 68.5% were men. In terms of actual books, 28.9% were written by women, 66.1% by men, 2.5% by mixed-gender pairs, 1.7% by collectives, and 0.8% unknown. Similarly, more than 90% of the listed authors were white, with only a dozen authors from black, Latin American, Indian, Asian, Native American, and Middle Eastern backgrounds. I believe these figures reflect the biases of the publishing industry more than the racism and sexism of respondents. As hooks writes, 'I assume that publishing quotas exist that determine the number of black women who will publish... Such quotas are not consciously negotiated and decided upon but are the outcomes of institutionalised racism, sexism, and classism.'²⁵³

Despite the overall gender imbalance, Starhawk was the most popular author, with five of her books (plus 'all books') listed in ten responses.²⁵⁴ Emma Goldman was the second most popular, with her autobiography listed five times. Altogether, among 121 secular books, twenty titles were repeated, with six women amid the all-white authors. Ten authors appeared more than once.

²⁵² I believe these came largely from the contacts of a radical Presbyterian minister I worked with in an interfaith peace group. With only two exceptions, respondents who listed the Bible and other Christian literature mentioned her by name or came from the region she serves (Southern California).

²⁵³ hooks, 1999: 165.

²⁵⁴ While the survey was sent to graduates of Earth Activist Training (which Starhawk teaches), only five of the respondents who listed her books were connected to that group.

SELECTION OF BOOKS

Because I seek to assess the current mythologies of the activist community, I singled out books amongst the repeated titles that have been published since 2000. In the case of an author listed multiple times, I selected their most recent activism-focused work:

Chomsky on Anarchism by Noam Chomsky
Days of War, Nights of Love by the CrimethInc. Collective
Powerdown by Richard Heinberg
A Language Older Than Words by Derrick Jensen
The Age of Consent by George Monbiot
Beyond Civilization by Daniel Quinn
Crossing the Rubicon by Mike Rupert
Hope in the Dark by Rebecca Solnit
Webs of Power by Starhawk
The Twentieth Century: A People's History by Howard Zinn

As this list contains only two books by women and one by a collective (which includes women), these works were chosen to address the gender imbalance. Amongst the books by male authors, there seem to be two 'types,' and I have selected the inspirational and practical over the theoretical in order to gain continuity with the previous selections. Therefore, this project originally focused on the following books:

Days of War, Nights of Love by CrimethInc. Collective
Powerdown by Richard Heinberg
A Language Older Than Words by Derrick Jensen
Beyond Civilization by Daniel Quinn
Hope in the Dark by Rebecca Solnit
Webs of Power by Starhawk

APPENDIX B: SURVEY DATA

31 August 2005 – 57 Survey Responses

53 e-mail surveys, 3 in-person, 1 telephone

Abbreviations		
G = Author Gender M = Male F = Female MF/FM/MM/FF = Co-authors C = Collective/Multiple	E = Author Ethnicity W = White B = Black I = Indian L = Latina/o N = Native American A = Asian M = Middle Eastern	N = Other Notes A = Autobiography B = Biblical M = Magazine S = Multiple Authors P = Poetry

