

smart  meme

Tools and Strategies for Building  
an Earth-Centered Movement

February 2003

## Introduction

This booklet is a compilation of three essays that were written for the Earth First! Journal between September 2002 and January 2003. The articles grew out of a series of movement building trainings conducted at the 2002 Earth First! Round River Rendezvous in Washington State's Gifford Pinchot National Forest. The smartMeme collective spent three days exploring different skills and aspects of building a stronger grassroots ecology movement. From grassroots organizing, coalition building and media work to analysis, information warfare and the future of the ecology movement, we learned a lot from each other and covered a lot of ground. These articles reflect some of the ideas and proposals which surfaced. We hope you find them provocative and useful and invite you to join us in exploring and applying them.

**The smartMeme project** is an emerging network of thinkers, trainers, writers, organizers and earth-centered radicals who are learning to dream collectively of a different type of activism and a different type of culture. The project works to connect grassroots movement building with methods to successfully inject earth centered values and democratic principles into the institutions of popular culture. We seek to magnify the impact of grassroots movements through the integration of new training resources, values based communication tools, meme campaigning and strategic organizing.

**The smartMeme project** is a joint effort between James John Bell, J Cookson, Ilyse Hogue, & Patrick Reinsborough. These articles also incorporate feedback from John Michael Greer and editorial input from the delightful folks at the Earth First! Journal collective. We would also like to thank Megan Dunn for her invaluable and tireless assistance in getting this booklet and other materials together without resources and very little time.

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**The smartMeme project** is available for training, speaking, writing and organizational/campaign consulting.

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## Direct Action at the Points of Assumption

The greatest potential for controlling the ends exists at the point where action takes place.

Louis A. Allen

### Step 1: De-voke the Apocalypse

In examining the current situation on planet earth, it is not a stretch to describe this as an apocalyptic time. The planet is in the throes of the most rapid and sweeping mass extinction it has ever endured. The planet's remaining wilderness areas, traditional cultures and land-based communities are all being assimilated into a rapidly spreading consumer monoculture. This monoculture is seeding the ground for a familiarity of an impending ecological apocalypse. We see this mass event played out numerous times a week on TV, at the movies, and children begin to create mental and emotional space for it as soon as they start to play video games.

Nature is becoming a more and more abstract space. A recent study determined that pre-teen children could identify less than 10 native plant species but over 1,000 corporate logos. This projected final test of humanity has taken on such a life of its own that no longer do people even question the inevitability of the apocalypse in their mind; rather they seem to be sifting through the possible characters that they might play. "Will I be the hero who narrowly averts death or the whiny guy who gets it in the end?" So embedded in our mind are the scenarios, so many times have they been played out on screen for us, that it requires something more than rational thought to reprogram these "future memories". It takes what we have come to call the "psychic break".

**Meme** – a unit of self-replicating cultural transmission (ex. idea, slogan, symbol etc.)

**SmartMeme** – a designer meme that simultaneously destroys and constructs new meaning

The psychic break is the answer to the common activist campfire question "How did you get radicalized?" The psychic break is what happens when the reality we are spoon-fed no longer fits – it one day feels uncomfortable on our skin. The blinders are lifted. This experience can be very individualistic, but at different times, mass segments of culture can experience a psychic break from the status quo simultaneously.

When this happens, a "tipping point" has been reached. Originating in epidemiology, the tipping point describes the exact moment when a disease becomes an epidemic. A broader definition explains that small changes will have little or no effect on a system until a critical mass is reached. Then, a further small change "tips" the system and a large effect is observed. Common vernacular speaks of "the straw that broke the camel's back."

The tipping point is a term that has been popularized through a best selling book by New York Times science writer Malcolm Gladwell. In his book, he explores the dynamic nature of cultural fads and value systems by applying the epidemiological lens. Gladwell writes from an apolitical vantage point, but his insights are too useful for us to ignore. When we apply the concept to public awareness of the ecological crisis we see the potential to direct our organizing towards a mass psychic break with the status quo. For at the moment when this happens, potential exists in time and space for a fundamental reordering to take place --of economies, communities, and first and foremost the stories that shape people's values. In order to be able to facilitate these opportunities, we must have a comprehensive analysis of where we are directing our energies into action.

### Step 2: Utilize all Forms of Direct Action

Direct action – actions that either symbolically or directly shift power relations – is an essential transformative tool. Direct action can be both a tactic within a broader strategy and a political ethic of fundamental change at the deepest

levels of power relations. Every direct action is part of the larger story we are creating to remind ourselves of the ability of collaborative power to overcome coercive power.

As we endeavor to link systemic change with tangible short-term goals we must seek out the **points of intervention** in the system. These are the places where when we apply our power – usually through revoking our obedience – we are able to leverage change.

Traditionally, strategies of direct action have been conceived and enacted within the confines of a specific campaign. Thus we tend to engage in actions tree by tree, mill by mill, store by store, global meeting by global meeting – a series of strong threads, but not woven together across campaigns or across borders.

The untapped power of direct action exists in its ability to seize a culture's predominant influence – to challenge its hegemony. This word, from the Greek *hegemonia* meaning "leadership," is defined as the ruling influence of an empire, state, region, or group, over others. Direct action, if only for a moment, seizes leadership and thus injects into the public sphere a competing discourse (story) – a strand of a new reality that has the ability to ripple outward. The ability to achieve success lies in the element of shaking people out of their culturally induced numbness.

The illusion of technological progress – global corporatization and consumer capitalism – now penetrates all arenas of life. It has in the truest sense taken on a life of its own by invading the “idea space” of the dominant culture. These stories permeate our daily existence by telling us that nature is a commodity, consumption is expression and monoculture is normal. This discourse of unlimited growth is thus not being directed from a centralized seat of power. Rather it is embodied in the underlying assumptions of contemporary business, politics, and culture. In practical terms, this means that it becomes increasingly difficult to accomplish the type of sweeping changes necessary to face the ecological crisis by targeting an individual person, government, or corporate entity. Rather our action must confront and rewrite the cultural mythology that is shaping the pathological values of the consumer monoculture.

Part of the cultural reinforcement lies in mass communications. State propaganda, the corporate media, consumer advertising and other narratives don't control how people think; however, they do control what people think *about*. The challenge of future direct action becomes one of context construction - changing not people's minds but the conditions that make thinking possible. French critic and philosopher Michel Foucault puts it thus, “The problem is not changing people's consciousness but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth.”

Since there is no controlling center within modern capitalistic society then the strategic goal of direct action becomes one of locating the loci of influence - the **points of assumption** within the system that can re-pattern our sense of reality. Intervention through direct action gains resonance when catalyzed with these transformative points. We discuss five such points in this essay: **destruction, decision, consumption, assumption, and potential**.

Intervention at all these points through direct action will inject into societal discourse the threads of a new reality, and weave a new pattern of thought. The poet-philosopher Goethe compares the union of our mental conceptions to a subtle weaving of many threads together into patterns that gradually display themselves. Direct action, when contextualized within this framework, can succeed in uniting the myriad of strands in our movement into the thought pattern of a new cultural, economic and political reality.

