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TO CONQUER THE ANONYMOUS
AUTHORSHIP AND MYTH IN THE WU MING FOUNDATION

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It is said that Mao never forgave Khrushchev for his 1956 "Secret Speech" on the crimes of the Stalin era (Li, 115–16). Of the aspects of the speech that were damaging to Mao, the most troubling was no doubt Khrushchev's attack on the "cult of personality" (7), not only in Stalin's example, but in *principle,* as a "perversion" of Marxism. As Alain Badiou has remarked, the cult of personality was something of an "invariant feature of communist states and parties," one that was brought to a point of "paroxysm" in China's Cultural Revolution (505). It should hence not surprise us that Mao responded in 1958 with a defense of the axiom as properly communist. In delineating "correct" and "incorrect" kinds of personality cult, Mao insisted: "The question at issue is not whether or not there should be a cult of the individual, but rather whether or not the individual concerned represents the truth. If he does, then he should be revered" (99–100). Not unexpectedly, Marx, Engels, Lenin, and "the correct side of Stalin" are Mao's given examples of leaders that should be "revere[d] for ever" (38). Marx himself, however, was somewhat hostile to such practice, a point Khrushchev sought to stress in quoting from Marx's November 1877 letter to Wilhelm Blos: "From my antipathy to any cult of the individual, I never made public during the existence of the International the numerous addresses from various countries which recognized my merits and which annoyed me. I did not reply to them, except sometimes to rebuke their authors. Engels and I first joined the secret society of Communists on the condition that everything making for superstitious worship of authority would be deleted from its statute" (Marx, quoted in Khrushchev, 8).

It would be difficult to imagine a setting more incongruous for a reading of these words than a closed session of the Soviet Party

Congress—and Khrushchev's deployment of Marx certainly did not indicate any late Soviet flourishing of Marxian principles. But I am not interested here in Khrushchev. Neither is it my intention to build these lines of Marx into a developed critique of the cult of personality. My concern in this article, rather, is to use Marx's words as an emblem to signal the existence of a communist *alternative* to the cult of personality—not the power of the privileged individual, but a de-subjectifying politics of anonymity.

The logical basis for Marx's critique of the personality cult is his materialist understanding of ideas and practices as products of *collective* experience and struggle, not *individual* capacity, of genius or otherwise. From this perspective the cult of personality is not only misguided, but perpetuates an essentially capitalist structure of identity. This correspondence between socialist and capitalist modes of identity and authority is clearly asserted by Amadeo Bordiga, one of the strongest communist critics of the personality cult.[1] He makes the case in the early 1950s with typical intransigence: "[I]t is the attribute of the bourgeois world that all commodities bear their maker's name, all ideas are followed by their author's signature, every party is defined by its leader's name. . . . Work such as ours can only succeed by being hard and laborious and unaided by bourgeois publicity techniques, by the vile tendency to admire and adulate men" (Bordiga, quoted in Camatte, 176).

Hard and laborious or not, efforts toward the supercession of such modes of identity and authority have often been made through the thematic of organization (workers' councils, spontaneity, disorganizations, and so forth). But Bordiga extended his critique of the personality cult and its capitalist structure of identity into a rather more unusual site of communist politics, the form of the *author*—opting to publish his considerable contributions to communist thought anonymously.[2] There are no doubt other ways to develop Marx's critique of the cult of the individual, but I want here to take a cue from this move of Bordiga's and pursue a communist anonymity through the thematic of authorship and the politics of writing.

The article first raises the critique of the author-function in Foucault and Marx before indicating the opening of a counter-tendency in Foucault's occasional comments on anonymous writing. I then concentrate on two interrelated literary and political ventures, the Luther

Blissett Project (1995–99) and the Wu Ming Foundation (2000–), authors of five novels—*Q* (Blissett 2003); *Asce di guerra* (Hatchets of War) (Ravagli and Wu Ming); and *54, Manituana,* and *Altai* (Wu Ming 2005a, 2009a, 2009b)—and a large body of critical writing. From this diverse and varied material I draw out and pursue two aspects of anonymous practice, with regard to issues of *authorship* and *political myth*.[3] First, I approach the "multiple name" of Luther Blissett as an expression in the field of the author of Marx's concepts of "communal being" and "general intellect." Second, turning to the collective author Wu Ming, Luther Blissett's most prominent successor, the article explores the problem of leftist myth as it is developed in their critique of myth's tendencies toward linguistic cliché and constraining subjectivity. This is not, however, to reject myth out of hand; indeed, my concern is to engage Wu Ming's efforts toward a properly communist or "unidentified" mode of mythopoesis.

WHAT MATTER WHO'S SPEAKING?

In his dissection of the features of the modern "author-function," Foucault (1977) famously associates the emergence of the author with texts that come to function, through the mechanisms of copyright law, as units of property. The author arises from the polymorphous field of discourse as a means to confer authority and value on a discrete share or text, and is concurrently projected back onto that text as its sole and unique source. But this late-eighteenth century arrival of the author into the dominant social order of property is historically secondary to authorial identification via penal law, where named authorship was a sign of, and deterrent to, transgressive discourse:

> Speeches and books were assigned real authors, other than mythical or important religious figures, only when the author became subject to punishment and to the extent that his discourse was considered transgressive. In our culture—undoubtedly in others as well—discourse was not originally a thing, a product, or a possession, but an action situated in a bipolar field of sacred and profane, lawful and unlawful, religious and blasphemous. It was a gesture charged with risks long before it became a profession caught in a circuit of property values. (124)

This strange interplay of property and penal law in the constitutive field of the author is evident also in Marx's earliest pieces of journalism

on censorship and freedom of the press, though here penal and property constraints are more directly enmeshed. As Margaret Rose argues, for Marx the censor's formal function of conferring and securing the identity of the author effected precisely the inverse; this state sanctioned form of literary identity stripped the author of their *real* individuality. Marx thus declaims: "The law permits me to write, only I must write in a style that is not mine! I may show my spiritual countenance, but I must first set it in the *prescribed folds!*" (1975a, 112) He penned this 1842 piece anonymously, by "a Rhinelander," on the occasion of a new Prussian censorship law, and it was summarily banned. Ten years later a French decree that all journal articles bear their author's signature prompted Marx to underscore the association of named authorship with the debasement of the critical field, this time indicating the proximity of the property relation (as text becomes "advertisement"). Here it is less the author's individuality than an amorphous public discourse that is Marx's valued party: "So long as the press was anonymous it appeared as the organ of a public opinion without number or name; it was the third power of the state. With the signature of each article a newspaper became merely a collection of journalistic contributions by more or less well-known individuals. Every article sank to the level of an advertisement" (1973a, 134).

It is clear that in these pieces Marx is posing a challenge to the state-sanctioned form of the author rather than making a direct case for anonymity, which as a positive value in itself would, one suspects, be too closely associated for him with the conspiratorial forms of Masonic and Bakuninist politics (though it is worth recalling that the first edition of the *Communist Manifesto* was published anonymously, and not primarily for reasons of censorship). Foucault, on the other hand, made some intriguing forays into anonymity as a counter to the author-function. In closing his essay on the author, Foucault imagines a culture where discourses would circulate in a "pervasive anonymity," evaluated not in terms of their authenticity, originality, and subjective density, but in their structural patterns and functions—as he quotes from Samuel Beckett: "What matter who's speaking?" (1977, 138).

