

On Having Something to Do

Sunfrog (Andy “Sunfrog” Smith)

2005

We tried dropping out, and we tried working in the factory. We tried teaching, and we tried going back to school. We tried organizing the workers, and we tried permitted protest marches. We tried passing leaflets to every passerby, and we tried wheatpasting every wall with provocative posters. We even tried nighttime guerrilla graffiti squads.

We tried growing all our own food, and we tried living off the grid. We tried email and websites and every interactive, interconnected, virtual hypermedia imaginable. We tried pirate radio and permitted radio and community access television.

We tried pacifism, and we tried self-defense. We tried stealing from the man, and we tried selling our labor to the highest bidder. We tried socialism, and we tried anarchism. And we tried every “ism” in between. We tried strikes, and we tried blockades. We tried silence, and we tried noise. We tried all of the above and nothing at all. And nothing fucking worked.

Nothing except the pact that tomorrow would be different, a pact written in the bond of strangers whose eyes met in recognition behind the barricades. Nothing except the poetry of her voice calling my name at 2am. Nothing except that dance party where we all stared at the sacred starlight and stayed up all night to see the sunrise. Nothing except that potluck dinner where every dish tasted like nectar and every argument led to a new revelation and an even better plan. Nothing except that toddler’s first steps on a cold October day.

The wide world is not as wild as we desire, and the ruling elite are even more demonic than first fathomed., And the “masses of regular people” are tired and worn and their allegiances torn between a hundred varieties of old time religion and common commodity fetishism. So hungry for something real, we’ll break bread with a guru at lunch and pie him for being a fraud before dinner.

Of course these are desperate times, but in a permanent culture of permanent crisis and catastrophe porn, when have the times been anything else? Some of us sold out our principles and voted for that dour-faced hypocrite from Massachusetts, and some of us have no principles to sell—we just do our best, day by day.

In the wake of the November election, a 25-year-old university student from Georgia drove to ground zero in lower Manhattan and took his own life with a shotgun. His closest friends and acquaintances shared the consensus, and their quotes make that clear: “I’m absolutely sure it’s a protest. I don’t know what made him commit suicide, but where he did it was symbolic;” “I see it as a political statement. He was so opposed to the war;” “I told his mother there are some people so sensitive and intelligent and passionate they don’t belong in the world the way it is today.”

Impressed by the drama of the action, I told some people the story. Whether pro-war or antiwar, the people seemed to feel the same. “That was stupid,” they said. Never an advocate of heroic martyrdom but knowing in my heart what that man felt that day, a suicidal zen nihilism suddenly didn’t seem so very strange to me. While I’m not suggesting we adopt suicide as a tactic, I’m equally unsure I’ve ever done anything as meaningful.

I stayed home from a protest today; I missed an opportunity to taunt the rulers and express my outrage at another injustice, because I didn’t want to leave this hollow and drive on the highway. Because I wanted to stay home and work on this essay about doing something.

Occasionally, people who read this journal seek us out and come to visit, wanting to meet some of the collective members who have advocated anarchy for so many years. Sometimes people are shocked to see how “normal” we are, shocked to learn that many of the collective members have regular paying jobs, houses with mortgages, even cars.

This dream that wakes me up, this dream that fuels my days: it’s not about whether we have it all figured out and have growing in our bellies the key to social revolution. It’s not so much about the answers—but the questions. It’s not that we have the solution—but that we want to understand the problem and undermine the power. We’ve tried so many things, and we’ll try many of them again.

On any given day, we might have something to do, some bold collective action to render all past actions mere rehearsals for the revolutionary dawn. And then, we might have nothing to do but drink and dance and ask you, our readers, “What are you going to do?”

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