

# Another Critique of Insurrectionalism

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## Translator's Foreword

This text is less so a general critique of insurrectionalist methodology or ideas than a critique of how a specific insurrectionalism, that which has developed in Barcelona in the last eighteen years, has played out in practice. It problematizes a set of practices and attitudes that it sees in the self-proclaimed insurrectionalist milieu there, from arrogance to bad security to an incomplete understanding of repression. At times it broadens to critique insurrectionalisms of other places or more general aspects of the tendency.

Unlike other critiques of insurrectionalism, this one doesn't come from the left. It doesn't seek to pacify resistance or manage struggle, nor do its authors believe in the preservation of productive work with a self-managed face. It also doesn't pretend to be universal. For these reasons I thought it was worth translating for an English-speaking audience. There are certainly great disparities between the anarchist milieu and practice in Barcelona and those of the Anglo world, not the least of which is that there is far more anarchist activity and a far greater number of anarchists in Barcelona than in any English-speaking city.

Some of the critiques and proposals are therefore less readily applicable to other places. However, it's important to share experiences, lessons, and perspectives across cultures and milieus. Whether one judges an idea or critique to be misplaced or deserved, applicable or not, without an exchange of perspectives it is hard to be well-informed, critical, and dynamic. Personally, I still find the term "insurrectional" worth holding onto and identify with the tendency. Living in North America, where there is comparatively little street conflict or subversive activity, pacification and recuperation are continuing full steam ahead, and many currents that call themselves anarchist are in themselves recuperative, this qualifier seems appropriate to use, when it refers to a coherent and well-thought-out set of ideas and methods rather than simply a posture or subculture. I also think the foundational ideas and critiques of the tendency have more depth than the authors may see in the practice in Barcelona. As they say below, there are multiple insurrectionalisms.

Additionally, while it largely fulfills its goal of comradely critique, at times the text strays towards a derogatory tone, overgeneralization, and perhaps misplaced blame. These instances don't further the meaningful dialogue it seeks. However, the text points many sound critiques at an imperfect milieu. The partial understanding of anti-repressive practice, the problems of arrogance and callousness, the dangerous lack of good security precautions, the ease with which many insurrectionalists fall into theoretical vagueness, extreme rhetoric, and posture—these things among others merit serious rethinking of approaches and practices. Not being intimately acquainted with the state of anarchist struggle in Barcelona, I have to base a lot on the word of the authors rather than my own experience, but clearly much of what is written applies beyond one city, and that to me is what makes it useful in other places. I think one would be hard-pressed to deny the presence of some of these problems and the obstacles they pose to social revolution.

I hope that the dissemination of this text will be a small step towards greater critical thinking in our anarchist trajectories and increased, meaningful communication across borders and experiences.

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# Another Critique of Insurrectionalism

(January – February 2014, Barcelona)

## Unlike the other critiques...

In the last few years, several critiques of insurrectionalism have appeared. In Castellano<sup>1</sup>, the most well known would be “Anarquismo profesional y desarme teórico” [“Professional anarchism and theoretical disarmament”] written by Miquel Amorós, and “Crítica a la ideología insurreccionalista” [Critique of the insurrectionalist ideology] written by Proletarios Internacionalistas. Both texts have good parts and harmful points—arrogance and polemical doublespeak in the first and the simplistic, millenarian and messianic figure of the proletariat in the second. It is interesting to underscore that both, in critiquing insurrectionalism, confuse it with Italian insurrectionalism. In order to critique it they focus not on the acts accomplished but rather exclusively on the words written. Furthermore, they focus almost only on the words of one Alfredo Bonanno, old comrade, indefatigable supporter of insurrectionalism, yes, but in the end, just one among many and one whose work had not even been well spread in Castellano in the moment in which an explicitly insurrectionalist current was launched in the Iberian Peninsula.

Contrary to the suppositions of those authors, insurrectionalism is multiple. One can speak of an insurrectionalism in the Spanish state that was born with the bank robbers<sup>2</sup> of Cordoba and with the excision of some the CNT’s most radical sectors, principally the Libertarian Youth.

One can also speak of a Chilean insurrectionalism that comes from the self-critique of sectors of the Marxist-Leninist guerrilla, plus the combatant youth that continued struggling against democracy.

An insurrectionalism exists in the North American context that has as its major influences Fredy Perlman, Wolfi Landstreicher, *At Daggers Drawn*, to a lesser extent the work of Bonanno and to a greater extent the experiences of ecological and indigenous struggles.

Insurrectionalism in Greece, if such a current can be spoken of in such a distinct milieu, takes much more influence from the Situationists than from Bonanno.

One can also speak of insurrectional currents of the past even though they don’t have a direct continuity to the present, such as the Spanish FAI (Iberian, not Informal) until ’34, or at least

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<sup>1</sup>(Trans) Castellano means Spanish. The word is used in Spain because there are several other widely spoken regional languages, such as Catalan, which is the primary language of Barcelona and the rest of Catalonia. I’ve kept the original because in Barcelona it’s a relevant distinction.

<sup>2</sup>(Trans) This was a milestone in the recent history of anarchism in Spain. In December 1996, four comrades—three Italians and one Argentinian—were arrested after a bank robbery in Cordoba, Spain, in which two cops ended up killed. For a while their anarchist affiliations were unknown, but when it became apparent, the majority of the CNT distanced itself from them, going so far as to say that they were not real anarchists and did not deserve anarchist support. *La Epidemia de Rabia en España* goes into this in detail; I’m not aware of a text in English but one probably exists.

several groups belonging to it, sectors of Argentinian anarchism in the same epoch, or groups like Black Banner in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century.

Italian insurreccionalism would be a very important example to study, however all the critiques of it, at least in Castellano, have been directed at its stand-in, Bonanno. Because of this we don't have any historical analysis of the fortune of the insurreccionalist current in the Italian state.

We would argue that insurreccionalism in Italy was in the end a failure. A very useful failure because of its teachings and very important in our history of combat against the State, but a failure nonetheless. Its utility comes from the collective lessons and experiences of defeat that were acquired thanks to courage, and not from the collective experiences of victory or advancement that were won thanks to lucid theory applied well.

That is not to say that the more pacifist or leftist currents in Italy were right, because they weren't, nor that the critiques that insurreccionalists made of the milieu were not correct, which they were. But against an enemy as powerful as the State it is not enough to be correct. We can only prevail by making a constant assessment of our efforts, lines of attack and positions of defense, and implementing the necessary changes.

And this has not been done in Barcelona.

Although a historical analysis of insurreccionalism in the Spanish state in the last 17 years would be of great interest, this text will not do that. (On this note, we recommend "La Epidemia de Rabia" ["The Epidemic of Rage"] by Los Tigres de Sutullena.) This critique will be based in the deeds, the strategies, the actions, and the current positions that could characterize the insurreccionalist current in Barcelona at this moment.

It will not be based on the work of distant and sometimes unconnected authors because insurreccionalism here has never been based in philosophy, always in the streets. And although reading and ideas are indispensable for anarchists—and this has been significantly lacking from insurreccionalism here—the anarchist critique must always be in relation to the struggle, because our experience comes from the street, and to the street, its fruits must return.

To begin, the question can be asked: What is insurreccionalism? It would not be so easy to give a clear answer. Between 1996 and 2003 the label of insurreccionalist made more sense, although it was not more precise, because in Barcelona theoretical clarity has always been lacking even more than in Italy. We use the label because it denotes a practice that exists, even though it does not have theoretical cohesion. It is not possible to currently define it because it exists as a response to a situation that no longer exists in the Spanish state. Moreover, it is influenced by a large participation of non-Spanish people, like some of the present authors whose insurreccionalism reflects the historical experience of other places and who have, to a greater or lesser extent, adapted their practice to the current situation in the Iberian Peninsula (or some who have not adapted anything, understanding that in forms of struggle there exist eternal and immovable truths).

Given that insurreccionalism is not a precisely defined and delimited current and that we are not going to refer to concrete texts, it is possible that this critique could become too broad and that people who don't reproduce the errors that we critique here, or reproduce some errors but not others, could be inappropriately faulted. We leave it to each individual to decide if the critiques describe them or not. In the end it is the responsibility of all to improve the practices of our milieu. This is precisely the point of the text.

Although we criticize some, we send a strong salute to all the comrades with the courage to continue attacking the State and to all those who dedicate themselves to the struggle, in whatever form that may be.

