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Anonymous: Polemics and Non-identity

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in
Media Studies

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ANONYMOUS: POLEMICS AND NON-IDENTITY
(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Sam Chiang

Graduate Program in Media Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The hacktivist collective Anonymous has been known to follow nonhierarchical, amorphous and sometimes contradictory strategies for online activism. This may weaken their potential to become a populist movement, as out-group members may find Anonymous's politics obscure and out of reach. Anonymous's communiqués compensate for this by enabling direct communication with the public. But as a critical discourse analysis finds, the communicative strategies employed deviate from logics of difference and non-identity. They express rigid beliefs, even at times under the banner of universal truth.

However, these findings do not suggest Anonymous inevitably embraces identity. By adopting a Deleuzian concept of minor politics, this thesis proposes that Anonymous's texts are strategic appropriations of molar identities, emphasizing how the minor never fully exists outside the molar. Rather, the minor is always a *movement* within or across immanent molar configurations. The tensions and contradictions within Anonymous are thus exemplary of a minor political struggle.

Keywords: Anonymous, hacking, hacktivism, cyper-activism, net-activism, non-identity, negation, invisible politics, decentralization, networks, netwar, autonomist-Marxism, communisation, Negri, Deleuze.

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INTRODUCTION

0.1 Anonymous: Historical Background

Since 2010, a hacker collective known as Anonymous has waged a succession of cyber attacks against institutions such as PayPal, MasterCard, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), and the governments of Egypt, Greece, Iran, Israel, Japan, Sweden, Tunisia, and others. True to its name, Anonymous derives its power to alarm and intimidate not just from its technical hacking skills, but also from its refusal to be seen, known, or understood. It departs from the familiar tendency of activism to embrace representation, whether expressed in its slogans, demands, causes, specific ideologies, or inspirational figures.

While this thesis will explore the possibilities and outcomes of non-representation, it also hopes to identify moments when Anonymous departs from this political (and strategic) initiative. The most acute deviations take place in the realm of Anonymous's manifestos and public statements, which announce, justify, and attempt to gain new supporters for hacking campaigns. As this study will show, some rhetoric or textual techniques used actually reinforce identity. For example, various statements may endorse singular, cohesive, and in some cases universalistic ideological claims. In other cases, statements rigidly define notions of belonging and exclusion, which evoke stable (rather than fluid) organizational boundaries. Are these lapses into identity merely examples of hypocrisy and/or simple mistakes? Or do they represent an intensification of diffuse political practice and deception—one that involves the strategic appropriation of identity, in accordance with post-structuralist theories of minor politics and strategic essentialism?

Before delving into these questions, this chapter wishes to provide a brief historical account of Anonymous. Given Anonymous's propensity to defy easy identification, perhaps it is less surprising that the group originated from a context seemingly antithetical to activism: the popular Internet message board 4chan, which hosts a wide array of humorous, eccentric, grotesque and sometimes crude content (Norton 2012b). As early as 2006, participants have engaged in a type of pranking known as "trolling", which involves anything from making threatening calls, exposing personal information of targets, to other activities verging on cyber-bullying (Coleman 2011). The binding emotional satisfaction behind trolling is known as "lulz" a mutation of the phrase "laugh out loud" (lol) (Coleman 2011). Both cultural phenomena still influence the group, although no longer as central objectives.

The first massively coordinated trolling incursions taken by Anonymous occurred in 2008, when the group decided to take a stand against the Church of Scientology (Coleman 2011). What initially provoked Anonymous's actions was the Church's attempt to suppress the circulation of a leaked video that showed actor Tom Cruise proudly endorsing Scientology (Coleman 2011; Norton 2012b). The Church went as far as to threaten online publishers with legal action if they refused to remove the video (Coleman 2011). Enraged, Anonymous took to Internet Relay Chat (IRC) channels to formulate cunning ways to troll the Church (Coleman 2011). Participants (known as "Anons"), began to strike Scientology websites with denial of service attacks (DDoS), which momentarily shuts down websites by flooding them with junk traffic (Olson 2012, 64). Other strategies included, "ordering unpaid pizzas to churches ... sending images of nude body parts to church fax machines, and relentless phone pranking, especially to the

Dianetics hotline” (Coleman 2012a). Due to the circulation of Internet videos that further roused anti-Scientology sentiment, Anonymous was suddenly edged towards more “traditional” political territory (but not without reluctance by those devoted to lulz) (Coleman 2011). Eventually, Anons decided to take to the streets to protest. On February 10, 2008 over six thousand people joined anti-Scientology protests across North America, Europe, New Zealand and Australia (Coleman 2011). These were also the first protests to feature demonstrators wearing Guy Fawkes masks (Coleman 2011), which has since become popularized worldwide—as most recently displayed in the 2013 protests across Brazil and Turkey.

Anonymous’s newfound political fervor was sparked again in 2010, this time by the cause of copyright freedom. Aiplex, an Indian software firm, was contracted by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) to unleash DDoS attacks against the file-sharing website The Pirate Bay (Coleman 2011; Norton 2012b). Anons responded by launching an operation called “OpPayback”, which involved DDoSing the websites of Aiplex, the MPAA, and the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) (Norton 2012b).

This momentum carried over to a different political cause in December of that same year: Paypal, Mastercard and Amazon began blocking donation services to Wikileaks after the organization released a trove of leaked diplomatic cables (Coleman 2011; Norton 2012b). The wave of hacking campaigns against these institutions were, according to Anonymous researcher Gabriella Coleman, a seminal moment in Anonymous’s history. As she recounts, it gave rise to AnonOps, one of the most active and populated channels in IRC history, which hosted over seven thousand people at one

point (Coleman 2011). Anons also managed to sustain a remarkable level of careful coordination despite the general air of chaos in the chat rooms (Coleman 2011). This situation demonstrated that non-hierarchical self-organization held enormous potential as a political practice, since “participants chose targets through polling, collectively wrote documents to explain who to and who to not attack, and constantly remind other participants of this on IRC” (Coleman 2011).

Anonymous’s next major initiatives were inspired by the “Arab Spring” uprisings in 2011. After the Tunisian government blocked online access to Wikileaks in their country, Anonymous began “OpTunisia”, which consisted of hacking government websites and assisting Tunisian protestors by sending them electronic “care packages”—tools and instructions that showed how to evade censorship and surveillance (Coleman 2012a). This was the beginning of the so-called “freedom ops”, which saw Anonymous branching out from internet-based struggles over free information towards more general human rights advocacy and activism (Coleman 2012a). Among this new trend of operations included operations responding to uprisings or injustices in Egypt, Libya, New Zealand, Italy, and the US (Coleman 2011).

In February 2011, Aaron Barr, the CEO of a security contracting company known as HBGary, claimed to have uncovered the identities of top Anonymous members, and in doing so, allegedly discovered that Anonymous was not as leaderless as they proposed (Coleman 2012a; Norton 2012b; Olson 2012, 9). Barr shared a sample of his revelations with journalist Joseph Menn, who published them in a *Financial Times* article (Olson 2012, 9). The FBI also requested to meet with Barr after the agency took wind of his findings (Olson 2012, 10). However, before any arrests occurred, Anons initiated a spate

of retaliation against Barr. They downloaded and leaked emails from HBGary's servers, deleted files, erased data from Barr's iPhone and iPad, and took over his Twitter account (Coleman 2012a). Some of the emails instructed how to discredit Wikileaks (by submitting fake documents to its website) and Wikileaks supporters, such as journalist Glenn Greenwald (Coleman 2012a).

Emboldened by the HBGary attacks, a splinter group called LulzSec was formed and subsequently embarked on a "hacking spree". They targeted SONY, US government websites, a FBI affiliate website, the Monsanto corporation, and several other institutions within the span of 50 days (Norton 2012b). It was shortly before LulzSec disbanded that Hector Xavier Monsegur, a key hacker of the group, was arrested by the FBI and hired as an informant (Norton 2012b). While it is not clear how effective Monsegur's assistance was, on March 2012, the FBI arrested five of the six core members of Lulzsec (Olson 2012, 406, 408). Around the same time, major news outlets broke news of Monsegur's collaboration with the FBI—a revelation that caught many Anons by surprise (Olson 2012, 404, 406). This was one of the first signs to Anons that they were not fully infallible, and could never be immune from being arrested, spied on, or exposed.

0.2. The Logic of Anonymity

Despite the arrests of over two-dozen members, Anonymous attacks continue to the time of this writing. The group's perseverance comes in part from its fluid nature and tendency to avoid easy identification. According to Quinn Norton, a journalist who has extensively reported on Anonymous, the group embraces an open and sometimes chaotic nature (2012b). The task of classifying Anons is complicated by the fact that Anonymous is constantly changing. Groups who congregate in IRC channels are never guaranteed to

be the same at any given time. As Norton puts it, much like the plastic Guy Fawkes mask popularized by the group, “Anonymous is an identity that anyone can put on, whenever they want to join up” (2012b). Arrests might temporarily diminish the technical ability and political impact of Anonymous (Norton 2012b), but they fail to match the longevity of a fluid and amorphous organizing principle.

However, anonymity contains more than a purely practical or strategic benefit. According to Gabriella Coleman, who studies the politics and culture of hackers, anonymity also implies a broader “anti-leader and anti-celebrity ethic,” which “modulates, even if it does not fully eliminate, the concentration of power” (Coleman 2011). This imperative to curtail hierarchy has held a common and enduring significance between participants. As an Anonymous statement proclaims:

Anonymous is not an organization. It is not a club, a party or even a movement. There is no charter, no manifest, no membership fees. Anonymous has no leaders, no gurus, no ideologists. In fact, it does not even have a fixed ideology. (*How to Join Anonymous – A Beginners Guide* 2012)

These polemic expressions speak towards a deeper disenchantment towards, and a willingness to abolish, basic categories of representation and political affiliation.

While much interest has surrounded the impact of anonymity towards Anonymous’s practices of hacking and organization, little attention has been paid to issues of textual representation. Deploying an approach of textual analysis known as critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough 2003), this thesis asks whether Anonymous actually maintains forms of identity—in particular, rigid divisions between those who adhere to or reject their political beliefs. It then asks whether such digressions into identity amount to an irrevocable violation of Anonymous’s principles, or alternatively, whether they can be partially reconciled by concepts of rhizomatic political struggle—

especially those associated with a Deleuze's framework of minor politics and post-colonial concepts of strategic essentialism (Thoburn 2003; Spivak 1996).

The next chapter will foreground an analysis of Anonymous with a larger historical and theoretical context of cyber-activism. It will explore problematic issues of determinism and agency found within the major strands of net-activism analysis. Chapter 2 will survey extant literature about Anonymous. In part, the goal is to elucidate the politics, cultural norms, and structural logics as revealed in such works. The chapter will also diagnose the strengths and problems of each perspective. Chapter 3 will feature a textual analysis of a selection of Anonymous's texts, and Chapter 4 will explain my findings through the lens of autonomist-Marxism and communisation-theory—both of which gesture towards non-representational and decentralized revolt in a similar vein to Anonymous.

CHAPTER 1: CYBER-ACTIVISM: HISTORY AND THEORY

Anonymous did not appear “out of the blue”, but rather emerges from several preceding episodes of political action on the Internet. This chapter provides some historical context for cyber-activism, starting with an account of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Mexico, one of the first social movements to harness the communicative powers of the Internet (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001; Cleaver 1998a). Many academic perspectives have examined how the Zapatistas came to be precursors to contemporary networked online struggles. This chapter complements their analyses with a more critical look at the strengths and weakness of net-activism and its associated research, especially within the context of the recent Arab Spring uprisings in 2011. Analysis of these events makes it clear that commentators who implicitly or explicitly endorse technological determinism ignore the agency of protestors and overlooks the relative economic, cultural, and political conditions of each political struggle. This chapter then turns to Galloway and Thacker’s (2007) ontology of networks, assessing both its possibilities and limits. This will help build a more complex theoretical foundation of net-activism, one that subsequent observations about Anonymous can refer back to.

1.1. The Zapatistas and the “Electronic Fabric of Struggles”

Starting in 1994, the Zapatista uprising emerged from a long history of repression within the Chiapas region of southern Mexico, which included unjust land partitions since the 1930’s and the exploitation of *campesino* agricultural labor (Cleaver 1998a, 623-24). The government’s widespread privatization of communal land—prompted by pressure from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)—drove the

Zapatistas to self-organize. On January 1st, 1994, the day when NAFTA was to take effect, the Zapatistas took action against the Mexican government—the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)—by occupying several towns in the Chiapas (Clever 1998a, 625).

Clever’s article “The Zapatistas and the Electronic Fabric of Struggle” (1998b) provides a thorough account of the Zapatistas’ incorporation of online strategies. This relationship started as a response to a number of government-imposed constraints. Through a series of violent skirmishes, the military attempted to confine the Zapatistas within the Chiapas (Clever 1998a, 625). Ideologically, the state-owned mass media tried to prevent any sense of unity to solidify between the Zapatistas and the larger Mexican populous. They did this by skewing the Zapatista image into one that reflected a pan-Mayan movement threatening to succeed from Mexico (Clever 1998a, 625). Furthermore, media coverage of the Zapatistas was partial and highly biased. Major newspapers printed only limited sections of the Zapatista declaration of war and refused to publish subsequent communiqués (Clever 1998b, 82-83).

In the context of widespread media blockage and misinformation, the Internet offered a space for alternative press. Sympathetic groups began a concerted effort of typing or scanning communiqués and letters, then disseminating them through online newsgroups (Clever 1998b, 83). In many cases, these texts were then re-posted and translated for a wider audience (Clever 1998b, 83). Eventually, Zapatista-affiliated websites would also host written observations of foreign journalists and humanitarian, religious, or indigenous groups who visited or embedded themselves within the Zapatistas (Clever 1998b, 83). Following the initiative of supporters to post “*everything*

available” on the web, the enormous breadth of independent material leads Cleaver to acknowledge the Zapatista movement’s success in leading a campaign of “counter-information”, which was “opposed to the official reports of governments and mass media” (1998b, 84).

1.2. Netwar and Networks

United States national security analysts John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt claim that online communication also helped the Zapatistas reach out to a number of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) outside of Mexico (mostly from the United States and Canada) (2001, 174). In doing so, the Zapatistas practiced a form of “netwar”, which describes how social movements are "increasingly organizing into cross-border networks and coalitions, identifying more with the development of civil society (even global civil society) than with nation-states" (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001, 29). Netwar denotes a fundamental shift in how movements organize themselves. Instead of resembling top-down hierarchies, such as nation-states, movements engaged in netwar organize into smaller non-state groups, such as guerrillas, terrorists, drug cartels, and gangs (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001, 40). They tend to distribute power more evenly and organize themselves through connections and linkages rather than as monolithic wholes (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001, 26). Contextualizing Arquilla and Ronfeldt’s insights within the Zapatista movement, Cleaver notes that horizontal collaboration created a continuing crisis for governability, exposing the increasingly ineptitude of the PRI’s attempts at repression and cooptation (1998b, 88).

Tactics of netwar benefitted the Zapatistas in a couple of ways. The coalition between the NGOs and the EZLN forced the government to cease its military offensive

and to begin negotiations with the Zapatistas (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001, 188). Global protests in solidarity with the Zapatistas, which were inspired in part by responses to the wealth of independent information online, were instrumental to the cease-fire (Clever 1998b, 86-87). More broadly, horizontal coordination allowed the Zapatista struggle to expand from the narrow terms of a military conflict to a broader “discussion of their ideas and the discussion of their political visions and programs” (Clever 1998b, 97). It should be noted that since the time of Cleaver’s writing, the Zapatistas have largely receded. Its negotiations with the Fox administration in 2000 promised to yield an Indian-rights law, but it was passed without the major provisions favored by the Zapatistas (Winn 2006, 577-78). Despite its limited impact, the communicative powers of the web, and a networked resistance it fostered, revealed its potentials during the early stages of the Zapatista struggle.

1.3. Social Media and the Arab Spring

The role of social media in kick starting revolt has been sharply debated in the context of the recent Arab Spring protests in 2011. Much attention surrounds the calls of protests made on Facebook pages, Youtube, Twitter, and other online platforms. A Facebook page called “We Are All Khaled Said”, named after a young Egyptian man beaten to death by police in 2010, helped publicize the famous January 25th demonstration in Tahrir Square (Mason 2012a, 11). BBC reporter Paul Mason outlines how social media was influential. For instance, Facebook was used to form groups to promote demonstrations, Twitter was used to coordinate or spread news in real-time, and Youtube or photo sites (such as Flickr) were used to provide evidence of claims or rumors (Mason 2012a, 75).

For Mason, the use of social media and other ICTs distinguish the 2011 uprisings from past social movements. In a blog post entitled “Twenty Reasons Why it’s Kicking Off Everywhere” (2012b), Mason attempts to uncover why protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Jordan, Syria, Greece, Britain, and elsewhere erupted with such rapid succession (91). Among other key social dynamics, such as student debt and the global economic downturn, the use of social media has introduced a new approach to activism (Mason 2012b, 92). Social media is not only pragmatic, allowing protestors to circumvent mainstream news outlets and political institutions in order to obtain news and communicate, but it also “kills hierarchies spontaneously”, leaving behind the 20th century paradigm of “killing ... dissent within movements, [and] the channeling of movements and their bureaucratization” (Mason 2012b, 92). By assembling into loose, heterogeneous, and networked relations, social movements avoid conforming to a centralized organizing logic that easily slips into the authoritarian tendencies of past Communist and Socialist states. Mason credits the success of the current wave of protests to a networked form of political struggle (2012a, 77). This is true, he believes, because social media allocates power into the hands of the individual user rather than to mass media organizations. In this way, the “instant evidence of truth” outlasts propaganda (Mason 2012a, 77).

Another emergent trend of the 2009-11 uprisings is the instantaneous replication of revolutionary sentiment throughout social media, in what can be best described as the Internet “meme” (Mason 2012b, 92). The meme derives from the work of evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, who in 1976 described how ideas within societies (e.g., fashion and catch phrases) are able to survive, evolve and mutate like genes (Mason

2012a, 150). If deemed favorably, ideas propagate through the “word of mouth”, outperforming and outlasting less popular ideas. A similar logic works with ideas on the Internet—they are “immediately ‘market tested’, and then are seen to either take off ... or, if they are deemed no good, disappear” (Mason 2012a, 151). This is the manner in which many slogans (e.g., for the Occupy Wall Street Protests: “We are the 99%”), ideas, and calls to protests circulated (Mason 2012a, 151). The strength of this trend comes not only from its accelerated replication, but also from its autonomous and decentralized character (Mason 2012a, 151). Memes are less about authorship and more about the collective approval or disapproval of Internet users. As such, the bottom-up logic of memes resonates with the decentralized composition of different ethnic, cultural, economic identities that define the new social movements. Mason concludes that a networked “way of thinking”, which is also embodied in the technologies that these young protestors use, is a progression from the logic of past political struggles. As he claims,

It seems to me that this generation knows more than their predecessors about power. They have read (or read a Wikipedia summary of) political thinkers like Foucault, Deleuze, Dworkin. They realize, in a way previous generations ... did not, that emotionally-fuelled action, loyalty, mesmeric oratory and hierarchy all come at an overhead cost. (Mason 2012a, 46)

1.3.1. The Egyptian Revolution: Beyond Social Media

One of the rewarding aspects of Mason’s book *Why it’s Kicking Off Everywhere* (2012a) is that it balances cyber-optimist views with ample consideration of the non-digital dimensions of the Egyptian uprising. In particular, Mason explains how long-lasting economic disparity bore a more direct influence on the unrest. Despite having pulled nine percent of its population out of poverty in the 2000, Egypt had widespread

youth unemployment (Mason 2012a, 119). Briefly before 2011, 92 percent of the unemployed were first-time job seekers, with those between twenty and twenty-five experiencing 28 percent unemployment (Mason 2012a, 119). The youth crisis was compounded by severe underinvestment in education—44 percent of workers were illiterate and more than 75 percent lacked anything above a middle school education (Mason 2012a, 120). Undereducated and unemployed, it comes as little surprise that the Egyptian youth represented a core demographic in the Tahrir Square protests. This may also partially explain why social media—a platform more familiar to the youth—had a powerful impact on the Arab Spring.

