

The Telescope or the Kaleidoscope: A Critique of the ELF

a critical individual's proposal for a diffused offensive attack

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Contents

An Ideology: Single issue and lobbying with dynamite.	3
A Name: Calling oneself a thing?	5
Violence and Terrorism?	7
The Conscious Individual and Self-Motivation	8
Opening up an illegal plane of existence	9
From defensive to offensive: A metaphysics of refusal and attack	10
Suggested Reading:	12

“Our lives are at stake and we will not renounce any weapon that we can use as our own.”

— Anonymous

In regards to the brief history of the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), an organization which has brought much inspiration to the North American context and drawn significant media attention, I would like to present a few points in order to critique, clarify and highlight the ways the ELF can be understood as a methodology instead of as an ideology. At the end of this piece, a proposal is drawn out for anarchists to develop their own actions separately in cells, groups or any informal structure they see fit whether or not these are aligned with the “ELF guidelines”.

Obviously this is something that is difficult, because on the one hand the ELF does exist as an organization but is also made up of many dispersed cells and individuals. So the critique will follow the ELF guidelines and not critique the individuals themselves.

An Ideology: Single issue and lobbying with dynamite.

“The gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor.”

— Albert Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus”

The reasons that the ELF proposes for doing actions is something I would like to question. These guidelines state:

1. To cause maximum economic damage to a given entity that is profiting off the destruction of the natural environment.
2. To educate the public on the atrocities committed against the environment and life.
3. To take all necessary precautions against harming life.

The guidelines are very similar to the goals of the ELF with one major exception. The third of three guidelines states that one must take all necessary precautions against harming life. The ELF considers itself a nonviolent organization as no physical harm has come to a human as a result of the group’s actions. This is by no means a sheer coincidence but in fact a commitment to the guidelines. Individuals interested in becoming active in the ELF need to follow the above guidelines and

create their own close knit anonymous cell made up of trustworthy and sincere people. Remember the ELF and each cell within it is anonymous not only to one another but also to the general public. So there is not a realistic chance of becoming active in an already existing cell. Take initiative, form your own cell and do what needs to be done to protect all life on the planet!¹

Since they put the Earth before their decision as conscious individuals,² a psychosis, a martyrdom complex for the Earth, begins to develop. This is similar to how most of the left today functions, by feeding a psychological need for self-justification in everyday life. When for example activists put so much energy into certain types of actions (petitions, lock downs, passive sit ins, etc.), for all the right and justified reasons for doing so and not seeing the desired results, they become hopeless in their own actions. I think it is important to have a sense of individual intention and self-motivation, rather than becoming blind to reasons for acting against the world around oneself. By blind I mean not having the ability to not see beyond the ways one is making decisions upon what actions to take and see the cause and effect of those actions. This blindness constructs a martyrdom complex similar to that of Sisyphus, who rolled the rock up a mountain day after day. This tunnel vision is caused by focusing solely on the theater of political affairs while neglecting the rest of life.

Having this type of perception about one's own reality can create something similar to what is called a "single issue campaign". Only in this case instead of doing tree sits like Earth First!, an individual or a group is setting incendiary devices to call upon the "unjust actions" of some company. When the company itself has no interest to change the reasons that it exists, it purely becomes a moral battle between the "just" and "unjust" – speaking truth to power when power has no interest in listening. This becomes an endless pursuit for some sad form of change.

The ELF in its FAQ's claims to not follow a leadership or central hierarchy, but an ideology. I would question the use of an ideology, instead proposing the use of a particular methodology that is anarchist in practice. Once an individual begins to believe in an ideology they put it – the ideology – above themselves, acting only in accordance with that ideology, weighing the rights and wrongs of a certain course

¹ Below in quotes and italics is the quote that will be referenced in the first section of this piece, but the overall piece is brought up throughout. It is highly recommend that one read the entirety of the FAQs before preceding with the entirety of this critique.

² "Anyone seeking to create actual positive social and political change must reflect on past attempts throughout history to learn what worked, what didn't, and what can be taken to aid in the current pursuit. A refusal to make this reflection is also a refusal to make an honest life commitment to the cause of justice and protection of life on this planet."- ELF FAQs

of action. This can be seen in the mentality of leftists, Christians, Catholics, vegans and anyone who adheres to an ideology through belief or action.

There is no ethical equation toward the understanding of how “we as society need to change capitalism”, where by acting in accordance with the state and one’s morals we see how things can become equal within the sphere of exploitation. To play within the ethical debate is to place oneself in a position of making compromises with the state and capital, using ethical and moral positions. This can be seen in this quote from the ELF’s facts:

“Anyone seeking to create actual positive social and political change must reflect on past attempts throughout history to learn what worked, what didn’t, and what can be taken to aid in the current pursuit. A refusal to make this reflection is also a refusal to make an honest life commitment to the cause of justice and protection of life on this planet.”

