

# *Lots of Money Because I am Many: The Luther Blissett Project and the Multiple-Use Name Strategy*

Marco Deseriis

*O mito é o nada que é tudo*  
—Fernando Pessoa

*Luther Blissett is a secret agent that plays the Myth's game with the goal of  
undermining the authority of Myth (of Truth, Identity, Reason, etc.)*  
*Paul K. Feyerabend as plagiarized by me*  
—Luther Blissett

This story, as any good crime story, begins with a murder. It is the evening of February 15, 1990, when the local police station of Porec, a sleepy Croatian village on the Istrian Peninsula, receives an anonymous phone call. The informant says a male body is lying on the railroad tracks a few miles away from the train station. When the cops arrive, what at a first sight appears to be a decapitated body reveals itself to be a gruesome realistic replica of a dismembered corpse.

Between 1991 and 1992 three other simulated “murders” occur in southern villages of the Croatian coast. Even in those cases, anonymous phone calls to local police stations are followed by the discovery of dismembered hyper-realistic mannequins in a parking lot in Umag, a public toilet in Rovinj, and a hotel room in Paklenika. However, as the Croatian press begins delving into the mystery, the collapse of the Yugoslav Federation and the outbreak of the Bosnian War in March 1992 divert public attention from the simulated slaughters to real ones.

But in spite of the war, the trail of simulated murders along the coastline continues. In 1993 and 1994, two other fake corpses are discovered in the Montenegro villages of Budva and Bar. As this pattern of macabre jokes unfolds, some journalists

speculate that the entire operation might be an artistic performance.<sup>1</sup> However it is not until the beginning of 1997 that this hypothesis takes shape, when an Italian website decides to publish the gruesome pictures of the dismembered mannequins, attributing the interventions to a hitherto unknown Serbian artist named Darko Maver.<sup>2</sup>

The website, managed by the obscure *Free Art Campaign*, claims that the photographs are the only remaining evidence of an eight-act performance orchestrated by the artist and named *Tanz der Spinne* (Dance of the Spider). The sinister and cryptic titles of the interventions only deepen the mystery, while a couple of texts attributed to Maver walk the thin line between the hermetic manifesto and the delirium of a psychopath.<sup>3</sup> According to the art magazines *Tema Celeste* and *Flesh Out*, Maver is arrested in 1997 in Kosovo (where the Serbian Army and the KLA Albanian guerrillas are engaged in a quickly escalating conflict), charged with anti-patriotic propaganda, and released after being detained for few weeks without a trial.<sup>4</sup>



One of Darko Maver's dismembered mannequins. Courtesy of  
[01001011110101101.org](http://01001011110101101.org)

In August 1998, Kapelica Gallery, a well-known art space in Ljubljana, dedicates a retrospective to the artist. The photographic documentation of *Tanz der Spinne* is showcased along with Maver's early artworks, including photos of hyper-realistic fetuses and abortions made of wax and plastic.

In January 1999, Maver is arrested a second time and detained in the prison of Podgorica, Kosovo. On April 30, 1999, Darko Maver is found dead in his prison cell. The Free Art Campaign issues a press release that circulates on various mailing lists together with an image of a supposedly dead man: "The official version states that this is a suicide; the suspect that Maver was summarily executed is doomed to stay. We are eye-witnesses of another uncounted crime."<sup>4</sup>

Maver's death casts a new light on his work. Art critics and journalists ask whether Maver's mannequins should be read as a radical interrogation of the propagandistic use of suffering bodies in the Balkan Wars of the 1990s, and whether Maver's very death should be interpreted as the final act of his radical performance art.<sup>5</sup>

Drawing on this Baudrillardian question on the hyperreality of modern warfare, art collectives, social centers, and even the 48th Venice Biennale of Arts pay tribute to the artist with performances and retrospectives.

On February 6, 2000, a press release entitled "The Great Art Swindle" co-signed by Luther Blissett and 0100101110101101.ORG, reveals that the entire Free Art Campaign has been orchestrated by a network of artists and activists operating in



An article published on the Italian magazine *Modus Vivendi* about Darko Maver's death, 1999

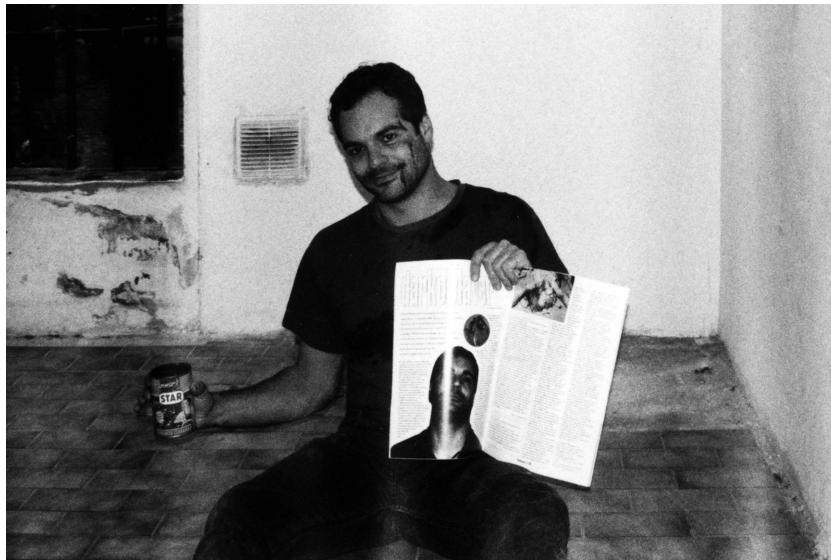
Bologna, Rome, and Lubljana. The life and death of Darko Maver were pure invention, a myth designed to expose the mechanisms by which the art system thrives and replicates itself:

*The dreadful images of fetuses and abortions, alleged evidence of Darko's activities at the Belgrade Academy, were true, yet, without effort, we made people believe they were huge PVC and fiberglass sculptures, even wearable!*

*The famous "Tanz der Spinne" is made of images of real deaths, rapes and violence of many kinds; no dummy ever existed and no Serbian newspaper ever reviewed Maver's performances. All this inventory of horrifying images can be found on the Internet site <http://www.rotten.com> and other sites like that, accessible to anybody who has a strong stomach. Maver's very face was actually that of Roberto Capelli, a long-time member of the Luther Blissett Project in Bologna.<sup>6</sup>*

The press release went further to describe the swindle as "an active riot" against the "capitalist art system," responsible for commodifying any creative act and even life itself. This was a risk that Darko Maver did not run because "Darko Maver doesn't exist!" as he is himself "an essay of pure mythopoesis," a virus designed to infiltrate the art world and release his potential from within.<sup>7</sup>

The Great Art Swindle—a pun on the Sex Pistols' *Great Rock'n Roll Swindle*—meticulously (and cynically) exploited two different factors: the first, strictly political,



Roberto Capelli a.k.a. Darko Maver is Resurrected. Courtesy of  
[0100101110101101.org](http://0100101110101101.org)

was the European sense of impotence and guilt toward the ferocious civil war which followed the demise of the Yugoslav Federation—an untimely conflict that had triggered tragic memories and reopened old scars in the heart of Europe.<sup>8</sup> The second aspect, more specific to the art system, was the late 1990s body-art hype that had brought into the spotlight performance artists such as Stelarc, Orlan, and Ron Athey. By referencing the body art imagery, with its repertoire of modified, pierced, and scarified bodies in simulated performances set against the backdrop of an actual conflict, Maver had produced an edgy body of work that the European art world could hardly ignore.

The Great Art Swindle was the last major prank of the Luther Blissett Project and one of the first of 0100101110101101.ORG, an offshoot of Luther Blissett and a new media art duo that had largely built its elusive identity upon the staging of fake events.

### **Origin and Early Phases of the Project**

But who is Luther Blissett? And who are the real actors behind the Free Art Campaign? Why did they decide to plot such a scheme? Did they really want to undermine the art system or did they have a broader agenda?

