

THE IMMANENCE OF MYTH:

INTRODUCTION

BEYOND REPRESENTATION

By James Curcio

NOTE:

The following are in-progress chapters for an upcoming work *The Immanence of Myth*, which picks up and expands on some of the ideas first presented in "Living The Myth" in *Generation Hex*. This will be an exploration of myth in its function as intermediary between human and world (represented as language, music, sculpture, or any other form of expression), and how the myth-making process underlies all of the beliefs that we hold about the world, no matter how logically consistent they are. Though it is my general preference to simply know this, and explore the [creation of myths in different media](#), I've been feeling lately that an expression of those underpinnings may be insightful, even useful for others. The book will be co-authored with Rowan Tepper, M.A. though the following was written by myself. Please forgive typos, structural inconsistencies and the like, as this book is still in production. It is being released in hopes of receiving feedback and generating conversation in unexpected corners, which will help strengthen the final form of the book. -James Curcio, April 2008.

Contact: jamescurcio@gmail.com

The Function of Myth In The 21st Century

Mythology isn't just *Bulfinch's*; far less is it Frazier's *Golden Bough*. It is the living, breathing story of humanity. Myths deal with the questions we all face in our lives, propose ways of being in the world which put us in accord or conflict with those various common dilemmas, and ultimately structure that world. However, it deals with those things that are often left unsaid, or which are difficult if not impossible to approach in any other manner. Thus, in an exploration of the subject, it is almost as if we need to explore all of the connective tissue linking to the heart of myth, without striking at that heart directly. For that heart is at once our own, and the truly unknowable font of being which supports it. This is the realm of the unquantifiable: that which is felt, glimpsed, experienced, but never fully secured. Nevertheless, the representation of this unknowable, which we call myth, can be tentatively defined, named, and owned through the process of naming.

On a personal level, a myth is the story of life. As living itself can act as intermediary between the chance and arbitrary nature of life and the possibility of an underlying, unifying form, myths are also the emergent and recursive cultural code that has always driven human civilization. Recursive because the stories that carry through the ages repeat themselves, in different forms, from one generation to the next.¹ Emergent because, at the cultural level, this code gives rise to all of the complexities that society has born, and can be considered to have a life of its own— whether we mythologize that cultural intelligence as the Will of God, the Hive-mind, or the Manifest Destiny of mankind, (or more dangerously, of a specific people).

Put another way— the mythic life is the whole, of which our current awareness is but a fragment. There is a sense in which we are living within our lives as the protagonist cast into a random situation that was neither our design nor our intention, and yet another in which we are disconnected from time, observers and creators, partaking in each other's creations. The personal life, its pains, frustrations, successes and hopes, are all transient and relatively insignificant except when given mythic resonance. The tale is what matters. Legends and heroes always lag a generation or two behind the present, and the times we live in are desperately in need of both, as it has always been. *You're living it right now.*

Life is a dream you won't remember upon awakening, and myth is the dream retold. This retold dream is the realm of myth, and concurrently, its representatives take the form of art, music, and literature. (In other words, those very forms of representation which were banished from Plato's *Republic* on account of

¹This progressive permutation is best represented by the symbol of a spiral, or the Tibetan Swastika, as it is neither a teleological progress, as we might represent with a line, nor a fully closed one, as we would represent with a circle.

their ephemeral nature.²)

Thus, there is a cultural dimension of myth as well, which we will deal with, however the key to first understanding – and thereby creating – a living mythology comes through self-examination and exploration, rather than a strict exploration of the "world out there." We transmit our living mythologies to each other through our art, but equally so, through our impact upon one another in our day-to-day lives.

Each of our lives is a story, an album, a painting, in which we play the starring role, but only posthumously, in hindsight, or through the internal wrestling of the creative process which separate us, momentarily, from our day-to-day concerns. These stories weave together into an ever-changing tapestry which we call culture. Each of us can essentially be demigods for those who inherit the worlds we create, but only if we are worthy of it. The ongoing (mythical) tradition that we partake in as a member of the brotherhood of our species is like a river that flows ever forward, sometimes branching off, or drying to drought or dam, yet nevertheless continually flowing, never reaching an ultimate destination.

From this we may recognize that the beliefs and symbols that live on through us, which we convey to those around us, are the currency of the mythological realm. Many have used the term meme³ to represent this currency, and to systematize this cultural economy. Memes serve a greater function than being mere packets of information, as "...Magic has always been about the encoding of meaning, about symbolic literacy, about the creation and even the restoration of calendars. Memetics is a way of comprehending the ramifications of such encoding, identifying the systems that result from rituals, and transmitting meaning into a goal - oriented complex system, the meme space. Memes are more than a linguistic phenomenon." (The Art of Memetics, page 29.)

It is impossible to speak of myth, and not simultaneously speak of artists, and the arts. Religion, art, and myth were born of the same impulse, rendered with the same brush-stroke. I am not just referring to those who manage to find a vocation of art. All myth-builders are artists, on the most fundamental level, as art is not just about what different people or cultures find aesthetically pleasing – it is also, and possibly more fundamentally, a process which tells people *what things mean* in an ontological rather than ethical sense.

But we do not exist as completely disparate, floating totalities. Myth is born of the social fabric. To live our myth we need to first come to terms with the history of the beliefs of a culture, the culture that bore us into this world, and as a result our personal history as well. As James Joyce said, "history is a nightmare from which we are desperately trying to awake." What does it mean to be at this place and this time, and

2 In terms of Plato's metaphysics ephemerality = deception. The primary nature of the the forms are their immortality, immutability, etc. Plato turns everything on its head, (not unlike the Christian metaphysic), making that immutable idea or form the "ultimate reality" and this fleeting world of phenomena the "shadows on the wall."

3 This term was first coined by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene*, literally meaning a "unit of cultural imitation."

how has it made you who you are? How do the beliefs of our fathers and fore-fathers continue to structure and define the face of the reality we experience on a day-to-day basis? Preliminary answers can be found in our family trees and personal psychological makeup, which each of us can unearth in the creative process, but it is also, and I would say more importantly, present in the ideological history of our culture.

A history of dates and facts is somewhat irrelevant on its own; all axioms and preconceptions must be evaluated from the vantage point of the task and situation at hand. The value of historic knowledge, in regard to this specific investigation, lies in an analysis of the evolution of ideas, rather than in the necessary validity of facts. There are a number of reasons why this is the case: facts are only useful within a specific context, the methods we use for “investigating” truths in fact create them, and as has been said before, History is made by the victors. Everything we “know” probably isn’t true. So it had better be useful, meaningful, (or at the very least, entertaining.)

So this is the terrain. Further discussion of myth and culture would be useless or even misleading without an exploration of the various elements that build up this “mythic tapestry,” through a philosophical rather than historical exploration of these elements. It is worth noting that many works already exist which provide a systematic philosophical analysis of the ideological history and function of myth.⁴ Though in various ways we are indebted to these works, our ultimate mission is not to explore what myth has been, except inasmuch as that can shed light on what its function is at present, nor is it to merely further the thesis of these works. Rather, it is our aim to continue a movement already well underway, namely, the re-legitimization of myth and myth-making as one of the principle, if not *the* principle, form of human representation.

We are nowhere with this word “myth” until we can determine what its personal and cultural function is, in total, and where the points overlap between these various elements. In other words, we need to build a map of a cognitive terrain that is not necessarily a “where” or a “when,” and so the rest of this work is dedicated towards exploring what one might call the ideological topology of myth.

4 Included prominently in this list are Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Joseph Campbell's *Masks of God I-IV*, Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Eliade's many works especially *Myth and Reality* and *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. This is not to say that the postulates or conclusions provided in these works are congruent with one another, or with our own thesis; nevertheless all of them contributed to bringing myth out of the realm of fanciful poetic naturalism.

THE IMMANENCE OF MYTH:

Chapter 2: So Much For Truth.

By James Curcio

"The only principle that does not inhibit progress is: anything goes. Without chaos, no knowledge. Without a frequent dismissal of reason, no progress. For what appears as sloppiness, chaos, or opportunism has a most important function in the development of those very theories which we today regard as essential parts of our knowledge. These deviations, these errors, are preconditions of progress." -Paul Feyerabend.

If we're going to start mucking around in the cultural machinery, it seems sensible that we should start at the bottom and work our way up. Along the way, we will demonstrate the underlying fallacies (or even, more commonly, *misappropriated* truths), that have been instrumental in sculpting Western civilization, and which still control people's thinking to this day.

What is the bedrock we generally try to set our cultural ideas in? How do we make the determination between real and unreal, the valuation between good and evil? How should we live our lives? We must ultimately take a leap of faith, and declare an axis mundi.

This axis mundi goes by another name: truth. Truth is a subject so abstract that whenever we explore it we risk simply talking a great deal of nonsense. But it's also a subject so central to our existence that the simple mention of it is bound to make people froth at the mouth.

The reason for this reaction is that we believe that truth is at the root of our beliefs. Without that implication of certainty, how can we make certain actions? It's what many of the first Philosophers set out to find, as if it was a tangible, distant shore we could discover, lay claim to, and be done with once and for all. Unfortunately for them, and for us, congruent linguistic analogies don't necessarily correlate with the shifting sands around us, as if saying a thing could make it so. Many of our beliefs are based on nothing more than such cockeyed quasi-poetic analogies. If it *seems* to follow, then it must. Even if it does play out through logical analogy or axiom, what does that actually mean? Do we knock our heads against the limitations of language, rather than peek through to the other side?

We can easily question if there is such a thing as specific or universal truth at all, or even if there is any point in asking in the first place. However, these questions don't get us out of the mire either. Whether there is such a thing as truth, or whether we have been duped by a simple linguistic or neurological illusion, we have that word and the reality it represents, and *these* have been with us for centuries. Aside from the

seemingly lofty goals of philosophy (unearthing “truth,” defining and even determining the nature of being, and so on), in a much more everyday sense truth is an idea implicit in most of our conversations, our actions, our beliefs. There's no escape from the necessity of dealing with this topic, even if the nature of such inquiries is like the Zen koan of the goose in the bottle: “How do you get the goose out of the bottle without either killing the goose or breaking the bottle?” Most investigations of truth kill the goose.

