

Complicating Authorship: Contemporary artists' names

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The visual arts, and particularly performance, have a rich history of authorial dissidence through the use of the pseudonym, which notably precedes the canonical authorship criticism of poststructuralists such as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. From Marcel Duchamp's first drag as Rose Sélavy in 1921 photographed by Man Ray and the artistic partnership of Lucy Schwob and Suzanne Malherbe, who took on the gender-bending noms de plume Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, through to contemporary artists Bob and Roberta Smith, the artist's pseudonym has served as a political tool challenging traditionally inherent concepts pertaining to authorship—gendered notions of genius, singular attribution, the scarcity model and notions of intellectual property—of which all are perpetuated by the art market. These facets of an art practice are not yet well recognized or documented because the artists' complex authorships often defy the economy that would otherwise benefit from writing their 'biography'.

As such, there is a much-needed up-dating and nuanced discussion on artistic authorship to be had. How do pseudonymous artists navigate intellectual property or work collectively and share recognition? How may a pseudonym aid activism? Can a pseudonym be considered so once it is attributed to an artist's identity like any other name?

This article takes the position that the politics of a name can complicate authorship, which will be discussed through a case study on collective identity, through the Guerrilla Girls, and another reviewing the pseudonymous practice of Marvin Gaye Chetwynd. That these artists have deliberately employed dissident identities has led me to consider them and/or their work as activist practices, resisting the framework of the traditional artist's biography.

The authorship problem with names

Throughout the history of art, we have been conditioned to examine the artist's biography to better understand their works of art. While this can be a useful tool for interpretation, it is generally accepted that a biography is subjective and socially constructed. Yet we are still overwhelmed with monographs and

retrospectives—a history of artists and encyclopaedias of names rather than a history of art.

This limited and linear model for reading works of art is dependent upon the singular author. The Western ‘myth’ of the artist has its origins in classical Greece. Artists’ biographies became an established literary genre during the Hellenistic period but it was Vasari who took this further with a series of narratives about the personalities of those artists he considered the best. In his The Lives of the Artists (1550), a homage to which the Western world terms the ‘Old Masters’, he arguably set a precedence for an art history that trains and conditions us to examine the artist’s life to better understand their work.

On closer examination, however, Vasari may not have intended his writing to have such an impact. He actually describes the work of several artists in an attempt to promote a new generation of ‘higher’ art and artists, regularly appending the works of one to another in order to identify new ‘schools’ and ‘styles’. Cosimo I’s regime, under which Vasari was commissioned, encouraged art as production—a set of skills that could be taught so that culture may be standardized or controlled, the antithesis of individual genius. Lives is therefore also a political and socio-economic historical source, a fact conveniently and continuously overlooked by the art market, which profits from the singular name and signature, a notion of individual authentication for monetary value, especially that of the Old Masters.

Social historians argue that no one single person is responsible for a work of art; ¹ there are many contributing factors such as the materials used, education, patronage, the market and the fact that the work of art only exists as such when it has an audience. In addition, many artists produce work in collaboration with peers or students or even have employees do it for them. For this school of thought, the notion of a stable or singular authorship is also problematic.

There are several reasons why the West glorifies the artist and dismisses their assistants, partners or patrons in the making of their work: the art market relies on a hierarchy of attribution, the single signature being most valuable; it is easier to research and insert a singular name into our linear and supposedly progressive history; and, finally, the singular, ‘inspired’ or ‘tortured’ artist is easier to identify or empathize with. From van Gogh to Frida Kahlo, Gwen John to Jackson Pollock, the wronged or tragic martyr forms the most popular subject.

Most of those names conjure particular narratives. These are like prisms

through which we see the rest of the artist's work. The name of an author, when attributed to more than one work, becomes descriptive and can come to represent (or misrepresent) all his or her works and signify a type of genre, like 'Jilly Cooper novels' or 'a Tarantino film'. When the author's name becomes an adjective, the product becomes inextricably linked to its author, their previous works and a forced milieu, upon which the audience relies for a sense of context. The name of the author, now synonymous with the work of art, is far more than a means of identification but paradoxically limiting in its ability to convey multiple interpretations. We are then forced to question what difference the name of an author makes to a work of art; the text or painting, for example, does not physically change when the name associated with it does. Indeed, art historian Rosalind Krauss famously argued that such referential readings, which she refers to as 'an aesthetics of the proper name' (1981: 10), limit meaning and the interpretive act of reading or viewing.

