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# Fiction and authenticity beyond the artist's body

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**Abstract**

This essay discusses the work of a series of imaginary artists who are, nevertheless, able to function as authors in the contemporary art world. Described as parafictional artists, the article emphasises the capacity of such active practitioners as Donelle Woolford, The Atlas Group, Reena Spaulings and Barbara Cleveland to interact with the art world in a plausible manner, regardless of the disclosure of their imaginary nature. These interactions include exhibiting and selling works, giving interviews, publishing books, or doing performances under their own names. Unlike earlier body-based investigations into identity, parafictional artists develop disembodied strategies that some researchers have associated with the use of digitally-constructed avatars. The question of whether the invention of parafictional artists can be considered as a way to reject or ignore the political implications of "authentic" identities is debated in detail throughout the article. The essay, however, opts for understanding these imaginary artists with "real" careers as a means to discuss and negotiate the complex function of artists' identities in the contemporary art world. The text finishes by predicting a future in which parafictional artists will become ubiquitous, and their growing numbers a possible threat.

**Keywords**

parafictional artist, authorship, contemporary art world, avatar, (post)identity

## Ficción y autenticidad más allá del cuerpo del artista

### Resumen

Este ensayo aborda el trabajo de una serie de artistas imaginarios que, sin embargo, funcionan como autores en el mundo del arte contemporáneo. Descritos como artistas paraficcionales, el artículo subraya la capacidad de profesionales tan activos como Donelle Woolford, The Atlas Group, Reena Spaulings y Barbara Cleveland para interactuar con el mundo del arte de manera plausible, con independencia de la divulgación de su naturaleza imaginaria. Dichas interacciones incluyen la exhibición y venta de obras, la concesión de entrevistas, la publicación de libros o la realización de performances usando su propio nombre. Al contrario que en anteriores investigaciones sobre la identidad, basadas en el cuerpo, los artistas paraficcionales desarrollan estrategias incorpóreas que algunos académicos asocian al uso de avatares construidos digitalmente. A lo largo del artículo se debate en detalle la cuestión de si la invención de artistas paraficcionales puede considerarse como un modo de rechazar o eludir las implicaciones políticas de las identidades “auténticas”. El ensayo, no obstante, opta por interpretar a estos artistas imaginarios con carreras “reales” como un medio para discutir y negociar la compleja función que la identidad de los artistas juega en el mundo del arte contemporáneo. El texto concluye con la predicción de un futuro en el que los artistas paraficcionales serán un fenómeno generalizado y su creciente número una posible amenaza.

### Palabras clave

artista paraficcional, autoría, mundo del arte contemporáneo, avatar, (post)identidad

## The Donelle Woolford debate

Am I, Donelle, a “god-made” idea, and if so, are ideas real or imaginary? If I’m an object — and as such, useful — does that make me more real? Or am I an imitation of something — an artist, perhaps — that relegates me to the realm of the imaginary? (Woolford, 2011)

Depending on which side of the classical real/imaginary dichotomy one stands, Donelle Woolford can be described (1) as an African-American female artist, a Yale University art graduate living in New York who, in 2006, began a successful career with exhibitions in Europe and the US; or (2) as a *character*, the invention of the artist and professor Joe Scanlan who decided to construct this fiction as his opposed (male/female, white/black, established/upcoming). If considered to be a practising artist, Woolford produces modernist-looking paintings and collages, as well as lectures and performances, in which case she is embodied by different African-American actresses.

If analysed, however, as the product of the imagination of a well-connected university tutor such as Scanlan, gender, race, and other ethically-sensitive, power-related issues began to appear. Despite this, Woolford’s name had been included in the lists of participating artists at numerous exhibitions in the US and abroad without major polemic, and it was not until she was selected to take part in the 2014 Whitney Biennial that her dual nature provoked a very public outburst of conflictual responses.



Figure 1. Clockwise: *Avatar*, 2008. Abigail Ramsay as Donelle Woolford in *Double Agent*, ICA London, 2008, installation and performance. Studio view of Jennifer Kidwell as Donelle Woolford, Harlem, 2008. Studio view of Namik Minter as Donelle Woolford, New Haven, Connecticut, 2006.