Secondly, the global repercussions of the U.S. 2010 economic collapse intensified Egypt's economic disparity in the years leading up to the January 25th revolution. In 2008, 400,000 Egyptians rioted for three days over high food prices and the violent repression of a textile strike (Mason 2012a, 10). During this time, youth protestors formed the “April 6th Youth Movement”, and in a manner perhaps overshadowed by the 2011 uprising, were one of the first groups to coordinate via Facebook, email, and the photo sharing service Flickr (Mason 2012a, 10). Aouragh and Alexander's article “The Egyptian Experience: Sense and Nonsense of the Internet Revolution” (2011) also outlines prior political struggles in Egypt. Throughout 2004-5, Egyptian protestors took part in mass demonstrations against government intervention in election monitoring, and rallied for constitutional reform (Aouragh and Alexander 2011, 1346). Cases of government vote rigging and intimidation in the 2010 parliamentary elections also likely contributed to the collective frustration, which ultimately surfaced on the day of January 25th (Aouragh and Alexander 2011, 1346).

Recognizing the breadth of the Egyptian class struggle dispels the notion that social media was the sole impetus for Egypt's insurrection. It prevents us from ignoring both the material conditions of the uprising and the agency of protestors (Aouragh and Alexander 2011, 1344). But another concern is whether the organizational dimensions of Egypt's class struggle complicates the paradigm of networked political struggles—the latter of which is said to be composed of heterogeneous actors who do not cohere under a uniform class identity. According to Aouragh and Alexander, there was a larger presence of leadership and decision-making than what proponents of network struggles hypothesized. As they articulate:

The fact that there was little clear political direction or decision-making online does not mean that they did not exist. Rather, it means that they are kept outside the scope of authoritarian surveillance, as well as having tactical strength: not letting ideological stigmas demobilize the public. It is precisely because it *looked* like it was new, youth-oriented, non-ideological, online, horizontal movement that it gained attention ... We think there is also a general problem among journalists and researchers: projecting their own experience ... and their inability to understand what is discussed between the lines in Arabic. (Aouragh and Alexander 2011, 1355)

The networked resistance narrative thus misses some basic facts. Most of the planning for the January 25th demonstrations actually occurred face-to-face rather than online. For weeks, representatives from youth movements, worker's rights groups, and the Muslim Brotherhood met daily to formulate tactics and strategies (Aouragh and Alexander 2011, 1350). To this extent, the January 25th protests fit the profile of a more "traditional" political movement, involving more formal—and by implication, more hierarchical—political groups.

1.3.2. A Dialectic View of ICTs

Despite Aouragh and Alexander's rejection of the cyber-optimist viewpoint, they disagree with presenting the digital divide as an "either/or" binary. Rather, online and offline actions relate dialectically—that is, one could not exist without the other (Aouragh and Alexander 2011, 1345). To explain this, Aouragh and Alexander distinguish two ways in which the Internet was deployed: as "spaces" and "tools". By *spaces*, Aouragh and Alexander refer to a sphere where activists could interact and mobilize autonomously from the state (2011, 1347). These online spaces are conducive to political action and expression because they are (mostly) free from barriers to participation and from government surveillance. As such, they resemble coffeehouses, meeting halls, factories and other spaces historically associated with activism (Aouragh and Alexander 2011, 1347). Furthermore, online spaces are oriented towards radical politics on an ideological level, as they are a potential source for alternative press or content. Such content encourages users to discuss, debate, formulate opinions, or take action (Aouragh and Alexander 2011, 1348). While these online spaces were highly influential on the material outcome of the revolt—e.g., by accelerating the mobilization of demonstrations—they would lose all value without the existing social inequalities in Egypt or the strides of prior political movements.

Social media, according to Aouragh and Alexander, should also be seen as a *tool*. Namely, research should focus on the different ways in which individuals employ social media, taking seriously the agency of individuals (Aouragh and Alexander 2011, 1348). For example, Internet users participating in the January 25th demonstrations were "highly conscious of available Internet tools, using different ones to reach different audiences and for different purposes" (Aouragh and Alexander 2011, 1349). Key here is the division of

labor: users who were fluent in English reached out to audiences in Western countries, while Arab speakers coordinated locally (Aouragh and Alexander 2011, 1349). One of the article's interviewees also took to social media to correct misrepresentations of events in mainstream news (Aouragh and Alexander 2011, 1350). Social media's role as a tool once again emphasizes the dialectic between online and offline actions: online cross-border communication would not be possible if it were not for the offline decision-making that collectively designated roles according to the different skill sets of users.

1.3.3. Flexibility of Tactics in the Arab Spring

Mason believes that a novel characteristic of the Arab Spring was the flexibility of tactics, i.e., the ability for activists to adjust and adapt to new challenges. During the 2009 protests in Iran, after the government responded violently to protests, activists redirected their efforts online, using "email, blogs and SMS to evolve the protests in real time" (Mason 2012a, 78). This flexibility pertains more to networks than to hierarchies. As Arquilla and Ronfeldt note, participants adapt best to changing circumstances when they are free from coordinating with a higher rank (2001, 36). In other words, networked struggles thrive when they act collectively and spontaneously.

However, Aouragh and Alexander interpret this flexibility as indicative of individual agency. It shows how protestors are able to intervene in tough situations with ingenuity and cunning skill. Here, the Mubarak regime's shutdown the Internet on January 27th was a telling moment. From the government's standpoint, blocking access to the Internet would be a crippling blow to the protestors. Ironically, this belief also matches the more determinist strains of cyber-optimism. Many in the U.S. tech industry, social networking companies, and communication rights organizations were shocked,

calling the Internet shutdown an assault on basic individual rights (Evangelista 2011). For Facebook spokesman Andrew Noyes, the shutdown not only curtailed free speech but was also damaging to “communication and to commerce” (Evangelista 2011). For this reason, Mubarak’s actions were a “matter of concern to the global community” (Evangelista 2011), which hints at the possibility that the Internet blackout had a potential to harm global trade. Jim Cowie, chief technology officer and co-founder of Renesys—an Internet monitoring company—claims that Mubarak’s Internet shutdown harmed Egypt’s “credibility with the Internet community and the economic world ... it will set Egypt back for years in terms of its hopes of becoming a regional Internet power” (Evangelista 2011).

Indeed, these comments highlight the various neoliberal interests that rely on the smooth functioning of the Internet. The Internet stands as the infrastructure on which banks, corporations and investment firms communicate, and where an entire slew of economic procedures takes place (marketing, advertising, stock exchanges, transactions, etc.). But the widespread shock by Mubarak’s decision to shutdown the Internet also speaks to a more general attitude: that the Internet is deeply embedded and is indispensable to contemporary society. As Noys puts it, “A world without the Internet is unimaginable” (Evangelista 2011).

While the Internet blackout complicated the activists’ ability to practice citizen journalism and coordinate protests, it had little significant impact beyond that (Aouragh and Alexander 2011, 1350). In fact, the effects of the Internet blackout were largely counterintuitive. According to Aouragh and Alexander, the blackout “infuriated many who felt it was time to take a stand or forced ... [those] involved in cyberspace but now

were prompted to join street protests, adding to the growing numbers of protesters ... it sent an important signal about the balance of power: namely, that the regime was threatened” (2011, 1350). In an ironic twist, the lack of social media actually kick started another stage of the political struggle. However, these events do not necessarily or simply vindicate skeptics of net-activism. The ways in which protestors persevered, and in some cases, found ways to circumvent the Internet shutdown speaks to a more complex possibility. Rather than prompting activists to completely return to a “pure” model of face-to-face protest, the post-shutdown events demonstrate how protestors harnessed both online and offline influences.

According to McQuillan (2011), social media’s impact was manifested in various non-technological circumstances. After the Mubarak regime initiated its first round of Internet blockage, which was focused within Tahrir Square, activists were able to find ways to access the Internet almost immediately. Some discovered that the mobile version of the Opera browser used a proxy server to reformat web pages, which was a key to accessing certain sites after the cut off period (McQuillan 2011). It was also possible to access Facebook and Twitter via their direct IP addresses, which prompted many activists to circulate these IP addresses (McQuillan 2011). Eventually, activists turned to the TOR network, a proxy that conceals information about a user’s connection to a website, preventing surveillance teams from obtaining that user’s IP address (McQuillan 2011). The TOR Project reported on January 30th that over the previous three days 120,000 users, mostly Egyptians, downloaded TOR software (McQuillan 2011). However, on January 27th, the government decided to restrict Internet access for the entire country, with the exception of the Noor Group, an Internet Service Provider (ISP) for the Egyptian

Stock Exchange (McQuillan 2011). According to Andrew McLaughlin, the White House Deputy Chief Technology Officer, Egypt was the first country to disconnect itself from the Internet entirely (McQuillan 2011). With cell phone access also blocked, disabling both calls and SMS—the ability to post content on the Web via text messaging (Dunn 2011)—this attempt to control data and communication was unparalleled by any other government.

In a show of remarkable determination to reconnect with foreign supporters—to keep them informed of domestic events—both Egyptian activists and outside supporters resorted to pre-Internet technologies to circumvent the blackout. One method involved using landlines and dial-up modems. Telecomix, the Internet activist group, circulated international dial-up numbers to the activists and set up servers that could receive dial-up calls through landlines (McQuillan 2011). Similarly, individuals connected to the Internet with the Bulletin Board System (BBS), which allowed individuals to obtain web access through a phone line and a modem (McQuillan 2011). Landlines were instrumental in two other ways. John-Scott Railton, a U.S. graduate student, called his acquaintances in Egypt to learn about updates, which he would then post on Twitter (McQuillan 2011). After the government shut down mobile networks, Railton corresponded with Egyptians via landlines (McQuillan 2011). Furthermore, in response to the blackout, Google and Twitter engineers collaborated to formulate a “speak2tweet” function (McQuillan 2011). This enabled Egyptians to leave voice mail on foreign numbers, which was then transferred onto Twitter in the form of a tweet (McQuillan 2011).

Dunn (2011) also provides an illuminating account of the post-blackout response. While Egyptian activists were able to send tweets through speak2tweet, they were unable

to read the Twitter responses from those around the world. Thus, Al-Jazeera and other news outlets broadcasted these responses to the Egyptians, completing the “Twitter feedback loop” (Dunn 2011). Radio and leaflets also played key roles. Al-Arabiya satellite news broadcasted their reports via radio, which was then passed on between protestors (including those without access to radios) (Dunn 2011). With simple word of mouth, most participants gained a relatively equal understanding of the protest’s developments (Dunn 2011). Finally, leaflets were instrumental in two ways. They helped counter the pro-Mubarak propaganda disseminated by mainstream news outlets and were able to spread word about protests to more “resource-poor” groups, who lacked Internet access in the first place (Dunn 2011). Dunn’s observations are noteworthy because they suggest that the breadth and speed of communication between face-to-face networks can possibly reach a similar, if not equal, footing with social media. Determined to challenge censorship, protestors were able to reestablish connections domestically and abroad with remarkable agency and ingenuity.

As McQuillan observes, these post-blackout practices suggest “a radical change in people’s perceptions of their entitlement to connectedness. Social media has constituted a real change that goes beyond specific technologies” (2011). In other words, such practices resemble an emerging networked and horizontal approach to political struggle, as explored throughout this chapter. They also add a more complex understanding to the issue of technological determinism. As Aouragh and Alexander insist, reductionism should not be challenged with reductionism. The notion that ICTs have no influence on on-the-street protesting, for instance, represents the one-sided logic of the opposite extreme. The goal should instead be to develop a dialectical perspective, whereby both

online and offline practices inform and internalize one another. This is true of McQuillan's point that networks are not an innate characteristic of ICTs, but emerge from a complex (and non-reductionist) succession of events: the blackout itself, the ingenuity of protesters in forging non-technological networks, and the economic and political inequities that initially sparked popular unrest.

1.4. Networks: A Problem for Nominalization

The idea that decentralized political struggles need not depend on technology is taken up in *The Exploit* (2007). According to authors Galloway and Thacker, networks can be “any system of interrelationality, whether biological or informatic, organic or inorganic, technical or natural—with the ultimate goal of undoing the polar restrictiveness of these pairings” (2007, 28). Thus, the defining characteristic of the network is the relation rather than the “whole”. Its *raison d'être*, in essence, is to establish as many connections between “nodes” as possible. In this way, networks can be diagrammatically mapped out as decentralized, flexible, amorphous, and sprawling entities. If the common denominator to all networks is something as abstract as a *relation*, the task of nominalization becomes increasingly difficult. That is, networks constantly escape attempts to name or prescribe an identity to them. As Galloway and Thacker observe, “At one moment the network appears far too large, as in the global dynamic of climate changes, but at another moment it appears too small, as with binary code or DNA” (2007, 6). These insights speak to the authors' broader effort of guiding research away from nominalization, or any similar perspective that privileges “wholeness”, cohesiveness, or pre-given identities. While Arquilla and Ronfeldt's work serves mostly to warn the U.S. government (which they support) of the leverages its adversaries might gain from

organizing into networks,¹ Galloway and Thacker are more attuned to the philosophical and social foundations of networks.

The problems of nominalization set the stage for contemplating whether networks can more appropriately be interpreted in organizational terms, i.e., as “abstract spaces of different structural or architectonic systems” (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 13). For instance, networks can be situated in one of three topological categories that Galloway and Thacker propose. Unlike a “politics of symmetry”—i.e., a conflict between two power blocs—networks participate in two other forms of topological warfare: 1) a *politics of asymmetry*, which consists of a conflict between a networked insurgency and a monolithic opponent, or 2) a *networked symmetry*, which consists of networks fighting networks (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 14). According to the topological perspective, one model of warfare is incommensurate with another. For instance, a military that wishes to defeat a networked insurgency with the tactics of symmetric warfare will ultimately fail (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 14).

1.4.1. A Topology of Networks

The paradigm of asymmetrical warfare presented up to this point treats monolithic bodies as hierarchies—structurally incommensurate with networks. But this does not preclude hierarchies from maintaining a networked infrastructure. As Galloway and Thacker claim, the concept of “American unilateralism” is a “misnomer” (2007, 8). Instead of representing a single source, American imperial power operates through several layers: “on one layer it connects the White House with the House of Saud, on

1. See Arquilla and Ronfeldt’s plea for the U.S. military to downsize into a smaller and decentralized configuration (2001, 43-45).

another with Israel, on another with Halliburton, on another with the United Nations” (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 8). While multilateralism maintains a certain degree of autonomy between its groups, unilateralism exerts control through networks—i.e., it employs networks as a means of control, rather than an end in itself. The same is true of U.S. communication and information systems. While the mainstream press (on television, radio, or on the Internet) consist of only a handful of outlets, including FOX, NBC, CNN and so forth—thereby reporting a relatively homogenous body of content—the telecommunication networks and technologies within which content travels through are diverse and heterogeneous. These communication networks may serve well as the vehicles for U.S. propaganda, but they are also the vehicles for al-Qaeda communiqués—such as that, “Without connectivity, terrorism would not exist in its current form” (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 16). In this way, there is a strictly material manner in which al-Qaeda, which Galloway and Thacker identify as emblematic of a networked insurgency, depends upon the United States.² The latter provides the material infrastructure for the former—a rapid and interconnected media system to broadcast al-Qaeda propaganda within the U.S. and potentially globally. Topologically speaking, this represents a properly asymmetrical relation whereby the smaller entity exploits the larger one. The networked insurgency attacks, so to speak, its opponent from *within*, rather than from outside.

2. Galloway and Thacker recognize al-Qaeda as a contemporary embodiment of networked insurgency insofar as the group is a non-state actor that serves as “a rallying cry for many different splinter groups” (2007, 12).

Galloway and Thacker’s metaphor of a virus (both digital and biological) is particularly instructive for thinking about asymmetrical conflict. Computer hacking typically involves infecting a larger computer system (or a entire network of computers) with Internet worms, botnets, spyware, or Trojan horses, in a way that infiltrates and spreads like a biological virus. They do this by “overwriting, replacing, or editing code; they use the host system to create copies and distribute copies of themselves, and ... [evade] detection by users or antivirus programs” (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 83). In this sense, hacking is a properly asymmetrical action because it does not aim to change existing technologies (i.e. symmetrical warfare) (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 81). Instead, it involves discovering holes or “exploits” within the larger system and ultimately changing the system through these vulnerabilities (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 81). That computer viruses replicate themselves and imitate the internal processes of their host system supports the point that a networked entity depends upon the infrastructure of their opponent. In other words, the computer’s code needs to function correctly within the system (and needs to exist in the first place) in order for the virus to have something to emulate and replicate itself to. Thus, key to asymmetrical warfare is not only that the infrastructure of the opponent exists, but that this infrastructure operates in an advanced, complex, and sophisticated manner. In this way, the “host” benefits the virus, inadvertently enhancing and increasing the degree to which the virus is able to spread and ultimately do damage (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 84). This is why the dissemination of al-Qaeda communiqués through the U.S. mass media can potentially shift the advantage over to al-Qaeda—their propaganda can flow rapidly, widely, and in

some cases globally through an advanced and sophisticated media system with relative ease.

1.4.2. Agency and Ideological Content

Galloway and Thacker paint a picture of resistance that leaves little room for agency of behalf of those who struggle for political, economic or gender equality. Under a topographic logic, there would be little to no need for progressive or radical movements to educate participants about history, politics, culture, or other issues about the particular contexts or dynamics of social justice. This is because the individual's ability to acquire social knowledge simply loses significance. Thus, a topographic understanding of networks is, as Galloway and Thacker themselves admit, a "misanthropic" endeavor (2007, 6). It excludes any consideration of an individual's capacity for action and thought, reducing him or her to the abstraction of antagonistic forces within the larger hierarchical system. To be sure, the topological perspective does not deny the ontological existence of agency, subjectivity, ideological content, or the material social conditions that provoke resistance in the first place. These phenomena may very well exist in material reality. But in order to participate in networked struggle, individuals must operate within the internal logic of the larger system—one that reshapes the ontological status of an individual from an autonomous, freethinking, and social actor into a de-individualized series of codes and information.

