

New Edition of “At Daggers Drawn”

afterword

Beaten Daggers

Published in May 1998 by NN editions, created seven months earlier by some anarchists that had taken part in the experience of the weekly *Canenero*, in the course of 17 years, this pamphlet has gone around the world, having been translated into Spanish, Portuguese, English (with editions in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia), French, Dutch, German, Swedish... Since it has nourished much reflections, furnished ideas, reinforced inclinations, raised doubts, as well as provoking irritation (the concept of the «existent» above all, in its unbridled totality, has shown itself rather indigestible to those who aspire to administer at least something of what is the state), one can affirm that in its own small way, *At*

Daggers Drawn has made its contribution to the spread of an autonomous anarchist insurrectional perspective. A perspective at the same time irreducibly hostile to «little reforming steps» and not at all charmed by «a revolt for a few close friends to the sound of pyrotechnic fires and badly put together slogans». Born from the refusal of the false alternative between *citizenist reformism* or *vanguardist armed-strugglism*, these pages therefore maintained the necessity and the immediate possibility of an insurrectional poetry made by all, not to be confused either with sad political propaganda or with bombastic communiques laying claim to actions.

Considering its respectable international fortune, it's bewildering that *At Daggers Drawn* has not been reprinted in the place where it first appeared. And yet, it is precisely in Italy that this text has had the least resonance, victim of "identitarian" prejudices and rancors nourished by a large part of the so-called movement in the face of the environment in which it arose, as well as a substantial lack of interest toward any deep examination and critical debate about this. In fact, in 1998, the insurrectional idea was viewed with a certain deprecatory pity by the militants of various schools – all desirous of a peaceful «exodus» into a «non-state public sphere» – who in most cases considered it a fortune that could occur in an exotic Chiapas and, in the worst case, a cataclysm that could strike a rough Albania. As if insurrection were only able to raise the social question at the distance of an ocean, and usually through authoritarian organization, force instead in Europe to manifest in ephemeral and frightening explosions of blind fury. Ceasing to linger over every possible distinction between insurrection, uprising

and riot, the events of the last 17 years have made such convictions waver, but without managing to completely deny it. As heady as it is in its persistence, the Greek fire seems to be an exception in the midst of the norm of «Arab springs» or «liberated Kurdish territories» on the one hand, and French *racaille* or English riots on the other.

This said, it is undeniable that the strong convulsions to which the whole social order is prey at the start of this third millennium have extinguished the smug smile of many subversives in front of those who dare to call for insurrection here and now. Yesterday's skeptics are transformed into today's enthusiasts to the point of making it become a downright international best-seller on the editorial, media, and militant marketplace. The reason is easy to understand: the social peace that accompanied the 1980s and 1990s, in its most inflated and complacent aspects, is terminated. The virtual wealth is not able to compensate for the real poverty, the supermarket shelves may even gleam with goods, but their consumption is no longer accessible to those who find themselves forced to tighten their belts. Or almost everyone. Today voluntary servitude is still certainly majoritarian, solidly majoritarian, but it has lost its air of stupid innocence. Discontent, malaise, and indignation spread everywhere in an unstoppable way, causing worry, panic, but also some hope for a counter-charge. These feelings of frustration will get pacified in a new institutional social cohesion or, in the face of the relentless succession of «political scandals», «financial crises», «ecological catastrophes», «religious wars» ... will they finally provoke a generalized hostility?

But then, if the insurrectional theory is back on the table, why does it seem that *At Daggers Drawn* has not left a trace and memory even among the anarchists themselves, precisely in Italy? Because, above all since the end of 2005, on the wave of the spread of the No TAV struggle in Val Susa, a new possibility has appeared within reach: that of an insurrectional rupture to be achieved through a skillful alternation of reformist flattery and radical assaults. The popular support that this protest movement received united the vast majority of Italian anarchists in the same practical observation capable of overcoming old divisions: the strategic necessity of abandoning all irreducible and unsustainable otherness. Here are the people, and they struggle together with us! Let's keep close to them, not scare them and drive them away with overly excessive demands.