## **An appalling assessment**

After much consideration, we have no other option but to make a devastating critique of what is currently insurrectionalism in Barcelona. We believe that the greater part of the *insu*<sup>3</sup> comrades, if they do not verbally agree with our critique, can only deny it out of pure pride. We insist that it is not possible to arrive at a positive assessment of all that is lived in Barcelona. In the whole city there are not enough brushes to paint a pretty picture of the insurrectionalist practice in the last few years.

It is because of this that, ultimately, we find ourselves obligated to say loudly that insurrectionalism has become homologous with civility<sup>4</sup>. Although its intentions are totally opposite to those of the good citizen, its effect is none other than the maintenance of social control.

## **Important but insufficient contributions**

Before continuing, it's necessary to clarify that insurrectionalism in its moment brought several very important contributions to the anarchist struggle in Barcelona, but these contributions are gradually diminishing. The rupture with the pacified and bureaucratized CNT of the '90s, the consistent position of total opposition to the prisons and support to prisoners, the recovery of the knowledge and determination necessary to attack the State—all are very important elements that radicalized the anarchist milieu in Barcelona and beyond, with marked effects that persist to this day. It is possible that without that insurrectionalist break of the '90s, anarchism in Spain would already have been transmuted into another lapsed and recuperated sect. The contributions of the insurrectionalists have influenced all the other sectors of the struggle (there are even sections of the CNT that have internalized some of the insurrectionalists' critiques and once again defend a vision of conflictual struggle). In part thanks to its early successes, now it does not exert as much radicalizing influence; in some way it has completed its work and generalized the good things it had. Blind to the limit against which it has been crashing for years, it continues in a posture of frozen defiance. In general it has not positioned itself in relation to the current configuration of social control.

Its theoretical influence has been minor. Although its critiques of pacification and comfort were correct, its social analysis—for example the critiques of work or of organization—was fairly weak. But what is most important is that its practice rapidly reached a limit and this limit never came to be understood. After the repression—successful for the State—of 2003, insurrectionalism in Barcelona had no excuse not to launch a self-critique and fundamental transformation, but from then on only found itself at a standstill in already chosen stances and changes towards the worse.

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<sup>3</sup>(Trans) The Spanish word “*insu*” is roughly translatable to “*insurrecto*” in the English-speaking context, however both are used and it's easily understandable to English speakers so I've kept it. It's simply a shortening, not a pejorative, and is used by insurrectionary anarchists to refer to themselves, as well as by other people.

<sup>4</sup>(Trans) The Spanish word is “*civismo*,” of which “*civic-ism*” is a more awkward but maybe truer translation.

The major contribution that insurrectionalism could still bring to Barcelona's anarchist milieu today, being an anti-intellectual insurrectionalism and as such without theoretical contributions, would be the collective increase of street force, introducing new tactics and extending them to everyone who takes the streets. But it will not bring these due to its arrogance, communicative incapacity, self-isolation, attachment to mistaken strategies, and lack of theoretical clarity about the world in which we live.

## **Jails of their own construction**

We believe that insurrectionalism in Italy had an important critique of recuperation, but fell short with its critique of repression. Without a doubt, this is the case in Barcelona. The principal shortcomings of insurrectionalism, for us, are not the fact that Bonanno says contradictory things from one decade to the next (his principal sin according to Amorós) or the fact that insurrectionalists say that the structure of class society has changed (it has changed, something that doesn't diminish the continuity of a fundamental reality of exploitation). Rather, its principal shortcomings have been that it has never understood what repression is, how it functions, and how to overcome it. On the contrary it has tended to function in a manner that only facilitated repression, principally through self-isolation.

One cause of insurrectionalist self-isolation is the arrogance that many insus insist on expressing towards other people. A Greek comrade, making a defense of that arrogance, explains to us that, originally, "arrogant" referred to the posture of the warrior who confronts a much more powerful enemy. As such, arrogance is necessary for the daring ones who confront the State. Up to here we're in agreement. But it has been a historical error of insurrectionalism not to understand who its enemies were and who were possible accomplices.

An awareness of how the whole society is structured to facilitate social control has directed the insurrectionalists in Barcelona with a more nihilist character to define all of society as the enemy and, in so doing, assuring their own self-isolation. There are those nihilists who define "society" as "institutionalized society." It seems to us little more than a word game to be able to utter slogans as extreme, appalling, and cocky as "we want to destroy society." Because of the etymology of the word "society," the historical non-universality of the massified institutions and forms that are what the nihilists really want to destroy, and the lack of another term to signify a human collectivity bound somehow by distinct types of communication, it seems much more sensible to reclaim the term "society" as something neutral that can be hierarchical and institutionalized or not. To signify that which the nihilists want to destroy just as much as we do, the terms "nation," "citizenry," "the public," "social classes," "mass society," or "society of the spectacle" could be used.

Nor do we want to reject misanthropy, but the game of faulting society as the enemy is confusing the institutions and apparatuses that structure society with the people that compose it, that is, confusing the prison with the prisoners. And although certainly no jail functions without the participation of the jailed, blaming them for their condition would be a great stupidity.

The truth is that the only immediate option that each individual has to deny the authority of the State is suicide. Any act of resistance conducts one to a higher degree of control, from normal citizen to surveilled subversive, from there to common prisoner and from there to prisoner in maximum security isolation where the possibility of counterattacking doesn't exist, only of tying

up one's shoelaces or bedsheets and exiting the game. In the end, a prison without prisoners doesn't function, the same as a State without subjects doesn't exist.

Approached on an individual level, the only revolutionary act is suicide (better taking some of the bastards out with us). Because, does it seriously seem justifiable to us to distinguish ourselves from the rest, from the "citizen sheep," for the simple fact that sometimes we break things? Our possible participation in acts of sabotage—even if these are the most radical, for example placing little camping-gas bombs—doesn't negate the fact that in all the other moments of our lives we are collaborating with our own domination.

Following this approach to its absurd conclusion, we would have to explain that the only coherent anarchist is the dead anarchist. Some do believe this, perhaps unconsciously with their martyr complexes; they also want to be dead and coherent anarchists. But this dead-end demands that we rethink the starting point. In this case, the fundamental supposition is that of individual liberation.

It's an idea that has its logic. Today, each one of us begins isolated, alone. We don't have ready-made comrades and accomplices just by belonging to the working class, like it could have been in past eras. To set forth on a struggle in these conditions requires great courage. "The secret is to really begin." Furthermore, our forebears' conception of mass politics is clearly erroneous. The idea of masses is authoritarian and destined to failure. A mass with a singular thought can't think and struggle as is necessary. What good are a million "anarchists" with CNT cards if the whole mass can be diverted towards reformism by a handful of upstarts and petty politicians? Massification stupefies. It doesn't create a revolutionary force in spite of all the millions that it might unite.

It turns out that almost every erroneous idea rests on false dichotomies. Insurrectionalism is justified by several. Not only mass struggle and individual struggle exist. We bet on the following vision: liberation is a collective process lived and defined in an individual manner. We are social beings and freedom only makes sense collectively. It must be in common, because I cannot have a full life without relating with others and because no one is free while some are not. But freedom doesn't come from an ideology, it arises neither from democratic equality nor from a class interest that is supposedly sufficient for all. No assembly concedes us freedom. Each one of us defines our own freedom and each one lives the struggle in a distinct manner, with distinct necessities and desires. Losing fear is an important step towards liberation, and without fear you will never be anyone's slave, but being a fugitive is not the same as living in freedom. This is not about gradualism, an alienation between means and ends, nor hoping for a utopia to come. Each moment of struggle has to base itself in this concept of freedom: we choose our own path, but searching for an expansive network of subversive relations, as much with people involved in a struggle very similar to ours as with people who resist in other ways. As individuals, we choose to be free and to fight against power, but not merely in order to live a stagnant and impotent antagonism—we actually want to destroy the State. One part of our struggle for the destruction of the State is the reclamation of lost collectivity. The dichotomy between gradualism and stagnation (so-called "total negation") is false. It doesn't correspond to our vision of struggle.

