



At the end of the 1990s, two masked artists haunted the Parisian night. INVADER and ZEVS acted together under the codename @nonymous, leaving traces of their wanderings throughout the urban landscape. In 1999, they clandestinely distributed a film on VHS that recorded their actions. This DVD features the full cut of the film, bonus tracks and a booklet of 56 pages. Those of a fragile nature should abstain!

#### AN ART OF THE PSEUDONYM / p.25 – 34

This is the story of a time when blind spots were still possible. The Twin Towers dominated the New York skyline, Motörhead were shaking the walls of the Bataclan, and the control society was only at its beginning. Cameras, like terrorist attacks, were part of a state of exception. As night fell, art went underground and appeared in subways, on motorway interchanges, on bridges, walls, and the rooftops of buildings, on advertising billboards and bus stops. Like all large urban areas, Paris by night became an anti-museum invaded by faceless artists known only by their pseudonyms, anonymous figures who forced their way into city dwellers' field of vision at the same time as they hid from their gaze. Zevs and Invader were among these clandestine artists. The first, the son of two painters, acted in repertory theatre and practiced graffiti, covering the streets of Paris in clouds and lightning bolts. The second, an art school and university dropout, launched a one-man invasion with his space invader mosaics that descended on the city. The two did not know each other, but in the street their trajectories intersected. Over the course of three years, they carried out actions in underground, nocturnal and alternative spaces in France and abroad, carving out their own path through a dramatically shifting artistic landscape.

When they met in late 1997, the worlds of graffiti and contemporary art had yet to merge – though the pair's collaboration would undeniably contribute to this process. Together, they developed a practice that borrowed the conceptual dimension of contemporary art and the spontaneous gestures and interventions of urban cultures. Their aesthetic project was thus informed by conceptual art, pop art, actionism and post-minimalism, whilst drawing on a digital language that remained unfamiliar to the general public at the time. These new forms became the main repertoire in the artistic language of Zevs and Invader, a dual geometry that brought together the point and the square, the acute angle and the right angle, the curved line and the short stroke. Free and unconstrained, their graphic gesture was also a form of performance, an action, in a period which for them was defined by the urgent imperative to create: to act in order to provoke a reaction, to agitate rather than cogitate.

The duo's collaboration was to be a sustained one. They adopted the moniker '@nonymous', long before the hacktivist movement of the same name emerged – though they too worked in disguise. They filmed themselves using portable equipment years before Instagram and Periscope

made such documentary acts a mass hobby. With a handheld camcorder, they recorded their urban actions as they went, paying no heed to framing or sound quality. Created using archival footage, much of it never before shown, @nonymous99 brings together sections of their clips in experimental, found footage works, low-tech U.F.O.s whose furious, punk-inflected montage produces a visual magma where shadowy grey areas give way to dazzling sequences and where snatches of voices, of cries, and of life jostle with synthetic sounds and silent streets. Published on cassettes in an edition of 300 and distributed clandestinely, the film spread like a virus or a bacterial counterculture caught in the wind. It had no more meaning than its creators sought to instil in it, but stands as an uncompromising record of the first steps of two acolytes united in the creation and the genesis of an art that did not yet speak its name.

Invader and Zevs declared their anonymity by way of a graphic attack. By appropriating the typographic codes of major brands to compose their name, @nonymous, they hijacked the techniques and strategies of commerce. This tour de force became a kind of signature for Zevs in particular, who 'liquidated' the logos of capital with dripping paint and, in an extension of that same principle, sprayed a red mark between the eyes of the models that graced their advertisements. A bullet in the head rather than the hole between the legs that the models seem to suggestively offer, a radical mockery of the market and its numerous toxins. Invader, meanwhile, became known for his appropriation of a product of the videogame industry, a free gesture that pointed backwards to dada that interrogated the means of diffusion and communication of a nascent digital language. As pictograms, icons, GIFs and pixelated forms spread across screens and began to penetrate imaginations, @nonymous mined them for the basis of a new plastic and aesthetic language to come. Integrating the still novel 'at sign' was another powerful act of graphic appropriation that situated their anonymity in a reflection around the pseudo-identities that had begun to proliferate across the virtual

world, and evoked both a clandestine freedom and the possibilities of remote manipulation. Along with Space Invader and Zevs, a number of other hacked alter egos including Mystery, Vnarc le virus, The Shadow Flasher and the Serial Ad Killer were subsumed under the generic name @nonymous. Through them, these two artists formed a shadowy duo of vigilantes, and became superheroes of the French underground.