## **Direct Action at the Point of Destruction**

Some of our most successful actions have targeted the system at its most blatant and grossly unjust – the "point of destruction" (or in the industrialist's terms "production"). We become the frontline resistance by placing our bodies in the way of the harm that is happening. Whether its plugging the effluent pipes that dump poison on a neighborhood, living in trees marked for cutting or defending indigenous ancestral homelands, direct action at the point of destruction polarizes the debate in an effort to attract the spotlight of public attention to a clear injustice.

Direct action at the point of destruction is critical to confront the world's grave injustices. It has also served to organize and mobilize many communities by providing a dramatic point of common interest. But tragically the point of destruction is often times far out of the public eye and the confrontation is made invisible by distance, imbedded patterns of bias or popular ignorance. Point of destruction action can gain tangible on-the-ground victories, but it is inherently limited in its ability to tackle systemic issues

## **Direct Action at the Point of Consumption**

"Point of consumption" campaigns have provided inspirational opportunities to stand in solidarity with communities fighting at the point of destruction by following the chain of production through to where the products are sold. Attacking the point of consumption expands the arena of struggle to mobilize individuals made complicit in the injustices of the globalized economy by their own consumer decisions. These campaigns have included consumer boycotts, attacks on corporate brand names and targeting the retail sector as a way to shut down the markets for destructive products. Activists have forced universities to cancel clothing contracts from sweatshop retailers. Likewise forest activists have forced major retailers to stop selling old growth forest products by engaging in direct actions aimed to tarnish companies' media profiles and market share. Point of consumption actions can also work to re-frame our individual identities away from the "consumer" culture prevalent in the global North to acting in solidarity with communities impacted by resources extraction.

## **Direct Action at the Point of Decision**

The "point of decision" has always been a common and strategic venue for direct action. Whether taking over a slumlord's office, a corporate boardroom or the state capital, most successful campaigns have used direct action to put pressure on the key decision makers. The mass action organizing of the past few years has been largely aimed at re-defining popular perceptions of the "point of decision". Demonstrations at WTO and World Bank meetings, G8 summits and Free Trade negotiating sessions have helped reveal the corporate take-over by showing that it is these new institutions of corporate rule that have usurped decision making power. Similarly ongoing campaigns against those in financial power have exposed our society's ultimate decision-makers as the architects of the global economic system.

## **Direct Action at the Point of Assumption**

All successful actions ultimately target assumptions. Targeting assumptions is the act of taking on the framework of myths, lies, and flawed rationale that normalize the corporate rule system. Point of assumption actions operate in the realm of ideas to expose flawed logic, cast doubt and undermine existing loyalties. Successful direct actions at this point identify, isolate and confront the big lies that maintain the status quo. A worthy goal for these types of actions is to encourage the most important act that a concerned individual can take in an era defined by systematic propaganda – TO QUESTION!

We must become skilled at using this tool to de-colonize people's revolutionary imaginations by linking analysis and action in ways that re-frame issues and create new political space. Whether we're devising radical spectacles, exposing the system's propaganda or birthing new rhetoric, we need actions that reveal the undeniable truth - that the intellectual underpinnings of the modern system are largely flawed assumptions. Direct action at the point of assumption is an effort to spread the rumors that trigger revolutions in consciousness and ask the questions that topple empires.

A great example of direct action at the point of assumption was the first action by the Earth First! the 1981 "cracking" of Glen Canyon Dam. At a time when most wilderness preservation groups were limiting their actions to fighting new dam construction Earth First! symbolically "cracked" the dam by unfurling a 300 ft long plastic wedge from the top of the structure creating an image of a fissure down the concrete face. This simple symbol sent a powerful message that advocates could and should be calling for the removal of big dams and the re-wilding of those rivers. Until then, the corporate paradigm of dominating nature had rendered the question of removing a mega-dam unthinkable – it was beyond the realm of imagination. The "cracking" action challenged that assumption and created a new political space to forward that agenda.

Likewise as automobiles increasingly dominate urban life, the anti-car movement has birthed groups like Reclaim the Streets (RTS). RTS has subverted the prevailing presumption that cars increase our quality of life and has actualized the idea of car free cities, even if for a short time. The RTS actions literally occupy usually car-clogged streets and transform them into people friendly space with music, festivity, arm-chairs, sofas and in some cases grass and plants. These actions stimulate the popular imagination about a re-wilding of our streets and our lives. Along the same vein, activists around the world have created "Buy Nothing Day" to attack the assumptions of consumerism by calling for a 24 hour moratorium on consumer spending on the busiest shopping day of the year. This simple idea, manifested with ridicule and humorous spectacle, has led to successful efforts to define consumerism itself as an issue.

Direct action at the point of assumption has taken many forms – creating new symbols, embodying alternatives or sounding the alarm. A well-known example of symbol creation came to light in 1994 when the Zapatista ski mask gained international notoriety. The ski masks repeatedly worn by the Zapatista insurgents and popularized by their spokesman Sub-commandante Marcos, created a symbol for the invisibility of Mexico’s indigenous peoples. Marcos has eloquently written of the irony that the ski masks – the symbol of militant confrontation – made visible to the government the indigenous peoples it had ignored for so long.

Acting to subvert basic belief systems provides new opportunities to expand the traditional political arenas. We are not necessarily reliant on specific physical spaces and we can choose the terms and location of engagement. Perhaps it’s a statue of a conquistador, a corporatized public space or an abandoned public transit facility. We can seek out the cracks in the system and plant the seeds of a better future. Effective point of assumption actions can transform the mundane into a radical conversation starter. For instance putting a piece of duct tape across a prominent logo on your clothing can invite a conversation about corporate commodification. These types of actions can be easily incorporated into our every day lives and spread from multiple points.

### **Direct Action at the Point of Potential**

Every time we successfully undermine some aspect of the status quo, we open up potential for the replacement of society’s destructive institutions. To fulfill this potential, we must create working examples that illustrate our hope for a sustainable future. By playfully constructing “futures in the present” we nurture visions that refute conventional notions of politics. These stories not only portray images of the future but also a pathway of events through time that could lead us from where we are now to that future world.

*We need to constantly create possible future scenarios within our movements for social and environmental transformation.*

A classic example of direct action at the point of potential took place during Cascadia EF!’s defense of Warner Creek in Oregon’s Willamette National Forest. Earth First!ers fought this fire salvage sale behind blockades and also by constructing an alternative future for the area. During the legislative phase of the campaign, they wrote a recovery plan titled “Alternative EF: Ecology of Fire.” In their future scenario, activists proposed permanent protection of Warner Creek as a Fire Ecology Research Natural Area. This visionary “educational-agitational” tool won the endorsement of the local community, scientists, and national environmental groups and forced publication by the Forest Service. This vision remains, even now, after the direct actions at the

point of destruction have served their purpose. Alternative EF is being used to help establish permanent protection of Warner Creek.

