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Research article

Politics of Usernames

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Abstract

We interact with usernames every day to communicate on the Internet. We are so familiar with this practice that it seems banal and we therefore fail to see the political implications associated with it. This article aims to help uncover this political dimension of the username. At first, the article follows the argumentation of two texts by Jacques Derrida, from where I establish a connection between the phenomena of proper names and usernames. Derrida deconstructed the founding act of American Independence to work out the role of the signature of proper names. He does the same with Friedrich Nietzsche's proper name to show that proper names play a far greater role in political processes than we might expect. In this context, the modern state is disclosed as an archive and administrator of proper names, while the new phenomenon of the username evades this state power and itself has the institutional potential to become powerful. Because access by the state through verification of names fails with the username, people are more difficult to identify in digital space. The state archive therefore can't exercise political power over usernames. At the same time, the lack of verification of a username creates the potential for new institutional forces which leads to a conflict with the modern state. This topic is illustrated using the username Q and the politically explosive QAnon movement. Lastly the article points to the conclusion that the phenomenon of usernames is shifting our institutional structures and questioning our beliefs about the modern state, identity and truth.

Keywords: Username; Politics; Signature; Jacques Derrida; Verification; QAnon; Institution

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Научная статья

Политика имен пользователей

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Abstract

Мы взаимодействуем с именами пользователей каждый день, чтобы общаться в Интернете. Мы настолько знакомы с этой практикой, что она кажется банальной, и поэтому мы не видим связанных с ней политических последствий. Данная статья призвана помочь раскрыть политический аспект имени пользователя. Вначале статья следует за аргументацией двух текстов Жака Дерриды, где устанавливается связь между феноменом имен собственных и имен пользователей. Деррида деконструировал основополагающий акт американской независимости, чтобы выяснить роль подписи собственных имен. Он делает то же самое с собственным именем Фридриха Ницше, чтобы показать, что собственные имена играют гораздо большую роль в политических процессах, чем мы могли бы ожидать. В этом контексте современное государство раскрывается как архив и администратор имен собственных, в то время как новое явление имени пользователя уклоняется от этой государственной власти и само имеет институциональный потенциал, чтобы стать силой. Поскольку государство не выполняет проверку соответствия имен пользователей, людей труднее идентифицировать в цифровом пространстве. Следовательно, государственный архив не может осуществлять политическую власть над именами пользователей. В то же время отсутствие проверки имени пользователя создает потенциал для новых институциональных сил, что приводит к конфликту с современным государством. Эта тема проиллюстрирована с использованием имени пользователя Q и политически опасного движения QAnon. Наконец, в статье делается вывод о том, что феномен имен пользователей меняет наши институциональные структуры и ставит под сомнение наши представления о современном состоянии, идентичности и истине.

Keywords: Имя пользователя; Политика; Подпись; Жак Деррида; Верификация; QAnon

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BANALITY OF PRACTICE

Communication in the 21st century is increasingly shifting to the digital space of the Internet. Whether social media platforms or email accounts, countless texts are produced and messages are exchanged every day, including a large part of public forms of communication. The base of technology for the Internet poses a problem for these forms of exchange. How can it be ensured that behind the discourse of participants, there is a binding identity?

The answer to that so far seems to be: the username. This is a name that shows from which user the communication originates and to whom it is to be assigned. The best example of this form of name is the email address which is mostly used in private conversations. Other usernames appear in connection with forums, boards and social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook.¹ On these websites, you are asked to identify yourself in a very rudimentary form in order to create a name with which all further actions on the respective platforms are linked and identified. The practice of the username seems very familiar to us now, we use it every day in various forms. We are increasingly creating new names and discarding old ones. Our dealings with them have become so common that we use these names to make statements or publish parts of our private lives. Can we now say that the username is just a technical solution to a practical problem? Or is something deeper changing here? Are we even shifting basic conceptions of our political institutions? This sounds like a broad claim for such a banal phenomenon of our everyday life. But we are increasingly coming across the effects of usernames. These are effects with a political dimension with thousands of people networking on the Internet, founding movements and carrying out political fights. If you only assign a technical function to the username, you fail to recognize its power. Although we have already known it, we have been using a form of a name for a very long time that makes it apparent how usernames can be understood – these are proper or given names.

