Right you are… if you think you are

Reflections and updates on a trial

Anna Beniamino

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There's not much to be said about an episode of repression, after all it's the simple cyclical occurrence of action and reaction – or even on how repression plays dirty – another well-known fact. At most these are just a few notes on the development of techniques and strategies.

This I'll try to do. More than a year after the arrests, with the trial already underway, a crack has opened in the censuring bell jar and the court papers been disclosed in all their misery after the short report on the last issue of Croce Nera and the latest developments on the closure of investigations and the preliminary hearing.

Before any assessment, however, I simply want to reiterate my pride in anarchy and the anarchists who have allowed me to nourish myself on the solidarity of actions, written words, anger ricocheted behind the gates and from prison to prison, showing yet again how the anarchist tension is alive, topical and capable of ridiculing categories and jumping over the obstacles that repression wants to impose, shaking off the burden of fear and the myth of consensus.

I've always thought that anarchy is something serious if practised by women and men doted with reason and instinct, something that – when locked up in the cages and traps of dominion – turns against it and gains strength from the weakness dominion wants to instil. We're here for this, in an endless game of dice between authority and its negation.

I've also always thought that anarchy has the unquestionable privilege of being able to lean on a strong philosophical, historical and cultural background, mixed with a primordial instinct for negation: elements that still continue to mingle spontaneously in effective destructive recipes.

"Anarchy is powerful, when it wants to be", to quote anarchist comrade Panagiotis Argyrou in his communique written in the summer in solidarity with those arrested at the G20 in Hamburg.

The anarchist idea continues to be a problem for authority as it makes the practical action inherent in its negation clear to minds that are free.

But I don't want to cause any misunderstanding, mere trials of ideas do not exist: when the repression strikes it always does after things have happened, precise actions that attack widespread social acquiescence and addiction to control typical of these times.

Action and reaction: trials are rigged against anarchists because of what anarchists are, enemies of the state.

Repression – and the consequent codification and application of the penal code – change form and adapt according to contingencies and the level of the ongoing conflict: they can move with vindictive fury, making a clean sweep of everything that lies before them, with bland paternalism or a with whole range of intermediate degrees. Sometimes it's the refractory ones to give the pace to the action, at others they submit to, and react to, the backlashes of the repression. They often complain about moving when they are cornered, rather than attacking first. However one must be aware of the fact that taking blows doesn't mean being 'victims'.

It could be that victim of repression has been a role for too a long, an easy one for some, in the theatre of democracy, a fake unpleasant label that has produced pietism, not combative awareness.

The importance of the present times is in this passage: on the new or renewed awareness of being blunt instruments, bearers of subversive germs if we want, not only in the limited milieus of the movement but also in presenting ourselves, social or antisocial as we feel, as proud bearers of an intensive critique to the era of technological domination, global control and homologation.

Denuding the king and his shame, has been and will continue to be a target of the repression, past and present, with old and new tools. The ridiculous categories of the penal codes – defending

criminal acts, instigation, association – aim at striking the connective tissue between word and action, solidarity.

We can't let ourselves be surprised by this, over a century ago there were associations of wrongdoers, the directing authorities closed down papers and persecuted the subversives and their meetings, put the disreputable places where they would meet under surveillance. Today the web and digital communication are also monitored.

Unlike the past, however, control has become all-pervasive thanks to the advent of the new technological frills, which is often accompanied by less awareness and trust in one's potential and possibilities of opposing it.

Repressive models and techniques are being re-proposed and updated (sometimes not even all that much), administered according to the needs: now, among other things, they are also used to restrain, or try to, an undeniable effervescence in anarchist milieus.

Acknowledging this doesn't mean immobilising oneself like scared rabbits caught in the headlights of a moving lorry or hurling oneself – tied hands and feet – into the jaws of the monster, convinced of its inevitable voracity. Rather a change in perspective: aspiring, now and always, to become indigestible bites, without succumbing to the delusion of an omniscience and omnipotence of power, where often there is no global strategy but a formless intertwining of contrasting career interests, orders given and variously zealous officers.

