

ABSTRACT

You Should Have Expected Us – An Explanation of Anonymous

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Anonymous is a decentralized activist collective that has evolved using the technology of the information age. This paper traces its origins as a way of contextualizing and better understanding its actions. The groups composition is examined using its self-ascribed imagery to illustrate its' unique culture and relational norms. Its structure and motivation are analyzed using the framework developed for social movements and terrorist networks. Finally a discussion of a splinter cell and official reaction delineate both strengths and weaknesses of the movement while suggesting its future development. The conclusion serves to expound on the ideal end for the online anonymous community as a new frontier in meritocratic activism.

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YOU SHOULD HAVE EXPECTED US
AN EXPLANATION OF ANONYMOUS

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PREFACE

Writing a paper about a decentralized, online collective of similarly minded individuals presents a unique set of challenges. In spending so much time with this subject, it is my goal to be both intellectually honest and as thorough as I can be. That being said, the reader may have disagreements with my observations and conclusions, and even some of the facts I present. And though this will be the case in any academic work, it is amplified by several orders of magnitude in this case. Anonymous means something different to everyone who is a part of it.

Over the course of my research, I had the chance not only to learn more than I wanted to know about some of the darkest corners of the internet but to meet some truly interesting and fascinating people. It is to them that I feel most responsible for making this paper as good as it possibly can be and even then I'm sure to disappoint in one way or another with some omission, inclusion or observation through the lens of some other part of the collective. That being said there are two things you must be aware of when reading this paper.

First, because of the nature of this research some of my most credible sources are those which, in most fields, would be discredited as pure internet nonsense. My job was to make a story from the nonsense. And secondly, although I act as a filter in a way, much of my research does include some very dark parts of internet culture and as such, its language and stories had to be recreated here to achieve that intellectual honesty.

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This paper would never have come to fruition without a long line of people supporting me and helping achieve this great feat. It is upon the shoulders of giants I stand and it is to them I would like to give credit and my eternal thanks. First to Dr. Linda Adams, my advisor, who stuck with me despite my aversion to deadlines. Also for the incredible education she has imparted to me in over five classes through the last four years. My parents were incredibly supportive through this whole process as a sounding board for ideas and a source of constant encouragement. To my thesis committee I owe a great debt. Dr. Thayer is one of the most brilliant men in his field and I have greatly benefited from his teaching. Professor Jewett, though I discovered him late in my Baylor career, whose style and principle inform not only this project but my approach to education.

Another group to whom I am very thankful are the members of the Anonymous community who were willing to speak with me as well as the academics whose work on this subject made my investigations possible. Cole Stryker gave me a foothold for understanding the world of 4chan and was gracious enough to allow me to interview him for this paper. Gabriella Collman's work was also invaluable to my understanding of this subject. To everyone at Motherfuckery thank you for allowing me to be a fly on the wall, to Vendetta for finding me, PokeAnon for indoctrinating me and Tremor, Shoe.Box, Snorlax and everyone else for the awkward moments. Also to kate morrigan for speaking in perfectly quotable verse.

Finally I would like to thank my friends who put up with me through all of this and the people that started me down this path: Hanspeter Neuhold for my interest in security studies, Christopher Arbor for teaching me how to tell a story, Heidi Gray and Mark May-Beaver who taught me to be a research writer and the countless others along the way.

Dedicated to Betty Gray

She would not have understood anything about this paper nor been interested in its subject whatsoever, but she made all the difference to me and taught me more about life than any research or study could ever hope to

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

A Manifesto of Sorts

Citizens of the World,

We are Anonymous.

We are people. Just like you. We are not robots, we are not inhuman. We are human. We are everyone.

That being said, We also have the capacity for the same errors of judgement [sic] and mistakes that everyone does.

We are committed to improving the lives of everyone on this planet by whatever means we deem necessary, because we feel that if we have to take action to right a wrong, its gone on entirely too long. If that is indeed the case, it has probably been ignored by the people who should've delt [sic] with it. Those people have much higher budgets and significantly larger resource pools, than what we have available. All we have is each other. For good or bad. Some use the Anonymous name to try to "Profit!" off of it, some use it for nefarious reasons, and we've even seen some use it to try to get laid. Regardless of the reason its used, we are united under common goals, for the common good.

There are projects we are working on that cannot be discussed, as to do so would impact them negatively, and significantly. However, even those of us working for good, sometimes make very bad, rash, and ill-thought out decisions. Such is the case of one individual who shall remain anonymous. We will leave it at this.

To the CIA: We are sorry your website is down. It was not the intended purpose of our actions, however, in doing so we have created a way more significant amount of attention to a situation that goes unnoticed far too often. Six compromised servers containing child pornography are actively [sic] DDOSing your webserver. We cannot stop this, we have no access to them, due to the fact that the network link is entirely saturated and we cannot log back in. It will stop

41.6 days after the time it began. Your only choice is to act, and have them taken offline, which should have already happened.

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

You should have expected us...¹

This letter was sent in response to an alleged Anonymous attack on the website of the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States. The “Tango Down” message was sent midday on February 10th 2012² and three days later the CIA was still without a website.³ So what power reached out from the tubes of the internet and brought down the largest and most technologically advanced intelligence agency in the world in some idealistic gamble to stop child pornographers? They call themselves Anonymous, and they are legion.

Anonymous is an entity birthed from the bowels of the internet, which has grown to be a global power for both influence and mayhem. It is a group which defies description because it has no head, no leadership, and its meaning is something slightly different to each of its members. Though typically simplified or blatantly misunderstood by the media, they have been called everything from hacktivists to terrorists. But this

¹ Biddle, Sam. "Anonymous Explains CIA Takedown." *Gizmodo, the Gadget Guide*. Gawker Media, 11 Feb. 2012. Web. 12 Feb. 2012. <<http://gizmodo.com/5884346/anonymous-explains-cia-takedown>>.

² @YourAnonNews. "CIA TANGO DOWN." Twitter. 10 Feb. 2012. <<https://twitter.com/#!/YourAnonNews/status/168068014758039552>>

³ Schwartz, Mathew J. "CIA Website Hacked, Struggles To Recover - Security - Attacks/breaches - Informationweek." *InformationWeek | Business Technology News, Reviews and Blogs*. UBM TechWeb, 13 Feb. 2012. Web. 14 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.informationweek.com/news/security/attacks/232600729>>.

decentralized cadre of likeminded individuals has become a force with which to be reckoned. Their movement has been met by the full force of the United States Government and has continued nonetheless. They not only are the future of activism but what will become the predominant means of resistance against government.

The purpose of this paper is to replace the current flawed understanding of the group Anonymous with one that is informed of their origins and accurate to their current composition. Though Anonymous is close to becoming a household name, most people's conception of them is that of a group of internet hackers. Though that is one aspect of it, it is nowhere close to the pervading culture that defines it.

First, the history of the group's origins will be traced as a way to explain many of its seemingly strange behavior. It is, in many ways, defined by where it came from. Next, an examination of the composition of the collective will serve to explain how it looks from the inside. Thirdly, the organizational structure and motivation will be examined. A framework developed for academic understanding of terrorism will be used to gain insight into how the structure defines the group. And lastly, a story will be presented about a splinter group which split from Anonymous and the government's reaction to both groups. This will underline the vulnerabilities of both the group and law enforcements' reaction to it.

Anonymous is an incredibly complex and in some ways elegant collection of people moving in different directions and yet moving the whole forward at the same time. It is an idea, not a group, which is defined by its history and structure and is the first in what is the new frontier of activism and civil disobedience.

CHAPTER TWO

The Story of Anonymous

4chan

There is a place on the internet that few “everyday” users have ever heard of directly, yet almost everyone is familiar with its work indirectly. It has been described as “a seedy, unpredictable place, where people have complete freedom to experiment; to try on new ideas, alternate identities.”¹ While perusing 4chan, one is just as likely to find a picture of someone’s new dog as one is to find gore photos of self-inflicted injury. The site is simply a place to upload photos and text completely anonymously.

A fifteen year old student named Christopher Poole launched the site 4chan in 2003. His original intention was to create a place where he and his friends could share Anime (Japanese comics) they created or found, along with other bits of Japanese culture.² Its design, which has for the most part remained unchanged since the site’s inception, is in stark contrast to the feel of the internet with which most users are familiar. It is however, emblematic of the internet at the time as well as a logical step in its evolution. Message boards were one of the first major uses of this new technology, connecting people who had never met, nor would ever meet, with simple segments of

¹ Stryker, Cole. *Epic Win for Anonymous: How 4chan's Army Conquered the Web*. New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2011. 11. Print.

² Brophy-warren, Jamin. "Modest Web Site Is Behind a Bevy of Memes - WSJ.com." *Business News & Financial News - The Wall Street Journal - Wsj.com*. The Wall Street Journal, 9 July 2008. Web. 28 Nov. 2011. <<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121564928060441097.html>>.

text. This was a type of interaction that people had never engaged in before and so demanded a reevaluation of norms and behaviors.

In the beginning, message boards were adopted by groups like the Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link (or WELL). These individuals were hyper-technological in their lifestyles and were prophets of this new technology. Their community was very intentional, however, very much like a group of academics discussing important issues confronting society. They paid per hour or month to access the message board community and were very polite and professional with each other.³ One of the co-founders has said, "I only had to ban one person in ten years at the Well. It was too expensive and difficult to dial in; the people who were there had a good reason to be there. We were very friendly, but very hands off."⁴ Though the technology behind these early communities was very similar to that employed on sites like 4chan, the culture had not yet evolved. The first step in cultural devolution was a site called Rotten.com.

Founded in 1996, Rotten was one of the first "shock sites" on the internet dominated by truly horrific and graphic content ranging from deformities to documented suicide. The site may have been best described by Janelle Brown who called it, "the darkest, deepest, most sordid side of human nature. There is absolutely nothing nice about Rotten.com; this site is simply foul."⁵ The site is self described as,

³ Hafner, Katie. "The Epic Saga of The Well." *Wired.com*. Wired Magazine, 01 May 1997. Web. 05 Jan. 2012. <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/5.05/ff_well_pr.html>.

⁴ Stryker, 111.

⁵ Brown, Janelle. "The Internet's Public Enema No. 1." *Salon.com*. 5 Mar. 2001. Web. 16 Nov. 2011. <http://www.salon.com/2001/03/05/rotten_2/>.

“The soft white underbelly of the net, eviscerated for all to see: Rotten.com collects images and information from many sources to present the viewer with a truly unpleasant experience” under the tag line “Pure Evil Since 1996.”⁶

While unpleasant, Rotten is an example of a pivotal realization on the internet. As people were adapting to this new technology, they realized that it was not just an extension of normal life but something new altogether. On the internet, no one knows who you really are, and frankly, no one cares. There are simultaneously liberating and frightening consequences to this realization. It is similar to the debauchery sometimes associated with college freshman but on a much deeper level. There is no concern with reputation or future consequences and so the desire to fulfill a truly morbid curiosity becomes easily possible. This laid the groundwork for much of the content that would become popular on 4chan.

There were other technological progressive steps that made 4chan possible but such as aggregators and specifically anonymous communities. It became popular by luck as much as anything else. It was in the right place at the right time. Understanding how 4chan works is fundamental to understanding how a movement was born from it.

In addition to its anonymity, 4chan is in a constant state of flux. When an image is posted, it must be actively commented on to remain on the site; otherwise it falls off, never to be seen again. On its most popular page, a typical post will stay on the front

⁶ "Rotten.com Homepage." *Rotten.com: This Is Rotten Dot Com*. Web. 16 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.rotten.com>>.

page for an average of 5 seconds.⁷ This means that everyone visiting the site has a slightly different experience and the only way to judge consensus is by how many times something is “bumped” so that it actually stays around. Bad ideas (or unpopular ones) are forgotten immediately. 4chan has no recording devices so once a story is gone, one cannot go back and search for it. It is gone. This aspect of the community will inform how Anonymous members will communicate with each other in the future as well as provide the systemic basis for consensus gathering.

The most important and most infamous contribution of 4chan is something called /b/. The community of 4chan has created what has been adopted as the “rules of the internet.” The first rule is “Do not talk about /b/.” The second, “Do NOT talk about /b/.”⁸ The site is essentially broken up into several different subject boards, from topics ranging from cars to digital art. All of these have rules about what can and cannot be posted there so as to direct the conversation. By far the most popular board is /b/ which is called random. There are no rules and no topic; it was the first “hive mind” of the internet. At peak times, there are over four hundred thousand posts to the board every day.⁹ The content is extremely varied but, more often than not, is intentionally offensive with almost nothing held pure or moral.

⁷ Bernstein, Michael, Monroy-Hernández, Andrés, Harry, Drew, André, Paul, Panovich, Katrina, AND Vargas, Greg. "4chan and /b/: An Analysis of Anonymity and Ephemerality in a Large Online Community" *International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media* (2011): n. pag. Web. 2 Feb. 2012

⁸ Lolrus. "Rules of the Internet | Know Your Meme." *Internet Meme Database | Know Your Meme*. Cheezburger Network, 2010. Web. 19 Feb. 2012. <<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/rules-of-the-internet>>.

⁹ Bernstein, Monroy-Hernandez, Harry, Andre, Panovich, Varga. 54.

A language has developed that people use to identify the difference between “newfags” and “oldfags,” that is those who have been around the community for a long time. This is necessary because with anonymity, there is no way to track how long someone has been around. These are the rudimentary pillars of a society, and people who spent a lot of time on the board began to embrace it, calling themselves /b/tards. Although used as terms of endearment, racial and homophobic slurs are used constantly. It is unlikely that users are as hateful of these groups as their speech implies; the use of the slurs have simply become part of the culture.