All these questions about usernames are not new, they originated with the beginning of human communication. Regarding acts of speech or physical acts, it is implied that someone is addressed. Especially, when people are strangers to each other or when common goals have to be pursued. Without a basis of trust, without being able to address something to someone and without being aware of an identity, the complex forms of communication and general exchange between humans cannot work. Therefore, the proper name plays an exceptional role in all of these processes. When someone expresses oneself publicly, one is always accompanied by his or her personal name as an expression of one's identity. My name Matthias Heß accompanies this article and assigns the content to myself. I enter a discourse with this name and through that name part of my identity is revealed. Proper names are so closely linked to personality that we sometimes forget how we interact with them when we speak them or write them down. Similar to the username we are mostly unaware of how we use it and which dimensions are affected by it. The aim of this article is to show that the

¹ For other aspects and further reading about the relationship between social media and politics: (Bailey, 2021; Calderaro, 2018).



username, nowadays, plays a similar role as that of the proper name in the pre-digital age. Both phenomena have a great effect on how the username initiates profound changes in dealing with institutions and the evolution of states. To illustrate my points, I relate to the thoughts of Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), from two of his famous writings, *Otobiographies* and *Declarations of Independence*.

PARADOX OF SIGNATURES

Derrida's papers deal with American Independence, and the authorship of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). With the help of these cases, it will become clear why proper names, like usernames, should not be overlooked as banalities. Let's start with the phenomenon of the proper name, the name given to children by their parents, the one recorded in a passport but also the name states registered in their laws. First, I would like to point out that all these proper names can be categorized and are therefore just words (Derrida & Kittler, 2000, p. 67). So, if Derrida addresses the proper name, he notes that it is only a word like any other, but when written down it develops a power that has to be deciphered. This power carries a political dimension, which Derrida explains using the example of the American Declaration of Independence. Here, proper names in the form of signatures become essential to the self-empowering act of the signing people. Thus, raising the question of: "How is a State made or founded, how does a State make or found itself? And independence? And the autonomy of one which both gives itself, and signs, its own law? Who signs all these authorizations to sign?" (Derrida, 1986, p. 13)

Considering this example, the founding fathers signed a declaration that proclaims a new state and breaks away from an old one, but on what basis? The signatures on the Declaration of Independence seem almost inconspicuous, as a side note to the events which follow it. But Derrida turns his attention to this very moment, the moment of signing, the exact moment everything started. The course of history seems to have something to do with the signature and its unnoticeable power. Of course, this independence was also physically fought for and a chain of actions confirmed this act. Still, no one denies that the official independence began with the signing of the declaration, with proper names written down. The question which then rises is, how is something like autonomy created through the act of a signature? For Derrida, this leads to a paradoxical process:

But this people does not exist. They do not exist as an entity, it does not exist, before this declaration, not as such. If it gives birth to itself, as free and independent subject, as possible signer, this can hold only in the act of the signature. The signature invents the signer. This signer can only authorize him- or herself to sign once he or she has come to the end [parvenu au vout], if one can say this, of his or her own signature, in a sort of fabulous retroactivity. That first signature authorizes him or her to sign. (Derrida, 1986, p. 10)

Here, people are signing on behalf of a nation, which officially did not exist prior to the act of that signing. Thus, the act of founding is based on a paradox. The signature



creates a subject that did not exist in this form before it was signed. At the same time, the subject authorizes oneself through the signature and declares oneself to be autonomous. The question of autonomy is not easy to answer. Since the same subject did not exist before the signature, on which it is based. However, it cannot be stated that a signature alone has autonomy without there being a subject for which it is responsible for. “This obscurity, this undecidability between, let's say, a performative structure and a constative structure, is required in order to produce the sought-after effect” (Derrida, 1986, p. 9).

Derrida clearly shows how this seemingly simple act leads to an aporia. The American people could not exist as such, without the signature on the declaration. The signature in return would be meaningless without the subject of the American people. The aporia arises from the fact that both the signature and the subject indicate the same autonomy. The first impulse is, therefore, to break down the whole act chronologically and find a solution. One could say that the signature produces the subject who then proclaims autonomy. But from what does the signature get the autonomy of signing? Concluding that the chronological approach does not lead to a single origin, Derrida pursues a different explanation of the relations: “In short, there are only countersignatures in this process. There is a differential process here because there is a countersignature, but everything should concentrate itself in the simulacrum of the instant” (Derrida, 1986, p. 11). With “countersignatures” Derrida describes nothing different than the mutual conditionality without autonomy would not exist. The co-dependencies meet at the moment of signing. In the case of the Declaration of Independence, would the American people exist without the signatures? It would be a subject but not the same because the signature creates an entity that is outside the subject, that in disregard to time proclaims that the subject exists. The signatures create a base for mutual reference, so that autonomy can develop from this relation. The autonomy is the mutual conditionality between subject and signature. This paradox cannot be resolved by looking at it one way but by the interplay of the two.

