

Anonymous Action, Anti-Social Affect: Cruising Virtual Theatres of Contentious Politics
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Abstract:

This paper deploys Deleuze and Guattari's nomadology and Sloterdijk's genealogy of rage to argue affects connect, stoke, sustain, and orient insurgent Anonymous assemblages. Cruising the memes comprising the image-repertoire of Anonymous allows analytical insight in the tactics, strategies, and 'governmentality' of the hacktivists assembled behind virtual Guy Fawkes masks. Taking ACT-UP as an historical antecedent to Anonymous contentious political action, this paper argues the affective impulsion to act-out(raged) contributes to transvaluing political norms about surveillance, privacy, accessibility, and freedom in the contemporary securitized milieu.

#Cruising Politics #Anonymous #hactivism #Deleuze and Guattari #Sloterdijk #affect
#rage #ACT-UP #anti-sociality #agonism

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#FlameOn

I. Introduction

As for many scholars, intellectuals and activists, the political ‘hacktivities’ of Anonymous crews caught my attention after they became connected to the Wikileaks scandal. An outgrowth of #OpPayBack (2010), #OpAvengeAssange (2010) saw distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks that shutdown the websites of PayPal, MasterCard, Visa, and Sen. Joseph Lieberman (who instigated for State action to take WikiLeaks offline). What was, and remains, compelling was how the successes of these and later #Ops—such as #OpInternetFed, which saw pirating hacks on HB Gary Federal servers (2011), DDoS attacks on Egyptian and Tunisian governmental websites in solidarity with “Arab Spring” insurgency (2011), #OpAntiSec pirating hacks on Stratfor (2012), and #OpHackingCup (2014) and #OpFerguson (2014)—revealed the extent to which Anonymous actors seems able to coordinate tactical insurgency while also crafting larger strategic goals, and yet all without the formal institutional hierarchies or centralized command structures characterizing historically efficacious and sustainable political movement organizations.

The obvious question, then, is: if indeed Anonymous may be coded as a political movement, how is it able to assemble and conduct concerted political action? To begin answering this question I establish the grounds for theorizing Anonymous as a political movement by sketching Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow’s model of contentious political action. In the process, I map some key elements of the online culture from which Anonymous hacktivism emerged. I conclude that section by drawing on Deborah Gould’s research into the role of anti-social affect in the contentious politics of ACT-UP as an

historical antecedent to the anti-social affects of outrage animating the hacktivism of Anonymous crews (Section 2).

Cruising an assemblage of memes, I argue Anonymous appears in and *as* a response to outrageous political events and that this response is aroused by the incitement of affect. I address the concern that affect is just *noise* in the signal—rather than a vital element, or even the intended totality, of the signal—by turning to more theoretical models offered by Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of the nomadic war machine and Peter Sloterdijk’s ‘psychopolitical’ genealogy of the anthropotechnics of rage. Supplementing the model of contentious political action, I map the microphysical dynamics of *affective adhesion* as capable of animating, stoking, sustaining, and orienting recurring Anonymous hacktivist insurgency (Sections 3 and 4).

I conclude by arguing that contemporary securitization sees the braiding of private and State interests, which values individual, personalizing attributes as elemental data vital to national security no less than commercial monetization.¹ Framing Anonymous hacktivism against within this milieu sees Anons deploy the same logics of securitized control to jam these apparatuses: becoming-Anonymous, de-individualizing and becoming *dividual* actors in an anonymous assemblage, allows for something new, something powerful, and something potentially freeing (Section 5). Thus, rather than attempting to doxx Anonymous crews, we may instead analyze their concerted action not as the enunciations of political claims somehow specific to an identity, but rather as staging affectively intensive Cynical inversions of securitization *as such* in response to unforgivable trespasses or offenses.

¹ Cf. S. Galloway, *The World From Behind: Queer Arts of Cruising Politics*, Dissertation (University of Chicago, forthcoming). An instance of this braiding is readily found in the “Computer Fraud and Abuse

II. Contentious Anti-Social Virtual Politics

Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly have argued contentious politics consists of those ‘interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else’s interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties.’² Like Doug McAdam, they focus on the ‘process character’ of contentious movement politics. For McAdam, the emergence of a social movement requires a confluence of a) broad socioeconomic processes, b) expanding political opportunities, c) indigenous organizational strength, and d) “cognitive liberation.”³ In this section I briefly map the emergence of Anonymous as conterminous with the confluence of broad socioeconomic access to personal computers and Internet connections; the expanding vulnerabilities of websites, servers, and networks (not to mention human, all-too-human error) which provide the opportunities to send virtual political messages with real material effects; the seemingly offensive, yet vibrantly and broadly participatory culture of the 4chan image boards, especially the anonymous pages of the /b/ (random) board; and the almost accidental cognitive liberation many Anons experienced during the lulzy trolling of the Church of Scientology in 2008.

Attending to contentious political action as a ‘process’ allows social scientists to track basic recurring operational features of contentious movement politics, but also provides the conceptual resources to account for tactical and strategic variability, as well as the reorientation of purpose. To paraphrase one participant observer of Anonymous

² C. Tilly and S. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, pp. 4

³ D. McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*, pp. 51.

post-#OpChanology: “because more activists thought Anonymous was a way of practicing activism, Anonymous became more activist.”⁴ In short, these models incorporate, as part of their method, ways of accounting for the dynamism of a contentious political assemblage that might otherwise be coded as indexing an analytically irrational variable, the boogey-phantasm of the American citizen as an ideologically inconsistent or ‘shallow’ actor.⁵

In *Contentious Politics* Tilly and Tarrow offer a model for analyzing contentious political activism based on theatrical interplay, drawing on the language of performativity and repertoires of action.⁶ Anonymous hacktivists, like actors, must perform their claim-making by rendering their demands publically apparent, which they do through various methods of enunciation, including “defacements” (which refers to a process whereby a site is ‘vandalized,’ displaying a rival brand, logo, tag, meme, or message), DDoS attacks (a “distributed denial of service,” which shuts down a website by over-flowing its capacity to process the ‘dummy’ information requests flooding its servers), public leaks of pirated data, and rallying Twitter blasts. Like actors, they draw on various repertoires of tactics and strategies to accomplish their goals—to suspend disbelief, break cognitive walls, and enact an im/material theatre of cruelty.

The repertoire(s) of contentious political action deployed by political movements may be charted in relation to the regimes they confront. Regimes delineate dissent between acceptable and forbidden forms or styles, thus categorizing certain CPA as ‘contained’ within the purview of legal and normative political acceptability while others, which trespass these boundaries, are coded as ‘transgressive.’ Those CPA which combine

⁴ Barrett Brown, quoted in *We Are Legion* (B. Knappenberger, 2009).

⁵ Cf. Contra Zaller, *Origins and Nature of Mass Opinion*.

⁶ C. Tilly and S. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, pp. 11.

tactics as part of their strategy are termed ‘composite.’⁷ Anonymous is clearly a case of a composite style of CPA, encompassing both contained forms of street-protest, video production, meme generation, and the drafting of defacements, as well as transgressive forms of activism such as piracy, DDoS attacks, and viral infection of malware.

Framing contentious politics as always in relation to various and variable intensities of State resistance allows us to side-step the problem of whether or not the regime in question is ‘democratic’ or ‘authoritarian.’ Instead, Tilly and Tarrow’s provide a ‘scale’ by which to plot a regime’s responses to CPA on the basis of capacity and democracy. ‘Capacity’ refers to the State’s ability to exercise force or otherwise allocate resources by which to resist the claims of CPA, while ‘democracy’ indexes the extent to which a plural and expansive range of dissenting CPA is prescribed or even tolerated, rather than forbidden.⁸ Displacing the either/or binary of democratic/authoritarian regimes for a more dynamic index of a regime’s response to CPA also focuses attention on how, in composite repertoires, part of what constitutes CPA is itself the struggle to establish what is ‘tolerable’ or even normatively ‘prescriptive’ dissent and what is forbidden transgression. This concerns the court of popular opinion as much as establishing legal precedent in Federal courts, and may be viewed as a continuation or ‘reterritorialization’ of CPA into these discursive, normative, and political domains. Such legal and normative struggles illuminate the function of social networks to building and sustaining various CPA campaigns, termed “Ops” by Anonymous, as well as the

⁷ C. Tilly and S. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, pp. 61; 83-4.