This convinced many of the most turbulent anarchists to get their heads straight, if not in (party?) line¹, and replace the drawn dagger with which to act. In this way, the dagger of permanent conflictuality (to carry forward through affinity) has been exchanged for the crochet needle of on-and-off conflictuality (to maneuver through political friendships). Since this transition entails a clear abandonment and renunciation of the ideas expressed up to then, along with the practices linked to them, this gives a good explanation for the embarrassed oblivion² of this pamphlet over the last decade. Since it is obvious to anyone who preserves even the smallest bit of intelligence and dignity that *those who over time have hobnobbed with politicians, journalists, academics, experts, recuperators of various stripes, dissociati*³ and even snitches, cannot be

the ones who will be able to keep on trying to come to daggers drawn with the false critics of the existent.

At least not here in Italy. This possibility continues to exist instead in other countries – in Spain, in particular, so it appears – where a comfortable geographic distance allows some local opportunist to be able to brag about a sulfurous reputation by now evaporated after many years of political blessings. The fate of an anonymous text like *All'aria aperta (In the Open Air)* is illustrative of this: published in September 2004 – whose *scribe of other people's ideas*, after first being repentant about his efforts at memory and transcription of what he heard in the course of a nocturnal journey, because it wasn't very profitable from the viewpoint of the consensus with the movement, with time was so satisfied with it as to publicly claim the text in an anthology where it appeared with his name and surname, first in Spanish and then in English. But the most blatant instance of this sort is perhaps that of the new Spanish edition of *At Daggers Drawn*, published in anonymous form in October 2012 in Madrid, and only now come into our hands. This new edition is embellished with an introduction presented as «fruit of a discussion between the authors and the editors of the text». It is a mere four pages where it is difficult to establish whether it is the most parasitical bragging or the most vulgar hypocrisy which raises the most disgust, nausea and loathing.

With regards to the first, we can say it quickly. Since the ones writing took part in NN editions, and therefore know its secrets, we can rule out in the most absolute manner that «*los autores*» of *At Daggers Drawn* had a discussion with the Iberian editors of “*Cuerpo a cuerpo con lo existente, sus defensores y sus falsos criticos*”. First of all,

because it is well known who the author of this text is: *no one*. Born at the end of long and continuous discussions, writings, rewritings, additions, modifications, suggestions and corrections, *At Daggers Drawn* had to belong to whoever recognized themselves in it, and so it will always have to be. The hand that wrote it would have never been able to do it without the meeting of the heads that thought it. The heads that thought it, taken separately, would never have managed to take up the pen that wrote it. As all this work belongs to no one in particular, it belongs to everyone in general. Anyone who claims it as their intellectual property is a miserable braggart. Furthermore, technically, it would not have even been possible for the «*editores*» to discuss with its *insignificant* editorial authors of 1998, since a few years after that their paths divided forever: there are those who can't choose, due to all the options, which people in need to support and enroll, and those who go on the more and more desperate search to meet people who desire. So a single hypotheses remains on its feet: that the Spanish «*editores*» had a discussion with *a few* of the «*autores*», *who strutted before their eyes as the only «autores» of that text, leading the other Spanish comrades to believe such a lie.*

But it gets worse. Indeed, because after such a premise, if you want to witness a genuine revision of the meaning of this text, you just have to read what is co-written by the self-styled Italian «*autores*» in this introduction in the Iberian language. Not content to claim exclusive right to a past that they have many times denied, they succeed in the remarkable feat of flaunting it as their burning present. In this they differ sharply from that long tradition of anarchists, more or less individualist, who after

repenting of their youthful singular exuberance have converted to a mature common calculation. The most famous of these is perhaps Victor “Serge” Kibalchich, who passed in the course of a few years from the admiration of Albert Libertad to the orders of Leon Trotsky, while in Italy the figure of Carlo Molaschi stands out, a young iconoclastic rebel saved from the idea of the Nietzschean overman thanks to the Italian Anarchist Union membership card. Like their predecessors (but to be charitable, let’s forget the end of both!), the self-styled «*autores*» also went through their youth following presumptuous dreams of individual revolt – who knows whether it was due to «badly digested» readings or «bad influences» – often accompanied by a certain contempt for the masses (there were those who loved to quote Cioran when he thundered that «as soon as you go out into the streets, in view of the people, “extermination” is the first word that comes to mind», and those who love to quote Brassens according to whom «more than four is a gang of assholes», in order to later grow up, become reasonable and dedicate themselves to the humble realities of collective actions, the only ones that, according to them, can get a grip on the state of things. Unlike their predecessors, however, they have never taken leave of what they stopped loving. No, they prefer to pretend to still be attached to it so that from time to time they can exploit it wherever it is possible. At bottom, the thought of having wasted all those years must be terrible, much better to make them bear fruit as if they had been a long-term investment.