As soon as we become dependent upon the author we become dependent upon the authenticity of the attribution of that author's name to the work of art. This is a circuitous problem perpetuated by the art market's investment in attribution, whereby an 'authentic Michelangelo' sells for more than a work of art attributed to 'the school of Michelangelo'. This is just one example of the various registers of terminology employed by auction houses to attribute works. However, market definitions of artworks authored by an artist or that of their assistant are also inconsistent. A taxidermy work by contemporary artist Damien Hirst, for example, involves several other technicians, and his studio assistants now execute his 'spot paintings'. Yet, unlike Old Master paintings, Hirst, not his 'school', authors his work. Thus, market definitions of authenticity, naming and attribution are discursive and part of a historical continuum, and not as fixed as one would have us believe.

Twentieth-century critical theorists, such as Barthes and Foucault, did challenge this notion of the author as a fixed, originator of meaning but with reference to literature. In Barthes' critical essay, 'Death of the Author' (1977 [1967]), he argues that the author's text is only ever a string of quotes with the author's role merely that of one who selects various possible permutations of a pre-existing cultural repertoire. Barthes therefore insists that the author cannot be relied upon as the sole originator of meaning and in order to give the reader more credit in the activation of a work's function, he concludes, 'The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author' (146). Foucault challenges this in 'What is an author?'

(2003 [1969]), and instead argues, rather than eliminating the author, we ought to view them as a discursive function whose role has changed throughout history but who, therefore, is as equally unreliable as a sole reference point for interpretation. These essays became canonical because they provided a timely counterpoint to the still-prevalent criteria of authenticity, sincerity and personal expression by which literary works are understood and judged. The authorship of an artwork is similarly problematic.

Critiques of the 'Author-God' have been taken up beyond literary criticism but authorship remains problematic, especially within art, where the 'product' and personal expression of gesture are still considered rare or unique. One of the most potent critiques of the market's fascination and commodification of the artist is Andrea Fraser's Untitled (2003) performance videotape. Fraser approached Friedrich Petzel Gallery in New York, her representative commercial gallery, to invite bids from collectors to spend a night with her and have sexual intercourse in an undisclosed hotel. Six copies were made and one pre-bought as part of the deal. Untitled conflates both artist and art in the meaning, value and production of creativity to its logical and perhaps sinister conclusion.

There are reasons that art historians, curators, critics, connoisseurs and other writers have turned to the biography that are not so intuitive. When constructing an artist's biography, only those aspects of that artist's life that are deemed to bear relation to their artistic oeuvre are included and discussed. In this sense, the artist's monograph may not even be considered a proper biography and the discipline of art history not a history at all, but an isolated genre of writing tracing only the 'arty' aspects deemed relevant to the artist's life. In this sense, the biographical art historian secures their own trade because the monograph or catalogue raisonné can be re-written, again and again, with new research, revelations and documentation. So much so that gallery-goers become dependent on the 'historian' as a mediator of the artist in order to understand the art, which undeniably perpetuates the historian's career. This again proliferates the name of the artist or author into the public domain but which also limits its meaning.

However, while it is understood that the artist's biography or the name under which they practice is unstable, with regard to interpretation, can we really dispense with it altogether? A biographical approach to reading works of art needs to be

critically questioned as fraught with myth but it is nonetheless still a significant aspect of artistic interpretation. In attempting to define all works of art without recourse to their author, we are left with a strictly semiotic or formalist approach. On top of this, if we don't acknowledge the impact of art's wider social production or indeed even acknowledge the ongoing significance of identity politics, we fail to recognize art not made by the default white male, who continues to define the canon.