We need to constantly create possible future scenarios within our movements for social and environmental transformation. These actions function as “memories of the future,” rehearsing tomorrow in people’s minds and reclaiming our ability to shape the future. The best scenarios aren’t necessarily those that come true; they’re the ones that subvert expectations, providing deep insights into the changes happening all around us. The better scenarios are, the more they penetrate to the deepest understanding of the present.

Engaging in direct action at the point of potential requires listening to what wants to change in the world - sensing what is trying to be born. Our job as activists is to build a bridge between the new world we’re trying to create and people’s current experiences. We call this bridge the “nexus”, from the Latin *nectere* meaning “to bind.” People will only go where they have first been in their minds so action at the point of potential must expand people’s imagination to allow them to believe in alternatives. By establishing the nexus between the culture of the present world, and the world we’re trying to create, fundamental change can occur. Our movements must locate the point of possibility where action can bind the present world to our dreams of a democratic, just and ecologically sane society.

### **Step 3: Apply Broadly – Target the System**

"Image Events" are actions, visuals or stories that either replace existing sets of symbols or re-define their meaning through the dis-identification of humor or shock. A simple application of this concept can be seen in what Adbuster’s magazine founder Kalle Lasn has dubbed "culture jamming" to describe methods of subverting corporate propaganda by juxtaposing new images or co-opting slogans. For instance when we over-lay the McDonald’s hyper-familiar golden

arches on images of starving children or re-write Chevron's advertising slogan to say "Do people kill for oil?" we use the power of corporate images against the corporations themselves.

This type of semiotic aikido exploits the embedded nature of corporate advertising to re-write the meaning of these familiar symbols and tell stories that challenge corporate power. These skills have been artfully applied in billboard liberations, guerilla media campaigns and creative actions but tragically they often remain in a limited media realm. Now we must expand guerilla meme tactics to connect with long-term strategies to build grassroots power.

The reliance of many mega-corporations on their branding has been widely acknowledged as an Achilles heel of corporate power. Effective grassroots attacks on corporate logos and brand image have forced corporations to dump multi-million dollar advertising campaigns and even to concede to activist's demands. While this work is important, we must not let go of the fact that there are many powerful industries that do not depend on consumer approval. Perhaps more importantly, we no longer have time to go after the corporations one at a time. Our movements need to contest the corporate monopoly on meaning and jam the controlling mythologies of consumer culture. The corporate take over has gotten so blatant that we need to openly attack the symbolic order of anti-life values, pathological greed and consumer capitalism.

#### **Step 4: Weaving the Tapestry : Building a Movement**

All of these points of intervention in the system are critical; the best strategies unite efforts across them. Increasingly as the global financial sector has become the "operating system" for the planet, the sick illogic of doomsday economics has replaced specific points of decision in driving the corporate take over. We aren't just fighting acts of injustice or destruction, but rather we are fighting the system of injustice and destruction. To keep up, we must expand our efforts to intervene in physical space with similar initiatives in cultural and intellectual space. How can we side step the machine and challenge the mentality behind the machine? In other words, we need to figure out how to take direct action at the "point of assumption."

Concerted direct action at the point of assumption in our society should be an effort to draw attention to the design errors of the modern era and encourage widespread **disobedience** to oppressive cultural norms. Potential targets to consider: the idea of corporate rule, notions forming our "separation" from nature, the concepts of unlimited growth, technological progress and "consumer" as identity.

In doing so, we propose some basic guiding questions to move this dialogue forward: Where are the points of assumption? What are the big lies and controlling myths that hold corporate rule in place? How can we exploit the hypocrisy between the way we're told the system works and the way it actually works? How can we link answers to these questions with concerted grassroots organizing and coalition building to create a vibrant movement?

This is uncertain work. Remember, these are fluid distinctions. One person's point of destruction is another one's point of potential, a point of decision in one campaign maybe a point of consumption in another. However, we can focus on the principle of systemic assumptions when we plan, execute, and repeat successful action. We need new symbols and contagious memes that can be combined with grassroots organizing and alternative institution building to expand the transformative arena of struggle. There is no way to know what will cause the psychic break. Tipping points are hardly a science no matter how Gladwell attempts to deconstruct the variables. Rather than being disempowering, this uncertainty should appeal to our innate sense of adventure and creativity. Let us set our sites on this new uncharted territory: the liberation of the collective imagination.

When asked what he would do if he knew the world would end tomorrow, Martin Luther said, "I would plant a tree." This action represents the height of potential! At the same time, though, it also inherently subverts the assumption that the world is going to end. It functions at a multiplicity of points. If Luther planted his tree in a clear-cut it would be at the point of destruction as well. It is these crystallizations of actions at multiple points that allow us to expand our strategy and vision to the scale that will be necessary to imagine systemic change.

Living at such a critical time compels us to search for those convergence points and exploit them. With this effort, we hope to expand the current debates and push our movements to explore new frontiers of struggle. We hope to provoke further and deeper action and build towards a movement with the power and clarity to weave our actions into new directions for modern society. As every earth activist knows we are running out of time. So let's get to work!

**It's Not the Story of the Battle...  
It's The Battle of the Story**

## **Building a Mass Ecology Movement with the Power to Transform the Culture**

*This article is an effort to summarize the proposals and conclusions that were reached after 3 days of skill sharing, collective dreaming and strategizing around how the Earth First! network can be more effective. These ideas are not meant to be written in stone or to be accusations; merely conversation starters. Some of the ideas you may like and some of them you may not. We wouldn't want it any other way. As earth defenders we model healthy ecosystems and our diversity is our strength. Our main goal with the movement track and this report back is to raise questions and spark discussion around how to strengthen the grassroots ecology movement.*

### **Organize!**

History is made by movements. That is, mass movements of people who organize themselves to struggle collectively for a better world. Since EF!ers need to fundamentally re-direct the trajectory of history we'd better start organizing a mass movement. We need the same level of dedication, commitment and focus for the day time work that our night time friends bring to theirs. Organizing is the business of creating an atmosphere or a structure that allows people to become empowered to make change. This means creating the institutions that allow us to recruit, replicate and spread the EF! analysis and commitment to action. The EF! network has some venerable traditions and institutions but perhaps the time has come to ask what new institutions do we need to be effective? Where are our common campaigns, our phone trees, our email lists, our coordinated days of action? Where are our field organizers, mentors and training collectives? Are we creative enough to imagine radically democratic structures that can unite eco-activists across bioregions without succumbing to centralization or hierarchy?

### **Goals, Analysis, Strategy THEN Tactics**

EF! spends too much time debating tactics. To monkey wrench or not? The reality is that no matter how dearly you hold monkey wrenching, it is still just a tactic. We must create the space for the underground without it stopping us from engaging in creative visioning around building something new. Now is the time to articulate our goals, and then formulate strategy. Picture the world you want to live in and then find the path. As Brazilian popular educator Paulo Friere said we must set our dreams beyond the furthest horizon and then "we make the road by walking".

