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Anonymous, Anonymity, and the ethics of resistance

In my paper I will not try to defend "Anonymous" on moral grounds, but I will try to point out some of the moral questions raised by "Anonymous" in various actions. Especially, I will argue that people acting behind the Guy Fawkes mask should not be seen as being irresponsible even if in the Western tradition of ethics responsibility is often linked with being visible as a person.

Following Coleman and Ralph's work on "Anonymous" (Coleman / Ralph 2011) I will focus on the tensions between the various actors providing and using the collective identity of "Anonymous" as well as the tensions within Liberalism becoming visible in the actions carried out under this collective identity. The later point had been the subject of Coleman's paper on "Hacker practice: Moral genres and the cultural articulation of liberalism" (2008). While Coleman does not refer to her earlier writings herself, I found this paper to be helpful in order to archive a better understanding of the link between _Anonymous_ and the hacking culture.

While hackers do only form a small part of the people making use and upholding the collective identity of "Anonymous", "Anons" are quit skilled in making use of the negative stereotype of the "hacker" and the "internet users" in general. "Anonymity" plays as central role here, because it is often assumed – and argued in computer ethics – that the anonymous use of the internet does undermine our moral character.

In my paper I will therefore focus on the ethics of the mask. The mask is an interesting device in resisting surveillance, because the mask does allow a person to be present and yet makes it harder to identify the person. In this sense is a powerful tool for returning the gaze while keeping one owns face out of sight, hence, preventing people not only from identifying the person but also from reading their faces. It's important to note that the wearer of a mask does not hide, but remains visible. After all, a mask would be of little use if nobody is watching.

Following Agamben's analysis of the link between the mask and the concept of personhood (Agamben 2009), I will explore the importance of the "ethical space" between the "persona" and the person. As Agamben and others have argued modern technologies of identification threaten to close this reflective space. Therefore, Anonymous' use of the Guy Fawkes mask can be understood as an attempt to open up this ethical space again.

Finally, the question will be raised if "Anonymous" actually make use of this ethical space. In

order to address this question I will turn to Nozomi Hayase's essay "Anonymous in Wonderland" (2011), who describes anonymity as "a place of transition to a new face that brings power back to individuals." I would like to conclude that the emphasis given on "transition" in this text does demonstrate that at least some who identify themselves with "Anonymous" are well aware of the danger of mistaking the mask with who they are.

References

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