

Anonymity

“...So I went up to him with an ivy-wood bowl of black wine in my hands:

‘Look here, Cyclops,’ said I, ‘you have been eating a great deal of man’s flesh, so take this and drink some wine, that you may see what kind of liquor we had on board my ship. I was bringing it to you as a drink-offering, in the hope that you would take compassion upon me and further me on my way home, whereas all you do is to go on ranting and raving most intolerably. You ought to be ashamed of yourself; how can you expect people to come see you any more if you treat them in this way?’

He then took the cup and drank. He was so delighted with the taste of the wine that he begged me for another bowl full. ‘Be so kind,’ he said, ‘as to give me some more, and tell me your name at once. I want to make you a present

that you will be glad to have. We have wine even in this country, for our soil grows grapes and the sun ripens them, but this drinks like Nectar and Ambrosia all in one.'

I then gave him some more; three times did I fill the bowl for him, and three times did he drain it without thought or heed; then, when I saw that the wine had got into his head, I said to him as plausibly as I could: 'Cyclops, you ask my name and I will tell it you; give me, therefore, the present you promised me; my name is Nobody; this is what my father and mother and my friends have always called me.'

But the cruel wretch said, 'Then I will eat all Nobody's comrades before Nobody himself, and will keep Nobody for the last. This is the present that I will make him.'

As he spoke he reeled, and fell sprawling face upwards on the ground. His great neck hung heavily backwards and a deep sleep took hold upon him. Presently he turned sick, and threw up both wine and the gobbets of human flesh on which he had been gorging, for he was very drunk. Then I thrust the beam of wood far into the embers to heat it, and encouraged my men lest any of them should turn faint-hearted. When the wood, green though it was, was about to blaze, I drew it out of the fire glowing with heat, and my men gathered round me, for heaven had filled their hearts with courage. We drove the sharp end of the beam into the monster's eye, and bearing upon it with all my weight I kept turning it round and round as though I were boring a hole in a ship's plank with an auger, which two men with a wheel and strap can keep on turning as long as they choose. Even thus did we bore the red hot beam into his eye, till the boiling blood bubbled all over it as we worked it round and round, so that the steam from the burning eyeball scalded

his eyelids and eyebrows, and the roots of the eye sputtered in the fire. As a blacksmith plunges an axe or hatchet into cold water to temper it—for it is this that gives strength to the iron—and it makes a great hiss as he does so, even thus did the Cyclops' eye hiss round the beam of olive wood, and his hideous yells made the cave ring again. We ran away in a fright, but he plucked the beam all besmirched with gore from his eye, and hurled it from him in a frenzy of rage and pain, shouting as he did so to the other Cyclopes who lived on the bleak headlands near him; so they gathered from all quarters round his cave when they heard him crying, and asked what was the matter with him.

'What ails you, Polyphemos,' said they, 'that you make such a noise, breaking the stillness of the night, and preventing us from being able to sleep? Surely nobody is carrying off your sheep? Surely nobody is trying to kill you either by fraud or by force?'

But Polyphemos shouted to them from inside the cave, 'Nobody is killing me by fraud; Nobody is killing me by force.'

'Then,' said they, 'if nobody is attacking you, you must be ill; when Jove makes people ill, there is no help for it, and you had better pray to your father Neptune.'

Then they went away, and I laughed inwardly at the success of my clever stratagem ..."

Homer, The Odyssey

From ancient times there's been no lack of people who have sensed and sung the potential of the use of anonymity. Only if one is *nobody* can one avoid being recognized by her enemies. This is a Greek wisdom which is

apparently lacking among the anarchist of the Conspiracy of the Cells of Fire, some of whom – in a document written in prison, signed by another comrade in prison and sent to an international anarchist encounter in Zurich in November 2012 – dedicated substantial space to the reasons for using a name, an acronym, a very precise identity with which to claim their actions in struggle.

