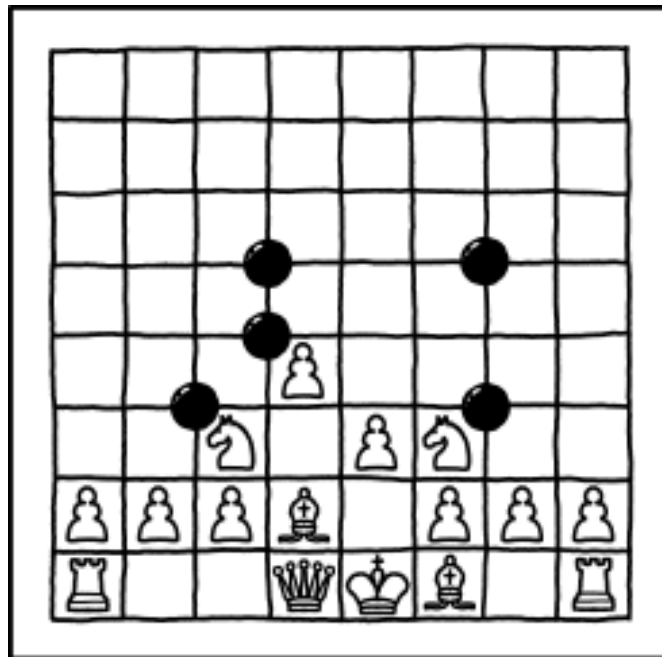


# Information Activism: Anonymous as a Cheater



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## Abstract

In 2008, Anonymous launched 'Project Chanology' which was a direct attack on scientology. They ordered pizza's to be delivered on scientology addresses, they attacked scientology websites with DDoS attacks and kept calling their main phone line. All in all, Anonymous played with the information outlets of scientology to take an activist standpoint against scientology. Here, activism is not solely about getting to the streets or letting your message heard, but it becomes about the control of flows of information.

Anonymous transgresses boundaries of what activism is about, by using 'new' information tactics, furthermore, they transgress laws: worldwide many Anonymous' members have been arrested. I propose to analyse Anonymous as a cheater that plays with information and with rules. And, just as cheaters, they raise questions on the rules, on what it means to be an activist, what the position is of protest online and more. In this thesis, I will formulate a new materialist conceptualization of cheating that will aid towards an understanding of what I will call Anonymous' information activism. This research project is not about the question whether Anonymous is wrong or right, but rather it is about how we can understand these practices in their entanglements with the world. This is not an ethical question, but a call for a better understanding of the events pre-judgement. In this context, I am posing the question: How can we understand the cheater Anonymous as a key example of information activism?



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## Introduction

### Activating Anonymous' Activism through Information

“But who and what are Anonymous? A radical new form of activism – or just bored teenagers?”<sup>1</sup>  
 “Was steckt hinter dem Protest? Ist es pubertärer Vandalismus oder eine neue Form von politischer  
 Meinungsäußerung?”<sup>2</sup> “‘Anonymous’, ¿quiénes son y cómo actúan?”<sup>3</sup> “‘Adolescents attardés’ ou  
 ‘dangereux’ hackers[?]”<sup>4</sup>

Anonymous has been repeatedly in the news worldwide for their actions such as the hacking of Stratforcasting Inc. (short: Stratfor), their largescale protests against scientology, their declaration of war on IS and many more actions; often newspapers dedicate an entire theme or topic page to them.<sup>5</sup> The questions stated above indicate how worldwide the media have attempted to understand Anonymous' ethics and actions. Apart from the media, Anonymous has also caught the attention of scholars.<sup>6</sup> However, few discuss the key aspect to Anonymous' activism: information. As I will demonstrate below and throughout this thesis, flows of information play a pivotal role in Anonymous' activism: censorship of information, spread of information, withholding of information, access to information, manipulation of information, playing with information etcetera. Anonymous' actions seem to all swerve around flows of information. What further characterizes Anonymous' intra-actions with information is that they play with the rules of information: they explore the boundaries of access to and spread of information by experimenting with the limits of activism in digital spaces. Anonymous plays with more boundaries, they for instance experiment with the anarchistic symbol of the Guy Fawkes mask, which blurs the boundary between activism and revolution. In short,

<sup>1</sup> Carole Cadwalladr, “Anonymous: Behind the Masks of the Cyber Insurgents,” *The Guardian* 8 Sept. 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2012/sep/08/anonymous-behind-masks-cyber-insurgents>.

<sup>2</sup> Translation: “What hides behind the protest? Is it pubescent vandalism or a new form of political expression?”; “Thema: Die Maske des Protests,” *Der Spiegel*, <http://www.spiegel.de/thema/anonymous/>.

<sup>3</sup> Translation: “‘Anonymous’, who are they and how do they act?”; David Sierra, “‘Anonymous’, ¿Quiénes Son y Cómo Actúan?” *RTVE* 28 Feb. 2012, <http://www.rtve.es/noticias/20120228/anonymous-quienes-son-como-actuan/438765.shtml>.

<sup>4</sup> Translation: “Crazy Adolescents or dangerous hackers?”; Par Florian Reynaud, “‘Adolescents Attardés’ ou ‘Dangereux’ Hackers: trois Anonymous Face à la Justice,” *Le Monde* 24 Feb. 2016. [http://www.lemonde.fr/pixels/article/2016/02/24/sunki-dump-et-calin-trois-militants-des-anonymous-face-a-la-justice\\_4870672\\_4408996.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/pixels/article/2016/02/24/sunki-dump-et-calin-trois-militants-des-anonymous-face-a-la-justice_4870672_4408996.html).

<sup>5</sup> See: “Topic: Anonymous (Internet Group),” *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/topic/organization/anonymous-internet-group?8qa>; “Technology: Anonymous,” *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/anonymous>; “Thema: Anonymous,” *Der Spiegel*, <http://www.spiegel.de/thema/anonymous/>; “Topic: Anonymous,” *Al Jazeera*, <http://america.aljazeera.com/topics/topic/organization/anonymous.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Philip F. DiSanto, “Blurred Lines of Identity Crimes: Intersection of the First Amendment and Federal Identity Fraud,” *Columbia Law Review* 115.4 (2015): 941-982; Noah C.N. Hamson, “Hacktivism: A New Breed of Protest in a Networked World,” *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review* 35.2 (2012): 511-542; Gabriella Coleman, *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous* (London and New York: Verso, 2014).

Anonymous tends to play with rules and boundaries. Similarly, cheaters in video games tend to explore the boundaries and rules of the game and will always search for the best tactic to win. A very literal example would be players that go off the map in a shooter to gain a tactical advantage. These players cross the boundaries of what is allowed in the game to win and/or to explore the limits of the game: they are cheaters. Throughout this thesis, I will discuss Anonymous' intra-actions with the boundaries of law and activism by using cheating as a framework which will eventually lead to a better understanding of Anonymous' activism and, specifically, the role of information in their activism.

In this introduction, I will first position Anonymous within the terms activism, protest, hacktivism and revolution to look for a term that performs Anonymous' mode of acting most potently. Second, Anonymous' use of information will be briefly touched upon, to consequently move to a first brief encounter with Anonymous as a cheater and cheating practices in general. Finally, the chapters of this thesis will be introduced. However, before all of this, I want to reflect upon who Anonymous is as a group by looking at what the media has written about their actions thus far, which will raise several questions on Anonymous' identity that will form the basis for chapter one.

### **Who is Anonymous?**

One of the more famous actions of Anonymous is their support of WikiLeaks through a hack of PayPal and MasterCard, called Operation Payback. Anonymous hacked these companies because they no longer offered their services to facilitate donations to WikiLeaks.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, various declarations of war, against IS, against Trump (which mainly consisted of online threats by means of videos in which they vow to use their hacking skills to attack IS and Trump) provided them with a lot of media attention.<sup>8</sup> Less covered are the conscious-raising actions of Anonymous such as Operation Green Rights, in which they revealed information that pinpointed some companies as specifically damaging to the environment and their Operation Death Eaters, which brought attention to the problem of child sex-trafficking and specifically how these activities were covered up by powerful

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<sup>7</sup> Josh Halliday and Charles Arthur, "WikiLeaks: Who are the hackers behind Operation Payback?", *The Guardian*, 8 Dec. 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2010/dec/08/anonymous-4chan-wikileaks-mastercard-paypal>; Ashley Fantz and Atika Shubert, "WikiLeaks 'Anonymous' hackers: 'We will fight'," *CNN*, 10 Dec. 2010, <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/US/12/09/hackers.wikileaks/>; "Operation Payback: Hacker-Großangriff auf Mastercard, Visa & Co.," *Spiegel Online*, 8 Dec. 2016, <http://www.spiegel.de/netzwelt/web/operation-payback-hacker-grossangriff-auf-mastercard-visa-co-a-733520.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Mills, Kelly-Ann. "Brussels attacks: Anonymous declares war on ISIS in chilling video vowing 'we will find you'," *Mirror*. 23 Mar. 2016. [www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/brussels-attacks-anonymous-declares-isis--7615029](http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/brussels-attacks-anonymous-declares-isis--7615029). Anony Mous. "OpISIS [PARIS] – Declared Cyber War Against ISIS." *YouTube* 16 Nov. 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTld7oeQuKg>; Anonymous Official. "Elucidating #OpISIS and #OpTrump." *YouTube* 16 Jan. 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ECT82UjG0x4>.



British individuals.<sup>9</sup> Anonymous has also been in the news for mistakes or misjudgements such as when they outed the wrong police officer as the one responsible for the death of Michael Brown in their OpFerguson, bringing an innocent individual in harm's way.<sup>10</sup>

These incidents show that Anonymous' actions and targets cover a wide range of societal debates and issues and that their actions not necessarily have similar goals or intentions. Furthermore, as anyone can be Anonymous and declare themselves Anonymous as there are no leaders to determine who is part of Anonymous and who is not, it is hard to put a definition or goal or meaning on Anonymous. They are their name: anonymous. But, how do you discuss a protest phenomenon as Anonymous without clear structures or an organisation office to call? How can you connect the different actions of Anonymous apart from that they are tied to this name? How can we understand Anonymous? These questions will be addressed in chapter one.

To briefly return to the examples mentioned above, these also showcase how Anonymous' tactics might sometimes be justified by the information they release or the issue they bring to attention, such as in Operation Green Rights, but how simultaneously some of their actions and methods can raise ethical concerns or questions, such as their involvement in the Ferguson protests. As will appear in chapter two, their actions also raise questions on the location and possibility of protest online and the distinction between cybercrime and activism. As their actions are dispersed and, as their name indicate, their identity is obscured, it is hard to make an ethical or moral judgement on what Anonymous is or does as a group. Furthermore, I would not consider this the most productive question to ask before there is a proper understanding of who or what Anonymous is, rather I am interested in the question of how we can understand Anonymous that does not have a linear campaign plan, nor clear goals, nor clear members or leaders.

As such, I wish to research how we can understand Anonymous in its various connections with society, law, companies etcetera. Most articles that I have referenced in the questions at the start of this introduction and that I have referenced in the footnotes to showcase some of Anonymous actions and the media attention these actions received, discuss Anonymous as hackers, or as a hackers collective, grouping them as 'hacktivists'. However, apart from hacking they have employed other methods, for instance, in their attack on scientology (which will be discussed in more detail later on in this thesis) Anonymous' members went on the streets to protest. Also, as will be discussed elaborately in chapter two, a journalist affiliated with Anonymous, has never hacked, but was only part of a

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<sup>9</sup> Gabriella Coleman, *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous* (London and New York: Verso, 2014), 402-403.

<sup>10</sup> Nicole Perloth, "Anonymous Hackers' Efforts to Identify Ferguson Police Officer Create Turmoil," *The New York Times*, 14 Aug. 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/15/us/ferguson-case-roils-collective-called-anonymous.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/15/us/ferguson-case-roils-collective-called-anonymous.html?_r=0).

greater play with flows of information. Consequently, I want to question whether calling Anonymous a hackers group or hacktivists is the most productive manner to create a better understanding of them as there seems to be more to Anonymous than hacking. In what follows below, I will briefly explore the concepts protest, activism and hacktivism, to see how Anonymous might be implicated in a more complex network of protest, activism and hacktivism than current news coverage might imply.

### **Protest-Activism-Revolution-Hacktivism**

If you were to look up ‘activism’ in the online Oxford English dictionary it states the following definition: “The policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change”.<sup>11</sup> The meaning of protest is slightly differently defined as “A statement or action expressing disapproval of or objection to something” or “An organized public demonstration expressing strong objection to an official policy or course of action”.<sup>12</sup> The difference between protest and activism is hence that protest is always directed against something while activism is about social change and does not necessarily (but can be) *against* something. In other words, activism is a broader term that encompasses protest as well, but activism does not always have to consist of solely protests. The distinction between activism and protest is important as the second is mostly against a policy, a law, and as we will see Anonymous fits better with the broader ‘activism’, as their actions are not synonymously always directed against someone/something, but as indicated before can also revolve around raising awareness.

In the introduction of their book on contemporary protest, Stuart Price and Ruth Sanz Sabido argue that protest has been defined as having the aim to either by force or convincing arguments persuade local authorities to hear and implement demands for social change.<sup>13</sup> As Price and Sabido indicate, what is significant about their definition of protest is the fact that it, by including the strife towards recognition by authorities, separates protest from revolution, because a revolution would have as an aim, rather than convincing an authority of standpoints, to overthrow that authority.<sup>14</sup> Similarly as protest, activism is not a revolution<sup>15</sup> but needs some kind of authority to situate its activism.

Interestingly, Anonymous plays with this distinction between activism and revolution that Price and Sabido make by their information tactics. As will appear in chapter two and three, Anonymous plays through its appearance, the anarchistic symbol of the Guy Fawkes mask, their language, such as

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<sup>11</sup> “Definition of Activism in English,” *Oxford Dictionaries*, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/activism>.

<sup>12</sup> “Definition of Protest in English,” *Oxford Dictionaries*, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/protest>.

<sup>13</sup> Stuart Price and Ruth Sanz Sabido, *Contemporary Protest and the Legacy of Dissent* (London and New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2014), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Price and Sabido, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Revolution is defined by the Oxford dictionaries as “A forcible overthrow of a government or social order”.

declaring war, and actions, such as performing hacks that violate laws on cybercrime, with overthrowing authority instead of convincing it with arguments. In the case of the Guy Fawkes mask, the anarchism of that symbol (as will be explained in chapter three) is in itself anti-authoritarian. Declaring war, as will appear in chapter two, is something that is regularly only something the State would do, and by positioning themselves on a similar position of power they discredit the power of the State. Lastly, some of the hacks Anonymous performs transgress laws and many Anonymous members have been arrested around the world<sup>16</sup>, which gives their activism a revolutionary touch as in some cases they do go as far as transgressing the laws of authorities. By challenging this boundary between protest and revolution, Anonymous could be seen as transgressing the 'rules' of activism, cheatingly playing its game of activism. Hence, Anonymous seems to cheat the game of activism, not neatly sticking within its definition but playing with the revolutionary as well. Nonetheless, most importantly, Anonymous depends on the State for its cheating. Without a game to play in, without a State, without rules, without companies, institutions and States with secrets and information, Anonymous' activism would not work, Anonymous might even be more similar to the State, the companies it is hacking and discrediting than one might think, as will be explored in chapter three. In other words, Anonymous can never be truly revolutionary because it depends on the flows of information emitting from those it is intra-acting with, as such activism is the appropriate term to attribute to Anonymous' practices.

The authority in which Anonymous' activism is located is one that considers itself more and more with the control of flows of information by companies and governments that individuals are either lured into for their own benefits or pleasure (companies) or for their own protection (governments). For instance, the popular Pokemon Go game is played by many for their enjoyment, while it simultaneously via GPS keeps track of its players' location.<sup>17</sup> If the user chooses to log in with a Google account, this provides Google with a tremendous amount of information on their users daily movements and rhythms that could be either used for commercial goals or surveillance motives.<sup>18</sup> Another example would be how a platform like Facebook facilitates political organisation and debate, but simultaneously uses the flows of information of their users to sell advertisements and it offers, for the right price, States and companies with large data sets of information on the interests and behaviours of their citizens.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the tremendous amount of information that we can find and publish online is a double-edged sword: there seems to be an enormous possibility for political change, freedom of speech and simply targeted entertainment, while simultaneously offering a possibility for capitalist selling motives and governmental surveillance. However, these flows of

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<sup>16</sup> Coleman, 401-402.

<sup>17</sup> "Pokémon GO Privacy Policy," *Niantic Labs*, <https://www.nianticlabs.com/privacy/pokemongo/en/>.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> "Learn More About the People that Matter to Your Business with Facebook Audience Insights," *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/business/news/audience-insights>.

information go hand in hand with a power imbalance: users are often not as technically capable or have similar tools or funds to amend and control these platforms of information as companies or governments have. It seems there is a dependence for access to flows of information on complex communication technologies such as WhatsApp, email, Facebook, Twitter etcetera, while simultaneously users are not in control of these technologies.<sup>20</sup> Within this context, Anonymous attempts to reclaim this control of flows of information and challenge the State's and companies' control over information by using and playing with flows of information. Their activism is mainly centred around this control of flows of information and a distrust for those who control information without disclosure, as will appear from the discussion of the Stratfor hack in chapter two.