To answer these questions we must rewind our story to the summer of 1994, when a number of individuals began using the name of Luther Blissett to author a variety of public interventions. The idea was simple: anyone could become Luther Blissett by simply adopting the name. As a result, in the following years the nom de plume was adopted by hundreds of individuals in Italy, the United Kingdom, Germany, and other countries to dupe the press into reporting non-events, hijack popular TV programs, sell dubious and radical books to publishers, conduct psychogeographic urban experiments, fabricate artists and artworks, and much more.<sup>9</sup>

Until 1994, the only character known to the Italian public as Luther Blissett was a British footballer of Jamaican origins who had played an unfortunate season in the Italian Serie A in the mid-1980s. Thus, since Blissett was synonym of “fiasco,” not certainly of counterculture and culture jamming, the reason why the name was adopted in the first place was and still remains shrouded in mystery. Some journalists have speculated that Blissett was chosen because the AC Milan scouts, who signed him for one million pounds from Elton John’s Watford in 1983, had mistaken him with the more talented John Barnes.<sup>10</sup> Others have argued that Blissett became a radical icon because he was one of the first black footballers to play in Italy.<sup>11</sup> Similar uncertainty surrounds the only circulating image of Blissett: a portrait of a yuppie-looking man, allegedly composed from the digital morphing of three or four faces.

The mystery regarding the origin of the multiple-use name was not casual. Rather, as we shall see, it was intentionally cultivated as part of an elaborate mythmaking



Luther Blissett, "Official Portrait," created by Andrea Alberti & Edi Bianco in 1994

strategy aimed at transforming Blissett's character into a folk hero of the information society. Certainly, Luther Blissett was not the first multiple personality in the history of avant-garde movements.

In the book *Mind Invaders*, which summed up the early phases of the Luther Blissett Project (LBP), Blissett (1995–2000) himself traced his own origins back to an invention of Ray Johnson, the father of Mail Art who had founded the New York Correspondence School in the early 1960s. As a matter of fact, Ray Johnson's death, which occurred under mysterious circumstances a few months before the publication of the book, is probably the reason why the founders of the Project decided to pay homage to the American artist by crediting him with the invention of the multiple-use name.

This hypothesis is reinforced by Vittore Baroni and Piermario Ciani's involvement in the early phases of the LBP. Since the beginning of the 1980s, Baroni and Ciani, probably the most well-known Italian mail artists, had started a number of avant-garde music projects, the orbit of which revolved around the Italian North-Eastern punk/new wave scene known as *The Great Complotto Pordenone*. In 1981, along with Massimo Giacon, they had launched *Trax*, a collaborative mail art project consisting of the distributed co-production and exchange, via the postal system, of various materials, mostly sound collages. Participants in the project adopted a serial name

(Trax 01, Trax 02, . . .) and acted either as Central Units in charge of organizing “a module” such as a music event or the release of a Trax collection, or as Peripheral Units contributing to one of the modules (Blissett 2000: 11–12). At the same time, Baroni and Ciani invented *Mind Invaders*, a fictional punk band whose concerts, releases, reviews, interviews, and subsequent disavowals were entirely fabricated by an extended network of music journalists. From 1980 through 1984, Baroni also co-founded Lieutenant Murnau, a sound-collage band whose name could be used by anybody to produce its recycled music (Ciani).

But the first pages of *Mind Invaders* (the book) managed to cloud the origins of the Project by assigning a founding role also to Coleman Healy, Monty Cantsin, and Karen Eliot—a dense web of multiple-use names that had been coined in the late 1970s by various mail artists, and used in the 1980s by Neoism, a pseudo-avant-garde that mocked the very idea of novelty and cultural fashions (Blissett 1995–2000).

Cantsin in particular was an “open pop star” whose *modus operandi* presented striking similarities with Blissett’s. Created in 1978 by US mail artist Al Ackerman, the name Montsy Cantsin was used as a handle by a number of Canadian, US, and European performance artists throughout the 1980s. With Cantsin, Blissett (1995) shared a predilection for pranks, pseudonyms, fabrications, and a radical undermining of the notions of individual identity and authorship:

*It is necessary to get rid of the concept of In-dividuum, once and for all. That concept is deeply reactionary, anthropocentric and forever associated with such concepts as originality and copyright. Instead, we ought to embrace the idea of a Con-dividuum, i.e., a multiple singularity whose unfolding entails new definitions of “responsibility” and “will,” and is no good for lawyers and judges.*<sup>12</sup>

The Neoist apartment festivals, and the emphasis on the “great confusion” and “radical play” had a poetic and surreal dimension that the LBP inherited, as we shall see, in the psychogeographic experiments of Radio Blissett and the urban performances of the Teatro Situazionautico Luther Blissett.<sup>13</sup> However, endless diatribes, secessions, and personal aspirations had rapidly splintered the Neoist network, confining it to fringe positions.<sup>14</sup>

The LBP instead was able to maintain a paradoxical unity of action and coordination throughout the arc of the project. In the period 1994–1999, the multiple-use name was adopted by three art/activist collectives in Rome, Bologna, and Viterbo, and by a number of individuals throughout Europe. Thus, even if some prominent and quarrelsome characters of the Neoist network, such as British novelist Stewart Home, had joined the Project, the Italian collectives that provided the backbone of the LBP did not engage in the personal diatribes of their predecessors.<sup>15</sup> This higher level of collaboration allowed them to focus most of their energy on media targeting and manipulation.

The first significant prank orchestrated by the LBP dates back to January 1995, when a troupe of *Chi l'ha visto?*—an Italian prime-time TV show dedicated to missing persons—was sent on the traces of Harry Kipper, a British conceptual artist allegedly touring Europe on a mountain bike with the purpose of linking several cities through an imaginary line that would eventually trace the word “Art” on Europe’s map.

The TV crew was first placed in touch with radio journalist and mail artist Pier Mario Ciani, who claimed that the British artist had been last sighted in Bertiole, a village in North-Eastern Italy. The journalists were then sent to London, where Stewart Home and Richard Essex of the London Psychogeographical Association showed them around “Kipper’s apartment.” After announcing full coverage of Kipper’s case in the upcoming show, the staff, smelling a rat, decided not to air the report. At this point, Blissett sent out a press release claiming that Kipper’s imaginary performance was to be read as an allegory of the death of the artist:

*On the first level of simulation, Kipper had to free the Luther Blissett Project from any founder and origin, to let it jettison ballast and take off. On the second level of simulation, the prank was an assault on “Chi l’ha visto?” and an opportunity to test the networking abilities of people using the multiple name.<sup>16</sup>*

In the ensuing years, the network grew in size and scope, coupling media pranks with other activities inspired by the notion of the *dérive* or the drift—an apparently aimless wandering through the modern city whereby individuals experience urban space in accordance with their own desires and sense of playfulness, rather than following the demarcations dictated by functionalist architecture and city plans.

Designed in the 1950s by the Lettrists and elaborated in the 1960s by the Situationists, the pseudo-sciences of psychogeography and Unitary Urbanism had been renewed in the 1980s by the London Psychogeographic Association (LPA) with the insertion of occultist elements such as the discovery of urban *ley lines*. (In archeology the ley lines describe the alignment of ancient sites stretching across the landscape). After collecting data through various drifts, the psychogeographers of the LPA traced the significant spots on a city map and aligned them to form previously undiscovered ley lines. The LBP updated this version of the *dérive* by adding another layer: the real-time sharing of information, among various psychogeographers, through the combined use of broadcast radio and the telephone system.

In fall 1994, a Bolognese community radio began broadcasting Radio Blissett, a late-night show featuring a variable number of Luthers who “patrolled” the city on foot and called the studio from local phone booths. Listeners could also call in at any time and direct the patrols to various locations to join or create unexpected social events, including guerrilla-theater interventions, street parties, three-sided football matches, and “psychic attacks” against public buildings and institutions.

The experiment was duplicated shortly thereafter in Rome, where the extension of the city required the simultaneous use of car patrols and cell phones. The Saturday



night show, which aired on the frequencies of Radio Città Futura, featured psychic attacks against the Italian copyright office (SIAE), the office of employment (*Ufficio di Collocamento*), and other semi-improvised direct actions which culminated in one of the most well-known stunts of the Blissett's saga.

On the evening of June 15, 1995, several Blissetts boarded the 30 night tram at different stops carrying confetti, drinks, and ghetto blasters blaring Radio Blissett. As the party grew wilder, a couple of police cars blocked the tram. Requested to disembark, the psychogeographers declined to identify themselves except by the multiple name: "A cop fired shots into the air. The riot and shoot-out were broadcast live via a mobile phone." Four Luthers were charged with disorderly conduct and participation in a seditious rally (Home XI).