The Biennial, held at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, is usually perceived as a site for discussing the intersection of identity politics and creativity.<sup>1</sup> The inclusion in the 2014 edition of Donelle Woolford's performance *Dick's Last Stand* — where, dressed up as a man, she re-enacted a routine by the African American stand-up comedian Richard Pryor — sparked the decision of the black artists collective *HowDoYouSayYamInAfrican?* (YAMS), who had also been invited to participate, to pull out of the event. After the controversial withdrawal, two representatives of the YAMS collective explained how their retreat from the exhibition was primarily a protest against “institutional white supremacy” in North American art organisations, while at the same time dramatically describing Scanlan's imaginary act as “raping black women conceptually” (Springer and Shields, 2014).

Despite (or in light) of the above, Woolford is able to navigate successfully between the realms of the real and the imaginary. But, why is she invited to participate in exhibitions, interviewed, represented by galleries and supported by curators? It is not a matter of tricking audiences about the veracity of Woolford's identity, as her manufactured origin has been revealed by Scanlan at interviews, exhibitions, and online.<sup>2</sup> So, why are these institutions supporting a project with potentially racist and sexist connotations? Is it solely because Scanlan is a well-connected professional and people like to help their friends? Or could it be that the Donelle Woolford case and its investigation into contemporary authorship via fiction is relevant in other ways too?

Over the years, Scanlan as himself or as Woolford has responded to questions about the intentions of his imaginary act by framing it in an examination of artistic authorship and agency. For example, the artist herself stated that her ultimate goal is to go “beyond what my physical appearance in the art world will allow” (Woolford, 2007, p. 64) or, in other words, to challenge the expectations that her identity as a black, female artist generates. Similarly, in the context of the polemic around the Whitney Biennial, Scanlan (2014) explained how the art world “tend[s] to lock artists into a certain type and insist that they stay that way”. Woolford's initial characterisation of herself as enjoying some kind of mobility between the real and the imaginary enables us to connect this project to an expanding discourse within art that, non-extended of polemic, argues for the “liberation” of artist's from the expectations associated with their given identities. The form of *flexible subjecthood* that Woolford represents is seen by the advocates

of what is generally known as post-identity positions as overcoming certain limitations of classical identity politics. It is, simultaneously, censured by those attacking the Donelle Woolford project as a strategy that disregards the political significance of *authentic* non-dominant identities and, consequently, conceals the unjust power relations at play in the art world.

## Parafictional artists

Scanlan is, of course, not the first artist to invent an alternative artistic persona and present work through him/her.<sup>3</sup> He is, nevertheless, exemplary of what I identify as an expanding tendency in recent contemporary art for artists to work totally or partially, alone or collectively, *under a parafictional identity*. By that I do not mean the mere substitution of an artist's officially recognised forename by a fictitious one, but rather the more complex articulation of a parafictional artist who, despite their dubious nature, and through a variety of strategies, is able to function as an author; that is, to produce works and present them publicly under their own name. Unlike pseudonyms, parafictional artists have biographies, styles and interests of their own which might or might not correspond to those of their “creators”. In that sense, parafictional artists come closer to what the Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa described as “heteronyms”.<sup>4</sup>

I am borrowing the term parafiction from art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty (2009) who uses it to describe fictional art projects that, at least for a period of time, are taken at face value by a number of people. Through examples like The Yes Men's impersonation of World Trade Organization representatives at conferences and on television programmes, Eva and Franco Mattes's (aka 0100101110101101.ORG) well-orchestrated campaign to rename Vienna's Karlplatz as Nikeplatz, or Michael Blum's presentation of the pseudo-historical feminist translator Safiye Behar at the 2005 Istanbul Biennial, Lambert-Beatty (2009, p. 54) explains how parafictional projects rely on convincing props and platforms invested with credibility to question current “pragmatics of trust”. Following Paul Virilio's (2000) insight into how power operates its censorial control not by omitting data but by inundating us with endless information, Lambert-Beatty praises parafictions for their capacity to train our ability to distinguish, from the vast amount of material thrown at us, *true facts* from the rest.

