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Litanies

Alfredo M. Bonanno

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All religions have lists of words, often barely comprehensible, that are repeated ad nauseam by the faithful in order to beseech deliverance from their god. These lists are drawn up and perfected by professionals who study the best way to blunt the brains of their flock.

The aims of such repetitions vary and of course have nothing to do with the god to whom they are addressed, who, not existing in any known shape or form, doesn't give a damn about so much wasted breath. The first aim is to let the devotees' minds loosen their perception of their surroundings, giving them the benefit of a kind of cheap ecstasy that relaxes the nerves and helps them to endure oppression, in whatever form. The second is to stimulate a collective feeling when more than one person is present, as these litanies are hardly ever recited by one devotee alone, though this should not be excluded in absolute. The third aim is to establish contact with the divine but given that, as previously mentioned, this doesn't exist, the contact is reduced to the act of repeating the same words obsessively over and over.

All this, along with other aims that I cannot recall right now, but which could be gone into by the benevolent reader, is to let

the sound of the words prevail over their actual meaning. After all, it is the intonation of the litany that one hears, not the concept relayed, which obviously only exists as an intensification of the absurd. Like any other music that is intended to lull people to sleep, it must be repetitive, monotonous, predictable and comforting to allow thoughts and perceptions of things to fly low until they fade away and finally disappear. Strange as it might seem, the unification and repetitive modulation of the litany produces dumbing down effects far more easily than one might imagine. The practitioners of any religion, i.e. the officers of the god being prayed to, know this very well and take advantage of it one way or other, to prepare the attention (so to speak) of the believers for the discourse that they want to channel their way. Whether preaching or a sermon, a summons to faith or fierce threats, it makes no difference, the listener's ears must be captured and the brain dazed before the new words appear, often violently in contrast to the previous chanting.

But why are you talking about litanies in an anarchist journal, one might ask.

I'll explain right away.

Anarchist comrades do not recite litanies together, at least not yet, but some of them draw up lists, which are devoutly sought, read, solicited, identified, discussed; they are applauded and used as tools to promote the anarchists' self-satisfaction. So, not litanies but lists.

But lists of what?

Lists of attacks that have already been carried out or could be carried out in the future. And this is just the best case scenario.

Even the writer of these lines, presumptuous as a scowling Cerberus with three heads, committed this sin from the mid-seventies onwards by drawing up the *Proletarian Chronicle*, a list of all the attacks on manifestations of power in the bimonthly journal *Anarchismo*. Along with the two comrades with whom I began the undertaking (note to the reader and also for my wounded heart: in

actual fact my comrades were not two but only one, Tito Pulsinelli, as the other, Vito Messina, was a man of the secret services under the name of agent “Meta”, as we discovered forty years later), we thought that this list could be helpful to spread both the action and the model employed in the operation, etc. This might have made sense at a time when there were so many comrades disposed to act, so many things being done, such great confusion and lack of clarity. Which is not an excuse, I just want to say that I wouldn’t do the same today.

Explaining why is not easy but that is what I am trying to do.

At the present time, a list of attacks being carried out can only apparently be an impulse to act. Yes, it can fill the vacuum left by our demolished and afflicted conscience. Well, someone might say (actually, many, as I can see when I am moving around), at the end of the earth, it doesn’t matter where, someone is acting against power by attacking it in its interests, its structures, its technological components and everything else. My turn will come, of course it will, the little comrade says, holed up in their eternal doubts as perpetual preparer of the next action in the near future, always still in the making. For the moment it is enough for me to know what is being done, everywhere, even at the end of the earth, it doesn’t matter. I don’t care about differences of background, about the fact that the conditions are radically different from one place to another, it’s enough for us to go forward heads down. It’s enough to simply read this long list, it cheers me up and makes me feel proud to be an anarchist.

The same kind of bitter reflection could be made concerning another kind of list, one specifying all the actions of attack possible: burning a police station, sawing down a high voltage pylon, pulling a policeman’s beard and so on.

Why did I write “in the best of cases”? Because sometimes among the actions of attack these lists also include sad manifestations of dissent called *presidi* [sit-ins], a horrid word of military origin that anarchists, along with many of those who borrow other people’s

words, use without noticing. Let's say, a full-blown *presidio* with a giant sheet carrying the words "let's destroy prisons." I have discussed the meaning of such initiatives elsewhere, here I just want to repeat that prison is a total institution, which in order to exist requires structural and economic connections spread throughout the territory. Are we sure that we know these connections, do we know who the contracted suppliers are, which power plants provide the energy, where the water tanks are located and everything else? Or are we only able to write "let's destroy prisons", which would be the same as saying "let's destroy society", since society as it is today cannot exist without prisons? Do we really think that we can suggest the slogan "let's destroy society" to the poor unfortunates who find themselves behind bars, as that is what we are saying to them? Under such conditions wouldn't it be better just to stay at home and read our manuals for becoming the perfect anarchist? Something similar, if not the same, could be said about other events.

Perhaps it would have been better to have drawn up another kind of list, one containing the tools required for a planned action, in plenty of detail so as to avoid unpleasant surprises or sudden blocks because the lighter to light the fuse is missing? Including the maps required in order to reach the objective, the distance from the nearest points of repression, timing, possible escape routes, the number of participants required, a thorough discussion on the significance of the action, a decision about who should take the lead and give the appropriate orders in the event of things not going as planned (yes, I'm talking about "command" and "orders" and I confirm that I am an anarchist and I repeat that I hate windbags), and everything else.

This would be a good list to draw up and one that I would read with interest, but I'd never publish one like this in any of our papers, journals and so on, because it only concerns the comrades who have decided—after finding and choosing themselves on the basis of reciprocal affinities—to carry out a precise action of attack.

If we want to dirty our pages with technical topics, well, let's do it by going into detail about some action which, due to its complexity, we consider deserves to be gone into in depth, and publish the experience of comrades who have lived (attention to this word) such an action, not just heard about it by reading lists. For example, in Italy, between the end of 1977 and 1989 1200 high voltage pylons were cut down. A few of these actions ended up in these blessed lists. But do you really think that was what triggered the proliferation of such actions, which I not only agree with but believe are good for one's health, being a question of night walks in the countryside? At the time the above-mentioned journal published an article in which one method (among the many) was examined, explaining how you can cut down a pylon without making any noise and without any specialist technical equipment, cheerfully sawing away. I was tried and sentenced for that article, but that's not the point. I believe, given some of the reports in the local newspapers at the time, that this effort of the pen had not been in vain. But, of course, it wasn't a sudden inspiration resulting from a list.

Let's leave litanies to the priests of every kind.

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