Nevertheless, we have no choice but to continue. It has always been human nature to blithely fumble around in this darkness, so off the precipice we go...

In everyday speech, usually when we speak of truth, we actually mean honesty—congruence between what we *believe* to be the case, and the information we can gather about it. (Even when we aren't speaking of truth as “honesty,” the basic idea of correspondence or congruence remains. This is actually a prevalent myth about truth that originates in the representational nature of language itself, which will be dealt with later in this section.)

For instance, we commonly say, “he’s not telling the truth.” Implied in the statement is the belief in a static thing that exists free from the limitations of context and interpretation. It's there, if we can but find it. This truth-myth is so old, so pervasive to our thinking, that we may not notice that the ground we're standing on isn't solid. It is easy enough to demonstrate that even facts, the currency of truth statements, are fluid rather than static. For example, it is a fact that the Earth orbits around the Sun at the moment, though in 100 billion years that may not be the case. Our interpretations of these facts are even more transient, and relative, as the history of astronomy demonstrates. For all I know our present view of even the most seemingly self evident facts, or truths we derive from them, may be bounded by our cultural or personal short-sightedness. This highlights yet another reason why myths are so central to us as humans, why it has been with us for as long as civilization and language. *Myth-making is truth-making.*

Like all words, the meaning of truth depends on the context of its use. In use, it is evident that the singular word “truth” is used to represent a plurality of situations which don't hold the same ontological status. Most of the so-called truths that we take for granted are in fact untestable *cultural myths*, which become personally held beliefs through imitation. These beliefs may have no truth let alone fact behind them, but as beliefs, they are presumed true a priori. Others are fact-based statements, which can be verified, or not, depending on the context and presuppositions provided, but which may nevertheless be untrue, useless or even harmful in the wrong contexts. (More on that in a moment.)

In other words, the truth that it is five o'clock (a contextually relevant fact, which can be said to be “true” under certain contexts) is not the same kind of truth as “killing is wrong” (an untestable but

potentially useful belief, with obvious sociological and ethical implications), or “everything happens for a reason,” (an untestable ontological or metaphysical belief.) These “truth statements” are as different as apples and oranges, their primary resemblance is that all are based on the symmetry or asymmetry of the correspondence between one thing and another.

Where, then, should we begin? To begin discriminating between our truths we need to look at what's operating underneath our “truth statements.”

In the Introduction, I mentioned that it was important that we come to understand the history of our axioms. By this, I mean that to understand any philosophical or religious train of thought, the preconceptions, what you might call the ground of the system, is in many ways more important than its final conclusions. It is generally the statement not the thing that ultimately gets evaluated. Traditionally this “ground” is a thesis or hypothesis, however it has as *its* ground any number of silent preconceptions which may or may not be true, and may or may not be useful or appropriate to the context of the question at hand. Many of these are cultural presuppositions which we simply cannot see because they are so pervasive. The myths a culture holds about truth aren't merely skewed: they are entrenched. Questions directed towards such beliefs, aside from often being considered impolite, are met with utter confusion. This has nothing to do with the fallacy or absurdity of the question: imagine traveling back in time 700 years and asking people around the dinner table why they think the Earth is flat, and not round. Who can say someone won't read this in a hundred years and scoff that we don't realize that it's a ten-dimensional hypersphere?

This historic distortion is not the only way that we get ourselves into trouble with presuppositions. It is very rare that an author recognizes that his conclusions are only valid if the presuppositions he has made in his thesis are in fact *a priori* correct. The very foundation may be faulty, in which case the entire structure, though potentially logically or otherwise consistent, will bear the underlying distortion from the basement to the roof. On top of this, these presuppositions must match the *specific context* of the question being asked for them to be true in a significant, that is to say, useful or meaningful way.⁵ Our general ignorance of the need of this congruence allows advertisers and politicians to make statements that seem like truth, even common sense, but which are rotten at their core. This “ignorance” isn't just the result of plain stupidity. Presuppositions tend to be invisible, as they are often culturally determined. They are subtle and they are pervasive.

5 To further complicate the matter, there are many cases where just one or the other is important, and some where both are. In other words, there are times when it is vastly more important for something to be useful than for it to be meaningful, times when it is more important for something to be meaningful rather than important, and times when both are necessary for something to be considered “true.”

I've found it's much easier for us to see the lies perpetrated in the media within other cultures, for this very reason. Within our own, many of us are too close to get the necessary perspective to actually think (rationally or otherwise), about what's being said. If we are easily able to spot them, it is likely that we are not in fact entirely a part of that culture, sub-culture, or micro-culture; we are not entirely assimilated.

As another case in point, consider that we feel the effects of gravity every day. Science has yet to discover why gravitation works, but nevertheless it is presupposed that there is such a thing as gravity, since it is a prerequisite of our experience, such as it is.⁶ Following from these theories of gravitation can be derived that cohere with that experience, even if they are grounded in what is, in former Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's rather curious epistemological language, an "unknowable unknown."⁷ This process of extension can give us theoretical knowledge of realms we can't possibly have first hand experience of, at least yet: distant space, the subatomic realm, potentially, even death.

It is possible, if not necessarily probable, that the common sense prerequisite which we all take as given is the result of a skewed or too-specific frame of reference, as we come to see from thought experiments such as Edwin Abbott's 'Flatland.'⁸ If we extend ourselves into the unknown using a faulty premise, we may create good science fiction, but that is all.

This dependence of the conclusion upon its silent presuppositions is sometimes called a Cartesian Circle,⁹ possibly with some amount of irony. Analytical truth and tautology are nearly synonyms; the logical definition of truth requires a conclusion to be drawn from a proposition, conversely, its propositions follow from the conclusions. Yet, as we have seen, all truth is contextual, or perhaps more accurately—"truth," when employed in a sense that matters, is dependent upon the use to which it is put rather than its *self*-congruence. Nor can efficacy be the *only* yardstick used to determine the ultimate truth of a statement, as the most efficient solution could easily yield abhorrent results.

The method we use to come to our conclusions is a product of an age and its ideological history, a

6 Indeed, it is safe to assume that the Earth, even the Universe as we know it would not have come to be without gravity. It is in this sense a prerequisite of our experience.

7 The Unknowable Unknown is a concept much much older than Donald Rumsfeld, though the absurd comedy of Rumsfeld as Philosopher is undeniable. It was discussed as a concept in *Theory of Life Deduced from the Evolution Philosophy* (1897).

8 For those who haven't read it, Flatland is an example of the kind of skewed conclusions we might find when drawing conclusions from perspectives that do not, and most likely can not, have a full picture view of what's taking place.

9 This comes from Descartes' "proof" that God exists and is not a deceiver which runs: 1) If God exists and is not a deceiver, then if I clearly and distinctly perceive that p , p is true. (2) I clearly and distinctly perceive that God exists and is not a deceiver. (3) If I clearly and distinctly perceive that p , p is true. (4) So, God exists and is not a deceiver. In other words, Descartes only knows that God exists and is not a deceiver if he knows that his clear and distinct perceptions are true. But he can only know that his clear and distinct perceptions are true if he knows that God exists and is not a deceiver.

particular nervous system, a social and physiological disposition. In other words, all represented thought has been a product of a holistic cultural disposition.¹⁰ Philosophy, art, and even science are essentially psychological and mythic in nature: all are forms of representation.

We can learn a great deal of history, of philology, and of psychology, from our philosophical and scientific inquiries, and yet we may find nothing “true”¹¹ in it, for we have set ourselves about the task of studying the “outside world,” created systems of likeness for studying those perceptions, and inevitably wound up studying those representational systems we have created rather than the world itself. The philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach — who was seminal in the formation of Marx and Engel’s ideas — made the assertion that God is the objectified essence of humanity, and in this sense he was correct, although I would add in parenthesis that God is not merely human nature writ large, rather, he is the *objectified human representational system*. Frederick Neitzsche’s words, “We still have faith in God because we still have faith in grammar,” help explain this statement.

In the terminology of Jean-Francois Lyotard, these “self evident,” often invisible axioms can be called meta-narratives, which are “the supposedly universal, absolute or ultimate truths that are used to legitimize various projects, political or scientific. Examples are: the emancipation of humanity through that of the workers (Marx); the creation of wealth (Adam Smith); the evolution of life (Darwin); the dominance of the Unconscious mind (Freud); and so on” (*Introducing Post-Modernism* – Appignanesi and Garratt.). What he refers to as “meta-narratives” I would simply refer to as “myth.” There is no difference between Freud’s Elektra-complex, and the myth of Sisyphus, in regards to their “truth”—both are stories or concepts which are used to frame reality, which may be valuable in some contexts and useless or even dangerous in others.

Lyotard actually defines the Post-modern condition as “skepticism towards *all* metanarratives.” To truly be free thinkers, we must strip ourselves of the idea that our ideas themselves are realities. No matter how much we may depend on the *useful fiction* of an unconscious in the process of psychoanalyzing ourselves, or even of the gravity which keeps us glued to the surface of the Earth, these ideas which we use to *represent* the forces we experience are nevertheless never more nor less than ideas.

This is equally true in science and politics, and this is where this train of thought has dangerous implications. Very few studies or tests are done without a presupposed end result. Nowadays, very few studies or tests are done without massive vested corporate interests, which further weighs the importance of those end results. All information that we receive is parsed in a manner determined by the nature of the questions we are asking, and the answers we expect to find. We can find answers that aren’t congruent with

¹⁰ I do not use the term “holistic” randomly here. The interaction of the parts *as* a whole is a fundamental aspect of what Culture is.

¹¹ In the sense that we suppose a Truth to be static, or to stand alone outside of a perceptual relationship.

those expectations, but the questions are nevertheless structured by them. Such truths are thought to pre-exist the questions, however the questions and method of inquiry *structures them as well*. Thus, to an increasing extent, our very realities are being shaped by corporate interests. (Not that they haven't been just as sharply shaped by political or religious ones in the past.)

These problems combined concern the validity of *all* knowledge. What we're talking about here is the metaphysical method: how representational systems such as math and language plumb truths from the world, and how we codify these truths as existent facts. This is not merely the method of philosophy, but as philosophy is one of the fathers of science, it also bears a great deal of import both to the lens science applies to phenomena, and to the world we see as a result of this view.