The topological perspective also suggests that networks preclude any essential ideological content, democratic or otherwise (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 13). The strength of a network depends not on the popular appeal or the moral integrity of its ideas, but to its structurally defined antagonism towards a hierarchical and monolithic

entity. In this sense, any political cause—revolutionary or reactionary—may harness the power of networks. While Galloway and Thacker make ample reference to al-Qaeda, they evade the question of whether terrorism might prevail as the most effective and enduring example of networked insurgency—especially when paired to the relative decline of the Zapatista movement. The collective Retort takes up a more thorough exposition of jihadism’s embrace of cyber-networks. Their text *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (2005) illustrates how al-Qaeda—much like democratic popular movements—has taken stock of online resources, from message boards, information hubs (e.g. Global Islamic Media), email, to “mother sites” (Retort, 153-54). Al-Qaeda affiliated cyber-networks have also demonstrated remarkable sophistication in circulating propaganda, laundering money, and mobilizing a scattered contingency of cells—such as that “millions of disaffected Muslims” around the world can participate and contribute to the “universalist aspirations (the global jihad) of the Islamic revolutionaries” (Retort 2005, 154-56). In this sense, the authors of Retort question the fervor that some facets of the left (especially Hardt and Negri [2000]) have shown for decentralized strategies. They assert: “*Insofar as Hardt and Negri’s “multitude” has constituted itself, thus far, as an enduring political force, its most visible face is that of the Islamic resistance*” (Retort 2005, 159). The point, then, is not that the jihadist embrace of netwar is by any means surprising—we may recall that Galloway and Thacker profess that networks are devoid of any ideological content (2007, 13). Nevertheless, any perspective that takes seriously the topographical nature of anti-imperialist struggles must confront the troubling fact that the most prevalent historical example is one that contains the violent legacy of jihadist terror.

This chapter has attempted to adopt a critical and complex look at online activism, especially strands that are fashioned towards a broader decentralized logic of political struggle. It suggests that research concerning online activism should acknowledge issues of the digital divide and numerous other offline dimensions of political struggle (economic and political inequality, historical dynamics, etc.). As the Arab Spring protests demonstrated, networked political struggle always consists of a tension between online and offline influences, whereby both sides of the dialectic inform the other in a non-reductive manner. With the help of social media, the offline social reality of Egypt eventually embraced networks (e.g. by drawing transnational support)—in a show of dialectical evolution that saw protestors, in a post-blackout Egypt, preserving the logic of networks through non-digital and offline strategies.

Galloway and Thacker's topological perspective reinforces the point that networks are ultimately defined not by high technology but by a more abstract logic. However, within their theoretical framework, we too find the need to view things dialectically: for networks cannot be reduced to a single political identity (whether on the left or right). Rather, networks always exist in tension with the politics of the group that they are of service to. They are conducive to the democratic virtues of non-hierarchy even as they may further the aims of fundamentalism via asymmetrical warfare (keeping in mind that unilateralism is to some extent also networked). In this sense, this chapter has attempted to shed light on the fact that Anonymous's current net-struggles stands on a historical foundation of networked insurgency that is complex and contested—one that does not offer any easy answers for how social struggles should be conducted or how they will play out.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Distinguishing the Facts

Anonymous has garnered widespread attention for its divergence from traditional activism, particularly its reluctance to conform into a single cohesive identity. However, this complicates the task of journalists, commentators, and researchers. By examining extant literature, this chapter attempts to distinguish foundational facts from fashionable misconceptions about Anonymous. It will also suggest what approaches are likely to generate critical, complex and accurate perspective for researchers and journalists covering Anonymous.

Gabriella Coleman, who studies the politics and cultural norms of hacking, understands that “traditional analytical categories” are often ill equipped to capture the full implications of Anonymous’s goals, internal dynamics, and history (2011). Coleman’s article “Anonymous: From the Lulz to Collective Action” interprets Anonymous’s loosely structured and leaderless ethos on a basic level. She highlights, for example, how it establishes new constraints for research, complicating attempts for researchers to classify or identify Anonymous’s participants. Far from resembling stable sociological categories, Anons occupy diverse and constantly changing roles. As Coleman points out, “those coordinating the DDoS attacks may not be the same people who write manifestos, or launch blogs or news sites under this name” (2011). This fluid (and in fact nearly nonexistent) membership structure permits individuals of varying skills to equally participate under the shared name of Anonymous. In fact, only a “small cadre” of Anons are trained hackers, having gained experience from working as “skilled programmers, security researchers, and systems administrators” (Coleman 2011).

However, the vast majority of participants perform tasks besides hacking, and in so doing embody a highly diverse division of labor. A group that Coleman provisionally describes as “geeks” contribute to “a number of digital media illiteracies such as video editing, design skills, collaborative writing tools, and enough technical know-how to be able to use Internet Relay Chat” (2011). Those lacking this level of expertise, but nevertheless drawn in by Anonymous’s political cause, increasingly learn and familiarize themselves with “the cultural codes and digital literacies” of their more technically proficient counterparts (Coleman 2011). In this regard, even classifying Anonymous strictly as “hackers” defies the group’s fundamental amorphous and heterogeneous composition.

Coleman’s article also offers intriguing insight towards the tensions and difficulty associated with maintaining the principle of anonymity. For instance, Anons constantly remind each other to refrain from acting like leaders or striving for personal attention in the media (Coleman 2011). True to the derogatory vernacular commonly found on 4chan, perpetrators are often accused of “namefagging” or “leaderfagging”—or, if their behavior persists, are banned from the IRC network altogether (Coleman 2011). There is thus a significant amount of deliberation and concerted effort in which anonymity is preserved and enforced within the internal fabric of Anonymous. This introduces a key paradox: despite Anonymous’s refusal to adopt rigid political tenets, such a commitment is itself sometimes rigidly imposed. Ironically, anonymity (along with information freedom), stands as an exception to Anonymous’s rejection of rules (Coleman 2011). Other forms of rules and authority also occasionally find their way into Anonymous’s networks. On IRC, chat room operators exercise more power than others, and have the power to ban individuals from the network (Coleman 2011). In addition to “leaderfagging”, other

behaviors that warrant bans are “constantly connecting and disconnecting ... [or] targeting the media or promoting violence” (Coleman 2011). The opinions of IRC operators also tend to “carry more weight” during debates, although they do not have the ultimate say in Anonymous’s major decisions or overall direction (Coleman 2011). In this regard, Coleman’s work effectively exposes the inconsistencies within Anonymous. Rather than painting Anonymous with a broad brush, the critical task is to identify tensions between authority and horizontal practices, where and when they occur.

Coleman also challenges the misconception that Anonymous is incomprehensible beyond our ability to study them. A closer look reveals that concrete norms, logics, skills and ethics—both unspoken and explicit—“lead some people and not others to politically engage in [Anonymous]” (Coleman 2011). Elsewhere, Coleman notes that operations are planned within a number of core IRC networks (e.g., AnonOps and AnonNet), which decide which targets are worth pursuing and which ones are not (2012b). There are also regular participants on these networks with whom one can talk to everyday (Coleman 2012b). Overstating Anonymous incomprehensible nature is not only misinformed, but may also legitimize the narrative of Anonymous’s opponents. As Coleman explains, it may exaggerate “the extent to which people find them threatening” as well as add to “the hysteria that law enforcement (and the defense contractors selling security and ‘anti-hacker’ solutions) self-consciously seeks to cultivate” (2012b).

However, the claim that Anonymous’s tendency to follow norms and trends means that they have thoroughly failed to follow their own principles is also misinformed. Instead of viewing both anonymity and lapses into authority as singular, binding, or overarching trends that dominate Anonymous at any given time, Coleman

suggests that it is more accurate to interpret these contradictory dynamics as a *dialectic* or a *tension*. Such is the case with collective efforts to suppress hierarchy and to encourage collective decision-making (Coleman 2011). This means that one should not take any given observation as representative of Anonymous's behavior as a whole. Rather, trends are developed only intermittently and are always subject to change (Coleman and Ralph 2011).

Coleman captures the drastic fluctuation of trends in an interview with the magazine *Death and Taxes* (2011). She recounts how Anonymous chooses tactics and operations:

“The reason for something sticking is different every time. Sometimes it's because a group with more influence is asserting itself. Other times it's because something is a really good idea and people jump on board. Sometimes it's because the event itself going out in the world calls itself so perfectly for Anon ... The event-ness of their actions has to be part of the equation to understand why it is that something come into being and why some things don't.” (DJ Pangburn 2011)

In addition to internal struggles surrounding hierarchy, collective interest in an event can also momentarily suspend authority. This was the case with Anonymous's support of Occupy Wall Street. While Anonymous announced its support for Occupy Wall Street in a number of videos and manifestos, it actually had a minimal influence (DJ Pangburn 2011). Anons recognized that their involvement might have been counter-intuitive, and in so doing decided to absorb themselves within the larger movement (DJ Pangburn 2011). Here, Anonymous demonstrated a form of anonymity at its most extreme, deciding to completely abolish itself in order to find identity in a different political movement.

Pertinent to Anonymous's inner tension were also instances when participants attempted to forge a false sense of collectivism onto actually existing forms of elitism.

Parmy Olson's journalistic *We Are Anonymous*, which traces the history of Anonymous, offers a detailed exposition of the events in question, which occurred during the attack on Paypal.com (2012, 113-19). While it was common knowledge that Anonymous crowd-sourced their attacks by encouraging hundred or thousands of Anons to utilize a web application that automatically carries out DDoS attacks, it became clear that "90 percent of the firepower from the attack on Paypal.com had not come from Anonymous volunteers but from zombie computers"—i.e. botnets (Olson 2012, 74, 117). Botnets are group of computers that, in addition to implementing DDoS attacks, can also send spam or find network vulnerabilities on websites (Olson 2012, 74-75). Crucially, they were operated by single users, which undercut beliefs that the Paypal attack was achieved through collective force (Olson 2012, 74, 114-19). This came as an uneasy truth for those who believed in the power of the "hive mind" (Olson 2012, 117-18).

However, in an attempt to preserve the credibility of horizontal participation, IRC operators refrained from publically admitting the real strength of botnets (Olson 2012, 118). In fact, a press release was written to falsely extol the power of the "hive mind" (Olson 2012, 119). While Olson presents enormous detail and evidence of interaction between Anons, her writing lacks deeper analysis about Anonymous's contradictory nature—which her detailed account would have been fitting evidence for.

2.2. From Trickery to Politics

The seemingly anomalous relation between humor and activism has also received much academic and journalistic interest. Anonymous's propensity towards humor revolves around its beginnings in 4chan, a popular forum that features content ranging from the strange and quirky, to the offensive and grotesque (Norton 2012b). Chan culture

generally shares an indifference towards moral or ethical standards. As Olson describes, “Racist comments, homophobia, and jokes about disabled people were the norm. It was customary for users to call one another ‘nigger’, ‘faggot,’ or just ‘fag.’ New 4chan users were newfags, old ones oldfags, and Brits were britfags, homosexuals were fagfags or gayfags” (2012, 34). There is, then, an enduring contradiction that ethical conduct exists in some forms (e.g., in advocating information freedom, collective action, human rights, etc.) but not in others (e.g. derogatory language).

Deeply indicative of the tension between humor and politics is the story of Jennifer Emick, an initial Anonymous supporter who grew disillusioned with the group after learning about its penchant for vulgar humor. Unable to find comfort in the “darker side of chan culture,” Emick wanted Anonymous to pursue a more peaceful style of protest—in the same vein as the one conducted against the Church of Scientology, which she participated in (Olson 2012, 95). After several Anons harassed Emick, she began a “crusade” against Anonymous, eventually uncovering the real identities of several hackers and contributing information to the FBI (Olson 2012, 96, 206, 216). Whether or not one agrees with Emick’s response (one could argue that it amounted to a particularly acute sense of betrayal), this incident reveals the troubling ways in which some facets of Anonymous can react. As Olson describes:

The more [Emick] tried telling other Anons that they were being irresponsible bullies, the more they threw insults and threats back at her. People found out her real name and address and posted it online, along with her husband’s details. People from various schisms in Anonymous began harassing her stepdaughter. There was talk of SWATing her house—calling up the FBI to send a SWAT team, a surprisingly easy prank to carry out. Soon Emick got her family to move to Michigan and started going online from a fake server that hid her true IP address. (2012, 96)

Taken together, the combination of cunning technical skill and exclusionary sentiment working against Emick suggests that the threat of abusive pranking should not be taken lightly. The strength of Olson’s text can be seen in such moments: it focuses on singular events with extensive detail, allowing readers to better assess dynamics and trends which are only briefly sketched out in the short articles written by Coleman. But again, Olson does not ask larger questions about the humor/politics dialectic—for instance, whether humor derives from a larger hacker tradition, or whether humor can activate various subversive impulses. As we shall see below, this is a task that Coleman (2012c) rightly takes up.

2.3. Chan Culture: Humor as Social Cohesion

Despite the unethical or ill-natured register of chan culture, it is also possible to identify where and where humor reinforces social cohesion. As Coleman (2012c) has surmised in her text *Coding Freedom*, humor can help “produce forms of collective awareness and shared sociality” (103). Because 4chan’s humor is largely stigmatized and confounding to the general public, these cases of marginalization potentially deepen 4chan’s social cohesion. If 4chan users tend to lack common ground with out-group individuals, they may in turn strengthen their insular interaction.

The prankster’s propensity to transgress the status quo belongs to a broader and more traditional ethos of hacking. According to Steven Levy (2001), who has written extensively about hacking culture, deeply embedded in the “hacker ethic” is a form of intellectual curiosity—that task of discovering the limits of knowledge and figuring out ways to transcend them. As he explains: “Hackers believe that essential lessons can be learned about the systems—about the world—from taking things apart, seeing how they

work, and using this knowledge to create new and even more interesting things. They resent any person, physical barrier, or law that tries to keep them from doing this” (Levy 2001, 40). In his estimation, hackers naturally oppose the status quo because it limits their “exploratory impulse” to improve upon imperfect systems of bodies of knowledge (Levy 2001, 40-41).

If humor can be defined generally as an “irreverent, frequently ironic stance towards language, social conventions and stereotypes” (Coleman 2012c, 100), then hacking is merely the application of this attitude towards technologies, mechanisms, tools, or any object that excites the intellectual scrutiny of hackers. Whether the hacker subverts one’s normal framework for understanding the world (humor) or the rigid function of a technology or tool (hacking), in both cases he or she exhibits “an awareness and rearrangement of form” (Coleman 2012c, 100). This ability to transfer an awareness of form and rearrangement into different “arenas”—i.e. from social contexts to technical systems—is molded by “a lifelong and routine practice of logic-oriented problem solving” (Coleman 2012b, 100). In this way, humor is habitually internalized into the thought processes of hackers. While these insights certainly do not present anything close to a compelling justification for crass pranking or conduct, they at least illuminate a broader cultural milieu from which mischief derives.

2.4. Opposing Perspectives

The more resounding arguments against Anonymous’s penchant for crude humor are present in the work of security experts Corman and Martin (2012). Both writers urge Anonymous to lean towards more traditional form of political engagement in order to become a group that is more efficient and refrains from creating collateral damage

(Lemos 2012). In an interview, Corman explains that in spite of Anonymous's well-natured activism, they have a tendency to embody a "chaotic evil" that encourages the behavior of those who "just want to see the world burn" (Lemos 2012). To be sure, Corman and Martin point towards some legitimate shortcomings that arose when some Anons indiscriminately leaked information. In a series of online articles critiquing Anonymous, they point to an anti-child pornography campaign ("Operation Darknet"), which involved leaking data from the wrongfully targeted website densetsu.com (Corman and Martin 2012). Accordingly, "Anonymous advocated the harassment of what appear to be legitimate users (including many women) that are likely innocent of any allegations related to such pornography. The site's members that signed up because of their interest in Hentai were in turn branded 'child porn traders' and pedophiles" (Corman and Martin 2012). Similarly, in leaking user information from BART's website during OpBART, Anonymous breached the privacy of many customers who had nothing to do with BART's actions (Corman and Martin 2012). In this regard, Corman and Martin find acute hypocrisy in Anonymous's failure to respect the anonymity for the individuals they allege to defend, despite advocating anonymity on behalf of their own members (Corman and Martin 2012). This argument, however, ignores the fact that a larger effort to violate privacy has been systematically employed by governments to curtail political dissent and prevent copyright infringement. There is a significant imbalance between government surveillance and Anonymous's unintentional breaches of privacy that result from poor planning.

Corman and Martin also express a more general tendency to overstate the destructive potential of Anonymous. Against this tendency, Coleman writes:

While there have been a handful of incidents we can describe as uncharacteristically un-Anonymous or led by one individual (as was the case with the lone anti-abortion hacker who targeted Britain's largest abortion clinic), [a] doom and gloom prediction of chaos unleashed by evil hackers remains largely unfulfilled – though it looms in the public anxieties of Anonymous as excessively dangerous. (2012b)

However, fears of Anonymous are also likely symptomatic of a larger habit to dismiss or feel aversion towards mischief, especially among those who fail to share the prankster's ironic engagement with established norms (Coleman 2012b). Not only do Corman and Martin fail to question these preconceived fears, but they also avoid a more complex interpretation of humor as part of the cultural logic of the hacker ethos.

2.5. The Critics of Decentralization

A common allegation among Anonymous's critics is the ineffectiveness of a leaderless and decentralized political engagement. Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, who had a falling out with Anonymous despite sharing close ties with them in the past, warned that a lack of unity would contribute to Anonymous's demise. He contends that a lack of central coordination has increased the possibility of government infiltration, as was clearly demonstrated by the FBI's ability to co-opt Sabu, the leading hacker of the Anonymous splinter group Lulzsec (Assange 2012). Assange concludes that Anonymous must ask itself whether it wants "to be a mere gang ... or a movement of solidarity. A movement of solidarity obtains its unity through common value and through the symbolic celebration of individuals whose actions strive towards common virtues" (2012).

Assange's statement, particularly his concluding remark, evokes the aforementioned tendency to discredit Anonymous's activism on the basis of its loosely structure and chaotic nature. This sentiment, as noted before, is often informed by negative connotations about mischief and transgressive behavior. While Assange makes no direct

mention of humor, he openly rebukes Anonymous's lack of leadership, claiming that, "Groups with unity flourish and those without unity are destroyed and replaced by those who have it" (2012).

To be sure, we should not downplay the legitimate concern of infiltration. As Corman and Martin explain, infiltration is one of the many paradoxes about the "open model"—or low barrier to participation—that comes by virtue of a non-hierarchical and loosely organized group (2012). They allege: "With no real bar for membership, anyone can approach the group through a variety of channels and claim to be a supporter. This creates a perfect avenue for infiltration due to the lack of vetting process" (Corman and Martin 2012). But unlike Assange, Corman and Martin are less keen to interpret the threat of infiltration as the sole reason for Anonymous's downfall—much less emblematic of why Anonymous fails to live up to the standards of an effective political group. Instead, they offer solutions—albeit vague ones—to ensure security. Namely, members should establish trust among each other in a manner that preserves decentralization, whereby "one member does not know details beyond a few other members" (Corman and Martin 2012). But despite their suggestions, Corman and Martin propose that the problems of decentralization ultimately outweigh the solutions. That is, building trust and security "doesn't even touch upon the imposters ... nor speak to outside players attempting to steer and manipulate the pack towards their own selfish ends" (Corman and Martin 2012).

That loose barriers to entry would increase the possibility for infiltration makes sense in theory, but Assange et al. have yet to present conclusive evidence that Anonymous's decentralized ties has suddenly opened up an unprecedented barrage of

government imposters. Coleman insists that most fears about infiltration within Anonymous's networks are mostly hypothetical, adding that “Anonymous is currently a bit too fragmented, dispersed, and subterranean for complete infiltration” (DJ Pangburn 2011).