The media attention that followed had the effect of placing Blissett on the map. Moreover, if up to that point, within radical leftist circles the multiple personality was considered little more than an intellectual gizmo for wannabe radicals, after the confrontation with the police Blissett began to be perceived as an organic component of the movement (*il movimento*).

### **The Radical Milieu of the LBP**

"The movement" is a network of squatted community centers, also known as Centri Sociali Occupati e Autogestiti (CSOA), which had begun spreading throughout Italy in the late 1980s. After the 1990 outbreak of La Pantera (*The Panther*)—a mass student movement that had led a three-month long occupation of virtually every Italian university to protest the privatization of higher education—students, unemployed, precarious, and underpaid workers occupied abandoned public buildings such as schools, warehouses, and military installations in suburban and non-residential metropolitan areas. With their unique mix of political cultures and subcultures, *centri sociali* such as Forte Prenestino, Villaggio Globale, and Corto Circuito in Rome, Livello 57 in Bologna, Officina 99 in Naples, Leonkavallo and Cox 18 in Milan organized demonstrations, festivals, debates, concerts, rave parties, and a wide range of daily and weekly activities. As Naomi Klein notes "The [Italian] social centre network is a parallel political sphere that, rather than trying to gain state power, provides alternative state services—such as daycare and advocacy for refugees—at the same time as it confronts the state through direct action."<sup>17</sup>

Even though Mail Art and Neoism had played an important role in the early stages of the Project, the LBP cannot be properly understood without considering the cultural, social, and activist milieu to which most of its young participants belonged. In this respect, I contend that the Luther Blissett Project stemmed from the interaction of two irreducible historical factors: 1) the peculiarity of the Italian socio-political situation in the early 1990s; and 2) the emergence of the Internet as a medium of mass communication.

With regard to the first factor, the end of the Cold War had ignited a period of prolonged political instability in Italy, marked by the inability of the national ruling groups to complete the political transition from the First to the so-called Second Republic. In fact, beginning in 1992, a national investigation known as *Mani Pulite* (Clean Hands) into political corruption led to the disclosure of *Tangentopoli* (Bribeville), an extended system of bribes whereby entrepreneurs won public contracts and political favors. The scandal ignited the sudden disintegration of the Pentapartito, the five-party coalition that had kept the country within the NATO alliance since the aftermath of World War II, and opened up a political gap that was rapidly filled by the emergence of new conservative forces such as media mogul Silvio Berlusconi's party Forza Italia, the post-fascist party Alleanza Nazionale, and the independentist party Lega Nord.

In other words, the fall of the Berlin Wall uncovered the unsustainability of a clientelist system that, thriving under the Cold War's frozen alliances, had provided political leaders and party machines with abundant black funds while allowing complacent entrepreneurs to dispense with market competition. In a context in which a spiraling public debt required a discredited political class to make draconian cuts to the welfare state, the *centri sociali* became a catalyst for a generation of young people who were given little opportunity to practice their skills within a stagnant job market.

The LBP was borne out of this milieu, even though its media-savvy members tried to reach beyond the often self-referential universe of the CSOA. In fact, many members of the LBP were undergraduate and graduate students in the departments of communication sciences, sociology, arts, literature, and philosophy of the universities of Rome, Viterbo, and Bologna, some were trained as journalists or writers, and many of them became professionals in the media sector or the culture industry after the demise of the Project.

The media-savviness of the LBP leads us to the second aforementioned historical factor. In Italy, as in many other countries, the early-1990s are also marked by the mass diffusion of the Internet and the first mobile phones, and by the descending costs of *prosumer* electronic devices such as digital cameras and editing workstations that tend to close the gap between professional and amateur productions. These social centers take advantage of this "revolution" to set up and reinforce an independent communication infrastructure consisting of the *autoproduzione* (self-production) and *autodistribuzione* (self-distribution) of music—in particular political hip-hop, punk/hardcore, and reggae bands—critical texts, and activist videos. In 1993, the creation of Cybernet, a national electronic network consisting of about thirty Bulletin Board Systems (BBS), sped up collaboration (and conflict) among different geographic and political areas of the movement.

Many members of the Roman LBP are directly involved with the AvaNa collective, the media lab of the social center Forte Prenestino that runs the homonymous BBS.

It is on the AvaNa/Cybernet mailing lists and in the physical meetings of the collective that a rich debate unfolds on the possible constitution of “autonomous political enterprises” [imprese politiche autonome]. The idea is to expand the market reach of the social centers’ *autoproduzioni* to create self-sustaining bodies, such as cooperatives and collectively-run businesses that could simultaneously function as economic entities and activist projects.

Some activists call this process “going overground” or leaving behind the Indian Reserves of the underground to have a larger cultural and political impact on Italian society (Dazieri). Some others argue that “coming to terms with the market” could have a chilling effect on social struggles, and see this discussion as largely misleading.<sup>18</sup> The members of the LBP clearly lean toward the former position, convinced as they are that any form of social activity is already an economic activity, and should be remunerated as such.

#### **Luther Blissett, Immaterial Worker of the World**

The social centers’ discussion on the autonomous political enterprise did not materialize out of the blue. Rather, it should be framed within an ongoing theoretical debate among Italian Marxist and post-Marxist intellectuals on the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism and the emergence of immaterial labor. This conversation can be roughly divided into three strands: (post)workerist, linguistic, and feminist.

Originally known as Autonomist or Workerist (*operaista*) Marxism, the first perspective dates back to the 1960s, when the Italian translation of Marx’s *Grundrisse* (1857–61) ignited a lengthy conversation on the relationship between the Marxian notions of *dead labor* (the labor objectified in machinery and technology) and *living labor*, that “form-giving fire” of human activity that Marx identified with the entire potential of the worker’s living body.

If, in the early 1960s, Renato Panzieri and the intellectuals revolving around the journal *Quaderni Rossi* [Red Notes] had given a “frankfurter” reading of the *Grundrisse*—that is, fixed capital and machinery were seen as a vehicle of oppression against living labor—by the end of the decade Mario Tronti (1966) suggested an almost opposite interpretation whereby the development of living labor anticipated and prefigured that of fixed capital. This theoretical U-turn was grounded in an analysis of the new cycle of social struggles that had moved a significant part of the Italian working class on openly anti-capitalist positions in the late 1960s.

By noting how the decentralization and reorganization of industrial production occurred right at the beginning of the 1970s, that is, after the 1968 student movement and the 1969 *autunno caldo* [hot fall], the Italian workerists interpreted the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism as capitalist reaction to the workers’ struggles.<sup>19</sup> For Antonio Negri, the workers’ “mass refusal” of waged labor and exodus from the working place had the effect of pushing laboring processes outside the

factory walls while setting in motion new forms of political organization and multiplying the sites of contestation throughout society. Living labor is thus the creative force that, on one hand, transforms work in the struggle against capital and, on the other, generates a multiplicity of self-valorizing, autonomous projects that point beyond capitalist relations.

This point introduces us to the second analysis of immaterial labor, which is more strictly linguistic, and whose main representative is Paolo Virno. A former member, like Negri, of *Potere Operaio*, Virno also approaches Marx from the *Grundrisse*. In the notorious *Fragment on Machines*, Marx notes how, in order to reproduce itself, capital has increasingly relied on socialized forms of labor, that is, “on the general state of science and on the progress of technology, or the application of this science to production.” (705) As the “general social knowledge” or *general intellect* is channeled toward the development of more productive machines and the development of fixed capital “a large part of the wealth already created can be withdrawn both from immediate consumption and from production for immediate consumption.” (709) Thus, as increased productivity allows the capitalist to “employ people upon something not directly or immediately productive,” labor moves to the side of the productive process, turning more and more into “a supervisory and regulatory activity.” (Ibid)

As Virno notes, this type of regulatory activity mobilizes the worker’s communicative and linguistic faculties. In fact, contemporary immaterial workers are evaluated and rewarded not only for the fulfillment of specific tasks, but also for their ability to cooperate, modify and ameliorate the organization of labor itself, i.e., for their ability to increase productivity. This leads Virno to argue that, besides being the core of the media industry “in the post-Ford era, human communication is also an essential ingredient of productive cooperation in general; thus *it is the reigning productive force*, something that goes beyond the domain of its own sphere, *pertaining instead to the industry as a whole*, to poiesis in its totality.” (60)