These are just some of the nuanced and complicated authorship questions pertaining to the politics of an artist's name. How then can an artist's name challenge authorship and distance the practitioner from becoming the site of intentionality and interpretation?

Artivism through names

'The artist (artist + activist) uses her artistic talents to fight and struggle against injustice and oppression—by any medium necessary' (Asante 2009: 39). While artivism is a relatively new term, the practice of activism and art has a far longer history and may be more obviously recognizable in particular forms of creative resistance. Rodney Diverlus suggests that typical artivists are thought of as anti-capitalist, anti-war and concerned with sociological and environmental issues and that explicit activist artists may use the medium of puppetry, performance and guerrilla theatre, vandalism and culture jamming. He also argues that we must broaden the scope of this definition and believes that all artists have the potential to be artivists (Diverlus 2016).

[[figure1.]]

My two case studies employ these mediums, often as overt tactics of social change, but they also utilize their names and artistic identities as part of a more ambiguous artivist practice, broadening its scope. The Guerrilla Girls name themselves after a political tactic and give feminist talks, advocating for equality in the artworld. But their use of names—their collective name and individual use of pseudonyms to retain anonymity—defy the biographical reading so inextricably linked to the art market, a capitalist infrastructure of its own. Their naming is therefore also political and a means of protest. How can a private institution profit from their name if it cannot accredit their work or link it to a person? Their multiple authorship is another tactic of resistance. While it serves as a stronger voice and means of shared labour, it also undermines the notion of the singular genius or name

that the canon and market is reliant upon. Marvin Gaye Chetwynd's pseudonym is more light-hearted; this is her third public art name. As such, it defies the notion of a consistent branding, or any coherent or reliable source of intent. Instead, currently taking the name of another, a musician, she mocks the prolific use of the referent and its limited meaning.

There are, of course, artists far more dissident. Nor are the case studies presented here representative of a comprehensive history of pseudonymous artists. We can read more radical critiques of authorship through the history of mail-art, situationism and punk, and there are artists who elude authorship for legal reasons, who set themselves far more against the artworld. The British artist, writer and activist Stewart Home, for example, deliberately employs plagiarism and has also taken on group identities, including the collective moniker Monty Cantsin as part of his practice. This is a multiple-use name associated with Neoism that other artists and writers are encouraged to adopt as parodistic and in a determination not to be categorized. Other examples include the collective monikers Luther Blissett and Karen Elliot. Another more radical rejection of recognizable authorships include our own editors of this issue: the contemporary artists Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša, who subsumed their former identities in 2007 to work under the name of the Slovenian Prime Minister at the time. Together they intend to disrupt notions of identity versus identification, the personal name as brand and the spaces between the personal and the political.

Instead, the Guerrilla Girls and Marvin Gaye Chetwynd serve as examples of artists who have negotiated the infrastructures of the artworld from the inside out. By briefly examining each of their practices, we can acknowledge the complexities of doing so as an activist through the context of names and authorship, and evaluate their limitations with regards to how volatile and accommodating the art market is. Through them, it should nonetheless be demonstrated that a collective name, or pseudonymous ones, can and should be considered as strategies of activism, even if this is implicit or ambiguous at times. While the politics of a name or dissident authorship may not be a well-recognized tactic of activism, this article argues that it is an extremely important one.

The Guerrilla Girls

One such group that have managed to continue to use their pseudonyms in

the name of activism are the Guerrilla Girls. The group have expanded and contracted since their inception in 1985 but retain their anonymity. When appearing in public, the Guerrilla Girls wear gorilla masks so that only their eyes and voices are distinguishable, which is also sometimes funny and charismatic, another indisputable power of theirs to engage an audience. Early press clippings show the Girls wearing ski masks; it wasn't until later that the group started using 'gorilla' as a pun and donned the primate masks as part of their guerrilla art actions. Aiding their anonymity is the use of (sometimes shared) pseudonyms, which are the names of deceased female artists such as Frida Kahlo, Käthe Kollwitz, Alice Neel, Alma Thomas, Claude Cahun, Eva Hesse and Meret Oppenheim, to name just a few. Not only are they directly challenging the art market's defining characteristics of authorship with their false names and collective action, they are also using their pseudonyms to raise awareness of passed women artists deserving more attention.

