

Action and Response

Spring 2015

There has been an uproar, stemming from the logical and important critique of activism, that fears the reemergence of a civil disobedience ethic. On the other side of action, theoretically, sits ITS. The Individualists Tending Towards the Wild (ITS) are individuals who have sent bombs to numerous universities, professors, researchers, as well as journalists and non-profits in the name of wild human nature. ITS has its cut throat communiqués stylized to provoke anger and wrought with strands of logic pulled harshly and quickly together, making arguments that seem pointless to engage with. In its communiqués ITS, though contradictory at times, aims to be another theoretical bullet (as opposed to the actual bombs) against the plague of pointless property destruction and “sentimental environmentalism”. Swallowed in is indeed civil disobedience and all other actions that would seem trivial (including non-human targeted arson as they have specifically named ELF as a sentimental “group”) in the face of a bomb.

But how real are the differences from a strategical perspective? ITS has not aimed to disable areas of the grid or take out large swaths of data (no matter who they kill the cloud holds all). Though they have taken the most serious actions in terms of prosecution and state punishment have they nevertheless been culled by the plague of sentimentalism? Surely only the sentimental would play into the cultural idea of murder being the worst and most effective crime when there may be more effective non-murder focused tactics?

The answer seems obvious enough, of course they are drawn into a sentimental and fundamentally emotional reality when confronted with the daunting question of “what to do” in the face of a civilization gripping at the final fuels, the final predators, caught in the last series of pushes before a cascading and dynamic shift that will be more horrific than any mail bomb.

Civil disobedience, in particular Earth First! has been condemned in this supposed resurrection of demonized tactics, is not evil. The discussion between these

two tactics, though I don't think they are adequately described as "ends of the spectrum", is vital. ITS has made numerous dubious claims about the legitimacy of its targets, which have included establishment journalists and Greenpeace. They refuse to acknowledge when an attack goes awry, saying that an unintended casualty does nothing to deter their struggle for ego driven wildness. ITS opens themselves up for maximum prosecution but their obsession with Ted Kaczynski makes them zealots for the killing of humans with no desire to understand the inherent limitations of their tactic. This is not to make an argument that "they have become like that which they fight". My point here is to engage with our biases. Because something is more extreme does not make it more effective. We seem perfectly capable of criticizing civil disobedience, and I understand how easy that critique rolls off the tongue, but other tactics become immune from engagement, even more so as we turn to an egoist and radically subjective view of the world.

In this egoist turn away from our inherent sense of connectedness we see each action as existing in a bubble and the analysis of ITS among some, including the fine folks at Free Radical radio, has boiled down to ITS "destroying something that is ugly to them". This hollow and pointless analysis leaves us in a vacuous space filled with ambiguous meandering. The subjective nature of "destroying something ugly" can only lead to an ultimately moralistic view of the world where purged and un-purged egos sit apart from each other. Always purge your ego of every perceivable reified notion or that ego will be "tainted" by something or possibly, if you are a nihilist, everything. The ugly can become anything. With no grounding, no analysis, action departs from effectiveness. The analysis of civilization is left by the wayside as we search down pathways of logic devoid of the material culture which constructs our daily behavior. The struggle is isolated and subjectiveness takes the reigns as community becomes more and more irrelevant to our analysis.

Our self is a manifestation of experience and neurosis as well as conscious and unconscious absorption of ideas, senses, and communication. That this blurry matrix of self-realization or ego-actualization is a starting point for action seems, at best, unhelpful. Destroying something ugly is meaningless in and of itself, the world driven by ego is manifested in countless ways and the end point is left purposely undefined to such a degree that no one, not even the ones taking action, have any idea what sort of world they want. The contradictions develop quickly as the hyper consciousness of our "self" spins into an idea of subjectiveness that can only be described as pointless and, ultimately, if we are to believe the premise, completely unrelatable. If it is true that our subjective experience is all that matters then we can just turn to transhumanism to fulfill the goal of realizing our true self.

Analysis matters. Infrastructure matters. For action to be effective we must simply look at implications not divinate for one truth. There is no precedent for an ego driven world yet anarchists seem to think they can open up a portal to liber-

ation through a convoluted notion of a perceivable self that is a manifestation of a multitude of inputs both known and unknown, those in our consciousness and those not.

All actions are open to discussion. We can decide amongst ourselves which seem worthwhile and respect a large array. It isn't about drawing lines, it's about understanding where we are and where we want to go.

One could easily posit that me making such claims, or calling into question ITS tactics, is heretical and that to denounce such "productive" actions, while seemingly defending remnants of petty and "outdated" tactics, does nothing to enhance our level of praxis. All this is under the deluded supposition that one day we may just happen to stumble upon an answer of "what to do?" There is no shortage of prophets on the left and right spending countless hours trying to articulate a "rational strategy" that changes the world. The baseline lunacy of this claim is self-evident and, historically, easy to rebuke. Success stories of theory and tightly woven praxis are not in ample supply.

To intellectually beat down the one asking the question, or the one with the U lock, does not create or clarify our praxis. The negation of strategical techniques once and for all is simply about purity. This goes both ways.

There is of course plenty of room for debate and questions addressing these issues, particularly around the notions of violence, property destruction, and moralistic pacifism. But discussion and critiques cannot, by a matter of necessity and actuality, exist apart from action. This is why discussion on ITS is important, at least tactically. Addressing the philosophical musings of ITS is tantamount to addressing Ted K's take on anthropology, forever frustrating and never satisfying. What this says about the psychology of those who see humans as the only legitimate targets is something worth thinking about.