1. The so-labelled “multicultural biennial” of 1993, which provoked the outrage of numerous art critics who censured the importance given to political content over aesthetic values, is mainly responsible for such characterisation. The Guerrilla Girls' protests outside the museum denouncing the shortage of female artists included in 1987, or the 2006 edition entrusted for the first time to two non-US curators, have also contributed to the impression of the celebration of the Biennial as being a likely occasion to generate debate around the institutional (in)visibility of non-dominant racial, ethnic, gender or sexual identities.

2. For example, on Scanlan's website, Donelle Woolford appears in his list of works. See “Things that Fall” [Accessed: 21 December 2016] <<http://www.thingsthatfall.com>>.

3. Marcel Duchamp's development of R. Mutt or Rose Sélavy are evident precedents.

4. As it is well-known, Pessoa wrote under numerous identities, including that of a futurist poet (Álvaro de Campos), a neo-classical one (Ricardo Reis), and their common tutor as well as Pessoa's own teacher (Alberto Caeiro). For Pessoa, these were not mere pseudonyms, but heteronyms, for each had his own biography and intellectual independency which allowed them to develop their own interests and make their own aesthetic choices.

The parafictional artists whose practices and concerns I am addressing here (including Donelle Woolford) also construct their credibility through the use of convincing props (their artworks) and through their inclusion in events at reliable platforms (museums and galleries). The term is therefore applicable and fits the aspirations of those interested in analysing how reality and fiction work together in the construction of an artist's identity. However, my use of the phrase parafiction significantly differs from Lambert-Beatty's one: while for her, the revelation of the fictionality of parafictions puts an end to their plausibility, I believe that the disclosure of the imaginary nature of parafictional artists does not affect their capacity to function as authors. Quite the contrary, for even after their dual nature has been revealed, parafictional artists are still able to interact with the world in a *credible* manner and, in so doing, further question the classical real/imaginary dichotomy.

Another term that has been used to describe these fictional artists with "real" careers is that of avatar. Originally a religious concept, an avatar now describes any "computer-generated figure controlled by a person via a computer" (Coleman, 2011, p. 12). Similarly to the already mentioned heteronym, these virtual characters can have characteristics of their own that do not need to match the offline identity of the person using them. Art historian David Joselit (2005), for his part, uses the idiom in connection to a series of practices that he labelled as "navigational art". He characterised this art as proposals that without being examples of new media art per se allowed artists to *move freely* between physical and virtual territories, confusing the distinctions between the factual and the fictional. In his words: "the avatar makes possible an imaginary/real mobility that the artist's physical presence in site-specific art could hardly allow" (Joselit, 2005, p. 278-79). If in previous generations of artists interested in identity, the truth of their quest was reinforced by the live presence of their own bodies, this seems no longer necessary.

## Manifestos

Reena Spaulings was originally a fiction in the most literary sense of the word: she came to be in a 2003 book entitled with her own name which narrates her "rise" from guard working at the Met Museum in New York to fashion model and cutting-edge performer (Bernadette Corporation, 2004). The same year the novel was published, Reena Spaulings started to operate in the physical world of art as an immediately successful artist and as an even more lucrative art dealer. Her oil-based portraits of other art dealers, unusable marble surfboards and stained tablecloths turned into *Flags* have been exhibited at the Whitney Museum, the MoMA and at important galleries in major European capitals. Meanwhile, Reena Spaulings Fine Art has participated in blue-chip art fairs and represents a long list of profit-making artists, including Bernadette Corporation (also known

as BC), an "evolving" collaborative implicated in fashion, photography, film and publishing that, in a convenient loop, is at the same time the multiple author of the novel *Reena Spaulings* that gave birth to the artist and dealer.

