



# Licence to Mask

Thoughts on the Venetian Anonymity Concept and its Relevance for the Internet Community




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## Starting Point

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- ✦ Imagine that you were walking around in your hometown wearing a mask hiding your face, your body and your clothes.
  - ✦ How would people on the street react?
  - ✦ Would you be able to do business?
  - ✦ How would you feel joining a neighborhood meeting that way?
- ✦ In old Venice, wearing masks during daily life and work was common among the citizens. The use of masks was based on an anonymity concept which was regulated by government and widely accepted for several hundred years.
- ✦ Could it be suitable as a model for modern internet anonymity and pseudonymity concepts?

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## The Bauta

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- ✦ The mask and disguise that made “incognito living” possible was called “Bauta and Volto”.
- ✦ Etymology: Same root as German “behüten”, “to protect”
- ✦ Hood, made of silk, covered the head down to the shoulders
- ✦ Face covered by “volto” or “larve”
- ✦ Tricorn hat

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## How it looked like

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Pietro Longhi  
„Il Ridotto“  
(The Casino)

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## How it looked like

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Source: [www.magicofvenezia.com](http://www.magicofvenezia.com)

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## How it was used

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A mask for daily life...

- ✦ Leaves mouth part free. Speaking, eating and drinking was possible.
- ✦ Hides clothing, no problem to walk swiftly.
- ✦ Eyes unhindered. Person behind the mask sees everything.

Commonly used for...

- ✦ A visit to the Casino (mask mandatory)
- ✦ Different kinds of adventures (Think about Casanova!)
- ✦ Certain types of governmental events (conferences, elections – mask mandatory to guarantee equality throughout target group)


Used by noble citizens of Venice only (those who were accountable, credit-worthy and had at least some money).

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## Bauta – from the user's perspective

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- ✘ Convenient device
- ✘ Anonymity guaranteed
- ✘ “I can hide what I want to hide like all of my peers and friends”
- ✘ “Negligible, understandable restrictions, I will obey them”
- ✘ No limitation of business or personal life
- ✘ Useful for first negotiations with merchants from abroad – without being in danger of getting involved too easily
- ✘ Respect guaranteed – mask proved to a certain extend, that user was Venetian citizen
- ✘ Device used for democratic elections and political negotiations
- ✘ “I know when to mask and when to unmask”
- ✘ When I talk, no listener will immediately relate my arguments to my personal situation.

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## Bauta – seen from the outside


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Venetians and friends of Venice:

- ✘ Venetian citizen, peer
- ✘ Anonymity is a right guaranteed by law
- ✘ No weapons
- ✘ It was clear how to meet and greet (“Signora Maschera”)
- ✘ It was clear when to unmask
- ✘ “He or she has something to hide, but everyone has, so it's OK”
- ✘ Masked person won't behave antisocial

Others:

- ✘ Suspicion – “They must have something to hide, and that must be unethical!”
- ✘ “They will behave antisocial, so beware!”
- ✘ “Nation of pirates and hedonists!” (Compare this to Internet geeks...)

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### Areas of comparison

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- ✘ How may internet internet anonymity regulation look like?
- ✘ Do we need one?
- ✘ Can restrictions be minimized like in old Venice?
- ✘ How do we know when to unmask?
- ✘ Can we put trust in those who wear masks?
- ✘ How can we search for “weapons”? Do we have to do so?
- ✘ Who may take the role of Venetian government? Banks, which were preferred by many users in the past, are not those trusted organizations any more...
- ✘ Will today's society understand that acting anonymously does not necessarily mean being anti-social?

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### Areas of comparison

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## Areas of comparison

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- “Anonymous” group, formed by members of anonymous imageboards – when entering reality, they wear masks.
- But why do avatars wear masks???



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