Referring to themselves as the 'conscience of the art world', they formed in response to the diminution of interest in 'active' feminism, the growth of academic and theoretical feminism and a general frustration with the under-representation and exclusion of women and artists of colour from exhibitions, collections and funding. As such, their work is largely protest based, using signature-style postcards, posters and banners to raise awareness of the artworld's inherent sexism and marginalization of the Other. These are displayed in public spaces as well as internationally renowned museums. Interestingly, the Guerrilla Girls frequently author their prints and posters in type-font with '© Guerrilla Girls' and 'conscience of the art world' in the bottom right-hand corner, further undermining the traditional artist's signature, which commonly appears in the same space. The use of copyright could be deemed a modern way of claiming (intellectual property and commercial) authorship, but it also implies a global entity, and serves as a reminder of the product's nature as a mass-produced commodity, rather than a singular 'original' artwork. They also give public talks and workshops, which they refer to as 'gigs'.

Beginning with pasting posters (illegally) on the streets of New York's Chelsea district, naming and shaming local galleries with researched statistics, through to their recent exhibition at London's Whitechapel Gallery, there's no doubt that their anonymity, aided by their pseudonyms, empowered the Girls with confidence to continue their critique with little consequence to their own careers. They became so popular and their research threatening that institutions have had to

adopt them as a means of self-critique. The Guerrilla Girls now work from the inside out, exhibiting while interrogating institutions such as the Venice Biennale, Italy and Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) New York, USA. In 2013, they had a retrospective at Alhóndiga Bilbao (now Azkuna Zentroa) in Spain and in 2016 they were named one of the most influential artists by Artsy, an online resource for art collecting and education. Their chosen guise has also served to generate fear among the art community—dealers and curators—who do not want to be outed for their discrimination by this seemingly infinite group of feminist avengers. For as soon as a Guerrilla Girl was exposed, it would be easier to dismiss her claims as personal.

[[figure2]]

[[figure3]]

The use of pseudonyms and anonymity is not, however, an easy strategy to adopt. It involves a career's worth of compromise and dedication to maintain and invites criticism—the Guerrilla Girls are frequently 'trolled' and accused of hiding behind their masks. Their practice is also under more scrutiny from a feminist perspective.

In 1998 the Guerrilla Girls published Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art. The book lists a series of female artists that the Guerrilla Girls considered to have been left out of art historical encyclopaedias published since the nineteenth century. By putting together a chronological list of these women artists with brief biographies, as other historians have nobly done to make art history take note of more women, we arguably exchange one set of monographs for another, neither of which critiques the 'star system so beloved by the art market, which prizes individual (male) genius' (Rekitt 2012: 111). So too may it be counterproductive to celebrate women for the sake of it.

Perhaps there is a similar danger in the Guerrilla Girls' use of varying pseudonyms pertaining to deceased female artists. When the Girls gig, for example, they lecture the messages of the Guerrilla Girls. They do not perform in character, per se, or adopt the personality of their pseudonym in public. So, although intended to memorialize the chosen artists, the Guerrilla Girls may also be guilty of decontextualizing the names and works of Alma Thomas, Frida Kahlo and Ana Mendieta from their place in history, by masking them once again or imposing a politics on that person.

The woman who adopted the pseudonym 'Alma Thomas' is herself African

American and describes feeling emotionally torn about wearing the gorilla mask. Not only did it obscure her own ethnicity, she felt it contained potential racial connotations.

