

## 4 **Anonymous**

### Hacktivism and Contemporary Politics

*Christian Fuchs*

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

It is Friday, August 6, 2012, on the Internet. Sixty-seven years earlier, on August 6, 1945, the U.S. dropped the first atom bomb on Hiroshima. One hears a song by Trey Parker: "America. Fuck yeah. [. . .] So lick my butt and suck on my balls, America, fuck yeah! Whatcha' gonna do when we come for you now? (. . .) McDonalds, fuck yeah! Wal-Mart, fuck yeah!" Pictures of cats that look human are accompanied by the request, "I want to start a collection of my fetish catboys so post moar!" There is a link to a live cam on Times Square. One also finds an image showing a burning American flag that is accompanied by the logos of McDonald's and images of a can of Mountain Dew, the Statue of Liberty, a guitar player and a screaming bear. "You should kill yourself, fucking AMERRRICAAA, you little fag- got." A rapper writes a new song and says that the first few minutes of the discussion in his thread will become part of the song. There is a story about a brother who tries to seduce his sister, but it turns out that his sister is a large arthropod. There is a thread with images of female but- tocks, accompanied by an announcement that one of the portrayed girls receives prank phone calls. One sees a picture of a couple having oral sex accompanied by the text "PORNO FUCK YEAH!" as well as a picture of a drunk sleeping man accompanied by the text "buddy passed out after 11 Coors lights and 2 bud lights" and the suggestion that a game will decide what the person who posted the picture will do to the drunk. There is a screenshot of a female teenager's profile on Facebook, suggesting "54, 72, 37 or 00 decides what I write," meaning that the fifty-fourth, seventy- second, thirty-seventh or hundredth posting determines what the person will write to the girl on Facebook. The subsequent interaction is posted online (e.g., "Hi, i liked you since high school i wanted to date you, but i was very young and very angry, perhaps that's no excuse. You're really hot and whenever i see you my wee wee goes woop, please go out with me or I'll skyrim myself"), the girl answers and each answer to her is determined in a new game. The girl temporarily closes her Facebook profile and the action ceases.

Welcome to 4chan.org.<sup>1</sup> Christopher Poole founded 4chan in 2003. It is the space where the movement that has become known as 'Anonymous' originated (Stryker 2011). It works as a series of forums, each oriented on a specific topic (or allowing all topics, such as the forum 'b'). Users can post text, images, links, content and answers to other threads. The postings are anonymous and therefore the word 'Anonymous' is displayed as the username in all threads and posts. As the examples show, 4chan is at the same time anarchistic, mean, rude, absurd, pornographic, political, creative, playful, sarcastic, a display of black humour, etc. Anonymous makes use of the wisdom and creativity of the crowd in its campaigns. This organized wisdom can hit randomly selected everyday people alongside powerful organizations and individuals. 4chan features "depraved images and nasty jokes," yet is "at the same time a source of extraordinary, unhindered creativity" (Olson 2012, 32).

The wider public has gained knowledge of Anonymous, especially because of the latter's support of WikiLeaks in December 2010. Distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks were used for shutting down the websites of PayPal, PostFinance, Visa, MasterCard and the Bank of America that disabled donation possibilities to WikiLeaks. Anonops, a node in the Anonymous network that maintains an Internet Relay Chat (IRC), a blog, a Twitter account and YouTube video channel, is said to have originated Operation Payback that attacked film companies opposed to file sharing and supported WikiLeaks (Reissmann, Stöcker and Lischka 2012, 127-128):

Anonymous' campaign will defend against any individual, organization, corporation, and/or government entity that seeks to hinder the free flow of information on the Internet and beyond. [. . .] We are using the LOIC [the Low Orbit Ion Cannon, a software tool for DDoS attacks] to conduct distributed denial of service attacks against businesses that have aided in the censorship of any person. [. . .] Our current goal is to raise awareness about WikiLeaks and the underhanded methods employed by the above companies to impair WikiLeaks' ability to function. [. . .] The continuing attacks on PayPal are already tested and preferable: while not damaging their ability to process payments, they are successful in slowing their network down just enough for people to notice and thus, we achieve our goal of raising awareness.<sup>2</sup>

Anonop's message titled "A Letter from Anonymous: Our Message, Intentions, and Potential Targets" was distributed as text and as multiple videos at different platforms.<sup>3</sup> Such videos are often made in an artistic way and are spread on multiple popular Internet platforms, which shows that Anonymous is also about creative, aesthetic and artistic expression of dissent and the use of user-generated content sites for communicating to the public and organizing distributed actions.

The task of this chapter is to reflect on what kind of movement Anonymous is. For doing so, I first give an overview of Anonymous' history (section

two). I then make a theoretical analysis of its status as a social movement and of its power, as well as the state counter-power that it is facing (section three). I also analyse how Anonymous relates to political world views (section four). The analysis presented in this chapter is grounded in political theory. Anonymous reconfigures the power of social movements and at the same time is facing state power's attempt to infiltrate and monitor activists.