### **Strategic Campaigning**

Campaigns are the building blocks of social change. The campaign is context for building a movement - the stepping stones that lead people through the process of radicalization. We need to combine the best lessons of strategic campaigning - ones that win real concessions out of corporations and the government - with a systemic analysis. Reform vs. revolution is a simplistic dichotomy which all too often hides the privilege of "radicals" who have the luxury of refusing concessions when it's not their community or ecosystem that is on the chopping block. A better way to conceptualize the struggle is how to win real concessions from the institutions we're targeting without legitimizing them.

### **We Are Not the Fringe. We Can Frame the Debate.**

We are all too often complicit in our own marginalization by forgetting that although our numbers may be small that doesn't mean our support is small. The number of people active in a movement is only one aspect of its strength. Far more significant, is the latent support a movement sparks in the broader culture. To engage this support it is essential that we not allow ourselves to self-define as a fringe. It means we need to fight in the cultural arena and constantly be working to frame the debate. We're not wackos it's the neoliberal policy writers and corporate executives who think the world can continue on with unlimited economic growth in a finite biological system who are crazy. We're having a common sense revolution. So let's remember to frame it that way and bring the most people possible along with us.

### **We Need More Cultural Shamans**

In the 1960's yippie prankster Jerry Rubin updated Sun Tzu's military strategy by writing "every guerrilla must know how to use the terrain of the culture he is trying to destroy". A metaphor for this work is the work of a shaman, who travels into the spirit world in order to influence events in the material world. We need members of our affinity groups who journey into the other world of pathological consumer culture to seek out the opportunities (points of intervention) for reaching people, co-opting images and shifting culture. Our shamans must keep one foot in the wilds of base camp

while establishing literacy in the world of mass culture. Their goal is to monitor the society by being current with the ebb and flow of popular trends. They can hunt for the points of intervention that can loosen and fray the fixed meanings of corporate, political and cultural iconography – hijack their brands, frame their spectacles, and facilitate the political potential of the ordinary and the new.

In navigating mass culture, we find a kind of shared memory. Environmental activists need to cultivate an understanding of this “omen language” of mass culture – those strange coincidences that can provide opportunity to magnify the impact of their environmental defense. Maybe we discover that a movie coming out or a book about to be published could provide an opening for inserting our message. Global blockbusters like Lord of the Rings and the Matrix carry heavy environmental and anti-technology messages and are examples of EF! issues circulating in popular culture. In the spirit of the practice of Aikido, we should use the dominant culture’s own momentum against itself and exploit these openings.

### **Join the Global Resistance**

EF! could have a very important role providing an earth-centered voice within the US wing of the global justice movement. We could be deepening the analysis of fair-traders, corporate reformers, smart growth advocates and Marxist-Leninists alike. EF! is not the first group of people to realize that the world is a fucked up place. In fact globally, we live among the last. We have to learn from our brothers and sisters around the world who have been fighting industrial colonization for the past 500 years. In order to do so, we must come to grips with our own privilege and recognize how it often times shapes our assumptions about struggle, organizing and the future. Efforts like the 1,000 person ECO-Bloc at the World Bank/IMF protests in the fall of 2002 show that many activists who may not identify with the status quo assumptions of the institutional environmental movement are hungry for a true ecology critique

### **Question Misanthropy**

One of the aspects of EF! culture we need to question is a tendency towards misanthropy. Misanthropy frequently stems from de-emphasizing the politics of race, class and colonization. All too often white, global north activists “universalize” their own experience and project their frustration with consumer culture onto a mythic category of humans in general. The reality is not all humans are equally culpable for the destruction of the Earth. Did the Guatemalan campesino fuck up the planet as much as the CEO of Exxon? Instead lets hate over-consumption and white supremacy. Let’s challenge the “American Dream” (aka the planet’s nightmare); global corporatization and the PR-media-advertising complex that is colonizing the minds of the world with America’s consumer pathology. Misanthropy is often perceived by other important movements as a manifestation of our privilege and our ignorance and prevents us from building the alliances with diverse communities that are needed to transform the culture.

### **The Ecological Crisis is a Symptom of the Crisis in Democracy**

An effective ecology movement must articulate the connections between the ecological crisis and the corporate erosion of democratic decision making. If we allow the same corporations who profit from destroying the earth to write the rules of the global economy than we’ll never protect the environment or re-center human society within nature’s cycles. We must fight global corporate rule and reveal the flawed assumptions that underlie it as global capitalism enters the cancer stage and metastasizes to kill the host - planet earth. Ecology and justice go hand in hand just as ecology and democracy do. Earth-centered activists need to make these links by modelling interconnectedness, a respect for diversity and solidarity in our organizing.

### **Alliance Building**

If we’re serious about building a systemic movement we can’t push an ecological agenda in isolation of building meaningful alliances across race and class lines. Institutional racism, class divisions and (hetero)sexism all work to divide people and prevent us from learning from communities with the most direct experiences of oppression. We have to take supporting impacted communities seriously. The first step towards building alliances across these historical divides is to show ourselves to be principled allies. This means budgeting a real percentage of your activist time for supporting the struggles of diverse allies. The goal is not to abandon our earth-centered analysis but to show that it includes a holistic understanding of interconnectedness and solidarity with other important movements. So when you go support that striking union or those migrant farm workers make sure and wear your EF! shirt. When it is time to make a real coalition the comfort levels will be there. Some EF! campaigns have done this very well (Minnehaha Free State, Taylor Ranch, Ward Valley etc.) We need to look to these examples and learn how to incorporate these principles into our core organizing philosophy.

## **Confronting Internal Power Dynamics**

We'll never save the earth if we disempower some of our own best warriors because they are different from what we expect our leadership to be. In other words our work to build an effective movement must confront our internal dynamics of sexism, racism, homophobia or other biases. As poet Audre Lorde says you can't destroy the master's house with the master's tools. This is smart strategic advice. We won't save the planet by just thwarting or greening capitalism. We also have to overcome white supremacy and patriarchy in order to avoid recreating the underlying causes of the global crisis as we build a transformative culture. A key component of the movement building track was a gender privileged circle where men and male identified activists gathered to discuss various manifestations of gender oppression. From male domination of meetings, to condescending attitudes towards women to sexual assault in activist communities the participants recognized that sexism was crippling our effectiveness. The struggle against patriarchy is an inseparable part of the struggle to defend the earth.

## **Things are Going to Get Worse; We Cannot Afford to Go it Alone**

To survive a confrontation with a system as ruthless as the US corporate state, we need to have back up when we stick our collective head above the ideological parapet. This means having allies and legitimacy. In order to enforce repressive laws, the government needs popular consent. They manufacture this consent by painting resistance groups as a public threat - criminals, freaks, terrorists. Transparency in organizing will go a long way to prevent this tactic from being used against radical groups. Particularly in post Sept 11<sup>th</sup> America, we can all expect a lot more difficulty carrying out the basic work of slowing down the destruction of the planet. EF! groups can be well known friendly faces in their local community without compromising the effectiveness of our work. Many actions require security culture but we can't let this strangle our organizing. The authorities would like nothing better than for their repression to make us paranoid and overly secretive. Nothing puts new people off more than suspicion and paranoia and people are our most important resource. Take for instance how the legal system approaches a lock down. The lock down is usually a misdemeanor but legally the conspiracy to commit the misdemeanor is a felony. In other words those in power are more afraid of the organization building that goes on through direct action than they are of any specific direct action.