If Foucault here imagines a world without authors, it is still essentially only a condensed presentation of his archaeological method for the analysis of *all* discourse. But elsewhere he makes a more direct evaluation of anonymity as a textual practice. In an interview published

in *Le Monde* in which he declined to reveal his name, Foucault forwards the choice of anonymity as a means to a better "surface of contact" with the reader, one "unrippled" or no longer distracted by the author's name (1997, 321). This is for a chance of better "being heard," for sure, but also for a more dynamic life of the work beyond authorial intent: "The effects of the book might land in unexpected places and form shapes that I had never thought of" (321). Such attention to opening the foreclosed work in the realm of its *readers* is complemented by Foucault's thoughts on what anonymity might bring to the *author.* In another interview, Foucault comments that a work "does not belong to the author's project" or "existence"—it is, rather, a desubjectifying experience of the "outside": "It maintains with [the author] relationships of negation and destruction, it is for him the flowing of an eternal outside" (1996, 26). To "conquer the anonymous," as Foucault (28) puts it, is to affirm this relation of authorial destruction or erasure, and this, not the individuation of the author-function, is the *real* mark of singularity: "What gives books like those which have no other pretension than to be anonymous so many marks of singularity and individuality are not the privileged signs of a style, nor the mark of a singular or individual interpretation, but the rage to apply the eraser by which one meticulously effaces all that could refer to a written individuality" (29).

TRANSINDIVIDUAL AUTHORSHIP

While it is true that Foucault's formulations of anonymity are principally oriented toward the writing practice of the solitary author, there is nevertheless also a *collective* dimension to his thought here. Of the different strategies to conquer the anonymous, Foucault comments favorably on the use of the collective pseudonym, saying this of Nicolas Bourbaki, the pseudonymous collective mathematician: "Bourbaki is at bottom the model. The dream for all would be, each in his own domain, to make something like this Bourbaki, where mathematics is elaborated under the anonymity of a fantastic name" (1996, 29). It is this mode of anonymity that is developed by the Italian writing collective Wu Ming and the Luther Blissett "multiple name." The politics of authorship is by no means the only concern of these projects,

but it has been a mobilizing problematic nonetheless, and is my initial focus for discussion. I have taken some license in discussing Luther Blissett under the ambit of Wu Ming. Wu Ming comprises the same people as the collective author of *Q*, Luther Blissett (except for one addition and, later, one departure), but Luther Blissett was also, or principally, a pseudonym shared by many—perhaps one hundred or more—people. My efforts to pursue the theme of anonymity back through Wu Ming to Luther Blissett should not, then, be taken as an attempt to subsume the two projects in one entity.

The kernel of Wu Ming's politics of authorship is evident in the three-fold explanation they provide of their name, which is Mandarin for "nameless" or "anonymous": "The name of the band is meant both as a tribute to dissidents ('Wu Ming' is a common byline among Chinese citizens demanding democracy and freedom of speech) and as a refusal of the celebrity-making, glamorizing machine that turns authors into stars. 'Wu Ming' is also a reference to the third sentence in the Tao Te Ching: 'Wu ming tian di zhi shi,' 'Nameless is Heaven's and Earth's Origin'" (Wu Ming 1, quoted in Baird, 250).[4] This characterization of the politics of anonymity shares Foucault's interest in circumventing the seduction and authority of the author-function, and in the possibilities of an unnamed field of dissent. The reference to Daoist understanding of the primordial and enduring dynamism of the cosmos suggests also that Wu Ming's anonymity has points of contact with Foucault's problematic of the "outside," where the author's desubjectifying relation to the "flowing of an eternal outside" is the constitutive field of their real singularity. But this is a relation to the outside that extends Foucault's somewhat ambiguous formulation of self-erasure with an active *construction,* a concrete set of procedures for the production of anonymous authorship. I approach these procedures here not in Wu Ming, but in the earlier project of the Luther Blissett multiple name. First, though, some comments on the ontological field of the author's "outside" are necessary, since it is set out by Luther Blissett (1997c) not through Foucault but through Marx, in the interrelated concepts of "communal being" and "general intellect."

Taking "communal being" and its direct cognates first, Marx famously shows in "On the Jewish Question" how the social form of the bourgeois subject is premised on an opposition between individual and social existence. In this oppositional relation the social appears

to impinge on the primary autonomy of the individual, but the real delimiting power is actually the form of the individual itself—the "*confined* individual, confined to himself"—which constrains an expansive social or communal being into the isolated subject of private property: "In the rights of man it is not man who appears as a species-being; on the contrary, species-life itself, society, appears as a framework extraneous to the individuals, as a limitation of their original independence. The only bond which holds them together is natural necessity, need and private interest, the conservation of their property and their egoistic persons" (Marx 1975b, 230).

Bourgeois politics adopts and enforces this structure, such that the potentially expansive social field experiences a double degradation, reduced to a mere support for the confined and partial individual: "[T]he [political] sphere in which man behaves as a communal being [*Gemeinwesen*] is degraded to a level below the sphere in which he behaves as a partial being" (Marx 1975b, 231). By contrast, the politics of the collective pseudonym seeks to break the bounds of the partial individual by founding itself upon—or bringing into expression— the communal being that traverses and exceeds the individual. The individual and the collective are no longer placed in a dichotomous relation; rather, each individual or singular instance is a product of the collective relations from which it emerges, and each collectivity is constituted through its singular manifestations. As Luther Blissett (n.d.) puts it, the collective pseudonym is a politics of the "multiple single" within and against the partial mode of being of the individual.

It is not too much of a leap to say that this "multiple single" is the *real* individuality that Marx was groping toward in his early critique of the state-sanctioned author (now that the Young Hegelian concern with consciousness and "spiritual countenance" in that very early text can be substituted with the concept of communal being).[5] From the standpoint of the multiple single, the source of the written word ceases to be a subjective interiority and becomes instead the immersion in a polymorphous communal being, as authorial originality gives way to a kind of primary "creative plagiarism," a "continual recombination and variation" of cultural and existential materials that denies "any dichotomy between 'collective' and 'individual'" (Wu Ming 1 2003). Wu Ming 1 writes: "I work with other people, we write fiction by using words, images, colors and sounds that we pick up from everyday life,

history and the media landscape. A whole, open community writes along with us, albeit unconsciously or semi-consciously. This has always been true for *every* author and cultural artifact" (2001a).

If there is a certain universality here, the ontology of expressive communal being is not a timeless abstraction but something located in features of collective production particular to contemporary capitalism—hence the centrality of the second of Marx's concepts, the "general intellect," of which Luther Blissett (1997c) has characterized himself as a "paradoxical anthropomorphisation." In the concept of the general intellect, Marx (1973b, 706) seeks to account for the effects of an expansive "general social knowledge" become "*direct force of production*." General intellect is a fundamentally social formation that exists both transindividually—circulating and multiplying in what Marx suggestively calls the "social individual" and the "social brain"—and machinically, in its immanent articulation with science and technology (705, 694). In this astonishingly prescient concept, Marx projects from the early days of industrial culture to grasp a great deal of the capacity of contemporary capitalism to generate value not only from direct labor time, but from the properties of communal being existent across the social whole, now fully incorporating the linguistic, corporeal, and affective dimensions of association (Virno). The nuances of the thesis are too great to explore here, but I would draw attention to three points of special relevance to the multiple name. First, the terrain of communal being *qua* general intellect is wholly techno-cultural; there is no naturalism to it. Second, as an articulation of general intellect, the multiple name author is not a point external to capitalist patterns of association, but is enmeshed within them, her substance—cognitive capacities, linguistic virtuosity, collective affects—increasingly central to new regimes of value. Hence, third, the multiple name must now not only affirm communal being against the partial individual (an ever vital political task in our intensely individualized societies), but also critically orient herself against the ways that communal being is itself mobilized as capitalist resource.

