Chapter 18
Becoming Anonymous:
A Politics of Masking

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ABSTRACT

In a new global topography of cultural movements, repressed layers of populations come to historical consciousness and demand autonomy and sovereignty: many are finding ways to engage through online communities. In the wake of rapid global and social change, groups increasingly organized and operated independently of the control and planning of states are taking shape. Elaborating these so-called "processes" as manifested by those behind Guy Fawkes's mask is a key concern in this study. The author builds theoretical insights on the shifting semiotic vocabulary of the Guy Fawkes Mask used by the niche online community of Anonymous as a disruptive insertion of online visual communication.

INTRODUCTION

*Today I took off my face and became #anonymous
1 am 1 of all.*

A faceless soldier for those with no army #OPEgypt #egypt #jan25 anon #legion (Twitter Handle: Anonymous_2D (Feb 4, 2011 at 23:30.22))

We have the ability to operate with efficiency in the digital realm.

And our protection comes from the fact that we have grown out of the fabric of humanity itself.

We cannot be stopped because we are not restricted by your rules.

We cannot be beaten because we are not playing your game.

Each of us has our Own Path, but each of us shares the Same Goal.(Anonymous YouTube Video, www. youtube.com 2013-05-12 original link deleted)

The screenshot in Figure 1 is one of a multitude of illustrations posted by various online group administrators claiming to be associated or linked with the now infamous online set of actors identifying themselves with the name "Anonymous" or Anons. The image symbolizes some of the key ideas behind this loose collective: identity in/as non-identity, and action as transformative. It also gestures toward the history of the coalescing of this collection of actors in that they had to take up a face upon "emerging" from the Internet. Like other photographic statements posted by Anonymous-related social media users, it makes a reference to "truth."

This image depicts a young white male with a laptop who, in the process of typing, literally has his face drawn in and through the screen. The visage emerging on the other side of the screen is a representation of the now well-known Guy Fawkes Mask (herein referred to as the V-mask). However, we can see that the hair of the subject is continuous, figuratively indicating that it is still *him* essentially. In the image, it is unclear whether the subject's face is only attracted to the screen and pulled into it, or if he is also venturing into that other space, perhaps as a function of the ability or desire to "see the truth." As a parallel, one might ask the same of Lewis Carroll's character, Alice from his children's book, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*. Why does Alice step through the looking glass and *how* does she do it? In the 1871 classic, Alice sighs, "How nice it would be if we could only get through into Looking-glass House! I'm sure it's got, oh! Such beautiful things in it! Let's pretend there's a way of getting through into it…" (1990, p. 4).

Carroll's Alice is clearly very imaginative, her favourite words as noted on the same page are "let's pretend," but she is also very curious. On the oddly ironic day of the fourth of November (i.e. the day before Guy Fawkes Night), Alice is pulled into the mirror by curiosity, but her own imagination is the vehicle that makes it possible. Imagination/ creativity and curiosity also play key roles in the emergence of Anonymous as what might be seen

Figure 1. Originally posted by the Facebook page, "World wide freedom" and then shared by "Anonymous PICTURES." (No comments below, shared 19 times and "liked" 55 times) (Screenshot by C. CAMBRE May 30, 2013. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/AnonPictures.)
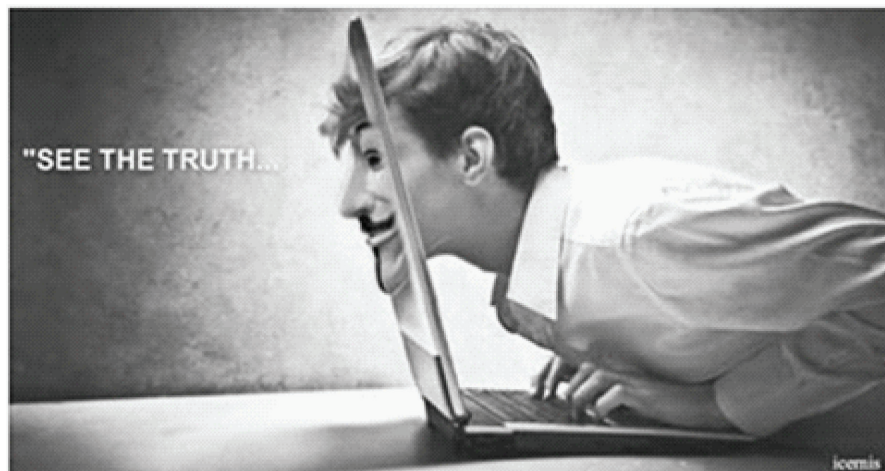
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