*To survive a confrontation with a system as ruthless as the US corporate state, we need to have back up when we stick our collective head above the ideological parapet.*

## **Understanding Memes**

A central focus of the movement building track was to apply "meme theory" -- the study of how memes (infectious information patterns such as ideas, slogans, icons etc.) spread and replicate -- to grassroots organizing and movement building. The concept of memes provides very useful tools for understanding the workings of movements. An effective meme can act as a viral structure for people to join a campaign or movement. Earth First! is itself an effective meme and this has been one of its great strengths. At its most basic EF! is an idea that virally infects people with the desire and context to take action for the earth. To build an effective movement we need to be a lot clearer about what memes were releasing into the culture and how effectively they are spreading.

## **Vision: Movements are Built on Ideas**

Movements are vehicles for new ideas. It is time to articulate the big changes we want to see. We have innovation and creativity, and the other side doesn't. Biocentrism, organic food production, direct democracy, renewable energy, tree free alternatives, people's globalization are all credible and palatable ideas. We just need to help people find ways to access them in their daily lives. With the right memes to communicate them, earth centered values can play a central part in strengthening the common sense revolutions against doomsday economics and corporate rule.

## **Using our Cultural Cache**

Understanding culture is just another strategy for us to pursue and calls for additions to our toolbox. We know how to turn garbage cans into a makeshift blockade during a protest. Now we have to learn to use the "garbage cans" in our cultural space for resistance against the very commercial trash that they contain. EF! like it or not has become culturally acceptable. TV -- the ultimate legitimizer in our media dominated culture -- has welcomed EF! into the cultural landscape. Take the episode of the X-files where Earth First!ers fought the "freddies" and loggers who were illegally cutting old growth. A couple years later thanks to the Hollywood movie Jurassic Park 2, Earth First! even got its first action figure. The heroic character is video activist, hunt saboteur, animal liberator, comms techie and seasoned monkey wrencher all rolled into one. In what many might argue be seen as the pinnacle of EF!'s pop culture cache, the Simpsons did an episode on "Dirt First!" and millions of Americans watched the lovable Lisa Simpson sit in an old growth tree to save it from unscrupulous developers.

We may object in principle to this mythologized depiction of our politics and insist that ironic television representation only trivializes our causes. But in many ways these mass media reflections of EF! are a bench mark of our success and contain many potential leverage points for further change. EF! and our uncompromising stance on ecological defense have become recognizable symbols in the culture. There is power in these collectively understood symbols because like any representation in modern culture their meaning is not fixed. We can contest them and use the vague familiarity of the images or ideas of EF! as reference points for articulating new stories and myths. Thus the question becomes, as Earth First!'s myths become meshed into books, television, films, and the whole of popular culture how we can we make them effective in achieving the goal of building a mass movement? How can we use them to confront the corporate paradigm and erode the support structures of the capitalist system? We must insure that our own mythology, and by extension the modern tales based on our exploits, portray a powerful vision of a future that is radically different than the dominant paradigm.

## **Controlling the Story**

Humans structure information through narrative. Stories shape our perception of reality. Mass culture is rooted in powerful, unacknowledged stories - the web of assumptions, identifications and images which make up the **control mythology** (see pg 15) - which help people define themselves and their world. Whether its the story of human domination of nature, the story of "American Democracy" or the story of consumerism, the story operates by shaping our self-identification and providing seamless context for the current social order.

In a recent report widely cited by Pentagon planners "Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy " RAND corporation analysts explore how the Bush administration can "sell" the war on terrorism to the American people. One of their main points is that in our modern media saturated society one of the most important aspects of military operations is to maintain popular support by "managing the memes" and fighting "the battle of the story". The powers-that-be are trying to control the interpretation of events. They use their power of framing to tell us that devastation = development; state terror = law and order, and doomsday economics = prosperity.

But all cultural narratives are dynamic and therefore contestable. The stories we tell as activists are an effort to challenge the control mythology and make social change attractive in popular culture. Too often we tell merely the story of the battle (the number of arrests, the endless litany of issue-based data, etc.) and fail to articulate core values or reach people in their own terminology. Thus the majority of people remain spectators because the battle doesn't directly touch their self-contained lives. But in order to open the cultural space for a true social change movement to grow **the essential piece is not the story of the battle but rather the battle of the story.**

We have to have the power to create new cultural narratives. We need to frame the big story of our time. The story of competing futures : a culture defined by the sacredness, diversity and abundance of life vs. corporate culture's commodification, homogeneity and assimilation. It is this battle of the story - the ability of earth-centered values to out-compete multi-million dollar PR campaigns - that will largely determine how society responds to the ecological crisis.

## **The Future of Earth First!**

We stand at a unique time in the evolution of EF! It's becoming clearer and clearer that the ecological crisis is spiraling beyond the limits of single points of intervention. Although the framework of place based campaigns and issues will continue to be important, it is inadequate to stop the global disruption of macro-issues like global warming, militarism, invasive species, spreading bio-contamination, etc. To really defend the wild we must take our targeting behind the chainsaws, behind the machine, and confront the mentality that operates the machine. If we want to save acres, we have to shift paradigms. In other words we no longer have the luxury of being outside the dominant culture or the time to build sub-culture alternatives to the dominant culture. If all that is wild is to have a future, earth centered voices must have the power to intervene and shape mass culture. We must be able to actively contest meaning in the dominant culture and use the power of myth and story telling to harness the passion, rage and love for the earth of a much wider cross section of society.

The battle of the story is already underway in our culture. A literal battle for the hearts, minds and attention spans of an ever more anesthetized American society. The center piece of this battle must be an articulate, smart and infectious mass ecology movement. As it grows it may not look like what EF! has been or even like what we expect it to. But if we insure that the Earth First! story is strong and compelling it can mutate and adapt to different cultural contexts without losing its core meaning. Together we can make the earth's voice heard. Organize. Act. Replicate.

## The Next Environmental Movement?

*“As a propagandizer, it is not his (sic) work to convince the convinced, but to plead with the unconvinced, which requires him (sic) to use their vocabulary, their values, their symbols insofar as this is possible”*  
- Kenneth Burke,  
*Revolutionary Symbolism in America, speech to American Writers Congress, April 26, 1935*

Analysis is the most important tool in the social change toolbox. It is this process of analysis—the work to find the points of intervention and leverage in the system we are working to transform—that suggests why, where and how to use the other tools. It is in this spirit that this essay will explore concepts and strategies around framing the ecological crisis in order to create momentum for fundamental social change. We hope this thinking can inform the question that many of us are asking: what is the next environmental movement going to look like?