LUTHER BLISSETT'S OPEN REPUTATION

If this is the ontological condition of Luther Blissett's approach to the anonymous, it is apparent that it is not reached merely by dropping

one's name—as an expression of the multiple single, anonymity must be actively constructed. The Luther Blissett "multiple name" is a clear case of such active anonymity, which I approach here through four imbricated aspects: the transindividual agency of the proper name in *Q*; the subjective and temporal disaggregation of the author-function enacted by the multiple name; the immanence of the "work" to mass media; and the changed status of the author's property.

To reiterate, the multiple single is not an undifferentiated whole, but rather an open dynamic where singularity or difference is an expression of collectivity, and vice versa. It is at this juncture of collectivity and difference that the peculiar function of the proper name is located in Luther Blissett's novel, *Q*. Sabrina Ovan makes a compelling case that the narrative motor of *Q* is precisely the transindividual property of the general intellect, a motor set in motion by the name. Narrating the turmoil of peasant insurgency, war, and radical heresy in sixteenth-century Reformation Europe, the novel follows two characters in their itinerant movement across the European terrain, paying special attention to the social and technological webs of authority, political alliance and intrigue, banking and trade, and production and distribution (and authorial provenance) of early printed matter. One character, the eponymous Q, is an austere papal spy and heretic hunter. The other, the Anabaptist object of Q's pursuit, remains nameless. Or rather, his name is in continual variation, changing as he traverses the sociopolitical terrain—from Gustav Metzger in the Peasants' War, to Gert-of-the-Well in the Münster Rebellion, to note just two of his incarnations.

In so suspending the consistent name, the subjective continuity that would normally orchestrate the narrative field is unsettled, allowing an excessive communal being, in its discontinuous, variegated, and antagonistic complexity, to itself come forth as protagonist. And this is the abiding experience of reading the novel, where subject and social relations operate on the same plane in an often disorienting swirl of forces, relations, and tumultuous events. The narrative leaps about from the bloody massacres of the Peasants' War to the plotting of a banking fraud or the movements of nascent capitalism, all the while— no doubt with allegorical purpose—enmeshed within, driven by, and testing the limits of assorted apparatuses of power and paradigms of resistance. Yet this narrative of social complexity is nonetheless

populated or enacted by (momentarily) named subjects, singularities in the communal field of practice. As Ovan argues, with this function the name is not, then, an identity in separation from the collective, or even a momentary *share*, but the *passage* of the collective, its putting into play as singularity.

The character Q, by contrast, is rather abstracted from the social field, his diaries and letter reports to Rome configuring a solitary subjectivity, driven across the novel by his facilitation of Giovanni Pietro Carafa's nefarious "Plan" of utilizing the Radical Reformation to modernize and entrench Church authority. It is thus all the more poignant that when Q finally betrays his master, it is to the unnamed multiple—the "anonymous architects" of the Plan—and the aleatory forces of the social that he delivers himself: "There is nothing you can do; you cannot even reproach yourself for your failure to predict the defection of your finest agent on the last mile: the minds of men move in strange ways, and no plan can take account of them all" (Blissett 2003, 743–44). It remains, nonetheless, for Q's nemesis to properly formulate the essential dynamic of the novel: "Details are escaping, the minor shades who populated the story are slipping away, forgotten. Rogues, mean little clerics, godless outlaws, policemen, spies. Unmarked graves. Names which mean nothing, but which have encountered strategies and wars, have made them explode, sometimes stubbornly, as part of a deliberate struggle, at other times purely by chance, with a gesture, a word" (743).

The processual and discontinuous property of the name becomes considerably more pronounced when we move to the terrain of *Q*'s author, the wider practice of the "multiple name" with which the novel is enfolded. The central feature of this multiple name—as others before it, from Captain Swing to Karen Eliot—is its subjective disaggregation and dispersal. While access to the pseudonym of Luther Blissett has no doubt been limited in part by competence in certain kinds of cultural capital, anyone can in principle adopt the name and in so doing become Luther Blissett (with a few provisos: efforts would be made to prevent him from propagating racist, sexist, or fascist material). Luther Blissett is an "open reputation" that confers a certain authority—the authority of the author, no less—on an open multiplicity of unnamed writers, activists, and cultural workers, whose work in turn contributes to and extends the open reputation. In this

sense the author-function is magnified and writ large. But it is such in breach of the structures that generate a concentrated and unified point of rarity and authority, since the author becomes a potential available to anyone, and each manifestation of the name is as original as any other. In this fashion a different kind of individuation emerges, the individuation of the multiple single: Luther Blissett is at once *collective*, a "con-dividual" shared by many, and *fragmented*, a "dividual" composed of multiple situations and personalities simultaneously (Blissett 1997a, 43–44). That Luther Blissett has his own portrait—a vaguely androgynous icon created of overlaid male and female photographic images—only confirms this new modality of individuation, as it invokes the paradox of a multiple name author (Figure 1).

The subjective disaggregation and dispersal of the author also has a temporal dimension. The name was borrowed from the Jamaica-born British footballer, Luther Blissett, who played an ill-fated season at AC Milan in 1983, contrary to great expectation. But no explanation is provided as to the reasons for the adoption of the footballer's name. Indeed, after a fabricated identification of the Luther Blissett multiple name with the conceptual art practice of one "Harry Kipper" (a tactic intended to divert from the start any association of the multiple name with its creators), the proliferation of origin stories became a part of the multiple name itself: "Anyone who makes use of the name may invent a different story about the origin of the project" (Blissett

Figure 1. Luther Blissett's portrait. Creative Commons Attribution—ShareAlike 2.5

1997b, 4). Luther Blissett is thus set loose from the unifying effects of linear temporality, allowing history to become a fragmented and multiple resource for each instantiation of the name.