The human factor should not be forgotten, even in the most degraded form that can emerge from those filling in files in police stations, who steal and deform pieces of our lives thus giving a wide view of their essential misery.

Starting at the end: from association to instigation and vice versa

With the notification of the end of investigations in April 2017 – for those arrested and others put under investigation in September 2016 – another charge has been added to those against 12 of the 17 defendants, namely article 414 (instigation to commit criminal acts) with intent of terrorism as creators and/or distributors of Croce Nera, paper and blog, with explicit mention of certain editorials and articles from issues 0 to 3. A sign of the times, the aggravating circumstance of 'having committed the act through IT and telecommunication instruments' was added to the charge of instigation.

Moreover on 2nd June 2017, with suggestive timing concerning the preliminary hearing of 5th June, repression's pyramid marketing has added to their loot. Another 7 comrades are put under investigation for articles 270bis and 414 because they are editors (and not) of Croce Nera and the blogs RadioAzione and Anarhjia, besides accusing 2 of the 7 just mentioned of article 280, following the raids of September 2016 and the finding, among other material published in Croce Nera, of a copy of the claim for an attack on the court of Civitavecchia carried out in January 2016, signed Fireworks committee for an extraordinary year-FAI/FRI. The two lines of investigation were unified at the preliminary hearing and all were sent to trial without changing anything of the various charges. Practically, after a year of obsessive censorship control (through the systematic blocking and seizing of prisoners' letters, which went directly to the prosecutor's files and added to the acts of the preliminary hearing) and monitoring of solidarity, the prosecutor and the police managed to generate a punitive 'summary' procedure against some of those who had continued to keep in touch with them [the comrades on trial] and carried on editorial activities.

The simultaneous use of articles 270bis and 414 is now an example of their strategies, if we consider what happened with the 'Shadow' trial sentence in Perugia and the use they want to make of it in this one.

Not to mention the exacerbation of article 414 in recent years, as it is also being used 'franc', as winemakers would say, without using it on the margins of associative charges, but to strike any anarchist writing that 'defends' anarchist action, as a malleable lid with which to try to suffocate the flames of words and actions of solidarity.

However it should be stressed that the cop's petty tricks have not scared anyone.

Recyclable paper... The structure of the investigation

It might be that written words remain but, with Scripta Manent the prosecutors and Digos of Turin didn't want to throw anything away. They have exhumed from the ancestors' cemetery about 20 years of monitoring and repression, archives and old trials, masticating them and spitting them out again.

— The ORAI trial (prosecutor Marini, ROS, Rome) of 1995;
- Investigation of the attack on Palazzo Marino in Milan in 1997 claimed by Azione Rivoluzionaria Anarchica;
- Investigation of International Solidarity (prosecutor Dambruoso, Digos, Milan) filed away in 2000;
- Operation Croce Nera (prosecutor Plazzi, ROS, Bologna), which in 2005 had led to the arrests of the Croce Nera editors of the time and which concluded shortly afterwards with a sentence of no case to answer;
- Investigation on the incendiary package sent to Lecce's police chief in 2005 signed by Narodnaja Volja/FAI;
- Investigation of the attack on the carabinieri training barracks in Fossano and the incendiary packages claimed by FAI/RAT in 2006 (prosecutor Tatangelo, ROS, Turin) archived in 2008;
- Investigation of the incendiary packages and the attack on the Crocetta claimed by FAI/RAT in 2007, archived in 2009 (prosecutor Tatangelo, Digos, Turin);
- Operation Shadow (prosecutor Comodi, Digos, Turin), which began in 2009 based on articles 270bis and 280 and concluded in 2016 with sentences based on article 414 against the periodical KNO3 and 2 sentences for car theft and attempted sabotage of a railway line;
- Operation Ardire (prosecutor Comodi, ROS, Perugia), begun in 2010, leading to 8 prison arrests in 2012 and was later integrally included in Scripta Manent after territorial jurisdiction vicissitudes first in Milan then in Turin;
- Investigations Kontro, Replay, Sisters, Tortuga (prosecutor Manotti, ROS, Genoa) on attacks on carabinieri barracks in Genoa, RIS headquarters in Parma in 2005 and other attacks;
- Investigations Evoluzione and Evoluzione II (prosecutors Musto and Milita, ROS, Naples), begun in 2012 in reference to the attack on Adinolfi then 'evolved' into monitoring of RadioAzione and RadioAzione Croatia;
- Investigation Moto (prosecutors Franz and Piacente, ROS, Genoa), which in 2012 led to the arrests of Nicola Gai and Alfredo Cospito;
- Investigation of the parcel bomb sent to Equitalia (prosecutors Cennicola and Polino, Digos,