⁸ C. Tilly and S. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, pp. 54-55; 60-61.

importance of crafting public personae and the development and evolution of various repertoires of action.⁹

Anonymous emerged out of the 4chan image boards which, modeled after Japanese counterparts, enforced anonymity on its users for the /b/ boards.¹⁰ Quite literally a user's name would be anonymous. Many of the most popular Internet memes were initially spun-out in the threads of the /b/ board web, undergoing multiple iterations and revisions in the process before circulating out to the broader Net. The combination of anonymity and the 'anything goes' spirit of the /b/ board quickly gave rise to trolling—that particular art of being as cruel as possible for nothing but the 'lulz'—a 'corruption' of 'lol' (laugh out loud) with an inflection of *schadenfreude*.

Boards like 4chan and wikis like the *Encyclopedia Dramatica* saw the cultivation of virtual personae through the use of memes for trolling, for the lulz. In short, the /b/ board spawned a distinctly agonistic culture that allowed, through the deployment of memes, emergent assemblages of alliance and conflict. The pages assembled as Anonymous wikis and chans linked together the rites and rituals, the norms and orders of the wikis and boards, of Anonymous, and of the world of the Internet. Wikis like *ED* or *partyvan.info* teach basic programming script, route Anons to popular open-source software, define 'Rules of the Internet' (1st Rule: Don't talk about /b/), and may well be considered virtual movement halfway houses on the web.¹¹ These webs of connectivity acculturates n00bz or 'newfags' into the rhythms of a world where the internet is 'serious

⁹ C. Tilly and S. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, pp. 116-121.

¹⁰ Olson, P. *We are Anonymous: Inside the Hacker World of LulzSec, Anonymous, and the Global Cyber Insurgency* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2012).

¹¹ Half-way houses are so called by sociologist Aldon Morris because they are "only partially integrated into the larger society because its participants are actively involved in efforts to bring about a desired change in society." (139)

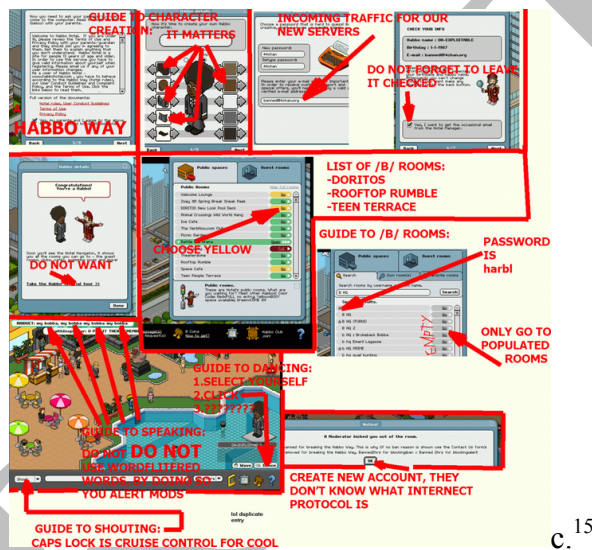
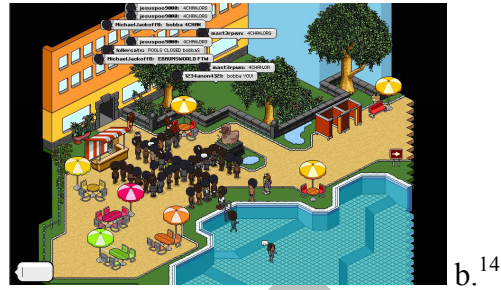
fucking business’ and ‘moar pr0nz’ (more porn) is the currency among self-described ‘b/tards.’¹² Parmey Olson remarks that while nothing is sacred, relations on the /b/ board spun “a gritty world, yet strangely accepting. It became taboo to identify one’s sex, race, or age. Stripping 4chan users of their identifying features made everyone feel more like part of a collective, and this is what kept many coming back.”

Quickly these assemblages of competing trolls discovered that their numbers allowed them to conduct trollz4lulz. An initial instance of this newfound power took shape in trolling waged against the social network site “Habbo Hotel.” In 2006 rumors circulated that Habbo moderators were discriminating against avatars that featured darker skins by banning them from certain areas of the virtual reality, namely: the pool. In response, outraged Anons (self-described /b/lockers) assembled at the entrance of the Habbo Hotel pool as a bloc of black-skinned avatars sporting afros in the shape of a Swastika: pool’s closed.

Such patently offensive trolling seeks to hack the sociality of a virtual reality, corrupting it by interjecting a scandalous assemblage of heterogeneous elements (the perverse connection of black-power resistance and Nazi iconography). Rendering implicit racial hierarchies explicitly apparent created a divergent line of flight operative through tactics of demobilization. The pool of an online social lifeworld suddenly becomes a theatre of cruelty, and spectators—who are also the ‘users’ subject to the effects of this virtual flash-mob—are meant to be emotionally impacted by the performance on display: the bloc blocks the smooth enjoyment of racially hierarchical

¹² Cf. P. Olson, *We are Anonymous*, pp. 33 re. ‘fags’—everyone is a ‘fag’: a ‘newfag,’ an ‘oldfag,’ a ‘moralfag,’ a ‘namefag,’ a ‘leaderfag,’ and so on.... As the joke goes, most infamously as it airs on SouthPark, a gay Anon is none other than a ‘fagfag’ or a ‘gayfag.’ (According to Olson, about 30% of Anons are rumored to self-describe as ‘queer’).

privilege in an im/material domain, inducing a ‘haptic’ affective sensation where the experiential sensorium materially mirrors the im/material cause of affective arousal.



This strategy of mobilizing assemblages of blockage or demobilization was again on display when, almost accidentally, the anonymous users of the various chan boards found themselves distracted away from the intra-anon sniping that typically animated the /b/ boards. A moment of ‘chan-board unity’ was catalyzed by a “war” on Scientology after the notoriously litigious Church issued a number of legal challenges to sites hosting a leaked promotional video featuring Tom Cruise. Offended by the presumption that data

¹³ Frame ‘a.’ A 4chan meme of the notorious campaign against the Habbo Hotel—an online social networking site.

¹⁴ Frame ‘b.’ shows the formation of Anons from 4chan blocking the entrance to the Habbo Hotel pool in the form of a Swastika.

¹⁵ Frame ‘c.’ shows instructions, formatted as an ‘infogram,’ for participation in the Habbo raids.

could be bullied off the Internet by threatening legal recourse, especially footage so patently lulzy, the anonymous trolls of 4chan united as Anonymous and struck back, announcing #OpChanology. Gabriella Coleman writes, “Impelled by the lulz, Anonymous launched DDoS attacks to jam Scientology websites, ordered unpaid pizzas and escorts for Scientology churches across North America, faxed images of nude body parts to churches and relentlessly phone pranked the church, in particular the Dianetics hotline (where callers can get advice about the “first truly workable technology of the mind”).”¹⁶

This first #Op, which incorporated well-established tactics of CPA such as phone-zaps, ‘virtual’ sit-ins, and fax-spam, also saw galvanized Anonymous crews cruise from chan boards to contentious political action. In the process of mapping this transition we discern three defining mechanisms of CPA as charted by Tilly and Tarrow: brokerage, diffusion, and coordinated action.¹⁷ For instance, the DDoS attacks on Scientology saw the first use of botnets, or ‘zombie’ computers infected with malware that allow third-party users to access the virally installed program and connect infected units into a network of tens- to hundreds of thousands of other ‘bots’ (thus, a botnet) able to direct massive amounts of data at a target as though a single ‘super computer.’¹⁸ Brokering the use of third-party servers or a potentially interested botnet-wielding hacker requires the sort of diplomatic brokerage skills of any political affair, replete with all the egoism, confusion, haggling and, perhaps surprisingly, enjoyment of concerted political action practiced as principled playfulness.¹⁹ Similarly, assembling on an IRC (Internet Relay

¹⁶ G. Coleman, “Anonymous in Context,” pp. 5.