In sum, the play with flows of information is what characterizes Anonymous' activism. Anonymous has performed its activism by, for instance, supporting the WikiLeaks project. As said in the above, when PayPal and MasterCard decided to no longer support donations to WikiLeaks and withdrew their services, Anonymous hacked their websites, to force them to not withdraw their services from WikiLeaks.<sup>21</sup> Anonymous, in this action, plays with flows of information to get an activist message across. More so, this action indicates Anonymous' activism as a support for projects that challenge the State's control over information. Another example of playing with information would be when Anonymous covered IS social media pages in rainbows and gay porn after the Orlando shootings.<sup>22</sup> In this action, Anonymous takes over an area that is supposedly 'owned' by IS online, and uses it to spread a message to IS and to offend them, not by using a drone and blow up a military location or by spreading pamphlets on LBGT issues among IS members but by bombarding their own social media pages with messages of Gay Pride, which is a colourful way to play with and manipulate the information that IS puts online. The WikiLeaks and Orlando example show how Anonymous employs information platforms and information in itself to perform its protests against PayPal but also against IS. Anonymous constantly attempts to control information either by retrieving it, manipulating or blocking it. Their potentiality lies in the manners in which they access and use flows of information to perform their protests, not necessarily in their identity as hackers. Hacking seems to be merely the tool, but not what their activism is considered with: information.

In result, calling Anonymous hacktivists emphasizes only one of their tools, hacking, while also creating an idea of Anonymous' members as hackers, while, as appears in chapter three, not all of their members are the technical savvy hackers, but also other ways of playing with information, such as

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<sup>20</sup> Tim Jordan and Paul A. Taylor, *Hactivism and Cyberwars: Rebels with a Cause?* (London: Routledge, 2004) 21.

<sup>21</sup> Brian Knappenberger, *We Are Legion: The Story of the Hacktivists*, 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Alex Hern, "Islamic State Twitter Accounts Get a Rainbow Makeover from Anonymous Hackers," *The Guardian* 17 Jun. 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/jun/17/islamic-state-twitter-accounts-rainbow-makeover-anonymous-hackers>.

journalism, are part of their activism. Throughout this thesis, I will propose an understanding of Anonymous as a cheater instead of as a hacker: a player that plays the game of the system and uses similar tools, but once in a while takes the position of the developer or explores the boundaries of the game, sometimes even transgressing them. However, how does Anonymous exactly cheat the game of activism? What does their militant language signal? What does it mean in Anonymous' activism terms to be in war with IS? How does Anonymous intra-acts with the State, while simultaneously being entangled with it? All in all, how does Anonymous cheats the information game of the State?

Activism by means of information, as indicated in the above, is about challenging the position of the State/authorities by, for instance, using flows of information to take over spaces and changing its meaning (the rainbow social media hack) or by stopping flows of information of a company that refuses a goal supported by Anonymous. Anonymous might hack sometimes, but their main cheat is using flows of information, against institutions, governments and others, and by doing so Anonymous raises questions on the current status quo of activism and the role of information in society as will appear in the following chapters.

### **The Entangled Chapters of this Thesis**

In what follows below, I will briefly introduce the structure of this thesis and how each chapter will contribute to an analysis of Anonymous as a cheater playing with information. Before doing so, I will introduce a conceptualization of cheating and how Anonymous plays a game in terms of information activism. It is important that it is clear throughout this thesis what I mean when I discuss cheating to avoid any confusion over the term that encompasses many forms of play. I will conceptualize cheating partly in chapter one. However, here I want to give a couple of examples that showcase what I mean when I discuss cheating that will be related to Anonymous cheating activities in the subsequent chapters.

Though not an academic source, in the YouTube Video *A Defense of Cheating in Gameplay* part of the PBS Game/Show channel, host Jamin Warren does lay out a provocative argument on the positive side of cheating by using theories of game scholars such as Mia Consalvo and Johan Huizinga. I want to briefly outline his argument here, as it quite clearly demonstrates the complexity of cheating in online videogames and discusses in plain language what cheating encompasses. Furthermore, Warren's exploration of cheating, as will appear in chapter one, comes close to my conceptualization of cheating by using Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

First of all, Warren distinguishes between the spoil sport and the cheater, by drawing upon Huizinga's theory, and compares a spoil sport to someone playing basketball who takes the ball of the field and walks home: she destroys the game. Where the cheater still plays the game, the spoil sport refuses to

play or destroys the game. Throughout his argument, Warren defines cheaters as players who think it is acceptable to play the game in any way possible as long as it does not destroy the game. In result, he does not deny that it is often annoying to play against cheaters, but he also argues that they are often good strategists, using every opportunity to gain a maximum advantage to win, which can feel a bit unfair. Relatedly, Warren argues that cheaters create optimal playing strategies that eventually help the evolution of the game. He gives the example of quick scoping, which is the use of a sniper rifle in online multiplayer as a pistol, which has now become a good tactic, but was first considered as cheating or spoiling the game. These inventions of new tactics push against the boundaries of fair play and force others to improve their tactics as well, eventually leading to a more challenging game.

The latter explains how the relation between player and game changes due to the evolution of better strategies. However, cheating can also lead to changes in design. Warren gives the example of the ‘zerg rush’ in *StarCraft*.<sup>23</sup> In this strategy game, players realized that if they chose the zerg people they were able to immediately attack other tribes (while others had to wait until they created an army), which eventually led to a collapse of the game because when you chose the zerg people and immediately attacked, the game practically ended before it had even started. As such, developers realized they had made a mistake in the design of the game and had to change it. A seemingly cheating practice hence leads to the improvement of a game. Warren summarizes this by arguing: “Cheating forces communities to create standards and to recalibrate them on a continual basis [...] and forces us to confront broken systems”.<sup>24</sup> In other words, better strategies lead to an evolution of the game play, continuing the challenge of the game; finding the best strategy that makes the game collapse leads to better games.

As a conclusion to his video, Warren makes a significant statement drawing from Dave Hickey’s “The Heresy of Zone Defense”. Hickey argues that “the trick of civilization lies in recognizing the moment when a rule ceases to liberate and begins to govern”.<sup>25</sup> To illustrate this statement, he gives the example of Jackson Pollock who cheated the rules of painting by suddenly dripping paint, which was liberating the ways in which artists could use paint. However, when that same dripping of paint became a rule within art classes it ceased to be liberating and another form of painting had to be developed for the continuation of the evolution of the art of painting.<sup>26</sup> Relatedly, cheating promotes a constant development of the game; a constant flow of change.

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<sup>23</sup> *StarCraft*, Blizzard Entertainment, 1998.

<sup>24</sup> PBS Game/Show, “A Defense of Cheating in Videogames, Game/Show, PBS Digital Studios,” *Youtube*, hosted by Jamin Warren, 20 Mar. 2014, 5:01-5:09, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=er-E1vxEnic>.

<sup>25</sup> Dave Hickey, “The Heresy of Zone Defense” *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy* (Los Angeles: Art Issue Press, 1995), n.p..

<sup>26</sup> Hickey, 1-2.

In sum, though not an academic source, Warren does characterize two important aspects of cheating in digital game play by drawing upon a range of theories: using new strategies and finding a strategy that forces the game to change. Cheating is about using the maximum potential of the game to create the most successful strategy to win, even though this strategy might be first concerned as unacceptable. Importantly, the cheater does not, however, destroy the game. The cheater is not a revolutionary. Throughout this thesis it is to this type of cheating that I am referring when I discuss cheating.

Chapter one will focus on how we can understand Anonymous as an immanent multiple and how this relates to its cheating practices, to ultimately understand Anonymous' activism that centres around flows of information. Furthermore, this chapter will draw upon Lars Spuybroek's conceptualization of the digital to discuss how Anonymous' pushes activism into the space of the digital. In short, chapter one will focus on the manner in which Anonymous exists and moves and how its resistance to organisation fits into this specific type of 'cheating movement' and information activism. Chapter one functions as an exploration to better understand Anonymous itself and its movements by drawing upon a variety of concepts that will also be helpful to discuss Anonymous' activism in chapter two and three.

In the second chapter, the focus will be on breaking and bending the rules, Anonymous' tactics and how the game and the rules react to this. In other words, I will discuss how international law is currently constituted in relation to online activism and how Anonymous raises questions on these rules. Additionally, I will discuss the meaning of declaring war as a form of protest, in the context of Deleuze and Guattari, by looking at Anonymous declaration of war against IS and how this positions them vice a vice the State and is part of their activism and the role information plays within this activism. Does Anonymous have the potential to show bugs in the system, similarly as some cheaters do? Or are they just an annoyance who hold up the game? Chapter two, hence, explores how Anonymous is the zerg rush that law attempts to tackle or the strategy that the designer does not yet entirely know how to deal with apart from just simply punishing it.

In chapter one and two, it might appear as if the State (companies, institutions, the status quo) and Anonymous are two opposite forces that are essentially distinct from one another. In this final and third chapter, I will show through a conceptualization of intra-action and performance by Karen Barad how, though Anonymous flirts with the revolutionary and the anarchistic, Anonymous and the State are both participating in the same game. Furthermore, this chapter will also take a more critical stance towards some of Anonymous cheating practices and explores how these could be similar to the practices of the surveillance State.

## Chapter 1

### Anonymous as an Intra-Actional Multiple: Cheating the Digital Game with Wolves

In the apropos, I have indicated that Anonymous employs flows of information to protest and threads the lines between activism and revolution. This first chapter will be mostly about getting a better understanding of Anonymous by drawing upon a wide range of concepts from, among others, Michel Serres, Gilles Deleuze and Karen Barad. Throughout the discussion of these concepts, I will discuss how Anonymous functions as a cheater, and how they push against the boundaries of protest, both in terms of where protest takes place, its locality, as well as what methods are employed to perform their activism by also drawing upon some examples of actions Anonymous partook in.

First, I will discuss Anonymous as a multiple, by looking at Serres' conceptualization of this term, to discuss them as a collective that is one yet lacks any clear structures or organising factors. Serres uses quite telling examples to describe how a collective can constitute a unity that is destroyed when it is limited to one entity. These examples will aid towards understanding the complexity of Anonymous' identity as a group that is not clearly defined by a hierarchy or by leaders. To gain an even more in depth understanding of Anonymous as both multiple and One, Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the wolf-man, who is one individual, while simultaneously being many, will further clarify Anonymous' positionality as an activist group and the impossibility of limiting Anonymous to an individual. Anonymous is not one lone wolf, but a pack, and Deleuze and Guattari describe this double-existence in detail, as such revealing how an individual in Anonymous can determine the group, and vice-versa how the group can determine the individual.

Additionally, to understand how Anonymous is not an organised body with leaders and specific goals or functions but is still capable of having an impact on society (as indicated by the many newspaper articles written on Anonymous, the fact that there is a series inspired by them: *Mr. Robot*, and a documentary made about them *We are Legion*), I will relate Deleuze's conceptualization of the Body without Organs to Anonymous. The Body without Organs will be particularly helpful to explain what I mean when I argue Anonymous is *not* an organisation. The Body without Organs is not necessarily a human body without a liver or a heart but broadens the idea of the body to contain many different types of matter, human and inhuman, breathing and non-breathing. His description of the Body without Organs can almost be read as a manifesto of how to become one by getting rid of organizing structures that are implicated upon the body. In other words, the Body without Organs describes how bodies, in all forms and matters, can exist (or should experiment) without organizing principles.



After this elaborate exploration of how Anonymous functions as an activist group without any clear organisation or hierarchies, I will move towards Anonymous' relation to the game of activism by drawing upon Barad's 'intra-action' and Gregory Bateson's idea of the immanent mind. Both 'intra-action' and the 'immanent mind' refer to a more relational practice of thinking, in which objects, subjects and matter are constituted through their relations, by this going against a Cartesian 'Cogito Ergo Sum'. Relatedly, these concepts will enable a discussion of Anonymous through their relations while doing justice to their complex existence as a multiple or wolf-pack without organisation. Lastly, I will take Lars Spuybroek's theory of the digital to demonstrate how Anonymous pushes against the boundaries of activism, by pushing it into the control of flows of information and employing an activism of constant change. In his book, Spuybroek discusses specifically Rushkin's notion of the Gothic, and partly relates this to the digital, by drawing upon two characteristics of the Gothic that are formulated by Rushkin: changefulness and savageness. These concepts are particularly useful to understand the platform that Anonymous uses to perform its actions or the locality of its activism.

### **Anonymous as a Multiple**

In his book *Genesis*, Michel Serres focuses on the multiple<sup>27</sup>, which is a useful term to discuss Anonymous as non-hierarchical and non-organised. By referring to Anonymous as not an organisation, I mostly refer to the fact that they do not have any hierarchies or structures that organise them (as in the Deleuzian conceptualization of the Body without Organs as I will demonstrate later in this chapter), however, the term 'organisation' can of course be interpreted in broader terms. For instance, the fact that Anonymous has a certain appearance (the Guy Fawkes mask), a certain collective identity of anonymity, creates a public image of Anonymous that does give them the appearance of an organisation. Additionally, they have a clear medium through which they communicate their activism: online environments, which in some manner localize them as an organisation. However, their image is something they experiment with, experimenting with anonymity and activism, not necessarily something that structures them. The internet is also a space they use freely, but in a manner that it becomes imbued and constantly changing in meaning due to its intra-actions with social issues, and hence cannot be a place that structures or organizes them. Furthermore, they do not have one clear objective or organisation in terms of leaders, as Alex Gekker points to, it is hard to capture Anonymous within the borders of a definition that gives them a clearly defined, bordered identity, which is also embedded in their motto: "We are legion" which signifies the collapse of multiple identities into one, yet disappears as a collective when attempting to attach it to one individual.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Michel Serres, *Genesis*, trans. by Geneviève James and James Nielson (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995).

<sup>28</sup> Alex Gekker, "Legionnaires of Chaos: 'Anonymous' and Governmental Oversight of the Internet," yet unpublished.

In his text, Serres argues that ‘we’, humans, want organisation, are fascinated by unity, creating principles, systems and numbers.<sup>29</sup> As such, it might be tempting to capture multiples into unities, systems; to capture Anonymous as an organised structure with clear members, leaders, offices etcetera. However, Serres argues against this and wants to let the multiple escape organisation:

“Sea, forest, rumor, noise, society, life, works and days, [are] all common multiples; we can hardly say they are objects, yet require a new way of thinking. I’m trying to think the multiple as such, to let it waft along without arresting it through unity, to let it go, as it is, as its own pace”.<sup>30</sup>

In other words, the multiple is something that escapes the borders reason wants to impose upon it.<sup>31</sup> In Serres’ terms, the forest disappears when you pick out one tree.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Anonymous consists of many individuals, all with distinct intentions, goals and desires, yet when you pick out one individual, this individual will not be Anonymous, neither will one operation nor one Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack define Anonymous. In this manner, Anonymous deterritorializes its protest; in contrast to famous protest organisations like the Civil Rights Movement, there are no individuals that can be said to represent Anonymous or be hold responsible for it. Though the U.S. government does make an effort to arrest Anonymous members,<sup>33</sup> taking one member away does not eliminate the group. Specifically because Anonymous has no leaders, as every tree in the forest is equally important to make it a forest, there is not one person in the multiple that holds the power to eliminate Anonymous. Nonetheless, every individual has the potentiality to become an Anonymous member.

To understand Anonymous as a multiple and how this relates to their activism centring on information, I will draw upon Deleuze’s and Guattari’s discussion of Freud’s Wolf-Man. Freud had a patient he could not ‘cure’, because he treated him as a unity, while as Deleuze and Guattari indicated, this patient, the Wolf-Man, was not one, but a multiplicity: a pack of wolves.<sup>34</sup> Before delving into multiplicity and the Wolf-Man, it is valuable to first discuss in which body a multiple or multiplicity can take place, and Deleuze and Guattari give a useful notion to work with: the Body without Organs, which will simultaneously explain why it is limiting to call Anonymous an organisation as it is not governed by structuring organs.

The Body without Organs is a fluid principle, in which the body is an attempt at being constantly open to experimentation, to being undefinable and to constantly change, but to remain some continuity

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<sup>29</sup> Michel Serres, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Michel Serres, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Michel Serres, 5-6.

<sup>32</sup> Michel Serres, 5-6.

<sup>33</sup> Coleman, 401-402.

<sup>34</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 30.

(some organs) in order for change to be possible.<sup>35</sup> In the following quotation Deleuze and Guattari explain first the three strata that govern the Body with Organs. Strata in this context can be understood as resting points of organization from which further experimentation can take place.<sup>36</sup> After discussing the strata of the Body without Organs (BwO), Deleuze and Guattari describe how the Body without Organs is an attempt at resisting these organising practices or resting points:

“The surface of the organism, the angle of signifi-ance and interpretation, and the point of subjectification or subjection. You will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body – otherwise you’re just depraved. You will be signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted – otherwise you’re just a deviant. You will be a subject, nailed down as one, a subject of the enunciation recoiled into a subject of the statement – otherwise you’re just a tramp. To the strata as a whole, the BwO opposes disarticulation (or *n* articulations) as the property of the plane of consistency, experimentation as the operation on that plane (no signifier, never interpret!), and nomadism as the movement (keep moving, even in place, never stop moving, motionless voyage, desubjectification).”<sup>37</sup>

The three great strata, or organising principles, are organism, signifi-ance, and subjectification, put differently, the articulation or image of the organism, to attribute or contain a meaning or definition (translated from French signifi-ance means ‘to have meaning’), and the becoming of a subject. In other words, if you are an organised body you will have an appearance (you will articulate your body), you will attribute meaning to yourself and others, and you will be in a process of making yourself a subject constantly. The Body without Organs instead opposes those definers and embraces experimentation with the organism, signifi-ance and subjectification. Furthermore, it will never stand still, constantly attempting to explore other territories. In sum, the Body without Organs is about getting rid of exterior organisers, to experiment with a resistance against having meaning, the articulation of the body and the attribution of meaning to oneself and others.