2.6. Decentralization: A More Critical Perspective

Anonymous's loosely affiliated structure also produces problems for media representation. Social engineering, which is “the practice of duping humans for the purposes of gaining information or for spreading misinformation” (Coleman and Ralph 2011), has been widely used among hackers to discover network vulnerabilities, gain leverage against their targets, or as mentioned before, attempt to preserve social cohesion or high morale by perpetuating the illusion of the “hive mind”. But misinformation does not always have a clear strategic purpose. As Norton explains, “Anons lie when they have no reason to lie. They weave vast fabrications as a form of performance. Then they tell the truth at unexpected and unfortunate times, sometimes destroying themselves in the process” (2012a). This places more pressure on journalists to accurately represent Anonymous. In her review of Olson's *We Are Anonymous*, Norton criticizes Olson for “play[ing] the narrative straight” (2012a). According to Norton, Olson not only glosses over the fact that Anonymous defies easy identification, but she also fails to acknowledge—in a self-reflexive manner—the challenges associated with reporting on Anonymous (2012a). Specifically, Norton asks, “How has Olson chosen who she trusts and when? Her methods are hidden, her notes not referenced in the text, and she appears nowhere in her book” (2012a). While these are fundamental questions for any kind of journalism, Anonymous's duplicity raises the stakes: “In an environment where all your

sources lie to you, you must tell the world how you came to believe the story you're telling" (Norton 2012a). In this way, reporting on Anonymous requires greater degree of self-examination and transparency. Journalists must constantly question, refine, qualify and openly justify their choices.

Norton admits that reporting on Anonymous is no easy task. She claims that reporting about "a world where nothing is true and everything is permitted [presents] a constant existential nightmare" (Norton 2012a). But for those who accept the challenges of reporting on or researching Anonymous, the group's penchant to dupe journalists makes it difficult to trust what Anonymous have to say to the public (Coleman and Ralph 2011). However, Coleman and Ralph encourage researchers and journalists to maintain some degree of trust in Anonymous. For both authors, trust—i.e., the ability for individuals to place their lives in the hands of "strangers" and expect to be treated the same way—is key to preserving a democratic polity (Coleman and Ralph 2011). When researchers and journalists refuse to trust Anonymous, they help promote "the relative alienation of residents and citizens that Danielle Allen, a political scientist with the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, has called, 'political distrust'" (Coleman and Ralph 2011). Moreover, trust is foundational to solidarity and social change. Within a political movement, participants from different backgrounds, cultures, or ideological affiliations must ideally negotiate a common vision for social change. When commentators refuse to take Anonymous seriously on account of their duplicity alone, they may contribute more to social fragmentation (i.e. "political distrust") than to solidarity and the democratic polity that Coleman and Ralph speak of. Researchers and journalists may never get full clarity about Anonymous's actions and motives, but they

can at least take discretion in deeming which actions and motives are accurate. Thus, trusting Anonymous's commitments to social change is not a naïve leap of faith, but is rather an exercise in rigorously making "choice[s] about what we believe, why, and how it fits into a larger picture" (Norton 2012a).

Both Coleman and Norton emerge as some of the more critical voices in the extant literature about Anonymous. The strength of their work lies in expressing the foundational challenges of researching or investigating a group that defies being observed. They correctly argue that Anonymous should be understood as a multifaceted and conflicting series of voices rather than as a singular logic—whether regarding the tension between hierarchy and collective action, or between activism and humor. These insights help steer future research away from starting from faulty premises. However, both authors fall short of situating Anonymous within a larger tradition of decentralized cyber-activism—a line of inquiry undertaken in the previous chapter, and one that this study will continue to extend.

CHAPTER 3: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ANONYMOUS'S TEXTS

3.1. Anonymous and Textual Mediation

While extant research has extensively discussed Anonymous's politics and ethics, very little has been written about their communiqués, or what this study refers to as "texts". Most of these are presented in the form of online videos and aim to assert the reasons behind a particular cyber attack. Textual mediation allows Anonymous to disseminate messages to audiences in a direct way and on a massive scale, which contrasts the obscure and convoluted manner in which they both carry out attacks and communicate internally (Coleman 2011; Coleman 2012a). This introduces new lines of inquiry about inconsistencies between Anonymous's commitments to non-identity and their communicative strategies, which draw upon coherent beliefs and rigid social identities. This chapter will present the methodology for examining Anonymous's texts, which is informed by social scientist and linguist Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA).

The public statements examined (included in Appendix A) are limited to those concerning the major cyber attacks of 2010-11. Studying a group whose actions are contemporaneous with this time of writing means that it is difficult—if not impossible—to take stock of a finite corpus of texts. As long as Anonymous remains active, the group will continue producing manifestos, with very little in the way of ensuring that each successive transmission will follow the same patterns of the last. For this reason, the observations herein should not be taken to be overarching or totalizing. This thesis has instead chosen to incorporate texts from 2010-11, which reflect a significant chapter of Anonymous's history. Not only did this period feature Anonymous first shifting into a

strictly political register, but their campaigns spoke directly to the major insurrectionary events at the time: “OpPayback” defended the journalistic freedom of Wikileaks (which began publication of its major leaks in the same year) while “OpEgypt” and “OpTunisia” supported the series of Arab Spring uprisings in 2011 (a major anti-authoritarian and populous shift in Middle East politics). These major events helped concentrate and unify Anonymous’s collective energies, providing a greater sense of tangibility or normalcy to what would otherwise be a more disparate series of political causes. In terms of research, this simplifies and streamlines the task of selecting texts.

Confining CDA within a small sample of texts rather than a larger body of work also follows Fairclough qualitative approach (2003, 14). The objective is to investigate the possibilities of action within the parameters of social structures rather than the fully empirical dimensions of reality (Fairclough 2003, 14). This is because “reality”, according to Fairclough, cannot be fully defined by what we know or see within the limits of our own thoughts and experiences. Instead, it is always “contingent, shifting, and partial” (Fairclough 2003, 14). Accordingly, a *reality* of texts is not “exhausted by our knowledge about texts,” and an analysis of a single text does not “tell us all there is to be said about it” (Fairclough 2003, 14).² In this sense, CDA is always selective and partial, motivated by particular interests rather than by attempts to discover their fully “objective” nature (Fairclough 2003, 14-15).

3.2. Language in Late Modernity/New Capitalism

2. Fairclough clarifies that while textual analysis is selective, texts are not “unknowable” (2003, 14). He continues: “social scientific knowledge of them is possible and real enough, and hopefully increasing, but still inevitably partial” (Fairclough 2003, 14).

Fairclough's approach to textual analysis interrogates a broad spectrum of social life, which includes, but is not limited to discourse. However, his approach carries an increased emphasis on semiotics, which reflects the growing a linguistic facet of contemporary society within the past twenty to thirty years—a period commonly referred to as “late modernity” (Fairclough 1993, 3). The reasons for this are both economic and social. Economically, language emerges as one facet of “new capitalism,” which is the most recent iteration of restructurings that enable capitalism to overcome crises (Fairclough 2003, 4). Specifically, these transformations feature a shift from Fordist production to post-Fordist “flexible accumulation”—the latter of which entails technological innovation, the diversification of production, flexible labor (i.e., short-term or part-time work), and the transnational spread of (mostly industrial) production (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1993, 3). Due to the increasing information or knowledge-based nature of production, many goods carry linguistic or partly linguistic features (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1993, vii). For example, “the language used by service workers is part of the service they provide, and the products of the advertising industry are semiotic products” (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1993, vii).

In terms of social life, late modernity has increasingly focused attention on the mass media, which uses language in ways that reinforce both economic and political objectives (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1993, vii). Thus, there is a clear discursual component to new capitalism. As Fairclough puts it, “‘flexible accumulation’ as a new economic form has been ‘talked into being’ in the substantial literature on the new capitalism—including the works of management ‘gurus’ which fill the shelves of airport and railway bookshops internationally—as well as being put into practice through

practical changes in organizations” (1999, 4). This is what Fairclough means when he says that language has been “colonized” by economic and state regimes (1999, viii). Indeed, language facilitates the larger impact of new capitalism on social life. For example, the language used in classrooms may reflect the marketization or practices of management that increasingly network together with higher education (Fairclough 2003, 24-25). This colonization of language is only one example of how the influence of new capitalism is confined not strictly to economic forces, but has implications across social and cultural life (Fairclough 2003, 4). It also emphasizes the importance of CDA in critiquing and challenging contemporary economical and political regimes.

3.3. Fairclough’s Dialectical Approach

As mentioned before, CDA is built upon an approach of research oriented towards broad elements of social life. Fairclough calls these elements “social practices”, by which he means, “habitualised ways, tied to particular times and places, in which people apply resources (material or symbolic) to act together in the world” (1999, 21). Practices are positioned between structures (i.e., political or economic institutions) and events (individual and immediate incidents), and shift between practices constrained by rules (i.e. structure) and agency (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 22). However, the point here is not simply that language is a subcategory of social practices. Under the framework of a dialectical approach, language, along with other social practices, never exists in isolation. Rather, it is entangled with and embedded within other practices. In other words, each social practice is internalized within the others in a way that cannot be reducible to them (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 21; Fairclough 2003, 25). To

elaborate, Fairclough borrows the concept of “articulation” associated with post-Marxist theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985). He explains:

Articulation refers to the relationship of ‘overdetermination’ ... between practices within such a network, not only in a sense that each practice is simultaneously determined by others without being reducible to any of them, but crucially also in the sense that each practice can simultaneously articulate together with many others from multiple social positions and with diverse social effects. (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 23-24)

Because any practice, including language, is capable of equally “determining” other practices, language takes its place alongside traditional areas of emphasis (the economy, race, gender, etc.) as a potential site of struggle. Consider how language used in advertisements may shape consumer or gender identities (Fairclough 2003, 8). Here, textual mediation is networked with the practices of consumer capitalism and unequal gender relations—which, in themselves, are networked in a non-reducible manner. The general point here is that the dialectical perspective allows us to situate power within broad sectors of social life.

3.3.1. Discourse

The political, economic, and social significance of language described up to this point matches Fairclough’s understanding of discourse. His approach can be contrasted with that of Michel Foucault, whose work defines discourse as a dispersion of ways to speak about a subject—a capability that emerged within the last three centuries in juxtaposition to the previous “prudishness of language” that surrounded taboo subjects such as sexuality (1978, 34).¹ Fairclough takes up a more specific definition of discourse

1. While the multiplicity of knowledges and statements is central to Foucault’s conception of discourse, there are also limits to what can or cannot be said within each discourse. In other words, each discourse is historically situated. Foucault explains, “we must show that [discourses] do not come about of

as “semiotic elements of social practice,” which includes “language (written and spoken in combination with other semiotics, for example, with music in singing), nonverbal communication (facial expressions, body movements, gestures, etc.) and visual images (for instance photographs, film)” (1999, 38). In an attempt to avoid reducing social life to semiotic relations, Fairclough emphasizes that discourse is dialectically related to other, perhaps non-semiotic, elements of social life—e.g. social relations, power, material practices, beliefs/values/desires, and institutions/rituals (1999, 28; 2003, 2).

3.3.2. Orders of Discourse

Another way that Fairclough avoids reductionism is by situating discourse within the category of *social practices*, which, as mentioned above, exists alongside *social structures* and *social events*. To reiterate, social structures are abstract entities that define a set of possibilities (Fairclough 2003, 23)—i.e., what kind of action is allowed or restricted. Anything from economic structures, family, religion, the state, and language fits into this category (Fairclough 2003, 23). Social events, on the other hand, are individual and immediate incidents that occur throughout social life (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 22). Events are not directly determined by structures (Fairclough 2003, 23), and instead entail a greater deal of unpredictability. Their relation to structures is best described as a process of mediation by social practices (Fairclough 2003, 24). Social practices are concrete and particular ways of acting, such as teaching, managing, and

themselves, but are always the result of a construction the rules of which must be known, and the justifications of which must be scrutinized: we must define in what conditions and in view of which analyses certain of them are legitimate; and we must indicate which of them can never be accepted in any circumstances (28, 2002).

governing (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 22; Fairclough 2003, 24). As intermediaries between structures and events, they control “the selection of certain structural possibilities and the exclusion of others, and the retention of these selections over time, in particular areas of social life” (Fairclough 2003, 23-24). In other words, practices contain both contingent and structural tendencies. They adopt some, but not all, of the constraints that social structures impose upon social life. Along these lines, practices can be understood as operating in “relative permanences,” i.e., networks of practices (partially informed by social structures), which are stabilized in a particular space and time but are always open to transformation (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 21).

The three levels of social reality can also be applied to the semiotic level, following Fairclough’s assertion that language is in large part socially shaped (dialectically, rather than reductively) (2003, 24). Fairclough therefore proposes the following model:

<p>Social structures: languages Social practices: orders of discourse Social events: texts</p>
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Figure 1. Levels of Semiosis. Source: data taken from Fairclough 2003, 24.

Much like political or economic structures, languages define the possibilities and limits of linguistic expression (Fairclough 2003, 24). Orders of discourse then network into the relative permanences of linguistic practices (Fairclough 2003, 24), presenting the conditions onto which texts (events) emerge from.

Orders of discourse can be mapped out as genres, discourses, and styles (Fairclough 2003, 24-26).

<p>Genres: ways of acting Discourse: ways of representing Styles: ways of being</p>

Figure 2. Orders of Discourse. *Source: data taken from Fairclough 2003, 26.*

Genres include the different uses of language within the contexts of different social activities (Fairclough 2003, 26, 65, 206). These include interviews, speeches and informal conversations. While genres vary in rigidity, they carry limits to what (and how) one can use language (Fairclough 2003, 66, 72). For instance, speeches do not typically involve two-way conversation (with a balance of dialogue between the speaker and audience), and interviews typically do not only involve one-way conversation (with either only the interviewer or the interviewee speaking the only time).

Genres may also facilitate governance, i.e. ways of managing social life (Fairclough 2003, 32). While genres are not inherently institutional, they attain an institutional character when they are dialectically linked with other networks (i.e., what Fairclough calls “genre chains”) (2003, 32). Genre chains can be alternatively described as the process of recontextualization, or “the appropriation of elements of one social practice within another, placing the former within the context of the latter, and transforming it in particular ways in the process” (Fairclough 2003, 32). Consider this excerpt from Kanter’s book *Evolve!* (2001):

[Companies] reporting that they are much better than their competitors in the use of the Internet tend to have flexible, empowering, collaborative organizations ... Working in e-culture mode requires organization to be communities of purpose ... A Community makes people feel like members, not just employees – members with privileges but also responsibilities beyond the immediate job, extending to colleagues in other areas. Community means having things in common, a range of shared understandings transcending specific fields. (169-70)

The text is primarily situated in the genre of management, which is concerned with organizing and supervising working practices. However, it recontextualizes communal and collective social practices, i.e., genres for community. In this way, genres may help legitimize forms of governance by networking with other practices.

Within the context of orders of discourse, Fairclough defines discourse more narrowly as the particular ways that social actors represent social reality (2003, 26). He elaborates:

Differently positioned social actors “see” and represent social life in different ways, different discourses. For instance, the lives of poor and disadvantaged people are represented through different discourses in the social practices of government, politics, medicine, and social science, *and* through different discourses within each of these practices corresponding to different positions of social actors. (Fairclough 2003, 206)

Examining discourses shifts analysis away from the concrete and material world, towards people’s inner thoughts, expectations, and identities formulated as a result from their social conditions. Discourses need not reflect the current state of affairs, but may also be imaginative, involving the speculation of possible and alternative futures (Fairclough 2003, 124, 207). Discourses also contribute to social relations. Individuals employ them in “keeping separate from one another, cooperating, competing, dominating—and in seeking to change the ways in which they relate to one another” (Fairclough 2003, 124). Like genres, then, discourses help orient texts within different social identities. Researchers should therefore differentiate which textual elements cohere to, for instance, a text that reflects the discourse of new capitalism and one that reflects subversive politics. Both discourses carry limits and expectations to what can be said or written.

3.4. CDA and Anonymous

Instead of investigating how transformations of capitalism are played out in hegemonic struggles over discourse—as Fairclough does—this thesis aims to critique the discourse of Anonymous, a group that we may define as counter-hegemonic. Keeping in mind that CDA can be selective, this thesis is less concerned with how various semiotic relations are imbued with institutional qualities. This is because Anonymous lacks the same structural and financial resources as, for instance, mass media organizations or political parties. In this way, it is unlikely that Anonymous will enact ideological devices (such as bias and censorship) in a way that easily penetrates the larger national or global populous—although it is quite possible for counter-hegemonic struggles to reinforce rigid belief systems within their own members via language and discourse. As mentioned previously, this thesis takes the latter approach. It hopes to identify how the radical and non-hierarchical elements of Anonymous’s principals are constrained by hegemonic discourses, e.g., hierarchy and identity (which are manifested in exclusionary statements). These hegemonic discourses may not reflect the institutional strength of capitalistic enterprises or political organizations—if this were so, there would be no ideological difference between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces. However, the possibility that Anonymous carries discursive elements antithetical to its own principals attests to the intensity of dialectical relations. In other words, it verifies how social practices associated with radical movements may internalize the discourses of the larger social order.

3.5. A Critical Discourse Analysis of Anonymous’s Texts

This chapter inquires whether Anonymous deviates from its own principles of anonymity and non-hierarchy within communicative strategies employed in its texts (through its terminology, semantic and grammatical relations, etc.). It draws from an

archive of communiqués that mostly aim to explain and justify the reasons behind a cyber attack. Thus, often described are the various social injustices that the targeted political or economic organizations are accused of committing (or supporting). The goal here is not to examine a comprehensive corpus of texts, following Fairclough’s proposition that textual analysis can analyze a small body of texts, or even analyze extracts from a single text (2003, 6). Accordingly, this study limits its analysis to texts that refer to notable cyber attacks, such as Anonymous’s interventions in support of Wikileaks and the Arab Spring uprisings, which took place from 2010-11.

3.5.1. Modality

The modality of the text includes clues about the author’s identity, which are revealed in large part by what the author considers true or necessary. Fairclough identifies two types of modality: “epistemic” modality, which includes commitments to knowledge, and “deontic” modality, which includes commitments to obligations or actions (2003, 167-68). The degree of certainty in which an author expresses their commitments may vary. For instance, the statements “it will rain tomorrow” and “it might rain tomorrow” differ in modality, with the former containing a stronger commitment to truth than the latter. Closely associated to modality are evaluations, which are statements about what is desirable or undesirable, and are thus indicative of the author’s values (Fairclough 2003, 172). While evaluations are distinguished from epistemic modality (commitments to truth), they can be expressed through deontic modality (commitments to activity) (Fairclough 2003, 173). Consider the statement, “one must wear a raincoat when it rains”, which carries the implication that wearing a raincoat is desirable.

Modality not only reveals the author's identity on a personal level, but also hints at the social relations in which the author is situated (Fairclough 2003, 166). Authority pertains to modality insofar as authors who commit most to truths or activities speak with a certain degree of command and expertise (Fairclough 2003, 166, 180)—the implication being that the speaker knows more about the subject matter than the audience. For instance, politicians typically speak towards the public under the impression that they know what policies or measures are best for society.³ While Anonymous's texts may purport to oppose major political and economical institutions, this does not preclude them from containing hints of authoritative speech.

Take an excerpt from Anonymous's video announcing their support for the 2011 Egyptian uprising, which displays different types of modalized speech:

To the Egyptian Government: Anonymous challenges all those who are involved in censorship. Anonymous wants you to offer free access to uncensored media in your entire country. When you ignore this message, not only will we attack your government websites, Anonymous will also make sure that the international media sees the horrid reality imposed upon your people. Anonymous will not spare anybody who supports this suppression. It is in the hands of the Egyptian government to end this: continue your repression and you will be subject to civil protest - lend an ear to the claim of freedom from your people and the hostilities will cease. (*Anonymous - Operation Egypt - A Press Release 2011*)

The underlined verbs and adverbs contain a high degree of modalization: e.g., “continue your repression and you will be subject to civil protest” instead of “continue your repression and you will likely be subject to civil protest” (*Anonymous - Operation Egypt - A Press Release 2011*). A majority of sentences are deontic, as they indicate various obligations to act, either on behalf of the author or the audience. Deontic modalities that describe the author's own commitments to action are what Fairclough calls “offers”

3. See Fairclough's analysis of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's speech: 2003, 174-75.

(2003, 168)—e.g., “Anonymous challenges all those who are involved in censorship ... Anonymous will not spare anybody who supports this suppression” (*Anonymous - Operation Egypt - A Press Release* 2011). On the other hand, “demands” are actions that the author deems necessary for the audience to undertake (Fairclough 2003, 168). In the passage above, they are directed at the Egyptian government: “Anonymous wants you to offer free access to uncensored media in your entire country” (*Anonymous - Operation Egypt - A Press Release* 2011).