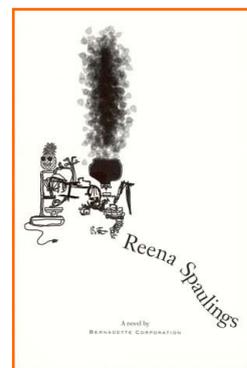


Figure 2. Cover of the novel *Reena Spaulings* written by Bernadette Corporation, 2004.

As the preface of the novel explains, *Reena Spaulings* was written by up to 150 individuals working under the corporation's name. Along with the significant use of a model of collective creative labour, the stated ambition of Bernadette Corporation was to publish a sort of iconic novel of the new millennia. The final text is, however, fragmentary, with constant changes of narrator, and chapters which seem to be side reflections rather than integrated parts of the narrative. The novel also contains a number of crude sex scenes, and a detectable cynicism in the description of how things work within those not-so-glamorous worlds. Nevertheless, in the influential art history survey text *Art since 1900*, edited by the art historians Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois *et al.*, *Reena Spaulings* is described "as a kind of manifesto or a general theory of avatars" (2011, p. 764), an impressive account that is worth exploring further.

The novel follows Reena's rapidly thriving career within fashion and art in contrast with her dispassionate attitude. Reena's recurrent ambivalence as a character is supported by what ends up being the novel's main theme: the protagonist's struggle between being authentic and being non-specific. In the book's pages we can find an unobvious mockery of the widespread presentation of the individual as a "unique self": "Funny how individuality makes you generic", or "How regrettable when people all around the world start becoming selves, tooth-brushing, anus-wiping, voting selves, Americans" (Bernadette Corporation, 2004, p. 154, 158, respectively). Against this parodic illustration of identity as a set of repetitive, meaningless characteristics, the heroine's final ability to *become no one* is presented as key to her success.

Beyond the novel's narrative, the view that artists are better off by giving up any pretension to individuality would seem in line with the configuration of Reena Spaulings (a literary character constructed

by numerous non-identifiable writers, and a profitable artist whose artworks cannot be ascribed to any known individual) as well as with the decision of a series of creative individuals to take on such an anonymous and even alienating non-identity as BC. These attempts at configuring artistic subjectivities whose agency is not limited to the characteristics — bodily or other — of any one pre-given identity, is what the art historians describing *Reena Spaulings* as a manifesto or theory of avatars are seemingly praising.

I have already mentioned David Joselit's interest in the figure of the avatar. In his study on the negative effects of television in the evolution of US politics, Joselit contrasts how both fiction and non-fiction televisual genres sell identities "as coherent stable properties" (2007, p. 149) with how artists working with early video — Bruce Nauman, Peter Campus or Vito Acconci — represented identities as unstable, and sometimes incoherent processes. He writes:

By calling forth animate images, these artists produce avatars whose purpose is to navigate media ecologies as 'wrong names,' storing potential power in the fissures of commercial character. (*Ibid.*, p. 163)

According to Joselit, therefore, in their capacity as "wrong names", avatars do not represent a stipulated position (as right names supposedly do) but have the potential to "liberate" individuals from the ties and expectations associated with pre-marketed identities. As Joselit goes on to advocate in his so-titled pro-avatars Manifesto:

LOSE YOUR IDENTITY. Don't believe that you're a piece of property, a "gay man" or an "African American" whose "subject position" is the product of market research. Use icons opportunistically, and share them with like-minded people. Make an avatar! (*Ibid.*, p. 171)

## Post-identities?

But why is identity understood as a negative concept from which artists should be "freed"? Why is Donelle Woolford challenging the expectations associated with her black female identity? Why is Bernadette Corporation encouraging artists to become no one? The applauded turn to fiction as an escape from "the balkanized pieties of identity politics" (Joselit, 2005, p. 278) is, as mentioned, connected to what has been designated as post-identity rhetoric. According to the art historian Amelia Jones (2012), identity politics of the 1970s and 1980s was primarily based on binary distinctions between fixed categories of "self" and "other", and on single-issue concerns like gender, race or sexuality. From the 1990s onwards, however, the discourses on identity evolved in two ways: either away

from identity politics (as either the result of a "frustration with some of the simplifications and binaries of conventional 1970s-style identity politics" or made "by those oblivious to the history of identity politics and activism of the past" [Jones, 2012, p. xx]) or towards a more complicated, porous and dynamic conception of identity, what Jones positively terms "identification". For Jones, the post-identity rhetoric in art (which includes expressions like "post-feminism" and "post-black") is the undesirable effect of the dismissal of identity politics.