## 2 ANONYMOUS: A BRIEF HISTORY

Anonymous is a networked movement that has its origins in 4chan (Stryker 2011). It has different nodes organized around IRCs and forums, such as Anonnet,<sup>4</sup> AnonOps,<sup>5</sup> VoxAnon,<sup>6</sup> AnonPlus<sup>7</sup> and affinity groups like the Peoples Liberation Front (PLF), LulzSec or AntiSec. Anonnet describes its task in the following way: "AnonNet, an anonymous IRC network, exists to enable the free flow of ideas and communication without fear of third party interception, monitoring, intimidation or coercion. We believe in freedom of expression, and we want to help you make your voice heard."<sup>8</sup>

The history of Anonymous can only be summarised briefly here (for details see Olson 2012; Reissmann, Stöcker and Lischka 2012; Stryker 2011). According to Reissmann, Stöcker and Lischka (2012, 32-33), one of Anonymous' first collective actions planned on 4chan was the blockage and disturbance of the teenager online community Habbo Hotel in 2006. Hundreds of Anonymous activists entered the community at the same time and disturbed the normal course of action. Also in 2006, a campaign against the fascist U.S. talk show host Hal Turner was started, in which his talk radio programme was disturbed, personal data about him was posted on the Internet and his Internet radio station was blocked. In 2008, a video about Scientology's practices was released on YouTube. Scientology made a legal claim to remove the video, which resulted in Anonymous' Project Chanology against Scientology. When Anonymous started engaging in such campaigns, it became common to use IRC channels as communication tools for coordinating and organizing the actions (Olson 2012, 52). In 2009, Anonymous created a website in support of the Iranian protests. In 2009 and 2010, it attacked computers and websites of Australian government institutions due to new Internet censorship laws. In 2010, Anonymous attacked the websites of organizations that defend intellectual property rights (like the Recording Industry Association of America, the Motion Picture Association of America and the British Phonographic Industry). In 2010, it started Operation Payback, which included DDoS attacks against Amazon, MasterCard, PayPal, PostFinance and Visa after they disabled payment possibilities to WikiLeaks. In 2011, Anonymous attacked Sony websites because the media company launched legal claims against George Hotz, who released instructions for how to jailbreak the Sony PlayStation 3. During the Arab Spring, a small group of AnonOps activists organizing themselves in the private IRC

channel #InternetFeds attacked the websites of the governments of Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Syria (Olson 2012, 425-426). The hackers Sabu, Tflow and Kayla, who participated in #InternetFeds, joined with Topiary, AVunit and Pwnsauce to form the group LulzSec, which in 2011 conducted various hacking activities over a fifty-day period (Olson 2012, 427ff.).

In solidarity with the protests against the plans to eliminate collective bargaining rights of public employment unions in Wisconsin, Anonymous attacked websites of Koch Industries, which supported anti-union activities in Wisconsin. Also in 2011, Anonymous attacked websites of the government of Malaysia because the latter blocked websites. It attacked private and local government websites in Orlando, Florida, because activists of Food Not Bombs were arrested for giving food to homeless people in Lake Eola Park. It blocked child porn sites and published data about the sites' users. After the maltreatment of the alleged WikiLeaks source Bradley Manning by prison personnel, it announced that it would attack the communications of the Quantico high security prison and its personnel. It called for mass protests against the U.S. Stop Online Piracy Act. Probably Anonymous' most visible activity in 2011 was the support of the Occupy Wall Street movement. It called its members to participate in the movement. After a policeman pepper sprayed non-violent student protesters at the University of California Davis campus, Anonymous released videos with the policeman's personal contact data. In December 2011, Anonymous started Nazi-Leaks, a platform that leaks the contact data of alleged neo-Nazis and their supporters.

Anonymous has made use of tactics such as DDoS attacks, anonymous phone calls, mobbing, publication of private data, death threats, sending black pages to fax addresses, ordering hundreds of pizzas to be delivered to one address simultaneously (Reissmann, Stöcker and Lischka 2012), d0xing (posting personal data about targets publicly on the Internet), signing people up for junk mail, defacing websites, hacking into servers, downloading data-bases from servers with the help of SQL injection attacks, publishing e-mail and address lists, rickrolling (links that pretend to lead to sexual or other content, but bring up Rick Astley's video "Never Gonna Give You Up"), releasing logins and passwords, and street protests (Norton 2011, 2012a, 2012b). Their targets are sometimes politically chosen, but in many cases more arbitrary, which, for example, also includes teenagers such as the then fifteen-year-old teenager Boxyy, against whom a harassment campaign was started on 4chan in 2007 because users thought that her YouTube videos were stupid.<sup>9</sup> Users, for example, posted nude pictures of themselves, writing on their breasts or other body parts messages such as "Kill Boxyy," "Fuck Boxyy" or "Boxx Sucks" (ibid.).

Anonymous users say they engage in such actions for fun, for "the lulz" (which stands for "laughing out loud"), as they say—"laughter at someone else's expense."<sup>10</sup> Anonymous is an unpredictable, anarchistic, disturbing, ambiguous, confusing, exaggeratory collective of the nameless, a loose network without members that has loose goals in which everyone can participate

and that struggles for Internet freedom (Reissmann, Stöcker and Lischka 2012). At the same time, this openness also can be a source of contradictions: "Because everyone can call himself Anonymous, the collective is full of contradictions" (ibid., 12). When the 4chan culture turned into the Anonymous movement, actions were no longer just performed "for the lulz," but began to serve more political purposes (ibid.). The anarchistic culture with arbitrary targets never ceased to exist, but over the years a more political agenda tended to emerge in parallel and by making use of the culture of playfulness.