Likewise, Anonymous resist the three strata of the Body without Organs: organism, signifi-ance and subjectification. They experiment with a clear body or appearance, by taking an appearance of anonymity; they experiment with what they mean, by only being defined immanently in their relations, in their operations; they experiment with having no clear organisation, no organs, no hierarchies, and no subjectification. Anonymous, hence, could be a body striving to get rid of its organs that constantly reinvents itself. As such, Anonymous again defies a form of activism in which certain individuals stand as an example or as leaders of their actions. Interestingly, while they play with information to define others, they experiment with the information that could define them.

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<sup>35</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP*, 186.

<sup>36</sup> Adrian Parr, *The Deleuze Dictionary*, revised edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 84.

<sup>37</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP*, 185.

Furthermore, Anonymous' actions do not serve to one goal, or even have a bigger end goal in mind. As is showcased in Brian Knappenberger's *We are Legion: The Story of the Hacktivists* (2012) documentary about Anonymous, Anonymous started with trolls on the internet, and did not start off as a political, activist multiple, but rather as a random collection of people with random actions to entertain others. To a certain extent, Anonymous is still this: a random collection of people performing random actions, only now not purely for entertainment but to attack those they feel threaten their values and with a preference to play with information. But what their values are is quite unknown, apart from a love for freedom of the free spread and availability of information, while simultaneously limiting the freedom of others online: a complex duality that becomes apparently clear in their 'wars' on IS, scientology and on Stratfor (see chapter three). The war on IS is mostly about pushing IS outside the spaces of the internet, by delegitimizing them, as IS would not respect the freedom of speech Anonymous prefers on the internet.<sup>38</sup> In the case of scientology, the threats of lawsuits for sharing a video of Tom Cruise, lead to an obstruction by Anonymous of the information flows of scientology.<sup>39</sup> Their methods, their actions and their 'members' can conflict and are not easily described under one motive, one appearance, one articulation, though momentary strata may appear as resting points, and Anonymous seemingly might have organisation, subjectification and signifiante, to afterwards experiment with those expectations. In chapter three, I will discuss how the Guy Fawkes' mask fulfils a position of signifiante and subjectification, while simultaneously also embodying experiment with organisation as an anarchic symbol.

Especially because Anonymous is not one, it is difficult to tie Anonymous to one ideology: Anonymous is a pack of wolves that rages war with as weapon information. The fact that they constantly reinvent themselves could be seen as a constant exploration of the playing field, to look for possibilities for 'winning', or in Anonymous' context, for intra-actions with information, and to use that playing field to its maximum potential they look at boundaries that close off flows of information and attempt to break those barriers (such as in the case of the Stratfor hack, see chapter two).

The Wolf Man is also a Body without Organs, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the Wolf Man is not a singularity, but inhibited by multiplicities.<sup>40</sup> The Wolf Man might help to further clarify how Anonymous can be one and a multiple at the same time and how this existence-as-multiple informs their activism. The chapter on the Wolf Man by Deleuze and Guattari describes how psychoanalysis fails to understand the Wolf Man as it treats it as singular rather than as a multiplicity. The Wolf Man

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<sup>38</sup> Kelly-Ann Mills, "Brussels attacks: Anonymous declares war on ISIS in chilling video vowing 'we will find you'," *Mirror* 23 Mar. 2016, [www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/brussels-attacks-anonymous-declares-isis--7615029](http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/brussels-attacks-anonymous-declares-isis--7615029); Callum Borchers, "Operations Isis: Anonymous member discusses how group is waging war on militant group," *The Independent*, 28 Nov. 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/operation-isis-anonymous-member-reveals-how-they-are-waging-war-on-the-militant-group-a6752831>.

<sup>39</sup> Patrick Barkham, "Hackers declare war on Scientologists amid claims of heavy-handed Cruise control," *The Guardian*, 4 Feb. 2008, [www.theguardian.com/technology/2008/feb/04/news](http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2008/feb/04/news).

<sup>40</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP*, 30-34.

chapter might help to understand how it would be limiting to tie Anonymous to a 'one' but how Anonymous can still be analysed, yet this time as a multiplicity, rather than as an individual.

As Deleuze and Guattari indicate in their analysis of the Wolf Man, I do not want to make the mistake of psychoanalysis/Freud who constantly addressed the father/the mother/the anus/the individual, instead of recognising that the Wolf Man is not one, but one part of many, and hence can never be reduced to a father or the individual. I will unpack the following quotation to clarify the latter: "Lines of flight or of deterritorialization, becoming-wolf, becoming-inhuman, deterritorialized intensities: that is what multiplicity is. To become wolf or to become hole is to deterritorialize oneself following distinct but entangled lines".<sup>41</sup> The first sentence describes the process of getting rid of organisation, of deterritorialization of pursuing desire and not be defined by the singularity of organs. In continuation with the latter, becoming wolf is in the second sentence related to becoming hole which means to again deterritorialize oneself but by *entangled* lines.

To understand entanglement it might be wise to draw briefly upon Barad here, who has discussed entanglements extensively. To be entangled is by Barad defined as to "not simply [...] be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence".<sup>42</sup> Becoming wolf/hole is, thus, to get rid of organisation but to still exists in relation to other bodies, even more extreme, as not being able to contain an existence without being entangled with others. As wolves live in packs, the Wolf Man is an entangled multiplicity: a wolf without clear organizing structures, but with an existence that is always depending on its pack. Anonymous is in that sense a wolf pack as well, no clear organizing structures, and dependent on its network of individuals, its entanglements for its existence. Furthermore, Anonymous manifests its protests through its entanglements with various individuals, activists, hackers, but also computers, organisations, governments and activists groups. Specifically, the information that flows between these individuals and is drawn from the knowledge and skills of the various members of Anonymous that are internationally attempting to find information they deem everyone should know about, or prevent organisations they deem to be preventing free speech in general (IS, Scientology) to use the platform of online spaces Anonymous uses so freely. As a wolf-pack they hunt for ways to play with the limits that are set to information.

For instance, in the case of the Stratfor hack (see chapter two), only the combination of individuals who hacked the global intelligence company Stratfor and journalists who pulled the hacked information from obscure platforms and translated a large data set into articles makes it possible for

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<sup>41</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP*, 36.

<sup>42</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), IX.

Anonymous to affect people's perception on Stratfor and on what kind of information global intelligence companies sell to governments around the world. As such, Anonymous is implicated in a web of entanglements between all the individuals that form the multiple to be able to give the information it acquires potentiality, even upon companies such as Stratfor to be able to perform their actions. In the following paragraph, I will further delve into how Anonymous exists through the relations it has with the world.

### **The Multiple Anonymous without Organs Intra-acts in its Entanglements**

In order to still be able to discuss Anonymous without enforcing a system upon it, I will use the concept intra-action by Barad which instead of focusing on creating essences and definitions to understand our world, draws upon the relations bodies have towards each other and themselves to comprehend Anonymous. In other words, by using the term intra-action, I will do justice to the entangled wolf-pack Anonymous, rather than forcing the pack to be an individual as the psychoanalyst would do. Barad will particularly be returning in the final chapter, where her notion of intra-action and performativity will prove to be essential to discuss Anonymous' relations to governments, societies, companies: the State.

In her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway* Barad describes intra-action as follows:

“The neologism ‘intra-action’ *signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*. That is, in contrast to the usual ‘interaction,’ which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. It is important to note that the ‘distinct’ agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, *agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don't exist as individual elements.*”<sup>43</sup>

In other words, entities do not arise from their own essence or their thinking (there is no ‘cogito, ergo sum’), but they arise from their entanglements with one another. As such, every entity, be it a human, stone, white rabbit, wolf, sea or tree, only exists in relation to other entities and cannot exist separate from those entanglements. Similarly, Anonymous does not exist separately from their actions and entanglements with the institutions they protest against; they need to draw flows of information from others to perform their protest.

Putting Barad's notion of intra-action in a different perspective, Gregory Bateson would call Anonymous part of ecological/cybernetic systems and as having an immanent mind, something that is constantly shaped and reshaped by its environment, while simultaneously also shaping and reshaping that environment. In this case, this relation is mainly based on the spreading, retrieving and managing

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<sup>43</sup> Emphasis from original, Barad, 33.

access to flows of information. To illustrate his argument of the immanent mind, Bateson gives an example of a man felling a tree:

“Consider a man felling a tree with an axe. Each stroke of the axe is modified or corrected, according to the shape of the cut face of the tree left by the previous stroke. This self-corrective (*i.e.*, mental) process is brought about by a total system, tree-eyes-brain-muscles-axe-stroke-tree; and it is this total system that has the characteristics of an immanent mind.”<sup>44</sup>

Every entity constantly shapes and is shaped by the relations it has, and does not pre-exist those relations. Anonymous is also constantly shaped and re-shaped by its relation to media, law and society. Thus, throughout this thesis, one might obtain a glimpse of the system in which Anonymous is involved immanently, constantly shaped and re-shaped by each Op, hack, and action, each piece of information with which they intra-act. Anonymous is specifically imbued in relations considering the access to and spreading of information by which they are constructing an image of what they are, and simultaneously create images of others: Anonymous-hacks-activists-information-media-law are all imbued in an ecology where all the relations constantly shape and reshape Anonymous, while Anonymous also shapes and reshapes the State (see chapter 3), law (see chapter 2) and activism by making their relations mostly about flows of information. In conclusion, Anonymous cannot be caught into one definition, but only be further understood by drawing upon the elaborate net of relations in which they engage.

As Coleman indicates in her book on Anonymous, this dispersed identity is part of their tactic to not be caught by the systems of law internationally and nationally, it is a survival tactic to for instance constantly switch user names and evade any talking about their individual identities among themselves and to others: it is a good tactic that levels the playing fields.<sup>45</sup> In other words, every member of Anonymous tries to really be anonymous to prevent potential prosecution. Hiding behind usernames, in anonymity, they can continue to bend and break the borders of social rules, sparking debates on security measurements and privacy, challenging authorities, law and companies, while avoiding prosecution. The web allows them to take action, to make statements without leaving their homes. They in a manner attempt to cheat sentences, court cases, by hiding their faces under a singular mask and name.

In the documentary *We are Legion* several (former) members of Anonymous, and academic Coleman, reflect upon project Chanology in which they engaged in a ‘war’ with Scientology. This example will show how Anonymous works as an immanent mind and multiple. As said previously, project Chanology started with a video of Tom Cruise, famous member of scientology, posted by scientology

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<sup>44</sup> Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (New Jersey and London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1987), 323.

<sup>45</sup> Coleman, 404-406.

on their private channels that quickly went viral as Tom Cruise makes an appearance as if he is on drugs, or at least hysterically laughing and talking nonsense.<sup>46</sup> The video was ridiculed online and soon all the videos that were reposted on pages were disappearing as the church of scientology threatened to sue websites for reposting the video without their permission.<sup>47</sup> Members of Anonymous got notice of this and were upset with scientology for censoring this use of the video and soon started to repost the Tom Cruise video everywhere online, and overloading the scientology website with DDoS attacks and scientology phone lines by simply constantly calling them.<sup>48</sup> Eventually, this led to protests on the streets in front of scientology churches, where all the members wore Guy Fawkes mask to protect themselves against potential suits they could expect from scientology (as it is famous for suing any critics of scientology).<sup>49</sup> During this protest (the documentary shows images of it) many held up protest boards with texts similar to “Scientology is a cult!”, “A corporation should not own a religion and its followers”, “Don’t worry we’re from the internet”. Due to this event, Anonymous’ members became aware of the international scope of their multitude, many showing up across the globe where scientology churches were located. Functioning immanently they were able to create a large global protest against scientology.

This action by Anonymous’ shows very literally what Anonymous’ activism and their immanence is about. First, Scientology posted a video, this is the tree. Second, Anonymous had an online confrontation with scientology over the access to information, or in this case a video of a disillusioned Tom Cruise, this is the swing of the axe on the tree and the responses of the tree to the cuts, which determined the following actions. Third, they get into action by blocking any possible access to information on scientology. Fourth, they draw attention to the fact they are not just a small group of nerds sitting in a basement, but an international movement of a wide variety of individuals that all speak for Anonymous together by going on the streets. Fifth, they used a tactic of anonymity in combination with a multitude of people blocking scientology’s information flows which appeared to be a tactic that scientology did not know what to do with. Anonymous cheated in the game scientology played. Scientology was a tree that needed to be cut down, and Anonymous replied with distinct, determined strokes. This example shows how Anonymous is immanently involved in protest, only reacting to what happens, not necessarily with a predetermined goal, but a process of action and reaction, that goes beyond just a simple thesis – antithesis, but was involved in a system of scientology-video-online trolls-information blocking-physical protest etcetera. Furthermore, though some Anonymous’ members were arrested, their arrest could not stop Anonymous as a whole, showcasing as well the power of the wolf-pack.

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<sup>46</sup> Aleteuk, “Tom Cruise Scientology Video – (Original Uncut)”, *Youtube* 17 Jan. 2012.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFBZ\\_uAbxS0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFBZ_uAbxS0)

<sup>47</sup> Knappenberger, *We Are Legion*, 2012.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*



### **Anonymous as a Cheater**

As Anonymous is hard to grasp in essences or categorizations, another method has to be found to further an understanding of their practices and existence. Using a new materialist conceptualization of cheating in digital games, drawing upon Deleuze, Barad and Bateson among others, cheating as a distinct kind of movement of rule-breaking and fixing, could be a useful manner to do justice to Anonymous as an intra-active multiple, mainly existing because of its relations to other bodies, rather than by a clear organisational structure. In what follows below, I will draw on one of the first theorists of play, Johan Huizinga, and Julian Kücklich's work on using cheating in academic research within game studies. I use games and play here to illustrate a certain mode of thinking and moving of Anonymous and the manner they play with the rules of law, media and the State, rather than limiting it to the specifics of a game of chess, or the specificity of particular videogames.

Throughout this thesis, games and play are used in a more fluid sense than how it is usually conceptualized in game studies, and draws more upon the manner in which Deleuze, for instance, uses games in his thought. However, some game theory on cheating is fruitful to understand the particular manner in which Anonymous performs its relations to the State, rules, boundaries, law and society as an immanent mind and multitude.

The strict categorizing of play in one of the first theoretical accounts of play by Huizinga, in which he argues that play is not part of ordinary life and is essentially immaterial, misfits the fluidity and materiality of games that I will argue for throughout this thesis subliminally.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, his conception of cheating as breaking the rules, but not the game, is useful to understand how Anonymous moves as a cheater. As was briefly hinted at in the apropos by Warren, when Huizinga talks about cheating, he makes a distinction between the spoil-sport and the cheat. The spoil-sport trespasses and ignores the rules to such an extent that play is no longer possible (the spoil-sport is the player who throws away the board), instead the cheater still plays along, but manipulates and transgresses the rules in such a way that the game is playing out differently but is still played.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, Huizinga argues that cheaters are often more accepted than spoil-sports and sometimes even praised for their innovative minds.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Anonymous has threatened by its action to have the power to be the spoil-sport by erasing information in a similar manner as happens in the television series *Mr. Robot* (on which I will elaborate in chapter 3) yet as for now has functioned mostly as a

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<sup>50</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, original date of publication: 1938 (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1950). See for instance on page 3, "for whatever else play is, it is not matter" and on page 7, "The play-concept must always remain distinct from all the other forms of thought in which we express the structure of mental and social life."

<sup>51</sup> Huizinga, 11-12.

<sup>52</sup> Huizinga, 12.

cheater, bending and transgressing rules but still not destroying the game in which it partakes: society, media, law, banks or the institutions that structure the everyday.

Anonymous is hard to define and so is cheating as Kücklich indicates in his paper on cheating as a methodological tool. In this paper, he states that cheating in digital games is a term for a variety of practices of which some are closely related but others are widely dispersed.<sup>53</sup> For instance, sometimes cheating is possible within the framework developers have offered to gamers, such as cheats that are embedded in the code. However, mods or modifications to the game space made by others can go beyond developers' intentions. Additionally, (online) multiplayer games add a whole layer of social and collaborative definitions of what is cheating and what is not.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, Kücklich argues cheating raises various questions about games that need to be addressed such as textual fluidity, rule-bounded-ness and authorship.<sup>55</sup> Anonymous raises similar questions about the location of activism, the authorship of activism, and the rules of society on the disclosure of information, as they use, as will be explored in chapter two, a tactic that specifically the law system is not yet adjusted to.