Author	Title	#	G	E	N
	<i>Bioneers Conference - www.bioneers.org</i>	1			
	<i>Hebrew prophetic literature: Amos, Micah, Isaiah</i>	1			B
	<i>The Bible</i>	4			B
	<i>The Book of Common Prayer (Episcopalian)</i>	1			B
	<i>The Good Samaritan</i>	1			B
	<i>The Gospel of John</i>	1			B
	<i>The Gospel of Luke</i>	1			B
	<i>The New Testament</i>	1			B
Abbey, Edward	<i>Desert Solitaire</i>	1	M	W	
Abbey, Edward	<i>The Monkey Wrench Gang</i>	2	M	W	
Abu-Jamal, Mumia	<i>Live From Death Row</i>	1	M	B	
AtKisson, Alan	<i>Believing Cassandra: an Optimist Looks at a Pessimist World</i>	1	M	W	
Berry, Thomas	<i>All Books</i>	1	M	W	
Berry, Thomas	<i>The Great Work</i>	1	M	W	
Black Elk	<i>Black Elk Speaks</i>	1	M		N
Bloch, Ernst	<i>The Principle of Hope</i>	1	M	W	
Bukharin, Nikolai & Preobrazhensky, Yevgeni	<i>The ABCs of Communism</i>	1	MM	W	
Butterfly, Julia	<i>Luna</i>	1	F	W	
Capra, Fritjof	<i>The Turning Point</i>	1	M	W	
Carter, Forrest	<i>The Education of Little Tree</i>	2	M	W	
Cayley, David	<i>Ivan Illich</i>	1	M	W	
Chomsky, Noam	<i>All Books</i>	3	M	W	
Churchill, Ward	<i>On the Justice of Roosting Chickens</i>	1	M	W	
CrimethInc. Collective	<i>Days of War, Nights of Love</i>	2	C		S
Day, Dorothy	<i>The Long Loneliness</i>	1	F	W	
Devall, Bill & Sessions, George	<i>Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered</i>	1	MM	W	
Doe, Jane	<i>Anarchist Farm</i>	1	F	W	

Ehrenreich, Barbara	<i>Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers</i>	1	F	W	
Galloway, George	<i>I'm Not the Only One</i>	1	M	W	
Gandhi	<i>Ghandi's (sic) autobiography</i>	1	M	I	A
Gandhi	<i>Hind Swaraj</i>	1	M	I	
Gastil, John	<i>Democracy in Small Groups</i>	1	M	W	
Goldman, Emma	<i>Living My Life</i>	5	F	W	A
Goodman, Amy	<i>Exception to the Rulers</i>	1	F	W	
Hafiz	<i>The Gift</i>	1	M	M	P
Harrod Buhner, Stephen	<i>The Lost Language of Plants</i>	1	M	W	
Hegland, Jean	<i>Into the Forest</i>	1	F	W	
Heinberg, Richard	<i>Powerdown</i>	2	M	W	
Hemenway, Toby	<i>Gaia's Garden</i>	1	M	W	
Heyerdal, Thor	<i>Kon Tiki</i>	1	M	W	
Hicks, Abraham	<i>Ask and It is Given</i>	1	M	W	
Holmgren, David	<i>Permaculture Principles and Pathways Beyond Sustainability</i>	2	M	W	
hooks, bell	<i>All About Love</i>	1	F	B	
Jensen, Derrick	<i>A Language Older Than Words</i>	3	M	W	
Jones, Ken	<i>Beyond Optimism</i>	1	M	W	
Jungk, Robert	<i>Trotzdem</i>	1	M	W	A
Katsen, Mollie	<i>The Moosewood Cookbook</i>	1	F	W	
Kauffman, Cynthia	<i>Ideas for Action</i>	1	F	W	
Kent, Corita	<i>Footnotes and Headlines</i>	1	F	W	
Keyes, Ken Jr.	<i>The Hundredth Monkey</i>	1	M	W	
Kingsley, Charles	<i>The Water Babies</i>	1	M	W	
Klein, Naomi	<i>No Logo</i>	1	F	W	
Kornfield, Jack	<i>A Path With Heart</i>	2	M	W	
Kropotkin, Peter	<i>The Conquest of Bread</i>	1	M	W	
Lee, Harvey	<i>Acid Dreams</i>	1	M	W	
Lenin, Vladimir	<i>All Works</i>	1	M	W	
Leopold, Aldo	<i>Sand County Almanac</i>	1	M	W	
Lewis, C.S.	<i>Chronicles of Narnia</i>	1	M	W	
Llewellyn, Grace	<i>The Teenage Liberation Handbook</i>	1	F	W	
Lundberg, Ferdinand	<i>The Rich and the Super Rich</i>	1	M	W	
Madison, James	<i>Notes on the Debates in the Federal Convention</i>	1	M	W	
Mao Zedong	<i>Selected Works of Mao Tsetung</i>	1	M	A	
Magazine	<i>Adbusters</i>	1	C		M
Magazine	<i>IF</i>	1	C		M
Magazine	<i>Ms.</i>	1	C		M
Magazine	<i>Permaculture Activist</i>	1	C		M
Magazine	<i>Stone Weekly</i>	1	C		M
Mander, Jerry	<i>In the Absence of the Sacred</i>	2	M	W	
Marcos, Subcommandante	<i>Our Word is Our Weapon</i>	1	M	L	
Marcos, Subcommandante	<i>Shadows of Tender Fury</i>	1	M	L	
Marx, Karl	<i>Capital</i>		M	W	