Rome) of 2011, reopened in 2014;
- Investigation of an attack on the court of Civitavecchia and molotov against the carabinieri of Civitavecchia in 2016 (prosecutor Cennicola, ROS, Rome).

This long list has been made by sifting the index – and surely something has been omitted – not to mention a whole other series of monitorings and intelligence activities transferred from investigation to investigation, from police station to police station, often amidst territorial jurisdictions through the loopholes allowed by the formulation of associative crimes.

The strategy at the base of all this is clear enough, and the usual bulk of papers, however contradictory, becomes suggestive. Consider that all the acts of the above-mentioned proceedings have almost entirely been thrown into Scripta Manent, and along with the duo Sparagna/ Turin Digos' elucubrations become over 206 files of judicial documents.

Filing and skimming off: hundreds of names and curriculum vitae, of episodes of daily subversion, filed, sectioned and recomposed ad hoc. To existential trajectories, fragments of discussions and publications are superimposed discordant interpretations according to the sharp eyes of the investigator on duty, attributive space-time acrobatics, neo-Lombrosian behavioural studies. It's not the first time this has happened; the attempt at dividing between 'good and the bad' and the use of anarchist publications as 'clandestine' and prone to 'association' are also well tested.

It often occurs, and I'm the first to do so, that one uses irony against the obvious coarseness and incongruence of the judicial papers, forgetting that there is deliberate arrogance on the part of power in all this.

Besides their great or small catch, the repressive apparatus is fully aware of the manoeuvring that its anti-terrorism operations allows. Supervise and punish… in-depth monitoring of contacts, reactions, attempts to put pressure on the 'capacity' and extent of solidarity, long pre-trial imprisonments.

However I find short-sighted and mistaken the analysis that sees repression against certain sectors of the movement as a laboratory for experimenting repressive techniques, so as to extend them to vast social strata. There is there a certain paternalistic presumption in that, although naïve, beyond seeking consensus through the cement of repression, in these years' lukewarm dissent.

When instead the use of carrot-and-stick is far more complex and subtle.

Power doesn't need to lab test repression on anarchists, it just applies a fragment of the violence employed more ferociously elsewhere: when the state has no scruples about training armed gangs of mercenaries to defend its borders and interests, about drowning thousands of human beings every day, about using coercive measures to send people away from their own area every week for simple crimes of opinion (a simple click on the web page of any idiot, religious fundamentalist of the twenty-first century, is sufficient to find oneself on the first plane).

For now repression is administering well diversified punishments and it knows very well where it can extend indiscriminately, with the widest slave-like media coverage. Without omitting that also in the milieus of the movement there is no lack of 'exemplary' punishments.

It often happens that comrades are more cautious and aware in facing repression. It is not accidental that more attention is being paid to the development of filing techniques, control, massive monitoring, as well as the manipulation of consensus from these parts.

Police psycho-anthropology

In a framework of accusations where everything moves on deductions/illations, a kind of behavioural study intervenes in massive doses to try to put them together. The awareness – and subtracting oneself – of an all-seeing omnipresent police control become suggestive in themselves.

There are now consolidated practices in the milieus of the movement, or rather a social practice spread for the most diversified reasons: talking evasively on the phone or using it in a limited way, not compulsively as the perfect citizen consumer's guide would like; taking care not to be followed; eliminating bugs and cameras from houses, cars, workplaces; being aware of computer control, to give a few examples.