Apart from the latter, similar to Anonymous, cheaters do not want to be caught cheating, because, as Mia Consalvo indicates throughout her book on cheating, cheating can have consequences, such as being blocked from accessing the game.<sup>56</sup> Anonymous similarly does not want to be caught and hides behind a single mask of anonymity, and as indicated in the above, hides behind distinct user names online, as a survival tactic.<sup>57</sup>

In order to conceptualize Anonymous' cheating activism further, I will discuss Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of chess and go, which will help to understand the manner in which I perceive cheating in digital game play: as a mode of thinking and acting. This conceptualization of cheating will hint at reasons for why, as appears in the next chapter, law fails to grasp the extent of Anonymous' actions. Furthermore, it shows how the randomness of Anonymous' cheating could still lead to change or could at least challenge some of the fixated moves of the State, or law.

### **Playing Chess with Anonymous: Playing Go to Cheat**

Deleuze and Guattari use the example of chess and go to talk about different kinds of movements, the movement of the State (chess) and the movement of the war machine (go). Hence, though both are games, in this opposition between movements, the movement of the game Go is most reminiscent of

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<sup>53</sup> Julian Kücklich, "Homo Deludens: Cheating as a Methodological Tool in Digital Games Research," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 13.4 (2007): 355.

<sup>54</sup> Kücklich, 356.

<sup>55</sup> Kücklich, 357.

<sup>56</sup> Mia Consalvo, *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007).

<sup>57</sup> Coleman, 402.

how cheaters, and Anonymous, move. In result, I want use chess as an example of fair play and go as an example of cheating.

On chess, Deleuze and Guattari say the following: “Chess pieces are coded; they have an internal nature and intrinsic properties from which their movements, situations, and confrontations derive”.<sup>58</sup> Chess is a game of organisation in which each piece has movements and positions that are predetermined. In contrast, the pieces in Go are differently defined: “Go pieces are elements of a nonsubjectified machine assemblage with no intrinsic properties, only situational ones”.<sup>59</sup> Go pieces are each the same, but connote their meaning from the moment their placed in relation to other pieces. go pieces are entangled, intra-actional multiples, while chess pieces are singularities. When chess goes to war it is a structural one, when go goes to war it is one without battle lines, but with *pure strategy*, the movement is not one directional or springs from one location but is seemingly without aim and can spring up from every location.<sup>60</sup>

Similarly, a cheater relates its action to the game context, plays with its rules, not necessarily to win, but also to push the boundaries of the game, to explore its space differently than its structure imposes to find the ultimate strategy. As such, cheating is similar to playing go against someone who plays chess. The MTV fantasy series *Teen Wolf* (2011-current) illustrates this opposition quite clearly. One of the characters, Stiles, discovers the difference between chess and go on first hand when he attempts to defeat a fox spirit by playing chess, while all along the fox was playing a distinct game, go. As the fox was playing go he was able to move entirely randomly, constantly surprising Stiles, until Stiles threw the board away and turned into the spoil sport, which allowed him to expel the evil spirit. Stiles eventually did not learn to play along, but simply destroyed the fox by no longer playing his game. Anonymous also moves randomly as the fox and surprises with their random actions: from IS, environment, Ferguson, to scientology. However, there is a difference between the fox and Anonymous. Anonymous is not an individual player as the fox is, but embodies the many go pieces on a board: take one away and others will turn up elsewhere. In sum, the game between Stiles and the fox, shows that at one point the State, Stiles, has to adopt and learn to play the game differently, as such showing that Anonymous’ tactic could be leading to real change, unless the State decides to throw the entire game away.

While fair players in videogames move according to the inscribed rules and the social rules, cheaters will push against the programmed rules and the social codes to find the best strategy. For instance, in online multiplayer shooters ‘camping’ is widely frowned upon. Camping is to take in one tactical

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<sup>58</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP*, 411.

<sup>59</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP*, 411.

<sup>60</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP*, 353.

position and ‘camp’ there to shoot, from a distance, everyone who approaches. Most consider this to be a ‘too easy’ win. However, one could also say that by moving differently (in this case moving hardly), the cheater has found the best tactic and changes the game, and forces players to move differently with her. Additionally, this change in behaviour could also make the game no longer enjoyable and consequently lead to better designs that will make camping difficult in the maps that will be developed for future games. Playing games by cheating is playing go when the digital game inscribes chess, moving randomly, while structure is imposed. As such, we can return to Warren’s definition of cheating as conceptualized in the apropos as using new strategies and explore strategies that force the game to change. Anonymous as a go player is using new strategies, using flows of information to get in formation, and, as will appear in the next chapter, this is already making law scholars think about the laws considering cybercrime: it might change the game and even broaden the ways we currently think of protest or activism.

Additionally, I briefly want to link chess and go to flows of information. At the beginning of chess all the pieces are already on the board, with go there are no pieces on the board. Consequently, if we see the chess pieces as guardians of information: institutions, companies, governments, and the go pieces as blocks of information, at first it would seem as if chess has the overhand, but chess has no means of effectively eliminating the go pieces that slowly take over the board by placing information strategically, enclosing existing structures, chess pieces, with information. Slowly, if the State, or Stiles, does not realize he is not playing the same game, the fox will lay bare the entire territory of organising structures. Anonymous’ actions are tiny go pieces that have the potential to grow slowly. Every piece of go-information gets in formation.

### **The Digital**

This game of go has a specific locality, where the location of a go piece achieves meaning from its position to other go pieces. To discuss Anonymous’ locality, I will discuss Spuybroek’s conceptualization of the digital in relation to the Gothic. Though called the digital, the digital is not necessarily limited to solely online communities. The digital can be understood broader, and as Anonymous as a multiple is hard to tie to a specific location (they do not have a headquarters), a fluid definition of on what kind of locality their actions take place might be helpful. First, I will relate the digital to the Gothic by looking at the characteristics of Rushkin’s Gothic that Spuybroek discusses. Afterwards, the movement of actions in the digital will be discussed by looking at the manner in which the Gothic creates movement. Lastly, I will incorporate the latter two aspects of the Gothic into a conceptualization of the digital as the space in which Anonymous’ moves: the playing field.

According to Spuybroek three characteristics are most central to Ruskin's conceptualization of the Gothic: savageness, changefulness and rigidity.<sup>61</sup> The first characteristic of the gothic is savage, the savage aspect of the Gothic is the influence the workmen have on its shape, and how their mistakes and decisions will determine its appearance.<sup>62</sup> In other words, savageness is the manner in which all individuals participating in the locality of the digital determine its appearance that hence constantly changes. The second characteristic, changefulness, does not refer to these changes by the workmen, but rather to how change is imbued in the design of the Gothic by the architects; every window, rib, and arch promotes change.<sup>63</sup> Spuybroek shows, by discussing, among other examples, the manner in which a rose window is constructed how this changefulness has two variabilities: the manner in which each figure can be different from another, and how all these different figures can be combined into a larger whole to create a wide range of new figures.<sup>64</sup> In result, both the smallest figure and the biggest form have an enormous impact on the entirety of the figure and constantly change in relation to one another. Changefulness is the design of the digital and how in its design the smallest change can lead to an entire new design, and, consequently, how every decision about the construction of the digital leads to distinct shapes and movements in the digital.

The final characteristic Spuybroek deems most relevant for the description of the Gothic is rigidity: "Gothic as an active form of support and transfer of loads rather than a simple form of resisting forces".<sup>65</sup> According to Spuybroek, while savageness and changefulness are part of the Gothic, this does not mean the Gothic is not rigid.<sup>66</sup> In other words, the Gothic is, in fact, capable of sustaining and transmitting loads, or ideas, rather than through changefulness simply resisting any rigidness, or thought. Exactly by being rigid, changefulness and savageness become possible. The rose window is a rigid structure, but within that rigid structure, figures and forms have the opportunity to move even towards the ribs of the church, and taking an entire building into its frame by its many configurations of figure and form.

Spuybroek argues that this fundamental changefulness and variability of all figures that are part of the Gothic plus the fact that they are all relational deems the Gothic digital:

"[c]hanges in a figure occur in relation to another figure with which it crosses, merges, or collides; a wide spectrum of effects flows from this collective behavior of figures. This dynamic, interactive relationship between figure and configuration is at the conceptual heart of Ruskin's remark about 'millions' and the 'infinite number' of variations. A figure is a formal

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<sup>61</sup> Lars Spuybroek, *The Sympathy of Things: Ruskin and the Ecology of Design* (Rotterdam: V2\_Publishing, 2012), 16.

<sup>62</sup> Spuybroek, 13-14.

<sup>63</sup> Spuybroek, 14.

<sup>64</sup> Spuybroek, 20.

<sup>65</sup> Spuybroek, 15.

<sup>66</sup> Spuybroek, 15.

organization of variable points, not a fixed form. The organization is fixed, but not the form.

[...] This is not almost but exactly how the digital is defined today".<sup>67</sup>

The Gothic is hence about a constant set of variations possible in a rigidity that flows from organisation and according to Spuybroek, this is exactly what the digital entails: an infinite number of variations within a non-fixed organisation.

The digital is the playing field of Anonymous in which through actions, hacks, digital sit-ins, they attempt to sometimes change the smallest bit of a figure to change the bigger figure, and sometimes change the bigger figure to change the smallest figure. In the chanology project, the smallest figure, a viral Tom Cruise video leads to the branching out towards an action against a much bigger figure, scientology. The digital is not so much a location as a square, or a building, but it is the movement that Anonymous partakes in that is marked by changefulness and savageness. Anonymous is one of the workers building the Gothic body letting the design guide them in decisions and mistakes. Anonymous is one of the architects, designers, that lets changefulness and variability flow through the Gothic. Institutions and governments, those 'attacked' by Anonymous do not quite understand the Gothic and attempt to grasp it in fixed rules such as international cybercrime rules (see chapter 2). At the same time, Gothic structures are part of the State's environment of the world as a whole and they somehow are forced to relate to Anonymous.

## **Conclusion**

In the above, we have seen how Anonymous as a multiple, a wolf-pack without organs, moves in the digital of changefulness and rigidity moving the smallest part in the Gothic rose window to change first the window, and consequently change the entire appearance of the church by the light suddenly showing a different angle. By employing a new and different technique by using the flows of information that constantly spread and change on the plane of the rose window, Anonymous has found a way to confront others with the game that they are playing. Anonymous 'fights' against those that limit 'their' free space via the digital, via occupying information channels and letting flows of information from those channels escape into the digital of changefulness, savageness and rigidity.

In the following chapters, I will set up Anonymous in a dialogue with cheating practices, to further an understanding of Anonymous and cheating simultaneously, while mainly focusing on the first. Furthermore, these chapters will give a more extensive perception on Anonymous' actions and how they relate to the cheating practices Anonymous employs.

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<sup>67</sup> Spuybroek, 22.

Anonymous and cheating in digital gameplay are not synonymous, setting them up in a dialogue with one another in the context of new materialist thinkers such as Barad, Deleuze, Bateson and game theorists will help to further an understanding of not only Anonymous in its multiplicity but also of cheating in digital game play, without making a moral or ethical judgement on either part. Likewise, Küchlich argues that using cheating as a methodology or tool for analysis will help to “identify blinds spots in our research perspectives and thus discover new avenues of inquire with regard to the phenomena we study”.<sup>68</sup> While here referring to games as the phenomena that are studied, this study will show that cheating could also be used as a tool for analysis outside the game space to understand a difficult to grasp entity such as Anonymous and to hopefully identify blind spots and new avenues of inquiry. Put differently, this research will, with the help of new materialist theories, rethink game theory of cheating from a relational/intra-active perspective to be able to use it for the analysis of contemporary complex social issues. Furthermore, by taking a new materialist perspective on games, this thesis will demonstrate the potential for using these philosophies to think through complex aspects, such as cheating, within game studies. Subliminally, this research will demonstrate how online, virtual spaces have ‘real’ and virtual impact on society and resistances to it.

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<sup>68</sup> Küchlich, 357.

## Chapter 2

## Anonymous and the Rules: Anonymous Cheats Law

WikiLeaks leaked stolen information from the U.S. government online.<sup>69</sup> The website wikileaks.org on which they published this information was attacked often by Denial of Service (DoS) attacks attempting to pull the website down, because of this WikiLeaks switched servers.<sup>70</sup> However, servers such as amazon.com expelled WikiLeaks from its services as a host, additionally, companies such as PayPal and MasterCard withdrew their services for facilitating the possibility to donate to WikiLeaks.<sup>71</sup> Companies did not want to be associated with the WikiLeaks project. In reaction to this, Anonymous started Operation Payback in which they attacked these companies with DDoS Attacks causing many sites to crash.<sup>72</sup> Anonymous did this to support the WikiLeaks project as it perceived the companies' actions as censorship.<sup>73</sup> Some saw these hacks considering wikileaks.org as the first digital war on information.<sup>74</sup> Others saw this war about the access to information online surrounding WikiLeaks as one of the most recent examples of protest online, in which various parties from different camps (pro or against WikiLeaks) battle to either block access to flows of information or spread flows of information (or by blocking spreading information on issues Anonymous considers important).<sup>75</sup> Some will call this an example of hacktivism.<sup>76</sup>

Noah C.N. Hamson discusses the tensions that currently exist in law considering hacktivism: in most Western countries hacktivism, or this activism online, is forbidden by law, but simultaneously these countries protect the right to protest due to the incorporation of the freedom of speech in their laws.<sup>77</sup> The international convention on cybercrime prescribes various rules to counteract hacking such as prohibitions on access to computers without permission, intercepting data without permission, interference of data without permission, intercepting information that the interceptor uses for its own financial benefit etcetera.<sup>78</sup> This convention aims to be a guide towards the establishment of domestic laws that will govern cybercrime locally.<sup>79</sup> However, the convention also states that these measures should be in line with the international agreements considering human and civil rights.<sup>80</sup> Hamson, consequently, argues the following:

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<sup>69</sup> Noah C.N. Hamson, "Hacktivism: A New Breed of Protest in a Networked World," *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review* 35.2 (2012): 511.

<sup>70</sup> Hamson, 511-513.

<sup>71</sup> Hamson, 513.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Hamson, 513-514.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Hamson, 511.

<sup>78</sup> Hamson, 522.

<sup>79</sup> Hamson, 524.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.



“those forms of hacktivism that are primarily expressive, that do not involve obtaining or exploiting illegal access to computers or networks for commercial advantage of financial gain, and that cause little or no permanent damage, should receive at least some protection as a legitimate form of protest”.<sup>81</sup>

As such, he argues that some forms of protest online by means of hacking should be allowed, though often, in for instance the United Kingdom, it seems, from Hamson’s argument, that there is yet little attention for considering some forms as hacking as a legitimate form of protest.<sup>82</sup> In sum, Hamson’s discussion shows how in law (as his paper is published in a law journal) actions like those of Anonymous, raise discussions on the locus of protest and whether the internet is a place where people should be able to protest. In this chapter, I will discuss how Anonymous cheats current laws, sometimes breaks them, sometimes challenges them and even could show some ‘bugs’ in the system of law considering hacktivism. As a case study, I will take Anonymous declaration of War on IS and discuss the court case against a hacker affiliated with Anonymous, Jeremy Hammond, and a journalist affiliated with Anonymous, Barrett Lancaster Brown in the context of the Stratfor hack.

### **The War on IS**

Anonymous’ war on IS initially started after the Charlie Hebdo attacks as OpCharlieHebdo, but was rebooted in several other operations such as OpParis, after the terrorist attacks on Paris on 13<sup>th</sup> of November 2015, and OpBrussels, after the terrorist attacks on Brussels on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2016.<sup>83</sup> After the Paris attacks, Anonymous declared war on IS, which meant publicizing and hacking IS websites, twitter and Facebook accounts in order to reveal their practices and secrets.<sup>84</sup> Anonymous indicates in a YouTube video that they oppose IS because of its censorship on its own citizens and (visiting) journalists.<sup>85</sup> However, they do not want or will not collaborate with the secret agents or intelligence contractors of the U.S. or other countries to counter IS because, as they argue in the video, it will only lead to more censorship.<sup>86</sup>

In their operations, Anonymous employs various tactics, some of them are conscious-raising: by providing information and publicizing it, Anonymous draws attention to various issues, such as Operation Death Eaters or operation Green Rights.<sup>87</sup> These conscious-raising ops are mainly about spreading information that others want to keep hidden: about their idea that the web should be a space

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<sup>81</sup> Hamson, 531-532.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Anony Mous, “OpISIS [PARIS] – Declared Cyber War Against ISIS,” *YouTube* 16 Nov. 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTId7oeQuKg>; Anonymous Official, “Elucidating #OpISIS and #OpTrump,” *YouTube* 16 Jan. 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ECT82UjG0x4>.

<sup>84</sup> Coleman, 403.

<sup>85</sup> Anonymous Official, “Elucidating #OpISIS and #OpTrump,”

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Coleman, 403-404.

for freedom of expression.<sup>88</sup> In this manner, Anonymous places go pieces around these organisations, enclosing them with information in attempt to remove them from the playing field or at least question their position in this playing field.

In contrast, their operations that comprise the war on IS are mainly about delegitimizing IS in that space. In result, their message is not as clear, it is not merely about the internet as a space for freedom of expression where information is readily available for everyone, but also about ideologies they oppose and prevent from using the internet as a space for freedom of expression, when that ideology inscribes censorship. Interestingly as well, the war on IS shows how Anonymous can have a similar target as the State, yet makes efforts, such as in the above mentioned YouTube video, to still distance themselves from the State and clearly positioning themselves as other than the State by putting an emphasis on the free flow of information. All in all, the war on IS as a case study will further clarify Anonymous' position towards the State's rules.