The interplay between subject and signature can be put into another light, so that the autonomy can be identified more precisely. To this end, Derrida turns to a new example. The signing of the Declaration of Independence, to which we will come back later, is replaced by Friedrich Nietzsche's personal name in the form of his signature underneath his texts. The mechanics between subject and signature remain the same. What happens between subject and signature is described in this context by Derrida with the metaphor in from of a debt²: “[...] yes, yes, I approve, I sign, I subscribe to this acknowledgment of the debt incurred toward 'myself', 'my-life' – and I want it to return” (Derrida, 1985, p. 14). The signature as such vouches for the signatory which contains a debt for the signed. The Founding Fathers pledged a debt on behalf of the American people, and there signatures are evidence of that debt. Just as Friedrich Nietzsche's signature put a debt on his person, which in return is connected to everything he wrote.

² The word “debt” translated into German means “Schuld”. Interestingly, the German word has two meanings. Which are linked to one another in a surprising sense. “Schuld” can mean “debt” in an economic sense as well as “guilt” in a moral one. Both meanings resonate. For clarity, I will use “debt” in a more economic sense and “moral debt” as the ethical equivalent.



How does autonomy fit into this example? After all, a debt acts as something binding and at the first glance it may not promote autonomy, but this is where the secret of the interplay between the signature and the signer lies. The signature forms a new entity that refers to the subject and ties it to its context. The signature now exists independently from the signer. This bond outlasts the lifetime of the signer and it never loses its tie to the 'debt' because the signature is in the form of a proper name. Autonomy in this sense means the ability of a subject to inscribe oneself in a new context, to escape his or her corporeality and to create something that lies outside oneself. With the proper name, the signature guarantees the existence of the signer long after his death. The ambiguity of this debt lies in the fact that it creates equal condition for debtors and creditors. As a result, granting oneself autonomy means binding oneself. One's independence lies in the ability to make oneself debtor and creditor. This is how autonomy is to be understood in the case of Nietzsche's signature. This analysis seems irrelevant at first, but the signature is part of our everyday life as a piece of banality. Let us now refer back to the act of the Declaration of Independence and Friedrich Nietzsche's signature, in order to understand its deeper meaning.

To accomplish this, one has to understand the context in which signatures are placed. If an intellectual work is signed by Friedrich Nietzsche, we can assign it directly to him and a specific historical time because the signature is his proper name. The entire work of Friedrich Nietzsche only becomes his, when the texts and contexts are linked to his persona through the signature. The proper name of the American people can be said to have a similar effect. Which people is one referring to? The people who used this term for themselves in 1776 or the people who still call themselves this people's nation today? It now becomes clear, what Derrida meant, when he is alluding to the politics of the proper name. The proper name gains a political dimension through the autonomy of the act of signing. It is a fixed point, which is able to connect different contexts with one another. Therefore, Derrida sees practical consequences:

The signature of every American citizen today depends, in fact and by right, on this indispensable confusion. The constitution and the laws of your country somehow guarantee the signature, as they guarantee your passport and the circulation of subjects and of seals foreign to this country, of letters, of promises, of marriages, of checks – all of which may be given occasion or asylum or right. (Derrida 1986, p. 11)

Political acts can be carried out in the proper name of the American people, since the moment the declaration was signed. This proper name has influenced the fate of people living in its country. In 1776 signatories created something that, regardless of them and the context of their time, has endured for centuries and continues to exert immense political influence. The debt that Derrida speaks of continues to today because it still binds the citizens to the institution of state. If one could argue that a proper name cannot have such a power, one would only have to think of the existence of the American people. However, it is important to note that this is a special case. The signatures under the Declaration of Independence have a genuine political character. However, this does not mean that the autonomy of the signatures is irrelevant, it only



makes it clear that it fell on fertile ground. Using Friedrich Nietzsche as an example, Derrida makes it even clearer how under other circumstances, proper names develop a political dimension. He writes in regards to Nietzsche:

He never knows in the present, with present knowledge or even in the present of *Ecce Homo*, whether anyone will ever honor the inordinate credit that he extends to himself in his name, but also necessarily in the name of another. The consequences of this are not difficult to foresee: if the life that he lives and tells to himself ('autobiography,' they call it) cannot be his life in the first place except as the effect of a secret contract, an indebtedness, an alliance or annulus, then as long as the contract has not been honored — and it cannot be honored except by another, for example, by you — Nietzsche can write that his life is perhaps a mere prejudice [...]. (Derrida, 1985, p. 9)

Here, the role of the creditor plays an important role. Nietzsche's work puts him in debt, his personal name stands for the content of his texts and thus burdens him with the extent of his thoughts. Whether this credit can be paid is no longer up to him, his texts stand for themselves with his signature. His personal name comes into the public eye through his texts, and thus they gain a political dimension. What the subject Friedrich Nietzsche really thought is thus detached from himself without losing the reference to him. From this point on it can still be said that Friedrich Nietzsche wrote the text, but the whole mechanism develops a dynamic of its own, that goes beyond the subject. Derrida draws a far-reaching conclusion from this: “[...] the effects or structure of a text are not reducible to its 'truth,' to the intended meaning of its presumed author, or even its supposedly unique and identifiable signatory” (Derrida, 1985, p. 29).

The text with the signature has become detached from the author, the proper name indicates a bond, but simultaneously creates the autonomy of the text. The significance of this can hardly be better discussed with any other author than Nietzsche. Derrida remarks somewhat cynically, that Nietzsche died before his name and gained a certain fame. Therefore, it is sufficient enough to consider the context in which his texts were placed after his death (Derrida, 2000, p. 51). Whether it was National-Socialism or other ideologies, Nietzsche's words were placed in many contexts and used as the basis for various worldviews. The question of the truth of the text does not arise, as Derrida remarks, it is more a question of what was made of these texts and how the proper name Friedrich Nietzsche has been adopted to each different context. What does this say about Nietzsche's debt, about the credit he is burdening himself with? He could have never known whether or not his thoughts would be honored the way he originally intended them to be, or who would honor them, because that was beyond his power of influence. His personal name will always be linked to the debt of his work, the debt that he placed on himself. One must not misunderstand debt here, it is not the moral debt of his work towards other people, it is the debt towards oneself that serves as the potential for other interpretations. It therefore remains open, who will pay off this debt and honor Nietzsche in their own way. But what makes Nietzsche's writings and signatures so special is that he did not sign any genuine political texts. Nietzsche was not in the same position as the founding fathers; he did not sign any declarations. Nevertheless, his



writings developed a political dimension, which seems all the more surprising the closer you look at it. The same could be said of all historical figures and generally of all proper names, that appear as signatures. It is the outstanding feature of the proper name as a signature, of one's autonomy towards one's signer. This makes it possible to place the signature and their linked documents in new contexts, in order to develop new dynamics.

THE SECRET OF VERIFICATION

The phenomenon of the proper name has thus been dealt with in the form of the signature and how a political dimension can grow from it. Let us now take a look at the username, for which my thesis states, that it works similarly to the proper name. Both phenomena are indications of entities and at the same time are fixed points of communication. Proper names and usernames bind statements to entities. But to differentiate the phenomenon of the username from that of the proper name, one has to work out their clearest difference: the verification. For this, it is necessary to understand who or what is verifying? This is where the institution comes into play. Institutions, such as the modern state vouch for the names of their residents. State authorities issue passports, marked with proper names and people prove their identity with government documents. The institution state, thus ensures that a person has a proper name, that statements are not only assigned to an anonymous entity, but to a person who is able to sign. Verified by the same institution, which was founded by signatures. Here, one can be amazed when taking a look at the genealogy of these mutual connections, in Derrida's (1986) words:

Although in principle an institution—in its history and in its tradition, in its offices [permanence] and thus in its very institutionality—has to render itself independent of the empirical individuals who have taken part in its production, although it has in a certain way to mourn them or resign itself to their loss [faire son deuil], even and especially if it commemorates them, it turns out, precisely by reason of the structure of instituting language, that the founding act of an institution—the act as archive as well as the act as performance—has to maintain within itself the signature. (p. 8)