The Beginning of Organized Action

It took time for the anonymous community to realize the power and possibilities of their non-group. At first, most action that left /b/ only went other places on the internet and was “trollish” in nature. Urban Dictionary says, “Trolling is the act of purposefully antagonizing other people on the internet, generally on message boards. When done in a moderated internet community, this can result in banning. When done to uptight people, ... this can result in hilarity.”¹⁰ The first instance happened in the online world of Habbo Hotel, a virtual reality community. A group of /b/tards flooded the virtual world with avatars of black men, causing havoc and blocking people from areas while repeating “The Pool is closed due to AIDS.” When the moderators banned

¹⁰ Jazzniff. "Urban Dictionary: Trolling." *Urban Dictionary*. 11 Oct. 2005. Web. 2 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=trolling>>.

them, they were accused of being racist.¹¹ In December of the same year, a high profile interview taking place in the Second Life virtual reality was interrupted by the group when they conjured a parade of giant pink penises to emerge from the stage.¹²

This behavior is generally “for the lulz” (lulz is a bastardization of the word laughs) and relatively benign. There is no hidden political agenda or cause; it is just something for this community to do. Businesses have office parties, /b/tards go trolling. But these original actions were so surprisingly vast in participation and response that the 4chan community began to realize how much mobilization capacity they had. They did not yet understand how to harness it or what to do with it. Before long, however, they started organizing not just for the laughs but also for a purpose, as demonstrated by an incident against a 21st century racist.

Hal Turner, a white supremacist currently incarcerated for threatening to kill three appellate judges, began broadcasting a radio program in 2002 espousing his radical right wing ideologies and racial prejudices. He organized “pro-white anti-violence” rallies after a white high school student was assaulted by a black colleague in collaboration with a group called National Vanguard.¹³ More counter demonstrators were present than actual protestors.

¹¹ "The Great Habbo Raid of July 2006." *Encyclopedia Dramatica*. Web. 16 Dec. 2011. <http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/The_Great_Habbo_Raid_of_July_2006>.

¹² Giles, Jim. "Virtual entrepreneurs and griefers spoil the fantasy of online worlds; Residents of virtual worlds are making millions but they are bringing laws from the real world with them, spoiling the fantasy for other residents." *New Scientist*. (September 1, 2007): 1444 words. LexisNexis Academic. Web. Date Accessed: 2012/02/19.

¹³ "Hal Turner, White Supremacists Exploit Tensions in Kingston, NY:." *Anti Defamation League*. 22 Nov. 2005. Web. 03 Dec. 2011. <http://www.adl.org/main_Extremism/turner_051117.htm>.

Turner was noticed by /b/ sometime in late 2006 when they decided to teach him a lesson “for great justice.” This was a term that originated from the meme (a recurring inside joke on the internet) “All your base are belong to us”¹⁴ but which would become a rallying cry for anonymous activism in the future.¹⁵ Members of Anonymous flooded Turners website and phone lines so Turner posted the prank caller’s phone numbers hoping his fan base would fight back for him. This resulted in escalation. Anonymous found and published Turner’s criminal record along with all his personal information (a practice which would later be called DOXing). Eventually Turner filed legal action which came to naught.¹⁶ The harassment by Anonymous was so instant and so prolonged that eventually Turner admitted defeat. On December 31, 2006 Turner posted on his website saying, “I am not certain where to go from here. My entire existence - short of my physical presence on this planet - has been utterly wrecked, by people I never met from places I've never been.”¹⁷

This was a very important turn for Anonymous for two reasons. First, their trolling turned from simply laughable diversion to an action carried out for a cause. While there was no political consensus or rallying cry, the members of /b/ decided that Hal Turner’s rhetoric was so inappropriate everyone could agree he needed taking

¹⁴ "For Great Justice." *Urban Dictionary*. Web. 05 Nov. 2011.
<[http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=for great justice](http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=for%20great%20justice)>.

¹⁵ ""All Your Base Are Belong To Us"" *H2g2*. 13 Feb. 2007. Web. 05 Nov. 2011.
<<http://h2g2.com/dna/h2g2/A19147205>>.

¹⁶ "HAROLD C. " HAL" TURNER v. 4CHAN.ORG Et Al." *Justia Dockets & Filings*. Web. 10 Jan. 2012.
<<http://dockets.justia.com/docket/new-jersey/njdce/2:2007cv00306/198438/>>.

¹⁷ "Hal Turner." *Encyclopedia Dramatica*. Web. 05 Nov. 2011.
<http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/Hal_Turner>.

down. This decision was an impressive step for a community who rarely agrees on anything and is often intentionally racist and offensive for its own sake. Secondly, the community realized its capacity for asymmetric warfare. The collective attacked Turner from the shadows, killing his will to fight, not his ability. By this action they had demonstrated that just as is true in actual warfare, that much smaller group can be incredibly effective against a much larger opponent.

Another example of surprising outrage among /b/tards is the creation of a character named Pedobear. On the surface (and to several news outlets) Pedobear is evidence that 4chan is a haven for deviants and child pornographers. He is typically posted whenever there are pictures of young girls posted to 4chan and is often quoted saying "Iz Dat Sum CP?" CP is 4chan speak for child pornography. Pedobear actually originated on a Japanese predecessor to 4chan called 2channel as an ASCII art image.¹⁸ It is used on 4chan to mock pedophiles or to alert the moderators of possible instances of child pornography. Once alerted, they remove the image immediately and report the offending IP address to the Center for Missing & Exploited Children's Cyber Tipline, the typical protocol for an image-upload site. Child pornography is one of very few, if not the only, things /b/ does not allow. This action is emblematic of the community - doing good, but in a way that nonmembers will mistake for evil. Several police departments have issued warnings about Pedobear, as if this fictional character were the one

¹⁸ Dubs, Jamie. "Pedobear." *Know Your Meme*. 2009. Web. 15 Nov. 2011. <<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/pedobear>>.

exploiting children, calling it the “Mascot of Pedophiles.”¹⁹ That some police departments misinterpret Pedobear’s intent, *Gawker Media* said of them, “As much as it would make cops' jobs easier ... pedophiles have not collectively decided to brand themselves with a logo so we can easily identify them. Jesus, cops can be dumb.”²⁰

While these examples cast a favorable, if not strange, light on the active community on /b/, trolling is sometimes very malicious. In 2006 a seventh grader named Mitchell Henderson committed suicide for unknown reasons. A Myspace page was set up as a memorial where his friends offered condolences and shared memories of Mitchell. One friend, signed Lila, left this comment:

He was such an hero, to take it all away. We miss him so, That you should know,
And we honor him this day. He was an hero, to take that shot, to leave us all
behind. God do we wish we could take it back, And now he’s on our minds.
Mitchell was an hero, to leave us feeling like this, Our minds are rubber, our
joints don’t work, Our tears fall into abyss. He was an hero, to take that shot, In
life it wasn’t his task, He shouldn’t have had to go that way, before an decade’d
past. Now he sits there in my heart, this hero of mine, Always there to make me
smile, Make me feel just fine. He had courage, that boy did, courage in his heart.
To take that shot, To end his pain, To tear us all apart. But in the end, he died in
courage. Lacking, nevermore, He died a hero, Mitchell did, And we’ll love him
forevermore. We love you like an brother. We miss you so much. We will always
love you, kid. Rest In Peace Mitch.²¹

¹⁹ Graff, Amy. "California Police Warn Parents of Pedophilia Mascot | The Mommy Files | an SFGate.com Blog." *San Francisco Chronicle*. 14 Sept. 2010. Web. 03 Jan. 2012. <<http://blog.sfgate.com/sfmoms/2010/09/14/california-police-warn-parents-of-pedophilia-mascot/>>.

²⁰ Chen, Adrian. "Stupid California Police Warn Parents of Pedobear, the â ~Pedophile Mascotâ™ (Updated)." *Gawker Media*. 12 Sept. 2010. Web. 03 Jan. 2012. <<http://gawker.com/5636011/stupid-california-police-warn-parents-of-pedobear-the-pedophile-mascot/>>.

²¹ "An Hero." Know Your Meme. The Cheezburger Network, 2010. Web. 31 Mar. 2012. <<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/an-hero>>.

It was a heartfelt poem by a grieving friend who was probably the same age as Mitchell, struggling to understand and cope with the situation. Two things stand out in this post. First, that she called suicide a heroic thing to do, and second, her continued and obvious grammatical mistake of saying “an hero.” Somehow the trolls found this post and loved it. Most important to them was the heroic comment, but the grammatical mistake gave it a handle for reference. Today whenever suicide is referenced or suggested on 4chan (which it is frequently), it is referred to as doing “an hero.” At the time however, /b/ not only raided the Myspace page, turning Mitchell’s face into that of a zombie but went much further. Somehow they decided Mitchell had killed himself over a lost iPod, adding to the lulz. A picture of an iPod on Mitchell’s grave was posted to /b/. Eventually, the Henderson’s personal information was posted which led to prank calls to their home saying, “Hi this is Mitchell, I’m at the cemetery.”²²

This incident represents the darker side of anonymity and there is certainly a lot of it on /b/. But as shown, it is also an outlet to work for the greater good, for great justice. It is with relative frequency that someone posts on /b/ saying he is going to an hero. Though there are always several people egging him on, a majority of people offer comforting and consoling words, a real rarity. So for good or for bad, it is indisputable that the anonymous community has the capacity for collective action.

²² Schwartz, Mattathias. "There Are Trolls Among Us." The New York Times. 3 Aug. 2008. Web. 31 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/03/magazine/03trolls-t.html>>.

A Legion is Born

Project Chanology, which was a coordinated attack aimed at the Church of Scientology was the first major operation conducted explicitly by Anonymous. One of the underlying beliefs of the internet community, especially those in the beginning, was the belief that information is meant to be free. Information is what the technology is based on and for many, that freedom is paramount. The Church of Scientology always has been shrouded in secrecy and has taken action in the past that led to the now infamous action by Anonymous.

In 1991, Scott Goehring started a conversation on Usenet about the hypocrisies and deceptions of the Church of Scientology. This board quickly became very popular, attracting many ex-church members as well as free speech activists. In 1994 the conversation exploded in popularity when a former high ranking church member named Dennis Erlich joined. Then, in December of that year, secret church documents were leaked to the group detailing such things as "Thetan Levels."

The Church formed a legal team that they would rely heavily on for future suppression of information. Throughout 1995, the Church, in cooperation with law enforcement, raided several homes belonging to people outspoken on the Usenet boards, including Erlich.²³ The internet community was furious at the use of federal power being used to suppress the voice of dissent. For several years, the Church used their legal team, as well as a technical team to spam these boards with propaganda and

²³ O'Connell, Kelly. "INTERNET LAW - Online Security, Online Churches, Internet Attacks, Hacking, Scientologists, Youtube Video, Church Web Sites, Denial of Service Attack, Website Attack, Blocking Websites." *Internet Business Law Service*. 30 Jan. 2008. Web. 15 Jan. 2012. <http://www.ibls.com/internet_law_news_portal_view.aspx?s=latestnews&id=1972>.

in the early days of search engines, bury and attack opinions beneath a slew of pro-Scientology sites. Geek fury stewed under the surface until January of 2008.

A video of Tom Cruise, a popular Scientology celebrity, that was posted on Youtube could not help but go viral unless, that is, the Church did not immediately have it removed.²⁴ But Nick Denton, the owner of *Gawker Media* saw an opportunity. He hosted the video himself and because he owns the most profitable network of blogs on the internet, he had the resources to stand up to the Church. The video has since been viewed over three million times. In it Cruise praises Scientology in what many have described as a brainwashed manner. Among other things he says,

When you're a Scientologist, and you drive by an accident, you know you have to do something about it, because you know you're the only one who can really help... We are the way to happiness. We can bring peace and unite cultures.²⁵

Denton describes it best, "Let me put it this way: if Tom Cruise jumping on Oprah's couch was an 8 on the scale of scary, this is a 10."²⁶ The church moved to have the video removed but what it was able to do in the past with a few Usenet boards it could no longer muster with a video gone viral in 2008. The video brought a "lulzy" nature to the movement that it had been lacking, and the community at 4chan went crazy.

²⁴ Vamosi, Robert. "Anonymous Hackers Take on the Church of Scientology." *CNET News*. CBS Interactive, 24 Jan. 2008. Web. 03 Jan. 2012. <http://news.cnet.com/8301-10789_3-9857666-57.html>.

²⁵ Denton, Nick. "The Cruise Indoctrination Video Scientology Tried To Suppress." *Gawker*. Gawker Media, 15 Jan. 2008. Web. 03 Jan. 2012. <<http://gawker.com/5002269/the-cruise-indoctrination-video-scientology-tried-to-suppress>>.

²⁶ Denton, Nick.

At first the rallying led to Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks on the Church's websites, which is simply flooding it with traffic until it collapses under the server load, effectively blocking any access to it. The message spread, leading to prank calls and faxes. But then, for the first time ever, Anonymous released a manifesto.

The message, entitled "Message to Scientology" was uploaded to Youtube in what has become the standard for such releases. As there is no group or leadership in Anonymous, an individual put together a simple video with text-to-speech technology reading a script. The posting spoke for the collective, as seen by how fervently it was accepted and shared. To date, the video has been seen over four and a half million times. The message was clear.

Hello, Scientology. We are Anonymous.

