



DIRECT DEMOCRACY

"I promise you it will be like nothing you have ever seen"

Anonymous has been described as the first Internet-based superconsciousness. It is a loose global coalition with a very diverse agenda. It does not have a leader or controlling party, no hierarchy, no physical headquarters or offices. As one of the hundreds of videos on YouTube explains: you cannot join an idea, you simply share it. One of the characteristics of this decentralized online community is that it always acts in a coordinated manner, and all actions have to be agreed upon. They are frequently referred to as hackers, but they are much more. Its members will probably never meet and there could be hundreds of thousands of them, which means no government can control it. The more sophisticated our communications become, the more powerful Anonymous becomes, because it is not some radical group defending a specific cause. Anonymous, in fact, is all of us, and it will do what we want it to do. It relies on the collective power of its individual participants.

Anonymous defends the fundamental right of access to knowledge, declares that censure and manipulation of information is unacceptable. Social interests are more important than economic ones. Privacy is a right. It advocates peaceful protest. It acts when it considers injustice is being committed and when something apparently needs to be done, anywhere. It is capable of creating huge internet armies in very little time and behaves like an anarchic global digital conscience. It looks chaotic but it isn't.

Anonymous may not have a members list but they do have immense powers, to assist revolutionaries anywhere -like during the Arab Spring- or to bring down websites of multibillion-dollar corporations. They admit sometimes they break laws, but for the greater good they say. So Anonymous also has a somewhat darker side. But don't most heroes? For younger generations, who get most of their culture from the internet, Anonymous could satisfy that need we all have to belong to something bigger than us, a space in our mind that in the past has been occupied by religions, political parties, football teams or nationalities.

Anonymous members or sympathizers have adopted the mask of the charismatic freedom fighter "V", from the movie V for Vendetta, as a symbol; especially when participating in street protests. In the movie, inspired by a comic book hero, "V" fights oppression and uses methods which are not necessarily legal, and plans to destroy the Houses of Parliament in London. He takes over state television to announce his intentions. The mask he wears at all times is inspired in real life conspirator Guy Fawkes, who in participated in a 1605 plan to assassinate Protestant King James.

That same mask has been appearing more and more in protests around the world, from the "acampadas" in Sol, to Boston's Scientology headquarters, and from to Arab countries to demonstrations in London. The mask has come to represent that mega-conscience that transcends borders and cultures and that represents all of us as victims of flawed systems, whether they are political or legal. It has become the face of protest for a younger generation, an icon as powerful and full of meaning as the face of Che Guevara for earlier generations. Thanks to Anonymous the mask now also represents power, a very real power.

Internet, international civic organizations, mobile communication and especially social networks have proved to be the perfect tools for regular citizens everywhere to organize themselves around ideas, principles or demands. Anonymous has become a sort of military arm to complement the rest. And a very efficient one too, as Amazon, Visa, PayPal, MasterCard, and many governments that have suffered their attacks have learnt.

We are witnessing what could be the beginning of the world's first global direct and instantaneous democracy, where responsibility for change rests on the shoulders of millions, not a few. But it is up to us to use these new tools to advance an agenda of improvement, to transform the world we live in. We are no longer merely spectators, we can all be players now. There is a true global conscience being formed and the potential to participate actively and directly in the creation of a New World Order is there.

So... the next time you go to a demonstration and you see a Guy Fawkes mask, remember V's words: "Beneath this mask there is more than flesh. Beneath this mask there is an idea".

Sources:
cnn.com
wikipedia.org
aljazeera.net
anonops.blogspot.com



Above left:
Images from movie V for Vendetta.

Above:
Schoolchildren in Tunisia, protesters in Madrid, demonstrators outside Scientology headquarters in Boston

Below:
Man wearing Guy Fawkes mask in demonstration in London



AND WHERE IS ANONYMOUS?

We are Anonymous. We are Legion. We do not forgive. We do not forget. Expect us.



In 2007, a 53-year-old Internet predator called Chris Forcand, was arrested thanks to a self-described vigilante group called Anonymous who contacted police after having discovered and tracked the man's activities on the Internet.

In 2008 Anonymous attacked the Church of Scientology, denouncing the financial exploitation of church members. Actions included protests outside Church of Scientology centers in the US and in more than 90 cities worldwide.

A Hip Hop news outlet insulted members of Anonymous in one of its forums. Anonymous' response came swiftly, and in stages. They flooded the website's forums which had to shut down; then came the DDoS (distributed denial of service attack); then they defaced the website's main page and stole information from SOHH employees, something called "raping the servers". The website had to be shut down by its administrators.

In 2009 some of its members targeted a website created by a California teen, whose mission was to eliminate "profanity, cussing, swearing and bad language in our society". Hatch's home address, phone number and other personal information were leaked on the Internet. Later that year, members of Anonymous uploaded pornographic videos on to YouTube, many of them disguised as children's videos, and names like "Jonas brothers".

June 2009: Iranian election, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was declared winner, despite vote rigging allegations. After watching thousands of Iranians demonstrating in the streets, Anonymous joined forces with Swedish website The Pirate Bay and with Iranian Hackers to launch a website that allowed for information exchange between the world and Iran, provided resources and support to Iranians protesting in the streets.

To protest the Australian government's plans for ISP-level censorship of the internet, Anonymous took down the prime minister's website with a distributed denial-of-service attack. A second more serious attack codenamed "Operation Titstorm" defaced the prime minister's website and took down the Australian Parliament House website for three days.

Anonymous has carried out attacks against websites of copyright organizations, antipiracy groups and their law firms. To show its might, they attacked Sony, taking down the PlayStation Network and other related PlayStation Websites.

December 2010, WikiLeaks came under intense pressure to stop publishing secret United States diplomatic cables. Anonymous announced its support for WikiLeaks, and launched DDoS attacks against Amazon, PayPal, MasterCard, Visa and others, in retaliation for perceived anti-WikiLeaks actions. It also brought down the Swedish prosecutor's website when WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was arrested in London and refused bail.

The websites of the government of Tunisia were targeted by Anonymous due to censorship of the WikiLeaks documents and the Tunisian Revolution. Tunisians were reported to be assisting in these denial-of-service attacks. Anonymous successfully performed DDoS attacks on eight Tunisian government websites.

During the 2011 Egyptian revolution, Egyptian government websites, along with the website of the ruling National Democratic Party, were hacked into and taken offline by Anonymous. The sites remained offline until President Hosni Mubarak stepped down. In response to the 2011 Libyan civil war, Anonymous hacked into Libyan government websites, and persuaded the host of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's personal website to take it down. Anonymous also released the names and passwords of the email addresses of Middle Eastern governmental officials, in support of the Arab Spring. Countries targeted included officials from Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco.

In early August, Anonymous hacked the Syrian Defense Ministry website and replaced it with a vector image of the pre-Ba'athist flag, a symbol of the pro-democracy movement in the country, as well as a message supporting the 2011 Syrian uprising and calling on members of the Syrian Army to defect to protect protesters.