When we lose a bit of our arrogance, we will see that it's indispensable to look for complicities—not just of four friends who can go out in the night and break windows with us, but complicities for all moments of life and resistance. Affinity groups are not enough, not even close. We are talking about reconstituting all of society, not as a gradualist strategy to reach a future freedom, but as a way of projecting our desires for freedom towards tomorrow and as a way of beginning



to live and struggle right now. When we lose a bit of our arrogance, we'll see that our small sabotages don't exempt us from the criticisms against collaborating with domination; they don't distinguish us from others. We will see that there are many forms of resistance, and we will never be conscious of all of them, nor will we know all the people who partake in them. Does it seem a coincidence that almost all the people in our milieu come from the same economic strata, have the same skin color, speak the same language and are more or less the same age? (Certainly, many are immigrants but from a very short list of countries, all culturally similar to Spain). Would we be so naïve as to believe that this is because all struggling people share these demographic characteristics? To assume that we are the only ones struggling is to prevent subversive contact with others and enclose ourselves in a superficial idea of struggle.

Yes, there are certain things that we do better than anyone, but there's a lot of knowledge that we lack and that other people resisting authority do much better than us—people we don't even know, or otherwise, whom we would have known but wrote off as reformists or hippies. Recognizing that there are forms of struggle that don't take place through demonstrations or claimed acts of sabotage is a first step towards understanding that the insurrectionalist vision of struggle is partial, that we need to evaluate other forms of participation in struggle, open ourselves up to other types of people, and weave wide networks of complicity and solidarity, not through affinity (these we already have, although we could work on them more) but through difference.

This would be a real step outside of self-isolation and towards a strong and anarchic struggle, with neither masses nor centralization. But we would also have to transform the view of repression and anti-repressive practice.

Insurrectionalism in Barcelona has not been capable of understanding what repression is, how it functions, and how to respond to it. In general, the insurrectionalist analysis of repression has been that of a blow or a series of blows that seek to punish the most combative sector and discourage future attacks. To this vision corresponds the following practice of response: knowing the list of court cases, defending the freedom of those charged, and counterattacking in order to demonstrate that the repression has managed to sow neither fear nor paralysis. Or to summarize: in the face of repression, continue attacking. And why not? To water down combativeness because there have been consequences is a disgraceful error, and one committed by the Organization<sup>5</sup> and its Libertarian Movement several times during the 20th century.

But repression is much more than a blow. It forms part of a whole process of social engineering that seeks to transform the social terrain to facilitate total surveillance and restrict the possibilities of struggle. The repressive part of the process tries above all to isolate a subversive sector from society. Insurrectionalists, in general, have facilitated their own isolation, and moreover with an air of superiority and scorn at being the only ones to express solidarity, within a situation produced as much by them as by the State, designed precisely to ensure they are alone in their response. Making posters with a certain aesthetic and language, inviting some and not others, veils of secrecy, downplaying or omitting the repression suffered by others, not respecting the limits of others: all these elements function to ensure that when the insurrectionalists request solidarity, only their closest friends come. Later, they grumble about this as evidence that no one else cares about solidarity: it is a pathetic case of self-fulfilling prophecy.

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<sup>5</sup>(Trans) "The Organization" is a common way of referring to the CNT in Spain.

Repression functions like this: before any arrests, there exists a continual campaign by the State to convert everyone into civil snitches, individualistic<sup>6</sup>, unsolidaristic people<sup>7</sup>, and superficial morons. This is achieved through advertising, TV shows, movies (being that we are social and symbolic beings, narratives are extremely influential on human beings), consumerism, laws, economic competition, narcotic apparatuses like Twitter and cellphones, etc. Berlusconi, in Italy, directed the perfect example of such social restructuring: before entering politics, he consolidated a media power that pursued this transformation of values in Italian society in order to “take the water away from the fish.” From a solidaristic and combative society that supported the forceful struggles of the 60s and 70s—struggles subdued only thanks to the ensemble formed by the compromising nature of the reformist communists, the vanguardism of the radical communists and a good application of state terrorism—a superficial, consumerist society emerged in the 2000s that didn’t care about the totalitarian practices that the State used to repress anarchists; anarchists that remained alone and as such were extremely easy to repress.

If the people with the most radical critiques don’t intervene to sabotage this process of social engineering, spreading counter-narratives and constructing material bases capable of supporting another way of existing, everyone will have just two options: either become superficial idiots in order not to remain isolated, or become rarities that belong to one or another urban tribe (one of which could be the anarchists). Now without the obstacle of an opaque and solidaristic society, the State can ratify and apply new laws that facilitate repression. And if to the radicals it seems reformist to struggle against new laws or if they simply don’t inform themselves of the State’s maneuvers, the State will have it even easier.

Now the moment of repression has arrived, after two steps that the insurrectionalists ignore (who consider standing alone in confronting repression a mere show of their bravery and the cowardice of others—a bit myopic). The State deals out the repressive blow and observes the results. Far from being the only ones repressed in the last few years, anarchists share this honor with independistas<sup>8</sup>, Muslims, immigrants, Roma people, and many more sectors of society. Each blow plays a distinct note as if one were dealing with a musical instrument. After a blow, they see who is agitated, who’s moving, like a vibrating guitar string. In doing so, the State can trace affinities, measure the strength of support of each bastion of resistance and fill in their map of governed society with more detail, taking away even more of its opacity in the interest of facilitating future incursions on a territory previously hostile and today docile. The effect of this continuous state cartography operation is that of increasingly controlling society through the isolation of any subversion.

This isolation operation should be of great difficulty for the State, given that the capitalist economy needs society to be increasingly more integrated and connected (only in a certain way, clearly), and given that governance always provokes resistance and historically societies have been hostile to states. How sad, then, that insurrectionalism has chosen to understand society as a hostile terrain when it is exactly this behavior that helps the State isolate it. The moment that society is opaque to the anarchists and transparent to the State, it is needless to talk of struggle—we will have already lost definitively.

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<sup>6</sup>We don’t want to confuse this capitalist individualism, which is not an ideology but rather an attitude of atomized people, with the individualism that comes from Stirner and constitutes a very valid critique of capitalist society. For the second, “egoism” seems more precise to us.

<sup>7</sup>(Trans) An awkward attempt to work around the Spanish “insolidarios:” “people who are unsolidaristic”

<sup>8</sup>(Trans) People struggling for Catalan independence

With each repressive blow, the State can intensify the isolation of subversive people, quarantining the arrested, tiring out their immediate circle, signaling to others that they are dangerous (or at least strange and undesirable) and preparing the terrain for the next wave of social restructuring.

The principal response of anarchists in the face of repression should be subverting isolation and overcoming the enclosure constituted by the police and media operation. Counter-attacking is important, and attacks in these situations can only be realized with close comrades, but the counter-attack doesn't debilitate the repressive operation and sometimes makes more repression fall on comrades than they can take. Getting caught in the necessity of counter-attacking as the only response to repression leads to a militarization of the conflict in which all is reduced to tactical questions and anarchist ideas cannot flourish.

More important is to look for complicities and support outside of the nucleus that's been hit. The support that comes from people with whom we share neither a tight affinity nor the same form of struggle will not be equal to the support that comes from other combative anarchists, but we have to learn to appreciate it. When subversive networks are wider is when we will have more possibilities of resistance and the State will be more restricted in its attempt to repress.

Let's speak in concrete terms. Let's say that the insu response to a blow can bring together a combative anti-repression demo of 200 people. For the moment, with so much support, the immediate necessities of the arrested can be covered: legal fees, letters and visits, etc. Later, other people probably will not join these 200. Why? For many reasons. Because of the arrogance and secrecy predominant among these 200. Because of the danger of going into a group that has been reduced in size and is dedicated to the counter-attack. And it's not that others are cowards, but rather that people don't put themselves in dangerous situations—and furthermore, with people who are not very known or close to them—if they don't understand what it has to do with them. And it's true, they should know that repression against some is a blow against the freedom of all. They should know that you have to support those who attack. They should know that you have to stand by those that the State marks as the worst. But one can understand why they're not there. To begin with, one is not born radical. The media are always sowing passivity and civility and it is essential to disseminate our own ideas. Furthermore, it's not that the insurrectionalists are in general the best example of solidarity without limits. Often they act as if these were only their prisoners; there are competitions to show who is closest to the heroic prisoners and that creates dynamics of secrecy and information control, and neither is it that many insurrectionalists are seen in the support demos for arrestees from other circles.