What did these so-called «*autores*» co-write when they presented *Ai ferri corti* to the outside world? Before the threat of a modernized “fascism” that weighs on some

countries, they maintained that the alternative is that of an “anarchist communism” (the exegesis of Stirner has gone out of fashion, today a Blanqui, revised and corrected in a libertarian key has much more draw) able to «interweave attack and self-organization». Vast problem, of which they emphasize few aspects. Aside from knowledge of the territory, their obsession is that of establishing «real contacts» with the inhabitants of the neighborhoods where they live (it is the same obsession that ate away at Kibalchich or Molaschi, both incapable of grasping the complementary nature of individual revolt and social revolution, and so maintainers of their contradiction). Without establishing these “relations of trust and complicity” in the various base structures, how would we ever be able to «know where the reactionaries or “collaborationists” lurk», how would we avoid the «risk of being looked with suspicion» by the exploited? In homage to Landauer, the self-styled «autores» maintain the the state «is the historical form that has replaced life in common». To destroy the state it is therefore necessary to «build a different way of producing, moving about, feeding ourselves, healing ourselves, loving each other. Between the insurrection and the generalized self-management there is a relationship of reciprocal involvement.»

Fine. But it goes without saying that these common exploited from whom we are to await indications on where to strike – because anarchists, notoriously, by virtue of their consciousness, are not mere exploited, and so know at the most where librarians lurk – never view the false critiques of the existent «with suspicion». Rather, quite the opposite. They admire them, they listen to them, they vote for them. The exploited have no need for the black or red ban-

ners of revolution; they prefer to wave the white ones of reformism. They have no reason to listen to the enemies of the state, but are always left gaping before politicians, intellectuals, experts, famous personages. This is why, if you intend to establish «real contact» with them, if you want to gain their «confidence and complicity», it is indispensable to first silence the most subversive propositions in order to repeat the more moderate ones in chorus.

Only in this way is it possible to easily approach the exploited. Certainly not making war on the false critics of the existence, but, on the contrary, making some kind of deal with them, appearing publicly with them, talking with them, coming to resemble them, acquiring «authoritativeness» through them. Well then, this is exactly what these self-styled «autores», these political hustlers who as soon as they cross the Italian borders pose as virtuous people of ethics, have done for years.

Those who in Italy have organized reformist initiatives against the High Speed Train along with state environmentalists (among them the WWF⁴, Environment and Health, and the Environment and Nonviolence Group), in Spain theorize the reciprocal link that unites insurrectional rupture with the «contents and objectives that they propos». Those who in Italy endorse the intrigues of various party hacks just to stand in the assembly, in Spain maintain that «in the absence of subversive objectives and content, the assembly form is an optimum tool of paralysis and political recuperation» (later providing as an example, the old German councils of 1918–19, not to be confused with the present-day Valsusian Free Republic). Those who in Italy capitulate to the strategic necessity of assembly decision-making. in Spain pre-

scribe that “it is the task of anarchists not to subordinate the practical agreement among individuals to assembly decision-making scematism”. There are those who in Italy make fun of horizontal decision-making, good only for deciding the color of a barn in a mountain commune, but not in a real struggle like that against evictions, since horizontality is crushed by the operational urgencies and so can only form a future objective to be achieved; in Spain they brag that this same anti-eviction struggle is “animated by anarchist comrades rooted in the ‘conflictual’ neighborhoods using methods based on direct action and horizontality”.

Among these self-styled «autores» there are those who in Italy have themselves photographed as they hold ladles and skillets to make a sound board for antimilitarist petitions delivered to the mayor by the same «disobbedienti» who were treated until recently as «cops and friends of cops» (to later go to Spain to announce in meetings that the construction of a military base «is not impeded by the collection of signatures, by the negotiations, or by symbolic and spectacular practices of dissent, but by direct action, by insurrectional intervention»), or who are jubilant about the presence of parties at their demonstrations, or who invite well-known television personalities to speak at their initiatives, or who take the word to the microphones of state radio, or who line up in defense of the «common good» together with reformists of all stripes, or who point to prayer as the dividing line between human beings and beasts, or who question whether libertarian organizations still make sense in a civil war situation like the present one (not asking what libertarian form to implement, but *whether* to implement it), or bustle about to offer their

present united fronts as the natural heirs of other separate fronts of the past...