Over the years, we have been watching you. Your campaigns of misinformation; suppression of dissent; your litigious nature, all of these things have caught our eye. With the leakage of your latest propaganda video into mainstream circulation, the extent of your malign influence over those who trust you, who call you leader, has been made clear to us. Anonymous has therefore decided that your organization should be destroyed. For the good of your followers, for the good of mankind--for the laughs--we shall expel you from the Internet and systematically dismantle the Church of Scientology in its present form. We acknowledge you as a serious opponent, and we are prepared for a long, long campaign. You will not prevail forever against the angry masses of the body politic. Your methods, hypocrisy, and the artlessness of your organization have sounded its death knell.

You cannot hide; we are everywhere.

We cannot die; we are forever. We're getting bigger every day--and solely by the force of our ideas, malicious and hostile as they often are. If you want another name for your opponent, then call us Legion, for we are many.

Yet for all that we are not as monstrous as you are; still our methods are a parallel to your own. Doubtless you will use the Anon's actions as an example of

the persecution you have so long warned your followers would come; this is acceptable. In fact, it is encouraged. We are your SPs.

Gradually as we merge our pulse with that of your "Church", the suppression of your followers will become increasingly difficult to maintain. Believers will wake, and see that salvation has no price. They will know that the stress, the frustration that they feel is not something that may be blamed upon Anonymous. No--they will see that it stems from a source far closer to each. Yes, we are SPs. But the sum of suppression we could ever muster is eclipsed by that of the RTC.

Knowledge is free. We are Anonymous. We are Legion. We do not forgive. We do not forget. Expect us.²⁷

This outright ideological mission statement was a first for Anonymous and became a rallying cry. Throughout the year the church was continually harassed technologically and in the media. But also for the first time, Anonymous took to the streets. Donning Guy Fawkes masks, people attended small rallies around the world in front of Scientology buildings; they called this the Global Day of Protest. These were categorically lulzy in nature but are very important because they bridged the gap from the internet to existing IRL (in real life).

Though these demonstrations were relatively small, any attempt to combat them by the church came off as silly because of their comedic nature. Chanology continues to this day with groups still dedicated to the cause, though it has fallen out of the public eye. And though the Church continues to operate, Anonymous had a very real impact. Gabriella Coleman, an NYU professor on digital activism, illustrates this impact:

²⁷ ChurchOfScientology. "Message to Scientology." *YouTube*. YouTube, 21 Jan. 2008. Web. 04 Jan. 2012. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCbKv9yiLiQ>>.

Scientology has received so much negative attention that they've refrained from legal intimidation tactics. If I had released some of the papers I've released recently six years ago, I would have been embroiled in legal battles. Anonymous really changed the landscape.²⁸

This was the first time that Anonymous had set out with a defined enemy and used the collective to fight them in their own way with great result, and a far cry from the trolling days of the past. When the Legion rises it is powerful, and now, self aware.

Anonymous Operations

After the Global Days of Protest a significant split occurred. Many anons who had come primarily for the lulz shrank back into their cyber webs from where they had come. But others realized their newfound might and steered toward a more traditionally political. This spawned a new era for Anonymous. They started going after big targets for ideological reasons. Their success with Scientology made them bold. In mid-2010, they launched Operation Payback, which would put them in front of the mainstream media for all to see.

It started with a Bollywood production company who hired a legal/technical company to DDoS websites who were distributing pirated copies of their films. Though the collective most likely had no affinity for any of the parties involved, anti-piracy organizations and their questionable tactics had been edging their way into the crosshairs. The group not only DDoS'ed the offending company but also all the other major anti-piracy organizations. They took down the websites of the Motion Picture

²⁸ Stryker, Cole.

Association of America, the Recording Industry Association of America, the British Phonographic Industry, and the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry for over thirty six hours. These attacks also bled over to legal firms that represented these entities who made some aggressive comments about the collective. Threatening Anonymous typically is seen as a challenge.

Piracy and its opponents have always been concerns of Anonymous. Because of its demographics, it is probable that many of them benefit from media piracy, most have extensive collection of pirated movies and music. But on a broader level, there is the sense that the anti-piracy campaigns that have become prevalent recently not only violate the “freedom of information” sentiment, but also use big budget corporations to bully and control elements of people’s lives. In that sense they see themselves as fighting the man who sues individuals to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars per track downloaded.

In December 2010, Amazon, Paypal, Bank of America, Post Finance, MasterCard and Visa began blocking internet donations to the site WikiLeaks, which members of Anonymous are very fond of, for obvious reasons. WikiLeaks publishes and hosts confidential information about governments and corporations for the world to see. Though there is no official partnership, they have hosted much of the content Anonymous has uncovered in their hacks. These financial websites bowed to political pressure to cut off donations which Anonymous saw as government abuse of power and so launched attacks against them. They brought down the websites for MasterCard and

Visa and caused significant network disruptions at the others. This also garnered the largest amount of media attention they had ever received.

Though the collective had proven its ability to mobilize and influence, its operations were limited to DDoS attacks targeted at opponents who were generally hated. The attacks were relatively frequent, or so they thought. By 2011 Anonymous was a household name. Members attacked internet security firms, incited protests on San Francisco public transportation, and personally targeted police deemed out of line, publically publishing their address, phone and social security numbers, and internet passwords on the web. Twitter accounts popped up releasing daily statements about Anonymous activity. Op Tunisia was active long before Western media organizations were reporting on activities there. The attacks were impressive in size, worldwide in scope, and relentless in frequency. Few weeks went by without a significant attack by Anonymous and many of them garnered serious media coverage. In their own words, “you should have expected us.”

CHAPTER THREE

A Group with no Head and No Members

Who are you?

Who? Who is but the form following the function of what and what I am is a man in a mask.

Well I can see that.

Of course you can. I'm not questioning your powers of observation; I'm merely remarking upon the paradox of asking a masked man who he is.

-V for Vendetta

When talking with members of Anonymous, they are quick to scoff at the word “group.”

They see themselves as completely decentralized with no membership and no leadership. It is a movement, carried forward on the backs of those compelled to join their ranks. But for a group of their size and operational capacity, it is difficult to believe there is absolutely no power structure. But if it is true, this creation cannot be controlled, directed or decapitated making it more powerful than anyone could have imagined.

What's in a Name?

The name Anonymous is a description of the collective. Its allure is also one of the central tenants of its power. It implies the group is not one individual but rather an idea. To quote one of Anonymous' favorite sources of imagery, the 2005 film *V for Vendetta*, “Beneath this mask there is more than flesh. Beneath this mask there is an

idea ... and ideas are bulletproof.”¹ This sense of “greater than the individual” is embodied in its use of an improper name.

The improper name is a divergence from the classical philosophical concept of millianism which postulates a meaning of a name is simply the object to which it refers.² The concept of a name is therefore expanded to “the adoption of the same alias by organized collectives, affinity groups, and scattered individuals.” Marco Deseriis constructed his dissertation on this subject stating,

Improper names empower a subaltern social group by providing anonymity and a medium for mutual recognition to its users. By adopting the same alias subjects who do not have a voice of their own seek to acquire a symbolic power outside of official rites of institution and sanctioned organizations. On the other hand, the uncontrolled adoption of the same name by multiple individuals leads to the formation of singularities which are neither collective nor individual, but rather "co-dividual" or "trans-individual"--i.e., characterized by multiplicity and the proliferation of difference.³

This self-identification allows for the decentralized structure which is exceedingly rare. There is no membership and anyone can claim to be part of the collective. Allowing this has been one of Anonymous’ biggest strengths.

Imagery always has been a significant part of the Anonymous culture. This is closely related to its use of language which will be discussed in a later section. Originally the group rallied around a picture of a man wearing a suit and black tie with no head.

¹ *V for Vendetta*. Dir. James McTeigue. Perf. Hugo Weaving and Natalie Portman. Warner Brothers Pictures, 2005. DVD.

² “The End of Millianism: Multiple Bearers, Improper Names, and Compositional Meaning.” Jerrold J. Katz. *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 98, No. 3 (Mar., 2001), pp. 137-166

³ Deseriis, Marco. "Improper Names: The Minor Politics of Collective Pseudonyms and Multiple-use Names." New York University, 2011. United States -- New York: ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (PQDT). Web. 11 Mar. 2012.

The most iconic image is that of the Guy Fawkes mask, again borrowed from the 2005 *V for Vendetta* movie.

The legend of Guy Fawkes is based somewhat in history although it has been highly romanticized. It is the story of an assassination attempt against King James I of England by a group of Catholics. It was planned by Robert Catesby but failed when explosives were discovered under the House of Lords after a tip by an informant. Guy Fawkes, having experience in the military fighting in the Dutch Netherlands, was put in charge of the explosives and discovered along with them. He was hung for his troubles on the 5th of November,⁴ a day that has been celebrated since, originally as a victory for the king.⁵

The 2005 film (derived from an earlier comic) inspired by these events portrayed Guy Fawkes as a hero for challenging the authority. The primary character, known only as V, takes on the persona, wearing a Guy Fawkes mask and exposes hidden corruption of a future dystopian English government. It ends with the citizens of England standing to join him in destroying the corrupt government. His famous speech has been used countless times by Anonymous and serves as one of their rallying cries.

Allow me first to apologize for this interruption. I do, like many of you, appreciate the comforts of every day routine- the security of the familiar, the tranquility of repetition. I enjoy them as much as any bloke. But in the spirit of commemoration, thereby those important events of the past usually associated with someone's death or the end of some awful bloody struggle, a celebration of a nice holiday, I thought we could mark this November the 5th, a day that is

⁴ Fraser, Antonia. *Faith and Treason: The Story of the Gunpowder Plot*. New York: Anchor, 1997. Print.

⁵ "The Gunpowder Plot." BBC News History. BBC. Web. 13 Feb. 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/the_gunpowder_plot>.

sadly no longer remembered, by taking some time out of our daily lives to sit down and have a little chat. There are of course those who do not want us to speak. I suspect even now, orders are being shouted into telephones, and men with guns will soon be on their way. Why? Because while the truncheon may be used in lieu of conversation, words will always retain their power. Words offer the means to meaning, and for those who will listen, the enunciation of truth. And the truth is, there is something terribly wrong with this country, isn't there? Cruelty and injustice, intolerance and oppression. And where once you had the freedom to object, to think and speak as you saw fit, you now have censors and systems of surveillance coercing your conformity and soliciting your submission. How did this happen? Who's to blame? Well certainly there are those more responsible than others, and they will be held accountable, but again truth be told, if you're looking for the guilty, you need only look into a mirror. I know why you did it. I know you were afraid. Who wouldn't be? War, terror, disease. There were a myriad of problems which conspired to corrupt your reason and rob you of your common sense. Fear got the best of you, and in your panic you turned to the now high chancellor, Adam Sutler. He promised you order, he promised you peace, and all he demanded in return was your silent, obedient consent. Last night I sought to end that silence ... to remind this country of what it has forgotten. More than four hundred years ago a great citizen wished to embed the fifth of November forever in our memory. His hope was to remind the world that fairness, justice, and freedom are more than words, they are perspectives. So if you've seen nothing, if the crimes of this government remain unknown to you then I would suggest you allow the fifth of November to pass unmarked. But if you see what I see, if you feel as I feel, and if you would seek as I seek, then I ask you to stand beside me one year from tonight, outside the gates of Parliament, and together we shall give them a fifth of November that shall never, ever be forgot.⁶

This character and his message appeal on every level to members of Anonymous. It is a populist uprising against a government they perceive to be oppressing information. And best of all, it is not lead by a person or a politician; it is lead by an idea embodied in a mask which has become the symbol of Anonymous. Members wear them to protests, and they are the subject of video and propaganda. Oscar Wilde once said, "Man is least

⁶ V for Vendetta

himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth.”⁷

Membership

The collective nature of Anonymous does not lend itself to membership lists. The common consensus to become part of the legion is simply to don a mask. From many accounts, concealing oneself online constitutes being a part of the collective. There are several venues through which the group can be contacted and engaged.

First it is important to understand the technical infrastructure many Anons use to communicate. Internet Relay Chat (IRC) was developed in 1988 and is a real time chat protocol.⁸ It was succeeded in popularity by the more user friendly protocol, namely America Online’s Instant Messenger. It is organized in channels and hosted on a server. There are two very popular servers on which Anonymous members chat, Anonops and Anonnet. Both have hundreds of channels dedicated to a myriad of things. Some are specifically created for ongoing ops where those taking part can organize DDoS attacks or coordinate other activity.⁹ Some channels are even dedicated to media personnel seeking answers to questions about stories they are covering.¹⁰

⁷ Oscar Wilde. The Quotation Page. Web. 11 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/38229.html>>.

⁸ Oikarinen, Jarkko. Internet Relay Chat Protocol RFC 1459. May 1993. Network Working Group Memo. <<http://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc1459>>

⁹ "AnonNet IRC Network." AnonNet. Web. 13 Mar. 2012. <<http://site.anonnet.org/>>.

¹⁰ "Contact." AnonOps. Web. 13 Mar. 2012. <<http://anonops.com/contact/>>.

The choice to use IRC is interesting but not surprising. It fits very well with the inherited 4chan motif. First, it can host many conversations with a vast number of participants all in a decentralized manner. But there is also a cultural aspect to it. IRC is an older technology that not many use anymore, similar to the feel of the 4chan design. Also it was the protocol most often used during the Usenet and early message boards days. So while it is technically not difficult to use, and instructions are provided for those who do not know how to use it, it is not as clean and corporate as many other things on the web. Lastly, and possibly most importantly, the servers Anonymous uses are completely open to anyone wanting to listen in.

This contributes to the decentralized nature of the collective and helps gauge popularity for different ideas. Similar to 4chan, there is no polling process; ideas are accepted only if they are kept in front of people by their constant mention. One thing that is immediately obvious to those who join the conversation is how typically trivial and childish it is. Conversation is usually nothing more than what you would expect from 4chan, mostly bored people with nothing better to do than insult each other. Specific groups, many of whom are explicitly not involved with any illegal activity, use other protocols like the popular Skype platform for communication, primarily because of its' ability to voice chat.