The method of representation becomes an embodied "fact" for those not subtle enough to recognize what it means to represent. Thus the downfall of Western spirituality has been the result of a series of simple literary mistakes, concretizing rather than recognizing the metaphorical reference, and thus (for instance), considering Heaven a literal "place" where one "goes." These "literary mistakes" impacts our lives constantly, in the sacred cows we hold, and hold against one another. It drives people to kill one another over ideas, and lies at the root of bloody tribal conflicts that have raged unceasingly for centuries, keeping our species in an unnecessary, near-constant state of struggle and turmoil over war-torn, often infertile lands.

It is also self-evident that since this metaphysical method is the specific device used to investigate *as well as* "prove" the proposed system of thought, (whatever it may be), it is really the method itself that is brought to question when we investigate the validity of an argument, rather than the philosophy itself. Or perhaps, more succinctly said, the heart of philosophy, insofar as philosophy is not art, is this method of like and not like—which is the analogy structure of Aristotelian logic, and the basis of linguistic representation as well. I would suggest that the forms of individual and cultural cognition are knowable through this application of the structure of language, however it is a tool unsuited to many of the tasks we put it to, and which can lead us to propose concepts that do not bear out in life. For example, the most obvious expression of this binary is "being" and "non-being." A great deal of conjecture has been spun around these seemingly opposite ideas; yet what exactly is "non-being"? What is its relationship to "being"? Surely it is not the relationship that 0 has to 1, as 0 still exists in the same sense that 1 does, it merely lacks any quantity. This linguistic concept of "non-being," formed from the idea of the negation of that which is ("being"), cannot, by definition, *be*. If you took and negated all things that were, are, and ever will be, one might say "then, you are left with non-being." Yet, you cannot say such a thing, because you aren't left with anything at all. It is a conceptual phantom, created by the structure of language, and thus, the

structure of logic. Grounded as they are in being, at a fundamental level no two things can ever be said to be true opposites, except for in mathematics. Male and female, for example, are not rooted in opposition, they are not opposite categories, they are merely two *different* alternatives provided as pre-requisites for species that procreate through sexual means. Language creates the simplistic forms of opposition which logic depends upon. Thus the crucial point: this exalted method of extracting truth does not, as many philosophers would like to think, strip away the illusions until only truth remains. Rather, it is a form of representational illusion, *a form of myth-making*, itself.

Analytical truths are useful within specific contexts and useless outside of them. It is a method of inquiry – a tool – which does not function well when applied to existential (or, in Ludwig Wittgenstein's terminology, “metaphysical”), questions. One may as well try to screw in a light bulb with a sledgehammer.

When it *is* employed to plumb philosophical questions it is ill-suited to, the logical “analogy system” of language is used to try to look around corners and in some way come to understand the absolute existence, the essence, of an object. If we know A, and we demonstrate that A=B, even if B is by definition “unknown,” and unknowable, then supposedly we still have come to know it. The general argument of this position is that logic is based upon the methods and modes of perception we use. Thus if something is logically valid, it is consistent with the world as the world itself is logical, as logic is derived directly from it. What a trick.

The extreme that evolved out of this general position came in the form of logical positivism, which expressed that the only sensible method of philosophical inquiry is analytic, and so only questions that can have analytical conclusions are themselves sensible. Everything else is metaphysical. In other words, philosophically speaking, nonsense.

This philosophical dead-end does not consider the intention which drives an author to choose one avenue of inquiry over another, for instance, Freud's emphasis on the Oedipal mythic framework as a means of understanding *all* son – father relationships. The unintentional autobiographical nature of such “science” reveals far more than the author likely intended, but none of it should be considered universally true.

Even more to the point, the logical consistency of a statement doesn't necessitate truth, unless if one of your initial propositions is, like Ludwig Wittgenstein states in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, “the world is the totality of facts, not of things.” Logic is only valid on its own grounds, thus the only valid proposition one can draw from this is tautological, e.g. only facts which can be evaluated through logic can be defined and verified. This doesn't mean that things outside of those boundaries are untrue, only by definition forever undefined. Yet, as previously discussed, by what method do we prove that logical

congruence is an indicator of truth except for that of logic itself?

This is the very mummifying and enervating quality which Nietzsche railed so hard against in *Twilight of the Idols*,¹² before any of the logical positivists, or empiricists, were born.¹³ The real substance of our lives come in the forms of experiences, stories, narratives, relationships, wants, fears, desires, and so on. This rationally obsessed position corners us out of being able to ask any of the interesting questions that should be at the very center of philosophy: what is consciousness, how do we know things, what is the nature of existence? The only questions that have meaning, when approached from the strict limitations of formal logic are incredibly limited, and often unrelated to any existential necessity. (Such methods certainly have their place, as it is most likely more useful to use mathematics than a fable about a young boy and his pet dragon to determine the area of a given isosceles trapezoid. But when it comes to giving us something of value regarding our lives, mathematics is out of its depth.)

Does all of this mean we should throw our hands in the air, and give up questioning altogether? Should we limit the question we are 'allowed' to ask to the most rudimentary inquiries of fact, as the analytic philosophers would have us do, or on the other hand conclude that it's "all the same" and imagine up whatsoever we choose? Surely we must be able to deal with these issues in a meaningful way.

Allow me a personal tangent as a means of directing us towards an answer: at around age sixteen I became obsessed with a need to understand the basis of other people's certainty. At the same time, as is the case with most inquisitive adolescents, I was simultaneously stricken with a burning need to unearth my identity. This is what initially drove me to explore philosophy, because those existential questions gained a horrific gravity that put them at the fore of my thoughts. I couldn't sleep at night because of them, and wrestled with them constantly. At the core of this dramatic struggle, initially, was the simple question "what am I?" Any question of personal identity eventually leads you to a question of consciousness, (you can't know what you are until you know what it is that is knowing), which leads you to questions of veracity, (you can't know what you are until you know how you know), and that leads you nearly full-circle to questions of identity and meaning.

The question is the thing. How different is it to ask "What is its function?" as opposed to "What is its meaning?" *The questions we ask frame the reality that we live in.* This process of questioning and building answers atop those frames is what I refer to as myth-making. It is a myth because we are reaching into the dark— we pose scenarios, hypothesis, we may even devise ways to test them a million times over and yet they remain myths: the intermediary between man and the void, the dark unknowable.

"The mind creates symbols to interpret the data of experience; to understand knowledge and the

12 Reason in Philosophy.

13 Ernst Mach, the members of the "Vienna circle," Ludwig Wittgenstein in his earlier years, Whitehead, etc.

significance of science it is necessary to understand the function of symbolic forms of explanation. Forms of cognition are affected by language and myth; language, myth, and science are all forms of human expression. Experience begins with the immediacy of feelings; but as living creatures respond in accordance with their needs, certain items in their experience take on sign and symbol functions.” (Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms.*)

Ultimately, there is no better way to express such “questions” than in the form of myth; that is, stories or narratives that express the significance of these questions, that wrestle with them, and ultimately, in one way or another, define the way that we exist within the world. All of this follows when you realize¹⁴ that the only concept of truth which mirrors life is not static. This flies in the face of the concept of enlightenment truth that has been central to Western Civilization since, and arguably before, Plato. However, it is a common observation that the only existential constant is change: everything is in the process of coming or going. Letting go of the need to define, delineate and dominate through the imposition of singular truth (the tyrant), is not the end of reason or sanity, *it is it's beginning*. Even if we found such an enduring, unchanging and absolute truth, what would we do with it? More to the point, *what would it do with us?* Certainty is often a harbinger of fascism.

Taking all of this to heart, “truth” isn't what we thought it would be. When we have limited it to what we can know with *certainty*, it merely becomes a list of tautologies. It is only when it is opened up to the possible paradoxes of contextualism that we can find it: a recognition that two opposing things can be true, in different circumstances, or where truths can change over time, or even change when our perspective changes. With this, truth again enters the realm of myth.

There should be no equivocation on this point: everything that we believe is a myth.

“In what strange simplification and falsification man lives! One can never cease wondering once one has acquired eyes for this marvel. How we have made everything around us clear and free and simple! How we have been able to give our sense a passport to everything superficial, our thoughts a divine desire for wanton leaps and wrong inferences! How from the beginning we have contrived to retain our ignorance in order to enjoy an almost inconceivable freedom, lack of scruple and caution, heartiness, and gaiety of life- in order to enjoy life! And only on this now solid, granite foundation of ignorance could knowledge rise so far... Even if language, here as elsewhere, will not get over its awkwardness, and will continue to talk of opposites where there are only degrees an many subtleties of gradation; even if the inveterate Tartuffery of morals, which now belongs to our unconquerable “flesh and blood,” infects the words even of those of us who know better— here and there we

14 The literal realization of this is presented, in subtly different forms, as an existential possibility in many Eastern paradigms: most notably in Taoism, where it is recognized as a given, and in Zen Buddhism, where the emphasis is on immediacy (Satori) and paradox (expressed in the koan). In fact it seems likely that the more Western thought strives to define, divide, and conquer the world through literal qualification and quantification, the less such an experience seems possible for those truly existing within the cultural topology.

understand it and laugh at the way in which precisely science at its best seeks most to keep us in this simplified, thoroughly artificial, suitably constructed and suitably falsified world— at the way in which, willy-nilly, it loves error, because being alive, it loves life.” (Beyond Good and Evil, Friedrich Nietzsche.)

Chapter 2: So Much For Truth.

Excursis: Magical Thinking

By James Curcio

At the closing of the previous article, I lead us to a somewhat awkward position: in seemingly absolute skepticism, we can rediscover truth in myth, and through that, a new license on reality through a recognition of its plasticity. After skepticism has had its say, it probably seems that we are dangling off a precipice. Without looking down, it may seem a great fall, but glancing backwards we will find it is but a step to solid ground.

