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All or None?

autonome a.f.r.i.k.a. gruppe

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A multiple name is "a name that anyone can use": those who introduced it, whether they are known or unknown, single persons or groups expressly claim neither a monopoly on its use nor any kind of copyright. Yet a name like this can be more than simply the expression of the fact that its users wish to remain anonymous: while the name as an expression of anonymity can also be merely a lacuna, a sign without a meaning of its own, it can still become a powerful signifier if it is linked with a certain, recognizable and identifiable praxis. It then designates not only this (artistic, political, religious) praxis, but also binds it simultaneously to the figure of an imaginary person. As the praxis becomes recognizable and filled with life, this person also comes alive. The figure gains contours, attains a history, a myth. As people enter into this history and take part in the practices that are linked with the multiple names, they actually become part of the imaginary and collective person: the praxis of the individual is imbued with power through the collective myth and simultaneously reproduces it. And conversely, if this praxis loses its contours and signifying power, the collective person, in which it is embodied, also dies.

The multiple name cancels out the separation between the individual and the collective. It magically grants a share in the

collective figure of the imaginary person, in which the movement and power of an invisible mass are embodied. The mass attains shape, becomes an active subject in the form of the imaginary person. The name-less oppressed have made use of this principle again and again. It comes up, for example, in the peasant revolts: in 1514 peasants in southern Germany went to fight in the name of "Poor Konrad".

Yet it was not a leader that the revolting mass that was thus embodied: every one of them was "Poor Konrad", who now stood up against his oppression. In early 19th century England, the multiple name of "General Ludd" embodied the oppressed. As the imaginary leader of attacks against the new machines, he directly his rarely empty threats against the capitalist agents of modern forms of exploitation. Although (or specifically because) "General Ludd's" movement had no fixed organizational form, it was able to continue to strike fear in the hearts of the exploiters for years.

Whereas "General Ludd" was neither a real person, nor did he stand for a fixed organization, later forms of workers' organization followed the bourgeois separation between the individual and collective praxis. The collective (the proletariat, etc.) becomes an abstract and hierarchically managed affair. Its symbolic power is no longer manifested directly in the praxis of each individual. The carriers of this power are, at best, a small few "outstanding" individuals, who function as leaders, heroes, role models. At the present, it is not a coincidence that the idea of multiple names appears where the bourgeois cult of the outstanding individual is most pronounced, specifically in the field of art. When a multiple name is used as an artist's name, this precludes the attribution of a work to an individual author. The *Neoists* made logical and consistent use of this principle. In this case, artist names such as Harry Kipper were transformed into multiple names, whereas other

names like Monty Cantsin, along with the concomitant myths, are to be regarded as conscious products of the Neoist art praxis. Finally, the creation of the collective myth of *Luther Blissett* should be mentioned as the most important postsituationist art work, whereby recourse is taken, as in the case of Karen Eliot, to the name of an existent person. A particularly insidious attack on bourgeois subject concepts is to transform real individuals into collective persons without their knowledge of it or even against their will. A popular example of this: a praxis that is relatively easy to learn is to sing badly wearing a blonde wig and sunglasses. It was thus inevitable that the first Heino [a well-known German singer] was followed by a second (the real ...) and then many others. Another example is the attempt to abruptly transform the bourgeois election candidate for the mayor of Zurich, Andreas Müller, into a collective person - to become part of this person, it was sufficient to be named Müller and appear on a ballot under this name.

A multiple name also comes up in a current political context. On of the most brilliant media-strategic achievements of the Zapatista guerillas of Chiapas was to make the name of their speaker Subcomandante Marcos a collective name ("We are all Marcos").

In this way, they not only continued the deconstruction of the principle of the revolutionary or guerilla leader, which was already incipient in the title "subcomandante", at the same time they also created a new form of collective myth: the person of the real guerrilla remains without a determinable, defined history. The recognizable attributes such as ski mask and uniform do not disguise his true role as an empty sign, but instead even emphasize it. This void can be filled with innumerable narratives and legends, specifically because the real person remains blurred. In this process, the collective myth "Marcos" became the omnipresent carrier of

the most diverse meanings, an expression and point of identification for subversive and sexual fantasies (These may express the symbolic potency of the collective person most clearly: although neither his face nor his body was ever to be seen, Marcos was voted the "most attractive" man in Mexico). Ultimately, with the cry "We are Marcos too", tens of thousands of people were able to take to the streets and articulate themselves politically.

Here the myth of "El Sub" clearly differs from that of an individual hero such as Che Guevra: a statement like "I am Che Guevara too" would be merely nonsensical. The rulers in Mexico understood exactly how the collective myth and its concomitant magical praxes functioned. This is evident in their desperate (and unsuccessful) attempts to find the individual that was "really" behind the name Marcos and show his face, in order to reduce the collective myth to a bourgeois individual.

The origin of multiple names is lost in the mists of history, referring to ancient religious and magical practices. The oldest of these names that is still living already demonstrates the principle perfectly clearly: everyone has always and naturally been Buddha. At the same time, however, participation in the collective person is mediated through a praxis: "By realizing the praxis of Buddha, you are the same as Buddha. You see with the same eyes, hear with the same ears, and speak with the same mouth. There is not the slightest difference."

The use of multiple names is thus almost a pristine way of taking recourse to archaic forms, which question the separation between the individual and the collective: multiple names are not primarily forms of anonymity (as such they are not better than no name at all), but rather the most radical attack imaginable on modern concepts of bourgeois subjectivity and identity. They vividly

demonstrate that these concepts are only illusions that are alien to the nature of the human being. In this way, they manifest the timeless truth of the ideas that human identity is nothing other than the articulation and intersection of collective praxes, that there is no human nature outside these. However, the real subversive power of the multiple name only shows itself, of course, in concrete praxis: You become Luther Blissett too!