One can note that many more people went out to the street to support the anarchists who participated in spaces of broad struggle that were of obvious importance to many other people, like the three thousand that spontaneously went out to take the Ramblas after the arrests in the Parliament case.<sup>9</sup>

So, the situation won't expand beyond these 200 people. The State soon knows who almost everyone is. They have separated and revealed themselves, and now they are controlled. In the best of cases, they continue taking the streets, caught in the only form of solidarity they know and recognize. The 200 are reduced to 100 because of the increase in risk. They will burn a large number of banks, in their demos or in nocturnal attacks, but the State knows more or less who

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<sup>9</sup>(Trans) The Ramblas is a wide, very touristy avenue in central Barcelona. The Parliament case refers to roughly a dozen comrades who were arrested at a big demonstration outside Parliament for allegedly spitting on politicians

they are. There are new arrests. Now there isn't sufficient energy to write letters or visit everyone frequently. The arrested remain isolated and upon getting out of jail, many are burned out and give up their involvement with the struggle and with other comrades. We all lose their experience. Meanwhile, few people beyond the anarchist milieu find out about all this because the attacks are clandestine and the demos are surrounded by police. If they notice, they see something external to them and they wouldn't even know how to involve themselves: ways of participating for people who find themselves on the outside are not apparent. The psychological distance between the anarchists and other people increases and depression generalizes in the milieu (more ignored evidence of the collective nature of freedom: the more separated we are from other human beings, the more dejected and hopeless we become).

It must be said that there are other factors. The critiques are true that say that there's a fear of repression in the libertarian milieu and this fear takes hold of many comrades, that many people take advantage of cheap excuses to disassociate themselves from the exhausting tasks of solidarity, that many people stop participating in the anti-repression assemblies because quitting is easier than continuing. To blame insurrectionalist practices for the failure of solidarity would be taking advantage of an insincere self-victimization. On the other hand, to blame the others without recognizing the self-isolation of insurrectionalist practice would be an act of sanctimoniousness that exaggerates the purity of solidarity among the insus and, even more serious, encloses insurrectionalism in the dead-end where it has spent a decade rotting, refusing the possibility of getting out.

Now let's imagine the results of another response to repression. When the blow comes down, the comrades choose to communicate, to the most people possible, why this case of repression and the struggle that it has hit are important. They widely invite people to participate and they respect other forms of participation. 1000 or so people come. The number isn't important but rather the fact that support is being gained among people who wouldn't have found out about it (only on TV) and that these people are bringing themselves closer to, in some manner, an illegal and anarchic form of struggle that was hit by the State. In other moments, high visibility counter-attacks are carried out, thought out to win empathy for those who attack and against the repressors. Within the anti-repression demos, a segment ups the level of sabotage and combativeness, but always with respect to others, for example always carrying out their actions from the back of the demo, just past the demo, or simply doing all of it calmly and sensibly.

In this case, in the short-term there might not be as many attacks, but in the middle-term there could be more. Even more important is the fact that the comrades have overcome the repressive enclosure that the State has erected. The police have a much harder time figuring out who is doing the illegal actions and it's even more difficult to isolate and repress them. Many more people are finding out about the repression and supporting a combative and anarchic struggle: ways of participating are being created that don't require being on the front line. This isn't about a big, empty, and inert mass, but rather a multifaceted milieu that supports combativeness in a way that's difficult for the State to monitor and understand.

We're not falling into mental masturbation: there will also be many who refuse to participate because the illegal actions of which the arrested comrades are accused seem bad to them. You can exhaust yourself working to inform and bring out a hundred thousand people and only 400 or 40 come. But it's ok. We will know who is really in solidarity and who's not if we work at it instead of assuming the reason people aren't there. And of the hundred thousand, we will know with more precision up to what point they are apathetic if we look for their complicity and

support, at least symbolic. Moreover, we will not have wasted our time in informing them of the repression simply because they don't show up at the solidarity actions. We don't do it principally to convince them but rather so that a revolutionary perspective reaches them, not just that of the TV. That other people position themselves in relation to our struggle, although in an apathetic and antagonistic way, and not in relation to social peace and the social categories emitted by the TV, is already an achievement. And with these 400 or 40 more who come, there will be more conflicts because they will not have the same ideas or experiences of struggle. As liberal as they may be, the conflict that arises is good. It's this conflict that erodes liberalism.

As a brief example, imperfect but historical, we can look at the solidarity campaign for Amadeu Casellas. Much more strength was generated, with a high level of attack, by creating an environment of struggle with a multiplicity of forms of participation and support. Clearly, there were conflicts with more leftist elements but this has to be assumed – we're not saying to accept it but rather to criticize it while we promote another vision of struggle.

Countering the criminalizing narratives of the press. Intervening against the State's social engineering campaign and against the new repressive laws. Widening our connections and looking for the widest support possible when repression touches us. Justifying—not in the eyes of the State but rather in the eyes of our neighbors—that there are people struggling in this or that manner, and winning support for the struggle. (It can be said that neighbors are often civic-minded and unsolidaristic. This is true. The neighborhood is one more institution of social control. So are lawyers, but facing repression, insus are accustomed to maintaining contact with lawyers who are only partial comrades. In a revolutionary project wouldn't it be more useful to look for a solidaristic neighborhood than a solidaristic judicial system?) These are necessary responses to repression. And the same way that the insurrectionalists say, with reason, that in the face of repression one must continue attacking, we say that in every moment it is necessary to develop a mode of struggle that analyzes and overcomes isolation, understanding this as one of the most potent forces of capitalism. For anarchists, overcoming enclosure isn't a mere response to repression but has to be second nature. Counter-attacking is also important, but the attacks have to respond to their own logic, not a blind necessity to do for the sake of doing.

## **It's easy to attack, but to attack well?**

As anarchists we insist that the attack has multiple logics. It is not merely about a military intention of destroying the enemy. If that were its aim, the ends would justify whatever means; strategy would demand of us a gradualist vision of struggle—of accumulation of forces—and an idea of postponed liberty—that of first winning the war and afterwards, the revolution. There's no place for anarchist ideas in such an approach. If the only purpose of the attack is to destroy the enemy, either a traditional strategy—that is to say, Machiavellian and gradualist—is posed, or an immediatist strategy—that of striking with all of the forces available in the moment independently of whether it will serve for something. As much as insurrectionalists promote a non-gradualist approach, but rather one of here and now, it will be nothing more than an inferior military strategy, destined to failure. The next logical step for the comrades attached to this conception of struggle is renouncing the hope of winning and the idea of revolution itself (a step that many nihilists and egoists take). In the name of a badly conceived anarchism, they deny the possibility of realizing anarchy.

For us, the attack is important precisely because it gives a transformative sense to all the other actions we carry out—actions that the majority of insus overlook and actions that dissidents who give sole focus to the creative part of the struggle also betray. There is no creative act that capitalism is not capable of recuperating if it isn't linked to actions of negation and destruction. In order to critique insurreccionalism, we turn to the great insurrecto Bakunin who said that “the passion for destruction is a creative passion.” In thinking about destruction only as destruction, insurreccionalists waste all its power. Attacks shine with beauty because they constitute the destruction of something ugly, something that oppresses us, and because they open a crack for the creation of something new, something ours. We also have to look to the creation of new social relations, anarchic relations.

And unlike mass-movement anarchists, we insist that the attack is important because it heals us; it allows us to become people again. Its benefit at the individual level is indispensable, because weak and sick people can't constitute a strong struggle. But this cannot be the final motive for the attack because healing ourselves, becoming people again, also happens through the collective, the recovery of relationships of community. Attacking to satisfy our anxieties is good, but cannot in itself be considered as struggle, much less if it goes masked in vainglorious and unrealistic rhetoric speaking of war against the State.

Attacks also cause economic damage to our enemies or damage the infrastructure essential to the economy and social control. Destruction alone cannot end capitalism. On the one hand, a social relationship can't be destroyed, only transformed. On the other, we will probably never be strong enough to exert the adequate level of destruction. In the Second World War, the capitalist powers unleashed a level of destruction that surpasses us completely, reducing the cities of Europe and Asia to ashes, and in the end the whole game was profitable for capitalism.

As such, the attack as a measure of material destruction always requires a strategic approach. Can the target of the attack concede something to us, like a business that's accusing comrades of damages and could rescind its accusation? Is it a moment of more generalized revolt, and infrastructural sabotage could break with normality and impede social control?