With a contextual sense of truth, we are again opened up to the possibilities of magical thinking, which have existed as a central element of culture since the dawn of civilization. Magical thinking,¹⁵ though maligned in modern psychiatric literature, is a process which has not so much left us as left our conscious sphere. However, with a grasp of what was discussed in the bulk of this chapter, the magical thinking we arrive at is not that of the schizophrenic or bushman who misappropriates cause. Instead, we recognize our *participation* in the process of determining the meaning of everything we experience.¹⁶ The meaning we

15 As defined by Frazier, magical depends on two principles: the law of similarity (between effect and cause) and the law of contagion (things which effect each other continue to effect one another even when taken out of contact.) Though there are more possibilities than the ones Frazier outlined, all of them come down to how we determine causality from the events of our lives, and the meaning that we attribute to this causal web. It is the latter aspect which we will be focusing on in this Excursis.

16 *There is the story of the American in the train who saw another American carrying a basket of unusual shape.*

His curiosity mastered him, and he leaned across and said: "Say, stranger, what you got in that bag?"

The other, lantern-jawed and taciturn, replied: "mongoose".

The first man was rather baffled, as he had never heard of a mongoose. After a pause he pursued, at the risk of a rebuff: "But say, what is a Mongoose?"

"Mongoose eats snakes", replied the other.

This was another poser, but he pursued: "What in hell do you want a Mongoose for?"

"Well, you see", said the second man (in a confidential whisper) "my brother sees snakes".

The first man was more puzzled than ever; but after a long think, he continued rather pathetically: "But say, them ain't real snakes".

"Sure", said the man with the basket, "but this Mongoose ain't real either". -Aleister Crowley, Magick In Theory & Practice.

A note here on the distinction between these two forms of magical thinking. Believing in the reality of those snakes will likely lead to a misappropriation of cause. If you become too sure in your beliefs, you will likely find yourself falling prey to the same sort of superstition which is easily identified in tribal and aboriginal cultures throughout the world. (It can also be found in many New Age publications, and health stores.)

If a person spends hours or even days working to bring about a certain end result, they will attribute a successful result with their efforts. It is altogether possible, if not even probable, that success had little or nothing to do with the operation, though the

give to experiences and sensations, even something as simple as a color, lies in human hands. For most, this process is primarily automatic or subconscious. However at some point, on some level, we have to choose which meanings (or often, causes), to attribute to which events, sensations, etc. Fundamentally, it is through choosing to accept predetermined meanings which we opt into cultures. The cogency of a culture arises, in part, through an agreement upon certain terms. If a group all choose to give x meaning to object y, they are then entering the same domain together. Some domains are more ubiquitous than others, possibly as a result of our biological commonality, that there are some “truth pacts” which are in certain places and times more likely to take hold and last.

Take for instance the color yellow. There is the English association of cowardice. Yet Buddhist monk's robes are a yellow-orange because to them it is the color of death. Even death itself has a different association for a Chinese Buddhist than a Catholic in London. We may instead choose to hold a personal association. As a result of a past experience, it may make us feel joy, or despair. Someone may say something to you, they meant it as a joke, but you suddenly feel tears welling to your eyes, because it reminded you of an old dead friend. Getting a handle on someone's “key words,” and what they mean to them, is means of coming to learn their language, through their language their myth, and through their myth- *them*.

It is this association of meaning, this “naming” of things, which is the root of our ability to build worlds.¹⁷ It is this ability to choose to create and give meaning, to reconstruct the coal of our experience and turn it into diamonds for those who have the subtlety to recognize them, which defines man as myth-maker. This capacity exists within us all. We construct our reality through mental images and words which we use to represent our experience. The references become bounded to that which they refer. (In this light, many “primitive” beliefs may seem less bizarre. For instance, the cliched tribal beliefs that a person's true

operation may have set them in motion. If the results are not what they were hoping for, this belief structure generally allows for "intrusions" of various kinds, such as another shaman operating at cross purposes, or some other more subtle force which waylaid the operation. (“It wasn't God's will,” “I sinned in some way,” “my magic wasn't strong enough,” etc.)

Consider this case in point: during the middle ages, a meteor falls to earth, which a young farm boy discovers. This meteorite is placed in a church, and considered a holy relic. The local despot, who is preparing for war, takes this as a sign from God, and leads his army to victory. The historians of the time attribute his victory to the meteorite, thus further increasing its "magical power."

Now, there's nothing to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the meteorite wasn't a sign from God that he should ride to battle and certain victory, but Occam's razor would certainly point to the confluence of other factors, from the skill and number of his troops and the weather on that particular day to the location that they fought, and so on. However, at the same time, such factors cannot account for the confluence of those events, (defined by Carl Jung as “synchronicity”), or the fact that the falling meteorite was the galvanizing cause, without which the success would not, and therefor could not, have occurred. So, in this sense it is true to say that the attributed meaning (“the meteorite is a sign from God that we will be victorious on this day”) was correct, if only because that meaning was attributed, and led them to a successful outcome.

17 The power of this ability must not be understated. The simple choice to consider the base biological drives a hindrance to spiritual life, rather than the path to it, helped create one of the predominant historic trends of Western History.

name shouldn't be given away lightly, or that a photograph might steal or trap someone's soul.) To this extent myth can almost be considered a disease of language, as Ernst Cassirer notes in *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*: "The phenomenon of 'paronymy,' the use of one and the same word to convey entirely different imagery, becomes here the key to the interpretation of myths. The source and origin of all mythology is linguistic ambivalence, and myth itself is a kind of disease of the mind, having its ultimate root in a 'disease of language.'" This is the case because "...man puts language between himself and the nature which inwardly and outwardly acts upon him, that he surrounds himself with a world of words in order to assimilate and elaborate the world of objects." It is also, as we will explore in the final sections of this book, the way in which we assert our dominance over each other, and even over nature itself, oftentimes with disastrous results.

Because we create maps of our environment that are not the same as the environment, we may analyze our maps—our history, as I said in the Introduction—our symbol systems, and, through this, continually deepen our experience of our self. Symbols are devices which, when unmasked, accurately refer to existential truths, so long as you can decipher the reference, and avoid the disastrous consequences of fundamentalism. (Mistaking the symbol for that which is referenced.) Religious symbols are particularly potent in this regard; they too represent reality, but to the believer, they in fact represent *ultimate reality*. Through unraveling the reality that the symbols point at, and invoking it into the present, one does not merely understand religious symbols— one lives through them. This, not fanatical belief or even blind faith, is what religion¹⁸ is.

How is such a symbol invoked? One steps outside of their normal role, and makes their body and mind a fit receptacle for a particular energy,¹⁹ which is codified in symbols. These symbols are impressed upon the mind as words, but during ritual, through art, meditation, and so on, scent, colors, etc. all congruent with the nature of the invocation strengthen these associations, further exalting the mind to allow this "deity" to indwell within it. It is worth noticing that this process exists most prevalently in the 21st Century as media- movies, albums, etc. For many Americans, movie stars and the like have become our pantheon, and Los Angeles our Olympus.

The difference between different practices is cultural and aesthetic. I theorize that the ritual garb and

18 "Religion" from Latin *religiō*, *religiōn-*, perhaps from *religāre*, *to tie fast*. Note that the meaning of this word is fundamentally the same as the meaning of the Sanskrit word Yoga, literally "union, yoking," or "to join." In both cases it is an attempt at joining the reference, which the religion refers to but cannot in itself embody, and the individual. This "joining" may also apply to the social body of the religion, though it is usually through the imposition of social dynamics that the religion polarizes into its opposite, and atrocities (holy wars as with the Crusades, bloody in-fighting over interpretation as with the Protestants, inquisitions, etc.), occur.

19 "Energy" may not be the most telling word to use, but it carries less baggage than the term "archetype," which in some ways is more appropriate. What we are speaking of is that disembodied character, whatever it may be, that the symbols refer to. Gods, spirits, and the like exist, in the least, as objectifications of existential, human realities. So it is that the Gods resemble us, and are more like us than unlike— otherwise, what use would the Gods themselves have for War? At the same time, War reflects an aspect of the nature of the universe outside of the human sphere, and could be said to inform it. This is the paradox.

mask of a Siberian shaman and the makeup of a pseudonymous performer like Alice Cooper or Marilyn Manson could serve the same function, if the performer approaches the act with this kind of intent, and a rich background in the subject.

The symbols we use and realities we exist in do not themselves exist within a void however. I do not mean to imply that by simply changing the linguistic structure and associations connected with a horrific situation we can transmute it into Shangrila. We are social animals, and the “magic” that we work with language operates primarily in the social and historic, in other words, human sphere. Under most circumstances, we aren't capable of entirely changing the nature of reality outside of this human sphere merely by calling it by a different name.

To summarize: ritual is an enactment of a mythology allowing us access to dimensions of our singular and collective being, through the language of symbols with specific connotations, in what is essentially a play-acting process. The energies and beings dealt with may be thought of as real or psychological projections, ultimately they are as real or unreal as any other impression that you might have. Every action, word and gesture may have symbolic meaning or mythological resonance. This resonance must occur between the myth or ritual and the individual(s) enacting it, in whatever mediums they choose to work.

CHAPTER 8 of *The Immanence of Myth.*

Deconstructing Our Myths:

By James Curcio.

Part 1: The Revolt Against Nature

To begin our excursion into deconstruction, I would like to pose some initial thoughts about our own heritage— a brief ideological history. These should be seen as jumping off points, as a comprehensive analysis of any of these ideas could spin off into an entire book. We will however be exploring several of them in greater depth in the chapters to follow.

The world that we live in is the *direct* result of our ideas and understanding of the universe. We mustn't forget that though gravity does not in fact work *because* it obeys Newton's laws, we did use Newton to get a man to the moon and back. Thus we glean the nature of things by extension, as cosmologists study distant galaxies without having ever been there.

