

RNC Update Number 4: Action Bardo

by Starhawk

I woke up this morning thinking about the Tibetan Book of the Dead, how it guides you through all the various hells that the spirit can travel through after death. It seemed we were trapped in some sort of action hell of plans that just wouldn't come together and decisions that just couldn't get made, and huge uncertainties. But perhaps that was just a reaction to an evening spent under the red gaze of the media.

Monday night we did the anarchist panel. I spent the day putting together the press packets, lining up our press release and articles on "Are You an Anarchist? The Answer May Surprise You." (You can see the whole thing on www.anarco-nyc.net) Brush and Yvonne made the press calls: we wanted to make the point that anarchists are not about chaos but about organizing, so we needed to be organized. We had eight speakers, and Eric Laursen as the moderator. Cindy Millstein began. She's a very brilliant and serious theorist who once had the misfortune to be locked up with the Pagan Cluster in a mass arrest. She suffered through our 2 AM group trance and 5AM yoga session, the belly dance class, the radical cheerleading lesson, and the spiral dance, with good grace. Actually, to make this simple here is the speakers' list from our press packet:

1. Kazembe Balagoon is a writer/teacher/activist living in the Bronx. Currently he is working on a group of essays entitled "Queering the X: James Baldwin, Malcolm X and the Third World."
2. David Graeber, professor of anthropology at Yale University and author of "Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology" (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004).
3. Ynestra King, anarcha and ecofeminist, co-author of "Dangerous Intersection: Feminist Perspectives on Population, Environment, and Development." She taught for many years at the New School for Social Research and has been a Visiting Scholar at Rutgers University and Columbia University.
4. Cindy Milstein teaches at the Institute for Social Ecology, a board member of the Institute for Anarchist Studies, and co-organizer of the annual Renewing the Anarchist Tradition conference. She writes for Arsenal magazine.
5. Father Frank Morales is an Episcopalian priest at St Mark's Church in the Bowery and an organizer with the Campaign to Demilitarize the Police.
6. Priya "Warcry" Reddy is a filmmaker, journalist, poet and environmental activist from New York whose work confronts the abuses of corporate globalization.

7. Hanon Reznikov, director of the Living Theatre, an anarchist performing group in existence for fifty years.
8. Starhawk, author of "Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising" (New Society, 2002) and veteran of progressive movements, who is deeply committed to bringing the techniques and creative power of spirituality to political activism.

We were perhaps heavy on the intellectuals, but the panel was quite impressive.

Ynestra King is an old friend of mine, one of the women who pioneered the concept of ecofeminism, who is now a single mom with mobility problems. When we were planning the panel, she told Yvonne that she was the anarchist from the PTA, and Yvonne thought she was referring to some socialist sectarian group she had never heard of. Ynestra spoke very eloquently about anarchism and feminism and everyday life. David Graeber talked about how anarchists actually believe in those things we learned in kindergarten, like sharing, and not hitting, and using your words. And then we grow up and are suddenly supposed to accept that the world is a cruel and cynical place. Democrats blow people up. Republicans blow people up. Anarchists don't actually blow anybody up—in fact, we oppose it, so why are we the terrorists? Frank Morales talked about Christian pacifism, Kazembe Balagoon talked about anarchism as an inspiration in the third world, Hanon announced that the Living Theater is coming back to New York, and read a poem, and Warcry—ah well, Warcry said a bit more about Jeffrey 'Free' Luers burning SUVs than maybe was strictly necessary in this particular press conference—but then, he is in jail for twenty three years for a crime that hurt no one at all, (except perhaps the insurance company), while there's a man about to be nominated President who is personally responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of people.

I finished off by talking about violence, about how if you turn on your TV and look for something to watch with your three year old, all you'll find is images of people stabbing and shooting and killing each other and blowing each other up. How we're surrounded by images of violence and by the message that violence is the way to solve every problem, violence is power, violence is sexy. And we have an administration in place who tells us that violence is the correct response to every international problem, who responded to the tragedy of 911 by bombing and killing more people, and in this climate, it's a strange miracle that we have people who are willing to go up against the greatest concentration of violence the world has ever seen by singing and dancing and making puppets and putting our bodies in the way of its workings. We may arguably be insane—that's certainly a possibility I can't discount. But I talked about the things we had done, the gardens we left behind in Miami and Sacramento and San Francisco, the commitment we have to make a better world.

It all went quite well and we actually got some good stories from it and some good TV coverage, and to get positive press about anarchists in New York City at this moment is no small accomplishment.,

Having worked ourselves out of the lowest circle of hell we found ourselves in the Bardo of the Endless Consensus Meeting. We had a True Security Cluster meeting at the Art Space in Brooklyn to firm up the shape of our action, and we had our own NPR reporter

who is doing a story on anarchist decision making and wanted some sound tape of a consensus meeting. Well we had one, for about five hours. It wasn't the worst hell—it was, in fact, a very good meeting. Everyone was listening to each other with respectful attention (except for a short interlude there around hour four point five when I found myself slipping into a very deep state of meditation, so deep that I remember nothing whatsoever about our scenario decisions), After the meeting I had to rush off and grab another subway to another part of Brooklyn for a meeting to plan a meeting—the spokescouncil meeting which went on till almost ten, and then we had a long subway ride home that kept threatening to turn into another meeting about tomorrow's jail training and next summer's Witch camp for activists.

All the bardo hells are distractions from enlightenment. With my mind fixed firmly on the great, straight upward path, I will shut this computer down, (Shut it Down!) and go resume that deep, deep meditative state. Tomorrow we will find out the results of the UFPJ lawsuit to get the park as a rally site. Now, good night.

Copyright (c) 2004 by Starhawk. All rights reserved. This copyright protects Starhawk's right to future publication of her work. Nonprofit, activist, and educational groups may circulate this essay (forward it, reprint it, translate it, post it, or reproduce it) for nonprofit uses. Please do not change any part of it without permission.

Starhawk is an activist, organizer, and author of *Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising* and eight other books on feminism, politics and earth-based spirituality. She teaches [Earth Activist Trainings](#) that combine permaculture design and activist skills, and works with the [RANT trainer's collective](#), that offers training and support for mobilizations around global justice and peace issues.