It's about these same self-styled «*autores*» who now, in a frenzy to seek out «real contact» in the neighborhoods, in a frenzy to not be limited by any «ideology» in their freedom to shake hands and lick ass left and right, *never manage to come to daggers drawn even with snitches*. Also because these snitches, *merely dissociati* until yesterday, have been their comrades in struggle for a decade. So they give them a slap on the wrist; some in a firmer way and some less so, feign indignation, of course, but then meet with these snitches again in assemblies to discuss this together. And the snitches give lessons on ethics to the «anarchists», who make no reply.

Besides, these self-styled «*autores*» who in Spain introduced *Cuerpo a cuerpo* are the same people who in Italy have among their closest comrades the translators and editors of *The Epidemic of Rage* by the Tigers of Sutulena, a Spanish critical-mystificatory text against the insurrectionary anarchist perspective expressed in *At Daggers Drawn*; not by chance, *The Epidemic of Rage* was originally published by those who wanted to spread this certainty: «believing that a revolution could take place today... is surely a *reactionary* idea».

As a young damned poet once said, «all the water in the ocean is not enough to wash out the stain of intellectual blood». Would this be why in Italy, people prefer to turn a blind eye to these well-known facts?

What happened to the incitement to the «unleashing of the evil passions», the defense of the «game of wild, barbarous forces», the awareness that «acting in small num-

bers does not constitute a limit, it represents a totally different way of seeing social transformation»? What happened to that «projectual affinity» and that «autonomous individual action» that remain «dead letters if they cannot spread without being sacrificed in the name of some claimed higher necessity»? What happened to that different way of conceiving of relationships, capable of going «beyond the quantitative idea» of struggle? What happened to the desire for «liquidating the lie of the *transitional period*»? What happened to these and other flashes of intuition contained in *At Daggers Drawn*?

All this has been submerged in the mud of opportunism, it has in its turn been liquidated by the lie of another transition, the one according to which smiles and pats on the back to the false critics of the existent is supposed to be a practical basis for their extinction. And the ones who have spread this disgustingly political lie in Italy have been above all these self-styled «*autores*» of this text, *for whom a popular caress is enough to domestic all their rhetorical uniqueness*. To spread such meekness in the so-called movement, no. This is the responsibility of many others, of all those for whom ideas count for nothing since they only count friends and only the numbers are counted. Like on Facebook.

In a world forged entirely by the state, everything is to be reinvented. As a Romanian poet said, «Everything is unattainable in hateful class society, everything including love, respiration, the dream, the smile, the embrace, everything, except the incandescent reality of becoming.» But whatever the anarcho-socialist Landauer thought of it, how much sorrow in the social obligation of life in common! And how much priestly spirit in that of sharing! On

the contrary, in order not to fall into the mechanisms of social reproduction in our estimation it is necessary to know how to keep distances. Because you can't hate what you continue to associate with. In a frenzy to breathe the same air as politicians and to speak the same language they speak, you lose any hostility toward them, ending up at the most with scolding them («And yet, *no one* has raised any questions at the institutional level», one of these «*autores*» shouted, scandalized, in the shadow of a town hall).

But if you hold that nothing new can be built on the foundations of the old, then there can be no doubt: even the ruins have to be demolished. We don't want a different configuration of what the state is, we want to explore the absolutely other. This is why we considered it important to reprint this text. Because we think that even here in Italy, there is still the need to come *to daggers drawn with the existent, its defenders and its false critics*.

some, not all, of the former animators of NN editions

¹ In Italian, «*mettere la testa a posto*» (literally «put the head in place») and «*mettere la testa a partito*» («put the head in the party») both mean to act “reasonably”, like an “adult”. The Italian wordplay reflects the current fascination of some anarchist with the «imaginary party» of the «invisible committee» as well as recent anarchist support for the authoritarian PKK (the Kurdish communist party

that is leading much of the Kurdish nationalist struggle in Turkey.

² In Italy

³ I have kept this term in Italian as it is a specific reference to those who participated in the uprisings – and particularly the armed struggles – of the 1970s in Italy and then dissociated themselves from their ideas and practices, but without specifically snitching. This dissociation often earned them lighter sentences, and *dissociati* generally moved into “peaceful” social struggle and working, to one extent or another, with the powers that be.

⁴ World Wildlife Federation

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