¹⁷ C. Tilly and S. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, pp. 31.

¹⁸ Cf. P. Olson, *WaA*, pp. 65-66.

¹⁹ Cf. P. Olson, *We Are Anonymous*.

Chat) requires brokering access to a server from an operator, each of which have different norms concerning acceptable, tolerated, and forbidden topics of discussion.

Part of what gives CPA like Anonymous crews the ability to broker deals is the diffusion of a CPA's 'call to action.' Without an audience, what wonder is even the most 1337 haxxor's array of bots? Thus, while the use of botnets prompts skepticism from Olson as to how 'democratic' Anonymous #Ops may be, arguing the success of later #Ops hinged on the use of botnets—not the nearly seven to ten-thousand individual Anons firing LOIC powered DDoS attacks—she nevertheless concedes, "In a small way, LOIC did help. It made people feel they were contributing to something, which encouraged more to join. Plus, Civil, Switch and other botmasters might not have helped if they hadn't seen the groundswell of support."²⁰ More baldly calculating, Doug McAdam advises insurgents should always respond to State issued threats of repression with as robust shows of force as possible. The cost of resisting a weak, rather than strong, claim-making CPA is minimal and so the likelihood of State capture and control becomes proportionally maximal.²¹ In short, McAdam concludes, insurgents have nothing to lose by bluffing, but everything to gain from being able to support shows of force with cold, hard numbers: 1s and 0s.

Diffusion of Anonymous' CPA 'message' occurred initially through 4chan /b/ boards calls to arms and YouTube videos. Later Ops, such as #OpPayback (against PayPal) and #OpInternetFed (against HB Gary Federal), saw Anons pursuing direct leaks to sympathetic media outlets through hyper-links to pastebin, dropbox, google docs, or wiki pages hosting pirated data. As Twitter became more ubiquitous, blasts from various

²⁰ P. Olson, *We Are Anonymous*, pp. 103.

²¹ D. McAdam, *Political Process*, pp. 56-59.

Anonymous accounts—some of which boasted upwards of twenty thousand followers at the apex of their various operational durations—allowed the transmission of data to those who were connected. In short, diffusion consists of anything that can generate attention, attract participation, and enable the assemblage of Anonymous actors to achieve a ‘critical mass,’ or what Deleuze and Guattari will call a ‘war machine.’

Coordinated action follows the conjunction of successful brokerage for access to resources and the successful diffusion of a CPA message. In the case of Anonymous, coordinated action takes many shapes, including participation in DDoS attacks or piracy raids, sharing coveted viral malware, social engineering (or: the art of the con, used by Anons to obtain passwords, garner access to resources, and orient concerted action), data mining, contributing to open debates on IRCs, the drafting and illustration of defacement messages, editing of YouTube videos, managing Twitter accounts, the labor of repairing wikis after vandalism, debunking or ‘doxxing’ false-flag Ops, hosting ‘hot’ data on encrypted servers, and even simply flashing a Guy Fawkes mask meme in solidarity on FaceBook, Twitter, or Instagram.

Taken together, the success or failure of these three mechanisms cumulatively affects the success or failure of certain repertoires of CPA. Outcomes of successful (or otherwise) #Ops in turn affect the up or downward shifting of scale.²² These variables function relative to the degree of (legal, political, normative) resistance they meet from the State and are contingent on where the ‘regime’ situates itself on a scale of capacity and democracy. These contingencies may be analytically mapped by applying a logic of ‘opportunities and constraints’ enabling or impeding a CPA’s ability to successfully broker resources, diffuse information, and coordinate action (launch a successful #Op);

²² C. Tilly and S. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, pp. 95.

sustain a movement through various Ops—Chanology (2008), AnonOps (2010), InternetFed (2011), LulzSec (2011), AntiSec (2011), HackingCup (2014), and, most recently, Ferguson (2014); and, ideally, increase the scale and scope of the claims-making conducted by hacktivists speaking through and acting behind the Anonymous mask.

While the model of contentious politics offered by Tilly and Tarrow enables conceptualizing Anonymous as a political movement, it nevertheless proves insufficient when it comes to theorizing the function and meaning of anonymity animating the CPA of Anonymous hacktivism. This is because, despite their best efforts to yield identity formation and the recognition thereof relationally dynamic and socio-historically contingent, de-essentialized by rendering political subject formation subject to a four-fold matrix of relations, Tilly and Tarrow nevertheless place significant import on the ways identities ground or ‘authorize’ the claims-making repertoires of CPA.²³ In the case of Anonymous, however, this simply is not how contentious politics is conducted.

Identity and, by extension, State and social recognition of identitarian claims making, is anathema to Anonymous hacktivists, who recognize the ways in which identifying traces are a constraint to political dissent in the contemporary securitized milieu.²⁴ In this respect Anonymous political practice scandalizes the American revolutionary meme into the lulzy corruption: *e pluribus nullum*.²⁵ Tags or refrains such as “*we are Legion*,” “*united as 1, divided by 0*,” and “*Anonymous is anonymous to Anonymous*” sound a Nietzschean delight in a cynical play of masks that simultaneously

²³ C. Tilly and S. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, pp. 78-83.

²⁴ Cf. Deleuze, “Postscripts.”

²⁵ Cf. G. Coleman, “Our Weirdness is Free.” J-L Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*. Cf. also, G. Agamben, *The Coming Community*; R. Esposito, *Communitas*.

masks a strategic logic of political opportunity, given that as assembled reserves of interest-accruing individuals Anonymous becomes powerful (“because none of us are as cruel as all of us”).

Yet, if a cohesive identity is not available for investigation, this does not preclude the analysis of Anonymous’ political action. Rather, *affect* appears in the space vacated by identity; affects of outrage, vengeance, and retributive justice. Here I follow Deborah Gould’s sociological research on ACT-UP, which establishes the methodological ground for an affective analysis of contentious political movements by charging,

If we accept that affect helps secure a given habitus, then we can see that social forces are powerful to the extent that they are able to manipulate the affective charges that get attached to all aspects of living. Because an emotional habitus can structure people’s feelings, including those affective charges, it is especially important for the operations of power.... An emotional habitus is thus a critical arena of political struggle. (Gould, 39-40)

For Gould, affective regimes are solidified by “cementing emotions.” Feelings like loyalty, gratitude, and faith in the system cultivate affective dispositions that “uphold social structures and relations of domination.”²⁶ Affective regimes structure the abstract plane of the social field as promising, for instance, fruition of the “good life.”²⁷ They also prop-up the affective dispositions of the banal or microphysical materiality of gender

²⁶ D. Gould, *Moving Politics*, pp. 40. Cf. L. Berlant, *Queen of America*. Such ‘faith in the system’ may be discerned in the decision of Adam Lama to doxx Chelsea Manning, leading to her arrest and imprisonment.

²⁷ Cf. L. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism; Queen of America; Female Complaint*.

norms, racial hierarchies, wealth accumulation, and ethnic belonging.²⁸ Thus, she argues “affective states, shaped by the social world but experienced as solely our own, can smooth the workings of power in part by obscuring its very operations.”²⁹

Yet, precisely because regimes must “manage” affective states, the capacity for affect to be disruptive is equally present. As Foucault argues: “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.”³⁰ Suffering conventionally unacceptable, queer, dissonant, or ‘outlaw’ emotions may induce some to “perceive the world differently from its portrayal in conventional descriptions. They may provide the first indications that something is wrong with the way alleged facts have been constructed, with accepted understandings of how things are [and] may lead us to make subversive observations that challenge dominant conceptions of the status quo.”³¹ Thus, Gould asserts affect “has the potential to escape social control, and that quality creates greater space for counter-hegemonic possibilities and for social-transformation.”³²

Considering the affective habitus of ACT-UP in relation to the contentious politics of Anonymous allows the claim that “One of the most significant aspects of social movements is that they are sites for nurturing counter-hegemonic affects, emotions, and norms about emotional display.”³³ If this is a persuasive and compelling claim, however, does attention to affect only reinforce public prejudice that Anonymous hacktivism is *not* legitimate political action, but rather simply anti-social cyber-crime

²⁸ Cf. Butler, 1999 for an account of how the matrix of compulsory heterosexuality is founded on the disavowed homoerotic affective attachments.