Infiltrating the streets and the subway, the duo snuck their cameras under all kinds of radars and slipped into the interstices of the visible to better reveal its blind spots. Having laid his hands on a license plate stamping machine, Zevs replaced the plates on numerous police cars. In this game of the visible, they were always one step ahead of their opponents. By outlining cracks in advertising display cases or the shadows of street furniture with silver spray-paint (Electric Shadows) in a nod to crime scene clichés, Zevs made manifest that which would have otherwise escaped our attention, underlining those many fugitive things that in some ways resemble the two artists. Invader meanwhile succeeded in his mission of launching a total yet nearly invisible invasion: it would take a bird's eye view to realize that the space invaders tiled on the walls across Montpellier together formed a monstrous, city-sized invader that appeared to have swallowed the urban area whole. These two masters of secretive art preferred to work unauthorized in abandoned apartment blocks and alternative spaces, and only entered museum spaces to disrupt them: Invader carried out an intrusion into the Louvre that was at once discreet and spectacular, virally infecting the museum's picture rails to become the first living artist to exhibit in the institution, forcing his way into the canons of art history like an armed bandit.

Their works exploded into public spaces like letter bombs\*. The film's montage indeed installs a foreboding sense of urgency that anticipates the security-fixated paranoia of the West in the era of global terrorism and mass terror attacks. The anxiety-inducing aesthetic

that they manipulate points to a humanity that has been captured by the apparatuses of power and the flows of media. The actions of @nonymous act in their own way as targeted interventions that trip up the control system by twisting its own code into a feedback loop, as well as disrupting the norms of exhibition spaces. In a performance at Main d'oeuvres in Saint-Ouen in 2000, they daubed the word 'ERROR' in vast black letters at the top of a wall as if to offer a counter-proposition to the white cube and its reassuring neutrality. The pair seized upon the societal notion of insecurity and transformed it into an artistic method that becomes all the more powerful when deployed against unsuspecting audiences. In their pared-down performances, the most basic expression of @nonymous emerges: crying out, making oneself present and then disappearing, eliciting reactions with no need for public speeches. Signalling one's presence and making one's mark with smash-and-grab actions is an art that seems to require no skill on the part of the artists. From the Café de la gare to the place de l'Opéra, @nonymous shout into the ears of traffic wardens, surprise passers-by and people sitting on benches or using cash machines, wrong-foot the customers of a shoe shop or even pigeons pecking at the ground. In @nonymous<sup>99</sup>, they make fun of the stunned faces of their victims using a box of visual tricks including freeze frames, voice distortion, rewinds, cuts, loops, glitches and slow motion, introducing a comic distance into the film. Hapless onlookers become anti-heroes in spite of themselves, shaken out of their habitual social behaviours, their faces fixed in open-mouthed shock, reluctant smiles or angry grimaces.

As with many of their precursors, @nonymous were met with a good deal of resistance and incomprehension by the establishment, working as they did long before the emergence of the international street art movement and the recognition that this earned for their practice. What would later become street art was then an illegal art, as well as a theoretical, legal, and cultural blind spot. Even though their crimes were victimless, @nonymous risked arrest by

the police and were forced to affirm the artistic dimension of their often-illicit actions. One scene features an exchange with an English police officer filmed in London in 1999, just after Invader had tiled a mosaic by the entrance to a public library while Zevs spray-painted a piece in front of the building. A group of police officers interrupts them as they go about completing their work, and Invader secretly films them throughout their questioning. A search of their bags uncovers silver paint, stickers, and, more unexpectedly for the bobbies, a tube of mosaic glue. Unable to conceive of something as inoffensive as a mosaic as an act of vandalism, the police send the two artists on their way after they promise to remove the painting at ground level. One of the arguments put forward by the police officer - "It's not artistic, it's criminal" - points squarely to the ambiguity of the artists' positions. These two outlaw agitators nonetheless transformed their transgression into an artistic practice. Through their appropriation (of video game characters and luxury brand logos), their invasion of public spaces and their contamination of the cityscape, @nonymous asserted their own legitimacy. Criminal or artistic? Why choose? For them, dissidence was the most powerful means of vandalizing not only walls but imaginations. Thanks to them, the @nonymous have since become famous.

Florian Gaité  
September 2019

\* Here we might recall one of their collective works of art which took the form of an imitation bomb complete with countdown timer that was exhibited in an empty apartment in Nation, Paris at the Plan d'évacuation exhibition organized with artist Etienne Zucker in winter 1999. At this same exhibition, they presented a cupboard that was duct-taped shut and from within which a recording of a man calling for help could be heard.

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In late 1998, the duo were contacted by the erotic magazine NewLook. Amused by the proposition, they accepted. In the interview that followed, Invader called himself Mystery and invited the journalist to follow his invasion of the Louvre, while Zevs switched the license plates of police cars parked in front of the headquarters of the Parisian police.