But if communication and language are critical to innovation and productivity, they do not take place in a vacuum, attached as they are to the worker’s living body and the complex of its physical and emotional needs. Since the early 1970s, scholars such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa (1972), Silvia Federici (1980; 1998), and Leopoldina Fortunati (1995) have analyzed the relationship between reproductive and productive labor, and between unwaged and waged labor in relation to domestic labor, nurturing and prostitution. As Leopoldina Fortunati points out, “while Marx clearly saw the domestic sphere as an unproductive sphere, we saw the production of goods and services (prostitution included) as a crucial stage inside the whole process of production and reproduction.” (145)

Thus, if the workerists drew on the *Grundrisse* to underscore the less deterministic aspects of Marxian thought, the feminists pointed to other aspects of Marxian

theory to demonstrate that Marx's definition of productive labor had to be revised to include those activities such as care labor, kin work, and sexual work, that were not strictly oriented toward the production of material goods, but rather "to producing and/or reproducing the commodity most precious for capital, the labor force." (Ibid)

Thus, the feminist movement questioned the Marxian definition of necessary labor as a rigid category that *takes for granted what kind of labor is socially recognized as a value-creating practice*. The importance of this line of inquiry has been subsequently acknowledged by some members of the post-workerist school. For example, Hardt and Negri contend that "the very concept of labor is mobile and historically defined through contestation. *In this sense the labor theory of value is equally a value theory of labor.*" (1994: 9)

But if labor and value are both independent variables in the structures of capital, then every social activity is potentially subject to such contestation. This means that immaterial labor, as an ensemble of affective, cognitive, and linguistic faculties, is not only limited to the economic but also becomes immediately a social, cultural and political force. "Ultimately," Hardt and Negri write, "the production involved here is the *production of subjectivity*, the creation and reproduction of new subjectivities in society." (2004: 66) Since this production invests the entirety of social life, the "biopolitical production [of immaterial labor] is on the one hand *immeasurable*, because it cannot be quantified in fixed units of time, and, on the other hand, always excessive with respect to the value that capital can extract from it because capital can never capture all life." (2004: 146)

Now if every social activity is potentially a value-generating practice, then it should be clear why Hardt and Negri claim that "a social wage and a guaranteed income for all" is one of the fundamental demands of the multitude (2000: 403). Similarly, post-workerist economists such as Christian Marazzi (1999, 2008), Andrea Fumagalli and Sergio Bologna (1997) argue that, since the high level of productivity incorporated in ICTs have the effect of both breaking the link between economic growth and occupational growth, and between salaries and productivity, all citizens should be entitled to a *reddito di cittadinanza* (citizen income) independent of their economic status or occupation.

This demand clearly echoes in Luther Blissett's *Declaration of Rights*:

*The industry of the integrated spectacle and immaterial command owes me money. I will not come to terms with it until I will not have what is owed to me. For all the times I appeared on TV, films, and on the radio as a casual passersby or as an element of the landscape, and my image has not been compensated . . . for all the words or expressions of high communicative impact I have coined in peripheral cafes, squares, street corners, and social centers that became powerful advertising jingles, without seeing a dime; for all the times my name and my personal data have been put at work inside stats, to adjust the demand, refine marketing strategies, increase the productivity of*

*firms to which I could not be more indifferent; for all the advertising I continuously make by wearing branded t-shirts, backpacks, socks, jackets, bathing suits, towels, without my body being remunerated as a commercial billboard; for all of this and much more, the industry of the integrated spectacle owes me money!*

*I understand it may be difficult to calculate how much they owe me as an individual. But this is not necessary at all, because I am Luther Blissett, the multiple and the multiple. And 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. From this viewpoint, we can agree on a generalized compensation. You will not have peace until I will not have the money! LOTS OF MONEY BECAUSE I AM MANY: CITIZEN INCOME FOR LUTHER BLISSETT!<sup>20</sup>*

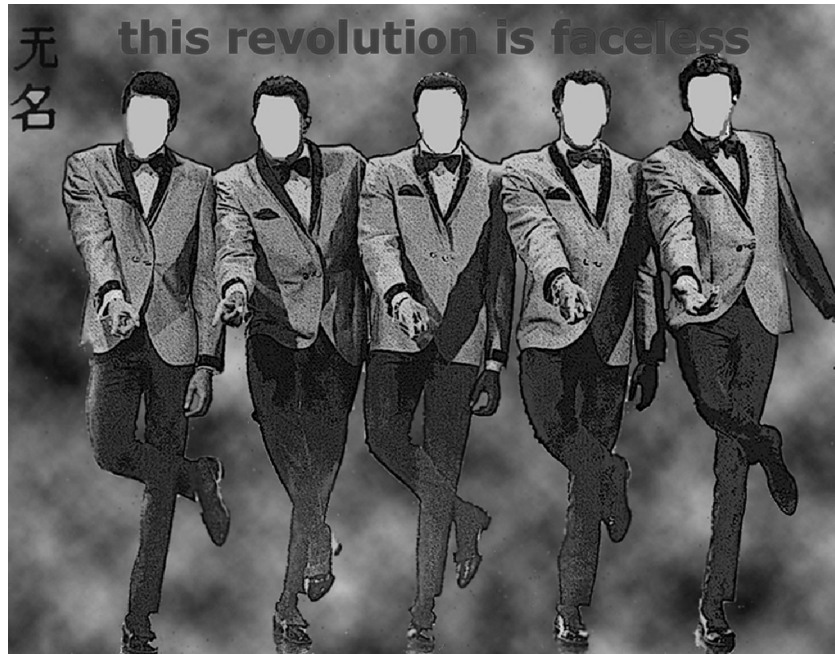
Thus, as labor increasingly becomes immaterial, and the creation of wealth is more and more entangled with the process of constituting forms of subjectivity, Luther Blissett reclaims the *immeasurable* and *excessive* character of the “con-dividuum” with respect to the value that “the industry of the integrated spectacle” extracts from it. If in the age of biopolitical production “the locus of surplus value” lies, as Hard and Negri argue, in the knowledge, language, and affects that society produces in common, then Luther Blissett was a figure of the common and of the self-valorizing capacity of the immaterial workers to cooperate and produce in common.

### **Mythmaking, Parasiting, Storytelling**

As we have seen, since the beginning, the LBP had managed to disguise the identity of actual Luther Blissett progenitors by tracing the origin of the multiple-use name to a Jamaican soccer player, a US mail artist, and a dense web of fictional characters. The manifold accounts of the Project’s origins served to create an imaginary field whereby Blissett’s name and gestures could be connected to other legendary figures.

Such a strategy was pursued by various Bolognese members of the LBP and, after the demise of the Project, by one of its main offshoots, the collective of historic novelists Wu Ming—a Chinese expression that translates as “no name” or “unknown.” In various articles and interviews, Wu Ming has compared Luther Blissett to other folk heroes such as Poor Konrad, Captain Swing, General Ludd, and the Subcomandante Marcos.<sup>21</sup> Even though those mythic characters were respectively created by struggling communities as diverse as the sixteenth-century Swabian peasants, the eighteenth-century impoverished English farmers, the nineteenth-century industrial workers, and the indigenous people of Chiapas, they all fulfill a similar function: they narrate and perform their communities into existence.

To be sure, being a brainchild of immaterial workers, Luther Blissett used a variety of media platforms and communication strategies virtually unknown to his predecessors. However, the comparison between Blissett and other folk heroes primarily served the purpose of stating that, far from simply being a media prankster,



Wu Ming, This Revolution is Faceless

Luther Blissett was a positive mythic figure, a “Robin Hood of the Information Age” who was supposed to embody the very process of community and cross-media storytelling. Such an objective is manifest in the following definition of *mythopoesis* offered by Roberto Bui, one of the founding members of the LBP and Wu Ming:

*Mythopoesis is the social process of constructing myths, by which we do not mean “false stories,” we mean stories that are told and shared, re-told and manipulated, by a vast and multifarious community, stories that may give shape to some kind of ritual, some sense of continuity between what we do and what other people did in the past. A tradition. In Latin the verb “tradere” simply meant “to hand down something,” it did not entail any narrow-mindedness, conservatism or forced respect for the past. Revolutions and radical movements have always found and told their own myths.*<sup>22</sup>

This political reading of mythmaking has the advantage of moving the stress from the strictly textual and narrative level to the social process whereby myths are created. If Marx and the Marxist tradition has predominantly read myth as an instrument of class domination, Wu Ming suggests that myths can have, in fact, a progressive and counter-hegemonic function as long as their movement and transformation is not arrested. From this angle, myth appears to be fundamentally different from

other forms of narrative in that, besides telling a story, it performs a certain task or, in Malinowski's words, is experienced as "lived reality" by a particular human group (81).