Enabled by this relation to history, one telling of the Luther Blissett story is especially enticing, projecting as it does the structure of a "negative hero"—and something of a zerowork stylist of sport—back into the footballer's media image at Milan. Our Luther Blissett writes: "Only the blindness of a young fan led me to hate him, then, for those badly-treated footballs" (2006), for he came to recognize that the footballer's erratic performance was in fact a calculated act. Sensing in the interactive and communicative game of football the dynamic structure of general intellect, the striker "revealed himself to 80,000 consumer-producers" as a *saboteur* of capitalist valorization:

> [He] refuse[d] to be an interface in this system. He decided to stop communicating, to be a living short-circuit. So he started to move around the field at random, appearing not to care about the game. . . . He became invisible, he could not be represented as part of a social system: he was a drifting mine ready to explode every Sunday in unexpected ways, with strange gestures which broke the cold normality of the football-system. . . . Luther, the black bomber, one of us. (2006)

Just as the multiple name enables an expressive communal being to breach the boundaries of the author-function, it unsettles too the author's twin pole—for Foucault (1977, 119), "equally problematic"—of the unified "work," which here becomes as fragmented, variable, and layered as the multiple name itself. It is in this sense that we should understand the cultural output of Luther Blissett (excepting *Q* perhaps) as less of the order of "product" than of "action" (to repeat Foucault's designation for texts of authorial property and of unnamed dissent). Through the skilful orchestration of hoaxes, pranks, and fakes, Luther Blissett's practice was characterized by scandalous disruption of mass media across the platforms of television, newspaper, radio, and Internet—his initial venture was, appropriately, a hoax on a prime time "missing persons" television show.[6] This is mass-mediated culture in its most contemporary manifestation, what we can call the media expression of general intellect. It is media as the technological mobilization and modulation of transindividual moods or affects, a regime that has become closely associated with the spread of punitive legal instruments and political regimes of emergency and security—

most commonly (in Luther Blissett's late 1990s, before the rise to dominance of current state paradigms of "terrorism" and "illegal immigration") in manufactured anxieties and legal prosecutions against Satanic ritual abuse and pedophilia (Luther Blissett Project 2000a). In this media environment Luther Blissett was less an external agent operating through an autonomous regime of truth, than a practice immanent to the techno-cultural formation of the media—comprising the same materials but working through immersion, mimicry, and exposure of its orchestration of truths and affects. It is a point well made by Wu Ming 1 while reflecting on one of Luther Blissett's media hoaxes: "by using the tools of traditional counter-inquiries, we had gotten no results. The 'homeopathic' effect of one single lie cured the illness better than the traditional media medicines administered to the public opinion" (in Jenkins).

The commodity form of the work could not remain untouched through this pseudonymous practice. If no one person or group owns the name of Luther Blissett, the name owns none of its product, which in keeping with the approach to a primary plagiarism of collective cultural production is protected from the encroachment of property by anti-copyright mechanisms. The move to the form of the novel with *Q* complicates matters, for this *is* a recognizable commodity (with international distribution and sales of upwards of 250,000 units). But this book and all Wu Ming's published material is available for free download and circulation; in their published form, these books at the least indicate and allow for circuits of distribution not constrained by commercial exchange.

As a singular expression of the multiple single that traverses identity, the name is not destined to endure, and Luther Blissett, like the names in *Q*, had only a temporary existence. Modeled according to a Five Year Plan, at the end of 1999 the Luther Blissett Project abandoned the name, committing "seppuku," or ritual suicide. Others remain free to propagate Luther Blissett's open reputation, but this act of the "veterans" of the multiple name was a means of returning to the generative basin of communal being: "[Seppuku] is one way like another to get rid once again of an identity, to be reborn open to new experiences of social warfare and new mad passions" (Luther Blissett Project 2000b, n.p.).

POLITICAL MYTHOPOESIS

Wu Ming emerged from the Luther Blissett Project no longer as a pseudonymous multiplicity but as a discrete collective author of five (now four) people, and one whose work is more directly located in the production of narrative fiction.[7] It is a different modality of practice, but there are continuities also: the critique of property persists; the collective retains a certain opacity toward the mechanisms of the author–celebrity; and though the group is limited in number, the qualitative benefits of the multiple single remain, such that Wu Ming characterize themselves as both a distinct entity and a body that is different and greater than the sum of its individual parts. Engaging with this changed arena, what follows is concerned less with Wu Ming's mode of authorship than with their approach to the contours and possibilities of an "unidentified" mythopoesis—this is what I take to be a second mode of active anonymity, a mode that operates against the subjective integration of political myth. It is not Foucault and Marx, but Deleuze who I use here for points of philosophical exchange, for Deleuze shares Wu Ming's rare concern with the need to re-found the politics of myth.

Myths are narratives iterated in communities that generate affective bonds, shared meanings, and volitional capacities. Despite a common misconception, the function of genuine myth is not to tie a community to the past, but to open the parameters of the future in the present by multiplying the resources of the past: "Ongoing narration makes [myth] evolve, because what happens in the present changes the way we recollect the past. As a result, those tales are modified according to the context and acquire new symbolic/metaphorical meanings. Myths provide us with examples to follow or reject, give us a sense of continuity or discontinuity with the past, and allow us to imagine a future" (Wu Ming 2010, xxxvii). In this manner, myths have a kind of shamanic or event-inducing capacity to "summon supernatural powers" toward a transformation of the present; for Wu Ming 1 it is no accident that "myths and folk tales [are] populated by demons, witches, magicians, gods etc." (in Jenkins).

That said, any attempt at a progressive evaluation of myth is immediately confronted by the knowledge that myths can have a decidedly conservative, even destructive, function in political environments:

"Revolutionary and progressive movements have always found their own metaphors and myths. Most of the times these myths outlive their usefulness and become alienating. Rigor mortis sets in, language becomes wooden, metaphors end up enslaving the people instead of setting them free" (Wu Ming 2010, xxxvii–xxxviii). This is what Furio Jesi calls the "technification of myth," when the mythical image overwhelms conscious and subconscious processes, dulling critical capacities and narrowing the individual's relation with the transformative field of communal experience (Wu Ming 2010, xxxix). Twentieth-century fascism is a principal case, of course, as is the cult of personality in state socialist regimes, but this can be experienced too in wider political environments. Indeed, much of Wu Ming's reflection on myth has emerged from a critical relation to activist currents in the period around the 2001 anti-G8 events in Genoa, from where they identify specific problems in the linguistic and subjective modalities of myth. Referring more or less directly to the Italian Disobedienti group (in a text accompanied by a satirical image of the group's spokesperson, Luca Casarini, morphed with Stalin) Wu Ming 1 comments on the way mythical language can operate as cliché and slogan abstracted from the rich ethical and affective qualities of experience:

> The problem is not merely the language being "outdated," because it can even sound new, it can include a lot of neologisms. No, the problem is that the "wooden language" . . . is *ethically* unacceptable, it is a jargon made of slogans and clichés that keep experience away, it never establishes any contact with sorrow or pain, love and delight, feelings, emotions. It only accompanies boredom. What good is an annoying sequence of words in a vacuum? Think of those stupid, ultra-rhetoric propaganda speeches filled with "the Movement of movements," "disobedience," . . . "we're going to disobey," . . . "we are the multitude." (2003)

This reflection on the linguistic "sclerosis" of the Italian scene after 2001 is especially interesting because it is in part a critical assessment of Wu Ming's own field of political practice, having themselves been involved in the Tute Bianche (White Overalls) movement, the remnants of which established the Disobedienti. And it raises a second problem with political mythopoesis: not only its lifeless language, but also its overly integrated and self-sacrificial subjective force. Wu Ming's early approach to myth has some debt to Georges Sorel's formulation of the "general strike." For Sorel, the power of socialist myth is its capacity

of "evoking instinctively" a coordinated set of feelings at a "maximum intensity" such that an instantaneous "intuition of socialism" is achieved "which language cannot give us," and that enables proletarians to "always picture their coming action as a battle in which their cause is certain to triumph" (Sorel, quoted in Wu Ming 1 2001b). Wu Ming's mythopoetical practice through stunts and performative texts in the build-up to Genoa clearly bears signs of this framework, as is most evident in "From the Multitudes of Europe" (Wu Ming 2001). This "edict" constructs a narrative movement of a historical subject focused on Genoa, a transhistorical confrontation between the class of property and the multitude: "We are new, and yet we are the same as always." But Sorel's "certainty of triumph" is a delusion, and Genoa turned out to be a "bloodbath" in which Wu Ming considered themselves indirectly complicit: "We were among the most zealous in urging people to go to Genoa, and helped to steer the movement into the ambush" (2010, xxxvi–xxxvii).[8] This recognition has prompted a critical reassessment of their relation to myth, central to which is an effort to re-found political mythopoesis without or against the unifications of subjectivity.