So there is no membership, it is simply a decision to be involved in the culture and retain ones anonymity. Often people who are part of the collective scoff whenever the media or others use the term "membership" because of its inherent connotations of

formal involvement. People come and go as they are interested and because there are no barriers to entry, membership is an entirely personal decision.

Archetypes

Probably the most common misconception about Anonymous is that it is a group of hackers. This generalization stems from the media attention the collective garners from these types of activities but it is but one of its many facets. Though it would be unlikely that anyone active in Anonymous would be a Luddite (someone adverse to technology on principle), there are many people who identify with and are defined by the technological lifestyle who have no programming or network protocol skills. Communicating and interacting with the collective requires little to no special skills, just the knowledge and will to find them. So while most identify with some definition of geek culture, there is a relatively small percentage involved in hacking.

While small, the hackers serve a very important function. They create the media frenzy with some of the very high profile attacks they have carried out. Because this type of activity is necessarily sensitive, they operate in private chat rooms planning and carrying out raids.¹¹ They are extremely technically literate and are among the most talented hackers on the planet. As a result, they can be quite boastful about activities and assertive of their relative power.

¹¹ Cook, John, and Adrian Chen. "Inside Anonymous' Secret War Room." Gawker. Gawker Media, 18 Mar. 2011. Web. 13 Mar. 2012. <<http://gawker.com/5783173/inside-anonymous-secret-war-room>>.

Because of its decentralized nature, members fill niches whenever their skills match a need within the collective. Propaganda has been very influential in past campaigns and operations. Some of these technologically savvy individuals put their efforts into creating the material that has been very influential, both internally and with the news media. In the beginning, Gregg Housh recruited 6 to 8 people during Project Chanology to help him create the now infamous Message to Scientology video. They were also responsible for putting together the UN inspired logo in common usage and originally picking the Guy Fawkes masks for use at the national day of protest.¹²

Other members operate as “Public Relations” for the collective. There are a number of ways information gets out but the niches are always filled. Because no one speaks for the collective, there are sometimes competing stories, but typically these different personalities seem to function together well. There are several twitter accounts dedicated to Anonymous news, @AnonymousIRC and @YourAnonNews being the most popular. As is the case with everything else the group does, the people who have access to publish on these accounts are unknown. The group also uses the site Pastebin.com to publish releases about hacks or other information. The appeal is its ability for anyone to post anonymously. This means however that to get a post read by many, it has to be picked up by someone trusted either on the channels or twitter to verify its legitimacy.

¹² Walker, Bob. "How Did a Hacker Group That Rejects Definition Develop Such a Strong Visual Brand?" Slate Magazine. 8 Dec. 2011. Web. 12 Mar. 2012.
<http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/design/2011/12/guy_fawkes_mask_how_anonymous_hacker_group_created_a_powerful_visual_brand.html>.

Though less popular with many of the newer operations, “IRL” (In Real Life) raids are also a function some members choose to undertake. These are very popular with groups who have carried on Chanology, as it was foundational in that project. They flyer and protest as any such demonstration would, although their’s typically takes a more lulzy tone. Other protests will pop up occasionally around specific issues that Anons have organized through online networks, for example protesting the treatment of Bradley Manning, the alleged Wikileaks informant.¹³

The most important members are the masses that make up the hive. Not only do they provide the legitimacy for Anonymous, they give Anonymous much of its power. It takes a large number of people to carry out a DDoS attack, especially against the well funded sites that have been brought down in the past. Also the hive functions as an incredible source of information gathering that rivals national intelligence agencies when it puts it mind to it. The hive-mind is the brain of Anonymous and going against it, even by one of the “hacker elite” can have serious consequences.

Power Pooling

The structure of power within Anonymous is widely disputed. Rhetoric from within the collective has always said that there is no group and no leaders, but news agencies and others, citing leaked chat transcripts, report that it is not as decentralized as it may seem. Power can be measured in a number of different ways including influence, actionable skills, and hierarchical command authority.

¹³ Morrigan, Kate; Gray, Alex. "Interview with Kate Morrigan." Online interview. 30 Mar. 2012.

The first level of possible power hierarchy is within the IRC networks. Each channel has users granted with operator status who have the power to ban other users from the channel. This is the case with any IRC chat room and is primarily used as a logistical function.¹⁴ There are rules in the chat room and spammers or people threatening violence or attacks on the media are not allowed in the discussion. Users who are granted this privilege are typically people already known and respected in the community and as a result have a greater sway in direction and debate, but cannot make decisions for the group as a whole. Many are simply there to provide the technical infrastructure to host the conversation.¹⁵

It is also important to understand the Anonymous anti-leader ethic to grasp the power dynamics at play. Mike Wesch sees it as a reactionary stance saying the community is “a scathing critique of the postmodern cult of celebrity, individualism, and identity while serving itself as the inverted alternative.”¹⁶ They are violently against people portraying themselves as leaders, calling them “leaderfags” and booting them from the channels. Personal promotion goes against the ethos of the group and is never tolerated.

Others argue that it is the hackers who call the shots and direct the organization under a guise of non-leadership. They cite conversations leaked from private chat

¹⁴ Oikarinen, Jarkko.

¹⁵ Coleman, Gabriella. "From the Lulz to Collective Action." The New Everyday. A Media Commons Project, 6 Apr. 2011. Web. 15 Jan. 2012.

¹⁶ In Press "Anonymous, Anonymity, and the End(s) of Identity and Groups Online: Lessons from “the First Internet-Based Superconsciousness” in Human No More, eds. Neil Whitehead and Michael Wesch. University of Colorado Press.

rooms where users like Sabu take credit for hacks, direct others to develop target lists, and argue about certain actions.¹⁷ Others point to the very existence of invite-only channels as proof of a hierarchy system.¹⁸ Gabriella Coleman, one of the most knowledgeable on the subject, says this about these claims,

They are confusing the power to hack, which is certainly powerful, with the power to lead all actions within Anonymous ... Those who are more present on the network and have put in more work carry more authority; and even they don't necessarily call all the shots.¹⁹

So it is not as if there is no power structure at all but rather, as with any group, some have more relative respect which leads them to be more influential. Because the anti-leader ideal is so strong, the collective is constantly self-policing those who try to assume a leadership role.

Though it is not true for some of the more premeditated operations, many actions by Anonymous are mob-like in nature and need no leadership. This characteristic comes from the 4chan trolling days when something would catch the community's interest for one reason or another and spur them to action. On January 19, 2012, a popular file sharing site, Megaupload, was taken down by the US Government, arresting many of the executives of the company. There was even a SWAT team assault on the founder's home.²⁰ This sent Anonymous into a frenzy for a number

¹⁷ Cook, John, and Adrian Chen.

¹⁸ Halliday, Josh, and Charles Arthur. "WikiLeaks: Anonymous Hierarchy Emerges." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, 16 Dec. 2010. Web. 15 Jan. 2012. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2010/dec/16/wikileaks-anonymous-hierarchy-emerges>>.

¹⁹ Coleman, Gabriella.

²⁰ Fowler, Geoffrey A., Devlin Barrett, and Sam Schechner. "U.S. Shuts Offshore File-Share 'Locker'" The Wall Street Journal. 20 Jan. 2012. Web. 13 Feb. 2012.

of reasons. Within hours, the DDoS'ing had started and by the end of the day it was the largest single attack of its kind in the internet's history. According to an Anonymous press release, the casualties included the Department of Justice, Universal Music, the Recording Industry Association of America, the Motion Picture Association of America, the US Copyright Office, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the White House. Several French sites also were targeted. And for good measure, Chris Dodd, the CEO of the MPAA was Dox'ed.²¹ All of this was done on a moment's notice and was extremely chaotic because there was not even time for leadership. A quote from the IRC channel best summed up the situation by one of its more influential members stated, "Danzu: STOP EVERYTHING, who are we DoSing right now?"²²

Culture

To understand Anonymous as a group, it is paramount to understand its culture. Anonymous is, more than anything, a culture, emerging from 4chan and has evolving to fit the collective as it currently operates. A member since 2008, kate morrigan, offered three core aspects of this incredibly unique culture: Freedom, Lulz and Dox.²³ Freedom

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204616504577171060611948408.html?mod=WSJ_hp_LEFTTopStories>.

²¹ AnonymousWiki. "#OpMegaupload." Pastebin. 19 Jan. 2012. Web. 13 Feb. 2012. <<http://pastebin.com/WEydcBVV>>.

²² Biddle, Sam. "Anonymous Goes on Megaupload Revenge Spree: DoJ, RIAA, MPAA, and Universal Music All Offline." Gizmodo. Gawker Media, 19 Jan. 2012. Web. 13 Feb. 2012. <<http://gizmodo.com/5877679/anonymous-kills-department-of-justice-site-in-megaupload-revenge-strike>>.

²³ Morrigan, Kate; Gray, Alex. "Interview with Kate Morrigan." Online interview. 30 Mar. 2012.

is a motivating force for Anonymous - from freedom of information and speech to “just being fucking weird.” Lulz is the most obvious aspect that came from 4chan but is essential. Chanology, the operation that uncovered the collective, did not take off until lulz was added to the outrage. Before the video of Tom Cruise was released, there were many people angry at the church but it took the funny nature of lulz to activate the hive. Some cells still active in Chanology almost five years after it started attribute their staying power to the intentional cultivation of the lulz. Many cells and members of that project have dwindled, but the ones who have survived claim that always appealing to that lulzy aspect of the culture is what keeps them going.²⁴ Finally, Dox (referring to personal documents) primarily applies to the anonymity aspect of the culture. By keeping your Dox private, one is effectively part of the culture. This is extremely important to the organization as a whole because it upholds the meritocracy, which is unique and powerful.

One facet of anonymity is its unbiased judgment of ideas. An idea cannot be discredited or praised on the basis of who it came from if its author is unknown. This means the best or most popular ideas always rise to the top, no matter from whence they come. The venues where Anons communicate are the opposite of places like Facebook, which focus on identity rather than ideas. People are less likely to say things or express ideas when they are concerned about how others will react to it. This was one of Christopher Poole’s most important ideals for 4chan:

²⁴ PokeAnon; Gray, Alex. "Interview with PokeAnon." Telephone interview. 28 Mar. 2012.

The greater good is being served here by allowing people – there are very few places now where you can go and be completely anonymous and say whatever you like. Saying whatever you like is powerful. Doing whatever you like is now crossing the line, but I think it’s important to have a place [like 4chan].²⁵

For many, anonymity directly correlates to authenticity. It may not yield socially acceptable results, /b/’s content is evidence of that, but it is nonetheless important and to some, a fundamental right. In any case, it is foundational for the anonymous culture.

Though many would disagree, for those who have been involved with Anonymous for a long time, “the culture is the group.”²⁶ Many of these “oldfags” become frustrated with the Anonymous banner being used for things that do not represent that culture. The media have often associated Anonymous with the Occupy movement, sometimes referring to them interchangeably. While many, if not most, members of the collective agree with the ideals of Occupy, they recognize it as a similar but distinctly different entity. It is not part of the culture and thus not part of the group.

In June of 2011 a cyber security consulting firm posted a challenge to the internet. On the firm’s homepage was posted the following “Change this website’s homepage picture and win \$10K and a position working with Senior Cybersecurity Advisor, Joe Black.” The breakaway cell from Anonymous calling itself Lulzsec plastered their meme logo on the front page with the message “DONE, THAT WAS EASY. KEEP

²⁵ Poole, Christopher (moot). “The case for anonymity online.” Last modified February, 2010. http://ted.com/talks/christopher_m00t_poole_the_case_for_anonymity_online.html.

²⁶ PokeAnon. "Interview with PokeAnon." Telephone interview. 28 Mar. 2012.

YOUR MONEY WE DO IT FOR THE LULZ.” The culture is clear, this collective is not what it was and its’ ideals of merriment are what makes them who they are.²⁷

Tools

Equipment and technology cannot only change the way people accomplish tasks but also can redefine the tasks all together. As such, an examination of tools is useful for better understanding certain aspects of a society. The same is true with Anonymous. Though some of what they do is very technical-based programming and network exploitation, the majority of their activity, and one of their greatest strengths, comes from their ability to employ the masses.

One of Anonymous’ signatures and source of great media coverage is their successful DDoS attacks against websites. Traditionally these types of attacks were rare due to the large amounts of resources necessary to overwhelm a target successfully. Typically the attacker would need use of a botnet to carry out these attacks. (Botnets are groups of computers that have been infected with malicious software that tie them together) Most commonly, these networks are used to produce spam. For a Distributed Denial of Service attack, the controller issues an order for them to send hundreds of packets of data at the same time to a specific IP address to take it offline.

²⁷ Podolak, Erin. "LulzSec Hacks Security Firm Black & Berg, Turns Down \$10,000 Prize." *Geek Systems*. Abrams Media Network, 8 June 2011. Web. 16 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.geekosystem.com/lulzsec-black-berg-hack/>>.