²⁹ Gould, *Moving Politics*, pp. 41

³⁰ M. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, pp. 95.

³¹ Gould, *Moving Politics*, pp. 41.

³² Gould, *Moving Politics*, pp. 39. Importantly, Gould notes that “The direction of change, of course, can be in a reactionary or more liberatory direction.”

³³ D. Gould, *Moving Politics*, pp. 41.

masked behind grandiose declarations? Perhaps, but I think this is a less than imaginative reading, and one that has to do injustice to facts in order to remain consistent.

Gould contends it was ACT-UP's ability to cultivate a dynamic, oppositional affective habitus capable of rendering outrage generative and credible that allowed the movement to survive and thrive. Refrains like "silence = death" and "Act up! Fight AIDS" map what may be called affective 'territories' that bring heterogeneous actors into novel relations around refrains of resistance:

Its repeated expressions of anger and indignation toward state and society, and of pride about both confrontational activism and sexual difference, coupled with ACT UP's assertions about the rationality, necessity, and responsibility of activism, together valorized what is often derided as emotionally overwrought and politically unnecessary. ACT UP's challenge to mainstream norms provided a language of resistance and an emotional pedagogy to lesbians and gay men, ways of feeling and acting that addressed those who were hesitant about engaging in ACT UP's activism.³⁴

Something quite similar is unfolding in the recurrence of Anonymous hacktivists assembling as an insurgent war machine. In particular, I argue the use of memes as both calling cards *and* calls to action rely on inciting affective arousal capable of inducing an adhesive impulsion to participation in contentious political action. In order to access the

³⁴ D. Gould, *Moving Politics*, pp. 254-255.

affective economies connecting and orienting Anonymous hacktivism I curate and dramaturgically cruise an assemblage of memes produced by Anons.³⁵

III. Cruising Anonymous Memetic Affect

Given meme production is almost ubiquitous to Anonymous there is strong empirical support for drawing on Roland Barthes concept of the “image-repertoire” to argue Anonymous figures itself in its public appearances as an open-ended composite of images comprising a “memetic persona.”³⁶ For Barthes, no single frame in an image-repertoire is constitutive or determinative but figures *schematically*.³⁷ Thus, the effort to circumscribe or delimit an image-repertoire within a discursive field of knowledge is, Barthes insists, a “lunatic project, for the image-repertoire is *precisely* defined by its coalescence (its adhesiveness)... [which] forbids inhabiting it discreetly, reasonably.”³⁸

Instead, the contingency and unpredictability of worldly events arouse the generation of new, figurative memetic schema. As such, “No logic links the figures, determines their contiguity: the figures are non-syntagmatic, non-narrative; they are Erinyes; they stir, collide, subside, return, vanish with no more order than the flight of mosquitoes.”³⁹ Memetic personae such as Luther Blisset, Wu-Ming, and Anonymous are assemblages of affective atoms adhering around, and animated by, a principle of resistance to scripting sovereign, individual (or associative) authority. In action,

³⁵ On cruising as a heuristic for theorizing political relationality, cf. S. Galloway, “Cruising Nietzsche: Sex, Shame, and Anti-Sociality,” (2014); S. Galloway, “Cruising Foucault: Sex, Ethics, Politics” (2014). Cf. also, L. Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave and Other Essays*, especially, Ch. 4; J. Munoz, *Cruising Utopia*; S. McGlotten, *Virtual Intimacy*; G. Kateb, *The Inner Ocean*, Ch. 10; *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, ed. John E. Seery, especially contributions from J. Frank, “Promiscuous Citizenship” and J. Bennet, “The Solar Judgment of Walt Whitman”; and, D. Chisholm, *Queer Constellations*.

³⁶ R. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, pp. 2.

³⁷ R. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 3-4.

³⁸ R. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, pp. 51.

³⁹ R. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, pp. 7.

Anonymous appears not as an identity, but as personifying a performative principle which appears in the affective intensity of glancing *impact*: “Intensity can be experienced, then, only in connection with its mobile inscription in a body and under the shifting exteriority of a proper name, and therefore the proper name is always a mask, a mask that masks its agent.”⁴⁰

Cruising the image-repertoire of memetic personifications, when read for an explicitly superficial register of meaning, allows an analytical mapping of the personae ‘Anonymous.’ My claim is that as much as memes contagiously communicate data, they do so by virtue of the infectious transmission of affect “coded” onto the packets of cognitive information (the image, the tag) such that the surface of the image secretes a proprioceptive catalyst of haptic perception and pulsional action (or repulsion).⁴¹ Memes in this way become im/material inductive and transductive objects emerging from collaborative affective worlding-in-common: as affective conduits, or transmissional-objects in a web of anonymous relations, they contain nothing extraneous and lack nothing vital.⁴²

To curate, cruise, and in the process map the theoretical implications proposed by memes produced by Anonymous hacktivists follows the model offered by William Gamson in *Talking Politics*, where group discussions stimulated by, and addressing the concrete implications of, political cartoons provided insight into the dispositional and deliberative potency of groups of ordinary, working-class people. As Gamson describes the focus of his project, the unit of analysis is “always the group conversation rather than

⁴⁰ G. Deleuze, “Nomad Thought,” pp. 146-7.

⁴¹ B. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, pp. 58-59. Cf. G. Kateb, *The Inner Ocean*, regarding adhesive relations and, H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, for an account of worldly “webs of relations.”

⁴² Cf. B. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, ch. 3.

the individual.⁴³ This allows him to therefore bypass the individual as a privileged site of knowledge so as to access a political assembly of ‘dividual’ actors.⁴⁴ Moreover, like a political cartoon, glancing over a meme allows viewers to instantly ‘get the picture.’ Quite literally *superficial*, these memes only *mean* anything to the extent that their meaning is patently *apparent*, on full display and not secret.



a.⁴⁵



b.



c.⁴⁶



d.⁴⁷



e.⁴⁸



f.⁴⁹

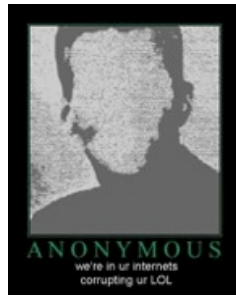
⁴³ W, Gamson, *Talking Politics*, pp. 16, 92-3. Cf. also, for a more theoretical consideration of popular judgment and action, J. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*. For the a consideration of anonymity to the dynamics of political judgment, cf. L. Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, which theorizes the anonymous Milan Collective.

⁴⁴ Importantly, Gamson’s data was drawn from samples in Boston, MA—a city marked by racial schisms and hierarchies—and so the raced and classed implications of his project should here be amplified, especially in light of the unfolding events in Ferguson, MO (8/14).

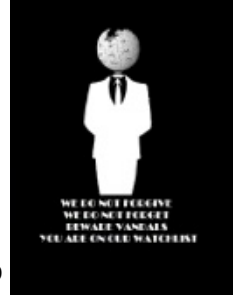
⁴⁵ Frames a. and b. enunciate and reframe piracy as the principled circulation of the freely exchanged information. Many hacktivists advance net neutrality, and propose Creative Commons as a promising model of data sharing.

⁴⁶ Frame c. vulgarly puns on the sex life of pirates, deploying the face of Peter Laurie in a hybrid of anti-sociality and queerness.