First of all, choosing to use the term 'War' evokes the idea of crossing the rules of declaring war. Normally only the State declares wars, on drugs, on terror etcetera, as Hardt and Negri point to when they argue that at the birth of modernity war became something that only the State or the sovereign could declare.<sup>89</sup> However, here Anonymous takes a militant position and declares a war that is only fought on computers, not only taking war into digital space, but also amounting to having a similar power as the State. In other words, Anonymous is not the State declaring war, thereby provoking the 'rules' of declaring war; by declaring war on IS, Anonymous suddenly claims to have this authority as well. Anonymous takes a position above the rules and cheats its way into power. By declaring war, Anonymous is intra-acting with the State, and both changes its own position as well as the position of the State. Put differently, Anonymous equals the playing field by positioning themselves as equal to the State by declaring war. Furthermore, as this war takes place in the digital, its changefulness and savageness or seemingly random movement and locality makes it impossible for the State to attack Anonymous as a whole. Additionally, it seems that due to this intra-action between State and Anonymous in declarations of war, what it means to go to war seems to change, as Anonymous pulls war into the digital and makes it one that is mainly concerned with flows of information.

However, what does war currently mean? The first definition given of war in the online Oxford dictionaries is "A state of armed conflict between different countries or different groups within a country", after this definition two subsequent definitions are given: "A state of competition of hostility between different people or groups," or "A sustained campaign against an undesirable situation or

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<sup>88</sup> Knappenberger. *We are Legion*. 2012.

<sup>89</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 5-6.

activity”.<sup>90</sup> In the first instance, war is directed at a battle between countries. However, currently, the wars that, at least, the U.S. is involved in seem to fall within the final category, namely a campaign against an undesirable situation: the war on terror and the war on drugs are examples of such a form of war. However, this war is not only fought at borders, but also internally, hence, a modernist definition of war as declared by a sovereign against another country might be hard to uphold here.

As seen in the previous chapter the digital is Gothic and characterized by savageness (the changes of the workers), changefulness (the fluidness of the design) and rigidity (the ability to support this change with rigid structures). To fight a war in the digital, one has to be prepared for unforeseen changes, as every little change can have a big effect, while every massive change can have no effect at all. Additionally, in this space of the digital and in combination with Anonymous’ activism, the acquisition and spread of flows of information becomes key in a ‘war’ as only the right way of putting the information online and on the right platforms might lead to a small impact that can slowly change the playing field and even let the rigid structures appear differently. Rather than fighting with drones and bombs, Anonymous attacks by manipulating, spreading and withdrawing information. In short, a digital war in the context of Anonymous’ activism that centres around information is not fought between countries with weapons and has not one tactic or goal but is fought with information. Furthermore, Anonymous’ digital wars are immanently fought in a cybernetic network: every swing of Anonymous’ information axe is imbued with the relations in which it takes place. In other words, the tactics and goals of the digital war are constantly changing depending on the intra-actions Anonymous has with the ‘enemy’. In this case, the war on IS was first about revealing social media accounts of IS and discredit their usage of online spaces by revealing their ‘secrets’ or by spreading their hidden flows of information, but after the Orlando attack, Anonymous reacted more specifically, as indicated before, by covering IS pages in LGBT pride images. Here again, the modernist idea of the sovereign declaring war does not seem to be applicable, as it is the intra-actional multiple Anonymous declaring war in the digital with information, which will react immanently, as a go player, rather than linearly as the State would with its chess pieces.

Relatedly, Hardt and Negri indicate that today this modern division of war as only taking place between sovereign states can no longer be upheld as civil, internal wars are waging.<sup>91</sup> They state that these internal, civil wars legitimize a state of exception in which the constitution and laws can be temporarily ignored, in order for a dictator or government to take extraordinary measures to protect the republic as the country is at ‘war’ (as the state of emergency or exception can only be declared in the

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<sup>90</sup> “Definition of *war* in English,” *Oxford Dictionaries*, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/war>.

<sup>91</sup> Hardt and Negri, 7.

context of clear threats to national security: when the country is at war).<sup>92</sup> A recent example of the state of exception put into action is after the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015, ever since and still today (28<sup>th</sup> of August 2016), France has been in a state of emergency, allowing the government to take actions without any laws interfering (they are in a state of war against terrorism).<sup>93</sup> However, this state of exception that is consistently continued means that France is in a constant state of war. This continuation of the state of exception in France after the Paris terrorist attacks exemplifies what Hardt and Negri are arguing:

“The constitutional concept of a ‘state of exception’ is clearly contradictory – the constitution must be suspended in order to be saved - but this contradiction is resolved or at least mitigated by understanding that the period of crisis and exception is brief. When crisis is no longer limited and specific but becomes a general omni-crisis, when the state of war and thus the state of exception become indefinite or even permanent, as they do today, then the contradiction is fully expressed, and the concept takes on an entirely different character”.<sup>94</sup>

What Hardt and Negri show in the above is the inherent contradiction in attempting to save a constitution that endorses democracy, while the state of exception allows for authoritarian or even dictatorial measures to be taken. Giorgio Agamben demonstrates the latter forcefully in his book on the state of exception by referring to the fact that the whole Third Reich was built upon a declaration of the state of exception.<sup>95</sup>

Furthermore, though the state of exception is meant to only exist on a short term period, currently states seem to be in a constant state of exception. This state of exception is not only literally endorsed in France, but as Hardt and Negri argue, is present in the way the U.S. rules currently as well.<sup>96</sup> On the basis of its idea of being the good republic, the good state, the U.S. claims a right to disobey international laws such as human rights, environmental laws, etcetera.<sup>97</sup> Subliminally, it seems as if Western states (again) put themselves on a pedestal of being ‘good’ states, to allow themselves to ignore international laws that should ensure the existence of ‘good’ states. Hardt and Negri imply in their text that the U.S. manner of acting entails that only ‘bad states’ need to obey laws, in contrast, ‘good’ states have the luxury of constantly being in a state of war, a state of exception, where laws and the constitution are temporally suspended and the government can make undemocratic decisions.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Hardt and Negri, 7.

<sup>93</sup> Pierre Alonso, Lilian Alemagna, Pascal Riché, Christian Rioux, Guillaume Ghampeau and Michel Soudais, “Dossier: Frankrijk in Nood,” *360: Het Beste uit de Internationale Pers*, trans. by Peter Bergsma, Henriëtte Aronds, Margreet de Boer, Tineke Funhoff, Nico Groen, Menno Grootveld, Nicolette Hoekmeijer, Frank Lekens, Marinette Susijn, Tess Visser, Annemie de Vries, Pieter Streutker, Dirk Zijlstra 5.94 (2016): 10-21.

<sup>94</sup> Hardt and Negri, 8.

<sup>95</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. by Kevin Attell (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>96</sup> Hardt and Negri, 8-9.

<sup>97</sup> Hardt and Negri, 8-9.

<sup>98</sup> Hardt and Negri, 8-9.

Likewise, when Anonymous declares a war, they oppose the State as the sole sovereign to disobey laws and the constitution; they claim this state of exception as well, therefore dismantling the sovereignty of the state and the idea of 'good' states and 'bad' states. They cheat by taking the position of the programmer of the game. Instead of the programmer of the game making all the rules and decisions, Anonymous has hacked into their code and now uses part of its language to justify its attacks on IS. Anonymous cheats by changing the game code. Anonymous takes the position of the sovereign, of the programmer, to manipulate flows of information of IS. As such, by taking over the game, finding a 'new' tactic to attack in the digital, Anonymous simultaneously pose the question whether the State's methods are most effective or whether the information activism of Anonymous is more effective as a 'war tool' than the actual bombs and drones the State employs. Anonymous reveals information and gets into action against ruling companies/governments/parties/ideologies by cheating, by changing the rules, the basic code of declaring a state of exception of having the luxury to suspend laws. Furthermore, Anonymous shows them a warfare that is not based on being a spoilsport that attempts to eliminate the playing field by completely discarding the opponent from the game, but instead employ a cheating tactic, using the digital as a manner to disrupt the online channels of IS as a powerful tool to prevent their organization. Anonymous is not about throwing the board away and destroying the game, but about implementing new tactics that challenge the rules by which the game is bound.

In other words, though Anonymous seems to tease the governments in this context, this information activism of Anonymous is not about overtaking a regime, as they will most likely will not be able to do so, but rather about interfering with the flows of information of that regime and thereby challenging the State. Additionally, by touching lightly upon a potential incapability of the State (to discredit IS digitally) or claiming a similar position as the State by taking an equal position as a declarer of war, or ignoring laws on cybercrime, they again balance on the border between activism and revolution. Just as cheating, it is not about creating an entirely new game, it is about making small adjustments by employing tactics the programmer/developer did not account for, by sometimes flirting with the position of the revolutionary. Hence, it is not about direct attacks that will undermine and overthrow a government, it is not a war, it is rather to reveal oppressive forces within society, be it companies that are polluting the world or officials that facilitate child sex trafficking. Anonymous' activism is not about a direct attack that destroys the government or a company, but is about revealing the hidden information or overlooked information to take a stance. By playing with information, and exactly by using the term war, they cheat, they deceive the State, the status quo, and change the meaning of war, by making that war against IS about controlling and distributing flows of information, not about destroying IS physically, but about discrediting their outlets of information: they make it digital. This

shows that Anonymous is not about physical attacks, drones and violence, but about playing with flows of information: information activism. Anonymous is the zerg rush the State is confronted with.

### **Cheaters declare War: the War Machine**

As explained in chapter one, cheaters play a game of go, of random movement, against the State's game of chess, of stratified movement. In this chapter, I will elaborate on the relation between the rules of the State and Anonymous, by discussing the relation between the State and War Machine that might seem as being in opposition, but actually function as a pair.<sup>99</sup>

The State defines itself by defining the war machine. By deeming the war machine stupid and unknowing, they define themselves as the way things are supposed to be.<sup>100</sup> As an example, Deleuze and Guattari describe how states deemed Genghis Khan as understanding nothing, because he did not understand the idea of the city, moving right through cities.<sup>101</sup> By defining Genghis Khan nomadic movement as a sign of ignorance or stupidity, the states showed their movement as static, and, hence, being defined by static forms of movement, like the movement in chess, while Others moved as Go. Consequently, "the State apparatus constitutes the form of interiority we habitually take as a model, or according to which we are in the habit of thinking".<sup>102</sup> In other words, the task of the State is to conserve, to create the norm, to maintain organs of power.<sup>103</sup> In contrast, the war machine is unorganised and has no stable powers for governance, but is a constantly changing entity: a pack, like Anonymous (see chapter one).<sup>104</sup>

Cheaters also move without clear direction, and are deemed to not understand the game, or at least to be ignorant about the rules of the game. The game world does not exist without hegemonic powers, without 'States' and, hence, cheating does not go unpunished. Mia Consalvo who has written extensively on cheating argues the following:

"it is crucial to keep in mind how power moves along those pathways, through individuals as well as industry professionals. Just as players exercise agency, they aren't doing so in a vacuum. Along the way, various industry elements work to constrain certain readings or activities, promoting certain ways of seeing gameplay and ways of playing that are valued over others".<sup>105</sup>

Playing videogames does not go without perceptions on how to play and how not to play imposed by the industry and other players. Companies that develop games themselves take extensive measures to

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<sup>99</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, ATP, 410.

<sup>100</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, ATP, 412.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, ATP, 412-413.

<sup>103</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, ATP, 413-416.

<sup>104</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, ATP, 416.

<sup>105</sup> Consalvo, *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 2.

counter cheating, but also external companies are specialised in countering cheating in videogames.<sup>106</sup> As cheating can imply players accessing code they should not have access to, or sometimes spoiling the experience of other players, it could potentially influence sales numbers negatively.<sup>107</sup>

Consalvo perceives cheating as deception, to illustrate her argument she gives the example of the Trojan horse: with deception, pretending to do something else than one is exactly doing, by cheating, the player gains an advantage on the opponent. She also indicates that often individuals who cheat or lie are looked upon, while in war this cheating is often valued or even necessary to overcome a powerful opponent as the Trojan Horse example also indicates.<sup>108</sup> Anonymous deceives as well, by using the language of the State, declaring war, and claiming their own state of exception they cheat their way into power.

Consalvo's research has shown that only few players cheat in multiplayer games, nonetheless, their actions have implications for other players, virtual worlds, and the game industry as a whole.<sup>109</sup> These implications vary and instead of just spoiling players' experiences it can also aid the developers of games. Consalvo describes cheating by means of glitches as helpful.<sup>110</sup> Glitches are mistakes the developers of the game have made.<sup>111</sup> For instance, the ability to sell and buy items infinitely at certain spots with a lot of profit, which, when discovered, makes for too easy money in the game, taking away the effort of acquiring this money is a glitch.<sup>112</sup> Often moderators discover these glitches when suddenly players acquire much more money in a relatively short time span or something unusual is happening in the manner players are progressing.<sup>113</sup> In result, the developers fix the glitch and the gameplay goes back to its 'normal' difficulty level for everyone. In this case, taking advantage of bad coding or mistakes by developers is cheating, but also helps to solve mistakes in the games, as this activity of cheating points out what is not working in the game. Similarly, the zerg rush showed what was not working in the video game *Starcraft*. Anonymous also shows glitches in the system, such as in the Stratfor hack in which they discovered this global intelligence security company did not encrypt credit card details of their customers, a serious glitch for an intelligence company that is expected to protect the information it wants to sell.<sup>114</sup>

Anonymous' actions are, just as cheaters, deemed unlawfully, which is shown by the fact that hundreds of Anonymous activists have been arrested throughout Europe, Australia, Asia and the

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<sup>106</sup> Consalvo, 129.

<sup>107</sup> Consalvo, 129.

<sup>108</sup> Consalvo, 5-6.

<sup>109</sup> Consalvo, 107.

<sup>110</sup> Consalvo, 114.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Costin Raiu, "Cyber-threat evolution: the past year," *Computer Fraud and Security* 3 (2012): 5.

Americas.<sup>115</sup> Among which were people who simply contributed their computer to facilitate a DDoS attack.<sup>116</sup> Currently, any form of hacking as a form of activism seems to be prohibited. As such, Anonymous' activists are deemed cheaters, deceivers, tricksters that spoil the game of the State or of companies as the only ones who can control flows of information. They function as Genghis Khan, moving in a territory of information to disorganise it, to confuse it, while the State (companies/governments) attempt to structure and control flows of information.

Anonymous is in a constant battle against rules and delineations, a war machine of flows of information: the game of go against the State's chess structures. In this manner, Anonymous shows glitches in the system, in the status quo: how social media facilitates IS recruitment, how companies can hide their environmentally harmful practices, how flows of money are attempted to be stopped to WikiLeaks, while those flows of money do go to radical websites such as the website of the Kux Kux Klan.<sup>117</sup> When a player refuses to play along the changefulness and savageness of the digital, Anonymous cheats to such an extent that it becomes for the other player particularly hard to play in that space. They deceive websites by letting them crash by millions of entries (DDoS attacks).<sup>118</sup> Currently, in the arrests there is no distinction made between the distinct forms of cheating Anonymous employs, simply cheating is deemed harmful, without looking at the potential benefits in showing glitches in the current system could have. Just as Kuchlich argues, as will appear from the following, cheaters raise questions on the game on textual fluidity, rule-bounded-ness and authorship.<sup>119</sup> Here Anonymous raises similar questions in the context of law and rules: how to interpret freedom of speech in the context of cybercrime legislation? Where do the laws on cybercrime end and those of freedom of speech begin? Who can you hold responsible for hacks performed by Anonymous? Only the hacker or also the messenger?

### **The Stratfor Hack: The Hacker and the Messenger**

First of all, it is very hard to gain access to the court case rulings on Anonymous members. However, I did succeed in obtaining one, almost complete, court case that relates to the Stratfor hack, in which information was stolen from the private provider of 'information analysis services' called Stratfor.<sup>120</sup> I hoped to be able to analyse both the court case of the hacker Jeremy Hammond and of the journalist Brown, to make a comparison between how a hacker and a messenger are treated by U.S. law. However, even though I called in the help of various law students and did obtain some documents

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<sup>115</sup> Coleman, 401.

<sup>116</sup> Coleman, 402.

<sup>117</sup> Coleman, 402-403; Knappenberger, *We are Legion*, 2012; Additionally, see for instance <https://www.kkkknights.com/donations/donations/>, where paypal still offers their services to make donations to the kux kux clan.

<sup>118</sup> Coleman, 402.

<sup>119</sup> Kuchlich, 357.

<sup>120</sup> United States District Court Southern District of New York, "United States of America versus Jeremy Hammond, Memorandum and Order," 12 Crim. 185 (LAP), 21 Feb. 2013.



relating to the Hammond case via their teachers, the court case in its totality seems impossible to be found.<sup>121</sup> As such in the case of hacker Hammond, I want to analyse some of the information that was put online both by newspapers and governmental websites on the Stratfor Hack, to obtain a general picture of what the Stratfor hack entailed and how the contrast between the manner of reporting the Stratfor Hack performs the differences in which the U.S. governmental institutions speaks of the people involved and how in contrast journalists discuss this event. Second, I will analyse the parts of the court case that I obtained of journalist Brown as a known former member of Anonymous, to see whether the proceedings of a journalist involved with Anonymous brings up distinct issues than the court case of a hacker involved with Anonymous.