### **Beyond Single-Issue Environmentalism**

Our planet is headed into an accelerating crisis. Ecologically speaking it is a meltdown defined by the sixth mass extinction, the destruction of the planet’s last wilderness areas and the forced assimilation of the planet’s few remaining earth centered cultures. Corporate capitalism’s inherent drive towards global domination has literally pushed the life support systems of the planet to the point of collapse.

So let's begin our analysis by asking ourselves an often unanswered question.

Why has the radical ecology movement failed to capture the imagination of the American public for more than the proverbial 15 minutes? Why in America - the engine of consumption which is driving the system of global destruction - isn't there more visible resistance to the suicidal direction of the corporatized consumer society?

One easy culprit is the environmental movement’s failure to weave our range of issues into a holistic analysis (story) that address the scale of cultural transformation needed to address the ecological crisis. This failure means that we are competing with ourselves for over-worked, over-stimulated people’s limited amount of time and compassion. The pool of aware, concerned people not immersed in front line struggle are constantly being bombarded with calls to action essentially asking them to choose between issues. Do I work on global warming or clean water? Corporate globalization or deforestation? Land use or genetic engineering? Unless our campaigns articulate a broader vision they often just become more background noise in our information saturated culture. The current consumption of pop culture apocalyptic fair, like *The Matrix* or *Terminator*, is a testament that people *want* a new vision so badly that they entertain themselves with the destruction of the current system.

This system we are fighting is not merely structural – biotech labs, clear-cuts, open-pit mines - it’s also inside us, through the internalization of oppressive cultural norms which define our worldview. Our minds have been colonized by deeply pathological assumptions that interlock to create the dominant culture's resistance to fundamental social change.

### **The Control Mythology**

Maintaining control in a global system that creates such blatant injustice relies on the age-old tools of empire: repression, brutality and terror. Whether its US approved military dictatorships or America’s ever-growing incarceration economy, the naked control that is used to criminalize, contain and silence dissent among the have-nots is obvious.

But this brutality is just one side of the system of global control. Far less acknowledged is that in addition to the wide spread use of the stick the global system relies heavily on the selective use of the carrot.

Most people who live outside the small group of privileged over-consumers can’t help but be aware of the system’s failings. But for the majority of American (global north) consumers the coercion that keeps them complicit with the system is not physical. Instead it is largely ideological, based on mass acceptance of a common mythology. We all know the Big Lies: America is the freest country in the world; corporate capitalism is the same as democracy; humanity is the centerpiece of creation and "nature" merely a resource; technology is a benevolent tool which has allowed modern

consumer society to become the pinnacle of human progress; America is the land of equal opportunity regardless of gender, skin color, religion or class background and so on. These webs of myths shape many people's sense of everyday reality and create a **control mythology** which buys people's loyalty by normalizing an increasingly insane culture.

Media saturation plays heavily into the control mythology by over digesting information and shrinking our attention spans to the point where people can no longer re-assemble the story of the global crisis. Media advocacy group, TV Free America estimates that the average American watches an equivalent of 52 days of TV per year. As corporations have seized the right to manufacture and manipulate collective desire, advertising has grown into a nearly \$200 billion a year industry and become the dominant function of mass media. Feminist media critic Jean Kilbourne estimates that each day the average North American is bombarded by 3000 print, radio and television ads.

Elements of the control mythology have become so deeply imbedded in our lives that they now define our culture, as witnessed in the unquestioned, unrestrained right to consume. Increasingly in the corporatized world a person's rights are defined by their purchasing power—health care, education, a nutritious diet, mental stimulation, or access to nature are all a factor of how much money you have. The right to over-consume becomes the centerpiece of the new unspoken Bill of Rights of America, Inc.

The twisted logic of consumerism continue to function as a control mythology even as much of the affluence of working America has been siphoned off by corporate greed. Whether its the digital opium den of 500 channel cable TV, the cornucopia of mood altering prescription drugs or now the terror-induced national obsession with unquestioning patriotism, there's little opportunity for people to break the spell of modern consumerism.

However let's not confuse the glossy advertising world with the image factories themselves. In our first article we talked about the **psychic break** - the point where people realize that the system is not working and become radicalized. The incredible amount of resources and effort that consumer culture has to put into perpetuating itself through advertising, propaganda, education and socialization is a glimmer of hope that the control mythology is a lot weaker than many activists think. There has never been a more urgent time to ask ourselves: how can we catalyze a mass psychic break?

## Articulating Values Crisis

To articulate the pathology of the corporate system we must avoid debating on the system's terms. As the classic organizer's tenet says "We have to organize people where they are at." In other words, if we tell people the truth in a way that they understand it they will believe it.

One strategy for reaching a larger section of the population and jarring them out of their inertia, is to replace our focus on single issues with a focus on values. It is the language of values that can be our most powerful tool in building a holistic analysis with the ability to subvert the control mythology.

**Values shift** is the recognition that we must change the pathological values which underlie the global crisis - alienation from nature, consumer narcissism, desire to dominate, fear of "otherness" etc. However we must be very careful how we frame this concept. Picture yourself knocking on America's front door and announcing you have come to shift peoples values. Slam!

A more effective way to capitalize on the power of people's core values to mobilize them is to **articulate values crisis**. By this we mean revealing the disconnect between what kind of world people want to live in - or even think that they live in - and the corporate world that is rapidly taking over. Understanding and exploiting values crisis can allow us to expose one of the most blatant revolutionary truths of the modern era: the fact that the corporate rule system based on sacrificing human dignity and planetary health for elite profit is out of alignment with most people's basic values.

*If you believe certain words, you believe their hidden arguments. When you believe something is right or wrong, true or false, you believe the assumptions in the words which express the arguments. Such assumptions are often full of holes, but remain most precious to the convinced.*

*- The Open-Ended Proof from The Panoplia Prophetica,*

Understanding the difference between strategies that promote values shift versus articulating value crisis is critical to deepening the impact of our social change work. Long term activist and movement theorist Bill Moyer writes about the

concept within psychology of “**confirmatory bias**” or people’s habit of screening information based on their own beliefs. In other words people are much more likely to believe something that reinforces their existing opinions and values than to accept information that challenges their beliefs. Therefore if activists promote values shift we are artificially separating ourselves from people’s existing beliefs and creating obstacles to reaching the public. Articulating values crisis on the other hand requires that we first position ourselves within peoples existing values. These means laying claim to life-affirming values -- democracy, justice, hope for our children etc. -- and showing people that corporate capitalism is no longer grounded in these common sense values.