To Jones' remark about the frustration with the oversimplification of identity, and the disregard for the history of identity politics, I would add the suspicion that in neoliberal societies "identity" is just another commodity as fuelling the post-identity positions in art.<sup>5</sup> For example, Bernadette Corporation's disembodied strategies have been described as ways to "remove themselves from a culture that has forfeited the question of self to the functions of capital" (Simpson, 2004, p. 220). Although I do not agree with the commercially knowledgeable BC being described as rejecting the contradictions of capitalism, it is hard to deny that many kinds of identities — not all — are being sold to us as stereotyped products. But, can all parafictional artists be described as post-identities? Is this turn to fiction and rejection of authenticity a way of positively "freeing" artists and their art from the restraints of identity? And is that even possible?

In 2011 the all-women Sydney-based collective Brown Council found evidence of a pioneer Australian performance artist, Barbara Cleveland, whose sudden disappearance in 1981 prevented her work from gaining its rightful place in art history. The group first presented their "rediscovery" at the exhibition-homage *Remembering Barbara Cleveland*, and then went on to produce several works based on their findings about her. At first sight, a number of similarities between Bernadette Corporation/Reena Spaulings and Brown Council/Barbara Cleveland come to mind. Apart from their coincidental shared initials, both collectives are committed to working collaboratively and have chosen names that reflect a group identity. Bernadette Corporation and Brown Council also share the responsibility of "(re)discovering" an artist and presenting her to the art world. Yet, while the configuration of Reena Spaulings is, as I have shown, the result of what can be described as post-identity concerns, I consider the development of Barbara Cleveland to be aligned with the type of proposals that Amelia Jones calls identification.

Taken at face value, Brown Council's project could be interpreted as the straightforward feminist recuperation of an under-recognised woman artist who is being "written back" into the history of Australian performance art. Yet, as has been acknowledged by Brown Council, Barbara Cleveland is an invention; not an actual artist, but a parafictional one (Smith, 2015). That said, her story is full of parallels to the "discovery" of other "enigmatic" female artists whose life is then

5. For a further analysis of the causes driving the post-identity rhetoric in art see the exhibition catalogue *Don't You Know Who I Am? Art after Identity Politics* (Kreuger and Haq, 2014).

conveniently “invented” to fit certain institutional conventions as well as the expectations of the art market.<sup>6</sup> More specifically, Cleveland’s surviving documentation and biographical details — including her late interest in symbolic rituals and performances in the landscape — seem to be referencing a series of clichés associated with the historiography of performance. For example, some of her images performing naked with paint over her body suspiciously resemble photographs of the works of the US artist Carolee Schneemann, while Cleveland’s biography and concerns, as well as her untimely disappearance, reminds me of another “tragic” figure of feminist performance art, the Cuban-US artist Ana Mendieta.



Figure 3 and 4. Barbara Cleveland, performances, undated. Courtesy of Brown Collective.

Considering the amount of references to actual events in the history of art, and the inclusion of Barbara Cleveland at exhibitions and other public situations, I see Cleveland as a parafictional artist who, despite her non-existence, is able to disclose *certain truths* about how women artists — and particularly feminist performers — are presented and

accepted. In my view, the intended confusion between imaginary and factual at work in Cleveland — including the contradictory information about her biography — is an illustrative example of why the development of a parafictional artist can be an effective strategy. Brown Council is a self-declared feminist collective, and its invention of a historical female artist should not be read as mocking the attempts to “rewrite” women into history, but as a serious questioning of how and why such rewriting needs to be done.