However, this method, and its atomizing, reductionalistic focus on the external world, has its drawbacks. While we advance exponentially in technological capability, standing, as it has been said, "upon the backs of giants," our spiritual or interior knowledge, in other words our maturity as a race, has yet to advance a whole lot since the dawn of our civilization. It is often only in the few, most of them misunderstood or even persecuted in their time, that this knowledge and tradition carries forward at all. This is because many of us live in world-maps that were ground-breaking in 500 B.C. In their day-to-day lives, most are unwilling or unable to ask the hard questions, why do we do things the way we do, why do we think as we do, what are the end results, at what cost?²⁰ Even amongst the brave and inquisitive, none of us can fully grasp, let alone wrestle with the weight of several thousand years of invisible cultural history. Nor, finally, is there a clear-cut means of absolutely valuating the answers that we may gather from such questions, though the process of question and answer itself does seem to allow us to gain new insight that can lead to genuine growth.²¹

20 This is not a blind statement. It has been demonstrated time-and-again in studies on social cognition that a great deal of our biological hardware (specifically within the brain) is dedicated to pattern recognition, distortion and extension techniques which serve to make the world around us simple, coherent. (Cite specific studies.) It is arguable to what extent these processes falsify, but it is inarguable that they vastly simplify, distort, even delete incongruities that don't fit into the schema. Culturally this functions like a set of blinders; everyone does as they have "always done" until such a time that something breaks through, at which point the past suddenly becomes alien. It is likely that this process is speeding up greatly in the past hundred years, possibly putting a great deal of strain not yet acclimated to such constant paradigm shifts, but exploration of this is far outside the scope of this survey.

21 By "genuine growth," I am referring to what might be called a "paradigm shift." An example of vertical growth would be

"Though Kurzweil's predictions about the exponential growth of processing power seems correct, it seems he forgot to realize that such "progress" bears no necessary relation to our own internal evolution.

Modern man is an ape with a rocket launcher."

On the whole, our grand technology is ecologically and spiritually stupid. In recent years, this statement has become self-evident: an increasing majority of the scientific community now agrees that our very way of life is unsustainable, without serious modification. The system carries itself forward to an inevitable end, and that end is to the end of history, the end of its own desire, its own motivation. The motivating factor behind our growth into the furthest reaches of our planet, even to outer space, is nothing other than the urge to compete, destroy or multiply. These are merely the motivations of man as animal, as Joseph Cambell expresses (Bill Moyers interview get citation) "health, wealth, and progeny." Though Kurzweil's predictions²² about the exponential growth of processing power seems correct, it seems he forgot to realize that such "progress" bears no necessary relation to our own internal evolution. Modern man is an ape with a rocket launcher.

For most of us, the bulk of the technology which we receive in the private sector may as well be magic devices. Without the relative few who truly understand the principles used in the manufacture and upkeep of the devices we use, (which is of course a good business position to be in for the manufacturers), we would be plunged back into the technological dark ages. Furthermore, most of us are no longer equipped to deal with the harsh realities that such a dark age would entail. This makes nearly all of us – including myself – dependents, domesticated animals without any capacity to thrive or even survive on our own without accepting our role as the cog in a cultural machine which is primarily beneficial to those who build and maintain the system, such as it is.²³

This is not to say that the society we live in is the result of conscious planning on the part of a government, or some secret Illuminati or Masonic order. The basic premises people hold as given, and the realities we each live in, are a direct product of certain archaic beliefs that are often erroneous and incongruous with the universe as we currently know it. Modern society, and technology has built upon

another doubling of the processing power of our computers, whereas a form of horizontal growth that creates for more sustainable or beneficial technology I would categorize as "genuine": shifting form as opposed to merely quantity. These are two entirely different forms of change: for instance, the advent of the press which allowed for multiple copies without manual transcription, as opposed to simply putting more people to the task of painstakingly hand-writing books.

22 *The Singularity Is Near*, Ray Kurzweil.

23 For an interesting excursion into the nature of this machine, I highly recommend you take a closer look at the history of the American Federal Reserve. *The Creature From Jeckyll Island*, by G. Edward Griffin is a good start in this direction.

itself without critical analysis of the history of our axioms. Even our governmental systems are predicated on beliefs that are several hundred years old, which themselves were predicated on beliefs that may have been held by a people across the world from a millennium before.

These ideological histories, or belief structures, build upon on top of each others like layers of sediment. Our cultural heritage is a palimpsest; the beliefs held in our linear past continue to effect the world we live in today, regardless of if we see them, or presently believe in them. Cultures and belief systems through time create a mesh-work that contributes inevitably to new forms in coming generations. Whether these cultural underpinnings co-exist harmoniously, or whether they lead to acts of fascism or genocide, they nevertheless give birth to what comes next.

Due to the invisibility of cultural belief when viewed from the inside, most people act upon this heritage without ever seeing it. The universe we exist in *experientially* was formed by Newton, by Kant, by Picasso, by the lives of thousands if not millions of unknown cultural sculptors. In a sense, their ghosts are still with us.

Many if not most of the people who contributed the most to the creation of the cultural fabric were simply serving their role within it. Intent is irrelevant in the long-view. After all, it isn't as if Albert Einstein pulled the curtain off the atom so we could turn around and bomb Hiroshima. The river, as I said, forever flows downhill; none of us can truly foresee what the next group standing in line will do with our creations, or how our children (real or figurative) will behave once they have left the nest.

The history of modern culture (and in many other places as well), is the legacy of a simple valuation: the artists, priests, scientists and other myth-builders painted the natural order as something which must be *overcome*, restructured, and dominated for personal, economic, or even spiritual advancement to take place. This is one of the premises explored at length by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, "In thought, human beings distance themselves from nature in order to arrange it in such a way that it can be mastered." (pg. 31) Though this thesis is arrived at in part through an overly negative conception of the function of myth, the point is valid nevertheless.

"There is the common element within these varying myths. Our current corporate, mass-media culture owes itself, in part, to an ideology that poses itself against nature and the natural order."

This is far from the only valuation that shapes our heritage, but it is a ubiquitous one. The myth of ownership, the myths of social hierarchies, the myth of capital, individuality, freedom, and so on are all the

true backbone of our culture, for better and worse, and all of them are informed by this valuation.

There is a common element within these varying myths. Our current corporate, mass-media culture owes itself, in part, to an ideology that poses itself *against* nature and the natural order. Though this valuation exists within these many seemingly disparate cultural myths, yet there is no singular source for this belief. You will find this ideology present in the religion of Zoroaster, Judaism, Manicheism, Christianity, but that is not to say it is an instinct that exists only because these traditions gave them voice. No, it is more likely the other way around: these traditions happened to give voice to a tendency that human instinct already desired. We desired mastery, and it was only possible through this valuation.

While most people today are unaware of Zarathustra, all of us live in a world fashioned from these models, which come to us through a sordid history of conquests, inquisitions, and other forced and unintentional cultural interminglings. Somehow, this idea remained. A world where the human dimension is held in tension against nature, where the purpose of the human animal is seen as bringing light to the world, changing a dark, wild chaos into a world of order through rational intention is also inevitably a world governed by the laws of rationality, with all of its blind spots. The history of the the Church and of rational Philosophy is a sordid one; at times the two were opposed, yet this conflict was integral.²⁴ Through this conflict, and the painful conquests and diasporas that surrounded it, the myths that capitalism and industry are founded upon were born.

This valuation sculpted our so-called Western world-view. It gave us the best and the worst of what we have in our present day society. The American myth of the individual, the idea that an individual can change his destiny, are the results of these underlying presuppositions as much as the corruption and unwitting bigotry which follows from them. The myth of the individual, so central in our society, and so crucial for the development of the wonders that we have accomplished, is as flawed as any other. Like all myths, it distorts, deletes, and invents towards the end of cogency. This heritage carries more baggage with it: lurking beneath the sentiment of the superiority of our species and our culture is a myth of psychological estrangement and personal sin.

This idea of estrangement is particularly worth highlighting.²⁵ Though Christianity ostensibly did away with the need of a Priestly caste to act as an intermediary between man and God, this ideology was quickly brushed under the carpet as the Catholic church rose to power. Thus the early Judaic idea of estrangement

24 As we can see in the history of Western thought from 500 B.C. to the present age, as scholasticism and even science merged with the earlier (pre-American Baptist/Evangelical) Christian world-view, or some might say subsumed it. While it would not be untruthful to call this valuation “Christian” it would be equally valid to call it “rational” or even “enlightenment” in the sense Adorno and Horkheimer uses it in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

25 Again, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* echoes this sentiment: “Enlightenment is more than enlightenment: it is nature made audible in its estrangement.” (pg. 31)

or exile remained – along with this growing belief that the physical world itself was a sort of purgatory from the union with God. This myth obviously germinated in the cultural soil of a people who were constantly being kicked out of their chosen homeland(s). This belief most likely begins with one of the oldest Monotheistic religion, Zoroastrianism, which originated somewhere between the 9th and 11th centuries BCE in or around what is modern day Afghanistan, oddly simultaneous with the roots of Judaism as well.

In these early monotheistic traditions, God took the role of an absolute Other, which makes a genuine relationship impossible: communication depends on commonality. To the average individual, this relationship continued with the older tradition of patriarchy; God became a father-figure so elevated that we could only follow his commands, but never understand him. Jewish mystics, however, recognized that a God of this sort can only be intelligently spoken of as a “not,” to identify him as any actual element of being would be to limit him by caging him within our own mortal realm. The Jewish mystical system of Kabbalah in many ways is an intellectual means of making elements of the divine accessible, without limiting “his” essence, at least on paper. However, while there may be many other merits to this system, like the empty logical gesticulations of the Christian scholars to follow (such as Boethius, St. Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas), these intellectual or linguistic games change nothing.

To attempt to relate to this absolute, estranged Father-God, one can only cry up to the heavens in hope of a response that cannot come but through an intermediary – half divine himself – thus sharing part of our essence and part of his. It is of course in response to this need for an intermediary that Jesus, historic figure that he may be, took on the mythic resonance of an age, simultaneously adopting many of the elements of the male agrarian regenerative Gods that the Israelites had discarded. As the Christian cult grew from its early days into an institution, (most notably after the Council of Nicea and subsequent Nicene Creed), their leadership developed many political tools out of their myths. An example of this is original Sin, and as a result of the historic and mythic resonance of this belief, we have this “revolt against nature” which has been with us for the duration of Western Civilization. This is not a linear progression but rather a series of feedback loops, which moves temporally in one direction, but with resonances that can cross cultural boundaries, even inexplicably occur simultaneously in geographically disparate locations.