These systems require extensive programming, and are combatted by the best talent that governments and corporations can field.²⁸

The Low Orbit Ion Cannon, despite its name, is not a cold war era offensive countermeasure but rather a computer program employed by Anonymous. It was developed by Praetox Technologies but has since been made open source. In a few simple clicks, it allows the user to be able to release a torrent of traffic to any website or IP address. In 4chan fashion, it is rigged with lulz, being named after a weapon from a popular video game. Also on the icon to begin the Dos'ing is written: "IMMA CHARGIN MAH LAZER."²⁹ It also allows for users to couple their copy of the software to an IRC channel, giving the operator of that channel targeting control.³⁰ A new program, High Orbit Ion Cannon, has recently been released, which is the same concept but with updated methods of packet flooding and protocols to make it harder for sites to block the traffic.³¹

This tool allows for the members of a collective to join in an attack with very little effort, analogous to distributing pitchforks to an angry mob. The very interesting aspect is the choice to join in. Gregg Housh describes it in an interview on CNN:

²⁸ Puri, Ramneek. "Bots & Botnet: An Overview." InfoSec Reading Room. SANS Institute, 8 Aug. 2003. Web. 14 Feb. 2012. <http://www.sans.org/reading_room/whitepapers/malicious/bots-botnet-overview_1299>.

²⁹ Abatishchev. LOIC. Computer software. Sourceforge.net. Vers. 1.0.7.42. Geeknet, Inc, 12 Jan. 2012. Web. 14 Mar. 2012. <<http://sourceforge.net/projects/loic/>>.

³⁰ Johnson, Joel. "What Is LOIC?" Gizmodo. Gawker Media, 8 Dec. 2010. Web. 14 Mar. 2012. <<http://gizmodo.com/5709630/what-is-loic>>.

³¹ Biddle, Sam. "What Is HOIC?" Gizmodo. Gawker Media, 8 Feb. 2012. Web. 14 Mar. 2012. <<http://gizmodo.com/5883146/what-is-hoic>>.

They have a tool where for the first time in these types of tools you can volunteer your computer to join. In the past people had to go out there and they had to actually be hackers, they had to be the bad guys and infect your machine with viruses, trojans, these types of things, to build their botnets. This time the public is joining the botnet of their free will and giving up their computers. And possibly with the knowledge that this is an illegal activity and they are still joining.³²

Though there has been at least one instance of members tricking people into using this tool,³³ the overwhelming majority are people taking part in pseudo online protests just like they would on the streets. This is how they generate the power to pull off some of their very large attacks, including the internet's largest, OpMegaupload. And though it is illegal, if there are enough people using it to take a server down, it can no longer log incoming IPs to be able to trace them.

Another crucial tool Anonymous' uses is not a tool at all but rather the community itself. The Hive, when focused, can do things that would be virtually impossible in most other settings. It has developed a knack for using its collective power for high speed and in depth investigative work. Because there is such a broad and diverse user base, they are capable of identifying and tracking down people based on very little information.

Community driven investigation was prevalent in the 4chan community before Anonymous. An illustrating example occurred in 2010 when the group reacted to an instance of animal cruelty. A video was posted to Youtube of a blonde woman in a red

³² MaxwellPaynter. "The Gregg House on CNN." YouTube. Google, 9 Dec. 2010. Web. 10 Mar. 2012. <<http://youtu.be/bdKwmmHxXGQ>>.

³³ Chen, Adrian. "The Evil New Tactic Behind Anonymous'™ Massive Megaupload Revenge Attack." Gawker. Gawker Media, 19 Jan. 2012. Web. 14 Mar. 2012. <<http://gawker.com/5877707/>>.

hooded sweatshirt taking newborn puppies out of a bucket one by one and tossing them into the river. She even seems to enjoy herself. The clip is 44 seconds long with almost no dialogue and no identifying evidences. The video was taken down because of its content but someone with the user name "btard4lulz" posted it to LiveLeak, a website known for hosting videos that others will not. It was posted with the following description.

We can determine from the picture so few things.
One, based on assumption, she probably has a facebook account, no matter what country they're in.
Two, she is 5ft 6in-5ft 8in, blond, eye color unknown, Caucasian
She has something written upside-down on her red sweater, barely legible, might be of assistance if it's the product of a local store.
Let's work together on exposing this sicko! Use the comments.³⁴

Then he posted it to /b/ and it enraged the hive and provoked them into action.

First, her country of origin was narrowed down by the one word she spoke. Channers from the region rejected several language suggestions until they settled on Bosnia. They dug through Youtube accounts of the person who originally posted it and found comments by him on unrelated gaming forums. Then the pieces began to fall into place, even finding pictures of the river.³⁵ Her name is Katja Puschnik, and /b/ did all

³⁴ Btard4lulz. "LiveLeak.com - Twisted Girl Throws Puppies in River **This Video Contains Scenes of Repeated Animal Cruelty**." LiveLeak.com. 30 Aug. 2010. Web. 15 Mar. 2012. <http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=bb4_1283184704>.

³⁵ "Image Capture of Original 4chan Puppy Throwing Thread." Imgur. Web. 15 Mar. 2012. <<http://i.imgur.com/V7bg2.jpg>>.

they could to harass her and people around her. The police were the first call they made.³⁶

This is not an atypical activity on 4chan. The thrill of the hunt is something the people of /b/ enjoy, it is all in real time and it is typically for great justice. In one instance, a man claimed on the board that he was 30 years old and was sexually interested in his niece's friend who was 16 years old; he needed advice on how to get her alone. The collective figured out where the girl went to school, called the principal informing of the situation, and faxed him the conversation.³⁷ They also tracked down a kid claiming he was going to blow up his school the next day (pictures of the bombs were included).³⁸ Users summoned what they call the "v&" (van) or 4chan party van, a reference to the van the FBI uses to make arrests. The boy, was in fact arrested the next morning by the FBI³⁹, though it turned out to be a hoax.⁴⁰

Typically Anonymous harnesses its power of investigation in the form of Dox'ing. When an individual falls into the targeting scope of the collective it is something they always do. Essentially it amounts to publishing as much data as they can about the

³⁶ Read, Max. "4chan on the Hunt for Puppy-Throwing Girl." Gawker. Gawker Media, 31 Aug. 2012. Web. 15 Mar. 2012. <<http://gawker.com/5626105/4chan-on-the-hunt-for-puppy-throwing-girl>>.

³⁷ Anonymous. "4chan - Better than Sherlock Holmes." Chan4chan. 15 Mar. 2005. Web. 15 Mar. 2012. <http://chan4chan.com/archive/4199/4chan_-_Better_than_Sherlock_Holmes>.

³⁸ "Pflugerville High School - the Threat." 4chanarchive. Web. 15 Mar. 2012. <http://4chanarchive.org/brchive/dspl_thread.php5?thread_id=39101047>.

³⁹ News 8 Austin Staff. "Teen Arrested for Threatening to Blow up School." Austin Your News Now. 9 Sept. 2007. Web. 15 Mar. 2012. <<http://austin.ynn.com/content/191790/teen-arrested-for-threatening-to-blow-up-school>>.

⁴⁰ "Pflugerville High School - the Aftermath." 4chanarchive. Web. 15 Mar. 2012. <http://4chanarchive.org/brchive/dspl_thread.php5?thread_id=39168208>.

subject. Often this includes addresses, phone numbers, place of employment, spouse and children's names and information, property values, and social security numbers etc. Much of this information is publicly available but it takes an army of dedicated people to locate and publish. They often publish this in congruence with any data they have achieved through hacking, typically private emails.

Most notably, they have done this to several Arizona police officers who mistreated undocumented immigrants, law enforcement using unreasonable force and pepper spray during the Occupy movement, and the head of the MPAA during OpMegaupload.⁴¹ It is certainly effective at causing major disruptions in people's lives, very similar to unconventional warfare. At least one subject of their Doxing decided to take his family into hiding for their safety.⁴²

⁴¹ Martin, Adam. "Anonymous Goes After the Pepper Spray Cop's Personal Info." The Atlantic Wire. 26 Sept. 2011. Web. 15 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.theatlanticwire.com/national/2011/09/anonymous-goes-after-pepper-spray-cops-personal-info/42960/>>.

⁴² McGinn, Frazier. "Anonymous Responds to LulzSec's Arizona Release." Examiner.com. 24 June 2011. Web. 15 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.examiner.com/anonymous-in-national/anonymous-responds-to-lulzsec-s-arizona-release>>.

CHAPTER FOUR

Activism or Terrorism

Anonymous exists between the classification frameworks historically developed for these types of groups. No one really knows how to identify it. Those partial to the cause believe that they represent activism in the modern era while their antagonists brand them as cyber terrorists bent on destruction and subject to the strict anti-terrorist laws created since September 11th. Though semantic arguments can be misleading, definitions of these terms are necessary to classify Anonymous, understanding that our system of classification may be inadequate for fully understanding its complexity. And though they may not be fully one or the other, the intellectual framework that has been developed for understanding modern terrorism yields interesting results when applied to Anonymous.

The technology that defines the 21st century has fundamentally changed how activism works, and society is continuously discovering the intricacies of that change. The free flow of information is credited with supporting the Jasmine Revolution with some people going so far as to refer to it as the Facebook Revolution. Democracies too are seeing change through systems of aggregated opinion which have had significant political impact. It is this technology that defines Anonymous and through which it will define its future.

Organization of people has always been dependent on transactional cost. Before the internet, it was only formal hierarchy manifested in either a government or

organization that would have been tasked with action facing the public. Basically the assumption was that people were unable to self-assemble. Market and managed effort were the only two choices. This was because the cost of interaction was so high.¹ The internet changed all that by significantly lowering the cost of assembly, which in turn opened the possibility of organizations without the need of a hierarchy organizational structure.²

Meme Culture

How does an animated dancing baby lay the foundation for a social movement?

Activism is dependent on shared culture. Collective action stems from a group connected by some means (technology or otherwise) having common experiences pushing them toward some action. Meme culture is a phenomenon far older than the internet but has been adopted as a phrase for a specific phenomenon on the internet. Though typically comedic in nature, they are the building block through which the collective “socializes” and interacts with each other. They make up the social bonds that connect people who have never and may never meet anywhere other than the virtual world of the internet.

The term “meme” was coined by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* which was published in the mid-1970s, long before the internet was available to the

¹ Coase, R. H. (1937), The Nature of the Firm. *Economica*, 4: 386–405. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0335.1937.tb00002.x

² Shirky, Clay. *Here Comes Everybody: How Digital Networks Transform Our Ability to Gather and Cooperate*. New York: Penguin, 2008. Print.

average person. His definition was very general and could encompass any aspect of a shared culture.

Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation.³

To some, memes can be used to explain all of human culture. These “self-replicating units of cultural transmission” build upon each other to create new culture all together.⁴

In this sense, they are subject to the same forces of natural selection. Bits of culture that are popular are not only shared and propagated, but are imitated and modified. So the loss of complicated regional dialects is comparable to a species selected out of the pool.

For this to happen, there must be a critical mass of human interaction. Culture, by definition, cannot exist in a vacuum. The internet amplifies interaction by orders of magnitude making it the ultimate petri dish for growing memes. Because the audience is so broad and connected at such a high rate of transfer, the time it takes for new species to emerge is shortened dramatically. These pieces of content are now available to be viewed by the whole world almost instantaneously. Videos or pictures go “viral” as they spread through blogs, social networks and aggregators. They travel and replicate as they did where they originated: 4chan.

³ Dawkins, Richard. *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford University Press. 1976

⁴ Stryker, Cole. *Epic Win for Anonymous: How 4chan's Army Conquered the Web*. New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2011. 11. Print.

Though 4chan did not create internet memes, it did spawn some of the most famous early ones. Also, the way the site works is very similar to how the system works as a whole. As described in earlier sections, the ephemeral nature of 4chan makes only very popular ideas last because the rest disappear if people are not commenting on them. As a result, typically if something is posted in that thread, people will modify it in some way and it is out of that process new memes are created. The most famous memes to come out of the 4chan community are Tay Zonday's Chocolate Rain, Rick Rolling, and lolcats.

The internet as a whole essentially does the same thing, propagating ideas and changing and adapting them for the most impact. These bits of culture and their transition were the forerunners of the ideas that birthed Anonymous. When a political issue hits the web, it mutates and spreads, gathering support by people repeating it. It is this process that, when focused, becomes an outright social movement.

Social Movements

There exists a level of group participation that resides between simple cultural units, from language to lolcats, and hierarchical formal organizations. They are not uncommon in the society we live in, but that has not always been the case. Before mass communication, it was nearly impossible to organize a group of people around a common idea. Political protests are obvious examples but social movements also can include the cultural shift to organic food being sold in grocery stores.

An accepted definition of a social movement is presented by the late Charles Tilly in his book, which studies the topic from 1768 to 2004. For him a social movement combines three key aspects. First, it begins with a series of campaigns which are organized public efforts whose purpose is to make a collective claim on the establishment. Secondly, it must employ a combination of formative political action. These include, but are not limited to, public meetings, rallies, and petitions. Lastly, the participants must represent worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment in public displays. When these conditions are met, a series of collective actions qualify as a social movement.⁵

Anonymous falls clearly under the umbrella definition of social movement. It is a “grass-roots” series of actions taken by a group of like-minded individuals with a set of goals to which they work toward. Because of their similar interest, they focus the shared bits of culture into an actionable series of executable steps. Social movements can be a number of different things depending on what actions are taken. Many are simply political movements but, if they become structured, they can become organizations, and if they become radicalized, they can become terrorists.

Terrorism

The beginning of the 21st century has seen a vast increase in the attention given to terrorism. Certainly terrorism has been around for a long time in one form or another and has troubled people and governments greatly in the regions where it was

⁵ Tilly, Charles. *Social Movements, 1768-2004*. Boulder: Paradigm, 2004. Print.

prevalent. Terrorism, like war, is the “continuation of policy by other means.”⁶ When an actor cannot get what he wants through the legal process, he sometimes turns to violence. Terrorism is idealism in force.