First, the only document I could gain access to is an article published by the FBI on their website called “Six Hackers in the United States and Abroad Charged for Crimes Affecting Over One Million Victims”, which at the bottom refers with a link to the ‘original source’ but when clicked on sends the user to the homepage of the department of justice of the Southern District of New York, where the court cases seem untraceable and only press releases can be found.<sup>122</sup> In the press release of the FBI, several hackers who affiliate themselves with Anonymous are named: Ryan Ackroyd, Jake Davis, Darren Martyn, Donncha O’Cearrbhail, Hector Savier Monsegur and Jeremy Hammond, and the hacks they undertook, however their motivations for hacking are left untold. Similarly, in the press release of the department of justice, the reasons for the hacks in which various members of Anonymous participated are not named. The FBI article mainly focuses on the ‘victims’ of hacking, only briefly mentioning that some hacks were undertaken as a retaliation against an unfavourable portrayal of Anonymous, any political motivations are not mentioned in the article. These press releases on Anonymous’ members simplify Anonymous’ actions to: ‘these people are cheaters, they do not play according to the rules, and they should be caught and punished’.

One of the main reasons for the arrest of Hammond was his involvement in the hacks on intelligent security company Stratfor.<sup>123</sup> Most of the charges, four out of six, Hammond faced related to his involvement in the Stratfor hack charging him with conspiracy to hack, computer hacking, aggravated identity theft and conspiracy access device fraud.<sup>124</sup> As is reported in *The Guardian* by Pratap Chatterjee, due to this hack around 5 million internal Stratfor emails were leaked and many of their

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<sup>121</sup> I find it important to mention this, as it seems by other sources on the cases that these cases should be easy to find.

<sup>122</sup> Press Release New York Field Office, “Six Hackers in the United States and Abroad Charged for Crimes Affecting over One Million Victims,” *The Federal Bureau of Investigation* 2012, <https://www.fbi.gov/newyork/press-releases/2012/six-hackers-in-the-united-states-and-abroad-charged-for-crimes-affecting-over-one-million-victims>.

<sup>123</sup> Press Release New York Field Office, “Six Hackers in the United States and Abroad Charged for Crimes Affecting over One Million Victims.”

<sup>124</sup> United States District Court, Southern District of New York, “United States of America versus Jeremy Hammond, Memorandum and Order.”

security lacks were revealed.<sup>125</sup> However, the FBI article announcing Hammond's arrest, as discussed above, does not mention the reasons Hammond hacked Stratfor and why for instance "HAMMOND and his co-conspirators stole credit card information for approximately 60,000 credit card users and used some of the stolen data to make unauthorized charges exceeding \$700,000". This article does not mention these charges were donated to charities, or, as Chatterjee notes that the Stratfor hacks revealed the in general low quality of information they provided or how their monitoring of various activists groups provided sometimes even inaccurate information to governments and companies.<sup>126</sup> As such, the articles by the governmental organisations ignore the protest side of Anonymous' hacks that battle against the following of activists groups and selling their information to companies and governments. It seems governments and law enforcement only perceive Anonymous as an annoying cheater spoiling the game centring around controlling information and simply want to dispel Anonymous from that game. These organisations do not recognise that these actions also reveal glitches in the system, about the war machine shaking up the status quo, while subliminally referring to it, as Manhattan U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara statement further confirms:

"While he [Jeremy Hammond] billed himself as fighting for an anarchist cause, in reality, Jeremy Hammond caused personal and financial chaos for individuals whose identities and money he took and for companies whose businesses he decided he didn't like.

He was nothing more than a repeat offender cybercriminal who thought that because of his computer savvy he was above the law that binds and protects all of us – the same law that assured his rights in a court of law and allowed him to decide whether to admit his guilt or assert his innocence. Computer hacking is a very serious crime that violates the privacy and economic security of its victims and disrupts legitimate commerce. We will continue to make the prosecution and punishment of cybercriminals like Jeremy Hammond a top priority".<sup>127</sup>

Here, the U.S. attorney focuses on the method that is a criminal offense, without mentioning the activist goals this hack might had. Furthermore, he literally states Hammond is a cheater, as he describes Hammond as an individual who places himself above the rules, the law, but purely in a negative manner. Additionally, by judging Hammond by that law Hammond is forced back into the structures of the game, and again bound by those rules, which makes Hammond's information activism impossible.

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<sup>125</sup> Pratap Chatterjee, "WikiLeaks' Stratfor Dump Lifts Lid on Intelligence-Industrial Complex," *The Guardian* 28 Feb. 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2012/feb/28/wikileaks-intelligence-industrial-complex>.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Southern District of New York Press Release, "Manhattan U.S. Attorney Announces Guilty Plea Jeremy Hammond for Hacking into the Stratfor Website," *United States Department of Justice* 28 May 2013, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/manhattan-us-attorney-announces-guilty-plea-jeremy-hammond-hacking-stratfor-website>.

A court case against an Anonymous-member that I could find was the case against U.S. journalist and former Anonymous-member Barrett Lancaster Brown, who also appears in the documentary *We are Legion*. In 2011, he started Project PM, after Anonymous had revealed that HBGary Federal, an intelligence contractor, cooperated with Palantir and Berico Technologies to disrepute WikiLeaks.<sup>128</sup> The goal of Project PM is to facilitate collective research into private intelligence companies.<sup>129</sup> After the Stratfor hack, Brown posted from an Anonymous document-sharing platform the hyperlink referring to the documents retrieved during the Stratfor hack on Project PM's website.<sup>130</sup> On the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 2012, the FBI entered both Brown's and his mother's house looking for information on HBGary, Anonymous, Twitter, WikiLeaks etcetera.<sup>131</sup> On the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 2012, the FBI arrested him after he posted videos in which he threatened an FBI agent and his family because he wanted his property back.<sup>132</sup> In 2015, he was sentenced to prison for 63 months.<sup>133</sup> His case was covered in the press extensively as many journalists uttered concerns on the nature of his arrest, asking questions whether anyone could be arrested who spread information that was not retrieved legally.<sup>134</sup> Journalists, varying from Noam Chomsky to Glen Greenwald to the scholar Coleman, have expressed their support for Brown's case.<sup>135</sup> Below, I will give a brief overview of the court proceedings based on the court documents, to consequently delve into the controversy surrounding this court case.

While being investigated for involvement with Anonymous and WikiLeaks, Brown was charged with threatening an FBI agent online on twitter, YouTube etcetera, conspiracy to make publically available restricted personal information of an FBI agent and his children and retaliation against an FBI agent on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October 2012.<sup>136</sup> The most controversial charge came on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December 2012, when he was charged with traffic in stolen authentication features and possessing stolen credit card account numbers and authentication features for those credit cards and aggravated identity theft in relation to the Stratfor hack.<sup>137</sup> After these indictments, as Brown is a journalist, the U.S. government filed a gag order, as they were afraid it would be hard to find an objective, untainted jury with the media attention this court case was given, and in some cases the first amendment can be superseded to ensure a fair

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<sup>128</sup> "Project PM," *Free Barrett Brown*, <https://freebarrettbrown.org/project-pm/>.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> The United States District Court for the Northern District Court of Texas Dallas Division, "United States of America versus Barrett Lancaster Brown, Indictment" Case 3:12-cr-00413-B 4 Dec. 2012, 1-6.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> The United States District Court for the Northern District Court of Texas Dallas Division, "United States of America versus Barrett Lancaster Brown, Memorandum in Support of Defendant's Opposition to Government's Request for a Gag Order", 3:12-CR-317-L; 3:12-CR-413-L; 3:13-CR-030-L, 1-13.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> "Individuals," *Free Barret Brown*, <https://freebarrettbrown.org/individuals/>

<sup>136</sup> The United States District Court for the Northern District Court of Texas Dallas Division, "United States of America versus Barrett Lancaster Brown, Indictment" Case 3:12-cr-00317-L 8 Oct. 2012, 1-11.

<sup>137</sup> The United States District Court for the Northern District Court of Texas Dallas Division, "United States of America versus Barrett Lancaster Brown, Indictment" Case 3:12-cr-00413-B 4 Dec. 2012, 1-6.

trial.<sup>138</sup> Brown defended that his utterances during his trial did all not relate to the trial and that he does have the right to write journalistic pieces if they do not concern his court case directly or could influence the trial.<sup>139</sup> In sum, Brown was indicted for threatening a FBI agent and for sharing documents that were illegally acquired.

Unfortunately, I could not obtain the document that outlines the jury's verdict in Brown's case. However, Philip F. DiSanto uses the Brown case as a case study for discussing the conflict between the first amendment (freedom of expression) and federal identity theft, with which Brown was charged.<sup>140</sup> While he argues that Brown's threatening of an FBI agent does not help him in his case, he does think that Brown's case highlights a problem. According to DiSanto, current U.S. statutes deal in too broad terms with cases of identity theft: "While such open-ended phrasing gives law enforcement and prosecutors powerful tools to pursue identity thieves, Brown's prosecution demonstrates that even the relatively innocuous act of copying and pasting a hyperlink may constitute federal identity fraud".<sup>141</sup> Consequently, he argues that this broad formulation of the statutes on federal identity fraud is in strife with the constitution, particularly the first amendment.<sup>142</sup> Similarly as Hamson, DiSanto sees a conflict in current usage of the law to arrest Anonymous' activists and fundamental laws that harbour the freedom to speech. DiSanto concludes by positioning democratic discussion and prosecution in conversation with one another, while also pinpointing to the internet as an important facilitator for the spreading of information:

"In addressing cases with potential implications for First Amendment rights, however, courts must carefully balance the need for aggressive prosecution of identity theft with the accompanying chilling effects on democratic discourse. The Internet now serves a uniquely valuable role in ensuring the free flow of information of public concern; without either judicial constraints on identity-fraud prosecution or statutory revisions to its outdated legal framework, arbitrary prosecution will remain a threat to independent commentators and ordinary citizens seeking to contribute to public discourse".<sup>143</sup>

These articles by Hampson and DiSanto demonstrate that globally, Anonymous cheats law, and though some of it may be in transgression, Anonymous also challenges law to confront its own rules and re-evaluate them in the light of 'new' tactics to protest.

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<sup>138</sup> U.S. vs. Brown, "Memorandum in Support of Defendant's Opposition to Government's Request for a Gag Order", 6.

<sup>139</sup> U.S. vs. Brown, "Memorandum in Support of Defendant's Opposition to Government's Request for a Gag Order", 1-6.

<sup>140</sup> Philip F. DiSanto, "Blurred Lines of Identity Crimes: Intersection of the First Amendment and Federal Identity Fraud," *Columbia Law Review* 115.4 (2015), 941-982.

<sup>141</sup> DiSanto, 942-943.

<sup>142</sup> DiSanto, 943.

<sup>143</sup> DiSanto, 982.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, the war on IS was taken as a case study to demonstrate how by declaring war, Anonymous not only changed their relation to the State as on a more equal footing, but also changed the meaning of what it means to go to war. As demonstrated, war, in terms of information activism, is not about eliminating threats by bombs and rifles, by fear, but by playing with the flows of information: by spreading information on Stratfor, by highlighting how social media is used to recruit new IS members, by spreading information on polluting companies etcetera. Afterwards, by discussing Hammond and Brown's court cases it is shown that both a hacker of information and a sharer of information are brought to court for transgressing cybersecurity laws. Furthermore, while the protest aspect of their information activism is acknowledged by journalists and media, governmental institutions as the FBI or judges, do not recognise this aspect of their actions, which is a right embedded in many international conventions under the right to freedom of speech, as indicated by Hamson.<sup>144</sup>

Current law practice seems to perceive Anonymous as the war machine, the go player, the cheater that needs to be punished for transgressing the rules. However, as Anonymous is a pack, arresting Hammond or Brown, does not eliminate the multiple. The game continues and as it takes place on the digital, through the wolf pack without organs, intra-actionally, these arrests and cases only confirm this identity of Anonymous. By intra-actionally constituting them as breaking the rules, the State also emphasizes Anonymous' position as challenging their status quo. Furthermore, as the arrests of Hammond or Brown have not stopped Anonymous it also shows that eliminating one wolf, will not stop this multiple.

All in all, Anonymous are cheaters, are the ones who employ a zerg rush and create a conflict in the code of the game between cybersecurity laws and the freedom of speech. Furthermore, by employing the war terminology of the State, Anonymous does not only place itself on an equal footing, it also broadens the meaning of war when they take it into the digital, where war becomes about the tactical placement of information. Though Brown was not imprisoned on the basis of the copy pasting of the hyperlink, many feel that his arrest is a sign that the State is watching those who spread hacked information. Anonymous uses information, and the State, as appears by these court cases is aware of the power and potentiality that information can hold. The gag order for Brown only further strengthens this idea of information as powerful.

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<sup>144</sup> Hamson, 531-532.

## Chapter 3

## Anonymous and the Developer: Entangling Anonymous

“When it comes to the ‘interface’ between a coffee mug and a hand, it is not that there are x number of atoms that belong to a hand and y number of atoms that belong to the coffee mug. Furthermore, [...] there are actually no sharp edges visually either: it is a well-recognized fact of physical optics that if one looks closely at an ‘edge,’ what one sees is not a sharp boundary between light and dark but rather a series of light and dark bands – that is, a diffraction pattern.”<sup>145</sup>

Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*

The diffraction Barad describes between the mug and the hand is a movement of waves, referring to the manner in which waves become one when they overlap and the breaking of waves when they encounter an obstruction.<sup>146</sup> These waves show that though being different waves they can still merge into one. In other words, the mug and the hand flow into each other and do not exist separately from each other. In a sense, this latter quotation illustrates Barad’s notion of intra-action, while simultaneously showing its complexity. The hand and the mug exist through their relation to one another, (their waving into each other) but where the relation begins and ends is not always as clear. Particles of the mug ‘invade’ the hand and vice-versa; both hand and mug exist together through their relation, rather than separately in a vacuum. In other words, Barad argues that matter exists in its entanglements with other matters: through their intra-action.<sup>147</sup> Similarly, Anonymous’ activism against the State, IS, society merges Anonymous with them and makes Anonymous part of them and vice-versa. Anonymous’ existence and meaning is constantly reconfigured by the institutions and governments it attacks with information. In Barad words: “Humans [objects, matter] enter not as fully formed, pre-existing subjects but as subjects intra-actively co-constituted through the material-discursive practices that they engage in”; objects/humans/matter are constituted by constant waves becoming part of them and breaking apart.<sup>148</sup> To explore this interweaving of Anonymous with its counterparts, I will explore Anonymous in relation to the State by starting to analyse them as a company that they have attacked: the global intelligence and strategic forecasting firm Stratfor to show how they might be more similar to the system and certainly cannot exist separately from the game they participate in with another player: the State. Just as a cheater, Anonymous can only exist through its intra-action with a developer.

In this chapter, I will first discuss intra-action in relation to representation by discussing Barad’s notion of performativity which will aid the consequential discussion on Anonymous’ entanglements

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<sup>145</sup> Barad, 156.

<sup>146</sup> Barad, 28.

<sup>147</sup> Barad, 160.

<sup>148</sup> Barad, 168.

with information service companies by looking at the contrast between how Anonymous represents or, rather, performs itself as anonymous while simultaneously desiring an openness from governments and companies (the developers). Furthermore, it will support the following analysis of the Guy Fawkes mask as a performer of anarchy and consumerism simultaneously through its entanglements with history, media and the State. In short, the State and Anonymous will be entangled by means of this chapter by demonstrating how their intra-actions constitute both of them.

### **Intra-Action and Representation: Anonymous' Performance**

Instead of talking about representation of matter, Barad prefers the term performance to discuss how matter, humans, organizations, nature are discursively constructed. She states,

“Unlike representationalism, which positions us above or outside the world we allegedly merely reflect on, a performative account insists on understanding thinking, observing, and theorizing as practices of engagement with and as part of, the world in which we have our being. Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real.”<sup>149</sup>

In the latter quotation, Barad wants to fashion a posthumanist account of performativity, going against an anthropocentric notion of performativity. Consequently, when she rejects representationalism, and the power of language in the quotation above, she also rejects the human as the centre of the creation of meaning. The issue Barad has with representationalism is the distinction it makes between that which it represents and the representation itself.<sup>150</sup> Borders are constructed between the object, the representation and the spectator, which creates questions on the accuracy of representation, whether it is ‘real’ and whether it can refer to the ‘real’.<sup>151</sup> Consequently, the representation becomes a mediating function between entities, creating a gap between representing image and represented object.<sup>152</sup> Instead, by turning to performativity she wants to focus on how the matter that we research is intra-actively imbued in the world, not only by human perception and language, but also by other material engagements. By focusing on performativity, she positions meaning in the engagement between bodies (of objects, humans, galaxies, media etcetera), in the pack, instead of localizing their meaning internally in the sole existence of a body. Furthermore, Barad’s performativity focuses on the boundaries of bodies and how these are stabilized and destabilized; how they are differentiated, how the mug and hand are one yet different.<sup>153</sup> In result, this performative approach challenges representationalism and the distinction between entities and the representations that are supposedly to

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<sup>149</sup> Barad, 133.

<sup>150</sup> Barad, 46.

<sup>151</sup> Barad, 46-48.

<sup>152</sup> Barad, 46-47.