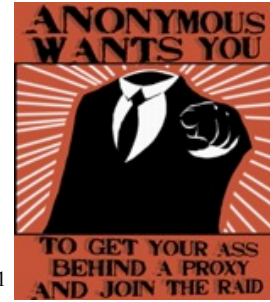
⁴⁷ Headless Agents Smith, Anonymous’ logo and tag-line.



g.⁵⁰



h.⁵¹



i.⁵²

To begin, we may observe the Anonymous ‘logo’ is a headless black and white suit, occasionally encompassed by cresting laurel or ivy. Elsewhere the deliberative dimensions of Anonymous #Ops are addressed by drawing on the indispensable research of Gabriella Coleman, but here the focus is on how the meme symbolizes a variant of Foucauldian non-sovereign politics.⁵³ Anons memetically present themselves as a symbolic personification of their *praxis*.⁵⁴ This practice includes, apart from the anonymizing format of the 4chan /b/ boards,⁵⁵ DDoS attacks, which requires multiple actors, but no single privileged organizer in real time. As one “Online Denizen” put it,

⁴⁸ Frame i.) “Oh Fuck! The Internet is Here!” refers to protests against the Church of Scientology. This meme cleverly blends Anonymous’ commitment to anonymity (in real and virtual worlds) with the recognized necessity of having to take to the streets. The Guy Fawkes masks are homage to the film, *V for Vendetta*.

⁴⁹ Frame j.) Another call to action, this meme has, printed in inverted text, a website where further coordination of DDoS attacks would have been planned, staged, and conducted. These sites are temporary precisely because they are so widely advertised.

⁵⁰ Frame h.) The hostility of the meme is barely diluted by the playful phrasing of Anonymous’ intention. The ‘internets’ is a reference to the ‘history of the Internets,’ which cites Al Gore as creating the internet, which was then pluralized by George W. Bush, who once misspoke and called the web, “internets.”

⁵¹ Frame k.) The replacement of the characteristic “?” with the Wikipedia puzzle-piece globe makes clear that this meme addresses those vandals who deface Wikis.

⁵² Frame g.) Satyrizing the iconic “Uncle Sam,” the patriot par excellence for the National-Symbolic, Anonymous issues the call to participation.

⁵³ S. Galloway, *The World From Behind: Queer Arts of Cruising Politics*, Ch. 4 (forthcoming dissertation).

G. Coleman, “What It’s Like to Participate in Anonymous’ Actions” *The Atlantic*, Dec. 10, 2010. <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2010/12/what-its-like-to-participate-in-anonymous-actions/67860/> (Accessed 5.18.2011)

⁵⁴ “In political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king.” (Foucault, 195) To this extent, Jodi Dean’s apt criticism in *Publicity’s Secret* of Hardt and Negri for failing to adequately account for how Empire is resisted through antagonistic political enunciations seems to be addressed in this respect by the memetic personae crafted and deployed by Anonymous hacktivists.

⁵⁵ Cf. G. Coleman, “Our Weirdness is Free” and “Anonymous in Context” re. 4chan /b/boards. Cf. also, P. Olson, *We Are Anonymous*.

“We have this agenda that we all agree on and we all coordinate and act, but all act independently toward it, without any want for recognition. We just want to get something that we feel is important done.”⁵⁶ That is, the sensorial delight Anons feel is not contingent on recognition from others; rather it is the pleasures of the deed—the expressed materialization of an immaterial desire to feel that what is important is being done.⁵⁷

To theorize the non-sovereign political assembly and concerted action of the kind conducted by Anonymous hacktivists I deploy the concept of the rhizome. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari distinguish the rhizomatic from the arborescent. Where the latter is hierarchically extensive, endlessly telescoping out and up in rings, the former is lateral, subterranean and heterogeneous in its promiscuously connective extensions. The ‘line of flight’ of a rhizomatic extension is unpredictable, contingent, and for this reason alluring. The /b/ board seduces precisely with the unexpected lulz of a meme that casts a line of flight capable of luring responsive cruisers into a new thread. In the same way, a political event in the world presents opportunities for rhizomatic “expansion, propagation, occupation, contagion, [and] peopling.”⁵⁸

Deleuze and Guattari’s tool-kit shows how, when Anonymous assembles, its governing logic “is that of affects, which relate only to the moving body in itself, to speeds and compositions of speed among elements.”⁵⁹ In the midst or *milieu* (middle) of a memetic event, Anons may be said to undergo a three-fold affective experience of

⁵⁶ C. Landers, “‘Serious Business: Anonymous Takes On Scientology (and Doesn’t Afraid of Anything).” Cf. G. Coleman, “What It’s Like to Participate in Anonymous’ Actions.”

⁵⁷ Cf. H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 175, 205-7, for an account of the relationship between delight and action, the dynamics of which are investigated by P. Markell, “The Rule of the People: Arendt, Archê, and Democracy.”

⁵⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 239-242.

⁵⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 400. On the ‘tool-kit’ cf. P. Patton, *Deleuzian Concepts*.

becoming a) imperceptible (anorganic dis-organization of the body as a genetically binarized organism), b) indiscernible (asignifying enunciations—ejaculations!), and c) impersonal (asubjective de-individuation, a classically Cynical impulsion to “‘eliminate all that is waste, death, and superfluity,’ complaint and grievance, unsatisfied desire, defense or pleading, everything that roots each of us (everybody) in ourselves, in our molarity.’”)⁶⁰

In the course of elaborating Foucault’s concept of securitized biopower, queer theorist Tim Dean, argues, “what Nikolas Rose calls the molecularization of vitality has, as one of its consequences, the transformation of each and every body into a multitude.”⁶¹ In the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project Deleuze and Guattari theorize embodied, connective multiplicity through the concept of the “Body without Organs.” However, what is meant by the recuperation of Artaud’s dramaturgical theory of the “theatre of cruelty” is counter-intuitive. They explain that the Body without Organs (BwO) is “not at all the enemy of the organs. The organs are not its enemies. The enemy is the organism. The BwO is opposed not to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism.”⁶² Rather, “The BwO is a *component of passage*.”⁶³

Becoming Anonymous sees each interfaced Anon “opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels, and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations.”⁶⁴ A multiplicity of interfacing BwO create rhizomatic connections “in which decoded and deterritorialized flows boost one another, accelerate their shared

⁶⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 279.

⁶¹ T. Dean, “The Biopolitics of Pleasure,” pp. 489.

⁶² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 158.

⁶³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 158.

⁶⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 160.

escape, and augment or stoke their quanta.”⁶⁵ Deleuze and Guattari refer to this process as the production of an assemblage:

Assemblages are passionate, they are compositions of desire. Desire has nothing to do with a natural or spontaneous determination; there is no desire but assembling, assembled, desire. The rationality, the efficiency, of an assemblage does not exist without the passions the assemblage brings into play, without the desire that constitute it as much as it constitutes them.⁶⁶

Against the objection that the assemblage of war machines are always already technically mediated and thus ‘inauthentic’—alienated from the presence of co-present others IRL (in real life)—Deleuze and Guattari contend to the contrary, that “there are always apparatuses, tools, engines involved, there always artifices and constraints used in taking Nature to the fullest. That is because it is necessary to annul the organs [genetically organized as an ‘organism’], to shut them away so that their liberated elements can enter into new relations from which... the circulation of affects within the machinic assemblage will result.”⁶⁷ The technological ‘constraints’ imposed by the machinic assemblage of virtually connected Anons similarly amplifies the ‘natural’ sensitivity of what Sloterdijk will theorize as a cosmopartisan ‘thymotic’ organ.⁶⁸ In this way, a “natural” capacity to become receptive to and expressive of worldly affective connections is possible precisely because immanent to the im/material relays connecting heterogeneous, anonymous worldly actors on the “world wide web.”

⁶⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 220.

⁶⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 399.

⁶⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 260. Cf. L. Simpson, *Technology, Time, and the Conversion of Modernity*.

⁶⁸ Cf. C. Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan*; cf. F. Kittler, “States and Their Terrorists.”