### **3 ANONYMOUS: SOCIAL MOVEMENT POWER AND STATE POWER**

Gabriella Coleman (2012) describes Anonymous as "hackers, technologists, activists, human rights advocates and geeks" who organize collective actions online and offline that "advance political causes" but are also organized "for sheer amusement." Coleman (2011a; see also Ralph and Coleman 2011), who has conducted an in-depth ethnography of Anonymous, observed that Anonymous after its emergence on 4chan developed from the IRC and online community Anonet's focus on trolling ("the act of agitating or fooling people for fun under false pretenses") (Stryker 2011, 94) used for fun ("lulz": from "lol"—laughing out loud) and concerns for freedom of speech (as in the campaign against Scientology) into a more complex structure, focusing on hacking as collective political protest action that is signified by the emergence of the IRC and online community AnonOps in 2001, which advanced Operation Payback, the WikiLeaks solidarity campaign, and other campaigns (Olson 2012, 421ff.). Since 2008, when the campaign against Scientology started, Anonymous has become more political (Coleman 2012; Norton 2012b). According to Coleman, it has "no consistent philosophy or political program," and due to anonymity is based on fluid participation, which enables fast intensification and abandonment of actions. Coleman, drawing from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), therefore describes Anonymous as rhizomatic. Coleman stresses that Anonymous is heterogeneous, that there are conflicts and debates about the political direction and that it has a culture of grassroots democracy based on an "anti-leader and anti-celebrity ethic" (Coleman 2011a), "decentralized non-hierarchical modes of interaction" and a "commitment to consensus" (Coleman 2011d).

Coleman (2012) compares Anonymous' humour to movements like the Situationists, the Dadaists, the Yippies or the Yes Men. Based on Ernst Bloch's (1985) principle of hope, she argues that Anonymous gives reason for hope that evading and toppling injustices are "latent possibilities that in certain conditions can be activated and perhaps lead to new political realities" (Coleman 2012). One can add that Anonymous to a certain extent also resembles the Spaßguerilla (fun guerrilla) movement that originated in the German student movement and made use of fun as a political strategy (see

AG Spaß muss sein 1997). Examples have included cake attacks on political opponents, the staging of politically motivated, invisible theatre performances in public spaces, or a planned pudding attack on U.S. vice-president Hubert Humphrey (in the context of the Vietnam War). Other examples include a fake demonstration that pretended to be organized by the German right-wing extremist party Deutsche Volksunion (DVU) and used slogans like "Germans, eat German bananas!" or "I am happy that the earth is a slice" (*ibid.*, 250). They distributed letters to private households during the 1991 Gulf War that stated that Aral Oil provides a voucher for 10 litres free gasoline as part of the campaign "Peace in the Gulf" (*ibid.*, 252).

A central characteristic of Spaßguerilla is that it estranges/distances situations in everyday life from their original context and gives a new meaning to them that has political significance; it tries to publicly uncover and criticise structures of domination (*ibid.*, 74ff.). The Spaßguerilla movement has taken this strategy from Brecht's distancing effect (V-Effekt, or Verfremdungseffekt) in his concept of the epical/dialectical theatre. "The distancing effect is that the thing that shall be brought to comprehension, to which attention shall be directed, is transformed from a common, known, immediately given thing into a special, striking, unexpected thing. The self-evident is made in a certain sense incomprehensible, but this happens only in order to make it then even more comprehensible" (Brecht 1967, 355, translated by the author).

The action performed on stage is brought into "contradiction with handed down beliefs" (*ibid.*, 362, translated by the author). "Conventions are turned into something astonishing, that which is generally present into something peculiar, and that which seems natural shall seem artificial" (*ibid.*, 372, translated by the author). Dialectical/epical theatre shows the "complex, diverse and contradictory relations between individuals and society" (*ibid.*, 922, translated by the author), the "unfixed, volatile, conditional" and "contradictions in all conditions that have the habit to turn into other contradictory conditions" so that the "transformability of the cohabitation of humans and thereby the transformability of the human itself" are shown (Brecht 1967, 923, translated by the author).

The goal is that the audience's attitude is transformed from being passive to being active, as well as that the spectator sees the world as "being available for him and his activity" (*ibid.*, 358, translated by the author) so that a standpoint can emerge that is critical of society (*ibid.*, 346). Dialectical theatre makes use of contradictions of the performed actions and feelings, as well as the transition from quantity to quality (accumulation of incomprehensibilities until comprehension emerges) (*ibid.*, 360, translated by the author). Brecht (*ibid.*, 364) mentions as examples the distancing effect of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Dadaism and Surrealism.

The text "Fünf Thesen für die Spaßguerilla" (Five theses for the fun guerrilla) concludes that "fun guerrilla has no programme—except: that everyone must become a clown" (AG Spaß muss sein 1997, 200; translated by

the author). Anonymous, just like Spaßguerilla and Brecht's dialectical theatre, aims at disrupting the normal functioning of everyday life and bringing absurdity into everyday life in order to show the incongruities and absurdities of the contemporary world itself. Tactics like mass pizza deliveries or the appearance of Guy Fawkes armies are classical Spaßguerilla tactics themselves. The differences between Spaßguerilla and Anonymous is that the first is always political, whereas the second is at times political; Spaßguerilla traditionally originated in offline communities like the Kommune 1,<sup>11</sup> in which the activists knew each other personally and developed close political, personal, emotional and often sexual relations, whereas Anonymous is mainly organized online, involves a high level of anonymity and tends to work to a certain degree from a distance without face-to-face meetings, although online activism tends to at times turn into offline activism (e.g., in the Scientology protests). Anonymous, just like Spaßguerilla, brings the unusual into the common world and thereby tries to estrange everyday life. Spaßguerilla's strategy is to estrange the estranged world from its estrangement by estranging situations in everyday life, which is a political strategy. Parts of Anonymous at times share this political strategy, whereas other parts are simultaneously non-political.