<sup>153</sup> Barad, 66.

reflect on these entities.<sup>154</sup> In other words, the performative account does justice to the practice involved in engaging with a certain object, rather than separating the object of the created image, the representation.<sup>155</sup>

Through Anonymous' performances an image of Anonymous is created. By their cheating practices in which they intra-act with the 'developers': the State, companies, MasterCard, scientology and so forth, Anonymous is created as an entity and attains meaning, while the same happens to the 'developers'. As I have indicated before, part of cheating is exposing glitches in games which the developer can consequentially amend and makes the game better. Simultaneously, a cheater explores the best tactics to play a game and challenges others to perceive the game differently. Cheating as an intra-action with the State performs Anonymous as a constant seeker of glitches and new tactics to act. Anonymous' performances, their cheating actions, determine who they are and how they position themselves vice-a-vice the State and the other way around the State in its rules (as seen in the previous chapter), its actions and is touched by Anonymous.

In the previous chapter, I have specifically discussed the intra-action between Anonymous and law, which to some extent would also qualify within the latter intra-action between a developer and a cheater. This chapter will, however, analyse this relation more generally by focusing on the manners in which Anonymous and the State perform themselves through their intra-actions, by looking at the Stratfor hack, project chanology and the Guy Fawkes mask. Using Barad's notion of performativity to discuss Anonymous' actions in relation to the 'developers' will emphasize this mutual co-constitution of developer and cheater, of State and Anonymous. In what follows below, I will show how through the Stratfor hack Anonymous intra-acts with Stratfor and performs a certain image of itself that is entangled with the Stratfor company; their motives and tactics might wave into each other, sometimes breaking apart, but are also at times hard to separate from one another.

### **Anonymous and Openness, Secrecy and Information**

Stratfor is a company that on the basis of flows of information (open access data sets) offers clients future scenarios for global events.<sup>156</sup> Their main occupation is hence the acquisition and analysis of information and to sell information to companies and individuals, which these clients can use to make strategic decisions for their companies. Stratfor earns money by using flows of information and creating new ones. Just as Anonymous, information is key to Stratfor. Just as Anonymous, there is a certain secrecy. Just as Anonymous, they desire a certain openness from others. Information, secrecy and openness are the three entanglements between Stratfor and Anonymous that I wish to elaborate on

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<sup>154</sup> Barad, 48.

<sup>155</sup> Barad, 53.

<sup>156</sup> "About Stratfor," *Stratfor*, <https://www.stratfor.com/about>.



below by discussing the hack and the court case and how these intra-actively constitute Anonymous and Stratfor.

To see how through the hack Anonymous and Stratfor are performed, I want to briefly analyse how Stratfor performs its own identity through the marketing on their website. On the Stratfor website, the corporation states that they offer three types of intelligence products: situation reports, analyses and forecasts, which they describe as follows:

“Situation Reports - Situation Reports are brief updates of important developments around the globe. It's an intelligence professional's responsibility — Stratfor's responsibility — to keep you apprised of what matters without wasting your time with clutter. We provide coverage on a variety of topics, from street revolutionary movements to military invasions.

Analyses - Stratfor tells its members what events in the world actually mean. We also tell you when events are unimportant. Oftentimes the seemingly momentous is geopolitically irrelevant, and vice versa. *We discern what's important objectively — without ideology, partisan agenda or policy prescription.*

Forecasts - Knowing what happened yesterday is helpful; knowing what's going to happen tomorrow is critical. Stratfor's intelligence team makes definitive calls about what happens next. *These aren't opinions about what should happen; they're analytical predictions of what is to come.*”<sup>157</sup>

From the latter, it becomes clear that Stratfor does not only harbour information but also analyses it for customers, categorizes it into hierarchies of importance and attempts to do this objectively as is indicated by the sentences I have emphasized in the above. This repetition of stating that they are objective and independent demonstrates the importance they attribute to objectivity. By means of Anonymous’ Stratfor hack, dump of the information on Wikileaks and subsequent news articles by news outlets such as *The Guardian* and *The Rolling Stone*, it became apparent, though, that Stratfor did more than simply take open-source information<sup>158</sup> and might not be as objective as the intelligence company is performing itself currently through its website. Through the hack by Anonymous it was revealed that Stratfor secretly worked on a strategy for a civilian domestic surveillance project in collaboration with the U.S. government. A collaboration with a government discredits their objectivity as the government is guided by a certain politics and ideology, which Stratfor says it does not have (“without ideology, partisan agenda or policy prescription”). Important here is to emphasize that it is specifically discussed as a collaboration, and not as the government hiring Stratfor to provide them with information. A collaboration implies having a similar goal and hence being more than an objective provider of knowledge. A surveillance collaboration could imply a certain vision upon

<sup>157</sup> “Frequently Asked Questions.” *Stratfor*,. <https://www.stratfor.com/about/frequently-asked-questions>. Emphasis added.

<sup>158</sup> Rodrigo Ferrada Stoeihel and Simon Lindgren, “For the Lulz: Anonymous, Aesthetics, and Affect,” *Triple C, Communication, Capitalism and Critique: Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society* 12.1 (2014): n.p.

society in which monitoring everyone for safety is positioned above privacy. This hack hence revealed Stratfor as potentially not as objective as it presents itself, simultaneously Anonymous is reinstated as an information activist group that by means of information, in this case, makes a statement about secrets and openness. Though it is not quite clear why Anonymous hacked Stratfor, the hack is a forceful rupture of a company's emails, files etcetera that are normally closed to the public but are now made available for everyone. Relatedly, this hack seems to constitute Anonymous as distrusting towards those that acquire, analyse and sell information to clients, without disclosing their methods, clients, means of communication and collaboration, or might simply distrust big companies that deal in information.

However, Anonymous is inherently secretive as well, which becomes blatantly clear through this intra-action between Stratfor and Anonymous: the hack and the subsequent trial. Anonymous created a desire for more openness through its hack of Stratfor. Stratfor was touched by this hack, entangled with Anonymous and consequently desired openness of Anonymous as well. However, Anonymous is anonymous and no one really knows who are part of them and even Barrett Brown states on his website that he has never been a member of Anonymous, still many see him as one and even in the documentary *We are Legion* on Anonymous, he is presented as a former operative of Anonymous. As Coleman indicates, this is a tactic of Anonymous to avoid prosecution<sup>159</sup>, but at the same time this protective measure gives their existence a mysterious and secretive touch. While Anonymous forcefully opens up a company like Stratfor to unveil all their secrets, uncover their clients, their employees, they do not (and cannot) have this openness themselves. Consequently, Stratfor and Anonymous might be opposing one another and be the same simultaneously in their intra-actions. First, Stratfor gets attacked by Anonymous to reveal information on the ways in which intelligence companies work by which Anonymous transgresses rules: to unveil Stratfor's secrets forcefully. Second, arrests are made and court cases are started, because the developer, Stratfor/the State, needs to keep the game in line and avoid the emergence of more cheaters and therefore attempts to uncover the cheaters. As such, due to the intra-action of a hack, Anonymous becomes that which it attacks: a secretive organisation that forcefully requires the openness of others.

All in all, the openness of information Anonymous pursues is the same openness of information the government requires of its citizens under the name of protection: if you have nothing to hide you have nothing to fear. In a sense, this is also what the state of exception as described by Hardt and Negri implies. In France this state of emergency/exception allows for more house searches and invasive measures to be taken for citizen's protection, this gives a problematic power imbalance in which

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<sup>159</sup> Coleman, 408-409.

citizens give up their independence and privacy in exchange for a (patriarchal form of<sup>160</sup>) protection by governments and companies that are not, as appears through Anonymous' hacks, without secrets themselves. Similarly, Anonymous requires openness without being open themselves, only they do not require this openness of citizens, but of organisations and governments,.

While revealing nothing about themselves for their own protection, this desire to uncover everything, the desire to inscribe, signify everyone, understand everyone to place everyone in a stratum and to have meaning is something that Anonymous and the State have in common. While Anonymous experiments with their own body, their organism, signification and subjectification, it does want to inscribe others with an image, a meaning and make it an organised subject, more specifically they, by means of information, want to first disorganise the image and meaning of for instance Stratfor to consequently let it be rebuilt through the 'new' information that they have confronted the world with. All in all, Anonymous' Stratfor hack performs Anonymous as both being against secretive intelligence companies and as being similar to such a company simultaneously, the only difference being that Anonymous does not let Stratfor inscribe them with an image and meaning, as they as a multiple and a Body without Organs escape such organising principles. Anonymous cheats openness, by requiring it of others but not of themselves.

### **Anonymous and Anarchism**

To discuss how Anonymous intra-acts with anarchism through their use of the Guy Fawkes mask, I first want to delve into when it came into use, how this mask is employed by Anonymous, and what it performs as an image of Anonymous. Consequently, I will analyse how this mask apart from performing a certain anarchism, also complicates Anonymous' image as an anarchist by linking it to practices of the State and the status quo, which constructs Anonymous as playing the game along, while they are simultaneously still cheating.

One of the first operations where Anonymous went on the streets and learnt about their numbers, instead of just battling online, was the previously mentioned chanology project, in which Anonymous took a stance against scientology. In this event also lies the origin of the use of the Guy Fawkes mask. In the documentary *We are Legion* that everyone can watch freely on the *Officially Anonymous* YouTube channel and can also be watched on *Netflix*, several self-identified associates or previous members of Anonymous talk about this project and how the now quite familiar image of Anonymous, the Guy Fawkes mask, was introduced in these protests against scientology. Part of the documentary is also Coleman, who I have cited in previous chapters and has written on Anonymous extensively.

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<sup>160</sup> See Iris M. Young, "The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State," *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29.1 (2003): 1-25, for an extensive exploration of this patriarchal form of protection.

Before discussing the mask in the context of anarchism, I want to discuss how this documentary discusses the mask and its origin.

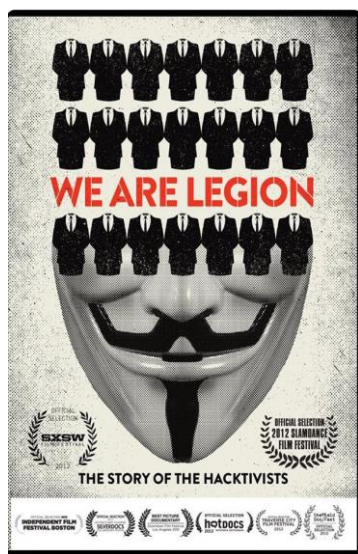


Image V

The poster of the documentary clearly features the Guy Fawkes mask (see image V) as representing Anonymous and the other image of anonymity that Anonymous uses: the man in a suit without a head. This poster combines these two images with the first part of Anonymous' motto: "We are legion". These combined images illustrate perfectly what I have argued in chapter one, on Anonymous as multiple and pack. While the man in the suit performs the various individuals that are part of Anonymous, yet remain anonymous, the Guy Fawkes mask brings them together into a unity. The men in suits without heads are starting at the eyes of the Guy Fawkes mask and going upwards, referring to how the individual members of Anonymous are all the brain and the eyes of the ideal that the mask performs, an idea of anonymity, but also, as the analysis below will show, an idea of political activism and anarchism. All in all, this poster shows Anonymous as a pack, while also showing how the Guy Fawkes mask is one of the few images that is performing Anonymous as a unity as it is one unchanging mask worn by many: a stratum.

In the documentary, (previous) members of Anonymous who participated in project chanology and Coleman discuss the cause and effect of this protest against scientology. Before chanology, Anonymous was merely about pranks and trolls, annoying people and making fun of people online who would take the internet too seriously or who would attempt to censor information, but they already had gotten some significant media attention due to various hacks. The attack on scientology was initiated on similar motives for previous hacks: the withholding of information, or censorship of information. As indicated before, scientology had released a video of Tom Cruise to be spread internally within scientology.<sup>161</sup> Consequently, the video has a distinct effect than members of scientology supposedly intended: it became a widely mocked and ridiculed video and spread quickly online. Soon afterwards, scientology started to threaten websites with lawsuits if they would not pull the videos down. Anonymous' members got notice of scientology attempting to erase the videos from the internet, and as Mike Vitale, who was according to the documentary part of project chanology as a member of Anonymous, indicates Anonymous then thought the following: "You [scientology] are trying to censor *our* internet, you know, you are trying to take a joke away from Anonymous, like, you don't do that".<sup>162</sup> The documentary indicates that, after posting the Tom Cruise video everywhere and 'battling' in this manner against scientology, Anonymous realised they had found a perfect target.

<sup>161</sup> See the scientology video of Tom Cruise here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFBZ\\_uAbxS0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFBZ_uAbxS0).

<sup>162</sup> Knappenberger, 28:00 - 29:18

Coleman explains in the documentary that scientology is the perfect nemesis for Anonymous as it performs an identity that is directly opposite to the ideals of Anonymous: while Anonymous wants to reveal secrets and abolish censorship, scientology is very secretive. Additionally, anyone can say they are part of Anonymous, while scientology is very restrictive in whom they allow to join.

I briefly want to reflect on this idea of scientology as the perfect nemesis Anonymous. While on first instinct it might seem logical to put them in a dialectical position opposing one another, Anonymous' ideology as performed through the Stratfor hack is contested by this particular action. In the documentary, members explain how Anonymous started mainly attacking scientology by the means of trolls, like occupying their hotline so no one could reach them, or ordering pizza's on their phone numbers or DDoS attacks. This attack on scientology is motivated from a position against those who censor and control information, but by blocking the scientology website and other outlets, Anonymous does the same as scientology, which is not providing free flows of information but blocking this particular outlet of information. Though Coleman's explanation makes sense, Anonymous wants to abolish secrets and censorship and scientology is very secretive, this project chanology also made them into that thing that they want to abolish: a censoring, secretive group. Through this intra-action Anonymous again becomes that which they oppose through occupying scientology's website by simply reversing the roles: instead of scientology, Anonymous censors the internet.

However, why did the Guy Fawkes mask appear for the first time in this project chanology? And what does this do to Anonymous? The origin lies in the need for a form of protection of members of Anonymous in their public protests against scientology. The documentary *We are Legion* shows parts of the first videos that were created by Anonymous during project chanology of which one was a call to arms, which lead to protests on the streets around the world in front of scientology centres. Another was a code of conduct video to warn people to hide their identities, as scientology is famous for suing people who critique them (as is repeatedly said throughout the documentary). Consequently, a lot of people appeared in a Guy Fawkes mask, because, as one of the commentators says, it performs what Anonymous thinks it is, as being tied to a form of anarchism. Most people who identified with Anonymous already knew the mask and as such it naturally happened that many protestors wore the Guy Fawkes mask during the protests against scientology. Through this public protest, the mask became a symbol of Anonymous, while simultaneously offering individual protection: it performs both the individual members of Anonymous and Anonymous as a multiple.

If we take a closer look at the history of the Guy Fawkes mask, it becomes clear why it might have seem a natural option for Anonymous: the Guy Fawkes mask wants to disrupt the game of the State and turn the chess pieces into go. Furthermore, the Guy Fawkes mask is an anarchistic symbol, which relates to Anonymous' information activism and blurring the boundary between revolution and

activism. By discussing the history of the Guy Fawkes mask, its ties to anarchism and the manner in which the mask is used currently, I will demonstrate another manner in which Anonymous performs an identity of simultaneously being against the State and part of the State: of being entangled with those that perform what Anonymous opposes.

The Guy Fawkes mask became popularized through the graphic novel *V for Vendetta* by Alan Moore and David Lloyd from 1982-1989, which was adapted into a movie in 2005 by the Wachowski siblings and David Lloyd in collaboration with the director James McTeigue. *V for Vendetta* tells the story of V, who at all times wears the Guy Fawkes mask, who wants to overthrow an authoritarian power that has taken over the United Kingdom after a time of Civil War and a horrendous virus outbreak. Instead of discussing the film and graphic novel at length, I wish to take a look at an article by Lewis Call that quite potently explains the history behind the mask and how it is performed in the film *V for Vendetta*, a film an Anonymous member references to in the *We are Legion* documentary. Call discusses *V for Vendetta* as a portrayal of postmodern anarchy in particularly the film, but also in the graphic novel. In relation to Anonymous' use of the Guy Fawkes mask, the postmodern argument is not as relevant as the history and the meaning of the mask he constructs throughout his article. Below, I will first delve a bit into the history of the mask that Call addresses to afterwards go into his conceptualization of the mask in the context of the film which I will use to analyse how the Guy Fawkes mask performs Anonymous' activism.

In 1605, a radical group of Catholics: Guy Fawkes and his fellow conspirers (Fawkes was not even the leader of this group but became the enigmatic symbol for this event), attempted to blow up the Palace of Westminster during the opening of the Parliament in London.<sup>163</sup> They attempted to assassinate James Stuart, the Scottish king, and, if they would have succeeded, would have also assassinated all the lords and commons assembled, preventing the union of Scotland and England.<sup>164</sup> This conspiracy was as such not only about Catholicism, but also about opposing the emergence of a United Kingdom of Great Britain; it was directed against the State, by assassinating the king at this particular event.<sup>165</sup> Ever since, the English remember this day on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November as a day on which terrorists were successfully captured, also calling it 'Bonfire Night'.<sup>166</sup> However, this remembrance was about to perform distinct functions and meanings throughout the years to come.<sup>167</sup> First the elites were in control of how this holiday should be celebrated, but at one point they abandoned this responsibility, after which it became a day to assault authority which often performed itself as a left-winged critique

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<sup>163</sup> Call, 154.

