

# **Basic contributions to the discussion about actions and revolutionary struggle**

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## 1. Introduction: theory and practice

“Direct action”, in the particular sense of the destructive and illegal attack, is a method of struggle widely used inside our political milieu. It’s not new at all, for it connects with the tradition of violence that has always been linked to the anarchist movement and, on the other hand, was revalued from theoretical frames with a strong influence in Barcelona these last years. So, the actions of this kind are rooted in the political identity in which we recognize ourselves. And precisely because of that, we feel the need to permanently question this tool, of situating it in a global reflection that allows us a more incisive practice, more coherent with a revolutionary perspective and more effective in the achievement of its objectives. A real practice able to go more further than inertia, than activism (to do just for doing) and identity fetishes. We have the feeling that the questions “What do we want to achieve when we go through such kind of initiative?” or “What role play sabotages in a specific situation and in the general context of the struggle?”, are, very often, vaguely answered with simplistic slogans, with a not so thorough approach, or even with a silence that puts in evidence the debility of our positions. Having in account the consequence that can come from this practice, we think that the absence of thought about the issue is not acceptable. In the same way that a theory that is inapplicable in practice doesn’t serve us, also doesn’t suit us a practice that we cannot intellectualize, that we cannot express through a clear political reflection. This text is our positioning and our modest contribution to the needed collective debate about sabotage actions.

## 2. Just one more tool

We think that the first thing to do is to locate the practice in its corresponding place inside our global perspective. To us, taking this kind of actions is not an unquestionable principle, nor the ultimate goal of our practice. In few words: our principles are the libertarian ones (rebellion against domination, reciprocity, horizontality, autonomy, mutual aid in human relations) and our goal is the development of these principles in the reality of which we are a part of, in order to ignite a revolutionary process that is able to put an end to this society characterized by domination, exploitation and generalized abuse. Inside this so schematic frame, actions are means, a tool that in a specific situation or context can be useful to the development of our revolutionary project.

When we stop seeing the option of “attack” as a means, and start to see it as a principle or goal, starts a distortion of our perception and practice. Distortion specially visible at the hour of analysing all those political and social phenomenons that surround us. Because we use attack as a principle to measure everything, instead of assessing the experiences capturing their complexity, having in account all the elements that compose them and putting them in relation with revolutionary perspective, we reduce all reflection to a basic dichotomy: “there’s attack, therefore it’s good” – there’s no attack, therefore “is not good” or “is not so good”. The demonstrations where “nothing happens”, the expressions that don’t explicitly call for violent attack, the meetings, the discussion, ... are despised in contrast with riots, the incendiary propaganda or sabotages. This simplistic way of thinking, that trivialises any kind of analysis, bases itself in the fetishism of violence, in the idea that violence is a value in itself. And nevertheless, violence doesn’t delimit anything, its absence doesn’t infallibly shows one initiative to be reformist or reactionary, nei-

ther its presence makes it revolutionary. Sabotage and violent methods have been historically used by many and diverse political subjects (from fascists to apolitical syndicalists, passing by ethnicist independentists without a lot of social pretensions) that don't have anything to do with a revolutionary struggle line. The riots – that sometimes we exalt uncritically without yet knowing their true characteristics – can perfectly have motivations and central contents that are very far away (due to being reactionary, racist, sexist, or subordinated to Mafia structures, etc) from the image of revolt that we try to project in them.

Regarding revolutionary violence, it rarely occurs as an isolated happening, but rather it represents concrete moments of much wider phenomenons, that involves very diverse forms of organization and social and political action. To think, for example, the last bursts that happened in the last general strikes as something born spontaneously, is to be seriously mistaken. The road blocks, the massive sabotage, the clash with the police, the looting or the smashing of banks and corporations, are the eruption of social processes matured by anger and catalysed by a previous and constant work of communication, organization and agitation. We cannot deny the great value of spontaneity, but also that much of the “chaos” that we see around us is, in part, an organized chaos. On the other hand, the attacks that we conducted as small action groups, outside the massive contexts, are as well linked to a wider whole. Or perhaps would be possible the existence of these groups without previous diffusion, without the political broth, without all the transmission work of ideas and practices that feed their activity, without the spaces where the comrades meet each other...?

To stop having the destructive actions as principle means to lower them down from their hierarchical position, to place them at the same level as all the other struggle tools, to learn to analyse reality from a critical and revolutionary point of view (no only taking into account the level of violence), and to assume that all means can be useful to us when we know how to use them cleverly.