Quinn Norton (2011) sees Anonymous as a culture organized around "doing weird things" that embarrass and separate, and collective attacks ("raids"). It is diverse and leaderless but does still somehow "succeed in speaking with a single voice, demanding freedom for the network that is their home" (Norton 2012b). Norton (2012a) describes how a typical Anonymous operation originates in an IRC chat (such as Anonops or Anonnet), where special channels are set up, in which press releases and videos are presented and where activists gather for planning a joint action. When "some offense to the net is detected, anons will converge on one or more of these 'chans,' with hundreds or thousands arriving within hours. [ . . . ] What looks in one moment like a sad, empty chat room can quickly become the staging ground for a major multi-pronged assault" (Norton 2012b). The operations against credit card companies that blocked payments to WikiLeaks were organized via the AnonOps IRC channel #operationpayback, where almost eight thousand users together planned the action (Olson 2012, 424). Norton (2012b) argues that since 2008, Anonymous became subsequently more political and a threat to governments and corporations; it became "a self-appointed immune system for the Internet, striking back at anyone the hive mind perceived as an enemy of freedom, online or offline." Especially the support for the Tunisian revolution and the Occupy movement featured a "radical new generation of members that eschewed pure lulz in favor of focused, disruptive action" (Norton 2012b). The Occupy movement had special relevance for Anonymous because Anonymous activists "could culturally connect with the local Occupys" (Norton 2012a). Both collectives were bound together by "being the kinds of people who never found a comfortable place in society" (ibid.). As a result, Anonymous "became bolder, stranger, more

threatening, and more comforting in turns" (ibid.). Anonymous is a leaderless "do-ocracy," "rul[ing] by mere doing": individuals propose actions, others join in (or not) and then the Anonymous flag is flown over the result. "There's no one to grant permission, no promise of praise or credit, so every action must be its own reward" (Norton 2012b).

Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani define social movements as "(1) informal networks, based (2) on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilize about (3) conflictual issues, through (4) the frequent use of various forms of protest" (della Porta and Diani 1999, 16). Diani, in another definition, says social movements are "networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflicts, on the basis of shared collective identities" (Diani 1992, 13). Based on these and other definitions, one can identify important aspects of social movements: societal problems; the negation of dominant values, institutions and structures; dissatisfaction; adversaries; shared collective identities; orientation toward social change; triggers of protest, contagion effects; mobilisation, protest practices and collective action; protest methods; and extra-parliamentary politics (Fuchs 2006).

A specific characteristic of Anonymous is that it is at the same time social movement and anti-movement; it is collective political action based on a shared identification with some basic values (such civil liberties and freedom of the Internet) that results in protest practices online and offline against adversaries and, at the same time, for many of those engaging on Anonymous platforms, individual play and entertainment. For most of the time, Anonymous exists "for the lulz," as fun for the users, but from time to time—and in the past years the frequency has increased—individual action turns into collective political action. Many people joining Anonymous' political actions share some basic political values that have been expressed in the text "5 Principles: An Anonymous Manifesto."<sup>12</sup> These values include struggle for an "open, fair, transparent, accountable and just society," in which information is "unrestricted and uncensored," and the upholding of citizens' "rights and liberties." Also, there is a guarantee of the "privacy of citizens" so that "citizens shall not be the target of any undue surveillance." Anonymous says that it is based on three principles: (1) the media should not be attacked; (2) critical infrastructure should not be attacked; and (3) one should work for justice and freedom.<sup>13</sup> Activists have their own interpretations of these basic values of freedom and justice. The overall principles are very loose, unlike a political party's programme, which is much more formalised. This looseness is also characteristic of social movements, but Anonymous differs from them by maintaining a high level of anonymity of its activists and practices.

The chosen protest methods are unconventional and take place online (hacking websites, publishing personal data, DDoS) and/or offline (street protests). The first require temporal synchronicity but are distributed actions conducted over the Internet from a spatial distance; they are collective online

action at a distance. The latter are coordinated and planned online but make use of temporal and spatial co-presence. Traditional social movements (just like political parties) tend to encourage and be based on personal relations, face-to-face meetings, discussions and actions. In contrast, anybody who shares some basic values can declare an action to be part of Anonymous. In conventional social movements, campaigns are often focused on strategic adversaries. The highly decentralised and informal character of Anonymous in contrast often results in multiple independent and parallel campaigns that can become networked and coordinated but can also exist independently.

Anonymous activists often do not know each other and have not met but act in concert as a collective. Anonymous is easier to join and leave than other movements. According to Anonymous, "Anonymous is every- one. Anonymous is no one. Anonymous exists as an idea. You can also be Anonymous. Becoming Anonymous is simple. Just take action."<sup>14</sup> So one specific quality of Anonymous is that it has no clearly defined membership—anybody can join it. Anonymous therefore defines itself as an open idea:

Now first and foremost, it is important to realize that ANONYMOUS— in fact—does not exist. It is just an idea—an internet meme—that can be appropriated by anyone, anytime to rally for a common cause that's in the benefit of humankind. [ . . . ] This means anyone can launch a new ideological message or campaign under the banner of ANONYMOUS. Anyone can take up a leading role in the spreading of the ANON-consciousness. [ . . . ] ANYONE anywhere can initiate an Anonymous operation, action, or group—and so long as they adhere to these [3] basic principles they are as much Anonymous as anyone. EVERYONE is Anonymous.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, this high level of informality can also result in a lack of trust, stability and cohesion and can result in problems once the movement faces state repression or other challenges.