Another meaning of attack is symbolic. Human beings are social and symbolic creatures. Symbols are very important for us. Neither the State nor the struggle can be thought about without turning to symbols that communicate norms and their subversion. That an attack is symbolic doesn't take away from its importance. But we should think hard about the symbolism. An attack becomes a symbol of our strength or of the fragility of the social peace. It can mark an enemy or visibilize our rage. In this sense, the most important thing is not the level of damage that is caused, but its visibility—that the effects are visible the day after or that other people see the attack in the moment it is carried out. An attack with a letter bomb, which only the police and the handful of comrades that read the anarchist web page where the communique is published find out about, has much less symbolic strength (and economic as well, probably) than an attack at midday with sledgehammers.

An attack with a bomb or with fire—more-so the first but always depending on how the action is carried out—can communicate to others that the authors of the attack don't care if a third party ends up hurt as collateral damage. We underscore: it totally depends on the level of precaution, sense, and calm with which the attack is prepared and carried out. An attack with explosives also communicates to society a material distance between the authors of the attack and others. Anyone can break a window with a hammer or set fire to a dumpster but someone who makes and places bombs has necessarily gone through a process of specialization. It must be asked: Is

this the message that they want to send? But all too often, at least according to the postures in the communiqués published afterwards, the authors are only thinking of sending a message to Father State, a gesture that is fairly useless, not very strategic according to anarchist criteria, and topped off with aromas of frustrated adolescence.

Clearly it's necessary to learn new techniques and recover practices of sabotage and weapons of struggle, but the insurrectionalists who place bombs at the peak of a tactical scale, in spite of the fact that it's often an inferior form of attacking, avoid strategic assessments. If from the start, bombings are the coolest—or “most radical,” using disguised language without any revolutionary criteria (maybe the Muslim capitalists of Al Qaeda are the most radical current of anti-colonial struggle today?)—actions, and anyone who critiques them is written off as a coward or reformist, an environment is created in which it is impossible to assess whether a concrete action contributes something to the struggle. An even sadder reality considering that this tactic in particular entails the greatest possibilities of tragedy if it's poorly thought-out.

Lastly, attacks can generalize. Reproduced by outside people, attacks constitute a way of growing in force without creating an authoritarian party, nor adopting a quantitative logic of struggle, nor waiting for a strength that is always still-to-come before starting to attack. As such it's important to conceive attacks in a way that they are easy to reproduce. The Greek comrades have had probably the most success in this matter, and the strategic lessons extracted from there have been applied in other much more pacified countries with similar results—although on a smaller scale, clearly—demonstrating their efficacy. In Greece it was a process of many years and of constant participation in social struggles. Sometimes the comrades formed blocs in demonstrations, with their own banners and their own propaganda to gain an anarchist visibility, and other times they attacked from the mass, beat riot cops with sticks, or threw trash, rocks, or molotovs, according to the strength of the moment. There is an important consideration: a social intuition or a sensitivity towards the receptivity or mood of the other people. The confrontations were carried out without fear of creating conflict or being the bad guys, but calculated not to exceed the tolerance of other people by creating a situation so out-of-step that everyone ends up fleeing. In other words, to remain in conflict and not end up alone: a very important tension that the insurrectionalists of Barcelona haven't identified. An important element of this tension is knowing and accepting that there are moments in which it's best simply to be there and not to attack.

Parallel to the line of conflictive participation in the social movements is the line of autonomous attack: that of choosing one's own moments to come together, carry out an attack and disappear. Often, such attacks in Greece took place in the full light of day, with fifty masked people destroying banks and luxury stores in five minutes and dispersing right after. The act of doing it in the day makes these into high-visibility attacks that easily enter into the consciousness of others. And many had a social character, for example the looting of supermarkets and subsequent redistribution of the stolen food. Being the bad guys for many years created a situation in which there were common conflictual events in society and in a certain moment, hundreds of thousands of people appropriated them as their own weapons to express their rage against the system. They generalized.

A few points remain to underscore. This insurrectional experience has little to do with the trajectory of clandestine groups that subsequently became the symbol of the anarchist struggle in Greece. Clandestinity offers other possibilities but it did not play an important role in the generalization of attacks. In fact, a large portion of insurrectionalist comrades in Greece strongly critiqued Revolutionary Struggle when they shot several police in Athens at the end of Decem-

ber 2008 and the beginning of January 2009. Their critique was not against violence but rather emphasized that during the previous month the whole society was exercising a high level of violence against the police and the attack with submachine guns—weapons that very few people had within reach—could only professionalize and limit the struggle.

Clandestinity can permit the realization of more complex and dangerous attacks, or simple survival in cases of extreme repression, but in Greece and in wider revolutionary history it has always been a failure in terms of generalization of struggle. It can't be any other way, given that clandestinity is a type of self-isolation. Far from being glorified it should be reserved for cases of necessity.

Another important point is that although insurrection, and as such the aforementioned actions, were transformative, neither anarchist ideas nor new social relations took root. And although the insurrection created a strength necessary for winning against the police in the streets and calling into question the capacity of the army to suppress it, anarchists didn't have plans for going further, so that the insurrection stagnated with the destruction of banks and police stations—the usual anarchist targets, showing a lack of capacity for adaptation to take advantage of the situation and go for it all.

If we speak of the generalization of attacks, we should put an identical emphasis on the generalization of anarchist ideas and the projects that allow us to put anarchic relations into practice. The insurrections of the last decade have made it clear that attacks alone are not enough. But as the situation is, it's unlikely that insurrectionalism in Barcelona will manage to generalize combativity. Attacks will not extend if they are poorly executed. We'll have to have more sense, admit that there are moments to attack and moments to just be, recognize and develop the social aspect of attacks and overall to care well for comrades instead of talking shit or harming our own through shoddy practice.

In spite of it all, it's likely that attacks will extend in the years to come. But it will be thanks to the crisis, without a good depth of ideas, based in anxiety over the current precarity and not in the rejection of the system in its totality. There will be insurrectionalists who claim this as a triumph of their practices, but this will be nothing more than an irresponsible opportunism. Without transforming anarchist practices well, the forms of rebellion that are sown today will disappear with the crisis.

## **The bad practices of security**

This would be an appropriate time to say a couple things about security. This does not apply to the insurrectionalists who have well worked-out security practices because—clearly—they do it well and don't talk about it. But there are some who have disgracefully careless practices. And if the champions of attack don't know good techniques for organizing their attacks well and discreetly, who will?

We're talking about bringing cellphones to meetings (showing the State who has gotten together with whom), bringing cellphones and turning them all off at the moment of the meeting (showing who was there and that illegal things were being talked about), carrying cellphones with the battery out during actions (if it's an action that the State is going to find out about, it gives them a list of suspects—all the people with their cellphone turned off during a certain



period of time). It seems like we're dealing with people who can't leave it in the house because they don't know how to walk through the streets without it.

To continue: meeting to plan actions in social centers, atheniums<sup>10</sup>, or known squats (handing over the details of the meeting directly to the police), saying things in a quiet voice or turning up the radio during a meeting (making it more difficult for one's own comrades to hear, but not the police, whose mics are better than human hearing), expressing in words what another comrade is trying to express with gestures or written on paper, as if they were children who are just learning to read and have to say every written line that passes before their eyes out loud (handing over the most dangerous details directly to the police), not criticizing comrades when they do these things (creating a culture of superficial pleasantries that's above all pleasant to the police), and assuming the fact that they haven't been arrested means that the police weren't listening (believing in a vision of repressive practices that stopped applying in the nineteenth century).

We can talk about security in street situations as well: in the age of mass recording, masking without changing the outside layer of clothing, or masking and unmasking all the time according to the level of danger that you feel in the moment, doesn't do much. Aim should be practiced before the demonstration and if someone's aim is so bad that they're more likely to hit a pedestrian or another demonstrator, they shouldn't throw dangerous things (instead they can carry a backpack; not everyone can be Rambo). If someone gets so nervous in chaotic situations that they get tunnel vision, don't see their surroundings, don't know how to breathe deep and calm down, and are capable of breaking windows one meter away from four-year-old kids or, who knows, knocking over an old person in a wheelchair, surely they should carry the banner or a spray can instead of a hammer and their closest friends and comrades should be the first ones to tell them so. Having to repeat such basic things at this stage in the game is disgraceful.

