

Who Are We?

The Redstockings Position on Names

Moreover, the women who made quilts knew and valued what they were doing: frequently quilts were signed and dated by the maker, listed in her will with specific instructions as to who should inherit them and treated with all the care that a fine piece of art deserves. . . . In sharp contradiction to the truth about these women artists is the fabric of lies that has been spread over their work—the distortion of the purpose of the “quilting bee” into the false idea that quilts were “collective art” instead of the work of individual women, and even more importantly, the lies about their anonymity. For example, the catalogue for the “American Pieced Quilts” exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., bears a cover reproduction of a quilt signed “E.S. Reitz” in large letters, clearly visible. The quilt is identified in the catalogue as to title, place, date, material and size *but the artist's name is not given*. Jonathon Holstein then dedicates the catalogue to “those anonymous women whose skilled hands and eyes created the American pieced quilt.”

—Patricia Mainardi

“*Quilts: The Great American Art*”
FEMINIST ART JOURNAL, Winter 1973

As Honorary Keeper of the Clocks of the Fogg Art Museum, Charles A. Ditmas Jr., tends Harvard's collection of more than 1,000 antique clocks.

Ditmas first became interested in clocks almost by accident. “Years ago when I was tutoring the children of a Boston family, I offered to have their broken grandfather clock fixed,” he said. “Of course, I knew absolutely nothing about grandfather clocks then. The Boston clockmakers said they couldn't fix it, but then I heard about an old man in Watertown who might do the job.

“He was a state-of-Mainer, a most unusual man of astonishing intellect. ‘Will you fix this?’ I asked him. ‘No, I won't. Fix it yourself.’ But he was a born teacher and after I took the clock apart, he did the actual repairs and showed me how to put it back together. I was a graduate student then in the Fine Arts Department and he told me: ‘You better get over here because you're never going to learn a god-damn thing at Harvard.’”

The craftsman taught Ditmas how to repair various kinds of clocks, from the 1600's to the present day. “But I've refused to learn electric clocks because they have no soul,” he said.

—James Shapiro

HARVARD TODAY, Spring 1974

Kathie Sarachild

The question of names has been an important problem in both the black and women's liberation movements since their beginnings. There has been the revolutionary action of challenging the names of former slave masters given to blacks and the names of present husbands given to women (or the patriarchal tradition of automatically carrying the father's name). Oppressed people have had even their names taken from them, been made nameless or given the names of others. They have wanted their own names and have fought for them.

Names are power. Names identify work and leadership that people can trace and link up with.

Denying people names is denying them power, denying others information. There is power in knowing the source of things, power for the oppressed. When names are withheld without need, the people lose political knowledge, and knowledge of themselves. Withholding names can also be a way of denying accountability. Names are actually anti-mystique. The proper name reveals the source, of an idea, clarifies and demystifies the process of politics and political thinking.

But there has also been an opposite tack within revolutionary movements. There has been the “class” question on names—an effort to present a solid front, to create complete egalitarianism, to eliminate leadership, to uphold an alleged anonymous tradition among the oppressed. It was in the wake of an ongoing debate over this in SNCC that Bob Moses, the brave leader of the movement for black voting rights in Mississippi, changed his name to Bob Parris in order to avoid an aura of leadership. The women's liberation movement likewise went through a period when the most consciousness-raising and correct thing for radicals to do was not to allude to work of individuals. This led at times to the cult of the anonymous instead of the cult of the leader in which author's names never appeared on papers, allegedly in solidarity with the anonymous sisters of the past and present.

An examination of just a sampling of so-called anonymous forerunners revealed, however, that they did not choose anonymity. It was imposed on them by people who were willing to appreciate the work but not the people who did it. The women quiltmakers are an example of this (see box). Women have either been forced to work anonymously or else have been rendered anonymous. This has been true of the vast masses of people throughout history whose humanity has not been recognized by those in power. The Harvard professor is named in great detail while the craftsman, his teacher, goes nameless (see box).

Anonymity and mystery are not useful among one's

people. They are a tactic to use against an enemy for protection from danger. They are a trick or a disguise that is sometimes necessary.

Pseudonyms, too, have a history in radical movements of the oppressed, including the feminist movement. They are used when people taking action fear reprisals by the oppressor. The two suffragettes in the wanted poster are using aliases. They have been a way to retain an identity for friends and allies and yet hide it from enemies. If the people have revolutionary leaders they should be able to find them and judge them, but bosses and the police shouldn't. Revolutionaries forced to use pseudonyms have often chosen consciousness-raising ones. Gorky, the playwright of the Russian Revolution, for instance, means "bitter."

Usually people use pseudonyms when to identify themselves will involve unfair or unnecessary risks to themselves or to others. There are times when one must offer verifiable testimony and then it is important to use one's own name. Even though it may involve some risk, the risk may be necessary.

Sometimes pseudonyms are a test. In writing they may be to see if someone will publish or even read the work, even if he doesn't know whom it is by or what sex wrote it—a way of discovering or circumventing prejudice and corruption. In the fight against male supremacy and barriers to women writing, many female writers in the 19th century used men's names to get their work published or to get fully paid for their work. In such cases we would hope that at some point the woman revealed herself for the historic record, as Olive Schreiner did after her wonderful *Story of an African Farm* was published. The use of pseudonyms by the rich and privileged, on the other hand, is a means of exploitation. For instance, men will sometimes write under female names for women's magazines. The Rockefellers and other millionaire families hide their financial holdings under the names of others.

Names are also important politically. Organizations can dissolve but people's names remain as a test of authenticity.