Their's is a special text since, even though they are part of the specific anarchist armed group that is perhaps the most well-known at this time, in a sense it welcomes and includes a large part of the most widespread critique of armed-struggle-ism, rejecting all separation, all division of roles. There aren't comrades who stay in the forefront handling weapons and comrades who stay in the rear handling papers, because every means is a weapon, one can pick up a banner like a torch, a rock like dynamite. Steel is the raw material for both guns and pens. There is no hierarchy of means, there is no technical fetishism. *All comrades should be able to use everything. An end to specialization.* Perfect. But there still remains, insurmountable, the question of identity. Moving in darkness, and not under the neon lights, this is something these Greek comrades don't want to hear anything about.

Since they have argued for their choices, something that for many years other anarchists who shared their path have not considered appropriate to do, thus making any debate on the question impossible, and having sent their text to an anarchist encounter, it is clear that their intention is to finally open a discussion on these themes. Happy with their decision, we intend here to give our contribution.

Let's start from the question of means. After explaining that they absolutely do not want to place limits on anarchist initiative and want to generalize all technical knowledge, these comrades write: "We believe that what is necessary to become appropriable is the will towards anarchist insurgency itself, and the means are nothing else than objects which our hands and our desires are capable of discovering. Therefore, we avoid the distinctions of low- or high-intensity violence, and we destroy the reproduction of the expertise myth. A typical example of polymorphous anarchist action is the experiment of FAI/IRF, whose members claim responsibility both for solidarity banners and blocking entrances of commercial stores with glue in Peru and Bolivia respectively, and the shooting of a chief executive of a nuclear power company in Italy as well as the execution of three municipal cops in Mexico. After all, as Conspiracy of Cells of Fire we started somewhat like this, too, and we were never tied up to an arrogance of the means and their unofficial hierarchy." Clear, unequivocal words, but... accompanied by an example that is, to say the least, absurd. Because it is a real folly that a single "acronym" claims action so far apart – as to consequences – as the display of banners and the murder of cops. The first is a common act, within everyone's capacity, unlike the second. Usually the author of the first action are more easily traced, not needing great precautions for this. But in the example reported, they would risk paying the consequences of the second as well, especially where both of these actions are carried out in the same territory. Or in Peru and Bolivia will the anarchists of the FAI/FRI have to always limit themselves to banners and glue? Or in accomplishing

such simple acts will they have to have the same levels of caution necessary to quite other forms of action?

These Greek comrades completely neglect to consider a few repressive mechanisms, like for example the use of associative crime, that paradoxically and unintentionally they have seen facilitated by their enthusiasm for identity. To clarify what we mean, we'll give two concrete historical examples. In Spain, in the final decades of the 1800s, there was much social agitation. In lower Andalusia, in particular, setting fire to vineyards and crops, the illegal cutting of wood, cattle theft, and even murder multiplied. Unlike Catalan anarchism, at that time closer to a legalist position, Andalusian anarchists maintained a certain inclination for direct action. In this scenario, in 1883, the "Mano Negra," the mythical anarchist organization to which the authorities attributed a plot aiming to kill all the land owners of the region. If it is true that it aroused the sympathy of many Andalusian anarchists, it is also true that the very existence of this organization is still in doubt. For example, the authors of *The Millenarian Fire*, the French Cangaceiros Delhoysie and Lapierre, wrote: "It is still probable that a group or a sect with the name Mano Negra never existed; this name served to point out an ensemble of actions and nameless sects. In total, the whole set of trials instituted against Andalusian anarchists in the sphere of Mano Negra would end up with 300 prison sentences." Beyond doubt, whether this "signature" was a pure police invention or an effective choice by some Andalusian comrade, it is nonetheless certain that it, on the one hand, consolidated all the nameless actions carried out in that period, and, on the other hand, was of use to the judicial system for handing out the highest penalties

to whoever had taken part in the various social struggles of that period (beyond justifying many summary executions at the expense of subversives). The authors of numberless small actions were therefore hunted down and condemned because they were accused of taking part in an armed gang of which they had never been a part (and that perhaps had never even existed).

A few decades later, in France, an analogous event was produced. The actions carried out by a few individualist comrades were attributed to a “Bonnot gang” that was born only in the imagination of a journalist. In reality there was not structured gang, only an environment of active and volatile comrades. Single individuals met, associated for action, left, without any homogeneity. But the specter of an “organized group” was stirred up by the magistrature and used to incriminate dozens of comrades for associative crimes that foresaw the greatest penalties, which would have been impossible to prepare for without the creation of that organizational, collective phantom.