And these shortcomings aren't the fault of insus. They're generalized in the milieu. But we must ask ourselves, if the insus haven't improved these practices, what is it they've been doing? We should go further: developing tactics against surveillance, that include practicing ways of avoiding tails going to certain meetings or employing methods for detecting or neutralizing more discreet and invasive microphones, like those planted by the Italian police in the backpacks and shoes of comrades, ten years ago now.

## A vague critique

The Iberian insurrectionalism of the '90s arose with astute critiques of the stagnation, bureaucratization, pacification, lack of solidarity, and workerism of the libertarian sphere dominated by the CNT of that time. Among certain groups that rejection evolved towards other more developed currents, including an anti-civilization environmentalism, several radical feminisms, a pessimist nihilism (distinct from the revolutionary nihilism of, for example, the CCF), several sects of diluted and libertarian Marxism, a current that shows signs of the beginnings of a deep critique of colonialism, a hybrid activism between progressivism and insurrectionalism (part of which has the diluted Marxism of the Tiqqunists) and even some groups of the CNT updated with

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<sup>10</sup>(Trans) Atheniums (ateneos in the original, for ateneo libertario, "libertarian athenium") are a type of social center in Barcelona. They can be distinguished from some other social centers, many of which are more DIY focused, in being more focused around educational/discussion-type events, and often more consciously/conflictually anarchist spaces.

insurrectional critiques. It hasn't always been a fruitful path just because it's been an evolution. The important thing is that these currents turned the page after taking the necessary posture of rejection towards the hegemony of a long-outdated vision of anarchism (although some turned the page back, see "a hybrid activism...") to advance their own logics of struggle.

But some remained in this posture of rejection, advancing a more pure insurrectionalism, editing another book of the notes from one of Alfredo Bonanno's conferences, putting on more anti-prison days, publishing another periodical remarkable more for its aesthetic and tone than for its content—in fact the words fade shortly after being read, leaving behind only a vapor of condemnation...

We're not talking here about particular people, or even a particular current, but rather the fact that in this way a type of ideological hammer was created and it has been this hammer, the desire to manage it or the fear of being hit by it, that has kept all the distinct currents in the segmented and dispersed libertarian milieu minimally united. And it's this hammer, this pure insurrectionalism, that has always suffered from a vague critique, in so constituting more an obstacle to the struggle than an impulse towards always better practices and ideas.

We can start with its critique of work, seen in writings like "Down with work" and in the proposals and shortcomings of periodicals like *Antisistema*. Critiques of the workerism of official anarchism and the extolling of the working class and its mass organizations, of the goal of productive but self-managed work and of an industrial organization supposedly for our own good, were needed. So was the exploration of egoist, feminist, situationist, ecological, and anti-colonial ideas on the concepts of work, production, discipline, indolence, pleasure, duty, desire, and necessity. But insurrectionalism simply threw itself to the other end of the same pool where the workerists were swimming, in so avoiding the complex questions on how to survive inside capitalism, how to struggle in the workplace while introducing a critique of work, how to relate to union organizations and how to replace commodified relationships. In all this theoretical evasion, insurrectionalism in Barcelona was strongly subsidized by the squatter movement and the relative autonomy the State allowed it out of a strategy of pacification and exhaustion to avoid more conflicts like the one provoked by the eviction of the *Cine Princesa* in '96. Enmeshed in squatting, insurrectionalism didn't have to concern itself with the problematics of work. It could have done more to replace commodified relationships, deepening and defending the ceded autonomy and in so doing, opening a new line of attack against the State, but no more than the minimum was done, Iberian insurrectionalism being a frozen posture of rejection and not a dynamic practice of liberation.

Its critique of organization has also been vague. We don't believe that it's a simple question of formality or informality, but rather of a worldview, of the social relations at the crux of it, of the singularity or redundancy of organizations and the unification or fragmentation of the anarchist milieu (singularity and unification being on the road to authoritarianism, redundancy and fragmentation constituting a creative, libertarian, and intelligent chaos that can include formal organizations without the danger that these take control of the milieu). Nevertheless, Iberian insurrectionalism has wagered on informality and we can critique it within its own logic. Immobilized by the posture of clandestinity and secrecy and finished off by laziness, insurrectionalism in Barcelona hasn't left any legacy of effective informal coordination. Neither has it made any advance in the practice of deepening affinity, instead allowing it to become a facile social club. In other words, it hasn't even managed to achieve its very unambitious organizational proposal. The fact that many ex-insus have come to experiment with and even get involved in projects

of formal organization demonstrates a failure—not the defeat of informality and the triumph of formal organization, but the failure to realize any worked-out proposal of informality that can compete with the formal organizations on a historical rather than abstract level, advancing anarchist theory with new experiences.

Therefore, insurrectionalists have really contributed little to dismantling all the myths of the formal organization and its supposed advantages. It's ironic that this work of historical argumentation has been realized above all by people like Miquel Amorós and Agustí Guillamon<sup>11</sup>, who, as much as we disagree with their critique of insurrectionalism, have done much to reveal the reformist role of the CNT in past eras. As to defining the enemy, insurrectionalism has done nothing more than entrench itself in vagueness. Is it that they don't understand that "we don't want to change the world, we want to destroy it" doesn't mean anything? That it's only a pose?

There are distinct ways of defining the world. All the common definitions understand it as something like the planet, the Earth, the universe, "all that can be seen," or as a minimum the ensemble of human life. In all these cases, if that is what insurrectionalism wants to destroy, it's wasting its time in the anarchist milieu. It should immediately join up with the right wing of the capitalists and fight the war against green capitalism. That is the only possibility it would have to realize the destruction of the world.

Or maybe with "we want to destroy the world" they refer to a certain construction of "the world" or "humanity" according to a Foucauldian critique? Ok, well between all of the insurrectionalist literature and action that we've seen along the length and width of the Spanish state we've never noticed an analysis of the structural immanence of power nor how it supports itself in discourse and in an institutionality with a concrete historical origin.

Or maybe it doesn't want to destroy the world, but rather gain power from a pseudo-radical appearance and be able to condemn everything from a Mt. Olympus of purity? It's notable that here it's about an extreme attitude, a pose of constant rage and not a radical critique. To leave this superficiality and advance ideas that merit such a name, they would have to identify what of all the existent they want to save and what exactly it is that they want to destroy.

But that wouldn't be in the interest of insurrectionalism. To admit that there are some existing things that they don't want to destroy isn't as cool. At least in Barcelona it refuses to become a deep practice. It would rather be the hammer in a paralyzed milieu, a mere posture. Ironically, this has attached it to a well-disguised pacifism. Refusing to define well what is its enemy and what it really wants, freezing itself in impotent tantrums against an abstract and untouchable "everything," it is capable of destroying little beyond windows.

To conclude this portrait of its theoretical vagueness, we mention the search for a revolutionary subject. It's curious how the insurrectionalists hit the mark in rejecting the dogmatic oversimplification of Marxism-Leninism and its revolutionary subject, that essentialized demographic category that the vanguard has to identify and direct towards revolution, but later, they suffer from a lack of allies and start the search for a new revolutionary subject. In the beginning it was prisoners, whom they glorified and tried to organize, radicalize, and follow all at the same time. The great disappointment from the failure of what is now stigmatized as "prisonerism" demonstrates the fact that it was not about a sincere solidarity with prisoners, understood as complex

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<sup>11</sup>(Trans) Two older Spanish anarchist authors who have actively criticized the counter-revolutionary role of the CNT in '36. They are very much not insurrectionalists and favor a more leftist—even almost Trotskyite—vision of struggle.<sup>33</sup>

and imperfect people like us, who sometimes struggled and sometimes gave in, and could be radicals or reactionaries, comrades or fakes. On the contrary, it was an ideological operation of lionizing a social sector sufficiently demonized to be able to distinguish themselves from the populists who only praised workers, the middle class or ordinary people, and then saddling this romanticized sector with the duty of destroying the State.

Even the new currents in Barcelona that call themselves nihilists or individualists—the latter without knowing or caring that individualism has always rejected the concept of a revolutionary subject—have joined the game, betting on the “criminal youth.” (To clarify, we’re not referring here to the nihilist current that’s been preaching in the *insu* milieu for quite a few years, but to the new expressions of it). If they believe that among the criminal youth there aren’t also norms of conformity, oppression by the collective towards the individual, new and creative forms of stupefaction, possible comrades and enemies like in any social sector (minus a few constituted purely of enemies), it’s because they don’t actually know any. Any abstraction of a multitude or collectivity is an act of violence. While some types of violence are useful, violence towards a collectivity that in theory is composed of allies or affines<sup>12</sup> is a way of constituting authoritarianism.