Although many of our critics are so blinded by propaganda and ideology that they will always see us as naïve, unpatriotic or dangerous there is already a critical mass of people recognizing that our society is facing severe problems. This analysis is supported by the work of researcher and author Paul Rey, who has done extensive demographic research into the beliefs and values of the American public. Rey’s work first received prominence through his discovery of the “cultural creatives” which he describes as a new and unrecognized sub-culture which has emerged as the cultural by-product of the past 40 years of social movements. The defining characteristics of this new grouping includes acceptance of the basic tenets of environmentalism and feminism, a rejection of traditional careerism, big business and monetary definitions of “success”, a concern with psychological and spiritual development, belief in communities and a concern for the future.

Perhaps most profound is the fact that since the mass media of America still reflects the modern technocratic consumerist world view, cultural creatives tend to feel isolated and do not recognize their true numbers. Based on their 1995 data, Rey and his co-author Sherry Ruth Anderson conclude that there are 50 million cultural creatives in America (26% of all adults) and that the numbers are still growing.

The message is clear: our movements need to stop focusing on *only* the details and start getting the bigger picture of a holistic analysis out there. A simple dichotomy for articulating the crisis is the clash between a delusional value system that fetishizes money and a value system based on the biological realities of life’s diversity. We need to cast these opposing value systems as two very different paths for the future of our planet. The path shaped by life values leads towards many choices— the decentralized, self-organizing, diversity of different cultures, political traditions and local economies. While the money values path leads to fewer and fewer choices and finally the homogeneity of global corporatization and consumer monoculture.

It is our job as activists to clarify the choice by revealing the nature of the system and articulating the alternatives in an accessible manner. For instance, in a recent Earthjustice media campaign to protect the Grizzly Bear the images appeal to people’s values where they’re at - in the cities. The image is a familiar one - it is Goldilocks eating her porridge. Only this time, in walk the three lizards. The headline reads, “It’s just not the same without bears.” People might never feel the loss of a wild grizzly, but they can see how that loss would impact their own cultural stories. In a heartbeat the two worlds are shown to be intertwined, losing one impacts the other.

## **Escaping the Protest Ghetto**

One of the biggest pitfalls activists face to effectively articulating the values crisis is the fact that the category of protester has been constructed (by the establishment) to be highly marginal. Dissent has been de-legitimized to be seen as unpatriotic, impractical, naïve or even insane. Unfortunately radicals are all too often complicit in our own marginalization by accepting this elite depiction of ourselves as the fringe.

As a consequence activists frequently ghettoize themselves by self-identifying through protest and failing to conceive of themselves as building movements that can actually change power relations. All too often we project our own sense of powerlessness by mistaking militancy for radicalism and mobilization for movement building. Radicals shoot themselves in the foot when they try to validate their resistance with a visible defection from the practices and ideas of "mainstream" society. These politics of defection by their very nature create obstacles to communicating with the unconverted and frequently rely on symbols of dissent and rebellion that are already marginalized. Visible defection can thwart our efforts to lay claim to the values we need to articulate values crisis thus we end up advocating values shift from a fringe position that is easy to ignore.

To be successful we must separate dissent from the self-righteous tone which many people associate with protest. We need to dodge the defector labels and be more effective subverters by mobilizing people from within the logic of the dominant culture rather than trying to reach them as outsiders.

## Creating smartMemes

We need new symbols of inclusive resistance and transformation. We need new memes– the basic units of cultural information – to convey the values crisis. Memes are viral by nature, they move easily through our modern world of information networks and media saturation. We need to craft **smartMemes** - designer memes - that articulate the values crisis and can be spread with effective point of assumption actions. We need to be training ourselves to become “**meme warriors**” and to tell the story of values crisis in different ways for different audiences. We must get a better sense of who our audiences are, and target our messages to fit into their existing experiences. Our revolution(s) will really start rolling when the logic of our actions and the appeal of our disobedience is so clear that it can easily replicate and spread far beyond the limiting definition of “protester” or “activist”.

Actions whose messages end as soon as the activists break camp, cannot easily be sustained. We need to create moments that echo and linger in the mind, like the songs that get stuck in your head and the scenes from a film you can't forget. We need to think in terms of a sequence of events, not just a singular moment. Our actions must be creating ongoing **image events** that deliver smartMemes with the power to move the well-intentioned, bystanders to join us in our struggle.

**We can attack the corporate myth that consumption provides happiness and satisfaction and reclaim real happiness, meaning and fun as the realm of social change.**

Media theorist Sut Jhally writes in his essay *Advertising at the Edge of the Apocalypse*, that “The imperative task for those who want to stress a different set of values is to make the struggle for social change fun and sexy. By that I do not mean that we have to use images of sexuality, but that we have to find a way of thinking about the struggle against poverty, against homelessness, for healthcare and child-care, to protect the environment, in terms of pleasure and fun and happiness.” This is articulating values crisis. We can attack the corporate myth that consumption provides happiness and satisfaction and reclaim real happiness, meaning and fun as the realm of social change.

Carrie McLaren the editor of the radical media critique zine *Stay Free!* tells a fascinating story of NYC activists who took action against the control mythology. In 1998, Calvin Klein installed an enormous billboard that covered the entire side of a building in downtown Manhattan, obscuring all the windows. In response to

this obvious attack on public space and the mental environment, McLaren and other likeminded activists, created a map that highlighted examples of excessive corporate advertising around the city. These included lighted billboards that shined so brightly they lit up peoples' nearby apartments, corporate "graffiti", city police recruiting ads, and other forms of signage that obliterated or other wise polluted the visual landscape. They sent out a press release and then passed out the "Free City Maps" as a way of creating a political space to talk with ordinary people about the issues of corporate control, consumerism and creative resistance. Eventually due to ongoing actions the city passed ordinances banning such excessive advertising.

Obviously we don't have easy access to the means of production and distribution. This should not be a reason to give up. It should be a reason to challenge us to be more creative. Imbuing social change with laughter and pleasure does not require massive media equipment and budgets. Radical cheerleading, street theater and Reclaim the Streets actions have successfully accessed these very means through spontaneity, artistic expression and humor. These are good starts, but we must find ways to take it much farther.

## Telling the Future

A new alternative vision of the future -- authentically new, not a retread of discredited utopian ideas -- is perhaps the most desperate need in the present situation. It will most assuredly not come out of the sometimes insular world of current environmental activism.

First, the environmental movement needs to do a good deal of listening to people outside the movement. We need to get a sense of what people actually want, what they long for, what they are willing to give up, what future they hope for and what future they fear. We also need to take stock of the impact that we are actually having on people outside the movement, and learn from it.

We know that ecology is the key ingredient in the future of pan-movement politics because the ecological collapse is the central and most visible contradiction in the global system. We know that the next environmental movement is not a protest movement. It's not a reactive, defensive, single-issue movement. The next environmental movement must be able to communicate that the central political project of our era is the re-thinking of what it means to be human on planet earth. Our battlefield will expand beyond the logging roads, corporate offices and trade ministerials to directly confront the symbols, mythology and flawed assumptions of corporate consumer culture.

As we work transcend the current framework of oppressive cultural norms we must liberate our imaginations and articulate our dreams for a life affirming future. Our actions must embody these new realities - the points of potential - which can help catalyze mass defections from the pathological norms of modern consumer culture.