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels	<i>The Communist Manifesto</i>	2	M	W	
McIntosh, Alastair	<i>Soil and Soul</i>	1	M	W	
Meadows, Donella	<i>Limits to Growth</i>	1	F	W	
Miller, Henry	<i>Big Sur</i>	1	M	W	
Millman, Dan	<i>Way of the Peaceful Warrior</i>	1	M	W	
Mollison, Bill	<i>Permaculture: A Designer's Manual</i>	2	M	W	
Monbiot, George	<i>Captive State</i>	1	M	W	
Monbiot, George	<i>The Age of Consent</i>	1	M	W	
Moore, Michael	<i>Stupid White Men</i>	1	M	W	
Moyers, Bill	<i>Making Democracy</i>	1	M	W	
Niebuhr, Reinhold	<i>The Nature and Destiny of Man</i>	1	M	W	
Nin, Anais	<i>The Diaries of Anais Nin</i>	1	F	W	
Norberg-Hodge, Helena	<i>Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh</i>	1	F	W	
Oldham, John & Morris, Lois	<i>Personality Self-Portrait</i>	1	MF	W	
O'Murchu, Diarmuid	<i>All Books</i>	1	M	W	
Ortega, Ofelia	<i>Women's Visions</i>	1	F	L	S
Orwell, George	<i>Homage to Catalonia</i>	1	M	W	
Parenti, Christian	<i>Lockdown America</i>	1	M	W	
Paton, Alan	<i>Cry the Beloved Country</i>	1	M	W	
Paulus, Trina	<i>Hope for the Flowers</i>	1	F	W	
Pilger, John	<i>All Books</i>	1	M	W	
Quinn, Daniel	<i>All Books</i>	1	M	W	
Quinn, Daniel	<i>Ishmael</i>	2	M	W	
Quinn, Daniel	<i>The Story of B</i>	1	M	W	
Randall, Margaret	<i>Gathering Rage: The Failure of 20th Century Revolutions to Develop a Feminist Agenda</i>	1	F	W	
Robbins, John	<i>Diet for a new America</i>	1	M	W	
Robbins, John	<i>May All be Fed: Diet of a New World</i>	1	M	W	
Roddick, Anita	<i>Take It Personally</i>	1	F	W	
Rolston, Holmes	<i>Environmental Ethics</i>	1	M	W	
Roy, Arundhati	<i>The God of Small Things</i>	1	F	I	
Rozak, Theodor	<i>On The Making of a Counter Culture</i>	1	M	W	
Ruether, Rosemary Radford	<i>Integrating Ecofeminism Globalization and World Religions</i>	1	F	W	
Rupert, Michael C.	<i>Crossing the Rubicon</i>	2	M	W	
Russell, Eric Frank	<i>Wasp</i>	1	M	W	
Russell, Letty	<i>Church in the Round</i>	1	F	W	
Sanjaya/Ganesh	<i>Bagavadgita</i>	1			B
Sark	<i>All Books</i>	1	F	W	
Shahn, Ben	<i>The Shape of Content</i>	1	M	W	
Sharp, Gene	<i>Politics of Nonviolent Action</i>	1	M	W	
Shulgin, Alexander & Ann	<i>Tikhah</i>	1	MF	W	
Sinclair, Upton	<i>The Jungle</i>	1	M	W	
Skinner, B.F.	<i>Walden II</i>	1	M	W	
Skolimowski, Henryk	<i>The Participative Mind</i>	1	M	W	
Solnit, Rebecca	<i>Hope in the Dark</i>	2	F	W	
Spretnak, Charlene & Capra, Fritjof	<i>Green Politics</i>	2	FM	W	