### **3. Actions' potentiality**

Having the destructive illegal action perceived as just one more tool, it's necessary to define what is its potentiality, its concrete utility. In our opinion, the actions' strength can only be really evaluated by its effects in a specific context. For example, in case of a repressive process against a comrade, the attacks against the complaining companies, or against the judicial and prison establishment, can exercise an effective pressure and provide real strength to an anti-repressive solidarity position. In labour conflicts, sabotage can change the correlation of forces between the company and the workers, overcoming in this way the unevenness imposed through the bourgeois legality. Against aggressions to the territory, attacks can, in an effective way, block the development of the project and to play a significant role in its paralyzation. In a moment in which State supports itself in the impunity of silence in order to commit an abuse – for example, repressing a protest inside a deportation centre -, direct action can break this silence and support the struggle amplifying it. What all these interventions have in common is that, in the mark of a conflict, they strengthen our own field and debilitate the enemy's one.

But outside these specific marks, where the practice of attack is equally legitimate, what is the actions' potentiality? What can they contribute to a revolutionary struggle? In Catalonia, several actions groups and armed organization have answered to this question, according to

their political analysis and historical moment. The libertarian Resistance of the 40's and 50's sought, through sabotage of the energetic infra-structure and spectacular actions as the attacks with explosive and the killing of known executioners, to economically destabilize the regime and incite the resurging of a referent of struggle in a moment of repression and almost absolute social silence. At the beginnings of the 70's, MIL-GAC intended to reinforce to autonomous wing of the workers' movement with bank robberies and other expropriation, that aside from financing revolutionary theoretical editions and workers resistance funds, would be claimed serving as anti-capitalist propaganda. The political approaches of a part of the group also shown the will to go deeper in the armed practice with the use of explosive and attacks to individuals, but several factors prevented the achievement of their plans. Later other groups would follow this line like. Groups like GARI or Grupos Autónomos, whose approaches to the struggle were easily and clearly explained by some of their imprisoned members:

“Our actions always had a social goal. The expropriations (we consider the robbery to be the re-appropriation of what the legal thieves stole since ever) were done to assure our autonomy: buying material, propaganda, support of autonomous struggles and imprisoned comrades, etc... We placed bombs to draw attention to common prisoners. Violence was not chosen by us but, in order to express ourselves, a communiqué and a stamp are not enough: capital closes our mouths. Only attacking would our communiqués have the right to be published in the press. That was what he did and we don't regret it” — Autonomous Group of Barcelona, March 78 (*Accused of bank robbery and attacks against several court-houses, the Barcelona's "Modelo" jail-house and the minors' detention centre "Asilo Duran" where, curiously, had been locked-up, while child, the guerrilla Quico Sabaté*)

These struggle experiences are just some few examples of several strategical projections that were given to these methods throughout our history. Nevertheless, they serve to show how each group managed to impress a political direction in their practice, how they put in front of their actions some concrete goals that guided them.

Nowadays we have the feeling that the practice of sabotage has become independent from any strategical consideration, being the attack justified by itself, as principle and goal of practice, or being reduced to an automatic reflex facing certain situations. This lack of strategy is many times fulfilled with confuse and ambiguous formulas, that belong more to the field of existential poetry and romantic literature than to the one of revolutionary analysis. But to us, direct action should be more than an expression of defiance, it should be practised not only to fulfil some individual desires, neither to, through catharsis, risk and confrontation, cover the need to feel that we are raising against everything that oppresses us. It's not enough to feel that we are confronting the system, we need as well to have some certainties that we are damaging it.

In this sense, we start from the premise that “*the strength of an insurrection is social, not military*” [“*At Daggers Drawn*”, Anonymous]. We don't exclusively measure the scope of our hits by the material damages they cause, but by their capacity to extend the questioning of the established order, disobedience and confrontation. To turn public and visible a clear symbol and the revolutionary struggle. Therefore, we think that the value that these actions can give to our struggle nowadays, in a general sense, is mainly rooted in their agitational potentiality. While breaking the state's sacred monopoly of violence and all the hegemonic speeches in which it

disguises itself, the actions cause an impact and can open cracks in the dominant social schemes. These cracks are the ones that a revolutionary movement should provoke, extend and develop, continuously feeding them with a sharp and firm social critique.

Therefore to us, independently of having a big or small support among the population in a certain given moment, the action with destructive and illegal means is effective when it has a tactical sense in a concrete struggle, or when generally tends to crack the social consensus and to transmit with potency a revolutionary political content. When it doesn't do it, doesn't matter how big the material damages were, the quantity of targets hit, the action's spectacularity or how "free" we felt having "taken back our lives" for some instants: from a revolutionary point of view it will not have served us much.