In this respect, it is useful to compare this progressive and positive interpretation of mythmaking to the negative reading of myth offered by Roland Barthes. In *Mythologies*, Barthes defines myth as a "type of speech," "a mode of signification," "an empty form," and a "second-order semiological system" that has the power to deprive each and every sign of its peculiarity with the three-fold purpose of naturalizing culture, eternalizing history, and obfuscating the actual relations of production.

Asked whether he believes myths are possible on the Left, Barthes responds negatively, arguing that myth always entails an ability to lie, and therefore to dispose of a certain wealth to spare—a wealth the "barren," "poverty-stricken," and "transitive type of speech" of the working classes cannot afford (147–48). Since the oppressed can only borrow the mask of myth and "the luxury of an empty form" from the bourgeoisie, Barthes suggests that the best way to resist myth "is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and to produce an *artificial myth* [. . .]. Since myth robs language of something, why not rob myth? All that is needed is to use it as a departure point for a third-order semiological chain, to take its signification as the first term of a second myth (135)."

Drawing on Barthes' suggestion, I contend that the Luther Blissett Project is a *third-order type of narrative, an artificial myth which makes a parasitical use of the myth of the pop star* or, to be more specific, of what Lazarsfeld and Merton have termed the "status conferral function" of the media, that is, their ability to legitimize the authority of selected groups and individuals. In other words, Blissett exploited the reputation accumulated by various media outlets (through their circulation and longevity) to enhance his own status and cultural capital.

In this respect, unlike Barthes' barren Leftist myths of the 1950s, Blissett's language was elaborate, nuanced and could afford to lie because it fed on the overabundance of the information age and on the "information surplus" generated by the seemingly unstoppable expansion of the media system. In a way, we could say that Blissett behaves like an *epiparasite*—a parasite feeding on another parasite. Like his host, the multiple singularity is a *medium* which enables communication among a variety of subjects. But unlike his host, the con-dividuum does not pretend to be a transparent or neutral channel. On the contrary, Blissett functions as a social medium in which a variety of enunciating subjects (the "-dividuals" borrowing Blissett's name) and the channel (the con-dividuum Luther Blissett taken in its complex) are deeply intertwined and constantly affect each other.

And yet, Luther Blissett as a concrete -dividual who authors a specific intervention (what we may call the syntagmatic dimension of the Project) and Luther Blissett as



the mythic personification of all those interventions (what we may call the paradigmatic dimension of the Project) fulfill two different functions. When a Luther Blissett pulls a prank, he, she or they denounce the media as an extension of big power and as profit-making machines that prey on the commonality of biopolitical production, i.e., of production as an ensemble of linguistic, cognitive, and affective relations. But when considered as a mythic character, Blissett comes to embody the creative potency of that commonality or what Hardt and Negri refer to as “the becoming common of labor” (2004: 103–15).

To be sure, this ability to demystify the media and reuse copyrighted materials to create narratives open to a plurality of social uses is neither unique nor original to the LBP. For example, the very practice of culture jamming—a term coined in 1984 by the US sound-collage band Negativland—entails “capturing the corporately controlled subjects of the one-way media barrage, reorganizing them to be a comment on themselves, and spitting them back into the barrage for cultural consideration.”<sup>23</sup> Similarly, a wide range of guerrilla-communication techniques such as *détournement*, fake, camouflage, montage/collage, subvertising, sniping, and cross-dressing undermine and try to reverse the power discourse by appropriating its mode of presentation and aesthetic codes.

*The Handbuch der Kommunikationsguerrilla*, a German book co-authored by Luther Blissett, Sonja Brunzels (another multiple-use name), and the Berlinese collective autonome a.f.r.i.k.a gruppe has sorted these techniques according to two basic operating principles: the principle of estrangement, a version of the Brechtian alienation effect (*verfremdungseffekt*); and Slavoj Žižek’s concept of *overidentification*.

The former undermines the often invisible system of rules that structure social relationships and interactions by inserting apparently incongruent elements within an ordinary context: the defacement of commercial billboards or websites, an unexpected street performance, the *détournement* of a political slogan or logo can disrupt daily routines, established linguistic codes, and thus reveal the power structures that lurk behind them. The principle of overidentification, on the other hand, achieves a similar effect by following a different if not opposite trajectory. According to Slavoj Žižek (1993), overidentification works by bringing to light an implicit and unspoken set of assumptions that are shared by the powers that be and the members of a community. For the Slovenian philosopher, power always requires a minimal distance from its explicit rules in order to function: what cannot be said explicitly is pointed to implicitly in order to become acceptable in the public sphere. This “obscene underside” of ideology is, for Žižek, the invisible premise or the “inherent transgression” upon which every power discourse rests.

If people are able to maintain a cynical attitude toward the more enticing aspects of ideology as a “call to arms,” it is precisely this ironic detachment, Žižek (1989) argues, that enables ideology to work as such. In fact, the members of any political,

religious, or military organization rarely take the official ideology so seriously. However, it is through this process of ironic distancing that they become part of a collectivity—and this unifying process is precisely the function of ideology. On the other hand, the fanatics, those who take the official doctrine literally, refuse to *make sense* of the otherwise Kafkaesque interpellation of the Law by sharing this traumatic experience with others—and replace the intersubjective process of elaborating the superego injunction with a direct, vertical identification with the commanding authority.<sup>24</sup>

If this is true, Žižek argues, then subversion does not consist of an attitude of ironic detachment and cynical distance toward public values but, on the contrary, in taking them more seriously than power itself: “By bringing to light the obscene superego underside of the system, overidentification suspends its efficiency.” (1993: 49)

Similarly, Inke Arns and Sylvia Sasse define “subversive affirmation” as *an artistic/political tactic that allows artists/activists to take part in certain social, political, or economic discourses and affirm, appropriate, or consume them while simultaneously undermining them. It is characterized precisely by the fact that with affirmation simultaneously there is taking place a distancing to, or revelation of what is being affirmed [ . . . ]. Subversive affirmation and over-identification—as “tactics of explicit consent”—are forms of critique that through techniques of affirmation, involvement and identification put the viewer/listener precisely in such a state or situation which s/he would or will criticize later.* (2006: 445)

All these guerrilla-communication techniques and critical definitions are certainly useful to grasp the *modus operandi* of contemporary art/activist and culture jamming groups such as Negativland, Laibach/NSK, <sup>®</sup>TMark, The Yes Men, 0100101110101101.ORG, and YoMango! to name a few.

However, this critical approach implies the existence of a double line of demarcation between power and society; and between activists/artists and the public. In other words, it is still based on a modern understanding of avant-garde work to the extent that it posits a vertical distribution of power, art/activism, and the general audience. According to this model, power irradiates a narrative or code of conduct that, in the best case scenario, is interrupted, jammed, and recoded by activists *before* reaching the public.<sup>25</sup> However, the emergence of immaterial labor and biopolitical production, that is, the progressive identification of economy with social life as such, suggests that this model can and must indeed be overturned.

As Matteo Pasquinelli points out, “activism, art, marketing share by now the same grammar and work on the same networks” (234). Thus the “vertical assault on the Code” of the modern avant-gardes and counterculture is progressively replaced by new tactics such as the multiple-use name which are not primarily aimed at undermining power or demystifying the Spectacle, but at affirming the constitution of new

forms of subjectivity springing from within the social bios. In this respect, Luther Blissett is a fully post-modern project that does not create alternative narratives but taps into the mainstream and borrows from pop culture imagery to expand its reach and visibility.

When Wu Ming underlines that mythopoesis is not about creating “false stories,” they are precisely emphasizing the positive side of third-order narratives and artificial myths. To put it differently, they are suggesting that, if the news media offer a dramatic re-presentation of reality, we may better learn how to present our stories in a dramatic fashion rather than limiting ourselves to debunking the media spin.

By inviting the audience to suspend disbelief and participate in a collective narration, the LBP also revived those poetic and performative aspects of oral culture that entailed a close bond and a potential interchangeability between narrator and narratee.