What and where is this “justice” coming from? Is it justice we are actually seeking? Justice implies a universal morality that everyone shares. Is it instead a matter of vengeance against civilization for denying one the ability to live a life one chooses?

We return to the use of methods rather than an ideology. A method can be defined as “a procedure, technique, or way of doing something, especially in accordance with a definite plan.” Hence one does not submit to an ideology of protecting the earth, but sees ways and courses to attack what surrounds them — these being the technique or practice. Once an individual or a group can become unhinged from the trap of ideological thinking and self-justification, their desires become in accordance with the interests and aims.

A Name: Calling oneself a thing?

“We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes, —”
— Anonymous

The ELF is referred to by the Department of Homeland Security^{3,4} as an organization, which classifies them as a thing with a name or single like-minded identity. In a time of widespread revolt or flourishing milieu it can be useful to have a name in order to communicate why an action was taken and tie it to the continued presence of a certain group or set of ideas, especially to differentiate amongst many tendencies existing within a specific context. However, by taking on a name, a group becomes an organization and becomes reified. It begins to be understood as a thing, an entity in and of itself. This further facilitates identification by authorities who begin to chart and map the movements of an organization or group in order to see where and how it moves, how it functions, what language it uses (environmental, anarchist, communist, etc). Not all investigations are carried out in this way (for example, in the Bombs Case in Chile and the Marini Trials in Italy, anarchists were framed as members of fictitious clandestine organizations), but the naming of oneself as a thing does make it easier for the state to repress the milieu as a whole. It's easy for the state to comb through the different groups that exist or existed at a determined period of time and go through arrest documents or do outright surveillance (the surveillance and subsequent arrest of the members of Direct Action in Canada can be a perfect example of this). Inevitably they find those who are more above ground and interrogate them about those specific activities, hold them under false pretexts and send in infiltrators to groups who try to establish long-term relationships. Although they don't know whose entirely involved these practices can eventually lead them to identify suspects.

There is no panacea to repression — it will exist as long as action is taken against the current world. It is only a matter of how deep relationships are rooted in commitment, honesty, and revolutionary courage between those who are partaking in different actions, which will directly correlate to refusal to cooperate with the state. It is worth noting that the ELF as a whole did not consider itself anarchist or revolutionary; it originally spawned from the environmental group Earth First!.

With this in mind, what if a group decided to not give itself a name? Making it harder for the cartographers of power to draw maps, where the longitude and latitude were unable to be connected, diffused and multifarious actions constituted themselves as a thing. Rather than one decisive group with a name, similar to the cellular structure proposed by the ELF, but on the basis of revolutionary activity against the current world.

³ "ALF and its sister organization ELF are considered to be the most active, the most dangerous, and the largest domestic terrorist groups in the United States." Eco-terrorism: Environmental and Animal-Rights Militants in the United States United States Department of Homeland Security

⁴ "The organization is an environmental group but also one that realizes the true cause of murder and destruction of life." — ELF FAQs

Violence and Terrorism?

The ELF is critical of the use of violence and harming individuals.⁵ They state this in their FAQs⁶ section, in which they give examples of other kinds of actions individuals and groups have taken throughout history. In this point they lack a critical assessment of these different groups, their motivations, and the intentions of their actions. The Boston Tea Party, Suffragette Movement and Gandhi did what they did on the basis of a certain interest to change the existing order through illegal means in some hope for positive change. Essentially these references reinforce an interest tending toward social change, an interest in altering the existing order, not destroying it in its entirety. This position is leftist, not anarchist. Again they constantly referred to this in their referential use of abolish, rather than destroy.⁷

⁵ “3) To take all necessary precautions against harming life” – ELF FAQs

⁶ “The British government understood Gandhi’s tactics and knew what broadly to expect from him. The more militant sector of the movement posed a far greater threat to the government simply due to the reality of the British not knowing what to expect or what might result if the road to India’s independence was not traveled down. In fact, Gandhi himself was released from prison on at least one occasion only on the direct order from the British that he would try to calm the more militant sector of the movement. Both the nonviolence tactics employed by Gandhi and his followers and the threat of more severe tactics from the militant sector brought about India’s eventual independence.

“Most schooling systems also do not teach and educate students about the Luddites. Perhaps one of the earliest (if not the first) groups to target the Industrial Revolution and its effects was the Luddites. From 1811 to 1816, the Luddites caused extreme economic damage to the weaver industry in England. Angry at the threat to life and culture that the new machines of the industrialized revolution posed, the Luddites fought back using tactics very similar to those performed by the ELF today. Some factories were forced to shut down and others agreed to stop running the industrialized machines due to the Luddite activity and threat.