Part 2: The Underpinnings of Progress

The next topic in our deconstruction of modern mythology is that of progress. Though we will deal with it in more depth in chapters to come, there are some preliminary ideas that bear expression and exploration: specifically some of the myths that we have of artistic, scientific, and philosophical "progress,"

and how these fold back into some of the larger issues of culture and civilization.

It is a common conception that breakthroughs in science, philosophy and the arts have all come about through critical analysis of the corpus of previous works, and that the process is gradual. However, in our culture, where we have a prevailing myth of "the artist," rather than a tradition of artisans and skilled tradesman, the real breakthroughs often occurred in the hands of rare individuals who borrowed from their heritage, but offered a contention, a new twist, so unexpected that it left a mark. These breakthroughs oftentimes are literally just that, changing the playing field altogether, rather than being a part of an unbroken, linear progression from antiquity to modernity. It is only in retrospect that we identify, or rather *invent*, the connections between one movement and sub-culture and the next.²⁶

"These advances happened as a result of people thinking about old problems in new ways. At first, they are seen as mavericks. The unlucky are excommunicated, exiled, even killed. A hundred years later, their ideas represent the next tradition that needs to be smashed in the name of progress."

This idea of contention is key in analysing the procession of creative works. Creativity thrives in an environment of nurturing conflict, and a motivating factor for many artists, as well as scientists, is the need to express themselves in contrast or conflict with the prevailing ideologies of the culture(s) around them. Though this may seem at first an oxymoronic statement, it is clear that the life-blood of artistic and philosophical advancement lies in struggle: each new "great" school of art or philosophy comes about as a reaction to the previous, now ossified system. (Calling it a "system" at all is a demonstration of this.) Many of these breakthroughs come as a result of critically analyzing the mythic axioms held by the surrounding culture, as we see in the history of Christianity with Eckhart, with Galileo, with Bruno, and so on. Each took a new gambit, however subtle or gross, based on the risks taken by those that came before. These advances happened as a result of people thinking about old problems in new ways. At first, they are seen as mavericks. The unlucky are excommunicated, exiled, even killed. A hundred years later, their ideas represent the next tradition that needs to be smashed in the name of progress.

There is a common misconception within capitalistic culture, that art and philosophy are useless endeavors – at best, a mental exercise, at worst, an activity for criminals and dilettantes. They forget that all of the great periods in human history have occurred side-by-side with paradigm shifts in the arts and philosophy. It is impossible, and irrelevant, to definitively argue which came first. Art and philosophy,

²⁶ We will return to the retroactive naming of art movements in the next section.

without trade, commerce, and *application*, is sterile and masturbatory. Similarly, trade and commerce is brutish and miopic when it isn't applied with the sensibility that comes from in-depth philosophical and artistic debate. Both are crucial to evolution, but only when applied together.

This misconception is one of the dangers of prevalent capitalistic myths. What cannot be commodified cannot be useful, cannot be meaningful. The qualities of what cannot be quantified are irrelevant. Max Horkheimer deals with this in *The Eclipse of Reason*, for example, this quotation: "However, the transformation of all products of human activity into commodities was achieved only with the emergence of industrialist society. The functions once performed by objective reason, by authoritarian religion, or by metaphysics have been taken over by the reifying mechanism of the anonymous economic apparatus. It is the price paid on the market that determines the salability of merchandise and thus the productiveness of a specific kind of labor. Activities are branded as senseless or superfluous, as luxuries, unless they are useful or, as in wartime, contribute to the maintenance and safeguarding of the general conditions under which industry can flourish. Productive work, manual or intellectual, has become respectable, indeed the only accepted way of spending one's life." (pg. 40)

However, Horkheimer attributes this to the "subjective reason" which to his thinking performed a *coupe d'etat* of both so-called "objective reason," on the one hand, and the mythological impulse on the other. I would instead argue that this end result, which he is quite correct about, was not arrived at through the overthrow of objective reason, but it is instead its ultimate conclusion. It is in fact the inevitable evolution of a specific mythology heritage, which gave birth to reason, which gave birth to the nation-state, which, through many other turn-about, gave birth to blind industry. Zeus consumed his own father, Kronos. That is not to say that he wasn't born by him. The same could be said of Horkheimer's objective and subjective reason, as presented in the *Eclipse of Reason*. No return to objective reason is possible: we are living in its aftermath. At the same time, it is arguable if it existed, save as an ideal, in the first place. Instead, the alternative can only come to life through the culture, embodied in the form of new art, and new myths.

This is not merely an academic point. Starvation, ignorance, or poverty aren't biological necessities.²⁷ They are the results of a myth that allows for a grossly unequal distribution of wealth, (let alone the concept of "wealth" in the first place.) These problems are unresolved not because they cannot be solved, but because the systems in place require it, or demand it. The dynamic of have and have not in fact polarizes – and thereby powers – the ecology of the economy. This dialectic is not an unfortunate

²⁷ Though it is worth noting that if our population continues to grow exponentially, as it has been, it is possible that no ecological or technological revolution can possibly stem the tide of the inevitable: too few resources demanded by too many mouths. There can be no better demonstration of the mindlessness, the simple biological imperatives, which continue to drive our species despite all that we may imagine ourselves capable of.

byproduct, it is an essential constituent. What American doesn't think they too might one day be rich, or famous? How many in the American working class would be able to go to their tedious job every day without that dream of success to keep them going?²⁸

In management, other myths prevail, still rooted in the idea of teleological progress: the representation of success matter more than the things they represent. As a matter of fact, they *replace* them. The sports car, the expensive watch, the designer suit are all, from a utilitarian perspective, less valuable than items half their cost. Though luxury items such as these are said to cost more because of increased craftsmanship- which may be true- the customer is buying them because they are *symbols* of wealth and success. To have either of these on their own is not enough; the symbols are of greater value. Though this seems harmless enough in itself, a common indulgence of the upper class, it is the same mis-valuation (weighing the symbol over what is represented) which leads to vastly damaging business practices.²⁹ The myths of a culture at once hold it together, and hold it back. This is the true power of a myth that gains the mind of a people,³⁰ and it is the true function of both myth and art, though both have been rendered somewhat toothless by the brilliant co-optive myths of Capitalist culture. One can only hope this is a temporary state of affairs.

"The early Christian Gnostic traditions of "love thy neighbor," "all is one," and the agape orgies were replaced by the Roman Orthodoxy and the authority provided through the union of State and Religion.

The hippies traded in their sandals and beat up VWs for SUVs and overpriced birkenstocks."

At present, the paradigms that root us in this mode of being are too strong for any single "revolutionary" or grass-roots movement to effectively shift them – all that results from such radicals is further polarization, disenfranchisement, estrangement. If, on the other hand, people find alternatives that truly work for them, which allow for new cultural possibilities (and blind-spots), they will likely spread by virtue of their efficacy.

Such growth on its own is not a clear indicator that the underlying ideals will remain preserved, however. If history has shown anything, it is that cultural movements lose substance either through a

28 The lottery, television award shows such as American Idol, and mainstream movie icons are all carrots which keep the middle and lower classes on the treadmill, ("you too could be a winner!")

29 A friend of mind summarized the mentality of American 'business-think' rather well: "if you're smiling when you close a deal, you're not fucking the person over- even if you are." The almost cultish corporate mentality which puts all weight on what a thing *seems* rather than what it *is* culminates in a complete lack of responsibility for the repercussions of corporate actions.

30 On the opposite side of the scale, we have examples such as the Nazi's.

shallowing of their core values until they become an empty, parroted aesthetic, as with most musical scenes and their transition from content to fashion; or the movement's core values are so emphasized that the meaning within them is lost through literalism, as we can see in the history of the world's major religions. The early Christian Gnostic traditions of "love thy neighbor," "all is one," and the agape orgies were replaced by the Roman Orthodoxy and the authority provided through the union of State and Religion. The hippies traded in their sandals and beat up VWs for SUVs and overpriced birkenstocks. It oftentimes seems that succeeding *too well* can be the greatest curse to befall a movement, and it is a well-documented fact of cultural trends that when the pendulum swings far in one direction, it often turns into its opposite without having the common decency to wait to swing back the other way.

Civilization is not synonymous with community. Rather, civilization *demand*s community. It requires it, and where it is increasingly absent, as in modern urban centers, civilization regresses to barbarism. Gangs are one of many signs that this process is underway, a de-mythologized tribalism which attempts to serve the same function as the men's initiatory societies which we see in nearly every documented tribal society.³¹ Without a mythological foundation of any sort, these groups serve precisely the opposite function that they are meant to, exasperating the malaise rather than creating a micro-community.

Civilization has more requirements than just this one. As groups or nations increase in size, a sacrifice must be made, either on the part of the individual or the group. This has been the crucial dilemma, the Gordian knot, that civilization has wrestled with since its inception, and it exists in a micro-level within cultural, artistic, and corporate endeavors. There is no right answer, but, no matter what society or time we live in, we all must live with the repercussions of our answer.

Though admittedly reductionistic, the contrasting examples of Communism and Capitalism³² demonstrate this point well. To that point: Capitalism leads to a failure towards the good of the group of the needs of the individual, whereas the opposite is true with Communism.³³ Most interesting, if we are to look at these two systems as the opposite ends of a dialectic in a Hegelian sense, the ultimate outcome of either, at their most extreme, is fascism, even if the face of Corporate (that is to say, Capitalist), and Communist fascism appear different.

The conflict between Capitalism and Communism is like the warring of two different personalities;

31 See Eliade's *Rites And Symbols of Initiation* for countless examples of this.

32 The form of Capitalism we are speaking of is best exemplified by the Corporate Capitalism which grew out of 1950's Post-war optimism in America. It would appear that European socialist Capitalism is of a slightly different sort. As it is relatively young, it is difficult to say what fruit it will bear.

33 Simply looking at recent debacles in the Capitalist system of Enron, and the countless other examples of executives fleecing their own companies and running, the crash of the US housing market in 2007-2008 due to variable rate mortgages, the economic and cultural effects of outsourcing and even the looming ecological crisis for examples of the Capitalist side of this.

both with virtues and flaws, but both only able to see the vices of the other, and their own virtues. To truly understand the character of a person, a nation, a religion, we need only look to their demons, their outcasts, and their enemies.