In fact, the traditional storyteller, as Walter Benjamin (1968) notes, was always part of the story he was telling, either because he experienced it directly or because he heard it from someone else. Consequently, the storyteller encouraged his listeners to continue telling stories, so that the narratee gained potential access to the same authority of the narrator simply by listening. Noting how traditional narrative knowledge unrolls the pragmatic protocols enabling its own transmission, Jean-Francois Lyotard acutely notes that “what is transmitted through these narratives is the set of rules that constitutes the social bond” (21).

From this angle, it should be clear why Wu Ming claims that myths and stories are “something living, something collective, something with which it’s possible to interact. To tell a story is a political activity in the primary sense of the word. Because to tell a story is to share, that is, to make a community” (in Baird 258).

Keeping in mind this performative and political function of storytelling, we can group the LBP’s interventions into two major areas: the actual performances and interventions such as psychogeographic drifts, media hoaxes, and fake publications which nurtured Blissett’s myth as the Robin Hood of the information age;<sup>26</sup> a consistent body of theoretical work, comprising mostly interviews and critical texts, focusing on the pragmatic rules and the *HowTos* that allowed for the reproduction and proliferation of the multiple-use name. I will now try to articulate these two aspects of mythopoesis in their dialectical unity by referring to one of the most complicated affairs in which the LBP was involved.

### **Media Homeopathy**

Founded in 1963, Comunità Incontro is an established network of over two hundred Catholic community centers scattered all over Italy for the rehabilitation of drug addicts. Incontro’s founding father, Don Pierino Gelmini, is a well-known TV character who has been at the forefront of prohibitionist marches and anti-pedophile crusades for over thirty years.

Thus when, in December 1996, the Italian police arrests a middle-aged Cambodian man on his way to Belgium, charging him with child trading, Blissett decides to seize the opportunity and jumps on the bandwagon of moral panic.

On January 4, 1997, a man identifying himself as Aldo Curiotto, the official spokesman for Comunità Incontro, phones Ansa, the main Italian newswire. Since Incontro has a branch office in Thailand, Blissett, posing as a distressed Curiotto, insinuates the doubt that there may be a Far East connection between Don Gelmini and the Cambodian man: “The Carabinieri did NOT arrest him, they are just interrogating him. Don Gelmini has NOT YET been charged with a traffic of child-abuse videos.”<sup>27</sup> Predictably, Ansa diffuses the non-news of the disavowal and, after a few hours, TV newscasts and newspapers run interviews with an unknowing Gelmini.

The phone prank on Don Gelmini was not an isolated coup but was part of an elaborate strategy of *media homeopathy*. The idea was to inject into the media bloodstream stories whose patent falsity would eventually induce the media immune system into a reaction of its own. (Instead of treating the symptom directly, homeopathic medicine contends that, by supplying the human body with a diluted substance that generates a symptom of a lesser intensity, the body can find its own resources to overcome the disease.)

Such a strategy had already yielded significant results in 1996, when the LBP branch operating in Viterbo, a medieval town 60 miles north of Rome, fabricated one of the more sophisticated and successful pranks of the entire LBP

In January 1996, the LBP begin spray-painting a series of cryptic Satanic messages and swastikas on Viterbo city walls. As the local press begins investigating, Blissett escalates his disinformation strategy by feeding the newspapers with a series of letters insinuating a connection between members of the right-wing city government and inexistent exoteric neo-Nazi groups. On a Saturday night in May, knowing that the woods surrounding the city were to be cleaned the following day by an environmentalist association, Blissett fabricates evidence of a black mass. On Tuesday, *Il Corriere di Viterbo*, *Il Tempo*, and *Il Messaggero* provide extensive coverage of the environmentalists’ horrific “discovery.”

As the media hysteria mounts, the LBP founds the ultra-Catholic Comitato per la Salvaguardia della Morale (Committee for the Safeguard of Morals), a fanatical squad of vigilantes who claim to have begun their own nocturnal patrols to hunt down the Satanists. In July, *Il Corriere di Viterbo* receives a videotape containing footage of a black mass in which “a screaming virgin” is supposedly sacrificed (the video is murky and the woman is always off-camera). When the alarmist campaign reaches its zenith, the LBP delivers extensive proof of the fabrication to the national public TV channel RAI Uno. The extended version of the video featuring the gruesome “killing of the virgin” ends with a tarantella in which the “Satanists” and the “virgin” hold hands, dance, and sing along.<sup>28</sup> Visibly embarrassed, the Viterbo papers abandon the Satanic trail for a while.<sup>29</sup>

While the Viterbo hoax is still unfolding, the Bolognese branch of the LBP decides to duplicate the experiment in Bologna. In June 1996, a human skull is left in the luggage lockers of the local train station with a message addressed to *Il Resto del Carlino*, the most popular Bolognese tabloid. The note is signed by *I Cacciatori di Satana* (*The Satan's Hunters*), a mysterious group claiming to have subtracted the skull to *I Bambini di Satana* (*The Children of Satan*), a notorious and actual existing Satanic sect. *Il Carlino* runs a piece, and a few days later, Luther Blissett uncovers the hoax by sending proof of the fabrication to other local newspapers.

*I Bambini di Satana* draws its notoriety from the fact that, throughout 1996, *Il Carlino* has led a moral crusade against Marco Dimitri and other members of the sect for having allegedly sexually abused a non-consensual 16-year-old girl during a black mass. Although, once again, the national press is quick to jump on the bandwagon of moral panic, endorsing the baseless charges pressed by the prosecutor Lucia Musti, the defendants do not take long to demonstrate that Dimitri, who is notoriously gay, has never engaged in child abuse, and that *The Children of Satan* are, in fact, an adult consensual cult that has no connection whatsoever to pedophiles.

In 1997, Blissett sends to print the instant book *Lasciate che i bimbi: "Pedofilia" un pretesto per la caccia alla streghe* [Let the Children: "Pedophilia" as a Pretext for a Witch Hunt] a counter-investigation of the *Bambini di Satana* trail that reveals how facts and witnesses have been meticulously manipulated in the service of an ultra-conservative Catholic agenda.<sup>30</sup> The book also sums up the LBP's media-homeopathic strategy by juxtaposing the Bolognese trial and the Viterbese witch hunt: while the former has been built up by an overzealous prosecutor with the complacent support of the press, the latter is a pure mythopoeic invention of the LBP that the press has managed to blow out of proportion.

Homeopathic remedies have proved effective to the extent that the Viterbese press have been discredited by the national TV; at the same time, the *Carlino's* hoax and the publication of *Lasciate che i bimbi* jolts the press into undoing Lucia Musti's investigation and questioning the initial wave of sensationalist news and moral panic. To put it simply, by checking on each other, the media have begun activating their own immune system.

The fact that the book has hit a raw nerve becomes evident a few weeks after its release when Lucia Musti files a libel suit against the publisher and the authors of *Let the Children* for "defamation" and "abuse of the right to critique."<sup>31</sup> After a two-year trial, the prosecutor obtains a partial victory: the author of the book, Roberto Bui, is fined for defamation, whereas the publisher, Alberto Castelvechi, is ordered to withdraw the remaining copies from the market and destroy them.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, as the trial against Blissett goes on, the electronic version of the book is downloaded and mirrored onto several websites engaging in a coordinated free speech campaign. In 2000, as a consequence of another wave of media hysteria instigated this time by

the Sicilian priest Don Fortunato di Noto, three websites hosted by the Rete Civica Romana, a public network managed by the City of Rome, are censored for publishing materials “not apt to children.” One of them, the Avana BBS website, hosts a copy of the book.<sup>33</sup>

As the publication of *Let the Children* snowballs into a real *affaire* involving publishers, sys-ads, priests, and politicians, the Bolognese LBP develops a theoretical reflection on the historic and political function of national emergencies in Italy.

In *Nemici dello Stato* [Enemies of the State], Blissett notes that the mid-1990s moral panic epitomizes “the fear of the great ‘disintermediation’ brought about by the Internet.”<sup>34</sup> After the 1970s emergency laws against terrorism, and the 1980s war on the mafia, Italian national emergencies were now shifting

*from the molar (the clash between masses, the battlepiece [sic], the confrontation on the stage of public life) to the molecular (the everyday micro-conflict, the control on individual differences by information technologies) . . . The new molecular emergencies serve to control and censor electronic communications, indeed, the behaviors of the new immaterial workers who are re-appropriating their know-how and tendency to innovation, becoming ever more autonomous from capital as direct command on the workforce. (Blissett 1999)*

From this angle, it should be clear why Blissett’s homeopathic strategy was aimed at debunking the media spin while counter-attacking the forces that dreaded and threatened the newfound autonomy of immaterial workers. In other words, the folk hero of the information age was not only a figure of the common productive capacity of immaterial workers, but also of their ability to organize themselves and rebuff the attacks coming from those forces, notably the Catholic church and its secular arms.