Anonymous, more than other movements, permanently transgresses the boundaries between individual and collective action, online and offline, movement and non-movement, spatial distance and presence, anonymity and knowledge, play and protest work, entertainment and politics, presence and absence, appearance and disappearance, the mundane and the uncommon, normality and absurdity, the real and the symbolic, conventional and unconventional behaviour. But one should not be mistaken; although everyone can join, Anonymous is not a pure leaderless, decentralised network.

James Surowiecki (2005) has argued that large groups of people are smarter than an elite few and that collective intelligence works better than leadership structures. "Even if most of the people within a group are not especially well-informed or rational, it can still reach a collectively wise decision" (Surowiecki 2005, xiii-xiv). The wisdom of the crowd faces three

Problems concerning (1) cognition, (2) coordination and (3) cooperation (ibid., xvii-xviii). These three dimensions can be mapped to a model of information that shapes information processing on the Internet. It conceives information as a threefold process of cognition, communication and cooperation. Anonymous therefore seems to be a distributed and networked information structure that involves cognition, communication and cooperation processes. Anonymous has all three dimensions: a mass of people gathers its collective knowledge about certain targets and shares it on the Internet, they coordinate their actions online in IRC channels by communicating, and take joint actions (such as DDoSing, etc.) at certain points in time.

The wisdom of the crowd has four characteristics: diverse opinions, independence of the actors, decentralisation and aggregation of actions (ibid., 10). Anonymous seems to satisfy these conditions: its activists have diverse opinions and motivations, they act anonymously without personal knowledge of each other, they are spatially distributed and their actions are aggregated to form a whole. Surowiecki argues that such structures are collectively smart. He argues that Internet phenomena such as Google, Slashdot and Wikipedia—and he would probably add Anonymous—are "the products of the wisdom of the crowds" (ibid., 275) and that the Internet is

antihierarchical. It provides a vivid demonstration every day that systems can work smoothly and intelligently without traditional hierarchies and without having any one person in charge. Similarly important is the fact that the Internet simply makes it much easier to aggregate information from many different sources than ever before. (ibid., 276)

So the question is whether Anonymous is such a form of distributed intelligence that makes use of the wisdom of the crowd. My argument is that on the one hand Anonymous is a distributed and networked form of intelligence and collective action, and that on the other hand there are hubs of knowledge and action in this network, that there are contradictions of power (just like in all organizations that are embedded into modern society) and that there are power asymmetries immanent in modern society that allow powerful organizations such as state institutions (the FBI in the case of Anonymous) to monitor and try to control networked structures.

There are core activists with specific technical skills, media skills and organizational skills who carry out the core of hacking activities (Olson 2012). According to Parry Olson (ibid.), they often meet in secret IRC channels, in which they plan campaigns. Olson (ibid., 9) argues that in many actions, there were several hundred activists, but a group of about ten who "managed most of the decisions" (ibid., 74-75, 113-122). She argues that in many DDoS attacks carried out by Anonymous, only a minor share of the participating computers was made up of the thousands of activists that simultaneously used the LOIC or other software tools (such as Gigaloder, JMeter), but that rather around 90 per cent (e.g., in the attack on PayPal.com)

of the "firepower" came from botnets, which are large networks of tens or hundreds of thousands of "zombie" computers that are controlled by single activists (such as Civil and Switch), with the help of malware that was injected into the computers of users without their knowledge in the form of downloads or viruses so that temporary remote control over these computers was enabled. Anonymous is a rhizomatic network of distributed activists (Coleman 2011a), but this network is neither non-hierarchical nor without internal conflicts and power structures. There are activists that have strategic skills and roles and form hubs in the activist network.

The existence of hubs and conflicts in the network seems to also have implications for state action. According to Olson (2012), Jennifer Emick, a former Anonymous activist, started to search for identifying information on Anonymous activists that she collected in lists and provided to the FBI, which as a result used the information to track down and finally arrest hackers like Sabu, Topiary, Kayla, Tflow and Pwnsauce. Since 2011, dozens of alleged Anonymous activists, including on the one hand AnonOps activists who were engaged in Operation Payback (e.g., Fennic, Nerdo) and on the other hand LulzSec and AntiSec hackers (Anarchaos, Kayla, Palladium, Pwnsauce, Sabu, TFlow, Topiary) were arrested (Olson 2012). This circumstance shows that Anonymous is not an invulnerable, mystic network, but made up of relations between real people that can, like all social movements, be monitored by the police and subjected to the violence of nation states and their coercive state apparatuses. Repression is a reality of all social movements, and Anonymous is no exception from this circumstance. The history of the modern state is also a history of the policing of social movements. Policing Anonymous is different from the policing of communists in the McCarthy era or the activities conducted in the COINTELPRO programme, but nonetheless it shares the aspect of the use of state power against politically motivated movements. The FBI has identified Anonymous as a threat and has defined it as not-for-profit cyber criminals that "undertake protests and commit computer crimes as a collective unit. [ . . . ] Anonymous has initiated multiple criminal Distributed Denial of Service attacks."<sup>16</sup> In contrast, Gabriella Coleman argues that Anonymous' use of DDoS has brought up the consideration about whether such tactics, although illegal, are ethically legitimate protest tactics (Coleman 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d).