UNIDENTIFIED NARRATIVE OBJECTS

Wu Ming's work on mythopoesis is traversed, then, by an abiding sense of crisis in political subjectivity. But it is a crisis made productive, as disaggregated style, affect, and iconicity become the parts of an experimental politics unconstrained by the unifications of a political subject. Wu Ming 1 conveys a little of this orientation in his assertion that "there is no such thing as a 'movement of movements.' . . . [Movements] are *plural,* they are multiplicities, I don't use any singular noun to describe them anymore" (2003). It is a perspective Wu Ming share with Deleuze, who argues that we are living through the demise of the unified subjective form of "the people"—as was principally expressed and corrupted in U.S. "universal immigration" and Soviet "universal proletarization"—such that politics need refound itself upon the condition that "the people are missing" (Deleuze 1997, 86; 1989, 219). In this situation the practice of storytelling, mythopoesis, or "fabulation" comes to the foreground as it takes on the role of generating

political association and imagination on the conditions of an absent people.[9] It is as such a desubjectified or unidentified mythopoesis, one that in Wu Ming is characterized by three features that I discuss here: first, a conception of time as bifurcating and nonlinear; second, a concern not with transcendent judgment and integrated subjectivity but with immanent evaluation of fragmented modes of being; and third, the agency of a desubjectified enunciative voice, the "unidentified narrative object."

First, Wu Ming's historical fiction is premised on an understanding of time as a "fractal" field, one neither linear or cyclical, but composed of "bifurcations," "conflicts," and "discontinuities" (Wu Ming 2002), the value of which resides in the capacity of the past to "retroact on the present, which is contradictory as well" (Wu Ming 2000). Fiction is uniquely placed to mine, overlay, and accentuate these bifurcations, practicing what Deleuze calls "falsifying narration." Falsifying narration emerges in postwar cinematic images and literatures that have broken with determination by linear movement to express time as a "labyrinth" of "forking" paths: "narration ceases to be truthful, that is, to claim to be true, and becomes fundamentally falsifying. This is not at all a case of 'each has its own truth', a variability of content. It is a power of the false which replaces and supercedes the form of the true, because *it poses the simultaneity of incompossible presents, or the coexistence of not-necessarily true pasts*" (Deleuze 1989, 131; emphasis added). To be clear, this is not a negation of the real, but its enrichment or intensification; as narration falsifies its object and generates incompossible worlds it "constitutes the layers of one and the same . . . reality," "sheets of past [that] coexist in a non-chronological order" where a "single event can belong to several levels" (46, xii). Falsifying narration is thus better seen as a *politicization* of the real, allowing art to make a direct and transformative intervention. As Timothy Murphy argues in his account of falsifying narration in the work of William Burroughs, "Narration is freed from the despotism of compossibility and multiplied, producing a fertile network of potential trajectories through time. . . . This is the role that artworks can play in the present, the role of fantasmatic structures that alter the direction and speed of the present moment by altering the past trajectory on which the present would have to travel" (44).

In this vein, Wu Ming's approach to historical fiction is not to

construct an alternative path through time—a reasonably common science fiction practice—but to explore worlds at their points of potential, worlds layered, discontinuous, and heated with the force of emergent events: "We prefer to investigate the 'possibility' of a bifurcation in history, the moment when history 'might have gone' in a different direction. We are not interested in depicting the bifurcation itself, or its consequences" (Wu Ming 2002). *Manituana*, for instance, is located in the complex field of the American War of Independence, and written with allegorical intent in our time of crisis and instability in the geopolitics of the United States. Against the state-myth of the birth of U.S. democracy, a myth bathed in the blood of Native American peoples and enslaved Africans, it depicts the Six Iroquois Nations forming alliance with the English Crown in self-defense against the genocidal territorial ambitions of the rebels. Here, through multiple narrative voices, the novel imagines the hybrid indigenous and settler cultures that were to be crushed by the emergent structures of the newly independent nation. Churning up a past that is not past, imagining possible worlds, multiplying perspectives, it is a historical hallucination, a falsifying narrative that reacts back on the "true" of American exceptionalism, past and present.

Turning to the second feature of Wu Ming's mythopoesis, in holding history in this intense and labyrinthine state of potential, falsifying narration resists the attraction of a valorized political subject and transcendent frame of judgment. *Manituana* displays a clear empathy with the Iroquois, but it produces no privileged standpoint: "We're not interested in the cliché of the 'innocent' Indian who's in harmony with nature" (Wu Ming, in Lipperini). An amusing scene at an aristocratic London party illustrates the point well. Here the Mohawk Philip Lacroix posits his *existential hybridity* as answer to the false Enlightenment problem of whether he is Voltaire's "*ingénu,* the natural man," or "a latecomer . . . yet to attain a state of civilisation." "I like the fairy tales of philosophers," Lacroix adds, wryly quoting Voltaire, but they "have never set foot in America and have never met an Indian" (Wu Ming 2009a, 160–61). Yet if hybridity is accorded a positive valence in the narrative, it is no guarantor of progressive existence. For if the Iroquois are as existentially complex as the Europeans, they are also as implicated in the brutal and insidious violence that pervades the novel, "drunk on blood" as Molly Brant warns in the prologue (6).

Without a valorized subject, false narration concerns itself instead with the immanent evaluation of the ethical and aesthetic capacities of the life with which it engages. For Deleuze "it is a matter . . . of evaluating every being, every action and passion, even every value, in relation to the life which they involve" (1989, 141). This is an evaluation that complements the bifurcating image of history in concerning itself with a *disaggregated* field—affects, images, values as so many raw materials or part-objects of political imagination and composition. Such are the terms that Deleuze uses to describe the concerns of 1970s U.S. black cinema: "[I]nstead of replacing a negative image of the black with a positive one, [it] multiplies types and 'characters,' and each time creates or re-creates only a small part of the image which no longer corresponds to a linkage of actions, but to shattered states of emotions or drives, expressible in pure images and sounds" (220). Wu Ming's literary creations are not this radical in form, maintaining a close relation with action-driven narrative structures. But modes of sociality, collective affects, and an ethical evaluation of different capacities of life are central constituent operators in their novels.