Whether in the social movement or an “area” of the specific movement, in both of these cases, small actions carried out by individual comrades, expressions of that dark forest that is anarchy, got swallowed up by an Organization, by a Group, real or virtual as it may be. The state has every interest in this happening. On the one hand, it can spread the idea that there are only a few hot heads fighting it, that every insurrectional endeavor is only the plot of a very few subversives against the will of very many citizens who consent to the state, thus depriving subversion of its social and generalizable character. On the other hand, it can use the heavy hand against its enemies, increasing sentences by using associative crime laws.

The Greek comrades not only don't in the least consider these aspects, even only for mere reasons of security, but aggravate them. In fact, they maintain that there is no difference between the one who unfurls a banner and the one who kills cops. They can and should be on the same level, belonging to the same organization that claims their action, that must claim them if it doesn't want to abandon them to meaninglessness. Music to the ears of the judicial system. If the umbrella-acronym can work with the ALF it is because the actions carried out around the world by its activists resembled each other, dealing for the most part with animal liberation. But the examples the Greek comrades gave are of a very different nature. Who is so crazy as to identify themselves with a banner drop, knowing they could be accused of murder? Must one therefore plan the hanging of a piece of cloth with the same caution with which one would plan the elimination of an enemy? In the long run, the hierarchy of means thrown out the door with good intentions will come back in through the window of hard practical necessity.

Unfortunately for these Greek comrades, there is only one way to avoid all these problems: anonymity. What we've said so far suggests it as a precaution, as a "strategic" choice. But this is only a supplementary aspect of the question, in our opinion the least important. In fact, anonymity is also and above all the method that most corresponds to our desires themselves. We don't just consider it useful and functional, above all we consider it sound.

Anonymity eliminates the right of possession of the author over what he has done; it depersonalizes the action, freeing it from the human particularity who committed

it. In this way it allows the action to potentially become the plural act (and never mind if it excites the shabbiness of crypto-braggarts). The anonymous action has no proprietors, no masters, it belongs to no one. *This means that it belongs to all those who share it.*

Dark among the dark, we are all equal. No one is ahead to lead, no one is behind to follow. What we do in the darkness, we alone know. That's enough. The darkness protects us from our enemies, but it also and above all protects us from ourselves. Nothing of the cult of the leader, nothing of the herd mentality, nothing of conceit, nothing of passive admiration, nothing of competition, nothing to prove to anyone. The deeds, raw and naked, without mediation. A bank is burned, a barracks is blown up, trellis is knocked down. Who was it? It doesn't matter, it has no importance. Whether Tom or Dick or Mary did it, what difference does it make? It happened, it is possible to do it, let's do it! In darkness, the action speaks for itself. If it isn't comprehensible, it will certainly not be bombastic communiques swallowed up by the state propaganda machine that will make sense of it. As has already been noted, an action followed by a communique is like a joke followed by an explanation. Doing this does not, in fact, improve the effect, it banalizes it, it ruins it. If an action doesn't speak for itself, accumulating words about it is not going to solve the problem that, obviously, is located upstream, in the wrong choice of target.

The actions of attack don't need any a posteriori justifications. On a planet torn apart by wars, is there any need to explain why one attacks a military base? In a world fallen prey to financial speculation, is there any need to explain why one attacks a bank? In a society corrupted by

politics, is there any need to explain why one attacks the parties? No. The reasons are before everyone's eyes and, wherever this isn't so, it is up to the whole movement to spread the social critique that is able to make them comprehensible, and therefore sharable, and therefore reproducible.

The desire to attack the enemy is as human, spontaneous, natural and immediate as the impulse to make propaganda about it, to assume paternity of it, to take credit for it is artificial and calculated. *For whose eyes does one do this?* If the authors of an action step forward, it is because they want to be recognized, because they want to distinguish themselves, that is, because they want to be admired and followed. This is where the spectacle begins, this is where the call for enlistment opens. Anyone who puts themselves in the spotlight inevitably ends up speaking in the name of others. It can't be otherwise since the spotlights are focused on him, the microphone has been put in her hand. The others, if they don't want to feel used, will be compelled in their turn to step forward; some to follow in the footsteps of the first, others to distance themselves from her. The end of anonymity marks the end of equality, the start of representation. The media are always ready to amplify the words of those who knock on their doors, of those who accept the logic of the spectacle. And this amplification is gratifying, because it gives the illusion of force. An anonymous act, however significant, will with all probability be passed over in silence, whereas even a banal action, if it has the "designer label," will get shouted to the four winds – look, they're talking about us! See how strong we are?