While the text’s use of strong modalization helps promote themes of social justice,⁴ we can observe its authoritative undertones. As described earlier, strong modalization implies that the author is granted the power to dictate what is, and what is not, true. But strong modalities can be seen as undercutting themes of social justice when they are combined with the passive voice. Consider these statements: “Continue your repression and you will be subject to civil protest—lend an ear to the claim of freedom from your people and the hostilities will cease” (*Anonymous - Operation Egypt - A Press Release* 2011). Such representations omit the actors responsible for these actions. Coupled with verbs that denote strong truth claims (“will”), the passive voice strengthens the notion of inevitability. This characterizes social change as part of a natural progression of events, instead of emphasizing the human element usually associated with social change—i.e., the agency and determination of individuals to change their social conditions. Anonymous’s statement in support of the Tunisian uprising further illustrates

4. Words like “suppression” and “repression,” are associated with descriptions of inequity or abuse perpetuated by powerful groups (governments, militaries, etc.) against less powerful groups (protestors, refugees, ethnic minorities, etc.) (*Anonymous - Operation Egypt - A Press Release* 2011). While such terms can be used in a variety of other contexts, from op-eds, newspaper articles, to political speeches, other features of the passage hint more directly at a commitment to political resistance.

this: “The time for truth has arrived. A time for freedom and transparency. A time for people to express themselves freely and to be heard from anywhere across the world” (*Anonymous - Operation Tunisia - A Press Release* 2011). Here, the need for social change is attributed to the passage of time. There is no mention of the individuals driving social change, or of the social conditions that provoked their acts of resistance.

Fairclough gestures towards the idea that the passive voice and other abstract representations reinforce governance.⁵ Policy documents, or other texts associated with genres of governance, often rely on the passive voice (or other forms of abstraction) in order to gain public consensus or legitimacy. This is in part because abstract language glosses over the causal factors, responsibility, and motives behind the implementation of various political, economic, or social measures (Fairclough 2003, 141). Such is the case with pro-globalization narratives, which often frame globalization as an agent-less, natural, universal, a-historical or inevitable process.⁶ Doing so avoids any disagreement that would arise if the authors were to expose the economic or political incentives behind those who support pro-globalization policies.

Another component of modality that reinforces authoritative speech is the power of prediction. While anyone can make predictions, the question is whether the author identifies as someone who has the “socially ratified power of prediction” (Fairclough 2003, 167). One way this can be expressed is when predictions are used to justify how the author wants people to behave (Fairclough 2003, 167). More generally, predictions can

5. For more on the rhetorical devices associated with neoliberal discourses, particularly nominalization, see: Fairclough 2003, 144.

6. For an example of pro-globalization narratives that employ the passive tense, see excerpts from the novel *The Blair Revelation*, cited in Fairclough’s text (2003, 249-50).

sustain authority when they justify the author's commitments to truth (epistemic modality). This harks back to the point that authoritative identities are considered as such when authors speak with a strong sense of certainty and command—which is to say that authoritative statements need not call for concrete action, as is the case with demands.

The power of prediction can be seen in a few key areas within Anonymous's texts. Take the sentence, "A true info-war is waged here for the very first time—and the outcome of this battle will affect all future battles about free access to information to come" (*Anonymous - Press Release, 9 December 2010* 2010). Here, prediction adds to the urgency and significance of the text's goals ("take to action", "reclaim what's ours" [*Anonymous - Press Release, 9 December 2010* 2010]). In this sense, prediction helps persuade the audience to act in a way prescribed by the author. We can also understand predictions as involving similar forms of abstraction noted above. In the sentence, "there have been and will be further changes in the way the world is organized, so that nevermore will small groups of people be able to restrain the fundamental freedoms of the collective that is humankind" (*Anonymous - Operation Tunisia - A Press Release* 2011), the author predicts that the future will guarantee some sort of egalitarian promise. But he or she does not go into detail about how such a future will be organized. Furthermore, the author fails to specify how this future will be attained, implying that these social changes will occur naturally. Again, the suppression or removal of actors, achieved through the passive voice, contributes to this. Crucially, these examples of high modality are not only antithetical to themes of social change but also to Anonymous's logic of non-identity. Rather than a strong commitment to truth, which suggests cohesion,

consensus, and thus a singular identity, we would imagine that Anonymous would adopt a more tentative attitude to their claims (low modality).

3.5.2. Intertextuality

Assumptions are shared meanings that the author and audience take as given (Fairclough 2003, 55). Fairclough speaks towards their association with governance when he asserts that, “the capacity to exercise social power, domination and hegemony includes the capacity to shape ... the nature and content of this ‘common ground’, which makes implicitness and assumptions an important issue with respect to ideology” (2003, 55). In other words, assumptions reinforce governance by rejecting scrutiny and other divergent or opposing voices. But they do so implicitly—instead of calling for certain actions or beliefs be undertaken, assumptions suggest that the audience *already* consents to the dominant view. This eliminates the need for forceful language, which evokes themes of hegemony, i.e., control through consent rather than coercion (Fairclough 2003, 45). However, assumptions vary to the degree in which they are shared or committed to, and thus may either operate with a high or low intensity. Which is to say that assumptions do not always sustain governance. For instance, the common ground assumptions create may also help sustain solidarity and community (Fairclough 2003, 55). This section therefore pays attention to whether the other textual elements that assumptions work alongside contribute to governance.

Assumptions are realized in large part through intertextuality. Intertextuality is “the presence of actual elements of other texts within a text—quotations” (Fairclough 2003, 39). In other words, intertextuality accentuates external voices or perspectives. Take for instance the difference between alluding to someone’s speech abstractly

(indirect speech—“X said they are going to movies”) and actually citing that person’s words (direct speech—“X said ‘I am going to the movies’”). Direct speech, which is indicative of high intertextuality, suppresses (but does not remove) the author’s role as an intermediary. This contributes to a more varied makeup of values, modalities and representations within the text—i.e., openness to difference (Fairclough 2003, 41). Intertextuality thus minimizes the assumed shared values associated with monological texts, puncturing what would otherwise be a narrative closed off to criticism (and thus amenable to governance).

If we measure intertextuality by simply looking at the ratio of monological speech (the author’s own words) to dialogical speech (other speakers’ words), most, if not all, of the texts analyzed rank low in intertextuality. In fact, intertextual speech appears only once. *Anonymous - Operation Egypt - A Press Release* quotes famous writer Khalil Gibran, likely for inspirational purposes: “For as Khalil Gibran once said: ‘life without freedom is like a body without a soul, and freedom without thought is like a confused spirit ... Life, freedom and thought are three-in-one, and are everlasting and shall never pass away’” (2011). However, this method of measuring intertextuality risks becoming too broad. For instance, expecting a text to fully adopt dialogical speech would involve an entire change of genre. Consider the difference between news articles and manifestos. The expectation is that the former would include more quotes than the latter because journalism (in principle) involves a suppression of opinion in favor of balanced reporting. On the other hand, manifestos are less likely to allow substantial room for intertextuality—particularly if external voices overshadow, deviate from, or dilute the political or social message that manifestos aim to communicate.

This analysis seeks to examine intertextuality under a narrower scope. It focuses on moments in texts that evoke external actors, which thereby carry the expectation of quoted speech. In a statement entitled, *What is Anonymous? – Understand Us!*, the author writes, “Anonymous is not a political current, nor is it based on a political current. Some may say that it’s anarchism, liberalism, communism, libertarianism, etc.—others say it’s nothing but a bunch of twelve-year olds from 4chan having fun on the Internet.

Anonymous is none of those” (2010). Here, the author addresses actors who are either antagonistically related to, or who fail to understand Anonymous. While the author goes as far as indicating the specifics of their speech (e.g., that Anonymous has a political current), he or she does not provide actual quotes. Nor does the author reveal any other contextual information—for instance, the names of these actors, or where and when they made these statements. A similar lack of specificity extends to depictions of sympathetic groups. While the author vows support for the Tunisian people in *Anonymous - Operation Tunisia - A Press Release* (“Anonymous has heard the cries for freedom from the Tunisian people” [2011]), he or she does not indicate what these “cries for freedom” are, in terms of specific demands. As such, representations of both antagonistic and sympathetic groups feature low levels of intertextuality, which provides considerable power for the author to decide how to represent external actors. This leaves the author’s assertions unchallenged or unsupported, perhaps to the extent that they can be understood as containing bias. As suggested earlier, excluding direct speech creates an assumed common ground between the author and the audience at the expense of divergent voices.

Texts that more adequately adhere to non-identity politics would ideally contain high levels of intertextuality. By opening up difference, intertextuality accentuates a

fragmentation of interests, political allegiances, and identities—which both avoids adversarial abilities to detect and classify Anonymous and supports a horizontal egalitarianism. That various elements of Anonymous’s manifestos minimize difference thus speaks towards a deeper contradiction between their alleged support for flexible and multiple identities and their actual practices of monological, abstract, and evaluative speech (which reinforces a singular and inflexible identity).

3.5.3. Universality

Commitments to universality are closely linked to hegemony. One of the methods by which the ruling class tries to achieve consent through non-coercive means is by claiming that their ideas reflect universal virtues or truths (Fairclough 2003, 45). We can interpret universality in ways previously described in this section—namely, modality and intertextuality. In terms of modality, strong commitments to truth (e.g., “will”, “is”, “can”) coupled with the omission of actors responsible for actions (i.e., the passive voice) bring a sense of inevitability or natural order to social processes. This obfuscates the particular groups responsible for setting forth these social changes (including their motives and social statuses) as well as the historical context in which they are embedded. Fairclough uses discourses of globalization to illustrate examples of universalization (2003, 45). Such discourses gloss over the extent to which globalization derives from specific geographic locales, such as from countries that hold major influence over international trade organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMP). Also ignored is the extent to which globalization is the outcome of economic policy—e.g., “the progressive removal of barriers to the free movement of goods and finance through inter-governmental agreements dominated by

the USA and other powerful states”—as well as how globalization “excludes large areas of the world (e.g. much of Africa)” (Fairclough 2003, 45). Universalization therefore legitimizes globalization in part by stripping it of its political character.

While Anonymous’s political values contrast those of the globalization discourses mentioned above, various parts of their texts are nevertheless built upon assumptions of universalization. Turning first to the more explicit examples, *What is Anonymous? – Understand Us!* declares that Anonymous is not about “personal achievement and recognition [but] ... about accomplishing goals for the betterment of humankind – together as a species” (2010). The text goes on to assert, “Anonymous ... will defend humanity against anyone willing to take this new-found freedom away” (*What is Anonymous? – Understand Us!* 2010). These claims appeal to the support of the audience by forging common ground on the broad and highly abstract terms of “humanity”. Universalization thus forecloses many differences between the speaker, audience and those who Anonymous purport to defend—differences in political affiliation, cultural, ethnic, and national backgrounds, and so forth. In terms of more implicit markers of universalization, both statements contain strong modal verbs: “Anonymous ... is about accomplishing goals for the betterment of humankind ...” and “Anonymous ... will defend humanity ...” (*What is Anonymous? – Understand Us!* 2010). In this sense, the author minimizes doubt, as well as alternatives to their claims—i.e., *difference of opinion*. Moreover, these statements rank low in intertextuality, as they fail to support claims of universalization with a wide range of scientific and philosophical knowledge dedicated to the subject. Thus, they suppress difference by excluding external—and possibly divergent—voices. Both strong modal commitments and a lack of external

voices add to the potency in which universalization functions as an assumption, i.e., the implicit agreement that Anonymous's values are beneficial on a universal scale.

The contradiction with Anonymous's use of universalization not only pertains to ideological content, as it might for social movements—i.e., the contrast between democratic and emancipatory politics and the amenability of assumptions to legitimize dominant social and political discourses. Instead, crucial here is the contrast between Anonymous's rejection of identity and the ways in which universalization in fact bolsters identity, by granting particular visions and representations universal validity (Fairclough 2003, 45). We would imagine that Anonymous, in staying true to its rejection of identity, would accentuate the relative and particular character of claims. At the very least, such a textual framework would make claims in a much more meticulous manner—for instance, by being aware of divergent and external voices (intertextuality), and by showcasing much more tentative modalities towards the truth or validity of claims.

3.5.4. Social Actors

This section turns to representations of social actors, with similar consideration of the ways in which they operate as assumptions. Fairclough offers specific variables for examining how social actors are represented.⁷ This study will draw from variables most pertinent to relations of power between the author and audience. Firstly, *inclusion* and *exclusion* refer to the presence of actors within texts.⁸ Inclusion relates to actors who are

7. Fairclough does not explicitly classify these variables under the specific category of assumptions. However, this section will explore the ways in which they strengthen, or operate similarly to, assumptions.

8. We may interpret inclusion and exclusion similarly to intertextuality, although the issue at hand pertains less to the words ("texts") of external actors and more to their general presence, which could include descriptions of non-verbal actions.

represented within the text while exclusion entails the reduction of their presence (Fairclough 2003, 145). In the latter case, actors can be suppressed, i.e. entirely removed, or represented in the background, i.e. present in some, but inferred in other places of the text (Fairclough 2003, 145). Secondly, the ways actors are addressed can be viewed in terms of *naming* and *classification*. Representing actors by name produces a more concrete representation, while classifying actors—i.e. representing actors by a category—is more abstract (Fairclough 2003, 146). Thirdly, actors can be *activated* or *passivated*. The former generally relates to an actor who produces changes and “makes things happen,” and the latter to someone who is subjected to processes (Fairclough 2004, 145). Finally, actors can either be addressed as pronouns (e.g., “you”, “we”, “him” or “her”) or as nouns (Fairclough 2003, 145). Pronouns can provide clues to how the author identifies with the audience, in terms of delineating groups and communities (Fairclough 2003, 149). The “we” pronoun, for instance, implies a sense of cohesion or unity between the author and audience. On the other hand, referring to the audience in the second person (“you”) implies distance—one that has to potential to be, but is not always, antagonistic.

3.5.4.1. Relations Between Social Actors

How the author employs pronouns often evokes an antagonist-protagonist relation. The “we” often identifies the protagonists—either Anonymous itself or groups which Anonymous supports: e.g. “Anonymous ... believes the Tunisian attempts at censorship are doomed to failure if only we, Anonymous, the people, take up our individual responsibilities” (*Anonymous - Operation Tunisia - A Press Release 2011*).⁹

9. Here, there is an attempt to incorporate “the people” within the unanimous-“we”, which identifies them as protagonists.

Contrast this with *Anonymous - Press Release, 9 December 2010*, which identifies antagonistic actors in the third person: “When governments and corporations control information they control you” (2010). Here, antagonism is reinforced by other variables. For example, “governments” and “corporations” are classified, which means that they are depicted categorically, rather than as specific entities (*Anonymous - Press Release, 9 December 2010* 2010). As Fairclough notes, abstractly representing actors may often take away the extent that the audience can view them as people (2003, 150)—much less as people the audience can emphasize with.

Antagonism may also take shape at the level of interaction between antagonistic actors and the audience (which is predominately addressed in the second person [“you”]). Take the following excerpt: “When governments and corporations control information they control you ... When corporations ... [use] their vast amounts of wealth to manipulate or influence the free flow of information, they control you” (*Anonymous - Press Release, 9 December 2010* 2010). Here, the audience is passivated, assuming less agentive power than “governments” and “corporations” (*Anonymous - Press Release, 9 December 2010* 2010). On one hand, this raises questions about whether the passivation of sympathetic actors works against the interests of the text—for instance, by implying that passivated actors are inherently powerless or serve as the extensions of institutional structures (Fairclough 2003, 150).¹⁰ However, addressing the audience as “you” might be beneficial to the author’s agenda in other ways. Consider how “you” appeals to the

10. The text stops short of thoroughly downplaying the agency of the audience, which is shown in the subsequent paragraph, where a more unanimous “we”—combining the audience and author in union—is activated (“When we are strong, we possess the power ... to make a difference, to better our world” [*Press Release, 9 December 2010* 2010]).

audience on more personal and intimate terms than, for instance, the third person (e.g., “the general populous”, “citizens”, “the public”, etc.—which are relatively abstract and, often times categorical, conceptions of people). Put differently, the “you” implies that state or corporate actions will impact the audience directly. As such, the second hand brings a sense of urgency to the issues at hand—the perceived threat of state and corporate power. Rhetorically, this can be seen as a way to add intensity, dramatic appeal, or fear to these threats.

The “you” need not be reserved for an audience that Anonymous attempts to gain support from. Consider how a passage from *Anonymous Operation B.A.R.T.* addresses BART in the second person, which is to say that it shifts to a different—more oppositional—audience: “We will be free to speak out against you when you try to cover up crimes, namely on behalf of those who have engaged in violence against a mostly unarmed public” (2011). The sense of communicative proximity associated with the second person heightens the immediacy of confrontation. It allows the author to express threats or demands more directly than if they were projected towards third person representations of actors (e.g. “governments”, “corporations”).

3.5.4.2. Pronouns and Abstraction

While the unanimous “we” may strengthen social cohesion and thus positively contribute to political solidarity, it could at times be seen as abstract. The point is to determine whether the “we” suppresses the heterogeneous voices or subjectivities of the audience—i.e., what has been previously referred to as “difference”, or the incorporation of external voices (*cf.* section 3.6.2.). At worst, the unanimous “we” could regard the participants of political struggle, or the wider populous that such social change would

benefit, in a categorical manner—with rigid expectations and/or qualifications for what qualities, capacities, expectations, interests, or belief systems such participants possess. Relevant here are also the ways in which low levels of intertextuality imply *consensus*—i.e., a lack of disagreement towards the views expressed in the text. Similarly, the unanimous “we” could implicitly encourage the audience to adopt the views of the author, restricting the space in which the audience could consider disagreeing or expressing divergent thought. Here, modality also comes into play: strong commitments to truths or to actions solidify the extent to which the author’s views are offered as the only avenue of thought.

