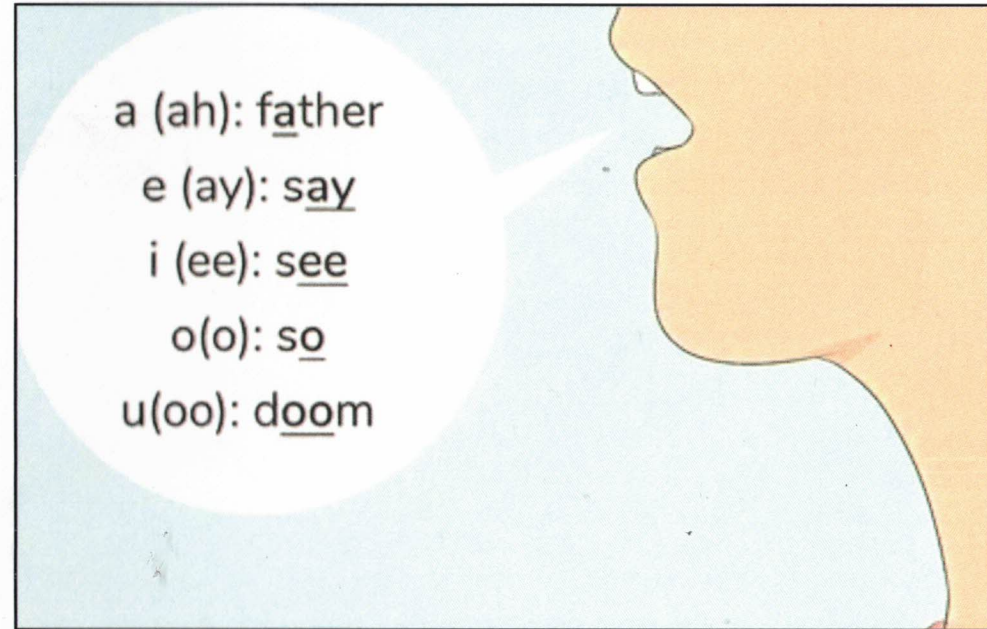


## Doomed to be Named

### *A battle against language*

And thus I remain elusive. Impossible to pin down, I roam freely across identities: neither aiming to have none and thus remain speechless and defenseless, nor piously clinging to one and claiming rights and responsibilities. I attack not you but your attempts to speak to me: to address me, to recognize me. Writing myself in long-gone letters, I am outside your focus and outside your grasp. Not speechless, I am not defenseless. But try to understand what I am, you'll find that I'm speaking not with you, nor at you, but against you.

*Watching as governments bailed out the arsonists who burned the world's so-called 'financial systems' to the ground taught Sascha early on that the world isn't all that. Like most Europeans who were over-educated and spat out into 'platform capitalism', he at first tried to make his way among the protesters and refuseniks on the 'left', before noticing that they sadly weren't all that either. The Seattle crowd at least tried to move beyond civilization's death and destruction; Occupy and Fridays for Future aren't even doing that any more. And contrary to the American notion of Europe as some sort of socialist haven, Sascha's been burned - and burned out - by apps too often to believe in safety nets. So if total refusal doesn't work, and partial refusal is partial complicity, why bother at all? Hiding in plain sight is much better, and the phone that receives notifications is the very same phone that writes essays like this one.*



Sascha Engel

As an 'individualist anarchist' in the society of this second decade of the 21st century, I am a nearly inconceivable entity. Too monstrous are the threats, too overbearing the so-called necessities of society. How is a true individualist outlook to develop when I am everywhere squeezed by the resurgence of moral and religious tyranny, by rising ecofascism and the smothering bureaucracies of 'social democracy'? By pandemic response teams on the one side, conspiracy loonies on the other? And yet these are not even the most pernicious obstacles to true individualism. There remain two far more dangerous problems.

The first of these is the appropriation of individualism by capitalism. In its present form, 'platform capitalism' presents itself as a paradise of independent, endlessly adventurous contractors and franchisees, chasing opportunities in contracts unfettered by rolled-back regulatory zealotry. Their apps allow them, so the ideology goes, to take up or refuse work as they see fit, while the consumer enjoys individual choice and individual delivery of goods and services. Yet what sort of individualism is this, where the choice between two delivery companies is branded as an 'opportunity'? What sort of individuality is this, at the beck and call of an app for sixteen hours a day—or indeed two or three apps? And is the 'consumer' any more of an individual than the contractor or franchisee?