In modern states, the signature is institutionally verified, and like I mentioned the state itself is based on the act of signatures. Derrida mentions the archive, which in its way can be understood as the collection and preservation of the signatures. It seems as if the state as an archive is locking away this concatenation of signatures and thus obscuring the economy of names. At the same time, however, the founding act is reactivated again and again in the form of a signature. It was mentioned earlier that the signatures of American citizens depend by law on this founding act. Justice is still spoken on behalf of the American people (Derrida, 1986, p. 11). The identity of these citizens, the verification of their names is fed by this economy, whose quintessential start will always be the signing of the Declaration of Independence.



But what happens when this institution falls apart? Proper names are documented and established; this does not apply to usernames. The state, as an archive of names, has no access to usernames. They can control, administer and judge proper names, but usernames do not fall into their jurisdiction. The technology of their archive is not adapted to the phenomenon of the username. This means not the end of institutions, but the end of an institution, whose founding is based on the signature of proper names. Usernames are not centrally verified by the state. They are therefore only subject to their specific institutions, where they are registered at; to their archives and their respective platforms. Which can lead to multiple uses of usernames, or the complete replacement of proper names with usernames. While the state manages to assign proper names to a person and thus verifying their identity, this can only be possible to a limited extent of usernames. It is up to the platforms to what extent a username has to be verified. There are no clear regulations. This fact alone would not pose a challenge for the state institution. Only the power of the Internet as a medium and the use of usernames can lead to conflicts with the state. Public discourses have long been taking place in online forums and on platforms that require usernames and not a proper name. Communication is thus tied to the use of a username, however that username is no longer necessarily tied to one person, as it was in the pre-digital space with proper names. The username becomes the signature in a digital space. Statements and texts are linked to usernames. Only here the big difference is, that the state loses its ability to access it for verification. A core competence of the state and its influence on the public discourse, is undermined by the username. Perhaps because of this, the phenomenon of the username reflects many conflicts that go hand in hand with the so-called postmodern era: the question of identity and the states attempt to claim power.³

The phenomena of the proper name and the username differ in their ability to be verified and thus, in the question of who or what verifies it. But what does verification mean? For this, I would like to consider a case that has become well-known politically around the world, especially in the United States. We are talking about the username Q and the QAnon movement⁴. The user Q first appeared on the imageboard 4chan.org, to spread statements, which can be classified as conspiracy theories. At this point, I would like to emphasize that I distance myself from this content. Nevertheless, the username Q perfectly demonstrates the entire political dimension of the phenomena and the mechanisms behind it. Who or what stands behind Q has not yet been clarified. The username only claims to be a senior government official with exclusive access to highly confidential government information. Including information on a conspiracy theory that

³ More insides about the relation between governance and the Internet give the following papers: (Haggart et al., 2021; Jensen, 2020; Karpf, 2020; Price, 2017).

⁴ The User Q first appeared on the imageboard 4chan.org in 2017. The name “Q” refers to the “Q clearance” security classification used by the US Department of Energy. Q proclaims to have exclusive information from this government sector. Furthermore, the user claims to be a high-ranking member of the government, during the presidential legacy of Donald Trump starting in 2017. The follower movement based on Q’s conspiracy theories is commonly referred to as QAnon. “Anon” stands for “anonymous”, since users do not have to identify themselves on the 4chan.org board. Q’s identity has not yet been clarified with certainty, but several people and groups have been considered. Q’s statements and the QAnon movement can be classified in the right extremism spectrum. For further reading and more information about QAnon: (Amarasingam & Argentino, 2020; Hannah, 2021; Papasavva et al., 2020; Richards, 2021; Zuckerman, 2019).



claims that government members, as well as economic elites, maintain an international child trafficking ring, and are even planning an attempted coup to turn the American democracy into a dictatorship. No matter how absurd these statements may sound, they fit into the discourse of conspiracy theories and are finding a growing following. Based on the username Q, a movement called QAnon has formed, which follows the worldviews of Q's statements. This is becoming more and more publicly perceptible, as observed on January 6, 2021 with the storm on the American Capitol and increasingly worldwide during protests against state institutions and regulations. The danger that this creates for the state and the autonomy that the username and the statements have, go back to the core of the verification process.