Nobody would believe that I was black, and they didn't even make the connection to the fact that I was being Alma Thomas... but the mask was an extremely powerful thing, and entering a space, the two girls, you know, throwing bananas, it was very, very—it was very powerful, but I myself always objected personally to the mask because the mask had such a terrible connotation for black women, the gorilla image. ('Alma Thomas' 2008)

While the use of pseudonyms and anonymity are key to the group's ongoing success, it also means that aspects of identity politics beyond womanhood, such as race, religion and sexuality, are less well recognized by the unified voice of the collective. Similarly, the individual women behind each pseudonym cannot be recognized for their contributions to the cause. The significance of their anonymity has changed over the years; once considered a means of protecting one's career, any artist would now covet the name of a Guerrilla Girl. This brings about issues of internal politics and some Girls have since tried to undo their anonymous 'naming' to take individual credit.

In October 2003, on behalf of Guerrilla Girls, Inc., a small group of original founders appeared in court as part of a settlement to clarify the distinctions between Guerrilla Girls On Tour and Guerrilla Girls Broadband, the now various fractions. During this period, anonymity was still prized as sacred by all, despite intellectual property being at risk. Proceedings described include that members asked to wear their masks in court and several women shared pseudonyms, adding to the anarchy of authorship at stake.

In reality, however, how anonymous can each woman really be? In order to travel, passports must be shown and, in close relationships, questions would be asked about income and careers. It is a testimony to the group and their family and friends that the Guerrilla Girls have managed to remain largely anonymous to this day. As the group continue to work internationally, more people within the arts community collaborate with the Guerrilla Girls and choose to protect their identities. In so doing, we too join and empower the conspiracy.

There is admittedly a small gap between the feminist ideals of the Guerrilla Girls and the practical realities of maintaining a shared authorship through some of their strategies—the notion of a universal feminism and issues of masking identity politics. Indeed, democracy and individual recognition, while preserving difference, must be worked at in the wider world, too. That they have had to traverse contemporary and commercial intellectual property concerns, through their book publishing and incorporation, makes them a pertinent example of how authorship and the patriarchal infrastructures of the artworld may be reimagined in a contemporary world through the pseudonym. By retaining anonymity and fluid names, albeit at a cost, the Guerrilla Girls have demonstrated that their project is one worth persevering with and that thankfully grows from strength to strength.

'I'm Spartacus' or Marvin Gaye?

On the other side of the Atlantic, Marvin Gaye Chetwynd is an example of a performance artist employing a pseudonym that has become synonymous with the individual (visible) artist, despite her working with an ongoing troupe, which begs the question of its purpose from an authorship perspective. She began as Lali and then changed her name to Spartacus by deed poll in 2006 (does this mean it's still a pseudonym?), a name rich in political history and popular culture. Spartacus Chetwynd was the first British performance artist to be nominated for the Turner Prize (2012). It was shortly after this that she changed her name again, while under the representation of Sadie Coles HQ contemporary art gallery in London.

Chetwynd's performances began as eccentric, fancy-dress parties that she hosted as a student. She continues to work with a band of friends and family staging film nights, open-house weekends and carnivalesque performances. Her practice explicitly addresses issues of morality and politics, while employing clashes of high and low culture with a low-budget aesthetic. She has previously re-enacted Michael Jackson's Thriller and dressed as Cousin Itt. She references the works of Milton and Hieronymous Bosch just as equally and with ease. Her work is full of energy and a sense of urgency, making her often chaotic performances convincingly deliberate. That she chooses to adopt a pseudonym is just as deliberate. It is, in itself, also a performance.

Spartacus' namesake legacy represents shared ownership and is inherently positive. It refers to a person, the famous rebel who headed the slave uprising

against the Romans, which ultimately failed, and more recently, Stanley Kubrick's film of the same name and its famous scene where each of the slaves claims 'I'm Spartacus' so to protect the 'original' Spartacus. Adopting the name is an example of her nonchalance in clashing old and new, high and low cultures, but that explicitly references notions of identity, collectivity and rebellion. Doing this in the public domain of artworld can only be a joke at the expense of its institutions of authorship.