With the rise of Al-Qaida, there has been a need to re-evaluate the frameworks by which we understand terrorism. This group brought to the table a fundamentally different type of conflict than we had seen before and as such demanded new study. Both the military and academia have a number of operational theories, some of them competing. But they provide a framework that can be applied to Anonymous that yields interesting observations.

The definition of the word terrorism is highly contested. It is not only academics who disagree; almost every branch of the United States government that deals with this subject has its own definition, sometimes with very important differences. And though it may seem semantic, when there are laws that apply to terrorists but not to social activists, the meaning of the words becomes very important. In addition, definitions are fundamental to man's classification and understanding of a subject. As a baseline, The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1566 defines terrorism as:

criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act, which constitute offences within the scope of and as defined in the international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism, are under no circumstances justifiable by

⁶ "Karl Von Clausewitz Quotes." ThinkExist. Web. 18 Mar. 2012. <http://thinkexist.com/quotes/karl_von_clausewitz/>.

considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other similar nature⁷

This definition has several working components. It clearly rules Anonymous out as a possible classification because it stipulates the crimes must cause death or injury, something Anonymous has never done. Its second part, however, is more applicable. These actions must provoke fear and be used to coerce a government to action. In reading the language regularly used by Anonymous, intent to instill fear is not hard to find, and clearly coercion is something they are attempting to leverage.

There has been a split in types of terrorism which has resulted in the need for delineation in definitions. "Old terrorism" is used to describe groups like the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA). They are very different when compared to "New Terrorists" like Al-Qaeda. These groups can be analyzed on the following five criteria: Target Selection, Casualty Rates, Organizational Profile, Tactical/Weapons Selection, and Typical Motives. Old terrorists choose surgical and symbolic targets with low possibility for casualties; if there are casualties they will be limited to government officials or members of the military. They are typically hierarchical in structure and are motivated by political aims which are definable. New terrorists on the other hand inflict high casualties on civilians indiscriminately yet

⁷ UN Security Council, Security Council Resolution 1566 (2004) Concerning Threats to International Peace and Security Caused by Terrorism, 8 October 2004, S/RES/1566 (2004), available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/42c39b6d4.html> [accessed 6 December 2010]

symbolically. They are cellular in organization and tend to be motivated by religion.⁸ Evaluating Anonymous on these criteria yields an inconsistent result.

Targets

The targets of Anonymous certainly are not indiscriminate although, because of the oftentimes unorganized ideological stances it takes, it can seem that way. Anyone that it targets, in the eyes of the group, is guilty of some crime worthy of retribution. And they are careful not to interfere with people's lives more than is necessary. As Gregg Housh mentioned in a CNN interview, during OpPayback, they attacked Visa and Mastercard's sites without effecting the end user at all.⁹ So thus far, Anonymous is careful whom they target, even apologizing to the CIA (an organization they have intentionally DDoS'ed in the past) when they did not intentionally take down the site. They have said publicly, "We do not wish to threaten anybody's way of life. We do not wish to dictate anything to anybody. We do not wish to terrorize any nation."¹⁰ Though there may be some in the community who do not agree, this seems to be an honest estimation of the group's mentality.

A counter argument can be made on two grounds. First is LulzSec which seemed indiscriminant in its targeting. For the purpose of this analysis they do not represent

⁸ Martin, Gus. *Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues*. Los Angeles: Sage, 2010. Print.

⁹ MaxwellPaynter. "The Gregg House on CNN." YouTube. Google, 9 Dec. 2010. Web. 10 Mar. 2012. <<http://youtu.be/bdKwmmHxXGQ>>.

¹⁰ LuckyLuciano412. "Anonymous Message to NATO." YouTube. YouTube, 05 June 2011. Web. 19 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MspXpvz6jI4>>.

typical action by Anonymous. Though they are encouraged by Anonymous, they are a separate entity. Secondly, GlobalBlackOut that was introduced via public release, claims that Anonymous would take down the entire internet on March 31st of 2012.¹¹ This may seem out of character, and it is. Anonops claims it was a troll release and that no such action would occur, as it would undermine Anonymous' operational tool and inconvenience the people they are trying to help.¹²

Organization

While target selection may suggest Anonymous is similar in nature to an old terrorist group, its organizational structure suggests otherwise. Perhaps its greatest strength and most defining characteristic is its decentralized nature. Arquilla and Ronfeldt, experts in the field of terrorism, describe the structure in this type of network:

The network as a whole (but not necessarily each node) has little to no hierarchy; there may be multiple leaders. Decision making and operations are decentralized, allowing for local initiative and autonomy. Thus the design may look acephalous (headless) at times, and polycephalous (Hydraheaded) at other times, though not all nodes may be "created equal." In other words, it is a heterarchy, or what may be better termed a panarchy.¹³

While this description is attempting to describe an organizational structure of terrorism, it almost perfectly describes Anonymous. Even the words are used frequently in the

¹¹ Guest. "Operation Global Blackout." Pastebin. 12 Feb. 2012. Web. 19 Mar. 2012. <<http://pastebin.com/XZ3EGsbc>>.

¹² Anonops. "GlobalBlackOut Announcement." Twitter.com. 21 Feb. 2012. Web. 19 Mar. 2012. <<https://twitter.com/#!/anonops/status/171942749359181824>>.

¹³ John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt. "The Advent of Netwar: Analytic Background," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 2(1999), p. 193.

community's lexicon. In response to threats or arrests, the message often mentions the hydra. In a press release to NATO, Anonymous says:

Finally, do not make the mistake of challenging Anonymous. Do not make the mistake of believing you can behead a headless snake. If you slice off one head of Hydra, ten more heads will grow in its place. If you cut down one Anon, ten more will join us purely out of anger at your trampling of dissent.¹⁴

They truly believe in the movement which will continue to bring new activist on board. What's more, they are better at this principle than new terrorists.

Cellular organizational structure is one of the most important elements for the new terrorist model and Al-Qaeda is an obvious illustration of this type of organization. Marc Sageman argues that this organizational structure formed because of the failures of old terrorism and how easy it was to combat hierarchical structures by simply decapitating them. He says that "the process of radicalization that generates small, local self-organized groups in a hostile habitat but linked through the internet also leads to a disconnected global network, the leaderless jihad."¹⁵ He suggests that these individual nodes would be self sustaining and operate relatively independently.

This was the hope Osama bin Laden had for his followers. In an interview he gave on October 21, 2001, he expressed his desire for Muslims everywhere to rise up in support of the Jihad and deal "terror for terror."¹⁶ This sentiment is echoed in his

¹⁴ LuckyLuciano412. "Anonymous Message to NATO." YouTube. YouTube, 05 June 2011. Web. 19 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MspXpvz6jI4>>.

¹⁵ Sageman, Marc. *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-first Century*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008. Print.

¹⁶ Bin, Laden Osama, Bruce B. Lawrence, and James Howarth. *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*. London: Verso, 2005. Print.

famous “Muslim Bomb” speech in 1998. He built on the religious framework of jihad that had been evolving for many years. He suggested that jihad, which should be violent and targeted at the far enemy, should be the duty of every Muslim. He saw himself as inspiration and after the attacks on September 11, 2001, duty bound Muslims would come out of the woodwork and, without any help or authorization, would carry out attacks within America and other enemy states.

Reality, however, seems to have detracted from the theoretical ideals of a decentralized network. Bruce Hoffman, another expert in the field of terrorism, disagreed with Sageman’s conclusions about Al-Qaeda. In a less than subtle article entitled “The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism” Hoffman argues that the center still holds and though it is extremely flexible, those in Al-Qaeda central were still calling many of the shots. He also argues that the threat of home grown terrorists simply had not materialized.¹⁷ Also the intelligence gathered from the bin Laden compound after he was killed by U.S. forces on May 2, 2011 suggested he had a much higher degree of operational control than originally thought.¹⁸ Though it was certainly not the hierarchy of old, bin Laden and a few others had direct command and control capabilities that undermine its truly decentralized nature.

¹⁷ Hoffman, Bruce. "The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism." *Foreign Affairs*. 3 May 2008. Web. 20 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/63408/bruce-hoffman/the-myth-of-grass-roots-terrorism>>.

¹⁸ Rehm, Diane, and Bruce Hoffman. "Intelligence Gains from Osama Bin Laden's Compound." *The Diane Rehm Show*. WAMU 88.5 Npr, 9 May 2011. Web. 20 Mar. 2012. <<http://thedianerehmshow.org/shows/2011-05-09/intelligence-gains-osama-bin-ladens-compound/transcript>>.

Anonymous then, is better at new terrorism than its most prolific example, at least in its structural capacity. Because of the technological infrastructure and its grass-roots social movement activism, it has realized a fully decentralized organization. This completely flat structure is the best for terrorism or activism, because of its flexible and secure nature, Anonymous is simply the only organization thus far to be able to accomplish it.

Motivation

The last characteristic of separation between old and new terrorism is its motivations. Very simply and generally, old terrorists were political (typically leftist) while new terrorists are motivated primarily by religion. On the surface, Anonymous is not religious at all and if anything it is condescending of religion in general. But its goals are not specific political state changes like the IRA's. Instead they apply an almost religious fervor to the idea of information freedom. While this may seem foreign to the West, many in the East view America's religion as capitalism. In that way, religion of an ideal is not implausible. Much of the rhetoric of Anonymous has the feel of a sermon as illustrated by its manifestos.

One of the main criticisms of Anonymous by the media is its apparent lack of ideology and clearly defined goals. Categorization is a natural habit of man and therefore understanding requires some sort of labeling system even if that approach is not valid. To the intellectually lazy, Anonymous is a cyber-terrorist group of hackers bent on spreading anarchism and destroying the state. But that is simply not true; there

are no clearly defined goals. There are unifying themes, however, and some stronger than others. Because of its collective nature, individuals have specific aims that may or may not be shared with the group as a whole.

The one ideal that unifies everything Anonymous does is to promote the freedom of information as a basic human right. While this may not be the focus of every operation, every operation has shades of it woven throughout. Anonymous started when the Church of Scientology tried to suppress distribution of a video and silence those who spoke out against it. From its support of Wikileaks to its hatred of anti-piracy organizations, everything supports the thesis that information wants to be free. Like every technological revolution before it, the information revolution is changing the nature of social interaction and Anonymous sees people who are resistant to it or are attempting to use it for their own profit as violating the endowed rights of the individual.

Understandably, that motivation bleeds into its motivation to uphold human rights. OpTunisia was started in the early days of the protests in Tunisia. Though the restriction of information is sighted as the reason for getting involved, its aims were clearly greater. In a press release, it speaks, "Anonymous has heard the cries for freedom from the Tunisian people and has decided to help them win this battle against oppression."¹⁹ These sentiments are echoed in the other freedom ops including Egypt,

¹⁹ Anonymousworldwar3. "OPERATION TUNISIA - A Press Release." YouTube. YouTube, 05 Jan. 2011. Web. 15 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFLaBRk9wY0>>.

Syria, and Iran.²⁰ In all of these cases, Anonymous has worked very hard to develop tools to get information in and out of these countries in spite of governments' blocking or, at times, simply turning off the internet.

As evidenced by OpMegaupload, the anti-piracy campaigns by government and media are a motivating force for Anonymous. And it is not simply anti-piracy but the copyright system in general. Originally copyrights were designed to foster a broad pool of information and media in the public domain. Recent litigation, however, has kept information within the private domain. Anonymous does not see information as being property that one can own. This belief has not been taken to its farthest extremes and currently stops with anti-piracy efforts.

An interesting, and difficult to understand movement in Anonymous has been the AnitSec campaign. Meaning Anti-Security, it is a continuation of a mission started by an offshoot group LulzSec. It is the least defined of their operations and its banner has become a catch all for any hacking related activity that is not large enough to be its own operation. Theoretically it is to prove how unsecure the internet is, especially when corporations and governments are negligent about it. It began with the hack of a private company called HB Gary Federal.

The CEO of HB Gary had announced that he had infiltrated Anonymous and was going to reveal their identities to anyone who would purchase them.²¹ In defense, a

²⁰ Norton, Quinn. "2011: The Year Anonymous Took On Cops, Dictators and Existential Dread." Wired.com. Conde Nast Digital, 11 Jan. 2012. Web. 15 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2012/01/anonymous-dicators-existential-dread/>>.

²¹ Taylor, Jerome. "Hacktivists Take Control of Internet Security Firms." The Independent. Independent Digital News and Media, 8 Feb. 2011. Web. 07 Apr. 2012.

small group of Anons hacked in to determine what information he had. It turned out to be an incredibly easy hack which troubled many that a company contracting for the NSA would be so easy to compromise. Also in the data they extracted, they found some very nefarious actions especially targeted at WikiLeaks. Bank of America had hired HB Gary to prepare for a WikiLeaks dump of their documents.²² The plan HB Gary was developing included cyber attacks against WikiLeaks, coercion of specific journalists, forging documents and other tactics of questionable ethical and legal standards.²³ This was motivation enough for Anonymous but the Antisec movement came out of a larger mentality. Cole Stryker, author of a book on Anonymous, said this about the collectives' thoughts on the hack, "if our random hacks of this one security company uncovered this diabolical plan, what else is out there?"²⁴

In keeping with their roots, Anonymous also can be motivated by the things that simply make them rage. Often it is difficult to separate 4chan users from those who only operate under the flag of Anonymous. It would be unfair to say that the most impressive 4chan hunts had nothing to do with Anonymous because two of the most famous ones occurred after Anonymous was well established. Animal cruelty is a

<<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/online/hacktivists-take-control-of-internet-security-firms-2207440.html>>.

