

# Stop your activism and go get therapy



I'm sorry about the stupid clickbait headline. You shouldn't stop your activism, and I won't pretend to know what's best for you. It's just, I've been talking to a bunch of activist friends lately, who are pushing themselves right up to the brink of burnout. So I want to make the case for a kind of activism that is anchored in tenderness and gentle compassion: for yourself first, then for your comrades.

My argument rests on two big assumptions: we're in this for the long haul (like centuries long), and second, the most effective strategies for change are inaccessible to us while we're in fight-or-flight mode. Lemme explain:

# We're in this for the long haul

I believe those of us with more opportunities have a moral responsibility to do everything we can to alleviate suffering and bring about 'the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible'. As environmental, social and economic crises twist and tighten and reinforce each other, we feel the urgent need for change growing more intense by the day. We're crossing planetary boundaries Right Now. Fascists are rallying Right Now. Sexual violence is rupturing our communities Right Now. We need to take action and there's not a second to lose.

While we're facing urgent crises on all fronts, the roots of these crises are ancient. Patriarchy is at least as old as agriculture. Colonialism's might-makes-right logic pre-dates *homo sapiens*. I can imagine a world where everyone has enough to eat, but honestly I don't imagine I'll be alive when we get there. I really have to squash down my god-complex saviour-narrative supersized ego to admit that. None of us are likely to outlive violence, exploitation or oppression.

I mean **we are doing inter-generational work**. There's a question I've been stewing in for some time: *how do we set ourselves up to do this work for 500 years?* Here's some of the answers that have come up for me:

- **Acceptance**. Learning how to be okay in an insane world of horrors. That's a skill you can cultivate without losing your clarity of purpose.
- **Economics**. Networks of productivity & exchange that can meet our material needs while shifting power away from the world-eaters.
- **Child-rearing**. We need the next generation to be less traumatised and more able to rewrite the status quo. Many of us don't want to procreate, but there's already an oversupply of kids and an undersupply of compassionate care and liberating education.

- **Humility:** knowing that younger generations are going to see the world much more clearly than I can, just like I saw through the bullshit that my parents took for granted.
- **Revolutionary homemaking.** I don't mean to leave the world behind and create our own private paradise. But I think we should have occasional tastes of a world predicated on abundance of freedom and care.

*How do your priorities shift when you approach your activism as **intergenerational work**?*

So I think we need to go the long haul, and we need to have really super smart strategies that create big big change. So that's my second assumption:

## **The most effective strategies for change are inaccessible to us while we're in fight-or-flight mode.**

We live in dominator hierarchies, which (always partially, but quite convincingly) project a 2-D logic onto the world. This is essentially a monotheistic logic, with a super empowered authority at the top of a pyramid. This authority could be a person like God or Dad or Boss or Teacher, or it could be a depersonalised protocol, set of rules, or orthodoxy. Either way, if you are inside a context where there's a centralised source of truth & goodness, if all judgement, power, and approval stem from one root, then all of your behaviours can only be understood as "obedient" or "disobedient". While you're inside that frame, the fucking devious trick of it, is that you reinforce the 2-D logic whatever choice you make. History has shown that you can get a critical mass of people to disobey, and all that happens is you switch out

the dominator for someone new. You get a new dominator hierarchy with some different flavours.

There is a way out of this trick: it's about *subversion*, not confrontation. Subversion projects a different logic, it shift our actions and identities into a different context where the dominator is irrelevant. If there's one mantra that 21st centuries political activists need to internalise it's this: **negating the frame reinforces the frame** ([George Lakoff](#)). It's not about winning or losing at the game that's on offer, it's about inventing a new game altogether.

So how do we gain access to these deeply subversive strategies? I think their siblings are humour, creativity, compassion, faith, lateral thinking, mysticism, joy, and peace. We do not have access to these resources when we are in fight-or-flight mode, when our intelligence is made rigid by anger or anxiety. We need spaces to grieve, to rest, to heal, and then to **dream**.

## Dream a big dream with me

Let's do a little dreaming example. Maybe it helps to take a second to arrive into this present moment, this clean new untouched moment that we're about to enter. I'll meet you there. Take a breath. Feel your feet. Notice what your senses are doing right now. Hi!

Now we're here together, let's zoom off into the future. Maybe it's 50 years from now, maybe 500. We're in a future where misogyny, sexism, patriarchy and gendered violence don't exist any more.

When you're ready, come back to the present and help me to think about how did we get from here to there, what phases did we go through?

My partner Nati has a great answer to this question: collective grieving. In her imagination, the way we got out beyond patriarchy, was that first men sat and lis-

tened to the pain that it has done to women. Not just listening in the abstract, but allowing themselves to empathise, to feel a little taste of that pain, just a little homeopathic dose, but enough to feel it *in their guts*. These men sat quietly and paid attention and they listened with their hearts and they said "I feel you. I understand. I'm so sorry." And they cried together.

And then, then there was another phase. Once there were enough men who had demonstrated they were trustworthy, some new circles started to form. These little gatherings were made up of people with all different combinations of gender and sexuality. In those circles, they grieved again, not just for the women, but for the harm that patriarchy had inflicted on all of them.

Then, after that recovery, after those relationships were healed and restored to harmony, then those groups demonstrated how much better life is when you are free of the dominator logic. They would go out sometimes on protests, they helped to rewrite laws, they went to the frontlines to obstruct violence with their bodies. But then they went home and rested in the deep web of support of their nourishing communities. They were restored and renewed by the queer poly fully automated luxury commune they called Home.

Haha okay back to earth.

I know a lot of my activist friends right now are at the brink of burning out. I love you & I know you are doing what you need to do. I know I'm only thinking in this way because my absurd level of privilege keeps me mostly ignorant of the horrors you are dealing with every day.

Still, I truly believe your best work comes after healing. And yeah my dumb headline says 'get therapy', but I don't mean 'go to a psychotherapist' necessarily. I mean, weave your way into therapeutic relationships. [Emmi's latest post about Radical Feelz Circles](#) has some great suggestions for how to do that with a couple of friends. You might find some ideas in [my last post too](#).

But please, please show compassion to yourself first. We need you for the long haul. We need you soft and open. If you do need to go to the battle lines, please make sure you've got someone back home to run the bath and pat your head. And if this post has just made you feel sadder and lonelier, call me okay.

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