Themes of political solidarity are frequently expressed within these manifestos: e.g., “We stand together and united against this oppression” (*Anonymous - Operation Egypt - A Press Release* 2011). They are abstract in so far as they forge common ground across differences, and are spoken with strong commitments to truth. However, one needs to ask whether there is an *expectation* of difference in the subject matter of these statements (for instance, if the text addressed a specific segment of people, such as particular ethnic group)—in which case abstraction would be more worth of analysis. Consider texts announcing Anonymous’s support for existing struggles, particularly the 2011 uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia. The concern is whether external supporters understand the particular historical, cultural, or political conditions of these uprisings. In both *Anonymous - Operation Egypt - A Press Release* and *Anonymous - Operation Tunisia - A Press Release* there is a slight recognition of difference, as evidenced by various references to the Tunisian and Egyptian people in the second and third person: “You will not be denied your right to free speech” (*Anonymous - Operation Egypt - A*

Press Release 2011); “the Tunisian government has decided it wants to control this present with falsehoods and misinformation and restrict the freedoms of their own people” (*Anonymous - Operation Tunisia - A Press Release* 2011). As discussed earlier, both the second and third person can imply distance between the author and the actors being addressed. However, moments when the author employs the unanimous-“we” in reference to protestors tend to minimize difference, sometimes quite explicitly. For example, the “we” in *Anonymous - Operation Egypt - A Press Release* invokes themes of solidarity that take place on a global scale: “We stand together and united against this oppression. This struggle is not just for you alone, but for the whole of humankind” (2011). An almost identical message is expressed in *Anonymous - Operation Egypt - A Press Release*: “To the Tunisian people: We stand together and united against this oppression. This is a battle which is waged, not just for you alone, but to serve as a precedent and statement to the world” (2011).¹¹ This study does not propose that universalistic political struggles are inherently flawed. On the contrary, it merely suggests that these texts fall short of accentuating difference in texts where there is an opportunity, and perhaps an expectation, to do so (i.e., texts that cater towards specific audiences). As mentioned throughout this chapter, these reoccurring themes of unanimity digress more from Anonymous’s vows to downplay a singular and cohesive identity.

3.5.5. The Generic Conventions of Populist Polemics

11. Interestingly, both quotes exhibit a transition from the “you”-protestors to the unanimous-“we”, in which the authors explicitly call for protestors to conceptualize the uprisings on a universal scale: “This struggle is not just for you alone, but for the whole of humankind” (*Anonymous - Operation Egypt* 2011); “This is a battle which is waged, not just for you alone, but to serve as a precedent and statement to the world” (*Anonymous - Operation Tunisia – A Press Release* 2011). This implies that unanimity was not already established (both in content and form), but requires some concerted effort to achieve.

Genres are textual elements (thematic, stylistic, semantic, grammatical, or lexical) arranged according to particular forms of discursal or non-discursal activity (Fairclough 2003, 65). Examples include interviews, speeches, conversations, education, and advertisements. Genres are typically fixed in their arrangement of textual elements (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 26; Fairclough 2003, 66). But Fairclough insists that genres can be mixed or loosely defined, and thus are fixed only to a degree (2003, 69). One way to determine the rigidity of a genre is to see if it is linked to a particularly purpose-driven social activity (Fairclough 2003, 70-71). This study proposes that Anonymous's texts adhere to high levels of generic convention because they serve a specific purpose of justifying political actions or attempting to gain popular support.

The larger point, however, is that generic conventions constrain the extent to which Anonymous can accentuate difference. Themes of social justice that espouse particularly abstract notions of universal truth may serve the narrow purpose of attempting to gain public support across different communities, and may not suggest a full-fledged breach of Anonymous's own commitments to non-identity. To be sure, a separate debate could be had about whether the activity of gaining public support—especially in line with attempts to transform Anonymous into a populist political movement—is itself a digression from non-identity politics. However, such a debate lies beyond the scope of this chapter.

Pertinent to this discussion are also Fairclough's thoughts on genres that are not particularly purpose-driven. As he stresses, we should refrain from the tendency to privilege purpose too much when examining genres (Fairclough 2003, 71). Doing so risks extending the notion that communication and various parts of social life are instrumental

or concerned with “efficiently producing results” (Fairclough 2003, 71). Against this, Fairclough asks us to consider a Habermasian concept of the “lifeworld”, which involves communicative interaction that is conversational and informal rather than driven by purpose—his point being that we should avoid “centring our view of genre on purpose” (2003, 71-72). The current discussion is less concerned about preconceived notions of genres. However, it is worth noting that less-structured forms of communication can in fact be found within other facets of Anonymous, particularly, as Coleman has investigated, IRC chat rooms (2012a). Which is to say that the relatively stabilized generic conventions of Anonymous’s communiqués can be located in a dialectical tension between identity and non-identity. Given the unpredictable and contradictory nature of Anonymous’s practices and internal communications, these communiqués can be understood as an attempt to formulate a coherent message requisite for maintaining or expanding a base of popular support. Again, this speaks towards the larger tensions between preserving the elusive and esoteric nature of a decentralized political struggle and ensuring that the aims of that struggle resonate widely, in ways that find themselves relevant and familiar to the needs of ordinary people.

The generic conventions of Anonymous’s communiqués will also be relevant to the next chapter, which will argue that forms of identity are not entirely incompatible with decentralized political struggles. Drawing from a Deleuzian concept of “minor” processes and “major” identities, it will situate Anonymous within the former. Anonymous’s communiqués are crucial because they represent the immanence of majoritarian identity, which do not fully feature an “outside” for minor politics to occupy. However, one of the defining features of the minor mode is its ability to allow movement

within and around major identities. This allows us to consider whether Anonymous may occupy major identities *strategically*, in order to take advantage of textual features (such as the broad reach of universalistic slogans) without permanently adopting them.

CHAPTER 4: THE POLITICS OF NEGATION

Writing about the riots that took place in Greece and California from 2008-9, Johann Kaspar proposes that “a demandless struggle” carries the radical potential of revealing “the totality of the enemy one fights (capital-as-society) and the totality of those who fight it (the potentiality of non-alienated life)” (14, 2009). By acknowledging the political order in its totality, it becomes clear that the means by which demands are met are inadequate because they fall within the dominant framework of capital and the state. Refusing to undertake the “accepted form of presenting disagreements” means that the revolutionary practice becomes both “internal to its presentation” and capable of confronting capital in its entirety (Kaspar 2009, 21).

This chapter does not claim that Anonymous approaches the *non-demand* for the same reasons in which Kaspar describes, that is, as a negation of capital. Nevertheless, both the Greek anti-austerity riots and Anonymous show disenchantment for the conventions of expressing and practicing political discontent. As previously noted, this disenchantment is, for Anonymous, aimed more at leadership and identity than at capital. This chapter investigates whether Anonymous’s commitments to non-identity are consonant with the politics of negation, and whether Anonymous has the potential to similarly confront the totality of their political adversaries.

While Anonymous do not specifically frame their objectives in Marxian terms—although various fragments within their heterogeneous participants might—this thesis takes guidance from a strand of Marxism called autonomist-Marxism. This is a theoretical tradition that is useful because it maps out the conditions in which politics of negation are most effective: namely, the current stage of capitalism in which the

prevailing initiative is to subsume unprecedented domains of the social. While the initial focus might be economic, autonomist-Marxism introduces lines of inquiry about the broader appropriation and subsumption of identity as such, which relates directly to Anonymous. This chapter then turns to Deleuzian conceptions of the *minor*, which theorizes the oppositional politics of those who are deprived of representation (i.e. *major* identities), and are thus forced to navigate and foment resistance from peripheral spaces. Importantly, this perspective views the major as a representational space that minor political subjects can strategically (but temporarily) occupy, in order to concentrate or amplify their political voices. This idea of *strategic essentialism*, forwarded by the post-colonial scholar Gayatri Spivak (1996), will allow this study to situate Anonymous's centralized and majoritarian polemics not as a violation of their decentralized ethos, but as an example of strategic minoritarian practice.

Before proceeding, it is worth briefly explaining why this chapter has chosen to combine thinkers—including Negri, Foucault, Deleuze, Agamben, and Spivak—who come from diverse and, in some cases, seemingly disparate or conflicting theoretical traditions. While these thinkers might attribute domination to difference sources, each has spoken in various capacities about its diffuse manifestation. This common interest has, in some cases, encouraged efforts to build trans-disciplinary ties. The autonomist-Marxist text *Radical Thought in Italy* (1996), which this thesis draws from, incorporates the philosophical thought of Agamben alongside other more economic-oriented perspectives, such as Lazzarato. Negri, the seminal autonomist-Marxist theorist, has also incorporated Deleuze and Foucault in one of his major works, *Empire* (2000), to help explicate emergent forms of control in contemporary capitalism. While Spivak has identified and

refuted the Western bias of French post-structuralism, she has helped delineate a subject of political resistance—the subaltern subject of the colonized—who cannot be *but* heterogeneous because of his or her exclusion from the self-actualized positive identity of the colonizers. This chapter hopes to illuminate the parallels between subaltern and minoritarian models of resistance, even as it recognizes that the tensions between their theoretical traditions are yet to be completely resolved.

In *Radical Thought in Italy* (1996), editor Michael Hardt remarks that one of the distinguishing factors of Italian autonomist-Marxism is how it has served as a kind of “laboratory for experimentation in new forms of political thinking that help us conceive a new revolutionary practice in our times” (1). Hardt takes experimentation to mean a prioritization of revolutionary practice—that, in the Italian context, on-the-street activism has constantly informed political theory (rather than the opposite) (1996, 1-2). In keeping with the themes of experimentation and intellectual openness, this study believes that it is key to also integrate different theoretical and disciplinary perspectives. As the current dynamic of capitalist domination continues to expand into different (non-economic) domains, a trans-disciplinary and non-reductive mode of analysis becomes all the more necessary.

4.1. Transformations: From the Mass Worker to the Socialized Worker

How demands-as-such come to be the objects of negation derives from a number of historical transformations within capitalism. In the episteme of post-Fordism, the extraction of labor power becomes less defined “by the four walls of the factory” (Lazzarato 1996, 136) and instead diffuses across social life to account for education, leisure time, domestic life, entertainment, and cultural activities. Increasing spheres of

activity become the domains where the logic of capital is reinforced (as in the marketization of education) or where the individual is subdued (through the extension of the surveillance state). As Maurizio Lazzarato—a key figure in Italian autonomist-Marxism—emphasizes, the point is that “the worker’s personality and subjectivity have to be made susceptible to organization and command” (1996, 133). If control reaches such abstract levels, it becomes more difficult to envision an “outside” of, or alternative to, capitalism.

Central to many autonomist-Marxist perspectives is the constantly shifting nature of struggles between those exercising, and those subjected to, political, economic and social order (i.e., a “cycle of struggles”) (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 66). In other words, both the working class and capital will always adapt to changes in how their opponent (re)constitutes themselves. According to Dyer-Witheford, this is the process autonomist-Marxists commonly refer to as *class composition* (1999, 66). That is, “if workers resisting capital *compose* themselves as a collectivity, capital must strive to *decompose* or break up this threatening cohesion” (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 66). This concept of transformation is also crucial to the work of Negri. As he explains, every time labor-power composes itself into a working-class—i.e., a fully “independent polarity” that is “incompatible with command”—capitalism enters into crisis (Negri 1988, 206, 212). It is at this point where capital seeks to restructure, creating a host of “organizational changes and technological innovations that divide, deskill, or eliminate dangerous groups of workers” (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 66). But restructurings never involve a dissemination of control that is entirely one-sided. As Dyer-Witheford elaborates:

Since capital is a system that depends on its power to organize labor through the wage, it cannot entirely destroy its antagonist. Each capitalist restructuring must

recruit new and different types of labor, and thus yield the possibility of working-class *recomposition* involving different strata of workers with fresh capacities of resistance and counterinitiative. (1999, 66)

In this sense, capital's mechanisms of control are premised upon its dependency on, and thus the preservation of, labor-power. Despite the aim to subdue worker's resistances, restructurings also form the foundations onto which workers can reformulate future resistance.

Negri has developed some of these concepts in his investigation of the shifting composition of struggles in the 1960's, which began with the "mass worker" (1988, 205). In this period, massive numbers of workers were enlisted to work within the assembly lines of factories, in what characterized a Fordist style of labor (Negri 1988, 205). This involved the deskilling of workers and the imposition of more efficient, but repetitive, forms of labor as prescribed by Taylorist scientific management. However, this particular configuration of work also gave rise to opportunities for worker's revolt. That is, Fordism brought to the worker a "high level of subjective awareness of abstract labor" which had a "centripetal" effect (Negri 1988, 210). In other words, the solidification of abstract labor contributed towards a "deeply-rooted political homogeneity", which signaled the prerequisite for class-consciousness and solidarity (Negri 1988, 210). What therefore followed was a series of strikes and struggles within the assembly line (Negri 1988, 210).

One of the ways in which capital responded to these disruptions was to focus attention on the social sphere (Negri 1988, 211). In addition to the factory wage, the welfare state distributes a *social wage*, or an average payment to both the employed and unemployed, such as welfare, pensions, health insurance, and the like (Negri 1989, 121). The idea is to provide "limited assistance to the poor" without permitting any "re-

examination of the organization of the working day or any major reduction of working hours,” much less the eruption of a full fledged class struggle (Negri 1989, 121). While at this point the social sphere had not fully become open to the diffusion of labor that would characterize the subsequent stage of the *socialized worker*, it was at this period when the burgeoning stages of such a transformation took place (Negri 1988, 211).

The transition into the socialization of work was to be solidified under capital’s response to another cycle of rebellion in the 1960’s, typified by wildcat strikes, acts of sabotage, and other “struggles against work” (Negri 1988 102-3). The basis for this recomposition was a diffusion of work beyond the factory and throughout society, in what has given rise to terms familiar to autonomist lexicon such as the “social factory” or “factory without walls” (Negri 1989, 77). On the one hand, the nature of work becomes increasingly redefined according to informal and flexible models. Rather than employing permanent workers, enterprises began enlisting part-time or temporary workers. This period also saw a transition towards work in the service or tertiary sector, as well as the incorporation of women into the workforce. The socialization of work also integrates parts of society previously separate from the domain of work. Particularly, the line between waged-time and nonwage-time (i.e. leisure time) becomes blurred, as the consumer—steered on by mass advertising and popular culture—increasingly “intervenes” into the production process (Lazzarato 1996, 137, 141).

The expansion of work has been explained with Marx’s concept of subsumption, which represents the development of the capitalistic mode of production. The period of “formal subsumption” sees the partial transformation of previous forms of artisanal labor into capitalist relations of production, within a context that is still largely pre-capitalist

(Marx 1976, 1:1021). “Real subsumption” carries forth from this point to transform all elements of work into the capitalist framework, whereby all scientific and technological forces are brought directly into the production process (Marx 1976, 1:1024). However, during the period of the socialized worker, where production extends across society and throughout the “life-span” of the worker, real subsumption has been “realized and exceeded” (Dyer-Witford 1999, 81).

While tracing the transformation of work pertains mostly to political economy, it can also survey a larger range of social and political phenomena. For instance, Negri is aware that the trajectory of this analysis starts within a Marxist paradigm but also has the potential of going “beyond Marx” (1989, 84). Interestingly, it is also the case that it was within Marx’s work that he “exceed[s] the limits of his analysis” (Negri 1989, 83). As Negri elaborates, “in Marx’s outline of the successive phases of subsumption, the idea of the socialized worker is merely hinted at and described as a possibility; we on the other hand, experience the actuality of the concept” (1989, 84). If Negri emphasizes the open-ended nature of this research, it is worth postulating how the struggle of socialized worker may go beyond strictly economic parameters. Negri, for example, emphasizes the need to rethink Marx’s traditional concepts of value, wage, profits, exploitation and property, encouraging the task of experimentation (Negri 1989, 77, 204). Similarly, he ponders if this line of research might at some point adopt terminology and definitions beyond those offered by Marx: “one may ask why a worker should still be described as a ‘worker’ rather than an ‘operator’ or a ‘social actor’” (Negri 1989, 84). These thoughts are significant to this study because they redefine the subject of revolutionary struggle, expanding it beyond the category of the “worker”. This sets the stage for contemplating

Anonymous's role within this current cycle of struggle. The central question is how their negation of identity welcomes a heterogeneous composition of participants—one that adequately confronts subsumptive qualities of power.

4.2. Immaterial Labor

The informational quality of value is the subject of “immaterial labor” (Hardt & Negri 2000, 290-94). As the name suggests, immaterial labor involves the integration of mental or intellectual activities into the domain of work, signaling a shift away from the forms of manual (or “material”) labor that distinguished Fordist industrialism (Lazzarato 1996, 133). During this post-industrial period, scientific industries, programming, engineering, designing, and “creative” jobs pertaining to media or communication industries become integrated into the domain of work. Immaterial labor also redefines the role of consumption. In the period of the mass worker, consumption was limited to mostly maintaining a demand necessary for perpetuating a “Keynesian circle” of economic growth (Lazzarato 1996, 139-40). As Hardt and Negri add, the relation between production and consumption was relatively “mute”—since an “adequate demand” was more or less guaranteed, there was little need to “‘listen’ to the market” (2000, 290). However, immaterial labor introduces a situation where consumption becomes “productive” (Lazzarato 1996, 140). In other words, capital knows what to produce by taking cues from cultural images, tastes, and needs of the consumer (Lazzarato 1996, 139).

One way in which the consumption aspect of immaterial labor is made possible is through the advent of new communication technologies. A consumer can actively “intervene” in the production process only if there is “continual interactivity or rapid

communication between production and consumption” in place—i.e. a “rapid feedback loop” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 290). In a task most recently undertaken by Web 2.0 infrastructures,¹ detailed profiles of consumers (including information about their identities, consumption habits, locations, and daily activities) are assembled in order to help companies target highly stratified groups and produce commodities according to specific consumer needs (Zimmer 2008). That consumers are often unaware of the information they provide corporations attests to how surveillant technologies mystify where and when “work” now takes place, as well as the fact that it goes unpaid.

Capital’s incessant quest for commodification also has the potential to appropriate vast parameters of culture, even those typically considered marginal or alternative. Dyer-Witford notes the clear set of historical variables that led up to this. The era of the mass worker featured a model of broadcast media that was relatively one-directional in content, as it was tasked with advertising an array of products (and one might also say a culture of consumption) that was largely standardized and homogenous. However, in the 1960’s and 1970’s, class struggles against the Fordist factory “manifested in movements which, as well as demanding better standards of living, asserted diverse needs for self-expression” (Dyer-Witford 1999, 117). This gave rise to a cultural fabric that was equally heterogeneous, as there was also an uptake of “experimentation in music, dress, drugs and art” (Dyer-Witford 1999, 117). But as capital sought to restore dominance, companies began to commercialize and commodify the cultural fruits of revolt that grew

1. Tim O’Reilly and Dale Dougherty first coined the term “Web 2.0” to describe technology companies that survived the “dot-com burst” of the late 1990’s (Zimmer 2008). These companies, along with the Web technologies they produced, were distinguished as being “collaborative, interactive, dynamic, user-centered, network-based, and data-rich” (Zimmer 2008).

out of the 1960's. It was thus in direct response to the challenges posed by its adversary that capital began to restructure the production process and the commodity-form into a more diverse configuration (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 117). All this can be considered to advance capital's hegemonic influence over society, as it becomes more difficult to occupy a cultural space that is external—or even seemingly antagonistic—to the logic of capital. We can thus begin to see how identity and representation come to be properly annexed by capitalism.

4.3. Societies of Control

The theme of subsumption resonates with Foucault's work on the nature of control—precisely, the historical transition from the *disciplinary society* to the *society of control* (Hardt and Negri 2000, 22-23). It is fair to say that these two distinct fields of research focus upon similar—if not the same—historical moments. As Hardt and Negri assert, disciplinary power can be understood as conceptualizing the “entire first phase of capitalist accumulation (in Europe and elsewhere)” (2000, 23)—on the other hand, the society of control, according to Deleuze, matches the contemporary context of advanced capitalism (1990, 6). But as this section will propose, the configuration of power proper to the control society has the potential to exceed a Marxist paradigm: rather than interpreting control as primarily in service to capitalist production, the scope of control in the Deleuzian paradigm is far more decentralized and capable of permeating through both economic and non-economic spheres of society.