²² Ragan, Steve. "Data Intelligence Firms Proposed a Systematic Attack against WikiLeaks." The Tech Herald. 9 Feb. 2011. Web. 7 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.thetechherald.com/articles/Data-intelligence-firms-proposed-a-systematic-attack-against-WikiLeaks/12751/>>.

²³ Ragan, Steve. "Firm Targeting WikiLeaks Cuts Ties with HBGary - Apologizes to Reporter." The Tech Herald. 11 Feb. 2011. Web. 7 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.thetechherald.com/articles/Firm-targeting-WikiLeaks-cuts-ties-with-HBGary-apologizes-to-reporter/12767/>>.

²⁴ Stryker, Cole. "Interview with Cole Stryker." Telephone interview. 16 Mar. 2012.

heinous crime as far as channers are concerned. In August 2010 a CCTV camera caught video of a lady encountering a cat on a wall, petting it, then inexplicably pushing it into a garbage can and replacing the lid.²⁵ The video was linked to /b/ who became outraged. They tracked her down, called the police, and so thoroughly harassed and threatened that she entered into police protection.²⁶

Through a framework developed for terrorism, conclusions can be made about Anonymous. They have realized the structural dreams of new terrorists while pursuing the goals of old terrorists. This puts them in new territory altogether and though they are not terrorists, they are motivated by many of the same influences. They have been frustrated by the political process and because of this injustice have taken to an unconventional means of coercing change.

Asymmetric Conflict

Though Anonymous is not a terrorist organization, they use the same theoretical source of strength. As big as the collective is, it is dwarfed by size and resources of the governments and corporations of whom it targets as enemies. So how then could it ever hope to be successful in achieving its goals? It has adopted the same principles as irregular fighting forces waging a guerilla campaign, fighting their opponents' will to

²⁵ Moylan, Bryan. "The Lady Who Threw a Cat in the Garbage Is Identified." Gawker. Gawker Media, 24 Aug. 2010. Web. 15 Mar. 2012. <<http://gawker.com/5620648/the-lady-who-threw-a-cat-in-the-garbage-is-identified>>.

²⁶ Mackey, Robert. "Hounded Online and in Person, Woman Apologizes for Abusing Cat." The Lede Blog. The New York Times, 25 Aug. 2010. Web. 15 Mar. 2012. <<http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/08/25/hounded-online-and-in-person-woman-apologizes-for-abusing-cat/>>.

fight and disappearing before the weight of their opponents can be mustered against them.

Asymmetric conflict refers to a significant disparity in power between opposing actors. In this context, power refers not only to traditional security strength (law enforcement or intelligence organizations) but also to cyber divisions and private firms. While current authors use this term in a variety of different ways, asymmetric conflict should be understood as an umbrella term that encompasses all activities in which a relatively “weak” force uses nontraditional means against a stronger force to attain a particular goal. This encompasses terrorism, organized crime, guerilla warfare, cyber warfare and insurgency.

What is unique about asymmetric conflict is its non-traditional winning conditions. Marc Andrews describes it in a paper entitled “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars.” As he notes:

In every case, success for the insurgents arose not from a military victory on the ground – though military successes may have been a contributory cause – but rather from the progressive attrition of their opponents’ *political* capability to wage war. In such asymmetric conflicts, insurgents may gain political victory from a situation of military stalemate *or even defeat*.²⁷

Movements employing asymmetric conflict use an indirect approach, targeting their opponents’ will to fight. Meanwhile, the relatively strong actors typically use a direct approach, attacking the weak actor’s capacity to fight. When strategies are mismatched, the favor goes to the relatively weak actor because they are able to deflect

²⁷ Mack, Andrew. "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict." *World Politics* 27.2 (1975): 175-200. JSTOR. Web. 6 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2009880>>.

the strong actor's asymmetric power and exploit its weakness.²⁸ Matching an opponent's strategy is advantageous for the relatively strong actor. Other than revolutionary insurgents engaging in guerilla warfare, terrorists today are employing indirect strategies. In conflicts in the past, one of the only indirect strategies available to strong actors was barbarism. This method proved efficient at ending conflicts very quickly but was dangerous, as it laid the foundation for future uprising and violated international human rights laws in most cases. Anonymous' structure and methods make it very difficult for states to effectively counter it.

²⁸ This is the thesis of Arreguín-Toft's Logic of Strategic Interaction presented in *How the Weak Win Wars* 104-109

CHAPTER FIVE

Distraction, Diversion, Division

The culture of Anonymous is heavily informed by the lulz and trollish nature of the internet. But for most, it has to be more than that to fall under the collective flag. There must be some sense of great justice. At the same time, because of its decentralized nature, there is no head determining where the line lies between trolling and activism, or even when it is no longer lulzy enough. As such, cells develop their own micro-cultures, sometimes realizing that they have become something altogether different.

In 2011, a group of Anons who were very talented hackers, and had been involved in that wing of Anonymous, stepped out to form their own group, distinct from Anonymous but complementary to it. Unlike Anonymous, they had no specific drives or goals, but their targets were indiscriminate. The bigger and funnier it could be, the better. For fifty days they caused pandemonium on the internet with some of the largest hacks to date, they “took to the high seas” and attacked anyone they found. As an internet meme puts it, “some men just want to watch the world burn.”¹

¹ "Some Men Just Want to Watch the World Burn." *Know Your Meme*. Cheezburger Network. Web. 16 Apr. 2012. <<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/some-men-just-want-to-watch-the-world-burn>>.

The Lulz Boat Sails

The cadre of individuals within Anonymous responsible for several high profile hacks refer to themselves as the Internet Feds. According to an indictment by the Southern District Court of New York, they were instrumental in action against Fine Gael, HB Gary, and the Fox Broadcasting Company.² Though the court attributes the Fox News hack to the Anonymous subgroup, the “booty” was published as LulzSec, the opening of their salvo into internet security.³ Their name is a combination of Lulz (as previously defined) and Security, implying the state of security was laughable and they would exploit it for their entertainment. Their website included their iconic meme character wearing a monocle and holding a glass of wine, the theme song from the television show “The Love Boat,” and their motto, “Laughing at your security since 2011!”⁴

For fifty days, they were not the only ones laughing. Their destruction was vast and in general very appealing to the internet community, if for nothing other than the sheer magnitude of it. Never before had this type of spree unleashed on the internet, and never so public. After the Fox hack, they released transaction logs from Automated Teller Machines in the United Kingdom. In May, they back-doored the Public

² United States v. Ryan Ackroyd, Jake Davis, Darren Martyn, and Donncha O’Cearrbhall. Southern District Court of New York. 13 Mar. 2012. Wired.com. 14 Mar. 2012. Web. 1 Apr. 2012. <http://www.wired.com/images_blogs/threatlevel/2012/03/Ackroyd-et-al.-Indictment.pdf>.

³ Guest. “[LulzSec] Fox.com Leakage Phase 0/1/2/3.” Pastebin. 13 May 2011. Web. 01 Apr. 2012. <<http://pastebin.com/Q2xTKU2s>>.

⁴ Morse, Andrew, and Ian Sherr. “For Some Hackers, Goal Is Pranks.” The Wall Street Journal. 6 June 2011. Web. 1 Apr. 2012. <<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304906004576367870123614038.html>>.

Broadcasting System's website posting a story about how famed rappers Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls were alive and well in New Zealand. They also changed all the administrators' passwords so they could not take the story down.⁵ These early media hacks were attributed to the networks' unfair treatment of Wikileaks and Bradley Manning. While this may be a motivation, when responding to claims of its hypocrisy, they simply respond with a meme: "U mad bro?"⁶

Possibly their largest and most controversial attacks occurred in June when they targeted Sony Pictures. They claimed to have compromised one million personal accounts with Sony, releasing names, addresses and other personal information. The reported reason for targeting Sony was the legal action it took against George Hotz in response to his "jailbreaking" his PlayStation 3.⁷ That term, technically called privilege escalation, refers to compromising the provided software to be able to manipulate it beyond the manufacturer's user controls. Practically speaking, this means running a different operating system or installing programs not authorized by the company. It is a common practice in the technology community, especially with phones. Much of the ire comes from the group's belief that technology is always meant to be manipulated and improved upon as a platform. Having a company dictate how someone who has

⁵ CNN Wire Staff. "Hackers Pirate PBS Website, Post Fake Story about Tupac Still Alive." CNN. 30 May 2011. Web. 01 Apr. 2012. <http://articles.cnn.com/2011-05-30/tech/pbs.hackers_1_pbs-tupac-shakur-tupac-story?_s=PM:TECH>.

⁶ Olson, Parmy. "Interview With PBS Hackers: We Did It For 'Lulz And Justice'" Forbes. Forbes Magazine, 31 May 2011. Web. 01 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/parmyolson/2011/05/31/interview-with-pbs-hackers-we-did-it-for-lulz-and-justice/>>.

⁷ Guest. "*V2 Update* LulzSec versus Sony Pictures." Pastebin. 2 June 2011. Web. 02 Apr. 2012. <<http://pastebin.com/GyhXiWaK>>.

purchased their product may use it then becomes corporate overstep and grounds for punishment.⁸

This operation also served as one of the catalysts for Operation Antisec. Part of the release included a description of the attack and how easy it was to pull it off:

Our goal here is not to come across as master hackers, hence what we're about to reveal: SonyPictures.com was owned by a very simple SQL injection, one of the most primitive and common vulnerabilities, as we should all know by now. From a single injection, we accessed EVERYTHING. Why do you put such faith in a company that allows itself to become open to these simple attacks? What's worse is that every bit of data we took wasn't encrypted. Sony stored over 1,000,000 passwords of its customers in plaintext, which means it's just a matter of taking it. This is disgraceful and insecure: they were asking for it.⁹

This was one of the first times in any of Anonymous' activities that lack of security was motivation for an attack. This, coupled with the sentiment following HB Gary, birthed Antisec sentiments. Lulzsec provided that service but it was carried out after the fact. In their own words, "They were asking for it."

The main reason this particular attack was so controversial was because of those targeted. Defacing a website only affects the company that owns it. The Sony attack, on the other hand, leaked personal information of unaffiliated customers. What's more, those attacked were part of the geek culture themselves; gamers especially were affected. A number of scams and identity theft occurred using the leaked data, and although it was more than likely not Lulzsec members doing it, they made it possible.

⁸⁸ Patel, Nilay. "Sony Follows Up, Officially Sues Geohot and Fail0verflow over PS3 Jailbreak." Engadget. Aol, 12 Jan. 2011. Web. 02 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.engadget.com/2011/01/12/sony-follows-up-officially-sues-geohot-and-fail0verflow-over-ps/>>.

⁹ Guest. "*V2 Update* LulzSec versus Sony Pictures." Pastebin. 2 June 2011. Web. 02 Apr. 2012. <<http://pastebin.com/GyhXiWaK>>.

In the first 16 days of June, Lulzsec compromised at least nine corporate targets, most of whom were involved in the online gaming community. This again targets people one would assume friendly to the members and thus seems to be more trollish in nature. These attacks compromised hundreds of thousands of user accounts and in several instances interrupted game play for the very popular Massively Multiplayer Online Games.¹⁰

During the same time period, Lulzsec also targeted several government agencies. First to go was InfraGaurd, which is associated with the FBI. They released a trove of user information from the United States Senate website in response to a statement that the Pentagon considered cyber-attacks an act of war. They commented, "This is a small, just-for-kicks release of some internal data from Senate.gov - is this an act of war, gentlemen? Problem?"¹¹ They also took down the CIA's website for over two hours on June 15th.¹² None of these attacks were very damaging in nature, but the frequency and size of their targets caused people to take notice.

Assembling the Armada

Salutations Lulz Lizards,

¹⁰ Bright, Peter. "Titanic Takeover Tuesday: LulzSec's Busy Day of Hacking Escapades." *Ars Technica*. 14 June 2011. Web. 03 Apr. 2012. <<http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/news/2011/06/titanic-takeover-tuesday-lulzsecs-busy-day-of-hacking-escapades.ars>>.

¹¹ Guest. "Untitled." *Pastebin*. 27 June 2011. Web. 03 Apr. 2012. <<http://pastebin.com/8ieBeAR5>>.

¹² Nakashima, Ellen. "CIA Web Site Hacked; Group LulzSec Takes Credit." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 17 June 2011. Web. 03 Apr. 2012. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/national-security/cia-web-site-hacked/2011/06/15/AGGNphWH_story.html>.

As we're aware, the government and whitehat security terrorists across the world continue to dominate and control our Internet ocean. Sitting pretty on cargo bays full of corrupt booty, they think it's acceptable to condition and enslave all vessels in sight. Our Lulz Lizard battle fleet is now declaring immediate and unremitting war on the freedom-snatching moderators of 2011.

Welcome to Operation Anti-Security (#AntiSec) - we encourage any vessel, large or small, to open fire on any government or agency that crosses their path. We fully endorse the flaunting of the word "AntiSec" on any government website defacement or physical graffiti art. We encourage you to spread the word of AntiSec far and wide, for it will be remembered. To increase efforts, we are now teaming up with the Anonymous collective and all affiliated battleships.

Whether you're sailing with us or against us, whether you hold past grudges or a burning desire to sink our lone ship, we invite you to join the rebellion. Together we can defend ourselves so that our privacy is not overrun by profiteering gluttons. Your hat can be white, gray or black, your skin and race are not important. If you're aware of the corruption, expose it now, in the name of Anti-Security.

Top priority is to steal and leak any classified government information, including email spools and documentation. Prime targets are banks and other high-ranking establishments. If they try to censor our progress, we will obliterate the censor with cannonfire anointed with lizard blood.

It's now or never. Come aboard, we're expecting you...

History begins today.