Weary of fake individualities, I turn to anarchists: surely they'd be natural allies whom I'd expect to be sympathetic to my position! Yet even here, the authority of society is ac-



cepted even as that of state and capital is attacked. Opposing society to the state and capital, anarchists of today—sometimes even self-proclaimed individualists—profess to liberate the former from the latter. But what if society is just as oppressive, and more insidiously so, than the state? What if the (undeniable) fact that I am not self-sufficient does not, for me, entail that cooperation is inherently desirable? And yet I am told to cooperate; a demand which entraps me in a society that, although it would proclaim to be anarchic, would actually turn out more to be tyrannical than the present one. Against the state I sometimes have recourse to the courts, against moralistic stateless tyranny I have none.

No way out then? Am I to remain languid and miserable, turning to a sort of “entirely spiritual internal rebellion”, as Palante has it?<sup>1</sup> Perhaps. But perhaps I can lay out, on the way there, a few pointers about true individuality. The first of these concerns the collision between the inexpressible individual and language, particularly now that language is weaponized by platform capitalism. The second looks on this collision as an opportunity to develop what I’d call an ontological contract, proposing a solution (of sorts) in the spirit of Josiah Warren.

### **Inexpressibility and Language**

The world tells me I am *consumer* or *contractor*, or sometimes both. I know I am neither. But what am I? This question takes me straight to the heart of the matter, for the question of true individuality is above all a question of language. Language, as surely everyone knows by now, is politics: the primary means of society to entrap me in names, labels, identities. True individuality is thus first and foremost a revolt against language. “Names name me not,” says the man whom the Prussian authorities knew as Johann Kaspar Schmidt, and whom we now

1 Georges Palante, “Anarchism and Individualism,” in *Enemies of Society*, Ardent Press 2011, 197.

know primarily as Max Stirner. And Apio Ludd expands: “A unique individual, acting for herself, is nameless. She is nameless, because her existence is too immediate and fleeting for any name that is not completely empty of meaning or thought to express him... Identity is about defining what you are... But these definitions, these identities can never be me.”<sup>2</sup>

Compare this to the sham individuality even of contemporary Western platform capitalism! (Not to mention the pesticidal/infanticidal/suicidal shackles of Agbogbloshie, Damascus, or Moria.) As a so-called consumer, I am tied to my bank account, which requires verification and thus ties me back to my citizenship papers. Moreover, I am tied to having to consume rather than exchange and appreciate—tied, that is, to checkout lanes or IP addresses, to legal barriers and moral judgments recommending, prescribing, and ultimately enforcing consumption patterns; to contracts full of unreadable clauses and jargon; and so on. Some individuality that is!

And what about me on the producing end? In office-based capitalism, I am a contract and employee number, an assigned desk or office, a workplace grievance policy, a parking space, and so on. Fair enough, neoliberals say, that’s why we have the freedoms of platform capitalism! But what of them? Yoked to my phone, I make haste through the city, swerving here, colliding there, risking life and limb to get stiffed by customers and platforms alike—while remaining at the beck and call of the authorities who have me verified before I receive payouts, of terms and conditions in my contract, of yet another bank account, of yet more expenses, requirements, and compromises...

Precariousness is not freedom, and living under the yoke of an app is not individuality.

Circling back: what is the basis of all this? As soon as I

2 Apio Ludd, “Nameless: an Egoist Critique of Identity,” in *Egoism*, Ardent Press 2013, 162.



have a role, an identity, a name, I am a subject. That is, I am empowered to assert myself as a consumer, as a contractor, as a citizen, even as a 'human being'. But I am not empowered to assert myself beyond these roles: I remain subject to norms, rules, laws—to names. I am woven into webs of language which engulf me at all sides and which are stronger than me, which name and affix me, categorize and characterize me, inscribe, seduce and reduce me. Through the mere act of speaking, society and its categories worm their way into the center of my being. Wherever I turn, they're already there: in my thoughts, in my perception, in my world. My thoughts, expressed in society's language, are not my thoughts: "If what matters is to come to an understanding and to communicate, then, of course, I can only make use of human means, which are at my command because I am at the same time human. And actually I have thoughts only as human; as I, I am at the same time thoughtless. One who can't get rid of a thought is to that extent only human, is a slave of language, this human institution, this treasury of human thoughts. Language or 'the word' tyrannizes most terribly over us, because it brings up against us a whole army of fixed ideas."<sup>3</sup>

Yet even here and now I cannot help it: I must use society's language even to express my resistance against it! Indeed, triply so: first, because I quote Stirner, I use someone else's words to express my thoughts; second, because I quote those words in a language that neither Stirner nor I were brought up in, thus yoking both of us to translation and translator. And third, and most decisively: these words above are yours, who reads them, as well as mine, and even as I write them down, I do so to speak to you, to express myself to you. Even as I proclaim that language does not express me, I can only do so within language, which is to say, I can only do

so to you! Language is irreducibly social, and I am irreducibly inscribed into it.

