

Affinity

Alfredo M. Bonanno

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Anarchists have an ambivalent relationship with the question of organisation.

On the one hand there are those who accept a permanent structure with a well-defined programme and means at their disposal (even if only a few), that is divided up into commissions, while on the other there is a refusal of any stable relationship, even in the short term.

Classical anarchist federations and individualists are the two extremes of an escape from the reality of the clash. The comrade that belongs to an organised structure hopes that a revolutionary transformation will result from a growth in numbers, so he holds the cheap illusion that the structure is capable of controlling any authoritarian involution or any concession to the logic of the party. The individualist comrade is solicitous of his own ego and fears any form of contamination, any concession to others or any active collaboration, believing such things to be giving in and compromising.

This turns out to be the natural consequence, even for comrades who consider the problem of specific organisation and the federation of groups critically.

The organisation is thus born before any struggles take place and ends up adapting to the perspective of a certain kind of struggle which—at least one supposes—is to make the organisation itself grow. In this way the structure has a vicarious relationship with the repressive decisions of power, which for various reasons dominate the scene of the class struggle. Resistance and the self-organisation of the exploited are seen as molecular elements to be grasped here and there, but only become meaningful on entering and becoming part of the specific structure or allow themselves to be regrouped into mass organisms under the (more or less direct) leadership of the latter.

In this way, one is always waiting. It is as though we are all in provisional liberty. We scrutinise the attitudes of power and keep ready to react (always within the limits of the possible) against the repression that strikes us, hardly ever taking the initiative, setting out our interventions in first person, overturning the logic of the loser. Anybody that recognises themselves in structured organisations expects to see their number of members increase. Anyone that works within mass structures (for example in the anarcho-sindicalist optic) is waiting for today's small demands to turn into great revolutionary results in the future. Those who deny all that but also spend their time waiting, who know what for, are often stuck in resentment against all and everything, sure of their own ideas without realising that they are no more than the flip side of the organisational and programmatic stance.

We believe that it is possible to do something else.

We start off from the consideration that it is necessary to establish contact with other comrades in order to pass to action. We are not in a condition to act alone as long as our struggle is reduced to platonic protest, as bloody and terrible as you like, but still platonic. If we want to act on reality incisively there must be many of us.

How can we find our comrades? We have cast aside any question of programmes and platforms in advance, throwing them out once and for all. So what is left?

Affinity.

Affinities and divergence exist among anarchists. I am not talking about personal affinity here, i.e. sentimental aspects that often bring comrades together (in the first place love, friendship, sympathy, etc.), I am talking about a deepening of reciprocal knowledge. The more this deepening grows, the greater the affinity can become. In the case of the contrary, divergences can turn out to be so great as to make any action impossible. So the solution lies in a growth in reciprocal knowledge, developed through a projectual examination of the various problems that the class struggle presents us with.

There are a whole range of problems that we want to face, and usually care is taken not to examine them in their entirety. We often limit ourselves to questions that are close at hand because they are the ones that affect us most (repression, prison, etc.).

But it is precisely our capacity to examine the problem that we want to face that leads to the best way to create conditions for affinity. This can obviously never be absolute or total (except in very rare cases), but can be sufficient to create relations disposed to acting.

If we restrict our intervention to the most obvious and superficial aspects of what we consider the essential problems to be, we will never be able to discover the affinity we desire. We will constantly be wandering around at the mercy of sudden, unsuspected contradictions that could upset any project of intervention in reality. I insist on pointing out that affinity should not be confused with sentiment. We can recognise affinity with comrades that we do not particularly like and on the other hand like comrades with whom we do not have any affinity.

Among other things, it is important not to let oneself be hindered in one's action by false problems such as a presumed differentiation between feelings and political motivations. From what has been said above it might seem that feelings should be kept separate from political analysis, so we could, for example, love someone and not share their ideas at all and vice versa. That is roughly possible, no matter how lacerating it might be. The personal aspect (or that of feelings if you like) must be included in the above concept of going into the range of problems, as instinctively succumbing to our impulses often signifies a lack of reflection and analysis, or not being able to admit to simply being possessed by god.

From what we have said there now starts to emerge, even nebulously, a first approximation of our way of considering the anarchist group: a number of comrades linked by a common affinity.

The more the project that these comrades build together is gone into, the greater their affinity will be. It follows that real organisation, the effective (and not fictitious) capacity to act together, i.e. to find each other, make analyses and pass to action, is in relation to the affinity reached and has nothing to do with more or less camouflaged monograms, programmes, platforms, flags or parties.

The affinity group is therefore a specific organisation that comes together around common affinities. These cannot be identical for all, but different comrades will have infinite affinity structures, all the more varied the wider the effort of analytical quest reached.

It follows that all these comrades will also tend towards quantitative growth, which is however limited and not the main aim of the activity. Numerical development is indispensable for action and it is also a test of the breadth of the analyses that one is developing and its capacity to gradually discover affinity with a greater number of comrades.

It follows that the organism thus born will end up giving itself means of intervention in common. First, an instrument of debate necessary for analysis that is capable, as far as possible, of supplying indications on a wide range of problems and, at the same time, of constituting a point of reference for the verification—at a personal or collective level—of the affinities or divergencies that arise.

Lastly it should be said that although the element that holds a group of this kind together is undoubtedly affinity, its propulsive aspect is action. To limit oneself to the first element and leave the other in second place would result in relationships withering in Byzantine perfectionism.

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