“In the abolitionist movement in the United States, there are numerous accounts of slaves sabotaging the property of their “masters” and engaging in various tactics to disrupt the flow of commerce in the slave system. Slave revolts were fairly rare, but even one would create a chilling threat that actually forced some slave owners to give up the practice.

“The suffragette movement, particularly in England, used sabotage in addition to other tactics to successfully gain rights for women. One example occurred in February 1913, when Emmeline Pankhurst, the founder of England’s suffragette movement, bombed the villa of the Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George in Surrey. Pankhurst accepted responsibility for the event and described it as “guerrilla warfare.”

“In the United States, most everyone has heard of the Boston Tea Party which consisted of bands of men boarding English ships in Boston Harbor (among others) and dumping British tea into the water. Seldom is this referred to as economic sabotage, but that is indeed an accurate description of it.” – ELF FAQs

⁷ “The only way to stop the symptoms of the problem is to identify the main root cause and directly work to abolish it... The ELF understands that this legal structure is part of the same system of government and now Westernized world domination that is causing the death of all life. It can never be trusted and ultimately needs to be abolished.” – ELF FAQs

Violence is a necessary tool for anarchists, one that must be constantly thought about and processed, especially for revolutionary individualist anarchists taking an offensive position aimed at the destruction of the current world and its existent order. This violent methodology should not be blind to a critical eye, rather it should be honed in through various actions, inflicted directly or indirectly against an enemy. This means that one cannot just go out right and say that one “wants to ensure that all of the time life will be taken into consideration”. This statement in and of itself does not take into consideration the war we find ourselves amidst, nor does it consider the positions that others like our enemies, “the people”, etc, take in relation to our position against them. We have to consider that there will be casualties at some point, and have already been casualties. We have many enemies (the judges, lumber companies, the police, scientists, politicians, biotechnologists, the left, the right, etc.) and to not harm them would be due to our own pacification.

If and when we choose to act violently (as defined by the state), we will be called terrorists. There is not doubt about it and it is part of the state’s larger strategy of isolating groups and individuals that oppose it, to fabricate a hostility and an ‘other’. The state creates an enemy of “the people,” the community, or whatever massified term the state uses to distinguish itself and those who identify with it from others.

The Conscious Individual and Self-Motivation

“courage to never yield or submit”
— Arthur Schopenhauer

Anarchists at times fall into a very limited view of acting upon their ideas. They build an organization by constantly waiting for this or that moment, yet when its capacity to act is finally reached, what each individual wants is largely misunderstood. Federations, collectives, organizations, and any other large formations are structured in such a way that individuals give up their own agency and desires for a set of guidelines or an ideology. Anarchist individual self-motivation is the ability to consciously understand one’s own desires, intentions, and motivations for acting. Rather than under the banner of a large formation or ideology, actions are taken on one’s own or with other individuals with an informal group who know what they want and why they desire to act together during a certain time period. This requires friendships and relationships that are trusted, understood and long-lasting (the topic of security is left out here because it is such a complex subject, maybe to be visited at another time), rather than political relationships built on an assumed affinity and polite platitudes. These friendships come together and are

shaped by mutually-developed histories, individual aims, and intentions. This does not mean one has to act with the same four people all the time, but that there are many relationships one can share which have the ability to come together to act.

Attacking different institutions and mechanisms of power is a leap, one that must be taken if one is interested in seeing this world destroyed. Each attack can be easily played out in one's head and their physical capacity to act in the most immediate sense, but this leap is a constant evaluation. A question of how to do such things in each instant, a collection of experiences of acting within differing situations that help one gain confidence and courage. Again, these are specific experiences, experiments and practices such as setting fires, throwing rocks through windows, building barricades, scouting for exit and entrance routes, the location of the police, doing research on the placement of different targets within a geographical area, etc.

Opening up an illegal plane of existence

“My daughter raises the smooth
brass kaleidoscope
and watches
as coloured glass slivers
conspire together.
New worlds create themselves before her eyes.”
— Anonymous

Through all the critiques I have tried to flesh out specifically about the ELF as a loose network of cells, I would like to make an open proposal to all anarchists critical of the ways anarchists currently engage in North America who desire to see the current world of Capitalism, the State and Civilization destroyed immediately on an international level.

As anarchists, especially the individualist tendency of this milieu, conscious of our own decisions to partake in a practice of refusal and continued attack, we have every method at our disposal. We have the use of different kinds of weapons: fake ids, improvised explosives, guns, disguises, accomplices, safe houses, robberies, etc etc. (manuals for all of which are readily available online).