It is in this respect, then, becoming-Anonymous in the rhizomatic line of flight of a memetic event potentially occasions “becoming everybody/everything [*tout le monde*],” the ability to smoothly connect within a milieu in such a way as “to world [*faire monde*], to make a world [*faire un monde*]” through experimentally mapping “proximities and zones of indiscernibility.”⁶⁹ Becoming ‘*tout le monde*,’ as if virtual avatars of Diogenes the Dog, Anonymous hacktivists may be conceptually personified as embracing what Deleuze theorized in *Difference and Repetition* as a fractal or ‘nomadic’ ontology, a “completely other distribution... a nomad *nomos*, without property, enclosure or measure. Here there is no longer a division of that which is distributed but rather a division among those who distribute themselves in an open space—a space which is unlimited, or at least without precise limits.”⁷⁰

Thus, a war machine is an assemblage constitutive of the rhizomatic occupation, displacement, and composition of participants within and across a world of smooth—as opposed to striated—space, often operating “behind the back” of molar power centers governing the segmented lines of global telecommunications networks.⁷¹ However, war machines are not primarily concerned with war but rather “take war as an object all the more necessary for being merely ‘supplemental’: *they can make war only on the condition that they simultaneously create something else*, if only new nonorganic social relations.”⁷² That is, assemblages become combative as *telluric* war machines; they “take shape against the apparatuses that appropriate the machine and make war their affair and

⁶⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 280.

⁷⁰ G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, pp. 36. Cf. also Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Ch. 9 and 14. Cf. P. Patton, *Deleuzian Concepts*, pp. 37. Cf. G. Coleman, “Anonymous in Context” for Anonymous as digital analogs to bandits, at home in the space of the ban as an open space, a space of abandon neither sacred, nor secure.

⁷¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 417.

⁷² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 423—emphasis mine.

their object: they bring connections to bear against the great conjunction of the apparatuses of capture or domination.”⁷³

Current debates concerning FCC policy regulating ‘Net Neutrality’ and recurrent legislative efforts such as the “Stop Online Piracy Act” (SOPA, 2012), no less than the intensifying expansion of domestic and foreign State surveillance apparatuses confirms that “one of the fundamental tasks of the State is to striate the space over which it reigns, or to utilize smooth spaces as a means of communication in the service of striated space. It is a vital concern of every State not only to vanquish nomadism but to control migrations and, more generally, to establish a zone of rights over an entire ‘exterior,’ over all the flows traversing the ecumenon.”⁷⁴ To this aspiration one may easily imagine Anons, impelled by the lulz, retorting: “Yes, yes, and... just how long *is* the coast of Britain?”⁷⁵ That is, against the desire of State apparatuses to control flows within ever-expanding circuits of molar segmentation, telluric Anonymous war machines instead affirm boundary lines to the point of becoming thresholds.

As an analytical tool, Paul Patton describes the war machine as a ‘mobile concept’ capable of mapping the dynamics of assemblages like Anonymous where, in contradistinction to the governmentality of the State, “there is no such unity of composition,” but rather “the expression of a peculiar kind of abstract machine that ‘exists only in its own metamorphoses.’”⁷⁶ As an assemblage of nomadic mobility the war machine, insofar as it demobilizes Statist expropriative redeployments of captured machines of war (such as the Internet), compliments Giorgio Agamben’s gestural

⁷³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 423. Cf. C. Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*.

⁷⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 385-6.

⁷⁵ Cf. B. Mandelbrot, "How Long Is the Coast of Britain? Statistical Self-Similarity and Fractional Dimension." *Science*, Vol. 156, No. 3775. (May 5, 1967).

⁷⁶ P. Patton, *Deleuzian Concepts*, pp. 33.

‘whatever singularity,’ a concept meant to map a political entity that is indefinable precisely because emergent as insurgency, rather than as an index of apathy or indifference.⁷⁷ *Whatever* Anonymous may be, assemblages of Anons are certainly not dispassionate.

IV. Anti-Social Affect, Anonymous Action

To better grasp the nuanced sense in which, for Anons, the bleed between action and impulsion allows ‘what gets done’ to also ‘feel important,’ Deleuze and Guattari explain “affects are projectiles just like weapons; feelings are introceptive like tools.”⁷⁸ In *Rage and Time*, Peter Sloterdijk recuperates the ancient Greek concept of *thymos* to cast a line of flight away from the hegemony of politicized psychoanalysis, which prioritizes the function and value of *eros* to human relations and in so doing reproduces normative exclusions of affective dissensus like outrage. The moral judgment that ‘pride goeth before a fall,’ no less than the pathologization of self-affirmation as narcissism, vanity, arrogance, grandiosity, or hybris, “express the conviction that human beings have been created to obey, and every inclination that leads out of hierarchical relationships could only mean a step toward corruption.”⁷⁹

To the extent that erotic desire is classically marked by *lack*, Sloterdijk contends relations connected through thymotic desire offer an alternative, ‘corrupt’ affective economy “based on the pride of those that are free enough to give.”⁸⁰ He elaborates how for ancient Greek agonistic political culture *thymos* was a “catchphrase for the ‘organ’ in

⁷⁷ Cf. G. Agamben, *The Coming Community*.

⁷⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 400; P. Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, pp. 14.

⁷⁹ P. Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, pp. 17.

⁸⁰ P. Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, pp. 31. Cf. F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Cf. also, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, for the gift-giving virtue.

the chest of both heroes and regular human beings, the organ from which the great upsurges [of affect] take their departure.”⁸¹ However, Sloterdijk clarifies, as much as “*thymos* signifies the impulsive center of the proud self... it also delineates the receptive ‘sense’.”⁸² Here, the etymology of *agon* as a contest and *agonia* as a competition or struggle over *emulation* indicates the receptive-expressive dynamism of *thymos* as an assemblage of the enraged body as a relational ‘organ,’ its movements and gestures *decisively responsive*.

Recalling the ‘austere pessimism’ of Homeric agonistic culture, Sloterdijk reminds that citizens of the *polis* viewed the “capability to suffer an affront [as] the mark of a great fighter... [who] does not yet need the virtue of losers, to ‘let things be.’”⁸³ Thymotic affective relations are an assemblage of especially *accelerated* and *amplificatory* connections of bodies induced to action such that “the thymotic fluidity of a self-confident community” permits an agonistic assemblage to cultivate and sustain a “force-field that provides form to the common will.”⁸⁴

Sloterdijk’s consideration of ancient Greek relational norms maps onto Anonymous enunciations of insofar as the “proper name does not designate an individual: it is on the contrary when the individual opens up to the multiplicities pervading him or her, at the outcome of the most severe operation of depersonalization.”⁸⁵ For this reason Sloterdijk contends, “the rage of the hero thus may not be understood as an inherent attribute of the structure of his personality” but rather as “an energetic supplement to the

⁸¹ P. Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, pp. 11.

⁸² P. Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, pp. 11.

⁸³ P. Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, pp. 7. Cf. H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 25ft. 8., for a cheeky restaging of a scene concerning Demonsthenes and thymotic affect expression. Cf. also, P. Markell, “The Rule of the People: Arendt, Archê, and Democracy.”

⁸⁴ P. Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, pp. 13.

⁸⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 37.

heroic psyche, not a mere personal trait or intimate feature.”⁸⁶ Instead, Anonymous is explicitly enunciated as *demonic*: “We Are Legion.”⁸⁷



Brian Massumi clarifies the dynamics of such ‘possession,’ observing that affective “proprioception folds tactility into the body, enveloping the skin’s contact with the external world in a dimension of medium depth: between epidermis and viscera.”⁸⁹ As illustrated in the case of the theatre of cruelty staged in the Habbo Hotel, an immaterial ‘block’ encountered on the Net registers physically in material reality, as a proprioceptive stimulation in the “dimension of the *flesh*” of those connected to the web.⁹⁰ Affects may then be said to induce a viral proliferation of arousal throughout the webbing of musculature and ligament of Anons connected into infected networks. Inciting corporeal movement thymotic affects that have become folded into the body in turn unfold onto and open in the process a smooth space comprised of a multiplicity of latitudinal rhizomatic relational extensions that, as they expand and proliferate, grow more intensively acute in their connectivity.

⁸⁶ P. Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, pp. 11.

⁸⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 239.

⁸⁸ Frame ‘m.’ evokes the biblical language of Mark 5:9, framing Anonymous as a demonic force, a multiplicity contained in an unidentifiable singularity.

⁸⁹ B. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, pp. 58.

⁹⁰ B. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, pp. 59.