Lulz Security¹³

The self-named Lulz Lizards released this commission to the internet on the June 19, 2011. Most obvious is their adoption of a pirate-like dialect. It undertones a very serious message and call for action with the Lulz that make them who they are. It was a rallying cry. Lulzsec was a group of only six core members and needed the help of the hive to continue their project. They birthed one of the largest operations in Anonymous' history that was not entirely consistent with their previous actions.

¹³ Guest. "Operation Anti-Security." Pastebin. 19 June 2011. Web. 01 Jan. 2012. <<http://pastebin.com/9KyA0E5v>>.

Under the Antisec banner, Lulzsec accomplished an impressive hit list. It targeted Arizona Department of Public Safety in protest of the law requiring noncitizens to carry identification. The data dump was entitled “chinga la migra” which means “fuck the border patrol.”¹⁴ There were several high profile attacks in Brazil and at least one targeted at a law enforcement agency in the United Kingdom. In their last and largest data dump, they released private information and user specific information from corporations including (but not limited to) AT&T, IBM, AOL, Sony, Viacom, Disney, EMI, and NBC Universal. It also included data from NATO’s online bookstore, an Irish private investigative firm and a deface of the United States Navy’s website.¹⁵

Just as suddenly as they appeared, Lulzsec called it quits. In a statement posted to Pastebin, they claimed they had always planned to sail for fifty days, but they hoped the Antisec movement would continue on. They say, “Please don’t stop. Together, united, we can stomp down our common oppressors and imbue ourselves with the power and freedom we deserve.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Aamoth, Doug, and Jared Newman. "LulzSec Claims Breach Against Arizona Law Enforcement." Time. Time, 23 June 2011. Web. 03 Apr. 2012. <<http://techland.time.com/2011/06/23/lulzsec-claims-breach-against-arizona-law-enforcement/>>.

¹⁵ Greenberg, Andy. "LulzSec Says Goodbye, Dumping NATO, AT&T, Gamer Data." Forbes. Forbes Magazine, 25 June 2011. Web. 03 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/andygreenberg/2011/06/25/lulzsec-says-goodbye-dumping-nato-att-gamer-data/>>.

¹⁶ Guest. "50 Days of Lulz." Pastebin. 25 June 2011. Web. 03 Apr. 2012. <<http://pastebin.com/1znEGmHa>>.

The Lizard's Lessons

There are several important conclusions to note concerning the Lulzsec event. First, though the decentralized structure of Anonymous allows for anyone to claim it, it is not an all encompassing entity for anything happening anonymously online. Lulzsec had distinct differences from Anonymous and in recognizing that, they deliberately separated themselves. They were similar, yes, and compatible on many issues but Anonymous will not be the only group of its kind.

Secondly, it greatly was able to spur a movement within Anonymous and shake some core convictions about the security of the internet. Though many people were unaware of what was going on, it brought serious attention to the state of internet security. Just as a terrorist attack exposes a flaw in airport or shipping security, this group of six individuals exposed dozens of technological security problems in the span of a few weeks. The sheer number, frequency, and size of their attacks were staggering to the online community.

Lastly, their targeting choices dramatically increased government involvement. When Anonymous was just pestering the church of Scientology and DDoS'ing a website now and then, the government did not have strong motivating forces to deal with the situation. But because they became direct targets and shown to be vulnerable to a group of basement hackers, action had to be taken. And it was.

The Story of Sabu

One of Lulzsec's members, and likely the one with the most power within the group, went by the pseudonym Sabu. He was a gifted hacker and instrumental in all of the Lulzsec hacks and many of the Antisec hacks that subsequently occurred. He also happened to be an informant for the FBI.

Hector Xavier Monsegur aka Sabu is a founder of Lulzsec who lives in New York with his two foster children. He was unemployed and twenty three years of age. He was arrested on June 7, 2011, right in the middle of the Lulzsec spree of mayhem, and immediately agreed to continue to operate under his pseudonym to gather information for the FBI.¹⁷ It is widely believed that he decided to make the deal under threat of losing his children. It was not until March 6, 2012 that his involvement with the FBI was released, though it had been suspected before that. On that day he was still tweeting his opposition to the government saying, "The federal government is run by a bunch of fucking cowards. Don't give in to these people. Fight back. Stay strong."¹⁸

There are several interesting conclusions to be drawn from this incident. First, it underlines vulnerabilities to the Anonymous structure. All of the core members of Lulzsec were arrested on information given by Sabu. Because there are no barriers to entry, anyone, including law enforcement can listen in to conversations. When small

¹⁷ Bray, Chad. "FBI's 'Sabu' Hacker Was a Model Informant." *The Wall Street Journal*. 9 Mar. 2012. Web. 4 Apr. 2012. <<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204603004577269844134620160.html>>.

¹⁸ Ball, James. "LulzSec Court Papers Reveal Extensive FBI Co-operation with Hackers." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 06 Mar. 2012. Web. 04 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2012/mar/06/lulzsec-court-papers-sabu-anonymous?intcmp=239>>.

cadres like this are formed, they are vulnerable just as any criminal organization and potentially more so because there is no way of verifying identity.

Secondly, Sabu represents a shift from total anonymity to pseudo-anonymity. Being such a high profile and boastful hacker, violated some of the fundamental reasons for being anonymous. The meritocracy aspect breaks down, because of the identity built into the pseudonym. Many people taking part in the illegal activity, and especially black hat hacking preceding Anonymous, would change their anonymous identity several times a year for security reasons. Sabu violated this by having his own Twitter account and asserting his opinions. He not only disrupted the meritocracy but also put a target on his back for the federal government.

Finally, and most importantly for Anonymous, the roll the FBI played in this is suspect at best. During the time Sabu was working as an informant, he assisted in some very high profile hacks, including stealing emails from the private intelligence firm Stratfor and leaking FBI conference calls. Supposedly the FBI was trying to find a link between Anonymous and Julian Assange from Wikileaks to build a better case for his extradition. In the process the FBI actively helped in what will probably result in the destruction of a private firm. Sabu used FBI servers to store the email troves from the Stratfor hack.¹⁹ This has led many to believe the FBI was complicit and liable for much of the damage that was done in the many hacks happening since Sabu's arrest.

¹⁹ Ball, James. "LulzSec Court Papers Reveal Extensive FBI Co-operation with Hackers." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, 06 Mar. 2012. Web. 04 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2012/mar/06/lulzsec-court-papers-sabu-anonymous?intcmp=239>>.

Official Response

Government agencies and law enforcement around the world take a typically simplistic view of Anonymous. When speaking on the matter in the Canadian Parliament, Marc Garneau described the collective as “an international cabal of criminal hackers.”²⁰ The story of Sabu is typical of their reaction. The FBI, Scotland Yard and other enforcement agencies arrested over 50 people in 2011 on charges relating to conspiracy to commit computer fraud and other similar charges.

Agencies characterize DDoS attacks as destruction of property with a penalty of up to ten years in prison. To many, a denial of service attack is simply a digital sit-in with so many people going to a site in order to take it down. This is especially true in cases where there is no botnet involved. Though search warrants have been issued, no arrests have been made of people taking part in these attacks.²¹

As officials begin to attain a more complete and complex view of Anonymous, opinion sometimes can be favorable, especially with elected officials. Rhode Island State Representative Dan Gordon took to Twitter to endorse “the idea that is Anonymous.” He focused on the vast amount of good Anonymous has done, especially in places like Syria, allowing the world to see what is going on.²² Accountability is not a

²⁰ "Debates of Feb. 29th, 2012." Marc Garneau, "Privilege" on Feb. 29th, 2012. Web. 04 Apr. 2012. <<http://openparliament.ca/debates/2012/2/29/marc-garneau-1/>>.

²¹ FBI. "Search Warrants Executed in the United States as Part of Ongoing Cyber Investigation." FBI.gov. 27 Jan. 2011. Web. 04 Apr. 2012. <http://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/warrants_012711>.

²² Ragan, Steve. "Anonymous Finds Political Support in Rhode Island." The Tech Herald. 14 Mar. 2012. Web. 4 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.thetechherald.com/articles/Anonymous-finds-political-support-in-Rhode-Island/16425/>>.

bad thing. He also cited an article by web consultant Jon Blanchard who makes a very convincing case in favor of Anonymous.

There are divergences within this coalition of ideologies, but I can agree with one basic tenet of the movement: It posits that, as worldwide connectivity tops 2 billion, the Internet has evolved into something new and greater than the sum of its parts, with rights, rules, obligations and a culture unique unto itself. It also believes action is needed to defend those rights.²³

²³ Blanchard, Jon. "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Anonymous." The Globe and Mail. 12 Mar. 2012. Web. 4 Apr. 2012. <<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/technology/tech-news/how-i-learned-to-stop-worrying-and-love-anonymous/article2366626/>>.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Wikipedia is an online, user generated, encyclopedia and one of the most trafficked sites on the internet. Its name holds household recognition in many countries around the world and has become the primary first location for quick facts about just about anything. It is one of the crowning jewels of the internet, made possible only by the extreme connectivity and infrastructure offered by today's information age. Many people visit the site at least once a day, but on January 18, 2012, they were greeted with a different landing page. Under the headline "Imagine a World Without Free Knowledge" it said:

For over a decade, we have spent millions of hours building the largest encyclopedia in human history. Right now, the U.S. Congress is considering legislation that could fatally damage the free and open Internet. For 24 hours, to raise awareness, we are blacking out Wikipedia.¹

There was a link to sign a petition and one to contact congressmen. Google, the largest internet company in existence, had a censored logo leading people to the petition. Tech giants involved in raising awareness on that day included Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit, along with over seven thousand smaller sites. Google's petition got over seven million

¹ Azarova, Katerina. "Wikipedia Blackout: 24-hour Strike against SOPA, PIPA is on." *RT*. 18 Jan. 2012. Web. 16 Apr. 2012. <<http://rt.com/news/wikipedia-blackout-sopa-pipa-031/>>.

signatures in one day, Wikipedia said over 162 million people saw their blackout page and eight million looked up their congressman's phone number.²

All of this was to protest legislation in the United States claiming to be targeting online piracy. The solution, however, was to block sites which were violating copyright law. The scope of this power was very vague and often left the decision to remove content to media corporations. It amounted to censorship. And the internet was not pleased. Under the overwhelming tide of outrage generated on that day, both resolutions were abandoned. Democracy, fueled by the rapid connection of the internet, prevailed over the profit seeking plan of a few media corporations. The day of the blackout, Anonymous celebrated because for that day, everyone was Anonymous.

Anonymous is not a roving band of hackers bent on mayhem, but a collective, steeped in culture that is defined by its past and the technology it depends on. It rose out of the primordial soup of 4chan when the trolls learned they were capable of collective action. Raiding for fun turned into raiding for great justice. Operation Chanology was the catalyst that caused something entirely new to evolve. By combining the lulz with the politics, it was the bridge needed to make Anonymous what it is today.

The collectives' composition creates the dynamic through which it changes and adapts. It uses an informal name and strong imagery to embolden and legitimize its members. Members fall into niches where they individually produce non-attributed services which, when aggregated, amount to collective action. Though power naturally

² "SOPA Petition Gets Millions of Signatures as Internet Piracy Legislation Protests Continue." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 19 Jan. 2012. Web. 16 Apr. 2012. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/sopa-petition-gets-millions-of-signatures-as-internet-piracy-legislation-protests-continue/2012/01/19/gIQAHaAyBQ_story.html>.

pools at times around individuals in the community with greater influence, the anti-leader ethic keeps the decentralized structure flat.

Anonymous is a social movement which uses shared bits of culture, embodied in memes, to forge the connections necessary for action without needing a hierarchical structure. It has realized a truly flat organizational structure which can be assessed through the framework designed to understand terrorist organizations. Though it targets and attacks like old terrorists, its aims and organization are similar to a new terrorist. That, combined with its capacity for asymmetric conflict, makes it a formidable opponent for its enemies.

Because of its lack of barrier to entry, splinter cells develop within Anonymous like the offshoot group Lulzsec. Its rise and fall illustrate the limitations of the security provided by anonymity and typical government response to its activities. The ethics and ethos of those pursuing Anonymous will be challenged and traditional criminal enforcement will be reexamined to apply to a new type of civil disobedience.

Anonymous is the first collective of its type but it suggests the type of activism that will pervade the internet. It represents the wild west of the web which is threatening to be stomped out, but unlike the west, there is always somewhere else on the internet for them to go. Anons dream of an internet without fences, harkening back to the days before every page was preceded by some sort of login to count and catalog the users. Though they will not reverse the trend and take the web back, they will teach it an important lesson.

In early 2012, when the web rose up and killed legislation in congress, it flexed its true collective muscle for the first time. It took no hacking, no DDoS'ing and no Dox'ing. Users simply mobilized in a way never before seen, made possible by the technological infrastructure they used. In one day, normal users were more powerful than Anonymous has ever been, and that was cause for celebration.

The future holds more activism and organization using the decentralized web as its foundational platform. It will become mainstream, hopefully improving its democratic import and actionable efficacy. But there will always be trolls and there will always be lulz. And though the collective as it is now will certainly fade or change or adapt, the culture will continue and take up a new cause. It is as ephemeral as posts on /b/ and just as exciting. Anon member kate morrigan said it best:

To me, Anonymous is best defined as 'what happens when people stop being afraid.'
Sometimes it's awesome and beautiful, sometimes it's hideous, sometimes it's inane bullshit, but it's honest and real in a way that you don't get when people are thinking about the consequences of their actions³

Love them or hate them, fear them or laugh with them, but never forget ... to expect them.

³ Morrigan, Kate; Gray, Alex. "Interview with Kate Morrigan." Online interview. 30 Mar. 2012.

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