A new environmental movement, if it is to catch on outside today's activist circles, must appeal to hopes as well as fears, and it must answer the honest concerns of people who think of environmentalism as just another excuse for government manipulation of their lives. It must come from the land and relate to the land, but it must also have something to say to the people who inhabit the land. It must provide new myths, ones that are more appealing than either the control mythology or the looming threat of a coming environmental collapse.

We are already winning. Life is stronger than greed. Hope is more powerful than fear. The values crisis is in full swing and more and more people are turning their back on the pathological values of the doomsday economy. A common sense revolution - a revolution in consciousness - is already underway. More and more people are recognizing that the collective future of life hangs in the balance. Indian writer and activist Vandana Shiva said it eloquently in her speech at the World Summit on Sustainable Development counter-summit in August 2002 "There is only one struggle left and that is the struggle for survival."

Now it's up to us to weave our hope, dreams and sense of struggle into a new movement that lives up to the challenge...

**The next environmental movement is not a protest movement. It's not a reactive, defensive, single-issue movement. The next environmental movement must be able to communicate that the central political project of our era is the re-thinking of what it means to be human on planet earth.**

**a few cognitive stepping stones towards building a lexicon for transformative action.....**

To join in the fun, help expand and apply these concepts check out the evolution at: [www.smartmeme.com](http://www.smartmeme.com).

**ABCNNBCBS** - the increasingly blurred brand names for the same narrow stream of U.S. corporate filtered mass media. That is the delivery system for the advertising product that giant media corporations sell to the general public. Is the U.S. media controlled by massive corporations? No. The U.S. media are massive corporations whose goal first and foremost is to generate profits for their shareholders. This process used to occur primarily through overt advertising, increasingly however it has become a complex web of cross-marketing, branding and self-promotion among different tentacles of the same Mega-media empires. George Orwell's classic study of authoritarianism 1984 warned us of "newspeak". Now 1/2 a century later in America 95% of homes watch television (usually multiple TVs) daily and some of the most popular programs are "news programs" (particular the magazine format - 60 minutes, The No Spin Zone, and 20/20) perhaps Orwell should have called it "news speak".

**advertising** - the manipulation of collective desire for commercial interests. Over the last 20 years as it has grown to be nearly a \$200 billion industry it has become the propaganda shell and dream life of modern consumer culture. (See **Control Mythology**)

**articulating values crisis** - a strategy in which radicals lay claim to common sense values and expose the fact that the system is out of alignment with those values

**controlMeme** - a meme used to marginalize, co-opt or limit the scale of social change ideas by institutionalizing a status quo bias into popular perception of events. The type of memes that RAND Corporation analysts and Pentagon information warfare experts spend countless hours, and millions of dollars designing.

**control mythology** - the web of stories, symbols and ideas which define our sense of normal (including limiting our imagination of social change) and make people think the system is unchangeable.

**confirmatory bias** - psychological concept in which studies have shown people are more likely to accept/believe new information if it sounds like something they already believe.

**defector syndrome** - the tendency of radicals to self-marginalize by exhibiting their dissent in such a way that it only speaks to those who already share their beliefs.

**direct action at the point(s) of assumption** - actions whose goal is to re-frame issues and create new political space by targeting underlying assumptions

**earth-centered** - a political perspective through which one defines themselves and their actions in the context of the planet's ecological operating systems, biological/cultural diversity and ongoing efforts to re-center human society within the Earth's natural limits/cycles. An emerging term to draw links and build alliances between ecological identity politics, land based struggles, indigenous resistance, earth spirituality, agrarian folk wisdom and visions of sustainable, ecologically sane societies both past and future. (etc.) A politicized acceptance of the sacredness of living systems.

**global crisis** - the present time in the history of planet earth characterized by the systematic undermining of the planet's life support systems through industrial extraction, unlimited growth, the commodification of all life and emergence of global corporate rule. Symptoms include: accelerating loss of biological and cultural diversity, the deterioration of all ecosystems, the de-stabilization of global ecology (climate change, soil erosion, bio-contamination etc.) growing disparities between rich and poor, increased militarization, ongoing patterns of racism, classism and sexism and the spread of consumer monoculture. Part of the endgame of 200 years of industrial capitalism, 500 years of white supremacist colonization and 10,000 years of patriarchal domination.

**image event** - an experience, event or action which operates as a delivery system for smartMemes by creating new associations and meanings

**meme** - (pronounced meem) a unit of self-replicating cultural transmission (ex. ideas, slogans, melodies, symbols) which spreads virally from brain to brain. Word coined by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in 1976 from a Greek root meaning "to imitate" to draw the analogy with "gene". "A contagious information pattern" - Glenn Grant

**movement** - a critical mass of people who share ideas, take collective action and build alternative institutions to create social change.

**points of intervention** - a place in a system, be it a physical system or a conceptual system (ideology, cultural assumption etc.) where action can be taken to effectively interrupt the system. Examples include **point of production** (factory) **point of destruction**, (logging road) **point of consumption**, (chain store) **point of decision**, (corporate HQ) **point of assumption** (culture/mythology) and **point of potential** (actions which makes alternatives real).

**political space** - the ability of an oppositional idea or critique of the dominant order to manifest itself and open up new revolutionary possibilities. The extent to which our imaginations are colonized is the extent to which we lack political space and can't implement or even suggest new political ideas.

**psychic break** the process or moment where people realize the system is out of alignment with their values.

**psycho-geography** - the intersection of physical landscape with cultural and symbolic landscapes. A framework for finding targets for direct action at the point of assumption.

**radical** - a person committed to fundamental social change that believes we must address the roots of the problem rather than just the symptoms

**smartMeme** - a designer meme which injects new infectious ideas into popular culture, contests established meaning (controlMemes) and facilitates popular re-thinking of assumptions. These are memes that act as containers for collaborative power, reveal creative possibilities for change and help grassroots social movements contest idea space.

**subverter** - an effective radical who works within the logic of the dominant culture to foster dissent, mobilize resistance and make fundamental social change imaginable

**tipping point** - epidemiology term to describe point where a disease becomes an epidemic. Popularized by author Malcolm Gladwell to apply to the point where a new idea hits a critical mass of popular acceptance.

**Values** - the social principles, goals or standards held or accepted by an individual, group or society. The moral codes that structure people's deepest held beliefs.

**Values crisis** - the disconnect between common sense values (justice, equality, democracy, ecological literacy) and the pathological values which underlie the global corporate system

**Values shift** - a recognition that the global crisis is the expression of pathological values which we will need to change. An area of extreme difficulty to organize since people's values are very ingrained and the effective values based language is often appropriated by powerful reactionary traditions and institutions. (government, organized religion, patriarchal family etc.)

**Xerxes** - ancient Persian emperor who despite having the world's largest military force over extended himself and was defeated by the unity and creativity of the Greeks starting a long decline that led to the end of Persian dominance. A conceptual archetype for the fall of all empires. America take note.