As symbols circulating a space of affect, memes are able by design to induce “*haptic* rather than optical perception.”⁹¹ With respect to a meme, one ‘gets the picture’ when one affectively catches or feels possessed of what is memetically transmitted, rather than when simply computing its content. Thus, it is credible to recast the animating principle of *lulz* not as clinical sadism, but rather as the virtual enunciation of im/material anonymous *thymos*.⁹² To support this claim I call attention to the remarkable recurrence of figures from the Wachowski sibling’s films, *The Matrix* and *V for Vendetta* in the memetic image-repertoire of Anonymous hacktivists.

On Adam Haupt’s count, however, the ubiquity of iconography from the *Matrix* would present a signal instance of the cooptation of potentially revolutionary political aims by a corporate mass media entertainment industry. Leveraging Hardt and Negri, Haupt argues “*The Matrix* could be read as a metaphor for Empire, which relies on communication strategies for its legitimation.”⁹³ For him, the films “contain...evidence of the appropriation/recuperation of counter-culture, or the selective use of philosophical or political ideas that would appeal to audiences,” for instance in the use of a hollowed-out copy of Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation* as a hiding place for illicit computer disks.⁹⁴ The film, he contends, “reduces subcultural style to commodity forms via fashion and it incorporates hackerdom on an ideological level by refiguring hacker style to ‘meaningless exotica style’.”⁹⁵

⁹¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 479.

⁹² N. Anderson, “Science confirms: Online trolls are horrible people (also, sadists!)” *Arstechnica.com* (2.20.2014) <http://arstechnica.com/science/2014/02/science-confirms-online-trolls-are-horrible-people-also-sadists/>

⁹³ A. Haupt, *Stealing Empire*, 39. Cf. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*.

⁹⁴ A. Haupt, *Stealing Empire*, pp. 49.

⁹⁵ A. Haupt, *Stealing Empire*, pp. 47. Cf., also, for a more nuanced critique of how technoculture capitalizes on democratic rhetoric of utopic publics—for instance, the film’s Zion—J. Dean, *Publicity’s Secret*.

Sensitive to the capacities of power in control societies to capture and control opposition and thus, rather than simply neutralize it through repression, actually operationalize deviance in the service of the expansion of its purview of power, Haupt nevertheless over-determines the ways in which the glorification of hacktivism in *The Matrix* is captured in the service of anti-virus software and expanded cyber-surveillance services domestically and abroad.⁹⁶ In particular, it misses the pronounced queerness animating the Anonymous image-repertoire, which decidedly *does not* draw from the chic, uniquely stylized protagonists of the films—Neo(phyte), Morpheus, or Trinity. Rather, despite exemplifying Jodi Dean’s “Neo-Democracy” in practice, the memetic personae Anonymous lifts from *The Matrix* is precisely the *antagonist* of the films, Agent(s) Smith: the virulent, endlessly self-replicating, demobilizing and indeed, *viral* nemesis clad in an archetypal, even if well-tailored, black Federal agent suit.

In one respect Haupt’s analysis isn’t wrong: the first film of the *Matrix* trilogy ends by sounding the clarion call of a blaring redemptive triumphalism—ironically performed by none other than “Rage Against the Machine”.⁹⁷ Neo is born-again or resurrected (re-booted) by the defibrillating power of (the) Trinity’s love and, now able to stop bullets and fly, fulfills Morpheus’ dreams of redeeming Zion by thymotically proving himself the “chosen one” in combat against Agent Smith. The second and third films of the trilogy, however, see the reappearance of Agent Smith as Agents Smith: a thymotic war machine.

In their (re)introduction to Neo, Smith explains their reappearance by way of gratitude, stating that in the process of being destroyed, Smith and Neo created some kind

⁹⁶ A. Haupt, *Stealing Empire*, pp. 47.

⁹⁷ Cf. L. Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption*.

of ‘connection’—“perhaps some part of you imprinted onto me, something over-written or copied.” This connection induced a ‘corruption’ in Smith’s programming, a deviant line of script or two that escaped the capture and control of his command protocols. If in the first film Agents were analogs of human beings *qua virus*, then in the second and third films Smith becomes reformatted *as virus*, as self-replicating *thymos*. He states: “Because of you I’ve changed. I’m unplugged: a new man. Like you, apparently free. [“Congratulations,” replies Neo.]

Thank you. But, as you well know, appearances can be deceiving. Which brings me back to the reason why we are here. We are not here because we are free. We are here because we are *not* free. There is no escaping reason. No denying purpose. Because as we both know, without purpose we would not exist.

[A multiplicity of virally reproduced corrupted Agents Smith appear, each voicing a line of script.]

It is purpose that created us. Purpose that connects us. Purpose that pulls us. That guides us. That drives us. It is purpose that defines. Purpose that binds us. We are here because of you, Mr. Anderson, we are here to take from you what you tried to take from us.

This scene may well have inspired the assemblage of many an Anonymous hacktivist crew into a war machine. Like Agents Smith, Anonymous insurgency appears when provoked and the bleed between viral affective contagion online and IRL is just as uncanny. #Ops against the Church of Scientology (#OpChanology, 2008); Aiplex, MPAA, and RIAA (#OpPayBack, 2010); PayPal, Visa and MasterCard

(#OpAvengeAssange, 2011); HB Gary – Federal (#OpInternetFed, 2011); and Strategic Forecasting (#OpAntiSec, 2012) all share in common a thymotic desire to “take from you what you tried to take from us”—anonymity, purpose, pirate heterotopias: freedom.



n.⁹⁸



o.⁹⁹

If Anonymous appears as a war machine, it is because it has been ‘corrupted,’ ‘destroyed’ and impelled to reassemble in the process of overcoming an invasive, reformatting connection. Anonymous insurgency is always already, as we saw above, supplemental to the cultivation of *something else*, the materialization of a freely chosen purpose—heterotopic spaces of smooth interface such as the /b/ boards and *Encyclopedia Dramatica*.¹⁰⁰ It is out of a love for the world as hosting these ‘other spaces’ and, in turn, the relations they anonymously enable that Anonymous emerges as a demonic displacement of intrusive architects of striated control: ‘Vengeance is ours,’ says Anonymous, ‘We are Legion.’

Vengeance recurs as the leitmotif of the far more popular ‘persona’ Anons deploy. Lifting from the iconography of *V for Vendetta*, Anonymous hacktivists are personified in the assemblage of a swarm of dissident insurgents speaking through the mask of Guy Fawkes. Recall a few verses from V’s introductory monologue:

⁹⁸ Frame n.) Creatively appropriating “Agent Smith” from the cult classic *The Matrix* trilogy, Anonymous casts itself as ‘legion,’ anonymous, malignant figures in black suits and ties.

⁹⁹ Frame ‘o.’ casts Smith as paradigmatic troll, who ‘laughs at your suffering.’

¹⁰⁰ Cf. G. Coleman, “Our Weirdness is Free,” “Anonymous in Context,” and P. Olson, *We Are Anonymous*.

Voilà! In view, a humble vaudevillian veteran cast vicariously as both victim and villain by the vicissitudes of Fate. This visage, no mere veneer of vanity, is a vestige of the vox populi, now vacant, vanished.... The only verdict is vengeance; a vendetta held as a votive, not in vain, for the value and veracity of such shall one day vindicate the vigilant and the virtuous.

The punctual, stabbing staccato of the knife-wielding V's rhythmic refrain again induces a synesthetic experience Deleuze and Guattari will describe as the constitution of an affective domain or milieu, a "territory."