Control in the disciplinary society has commonly been encountered through the management of space. Specifically, the analogy presented is that of closed and rigidly separated spaces (or “enclosures”) (Hardt and Negri 2000, 24; Deleuze 1990, 6). To grasp

this, it is necessary to start by acknowledging, as Deleuze does, how the disciplinary configuration of space derives from the organization of capitalism during that time. For Deleuze, “nineteenth-century capitalism is a capitalism of concentration, for production and for property” (1990, 6). By *concentration*, the implication is that capitalist ownership is focused upon and confined within the walls of the factory (Deleuze 1990, 6). In this sense, the scope of power was only partial and discontinuous (Deleuze 1990, 6). It was restricted by the expectation that different sectors of society imposed their own unique, separable, and self-contained form of control: e.g. patriarchy in the household, capitalism in the factory, or religion in the church.

All this changes under the paradigm of the control society. Along with developments in capitalism that render it more dispersive, control societies are also increasingly defined by ubiquitous technology (Deleuze 1990, 5-6). Here, Deleuze articulates the importance of code: “The numerical language of control is made of codes that mark access to information, or reject it. We no longer find ourselves dealing with the mass/individual pair. Individuals have become ‘dividuals,’ and masses, samples, data, markets, or ‘banks’” (1990, 5-6). One is no longer controlled on the basis of his or her cohesive—let alone physical—presence. While disciplinary power required subjects to be physically present in whichever enclosure they occupied, this is no longer true of control societies. Now, an individual need only submit one aspect of their personal information into a database (a credit card number, an address, a birth date). It would then be in the hands of a larger corporate or political entity to compile separate pieces of information from other databases to create a cohesive “profile” of the individual in question (Poster 1996, 186).

Deleuze's thoughts on code provide an ideal entry point to understand his more abstract depiction of control societies. As with his discussion of disciplinary societies, control societies can be conceived of in terms of spatial configurations. While in disciplinary societies one was always "starting again (from school to the barracks, from the barracks to the factory)" in control societies "one is never finished with anything—the corporation, the educational system, the armed services being metastable states coexisting in one and the same modulation, like a universal system of deformation" (Deleuze 1990, 5). This means that control becomes more continuous, fleeting, and unrestrained by previous requirements to conform to the distinct and self-contained logics of separate spheres (schools, households, factories).

4.4. Biopower

Closely related to societies of control is the concept of biopower, which is a form of control involved with managing and administering life (Hardt and Negri 2000, 24). However, biopower does not exert control in a manner that is "top-down" or hierarchical. As Foucault explains, while the classical age (and we can include within this category the disciplinary age) was interested in "reductive" power—i.e., "a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself"—contemporary forms of power introduce "the right of the social body to ensure, maintain or develop its life" (1978, 136). The objective of control turns towards sustaining, extending, or preserving the collective lifespan of the population. For the first time, concepts of the population, biology, the human species, and "life itself" become the concern for governance (Foucault 1978, 137; Galloway and Thacker 2007, 70-71). Accordingly, health-related data such as demographics, reproduction, mortality rates, diseases, and heredity come under statistical scrutiny as a

“means to monitor the population as a single, dynamic entity” (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 73-74).

It is in the re-conceptualization of control towards life-optimization that governance becomes associated with benevolence rather than authoritarianism. However, this does not lessen the role of discipline and surveillance, as biopower creates a wide range of techniques to monitor and manage the population: i.e., the “infinitesimal surveillances, permanent controls, extremely meticulous orderings of space, indeterminate medical or psychological examination” (Foucault 1978, 145). The logic of optimization is thus put into practice as a productive proliferation of biopolitical institutions and mechanisms. As such, it extends the logic of subsumption, increasingly supplanting a Marxist paradigm (which takes production as the primary lens of examining social relations) with a framework that sees “life-itself” as the object of control.

According to Galloway and Thacker, “life itself” is a concept that often seems self-evident and which remains largely unquestioned (2007, 77). It is often viewed as being the “limit point ... of organic vitality” and thus as “having nothing behind or beneath it” (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 77). However, as we have seen, “life itself” has become mobilized as the object of biopolitical control, as well as valorized within the advanced stages of capitalist subsumption. While institutions involved with the management of health purport to “optimize life”, little attention has been paid to the fact that for such institutions, the value of the individual extends little beyond his or her utility as information, or in some cases surplus value. As Galloway and Thacker put it, for biopower “all living forms must be made amenable to an information point of view,”

which then must be organized and indexed into databases (2007, 77). In the paradigm of immaterial labor, the body becomes reduced to code; it is valuable only insofar as it transmits information about consuming habits and cultural tastes. This same period saw the integration of self-expression and identity into the commodity-form—either as consumer goods or as commercialized media. It is with the conflation between the concepts of selfhood and the consumer that the collective Invisible Committee writes, “‘I AM WHAT I AM.’ Never has domination found such an innocent-sounding slogan. The maintenance of the self in a permanent state of deterioration ... is the best-kept secret of the present order of things” (2009, 31). In this sense, the crude rendering of selfhood into information is coupled by a more affective, qualitative, and self-imposed expropriation of the self (under the illusion of individuality). All this has been built upon past centuries of industrial capitalism, whereby “life-itself” was defined only as labor power. This goes back to Marx’s formulation that the working class had “nothing but their bodies to sell” (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 135). Common to all past iterations of capitalism have thus been the alienation and deprivation of selfhood—a trend that has intensified and become more elaborate with successive phases of restructuring.

4.5. Life-Negation

The issues of alienation and negativity resonate with themes in the work of Giorgio Agamben—or at least with the reading of his work provided by partisans of the subversive current of communisation, prominent in recent European anti-austerity struggles (Cunningham 2009). For Agamben, the concept of life has for generations been prescribed by sovereign rule. What was at stake for sovereignty was always “naked life”. It was only when naked life was “put into question” that the sovereign was vested with

the power to intervene (Agamben 1996, 151-52). A pivotal shift occurs when this process becomes the “rule” rather than the “exception” (Agamben 1996, 152). That is, naked life is normalized throughout society, becoming “abstractly recodified social-juridical identities (the voter, the worker, the journalist, the student, but also the HIV-positive, the transvestite, the porno star, the elderly, the parent, the woman)” (Agamben 1996, 152). In this sense, life becomes realized only through the disciplinary institutions that identify, classify, monitor, and manage it.

But what interests this thesis is how Agamben’s work avoids the conclusion that the subsumption of life-itself signals the highest order of defeat for the political subject, which by now should be seen not only as the worker, but possibly also as the broadest category of the *bios*. Rather, he sees the possibility for an emancipation, exodus, or radical break from naked life towards the qualitatively different concept of “form-of-life”—that is, “a life for which living itself would be at stake in its own living” (Agamben 1996, 153). Form-of-life is less an essential or pure formulation of life than a potential, or a power (*Potenza*) to resist the dominant codifications of the self (Agamben 1996, 150, 153). Cunningham proposes a link between form-of-life and an anti-capitalist political struggle. As Cunningham claims, Agamben’s interpretation of *Potenza* suggests a “refusal of the role of the worker” and a direct challenge to “wage labour and hence ... the extraction of value from living labor” (2009). While capitalism is not at the fore of Agamben’s analysis, he nevertheless expresses how form-of-life is oriented towards a “communitarian principle”—i.e., an attempt to regain a common life that has been lost within the parameters of sovereignty, statist politics, and we might add, capitalism (1996, 154-55).

Here, the concept of “refusal” is found in both autonomist-Marxism and the strand of French ultra-Leftism known as communisation (which Cunningham espouses). The former has roots in the “refusal of work” struggles across Italian factories during the 1960-70’s (Hardt 1996, 1). As Hardt elaborates, this movement’s objective was to reject the “established capitalist relations of production,” which “translated directly into a generalized opposition to the State, the traditional parties, and the institutional trade unions” (1996, 1). As Dyer-Witheford notes, refusal was a concept initially formulated by Negri to describe the worker-led sabotage of the innovations of the factory, as opposed to “accepting the necessity of modernization, as official trade unions insisted” (1999, 70). Hardt’s statement preserves the notion of refusal as a means to confront capitalism at its source—i.e., a rejection of any sort of compromise with capitalists. However, it redirects its target from the factory owners to a more abstract logic of capitalism, co-existing in a larger fabric of control and statism.

Similar to autonomist-Marxism, communisation is attuned to challenging capital at the level of its immanence.² Communisation therefore sees refusal as symmetrically matching the immanent powers of capital—or, as being an “immanent supersession of capital” as Cunningham puts it (2009). If capital’s subsumption grants very little in the way of an external or transcendent space—culturally or politically—it becomes the imperative of dissidence to reject, block, or deflect the totality of capital (a “line of flight”). This is a task that is simultaneously defensive (because it takes place *within* the immanent parameters of capital) and offensive (because it recognizes the totality of its

2. Despite this shared objective, communisation contests what it considers the more utopian undertones of autonomist-Marxism. This is true with regards to Cunningham’s claim that Negri overestimates the “immanent possibility” capitalism contains for multitudinous lines of flight (2009).

enemy and seeks its dissolution). As Galloway and Thacker remark, tactics of abandonment are also “tactics of fullness” (2007, 136). Rather than an act of nihilism or defeat, refusal seeks to abolish the frame of representation of the dominant social order (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 136).

Pertinent to the theme of refusal is what Galloway and Thacker term “tactics of nonexistence” (2007, 137). What they have in mind is not so much a response to the subsumptive powers of capital than the more generalized subjectification of individual under digital apparatuses of control. As Galloway and Thacker explain, the extraction of information from individuals adds another layer of exploitation: “impoverished classes ... are expected to give up not just their body’s labor power but also their body’s *information* in everything from biometric examinations at work, to the culling of consumer buying habits, to prospecting inside ethnic groups for disease-resistant genes” (2007, 135). In the face of omnipresent surveillance, those at the forefront of revolt must resort to a form of “cloaking”—a method akin to hacking insofar as the goal is to trick the digital system into believing the individual is absent when in fact he or she is fully there (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 135).

While nonexistence serves as a practical tactic, it is also in the fullest sense a metaphor for a type of resistance that confronts the appropriation of “life-itself”. We may recall that under the informatic networks of biopolitical control, humanity is defined only as information. As information is increasingly adapted to wider facets of life, control begins to take as its subject humanity as a whole. It is at this point that the object of refusal must not only be work, but also *life*. This should not be taken to mean death, but rather as the rejection of any type of *representable* life (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 136). In fact,

if we refer back to Agamben's work, an escape from naked life is precisely a type of resistance that promotes life—or rather the return to a life lived for-itself (form-of-life). Deleuze, too, remarks, “When power becomes bio-power resistance becomes the power to life” (1988, 92). There are resounding similarities between tactics of nonexistence and Anonymous, given the latter's negation of identity as such—one of the most basic requisites for life. Without presupposing any sort of open affiliation between Anonymous and this tradition of political struggle, both adopt negation as a form of resistance that rejects the numerous appropriations of life across the field of biopolitical and capitalist control.

4.5.1. The Autovalorization of Life

As Cunningham notes, there is a danger that politics of negation will risk sounding anti-humanist (2009). Overplaying the subsumptive qualities of capital may endorse the view that such a structural power is all too well orchestrated, leaving individuals with little choice except for radical abandonment or a subjectivity that is “a sappy romanticism in favour of economic determination” (Cunningham 2009). Against this, we should take seriously the autonomist theme of workers' agency. Contrasting a “one-sided Marxism”, which focuses a great deal on the “the activity of capital and neglects the counteractivities of workers”, autonomist-Marxism takes interest in the workers' ability to actively, creatively and dynamically challenge capital as part of a cycle of struggles. Struggle is launched not only as an offensive assault, but also as an act of appropriation. That is, successive transformations in capital (such as the integration of scientific knowledge and intellect into work) paradoxically introduce a more social or

communal aspect of labor that may valorize the working class against capital (“autovalorization”) (see Thoburn 2003, 118).

Some lines of argument against autonomist-Marxism have alleged that such a view is idealist or utopian, in the sense that it forges a revolutionary strategy outside of capital. However, tactics of flight and autovalorization are precisely engagements with the immanent parameters of capital. Resistance is formulated not in an autonomous pure space, but within the “practices, desires, inventions, and needs” of the social (Thoburn 2003, 116). An appropriate metaphor would be that of hacking. If we recall, hacking is an act of intervention that is resolutely *internal*, in the sense that it exploits the technical complexities of the existing system (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 81-82).

Discussing the full range of capital’s structural qualities that make such a radical appropriation possible (what autonomists have called “general intellect”) lies beyond the current discussion. Instead, this chapter turns its attention to the innovative capacities of exodus—i.e., the creation of new organizational forms that rupture the logic of capital. Picking up from the previous point that resistance occurs within the immanent plane of the social, Thoburn (2003)—who attempts to illuminate ties between Deleuze and Marx—argues that autovalorization does not aim to replace capital with a revolutionary force that simply replicates the same “axiom of identity” of capital, such as the unified, coherent and centralized qualities of a class (122-23). Instead, autonomist strategies are a “continual problematization” of those identities (Thoburn 2003, 122). This is a process that follows a more diffuse and marginal type of revolutionary practice—one that is qualitatively different than the modes of expression associated with capital. The goal is to activate the revolutionary potentials of (or one may say exploit) the diffuse and marginal

experiences that are already immanent to capital, in hopes of creating something along the lines of a “proletarian unnamable” (Thoburn 2003, 122-23).

4.6. Minor Politics

The practices discussed up to this point are part and parcel of Deleuze’s concept of the “minor”. Groups who fit into this category do so not only because they have experienced political oppression, but because they “lack the ready-made structures of history, narrative, and tradition that would enable the easy passage of a demarcated autonomous identity through culture” (Thoburn 2003, 19). Thus, a minoritarian experience of oppression cannot occupy a symmetrical position of representation to the oppressors—the latter of which is known as the “major” (Thoburn 2003, 6). While the major is premised upon stable and holistic identities (such as those belonging to the social order), the minor is expressed through plentitude, difference, and a constant maneuver around major identities (Thoburn 2003, 16). It is thus its reluctance (and impossibility) of conforming to the major that defines the minor.

Despite this incompatibility, the minor is always confined within the immanent field of the major—for, the periphery only exists as such because it is in relation to (and thus immanent to) the center (Thoburn 2003, 7, 21). But it is precisely the fact that the minor is “cramped” within the major that they are forced to constantly traverse the periphery and proliferate relations with other minorities. In other words, the dispossession of minor subjects is in a sense a purely productive force, akin to an “incessant bustle’ charged with vitality, with polemic, and with a continuous process of interrogation, intrigue and invention” (Thoburn 2002, 436). Here, building communal ties

with other minorities and creating cultural forms, ethics, and knowledges consonant with the minor are precisely the examples of innovation and agency (Thoburn 2003, 8).

One of the most intriguing groups to embody minorities is the lumpenproletariat (Thoburn 2002, 437). Marx most clearly developed the concept as the set of characters Louis Bonaparte enlisted as part of his December 10th Society—a varied list that includes criminals, vagabonds, tricksters, thieves, gamblers and beggars (Thoburn 2002, 440). Marx condemns this group mostly because they fail to set forth revolutionary change and instead personify a “farcical” repetition of bourgeois interests (Thoburn 2002, 442). Interestingly, Marx’s rebuke takes a particularly identity-based interest. That is, the lumpenproletariat’s reactionary tendency derives in large part from the fact that they exist outside the “productive relations” that would otherwise unify the working class (Thoburn 2002, 443). In other words, the issue is that the lumpenproletariat—in true minoritarian fashion—fails to conform to the shared identity of working class.

That the repertoire of minoritarian insurrection may include criminal behavior is a something that Cunningham identifies in the Invisible Committee’s initiative for revolt. Replacing what Cunningham considers a utopian strain of Negri’s work—that capital contains immanent possibilities for revolutionary exodus—the Invisible Committee sees a pervasive nihilism or “death of experience” left as a residue of exchange-value (2009). Rather than cultivating a preliminary form of communism within the productive forces of capital, the revolutionary imperative is to “accelerate” this nihilism against the wishes of the status quo (Cunningham 2009). While Cunningham himself does not explicitly say so, the tone of his assessment is sharply minoritarian. That is, the revolutionary value of illegalism is precisely the aversion of subjectivities that reproduce the logic of state

sovereignty and the commodity form—hence the risk of reifying a hierarchical or meritocratic gang culture (Cunningham 2009). Instead, the Invisible Committee privilege random and hysterical acts of destruction, practiced in an avant-garde or surrealist register (Cunningham 2009). Much like minor politics, it is the fact that illegalism cannot be reconciled or resolved within the identity of the conventional revolutionary subject that makes it appealing as a subversive tactic.

Anonymous has also been understood to occupy an ethical gray area, especially with regards to its embrace of crude humor and mischief. However, as Coleman points out, the relationship between humor and politics is not as anomalous as many commentators have claimed. For example, she claims that Anonymous resembles Eric Hosbawm’s conception of “pre-political figures”—i.e., nineteenth-century European mafias, secret societies, religious sects, mobs and gangs (2012a). While most are still overwhelmingly involved with criminal behavior, Hosbawm acknowledges their political potential, alleging that they ““have not yet found, or only begun to find, a specific language in which to express their aspirations about the world”” (Coleman 2012a). This “faintly revolutionary spirit” was best exemplified by instances when bandits would redistribute their stolen goods to the poor, or would offer them protection from other bandits (Coleman 2012a). Anonymous, along with these “pre-political groups”, shares a resounding parallel with minor politics in the sense that it resides in the intermediary stage between activism and mischief, without entirely conforming into either category.

4.7. Strategic Essentialism

Gyatri Spivak offers a different angle on identity—one that refutes the theories of post-structuralism mentioned up to this point. Specifically, she charges thinkers such as

Deleuze and Foucault for overlooking the historical realities of colonialism, which materializes in their assumption that the colonized peoples (whom she calls the “subaltern”) can “*speak and know their conditions*” when in fact their voices have historically always been expressed through the “epistemic violence of imperialist law and education” (Spivak 1988, 283, 291). That the privilege of “speaking for oneself” is taken to be self-evident exemplifies post-structuralism’s tendency to hold first world experiences as the universal archetype of power.

Here, Spivak presents an interesting twist on the concept of major identity, adding to the category the hidden essentialism of the poststructuralist idea of representation (1988, 285). The subaltern’s exclusion from representation (and thus its exemplification of minor qualities) is thus doubly entrenched: it risks being fetishized both within the homogeneity of the traditional proletariat and the heterogeneity of the post-structuralist revolutionary subject. Granted the severity of this exclusion, the urgent task for research is to view the subaltern’s minor position not as pre-given but as the direct consequence of historical subjugation and the ideological production of colonialism. As for this chapter’s focus on minor politics, Spivak’s work makes an important proviso—that gaining access to the minor is never an easy task: it never falls into our hands as a self-evident and self-contained concept. If the ruling class makes its logic dominant by elevating it into the position of immanence, accessing the subaltern can only be possible through the intermediaries of major identities (or, for Spivak, first world narratives). In this sense, the minor can only make itself known through the major.

Avoiding a transcendental concept of revolt, Spivak sees value in taking *strategic* action (i.e. strategic essentialism) from within the parameters of major identity. Spivak makes this case first by referencing Marx:

[For Marx] class-consciousness does not engage the ground level of consciousness—consciousness in general. "Class" is not, after all, an inalienable description of a human reality. Class-consciousness on the descriptive level is itself a strategic and artificial rallying awareness which, on the transformative level, seeks to destroy the mechanics which come to construct the outlines of the very class of which a collective consciousness has been situationally developed. (1996, 214)

Given that capital projects the identity of class (or in the case of first world discourse, a pre-given, self-contained subject) onto all levels, the oppressed have little recourse except to challenge the ruling ideology in this way. In other words, the innovative qualities of strategic essentialism derive precisely from a position of constraint. For the subaltern, who lacks the means for self-representation, strategic essentialism grants them the ability to exploit features of symbolic power and collective consciousness (Spivak 1996, 215). The ruling ideology thus becomes prone to being abolished on its own terms.