We will explore the micro-fascisms which can arise from this dialectic in coming sections, but first I would like to discuss another myth: that of the artistic movement, or, more specifically, the counterculture myth.

CHAPTER 8 of *The Immanence of Myth*.

Deconstructing Our Myths:

Excursis: The Myth of a Counterculture.

By James Curcio.

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A Brief Jaunt Through Psychedelic History

Even by definition, the idea of counterculture expresses itself as a negation. It is arguable if a counterculture exists at all, or could possibly exist, without the myths of the mainstream. As such it is a product of the market, and exists only insofar as it serves a function within that market. Yet there are ideals which once were a part of various vibrant (if short-lived) countercultures, and these rest close to the true heart of the creative process: self-expression, freedom, irreverent humor, an element of egalitarianism mixed liberally with pirate capitalism, and a sense of pragmatic community. These ideals are quickly lost in such movements however, oftentimes as soon as they gain a true pulpit. They become toothless political movements, utilizing a social currency of cool-points, self-defeatism, sprinkled liberally with pointless elitism and a side of Who Gives A Fuck?

“Any element of punk, underground, beatnik, hippy, psychedelic, straight-edge, or occult culture will be co-opted the moment the shtick becomes profitable.”

Let's begin with a quintessential *mainstream* icon of the branded counterculture: *The Matrix*. Yes, even as an example it's a cliché, and that's part of my ultimate point. Here's a framed sketch of the first movie: in the scenes where Keanu Reeves isn't desperately attempting to recall his lines, it is a slick take on the alienation most suburban American youth feel, packaged within the same epistemological skepticism wrestled with by Descartes in the 17th century. Taken out of the cubicle and into the underworld, we witness the protagonist “keeping it real” by eating mush, donning co-opted fetish fashion,³⁴ and fighting an army of identical men in business suits in slow motion. The movie superimposes the oligarchic and

³⁴ Yet another example of how this process works. Shortly after the release of the Matrix fetish sheik was suddenly all the rage in the magazines, whereas before it still remained part of an oft-maligned underground.

imperialist powers-that-be in the world over the adolescent's authority figures. A successful piece of marketing- you can be sure no one collecting profits off of points or licensing deals had any misgivings about “the man.”

This is not to point an accusatory finger, but rather to point out the very nature of “counter culture.” As Yogi Bhanjan put it, “money is as money does.” The question is how you utilize or leverage the potential energy represented by that currency. Hard nosed books on business such as Drucker’s *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* say exactly the same thing, in a less epigrammatic, Yoda-like way: profit is not a motive, it is a means. Within our present world economic paradigm, without profit, nothing happens. Game over.

Any element of punk, underground, beatnik, hippy, psychedelic, straight edge, or occult culture will be co-opted the moment the shtick becomes profitable. It doesn’t matter that these ideologies have little in common. It is the fashion or mystique that gets sold. When all an ideology really boils down to is an easy to replicate aesthetic, how could they not? “Cool” is what customers pay a premium for, along with the comfort of a world with easy definitions and pre-packaged, harmless rebellions. Psychedelic and straight edge can share the same rack in a store if the store owner can co-brand the fashions, and people can brand themselves “green” through their purchasing power without ever leaving those boxes or worrying about the big picture. Buy nothing day, AdBusters, etc. ad nauseum all utilize this principle.³⁵ (None of this, of course, is to say that this purchasing power in-and-of-itself is a “bad” thing. More on that in a moment.)

Though this didn't start in the 1960's, there we have one of the first instances of the mix of mass marketing and manufacturing and the zeitgeist of the counter culture. The second that psychedelic culture gained a certain momentum, Madison Avenue chewed it up and spit it out in 7up ads. This was used to sell these “psychedelic clothes” to a wider market. When people bought those hip clothes to “make a statement,” whose pockets were they lining? It’s a revolving door of product tie-ins, and it all feeds on the

35 *All you read and
Wear or see and
Hear on TV
Is a product
Begging for your
Fatass dirty
Dollar*

–Hooker With a Penis, Tool.

Those who position themselves as extreme radicals within the counter culture framework merely disenfranchise themselves through an act of inept transference, finding anything with a dollar sign on it questionable. To this view, anyone that’s made a red cent off of their work is somehow morally bankrupt. This mentality can only end one way: they will wind up howling after the piece of meat on the end of someone else's string, working by day for a major corporation, covering their self-loathing at night in tattoos, and body-modifications they can hide. That is, unless they lock themselves in a cave or try to start an agrarian commune. For my part, I welcome the Luddites to live amongst the chickens, I simply have no capacity for it, let alone interest. Two weeks at Burning Man may be fun, but try doing it for a year and chances are you’ll come back telling me what hell is like.

needs of the individual, embodied in a sub-culture.

Fashion embodies a state of mind, a culture. But it is not that culture. An example of this can be seen in Harley Davidson driving lawyers in their 40s. As the company rose to prominence in the 1920's and beyond, Harley Davidson developed its brand off of what they sold, functionally, yet in later years that became a shtick that was re-marketed to people that needed not an alternate form of transportation, but instead what Harley Davidson had come to “mean.” The bottom line here, as discussed previously: we live in a culture where appearances count for a lot more than reality.

Despite popular opinion, effective marketing is not about outright manipulation. It is about meeting people halfway. For example, Yoga was boiled down from a very demanding esoteric practice with a rich and complex ideology behind it into something any housewife can do. These housewives were looking for a lifestyle change, a way to stay healthy and feel good. This was provided to them in an effective, albeit diluted, package. They wouldn't have been gotten into the Yoga baby-pool if it wasn't packaged in a way that catered to their needs and beliefs. Yet, at least at the moment, those more rich and intricate ideologies behind Yoga still exist, and they can be sought out.

All products and their associated myths, (people in advertising speak fairly openly about developing the “story” of the brand, which is the brand's myth), have to find a home within the lives and thoughts of the market. If people demand organic products, companies will meet that demand. Though the proliferation of Yoga, organic food, specialty food products, high quality imports, and the like are being supplied to an increasing degree by the “evil empire,” it is also a sign that consumers have much more power in their hands than they realize. In fact, within the market framework, they have *all the power*. They just don't realize it, and often don't seem to have the willpower or where-with-all to wield it.³⁶

Instead, many people live as shells to various corporate myths because they quietly choose to. If your life revolves around what people think about you, how the shoes you wear define you as a person, or which line of body spray is most likely to get you laid, you've turned yourself into a patsy. The only way out of this cycle for the consumer is to take control of their choices. The only way out for the myth-maker is to create, and forget about trying to be original.

People don't set the artistic trends by *trying* to set the trends. They are genuine to what gets them in the vitals. Fight long enough and it will find its market, or you will die trying. Even if only one other person

36 Along with that power, of course, comes a responsibility that most consumers are unwilling to take on. For instance, though it is perhaps easy to complain about the quality of Hollywood movies today, if people stopped going to see them, Hollywood would very quickly work to develop a new formula. If people recognize that, good or bad, within a capitalist society your dollar is possibly an even stronger form of “voting power” than what is exercised in the voting booth. How many Americans complain about Walmart and then go there the next day?

reads and really absorbs your words, you haven't lost. You only lose if you give up, and let your identity get co-opted because it's easier that way.

(For those interested, you can read a great deal more about this anti-advertising advertising trend in a book called *Nation of Rebels* by Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter: [Article](#).)

Innovation and Originality

It is true, the so-called counter culture is full of underground posers, sharpening their sticks for the coming revolution against an opposition that doesn't exist, artistes who haven't done a lick of real artistic work in a decade, who use their supposed underground artistic cred to get them in bed with whomever they can scam, would-be rock stars that think they are evolving music by turning it into a vapid fashion show, and old school DIY punks who haven't yet realized that their ideological stance, though noble in its way, simply limits them.

But there are also daring innovators and experimenters within all of these fields and more, who only really give a damn about *the work*. The posturing, the politics, the bullshit be damned.

These innovators I'm speaking of are the people who push their own boundaries, and the boundaries of the culture around them enough that they are simply classified as "counterculture" or "revolutionary" because the culture, and the media, doesn't really know what to make of them. (My hope is, you could very well be one yourself.)

These creators are the people that the fashionista Counterculture du jour will forever be trying to play catch-up with, without necessarily even realizing it. When something has been branded as a movement, most of these people have moved on.

However, let's be clear: originality is not a requirement of innovation. They aren't inventing these things *ex nihilo*. Their ideas, their art, and their rhetoric is and has always been built on what has come before. This isn't to say that their posthumously declared "movements" are not unique, because they are. But there is a lineage, and there is a tradition, no matter how fragmented it may seem to the outside observer.

It is to my mind a great loss that the practice of mentorship under accomplished artists has mostly died out in the past century. Not only does it keep the lineage of a cultural perspective alive, it also fosters a familial aspect of community that has, at least in my experience, mostly been removed from the artistic process. The closest we seem to have is the revolving door found in art schools and universities, which doesn't provide the time or often the one-on-one relationship required to really bring about the benefits of

mentorship. It is also interesting that in our society, like with smoking pot, college is one of the only places where “experimenting with” art is condoned. Though many bad artists may be weaned from their aspirations in the “real world,” just as many or more with real potential are driven to other occupations which they may be poorly suited to.

This idea of “originality” as a primary indicator of the value of something is perplexing. It is the vitality of a piece, it’s ability to strike the heart or the mind, and wring things out of us we didn’t even know we had in us, which speaks to me as “original.” But the elements: the story, the medium, or even the components of the piece itself could have been used a thousand times before. So what? This is equally true in business, where the true innovators take something that’s being done, and figure out how to do it better, or more efficiently. Attempts at “true originality” usually result in bizarre and often useless gizmos that at the end of the day do several incompatible things poorly and nothing well. (Anybody remember the Nokia N-Gage?) The art of the collage or montage demonstrates what we all do as thinkers, as painters, as poets, or as scientists. The message of the collage approach is clear enough: do not be afraid to show and honor your influences, and at the same time, don’t be afraid to break those idols.