Not quite a stage name like Meat Loaf, a pseudonym like Marcel Duchamp's Rose Sélavy or a Subcommandante Marcos-type nom de guerre, Chetwynd's adopted moniker seems designed to make us stage a mock-heroic mini-drama in our minds, in which she persuades a band of artists to stop pitting themselves against each other and instead revolt against their masters... (Morton 2007: paragraph 1)

Although the original Spartacus is a heroic-failure, it is the elements of hope and collectivism that are most important. Ask anyone what they know of 'Spartacus' and the majority will describe Kubrick's iconic scene of camaraderie. As such, it becomes difficult to extract the name Spartacus from the slave, the geopolitical historical event, its retelling through an iconic film, Kirk Douglas, the actor who put a face to this name and, now, Chetwynd and her troupe. Spartacus is therefore a loaded cultural and political pseudonym, a legacy to which this latest artist and her practice can be added by association.

In an interview, the artist discussed her change of name and issues with the concept of the referential signature:

Spartacus offered a form of protection, 'like a shield, like a trading name', she says... 'Spartacus, I thought, was going to stop me from becoming professionalised and allow me to continue to have fun—although actually it has been quite serious, the name thing, because people don't like you to be so flippant, or irreverent. And I am really irreverent.' (Chetwynd in conversation with Ben Luke in Luke 2010: paragraph 3)

Her pseudonyms may have initially been employed to avoid the pressures of professionalism but they have also brought about more attention for the artist. Indeed, Spartacus changed her forename again, to Marvin Gaye, in 2013 after the

media flurry of attention she received from her Turner Prize nomination. She admitted in an interview for the BBC Four television documentary series What Do Artists Do All Day? that her name changes are a kind of ‘private joke’ to cheer herself up. But while she states that it is as simple as a trading name or nom de plume, she also refers to it as a deliberate act ‘to annoy people’ (Chetwynd 2014: episode 10). The artist clearly understands the implications of a pseudonym in the artworld that is reliant on attribution and the biography.

[[figure4]]

As Chetwynd’s performances have grown from elaborate fancy-dress parties to institutional artworks, she has retained her band of friends and family who continue to play alongside her. This troupe acts as a type of collective. Among her performances, Chetwynd is often not identifiable. She is the brand under which this ‘play’ is being performed and re-enacted, whereby no single narrative or source material takes precedence and the idea of the author—which one: the performer, the artist, the curator or the person whose work has been appropriated?—is rendered obsolete. It would be nice, then, to conceive of Chetwynd’s name as a type of travelling circus or carnival that she delivers rather than that of a singular artist, but her works continue to be read as her products alone, authored to her current pseudonym, no matter how many people this may encompass on a given night. This may be because the artist retains her surname. This makes it much easier for search engines to connect her works and sustains a consistent provenance. As such, she is never quite anonymous and her pseudonymous forenames can only be seen as a performance, not inhabited or embodied like the Guerrilla Girls. This raises questions over whether the guise may inadvertently serve as a marketing tool rather than a form of authorial defiance—playing the artworld at its own game.

Her performances, however, are carnivalesque in nature so they assert the significance of the lived experience in order to puncture authority, as Bakhtin wrote of the spirit of the carnival. Chetwynd also employs subversive theatrical interventions as part of her politics, like Theatre of the Absurd and Theatre in the Round. The audience is important, as is participation. Add to this chaos and humour, and all of these tease the notion of a singular, authoritative artist, elevating the audience to chief of interpretation, another means of authorial defiance. This is important, as performance art is otherwise a medium often heavily invested in the body and that particular artist—a psycho-biographical approach to art appreciation.

At the same time, Chetwynd's performances have been accessioned by museums, which questions how a pseudonym and performance may be sustained over time, beyond that of an artist's life. In 2015, Chetwynd sold her first performance to an institution. With the help of the Art Fund, the New Walk Museum and Art Gallery in Leicester acquired Chetwynd's Home Made Tasers (2011–12) for £30,000 from Sadie Coles HQ. This consisted of cloth, aluminium, latex, paint, script and instructions for its re-enactment without her. In this instance, it appears that the commercial value of her work and intellectual property has lent itself to a means of sharing authorship even posthumously.