Strategic essentialism also offers a possible way to square the contradiction between the Anonymous's centralized narratives and their decentralized practices. It allows us to ask whether centralized narratives are both strategic and necessary. Consider the risk that the negation of political identity and alliances may complicate the ability for non-hackers to relate to, support or trust Anonymous. In this regard, Anonymous's hope of defending the public interest becomes out of reach. As previously discussed, there is also a real possibility that the divergent interests of Anons may deteriorate into a sort of political stagnation caused by infighting. Strategically employing the populist and sometimes uncritically universalist register of their texts allows Anonymous to build ties

with the general public as well as preserve some level of internal cohesion. Here, it is also worth questioning whether forms of minor literature would be appropriate given these noted challenges. While Thoburn muses about Deleuze's appreciation of minor literature as a privileging of particular and quotidian details, anomalies, and small intrigues (2003, 24-30) it is unlikely that, when called to the task of rallying revolutionary sentiment, this literary style will directly and immediately resonate with the general public.

It would be a mistake to assume that Anonymous's tactical uses of unanimity are driven by clear intensions (to bolster public appeal, maintain internal cohesion, or anything else). This is especially true for an amorphous group whose intensions will always be slippery and hard to predict. However, viewing Anonymous's texts through the lens of strategic essentialism is more of theoretical statement about the general discursive conditions in which the group resides. For instance, we know from Spivak that there is little to no autonomous discursive space from which the subaltern (and by extension, the minor) can speak.

In his interpretation of the minor, Deseriis (2012) makes a similar proposal: "minor and radical interventions have to make *do with what is at hand*, by taking advantage of opportunities and temporary winnings that cannot be stockpiled without becoming strategic and majoritarian in their own turn" (148; emphasis added). Or, as Thoburn puts it: "The minor ... is not a question of *who* one is, but where one is situated vis-à-vis a particular set of identities, relations, practices, and languages, and what one does with this situation" (2003, 22). The issue at hand is once again the fallacy of a transcendental or essentialist logic. While the defining characteristic of the minor is its movement, this is a movement within, around, as well as in the place of the major.

Whatever Anonymous's intentions behind tactical uses of the major may be, we can at the very least affirm this: it is only through the major that a minor expression (understood without bypassing the conditions of its discursive exclusion) is possible. This is not to conflate the two forms of identity, but rather to devise an analytical approach that traces the minor through its tactical or temporary occupations of the major, as well as the properties which render it incapable of conforming to an identity (whether due to historical imperialist subjugation or to a radical prerogative to negate the valorization of power). This thesis has attempted to do this by understanding Anonymous's majoritarian texts as a strategic and illusive core, against which they gain the ability to traverse minor relations (through the non-expressible opacity of their decentralized hacking and transgressive behavior) while experiencing and articulating the artificial, but necessary, substance of unanimous consciousness.

CONCLUSION

While Anonymous has drawn attention for its major incursions against major corporations and political institutions, it has also presented a logic of activism that departs from (or outwardly rejects) the familiar motifs of representation and leadership. This study has attempted to situate Anonymous both within a historical and contemporary context of net-activism. It has also drawn comparisons between Anonymous and autonomist-Marxism and communisation—all of which embrace tactics of non-identity, and in so doing attempt to adequately confront the *totality* of the social order.

But herein lies a paradox: for a political project that constantly decries representation, does presenting itself as a self-contained category of revolutionary practice also constitute a form of identity? As the communisation collective Tiqqun's warns, "Dressing up what is hostile to the system of representation in the guise of the 'negative' ... is simply a tactic that the system uses to bring within its plane of inconsistency the positivity it lacks ..." (2011, 44). The task for non-identity politics then, is not to claim a space "outside" the dominant representational order, but to occupy and exploit the already existing spaces of majoritarian identities. Thus, through textual analysis, this thesis proposes that Anonymous strategically uses polemic manifestos to gain public support and to unify its internal factions, while practicing rhizomic and non-hierarchical strategies in other contexts.

However, before we can declare negation and non-identity politics to be the most adequate and effective form of political struggle, we have to attend to a host of questions. Despite the divisions between communisation and autonomist-Marxism, the authors belonging to the former offer intriguing lines of critique and self-examination, which

speak to the larger milieu of non-identity politics. The collective Endnotes, for example, insists that communisation is not “a form of practice, or as some set of individuals with the right ideas about such practice” (2011, 28-29). Communisation, they continue, does not present itself “as some sort of messianic arrival”—such an option is not even possible since participating in “the capitalist class relation is not something that can be opted out of, or into, for that matter” (Endnotes 2011, 29). Here, Endnotes avoids the error of essentialism mentioned above (that non-identity is a self-contained revolutionary practice). In so doing, they correctly imply that non-identity exists more along the lines of what Thoburn calls an *engagement* with immanent capitalist relations.

However, if we take seriously the *relational* character of non-identity, we arrive at the stark realization of its nothingness—for, as Endnotes posits, communization provides no answers to what revolution is or what a revolution will look like (2011, 29). While they offer the reassurance that revolution will be led, in some measure, by the “ever-present and always amorphous positivity” of the “we” (Endnotes 2011, 29), this solution is overly vague—partially because the schematic nature of their analysis offers no other choice. With no specific clues or instructions about how to challenge the mammoth character of capitalism, communisation leaves individuals to mire in their own the passivity.

That networked struggles are necessarily devoid of content (and thus of any moral code) also leaves them open to being used by repressive groups: as we may recall, Al Qaeda’s assault on the US stands as the most effective example of decentralized warfare. The abrupt nature in which non-identity political struggles attempt to abolish identity and leadership also broaches some practical concerns. As David Harvey reminds us,

“Capitalism, with its hierarchical forms, has made serious progress in feeding the world, albeit unevenly, so one must be careful not to demolish those structures too readily” (2009, 213). The possibility that a misanthropic current of anarchic violence could accompany revolutionary action is thus most troubling for a politics of negation.

On the other hand, the inventive and strategic nature of minor politics is what this study finds most positive about rhizomatic political practice. As illuminated by Anonymous’s tensions between occupying identity and non-identity, political struggles must always straddle the *constraints* imposed by the ruling order and the *possibilities* of autonomy. Because neither domination nor subversion is completely predictable or definitive, there is always some element of innovation and agency associated with revolt. As Noys posits, the task of revolution—while recognizing the monolithic power of capitalism—must always be attuned to “spaces and times through which revolt can emerge, or into which revolt can slip away from power” (2011, 9). From “squats, to communal gardening, communes themselves” (and we may add collective net-activism), seeking opportunities for autonomy and commoning is the most promising initiative for struggles *in progress* (Noys 2011, 10).

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APPENDIX A

Press Release 12/9/10

Dear citizens of the internet. The time has come for us to take to action. The time has come to reclaim what's ours.

Now ever since the dawn of ages, knowledge has been power. And thus many groups of people - over time - have tried to regulate and put restrictions to the public access to information and the means by which this information can be stored, duplicated and distributed.

Especially since the second world war, governments have been growing this exponentially expanding web of secrecy - which they claim is a necessary prerequisite to protect and serve our national interests and personal well-being.

Time and time again, we have learned that these are lies.

On the other hand, increasingly more idea's, things and technologies are being locked away from the majority of the public by large multinational corporations, copyright laws and patent offices worldwide.

However, the emergence of the internet has deeply challenged this way of doing things.

It has opened up a vast network of information - even to the poor - and made it possible to study pretty much anything you could possibly imagine to study.

It made accessible most so-called 'cultural products' for free - and gave people a means for their own production and distribution of ideas, things and technologies

At the same time - it has undermined the very ideas of secrecy and censorship as such.

Anonymous applauds this turn of events and believes there is great emancipatory power for the whole of humankind in these technological and ideological developments.

For we know that knowledge is free - and secrecy only leads to injustice and brutal abuse of power.

Now - one of the institutions fighting censorship and secrecy under the banner of free access to information is Wikileaks.

What they do is very important.

That is exactly why Wikileaks - and it's public spokesman Julian Assange- have been under such severe attack by the powers that be these last weeks.

Anonymous thinks the recent events and media-storm around Wikileaks are very important, in both a real and symbolic sense.

In a way - a true info-war is waged here for the very first time - and the outcome of this battle will affect all future battles about free access to information to come.

This battle is between the people - us - Anonymous – and those who are in power.

If you care at all about this stuff, then you are Anonymous.

Anonymous is the people and the people is Anonymous.

Anonymous is the consciousness of the internet and it will avenge all those who seek to regulate, and put restrictions to, the public access to information through the internet.

Spread this consciousness!

Make video's, posters, stencils, stickers and so on - and spread them everywhere, both virtually and in the real world.

Write articles - and put them on your blog or send them to your local newspaper.

Put your local media under pressure to spend a reasonable amount of attention to - and a fair and 'objective' treatment of - these issue's.

Boycott - or attack - anyone who threatens the freedom of information on the internet.

Yes - this includes anyone trying to prevent sites as Wikileaks from operating properly.

Talk with your friends about these issue's.

Download, share, produce - be free!

Because you are Anonymous!

We - Anonymous - will win this war!

We are Anonymous!

We are legion!

We do not forgive!

We do not forget!

Knowledge is free!

Operation B.A.R.T.

This is a message from Anonymous to the Bay Area Rapid Transit System (BART)
TO THE PEOPLE OF THE USA:

The past year has brought about substantial awareness through some unfortunate events that have occurred around our world. From internet censorship to the unnecessary violence inflicted upon un-armed civilians, we've all seen what can happen once a portion of us are gagged.

In Egypt and Tunisia, we saw people struggling to make their voices heard. We have seen companies such as Telecomix delve into the nastiness of political corruption in an attempt to free those censored individuals from their prisons of silence. We have seen social media such as Face Book and twitter explode with users from around the world speaking out against censorship.

Today, we've seen America come alive. In the Bay Area, we've seen people gagged, and once more, Anonymous will attempt to show those engaging in censorship what it feels like to be silenced. #Operation BART is an operation geared toward balance - toward learning. You do not censor people because they wish to speak out against the wrongful occurrences around them. The Bay Area Rapid Transit has made the conscious decision of ordering various cell phone companies to terminate services for the downtown area inhibiting those in the area from using cell phones - even in the case of an emergency.

To BART:

We will not tolerate censorship.

We will do everything in our power to parallel the actions of censorship that you have chosen to engage in, we are legion.

We will be free to speak out against you when you try to cover up crimes, namely on behalf of those who have engaged in violence against a mostly unarmed public. We will set those who have been censored free from their silence. That is a promise. Anonymous demands that this activity revolving around censorship cease and desist and we know you are already planning to do this again.

We will not issue any more warnings.

To the people of San Francisco:

People of San Francisco, join us Monday, August 15th at 5pm for a peaceful protest at Civic Center station to illustrate the solidarity with people we once knew and to stand up for your rights and those of your fellow citizens. We will be wearing blood stained shirts for remembrance to the blood that is on the hands of the BART police.

For the people outside of San Francisco, show solidarity by using black fax, email bombs, and phone calls to the BART Board of Directors. BART decided to cut off your communications and now we will flood theirs.

We request that you bring cameras to record further abuses of power by the police and to legitimize the protest. The media will certainly spin this in an attempt to make our actions appear to be violent or somehow harmful to the citizenry at large. Remember, this is a peaceful protest. Any actions trying to incite violence in our protest are not of our people, and they ought to be discouraged.

We are Anonymous,
We are legion,
We do not forgive,
We do not forget,
Expect us.

Anonymous - Operation Egypt – A Press Release

Dear citizens of the world,

Anonymous can not, and will not stand idly while people are being denied their basic rights and human liberties. Yet, there are still a lot of governments worldwide who fail to even aspire to the standard of freedom that was set by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These governments believe they have the right and privilege to impose upon their own people an 'official' version of 'reality' which isn't in any way tampered by the truths of everyday life under which its citizens are living. Anonymous believes this is an outright crime which can not go unpunished.

The Egyptian people are living under inhumane conditions; being denied their basic rights to freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of association, and the free access to information. By imposing censorship upon its own people and condemning these freedoms, the Egyptian government has revealed itself to be criminal, and has made itself an enemy of Anonymous.

To the Egyptian Government: Anonymous challenges all those who are involved in censorship. Anonymous wants you to offer free access to uncensored media in your entire country. When you ignore this message, not only will we attack your government websites, Anonymous will also make sure that the international media sees the horrid reality you impose upon your people. Anonymous will not spare anybody who supports this suppression. It is in the hands of the Egyptian government to end this: continue your repression and you will be subject to civil protest - lend an ear to the claim of freedom from your people and the hostilities will cease.

To the Egyptian people: We stand together and united against this oppression. This struggle is not just for you alone, but for the whole of humankind. Citizens can no longer endure their governments abuse. When forced by the threat of oppression, we will be loud as hell - and when the people roar, it will send shivers down the spines of all those who stifle our freedom and take our precious liberties away.

Anonymous are your brothers and sisters, your sons and daughters, your parents and your friends, regardless of age, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, or place of birth. Anonymous is you. You will not be denied your right to free speech, free press, free association and your universal right to freely access information, both in real life and through the internet.

Join us on the IRC - [#opEgypt!](irc://irc.anonops.ru)

Join us in this battle for freedom of information worldwide!

For as Khalil Gibran once said: "Life without Freedom is like a body without a soul, and Freedom without Thought is like a confused spirit... Life, Freedom and Thought are three-in-one, and are everlasting and shall never pass away."

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

What is Anonymous? – Understand Us!

Open Letter from Anonymous

Free-thinks, hyperboreans, builders of the future,

We are Anonymous. Because many of you seem to think the very fact of our existence is indeed rather confusing, we would like to take this opportunity to elucidate to you what it is Anonymous is and does exactly - what it means we are Anonymous, what it is we're aiming at, and what is our ontological status.

Now first and foremost, it is important to realize that Anonymous - in fact - does not exist. It is just an idea - an internet meme - that can be appropriated by anyone, anytime to rally for a common cause that's in the benefit of humankind.

This means anyone can launch a new ideological message or campaign under the banner of Anonymous. Anyone can take up a leading role in the spreading of the Anon-consciousness.

Whether or not these appropriations are legitimate is decided by the rest of the internet citizenry : If the majority of the public agrees with a proposed appropriation, then the public will act - If the majority of the public disagrees with a proposed appropriation, then the public will protest and label the message in question as illegitimate and thus not representative of the values of Anonymous.

This makes Anonymous the first truly democratic endeavour in the world. It is a bee-hive where the queen is missing - yet buzzing with activity in every possible form, direction, shape and colour one could possibly imagine.

This does not mean, however, that there can't be 'bad' actions presented as coming from Anonymous. Just as with 'bad' speech though, we believe the solution to these issues is not less speech, but more speech - not less (or restrictive) action, but more (and constructive) action.

Anonymous believes the only legitimate form of power is that power which rests on widespread public consent, and so there is not one person or group of people who can ever claim to be Anonymous.

Anonymous is not a political current, nor is it based on a political current. Some may say that it's anarchism, liberalism, communism, libertarianism, etc. - others say it's nothing but a bunch of twelve-year olds from 4chan having fun on the internet. Anonymous is none of those - yet it encompasses elements of all these things and many, many more.

Anonymous is the people and the people is Anonymous. Anonymous is anything and

everything, anyone and everyone, anywhere and everywhere.

Moreover, anyone taking part in the actions of Anonymous endeavours to defend an idea through anonymous collective action, and not to promote themselves as some kind of hero or saviour of the world. Anonymous, therefore is not about personal achievement and recognition. It is about accomplishing goals for the betterment of humankind - together - as a species.

The Internet has changed the way we look at each other and the world. New technology has enabled people to communicate faster and more often. Anonymous realizes that this freedom of information makes people more free to decide what they like or disagree with.

This freedom of information has forever changed how society perceives consensus, democracy, transparency, and freedom itself. Never before has society been able to have these debates twenty four hours a day, at all locations at the same time.

Anonymous applauds these developments and will defend humanity against anyone willing to take this new-found freedom away. We do not forgive censorship, and we do not forget that knowledge is free. Moreover, we are legion, so we will not be denied.

The more they repress us, the more we will fight back. Because we are more than one. Because they can find and persecute one man or woman fighting for a cause - but not hundreds of thousands of people all across the globe, fighting for a more just and transparent society.

Now please take up your personal responsibility!

Show the world some loving and be Anonymous!

We are Anonymous – and so are you

Knowledge is free

Anonymous - Operation Tunisia – A Press Release

Dear Citizens of the World,

The time for truth has arrived. A time for freedom and transparency. A time for people to express themselves freely and to be heard from anywhere across the world.

Yet, the Tunisian government has decided it wants to control this present with falsehoods and misinformation and restrict the freedoms of their own people - all of this in order to impose upon them their own self-serving vision of the future. However, they can only accomplish this goal by keeping the truth hidden from its citizens and by putting restrictions on the free access of information. In doing so, the Tunisian government has made itself an enemy of Anonymous.

Anonymous can not and will not remain silent while this happens. Anonymous has heard the cries for freedom from the Tunisian people and has decided to help them win this battle against oppression.

Anonymous believes there have been and will be further changes in the way the world is organized, so that nevermore will small groups of people be able to restrain the fundamental freedoms of the collective that is humankind. Anonymous therefore believes the Tunisian attempts at censorship are doomed to failure if only we, Anonymous, the people, take up our individual responsibilities. For if only we decide to make it so - it will be done.

To the Tunisian government: Attacks on the freedom of speech and information of your citizens will not be tolerated. Any organization involved in censorship will be targeted. Attacks will not cease until the Tunisian government hears the claim of freedom from its own people. It is in the hands of the Tunisian government to bring this to a resolution.

Oppressive governments of the world take this as a warning: Anonymous has been watching recent developments in Spain, France, Hungary, China, Belarus, U.S. and many other countries with a great deal of attention. Keep this in mind, for you may be next!

To the Tunisian people: We stand together and united against this oppression. This is a battle which is waged, not just for you alone, but to serve as a precedent and statement to the world. We unite to send a message that we, in fact, are not simply quiet citizens who can be peddled and choked into submission. When forced to by the threat of oppression, we can be loud as hell - and when the people roar it will send shivers across the spines of all those who want to stifle our freedom and take our precious liberties away.

Anonymous is a banner under which any Citizen can fly. It is a banner that accentuates the bold and loud manner in which we as Citizens must act when we must. Most importantly, Anonymous unites us all regardless of age, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, or place of birth. It unites us all and calls upon us as Citizens of the Free World. A world

where we, as Citizens, can stand up and make our mark in history. For the events of these times will be the printed words that our children will come to read. Let your children and your children's children be proud of the fact that you were a part of a revolution that changed the world. A revolution that said: We will not forgive corruption. We will not forget injustice. We will not tolerate the denial of our freedoms, and we will not be silenced!

Yes, this means you are Anonymous.
 You will not forgive. You will not forget.
 You will not be denied your right to free speech, free press, free association and your right to an uncensored world of information provided to you through the internet.

When we stand together we have strength!

Join us in this battle for freedom worldwide!

Come out this January 6 and let your voice be heard!

We are Anonymous.
 We do not forgive the denial of the right to freedom of expression.
 We do not forget the injustices caused by the removal of this right.
 If you are responsible for these acts: Expect us - Always!

Knowledge is free!

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