The employment of symbolic means of expression as symbolic power is particularly important for Anonymous. When Anonymous activists join or organize street protests, they wear Guy Fawkes masks. Guy Fawkes was involved in the Gunpowder Plot in 1605, in which activists tried to bomb the British House of Lords. The Fawkes mask became popular in Alan Moore's comic "V for Vendetta," in which the revolutionary V struggles against a fascist regime. The use of the masks is a media strategy itself because it aims at directing the media and the public's attention to Anonymous. Symbolic expression is important for Anonymous, which relies on videos that are created in a crafty manner and often reflect an expression of artistic creativity.

They contain political messages, announcements of campaigns, statements about broader goals, etc., and are spread on user-generated content platforms like YouTube or Vimeo.

#### **4 ANONYMOUS: LIBERALISM AND SOCIALISM**

Stuart Hall (1986) argues that there are different variants of liberalism: conservative, social democratic and radical liberalism. Neo-liberalism as the dominant form of liberalism today blends cultural conservatism with nineteenth-century economic liberalism. Hall says that the dominant form of liberalism is grounded in the thought of John Locke and Adam Smith, whereas a radical form of liberalism that historically blended with socialism has grounds in feminist rights arguments of thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft, struggles for female suffrage, the reliance of the Chartists and Owenites on liberal parliamentary democracy for socialist goals and the works of Tom Paine. These elements "flowed into working class radicalism and later became a key element in the formation of English socialism" (Hall 1986, 57). Linguistically this ambivalence can be observed in the fact that the term "liberal has often been a group term for progressive or radical opinions, and is still clear in this sense, notably in the USA" (Williams 1983, 181). Liberalism is a contradictory ideology. Anonymous is an expression of liberalism's contradictions. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have seen the political rise of the neo-liberal ideology that stresses radical individualism, entrepreneurialism, individual responsibility, the ideology of the homo oeconomicus, markets and competition as governing principles, and laissez-faire. This ideology aims at the "formalization of society on the model of the enterprise" (Foucault 2008, 160), the "economization of the entire social field" (ibid., 242) and the creation of an "enterprise society" (ibid.). Anonymous to a certain degree aligns itself with the language of the free individual that characterises contemporary liberalism, but at the same time expresses the contradictions of liberalism. To a minor extent it productively works on those elements that Hall stresses have historically had a potential to turn liberalism into socialism.

Jodi Dean (2002) points out that the culture of computing has always related to the relationship of publicity and privacy, as well as secrecy and transparency. She argues that in the 1950s and 1960s programmers were seen as a kind of priest-like elite that held a secret knowledge. In the 1970s, hackers would have challenged this aura of secrecy by arguing that information wants to be free and that computing can serve the people and the public. With the rise of neo-liberalism in the 1980s, this countercultural ethos of public information became the ideology of communicative capitalism, so that "net freedom is the freedom of the market, the freedom of corporations to extend market forces throughout the domain of the social" (ibid., 110). Although Anonymous functions as a covert organization, it shares the

value of public information and a free Internet that comes from the hacker counterculture and has become a new ideology of capitalism, the new spirit of capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; Fisher 2010). This does not mean, however, that Anonymous necessarily supports capitalist ideology, but rather that the complex relations of Anonymous to capitalism are crucial for its political values. The neo-liberal ideology of public information benefits a small elite: there is 'free' access to services like Facebook, YouTube, Google and Twitter, but monetary profit for private owners; there are information production capacities for everyone, but visibility on the Internet for the few; there calls for discussions, the voicing of political opinions, the sharing of user-generated content, innovative ideas, etc. in the 'online public,' but material and political benefits for an elite, etc. Anonymous (and WikiLeaks; see Fuchs 2011) has a contradictory role in this context: on the one hand they reproduce the language of Internet freedom, and on the other hand, the private and capitalist appropriation of benefits at the expense of the public is to a certain degree also questioned.

Coleman (2009) shows how the arrests of Jon Johansen, who programmed a software that unlocks the digital rights management on DVDs so that they can be played on Linux computers, and Dmitry Sklyarov, who developed a software that unlocks Adobe's e-book access control, resulted in protests and the politicisation of hackers. From a rather apolitical culture the liberal political attitude that source code is free speech emerged. The parallel between Anonymous and the politicised free software movement that Coleman describes is that both movements are political and stress the liberal value of freedom. Another parallel is that both have engaged with the corporate domination of the Internet and the software industry (digital rights management and proprietary software in the case of the free software movement; ACTA, PIPA and legal claims against file sharers in the case of Anonymous). Both the free software movement and Anonymous tend to stress freedom of speech. The same liberal value of freedom is at the heart of the idea of the freedom of private ownership that drives the culture industry's interest in commodifying software, culture and the Internet and defending its interests with legal means against those who argue that culture, code and technology is a commons that should be available to all. It was therefore consequent that both the free software movement and Anonymous give up the stress on individual rights and liberalism and consequently see the contradiction that freedom under capitalism benefits private owners of capital, which requires questioning capitalism and liberalism and stressing the collective rights of humans to own knowledge and technology, which is more a socialist than a liberal strategy.