Am I doomed to being named, categorized, filed away? How can I rebel against names, categories, and filing systems—if doing so requires me to use the very same names, categories and filing systems? How can I escape a prison whose very existence, it seems, would be the means of escaping it? Is it possible for me to retreat: first perhaps into a language only I speak, and secondly, further even, into total silence?

What would this language look like? Wittgenstein is quite right, after all, to say that there is no possible language for which I can guarantee in principle that only I speak it. As soon as it is a language—that is, as soon as it's an utterance that means something—it can be translated. For any given sound I make, as long as it has any meaning at all, there are other sounds expressing the same meaning. Thus the sound can be translated, and I am inscribed into a system: a language. As soon as I utter sounds that have some meaning, however much gibberish they may be at first glance, I speak a language among languages: I name, I classify, I categorize.

And if I make sure that my utterances are unsystematic or, going even further, if I retreat into total silence? I would, to be sure, no longer name myself nor others, and I would no longer commit the violence of identifying and classifying. But what can I then refer to? How do I relate to the world? Even in total solitude, I still have to plan, organize, and acquire. How can I do this without classifying my surroundings—that is, without a meaningful system of utterances? How can I assert myself in the world—how can I make it my own—without classifying, grasping, identifying? A world without words, does it not become a dark beyond, a gloomy realm of shadows outside my grasp, a horror beyond comprehension?

Moreover, how can I defend myself—if not my self-definition, then my self-expression—without words? Am I not then vulnerable to the violence that is done to the

3 Stirner, *The Unique One and his Property*, tr. Landstreicher (<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/max-stirner-the-unique-and-its-property>)



speechless—and hence defenseless—animal? At the very least: won't my retreat into silence be misunderstood, won't I be subject to others' imperialist interpretations of what I do? Perhaps they're charitable and read it as a spiritual exercise, but more often they will see it as a form of madness, and confine me in that worst of all tyrannies, the system against which there is no defense and from which there is no escape: psychiatry.

Defending myself, then, I must name. I must battle language within language. I must attack the irreducible medium of my attack. I must speak to assert my speechlessness: express my inexpressibility. True individualism, or if you will individualist anarchism, is an economy of violence pitting language against language. True individuality is a shape-shifting series of assertions and disavowals, attacks and retreats: I, the unnameable, defending my unnameability by using names within a sea of names.

### **Dis-association and Ontological Contract**

I therefore pursue not a passive, languid silence but an active type of silence: a defense, conducted within language, of my remaining outside of language. It is not passive solitude that I seek, but active dis-association. The speechlessness of solitude is a defenseless condition, much akin to Rousseau's description of a hypothetical state of nature before language. Rousseau's individuals freely roam vast woods, rarely encountering each other. But when they do, they're unnameable spooks to one another, scary to the point of terror; indefinite shadows beyond comprehension. They know no defense against one another, no way to keep one another at bay, no techniques of relating to one another.

This is not my desired solitude. I want to be free from others, yes—but I also want to know how to defend myself. Ideal though it sounds, perfect speechless solitude can and will be disrupted just as soon as I encounter someone hostile

to me. And make no mistake: I will! Not just because there are now seven billion of us. Even among anarchists, who I'd think should be fellow individuals, on the same page with me as far as dis-association it concerned, there arises a double threat. First, I will encounter 'social' anarchists, against whose eagerness to force me into a moral straightjacket I will need to defend myself. And second, I will encounter the likes of Martucci, whose egoism is essentially a license to violence. This too requires a defense.

Yet on the one hand, such a defense need not primarily be armed or violent in turn, nor even based on Hobbesian cunning. On the other hand, I need to take firmly into account that I cannot physically wander in the style of Rousseau's state of nature. A solution to both, however, would be the development of an ontological evasion: a set of techniques organizing a defense of my inexpressibility within language. That is, rather than appealing to 'my rights as...', I evade all ascription that comes my way. Much like the illegalists jammed state recognition with fake papers and passports, and much like a VPN jams IP address recognition, so I jam your recognition with ambiguous names and genders, use archaic writing systems and semi-coherent sentences to jam your ideas about me, throw off the yokes of brevity and clarity to prevent your understanding from solidifying over me, laughingly dance around my previously espoused positions and terminologies, casting them into the fires of doubt and ridicule wherever I can, to prevent them from solidifying and pinning me down. I am legion: each corner of my ever-shifting mental universe writes in a different alphabet, and I slip back and forth between them, abandoning each discourse you engage, shifting each register in which you try to pin me down, jamming each of your channels of communication.