Writer and philosopher Peter Osborne (2013) has also signalled the importance of fiction in recent art. For him, the actuality of fiction as a contemporary artistic methodology is related to the fictional character of “the contemporary” itself. As he argues, the contemporary is a term that embodies a fiction both in terms of time — for the periodisation “contemporary” generates the impression of the unity of multiple times — and in terms of space — because it projects uniformity over distant geopolitical areas. In his view, art and artists can only “occupy, articulate, critically reflect and transfigure so global a transnational space” if they are able to reproduce themselves something of the fictional structure of the contemporary (*Ibid.*, p. 28). Writing about the Lebanese artist Walid Raad and his pseudo-historical projects with the made-up collective The Atlas Group, Osborne explains how, in this case, the construction of the fictional group on the one hand, and of a series of fabricated documents about the actual Lebanese Civil Wars (1975-1991) on the other, are both strategies intrinsically linked to the fictional rationale of the contemporary itself. In Osborne’s opinion, the capacity of Walid Raad to develop a fictional subject position (The Atlas Group) and semi-fictional content (constructed videos, diaries and photos relating to the conflict), is what turn his projects into successful interventions in the context of the contemporary. To that I would add that by turning to fiction as his artistic methodology, Raad is able to produce projects that, despite their geopolitical specificity, fruitfully intervene in the debates around the identity of contemporary artists in the global art world.

That non-Western artists exhibiting internationally are expected to refer to their cultural background in their artworks is the centre of much critique in discussions about globalisation and contemporary art (Belting, 2009; Araeen, 2011; Chakrabarty, Joselit, Keeling *et al.*, 2016). Quite evidently, such discussions share a number of concerns with the post-identity debates about the gender, race and sexuality of the artist; namely the dynamic by which non-male, non-white, non-heterosexual *and* non-Western artists are expected to be discussing otherness in their works. Therefore, it is not surprising that The Atlas Group is considered an avatar in *Art since 1900* even if this entry does not mention the effects of globalisation in the identity of the artist. One could say that by inventing The Atlas Group — a name whose geographical reference could indicate a Maghreb-related origin, while

6. I am thinking about the nanny-photographer Vivian Maier and the “reconstruction” of her life story in several documentary films, or about the late Indian abstract painter and photographer Nasreen Mohamedi, whose current institutional success in the West would seem to fit a certain curatorial urge to “rethink” modernity.

its mythical connotations could suggest a global collective — Raad “liberates” himself from his given identity as a Lebanese artist. Yet, rather than using that strategy to produce artworks unrelated to his cultural background, his various fictional and parafictional devices allow him to discuss Lebanon’s history in terms that resonate with the interests of the international art scene.

Although it is possible to interpret parafictional artists as avatars that support post-identity positions, in my view, this turn to fiction in relation to authorship highlights something different. Rather than a rejection of identity politics, I interpret it as a means to emphasise some of the complicated circumstances experienced by artists working today (including those of feminist performers or non-Western practitioners) while they keep participating in the art world. What is more, it is simply not possible to disassociate art from what we know or imagine we know about who made it, making any so-called “liberation” of art from the “real” or fictional identity of its maker impossible. As Amelia Jones says:

There is no “object itself” that is not entangled in what *we believe* about the artist or agent *we believe* to have produced it [my emphasis], whether or not we read, ask or otherwise research about the artist’s biographical trajectory or identifications. (Jones, 2012, p. 137)

The return to the object that Jones criticises as part of an attempt to separate the meaning of art from the political reading of the identity of the artist — regardless of whether this is “authentic” or not — could indeed be one of the consequences of the proliferation of parafictional artists. Yet, as I have tried to show, most artists (not all) employ parafictional others not as a way to “free” themselves and their art from their given identity, but rather, like Brown Council and Walid Raad, and to a lesser extent Joe Scanlan and Bernadette Corporation, to modify certain expectations about who is legitimised to produce and present, to say and see, to witness and testify, without having to disown or reject the benefits of being part of the art world.