Categories are crude imprecisions that trample over the chaotic nature of things. If we use them knowing that they are convenient lies, it’s ok. That’s language. But if we require our categories to bear the weight of dogma, it’s an affront against the liberty of the categorized beings and the beginning of a war against nature. In searching for a revolutionary subject, the new nihilisms and individualisms within insurrectionalism lose the best theoretical contribution that nihilism and egoism brought.

## Tied and tied well<sup>13</sup>

As a way of preserving their evident shortcomings, many *insu* comrades exercise a type of bullying towards others, always waving the flag of the brave and the martyrs, insinuating that they are the only ones who truly struggle or at least those who struggle in a more “radical” manner (confusing this with “risky”) and writing off everyone who differs from them as cowardly, sold-out, and incoherent, or at a minimum, less important. The function of this bullying is to make all comrades of a more uncontrollable character toe their line or at least not make an open critique of them out of fear of being called into question. And the comrades dedicated to the struggle but of a less combative character are silenced beforehand, because the only criterion that insurrectionalism recognizes is the zeal to attack here and now and in the most symbolically hard-hitting way possible (in place of hard-hitting on an economic, strategic, tactical, or social level, etc.).

Taking this not-so-discreet stance, they’re left with the fame of the ensemble of anarchist attacks carried out against the State, although many of these actions are carried out by comrades who share little with the insurrectionalist line. But this monopoly on attacks can’t be disputed without risking acknowledging participation in illegal acts. This is how the people with the least discreet stance seize the privilege of speaking in the name of the whole anarchist offensive.

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<sup>12</sup>(Trans) This is indeed an English word. It means someone with whom one has affinity.

<sup>13</sup>(Trans) This is a reference to a quote from the Franco regime that society was well under control as it approached the transition to democracy. The Spanish is “Atado y bien atado.”

In Barcelona, at least in the last few years, this problem has been smoothed out a bit. Certain sectors have learned to relate a little better with other people (perhaps, ironically, thanks to the experiences of 15M<sup>14</sup> ) while others have isolated themselves. But this change hasn't been enough to erase a dynamic that was created over years. In part because many comrades of other tendencies opt for superficial pleasantries, gossip, and back-stabbing and in so doing construct specters of the bad insurrectionalist wherever they imagine that someone could have a criticism of them. And in part because we don't stop bombarding ourselves with the sanctimoniousness of insurrectionalist comrades in other countries, through the reading of communiqués on the internet or the editing of texts. The arrogance that comes to us from other contexts continues reinforcing the figure of the ruthless insurrectionalist with his hammer. On the one hand, it's not fair to the insurrectionalists who have improved their practice in this regard. On the other hand, neither have they rectified nor do they critique the sad arrogance of their counterparts in other countries, if not often glorifying it.

In doing so they can also benefit from their ideological hammer without doing the dirty work of mistreating other comrades. Far beyond Barcelona, the easiness of bullying in the anarchist milieu indicates an internalized patriarchal dynamic. Proletarian violence—understood as self-defense, sabotage, and attack against all that oppresses us—belongs to everyone, and as such we completely reject the essentialist argument that violent struggle is patriarchal in itself. Even so, at least a part of the insurrectionalist current has indeed fallen into making a fetish of violence, an act that goes hand in hand with the reproduction of patriarchal culture. Furthermore, many of these comrades undervalue or invisibilize other ways of participating in struggle, which could be cleaning social centers, cooking for popular meals, writing prisoners, supporting burned out or traumatized comrades, transmitting collective experience and historical memory, connecting distinct generations in struggle, developing a healthy, critical and careful communication between comrades, spreading a libertarian culture, recovering useful knowledge for the self-organization of life, and many more things.

But all that isn't breaking or burning is almost not talked about and never praised. Acts of destruction are indispensable, it's clear, but in themselves they don't form a revolutionary struggle. The comrades in Greece burned almost all the banks and police stations in the country and it wasn't enough. The comrades in Egypt exercised an equal or greater level of violence against the State, but a few years later it's been shown that a large part of the supposed comrades of struggle (not the anarchists but the others that went out into the streets) are reproducing insurrectionalist tactics in one moment and the next they can demonstrate in favor of a military government or gang rape comrades in the supposedly liberated plaza. Why should we have to repeat the same errors when others have already shown us, through their bravery and the advanced state of their struggle, that the path we follow becomes a dead-end?

It's not enough to speak of attacks. It has been more than confirmed that capitalism can't be destroyed with violence alone. But whoever makes this assertion exposes themselves to the insurrectionalist critique that one is weak or is trying to pacify the struggle. It's like a game played by macho adolescents who face off with an imminent danger they can't turn away from for fear of being called cowards or faggots. And insurrectionalism in Barcelona doesn't even talk about patriarchy, as though it had no importance in a struggle against all authority. It seems that

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<sup>14</sup>(Trans) The plaza occupation movement that spread across Spain beginning May 15, 2011 and leading to an intense cycle of protests, occupations, and self-organization via assemblies. Inspirational to Occupy in the US.

a large part of insu comrades ignore the indispensability of patriarchy to the advancement and maintenance of the State and capitalism (as if its own forms of oppression weren't enough of a reason to fight against it).

Their struggle suffers from this lack of critique of patriarchy. Dynamics of communication are produced that obstruct self-critique and solidaristic support and care towards others; competition, sectarianism, and shit-talking towards other sides in order to always be the best are facilitated; it stays trapped in dead-ends out of pure pride, and it tends towards a partial struggle that doesn't identify an important source of oppression in our society. Lacking this critique, they are more capable of reproducing patriarchal hierarchies and the corresponding abuses, a reality that harms comrades in struggle and that weakens the whole milieu.

The lack of analysis on the importance of patriarchy and its historical relation with the State and capitalism isn't surprising either, given that insurrectionalism in Barcelona, with important exceptions, has tended towards cheap ideas and an anti-intellectualism that not only rejects academic interventions in the terrain of struggle (an important position) but also theory, deepening of ideas, and reading beyond the histories of heroic battles fought by past martyrs. In the last few years a certain periodical has indeed published more thorough articles than the usual ones, but in general insurrectionalism in Barcelona hasn't promoted theoretical and analytical development.

Perhaps the worst of all of this is that insurrectionalism in Barcelona expresses itself in an arrogant tone that obstructs communication, self-critique, debate, the extension of solidarity, the search for new complicities, propaganda—in the end, struggle itself. At times it gives the impression of being some kind of hybrid between Napoleon and Christ, carrying out its crusade so alone, a few people, them against the world because everyone else is so wretched, and they, poor them, have humbly decided not to retreat.

Even worse when as anarchists we have very little to be proud of. It's one thing to be arrogant when one is winning (and even so it can be inopportune). Arrogance within misery is something else.

## **In conclusion...**

We see that insurrectionalism, such as it has been put into practice, now has little to offer. Its most important contribution, the combative attitude, is out of its hands. In the demonstrations and the strikes, if the climate favors it, it's not just a revolutionary minority throwing rocks and burning banks, but many more.

And the attacks in moments of peace, the nighttime and daytime sabotages, for some time now have not belonged to any concrete "sector," as much as some insus would like to believe that they are the only ones on the front line.

Sadly, the only way out for insurrectionalism within its own logic is to gain a symbolic superiority through more daring actions—but not necessarily more destructive, neither on an economic level nor on the level of a social rupture that an action could potentially provoke. Given their rejection of the social, their conviction to leave relationships of obedience and spectacularity intact, they don't look for complicities or conflictivity in the street, turning instead to their preferred terrain of clandestinity and, as such, professionalization of actions.

We've already seen where this path leads. With a professionalism that is sloppy—the norm in Spain still to this day—it leads to quick repression without a strengthening of the struggle but

rather its exhaustion. And with a well worked-out professionalism, it goes through a process of several years of spectacle and self-isolation of the struggle before repression puts an end to the trajectory.

It's not a question of the tactics chosen but the approach that gives them life. There are cases in which actions were indeed based on a strategic and well thought-out approach, truly radical in terms of how to sharpen the struggle, but we get the feeling that more often the plan responded to the spectacular and vanguardist trajectory that we just outlined.