By showing the extraordinary ability of becoming-other by impersonating, if only for a while, the role of his opponents, Blissett’s moves can also be seen as Aikido techniques—a martial art that did not stop at the media, but found an ultimate target in Blissett himself.

### **Seppuku and the heritage of the LBP**

When the Catholic inquisition struck the Rete Civica Romana in 2000, Luther Blissett was already a specter of the past. On September 6, 1999, the Bolognese branch of the LBP, together with the vast majority of the groups and individuals that had started the Project in 1994, agreed to send out a press release that read:

### ***Seppuku!***

*Many subjectivities of the Luther Blissett Project Italian columns have decided to greet the new millennium by committing seppuku, a ritual suicide. Suicide is the practical*

*demonstration that Blissett gives up mere survival as a territorial, identitarian logic. Suicide is the ultimate and most extreme “take to the bush” of this folk hero. We are not advocating nihilism or relinquishment; rather, we are choosing life.*

*Seppuku is not \*the\* course of action, Luther Blissett is a name that anybody can keep adopting also after next New Year’s Day. There are countries where the fight has just begun, and we surely hope it goes on . . .*

*The Seppuku is not the end of Luther Blissett. It is the beginning of a new phase, a new way of using his face and name. For those who will commit it, Blissett’s suicide will consist of giving up that signature and moving on to new conflicts. It is quite the contrary of what usually happens to suicides: they don’t go anyplace, while their names are more oft-mentioned than before their death . . .*

*As Zhuangzi reminds us: “The perfect man has no ego, the inspired man has no works, the wise man has no name.” And, as the matchless Cary Grant once put it: “It is better to leave a minute earlier, leaving people wanting more, rather than a minute too late, when people are getting bored.”<sup>35</sup>*

The seppuku proved to be a prophetic gesture. In the new millennium, new projects and identities have blossomed, often adopting mythopoeic strategies similar to the LBP’s. Such is the case of 0100101110101101.ORG, a Bologna-based art collective that had co-authored the Darko Maver’s swindle and kept creating several projects using the same tactics of misinformation.

In Rome, several members of the LBP founded Men In Red (MIR), a collective of “radical ufologists” that organized exhilarating stunts such as the fake landing of a UFO in Riccione, Italy. After the end of MIR, Andrea Natella founded guerrigliamarketing.it, a guerrilla-marketing company and autonomous political enterprise whose surreal motto was “Fuck the Market to Enter It.”<sup>36</sup>

In Milan, mythmaking has resurfaced in the recent appearance of Serpica Naro, a fictitious Anglo-Japanese stylist created by a group of precarious workers of the Milanese fashion industry. In 2005, the workers put together a fake press book and biography for the imaginary stylist, and submitted the application package to the Settimana della Moda, a mainstream showcase of the Milanese fashion industry. Beguiled by the stylist’s edgy and allegedly controversial profile, the organizers took the bait. When the official runway was finally taken over by “models” of the Milanese squatted community centers, the authors of the spoof revealed that Serpica Naro was the anagram of another mythopoeic character, San Precario, the radical patron of the Italian precarious and temporary workers.<sup>37</sup> Besides being a symbol of precarity on the workplace, Serpica Naro is promoted today as an open “meta-brand” that anyone can reuse.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, the most significant heritage of the LBP is probably in the world of literature. A few months after the seppuku was announced, four members of the Bolognese LBP, who authored the historic novel *Q*, decided to reveal their real names, and to launch the new collective of writers Wu Ming.<sup>39</sup>

The novel, the last book authored by Luther Blissett, was a bestseller and translated into several languages. Set in Germany in the sixteenth century, at the time of the social unrest ignited by the Reformation and at the onset of the Gutenberg revolution, *Q* can be read as a political allegory. The hero changes identity several times as he participates in peasant uprisings (the Anabaptists) and radical protestant movements (the Movement of the Free Spirit) that seek to abolish private property, religious authority, and secular privileges. *Q*, the mysterious emissary reporting on the popular revolts to the Vatican, will eventually ascend to papacy. But the triumph of the most conservative elements of the Catholic Church is not necessarily a tragedy insofar as repression and restoration are unable to fully tame the ghosts of the defeated. As McKenzie Wark notes, “It’s a question of a narrative resurrection, where the return of the marginalized, the disempowered is still possible. A return, not as victim, but as a different kind of hero. The kind of hero who works in situations, does what is possible, and moves on. A Luther Blissett.”<sup>40</sup>



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## Notes

1. An unsigned article published in the daily Blic on September 12, 1993 read: There is a rumor around that these "actions" might actually be works of art, albeit not conventional in the slightest, planned and performed by one or more persons in order to provoke the instinctive reactions of those who find the dummies and obviously mistake them for real corpses. "Eurotic. Excerpts from an article published in Blic," Sept 12, 1993. Available at <[http://0100101110101101.org/home/darko\\_maver/tanzderspinne.html](http://0100101110101101.org/home/darko_maver/tanzderspinne.html)>.
2. Cf. <[http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Coffeehouse/6563/index\\_it.html](http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Coffeehouse/6563/index_it.html)>.
3. Ibid. The titles of the eight performances are Jung, Va' Pensiero, Beata Mariae Vergini,

Skinned Rembrandt, Deposition, Eurotic, Garbage, and Ecce Homo. Maver's manifestoes "Aforagenetica" and "The Dimension of the Extrabodies" are archived on the same website.

4. Ibid. Cf. Antonio Caronia, "Darko Maver," in *Flesh Out*, n.3. April–May 1999 and Free Art Campaign "Darko Maver è stato incarcerato per aver esercitato il diritto alla libertà di espressione" [Darko Maver has been detained for having exercised the right to freedom of expression] in *Tema Celeste*, n. 73, March–April 1999. Available at <[www.geocities.com/SoHo/Coffeehouse/6563/index\\_it.html](http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Coffeehouse/6563/index_it.html)>.

5. Ibid. Cf. Andrea Natella, "Manichini di Guerra," [War Mannequins] *Modus Vivendi*, July–August 1999.

6. 0100101110101101.ORG and Luther Blissett, "The Great Art Swindle: Do You Ever Feel You're Being Cheated?" Feb 6, 2000. Available at <[http://www.lutherblissett.net/archive/487\\_en.html](http://www.lutherblissett.net/archive/487_en.html)>.

7. Ibid.

8. *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* (1980) is a film documentary on the Sex Pistols directed by Julien Temple.

9. The most comprehensive collection of English, Italian, and Spanish texts by and about the Luther Blissett Project is archived on the LBP "official" website <[www.lutherblissett.net](http://www.lutherblissett.net)>.

10. Cf. Paul Doyle, Sajit Shaikh and Georgina Turner, "Did AC Milan sign Luther Blissett by mistake?" January 5, 2005, available at <<http://football.guardian.co.uk/theknowledge/story/0,13854,1383221,00.html>>. See also James Wright, "Englishmen Abroad: Luther Blissett," July 2, 2003, available at <<http://www.thefa.com/Features/EnglishDomestic/Postings/2003/07/54903.htm>>.

11. Cf. BBC Sport, "Luther Blissett: Anarchist Hero," March 9, 1999, available at <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/sport/football/293678.stm>>.

12. An English translation of selected excerpts from this book is available at <[www.lutherblissett.net/archive/215\\_en.html](http://www.lutherblissett.net/archive/215_en.html)>.

13. The Teatro Situazionario "Luther Blissett" was founded in February 1995 by Riccardo Paccosi in Bologna. Actors training consisted of recording a series of environmental stimuli in various urban spaces such as streets, squares, public buses, and malls. On the basis of the gathered information, the actors prepared a performance and enacted it in the appropriate areas with the purpose of transforming the social perception of a specific space. A video documentation of one of the Teatro Situazionario's interventions is available on YouTube, <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNiP3p5a9nl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNiP3p5a9nl)>.