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**ARTISTS OR TERRORISTS?**

After the taggers and graffiti artists who repainted walls throughout the 80s, now artists of the third kind are taking over the city. Their works are everywhere, even if you haven't noticed them yet... One leads a charge of space invaders to conquer Paris. The other unscrews the license plates of police cars to replace them with others of his own invention. Mystery and Zevs each have their own style, but they have one thing in common: risk. And they were ready to prove it for 'Newlook', with raids on the Louvre and on the car park of the headquarters of the Paris police.

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**WHY THE LOUVRE?**

The Louvre, one of the world's most prestigious museums, is an ideal place to ask Mystery the "Artist or terrorist?" question: "Though this action might shock some people, I think it actually fits in quite well with an old tradition of representing battles and invasions. And it also nicely demonstrates the idea of moving from the virtual to the real in which the museum becomes a playful space, a video game screen."

**INTERVIEW****Mystery, Sower of Space Invaders**

**NEWLOOK:** Who are these Space Invaders and why do we see them here and there across the city?

**MYSTERY:** They're little creatures from space that are invading Paris. They were inspired by the video game of the same name where players have to shoot down an army of aliens who have come to invade the Earth. This game was part of the very first generation of videogames. Its 'prewar' aesthetic features large pixels whose forms can be reproduced with the mosaic tiles that Mystery cements on walls.

**Who is Mystery?**

That's my pseudonym, and it's also the name of the flying saucer that hovers over the game. No one knows how many points you get for bringing it down, so it's called Mystery.



**And why this character ?**

To begin with, my approach looked for an original way of getting around the traditional circuits of art, galleries and the other spaces of contemporary art. I had already worked on the theme of the virus, and I was interested in parasitizing, urban appropriation. People were interested from the get go. They wondered what it meant, where it came from, what the point of it was, whether it was dangerous... So I decided to reorient the process towards something more playful, like a videogame scaled up to the level of the city. And so Mystery, the father of the Space Invaders, naturally appeared. But you'll understand why I prefer to remain anonymous.

**What is your favourite territory to work in ?**

The planet. Paris is just the beginning. The Space Invaders won't be limited to this city, or to this country, or even to urban architecture. They're far more advanced, they'll infiltrate everywhere, including your magazine, and the internet, where you can track their evolution across the entire world ([www.space-invaders.com](http://www.space-invaders.com)).

**And how does the invasion go down ?**

At night, mostly, when the city sleeps. There is a different atmosphere then, more conducive to this kind of action. In fact, that's how I met Zevs when he was out tagging. We both had a video camera in our pockets. Since then, we have created a few films together, and we are going to publish a video under the @nonymous label that'll be sold 'under the counter', of course. To go back to the space invaders, you can find them more or less everywhere, on busy thoroughfares or in tucked-away corners. That said, they do obey precise rules. Their development takes place in three stages. Level 1, when they appear. They're vulnerable, and hidden beneath plastic film. Level 2, the plastic falls away and reveals a unique type of Space Invader. Level 3, if one of them is ripped off, then Mystery will spray a stencil near their remains that says '10 pts'.

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**INTERVIEW****Zevs, Planter of Plates****NEWLOOK : Who is Zevs ?**

Zevs : He is the supreme god, the God of gods, actually... mythological speaking, of course ! Zevs is also the name of a train, on the Parisian RER that goes back and forth along the line A. And it was this train that almost crushed me when I was younger and I was painting a piece by the tracks with a friend. So you can understand why, since then, this RER has a particular significance for me. Its image is so strong in my mind that I sign my work Zevs !

**So you began with graffiti ?**

Yes, I followed my father who would go and spray stencils on street corners. He painted my astrological sign : scorpio. And that made me want to go out and conduct my own experiments on the street.

**And that's your favourite territory to work in?**

No, that would be the Earth, the planet that I live on. I really like land art [where artists intervene on large scales on natural and architectural formations] and everything that resembles it. That's by far what inspires me most at the moment. I do all this to be seen, because a work only takes form when it can be seen by everyone. So I started to put my name all over the streets so it could be seen by as many people as possible. And now, I want to use other mediums. I'd like to put my name on hot air balloons, on big buildings... I don't want to just use spray paint.

**So you've got some new techniques?**

Yes, for example number plates, which I switch out on cars. In fact, that's the beginning of my land art... Sometimes, I sign car crashes, indicating what time the crash took place!

**How do you know when there's been a crash?**

At the moment, I walk around Paris with a scanner, a DIY radio made by a friend that lets me pick up high frequencies, those of the police, the fire brigade, the ambulance service... and I always have a few number plates on me with different times on them, and when I arrive on the scene of the accident, I switch the plates and film the whole atmosphere. Sometimes I even film the car getting crushed! All that to tell a story, a short film that retells the story of the moment when 'the lightning struck'! Here it's really the instant that counts.