For years, too, we've known about the cops' opportunistic interpretations of relations with friends and comrades and in movement initiatives: to the unquestionable judgement of the spy on duty and/or calculated short-sightedness, according to the needs, one is too much or too little present. We also know about the cops' passion for seeing any initiative, journey or out-of-town trip as a 'meeting of associates' (overzealous Piedmont cops even produced ample video-reports from the seaside, in Liguria on the rocks on the August holiday, with lots of swimming to the buoy as 'secret meetings').

Now, in a perfect encounter between psycho-police and Italian-style comedy, absence becomes suggestive: physical absence, absence of telephone calls and contacts. This is not linked to a given event or action by the accusation, but just avoiding control, or better not being monitored step by step, is sufficient and it's not clear whether this happens because of those under control or the clear incapacity of the controllers.

Too much irony? Perhaps so, given that reality is made of obsessive and worrying control, that stops at nothing: impromptu searches to cover checks on malfunctioning bugs hidden in homes, control and x-rays of post, correspondence removed directly from post boxes and sorting offices; duplicate keys to get into workplaces in the absence of those under investigation, cameras hidden in public places because they are 'possible targets'.

These are just a few examples of quite a capillary application of control, added to the traditional ones: telephones tapped for years, bugs in homes and workplaces, GPS in cars, cameras above doors of homes, basements and workplaces, cross checks of phone records and mobile phone positioning, tracking with photos and video recordings, control of mail and eavesdropping through computers.

Then, still in the techno-logic and pseudoscientific approach of the new millennium, a flourishing of statistics, diagrams, percentages, cross-matching of the oddest data: how often the defendants met over the years (…even at home, with relatives and partners, as well as at their own trials) and how often their respective telephones… met; in which days of the week most incendiary packages are delivered; which cities have most attacks; which words anarchists prefer to use… but here we are straying from sociological statistical and behavioural study to another cornerstone of the court…

The expert opinion approach

A tailoring technique attributing specific charges to individual defendants has emerged in this trial. Massive use is made of graphic, linguistic-stylistic appraisals in order to attribute the writing of some claims to a couple of defendants and give consistency to accusatory conjectures.

Put this way it might seem like something serious (because it serves as a pretext for pre-trial detention), but if we go deeper into the reading of a modern expert's report either techno-logical or of the human mind, we can see how the methods employed are questionable and malleable and results uncertain.

On the one hand the decision to proceed by deliberately ignoring results that contradict the thesis to be maintained is obvious, so comparisons with negative results are ignored and texts are gone through to find those that meet the needs. Common expressions or those belonging to anarchist political-poetic language become so characteristic that attributions abound in this paroxysm of combinations… that is to say the most odd assortments emerge, that even go beyond the charges themselves.

The mechanism of repression is well aware of the inconsistency of certain comparisons and examinations – and they even admit it between the lines – but also knows that the use of DNA and other techno-scientific expert's reports has been sold to public opinion as reliable incontrovertible technology and so they also try to use it in court. As a matter of fact the record of errors, manipulation and approximation is remarkable (even the law has been forced to admit it, after the early years of an 'acritical' use of biological reports). We have seen signs of this in recent times too, all over the world, in trials against comrades.

However, from this compulsive collection of material and cross comparisons some data can be obtained on their systematic collection and use.

The DAP [department of prison administration] offers itself as a container of, as well as identification photos and fingerprints, records of previous incarcerations, providing personal files and graphology samples of all the anarchists who have passed through the country's jails, even extracting letters, demands, requests, etc. from their archives. If there had been no arrest or search, they go to the registry office or other municipal archives.

Various DNA databases have been in use for over 10 years, not only with samples taken during raids but also by keeping samples and making cross-comparisons of findings in various archives.

– These are just a few aspects to be developed and thought about. The fact remains that within a framework where repressive procedures are communicating vessels, absence is a sign of guilt, solidarity is an aggravating circumstance, if Scripta Manent was trying to strike a few anarchists, on the contrary it has contributed to making solidarity and awareness flourish and this – all things considered – can only continue to make me smile in spite of the constraints on my present horizon.

Anna

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