Stalvey, Lois	<i>Education of a W.A.S.P.</i>	1	F	W	
Starhawk	<i>All Books</i>	2	F	W	
Starhawk	<i>Dreaming the Dark</i>	1	F	W	
Starhawk	<i>Fifth Sacred Thing</i>	2	F	W	
Starhawk	<i>Spiral Dance</i>	1	F	W	
Starhawk	<i>Truth or Dare</i>	2	F	W	
Starhawk	<i>Webs of Power</i>	2	F	W	
Steinbeck	<i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>	1	M	W	
Suess, Dr.	<i>The Butter Battle Book</i>	1	M	W	
Suess, Dr.	<i>The Lorax</i>	1	M	W	
Suzuki, D T	<i>Zen and Japanese Culture</i>	1	M	A	
Swimme, Brian	<i>All Books</i>	1	M	W	
Thich Nhat Han	<i>Lotus in a Sea of Fire</i>	1	M	A	
Thoreau	<i>Journals</i>	1	M	W	
Tolkien, J.R.R.	<i>All Books</i>	1	M	W	
Trumbo, Dalton	<i>Johnny Got His Gun</i>	1	M	W	
Unknown	<i>The Rivers</i>	1	?		
Updike, John	<i>All Books</i>	1	M	W	
Various	<i>The Itations of Jamaica and I Rastafari</i>	1	C		S
Victor Frankl	<i>Man's Search for Meaning</i>	1	M	W	
Walker, Barbara G.	<i>The Cronee</i>	1	F	W	
Watson, Lyall	<i>Supernature</i>	1	M	W	
Watts, Alan	<i>Tao and the Watercourse Way</i>	1	M	W	
Wheatley, Margaret	<i>Leadership and the New Science</i>	1	F	W	
Whitaker, Robert	<i>Mad in America</i>	1	M	W	
Williams, Terry Tempest	<i>An Unspoken Hunger</i>	1	F	W	
Wollstonecraft, Mary	<i>The Rights of Women</i>	1	F	W	
X, Malcolm	<i>Autobiography of Malcolm X</i>	2	M	B	A
Zinn, Howard	<i>A People's History of the United States</i>	3	M	W	
Zinn, Howard	<i>All Books</i>	1	M	W	

BREAKDOWN OF BOOKS

Specific Books (non-Bible): 121
Books (Biblical & Ancient Religious Literature): 8
'All Books' by specific authors: 13
'Various Anarchist and Anti-Authoritarian Books': 1
Magazines: 5
Collections, Triologies, etc: 2 (counted as one in 'specific books')
Specific Non-Literature: 1 (Bioneers Conference)
Life Experience & Travel in lieu of books: 4
Total Authors: 127
Books by collectives or 'various' authors: 2

Repeated Books:

The Monkey Wrench Gang by Edward Abbey (2)
The Education of Little Tree by Forrest Carter (2)
Days of War, Nights of Love by the CrimethInc. Collective (2)
Living My Life by Emma Goldman (5)
Powerdown by Richard Heinberg (2)
Permaculture: Principles and Pathways Beyond Sustainability by David Holmgren (2)
A Language Older Than Words by Derrick Jensen (3)
A Path with Heart by Jack Kornfield (2)
In the Absence of the Sacred by Jerry Mander (2)
The Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (2)
Permaculture: A Designer's Manual by Bill Mollison (2)
Ishmael by Daniel Quinn (2)
Crossing the Rubicon by Mike Rupert (2)
Hope in the Dark by Rebecca Solnit (2)
Green Politics by Charlene Spretnak & Fritjof Capra (2)
The Fifth Sacred Thing by Starhawk (2)
Webs of Power by Starhawk (2)
Truth or Dare by Starhawk (2)
Autobiography of Malcolm X (2)
A People's History of the United States by Howard Zinn (3)