**And what about changing the plates on police cars?**

Well, there I'm kind of making fun of them, because 'the police are always wrong'! Actually, when I changed the plates of the cars parked at the depot opposite the Palais de justice in Paris where the major criminals go on their way to prison - it was a kind of nod to them. And seeing a dozen police cars driving around Paris with my name on them, well, it's pretty pleasing...

**But you have other projects?**

Yes, film projects, because I think it's a really good medium and can reach lots of people. Other land art projects, as well, but I'd need funding. I have some quite new ideas. In New York, with all those buildings, you get pretty close to the sky! In Paris, there's La Défense, as well...

**And what's the legality of all this?**

With regards to the police, or when I do something illegal, I'm an artist. It's not terrorism... zevsism is more like it!

**Do you think you'll exhibit your work?**

No, my scene is anywhere but galleries. Actually, I am who I am, but I am no one, I go where I like!

Interviews by Gérald Wassen

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## @NONYMOUS IN LONDON

In June 1999, @anonymous ventured beyond their habitual terrain to London. Invader installed forty or so mosaics in the city while Zevs traced out numerous shadows. The long, final sequence of the film @anonymous99 was filmed during this trip.

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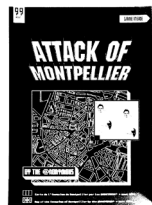
In summer 1999, @anonymous set to work in the city of Montpellier. The September issue of the magazine Technikart records this episode.

## ANONYMOUS ATTACK

### A successful assault on the city gates

We don't yet know if there is a link between the recent cataclysmic storm and the intervention of @anonymous (the collective of artist-terrorists, Space Invaders and Zevs). All we have is a message left by the duo : "@anonymous report : Attack of Montpellier = successfull" [sic]. However, the site panoplie.org seems to have uncovered a clue thanks to some detective work in which they mapped the sites of each intervention. A paper version of the map is also available upon request. Other attacks to follow on [idez.net/anonymous](http://idez.net/anonymous) and [space-invaders.com](http://space-invaders.com)

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Published in August 1999, the map of the invasion of Montpellier recorded the interventions of @anonymous in the city. Linked together in the order indicated by the map, the sites reveal city-sized figures.

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In late 1999, the duo created @anonymous99, a film which was clandestinely circulated on 300 VHS tapes. One ended up in the hands of Patrick Williams, a journalist at Technikart who dedicated an article to the film in the November issue.

Intrigued by the film, the dandy journalist Ariel Wizman contacted @anonymous and gave them carte blanche to create a sequence for his programme 'L'appartement' that was broadcast each week on Canal+. The duo responded with a series of cries and shouts emitted at sites throughout the capital.

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## VIDEO ATTACK

@nonymous filmed their misdemeanours.

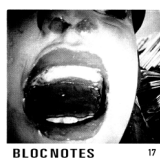
Now you just have to find a copy of the tape.

The video of the month isn't available for viewing: it is secretly doing the rounds, passing under the table from one person to another in the contemporary art scene. It seems as if the law of our age holds that anything that counts must be hidden. We're talking about a video by @nonymous, a duo of urban artists whose interventions have been popping up on the walls and paving stones of Paris for over a year now. Space Invaders, the more famous of the pair, sticks his pixelated figures on street corners following an irresistible viral logic. Zevs, meanwhile, waits until nightfall before outlining the shadows of street furniture (billboards, bus shelters, etc.) with silver spray paint. By day, busy passers-by are left nonplussed by these mysterious lines on the ground. But at night, the streetlights come on and all of a sudden, a shadow appears and fills its silvery vessel. Cosmic, right?

That's enough poetry. @nonymous apparently weren't satisfied with their successive invasions of Paris, Tokyo, New York and Montpellier. So they also filmed themselves as they went about committing their acts of vandalism or attacking their contemporaries, with all the evidence included in this very satisfying tape. We see the pair hooded, arrested in the middle of the night by the police, ("But sir, we didn't know that it was forbidden to paint"), or shouting into the ears of two traffic wardens and filming their terrified faces... The images are black and white, the soundtrack strange and aggressive. The result? A film that is at once goofy and unsettling. @nonymous show themselves to be true brats, slackers for a post-apocalyptic age who have decided to adopt a post-situationist logic and fuck with their cyberworld. Why? No reason. And that's what's disturbing. And that's what we like about this. No surprise, then, that their tape is impossible to find. After all, do clever minds leave a trace?

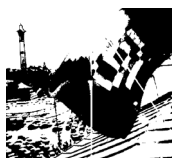
Patrick Williams

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Invited by the art magazine BlocNotes to create a double-page spread for a denim brand, Invader and Zevs wore the clothes they had received from the brand on their heads and produced this image.

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In 2000, the installation of a flag on the roofs of Bastille was one of @nonymous' final interventions.