SHIFTING DIMENSIONS

Verification, derived from the Latin words *veritas*, truth and *facere*, to make, means to provide evidence of the truth. To declare something true. Like the state that ties statements back to a person and verifies them. It guarantees that a proper name stands for a specific identity, which makes it possible to tie the truth of a statement to that person. But how could a state verify a statement of a username? How can someone proof that the person behind a username speaks the truth? Without any information about a person, or whatever stands behind a username, one cannot verify that a user has the knowledge or the power which is claimed by his/her statements. It is possible to check the statements of course, but not whether or not they are true for their proclaimer. Therefore, an important aspect of the verification process is omitted. Who can say that the user Q doesn't have this information if we don't even know who or what he/she/they is/are? The only option left is to remain agnostic about this path of truth-checking. One could also call this a consequence of the autonomy of the proper name, which finds its completion in the username:

We are not, I believe, bound to decide. An interpretive decision does not have to draw a line between two intents or two political contents. Our interpretations will not be readings of a hermeneutic or exegetic sort, but rather political interventions in the political rewriting of the text and its destination. (Derrida 1985, p. 32)

The point here is no longer to verify, to check the truth of the statements or to recognize their true meaning, but to shift them into a political context.

This is one aspect that the username radicalizes. But there is a second that starts another momentum, which questions the institution of the modern state much more. One may not be able to verify “Q's” statements, but what is much more dangerous is the institutional potential of such usernames. To be aware of this potential, one only has to look at the founding act of American independence in the form of their signatures. Derrida's analysis that I have given, illustrated the paradoxical act of founding a people's nation in their own name. I have left out one important detail: Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), who wrote the Declaration of Independence, used a trick to ensure independence:



One can understand this Declaration as a vibrant act of faith, as a hypocrisy indispensable to a politico-military-economic, etc. coup of force, or, more simply, more economically, as the analytic and consequential deployment of a tautology: for this Declaration to have a meaning and an effect, there must be a last instance. God is the name, the best one, for this last instance and this ultimate signature. Not only the best one in a determined context (such and such a nation, such and such a religion, etc.), but the name of the best name in general. Now, this (best) name also ought to be a proper name. God is the best proper name, the proper name the best [Dieu est le nom propre le meilleur]. One could not replace 'God' by 'the best proper name [le meilleur nom propre]'. (Derrida, 1986, p. 12)

Jefferson needed the security of a higher authority for this authorization. He used the proper name of God for this. What is the intention of this name, what makes it “the best proper name”? First, the deep Christian roots in the culture of the settlers of that time must be pointed out. The legacy of the old continent, where the name of God has an unparalleled genealogy. Any comparison cannot withstand this history. But I would like to point out the verification of this name, which makes it so special. If one places the proper name of God opposite the names of the founding fathers, it becomes clear what makes Him stand out. The founding fathers are empirically tangible people, identities that can be verified, which gives the opportunity to question them. If Jefferson had not added the name of God to the Declaration of Independence, it would always run the risk of being contestable through its signatories. But how can one challenge God, how can one verify this name? It cannot be refuted, and as Derrida realizes, in the end it remains a question of faith. Thus, the establishment of the institution closes itself in a tautology, for those who believe in it, it proves to be true through the founding act, authorized by the unquestionable proper name of God himself. American independence is just one example of this institutional potential in whose name tribes, empires and states have been founded over millennia. The reference to the QAnon movement may not be truly comparable, but one recognizes similar approaches of institutional potential. Usernames are difficult to verify, ultimately it remains a question of faith whether you want to trust the statements of a user or not. Like the name of God, they disregard verification. The username now has the potential to disguise and authorize the act of founding new institutions, which does not imply that every username unfolds such potential. But examples like Q show that they can be the beginning of new institutional structures, to which people align themselves, in which they believe in and which questions old institutions.

Usernames are therefore, not simply a technical solution or just a banal practice of digital space, they have a structural institutional characteristic. One’s understanding helps explain post-digital political shifts. The basis for this begins with the familiar phenomenon of the proper name and leads to the question of verification. The modern state, understood in this article as the archive of proper names, is faced with the challenge of dealing with the phenomenon of the username. They face the challenge of verification, which gives them part of their state power. Because as long as usernames



cannot be clearly verified, they have the potential for new institutional structures, which in turn questions the existing institutions and our understanding of identity and truth.

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