However, ITS is presenting a praxis of some sort and they are forthright about their immediate goals. We can dig into their formulations, we can actually discuss the implications of it from the perspective of what is currently happening. It would be easy to construct numerous ways to knock it down, feel as though we had philosophically kicked its ass and put the final word on "murder" as a tactic. As I read Black Seed I wonder what the reaction to an article titled "Two Steps Back: the Return of Murder in Ecological Resistance" would be. Didn't FC show us the abundant failure of a few (or one) murderous earth avengers mailing bombs? But for some reason, mostly aesthetic, there is a hesitation to make those claims. I see that as a good thing, we shouldn't be making blanket claims about tactics. But that hesitation does not extend, for reasons that are, again, mostly aesthetic, to civil disobedience. This is despite the fact that Earth First! has had some, albeit quite small in the scale of global civilization, successes protecting isolated areas. Of course there are serious strategical problems with saving isolated areas but it does

not follow that those areas are irrelevant or that I am not personally happy that they still exist in some less mediated state of wildness. All wild places matter. With 75% of the surface area of the earth under human control, influence or habitation it seems relevant to stop new areas from being taken over. If we want a future primitive, this may be one of the most important things happening. Wild spaces reappear fast but healthy ecosystems take time. Overall, however, this is a large scale failure, more is destroyed daily. While I appreciate the spaces “saved” there are several missing pieces and each Earth First! campaign can be looked at individually, something Black Seed does do. They make a blanket assertion in the article but truthfully it is a critique of select campaigns.

The point here is to address the way we view debating tactics and strategy in a largely theoretical vacuum. Theory and practice may very well be tied together but words, much like a sanctioned march, are ineffective at actualizing action in the here and now. The words may be more important than the march but to say that our theory can firmly define our praxis verges on a neo-Marxist argument that the people just need a rational argument, upon the perfect articulation revolution happens. The likes of Deep Green Resistance and the Revolutionary Communist Party have already found their perfect articulation in Derrick Jensen and Bob Avakian respectively, and look how far they have come! Action is tantamount to existing as a human, an agreement I share with the ITS articulation of being human, but there is often a chain of evasiveness in how we, as anti-civilization anarchists, address action. There are some decent and grounded reasons for this, prison among them, but the evasiveness needs to be acknowledged.

A program is hardly needed, a look to DGR solidifies this point. No one needs another “above ground” political apparatus dictating ideology with a “below ground” (that no one, in any circumstance, should ever admit to knowing about) committing actions which the “above ground” may or may not take credit for. This party-action structure has shown itself historically to be not only authoritarian but ineffective. Nonetheless, we can be more instructive about action when we talk, discuss, and confront. The discussion usually shifts around issues of legality and or violence. It may be more important to clarify what we want from actions and think about our goals.

I do not think ITS (or its contemporaries, Wild Reaction, Obsidian Point to name a couple) is harboring an effective strategy. This is less to say about the moral affect of those participating and more about the obviousness of their failure. Civilization still exists, the universities still exist, the papers, the environmental groups, even nanotechnology still exists. Worse off, they are expanding. So where are we left with this “destroy what is ugly to you” strategy? In the same place as the revolutionary as we can only possibly hope, in order for total destruction of the reified world, that there is a mass rising of egos motivated to destroy, in a nihilistic fash-

ion, all possible impediments to the ego. The self at the center of actions seems increasingly bizarre in cases of meticulous planning, particularly when that planning involves conspiracy to commit an act which may lead to significant, if not permanent, prison time.

Somewhere in the middle of this we have black bloc and other supposedly radical tactics loosely associated with the idea of “insurrection”. While helpful in many ways, and more often than not worth supporting, the idea of effectiveness hinges upon mass participation. While a move to lawlessness creates more opportunities for individuals and small groups the setting is exceedingly important and what we can say for ITS is that at least some planning is necessary to reach your short-term goal. Is that goal embedded in an overall strategy? A question worth asking, though the answer need not only be yes.

Liberating your individual person is a tiresome job and our concentration upon the fulfillment of our egos, even in their supposed and likely “union”, leads us to a strategy or pure self-determination destroying manifestations of ideas, with our very own idea that liberation will come from their destruction. The institutions will have their illusion shattered and then something will happen. The exciting nature of this seemingly unexplored space is liberating for a moment but does this radical strategy of waiting for the theoretical hammer to drop do anything?

I do believe there is an effective strategy, I know that it cannot be fully articulated for reasons that go beyond law. We can create massive disruptions and heed the destruction of wildness, both internal and external to ourselves and our families. The answers are far less complex than we would like to believe. Continuing to hype an insurrection coming any day, or supporting actions because of their ego liberating bent, as well as demonizing any of these actions including all civil disobedience is not generally helpful. We may harbor the day of insurrection and I do believe that the unexpected is possible, even likely in the face of our ultra-domesticated day to day, but ultimately the collapse of global civilization will not have its primary driver be an insurrection or mass revolt. The infrastructure and armies cannot continue if we wish for a world of wildness. This is undeniable. It may be necessary that consciousness shift but that does not mean that civilization will fall. To put it bluntly: I do not mourn the nano-tech scientist, I celebrate wild lands, and insurrection in the streets brings us each and collectively closer to touching experience, but civilization will exist as long as the material structure exists with the fuel to run it. The reality is simple, the implications are striking, but we are stuck celebrating ineffectiveness, rallying the masses, and diminishing any victories not deemed radical enough in methodology. The implications of a critique of civilization are widespread and in front of our faces. Let’s not forget them.

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