It is not very easy to take a step in this direction or realm of actually living in an unchained and free way, and it has not been seen in sometime in the North American context. It is a great leap, but a leap nonetheless, for which some may be ready, but others may not. This should not deter solidarity and support in the most specific ways possible towards those who choose to this path.

This proposal is to be an immediate wager on an offensive in the continual war that surrounds every one of us, individually and collectively, whether we consider ourselves anarchists or not. We are part of the existing order; a giant prison with loose and open cells surrounding us. We make conscious choices to continue amid this miserable life (work, school, family, etc) of alienation and imposed exploitation on an international scale.

This proposal is not for a “front” of the organized masses, but for a diffused and open network of cells across North America and internationally. Cells that are not fighting on a militarist front nor see themselves as the “people’s army”. This has nothing to do with the masses being on one’s side, but with the ability for conscious individuals to activate themselves on a plane of existence that is continually practiced in all its composed elements. Similar to the FAI-IRF (Informal Anarchist Federation — International Revolutionary Front), an open network that is anarchist and anti-authoritarian in nature, except without a name. Communiques only released on an as-needed basis when it is necessary to do so, with actions that speak for themselves. Choosing the most critical targets of the existing order.

From defensive to offensive: A metaphysics of refusal and attack

“As our desire to create our lives as we see fit, to realize ourselves to the fullest extent, to reappropriate the conditions of our existence, develops into a real project of revolt against all domination and oppression, we begin to encounter the world with a more penetrating eye.”

— Wolfi L.

With this in mind, we as human beings are also vessels, political vessels, conscious and always evolving in the plane of war against the existing world of capital, state and civilization. To negate the cause and effect of our surroundings is to limit oneself to a life of misery as a commodity, to the subjugation of all life, to the domination of time by a sedentary existence, to a society that needs one more human cog to speed itself up, to a civilization that imposes the domination of capital within all social relations. To say we are political vessels is to not just stroke a pen upon paper, but to acknowledge that our everyday lives are a melding of ideas with practices and practices with ideas. To put it another way, to experiment with the hypothesis and wager of what is called life.

Attacking from an offensive position means actions should be rehearsed, understood and gone through many times so that if a plan goes wrong, a group or cell

would have the ability to change its movements and tactics very efficiently and quickly.

An offensive position does not wait for our enemies to make a move before attacking them. This means not waiting for someone to be killed by the police and then reacting to it, nor waiting for some crisis in capitalism to strike a group of people and then trying to push the iceberg out of the water. These situations and points do have certain social implications to act within, and provide an opportunity to generalize anarchist methods and illegal practices on a much more social scale that is not isolated to any specific group. But the offensive position is not always social; while the actions themselves may have a social resonance to a specific situation, they can come from an anti-social place of offensive attack, one that is not predetermined nor understood as such a reaction to the state or capital. An attack that is made instead by studying (through the use of different anonymous research technologies – phone books, computers, etc) of the already-existing networks of exploitation and domination in which one or a group of individuals can select a decisive point to hit. This is where the use of the ELF as a method comes in: small cells with an interest in attacking aspects of the civilized order, on the basis of a common hatred of civilization, not based on a common ideology. In its practical sense this means sabotaging railroad lines, destroying electricity infrastructure (telecommunication lines, fiber optics, electrical power lines, cell phone towers or any other unsecured electrical target left open), bombing government buildings or companies that are identified as targets by our individual research.

With this offensive position we must also have the strength and courage to carry on in our individual motivations and intentions. Even if we are carrying on alone, and desire to do so. Understanding when and where to attack our enemies (whether physical or psychological) within the places they reside. To put it another way, this is when we are able to put down the telescope and our limitations based on ideological containers, and open up our field of vision to the colorful world of the kaleidoscope, where the expansive potential of possibilities arise.

This piece is dedicated to:

Conspiracy Cells of Fire

The Informal Anarchist Federation

The International Revolutionary Front (Chile, Italy and elsewhere)

The Black International

Tortuga

Individualists Tending Toward the Wild

The eco-prisoners of the United States

Suggested Reading:

- FAQ page on the ELF press office web page — www.animalliberationfront.com
- Points of ELF pamphlet
- A few topical question concerning anarchist and others — sysiphus-angrynewsfromaroundtheworld.blogspot.com
- Call from the Conspiracy of Cells of Fire — Commando Horst Fantazzini for an International Network of Action and Solidarity — Informal Anarchist Federation — 325.nostate.net
- Our lives of a Burning Vision — 325.nostate.net
- Escalation #1 — 325.nostate.net
- Igniting a Revolution — Earth Liberation Front (2 part movie) — www.youtube.com
- Resistance (magazine about the ELF)

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