<sup>164</sup> Call, 154-155.

<sup>165</sup> Call, 159.

<sup>166</sup> Call, 155.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

of conservative politics.<sup>168</sup> Effigies (a sort of puppets bearing the image of often a famous, political person) of Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush have been burnt at Bonfire Nights in the recent past.<sup>169</sup> As stated by Call,

“With the elites abandoning what little control they may once have had over this anarchic holiday, it soon mutated into a generalised secular assault on authority. This assault has frequently taken a left-wing form: in recent years, Bonfire Night has featured burning effigies of Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush”.<sup>170</sup>

Last year, an effigy of David Cameron has been burnt, showing this tradition is still continuing.<sup>171</sup>

Call argues that, because of these political motivations behind the celebration of the 5<sup>th</sup> of November, Guy Fawkes has become the symbol for protests directed against the state, for anti-statism, particularly against Thatcherite conservatism and Anglo-American militarism.<sup>172</sup> The idea of Guy Fawkes and celebrating the 5<sup>th</sup> of November has hence taken a distinct meaning then it might have had in 1605, and performs an idea of anti-statism, anti-control, which is an idea that comes back in *V for Vendetta*. Call says that in the film the Guy Fawkes mask “became truly nomadic, perpetually mutating postmodern symbol, impossible for the state to nail down. Shifting meanings in every frame, the face demonstrated its ability to destabilize the entire representational order which underwrites state power in the postmodern world.”<sup>173</sup> In other words, the film *V for Vendetta* shows how the meaning of the Guy Fawkes mask is performative and inherently relational, but its potentiality lies in its workings as a war machine that destabilizes that status quo: as a go player in the game of chess or the image of the cheater, of pushing against the boundaries of the rules, of the State.

By using this mask, Anonymous also performs a certain anarchic identity: again Anonymous cheats the boundaries of activism and with this plays with anarchy and revolution. Through the mask Anonymous experiments with its significance, by articulating this mask as its body. The mask is a stratum, but it is also an experiment with the significance of Anonymous: both a resting point and a point of getting rid of organisation. In sum, their face of anonymity is not just anonymity, but also holds a certain anarchism. However, the means towards roaring up the rules, is a bit distinct from Guy Fawkes and his fellow conspirers methods: Anonymous employs more randomness, more non-linearity and though there is a certain fantasy or temptation of overthrowing the government, being the

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<sup>168</sup> Call, 158.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Jamie Grierson, “Effigy of David Cameron and Pig’s Head to burn at Lewes Bonfire Night Display,” *The Guardian* 5 Nov. 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/nov/05/david-cameron-pigs-head-effigy-lewes-bonfire-night>.

<sup>172</sup> Call, 159.

<sup>173</sup> Call, 156.

spoil sport, Anonymous is entwined with the State and to remain cheaters, they need a board to play with, and fellow players to troll.

Furthermore, while the Guy Fawkes mask might have a history of anarchism, currently it could be perceived as an idea of anarchism that can be sold and bought and consumed through popular media; as a symbol that has been incorporated by the State and has become a chess piece rather than a Go piece, clearly performed in its meaning and clearly defined in its movement. As an example, when I bought the *V for Vendetta* graphic novel online it was sold together with the Guy Fawkes mask. The Guy Fawkes mask has the typical ‘made in China’ label in it and is made out of cheap plastic. The image of anarchism can be bought and sold in the hands of the State and as such become no longer unambiguously performing anti-statism or anarchy, but an object that is tied up in consumerism as well: everything can be bought and sold, even ideology. Consequently, in the Guy Fawkes mask the waves of the State and of anarchism are waved together, and are no longer easily distinguished. Moreover, Anonymous itself plays into the sell and buy aspect of their anarchic image through various web shops: My Anon Store<sup>174</sup> and Officially Anonymous Shop<sup>175</sup>. Though of course these web shops can be initiated by anyone who associates herself with Anonymous, these web shops also perform this Anonymous’ identity and hence become part of what Anonymous entails: as Anonymous only exists through its entanglements with the State, media outlets and actions.

As Anonymous is a multiple so is its image in society, all connected and intra-actively engaging Anonymous, yet very diverse: when Anonymous’ appearance is concerned it is difficult to determine any borders, as their image is diffractive, which is to some extent implied in their name of anonymity. Anonymity is an appearance without an appearance; it is everyone and no one at the same time. In other words, Anonymous even escapes the boundaries or the rules of their appearance: they cheat their image. This can be again related to their existence as a Body without Organs. As indicated in chapter one, Anonymous experiments with the governing strata of the Body without Organs: the organism, significance and subjectification. This escape of the image makes every iteration of their body, every stratum part of who they are, as such an online web shop where everyone can buy their image, performs them as a company or a brand and turns them into a clearly defined image to be bought or sold and even though it might be just one person identifying herself as Anonymous, these web shops, especially due to their experimentation with their image, performs them as well. The Guy Fawkes mask and Anonymous’ symbols become a stratum that insert a chess piece in their game of Go, which makes them inherently, intra-actionally entangled with the State, especially when this mask becomes a manner to buy an ideology.

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<sup>174</sup> “My Anon Store,” <https://myanonstore.com/>.

<sup>175</sup> “Officially Anonymous,” <https://shop.spreadshirt.com/anonymousofficial/>.



### **Anonymous and the State, Patriarchs?**

Through their intra-actions with Stratfor, with scientology, with imagery such as the Guy Fawkes mask Anonymous performs itself as simultaneously being against the State and being part of it. As I am analysing Anonymous as a cheater this is not a surprise, as playing along with the developer while simultaneously exploring the developer's game to the max is a characteristic of cheating. A cheater is not always a cheater, she is firstly a player of a game and secondly she searches for bugs, boundaries and rules of the game she can exploit: Jackson Pallock had to know how to paint before he could change the rules of painting. Similarly, Anonymous searches for developers that censor, manipulate or hide flows of information they can exploit and open up. However, part of this cheating is this intra-action with the developer and of sometimes being the same as the developer, such as changing the code of a game or using a cheat. Unsurprisingly, Anonymous is simultaneously against the State and sometimes acts similarly as the State: Anonymous plays along but also resists. Sometimes their activism takes the form of censorship of information, sometimes they take the position of the (patriarchal) protector, protecting citizens from governments and companies that might be exploiting them.

By using language such as war and their distrust towards secretive, closed and censoring groups, be they companies or religions, while remaining secretive themselves creates an idea of Anonymous perceiving themselves as being above society, rather than, as I have discussed above, the fact that they are very much imbued and performed through this society and State. However, this idea of superiority of standing above the developers, of knowing the game better than anyone else as Anonymous constantly explores its borders, combined with their declarations of war waves them closely together with the State: protecting the 'normal' civilian from the secretive forces of those in power or protecting the 'normal' civilian from secretive organisations by revealing them seems to not be so far away from each other as it might appear on first sight. Relatedly, this perception of themselves on a similar level or above the State is actually what entangles them with the State. Declaring war is very much part of such a way of thinking, protecting citizens against unknown evils is very much part of this manner of thinking, and most importantly is not far away from the State's mode of thinking. If we take the State as a patriarch, is Anonymous playing for developer not imbued with a similar position? The State asks its citizens to give up independence and privacy in exchange for protection, one example being the state of exception from chapter two, Anonymous protects citizens from this requirement of openness from the State by laying those open that do ask this openness from citizens but are not transparent themselves. Though there might be a difference in motives, the tactics of Anonymous and the State (governments, companies) are interweaving, and Anonymous' game of Go cannot exist separately from the game of chess against which they are playing. And this is exactly what makes them a cheater: being against the State and the same simultaneously, they play along in a

game surrounding the control of flows of information, but they also oppose this game and challenge the game by cheating their way into flows of information.

### **Conclusion**

Through the Stratfor hack Anonymous performs itself as a (patriarchal) protector, in exchange for protection against the State, citizens, and in particular companies and governments, have to open up their streams of information and no longer keep secrets. Through their intra-action with scientology by means of project chanology it becomes clear Anonymous does not shy away from censorship themselves. In the Guy Fawkes mask lies the waving together of Anonymous' flirtation with anarchism and their play with commercial practices; of revolution and institutionalized protest. Additionally, Anonymous is not bound by any laws or limited by a geographical location. Through their existence in the Digital everyone who names themselves Anonymous can perform a small action with big consequences warping out over the globe. Anyone can be Anonymous, anyone can cheat. Anyone can become the zerg rush, the tactic that forces the developers to change the game. A cheater is constantly looking for the best tactic to win, but what does it mean to win for Anonymous? If everyone is open about everything? If everyone can say whatever they want? Or when the internet is a space as Anonymous perceives it: without censorship, except from them? How is Anonymous, if it would take such a position, be distinct from the State?

## Conclusion

Oppressive father figure: “No matter what you do, you’ll never amount to anything more than a single drop in a limitless ocean.”

Abolitionist son, Adam Ewing: “But what is an ocean, but a multitude of drops?”

*Cloud Atlas* (Tom Tykwer and Wachowski siblings, 2012)

Towards the end of *Cloud Atlas*, Adam Ewing leaves his family with a history in slave trade to join the abolitionists with his wife. His father condemns his decision and says his actions will make no difference as he is insignificant as an individual. Ewing counters this with a sentence reminiscent of Serres, he is a drop that eventually makes the ocean an ocean. He is one individual that in the end can make the waves of the sea move differently and flow differently. As explored throughout this thesis, Anonymous, consists of many drops, composing a multitude that plays with the waves of information and might create a wave that changes the status quo.

Starting with how Anonymous’ activism is about playing with flows of information, I, consequently, delved into a variety of concepts in an attempt to grasp Anonymous without limiting it to strict essences or definitions. Chapter two considered an in depth exploration of the relation of Anonymous to the State and law, where chapter three delved into the ways in which Anonymous’ identity was performed through their actions and the Guy Fawkes mask but is also inherently entangled with the State. Throughout this thesis, I pursued to showcase Anonymous as the example of an activism that is driven by the play with flows of information and characterized by cheating behaviour. Below, I will reflect upon the three recurring themes and how they can be tied back to this ‘information activism’: multiple, cheating, playing with the anarchic. In conclusion, I will look at another form of this type of activism: the Nuit Debout movement in France that could be an interesting starting point for further research into this type of activism.

### **Multiple**

As chapter one has elaborately shown, Anonymous is hard to define or to capture in one definition, which is actually their strength. This enables their activism: as they are multiple, wolves, removing one of the actors will not stop the actions they pursue by using information, being a multiple is part of their tactic. Arrests have not stopped Anonymous, as they cannot be limited to an individual leader or set of individuals. As will also be demonstrated in the analysis of Nuit Debout below, the power of information activism lies partly in that it is hard to define and impossible to tie Anonymous and Nuit Debout to one essence. The information they spread is random and is often stumbled upon as is the case with the chanology project that was initiated by one video. Additionally, Anonymous’ actions are unpredictable, it goes from overloading phone lines and websites to covering social media pages in

images that were not posted by the moderator of that page. As such the information that is spread by information activism is also characterized by the multiple, the information is not one message nor does it serve one goal, yet it is constantly used and controlled in ways that it affects governments, authorities, groups and companies around the globe.

### **Cheating**

Throughout the chapters, I have touched upon a variety of theories on cheating as formulated by Kücklich, Consalvo, Warren, Huizinga etcetera, eventually comparing cheating to a go-player versus a chess-player. Anonymous as a go player employs different tactics and attacking pieces (the meaning of a go piece is not inscribed in the piece, but is only related to the other pieces on the board) than the State employs with its pre-formulated chess tactics. Similarly as Stiles in *Teen Wolf* the State is frustrated by Anonymous' tactics, does not entirely understand it, and attempts to destroy the game Anonymous is playing by turning into the spoil sport. Just as Stiles, the State throws the board away, in this case, this means arresting and imprisoning Anonymous' activists.

As the second chapter indicated, law is not yet adjusted to the information activism in which Anonymous is partaking: there is not yet a clear space or rules for that space online, apart from the rules that simply forbid to use that space in that manner. Perceiving information activism as cheating, as not following the rules, makes it an activism that challenges the static status quo, makes people think of the companies and governments they trust. Information activism is a game of go, an activism without a linear movement or a singular predetermined goal, but a drive to spread, acquire information with a deep suspicion for those who want to hide information. An example of this suspicion is most directly performed in a television series based on Anonymous, *Mr. Robot*. The main character, Elliot, in *Mr. Robot* is also a very suspicious character, as is made clear throughout the series: he always looks for the worst in people. For instance, the series begins with Elliot confronting a coffee place owner. Elliot loved it there because the Wi-Fi was very good, however, "it was too good", and he started to dig into the owner and the network and discovered the Wi-Fi was so good because it was used to spread child pornography. This particular mind-set of always looking behind the rules, behind the surface, of companies, of governments, of individuals, is part of information activism. This contributes to the image of Anonymous as paranoid, crazy, connecting them to individuals like V in *V for Vendetta* and Elliot in *Mr. Robot*, but this constant search for information is part of what makes them a perfect example of information activism. A constant search for a bug in the system and exploit it as every cheater would.

### **Playing with the Anarchic**

The play with the anarchic that Anonymous employs is mainly part of their image as manifested in the Guy Fawkes' mask and in the fact that they position themselves on a similar level as the State, as

demonstrated in chapter two and three. They challenge the government by not (always) caring about their laws and acting as if not having to amount to those rules.

Information activism uses information to get information, and that getting information often has an anarchic taste. In the case of Anonymous it is a resistance to anyone who censors, hides sensitive information, or limits the freedom of speech online. However, it is not full-blown anarchy, but rather a performativity of a potential for anarchy. By playing with the anarchic, Anonymous challenges the State while simultaneously not accepting its position as 'above' Anonymous. Instead Anonymous takes a similar position as the State by declaring war and by ignoring and challenging rules. Nevertheless, Anonymous is not a spoil sport destroying the game, striving for chaos, but plays with the rules, exploring the boundaries of those rules by sometimes transgressing them. In other words, information activism and its play with the anarchic is not about destroying the State, but functions as a war machine that challenges the status quo, intra-actionally constituting itself and the State. Sometimes, Anonymous even gets involved in the tactics of the State that it opposes: censorship and secretiveness. As a cheater they play along, not disclosing themselves as cheaters, but simultaneously search for ways to resist or challenge the status quo, the State.

In sum, Anonymous is an example of information activism because they are multiple, they behave like wolves, they are a pack, they are cheaters, they play with the anarchic and they play along with the State, while simultaneously being very suspicious of the State. They fight their wars with information in the digital. No offices, no leaders, no goals, and no frontlines. They challenge the developers of the game with a zerg rush of anonymity. Information activism is about playing with the State by tactically spreading, hacking and using information, sometimes by even taking up the role of the developer.

There is yet little known of Anonymous and where Coleman talks to Anonymous members, law scholars look at them through their discipline and the media attempts to create a popular image by which 'we' can understand them. This thesis has created a distinct look upon Anonymous by attempting to understand its activism by looking at cheating and a variety of new materialist philosophies that do justice to Anonymous' complexity. Hopefully this theory will be useful to also discuss other forms of information activism, and above all, aid towards a better understanding of Anonymous' actions before condemning or idolizing their playing with flows of information.

### Other Forms of Information Activism

Nuit Debout started on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, when suddenly night after night people returned to protest at the Place de la Republique in Paris.<sup>176</sup> These protests soon expanded to other French cities and eventually even across the border towards Spain and Brussels.<sup>177</sup> Their objective is quite unclear and is on their website formulated as follows:

“Nuit Debout’s first aim is to create a space for the ‘convergence of struggles’. We hope this convergence will go beyond France and spread worldwide. There exist numerous links between social movements in all four corners of the world; from unemployment to the imposition of the financial markets, from the destruction of the environment to war and unacceptable inequality”.<sup>178</sup>

Put differently, Nuit Debout is about collaboration between various social movements to counter a range of (global) issues that are as wide in scope as Anonymous’ operations. What is specifically reminiscent about Nuit Debout and Anonymous is their common existence as a multiple, and their protest through discussion and sharing of knowledge. As stated by one of the protesters, “We came back the next day and as we keep coming back every night, it has scared the government because it’s impossible to define”.<sup>179</sup> Similarly as Anonymous, the State, the government, cannot grasp Nuit Debout. The State attempts to send them away by sending police to the Place de la Republique, but they just simply turn up the next day again.<sup>180</sup> They exist as a wolf pack, and though they might not all have the same motives or ideologies, they do know they stand strong as a pack. Researching Nuit Debout in the context of information activism might help to understand their movement and existence better in relation to the State as well as their potentiality.

All in all, Nuit Debout shows that every drop in the ocean counts to finally form an ocean or a wave. In information activism it is not necessarily about one goal and one linear progression, but about spreading knowledge by making people aware through playing with flows of information. Anonymous and their information activism is about playing with information and exploring the boundaries, rules and assumptions on who has the right to control information.

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<sup>176</sup> Angelique Chrisafis, “Nuit Debout Protesters Occupy French Cities in a Revolutionary Call for Change,” *The Guardian* 8 Apr. 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/08/nuit-debout-protesters-occupy-french-cities-in-a-revolutionary-call-for-change>.

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