A case in point is *54*, a novel much concerned with the ethical and aesthetic styles of life of 1950s Italy. Against the backdrop of cold war maneuvering and the dashed dreams of the Resistance, here working class popular culture—most especially the *filuzzi* dance and the neighborhood bar—brushes up against new consumer desires, global networks, and the charmed life of Cary Grant in a manner that posits *style* at the foreground of experience. This is style as the direct expression and handling of the complexities of existence, the way a time is affirmed or actively lived—where "ethics and aesthetics coincide and become act" (Wu Ming 5, in Baird, 253). And Cary Grant is its privileged figure. Indeed, Grant is introduced with a rave evaluation from an omniscient narrator that elevates him to a (somewhat unorthodox) figure of *communist overcoming:* "In classless society, anybody could be Cary Grant" (Wu Ming 2005a, 50). This is the passage at its most exuberant: "[W]ho had never yearned for such perfection, to draw down from Plato's Hyperuranium the Idea of 'Cary Grant,' to donate it to the world so that the world might change, and finally to lose himself in the transformed world, to lose himself never to re-emerge? The discovery of a style and the utopia of a world in which to cultivate it" (49). Grant functions in the novel, then, as an icon or "Idea," but an

icon without transcendent judgment, without judgment of *any* kind. It is an iconicity based solely on Grant's immanent affirmation of existence, the singular style of which this trans-Atlantic star was famed. To partake of Grant's iconicity, to *become* Cary Grant, is to practice no less of an immanent affirmation of one's conditions of life. Grant's iconicity must hence disaggregate in the very process of its affirmation, since to affirm Cary Grant is to project oneself back into the manifold of social existence: Pierre, the star *filuzzi* dancer and key protagonist, "crossed the [dance] floor as though it were Piazza Maggiore on a Sunday morning, keeping his hand in his trouser pocket, under his jacket, more Cary Grant than ever" (42).[10]

What happens to political agency and collectivity in this field of incompossible worlds and fragmented modes of being? The agency of myth is generated through its peculiar form of enunciative voice, this is myth's third characteristic. If false narration is an evaluation of life, it should be clear that it cannot be an arbitrary imposition by an author on a historical or social field. Examples of the cinema of falsifying narration that Deleuze cites tend to be documentary in genre, and Wu Ming's mythopoesis emerges only after prolonged periods of research; their characters are meticulously located—indeed, the likeness of their Cary Grant to the actor is such that a comparative review of *54* with a recent Grant biography found the *fictional* portrayal to be the most convincing (Petit). This close relation between reality and fiction—where "real and not fictional characters" are put "in the condition of 'making up fiction'" (Deleuze 1989, 222)—produces a blurring or contamination of the point of view of the author (external to the scene presented, hence in cinematic convention "objective") and that of the characters portrayed (internal to the scene, hence "subjective"). Wu Ming call the resultant enunciative mode an "unidentified narrative object." It is a concept with its own specificity, but in this respect it bears association with what Deleuze designates "free indirect discourse" (148): narration between subjective and objective viewpoints that sweeps up both in an utterance that is loosened from determination by either. The effect, as Wu Ming 1 describes it, is somewhat "hallucinatory" or "uncanny" (2008), an at once seductive and disconcerting feeling of familiarity and strangeness that arises as one loses the ability to locate the enunciative voice. It is an effect he considers most successfully achieved in Roberto Saviano's *Gomorrah*, the

devastating work of reportage, fiction, and political economy on Neapolitan organized crime: "The 'narrating I' frequently hallucinates and 'hijacks' the points of view of other people, intentionally playing on the confusion between the author, the narrator and a 'narrating I' that doesn't belong to any of them" (Wu Ming 1 2008).

It is the autonomy of this unidentified roving voice—between reality and fiction, between the author and a particular historical or social body—and its disorienting, hallucinatory, and alluring affect that provides myth with its agential, catalytic force. An *effect* of its telling, myth gains autonomy and folds back upon its field of emergence to become a *cause*. As Deleuze has it, myth is a "monster" (1989, 150), it "*has a life of its own:* an image that is always stitched together, patched up, continually growing along the way" (1997, 118). Referring back for a moment to the earlier discussion, one might think of Luther Blissett in exactly these terms—not only a collective author, but an unidentified myth, a catalyst, an "uncontrollable golem" (Blissett n.d.).

Of course, it is the agential, catalytic property of distributed myth—to gather diverse affects and relations in an intensity that projects into action—that also makes the cult of personality so effective. The intensity of the popular cult of Mao, for example, did indeed enable people to accomplish extraordinary feats, be it in industry, sport, or popular violence (Lifton). The difference with Wu Ming's conception, however, is that here myth provides no fusion of belonging determined by a transcendent subject or truth. Fragments of association, imagination, meaning, and mood are woven together through myth, but—if it avoids becoming technified—these emergent arrangements remain constituted around an absent center, with a processual openness to their outside.

To dispel any Arcadian images that may have been conveyed thus far, it should be underscored that these unidentified and fragmented qualities of myth are facilitated by its relation to artifice and technology. Just as Luther Blissett was immersed in general intellect, free indirect discourse is for Deleuze a fully mediated mode of expression, characterized by a taste for "making the camera felt": obsessive framing, alternation of lenses on the same image, bizarre angles, abnormal movements, excessive zooming. The novel has fewer technological affordances, but it is productive to regard Wu Ming's literary practice as similarly concerned—albeit in deliberately "popular" mode—with

foregrounding and testing the capacities of the medium. Here we can note: the incorporation into the novels of nonliterary textual forms such as historical documents, diaries, and newspaper articles; the insertion of Wu Ming's own interviews with historical figures into the mouths of fictional characters in *Asce di guerra;* the cross-media storytelling, Web-based reader interaction, and fan fiction of *Manituana;* and the attention to the way that linguistic structure itself can express political forms, sensibilities, and relations of power. To illustrate only the last of these features, *Manituana* is especially attentive to the politics of expression that subtends more formal political structure. Contemplating the tensions of political negotiation, Joseph Brant—Iroquois protagonist and sometime translator—reflects thus on the disjunction between the expressive language of the Mohawk and the language of clarity, order, and Empire:

> English was a rougher, more concise language; in the journey from eyes to mouth the words shrank, leaving part of their significance on the page. In the language of the Empire, every cause was followed by a consequence, to every action there was a single corresponding purpose, to every action the most appropriate reaction. On the contrary, the language of the Mohawk was full of details, run through with doubts, refined by constant adjustments. Each word stretched and expanded to capture every possible meaning and ring in the ear in the most consonant manner. (Wu Ming 2009a, 33)

THE STYLES OF MALCOLM X

There is little doubt that Wu Ming's tastes are for the excluded, the nameless, the "minor shades" of history. Yet they also engage with established and enduring iconic instances of political myth, allowing for the possibility of an unidentified mythopoesis to operate on the broad terrain of popular culture. In their interventions on this front the structures of myth discussed so far have particular and novel expressions, but it is Wu Ming's mythopoetical encounter with Malcolm X (on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of his assassination) that I will isolate here, not least because of the latter's own politicization of the name.