#### **4. Actions as a communicative act**

To realize sabotage mainly as agitation tool leads us to think in the concrete way in which these actions transmit a message. To us the meaning of an action is given by the context where it occurs, the target hit and the form of hitting it. Certainly the actions not always speak for themselves. Do the burning of trash bins in an ordinary night, the destruction of a random company's van, the isolated torching of a high class car... do they really communicate what we want to transmit? Do these actions manage to transfer the meaning, the sense of the attack we want to perpetrate? The less comprehensible the action is, due to target, moment, place and chosen means, more open are the possible interpretations. And the lack of meaning of an action that could be attributed both to an anarchist group as to a pyromaniac or a thug, can difficultly be suppressed with an explanatory communiqué that will never go out of the militant circles.

The Generalitat [*t.n.: Catalan government*] understand this perfectly, and for that reason since years it imposes a strict silence about the attacks carried by the several action groups. In this way, not only has hidden a big amount of actions that we saw claimed in our media, it tried as well to suppress the political characteristics of actions that had certain repercussion. For example, in the news that were denouncing the numerous attacks against CiU offices [*t.n.: Convergència i Unió – Catalanist centre-right party*] due to the imprisonment of several strikers of March the 29<sup>th</sup>, they always tried to avoid mentioning the strikers, although them being constantly evoked in the spray paintings that would go along with the damages. Months before, the ignition of an explosive device would force the eviction of the business school ESAD, which made the news to be spread in the social networks by the students themselves. Once the news was known by journalists, the police offices kept a hermetic silence little consistent with the importance of this kind of action, that some years ago would had started a noisy campaign against the "radical groups", the "low intensity terrorism", etc...

Turning these actions invisible and hiding their political significance, the State intends to neutralize their agitative power. For that reason, work effort must go in the opposite direction. To turn visible the reality of this practice of struggle implies to carry audacious actions, difficult to hide, and mainly with a clear and defined message. This is, in big part, the task that each group much solve, elaborating a strategical perspective for their actions...

On other hand, it's evident that as stronger and effective is the political work we carry out as a movement (through propaganda, demonstrations, public actions, discussion in the work place, neighbourhoods, schools...), more the attacks will be able to rely in visible contents constantly

present in the daily reality of our streets, and in wider channels for the diffusion of the comu-niqués.

## 5. Responsibility and honesty

Having spoken about sabotage in the mark of our perspective of struggle, and also about its concrete utility, we want now to throw a reflection about the form we project this practice. We are specially worried about the way he have mythologised and fetishized theses practices, wrapping them in a literature that idealizes violence and disconnects it from its effects in the real world.

We have to be clear in this. The practice of revolutionary violence can bring very heavy consequences, sometimes irreparable, not only for the lives of the ones the practice it. It has for our social environment, for the movement in general, for anyone that finds himself in a demonstration in which we decide to start or to maintain a riot, for the one that casually passes at 3 AM near the place where some minutes before someone left an arson device,... We don't speak too much about this in our texts, although we insist on how "easy" and accessible is sabotage or about the absence of motives for waiting to "attack". And nevertheless, paradoxically, sometimes a short moment of await, of reflection or paused conversation, would had been enough to avoid disastrous results...

At the moment of speaking about the struggle, of trying to expanding it, we have to say everything. We cannot say one thing and shut up the other. We have to be responsible enough to have in account the consequences of our actions, and honest enough to show to the others, specially to younger comrades, that they exist. The possibility of accidents, the fear and repression (selective or generalized) should not stop us. But to act as if all these realities didn't exist doesn't make us more revolutionaries, but more unconscious.

## 6. Final notes

There are still lots of things to be said about actions, and we have said some that others have already said many times. We would like, for example, to have spoken about the technical and material precariousness with which the things are done, or the reign of immediatism and quantity as criteria to elect and carry out actions, opposed to a better quality with more expanded periods of time. As well, the need of imagination, creativity, or precision in the mode of identifying and hit our targets would be a subject we would like to speak about. Other points would be the need to dedicate time and effort to the technical formation and the construction and maintenance of logistic, personal, information and anti-repressive structures, that enhance de struggle activity from distinct positions, sometimes of "rearguard". And nevertheless, we go back to basic themes, because we feel that we must insist on them: the political conceptualization of action, its place in our global project, its concrete potential, the form we transmit the practice...

The reflection and the definition about these aspects constitute the basis of all the rest. If these points fail, it doesn't matter that the rest is well developed. We will be constructing a giant with clay feet. So we encourage to keep thinking about this issue collectively. Not allowing the reflections and experiences of each individual or group to be stagnated in their most intimate

environment, but to make them flow, confronting themselves with other approaches in a debate that strengthens all of us. As individuals, as groups, and as movement.

*Barcelona, Autumn 2012*



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