Christopher Kelty (2005) argues that geeks (IT producers, the free software movement, Internet users, etc.) form a recursive public, "a group constituted by a shared, profound concern for the technical and legal conditions of possibility for their own association" (ibid., 185). Kelty expresses with the notion of the recursive Internet public the idea that geeks all have an

interest in the Internet staying free from corporate and state control because such control negatively impacts their own existence in their various roles as workers, consumers, friends, activists, etc., which rely on the Internet for organizing their everyday social relations. As a consequence, they are "concerned to protect" the Internet and to keep it "as radically open as possible—for it is now the sine qua non of any other software or network they or anyone else might build" (ibid., 202). The Internet is a tool through which this public constantly comes into being. Applied to Anonymous, the idea of the recursive public allows us to argue that Anonymous has a special interest in Internet politics because the Internet is an existential medium for the movement and its members that enables and organizes their everyday interactions. This is just another way of saying that Anonymous is made up of people who come from a younger generation, whose lives are shaped by the Internet, who cannot imagine a life without it and for whom Internet politics is therefore of particular relevance. Saying that Anonymous is a recursive public, however, does not automatically tell us something about the kind of politics that the movement aligns itself with. Opposition to intellectual property rights, ACTA, PIPA, the prosecution of file sharers, and the corporate and state censorship of the Internet and the advocacy of free software, creative commons, open access, commons-based peer production, etc. does not necessarily have to be framed as individual liberal freedom of opinion and expression, but can rather also be conceived as the collective right of humanity to the common goods (such as knowledge, technology, nature, health and social care, education, nutrition, etc.) that all produce in common and need to exist and lead a good life and that thereby should not be controlled and owned by a specific class, but rather be open to, owned and controlled by all. The fact that geeks tend to frame Internet politics in liberal terms of freedom and individual rights has to do with the circumstance that neoliberal culture and politics permeate our societies so heavily, whereas the notions of collective rights and the commons come from a socialist political tradition that has been politically marginalised during the decades of neo-liberalism, but is today (among other phenomena in the form of the Occupy movement) making a return. Many Anonymous activists and contemporary movement activists come from a younger generation of people, who have experienced precarious work and life, as well as temporary or long-term unemployment (Norton 2012). They are the generation that is hailed by neo-liberalism's values, such as individualism, self-responsibility and self-help, but has at the same time suffered under neo-liberalism's intensification of inequality that has benefited corporations and the rich so that they have a more objective interest in questioning liberalism and negating it.

The focus on liberalism and socialism is a contested issue within Anonymous. In August 2011, one Anonymous video called for a campaign (Operation Facebook) to "kill Facebook for the sake of your own privacy,"<sup>17</sup> which was the initiation of an operation directed against a capitalist organization that some perceive as exploiting and commodifying users.

Questioning this operation, other Anonymous activists stressed in another video, "Though we do not agree with Facebook's privacy procedures, we understand that such an attack would not only hurt the people, but also weaken our cause. We would ask any such hacktivists and crackers do not do this attack in the name of Anonymous. Facebook allows friends and families to connect with one another. Anonymous understand the importance of this."<sup>18</sup> A more socialist politics stressing corporate domination was questioned by liberal politics, stressing that it is the users' individual choice to use Facebook and that attacking Facebook means limiting freedom of information. In November 2011, another operation was launched that called on users to delete their Facebook accounts on December 24 (#OpDeleteFB). This operation also took a rather liberal position: "We respect Facebook's right to host a website free from hacking attempts, and any attacks aimed at defacing or taking control in any way of the Facebook website are in no way associated with Anonymous, its members, or those promoting #OpDeleteFB."<sup>19</sup> In contrast to this operation, another faction announced in the same month that it would attack Facebook by spreading the Guy Fawkes virus on the platform (#55).

Support for the attack on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) has also been contested within Anonymous: "I am here to clarify that factions of Anonymous are going with the operation. Other factions are opposing it" (#33). Some within Anonymous hold that the NYSE is representing the power of the 1 per cent, whereas others maintain that its website "does not control or contribute to any stock trade or exchange of bonds within the one percent" (#32). This conflict shows that socialist politics and goals are disputed within Anonymous.

Liberal ideology postulates individual freedoms (of speech, opinion, association, assembly, the press) as universal rights, but the particularistic and stratified class character of capitalism undermines these universal rights and creates inequalities and as a consequence unequal access to the public sphere. Jürgen Habermas (1991) in his theory of the public sphere has not idealised the bourgeois public sphere but has rather stressed that there are two immanent limits of the bourgeois public sphere that capitalism poses and cannot overcome: (1) the limitation of freedom of speech and public opinion—individuals do not have the same formal education and material resources for participating in the public sphere (*ibid.*, 227); (2) the limitation of freedom of association and assembly—big political and economic organizations "enjoy an oligopoly of the publicistically effective and politically relevant formation of assemblies and associations" (*ibid.*, 228).

The bourgeois public sphere creates its own limits and thereby its own immanent critique. Liberalism postulates individual freedoms as universal values, but in its own reality permanently undermines these values. Anonymous broaches the issue of the limits of liberalism in contemporary capitalism. On the one hand, it to a certain extent affirms liberal values; on the other hand it constitutes an immanent critique of these values by

showing how liberal institutions violate the liberal values of the system that they represent—for example, in the form of police violence against protests, the implementation of intellectual property rights laws that question freedom of information, U.S. support of political regimes that violate liberal rights of the individual, laws that censor the Internet or independent media, and the restriction of freedom of speech and information by the criminalisation and repression of WikiLeaks. The internally contested combination of liberal and socialist world views constitutes a threat for liberal societies that proclaim liberal values, but in their economic and political practices violate these values.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Horkheimer and Adorno (2002, 28) argue that the liberal enlightenment ideology turns into its own opposite that it initially questioned so that "irresistible progress is irresistible regression." "Once harnessed to the dominant mode of production, enlightenment, which strives to undermine any order which has become repressive, nullifies itself" (ibid., 73-74). Although "freedom in society is inseparable from enlightenment thinking," the negative dialectic of freedom in capitalism is that the very concepts of enlightenment thinking, such as freedom, "no less than the concrete historical forms, the institutions of society with which it is intertwined, already contain the germ of the regression which is taking place everywhere today" (ibid., xvi). The freedoms proclaimed by liberal enlightenment ideology find their actual violation in the practice of capitalism: the ideal of freedom turns into an opposite reality—unfreedom. Marx (1867, 272-273) described this unfreedom as an immanent feature of capitalism when he spoke of the worker's role in capitalism and stressed that the worker is

free in the double sense that as a free individual he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity, and that, on the other hand, he has no other commodity for sale, i.e. he is rid of them, he is free of all the objects needed for the realization [*Verwirklichung*] of his labour power.