BREAKDOWN OF AUTHORS

<i>Repeated Authors</i>	
<p>Multiple books mentioned excluding 'all books'</p> <p>Edward Abbey (2) Fritjof Capra (2) Gandhi (2) Subcommandante Marcos (2) Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels (2) George Monbiot (2) Daniel Quinn (2) John Robbins (2) Dr. Seuss (2) Starhawk (5)</p>	<p>'All Books By'</p> <p>Thomas Berry (1) Noam Chomsky (3) Vladimir Lenin (1) Diarmuid O'Murchu (1) John Pilger (1) Daniel Quinn (1) Sark (1) Starhawk (2) Brian Swimme (1) J.R.R. Tolkien (1) John Updike (1) Howard Zinn (1)</p>

<i>Gender</i>	
<p>Numbers</p> <p>Books by Women: 35 (excl. 'all books' by) 'All Books' by Female Authors: 2 Total Female Authors: 39 (including pairs)</p> <p>Books by Men: 80 (excl. 'all books' by) 'All Books' by Male Authors: 10 Total Male Authors: 85 (including pairs)</p> <p>Books by Collectives: 2 (excluding magazines) Books by Mixed-Gender Pairs: 3 Female Listed First: 1 Male Listed First: 2 Unknown Author: 1 (excluding biblical)</p>	<p>Percentages</p> <p>Books by female authors: 28.9% Books by male authors: 66.1% Books by mixed-gender pairs: 2.5% Books by collectives: 1.7% Unknown author: 0.8%</p> <p>Of All Authors Listed</p> <p>Female authors: 31.5% (including pairs) Male authors: 68.5% (including pairs)</p>

<i>Ethnicity</i>	
<p>Numbers</p> <p>White Authors: 112 Black Authors: 3 Indian Authors: 3 Asian Authors: 2 Latina/o Authors: 2 Middle Eastern Authors: 1 Native American Authors: 1</p>	<p>Percentages</p> <p>White Authors: 90.4% Black Authors: 2.4% Indian Authors: 2.4% Asian Authors: 1.6% Latina/o Authors: 1.6% Middle Eastern Authors: 0.8% Native American Authors: 0.8%</p>

RESPONDENT DATA

30 AUGUST 2005, 57 SURVEY RESPONSES

'Kinds' of Activists	#
Not Activist	5
Cultural Creative / Artist	2
Live by Ideals / Lifestyle Activism	11
Creating Alternatives / Practical	5
Direct Action / In the Streets	3
Way of Interacting / Consciousness-Raising	6
Green	2
Multicultural / Anti-Racist	3
Peace	7
Under-Resourced	1
Church / Christian	4
Specific Tasks Listed	19
Specific Issues Listed	14
Specific Organisations Listed	6
Human	1
Education / Teacher	4
Spiritual (non-Christian)	5
Feminist	3
Locally Focused / Grassroots	3
Environmental / Conservation / Ecological	5
Media	2
Political / Electoral (letters, campaigns, etc)	10
Eco-Crone	1
Critique of Other Activists	4
Contemplative	1
Reluctant / Discomfort with word 'Activist'	3
Bridge Between Activists and Mainstream	1
Permaculture	3
Financial Support of Activist Organisations	4
Student Organiser	2
Radical	3
Left/Liberal	2
Anarchist	6
Global Justice	1
Social / Social Justice	4
Long-Term	6
Human Rights	2
Online	3
Vegetarian / Vegan	2
Anti-Capitalist / Anti-Corporate	3

Locations	#
No Location Given	9
Scotland, UK	6
England, UK	3
California, USA	24
Colorado, USA	3
Utah, USA	1
South Carolina, USA	1
Connecticut, USA	1
Missouri, USA	1
Maine, USA	1
Louisiana, USA	1
New Mexico, USA	1
Canada	2
Israel	1
Germany	1
Japan	1