An anarchist guide to ... action

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An Anarchist Guide To... Action

1. Action is the art of antistatecraft

It means opposing the deployment of DEFEAT as an instrument of rule and all that fearful government involves. Proudhon said it best:

"Is action about power? Yes. Spiritual action casts POWER away. Duty? All it means is that action is motivated by a desire not to feel compelled to lie or wrongdoing by inactivity (tacit consent). The power to act is driven by passion. Statecraft warns against passion: Machiavelli says love is fickle and that hate makes rulers vulnerable. Antistatecraft embraces passion as a route to ethical action. What else is rage if not some insight of injustice? Your rage might be kept in sight, inspected, spied upon, directed, law driven, numbered, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, estimated, valued, censured, commanded. It involves a lot of other things, too. Take, for example, the Prince, Leviathan, possessions, monopoly, capital, patriarchy, colonisation... they all depend on fear. Action then, is DIRECT DARRER.

2. Is DIRECT.

Barber How and his friends once said action was about putting up the BARRICADE: the ubiquitous, permanently temporary obstruction to be erected, not especially in moments of crisis, but successively with each cultural shift, each fleeting moment of change, in order to keep reaction at bay. It speaks to the permanence of action and the balancing and re-balancing of forces through action.

3. What does action involve? Bakunin said:

"In order to destroy the existing order of society - it is up to us to set it on fire and to do it!"

4. DESTRUCTION!

About the irrepressibility of PROPAGANDA BY THE DEED and some worry that it seems to give permission to all kinds of self-regarding, self-aggrandising acts. It started off as a conscious raising tactic, based on confrontation. But it morphed into individual acts of violence and illegality. And of course, by the late 1960s, it was class struggle that people were talking about. But it also gave a sense of solidarity with others. Passions can be felt self-destructively, but once it's realised in action it becomes constructive, reaching to its source. Through being into creative, wilful practice, action involves both the consideration of the ability to better the condition of society and the willingness to own the rightness of the action — its ethics as a response to the wrong.

5. So, in what does action consist?

The answer is about anything that your ethics allows and that you are empowered to do. Is it right to ask, WHAT IS TO BE DONE? Yes, but not with a view to converting people to any particular political or social view. Emma Goldman's dictum about dancing and revolution is all about restating preconceived ideas about what action involves and refusing to conform to someone else's strategy. And that can be interpreted in different ways. One view is that the core of the doctrine of 'antistatecraft' means 'that it defies a goal and then allows any means as long as they support its realisation: every thing's ok as long as action is directed towards the goal's attainment. An opposing view is that the failure of the dialectic stems from the failure to properly specify the ends. This view says that it's only possible to decide what kinds of actions are consistent with goals once the goals have been agreed. If you're not agreed, what's to stop anyone from imposing their ideals on everybody else? The first point denies ends for fear that individuals are likely to be sacrificed for the greater good, the second says that setting the aims of action is essential in order to protect against their perversion or usurpation. The significant difference is the status that attaches to the idea of 'goals'. On the first view, the end is linked to an idea of history as a progressive, civilising or liberating force. Whether or not these involved in action know it, they are treated as players in a bigger game — bearers of oppression rightly deployed by experts or elites who understand the logic of history and so are confident about the benefits that action will bring (the breaking of gags, the like). The opposite pit this like: the French Revolutionaries called for the rights of man. They then cut off the heads of men. On the second, there is no ultimate good or progressive historical march: it's only philosophy, not real life. Because we don't accept that we're destined to consume omelettes, we have to decide what we want to eat, and then plan on the provision accordingly. So refusing to be incorporated in the ends that history is said to desicrate is only one response that we have to deal with despotic political philosophies. If I decide that there's no logic in history, that there are no stages through which struggle must move, no necessary advancement and that history is just what I or we can make it, then the potential power of any actions can equally be said to depend on my determination of my ends — as opposed to my refusal to take part in any discussion about what might be desirable.

6. NO GODS NO MASTERS

means that there are no absolute moral benchmarks to determine what ethical action might entail. Tolstoyans promote NONRESISTANCE TO EVIL as a form of resistance. The Free Art Collective says PROTEST IS BEAUTIFUL. Malcolm X promotes POETIC TERRORISM and TEMPORARY AUTONOMOUS ZONES. Colin Ward talked about the transformational potential of myriad newtopian experiments as well as squatting, subversion and strike action.

7. There is one proviso:

The MEANS MUST BE CONSISTENT WITH THE ENDS.

The politics of antistatecraft is about breaking free, resisting, experimenting and challenging norms and practices. We can't all do that, or do it all the time. We're more or less enmeshed in statecraft. But we all have breaking points and we can still interact and be inspired.