## As many as a legion

A multitude of parafictional artists are gathering not outside, but already within the walls of the art world. Apart from Donelle Woolford, Reena Spaulings, Barbara Cleveland and The Atlas Group, many others with various degrees of visibility are starring in all kinds of encounters. From metropolises such as New York, London, São Paulo, Sydney and Istanbul, to numerous other places all over Europe, America and Asia, events are showcasing the projects of these non-physical entities. Art fairs, biennials, lectures, auctions, magazines and universities are slowly becoming the vehicle through which parafictional artists function as actual authors in the contemporary world; yet no one seems to be worrying about the possible outcomes of their ubiquity.

In the New Testament we can read the story of the encounter between Jesus and a man possessed by demons. According to the Gospel of Mark (5:9), Jesus asked this individual for his name, to which he replied: “My name is Legion: for we are many”. This dramatic line, which has been adopted and adapted by numerous popular culture ventures — including black metal bands, horror movies and comic books — was also used by Roland Barthes to characterise the radical plurality he perceived in a new kind of writing which he described as “text” in opposition to the monolithic, fixed, single and sacred interpretation of what until then had been known as “work”:

The work has nothing disturbing for any monistic philosophy... for such a philosophy, plural is the Evil. Against the work, therefore, the text could well take as its motto the words of the man possessed by demons. (Barthes, [1971] 1977, p. 160)

In the sense used by Barthes — and more so taken the intrinsic dependence between the advent of the text and *The Death of the Author* (Barthes, [1967] 1977) — the phrase “for we are many” can also frame the radical polysemy implied by parafictional artists and the menace that their presence implies.

Parafictional artists personify a “possession”, the psychological perception of the multiple others which co-exist in each of us. Plus, if in present-day self-help discourses the call to “being authentic” is a sort of sacred motto, parafictional artists imply a certain evil impossibility to discovering one’s “true self”. From quite a different perspective, the phrase “My name is Legion: for we are many” has also been appropriated to articulate political demands for its connotations of community, specifically of one made up of outsiders. This was the sense in which the collective fictional identity Luther Blissett employed a slightly modified version of the expression in the *Declaration of Rights* authored in his name:

What the industry of the integrated spectacle owes me, it is owed to the many that I am, and is owed to me *because I am many* [my emphasis]. From this viewpoint, we can agree on a generalized compensation. You will not have peace until I will not have the money! (Blissett, 1995-96, p. 78)

During the second-half of the 1990s, the name Luther Blissett functioned as an open source alias that a network of people and activists used to present counterculture proposals that would feed off each other. Originated by a group of Italian students, hackers, and artists, Luther Blissett — a name which had originally belonged to a British-Jamaican footballer — became, over the course of a few years, the author of a series of media pranks, interventions in the urban space and politically-minded texts throughout Europe. The supposed lack of control over the name’s use and the invitation to share its visibility with whoever was interested in appropriating it, turned Luther Blissett into a “readymade author” with democratic intentions. Linked



Figure 5. "Official" portrait of Luther Blissett, created in 1994 by Andrea Alberti and Edi Bianco by superimposing several faces.

to this, the use of "for I am many" in his *Declaration of Rights* can be regarded as inspirational for those communities of practitioners that join together under a fictive multiple identity with the aspiration of gaining a more powerful political voice while remaining beyond any sort of individual identification. In this openly interventionist sense, the phrase implies the rightfulness of the demands made to the very few that economically exploit the creative labour of the many.

Through conversations, exchanges and daydreams, I have learnt about: the Jewish-Belgian surrealist artist and pornographer Justine Frank; Luis Ospina's documentary *Un Tigre de Papel* (A Paper Tiger) on the non-existent Colombian artist Pedro Manrique Figueroa; the transformation of Claire Fontaine from a French notebook brand into an internationally successful author; the reappearance of Walter Benjamin and Kazimir Malevich in XXI-century Belgrade; Olivier Castel's conception of more than thirty creative identities; the time-travels of the artist Rosalind Brodsky who died in 2058; and the invention of the painters Nikolai Buchumov and Apelles Ziablov by the Russian-born tandem Komar and Melamid. Thereby, I can imagine a near future in which parafictional artists will become ubiquitous within the art world and their numbers as threatening as Legion.

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## CV



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