Meanwhile in the darkness there are no names, there are no identities, there is a heterogeneous, molten, fragmentary, convulsive movement. Nobody commands, nobody obeys. Acts, like words, are valued for their meaning, for their content, for their consequences, not for the reputation of the authors. Instead of calling for the end of anonymity in actions, it should be introduced in words as well. Giving life to an autonomous, anonymous, anarchist movement, determined to attack without providing any explanations to the enemy. Capable of carrying forward theory and practice without building pedestals for the ambitious. The reasons for the actions get expressed in books, magazines, posters, flyers, in all the theory put forward by the movement as a whole. The passions of the ideas are expressed in the demonstrations, acts of sabotage, fires, attacks, in all the practices carried out by the movement as a whole.

The Greek comrades write that “The name of each group we participate in is our psyche, our soul.” What a bizarre affirmation! But what could be more secret, more intimate, more *unspeakable* than the psyche and the soul? Who would want to see their own psyche splashed across the front page, their own soul vomited out of the cathode ray tube? The name is only an identity. It is useful for making oneself known and for being recognized. Refusing the name imposed by the society of merchandise in order to choose a name of one’s own really doesn’t make much difference. It does nothing more than launch a new logo. In the face of the media chatter, of this deafening noise, as in the face of the enemy, there is no doubt: silence is golden. Will the media attribute the meaning that is most convenient to them to anonymous actions, distorting

these actions for their own use and consumption? Of course they will, it is their job. But the use of an acronym does not in fact change this situation. Or rather, in this way one does nothing more than participate in this work of confusionism. Anyone who thinks that they can speak loud and clear in the media is naïve. In reality, the media speak through them.

And then, what is there to say of this idea that informal groups can and should discuss with each other through communiques laying claim to actions! But, we ask ourselves, who does one want to address? The person on the street, the exploited who are therefore potential accomplices, who don't understand the meaning of the action? Or comrades from elsewhere to dialogue? In the first case, aside from the illusion of being able to use the media, most people wouldn't understand the presence of all those illusions to what happens in the movement: cross messages, quotations, allusions, all things that make the claims incomprehensible to common people. Their reaction could only be indifference in the face of the struggle of these strange anarchists who in the moment of action express a truly stunted mental universe, incapable of going beyond the door of its own house. Anarchists against the state, the state against anarchists: is that the whole social war? In the second case, instead, we don't understand the reason why one would avail themselves of such an instrument. Why should a dialogue, a discussion, a debate among comrades be developed through the mass media rather than solely through movement channels? Why shouldn't the movement papers, zines, journals, or even blogs be enough for confronting certain questions? And how are these discussions more interesting and

valid when all comrades are not carrying them forward, perhaps even daily, but rather the “militants of combatant organizations” on the occasions of their actions? In the meantime, here’s what is unleashed in this game of *pure self-representation*, cops and journalists read our words, learn linguistic codes, note similarities, decipher references, speculate about relationships, deduce responsibility... and prepare.

As a comrade made known during the encounter in Zurich, during the 1970s in Italy various armed organizations claimed hundreds of actions of attack against the state. But outside of this political spectacle, which contributed so much to creating a completely demented revolutionary mythology that still today continues to harvest victims, thousands of actions occurred. The media gave ample space to the first, but did everything to silence the second. Is there really any need still to explain the reason?

This is why we have carefully read the document of these Greek comrades, and we are glad that they expressed themselves clear in this regard. But between the hypothesis that anarchist radical anarchist actions be combined in Single Fronts and Anarchist Federations (perhaps with their associative agreements to sign), or the hypothesis that they be spread in small affinity groups, we continue to have no doubts. And to prefer an autonomous, anonymous, anarchist revolt.

Anonymity