   In keeping with the nonlinear, falsifying approach to history, this is Malcolm X as a historical figure *and* a most contemporary myth, a

roving and mediated power: "When an actor—any actor—plays the part of Malcolm X, it's as if Malcolm possesses him" (Wu Ming 1 2005b). This time slip typical of myth is here given critical purchase by the persistence of the property form, and is instituted by the dynamics of Malcolm's last name—or, rather, its substitution with an "X": "Renouncing the surname of a slave, the stigma of an ancient violation, pulls the present into the discussion, the imposed identity, the role that is assigned to us by the script of the winners. Putting into play a radical discussion, this is to say, one that descends to the roots to reconquer negated memory. Your ancestors were merchandise" (Wu Ming 1 2005c). Here the property function of the name that Marx and Foucault identified in the citizen author is found also in modern capitalism's alloyed power of primitive accumulation, in the form of slavery. It is a different articulation of the same transhistorical structure of property and appropriation: "Malcolm—freed from the racist doctrines of Elijah Muhammad—understands even better that the horrors of slavery, of segregation and inner colonialism of the USA don't depend on the 'evilness' of the whites (the 'devils with blue eyes'), they're not gratuitous nor unjustified, and what's more, they're necessary for the defence of property relationships. Those who maintain the memory of slavery in the center of their own reflection will arrive more easily at criticizing property" (2005c). Malcolm's "X," then, recalls across time the violence of property—just as it shatters the property relation of the name, constituting a nonfilial and nonlinear community of struggle: "George Washington exchanged his slave for a barrel of molasses, but your grandfather wasn't a barrel of molasses. Your grandfather was Nat Turner. Your grandfather was Toussaint L'Ouverture" (Wu Ming 1 2005b).

Constructed on this collective field of property and its negation, Malcolm X lives as an affective pattern—"Malcolm X became imprinted upon my neurons"—and as a style (Wu Ming 1 2003). I noted above that for Deleuze, mythical affect comprises "shattered states of emotions," "pure images and sounds" without linkage to historical action. But he has commented also that from time to time one does find a conjunction of such aesthetic qualities with political struggle, a conjunction manifest in the gestures or styles of historical personas: "[A] coincidence of poetic acts and historical events or political actions, the glorious incarnation of something sublime or untimely. Such great

coincidences are Nasser's burst of laughter when he nationalized Suez, or Castro's gestures, and that other burst of laughter, Giap's television interview" (Deleuze 2004, 130). These are "tiny events," but as fragmented blocs of politics, style, image, and affect they have a joyous and untimely quality that works as a mythopoetical catalyst for "new worlds," new patterns of association (130). To expand on one of Deleuze's examples, it is reported in Chris Marker's *A Grin without a Cat* (a film as concerned as Deleuze is with the politics of the missing people) that Castro's habit of punctuating his oratory with a nervous adjustment of his microphone became a central affective operator of his speeches, a part-object joyously anticipated by his audience. As the film's narrator comments, it displayed Castro's skill in "turning the accidental into the legendary." For Wu Ming, Malcolm X too has this untimely aesthetic power, though what is a rather enigmatic suggestion on Deleuze's part, here finds more substantial elaboration. Malcolm communicates today—in a manner "so direct that it breaks the barriers of time"—as a disaggregated style, a layered and discontinuous arrangement of bodily and sonorous parts: "husky sounds [that] grab you by the shoulders," "parables and stories," "rhetorical questions," "body language," "'call and response' passages" (Wu Ming 1 2005b), "close-cropped hair," "the rims of his glasses" (Wu Ming 5), and his "dazzl[ing]" "smile" (Wu Ming 1 2005b).

There are always dangers with this kind of focus on style, as is apparent from the experience of another Left icon of the period, Angela Davis. In an essay reflecting upon the multiple and contradictory semiotic and political functions of her 1970s "Afro" or "natural" hairstyle, Davis shows how this complex aggregation of style and politics was reduced over time to a decontextualized fashion item, a unit of "revolutionary glamor." She especially attends here to the destructive power of photography, a power to arrest agency and atrophy memory, even in the midst of social struggle. It is a concern that Wu Ming share. Though they make no attempt to hide their individual names, they refuse to appear on television or allow their photographs taken, providing instead (until spring 2008) a publicity image of a 1950s dance troupe devoid of faces and captioned, "This revolution is faceless" (Figure 2). Wu Ming's explanation has some resonance with Davis's critique of the power of the image: "No photos, no filming. Once the writer becomes a face that's separate and alienated . . . , it's a cannibalistic
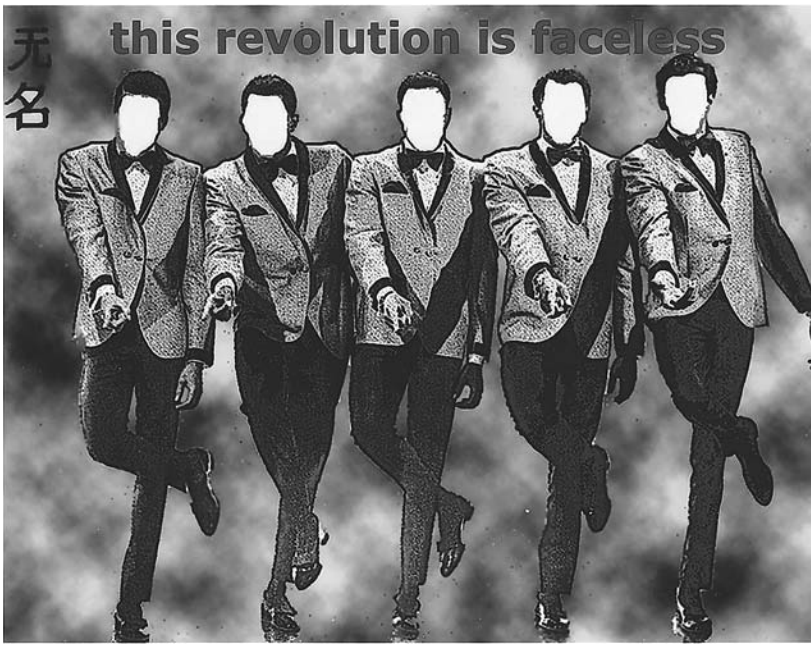
Figure 2. Wu Ming's portrait (2000–2008). Creative Commons Attribution—ShareAlike 3.0

jumble: that face appears everywhere, almost always out of context. A photo is witness to my absence; it's a banner of distance and solitude. A photo paralyzes me, it freezes my life into an instant, it negates my ability to transform into something else. I become a 'character,' a stopgap used to quickly fill a page layout, an instrument that amplifies banality" (Wu Ming 1, in Wu Ming 2007). This assessment of facial representation does not, however, extend to the public articulation of other component parts and expressions of the human body, parts that can enfold and project experiential and associational vitality: "On the other hand my voice—with its grain, with its accents, with its imprecise diction, its tonalities, rhythms, pauses and vacillations—is witness to a presence even when I'm not there; it brings me close to people and doesn't negate my transformative capacity, because its presence is dynamic, alive and trembling even when seemingly still" (2007). The fate of bodily images, parts, and styles is not only, then, to integrate and paralyze political composition. Malcolm X does of course circulate in culture as a unified photographic image. But Wu Ming's engagement suggests that in a *disaggregated* state, his styles can maintain a

propulsive vitality, "alive and trembling" at the borders of the facial-ized subject.[11] Malcolm is a fragmented set of affects, refrains, sounds, and rhetorics constituted in the open and non-filial community of the critique of property, a mythical field evoked with an "X."