We predict that there will be those who respond to this critique saying that we're advancing a pacifying position; that we're attacking the only sector that's really struggling. These will be the caws of those whom reasoning has abandoned. They will confuse the words written here with surrender and the authors with cowards, when we have always struggled by their side, we have lost comrades, we have lived through repression and we continued forwards, but we insist on searching for the radical path not in frozen postures but in self-critique and experience, so as not to repeat the same failures year after year.

Finally, we ask forgiveness from the comrades who identify with insurrectionalism who don't see themselves reflected in the critiques that we present here and who have found in insurrectionalism something that has nourished them in their struggle, something that we were incapable of seeing.

In solidarity,  
some anarchists from Barcelona

## Epilogue to the second edition

We now realize with curiosity that in the first edition, in speaking of the multiplicity of insurrectionalisms, we neglected the French comrades. Although we are somewhat unaware of the situation of our Gallic neighbors—apart from the chronicle of cases of repression that certainly makes it over the border—through the lens of us oafs who don't speak very good French, it seems that the most lucid voice of French insurrectionalism would be the magazine *A Corps Perdu*, an infrequent collection of texts with a notable theoretical and historical base, deftly translated into Castellano.

The last number, no. 3, is by far the best, easily surpassing any natively-produced insurrectionalist text in Castellano (of which perhaps only "Afilando nuestras vidas" ["Sharpening our lives"] and "Abajo el trabajo" [Down with work] deserve to be preserved by history, and not so much for their quality in itself as for their relation to the struggles of the time). In quality we could compare it with *At Daggers Drawn* (a text so lucid that even *Proletarios Internacionalistas* admitted their respect for it). If this is a poetic sketch of the guidelines and spirit of insurrection (in one chapter making an inexplicit yet very direct critique of the informalism of Bonanno), no. 3 is a well-grounded, detailed analysis of several concrete revolts of the past decade, from Argentina to Greece. If sometimes insurrectionalism can be accused of being a mere posture, in the pages of *A Corps Perdu* it is clearly a conflictual projectuality.

Basing ourselves clearly in a very respectful assessment towards the work of these comrades, we want to enter into two points of discrepancy that—although of lesser importance within the work itself—for us are key errors of insurrectionalism, as much here as in other parts. The first

deals with that matter so central to insurrectionalism: affinity. In the magazine, on page 26, they argue the oft-repeated dogma: “Affinity tends towards a quality of relations between comrades.”

We insist that this argument is false and that the history of our struggles as much as the daily practice confirm that it’s false. Affinity only brings one to a stalemate. It’s precisely the attempts to carry solidarity beyond affinity that give relationships of affinity the possibility to grow and mature. The same as it’s impossible to create an alternative freedom inside of capitalism, affinity currently isn’t capable of sustaining us. Sooner or later, we will also rot inside of our informal groups. We’ll arrive at superficial or banal rifts or estrangements (not as absurd as the rifts of the formal federations, but equally tragic). Inside of capitalism, even friendship will let us down. It’s a great disappointment that after so many years, Mediterranean insurrectionalisms haven’t gone further than affinity. We know that affinity has failed many more comrades. It could be that the mere word in itself is the last true friend of the dispersed and isolated insurrectionalists.

The other point has to do with imagination. It seems that finally, the comrades of A Corps Perdu are rectifying the great error of insurrectionalism, that of omitting, ignoring, or undervaluing the importance of imagination and visions of other worlds, a counter-revolutionary tendency that the nihilists have perfected, converting their eternal present into dogma. With a good base in classical anarchism (complete with quotes from Bakunin and Volin), those of A Corps Perdu write: “What has changed in the paradises of merchandise of Western democracy is not just the degree of alienation [...], but rather above all the difficulty of imagining a different world.” (p. 45).

But later they abandon this theme to ambiguity, underrating “the dream of another world” (p. 47). “The only ‘positive’ projects now seem to be more on the side of reaction,” they say. They don’t bother to name or analyze these projects, nor do they go beyond indicating the necessity of “working in the bosom of the negative with a view towards maintaining and sharing our dreams” (p. 48). They don’t go into depth about these dreams, as Malatesta, Bakunin, Volin and others they quote often did. They discuss the lack of visions of other worlds and the relationship of this lack as much with capitalism as with our incapacity to direct insurrections towards revolution. And then they stop talking about this theme. They don’t do anything to correct what we insist—and they seem to recognize—is one of the most key weaknesses of our struggle, but instead close off the matter with a certain irony that leaves the door open for a quick escape to insurrectionalism’s typical scorn and they stay there in the hallway with their arms crossed. They show a path that, if they and we are correct, will have to be taken decisively, but then they don’t take another step; moreover they don’t make it clear to the reader whether they value or look down on such a path.

I suspect that the reason is that their ideology makes it difficult for them to talk about something that isn’t destruction, something that furthermore would have such childish or mystified names as “imagination” or “vision.” If this is so, then this is indeed an insurrectionalism that’s a mere posture and not a conflictual project. A sad matter, given that the capitalist war against the imagination is already reaching its finale and most comrades haven’t even raised their arms to defend themselves.

## **Annex: An organizational proposal**

It seems appropriate to us to add a vision of possible organization that we could take as anarchists motivated to do so in the current context in Catalonia. These are some reflections for a debate that’s now already in motion. We understand that this text will be spread beyond Catalonia—



because of this we have written it in Castellano—but we think that the present organizational proposal could give more content to our critiques and extend the same reflection to other places.

Unfortunately, it turns out that many comrades in Catalonia haven't taken a sufficient lesson from the failures of the CNT and organized anarchism in the era of '34-'36 and during the Transition and the following decade. They persist in an illusory vision of the strength and social influence of a big formal organization.

We fear that we who believe that '36 was the saddest year in the history of anarchism are a minority. The year in which the existence was revealed of anarchist leaders who would collaborate with the State and its whole repressive apparatus, who would support the communists and the bourgeoisie against any revolutionary steps and even would be complicit in the expansion of a prison apparatus (that later would be used against themselves), all the way up to the execution by firing squad of anarchist expropriators. Also during the Transition and the '80s the CNT gifted history with the same lesson as Leninism: that a bureaucracy is always authoritarian and as such never anti-capitalist.

Facing the dangerous zeal of having a federation for its own sake, and the continuous failure of insurrectionalist informality, we propose the following:

—A Catalan anarchist encounter every three or six months, in which information is shared about projects and campaigns, ties and friendships are established between collectives and individuals, a consciousness of collective strength is generated and as such the sensation of daily isolation is neutralized, and discussions are organized, not to arrive at agreements but to foment a heterogeneous deepening of ideas.

—Coordinating spaces<sup>15</sup> for concrete matters, never abstract or ideological. We don't coordinate anarchism or being anarchists, but specific tasks. We propose three:

1) one for anti-repressive collectives and prisoner support, to share resources, ensure that no charged or incarcerated comrade is forgotten and occasionally to call mobilizations against the ensemble of repression;

2) another for sharing propaganda and facilitating big printing runs of posters and pamphlets in order not to duplicate tasks and to reduce expenses;

3) a third for infrastructure projects, to establish ties between them and facilitate the direct distribution of goods and resources, to economize on tasks instead of duplicating them, to facilitate the creation of new infrastructure projects sharing experiences, to maintain a collective and combative force capable of resisting the capitalist dynamic that isolates, recuperates, and pacifies constructive projects, and to weave material networks that foment a practice of mutual aid beyond the abstract. With coordinating groups based in such concrete tasks, the eternal problem of the organization of fictitious collectives, the federation that exists on paper and not in reality, could be avoided.

—For the comrades who yearn for a federation, the CNT still exists. They can join it and put their hands to work to prove if it's still possible today to carry out a formal struggle in the sphere of work that isn't rapidly recuperated. If it goes well for them, they will quickly be shocked by the bureaucratic or reformist sectors within the Organization and they can reconstitute their sacred Federation to combat them.

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<sup>15</sup>(Trans) The Spanish word is *coordinadora*, literally “coordinator,” but in this case not in the sense of a person who coordinates – rather, a semi-formal gathering space for diverse groups to share information and aiding in the making of coordinated or common, but not necessarily unified, decisions.

—That no one founds an organization believing that in doing so more revolutionary activity will appear. There's nothing more pathetic than an organization composed of comrades that have neither their own projects nor their own projectuality and are looking for a collective force that they lack.

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