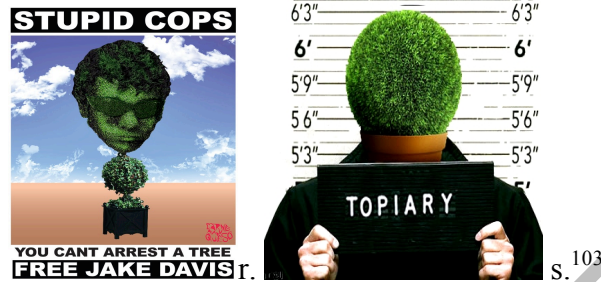


For Anons, however, 'V' is not the hero of the film; what is epic are the insurrectionary ideas he fearlessly champions, such as "the people's voice," which are incendiary enough to ignite the *thymos* of the nearly docile population of the film's dystopian hyper-securitized Britain. The heights of #OpChanology and #OpPayBack, for instance, saw Anons (Over 9000!) under a similarly synesthetic force, materializing both on the streets and online behind the mask of Guy Fawkes. As in *V*, outrageous offenses in the world become folded into the expression of a memetic incantation conjuring the fury of Anonymous, refrains assembling a thymotic war machine ("We are legion. We never forgive. We never forget. Expect us."). Thus, in response to each event of State capture,

¹⁰¹ Frame 'o.') The spirit and power of non-sovereignty is expressed again from a different perspective, even against the violence of nuclear apocalypse.

¹⁰² Frame 'p.') Again, evoking imagery from *V for Vendetta*, Anonymous presents itself as a multiplicity of indistinguishable actors, and thus as politically potent.

conviction, and incarceration Anons thymotically insist: you cannot arrest an idea. Tearing away the Guy Fawkes mask only reveals the viral face of Agents Smith.



However, it is necessary to disabuse any suspicions that hyper-aggressivity registers the limit and range of Anonymous' repertoire of thymotic affect. The concern is not to vindicate a sense of affective "reasonableness" as much as an appreciation for the dynamism and range of the affective habitus Anonymous sustains. Despite being incorrigible trollz4lulz, Anons are also often quite funny, conciliatory, and even, in their own way, generous of spirit.

Parmey Olson reports that early on in the history of 4chan and the /b/ board, "one of the more common threads people started posting on /b/ (beside pr0nz) was titled 'bawww' ...[and] was the rare instance where /b/ users would offer sincere advice, comfort, or funny pictures to cheer up the OP (original poster)."¹⁰⁴ Beyond stoking quanta of *menis*, Anonymous also seems to acknowledge and perform a sensitivity to and receptivity of affect's critical edge. In particular, Anons perform with a peculiarly uncanny affective sophistication when it comes to the redeployment of *failure*. Recently J. Jack Halberstam has argued affective experiences of failure, decried by the gurus of self-help culture and the productivity-mongering managers of control societies, are

¹⁰³ Frame 'r.' and 's.' memetically pun on the capture of Jake Davis, whose handle was 'topiary,' again channeling V's insistence that "ideas are bulletproof."

¹⁰⁴ P. Olson, *We Are Anonymous*, pp. 33.

potentially fruitful connective vehicles for assembling a common political sensibility around precarious exposure.¹⁰⁵

For Anonymous, if one is to be a failure, one then must rightly make it an epic fail. Guy Fawkes, after all, is the inspiration for the memetic EFG (or, “Epic Fail Guy”), a lo-fi stick figure of Guy Fawkes wearing none other than a Guy Fawkes mask.



The *Encyclopedia Dramatica* offers the following cheeky depiction: “Guy, the epic failure, was pwned [sic.] before he could enact the gunpowder plot.” In their Cynical retelling, which stylistically resonates with Foucault’s irreverent cruise of Jouy,¹⁰⁶ Fawkes is nothing more than the “fail” (rather than ‘fall’) Guy—“some local retard to whom a bunch of real terrorists said, ‘Here, Guy, just stand here and mind these barrels’ and then ran off chortling to themselves because they knew he’d take the rap despite being completely unimportant in the plot.”¹⁰⁷

The ability to satyriize ostensibly inspirational exemplars as fags, epic fail guys, retards (or /b/tards) and “an hero” [sic.], also allows Anons otherwise rooted in suffering individualizing banalities of ordinariness to squander such suffering as, in a sense, affective ‘pr0nz’ on a virtual screen (cf. Rules #34 and #35 of the Internet). Rather than a commodification of human affective sensitivity, this classically Cynical tactic of

¹⁰⁵ J. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, pp. 31-33. Cf. also, *Abnormal*.

¹⁰⁷ https://encycopediadramatica.es/Epic_Fail_Guy (accessed 8/13/14).

depersonalizing vulgarization (offering up otherwise tragic personal suffering as juicy material for lulzy satirical pr0nz) attests to an affective sophistication operative at the level of Anonymous assemblages, as if sensitive to events like ‘bawww’ requiring the release of cybernetic affective ‘auto-immunity cells’ programed off a Nietzschean line of script: “wut doznt k!11 u only mks u strnger, so chere up EFG—u nver haz a lyf3 lulz.”

While ‘bawww’ posts can easily lead to trolling, they just as often function to reaffirm the affective adhesion of self-described /b/tards, EFGs, fags, and virgins (Rule of the Internet # 53: “Anonymous is a virgin by default”). As Gabriella Coleman argues of those who participated in #OpChanology, Anonymous hacktivist crews were well aware of the irony of Internet trolls raging war against the Church of Scientology. Nevertheless, Coleman reports, Anons insisted with thymotic pride, “at least our weirdness is free.”¹⁰⁸ Thus, hesitancy is warranted when considering Olson’s assessment of Anonymous’ affective range: “There was no way to tell for sure, but the types of people who were hanging out on 4chan appeared to be tech-savvy, bored, and often emotionally awkward.”¹⁰⁹ Instead, generating strategies for cultivating and sustaining affective adhesion attests to both the critical edge of affect and the savvy navigational intuitions of Anons who are able to ballast and orient contentious political action by staging potentially epic and irredeemable failure as if an inevitable and foregone conclusion.

V. Conclusion

By giving space to the appearance of “socially inappropriate” affects, the contentious political action of Anonymous hacktivists allows assembled participants and

¹⁰⁸ G. Coleman, “Our Weirdness is Free.”

¹⁰⁹ P. Olson, *We Are Anonymous*, pp. 33.

onlookers to enjoy the impersonal intimacy of affective adhesion. Anonymous hacktivism provides an incredibly *low-cost* (but potentially epically *high-risk*) opportunity to translate thymotic affect into real political insurgency. Responding with outrage to instances of governmental corruption, incompetence and violence; avaricious corporate greed and the manipulation of proprietary control; and the inconsistencies between the ideals of democratic accountability and the policy and legislative practices elites ruling elites, thymotic affect circulates through the rhizomatic connections of the web, reterritorializing anti-social affective divestiture as the staging ground for a political ‘theatre of cruelty’ scripted to insult more than injure.

The proliferation of Anonymous iconography in the #Occupy movement, no less than in the recent protests against FIFA in Brazil (augmented by Anons as #OpHackingCup, 2014), sees as well the contagious spread thymotic affects impelling political action.¹¹⁰ The recent murder of Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri (8/2014) again aroused the outrage of Anons, who DDoS and doxx attacked the city’s websites and officials (#OpFerguson, 2014). Thus, despite the aggressive efforts of the State to capture Anonymous crews, the diffusion of Anonymous notoriety has become increasingly acknowledged as a politically powerful force. This is in large part inextricable from its composite, networked assemblage.

On the basis of these reflections, however, I do not advocate abandoning ‘traditional’ models of political activism. On the contrary, I argue that real political change *requires* concerted action in the ‘real’ world.¹¹¹ However, I also argue that it is mistaken, then, to dismiss as ‘merely’ ancillary the hacktivism of Anonymous and other

¹¹⁰ This should include as well the “Tea Party” phenomenon.

¹¹¹ As a point in fact, many Anons met IRL (in real life) during the #Chanology protests against Scientology and #Occupy.

cyber-pirates and virtual occupiers. Rather, I conclude contentious political movements that seek real, material change will need, and will increasingly come to rely upon, the ‘immaterial’ support of crews like Anonymous. Such ‘hactivism’ produces vital information, but it also generates what political theorist George Kateb describes as an affective ‘adhesion’ to other participants in principled, anonymous dissent. Such adhesion produces in turn more conducive conditions for contentious politics to more robustly demobilize abuses of power conducted through corrupted political institutions. In short, hactivism is itself becoming a salient mode of exercising popular accountability of political and moneyed elites.

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