05 2002

Radical Cheerleading

Robert Foltin

Translated by Aileen Derieg

With the global protest movement, traditional leftist forms of action such as demonstrations, rallies, etc. have been supplemented with direct actions, such as blockades, taking over public space, etc. Among these, there are forms of action containing carnivalesque elements. One such concept is pink-silver. In this case, women and men dress in red-pink-silver, enhance their feminine attributes, so to speak, and dance (mostly to samba rhythms) at demonstrations against the police. Radical cheerleading is the performance of choreographies in a context, in which this kind of action and performance is not obviously suitable. In addition to the fun of pleasurable movements, the point is to counter predominant representations with something that is unexpected in the context of political demonstrations.

Against Positive or Negative Order

Political groups always regard themselves as representatives of some kind of imaginary mass. Their intentions include representing parts of demonstrations. In fact, though, the era of organized blocks is over, there are no forms of organization that could express the differences of the wishes and needs of the demonstrators (if there really ever was). This non-representable diversity of the participants

is put into a clear order by the dominant discourse. There are the discussion partners of the powerful - the "reasonable ones" - from traditional (left-wing) parties and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), then the various leftist and radical leftist small groups that dream of representing the masses, and finally there are the non-addressable participants, which police and media construct as a "black block". Carnivalesque forms of action try not to conform to the dominant structures, nor to enter into male-dominated street fighting rituals. They are (initially) not integrated, nor can they be represented in a negative sense as the "black block".

Our Creativity Against the Capitalist System

The (labor) relationships in capitalism, such as oppression and exploitation in general, have changed massively in recent decades (developed in a direction that is referred to as post-fordism on the one hand, as the control society on the other). Whereas we used to be standardized and adapted through institutions such as school, work or family, today the system works by exploiting our creativity and our communicative and social abilities. The separations between work and leisure time, between art and work, between advertising and enjoyment, seem about to disappear. We are forced to put our creativity on a back burner in order to function capitalistically, or we have to sell our creativity. Pink-Silver and other carnivalesque forms provide an opportunity to direct our wishes, our desire, our creativity, and our life against the capitalist system during a demonstration, at least temporarily.

Reappropriation of our Corporeality

The new capitalist relations are also linked with another form of the exploitation of our bodies; social and communicative abilities (as feminine abilities) are increasingly in demand. Our bodies (from the saleswoman's smile to social and communicative structures in the office) play a greater and greater role for capitalist exploitation. The gender-specific distribution of labor in production and reproduction has been shifted from the family into society. Experiencing our bodies in oppositional action can thus also be understood as an at least temporary reappropriation of our corporeality.

Making the Construction of Gender Visible

Cheerleaders play a role, especially in American society, in affirming bodily gender. The contrast to the football players, the emphasis on secondary gender characteristics are an affirmation of the gender difference. In this sense, they are integrated in the context of sports events. Demonstrations and direct actions are seemingly gender-neutral contexts, but in the representation it is so - as in language - that maleness coincides with generality, women and femaleness are only supplemental, so to speak: just as the linguistic feminine suffix is added in German (*Demonstrant* = demonstrator/male demonstrator, *Demonstrantin* = female demonstrator) or the male singer or host on a stage is supplemented by female bodies in the background. Pink & Silver and Radical Cheerleading place female attributes in the foreground, thus disturbing the "neutral" demonstration context.

Revolt as Carnival

The right to demonstrate was introduced to direct resistance on the part of certain groups of the population along orderly tracks.

Before that, every demonstration quickly took on the character of a revolt. Thus it was a matter of defending certain public spaces against state power. These liberated spaces, these temporary liberations, were usually transformed directly into a celebration. Current social movements are also always linked with militancy ("violence"). Only when there is a threat that the revolting elements may get out of bounds is there a rift leading to reactions among a broader bourgeois public, which is the first step to the expansion of a movement. When militancy becomes a street fighting ritual, however, it is no longer spontaneous, but organized, which is already a symptom for the demise of a movement, rigidity, an end to the celebration and thus to the resistance movement. Carnivalesque forms of action like Pink & Silver are an element of the anticipation of life that is linked with revolts.

Pink & Silver is a possibility for employing the creativity and corporeality demanded by capitalism outside the realm of traditional forms of representation. In this context, it is possible to question the construction of gender identity and to anticipate elements of lighthearted revolt. However, this demonstration form is only ONE possibility, which can achieve a subversive effect to a limited extent. As soon as these kinds of structures become established, they become part of a controllable representation. Creativity and corporeality are then just a decorative supplement, just as the female frequently is in the dominant society. The subversion of gender roles is also affirmed in ritualization and repetition. For the time being, though, this represents a possibility to break through what is "normal". When it is no longer subversive, then we will have to look for new forms of resistance again.