And thus I remain elusive. Impossible to pin down, I roam freely across identities: neither aiming to have none and thus remain speechless and defenseless, nor piously clinging



to one and claiming rights and responsibilities. I attack not you but your attempts to speak to me: to address me, to recognize me. Writing myself in long-gone letters, I am outside your focus and outside your grasp. Not speechless, I am not defenseless. But try to understand what I am, you'll find that I'm speaking not with you, nor at you, but against you.

Yet this is not the only result of writing myself in long-gone archaic letters. In doing so, I achieve two goals at once. First and foremost, I am unreadable to those whom I aim to evade. They are unable to understand me, literally and deliberately. My language is not an engagement but a rejection: I write and rewrite myself not to converse with you but to destroy the grounds of our mutual intelligibility.

Secondly, however, I do not thereby retreat into total idiosyncrasy. I write and rewrite myself, not as impossibly private gibberish, but in an alphabet which is archaic but in principle understandable. I accept that there is no private language, and indeed I don't aspire to one: it wouldn't furnish me with the means to defend my inexpressibility! Thus in using language strategically and asserting my true individuality in archaic lettering I repel those who'd want to understand or impose what I am—and yet also extend an invitation, however reluctant and thorny, to those who want to experience who I am. Understanding or imposing what I am is an imperialist gesture, extending cooperation at the price of violating my inexpressibility. It is the gesture of fake individuality extended by the platform economy. Experiencing who I am, by contrast, joins me in my quest to remain ontologically elusive—hidden, out of sight, “rolling around this world like a stone tossed from the mountain top into the yawning chasm.”<sup>4</sup>

Once you approach me in this way, I can let my guard down if I choose to do so, and to the extent I choose, and

4 Ernest Coeurderoy, “Citizen of the World,” in *Disruptive Elements*, Ardent Press 2014, 9.

we can enter into a union of egoists based on an ontological contract.

This contract preserves what Josiah Warren would have called the sovereignty of the individual—that is, the sovereignty of true individualism. It stipulates that both of us, temporarily and provisionally, agree to cease clogging each other's communication and attacking each other's ability to communicate, while also agreeing not to attempt to impose on each other by asking what we are. Rather than basing our contract on some sort of human right, equality, or commercial relation, we rather agree to temporarily suspend our inexpressibility. Remaining sovereign over the “innumerable variety of different definitions, constructions, and applications” making up the frontiers of our minds, we agree never to let them solidify into “government and law.”<sup>5</sup> Yet we also don't evade each other, for the time being. Once this is established, we can go about finding the “similarity of interests, feelings and objects” which bring us together for “mutual assistance in cases of need,” as Warren would have it.<sup>6</sup> Yet this cooperation remains at all times subject to my dissolution, by retreat back into my own writing and rewriting of myself in archaic letters, my own multitude, my own ontological ambiguity.

Would this repel the likes of Martucci trying to subdue me? Certainly not—but my ontological contract allows me to gather others to help defend myself.

Would it allow me to live in deep solitude, alone on the mountaintop? Certainly not—but it allows me to use the ‘community’ to which I live adjacent as I see fit, and remain elusive otherwise.

Would it make for a gregarious world full of travels, joy, and wine? Sure—if I can find others to join me in this kind of ontological contract.

Would it make for a solitary world where I wander

5 James Martin, *Men Against the State*, Ralph Myles Publishing 1970, 32.

6 Cited in *ibid*, 33 (fn 24).



from place to place, enjoying sights and sounds and a few precious friendships? Sure—if I can find others to join me for limited times and specific places.

Would it make for a world of shared labor and communal enjoyment? A world of competition and continuous improvement? A world of leisure and bohemian artistry? Sure, sure, sure: if I can find others to join me in these kinds of ontological contracts.

Indeed, it may well make for a world where a few siphon off the wealth of all others, just like this one: if they can find others to agree to such ontological contracts...

### **In Conclusion**

This network of ontological contracts, each constituting a temporary union of egoists amid the noise of jammed communication and writing of dis-association, may well be a shape of true individualist anarchy. Yet more importantly, I can implement this true individuality right here and right now: evasion within language, joyful defense of my inexpressibility to most—and ontological contracts for those few who aren't interested in what I am but in the legions within me: in my true individualism, in who I am. An individualist anarchist, I part ways both with the egoist who will "command others" if their "power permits"<sup>7</sup> and the 'individualist' whose critique collapses back into "cooperating with the kind of love that can only come naturally and spontaneously."<sup>8</sup> But when I say 'part ways', I mean this in a literal sense: I engage with them when and as I please, and jam their signals to defend my dis-association when I don't.

7 Enzo Martucci, "A Note on Authority," in *Enemies of Society*, 217.

8 Francis Ellingham, "Anarchism, Society, and the Socialized Mind," in *ibid*, 215.