Organizations can be destroyed, by legal actions, for instance, or internal dissension, but the people are still there. Your name allows enemies to keep track of you, but it also allows friends and allies to hook up with you. (The CIA, FBI and other police agencies spend vast amounts of energy—and money—simply collecting names.) When people and work are identified incorrectly, rather than not identified at all, when the wrong people are given credit, this is also effective political disruption.

The way names are used and mis-used is an indication of where we are politically in terms of freedom. Although changing one's name or hiding it may be useful and necessary in the liberation struggle, we look forward to the day when names—for personal identification and personal identity—can be true and useful, open and lasting.

In this journal our policy is to give people as much truth and information as possible. If something has an author, we want people to know it and to know whom. But if something won't get published because the person won't do it under her own name and we think what this person has to

say is important, then we'll publish it under a pseudonym or we may simply identify the author as a member of a group. But we'll try to use a pseudonym consistently so people can follow a continuity of thinking in the same person.

CRIMINAL RECORD OFFICE,

NEW SCOTLAND YARD, S.W.

16th May, 1914.

In continuation of the Memorandum of 24th April, 1914, special attention is also drawn to the undermentioned SUFFRAGETTES who have committed damage to public art treasures or public offices, and who may at any time again endeavour to perpetrate similar outrages.



MARY ALDHAM.



ETHEL COX.

Mary Aldham, alias **Wood** (S/178500), age 55, height 5ft. 4in., complexion pale, hair turning grey.

Wilfully damaged a portrait of Mr. Henry James with a chopper at the Royal Academy, and on four occasions has broken plate glass windows, etc. (on the last occasion she smashed the plate glass in the panels of the door, etc., at the Central Criminal Court at the trial of another suffragette).

Ethel Cox, alias **Gwendoline Cook** (5581-1914), age 26, height 5ft. 8in., complexion pale, hair brown, eyes blue.

Has been convicted of breaking windows at the residence of the Home Secretary, and on the occasion of the visit of Their Majesties the King and Queen to the Coliseum Music Hall, 11th October, 1913, she attempted to throw suffragette leaflets into the Royal carriage. She is said to be capable of committing any damage.

Of course there are problems in this name question that are hard to resolve. Often many people's ideas go into someone's paper. We think people should be aware of this reality, of the collective—historic—development of ideas. But history also consists of the individual efforts of the people in it. The ideas and work these individuals represent are also part of the reality which people must be aware of for progress to be as rapid as possible for the benefit of all. Sometimes it is important to know from whom in particular ideas you like are coming so you can join efforts—support her stand. Other times it is important and powerful to make clear and to state strongly that these ideas represent an entire group, so the statement will be signed with a group's name. Covering up the origins—either individual or group—of an idea you like is an act against the movement. Unless it is a temporary safety measure, it stops the movement, buries its achievements. And always it is necessary to remember that the idea, however bravely formulated by an individual person, represents the accumulation of the sweat and tears, experience and observations of countless human beings over generations—the experience of the people—to whom the fruit of this experience belongs.

In this journal the writer—the person whose name goes on the paper—is she who has done the work of gathering all her observations on a certain subject, along with those gathered from others, making her ideas coherent, daring to stand behind them, and taking off from there to carry them further.

On this subject of feminism and revolution which by its nature is always new ground, many of us have found that just doing this requires tremendous emotional energy. Sometimes it is an effort to transfer already written pages to the typewriter. So the pleasure of writing that people speak about is something elusive. Maybe it's because we're not yet safe enough or strong enough.

As the black writer John Oliver Killens says, "There are truths that have never been told. If I didn't believe that, I'd put away my typewriter."

We write because there are truths that must get told and because we are nourished when truths are told by others. So whatever help people can contribute to this effort comes as a welcome relief and an inspiration.

Another insight into women's inferior status then that Comrade Wang gave was her story about land reform in the areas liberated by the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army. When land was distributed, married women also received their share. But as the poor peasant women did not even have a name they were either listed as "so-and-so's wife" or "so-and-so's mother," or were hurriedly given a name for the occasion. Thus the liberation gave the women a name along with a share of the land. —*Peking Review*, No. 10, 1973

A genuine women's movement began in 1911, when the magazine *Seito* (Blue Stocking) was published by a small women's group led by Hiratsuka Raicho. The famous declaration of *Seito*, written by Hiratsuka, said: "At the beginning of our history, woman was a sun, a real human being. Now, woman is a moon, pale, like a sick person, given life by others and illuminated by others' light. We must take back our hidden sun, right now!"

And Yosano Akiko, a famous woman poet who had shocked out-dated people by her passionate praise for love, sang:

The mountain-moving day is coming.
I say so, yet others doubt.
Only a while the mountain sleeps.
In the past
All mountains moved in fire.
Yet you may not believe it.
Oh man, this alone believe,
All sleeping women now will awake and move.

Strictly speaking, *Seito* was not a movement. The members who started the magazine intended only to make a literary campaign in order to raise women's consciousness and to discover hidden female talent. But when the magazine started, men attacked these disobedient "new women" furiously, while many young women were encouraged by them. Publishing itself became a struggle. The supporters of *Seito* began to discuss not only literature, but *all* women's problems. Back issues of *Seito*, published from 1911 to 1916, contain almost all the women's questions that are still being discussed—abortion, protection of mothers, love, socialism, consciousness-raising, prostitution, etc. Most of the women activists to whom I will refer later began their activity through *Seito*. They continued in various areas of the women's movement throughout their later lives.

Seito marked an epoch in the Japanese women's movement. The present liberation movement still owes much to it.

— Yoko Akiyama

INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST REVIEW, March 1974

The name REDSTOCKINGS was intended to represent a synthesis of two traditions: that of the earlier feminist theoreticians and writers who were insultingly called "Bluestockings" in the 19th century, and the militant political tradition of radicals—the red of revolution.

— coined by Shulamith Firestone
February, 1969