Innovation comes from the fact that each person is unique: our observations, our experiences are our own. We cannot but be original if we are brave enough to be true to that, if by original we mean “vital” and “genuine,” and throw out this idea of creativity occurring in a vacuum. Nothing is more poseur artiste than the desperate drive to create originality for its own sake, without putting your voice, your interest, your passion first. Finally, it isn’t about whether a story has been told a hundred times, it’s about how you tell it, and how you live it.

Myths of The Artist and The Scene

It is undeniable that there is a real value in a fringe, in an underground, in a community. Even in a concrete way, this ever-changing, forward thinking movement provides something valuable that a healthy culture at large could not do without– they challenge the status quo, they bring in new ideas from the outside. Most importantly, they create living myths.

Let me be clear: a movement, a specific sub-culture, is *itself* based upon a myth. You may find people proclaiming to be a part of such a movement, I have also seen them pop into and out of existence all over the place, but you’ll never find an absolute, concrete demonstration of what that sub-culture is said to embody. A movement is an ideal which holds the lure of total freedom, a sweet taste that often quickly sours on the tongue, which is nevertheless integral, and indispensable to the artistic spirit. Like any good

myth, or art itself, there's a definite value in it, and there is a kind of truth in it, even if it is also a lie in a literal sense.

There are several layers of this myth building. There is, first, the myth of there being a particular movement, such as the Beats. Like a corporate entity, this movement develops a brand identity. I can say, "the Beats," and most people even vaguely aware of American art and literature know what I'm talking about. Think about that a moment. Here are separate artists, living separate lives. Sure, they may have been friends, and they influenced one another. But this idea of "the Beats." That was branding on Keruac's part, plain and simple. Like most successful branding, or myth-building, though the "in-crowd" surely had a hand in it, most of it came about over time from the outside. Perhaps, more than anything else, people just needed a name to call them by, and it stuck.

They borrowed from jazz at that time, from the culture and politics at that time; none of it was "original" in that sense, but it was all unique. From this melting pot of experience, personality, and social context a group identity forms, and it might do our more recent would-be underground movements some good to remember that if you do everything else right, and have a cohesive community of vital people who have the means to produce their work, this happens all on its own. You needn't brand before you have an identity.

Then there is the myth of the personalities, for example, the anecdotes about Burroughs, Kerouac, Ginsberg, and so on, which also helps perpetuate the myth of the movement. This isn't to say that "William Tell routine" did or didn't happen, but as it moves into the realm of myth, it ceases to matter.

Then, finally, there is the myth contained in the individual works themselves, unique for each artist or group of collaborators, but which would in no way exist as they do without the group as a whole living, growing, arguing, fucking, and ultimately dissipating and dying as they did.

I talked quite a bit about the role of art and myth in "Living The Myth: Creating Meaning In A Cultural Void," which was first published in *Generation Hex* (Disinformation) and became the basis of the first two sections of this book. I don't mean to rehash that material here, but to get at the meat of the counterculture as myth, I have to talk about these things again to provide context, if in a slightly different light. Myths help us understand ourselves, our motivations, our fears, our hopes, our desires; they help us explore the nature of our existence without for a moment being (necessarily) historically accurate, or objectively true.

The value that myth provides is demonstrated, first off, in the fact that it has been with us since the birth of civilization: as previously discussed, myth is a symptom of language. The myths, art, and religions of antiquity sprung into existence together, and only over time did they come to be viewed as separate.

Myths and art, still nearly inseparable terms so far as I can tell, provide a distorted mirror for us to regard ourselves in. We see ourselves, but in a new light, the best artists showing us greater existential truths through the distortion or even complete abandonment of empirical truths. Artist, and the myths they weave from their own lives, thus point our eyes upon ourselves, both as individuals and as a culture, in a new way.

It is, just from this historic precedent, a self evident fact that myths speak to our humanity; they convey meaning. Since a very early age this was always clear to me. Even as a youth I remember staring at the television in befuddlement as documentaries would attempt to discover the supposed “historic truth” of a myth. Did giants actually walk the Earth before the time of King Arthur’s court? How did Noah manage to get every species of animal aboard a single ship?

These are the wrong questions to ask, and for the wrong reasons. Myths speak to the narrative, the qualitative, to the emotional side of us which quite simply need grand stories and images for us to relate ourselves to. It is psychological nourishment, and cultures that are devoid of it suffer for it. Such a thing could hardly be called a culture at all.

Enriching The Soil

It is quite apparent that fringe political movements, which for instance liberate the workers from wage slavery or develop alternative and sustainable methods of energy, communication, or commerce may appear more essential in the coming years than the mere development and disbursement of myths or art movements. However, all of these developments are knitted together. We cannot, in fact, have one without the other. As was stated in the first chapter:

“There is a common misconception, especially within the capitalistic myth, that art and philosophy are useless endeavors— at best mental exercises, at worst, activities for criminals and dilettantes. They forget that all of the great periods in human history have occurred side-by-side with quantum leaps in the arts and philosophy. It is impossible, and irrelevant, to definitively argue which came first. Art and philosophy, without trade, commerce, and application, are sterile and masturbatory. Similarly, trade and commerce are brutish and myopic when not applied with the sensibility that comes from in-depth philosophical and artistic debate. All are crucial to evolution, but only when applied together.”

Artists and thinkers are neither engendered nor supported for the value they can produce within other sectors of the economy. This is partially because this value, both in being qualitative, and in being a part of a *systemic* benefit, is difficult if not impossible to evaluate. That is a valid problem, as there is a meaningful distinction between advocating the arts, and a free ride.

But that isn't really the cause, at least not entirely. Most don't recognize this benefit at all. What is worse, social and economic systems don't engender it. The arts are seen as a nuisance, with endowments shrinking every year. (Even if this wasn't the case, the parameters and requirements for artistic grants are so specific and oftentimes so complicated and arcane that they make Heidegger seem plainspoken.) In a country where scientific research is most enfranchised when it can be used to make bombs, and the Department of Defense budget exceeds what is spent on the entire rest of the country, this comes as no large surprise.

Yet, for this as well, we all suffer as a result.

Requirements of a Movement

In revealing the nature of the counter culture myth, we also have to explore the myth of the artist as a unique and individual creator, slaving away in solitude, because this doesn't seem to line up with the history of art. Nor does it make a whole lot of sense for the myth-makers to be working in isolation, given the cultural significance of myth itself.

It is true that the unique perspective of a genuine, engaged outsider is part of what gives art its teeth. The revolution comes from listening to your experience, everything else be damned; the necessary compromise comes in learning how to play well with others without putting a pair of scissors in their eye.

In other words, for a movement to have integrity, each individual must be true to themselves above all else, yet for that to come about, we need solidarity of purpose. This is the dilemma. Creators need one another, for critique, for diversity, for sustainability. They need each other to build a myth of a "scene." You needn't agree about anything else, but without an alignment of collective and mutual best interest, a movement, a commune, a culture cannot come to be. It will collapse in on itself before it attains any sort of critical mass. This seeming paradox is part of what keeps many creative individuals disenfranchised, biting at each others ankles: they're arguing about the wrong things, and focusing their energy and attention in the wrong place. Movements only occur when people learn to work together towards common goals, to hell with the politics.

Such groups require no closed manifestos, no party lines, no armbands. What is needed is space to meet up and share ideas and collaborate, a means of making the relevancy of their work evident outside the insular and seemingly elitist circles that form around such groups, and the ability to eat without completely shilling the underlying premise or making other creative prerequisites impossible. In the words of the intentionally maligned Aleister Crowley (a counter culture figure himself if ever there was one), "man has

the right to live (and love) by his own law."³⁷ Last but not least, they require time, and colossal dedication.

I have personally worked towards such ends, and have even at times been part of such groups. The question worth asking is not what we can imagine, but what we can realize.

There Is No Movement; Apply Within

And there we have it. As in many times in the past, there is a strong and demonstrable need for creative movements and cultural revolutions that the culture at large may neither recognize, understand, nor support. All these facts do not mean that you should not, or can not, bring it about. Supposing this is a course that speaks to you, as it does to me, barring bad luck and the "acts of God," the only real barrier is in ourselves, in the forms of egotism, laziness, isolation, a lack of vision, planning, or making the wrong compromise.

We have no need for a counterculture, an ultraculture, or any other movement so long as it is for the sake of fashion, so long as we hobble ourselves or one another or use elitism or ideological disagreements as excuses that keep us from getting something done. Nor do we have any use for these things if they are anything but a means to an end which realizes the common and manifest goals of its members. It doesn't matter if you consider yourself a Pagan, a Christian, or a Muslim; a plumber, an artist, or an information architect. That is, so long as we can mutually find the fulcrum point of a common ground, and a common good, to lift us both up with. If, on the other hand, we both define ourselves as artists, but can find no such leverage, we'd probably be better off going our own ways. We can have our ideological arguments over tea; there is no ideology in my mind which trumps someone being a genuine, open-minded,

37 1. Man has the right to live by his own law--

to live in the way that he wills to do:

to work as he will:

to play as he will:

to rest as he will:

to die when and how he will.

2. Man has the right to eat what he will:

to drink what he will:

to dwell where he will:

to move as he will on the face of the earth.

3. Man has the right to think what he will:

to speak what he will:

to write what he will:

to draw, paint, carve, etch, mould, build as he will:

to dress as he will.

4. Man has the right to love as he will:--

"take your fill and will of love as ye will,

when, where, and with whom ye will." --AL. I. 51

5. Man has the right to kill those who would thwart these rights.

"the slaves shall serve." -- Aleister Crowley, *Liber OZ*, AL. II. 58

passionate person, and no party line agreement can provide reparations if they are not.

Revolution, or evolution for that matter, isn't going to be found in a common manner of dress, speech, or ideology. If it is found at all, it will come in the chance meeting of equals in this wasteland that we call the world, and the work they do to water the desert until it flowers.

When any counter culture gets big enough, it gets co-opted by a "Major." If there is any value in a "counterculture" it is in a core ideology which cannot be replicated, cannot be sold. As I said, it is the trappings and mystique which get marketed and sold. So if you have it in you, and shooting from the hip is getting old: make a shtick. Make it huge. Sell it off to the highest bidder. Sell out without "selling out."

And use that to build something wonderful.