Marvin Gaye Chetwynd manages to resist some of the infrastructures of the artworld, despite being commercially represented, through her guises, collaborators and polyphonic and chaotic performances, which have also been key to navigating traditional systems of authorship. Unlike the Guerrilla Girls, she is not anonymous, but her inclusive practice is a means by which her work may be shared and expanded beyond the individual. Chetwynd's various guises, her costumes and pseudonyms, also suppress her own identity, debunking the notion of the author, but can be reincarnated and re-enacted by others as her work is shared and re-staged without her. While her pseudonyms have become synonymous with her practice and the woman who adopts them, in updating them, Chetwynd has managed, intentionally or otherwise, to make a political statement through mockery at the market's fascination with the biography.

[[figure5]]

Conclusion

It is worth pointing out that Marvin Gaye Chetwynd and the Guerrilla Girls serve as examples of Western artists who have taken potentially (or originally) radical alternatives to traditional authorship and put them to the test within the institutional spaces of art, while also playing the artworld at its own game. They are specifically Western because this is where authorship is most problematic. Indeed, the authorship problem critiqued here pertains almost only to the Western world, or market-driven artworlds. In other cultures and histories, the artist may be seen more as a mediator, not the genius themselves, and hence their biography or name is less scrutinized and the reader is less patronized.

The fact that the Guerrilla Girls and Marvin Gaye Chetwynd work within the

financially incentivized infrastructures of the artworld, and continue to thrive, helps demonstrate how a name may critique, challenge and reshape the parameters of authorship from the inside out. The Guerrilla Girls manage their own practice; they do not have to rely upon representation or the market's definition of good art. Because their work is primarily produced in unlimited numbers of prints and posters, they do not subscribe to the scarcity model, and nor do they need to 'authorize' their work as individuals—the copyright sign, instead, serving as a collective form of branding and ownership. While they have faced internal politics, they stand as a public facing an example of name-artivism. Although they are now recognized and welcomed by large public institutions, who otherwise champion the biographical model, their collective and anonymous naming allows them to simultaneously critique these institutions while using their public reach to their advantage—an undisputable strategy as part of their intention to create social change.

Chetwynd's performances are less overtly political, although their carnivalesque nature and themes of debt and morality are undeniable; they involve collaboration and puncture notions of authority. Her comedic naming, whether intentional or not, contributes to this irreverent practice and is a snub to the artworld and its notions of authorship and individuality.

Authorship should no longer be considered an unfashionable subject of the past. Its critique is a means of artivism and challenges the long-outdated status quo of what good art is, who it is by or made for. Through the above two case studies we can see how a name may reshape an art collection to include more women or be used to question the definitions of art—previously conceived by and for an elite. Employing authorial dissident tactics, such as the pseudonym or collective identity, empowers an artist and gives them greater freedom to be creative; it enables protection, play and camaraderie without the usual constraints or responsibility attached to a 'real' name. This is why so many of the artists employing alternative identities are politically aligned. Perhaps their guise was a necessary tactic to support an avant-garde or risky practice, or perhaps the nom de plume was part of a performance in and of itself that has been read as a political statement against the art market. Whether it's chicken or egg, one's name/namelessness is inherently political.

Notes

1 See, for example, Janet Wolff's argument on authorship in her book The Social Production of Art (1993: 117–36).

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Captions

Figure 1. Marvin Gaye Chetwynd, The Green Room, Nottingham Contemporary, 7 February 2014. Photo San Matthams, copyright the artist, courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London.

Figure 2. Whitechapel Gallery Guerrilla Girls Commission: Is it even worse in Europe? (2016) Photo David Parry/PA Wire.

Figure 3. GUERRILLA GIRLS 1985–2015, Matadero, Madrid, 2015 (iteration of the Bilbao retrospective, 2013). Retrospective of almost 200 works, including photos, letters and small projects. Copyright the artists, courtesy Guerrilla Girls.

Figure 4. Camshafts in the Rain, Marvin Gaye Chetwynd, Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, 4 June 2016. Photo Simon Vogel, copyright the artist, courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London.

Figure 5. Spartacus Chetwynd, Home Made Tasers, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 26 October 2011–1 January 2012. Copyright the artist, courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London.