CONCLUSION

I began this article with a reference to Bordiga's practice of anonymous writing. As a counter to the cult of personality and the wider capital-ist structures of identity and authorship, such anonymity has definite progressive features. But it is not without problems. Camatte remarks that despite Bordiga's intensions to the contrary, his formulation of anonymity carried the air of the "self-sacrificing militant," subsuming all difference to "doctrinal monolithism" (175–76). Luther Blissett and Wu Ming have some relation to Bordiga, acknowledging the influence of his revolutionary anonymity on the tactic of the multiple name, and crediting their reading of the general intellect to Bordiga's remarkable work on Marx's *Grundrisse* in the 1950s. However, their practical cri-tique of capitalist patterns of individuality is not recomposed on the terrain of doctrine and militant self-sacrifice. The politics of anonymity in Luther Blissett and Wu Ming has a *joyous* quality, a style character-ized by an opening out to the author's "outside," to the multitudi-nous and expansive relations of social and technological existence.

To reach a communist anonymity it is not enough, then, to write with no name; the anonymous must be actively constructed. Two approaches have been explored here, the multiple name author and unidentified myth. The first, the pseudonymous multiplicity of Luther Blissett, brings the power of the "multiple single" to bear on the con-fined subjectivity of the partial individual, and does this through a set of techniques that trouble the author as a point rarity and value. This is a communist mode of authorship: at once collective and singular, immanent to sociotechnical relations, and disdainful of the property form. It is the condition, after Marx and Foucault, of the author's *real* individuality. The second technique of anonymous practice operates against the reactionary powers of technified myth, with its linguis-tic clichés and integrated subjectivities. It posits instead a peculiar kind of unidentified and roving myth that is generated through the

investigation and circulation of affects, styles, and values across the divide between fiction and reality. In this one finds the imaginative, exploratory, and catalytic force of myth to call forth new associations, new worlds—albeit that they inhere in a fragmentary, experimental state. But if mythical, this practice is by no means devoid of purchase on the concrete reality of capitalist life; what is perhaps most ingenious in Luther Blissett and Wu Ming is their interlacing of a politics of mythical invention with the critique of the intolerable, as is most apparent in the engagement with Malcolm X.

In contrast to the concentrative and authoritarian function of the cult of personality—premised, at least in Mao's case, on the singular "truth" of the integrating leader—here myth is a collective endeavor without a determined subject, not a "people" but a processual "monster," stitched together and patched up through its situated and variable iterations. Wu Ming's not infrequent encounters with orthodox Left icons should be approached with this understanding—it is as if even these highly integrated images can be rerouted and potentialized through the disaggregating powers of the unidentified narrative object. Something of this is apparent in Wu Ming's new self-portrait (Figure 3). "جمال عبد الناص" (Gamal Abdel Nasser) provides a key component of the image, but it is a strange montage, where Nasser's face is multiplied four-fold and placed on the heads of a *filuzzi* dance band. As fragments of pan-Arabist icon, Mediterranean basin, Italian working

Figure 3. Wu Ming's portrait (2009–). Creative Commons Attribution—ShareAlike 3.0

class musical culture, and a certain 1950s proletarian style swirl to-
gether, the effect is, as Wu Ming have it, "uncanny" indeed (2009c)—
quite the reverse of an integrated and subjectifying image, yet all the
more generative for it. But I will come to a close with an image of per-
haps greater irreverence, and one that takes us back to the figure who
opened this article. If Mao himself is not directly subject to such treat-
ment, the iconography of Chinese Maoism is. Identifying the link to
the free digital downloads of their books, Wu Ming's English language
Web site carries a familiar socialist realist image of a triumphant
worker holding aloft a copy of Mao's "Little Red Book." However,
floating in the sky above is the disarming face of Cary Grant, doubling
the cult of personality and its transcendent regimes of truth with an
icon of a rather different order.

Notes

1. The first general secretary of the Italian Communist Party, Bordiga has the
distinction of being the last Western communist to criticize Stalin to his face and
survive, at a 1926 meeting of the Comintern.

2. Camatte comments: "Bordiga's anonymity was directed against the cult
of the great men and messiahs, against individualism and bourgeois personalism,
which were seen as pathogenic elements that had caused gangrene in the workers'
movement" (176).

3. This article is hence not a close reading of the novels, but a selective treat-
ment of them as part of a wider field of writing practice and toward the articula-
tion of a specific set of political concerns.

4. The members of Wu Ming use numerals (derived from the alphabetical
order of their surnames) to identify themselves and have individually written a
number of books whose authorship is signaled using the same convention. They
do not, however, make any concerted efforts to conceal their given names. This
institutes a clear distinction both from clandestine models of subjectivity associ-
ated with conspiracy and the self-assumption of a vanguard role to the clandes-
tine subject—"Secret societies are freak factories, the revolution is not a Masonic
affair" (Wu Ming 2005b)—and structures of anonymity that serve to enforce the
mystique and market value of the individual author, as recently exemplified in
the UK case of the blogger "Belle de Jour" and her *Diary of a London Call Girl*.

5. I can only gesture here to Marx's crucial account of the interplay of the
singular and the collective. For an enticing contemporary development of this
thesis—and, indeed, a textual enactment—see Casarino and Negri.

6. The essence of the hoax was that the (fabricated) English conceptual
artist Harry Kipper had vanished on the Italo-Slovenian border while tracing the

word "ART" across the continent, shortly after attending a conference in Bologna where he had proposed the collective adoption of the name Luther Blissett. Their attention piqued, interviews with Kipper's acquaintances drew the television crew of *Chi l'ha visto?* (Has Anybody Seen Them?) across Italy and as far as London. Due to an overheard bar conversation, the hoax was dashed and the announced program pulled shortly before broadcast, but not before the reveal was published in the press, and Luther Blissett launched into the mediascape (Blissett 1997b).

7. Wu Ming 3 left the collective in spring 2008.

8. Caught up in the wave of mobilization it appears that Wu Ming lost sight of their earlier critique in *Q* of these self-sacrificial approaches to political subjectivity. As they comment on the popular weaving of features of *Q*'s world—Thomas Müntzer, the Peasants' War, the siege of Münster—in the mythopoetical "general metaphor" of the movement: "Although it was inspiring and effective, the metaphor was a misrepresentation. . . . Thomas Müntzer spoke to us, but we couldn't understand his words. It wasn't a blessing, but a warning" (2010, xxxvi).

9. Wu Ming 1 writes of the "*political* necessity" of fiction, its capacity to "use alternative history and alternative realities to force our gaze into imagining the future" (2008).

10. The structure of immanent iconicity sketched here is such that the selection of Grant for this role must itself be somewhat arbitrary, contingent on local taste and preference. Wu Ming 1 thus comments elsewhere that the passage in *54* that introduces Grant's myth is also in part a parody of efforts by leftists to rationalize and constrain their affective investments according to higher political values, "the temptation . . . to force that passion or preference back under the umbrella of your ideology." By contrast, he offers a more immanent, local explanation for their choice: "We included Grant . . . because we like him, we find him intriguing, we like his style" (2005a).

11. There is an engaging consonance here with Deleuze's comments on the desubjectifying "sonorous particles" of the voice: "Some of us can be moved by certain voices in the cinema. Bogart's voice. . . . It's a metallic thread that unwinds, with a minimum of intonation; it's not at all the subjective voice" (1977). For this reference and for their incisive comments, I am most grateful to the two anonymous reviewers of this article.

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