Marx speaks of the "freedom" of the worker in a cynical way in order to stress that the worker is unfree in a double sense: he or she must sell his or her labour power as a commodity in order to survive and is the non-owner of the means of production and the produced commodities. The existence of classes guarantees liberal freedoms only for those in power and deprives the subordinated of these freedoms. Class inequality and capitalism's immanent monopoly tendency constitute the necessary regression of the ideals of freedom into unfreedom. Anonymous describes itself as "the 21st century enlightenment" (#35). It is even more than this; Anonymous is the dialectic of the enlightenment

of twenty-first-century informational capitalism. It demonstrates and discloses the contradictions of freedom and liberal ideology by demanding the very rights and values that capitalism, its constitutions and politicians proclaim and that in economic and political reality turn into their opposites. Anonymous shows the difference between the proclaimed essence and actual existence of liberalism. If Anonymous, for example, argues in favour of the freedom of assembly and expression of the Occupy movement and criticises police violence against activists, then it, on the one hand, stays within the categories of liberal thought. At the same time it shows how within the U.S., the country in the world that most stresses the liberal value of freedom, freedom is actually limited by state action, which drives liberal values ad absurdum and shows their actual contradictory existence. Anonymous thereby conducts a practical immanent political critique of liberalism. It, however, frequently misses taking this form of critique to the next step and advancing from immanent critique towards a transcendental critique that sees the limits of the realization of liberal values within capitalism and calls for the establishment of an alternative to capitalism, in which individual and collective values can exist through each other, which is just another formulation for saying that true liberalism can be achieved only in a democratic form of communism. In the case of the Occupy movement, Anonymous has managed to a certain degree to formulate transcendent values by taking up issues of socio-economic inequality, class and capitalism.

One can understand Anonymous not only as an immanent critique of liberalism but also as a parody and absurd theatre of liberalism. A connection between Anonymous and the Spaßguerilla (fun guerrilla) movement becomes clear: humour is to a certain degree used as a political weapon. Anonymous makes fun of its political opponents and uses clownery (in the form of Guy Fawkes armies) as a symbolic strategy to attain the media's and public's attention. There is also a connection of Anonymous to Brecht's (1967) absurd theatre: by proclaiming liberal values and criticising how they become violated in capitalist reality, Anonymous shows the contradictory dialectic of liberalism.

The freedoms that capitalism negates can be realized only in a society of equal owners and participants, a participatory democracy. Anonymous is a theatre of liberalism, and in its own political demands complexly articulates the conflict between liberalism and socialism that is expressed in the presence of the three political positions analysed in this chapter. Liberal enlightenment ideals negate themselves in turn in capitalism and turn into their opposite. Only negating the negative dialectic of the enlightenment by establishing a new society can overcome the consequences of the negative dialectic. Establishing a new society is the only way to address the failings of the enlightenment dialectic. This requires building a new socialism that aims at "an association of free men working with the means of production held in common, and expending their many different forms of labour-power in full self-awareness as one single social labour force" (Marx 1867, 171).

Freedom requires appropriation, joint control and production of the commons, including the communication commons.

## NOTES

1. <http://boards.4chan.org/b>, accessed on 15 April 2014.
2. <http://guerrillanews.wordpress.com/2010/12/08/operation-payback>, accessed on 15 April 2014.
3. For example, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRm98gFaXgM>, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_4LU7piK9X4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_4LU7piK9X4), and [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxT3Bn7\\_-Ig](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxT3Bn7_-Ig), accessed on 15 April 2014.
4. <http://anonnet.org>, accessed on 4 December 2012.
5. <http://www.anonops.org>, accessed on 4 December 2012.
6. <http://www.voxanon.org>, accessed on 4 December 2012.
7. <http://www.anonplus.com>, accessed on 4 December 2012.
8. <http://site.anonnet.org>, accessed on 4 December 2012.
9. See <https://encyclopediadramatica.se/Boxxy>, accessed on 15 April 2014.
10. <https://encyclopediadramatica.se/Lulz>, accessed on 15 April 2014.
11. Commune 1; see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kommune\\_1](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kommune_1), accessed on 15 April 2014.
12. <http://anonnews.org/press/item/199>, accessed on 15 April 2014.
13. <http://occupywallst.org/article/anonymous-joins-occupywallstreet>, accessed on 4 December 2012.
14. <http://anonnews.org/press/item/199>, accessed on 15 April 2014.
15. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7cqP8qqfI0>, accessed on 15 April 2014.
16. <http://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/cybersecurity-responding-to-the-threat-of-cyber-crime-and-terrorism>, accessed on 15 April 2014.
17. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6crH8qmyZ8>, accessed on 15 April 2014.
18. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Ig4bZawisQ>, accessed on 15 April 2014.
19. <http://anoncandyman.blogspot.com/2011/11/opdeletfb.html?m=0>, accessed on 15 April 2014.

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