

To be a fencer is to be a warrior. In both, war and fencing, individuals are pitted against one another having only one emerge as the victor. These combatants identify themselves by skill and ability, which results in accomplishments. In their world, the realm of the warrior-athlete name means nothing; instead it is replaced by the ability to prove oneself constantly. In the same sense when an athlete becomes adopted by a brand that brand must assume a similar mantra. In the arena of sporting brands, accomplishments come first and only after does their successes become synonymous with their name. In this regard both the brand and the athlete are forced to adopt alter-egos, or vehicles by which their achievements are made known to the world. In the world of brands the same occurrences can be seen. Nike has created a mystique about itself based around its accomplishments in the sporting industry; they have effectively masked themselves behind a façade that speaks only of their amazing successes—their extraordinary achievements. This is the world I seek to explore with vigor and excitement: those entities that exist behind the “mask”—the Alter Ego.

The assumption of a new self or alter ego is typically associated with superheroes; take for instance Batman, the alter-ego of Bruce Wayne; Wayne must undergo a complete physical and psychological transformation before emerging as Batman and being able to achieve the super-human feats that distinguish him. The same can be said of the Masai Moran, of Kenya, who undergo extensive ceremonies before “emerging” and embarking on their rights of passage into man-hood, upon which they are asked to

accomplish extraordinary tasks. They adorn themselves with body-paint and garments that assist in changing them, much in the same way that a fencer must put on his mask before he is able to fence and compete and “become” his fencing-self. When finished with these preparatory actions their old identity has been masked—quite literally in fencing—thus they emerge a new self: an alter-ego, capable of super-human actions that will hopefully help them secure victory. In the sport of fencing this is magnified because of the existence of an actual mask, one that is iconic and necessary to the sport. The fencer lowers the mask to signify that they are ready to begin the bout and perhaps as the final action in transforming themselves. When one dons a mask a change happens. It is most documented in the different rituals that surround the lore of the African mask. Here you have individuals that are covered in their entirety—the mask does not just refer to the object covering the face but extends to the entire garment—playing the role of a conduit. “The mask swallows up the man, who is nothing more than its anonymous motor”; the mask is more than an object. Beneath the mask exist a man—in most African cultures only men wear masks—who has made a commitment to lend himself to the spirit that he wishes to call forth; his actions however, are not self-serving they serve the will of the spirit.

“...[A]gain I lend the Zamble my body so that he can benefit from a guise worthy of his power.’ At this precise moment, man is the divinity as much as the divinity is the man...”