14. One of the most divisive events of the Neoist network was the choice of Canadian performance artist Istvan Kantor to adopt Montsy Cantsin as his permanent nickname. Furthermore, in 1994, Stewart Home founded the Neoist Alliance in London to mark his distance from the international Neoist network. In the same year, he established the first contact with the Bolognese branch of the LBP.

15. Home's contribution to the LBP is collected in Stewart Home (ed.) *Mind Invaders* (1997). Although the book features some texts by the Italian LBP, this is a collection of texts largely written by Home himself, the London Psychogeographical Association, and the Neoist Alliance.

16. Luther Blissett, "Missing Presumed Dead: How Luther Blissett Hoaxed the TV Cops," in Stewart Home (1997: 5).

17. Naomi Klein, "Squatters in White Overalls," *The Guardian*, 06/08/2001, available at <[www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,503535,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,503535,00.html)>.

18. The debate on autonomous political enterprises is well articulated in Moroni, Farina, and Tripodi (1995). Another volume that tackles the issue focusing on two Milanese case studies is a social investigation edited by Consorzio

Aaster, CSOA Cox 18, CSOA Leoncavallo, and Moroni (1996).

19. Thirty years later, Hardt and Negri reiterate this key concept: "Even though common use of the term might suggest the opposite—that resistance is a response or reaction—*resistance is primary with respect to power* (2004: 64)."

20. Luther Blissett, "Dichiarazione dei diritti," *Rivista Mondiale di Guerra Psichica*, #3, 1995–96, reprinted in *Totò, Peppino e la guerra psichica 2.0*, cit., pp. 83–84. Translation mine.

21. Cf. Ernesto Assante and Wu Ming, "Excerpts from the 10th anniversary interview with La Repubblica," August 24, 2004, available at <[www.wumingfoundation.com/english/giap/giapdigest26.htm](http://www.wumingfoundation.com/english/giap/giapdigest26.htm)>.

22. Wu Ming 1, "Why Not Show Off About The Best Things? A Few Quick Notes on Social Conflict in Italy and the Metaphors Used to Describe It," December 2002. Available at <[www.wumingfoundation.com/english/giap/giapdigest18.html](http://www.wumingfoundation.com/english/giap/giapdigest18.html)>. Empasis mine.

23. This definition of culture jamming is extracted from the voice-over of *Sonic Outlaws* (1995), a film documentary by Craig Baldwin about Negativland and the West Coast culture-jamming scene of the 1980s and early 1990s.

24. Citing Lacan, Žižek argues that the fanatics or the fools are those who are incapable of having a dialectically mediated distance toward themselves, like a king "who takes his being-a-king as his immediate property and not a symbolic mandate imposed on him by a network of intersubjective relations of which he is part (1989: 47)."

25. One book that largely reflects this view of culture jamming is the classic Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (1999–2000).

26. For lack of space, I preferred to detail what I deem the most elaborate and relevant hoaxes rather than listing them all. Among the countless pranks against the culture industry, it is worth remembering the selling of a fake book to

Mondadori, the main Italian publishing house owned by media mogul and Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. Entitled *Net.generation*, and "found" on the Internet by Giuseppe Genna, a young conservative writer who was trying to use Blissett's name for achieving personal notoriety, the book was a compilation of trite commonplaces about the Internet and the death of the author. Before *Net.generation* hit the bookstores, Blissett sent out a press release disavowing the book and attacking the copyright clause on it. Within few weeks, Mondadori quickly retired the volume from bookstores. For a detailed account, see Luther Blissett, "How Luther Blissett turned a corporate attack on the multiple name into a marvellous prank on a major publishing house," available at <[www.lutherblissett.net/archive/149\\_en.html](http://www.lutherblissett.net/archive/149_en.html)>. Blissett's prolific writings did not spare alternative publishers. In 1996, Blissett sold a fake book by Hakim Bey, the anarchist philosopher of Temporary Autonomous Zones, to the Roman publishing house Castelvechi. Cf. "Why I wrote a fake Hakim Bey book and how I cheated the conformists of Italian 'Counterculture,'" August 1996, available at <[www.lutherblissett.net/archive/171\\_en.html](http://www.lutherblissett.net/archive/171_en.html)>.

27. Luther Blissett, "1997: Well Begun is Half Done. A phone prank pulled by Luther Blissett in January 1997," 01/161997, available at <[http://www.lutherblissett.net/archive/222\\_en.html](http://www.lutherblissett.net/archive/222_en.html)>.

28. Loredana Lipperini and Gianluca Nicoletti showed the extended version of the video in Rai Uno's TV Magazine "TV7" on March 2, 1997.

29. For a complete account of the Viterbo Ruse cf. Luther Blissett Project Comando Unificato dell'Etruria Meridionale, "Viterbo un Anno Vissuto Satanicamente" in *Lasciate che i Bimbi*. . . J (1997). Available at <[www.lutherblissett.net/archive/173\\_it.html](http://www.lutherblissett.net/archive/173_it.html)>.

30. Cf. Luther Blissett, *Lasciate che i Bimbi* (1997). The book shows how the main witness at the trial, a 16-year-old girl whose fictional name was "Simonetta," first tried to retract her accusations, was then taken care of by a Catholic association and "exorcised" by a priest,

contradicted herself, and was never able to back her accusations.

31. The “Atto di Citazione” [Certificate of Action at Law] with which Musti filed the libel suit is available on La Repubblica’s website, <[www.repubblica.it/online/sessi\\_stili/blissett/cronaca/cronaca.html](http://www.repubblica.it/online/sessi_stili/blissett/cronaca/cronaca.html)>.

32. It is important to note that the “abuse of the right to critique” and the “defamation” refer to the strong wording used in the book to describe Musti’s character, not the actual content of Blissett’s allegations.

33. A detailed account of the censorship of the Roman Civic Network is available at <[www.ecn.org/forte/RCR/appello\\_en.htm](http://www.ecn.org/forte/RCR/appello_en.htm)>. Don Fortunato di Noto had already obtained the obscuration of the entire network in 1998 for the publication of a presumably Satanic article.

34. Wu Ming Yi, “Introduction to Enemies of the State: Criminals, ‘Monsters’ and Special Legislation in the Society of Control,” Summer 2000, available at <[www.lutherblissett.net/archive/078\\_en.html](http://www.lutherblissett.net/archive/078_en.html)>. This text is the English translation of the introduction to Luther Blissett, *Nemici dello Stato* (1999).

35. Luther Blissett Project, “Seppuku!” September 6, 1999, available at <[www.lutherblissett.net/archive/452\\_en.html](http://www.lutherblissett.net/archive/452_en.html)>.

36. For information about the MIR project, see Men In Red, *Ufologia Radicale: Manuale di*

*Contatto Autonomo con Extraterrestri*, (Roma: Castelveccchi), 1999. In English, see the website <[www.kyuzz.org/mir](http://www.kyuzz.org/mir)>. Guerrigliamarketing’s website is <[www.guerrigliamarketing.it](http://www.guerrigliamarketing.it)>.

37. Cf. Marcello Tari and Ilaria Vanni, “On the Life and Deeds of San Precario, Patron Saint of Precarious Workers and Lives,” *Fibreculture*, Issue 5, 2005, available at <[http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue5/vanni\\_tari.html](http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue5/vanni_tari.html)>.

38. The authors of *Serpica Naro* have borrowed the idea of the meta-brand from YoMango! another counter-couture project coordinated by an activist collective originally based in Barcelona, Spain. *Serpica Naro*’s website is available at <[www.serpicanaro.com](http://www.serpicanaro.com)>.

39. Luther Blissett, *Q* (1999–2000). English version translated by Shaun Whiteside (2003). The names of the four authors of *Q* are Roberto Bui, Giovanni Cattabriga, Federico Guglielmi, and Luca di Meo. In 2001, they were joined by Riccardo Pedrini in the Wu Ming collective. The five authors of Wu Ming have authored several collective novels, including *54* (2005) and *Manituana* (2009), as well as several solo novels. Luca di Meo left the group in 2008. All of Wu Ming’s books can be downloaded at no charge from their website, <[www.wumingfoundation.com](http://www.wumingfoundation.com)>.

40. McKenzie Wark, “Luther Blissett, Q, William Heinemann, 2003” July 29, 2003, available at <[www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-I-0307/msg00108.html](http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-I-0307/msg00108.html)>.